

BOOK VIII. SUNSET AND SUNRISE

Chapter LXXII

Full souls are double mirrors, making still An endless vista of fair things before, Repeating things behind.

Dorothea's impetuous generosity, which would have leaped at once to the vindication of Lydgate from the suspicion of having accepted money as a bribe, underwent a melancholy check when she came to consider all the circumstances of the case by the light of Mr Farebrother's experience.

'It is a delicate matter to touch,' he said. 'How can we begin to inquire into it? It must be either publicly by setting the magistrate and coroner to work, or privately by questioning Lydgate. As to the first proceeding there is no solid ground to go upon, else Hawley would have adopted it; and as to opening the subject with Lydgate, I confess I should shrink from it. He would probably take it as a deadly insult. I have more than once experienced the difficulty of speaking to him on personal matters. And - one should know the truth about his conduct beforehand, to feel very confident of a good result.'

'I feel convinced that his conduct has not been guilty: I believe that people are almost always better than their neighbors think they are,' said Dorothea. Some of her intensest experience in the last two years had set her mind strongly in opposition to any unfavorable construction of others; and for the first time she felt rather discontented with Mr Farebrother. She disliked this cautious weighing of consequences, instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy, which would conquer by their emotional force. Two days afterwards, he was dining at the Manor with her uncle and the Chettams, and when the dessert was standing uneaten, the servants were out of the room, and Mr Brooke was nodding in a nap, she returned to the subject with renewed vivacity.

'Mr Lydgate would understand that if his friends hear a calumny about him their first wish must be to justify him. What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other? I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in *my* trouble, and attended me in my illness.'

Dorothea's tone and manner were not more energetic than they had been when she was at the head of her uncle's table nearly three years before, and her experience since had given her more right to express a decided opinion. But Sir James Chettam was no longer the diffident and acquiescent suitor: he was the anxious brother-in-law, with a devout admiration for his sister, but with a constant alarm lest she

should fall under some new illusion almost as bad as marrying Casaubon. He smiled much less; when he said 'Exactly' it was more often an introduction to a dissentient opinion than in those submissive bachelor days; and Dorothea found to her surprise that she had to resolve not to be afraid of him - all the more because he was really her best friend. He disagreed with her now.

'But, Dorothea,' he said, remonstrantly, 'you can't undertake to manage a man's life for him in that way. Lydgate must know - at least he will soon come to know how he stands. If he can clear himself, he will. He must act for himself.'

'I think his friends must wait till they find an opportunity,' added Mr Farebrother. 'It is possible - I have often felt so much weakness in myself that I can conceive even a man of honorable disposition, such as I have always believed Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation as that of accepting money which was offered more or less indirectly as a bribe to insure his silence about scandalous facts long gone by. I say, I can conceive this, if he were under the pressure of hard circumstances - if he had been harassed as I feel sure Lydgate has been. I would not believe anything worse of him except under stringent proof. But there is the terrible Nemesis following on some errors, that it is always possible for those who like it to interpret them into a crime: there is no proof in favor of the man outside his own consciousness and assertion.'

'Oh, how cruel!' said Dorothea, clasping her hands. 'And would you not like to be the one person who believed in that man's innocence, if the rest of the world belied him? Besides, there is a man's character beforehand to speak for him.'

'But, my dear Mrs Casaubon,' said Mr Farebrother, smiling gently at her ardor, 'character is not cut in marble - it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.'

'Then it may be rescued and healed,' said Dorothea 'I should not be afraid of asking Mr Lydgate to tell me the truth, that I might help him. Why should I be afraid? Now that I am not to have the land, James, I might do as Mr Bulstrode proposed, and take his place in providing for the Hospital; and I have to consult Mr Lydgate, to know thoroughly what are the prospects of doing good by keeping up the present plans. There is the best opportunity in the world for me to ask for his confidence; and he would be able to tell me things which might make all the circumstances clear. Then we would all stand by him and bring him out of his trouble. People glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbors.'

Dorothea's eyes had a moist brightness in them, and the changed tones of her voice roused her uncle, who began to listen.

'It is true that a woman may venture on some efforts of sympathy which would hardly succeed if we men undertook them,' said Mr Farebrother, almost converted by Dorothea's ardor.

'Surely, a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know the world better than she does.' said Sir James, with his little frown. 'Whatever you do in the end, Dorothea, you should really keep back at present, and not volunteer any meddling with this Bulstrode business. We don't know yet what may turn up. You must agree with me?' he ended, looking at Mr Farebrother.

'I do think it would be better to wait,' said the latter.

'Yes, yes, my dear,' said Mr Brooke, not quite knowing at what point the discussion had arrived, but coming up to it with a contribution which was generally appropriate. 'It is easy to go too far, you know. You must not let your ideas run away with you. And as to being in a hurry to put money into schemes - it won't do, you know. Garth has drawn me in uncommonly with repairs, draining, that sort of thing: I'm uncommonly out of pocket with one thing or another. I must pull up. As for you, Chettam, you are spending a fortune on those oak fences round your demesne.'

Dorothea, submitting uneasily to this discouragement, went with Celia into the library, which was her usual drawing-room.

'Now, Dodo, do listen to what James says,' said Celia, 'else you will be getting into a scrape. You always did, and you always will, when you set about doing as you please. And I think it is a mercy now after all that you have got James to think for you. He lets you have your plans, only he hinders you from being taken in. And that is the good of having a brother instead of a husband. A husband would not let you have your plans.'

'As if I wanted a husband!' said Dorothea. 'I only want not to have my feelings checked at every turn.' Mrs Casaubon was still undisciplined enough to burst into angry tears.

'Now, really, Dodo,' said Celia, with rather a deeper guttural than usual, 'you *are* contradictory: first one thing and then another. You used to submit to Mr Casaubon quite shamefully: I think you would have given up ever coming to see me if he had asked you.'

'Of course I submitted to him, because it was my duty; it was my feeling for him,' said Dorothea, looking through the prism of her tears.

'Then why can't you think it your duty to submit a little to what James wishes?' said Celia, with a sense of stringency in her argument. 'Because he only wishes what is for your own good. And, of course, men know best about everything, except what women know better.' Dorothea laughed and forgot her tears.

'Well, I mean about babies and those things,' explained Celia. 'I should not give up to James when I knew he was wrong, as you used to do to Mr Casaubon.'