



MIDDLEMARCH

GEORGE ELIOT

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MIDDLEMARCH

BY
GEORGE ELIOT

1871-1872

Middlemarch By George Eliot.

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Finale

"Ah! Well! I've often wondered what became of your mother. She ran away from her friends when she was a young lass—a proud-spirited lass, and pretty, by Jove! I knew the reason why she ran away," said Raffles, winking slowly as he looked sideways at Will.

"You know nothing dishonorable of her, sir," said Will, turning on him rather savagely. But Mr. Raffles just now was not sensitive to shades of manner.

"Not a bit!" said he, tossing his head decisively "She was a little too honorable to like her friends—that was it!" Here Raffles again winked slowly. "Lord bless you, I knew all about 'em—a little in what you may call the respectable thieving line—the high style of receiving-house—none of your holes and corners—first-rate. Slap-up shop, high profits and no mistake. But Lord! Sarah would have known nothing about it—a dashing young lady she was—fine boarding-school—fit for a lord's wife—only Archie Duncan threw it at her out of spite, because she would have nothing to do with him. And so she ran away from the whole concern. I travelled for 'em, sir, in a gentlemanly way—at a high salary. They didn't mind her running away at first—godly folks, sir, very godly—and she was for the stage. The son was alive then, and the daughter was at a discount. Hallo! here we are at the Blue Bull. What do you say, Mr. Ladislaw?—shall we turn in and have a glass?"

"No, I must say good evening," said Will, dashing up a passage which led into Lowick Gate, and almost running to get out of Raffles's reach.

He walked a long while on the Lowick road away from the town, glad of the starlit darkness when it came. He felt as if he had had dirt cast on him amidst shouts of scorn.

There was this to confirm the fellow's statement—that his mother never would tell him the reason why she had run away from her family.

Well! what was he, Will Ladislaw, the worse, supposing the truth about that family to be the ugliest? His mother had braved hardship in order to separate herself from it.

But if Dorothea's friends had known this story—if the Chettams had known it—they would have had a fine color to give their suspicions a welcome ground for thinking him unfit to come near her. However, let them suspect what they pleased, they would find themselves in the wrong. They would find out that the blood in his veins was as free from the taint of meanness as theirs.

CHAPTER 61

"Inconsistencies," answered Imlac, "cannot both be right, but imputed to man they may both be true."—Rasselas.

The same night, when Mr. Bulstrode returned from a journey to Brassing on business, his good wife met him in the entrance-hall and drew him into his private sitting-room.

"Nicholas," she said, fixing her honest eyes upon him anxiously, "there has been such a disagreeable man here asking for you—it has made me quite uncomfortable."

"What kind of man, my dear," said Mr. Bulstrode, dreadfully certain of the answer.

"A red-faced man with large whiskers, and most impudent in his manner. He declared he was an old friend of yours, and said you would be sorry not to see him. He wanted to wait for you here, but I told him he could see you at the Bank tomorrow morning. Most impudent he was!—stared at me, and said his friend Nick had luck in wives. I don't believe he would have gone away, if Blucher had not happened to break his chain and come running round on the gravel—for I was in the garden; so I said, 'You'd better go away—the dog is very fierce, and I can't hold him.' Do you really know anything of such a man?"

"I believe I know who he is, my dear," said Mr. Bulstrode, in his usual subdued voice, "an unfortunate dissolute wretch, whom I helped too much in days gone by. However, I presume you will not be troubled by him again. He will probably come to the Bank—to beg, doubtless."

No more was said on the subject until the next day, when Mr. Bulstrode had returned from the town and was dressing for dinner. His wife, not sure that he was come home, looked into his dressing-room and saw him with his coat and cravat off, leaning one arm on a chest of drawers and staring absently at the ground. He started nervously and looked up as she entered.

"You look very ill, Nicholas. Is there anything the matter?"

"I have a good deal of pain in my head," said Mr. Bulstrode, who was so frequently ailing that his wife was always ready to believe in this cause of depression.

"Sit down and let me sponge it with vinegar."

Physically Mr. Bulstrode did not want the vinegar, but morally the affectionate attention soothed him. Though always polite, it was his habit to receive such services with marital coolness, as his wife's duty. But to-day, while she was bending over him, he said, "You are very good, Harriet," in a tone which had something new in it to her

ear; she did not know exactly what the novelty was, but her woman's solicitude shaped itself into a darting thought that he might be going to have an illness.

"Has anything worried you?" she said. "Did that man come to you at the Bank?"

"Yes; it was as I had supposed. He is a man who at one time might have done better. But he has sunk into a drunken debauched creature."

"Is he quite gone away?" said Mrs. Bulstrode, anxiously but for certain reasons she refrained from adding, "It was very disagreeable to hear him calling himself a friend of yours." At that moment she would not have liked to say anything which implied her habitual consciousness that her husband's earlier connections were not quite on a level with her own. Not that she knew much about them. That her husband had at first been employed in a bank, that he had afterwards entered into what he called city business and gained a fortune before he was three-and-thirty, that he had married a widow who was much older than himself—a Dissenter, and in other ways probably of that disadvantageous quality usually perceptible in a first wife if inquired into with the dispassionate judgment of a second—was almost as much as she had cared to learn beyond the glimpses which Mr. Bulstrode's narrative occasionally gave of his early bent towards religion, his inclination to be a preacher, and his association with missionary and philanthropic efforts. She believed in him as an excellent man whose piety carried a peculiar eminence in belonging to a layman, whose influence had turned her own mind toward seriousness, and whose share of perishable good had been the means of raising her own position. But she also liked to think that it was well in every sense for Mr. Bulstrode to have won the hand of Harriet Vincy; whose family was undeniable in a Middlemarch light—a better light surely than any thrown in London thoroughfares or dissenting chapel-yards. The unreformed provincial mind distrusted London; and while true religion was everywhere saving, honest Mrs. Bulstrode was convinced that to be saved in the Church was more respectable. She so much wished to ignore towards others that her husband had ever been a London Dissenter, that she liked to keep it out of sight even in talking to him. He was quite aware of this; indeed in some respects he was rather afraid of this ingenuous wife, whose imitative piety and native worldliness were equally sincere, who had nothing to be ashamed of, and whom he had married out of a thorough inclination still subsisting. But his fears were such as belong to a man who cares to maintain his recognized supremacy: the loss of high consideration from his wife, as from every one else who did not clearly hate him out of enmity to the truth, would be as the beginning of death to him. When she said—

"Is he quite gone away?"

"Oh, I trust so," he answered, with an effort to throw as much sober unconcern into his tone as possible!

But in truth Mr. Bulstrode was very far from a state of quiet trust. In the interview at the Bank, Raffles had made it evident that his eagerness to torment was almost as

strong in him as any other greed. He had frankly said that he had turned out of the way to come to Middlemarch, just to look about him and see whether the neighborhood would suit him to live in. He had certainly had a few debts to pay more than he expected, but the two hundred pounds were not gone yet: a cool five-and-twenty would suffice him to go away with for the present. What he had wanted chiefly was to see his friend Nick and family, and know all about the prosperity of a man to whom he was so much attached. By-and-by he might come back for a longer stay. This time Raffles declined to be "seen off the premises," as he expressed it—declined to quit Middlemarch under Bulstrode's eyes. He meant to go by coach the next day—if he chose.

Bulstrode felt himself helpless. Neither threats nor coaxing could avail: he could not count on any persistent fear nor on any promise. On the contrary, he felt a cold certainty at his heart that Raffles—unless providence sent death to hinder him—would come back to Middlemarch before long. And that certainty was a terror.

It was not that he was in danger of legal punishment or of beggary: he was in danger only of seeing disclosed to the judgment of his neighbors and the mournful perception of his wife certain facts of his past life which would render him an object of scorn and an opprobrium of the religion with which he had diligently associated himself. The terror of being judged sharpens the memory: it sends an inevitable glare over that long-unvisited past which has been habitually recalled only in general phrases. Even without memory, the life is bound into one by a zone of dependence in growth and decay; but intense memory forces a man to own his blameworthy past. With memory set smarting like a reopened wound, a man's past is not simply a dead history, an outworn preparation of the present: it is not a repented error shaken loose from the life: it is a still quivering part of himself, bringing shudders and bitter flavors and the tinglings of a merited shame.

Into this second life Bulstrode's past had now risen, only the pleasures of it seeming to have lost their quality. Night and day, without interruption save of brief sleep which only wove retrospect and fear into a fantastic present, he felt the scenes of his earlier life coming between him and everything else, as obstinately as when we look through the window from a lighted room, the objects we turn our backs on are still before us, instead of the grass and the trees. The successive events inward and outward were there in one view: though each might be dwelt on in turn, the rest still kept their hold in the consciousness.

Once more he saw himself the young banker's clerk, with an agreeable person, as clever in figures as he was fluent in speech and fond of theological definition: an eminent though young member of a Calvinistic dissenting church at Highbury, having had striking experience in conviction of sin and sense of pardon. Again he heard himself called for as Brother Bulstrode in prayer meetings, speaking on religious platforms, preaching in private houses. Again he felt himself thinking of the ministry as possibly his vocation, and inclined towards missionary labor. That was the

happiest time of his life: that was the spot he would have chosen now to awake in and find the rest a dream. The people among whom Brother Bulstrode was distinguished were very few, but they were very near to him, and stirred his satisfaction the more; his power stretched through a narrow space, but he felt its effect the more intensely. He believed without effort in the peculiar work of grace within him, and in the signs that God intended him for special instrumentality.

Then came the moment of transition; it was with the sense of promotion he had when he, an orphan educated at a commercial charity-school, was invited to a fine villa belonging to Mr. Dunkirk, the richest man in the congregation. Soon he became an intimate there, honored for his piety by the wife, marked out for his ability by the husband, whose wealth was due to a flourishing city and west-end trade. That was the setting-in of a new current for his ambition, directing his prospects of "instrumentality" towards the uniting of distinguished religious gifts with successful business.

By-and-by came a decided external leading: a confidential subordinate partner died, and nobody seemed to the principal so well fitted to fill the severely felt vacancy as his young friend Bulstrode, if he would become confidential accountant. The offer was accepted. The business was a pawnbroker's, of the most magnificent sort both in extent and profits; and on a short acquaintance with it Bulstrode became aware that one source of magnificent profit was the easy reception of any goods offered, without strict inquiry as to where they came from. But there was a branch house at the west end, and no pettiness or dinginess to give suggestions of shame.

He remembered his first moments of shrinking. They were private, and were filled with arguments; some of these taking the form of prayer. The business was established and had old roots; is it not one thing to set up a new gin-palace and another to accept an investment in an old one? The profits made out of lost souls—where can the line be drawn at which they begin in human transactions? Was it not even God's way of saving His chosen? "Thou knowest,"—the young Bulstrode had said then, as the older Bulstrode was saying now—"Thou knowest how loose my soul sits from these things—how I view them all as implements for tilling Thy garden rescued here and there from the wilderness."

Metaphors and precedents were not wanting; peculiar spiritual experiences were not wanting which at last made the retention of his position seem a service demanded of him: the vista of a fortune had already opened itself, and Bulstrode's shrinking remained private. Mr. Dunkirk had never expected that there would be any shrinking at all: he had never conceived that trade had anything to do with the scheme of salvation. And it was true that Bulstrode found himself carrying on two distinct lives; his religious activity could not be incompatible with his business as soon as he had argued himself into not feeling it incompatible.

Mentally surrounded with that past again, Bulstrode had the same pleas—indeed, the years had been perpetually spinning them into intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral sensibility; nay, as age made egoism more eager but less enjoying, his soul had become more saturated with the belief that he did everything for God's sake, being indifferent to it for his own. And yet—if he could be back in that far-off spot with his youthful poverty—why, then he would choose to be a missionary.

But the train of causes in which he had locked himself went on. There was trouble in the fine villa at Highbury. Years before, the only daughter had run away, defied her parents, and gone on the stage; and now the only boy died, and after a short time Mr. Dunkirk died also. The wife, a simple pious woman, left with all the wealth in and out of the magnificent trade, of which she never knew the precise nature, had come to believe in Bulstrode, and innocently adore him as women often adore their priest or "man-made" minister. It was natural that after a time marriage should have been thought of between them. But Mrs. Dunkirk had qualms and yearnings about her daughter, who had long been regarded as lost both to God and her parents. It was known that the daughter had married, but she was utterly gone out of sight. The mother, having lost her boy, imagined a grandson, and wished in a double sense to reclaim her daughter. If she were found, there would be a channel for property—perhaps a wide one—in the provision for several grandchildren. Efforts to find her must be made before Mrs. Dunkirk would marry again. Bulstrode concurred; but after advertisement as well as other modes of inquiry had been tried, the mother believed that her daughter was not to be found, and consented to marry without reservation of property.

The daughter had been found; but only one man besides Bulstrode knew it, and he was paid for keeping silence and carrying himself away.

That was the bare fact which Bulstrode was now forced to see in the rigid outline with which acts present themselves onlookers. But for himself at that distant time, and even now in burning memory, the fact was broken into little sequences, each justified as it came by reasonings which seemed to prove it righteous. Bulstrode's course up to that time had, he thought, been sanctioned by remarkable providences, appearing to point the way for him to be the agent in making the best use of a large property and withdrawing it from perversion. Death and other striking dispositions, such as feminine trustfulness, had come; and Bulstrode would have adopted Cromwell's words—"Do you call these bare events? The Lord pity you!" The events were comparatively small, but the essential condition was there—namely, that they were in favor of his own ends. It was easy for him to settle what was due from him to others by inquiring what were God's intentions with regard to himself. Could it be for God's service that this fortune should in any considerable proportion go to a young woman and her husband who were given up to the lightest pursuits, and might scatter it abroad in triviality—people who seemed to lie outside the path of remarkable providences? Bulstrode had never said to himself beforehand, "The

daughter shall not be found"—nevertheless when the moment came he kept her existence hidden; and when other moments followed, he soothed the mother with consolation in the probability that the unhappy young woman might be no more.

There were hours in which Bulstrode felt that his action was unrighteous; but how could he go back? He had mental exercises, called himself nought, laid hold on redemption, and went on in his course of instrumentality. And after five years Death again came to widen his path, by taking away his wife. He did gradually withdraw his capital, but he did not make the sacrifices requisite to put an end to the business, which was carried on for thirteen years afterwards before it finally collapsed. Meanwhile Nicholas Bulstrode had used his hundred thousand discreetly, and was become provincially, solidly important—a banker, a Churchman, a public benefactor; also a sleeping partner in trading concerns, in which his ability was directed to economy in the raw material, as in the case of the dyes which rotted Mr. Vincy's silk. And now, when this respectability had lasted undisturbed for nearly thirty years—when all that preceded it had long lain benumbed in the consciousness—that past had risen and immersed his thought as if with the terrible irruption of a new sense overburthening the feeble being.

Meanwhile, in his conversation with Raffles, he had learned something momentous, something which entered actively into the struggle of his longings and terrors. There, he thought, lay an opening towards spiritual, perhaps towards material rescue.

The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with him. There may be coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all, to whatever confession we belong, and whether we believe in the future perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world; whether we regard the earth as a putrefying nidus for a saved remnant, including ourselves, or have a passionate belief in the solidarity of mankind.

The service he could do to the cause of religion had been through life the ground he alleged to himself for his choice of action: it had been the motive which he had poured out in his prayers. Who would use money and position better than he meant to use them? Who could surpass him in self-abhorrence and exaltation of God's cause? And to Mr. Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct: it enforced a discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be as well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence. Also, profitable investments in trades where the power of the prince of this world showed its most active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits in the hands of God's servant.

This implicit reasoning is essentially no more peculiar to evangelical belief than the use of wide phrases for narrow motives is peculiar to Englishmen. There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.

But a man who believes in something else than his own greed, has necessarily a conscience or standard to which he more or less adapts himself. Bulstrode's standard had been his serviceableness to God's cause: "I am sinful and nought—a vessel to be consecrated by use—but use me!"—had been the mould into which he had constrained his immense need of being something important and predominating. And now had come a moment in which that mould seemed in danger of being broken and utterly cast away.

What if the acts he had reconciled himself to because they made him a stronger instrument of the divine glory, were to become the pretext of the scoffer, and a darkening of that glory? If this were to be the ruling of Providence, he was cast out from the temple as one who had brought unclean offerings.

He had long poured out utterances of repentance. But today a repentance had come which was of a bitterer flavor, and a threatening Providence urged him to a kind of propitiation which was not simply a doctrinal transaction. The divine tribunal had changed its aspect for him; self-prostration was no longer enough, and he must bring restitution in his hand. It was really before his God that Bulstrode was about to attempt such restitution as seemed possible: a great dread had seized his susceptible frame, and the scorching approach of shame wrought in him a new spiritual need. Night and day, while the resurgent threatening past was making a conscience within him, he was thinking by what means he could recover peace and trust—by what sacrifice he could stay the rod. His belief in these moments of dread was, that if he spontaneously did something right, God would save him from the consequences of wrong-doing. For religion can only change when the emotions which fill it are changed; and the religion of personal fear remains nearly at the level of the savage.

He had seen Raffles actually going away on the Brassing coach, and this was a temporary relief; it removed the pressure of an immediate dread, but did not put an end to the spiritual conflict and the need to win protection. At last he came to a difficult resolve, and wrote a letter to Will Ladislaw, begging him to be at the Shrubs that evening for a private interview at nine o'clock. Will had felt no particular surprise at the request, and connected it with some new notions about the "Pioneer;" but when he was shown into Mr. Bulstrode's private room, he was struck with the painfully worn look on the banker's face, and was going to say, "Are you ill?" when, checking himself in that abruptness, he only inquired after Mrs. Bulstrode, and her satisfaction with the picture bought for her.

"Thank you, she is quite satisfied; she has gone out with her daughters this evening. I begged you to come, Mr. Ladislaw, because I have a communication of a very private—indeed, I will say, of a sacredly confidential nature, which I desire to make to you. Nothing, I dare say, has been farther from your thoughts than that there had been important ties in the past which could connect your history with mine."

Will felt something like an electric shock. He was already in a state of keen sensitiveness and hardly allayed agitation on the subject of ties in the past, and his presentiments were not agreeable. It seemed like the fluctuations of a dream—as if the action begun by that loud bloated stranger were being carried on by this pale-eyed sickly looking piece of respectability, whose subdued tone and glib formality of speech were at this moment almost as repulsive to him as their remembered contrast. He answered, with a marked change of color—

"No, indeed, nothing."

"You see before you, Mr. Ladislaw, a man who is deeply stricken. But for the urgency of conscience and the knowledge that I am before the bar of One who seeth not as man seeth, I should be under no compulsion to make the disclosure which has been my object in asking you to come here to-night. So far as human laws go, you have no claim on me whatever."

Will was even more uncomfortable than wondering. Mr. Bulstrode had paused, leaning his head on his hand, and looking at the floor. But he now fixed his examining glance on Will and said—

"I am told that your mother's name was Sarah Dunkirk, and that she ran away from her friends to go on the stage. Also, that your father was at one time much emaciated by illness. May I ask if you can confirm these statements?"

"Yes, they are all true," said Will, struck with the order in which an inquiry had come, that might have been expected to be preliminary to the banker's previous hints. But Mr. Bulstrode had to-night followed the order of his emotions; he entertained no doubt that the opportunity for restitution had come, and he had an overpowering impulse towards the penitential expression by which he was deprecating chastisement.

"Do you know any particulars of your mother's family?" he continued.

"No; she never liked to speak of them. She was a very generous, honorable woman," said Will, almost angrily.

"I do not wish to allege anything against her. Did she never mention her mother to you at all?"

"I have heard her say that she thought her mother did not know the reason of her running away. She said 'poor mother' in a pitying tone."

"That mother became my wife," said Bulstrode, and then paused a moment before he added, "you have a claim on me, Mr. Ladislaw: as I said before, not a legal claim, but one which my conscience recognizes. I was enriched by that marriage—a result which would probably not have taken place—certainly not to the same extent—if your grandmother could have discovered her daughter. That daughter, I gather, is no longer living!"

"No," said Will, feeling suspicion and repugnance rising so strongly within him, that without quite knowing what he did, he took his hat from the floor and stood up. The impulse within him was to reject the disclosed connection.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Ladislaw," said Bulstrode, anxiously. "Doubtless you are startled by the suddenness of this discovery. But I entreat your patience with one who is already bowed down by inward trial."

Will reseated himself, feeling some pity which was half contempt for this voluntary self-abasement of an elderly man.

"It is my wish, Mr. Ladislaw, to make amends for the deprivation which befell your mother. I know that you are without fortune, and I wish to supply you adequately from a store which would have probably already been yours had your grandmother been certain of your mother's existence and been able to find her."

Mr. Bulstrode paused. He felt that he was performing a striking piece of scrupulosity in the judgment of his auditor, and a penitential act in the eyes of God. He had no clew to the state of Will Ladislaw's mind, smarting as it was from the clear hints of Raffles, and with its natural quickness in construction stimulated by the expectation of discoveries which he would have been glad to conjure back into darkness. Will made no answer for several moments, till Mr. Bulstrode, who at the end of his speech had cast his eyes on the floor, now raised them with an examining glance, which Will met fully, saying—

"I suppose you did know of my mother's existence, and knew where she might have been found."

Bulstrode shrank—there was a visible quivering in his face and hands. He was totally unprepared to have his advances met in this way, or to find himself urged into more revelation than he had beforehand set down as needful. But at that moment he dared not tell a lie, and he felt suddenly uncertain of his ground which he had trodden with some confidence before.

"I will not deny that you conjecture rightly," he answered, with a faltering in his tone. "And I wish to make atonement to you as the one still remaining who has suffered a loss through me. You enter, I trust, into my purpose, Mr. Ladislaw, which has a reference to higher than merely human claims, and as I have already said, is entirely independent of any legal compulsion. I am ready to narrow my own resources and the prospects of my family by binding myself to allow you five hundred pounds yearly

during my life, and to leave you a proportional capital at my death—nay, to do still more, if more should be definitely necessary to any laudable project on your part." Mr. Bulstrode had gone on to particulars in the expectation that these would work strongly on Ladislaw, and merge other feelings in grateful acceptance.

But Will was looking as stubborn as possible, with his lip pouting and his fingers in his side-pockets. He was not in the least touched, and said firmly,—

"Before I make any reply to your proposition, Mr. Bulstrode, I must beg you to answer a question or two. Were you connected with the business by which that fortune you speak of was originally made?"

Mr. Bulstrode's thought was, "Raffles has told him." How could he refuse to answer when he had volunteered what drew forth the question? He answered, "Yes."

"And was that business—or was it not—a thoroughly dishonorable one—nay, one that, if its nature had been made public, might have ranked those concerned in it with thieves and convicts?"

Will's tone had a cutting bitterness: he was moved to put his question as nakedly as he could.

Bulstrode reddened with irrepressible anger. He had been prepared for a scene of self-abasement, but his intense pride and his habit of supremacy overpowered penitence, and even dread, when this young man, whom he had meant to benefit, turned on him with the air of a judge.

"The business was established before I became connected with it, sir; nor is it for you to institute an inquiry of that kind," he answered, not raising his voice, but speaking with quick defiantness.

"Yes, it is," said Will, starting up again with his hat in his hand. "It is eminently mine to ask such questions, when I have to decide whether I will have transactions with you and accept your money. My unblemished honor is important to me. It is important to me to have no stain on my birth and connections. And now I find there is a stain which I can't help. My mother felt it, and tried to keep as clear of it as she could, and so will I. You shall keep your ill-gotten money. If I had any fortune of my own, I would willingly pay it to any one who could disprove what you have told me. What I have to thank you for is that you kept the money till now, when I can refuse it. It ought to lie with a man's self that he is a gentleman. Good-night, sir."

Bulstrode was going to speak, but Will, with determined quickness, was out of the room in an instant, and in another the hall-door had closed behind him. He was too strongly possessed with passionate rebellion against this inherited blot which had been thrust on his knowledge to reflect at present whether he had not been too hard on Bulstrode—too arrogantly merciless towards a man of sixty, who was making efforts at retrieval when time had rendered them vain.

No third person listening could have thoroughly understood the impetuosity of Will's repulse or the bitterness of his words. No one but himself then knew how everything connected with the sentiment of his own dignity had an immediate bearing for him on his relation to Dorothea and to Mr. Casaubon's treatment of him. And in the rush of impulses by which he flung back that offer of Bulstrode's there was mingled the sense that it would have been impossible for him ever to tell Dorothea that he had accepted it.

As for Bulstrode—when Will was gone he suffered a violent reaction, and wept like a woman. It was the first time he had encountered an open expression of scorn from any man higher than Raffles; and with that scorn hurrying like venom through his system, there was no sensibility left to consolations. But the relief of weeping had to be checked. His wife and daughters soon came home from hearing the address of an Oriental missionary, and were full of regret that papa had not heard, in the first instance, the interesting things which they tried to repeat to him.

Perhaps, through all other hidden thoughts, the one that breathed most comfort was, that Will Ladislaw at least was not likely to publish what had taken place that evening.

CHAPTER 62

"He was a squyer of lowe degre, That loved the king's daughter of Hungrie. —Old Romance.

Will Ladislaw's mind was now wholly bent on seeing Dorothea again, and forthwith quitting Middlemarch. The morning after his agitating scene with Bulstrode he wrote a brief letter to her, saying that various causes had detained him in the neighborhood longer than he had expected, and asking her permission to call again at Lowick at some hour which she would mention on the earliest possible day, he being anxious to depart, but unwilling to do so until she had granted him an interview. He left the letter at the office, ordering the messenger to carry it to Lowick Manor, and wait for an answer.

Ladislaw felt the awkwardness of asking for more last words. His former farewell had been made in the hearing of Sir James Chettam, and had been announced as final even to the butler. It is certainly trying to a man's dignity to reappear when he is not expected to do so: a first farewell has pathos in it, but to come back for a second lends an opening to comedy, and it was possible even that there might be bitter sneers afloat about Will's motives for lingering. Still it was on the whole more satisfactory to his feeling to take the directest means of seeing Dorothea, than to use any device which might give an air of chance to a meeting of which he wished her to understand that it was what he earnestly sought. When he had parted from her before, he had been in ignorance of facts which gave a new aspect to the relation between them, and made a more absolute severance than he had then believed in. He knew nothing of Dorothea's private fortune, and being little used to reflect on such matters, took it for granted that according to Mr. Casaubon's arrangement marriage to him, Will Ladislaw, would mean that she consented to be penniless. That was not what he could wish for even in his secret heart, or even if she had been ready to meet such hard contrast for his sake. And then, too, there was the fresh smart of that disclosure about his mother's family, which if known would be an added reason why Dorothea's friends should look down upon him as utterly below her. The secret hope that after some years he might come back with the sense that he had at least a personal value equal to her wealth, seemed now the dreamy continuation of a dream. This change would surely justify him in asking Dorothea to receive him once more.

But Dorothea on that morning was not at home to receive Will's note. In consequence of a letter from her uncle announcing his intention to be at home in a week, she had driven first to Freshitt to carry the news, meaning to go on to the Grange to deliver some orders with which her uncle had intrusted her—thinking, as he said, "a little mental occupation of this sort good for a widow."

If Will Ladislaw could have overheard some of the talk at Freshitt that morning, he would have felt all his suppositions confirmed as to the readiness of certain people to sneer at his lingering in the neighborhood. Sir James, indeed, though much relieved concerning Dorothea, had been on the watch to learn Ladislaw's movements, and had an instructed informant in Mr. Standish, who was necessarily in his confidence on this matter. That Ladislaw had stayed in Middlemarch nearly two months after he had declared that he was going immediately, was a fact to embitter Sir James's suspicions, or at least to justify his aversion to a "young fellow" whom he represented to himself as slight, volatile, and likely enough to show such recklessness as naturally went along with a position unriveted by family ties or a strict profession. But he had just heard something from Standish which, while it justified these surmises about Will, offered a means of nullifying all danger with regard to Dorothea.

Unwonted circumstances may make us all rather unlike ourselves: there are conditions under which the most majestic person is obliged to sneeze, and our emotions are liable to be acted on in the same incongruous manner. Good Sir James was this morning so far unlike himself that he was irritably anxious to say something to Dorothea on a subject which he usually avoided as if it had been a matter of shame to them both. He could not use Celia as a medium, because he did not choose that she should know the kind of gossip he had in his mind; and before Dorothea happened to arrive he had been trying to imagine how, with his shyness and unready tongue, he could ever manage to introduce his communication. Her unexpected presence brought him to utter hopelessness in his own power of saying anything unpleasant; but desperation suggested a resource; he sent the groom on an unsaddled horse across the park with a pencilled note to Mrs. Cadwallader, who already knew the gossip, and would think it no compromise of herself to repeat it as often as required.

Dorothea was detained on the good pretext that Mr. Garth, whom she wanted to see, was expected at the hall within the hour, and she was still talking to Caleb on the gravel when Sir James, on the watch for the rector's wife, saw her coming and met her with the needful hints.

"Enough! I understand,"—said Mrs. Cadwallader. "You shall be innocent. I am such a blackamoor that I cannot smirch myself."

"I don't mean that it's of any consequence," said Sir James, disliking that Mrs. Cadwallader should understand too much. "Only it is desirable that Dorothea should know there are reasons why she should not receive him again; and I really can't say so to her. It will come lightly from you."

It came very lightly indeed. When Dorothea quitted Caleb and turned to meet them, it appeared that Mrs. Cadwallader had stepped across the park by the merest chance in the world, just to chat with Celia in a matronly way about the baby. And so Mr.

Brooke was coming back? Delightful!—coming back, it was to be hoped, quite cured of Parliamentary fever and pioneering. Apropos of the "Pioneer"—somebody had prophesied that it would soon be like a dying dolphin, and turn all colors for want of knowing how to help itself, because Mr. Brooke's protege, the brilliant young Ladislaw, was gone or going. Had Sir James heard that?

The three were walking along the gravel slowly, and Sir James, turning aside to whip a shrub, said he had heard something of that sort.

"All false!" said Mrs. Cadwallader. "He is not gone, or going, apparently; the 'Pioneer' keeps its color, and Mr. Orlando Ladislaw is making a sad dark-blue scandal by warbling continually with your Mr. Lydgate's wife, who they tell me is as pretty as pretty can be. It seems nobody ever goes into the house without finding this young gentleman lying on the rug or warbling at the piano. But the people in manufacturing towns are always disreputable."

"You began by saying that one report was false, Mrs. Cadwallader, and I believe this is false too," said Dorothea, with indignant energy; "at least, I feel sure it is a misrepresentation. I will not hear any evil spoken of Mr. Ladislaw; he has already suffered too much injustice."

Dorothea when thoroughly moved cared little what any one thought of her feelings; and even if she had been able to reflect, she would have held it petty to keep silence at injurious words about Will from fear of being herself misunderstood. Her face was flushed and her lip trembled.

Sir James, glancing at her, repented of his stratagem; but Mrs. Cadwallader, equal to all occasions, spread the palms of her hands outward and said—"Heaven grant it, my dear!—I mean that all bad tales about anybody may be false. But it is a pity that young Lydgate should have married one of these Middlemarch girls. Considering he's a son of somebody, he might have got a woman with good blood in her veins, and not too young, who would have put up with his profession. There's Clara Harfager, for instance, whose friends don't know what to do with her; and she has a portion. Then we might have had her among us. However!—it's no use being wise for other people. Where is Celia? Pray let us go in."

"I am going on immediately to Tipton," said Dorothea, rather haughtily. "Good-by."

Sir James could say nothing as he accompanied her to the carriage. He was altogether discontented with the result of a contrivance which had cost him some secret humiliation beforehand.

Dorothea drove along between the berried hedgerows and the shorn corn-fields, not seeing or hearing anything around. The tears came and rolled down her cheeks, but she did not know it. The world, it seemed, was turning ugly and hateful, and there was no place for her trustfulness. "It is not true—it is not true!" was the voice within her that she listened to; but all the while a remembrance to which there had always

clung a vague uneasiness would thrust itself on her attention—the remembrance of that day when she had found Will Ladislaw with Mrs. Lydgate, and had heard his voice accompanied by the piano.

"He said he would never do anything that I disapproved—I wish I could have told him that I disapproved of that," said poor Dorothea, inwardly, feeling a strange alternation between anger with Will and the passionate defence of him. "They all try to blacken him before me; but I will care for no pain, if he is not to blame. I always believed he was good."—These were her last thoughts before she felt that the carriage was passing under the archway of the lodge-gate at the Grange, when she hurriedly pressed her handkerchief to her face and began to think of her errands. The coachman begged leave to take out the horses for half an hour as there was something wrong with a shoe; and Dorothea, having the sense that she was going to rest, took off her gloves and bonnet, while she was leaning against a statue in the entrance-hall, and talking to the housekeeper. At last she said—

"I must stay here a little, Mrs. Kell. I will go into the library and write you some memoranda from my uncle's letter, if you will open the shutters for me."

"The shutters are open, madam," said Mrs. Kell, following Dorothea, who had walked along as she spoke. "Mr. Ladislaw is there, looking for something."

(Will had come to fetch a portfolio of his own sketches which he had missed in the act of packing his movables, and did not choose to leave behind.)

Dorothea's heart seemed to turn over as if it had had a blow, but she was not perceptibly checked: in truth, the sense that Will was there was for the moment all-satisfying to her, like the sight of something precious that one has lost. When she reached the door she said to Mrs. Kell—

"Go in first, and tell him that I am here."

Will had found his portfolio, and had laid it on the table at the far end of the room, to turn over the sketches and please himself by looking at the memorable piece of art which had a relation to nature too mysterious for Dorothea. He was smiling at it still, and shaking the sketches into order with the thought that he might find a letter from her awaiting him at Middlemarch, when Mrs. Kell close to his elbow said—

"Mrs. Casaubon is coming in, sir."

Will turned round quickly, and the next moment Dorothea was entering. As Mrs. Kell closed the door behind her they met: each was looking at the other, and consciousness was overflowed by something that suppressed utterance. It was not confusion that kept them silent, for they both felt that parting was near, and there is no shamefacedness in a sad parting.

She moved automatically towards her uncle's chair against the writing-table, and Will, after drawing it out a little for her, went a few paces off and stood opposite to her.

"Pray sit down," said Dorothea, crossing her hands on her lap; "I am very glad you were here." Will thought that her face looked just as it did when she first shook hands with him in Rome; for her widow's cap, fixed in her bonnet, had gone off with it, and he could see that she had lately been shedding tears. But the mixture of anger in her agitation had vanished at the sight of him; she had been used, when they were face to face, always to feel confidence and the happy freedom which comes with mutual understanding, and how could other people's words hinder that effect on a sudden? Let the music which can take possession of our frame and fill the air with joy for us, sound once more—what does it signify that we heard it found fault with in its absence?

"I have sent a letter to Lowick Manor to-day, asking leave to see you," said Will, seating himself opposite to her. "I am going away immediately, and I could not go without speaking to you again."

"I thought we had parted when you came to Lowick many weeks ago—you thought you were going then," said Dorothea, her voice trembling a little.

"Yes; but I was in ignorance then of things which I know now—things which have altered my feelings about the future. When I saw you before, I was dreaming that I might come back some day. I don't think I ever shall—now." Will paused here.

"You wished me to know the reasons?" said Dorothea, timidly.

"Yes," said Will, impetuously, shaking his head backward, and looking away from her with irritation in his face. "Of course I must wish it. I have been grossly insulted in your eyes and in the eyes of others. There has been a mean implication against my character. I wish you to know that under no circumstances would I have lowered myself by—under no circumstances would I have given men the chance of saying that I sought money under the pretext of seeking—something else. There was no need of other safeguard against me—the safeguard of wealth was enough."

Will rose from his chair with the last word and went—he hardly knew where; but it was to the projecting window nearest him, which had been open as now about the same season a year ago, when he and Dorothea had stood within it and talked together. Her whole heart was going out at this moment in sympathy with Will's indignation: she only wanted to convince him that she had never done him injustice, and he seemed to have turned away from her as if she too had been part of the unfriendly world.

"It would be very unkind of you to suppose that I ever attributed any meanness to you," she began. Then in her ardent way, wanting to plead with him, she moved from

her chair and went in front of him to her old place in the window, saying, "Do you suppose that I ever disbelieved in you?"

When Will saw her there, he gave a start and moved backward out of the window, without meeting her glance. Dorothea was hurt by this movement following up the previous anger of his tone. She was ready to say that it was as hard on her as on him, and that she was helpless; but those strange particulars of their relation which neither of them could explicitly mention kept her always in dread of saying too much. At this moment she had no belief that Will would in any case have wanted to marry her, and she feared using words which might imply such a belief. She only said earnestly, recurring to his last word—

"I am sure no safeguard was ever needed against you."

Will did not answer. In the stormy fluctuation of his feelings these words of hers seemed to him cruelly neutral, and he looked pale and miserable after his angry outburst. He went to the table and fastened up his portfolio, while Dorothea looked at him from the distance. They were wasting these last moments together in wretched silence. What could he say, since what had got obstinately uppermost in his mind was the passionate love for her which he forbade himself to utter? What could she say, since she might offer him no help—since she was forced to keep the money that ought to have been his?—since to-day he seemed not to respond as he used to do to her thorough trust and liking?

But Will at last turned away from his portfolio and approached the window again.

"I must go," he said, with that peculiar look of the eyes which sometimes accompanies bitter feeling, as if they had been tired and burned with gazing too close at a light.

"What shall you do in life?" said Dorothea, timidly. "Have your intentions remained just the same as when we said good-by before?"

"Yes," said Will, in a tone that seemed to waive the subject as uninteresting. "I shall work away at the first thing that offers. I suppose one gets a habit of doing without happiness or hope."

"Oh, what sad words!" said Dorothea, with a dangerous tendency to sob. Then trying to smile, she added, "We used to agree that we were alike in speaking too strongly."

"I have not spoken too strongly now," said Will, leaning back against the angle of the wall. "There are certain things which a man can only go through once in his life; and he must know some time or other that the best is over with him. This experience has happened to me while I am very young—that is all. What I care more for than I can ever care for anything else is absolutely forbidden to me—I don't mean merely by being out of my reach, but forbidden me, even if it were within my reach, by my own

pride and honor—by everything I respect myself for. Of course I shall go on living as a man might do who had seen heaven in a trance."

Will paused, imagining that it would be impossible for Dorothea to misunderstand this; indeed he felt that he was contradicting himself and offending against his self-approval in speaking to her so plainly; but still—it could not be fairly called wooing a woman to tell her that he would never woo her. It must be admitted to be a ghostly kind of wooing.

But Dorothea's mind was rapidly going over the past with quite another vision than his. The thought that she herself might be what Will most cared for did throb through her an instant, but then came doubt: the memory of the little they had lived through together turned pale and shrank before the memory which suggested how much fuller might have been the intercourse between Will and some one else with whom he had had constant companionship. Everything he had said might refer to that other relation, and whatever had passed between him and herself was thoroughly explained by what she had always regarded as their simple friendship and the cruel obstruction thrust upon it by her husband's injurious act. Dorothea stood silent, with her eyes cast down dreamily, while images crowded upon her which left the sickening certainty that Will was referring to Mrs. Lydgate. But why sickening? He wanted her to know that here too his conduct should be above suspicion.

Will was not surprised at her silence. His mind also was tumultuously busy while he watched her, and he was feeling rather wildly that something must happen to hinder their parting—some miracle, clearly nothing in their own deliberate speech. Yet, after all, had she any love for him?—he could not pretend to himself that he would rather believe her to be without that pain. He could not deny that a secret longing for the assurance that she loved him was at the root of all his words.

Neither of them knew how long they stood in that way. Dorothea was raising her eyes, and was about to speak, when the door opened and her footman came to say—

"The horses are ready, madam, whenever you like to start."

"Presently," said Dorothea. Then turning to Will, she said, "I have some memoranda to write for the housekeeper."

"I must go," said Will, when the door had closed again—advancing towards her. "The day after to-morrow I shall leave Middlemarch."

"You have acted in every way rightly," said Dorothea, in a low tone, feeling a pressure at her heart which made it difficult to speak.

She put out her hand, and Will took it for an instant without speaking, for her words had seemed to him cruelly cold and unlike herself. Their eyes met, but there was

discontent in his, and in hers there was only sadness. He turned away and took his portfolio under his arm.

"I have never done you injustice. Please remember me," said Dorothea, repressing a rising sob.

"Why should you say that?" said Will, with irritation. "As if I were not in danger of forgetting everything else."

He had really a movement of anger against her at that moment, and it impelled him to go away without pause. It was all one flash to Dorothea—his last words—his distant bow to her as he reached the door—the sense that he was no longer there. She sank into the chair, and for a few moments sat like a statue, while images and emotions were hurrying upon her. Joy came first, in spite of the threatening train behind it—joy in the impression that it was really herself whom Will loved and was renouncing, that there was really no other love less permissible, more blameworthy, which honor was hurrying him away from. They were parted all the same, but—Dorothea drew a deep breath and felt her strength return—she could think of him unrestrainedly. At that moment the parting was easy to bear: the first sense of loving and being loved excluded sorrow. It was as if some hard icy pressure had melted, and her consciousness had room to expand: her past was come back to her with larger interpretation. The joy was not the less—perhaps it was the more complete just then—because of the irrevocable parting; for there was no reproach, no contemptuous wonder to imagine in any eye or from any lips. He had acted so as to defy reproach, and make wonder respectful.

Any one watching her might have seen that there was a fortifying thought within her. Just as when inventive power is working with glad ease some small claim on the attention is fully met as if it were only a cranny opened to the sunlight, it was easy now for Dorothea to write her memoranda. She spoke her last words to the housekeeper in cheerful tones, and when she seated herself in the carriage her eyes were bright and her cheeks blooming under the dismal bonnet. She threw back the heavy "weepers," and looked before her, wondering which road Will had taken. It was in her nature to be proud that he was blameless, and through all her feelings there ran this vein—"I was right to defend him."

The coachman was used to drive his grays at a good pace, Mr. Casaubon being unenjoying and impatient in everything away from his desk, and wanting to get to the end of all journeys; and Dorothea was now bowled along quickly. Driving was pleasant, for rain in the night had laid the dust, and the blue sky looked far off, away from the region of the great clouds that sailed in masses. The earth looked like a happy place under the vast heavens, and Dorothea was wishing that she might overtake Will and see him once more.

After a turn of the road, there he was with the portfolio under his arm; but the next moment she was passing him while he raised his hat, and she felt a pang at being

seated there in a sort of exaltation, leaving him behind. She could not look back at him. It was as if a crowd of indifferent objects had thrust them asunder, and forced them along different paths, taking them farther and farther away from each other, and making it useless to look back. She could no more make any sign that would seem to say, "Need we part?" than she could stop the carriage to wait for him. Nay, what a world of reasons crowded upon her against any movement of her thought towards a future that might reverse the decision of this day!

"I only wish I had known before—I wish he knew—then we could be quite happy in thinking of each other, though we are forever parted. And if I could but have given him the money, and made things easier for him!"—were the longings that came back the most persistently. And yet, so heavily did the world weigh on her in spite of her independent energy, that with this idea of Will as in need of such help and at a disadvantage with the world, there came always the vision of that unfittingness of any closer relation between them which lay in the opinion of every one connected with her. She felt to the full all the imperativeness of the motives which urged Will's conduct. How could he dream of her defying the barrier that her husband had placed between them?—how could she ever say to herself that she would defy it?

Will's certainty as the carriage grew smaller in the distance, had much more bitterness in it. Very slight matters were enough to gall him in his sensitive mood, and the sight of Dorothea driving past him while he felt himself plodding along as a poor devil seeking a position in a world which in his present temper offered him little that he coveted, made his conduct seem a mere matter of necessity, and took away the sustainment of resolve. After all, he had no assurance that she loved him: could any man pretend that he was simply glad in such a case to have the suffering all on his own side?

That evening Will spent with the Lydgates; the next evening he was gone.

BOOK 7. TWO TEMPTATIONS

CHAPTER 63

These little things are great to little man.—GOLDSMITH.

"Have you seen much of your scientific phoenix, Lydgate, lately?" said Mr. Toller at one of his Christmas dinner-parties, speaking to Mr. Farebrother on his right hand.

"Not much, I am sorry to say," answered the Vicar, accustomed to parry Mr. Toller's banter about his belief in the new medical light. "I am out of the way and he is too busy."

"Is he? I am glad to hear it," said Dr. Minchin, with mingled suavity and surprise.

"He gives a great deal of time to the New Hospital," said Mr. Farebrother, who had his reasons for continuing the subject: "I hear of that from my neighbor, Mrs. Casaubon, who goes there often. She says Lydgate is indefatigable, and is making a fine thing of Bulstrode's institution. He is preparing a new ward in case of the cholera coming to us."

"And preparing theories of treatment to try on the patients, I suppose," said Mr. Toller.

"Come, Toller, be candid," said Mr. Farebrother. "You are too clever not to see the good of a bold fresh mind in medicine, as well as in everything else; and as to cholera, I fancy, none of you are very sure what you ought to do. If a man goes a little too far along a new road, it is usually himself that he harms more than any one else."

"I am sure you and Wrench ought to be obliged to him," said Dr. Minchin, looking towards Toller, "for he has sent you the cream of Peacock's patients."

"Lydgate has been living at a great rate for a young beginner," said Mr. Harry Toller, the brewer. "I suppose his relations in the North back him up."

"I hope so," said Mr. Chichely, "else he ought not to have married that nice girl we were all so fond of. Hang it, one has a grudge against a man who carries off the prettiest girl in the town."

"Ay, by God! and the best too," said Mr. Standish.

"My friend Vincy didn't half like the marriage, I know that," said Mr. Chichely. "He wouldn't do much. How the relations on the other side may have come down I can't say." There was an emphatic kind of reticence in Mr. Chichely's manner of speaking.

"Oh, I shouldn't think Lydgate ever looked to practice for a living," said Mr. Toller, with a slight touch of sarcasm, and there the subject was dropped.

This was not the first time that Mr. Farebrother had heard hints of Lydgate's expenses being obviously too great to be met by his practice, but he thought it not unlikely that there were resources or expectations which excused the large outlay at the time of Lydgate's marriage, and which might hinder any bad consequences from the disappointment in his practice. One evening, when he took the pains to go to Middlemarch on purpose to have a chat with Lydgate as of old, he noticed in him an air of excited effort quite unlike his usual easy way of keeping silence or breaking it with abrupt energy whenever he had anything to say. Lydgate talked persistently when they were in his work-room, putting arguments for and against the probability of certain biological views; but he had none of those definite things to say or to show which give the waymarks of a patient uninterrupted pursuit, such as he used himself to insist on, saying that "there must be a systole and diastole in all inquiry," and that "a man's mind must be continually expanding and shrinking between the whole human horizon and the horizon of an object-glass." That evening he seemed to be talking widely for the sake of resisting any personal bearing; and before long they went into the drawing room, where Lydgate, having asked Rosamond to give them music, sank back in his chair in silence, but with a strange light in his eyes. "He may have been taking an opiate," was a thought that crossed Mr. Farebrother's mind—"tic-douloureux perhaps—or medical worries."

It did not occur to him that Lydgate's marriage was not delightful: he believed, as the rest did, that Rosamond was an amiable, docile creature, though he had always thought her rather uninteresting—a little too much the pattern-card of the finishing-school; and his mother could not forgive Rosamond because she never seemed to see that Henrietta Noble was in the room. "However, Lydgate fell in love with her," said the Vicar to himself, "and she must be to his taste."

Mr. Farebrother was aware that Lydgate was a proud man, but having very little corresponding fibre in himself, and perhaps too little care about personal dignity, except the dignity of not being mean or foolish, he could hardly allow enough for the way in which Lydgate shrank, as from a burn, from the utterance of any word about his private affairs. And soon after that conversation at Mr. Toller's, the Vicar learned something which made him watch the more eagerly for an opportunity of indirectly letting Lydgate know that if he wanted to open himself about any difficulty there was a friendly ear ready.

The opportunity came at Mr. Vincy's, where, on New Year's Day, there was a party, to which Mr. Farebrother was irresistibly invited, on the plea that he must not forsake his old friends on the first new year of his being a greater man, and Rector as well as Vicar. And this party was thoroughly friendly: all the ladies of the Farebrother family were present; the Vincy children all dined at the table, and Fred had persuaded his mother that if she did not invite Mary Garth, the Farebrothers would regard it as a

slight to themselves, Mary being their particular friend. Mary came, and Fred was in high spirits, though his enjoyment was of a checkered kind—triumph that his mother should see Mary's importance with the chief personages in the party being much streaked with jealousy when Mr. Farebrother sat down by her. Fred used to be much more easy about his own accomplishments in the days when he had not begun to dread being "bowled out by Farebrother," and this terror was still before him. Mrs. Vincy, in her fullest matronly bloom, looked at Mary's little figure, rough wavy hair, and visage quite without lilies and roses, and wondered; trying unsuccessfully to fancy herself caring about Mary's appearance in wedding clothes, or feeling complacency in grandchildren who would "feature" the Garths. However, the party was a merry one, and Mary was particularly bright; being glad, for Fred's sake, that his friends were getting kinder to her, and being also quite willing that they should see how much she was valued by others whom they must admit to be judges.

Mr. Farebrother noticed that Lydgate seemed bored, and that Mr. Vincy spoke as little as possible to his son-in-law. Rosamond was perfectly graceful and calm, and only a subtle observation such as the Vicar had not been roused to bestow on her would have perceived the total absence of that interest in her husband's presence which a loving wife is sure to betray, even if etiquette keeps her aloof from him. When Lydgate was taking part in the conversation, she never looked towards him any more than if she had been a sculptured Psyche modelled to look another way: and when, after being called out for an hour or two, he re-entered the room, she seemed unconscious of the fact, which eighteen months before would have had the effect of a numeral before ciphers. In reality, however, she was intensely aware of Lydgate's voice and movements; and her pretty good-tempered air of unconsciousness was a studied negation by which she satisfied her inward opposition to him without compromise of propriety. When the ladies were in the drawing-room after Lydgate had been called away from the dessert, Mrs. Farebrother, when Rosamond happened to be near her, said—"You have to give up a great deal of your husband's society, Mrs. Lydgate."

"Yes, the life of a medical man is very arduous: especially when he is so devoted to his profession as Mr. Lydgate is," said Rosamond, who was standing, and moved easily away at the end of this correct little speech.

"It is dreadfully dull for her when there is no company," said Mrs. Vincy, who was seated at the old lady's side. "I am sure I thought so when Rosamond was ill, and I was staying with her. You know, Mrs. Farebrother, ours is a cheerful house. I am of a cheerful disposition myself, and Mr. Vincy always likes something to be going on. That is what Rosamond has been used to. Very different from a husband out at odd hours, and never knowing when he will come home, and of a close, proud disposition, / think"—indiscreet Mrs. Vincy did lower her tone slightly with this parenthesis. "But Rosamond always had an angel of a temper; her brothers used very often not to please her, but she was never the girl to show temper; from a baby

she was always as good as good, and with a complexion beyond anything. But my children are all good-tempered, thank God."

This was easily credible to any one looking at Mrs. Vincy as she threw back her broad cap-strings, and smiled towards her three little girls, aged from seven to eleven. But in that smiling glance she was obliged to include Mary Garth, whom the three girls had got into a corner to make her tell them stories. Mary was just finishing the delicious tale of Rumpelstiltskin, which she had well by heart, because Letty was never tired of communicating it to her ignorant elders from a favorite red volume. Louisa, Mrs. Vincy's darling, now ran to her with wide-eyed serious excitement, crying, "Oh mamma, mamma, the little man stamped so hard on the floor he couldn't get his leg out again!"

"Bless you, my cherub!" said mamma; "you shall tell me all about it to-morrow. Go and listen!" and then, as her eyes followed Louisa back towards the attractive corner, she thought that if Fred wished her to invite Mary again she would make no objection, the children being so pleased with her.

But presently the corner became still more animated, for Mr. Farebrother came in, and seating himself behind Louisa, took her on his lap; whereupon the girls all insisted that he must hear Rumpelstiltskin, and Mary must tell it over again. He insisted too, and Mary, without fuss, began again in her neat fashion, with precisely the same words as before. Fred, who had also seated himself near, would have felt unmixed triumph in Mary's effectiveness if Mr. Farebrother had not been looking at her with evident admiration, while he dramatized an intense interest in the tale to please the children.

"You will never care any more about my one-eyed giant, Loo," said Fred at the end.

"Yes, I shall. Tell about him now," said Louisa.

"Oh, I dare say; I am quite cut out. Ask Mr. Farebrother."

"Yes," added Mary; "ask Mr. Farebrother to tell you about the ants whose beautiful house was knocked down by a giant named Tom, and he thought they didn't mind because he couldn't hear them cry, or see them use their pocket-handkerchiefs."

"Please," said Louisa, looking up at the Vicar.

"No, no, I am a grave old parson. If I try to draw a story out of my bag a sermon comes instead. Shall I preach you a sermon?" said he, putting on his short-sighted glasses, and pursing up his lips.

"Yes," said Louisa, falteringly.

"Let me see, then. Against cakes: how cakes are bad things, especially if they are sweet and have plums in them."

Louisa took the affair rather seriously, and got down from the Vicar's knee to go to Fred.

"Ah, I see it will not do to preach on New Year's Day," said Mr. Farebrother, rising and walking away. He had discovered of late that Fred had become jealous of him, and also that he himself was not losing his preference for Mary above all other women.

"A delightful young person is Miss Garth," said Mrs. Farebrother, who had been watching her son's movements.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vincy, obliged to reply, as the old lady turned to her expectantly. "It is a pity she is not better-looking."

"I cannot say that," said Mrs. Farebrother, decisively. "I like her countenance. We must not always ask for beauty, when a good God has seen fit to make an excellent young woman without it. I put good manners first, and Miss Garth will know how to conduct herself in any station."

The old lady was a little sharp in her tone, having a prospective reference to Mary's becoming her daughter-in-law; for there was this inconvenience in Mary's position with regard to Fred, that it was not suitable to be made public, and hence the three ladies at Lowick Parsonage were still hoping that Camden would choose Miss Garth.

New visitors entered, and the drawing-room was given up to music and games, while whist-tables were prepared in the quiet room on the other side of the hall. Mr. Farebrother played a rubber to satisfy his mother, who regarded her occasional whist as a protest against scandal and novelty of opinion, in which light even a revoke had its dignity. But at the end he got Mr. Chichely to take his place, and left the room. As he crossed the hall, Lydgate had just come in and was taking off his great-coat.

"You are the man I was going to look for," said the Vicar; and instead of entering the drawing-room, they walked along the hall and stood against the fireplace, where the frosty air helped to make a glowing bank. "You see, I can leave the whist-table easily enough," he went on, smiling at Lydgate, "now I don't play for money. I owe that to you, Mrs. Casaubon says."

"How?" said Lydgate, coldly.

"Ah, you didn't mean me to know it; I call that ungenerous reticence. You should let a man have the pleasure of feeling that you have done him a good turn. I don't enter into some people's dislike of being under an obligation: upon my word, I prefer being under an obligation to everybody for behaving well to me."

"I can't tell what you mean," said Lydgate, "unless it is that I once spoke of you to Mrs. Casaubon. But I did not think that she would break her promise not to mention

that I had done so," said Lydgate, leaning his back against the corner of the mantel-piece, and showing no radiance in his face.

"It was Brooke who let it out, only the other day. He paid me the compliment of saying that he was very glad I had the living though you had come across his tactics, and had praised me up as a lien and a Tillotson, and that sort of thing, till Mrs. Casaubon would hear of no one else."

"Oh, Brooke is such a leaky-minded fool," said Lydgate, contemptuously.

"Well, I was glad of the leakiness then. I don't see why you shouldn't like me to know that you wished to do me a service, my dear fellow. And you certainly have done me one. It's rather a strong check to one's self-complacency to find how much of one's right doing depends on not being in want of money. A man will not be tempted to say the Lord's Prayer backward to please the devil, if he doesn't want the devil's services. I have no need to hang on the smiles of chance now."

"I don't see that there's any money-getting without chance," said Lydgate; "if a man gets it in a profession, it's pretty sure to come by chance."

Mr. Farebrother thought he could account for this speech, in striking contrast with Lydgate's former way of talking, as the perversity which will often spring from the moodiness of a man ill at ease in his affairs. He answered in a tone of good-humored admission—

"Ah, there's enormous patience wanted with the way of the world. But it is the easier for a man to wait patiently when he has friends who love him, and ask for nothing better than to help him through, so far as it lies in their power."

"Oh yes," said Lydgate, in a careless tone, changing his attitude and looking at his watch. "People make much more of their difficulties than they need to do."

He knew as distinctly as possible that this was an offer of help to himself from Mr. Farebrother, and he could not bear it.

So strangely determined are we mortals, that, after having been long gratified with the sense that he had privately done the Vicar a service, the suggestion that the Vicar discerned his need of a service in return made him shrink into unconquerable reticence.

Besides, behind all making of such offers what else must come?—that he should "mention his case," imply that he wanted specific things. At that moment, suicide seemed easier.

Mr. Farebrother was too keen a man not to know the meaning of that reply, and there was a certain massiveness in Lydgate's manner and tone, corresponding with his physique, which if he repelled your advances in the first instance seemed to put persuasive devices out of question.

"What time are you?" said the Vicar, devouring his wounded feeling.

"After eleven," said Lydgate. And they went into the drawing-room.



CHAPTER 64

1st Gent. Where lies the power, there let the blame lie too.

2d Gent. Nay, power is relative; you cannot fright

The coming pest with border fortresses,

Or catch your carp with subtle argument.

All force is twain in one: cause is not cause

Unless effect be there; and action's self

Must needs contain a passive. So command

Exists but with obedience."

Even if Lydgate had been inclined to be quite open about his affairs, he knew that it would have hardly been in Mr. Farebrother's power to give him the help he immediately wanted. With the year's bills coming in from his tradesmen, with Dover's threatening hold on his furniture, and with nothing to depend on but slow dribbling payments from patients who must not be offended—for the handsome fees he had had from Freshitt Hall and Lowick Manor had been easily absorbed—nothing less than a thousand pounds would have freed him from actual embarrassment, and left a residue which, according to the favorite phrase of hopefulness in such circumstances, would have given him "time to look about him."

Naturally, the merry Christmas bringing the happy New Year, when fellow-citizens expect to be paid for the trouble and goods they have smilingly bestowed on their neighbors, had so tightened the pressure of sordid cares on Lydgate's mind that it was hardly possible for him to think unbrokenly of any other subject, even the most habitual and soliciting. He was not an ill-tempered man; his intellectual activity, the ardent kindness of his heart, as well as his strong frame, would always, under tolerably easy conditions, have kept him above the petty uncontrolled susceptibilities which make bad temper. But he was now a prey to that worst irritation which arises not simply from annoyances, but from the second consciousness underlying those annoyances, of wasted energy and a degrading preoccupation, which was the reverse of all his former purposes. "*This* is what I am thinking of; and *that* is what I might have been thinking of," was the bitter incessant murmur within him, making every difficulty a double goad to impatience.

Some gentlemen have made an amazing figure in literature by general discontent with the universe as a trap of dulness into which their great souls have fallen by mistake; but the sense of a stupendous self and an insignificant world may have its

consolations. Lydgate's discontent was much harder to bear: it was the sense that there was a grand existence in thought and effective action lying around him, while his self was being narrowed into the miserable isolation of egoistic fears, and vulgar anxieties for events that might allay such fears. His troubles will perhaps appear miserably sordid, and beneath the attention of lofty persons who can know nothing of debt except on a magnificent scale. Doubtless they were sordid; and for the majority, who are not lofty, there is no escape from sordidness but by being free from money-craving, with all its base hopes and temptations, its watching for death, its hinted requests, its horse-dealer's desire to make bad work pass for good, its seeking for function which ought to be another's, its compulsion often to long for Luck in the shape of a wide calamity.

It was because Lydgate writhed under the idea of getting his neck beneath this vile yoke that he had fallen into a bitter moody state which was continually widening Rosamond's alienation from him. After the first disclosure about the bill of sale, he had made many efforts to draw her into sympathy with him about possible measures for narrowing their expenses, and with the threatening approach of Christmas his propositions grew more and more definite. "We two can do with only one servant, and live on very little," he said, "and I shall manage with one horse." For Lydgate, as we have seen, had begun to reason, with a more distinct vision, about the expenses of living, and any share of pride he had given to appearances of that sort was meagre compared with the pride which made him revolt from exposure as a debtor, or from asking men to help him with their money.

"Of course you can dismiss the other two servants, if you like," said Rosamond; "but I should have thought it would be very injurious to your position for us to live in a poor way. You must expect your practice to be lowered."

"My dear Rosamond, it is not a question of choice. We have begun too expensively. Peacock, you know, lived in a much smaller house than this. It is my fault: I ought to have known better, and I deserve a thrashing—if there were anybody who had a right to give it me—for bringing you into the necessity of living in a poorer way than you have been used to. But we married because we loved each other, I suppose. And that may help us to pull along till things get better. Come, dear, put down that work and come to me."

He was really in chill gloom about her at that moment, but he dreaded a future without affection, and was determined to resist the oncoming of division between them. Rosamond obeyed him, and he took her on his knee, but in her secret soul she was utterly aloof from him. The poor thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate was part of that world. But he held her waist with one hand and laid the other gently on both of hers; for this rather abrupt man had much tenderness in his manners towards women, seeming to have always present in his imagination the weakness of their frames and the delicate poise of their health both in body and mind. And he began again to speak persuasively.

"I find, now I look into things a little, Rosy, that it is wonderful what an amount of money slips away in our housekeeping. I suppose the servants are careless, and we have had a great many people coming. But there must be many in our rank who manage with much less: they must do with commoner things, I suppose, and look after the scraps. It seems, money goes but a little way in these matters, for Wrench has everything as plain as possible, and he has a very large practice."

"Oh, if you think of living as the Wrenches do!" said Rosamond, with a little turn of her neck. "But I have heard you express your disgust at that way of living."

"Yes, they have bad taste in everything—they make economy look ugly. We needn't do that. I only meant that they avoid expenses, although Wrench has a capital practice."

"Why should not you have a good practice, Tertius? Mr. Peacock had. You should be more careful not to offend people, and you should send out medicines as the others do. I am sure you began well, and you got several good houses. It cannot answer to be eccentric; you should think what will be generally liked," said Rosamond, in a decided little tone of admonition.

Lydgate's anger rose: he was prepared to be indulgent towards feminine weakness, but not towards feminine dictation. The shallowness of a waternixie's soul may have a charm until she becomes didactic. But he controlled himself, and only said, with a touch of despotic firmness—

"What I am to do in my practice, Rosy, it is for me to judge. That is not the question between us. It is enough for you to know that our income is likely to be a very narrow one—hardly four hundred, perhaps less, for a long time to come, and we must try to re-arrange our lives in accordance with that fact."

Rosamond was silent for a moment or two, looking before her, and then said, "My uncle Bulstrode ought to allow you a salary for the time you give to the Hospital: it is not right that you should work for nothing."

"It was understood from the beginning that my services would be gratuitous. That, again, need not enter into our discussion. I have pointed out what is the only probability," said Lydgate, impatiently. Then checking himself, he went on more quietly—

"I think I see one resource which would free us from a good deal of the present difficulty. I hear that young Ned Plymdale is going to be married to Miss Sophy Toller. They are rich, and it is not often that a good house is vacant in Middlemarch. I feel sure that they would be glad to take this house from us with most of our furniture, and they would be willing to pay handsomely for the lease. I can employ Trumbull to speak to Plymdale about it."

Rosamond left her husband's knee and walked slowly to the other end of the room; when she turned round and walked towards him it was evident that the tears had come, and that she was biting her under-lip and clasping her hands to keep herself from crying. Lydgate was wretched—shaken with anger and yet feeling that it would be unmanly to vent the anger just now.

"I am very sorry, Rosamond; I know this is painful."

"I thought, at least, when I had borne to send the plate back and have that man taking an inventory of the furniture—I should have thought *that* would suffice."

"I explained it to you at the time, dear. That was only a security and behind that Security there is a debt. And that debt must be paid within the next few months, else we shall have our furniture sold. If young Plymdale will take our house and most of our furniture, we shall be able to pay that debt, and some others too, and we shall be quit of a place too expensive for us. We might take a smaller house: Trumbull, I know, has a very decent one to let at thirty pounds a-year, and this is ninety."

Lydgate uttered this speech in the curt hammering way with which we usually try to nail down a vague mind to imperative facts. Tears rolled silently down Rosamond's cheeks; she just pressed her handkerchief against them, and stood looking at the large vase on the mantel-piece. It was a moment of more intense bitterness than she had ever felt before. At last she said, without hurry and with careful emphasis—

"I never could have believed that you would like to act in that way."

"Like it?" burst out Lydgate, rising from his chair, thrusting his hands in his pockets and stalking away from the hearth; "it's not a question of liking. Of course, I don't like it; it's the only thing I can do." He wheeled round there, and turned towards her.

"I should have thought there were many other means than that," said Rosamond. "Let us have a sale and leave Middlemarch altogether."

"To do what? What is the use of my leaving my work in Middlemarch to go where I have none? We should be just as penniless elsewhere as we are here," said Lydgate still more angrily.

"If we are to be in that position it will be entirely your own doing, Tertius," said Rosamond, turning round to speak with the fullest conviction. "You will not behave as you ought to do to your own family. You offended Captain Lydgate. Sir Godwin was very kind to me when we were at Quallingham, and I am sure if you showed proper regard to him and told him your affairs, he would do anything for you. But rather than that, you like giving up our house and furniture to Mr. Ned Plymdale."

There was something like fierceness in Lydgate's eyes, as he answered with new violence, "Well, then, if you will have it so, I do like it. I admit that I like it better than making a fool of myself by going to beg where it's of no use. Understand then, that it is what I *like to do*."

There was a tone in the last sentence which was equivalent to the clutch of his strong hand on Rosamond's delicate arm. But for all that, his will was not a whit stronger than hers. She immediately walked out of the room in silence, but with an intense determination to hinder what Lydgate liked to do.

He went out of the house, but as his blood cooled he felt that the chief result of the discussion was a deposit of dread within him at the idea of opening with his wife in future subjects which might again urge him to violent speech. It was as if a fracture in delicate crystal had begun, and he was afraid of any movement that might make it fatal. His marriage would be a mere piece of bitter irony if they could not go on loving each other. He had long ago made up his mind to what he thought was her negative character—her want of sensibility, which showed itself in disregard both of his specific wishes and of his general aims. The first great disappointment had been borne: the tender devotedness and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have lost their limbs. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a hold on his heart, and it was his intense desire that the hold should remain strong. In marriage, the certainty, "She will never love me much," is easier to bear than the fear, "I shall love her no more." Hence, after that outburst, his inward effort was entirely to excuse her, and to blame the hard circumstances which were partly his fault. He tried that evening, by petting her, to heal the wound he had made in the morning, and it was not in Rosamond's nature to be repellent or sulky; indeed, she welcomed the signs that her husband loved her and was under control. But this was something quite distinct from loving *him*. Lydgate would not have chosen soon to recur to the plan of parting with the house; he was resolved to carry it out, and say as little more about it as possible. But Rosamond herself touched on it at breakfast by saying, mildly—

"Have you spoken to Trumbull yet?"

"No," said Lydgate, "but I shall call on him as I go by this morning. No time must be lost." He took Rosamond's question as a sign that she withdrew her inward opposition, and kissed her head caressingly when he got up to go away.

As soon as it was late enough to make a call, Rosamond went to Mrs. Plymdale, Mr. Ned's mother, and entered with pretty congratulations into the subject of the coming marriage. Mrs. Plymdale's maternal view was, that Rosamond might possibly now have retrospective glimpses of her own folly; and feeling the advantages to be at present all on the side of her son, was too kind a woman not to behave graciously.

"Yes, Ned is most happy, I must say. And Sophy Toller is all I could desire in a daughter-in-law. Of course her father is able to do something handsome for her—that is only what would be expected with a brewery like his. And the connection is everything we should desire. But that is not what I look at. She is such a very nice girl—no airs, no pretensions, though on a level with the first. I don't mean with the

titled aristocracy. I see very little good in people aiming out of their own sphere. I mean that Sophy is equal to the best in the town, and she is contented with that."

"I have always thought her very agreeable," said Rosamond.

"I look upon it as a reward for Ned, who never held his head too high, that he should have got into the very best connection," continued Mrs. Plymdale, her native sharpness softened by a fervid sense that she was taking a correct view. "And such particular people as the Tollers are, they might have objected because some of our friends are not theirs. It is well known that your aunt Bulstrode and I have been intimate from our youth, and Mr. Plymdale has been always on Mr. Bulstrode's side. And I myself prefer serious opinions. But the Tollers have welcomed Ned all the same."

"I am sure he is a very deserving, well-principled young man," said Rosamond, with a neat air of patronage in return for Mrs. Plymdale's wholesome corrections.

"Oh, he has not the style of a captain in the army, or that sort of carriage as if everybody was beneath him, or that showy kind of talking, and singing, and intellectual talent. But I am thankful he has not. It is a poor preparation both for here and Hereafter."

"Oh dear, yes; appearances have very little to do with happiness," said Rosamond. "I think there is every prospect of their being a happy couple. What house will they take?"

"Oh, as for that, they must put up with what they can get. They have been looking at the house in St. Peter's Place, next to Mr. Hackbutt's; it belongs to him, and he is putting it nicely in repair. I suppose they are not likely to hear of a better. Indeed, I think Ned will decide the matter to-day."

"I should think it is a nice house; I like St. Peter's Place."

"Well, it is near the Church, and a genteel situation. But the windows are narrow, and it is all ups and downs. You don't happen to know of any other that would be at liberty?" said Mrs. Plymdale, fixing her round black eyes on Rosamond with the animation of a sudden thought in them.

"Oh no; I hear so little of those things."

Rosamond had not foreseen that question and answer in setting out to pay her visit; she had simply meant to gather any information which would help her to avert the parting with her own house under circumstances thoroughly disagreeable to her. As to the untruth in her reply, she no more reflected on it than she did on the untruth there was in her saying that appearances had very little to do with happiness. Her object, she was convinced, was thoroughly justifiable: it was Lydgate whose intention was inexcusable; and there was a plan in her mind which, when she had carried it

out fully, would prove how very false a step it would have been for him to have descended from his position.

She returned home by Mr. Borthrop Trumbull's office, meaning to call there. It was the first time in her life that Rosamond had thought of doing anything in the form of business, but she felt equal to the occasion. That she should be obliged to do what she intensely disliked, was an idea which turned her quiet tenacity into active invention. Here was a case in which it could not be enough simply to disobey and be serenely, placidly obstinate: she must act according to her judgment, and she said to herself that her judgment was right—"indeed, if it had not been, she would not have wished to act on it."

Mr. Trumbull was in the back-room of his office, and received Rosamond with his finest manners, not only because he had much sensibility to her charms, but because the good-natured fibre in him was stirred by his certainty that Lydgate was in difficulties, and that this uncommonly pretty woman—this young lady with the highest personal attractions—was likely to feel the pinch of trouble—to find herself involved in circumstances beyond her control. He begged her to do him the honor to take a seat, and stood before her trimming and comporting himself with an eager solicitude, which was chiefly benevolent. Rosamond's first question was, whether her husband had called on Mr. Trumbull that morning, to speak about disposing of their house.

"Yes, ma'am, yes, he did; he did so," said the good auctioneer, trying to throw something soothing into his iteration. "I was about to fulfil his order, if possible, this afternoon. He wished me not to procrastinate."

"I called to tell you not to go any further, Mr. Trumbull; and I beg of you not to mention what has been said on the subject. Will you oblige me?"

"Certainly I will, Mrs. Lydgate, certainly. Confidence is sacred with me on business or any other topic. I am then to consider the commission withdrawn?" said Mr. Trumbull, adjusting the long ends of his blue cravat with both hands, and looking at Rosamond deferentially.

"Yes, if you please. I find that Mr. Ned Plymdale has taken a house—the one in St. Peter's Place next to Mr. Hackbutt's. Mr. Lydgate would be annoyed that his orders should be fulfilled uselessly. And besides that, there are other circumstances which render the proposal unnecessary."

"Very good, Mrs. Lydgate, very good. I am at your commands, whenever you require any service of me," said Mr. Trumbull, who felt pleasure in conjecturing that some new resources had been opened. "Rely on me, I beg. The affair shall go no further."

That evening Lydgate was a little comforted by observing that Rosamond was more lively than she had usually been of late, and even seemed interested in doing what would please him without being asked. He thought, "If she will be happy and I can

rub through, what does it all signify? It is only a narrow swamp that we have to pass in a long journey. If I can get my mind clear again, I shall do."

He was so much cheered that he began to search for an account of experiments which he had long ago meant to look up, and had neglected out of that creeping self-despair which comes in the train of petty anxieties. He felt again some of the old delightful absorption in a far-reaching inquiry, while Rosamond played the quiet music which was as helpful to his meditation as the splash of an oar on the evening lake. It was rather late; he had pushed away all the books, and was looking at the fire with his hands clasped behind his head in forgetfulness of everything except the construction of a new controlling experiment, when Rosamond, who had left the piano and was leaning back in her chair watching him, said—

"Mr. Ned Plymdale has taken a house already."

Lydgate, startled and jarred, looked up in silence for a moment, like a man who has been disturbed in his sleep. Then flushing with an unpleasant consciousness, he asked—

"How do you know?"

"I called at Mrs. Plymdale's this morning, and she told me that he had taken the house in St. Peter's Place, next to Mr. Hackbutt's."

Lydgate was silent. He drew his hands from behind his head and pressed them against the hair which was hanging, as it was apt to do, in a mass on his forehead, while he rested his elbows on his knees. He was feeling bitter disappointment, as if he had opened a door out of a suffocating place and had found it walled up; but he also felt sure that Rosamond was pleased with the cause of his disappointment. He preferred not looking at her and not speaking, until he had got over the first spasm of vexation. After all, he said in his bitterness, what can a woman care about so much as house and furniture? a husband without them is an absurdity. When he looked up and pushed his hair aside, his dark eyes had a miserable blank non-expectance of sympathy in them, but he only said, coolly—

"Perhaps some one else may turn up. I told Trumbull to be on the look-out if he failed with Plymdale."

Rosamond made no remark. She trusted to the chance that nothing more would pass between her husband and the auctioneer until some issue should have justified her interference; at any rate, she had hindered the event which she immediately dreaded. After a pause, she said—

"How much money is it that those disagreeable people want?"

"What disagreeable people?"

"Those who took the list—and the others. I mean, how much money would satisfy them so that you need not be troubled any more?"

Lydgate surveyed her for a moment, as if he were looking for symptoms, and then said, "Oh, if I could have got six hundred from Plymdale for furniture and as premium, I might have managed. I could have paid off Dover, and given enough on account to the others to make them wait patiently, if we contracted our expenses."

"But I mean how much should you want if we stayed in this house?"

"More than I am likely to get anywhere," said Lydgate, with rather a grating sarcasm in his tone. It angered him to perceive that Rosamond's mind was wandering over impracticable wishes instead of facing possible efforts.

"Why should you not mention the sum?" said Rosamond, with a mild indication that she did not like his manners.

"Well," said Lydgate in a guessing tone, "it would take at least a thousand to set me at ease. But," he added, incisively, "I have to consider what I shall do without it, not with it."

Rosamond said no more.

But the next day she carried out her plan of writing to Sir Godwin Lydgate. Since the Captain's visit, she had received a letter from him, and also one from Mrs. Mengan, his married sister, condoling with her on the loss of her baby, and expressing vaguely the hope that they should see her again at Quallingham. Lydgate had told her that this politeness meant nothing; but she was secretly convinced that any backwardness in Lydgate's family towards him was due to his cold and contemptuous behavior, and she had answered the letters in her most charming manner, feeling some confidence that a specific invitation would follow. But there had been total silence. The Captain evidently was not a great penman, and Rosamond reflected that the sisters might have been abroad. However, the season was come for thinking of friends at home, and at any rate Sir Godwin, who had chucked her under the chin, and pronounced her to be like the celebrated beauty, Mrs. Croly, who had made a conquest of him in 1790, would be touched by any appeal from her, and would find it pleasant for her sake to behave as he ought to do towards his nephew. Rosamond was naively convinced of what an old gentleman ought to do to prevent her from suffering annoyance. And she wrote what she considered the most judicious letter possible—one which would strike Sir Godwin as a proof of her excellent sense—pointing out how desirable it was that Tertius should quit such a place as Middlemarch for one more fitted to his talents, how the unpleasant character of the inhabitants had hindered his professional success, and how in consequence he was in money difficulties, from which it would require a thousand pounds thoroughly to extricate him. She did not say that Tertius was unaware of her intention to write; for she had the idea that his supposed sanction of

her letter would be in accordance with what she did say of his great regard for his uncle Godwin as the relative who had always been his best friend. Such was the force of Poor Rosamond's tactics now she applied them to affairs.

This had happened before the party on New Year's Day, and no answer had yet come from Sir Godwin. But on the morning of that day Lydgate had to learn that Rosamond had revoked his order to Borthrop Trumbull. Feeling it necessary that she should be gradually accustomed to the idea of their quitting the house in Lowick Gate, he overcame his reluctance to speak to her again on the subject, and when they were breakfasting said—

"I shall try to see Trumbull this morning, and tell him to advertise the house in the 'Pioneer' and the 'Trumpet.' If the thing were advertised, some one might be inclined to take it who would not otherwise have thought of a change. In these country places many people go on in their old houses when their families are too large for them, for want of knowing where they can find another. And Trumbull seems to have got no bite at all."

Rosamond knew that the inevitable moment was come. "I ordered Trumbull not to inquire further," she said, with a careful calmness which was evidently defensive.

Lydgate stared at her in mute amazement. Only half an hour before he had been fastening up her plaits for her, and talking the "little language" of affection, which Rosamond, though not returning it, accepted as if she had been a serene and lovely image, now and then miraculously dimpling towards her votary. With such fibres still astir in him, the shock he received could not at once be distinctly anger; it was confused pain. He laid down the knife and fork with which he was carving, and throwing himself back in his chair, said at last, with a cool irony in his tone—

"May I ask when and why you did so?"

"When I knew that the Plymdales had taken a house, I called to tell him not to mention ours to them; and at the same time I told him not to let the affair go on any further. I knew that it would be very injurious to you if it were known that you wished to part with your house and furniture, and I had a very strong objection to it. I think that was reason enough."

"It was of no consequence then that I had told you imperative reasons of another kind; of no consequence that I had come to a different conclusion, and given an order accordingly?" said Lydgate, biting, the thunder and lightning gathering about his brow and eyes.

The effect of any one's anger on Rosamond had always been to make her shrink in cold dislike, and to become all the more calmly correct, in the conviction that she was not the person to misbehave whatever others might do. She replied—

"I think I had a perfect right to speak on a subject which concerns me at least as much as you."

"Clearly—you had a right to speak, but only to me. You had no right to contradict my orders secretly, and treat me as if I were a fool," said Lydgate, in the same tone as before. Then with some added scorn, "Is it possible to make you understand what the consequences will be? Is it of any use for me to tell you again why we must try to part with the house?"

"It is not necessary for you to tell me again," said Rosamond, in a voice that fell and trickled like cold water-drops. "I remembered what you said. You spoke just as violently as you do now. But that does not alter my opinion that you ought to try every other means rather than take a step which is so painful to me. And as to advertising the house, I think it would be perfectly degrading to you."

"And suppose I disregard your opinion as you disregard mine?"

"You can do so, of course. But I think you ought to have told me before we were married that you would place me in the worst position, rather than give up your own will."

Lydgate did not speak, but tossed his head on one side, and twitched the corners of his mouth in despair. Rosamond, seeing that he was not looking at her, rose and set his cup of coffee before him; but he took no notice of it, and went on with an inward drama and argument, occasionally moving in his seat, resting one arm on the table, and rubbing his hand against his hair. There was a conflux of emotions and thoughts in him that would not let him either give thorough way to his anger or persevere with simple rigidity of resolve. Rosamond took advantage of his silence.

"When we were married everyone felt that your position was very high. I could not have imagined then that you would want to sell our furniture, and take a house in Bride Street, where the rooms are like cages. If we are to live in that way let us at least leave Middlemarch."

"These would be very strong considerations," said Lydgate, half ironically—still there was a withered paleness about his lips as he looked at his coffee, and did not drink—"these would be very strong considerations if I did not happen to be in debt."

"Many persons must have been in debt in the same way, but if they are respectable, people trust them. I am sure I have heard papa say that the Torbits were in debt, and they went on very well. It cannot be good to act rashly," said Rosamond, with serene wisdom.

Lydgate sat paralyzed by opposing impulses: since no reasoning he could apply to Rosamond seemed likely to conquer her assent, he wanted to smash and grind some object on which he could at least produce an impression, or else to tell her brutally that he was master, and she must obey. But he not only dreaded the effect

of such extremities on their mutual life—he had a growing dread of Rosamond's quiet elusive obstinacy, which would not allow any assertion of power to be final; and again, she had touched him in a spot of keenest feeling by implying that she had been deluded with a false vision of happiness in marrying him. As to saying that he was master, it was not the fact. The very resolution to which he had wrought himself by dint of logic and honorable pride was beginning to relax under her torpedo contact. He swallowed half his cup of coffee, and then rose to go.

"I may at least request that you will not go to Trumbull at present—until it has been seen that there are no other means," said Rosamond. Although she was not subject to much fear, she felt it safer not to betray that she had written to Sir Godwin.

"Promise me that you will not go to him for a few weeks, or without telling me."

Lydgate gave a short laugh. "I think it is I who should exact a promise that you will do nothing without telling me," he said, turning his eyes sharply upon her, and then moving to the door.

"You remember that we are going to dine at papa's," said Rosamond, wishing that he should turn and make a more thorough concession to her. But he only said "Oh yes," impatiently, and went away. She held it to be very odious in him that he did not think the painful propositions he had had to make to her were enough, without showing so unpleasant a temper. And when she put the moderate request that he would defer going to Trumbull again, it was cruel in him not to assure her of what he meant to do. She was convinced of her having acted in every way for the best; and each grating or angry speech of Lydgate's served only as an addition to the register of offences in her mind. Poor Rosamond for months had begun to associate her husband with feelings of disappointment, and the terribly inflexible relation of marriage had lost its charm of encouraging delightful dreams. It had freed her from the disagreeables of her father's house, but it had not given her everything that she had wished and hoped. The Lydgate with whom she had been in love had been a group of airy conditions for her, most of which had disappeared, while their place had been taken by every-day details which must be lived through slowly from hour to hour, not floated through with a rapid selection of favorable aspects. The habits of Lydgate's profession, his home preoccupation with scientific subjects, which seemed to her almost like a morbid vampire's taste, his peculiar views of things which had never entered into the dialogue of courtship—all these continually alienating influences, even without the fact of his having placed himself at a disadvantage in the town, and without that first shock of revelation about Dover's debt, would have made his presence dull to her. There was another presence which ever since the early days of her marriage, until four months ago, had been an agreeable excitement, but that was gone: Rosamond would not confess to herself how much the consequent blank had to do with her utter ennui; and it seemed to her (perhaps she was right) that an invitation to Quillingham, and an opening for Lydgate to settle elsewhere than in Middlemarch—in London, or somewhere likely to be free from unpleasantness—

would satisfy her quite well, and make her indifferent to the absence of Will Ladislaw, towards whom she felt some resentment for his exaltation of Mrs. Casaubon.

That was the state of things with Lydgate and Rosamond on the New Year's Day when they dined at her father's, she looking mildly neutral towards him in remembrance of his ill-tempered behavior at breakfast, and he carrying a much deeper effect from the inward conflict in which that morning scene was only one of many epochs. His flushed effort while talking to Mr. Farebrother—his effort after the cynical pretence that all ways of getting money are essentially the same, and that chance has an empire which reduces choice to a fool's illusion—was but the symptom of a wavering resolve, a benumbed response to the old stimuli of enthusiasm.

What was he to do? He saw even more keenly than Rosamond did the dreariness of taking her into the small house in Bride Street, where she would have scanty furniture around her and discontent within: a life of privation and life with Rosamond were two images which had become more and more irreconcilable ever since the threat of privation had disclosed itself. But even if his resolves had forced the two images into combination, the useful preliminaries to that hard change were not visibly within reach. And though he had not given the promise which his wife had asked for, he did not go again to Trumbull. He even began to think of taking a rapid journey to the North and seeing Sir Godwin. He had once believed that nothing would urge him into making an application for money to his uncle, but he had not then known the full pressure of alternatives yet more disagreeable. He could not depend on the effect of a letter; it was only in an interview, however disagreeable this might be to himself, that he could give a thorough explanation and could test the effectiveness of kinship. No sooner had Lydgate begun to represent this step to himself as the easiest than there was a reaction of anger that he—he who had long ago determined to live aloof from such abject calculations, such self-interested anxiety about the inclinations and the pockets of men with whom he had been proud to have no aims in common—should have fallen not simply to their level, but to the level of soliciting them.

CHAPTER 65

*"One of us two must bowen douteless,
And, sith a man is more reasonable
Than woman is, ye [men] moste be suffrable.
—CHAUCER: Canterbury Tales.*

The bias of human nature to be slow in correspondence triumphs even over the present quickening in the general pace of things: what wonder then that in 1832 old Sir Godwin Lydgate was slow to write a letter which was of consequence to others rather than to himself? Nearly three weeks of the new year were gone, and Rosamond, awaiting an answer to her winning appeal, was every day disappointed. Lydgate, in total ignorance of her expectations, was seeing the bills come in, and feeling that Dover's use of his advantage over other creditors was imminent. He had never mentioned to Rosamond his brooding purpose of going to Quallingham: he did not want to admit what would appear to her a concession to her wishes after indignant refusal, until the last moment; but he was really expecting to set off soon. A slice of the railway would enable him to manage the whole journey and back in four days.

But one morning after Lydgate had gone out, a letter came addressed to him, which Rosamond saw clearly to be from Sir Godwin. She was full of hope. Perhaps there might be a particular note to her enclosed; but Lydgate was naturally addressed on the question of money or other aid, and the fact that he was written to, nay, the very delay in writing at all, seemed to certify that the answer was thoroughly compliant. She was too much excited by these thoughts to do anything but light stitching in a warm corner of the dining-room, with the outside of this momentous letter lying on the table before her. About twelve she heard her husband's step in the passage, and tripping to open the door, she said in her lightest tones, "Tertius, come in here—here is a letter for you."

"Ah?" he said, not taking off his hat, but just turning her round within his arm to walk towards the spot where the letter lay. "My uncle Godwin!" he exclaimed, while Rosamond reseated herself, and watched him as he opened the letter. She had expected him to be surprised.

While Lydgate's eyes glanced rapidly over the brief letter, she saw his face, usually of a pale brown, taking on a dry whiteness; with nostrils and lips quivering he tossed down the letter before her, and said violently—

"It will be impossible to endure life with you, if you will always be acting secretly—acting in opposition to me and hiding your actions."

He checked his speech and turned his back on her—then wheeled round and walked about, sat down, and got up again restlessly, grasping hard the objects deep down in his pockets. He was afraid of saying something irremediably cruel.

Rosamond too had changed color as she read. The letter ran in this way:—

"DEAR TERTIUS,—Don't set your wife to write to me when you have anything to ask. It is a roundabout wheedling sort of thing which I should not have credited you with. I never choose to write to a woman on matters of business. As to my supplying you with a thousand pounds, or only half that sum, I can do nothing of the sort. My own family drains me to the last penny. With two younger sons and three daughters, I am not likely to have cash to spare. You seem to have got through your own money pretty quickly, and to have made a mess where you are; the sooner you go somewhere else the better. But I have nothing to do with men of your profession, and can't help you there. I did the best I could for you as guardian, and let you have your own way in taking to medicine. You might have gone into the army or the Church. Your money would have held out for that, and there would have been a surer ladder before you. Your uncle Charles has had a grudge against you for not going into his profession, but not I. I have always wished you well, but you must consider yourself on your own legs entirely now.

Your affectionate uncle,
GODWIN LYDGATE."

When Rosamond had finished reading the letter she sat quite still, with her hands folded before her, restraining any show of her keen disappointment, and intrenching herself in quiet passivity under her husband's wrath. Lydgate paused in his movements, looked at her again, and said, with biting severity—

"Will this be enough to convince you of the harm you may do by secret meddling? Have you sense enough to recognize now your incompetence to judge and act for me—to interfere with your ignorance in affairs which it belongs to me to decide on?"

The words were hard; but this was not the first time that Lydgate had been frustrated by her. She did not look at him, and made no reply.

"I had nearly resolved on going to Quallingham. It would have cost me pain enough to do it, yet it might have been of some use. But it has been of no use for me to think of anything. You have always been counteracting me secretly. You delude me with a false assent, and then I am at the mercy of your devices. If you mean to resist every wish I express, say so and defy me. I shall at least know what I am doing then."

It is a terrible moment in young lives when the closeness of love's bond has turned to this power of galling. In spite of Rosamond's self-control a tear fell silently and rolled

over her lips. She still said nothing; but under that quietude was hidden an intense effect: she was in such entire disgust with her husband that she wished she had never seen him. Sir Godwin's rudeness towards her and utter want of feeling ranged him with Dover and all other creditors—disagreeable people who only thought of themselves, and did not mind how annoying they were to her. Even her father was unkind, and might have done more for them. In fact there was but one person in Rosamond's world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and that was the graceful creature with blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, who had never expressed herself unbecomingly, and had always acted for the best—the best naturally being what she best liked.

Lydgate pausing and looking at her began to feel that half-maddening sense of helplessness which comes over passionate people when their passion is met by an innocent-looking silence whose meek victimized air seems to put them in the wrong, and at last infects even the justest indignation with a doubt of its justice. He needed to recover the full sense that he was in the right by moderating his words.

"Can you not see, Rosamond," he began again, trying to be simply grave and not bitter, "that nothing can be so fatal as a want of openness and confidence between us? It has happened again and again that I have expressed a decided wish, and you have seemed to assent, yet after that you have secretly disobeyed my wish. In that way I can never know what I have to trust to. There would be some hope for us if you would admit this. Am I such an unreasonable, furious brute? Why should you not be open with me?" Still silence.

"Will you only say that you have been mistaken, and that I may depend on your not acting secretly in future?" said Lydgate, urgently, but with something of request in his tone which Rosamond was quick to perceive. She spoke with coolness.

"I cannot possibly make admissions or promises in answer to such words as you have used towards me. I have not been accustomed to language of that kind. You have spoken of my 'secret meddling,' and my 'interfering ignorance,' and my 'false assent.' I have never expressed myself in that way to you, and I think that you ought to apologize. You spoke of its being impossible to live with me. Certainly you have not made my life pleasant to me of late. I think it was to be expected that I should try to avert some of the hardships which our marriage has brought on me." Another tear fell as Rosamond ceased speaking, and she pressed it away as quietly as the first.

Lydgate flung himself into a chair, feeling checkmated. What place was there in her mind for a remonstrance to lodge in? He laid down his hat, flung an arm over the back of his chair, and looked down for some moments without speaking. Rosamond had the double purchase over him of insensibility to the point of justice in his reproach, and of sensibility to the undeniable hardships now present in her married life. Although her duplicity in the affair of the house had exceeded what he knew, and had really hindered the Plymdales from knowing of it, she had no consciousness that

her action could rightly be called false. We are not obliged to identify our own acts according to a strict classification, any more than the materials of our grocery and clothes. Rosamond felt that she was aggrieved, and that this was what Lydgate had to recognize.

As for him, the need of accommodating himself to her nature, which was inflexible in proportion to its negations, held him as with pincers. He had begun to have an alarmed foresight of her irrevocable loss of love for him, and the consequent dreariness of their life. The ready fulness of his emotions made this dread alternate quickly with the first violent movements of his anger. It would assuredly have been a vain boast in him to say that he was her master.

"You have not made my life pleasant to me of late"—"the hardships which our marriage has brought on me"—these words were stinging his imagination as a pain makes an exaggerated dream. If he were not only to sink from his highest resolve, but to sink into the hideous fettering of domestic hate?

"Rosamond," he said, turning his eyes on her with a melancholy look, "you should allow for a man's words when he is disappointed and provoked. You and I cannot have opposite interests. I cannot part my happiness from yours. If I am angry with you, it is that you seem not to see how any concealment divides us. How could I wish to make anything hard to you either by my words or conduct? When I hurt you, I hurt part of my own life. I should never be angry with you if you would be quite open with me."

"I have only wished to prevent you from hurrying us into wretchedness without any necessity," said Rosamond, the tears coming again from a softened feeling now that her husband had softened. "It is so very hard to be disgraced here among all the people we know, and to live in such a miserable way. I wish I had died with the baby."

She spoke and wept with that gentleness which makes such words and tears omnipotent over a loving-hearted man. Lydgate drew his chair near to hers and pressed her delicate head against his cheek with his powerful tender hand. He only caressed her; he did not say anything; for what was there to say?

He could not promise to shield her from the dreaded wretchedness, for he could see no sure means of doing so. When he left her to go out again, he told himself that it was ten times harder for her than for him: he had a life away from home, and constant appeals to his activity on behalf of others. He wished to excuse everything in her if he could—but it was inevitable that in that excusing mood he should think of her as if she were an animal of another and feebler species. Nevertheless she had mastered him.

CHAPTER 66

"'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,

Another thing to fall."

—Measure for Measure.

Lydgate certainly had good reason to reflect on the service his practice did him in counteracting his personal cares. He had no longer free energy enough for spontaneous research and speculative thinking, but by the bedside of patients, the direct external calls on his judgment and sympathies brought the added impulse needed to draw him out of himself. It was not simply that beneficent harness of routine which enables silly men to live respectably and unhappy men to live calmly—it was a perpetual claim on the immediate fresh application of thought, and on the consideration of another's need and trial. Many of us looking back through life would say that the kindest man we have ever known has been a medical man, or perhaps that surgeon whose fine tact, directed by deeply informed perception, has come to us in our need with a more sublime beneficence than that of miracle-workers. Some of that twice-blessed mercy was always with Lydgate in his work at the Hospital or in private houses, serving better than any opiate to quiet and sustain him under his anxieties and his sense of mental degeneracy.

Mr. Farebrother's suspicion as to the opiate was true, however. Under the first galling pressure of foreseen difficulties, and the first perception that his marriage, if it were not to be a yoked loneliness, must be a state of effort to go on loving without too much care about being loved, he had once or twice tried a dose of opium. But he had no hereditary constitutional craving after such transient escapes from the hauntings of misery. He was strong, could drink a great deal of wine, but did not care about it; and when the men round him were drinking spirits, he took sugar and water, having a contemptuous pity even for the earliest stages of excitement from drink. It was the same with gambling. He had looked on at a great deal of gambling in Paris, watching it as if it had been a disease. He was no more tempted by such winning than he was by drink. He had said to himself that the only winning he cared for must be attained by a conscious process of high, difficult combination tending towards a beneficent result. The power he longed for could not be represented by agitated fingers clutching a heap of coin, or by the half-barbarous, half-idiotic triumph in the eyes of a man who sweeps within his arms the ventures of twenty chapfallen companions.

But just as he had tried opium, so his thought now began to turn upon gambling—not with appetite for its excitement, but with a sort of wistful inward gaze after that easy way of getting money, which implied no asking and brought no responsibility. If he

had been in London or Paris at that time, it is probable that such thoughts, seconded by opportunity, would have taken him into a gambling-house, no longer to watch the gamblers, but to watch with them in kindred eagerness. Repugnance would have been surmounted by the immense need to win, if chance would be kind enough to let him. An incident which happened not very long after that airy notion of getting aid from his uncle had been excluded, was a strong sign of the effect that might have followed any extant opportunity of gambling.

The billiard-room at the Green Dragon was the constant resort of a certain set, most of whom, like our acquaintance Mr. Bambridge, were regarded as men of pleasure. It was here that poor Fred Vincy had made part of his memorable debt, having lost money in betting, and been obliged to borrow of that gay companion. It was generally known in Middlemarch that a good deal of money was lost and won in this way; and the consequent repute of the Green Dragon as a place of dissipation naturally heightened in some quarters the temptation to go there. Probably its regular visitants, like the initiates of freemasonry, wished that there were something a little more tremendous to keep to themselves concerning it; but they were not a closed community, and many decent seniors as well as juniors occasionally turned into the billiard-room to see what was going on. Lydgate, who had the muscular aptitude for billiards, and was fond of the game, had once or twice in the early days after his arrival in Middlemarch taken his turn with the cue at the Green Dragon; but afterwards he had no leisure for the game, and no inclination for the socialities there. One evening, however, he had occasion to seek Mr. Bambridge at that resort. The horsedealer had engaged to get him a customer for his remaining good horse, for which Lydgate had determined to substitute a cheap hack, hoping by this reduction of style to get perhaps twenty pounds; and he cared now for every small sum, as a help towards feeding the patience of his tradesmen. To run up to the billiard-room, as he was passing, would save time.

Mr. Bambridge was not yet come, but would be sure to arrive by-and-by, said his friend Mr. Horrock; and Lydgate stayed, playing a game for the sake of passing the time. That evening he had the peculiar light in the eyes and the unusual vivacity which had been once noticed in him by Mr. Farebrother. The exceptional fact of his presence was much noticed in the room, where there was a good deal of Middlemarch company; and several lookers-on, as well as some of the players, were betting with animation. Lydgate was playing well, and felt confident; the bets were dropping round him, and with a swift glancing thought of the probable gain which might double the sum he was saving from his horse, he began to bet on his own play, and won again and again. Mr. Bambridge had come in, but Lydgate did not notice him. He was not only excited with his play, but visions were gleaming on him of going the next day to Brassing, where there was gambling on a grander scale to be had, and where, by one powerful snatch at the devil's bait, he might carry it off without the hook, and buy his rescue from his daily solicitings.

He was still winning when two new visitors entered. One of them was a young Hawley, just come from his law studies in town, and the other was Fred Vincy, who had spent several evenings of late at this old haunt of his. Young Hawley, an accomplished billiard-player, brought a cool fresh hand to the cue. But Fred Vincy, startled at seeing Lydgate, and astonished to see him betting with an excited air, stood aside, and kept out of the circle round the table.

Fred had been rewarding resolution by a little laxity of late. He had been working heartily for six months at all outdoor occupations under Mr. Garth, and by dint of severe practice had nearly mastered the defects of his handwriting, this practice being, perhaps, a little the less severe that it was often carried on in the evening at Mr. Garth's under the eyes of Mary. But the last fortnight Mary had been staying at Lowick Parsonage with the ladies there, during Mr. Farebrother's residence in Middlemarch, where he was carrying out some parochial plans; and Fred, not seeing anything more agreeable to do, had turned into the Green Dragon, partly to play at billiards, partly to taste the old flavor of discourse about horses, sport, and things in general, considered from a point of view which was not strenuously correct. He had not been out hunting once this season, had had no horse of his own to ride, and had gone from place to place chiefly with Mr. Garth in his gig, or on the sober cob which Mr. Garth could lend him. It was a little too bad, Fred began to think, that he should be kept in the traces with more severity than if he had been a clergyman. "I will tell you what, Mistress Mary—it will be rather harder work to learn surveying and drawing plans than it would have been to write sermons," he had said, wishing her to appreciate what he went through for her sake; "and as to Hercules and Theseus, they were nothing to me. They had sport, and never learned to write a bookkeeping hand." And now, Mary being out of the way for a little while, Fred, like any other strong dog who cannot slip his collar, had pulled up the staple of his chain and made a small escape, not of course meaning to go fast or far. There could be no reason why he should not play at billiards, but he was determined not to bet. As to money just now, Fred had in his mind the heroic project of saving almost all of the eighty pounds that Mr. Garth offered him, and returning it, which he could easily do by giving up all futile money-spending, since he had a superfluous stock of clothes, and no expense in his board. In that way he could, in one year, go a good way towards repaying the ninety pounds of which he had deprived Mrs. Garth, unhappily at a time when she needed that sum more than she did now. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that on this evening, which was the fifth of his recent visits to the billiard-room, Fred had, not in his pocket, but in his mind, the ten pounds which he meant to reserve for himself from his half-year's salary (having before him the pleasure of carrying thirty to Mrs. Garth when Mary was likely to be come home again)—he had those ten pounds in his mind as a fund from which he might risk something, if there were a chance of a good bet. Why? Well, when sovereigns were flying about, why shouldn't he catch a few? He would never go far along that road again; but a man likes to assure himself, and men of pleasure generally, what he could do in the way of mischief if he chose, and that if he abstains from making

himself ill, or begging himself, or talking with the utmost looseness which the narrow limits of human capacity will allow, it is not because he is a spooney. Fred did not enter into formal reasons, which are a very artificial, inexact way of representing the tingling returns of old habit, and the caprices of young blood: but there was lurking in him a prophetic sense that evening, that when he began to play he should also begin to bet—that he should enjoy some punch-drinking, and in general prepare himself for feeling "rather seedy" in the morning. It is in such indefinable movements that action often begins.

But the last thing likely to have entered Fred's expectation was that he should see his brother-in-law Lydgate—of whom he had never quite dropped the old opinion that he was a prig, and tremendously conscious of his superiority—looking excited and betting, just as he himself might have done. Fred felt a shock greater than he could quite account for by the vague knowledge that Lydgate was in debt, and that his father had refused to help him; and his own inclination to enter into the play was suddenly checked. It was a strange reversal of attitudes: Fred's blond face and blue eyes, usually bright and careless, ready to give attention to anything that held out a promise of amusement, looking involuntarily grave and almost embarrassed as if by the sight of something unfitting; while Lydgate, who had habitually an air of self-possessed strength, and a certain meditateness that seemed to lie behind his most observant attention, was acting, watching, speaking with that excited narrow consciousness which reminds one of an animal with fierce eyes and retractile claws.

Lydgate, by betting on his own strokes, had won sixteen pounds; but young Hawley's arrival had changed the poise of things. He made first-rate strokes himself, and began to bet against Lydgate's strokes, the strain of whose nerves was thus changed from simple confidence in his own movements to defying another person's doubt in them. The defiance was more exciting than the confidence, but it was less sure. He continued to bet on his own play, but began often to fail. Still he went on, for his mind was as utterly narrowed into that precipitous crevice of play as if he had been the most ignorant loungeur there. Fred observed that Lydgate was losing fast, and found himself in the new situation of puzzling his brains to think of some device by which, without being offensive, he could withdraw Lydgate's attention, and perhaps suggest to him a reason for quitting the room. He saw that others were observing Lydgate's strange unlikeness to himself, and it occurred to him that merely to touch his elbow and call him aside for a moment might rouse him from his absorption. He could think of nothing cleverer than the daring improbability of saying that he wanted to see Rosy, and wished to know if she were at home this evening; and he was going desperately to carry out this weak device, when a waiter came up to him with a message, saying that Mr. Farebrother was below, and begged to speak with him.

Fred was surprised, not quite comfortably, but sending word that he would be down immediately, he went with a new impulse up to Lydgate, said, "Can I speak to you a moment?" and drew him aside.

"Farebrother has just sent up a message to say that he wants to speak to me. He is below. I thought you might like to know he was there, if you had anything to say to him."

Fred had simply snatched up this pretext for speaking, because he could not say, "You are losing confoundedly, and are making everybody stare at you; you had better come away." But inspiration could hardly have served him better. Lydgate had not before seen that Fred was present, and his sudden appearance with an announcement of Mr. Farebrother had the effect of a sharp concussion.

"No, no," said Lydgate; "I have nothing particular to say to him. But—the game is up—I must be going—I came in just to see Bambridge."

"Bambridge is over there, but he is making a row—I don't think he's ready for business. Come down with me to Farebrother. I expect he is going to blow me up, and you will shield me," said Fred, with some adroitness.

Lydgate felt shame, but could not bear to act as if he felt it, by refusing to see Mr. Farebrother; and he went down. They merely shook hands, however, and spoke of the frost; and when all three had turned into the street, the Vicar seemed quite willing to say good-by to Lydgate. His present purpose was clearly to talk with Fred alone, and he said, kindly, "I disturbed you, young gentleman, because I have some pressing business with you. Walk with me to St. Botolph's, will you?"

It was a fine night, the sky thick with stars, and Mr. Farebrother proposed that they should make a circuit to the old church by the London road. The next thing he said was—

"I thought Lydgate never went to the Green Dragon?"

"So did I," said Fred. "But he said that he went to see Bambridge."

"He was not playing, then?"

Fred had not meant to tell this, but he was obliged now to say, "Yes, he was. But I suppose it was an accidental thing. I have never seen him there before."

"You have been going often yourself, then, lately?"

"Oh, about five or six times."

"I think you had some good reason for giving up the habit of going there?"

"Yes. You know all about it," said Fred, not liking to be catechised in this way. "I made a clean breast to you."

"I suppose that gives me a warrant to speak about the matter now. It is understood between us, is it not?—that we are on a footing of open friendship: I have listened to

you, and you will be willing to listen to me. I may take my turn in talking a little about myself?"

"I am under the deepest obligation to you, Mr. Farebrother," said Fred, in a state of uncomfortable surmise.

"I will not affect to deny that you are under some obligation to me. But I am going to confess to you, Fred, that I have been tempted to reverse all that by keeping silence with you just now. When somebody said to me, 'Young Vincy has taken to being at the billiard-table every night again—he won't bear the curb long;' I was tempted to do the opposite of what I am doing—to hold my tongue and wait while you went down the ladder again, betting first and then—"

"I have not made any bets," said Fred, hastily.

"Glad to hear it. But I say, my prompting was to look on and see you take the wrong turning, wear out Garth's patience, and lose the best opportunity of your life—the opportunity which you made some rather difficult effort to secure. You can guess the feeling which raised that temptation in me—I am sure you know it. I am sure you know that the satisfaction of your affections stands in the way of mine."

There was a pause. Mr. Farebrother seemed to wait for a recognition of the fact; and the emotion perceptible in the tones of his fine voice gave solemnity to his words. But no feeling could quell Fred's alarm.

"I could not be expected to give her up," he said, after a moment's hesitation: it was not a case for any pretence of generosity.

"Clearly not, when her affection met yours. But relations of this sort, even when they are of long standing, are always liable to change. I can easily conceive that you might act in a way to loosen the tie she feels towards you—it must be remembered that she is only conditionally bound to you—and that in that case, another man, who may flatter himself that he has a hold on her regard, might succeed in winning that firm place in her love as well as respect which you had let slip. I can easily conceive such a result," repeated Mr. Farebrother, emphatically. "There is a companionship of ready sympathy, which might get the advantage even over the longest associations." It seemed to Fred that if Mr. Farebrother had had a beak and talons instead of his very capable tongue, his mode of attack could hardly be more cruel. He had a horrible conviction that behind all this hypothetical statement there was a knowledge of some actual change in Mary's feeling.

"Of course I know it might easily be all up with me," he said, in a troubled voice. "If she is beginning to compare—" He broke off, not liking to betray all he felt, and then said, by the help of a little bitterness, "But I thought you were friendly to me."

"So I am; that is why we are here. But I have had a strong disposition to be otherwise. I have said to myself, 'If there is a likelihood of that youngster doing

himself harm, why should you interfere? Aren't you worth as much as he is, and don't your sixteen years over and above his, in which you have gone rather hungry, give you more right to satisfaction than he has? If there's a chance of his going to the dogs, let him—perhaps you could somehow hinder it—and do you take the benefit."

There was a pause, in which Fred was seized by a most uncomfortable chill. What was coming next? He dreaded to hear that something had been said to Mary—he felt as if he were listening to a threat rather than a warning. When the Vicar began again there was a change in his tone like the encouraging transition to a major key.

"But I had once meant better than that, and I am come back to my old intention. I thought that I could hardly *secure myself* in it better, Fred, than by telling you just what had gone on in me. And now, do you understand me? I want you to make the happiness of her life and your own, and if there is any chance that a word of warning from me may turn aside any risk to the contrary—well, I have uttered it."

There was a drop in the Vicar's voice when he spoke the last words. He paused—they were standing on a patch of green where the road diverged towards St. Botolph's, and he put out his hand, as if to imply that the conversation was closed. Fred was moved quite newly. Some one highly susceptible to the contemplation of a fine act has said, that it produces a sort of regenerating shudder through the frame, and makes one feel ready to begin a new life. A good degree of that effect was just then present in Fred Vincy.

"I will try to be worthy," he said, breaking off before he could say "of you as well as of her." And meanwhile Mr. Farebrother had gathered the impulse to say something more.

"You must not imagine that I believe there is at present any decline in her preference of you, Fred. Set your heart at rest, that if you keep right, other things will keep right."

"I shall never forget what you have done," Fred answered. "I can't say anything that seems worth saying—only I will try that your goodness shall not be thrown away."

"That's enough. Good-by, and God bless you."

In that way they parted. But both of them walked about a long while before they went out of the starlight.

Much of Fred's rumination might be summed up in the words, "It certainly would have been a fine thing for her to marry Farebrother—but if she loves me best and I am a good husband?"

Perhaps Mr. Farebrother's might be concentrated into a single shrug and one little speech.

"To think of the part one little woman can play in the life of a man, so that to renounce her may be a very good imitation of heroism, and to win her may be a discipline!"

CHAPTER 67

Now is there civil war within the soul:

Resolve is thrust from off the sacred throne

By clamorous Needs, and Pride the grand-vizier

Makes humble compact, plays the supple part

Of envoy and deft-tongued apologist

For hungry rebels.

Happily Lydgate had ended by losing in the billiard-room, and brought away no encouragement to make a raid on luck. On the contrary, he felt unmixed disgust with himself the next day when he had to pay four or five pounds over and above his gains, and he carried about with him a most unpleasant vision of the figure he had made, not only rubbing elbows with the men at the Green Dragon but behaving just as they did. A philosopher fallen to betting is hardly distinguishable from a Philistine under the same circumstances: the difference will chiefly be found in his subsequent reflections, and Lydgate chewed a very disagreeable cud in that way. His reason told him how the affair might have been magnified into ruin by a slight change of scenery—if it had been a gambling-house that he had turned into, where chance could be clutched with both hands instead of being picked up with thumb and fore-finger. Nevertheless, though reason strangled the desire to gamble, there remained the feeling that, with an assurance of luck to the needful amount, he would have liked to gamble, rather than take the alternative which was beginning to urge itself as inevitable.

That alternative was to apply to Mr. Bulstrode. Lydgate had so many times boasted both to himself and others that he was totally independent of Bulstrode, to whose plans he had lent himself solely because they enabled him to carry out his own ideas of professional work and public benefit—he had so constantly in their personal intercourse had his pride sustained by the sense that he was making a good social use of this predominating banker, whose opinions he thought contemptible and whose motives often seemed to him an absurd mixture of contradictory impressions—that he had been creating for himself strong ideal obstacles to the proffering of any considerable request to him on his own account.

Still, early in March his affairs were at that pass in which men begin to say that their oaths were delivered in ignorance, and to perceive that the act which they had called impossible to them is becoming manifestly possible. With Dover's ugly security soon to be put in force, with the proceeds of his practice immediately absorbed in paying

back debts, and with the chance, if the worst were known, of daily supplies being refused on credit, above all with the vision of Rosamond's hopeless discontent continually haunting him, Lydgate had begun to see that he should inevitably bend himself to ask help from somebody or other. At first he had considered whether he should write to Mr. Vincy; but on questioning Rosamond he found that, as he had suspected, she had already applied twice to her father, the last time being since the disappointment from Sir Godwin; and papa had said that Lydgate must look out for himself. "Papa said he had come, with one bad year after another, to trade more and more on borrowed capital, and had had to give up many indulgences; he could not spare a single hundred from the charges of his family. He said, let Lydgate ask Bulstrode: they have always been hand and glove."

Indeed, Lydgate himself had come to the conclusion that if he must end by asking for a free loan, his relations with Bulstrode, more at least than with any other man, might take the shape of a claim which was not purely personal. Bulstrode had indirectly helped to cause the failure of his practice, and had also been highly gratified by getting a medical partner in his plans:—but who among us ever reduced himself to the sort of dependence in which Lydgate now stood, without trying to believe that he had claims which diminished the humiliation of asking? It was true that of late there had seemed to be a new languor of interest in Bulstrode about the Hospital; but his health had got worse, and showed signs of a deep-seated nervous affection. In other respects he did not appear to be changed: he had always been highly polite, but Lydgate had observed in him from the first a marked coldness about his marriage and other private circumstances, a coldness which he had hitherto preferred to any warmth of familiarity between them. He deferred the intention from day to day, his habit of acting on his conclusions being made infirm by his repugnance to every possible conclusion and its consequent act. He saw Mr. Bulstrode often, but he did not try to use any occasion for his private purpose. At one moment he thought, "I will write a letter: I prefer that to any circuitous talk;" at another he thought, "No; if I were talking to him, I could make a retreat before any signs of disinclination."

Still the days passed and no letter was written, no special interview sought. In his shrinking from the humiliation of a dependent attitude towards Bulstrode, he began to familiarize his imagination with another step even more unlike his remembered self. He began spontaneously to consider whether it would be possible to carry out that puerile notion of Rosamond's which had often made him angry, namely, that they should quit Middlemarch without seeing anything beyond that preface. The question came—"Would any man buy the practice of me even now, for as little as it is worth? Then the sale might happen as a necessary preparation for going away."

But against his taking this step, which he still felt to be a contemptible relinquishment of present work, a guilty turning aside from what was a real and might be a widening channel for worthy activity, to start again without any justified destination, there was this obstacle, that the purchaser, if procurable at all, might not be quickly forthcoming. And afterwards? Rosamond in a poor lodging, though in the largest city

or most distant town, would not find the life that could save her from gloom, and save him from the reproach of having plunged her into it. For when a man is at the foot of the hill in his fortunes, he may stay a long while there in spite of professional accomplishment. In the British climate there is no incompatibility between scientific insight and furnished lodgings: the incompatibility is chiefly between scientific ambition and a wife who objects to that kind of residence.

But in the midst of his hesitation, opportunity came to decide him. A note from Mr. Bulstrode requested Lydgate to call on him at the Bank. A hypochondriacal tendency had shown itself in the banker's constitution of late; and a lack of sleep, which was really only a slight exaggeration of an habitual dyspeptic symptom, had been dwelt on by him as a sign of threatening insanity. He wanted to consult Lydgate without delay on that particular morning, although he had nothing to tell beyond what he had told before. He listened eagerly to what Lydgate had to say in dissipation of his fears, though this too was only repetition; and this moment in which Bulstrode was receiving a medical opinion with a sense of comfort, seemed to make the communication of a personal need to him easier than it had been in Lydgate's contemplation beforehand. He had been insisting that it would be well for Mr. Bulstrode to relax his attention to business.

"One sees how any mental strain, however slight, may affect a delicate frame," said Lydgate at that stage of the consultation when the remarks tend to pass from the personal to the general, "by the deep stamp which anxiety will make for a time even on the young and vigorous. I am naturally very strong; yet I have been thoroughly shaken lately by an accumulation of trouble."

"I presume that a constitution in the susceptible state in which mine at present is, would be especially liable to fall a victim to cholera, if it visited our district. And since its appearance near London, we may well besiege the Mercy-seat for our protection," said Mr. Bulstrode, not intending to evade Lydgate's allusion, but really preoccupied with alarms about himself.

"You have at all events taken your share in using good practical precautions for the town, and that is the best mode of asking for protection," said Lydgate, with a strong distaste for the broken metaphor and bad logic of the banker's religion, somewhat increased by the apparent deafness of his sympathy. But his mind had taken up its long-prepared movement towards getting help, and was not yet arrested. He added, "The town has done well in the way of cleansing, and finding appliances; and I think that if the cholera should come, even our enemies will admit that the arrangements in the Hospital are a public good."

"Truly," said Mr. Bulstrode, with some coldness. "With regard to what you say, Mr. Lydgate, about the relaxation of my mental labor, I have for some time been entertaining a purpose to that effect—a purpose of a very decided character. I contemplate at least a temporary withdrawal from the management of much

business, whether benevolent or commercial. Also I think of changing my residence for a time: probably I shall close or let 'The Shrubs,' and take some place near the coast—under advice of course as to salubrity. That would be a measure which you would recommend?"

"Oh yes," said Lydgate, falling backward in his chair, with ill-repressed impatience under the banker's pale earnest eyes and intense preoccupation with himself.

"I have for some time felt that I should open this subject with you in relation to our Hospital," continued Bulstrode. "Under the circumstances I have indicated, of course I must cease to have any personal share in the management, and it is contrary to my views of responsibility to continue a large application of means to an institution which I cannot watch over and to some extent regulate. I shall therefore, in case of my ultimate decision to leave Middlemarch, consider that I withdraw other support to the New Hospital than that which will subsist in the fact that I chiefly supplied the expenses of building it, and have contributed further large sums to its successful working."

Lydgate's thought, when Bulstrode paused according to his wont, was, "He has perhaps been losing a good deal of money." This was the most plausible explanation of a speech which had caused rather a startling change in his expectations. He said in reply—

"The loss to the Hospital can hardly be made up, I fear."

"Hardly," returned Bulstrode, in the same deliberate, silvery tone; "except by some changes of plan. The only person who may be certainly counted on as willing to increase her contributions is Mrs. Casaubon. I have had an interview with her on the subject, and I have pointed out to her, as I am about to do to you, that it will be desirable to win a more general support to the New Hospital by a change of system." Another pause, but Lydgate did not speak.

"The change I mean is an amalgamation with the Infirmary, so that the New Hospital shall be regarded as a special addition to the elder institution, having the same directing board. It will be necessary, also, that the medical management of the two shall be combined. In this way any difficulty as to the adequate maintenance of our new establishment will be removed; the benevolent interests of the town will cease to be divided."

Mr. Bulstrode had lowered his eyes from Lydgate's face to the buttons of his coat as he again paused.

"No doubt that is a good device as to ways and means," said Lydgate, with an edge of irony in his tone. "But I can't be expected to rejoice in it at once, since one of the first results will be that the other medical men will upset or interrupt my methods, if it were only because they are mine."

"I myself, as you know, Mr. Lydgate, highly valued the opportunity of new and independent procedure which you have diligently employed: the original plan, I confess, was one which I had much at heart, under submission to the Divine Will. But since providential indications demand a renunciation from me, I renounce."

Bulstrode showed a rather exasperating ability in this conversation. The broken metaphor and bad logic of motive which had stirred his hearer's contempt were quite consistent with a mode of putting the facts which made it difficult for Lydgate to vent his own indignation and disappointment. After some rapid reflection, he only asked—

"What did Mrs. Casaubon say?"

"That was the further statement which I wished to make to you," said Bulstrode, who had thoroughly prepared his ministerial explanation. "She is, you are aware, a woman of most munificent disposition, and happily in possession—not I presume of great wealth, but of funds which she can well spare. She has informed me that though she has destined the chief part of those funds to another purpose, she is willing to consider whether she cannot fully take my place in relation to the Hospital. But she wishes for ample time to mature her thoughts on the subject, and I have told her that there is no need for haste—that, in fact, my own plans are not yet absolute."

Lydgate was ready to say, "If Mrs. Casaubon would take your place, there would be gain, instead of loss." But there was still a weight on his mind which arrested this cheerful candor. He replied, "I suppose, then, that I may enter into the subject with Mrs. Casaubon."

"Precisely; that is what she expressly desires. Her decision, she says, will much depend on what you can tell her. But not at present: she is, I believe, just setting out on a journey. I have her letter here," said Mr. Bulstrode, drawing it out, and reading from it. "'I am immediately otherwise engaged,' she says. 'I am going into Yorkshire with Sir James and Lady Chettam; and the conclusions I come to about some land which I am to see there may affect my power of contributing to the Hospital.' Thus, Mr. Lydgate, there is no haste necessary in this matter; but I wished to apprise you beforehand of what may possibly occur."

Mr. Bulstrode returned the letter to his side-pocket, and changed his attitude as if his business were closed. Lydgate, whose renewed hope about the Hospital only made him more conscious of the facts which poisoned his hope, felt that his effort after help, if made at all, must be made now and vigorously.

"I am much obliged to you for giving me full notice," he said, with a firm intention in his tone, yet with an interruptedness in his delivery which showed that he spoke unwillingly. "The highest object to me is my profession, and I had identified the Hospital with the best use I can at present make of my profession. But the best use is not always the same with monetary success. Everything which has made the Hospital unpopular has helped with other causes—I think they are all connected with

my professional zeal—to make me unpopular as a practitioner. I get chiefly patients who can't pay me. I should like them best, if I had nobody to pay on my own side." Lydgate waited a little, but Bulstrode only bowed, looking at him fixedly, and he went on with the same interrupted enunciation—as if he were biting an objectionable leek.

"I have slipped into money difficulties which I can see no way out of, unless some one who trusts me and my future will advance me a sum without other security. I had very little fortune left when I came here. I have no prospects of money from my own family. My expenses, in consequence of my marriage, have been very much greater than I had expected. The result at this moment is that it would take a thousand pounds to clear me. I mean, to free me from the risk of having all my goods sold in security of my largest debt—as well as to pay my other debts—and leave anything to keep us a little beforehand with our small income. I find that it is out of the question that my wife's father should make such an advance. That is why I mention my position to—to the only other man who may be held to have some personal connection with my prosperity or ruin."

Lydgate hated to hear himself. But he had spoken now, and had spoken with unmistakable directness. Mr. Bulstrode replied without haste, but also without hesitation.

"I am grieved, though, I confess, not surprised by this information, Mr. Lydgate. For my own part, I regretted your alliance with my brother-in-law's family, which has always been of prodigal habits, and which has already been much indebted to me for sustainment in its present position. My advice to you, Mr. Lydgate, would be, that instead of involving yourself in further obligations, and continuing a doubtful struggle, you should simply become a bankrupt."

"That would not improve my prospect," said Lydgate, rising and speaking bitterly, "even if it were a more agreeable thing in itself."

"It is always a trial," said Mr. Bulstrode; "but trial, my dear sir, is our portion here, and is a needed corrective. I recommend you to weigh the advice I have given."

"Thank you," said Lydgate, not quite knowing what he said. "I have occupied you too long. Good-day."

CHAPTER 68

*"What suit of grace hath Virtue to put on
 If Vice shall wear as good, and do as well?
 If Wrong, if Craft, if Indiscretion
 Act as fair parts with ends as laudable?
 Which all this mighty volume of events
 The world, the universal map of deeds,
 Strongly controls, and proves from all descents,
 That the directest course still best succeeds.
 For should not grave and learn'd Experience
 That looks with the eyes of all the world beside,
 And with all ages holds intelligence,
 Go safer than Deceit without a guide!*

—DANIEL: *Musophilus.*

That change of plan and shifting of interest which Bulstrode stated or betrayed in his conversation with Lydgate, had been determined in him by some severe experience which he had gone through since the epoch of Mr. Larcher's sale, when Raffles had recognized Will Ladislaw, and when the banker had in vain attempted an act of restitution which might move Divine Providence to arrest painful consequences.

His certainty that Raffles, unless he were dead, would return to Middlemarch before long, had been justified. On Christmas Eve he had reappeared at The Shrubs. Bulstrode was at home to receive him, and hinder his communication with the rest of the family, but he could not altogether hinder the circumstances of the visit from compromising himself and alarming his wife. Raffles proved more unmanageable than he had shown himself to be in his former appearances, his chronic state of mental restlessness, the growing effect of habitual intemperance, quickly shaking off every impression from what was said to him. He insisted on staying in the house, and Bulstrode, weighing two sets of evils, felt that this was at least not a worse alternative than his going into the town. He kept him in his own room for the evening and saw him to bed, Raffles all the while amusing himself with the annoyance he was causing this decent and highly prosperous fellow-sinner, an amusement which

he facetiously expressed as sympathy with his friend's pleasure in entertaining a man who had been serviceable to him, and who had not had all his earnings. There was a cunning calculation under this noisy joking—a cool resolve to extract something the handsomer from Bulstrode as payment for release from this new application of torture. But his cunning had a little overcast its mark.

Bulstrode was indeed more tortured than the coarse fibre of Raffles could enable him to imagine. He had told his wife that he was simply taking care of this wretched creature, the victim of vice, who might otherwise injure himself; he implied, without the direct form of falsehood, that there was a family tie which bound him to this care, and that there were signs of mental alienation in Raffles which urged caution. He would himself drive the unfortunate being away the next morning. In these hints he felt that he was supplying Mrs. Bulstrode with precautionary information for his daughters and servants, and accounting for his allowing no one but himself to enter the room even with food and drink. But he sat in an agony of fear lest Raffles should be overheard in his loud and plain references to past facts—lest Mrs. Bulstrode should be even tempted to listen at the door. How could he hinder her, how betray his terror by opening the door to detect her? She was a woman of honest direct habits, and little likely to take so low a course in order to arrive at painful knowledge; but fear was stronger than the calculation of probabilities.

In this way Raffles had pushed the torture too far, and produced an effect which had not been in his plan. By showing himself hopelessly unmanageable he had made Bulstrode feel that a strong defiance was the only resource left. After taking Raffles to bed that night the banker ordered his closed carriage to be ready at half-past seven the next morning. At six o'clock he had already been long dressed, and had spent some of his wretchedness in prayer, pleading his motives for averting the worst evil if in anything he had used falsity and spoken what was not true before God. For Bulstrode shrank from a direct lie with an intensity disproportionate to the number of his more indirect misdeeds. But many of these misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring about the end that we fix our mind on and desire. And it is only what we are vividly conscious of that we can vividly imagine to be seen by Omniscience.

Bulstrode carried his candle to the bedside of Raffles, who was apparently in a painful dream. He stood silent, hoping that the presence of the light would serve to waken the sleeper gradually and gently, for he feared some noise as the consequence of a too sudden awakening. He had watched for a couple of minutes or more the shudderings and pantings which seemed likely to end in waking, when Raffles, with a long half-stifled moan, started up and stared round him in terror, trembling and gasping. But he made no further noise, and Bulstrode, setting down the candle, awaited his recovery.

It was a quarter of an hour later before Bulstrode, with a cold peremptoriness of manner which he had not before shown, said, "I came to call you thus early, Mr. Raffles, because I have ordered the carriage to be ready at half-past seven, and intend myself to conduct you as far as Ilseley, where you can either take the railway or await a coach." Raffles was about to speak, but Bulstrode anticipated him imperiously with the words, "Be silent, sir, and hear what I have to say. I shall supply you with money now, and I will furnish you with a reasonable sum from time to time, on your application to me by letter; but if you choose to present yourself here again, if you return to Middlemarch, if you use your tongue in a manner injurious to me, you will have to live on such fruits as your malice can bring you, without help from me. Nobody will pay you well for blasting my name: I know the worst you can do against me, and I shall brave it if you dare to thrust yourself upon me again. Get up, sir, and do as I order you, without noise, or I will send for a policeman to take you off my premises, and you may carry your stories into every pothouse in the town, but you shall have no sixpence from me to pay your expenses there."

Bulstrode had rarely in his life spoken with such nervous energy: he had been deliberating on this speech and its probable effects through a large part of the night; and though he did not trust to its ultimately saving him from any return of Raffles, he had concluded that it was the best throw he could make. It succeeded in enforcing submission from the jaded man this morning: his empoisoned system at this moment quailed before Bulstrode's cold, resolute bearing, and he was taken off quietly in the carriage before the family breakfast time. The servants imagined him to be a poor relation, and were not surprised that a strict man like their master, who held his head high in the world, should be ashamed of such a cousin and want to get rid of him. The banker's drive of ten miles with his hated companion was a dreary beginning of the Christmas day; but at the end of the drive, Raffles had recovered his spirits, and parted in a contentment for which there was the good reason that the banker had given him a hundred pounds. Various motives urged Bulstrode to this open-handedness, but he did not himself inquire closely into all of them. As he had stood watching Raffles in his uneasy sleep, it had certainly entered his mind that the man had been much shattered since the first gift of two hundred pounds.

He had taken care to repeat the incisive statement of his resolve not to be played on any more; and had tried to penetrate Raffles with the fact that he had shown the risks of bribing him to be quite equal to the risks of defying him. But when, freed from his repulsive presence, Bulstrode returned to his quiet home, he brought with him no confidence that he had secured more than a respite. It was as if he had had a loathsome dream, and could not shake off its images with their hateful kindred of sensations—as if on all the pleasant surroundings of his life a dangerous reptile had left his slimy traces.

Who can know how much of his most inward life is made up of the thoughts he believes other men to have about him, until that fabric of opinion is threatened with ruin?

Bulstrode was only the more conscious that there was a deposit of uneasy presentiment in his wife's mind, because she carefully avoided any allusion to it. He had been used every day to taste the flavor of supremacy and the tribute of complete deference: and the certainty that he was watched or measured with a hidden suspicion of his having some discreditable secret, made his voice totter when he was speaking to edification. Foreseeing, to men of Bulstrode's anxious temperament, is often worse than seeing; and his imagination continually heightened the anguish of an imminent disgrace. Yes, imminent; for if his defiance of Raffles did not keep the man away—and though he prayed for this result he hardly hoped for it—the disgrace was certain. In vain he said to himself that, if permitted, it would be a divine visitation, a chastisement, a preparation; he recoiled from the imagined burning; and he judged that it must be more for the Divine glory that he should escape dishonor. That recoil had at last urged him to make preparations for quitting Middlemarch. If evil truth must be reported of him, he would then be at a less scorching distance from the contempt of his old neighbors; and in a new scene, where his life would not have gathered the same wide sensibility, the tormentor, if he pursued him, would be less formidable. To leave the place finally would, he knew, be extremely painful to his wife, and on other grounds he would have preferred to stay where he had struck root. Hence he made his preparations at first in a conditional way, wishing to leave on all sides an opening for his return after brief absence, if any favorable intervention of Providence should dissipate his fears. He was preparing to transfer his management of the Bank, and to give up any active control of other commercial affairs in the neighborhood, on the ground of his failing health, but without excluding his future resumption of such work. The measure would cause him some added expense and some diminution of income beyond what he had already undergone from the general depression of trade; and the Hospital presented itself as a principal object of outlay on which he could fairly economize.

This was the experience which had determined his conversation with Lydgate. But at this time his arrangements had most of them gone no farther than a stage at which he could recall them if they proved to be unnecessary. He continually deferred the final steps; in the midst of his fears, like many a man who is in danger of shipwreck or of being dashed from his carriage by runaway horses, he had a clinging impression that something would happen to hinder the worst, and that to spoil his life by a late transplantation might be over-hasty—especially since it was difficult to account satisfactorily to his wife for the project of their indefinite exile from the only place where she would like to live.

Among the affairs Bulstrode had to care for, was the management of the farm at Stone Court in case of his absence; and on this as well as on all other matters connected with any houses and land he possessed in or about Middlemarch, he had consulted Caleb Garth. Like every one else who had business of that sort, he wanted to get the agent who was more anxious for his employer's interests than his own. With regard to Stone Court, since Bulstrode wished to retain his hold on the stock,

and to have an arrangement by which he himself could, if he chose, resume his favorite recreation of superintendence, Caleb had advised him not to trust to a mere bailiff, but to let the land, stock, and implements yearly, and take a proportionate share of the proceeds.

"May I trust to you to find me a tenant on these terms, Mr. Garth?" said Bulstrode. "And will you mention to me the yearly sum which would repay you for managing these affairs which we have discussed together?"

"I'll think about it," said Caleb, in his blunt way. "I'll see how I can make it out."

If it had not been that he had to consider Fred Vincy's future, Mr. Garth would not probably have been glad of any addition to his work, of which his wife was always fearing an excess for him as he grew older. But on quitting Bulstrode after that conversation, a very alluring idea occurred to him about this said letting of Stone Court. What if Bulstrode would agree to his placing Fred Vincy there on the understanding that he, Caleb Garth, should be responsible for the management? It would be an excellent schooling for Fred; he might make a modest income there, and still have time left to get knowledge by helping in other business. He mentioned his notion to Mrs. Garth with such evident delight that she could not bear to chill his pleasure by expressing her constant fear of his undertaking too much.

"The lad would be as happy as two," he said, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking radiant, "if I could tell him it was all settled. Think; Susan! His mind had been running on that place for years before old Featherstone died. And it would be as pretty a turn of things as could be that he should hold the place in a good industrious way after all—by his taking to business. For it's likely enough Bulstrode might let him go on, and gradually buy the stock. He hasn't made up his mind, I can see, whether or not he shall settle somewhere else as a lasting thing. I never was better pleased with a notion in my life. And then the children might be married by-and-by, Susan."

"You will not give any hint of the plan to Fred, until you are sure that Bulstrode would agree to the plan?" said Mrs. Garth, in a tone of gentle caution. "And as to marriage, Caleb, we old people need not help to hasten it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Caleb, swinging his head aside. "Marriage is a taming thing. Fred would want less of my bit and bridle. However, I shall say nothing till I know the ground I'm treading on. I shall speak to Bulstrode again."

He took his earliest opportunity of doing so. Bulstrode had anything but a warm interest in his nephew Fred Vincy, but he had a strong wish to secure Mr. Garth's services on many scattered points of business at which he was sure to be a considerable loser, if they were under less conscientious management. On that ground he made no objection to Mr. Garth's proposal; and there was also another reason why he was not sorry to give a consent which was to benefit one of the Vincy family. It was that Mrs. Bulstrode, having heard of Lydgate's debts, had been anxious

to know whether her husband could not do something for poor Rosamond, and had been much troubled on learning from him that Lydgate's affairs were not easily remediable, and that the wisest plan was to let them "take their course." Mrs. Bulstrode had then said for the first time, "I think you are always a little hard towards my family, Nicholas. And I am sure I have no reason to deny any of my relatives. Too worldly they may be, but no one ever had to say that they were not respectable."

"My dear Harriet," said Mr. Bulstrode, wincing under his wife's eyes, which were filling with tears, "I have supplied your brother with a great deal of capital. I cannot be expected to take care of his married children."

That seemed to be true, and Mrs. Bulstrode's remonstrance subsided into pity for poor Rosamond, whose extravagant education she had always foreseen the fruits of.

But remembering that dialogue, Mr. Bulstrode felt that when he had to talk to his wife fully about his plan of quitting Middlemarch, he should be glad to tell her that he had made an arrangement which might be for the good of her nephew Fred. At present he had merely mentioned to her that he thought of shutting up The Shrubs for a few months, and taking a house on the Southern Coast.

Hence Mr. Garth got the assurance he desired, namely, that in case of Bulstrode's departure from Middlemarch for an indefinite time, Fred Vincy should be allowed to have the tenancy of Stone Court on the terms proposed.

Caleb was so elated with his hope of this "neat turn" being given to things, that if his self-control had not been braced by a little affectionate wifely scolding, he would have betrayed everything to Mary, wanting "to give the child comfort." However, he restrained himself, and kept in strict privacy from Fred certain visits which he was making to Stone Court, in order to look more thoroughly into the state of the land and stock, and take a preliminary estimate. He was certainly more eager in these visits than the probable speed of events required him to be; but he was stimulated by a fatherly delight in occupying his mind with this bit of probable happiness which he held in store like a hidden birthday gift for Fred and Mary.

"But suppose the whole scheme should turn out to be a castle in the air?" said Mrs. Garth.

"Well, well," replied Caleb; "the castle will tumble about nobody's head."

CHAPTER 69

"If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee."

—*Ecclesiasticus.*

Mr. Bulstrode was still seated in his manager's room at the Bank, about three o'clock of the same day on which he had received Lydgate there, when the clerk entered to say that his horse was waiting, and also that Mr. Garth was outside and begged to speak with him.

"By all means," said Bulstrode; and Caleb entered. "Pray sit down, Mr. Garth," continued the banker, in his suavest tone.

"I am glad that you arrived just in time to find me here. I know you count your minutes."

"Oh," said Caleb, gently, with a slow swing of his head on one side, as he seated himself and laid his hat on the floor.

He looked at the ground, leaning forward and letting his long fingers droop between his legs, while each finger moved in succession, as if it were sharing some thought which filled his large quiet brow.

Mr. Bulstrode, like every one else who knew Caleb, was used to his slowness in beginning to speak on any topic which he felt to be important, and rather expected that he was about to recur to the buying of some houses in Blindman's Court, for the sake of pulling them down, as a sacrifice of property which would be well repaid by the influx of air and light on that spot. It was by propositions of this kind that Caleb was sometimes troublesome to his employers; but he had usually found Bulstrode ready to meet him in projects of improvement, and they had got on well together. When he spoke again, however, it was to say, in rather a subdued voice—

"I have just come away from Stone Court, Mr. Bulstrode."

"You found nothing wrong there, I hope," said the banker; "I was there myself yesterday. Abel has done well with the lambs this year."

"Why, yes," said Caleb, looking up gravely, "there is something wrong—a stranger, who is very ill, I think. He wants a doctor, and I came to tell you of that. His name is Raffles."

He saw the shock of his words passing through Bulstrode's frame. On this subject the banker had thought that his fears were too constantly on the watch to be taken by surprise; but he had been mistaken.

"Poor wretch!" he said in a compassionate tone, though his lips trembled a little. "Do you know how he came there?"

"I took him myself," said Caleb, quietly—"took him up in my gig. He had got down from the coach, and was walking a little beyond the turning from the toll-house, and I overtook him. He remembered seeing me with you once before, at Stone Court, and he asked me to take him on. I saw he was ill: it seemed to me the right thing to do, to carry him under shelter. And now I think you should lose no time in getting advice for him." Caleb took up his hat from the floor as he ended, and rose slowly from his seat.

"Certainly," said Bulstrode, whose mind was very active at this moment. "Perhaps you will yourself oblige me, Mr. Garth, by calling at Mr. Lydgate's as you pass—or stay! he may at this hour probably be at the Hospital. I will first send my man on the horse there with a note this instant, and then I will myself ride to Stone Court."

Bulstrode quickly wrote a note, and went out himself to give the commission to his man. When he returned, Caleb was standing as before with one hand on the back of the chair, holding his hat with the other. In Bulstrode's mind the dominant thought was, "Perhaps Raffles only spoke to Garth of his illness. Garth may wonder, as he must have done before, at this disreputable fellow's claiming intimacy with me; but he will know nothing. And he is friendly to me—I can be of use to him."

He longed for some confirmation of this hopeful conjecture, but to have asked any question as to what Raffles had said or done would have been to betray fear.

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Garth," he said, in his usual tone of politeness. "My servant will be back in a few minutes, and I shall then go myself to see what can be done for this unfortunate man. Perhaps you had some other business with me? If so, pray be seated."

"Thank you," said Caleb, making a slight gesture with his right hand to waive the invitation. "I wish to say, Mr. Bulstrode, that I must request you to put your business into some other hands than mine. I am obliged to you for your handsome way of meeting me—about the letting of Stone Court, and all other business. But I must give it up." A sharp certainty entered like a stab into Bulstrode's soul.

"This is sudden, Mr. Garth," was all he could say at first.

"It is," said Caleb; "but it is quite fixed. I must give it up."

He spoke with a firmness which was very gentle, and yet he could see that Bulstrode seemed to cower under that gentleness, his face looking dried and his eyes swerving away from the glance which rested on him. Caleb felt a deep pity for him, but he could have used no pretexts to account for his resolve, even if they would have been of any use.

"You have been led to this, I apprehend, by some slanders concerning me uttered by that unhappy creature," said Bulstrode, anxious now to know the utmost.

"That is true. I can't deny that I act upon what I heard from him."

"You are a conscientious man, Mr. Garth—a man, I trust, who feels himself accountable to God. You would not wish to injure me by being too ready to believe a slander," said Bulstrode, casting about for pleas that might be adapted to his hearer's mind. "That is a poor reason for giving up a connection which I think I may say will be mutually beneficial."

"I would injure no man if I could help it," said Caleb; "even if I thought God winked at it. I hope I should have a feeling for my fellow-creature. But, sir—I am obliged to believe that this Raffles has told me the truth. And I can't be happy in working with you, or profiting by you. It hurts my mind. I must beg you to seek another agent."

"Very well, Mr. Garth. But I must at least claim to know the worst that he has told you. I must know what is the foul speech that I am liable to be the victim of," said Bulstrode, a certain amount of anger beginning to mingle with his humiliation before this quiet man who renounced his benefits.

"That's needless," said Caleb, waving his hand, bowing his head slightly, and not swerving from the tone which had in it the merciful intention to spare this pitiable man. "What he has said to me will never pass from my lips, unless something now unknown forces it from me. If you led a harmful life for gain, and kept others out of their rights by deceit, to get the more for yourself, I dare say you repent—you would like to go back, and can't: that must be a bitter thing"—Caleb paused a moment and shook his head—"it is not for me to make your life harder to you."

"But you do—you do make it harder to me," said Bulstrode constrained into a genuine, pleading cry. "You make it harder to me by turning your back on me."

"That I'm forced to do," said Caleb, still more gently, lifting up his hand. "I am sorry. I don't judge you and say, he is wicked, and I am righteous. God forbid. I don't know everything. A man may do wrong, and his will may rise clear out of it, though he can't get his life clear. That's a bad punishment. If it is so with you,—well, I'm very sorry for you. But I have that feeling inside me, that I can't go on working with you. That's all, Mr. Bulstrode. Everything else is buried, so far as my will goes. And I wish you good-day."

"One moment, Mr. Garth!" said Bulstrode, hurriedly. "I may trust then to your solemn assurance that you will not repeat either to man or woman what—even if it have any degree of truth in it—is yet a malicious representation?" Caleb's wrath was stirred, and he said, indignantly—

"Why should I have said it if I didn't mean it? I am in no fear of you. Such tales as that will never tempt my tongue."

"Excuse me—I am agitated—I am the victim of this abandoned man."

"Stop a bit! you have got to consider whether you didn't help to make him worse, when you profited by his vices."

"You are wronging me by too readily believing him," said Bulstrode, oppressed, as by a nightmare, with the inability to deny flatly what Raffles might have said; and yet feeling it an escape that Caleb had not so stated it to him as to ask for that flat denial.

"No," said Caleb, lifting his hand deprecatingly; "I am ready to believe better, when better is proved. I rob you of no good chance. As to speaking, I hold it a crime to expose a man's sin unless I'm clear it must be done to save the innocent. That is my way of thinking, Mr. Bulstrode, and what I say, I've no need to swear. I wish you good-day."

Some hours later, when he was at home, Caleb said to his wife, incidentally, that he had had some little differences with Bulstrode, and that in consequence, he had given up all notion of taking Stone Court, and indeed had resigned doing further business for him.

"He was disposed to interfere too much, was he?" said Mrs. Garth, imagining that her husband had been touched on his sensitive point, and not been allowed to do what he thought right as to materials and modes of work.

"Oh," said Caleb, bowing his head and waving his hand gravely. And Mrs. Garth knew that this was a sign of his not intending to speak further on the subject.

As for Bulstrode, he had almost immediately mounted his horse and set off for Stone Court, being anxious to arrive there before Lydgate.

His mind was crowded with images and conjectures, which were a language to his hopes and fears, just as we hear tones from the vibrations which shake our whole system. The deep humiliation with which he had winced under Caleb Garth's knowledge of his past and rejection of his patronage, alternated with and almost gave way to the sense of safety in the fact that Garth, and no other, had been the man to whom Raffles had spoken. It seemed to him a sort of earnest that Providence intended his rescue from worse consequences; the way being thus left open for the hope of secrecy. That Raffles should be afflicted with illness, that he should have been led to Stone Court rather than elsewhere—Bulstrode's heart fluttered at the vision of probabilities which these events conjured up. If it should turn out that he was freed from all danger of disgrace—if he could breathe in perfect liberty—his life should be more consecrated than it had ever been before. He mentally lifted up this vow as if it would urge the result he longed for—he tried to believe in the potency of that prayerful resolution—its potency to determine death. He knew that he ought to say, "Thy will be done;" and he said it often. But the intense desire remained that the will of God might be the death of that hated man.

Yet when he arrived at Stone Court he could not see the change in Raffles without a shock. But for his pallor and feebleness, Bulstrode would have called the change in him entirely mental. Instead of his loud tormenting mood, he showed an intense, vague terror, and seemed to deprecate Bulstrode's anger, because the money was all gone—he had been robbed—it had half of it been taken from him. He had only come here because he was ill and somebody was hunting him—somebody was after him, he had told nobody anything, he had kept his mouth shut. Bulstrode, not knowing the significance of these symptoms, interpreted this new nervous susceptibility into a means of alarming Raffles into true confessions, and taxed him with falsehood in saying that he had not told anything, since he had just told the man who took him up in his gig and brought him to Stone Court. Raffles denied this with solemn adjurations; the fact being that the links of consciousness were interrupted in him, and that his minute terror-stricken narrative to Caleb Garth had been delivered under a set of visionary impulses which had dropped back into darkness.

Bulstrode's heart sank again at this sign that he could get no grasp over the wretched man's mind, and that no word of Raffles could be trusted as to the fact which he most wanted to know, namely, whether or not he had really kept silence to every one in the neighborhood except Caleb Garth. The housekeeper had told him without the least constraint of manner that since Mr. Garth left, Raffles had asked her for beer, and after that had not spoken, seeming very ill. On that side it might be concluded that there had been no betrayal. Mrs. Abel thought, like the servants at The Shrubs, that the strange man belonged to the unpleasant "kin" who are among the troubles of the rich; she had at first referred the kinship to Mr. Rigg, and where there was property left, the buzzing presence of such large blue-bottles seemed natural enough. How he could be "kin" to Bulstrode as well was not so clear, but Mrs. Abel agreed with her husband that there was "no knowing," a proposition which had a great deal of mental food for her, so that she shook her head over it without further speculation.

In less than an hour Lydgate arrived. Bulstrode met him outside the wainscoted parlor, where Raffles was, and said—

"I have called you in, Mr. Lydgate, to an unfortunate man who was once in my employment, many years ago. Afterwards he went to America, and returned I fear to an idle dissolute life. Being destitute, he has a claim on me. He was slightly connected with Rigg, the former owner of this place, and in consequence found his way here. I believe he is seriously ill: apparently his mind is affected. I feel bound to do the utmost for him."

Lydgate, who had the remembrance of his last conversation with Bulstrode strongly upon him, was not disposed to say an unnecessary word to him, and bowed slightly in answer to this account; but just before entering the room he turned automatically and said, "What is his name?"—to know names being as much a part of the medical man's accomplishment as of the practical politician's.

"Raffles, John Raffles," said Bulstrode, who hoped that whatever became of Raffles, Lydgate would never know any more of him.

When he had thoroughly examined and considered the patient, Lydgate ordered that he should go to bed, and be kept there in as complete quiet as possible, and then went with Bulstrode into another room.

"It is a serious case, I apprehend," said the banker, before Lydgate began to speak.

"No—and yes," said Lydgate, half dubiously. "It is difficult to decide as to the possible effect of long-standing complications; but the man had a robust constitution to begin with. I should not expect this attack to be fatal, though of course the system is in a ticklish state. He should be well watched and attended to."

"I will remain here myself," said Bulstrode. "Mrs. Abel and her husband are inexperienced. I can easily remain here for the night, if you will oblige me by taking a note for Mrs. Bulstrode."

"I should think that is hardly necessary," said Lydgate. "He seems tame and terrified enough. He might become more unmanageable. But there is a man here—is there not?"

"I have more than once stayed here a few nights for the sake of seclusion," said Bulstrode, indifferently; "I am quite disposed to do so now. Mrs. Abel and her husband can relieve or aid me, if necessary."

"Very well. Then I need give my directions only to you," said Lydgate, not feeling surprised at a little peculiarity in Bulstrode.

"You think, then, that the case is hopeful?" said Bulstrode, when Lydgate had ended giving his orders.

"Unless there turn out to be further complications, such as I have not at present detected—yes," said Lydgate. "He may pass on to a worse stage; but I should not wonder if he got better in a few days, by adhering to the treatment I have prescribed. There must be firmness. Remember, if he calls for liquors of any sort, not to give them to him. In my opinion, men in his condition are oftener killed by treatment than by the disease. Still, new symptoms may arise. I shall come again to-morrow morning."

After waiting for the note to be carried to Mrs. Bulstrode, Lydgate rode away, forming no conjectures, in the first instance, about the history of Raffles, but rehearsing the whole argument, which had lately been much stirred by the publication of Dr. Ware's abundant experience in America, as to the right way of treating cases of alcoholic poisoning such as this. Lydgate, when abroad, had already been interested in this question: he was strongly convinced against the prevalent practice of allowing

alcohol and persistently administering large doses of opium; and he had repeatedly acted on this conviction with a favorable result.

"The man is in a diseased state," he thought, "but there's a good deal of wear in him still. I suppose he is an object of charity to Bulstrode. It is curious what patches of hardness and tenderness lie side by side in men's dispositions. Bulstrode seems the most unsympathetic fellow I ever saw about some people, and yet he has taken no end of trouble, and spent a great deal of money, on benevolent objects. I suppose he has some test by which he finds out whom Heaven cares for—he has made up his mind that it doesn't care for me."

This streak of bitterness came from a plenteous source, and kept widening in the current of his thought as he neared Lowick Gate. He had not been there since his first interview with Bulstrode in the morning, having been found at the Hospital by the banker's messenger; and for the first time he was returning to his home without the vision of any expedient in the background which left him a hope of raising money enough to deliver him from the coming destitution of everything which made his married life tolerable—everything which saved him and Rosamond from that bare isolation in which they would be forced to recognize how little of a comfort they could be to each other. It was more bearable to do without tenderness for himself than to see that his own tenderness could make no amends for the lack of other things to her. The sufferings of his own pride from humiliations past and to come were keen enough, yet they were hardly distinguishable to himself from that more acute pain which dominated them—the pain of foreseeing that Rosamond would come to regard him chiefly as the cause of disappointment and unhappiness to her. He had never liked the makeshifts of poverty, and they had never before entered into his prospects for himself; but he was beginning now to imagine how two creatures who loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common, might laugh over their shabby furniture, and their calculations how far they could afford butter and eggs. But the glimpse of that poetry seemed as far off from him as the carelessness of the golden age; in poor Rosamond's mind there was not room enough for luxuries to look small in. He got down from his horse in a very sad mood, and went into the house, not expecting to be cheered except by his dinner, and reflecting that before the evening closed it would be wise to tell Rosamond of his application to Bulstrode and its failure. It would be well not to lose time in preparing her for the worst.

But his dinner waited long for him before he was able to eat it. For on entering he found that Dover's agent had already put a man in the house, and when he asked where Mrs. Lydgate was, he was told that she was in her bedroom. He went up and found her stretched on the bed pale and silent, without an answer even in her face to any word or look of his. He sat down by the bed and leaning over her said with almost a cry of prayer—

"Forgive me for this misery, my poor Rosamond! Let us only love one another."

She looked at him silently, still with the blank despair on her face; but then the tears began to fill her blue eyes, and her lip trembled. The strong man had had too much to bear that day. He let his head fall beside hers and sobbed.

He did not hinder her from going to her father early in the morning—it seemed now that he ought not to hinder her from doing as she pleased. In half an hour she came back, and said that papa and mamma wished her to go and stay with them while things were in this miserable state. Papa said he could do nothing about the debt—if he paid this, there would be half-a-dozen more. She had better come back home again till Lydgate had got a comfortable home for her. "Do you object, Tertius?"

"Do as you like," said Lydgate. "But things are not coming to a crisis immediately. There is no hurry."

"I should not go till to-morrow," said Rosamond; "I shall want to pack my clothes."

"Oh, I would wait a little longer than to-morrow—there is no knowing what may happen," said Lydgate, with bitter irony. "I may get my neck broken, and that may make things easier to you."

It was Lydgate's misfortune and Rosamond's too, that his tenderness towards her, which was both an emotional prompting and a well-considered resolve, was inevitably interrupted by these outbursts of indignation either ironical or remonstrant. She thought them totally unwarranted, and the repulsion which this exceptional severity excited in her was in danger of making the more persistent tenderness unacceptable.

"I see you do not wish me to go," she said, with chill mildness; "why can you not say so, without that kind of violence? I shall stay until you request me to do otherwise."

Lydgate said no more, but went out on his rounds. He felt bruised and shattered, and there was a dark line under his eyes which Rosamond had not seen before. She could not bear to look at him. Tertius had a way of taking things which made them a great deal worse for her.

CHAPTER 70

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,

And what we have been makes us what we are."

Bulstrode's first object after Lydgate had left Stone Court was to examine Raffles's pockets, which he imagined were sure to carry signs in the shape of hotel-bills of the places he had stopped in, if he had not told the truth in saying that he had come straight from Liverpool because he was ill and had no money. There were various bills crammed into his pocketbook, but none of a later date than Christmas at any other place, except one, which bore date that morning. This was crumpled up with a hand-bill about a horse-fair in one of his tail-pockets, and represented the cost of three days' stay at an inn at Bilkley, where the fair was held—a town at least forty miles from Middlemarch. The bill was heavy, and since Raffles had no luggage with him, it seemed probable that he had left his portmanteau behind in payment, in order to save money for his travelling fare; for his purse was empty, and he had only a couple of sixpences and some loose pence in his pockets.

Bulstrode gathered a sense of safety from these indications that Raffles had really kept at a distance from Middlemarch since his memorable visit at Christmas. At a distance and among people who were strangers to Bulstrode, what satisfaction could there be to Raffles's tormenting, self-magnifying vein in telling old scandalous stories about a Middlemarch banker? And what harm if he did talk? The chief point now was to keep watch over him as long as there was any danger of that intelligible raving, that unaccountable impulse to tell, which seemed to have acted towards Caleb Garth; and Bulstrode felt much anxiety lest some such impulse should come over him at the sight of Lydgate. He sat up alone with him through the night, only ordering the housekeeper to lie down in her clothes, so as to be ready when he called her, alleging his own indisposition to sleep, and his anxiety to carry out the doctor's orders. He did carry them out faithfully, although Raffles was incessantly asking for brandy, and declaring that he was sinking away—that the earth was sinking away from under him. He was restless and sleepless, but still quailing and manageable. On the offer of the food ordered by Lydgate, which he refused, and the denial of other things which he demanded, he seemed to concentrate all his terror on Bulstrode, imploringly deprecating his anger, his revenge on him by starvation, and declaring with strong oaths that he had never told any mortal a word against him. Even this Bulstrode felt that he would not have liked Lydgate to hear; but a more alarming sign of fitful alternation in his delirium was, that in-the morning twilight Raffles suddenly seemed to imagine a doctor present, addressing him and declaring that Bulstrode wanted to starve him to death out of revenge for telling, when he never had told.

Bulstrode's native imperiousness and strength of determination served him well. This delicate-looking man, himself nervously perturbed, found the needed stimulus in his strenuous circumstances, and through that difficult night and morning, while he had the air of an animated corpse returned to movement without warmth, holding the mastery by its chill impassibility his mind was intensely at work thinking of what he had to guard against and what would win him security. Whatever prayers he might lift up, whatever statements he might inwardly make of this man's wretched spiritual condition, and the duty he himself was under to submit to the punishment divinely appointed for him rather than to wish for evil to another—through all this effort to condense words into a solid mental state, there pierced and spread with irresistible vividness the images of the events he desired. And in the train of those images came their apology. He could not but see the death of Raffles, and see in it his own deliverance. What was the removal of this wretched creature? He was impenitent—but were not public criminals impenitent?—yet the law decided on their fate. Should Providence in this case award death, there was no sin in contemplating death as the desirable issue—if he kept his hands from hastening it—if he scrupulously did what was prescribed. Even here there might be a mistake: human prescriptions were fallible things: Lydgate had said that treatment had hastened death,—why not his own method of treatment? But of course intention was everything in the question of right and wrong.

And Bulstrode set himself to keep his intention separate from his desire. He inwardly declared that he intended to obey orders. Why should he have got into any argument about the validity of these orders? It was only the common trick of desire—which avails itself of any irrelevant scepticism, finding larger room for itself in all uncertainty about effects, in every obscurity that looks like the absence of law. Still, he did obey the orders.

His anxieties continually glanced towards Lydgate, and his remembrance of what had taken place between them the morning before was accompanied with sensibilities which had not been roused at all during the actual scene. He had then cared but little about Lydgate's painful impressions with regard to the suggested change in the Hospital, or about the disposition towards himself which what he held to be his justifiable refusal of a rather exorbitant request might call forth. He recurred to the scene now with a perception that he had probably made Lydgate his enemy, and with an awakened desire to propitiate him, or rather to create in him a strong sense of personal obligation. He regretted that he had not at once made even an unreasonable money-sacrifice. For in case of unpleasant suspicions, or even knowledge gathered from the raving of Raffles, Bulstrode would have felt that he had a defence in Lydgate's mind by having conferred a momentous benefit on him. But the regret had perhaps come too late.

Strange, piteous conflict in the soul of this unhappy man, who had longed for years to be better than he was—who had taken his selfish passions into discipline and clad them in severe robes, so that he had walked with them as a devout choir, till now

that a terror had risen among them, and they could chant no longer, but threw out their common cries for safety.

It was nearly the middle of the day before Lydgate arrived: he had meant to come earlier, but had been detained, he said; and his shattered looks were noticed by Balstrode. But he immediately threw himself into the consideration of the patient, and inquired strictly into all that had occurred. Raffles was worse, would take hardly any food, was persistently wakeful and restlessly raving; but still not violent. Contrary to Balstrode's alarmed expectation, he took little notice of Lydgate's presence, and continued to talk or murmur incoherently.

"What do you think of him?" said Bulstrode, in private.

"The symptoms are worse."

"You are less hopeful?"

"No; I still think he may come round. Are you going to stay here yourself?" said Lydgate, looking at Bulstrode with an abrupt question, which made him uneasy, though in reality it was not due to any suspicious conjecture.

"Yes, I think so," said Bulstrode, governing himself and speaking with deliberation. "Mrs. Bulstrode is advised of the reasons which detain me. Mrs. Abel and her husband are not experienced enough to be left quite alone, and this kind of responsibility is scarcely included in their service of me. You have some fresh instructions, I presume."

The chief new instruction that Lydgate had to give was on the administration of extremely moderate doses of opium, in case of the sleeplessness continuing after several hours. He had taken the precaution of bringing opium in his pocket, and he gave minute directions to Bulstrode as to the doses, and the point at which they should cease. He insisted on the risk of not ceasing; and repeated his order that no alcohol should be given.

"From what I see of the case," he ended, "narcotism is the only thing I should be much afraid of. He may wear through even without much food. There's a good deal of strength in him."

"You look ill yourself, Mr. Lydgate—a most unusual, I may say unprecedented thing in my knowledge of you," said Bulstrode, showing a solicitude as unlike his indifference the day before, as his present recklessness about his own fatigue was unlike his habitual self-cherishing anxiety. "I fear you are harassed."

"Yes, I am," said Lydgate, brusquely, holding his hat, and ready to go.

"Something new, I fear," said Bulstrode, inquiringly. "Pray be seated."

"No, thank you," said Lydgate, with some hauteur. "I mentioned to you yesterday what was the state of my affairs. There is nothing to add, except that the execution has since then been actually put into my house. One can tell a good deal of trouble in a short sentence. I will say good morning."

"Stay, Mr. Lydgate, stay," said Bulstrode; "I have been reconsidering this subject. I was yesterday taken by surprise, and saw it superficially. Mrs. Bulstrode is anxious for her niece, and I myself should grieve at a calamitous change in your position. Claims on me are numerous, but on reconsideration, I esteem it right that I should incur a small sacrifice rather than leave you unaided. You said, I think, that a thousand pounds would suffice entirely to free you from your burthens, and enable you to recover a firm stand?"

"Yes," said Lydgate, a great leap of joy within him surmounting every other feeling; "that would pay all my debts, and leave me a little on hand. I could set about economizing in our way of living. And by-and-by my practice might look up."

"If you will wait a moment, Mr. Lydgate, I will draw a check to that amount. I am aware that help, to be effectual in these cases, should be thorough."

While Bulstrode wrote, Lydgate turned to the window thinking of his home—thinking of his life with its good start saved from frustration, its good purposes still unbroken.

"You can give me a note of hand for this, Mr. Lydgate," said the banker, advancing towards him with the check. "And by-and-by, I hope, you may be in circumstances gradually to repay me. Meanwhile, I have pleasure in thinking that you will be released from further difficulty."

"I am deeply obliged to you," said Lydgate. "You have restored to me the prospect of working with some happiness and some chance of good."

It appeared to him a very natural movement in Bulstrode that he should have reconsidered his refusal: it corresponded with the more munificent side of his character. But as he put his hack into a canter, that he might get the sooner home, and tell the good news to Rosamond, and get cash at the bank to pay over to Dover's agent, there crossed his mind, with an unpleasant impression, as from a dark-winged flight of evil augury across his vision, the thought of that contrast in himself which a few months had brought—that he should be overjoyed at being under a strong personal obligation—that he should be overjoyed at getting money for himself from Bulstrode.

The banker felt that he had done something to nullify one cause of uneasiness, and yet he was scarcely the easier. He did not measure the quantity of diseased motive which had made him wish for Lydgate's good-will, but the quantity was none the less actively there, like an irritating agent in his blood. A man vows, and yet will not cast away the means of breaking his vow. Is it that he distinctly means to break it? Not at all; but the desires which tend to break it are at work in him dimly, and make their

way into his imagination, and relax his muscles in the very moments when he is telling himself over again the reasons for his vow. Raffles, recovering quickly, returning to the free use of his odious powers—how could Bulstrode wish for that? Raffles dead was the image that brought release, and indirectly he prayed for that way of release, beseeching that, if it were possible, the rest of his days here below might be freed from the threat of an ignominy which would break him utterly as an instrument of God's service. Lydgate's opinion was not on the side of promise that this prayer would be fulfilled; and as the day advanced, Bulstrode felt himself getting irritated at the persistent life in this man, whom he would fain have seen sinking into the silence of death: imperious will stirred murderous impulses towards this brute life, over which will, by itself, had no power. He said inwardly that he was getting too much worn; he would not sit up with the patient to-night, but leave him to Mrs. Abel, who, if necessary, could call her husband.

At six o'clock, Raffles, having had only fitful perturbed snatches of sleep, from which he waked with fresh restlessness and perpetual cries that he was sinking away, Bulstrode began to administer the opium according to Lydgate's directions. At the end of half an hour or more he called Mrs. Abel and told her that he found himself unfit for further watching. He must now consign the patient to her care; and he proceeded to repeat to her Lydgate's directions as to the quantity of each dose. Mrs. Abel had not before known anything of Lydgate's prescriptions; she had simply prepared and brought whatever Bulstrode ordered, and had done what he pointed out to her. She began now to ask what else she should do besides administering the opium.

"Nothing at present, except the offer of the soup or the soda-water: you can come to me for further directions. Unless there is any important change, I shall not come into the room again to-night. You will ask your husband for help if necessary. I must go to bed early."

"You've much need, sir, I'm sure," said Mrs. Abel, "and to take something more strengthening than what you've done."

Bulstrode went away now without anxiety as to what Raffles might say in his raving, which had taken on a muttering incoherence not likely to create any dangerous belief. At any rate he must risk this. He went down into the wainscoted parlor first, and began to consider whether he would not have his horse saddled and go home by the moonlight, and give up caring for earthly consequences. Then, he wished that he had begged Lydgate to come again that evening. Perhaps he might deliver a different opinion, and think that Raffles was getting into a less hopeful state. Should he send for Lydgate? If Raffles were really getting worse, and slowly dying, Bulstrode felt that he could go to bed and sleep in gratitude to Providence. But was he worse? Lydgate might come and simply say that he was going on as he expected, and predict that he would by-and-by fall into a good sleep, and get well. What was the use of sending for him? Bulstrode shrank from that result. No ideas or

opinions could hinder him from seeing the one probability to be, that Raffles recovered would be just the same man as before, with his strength as a tormentor renewed, obliging him to drag away his wife to spend her years apart from her friends and native place, carrying an alienating suspicion against him in her heart.

He had sat an hour and a half in this conflict by the firelight only, when a sudden thought made him rise and light the bed-candle, which he had brought down with him. The thought was, that he had not told Mrs. Abel when the doses of opium must cease.

He took hold of the candlestick, but stood motionless for a long while. She might already have given him more than Lydgate had prescribed. But it was excusable in him, that he should forget part of an order, in his present wearied condition. He walked up-stairs, candle in hand, not knowing whether he should straightway enter his own room and go to bed, or turn to the patient's room and rectify his omission. He paused in the passage, with his face turned towards Raffles's room, and he could hear him moaning and murmuring. He was not asleep, then. Who could know that Lydgate's prescription would not be better disobeyed than followed, since there was still no sleep?

He turned into his own room. Before he had quite undressed, Mrs. Abel rapped at the door; he opened it an inch, so that he could hear her speak low.

"If you please, sir, should I have no brandy nor nothing to give the poor creetur? He feels sinking away, and nothing else will he swaller—and but little strength in it, if he did—only the opium. And he says more and more he's sinking down through the earth."

To her surprise, Mr. Bulstrode did not answer. A struggle was going on within him.

"I think he must die for want o' support, if he goes on in that way. When I nursed my poor master, Mr. Robisson, I had to give him port-wine and brandy constant, and a big glass at a time," added Mrs. Abel, with a touch of remonstrance in her tone.

But again Mr. Bulstrode did not answer immediately, and she continued, "It's not a time to spare when people are at death's door, nor would you wish it, sir, I'm sure. Else I should give him our own bottle o' rum as we keep by us. But a sitter-up so as you've been, and doing everything as laid in your power—"

Here a key was thrust through the inch of doorway, and Mr. Bulstrode said huskily, "That is the key of the wine-cooler. You will find plenty of brandy there."

Early in the morning—about six—Mr. Bulstrode rose and spent some time in prayer. Does any one suppose that private prayer is necessarily candid—necessarily goes to the roots of action? Private prayer is inaudible speech, and speech is representative: who can represent himself just as he is, even in his own reflections?

Bulstrode had not yet unravelled in his thought the confused promptings of the last four-and-twenty hours.

He listened in the passage, and could hear hard stertorous breathing. Then he walked out in the garden, and looked at the early rime on the grass and fresh spring leaves. When he re-entered the house, he felt startled at the sight of Mrs. Abel.

"How is your patient—asleep, I think?" he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness in his tone.

"He's gone very deep, sir," said Mrs. Abel. "He went off gradual between three and four o'clock. Would you please to go and look at him? I thought it no harm to leave him. My man's gone afield, and the little girl's seeing to the kettles."

Bulstrode went up. At a glance he knew that Raffles was not in the sleep which brings revival, but in the sleep which streams deeper and deeper into the gulf of death.

He looked round the room and saw a bottle with some brandy in it, and the almost empty opium phial. He put the phial out of sight, and carried the brandy-bottle downstairs with him, locking it again in the wine-cooler.

While breakfasting he considered whether he should ride to Middlemarch at once, or wait for Lydgate's arrival. He decided to wait, and told Mrs. Abel that she might go about her work—he could watch in the bed-chamber.

As he sat there and beheld the enemy of his peace going irrevocably into silence, he felt more at rest than he had done for many months. His conscience was soothed by the enfolding wing of secrecy, which seemed just then like an angel sent down for his relief. He drew out his pocket-book to review various memoranda there as to the arrangements he had projected and partly carried out in the prospect of quitting Middlemarch, and considered how far he would let them stand or recall them, now that his absence would be brief. Some economies which he felt desirable might still find a suitable occasion in his temporary withdrawal from management, and he hoped still that Mrs. Casaubon would take a large share in the expenses of the Hospital. In that way the moments passed, until a change in the stertorous breathing was marked enough to draw his attention wholly to the bed, and forced him to think of the departing life, which had once been subservient to his own—which he had once been glad to find base enough for him to act on as he would. It was his gladness then which impelled him now to be glad that the life was at an end.

And who could say that the death of Raffles had been hastened? Who knew what would have saved him?

Lydgate arrived at half-past ten, in time to witness the final pause of the breath. When he entered the room Bulstrode observed a sudden expression in his face, which was not so much surprise as a recognition that he had not judged correctly.

He stood by the bed in silence for some time, with his eyes turned on the dying man, but with that subdued activity of expression which showed that he was carrying on an inward debate.

"When did this change begin?" said he, looking at Bulstrode.

"I did not watch by him last night," said Bulstrode. "I was over-worn, and left him under Mrs. Abel's care. She said that he sank into sleep between three and four o'clock. When I came in before eight he was nearly in this condition."

Lydgate did not ask another question, but watched in silence until he said, "It's all over."

This morning Lydgate was in a state of recovered hope and freedom. He had set out on his work with all his old animation, and felt himself strong enough to bear all the deficiencies of his married life. And he was conscious that Bulstrode had been a benefactor to him. But he was uneasy about this case. He had not expected it to terminate as it had done. Yet he hardly knew how to put a question on the subject to Bulstrode without appearing to insult him; and if he examined the housekeeper—why, the man was dead. There seemed to be no use in implying that somebody's ignorance or imprudence had killed him. And after all, he himself might be wrong.

He and Bulstrode rode back to Middlemarch together, talking of many things—chiefly cholera and the chances of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords, and the firm resolve of the political Unions. Nothing was said about Raffles, except that Bulstrode mentioned the necessity of having a grave for him in Lowick churchyard, and observed that, so far as he knew, the poor man had no connections, except Rigg, whom he had stated to be unfriendly towards him.

On returning home Lydgate had a visit from Mr. Farebrother. The Vicar had not been in the town the day before, but the news that there was an execution in Lydgate's house had got to Lowick by the evening, having been carried by Mr. Spicer, shoemaker and parish-clerk, who had it from his brother, the respectable bell-hanger in Lowick Gate. Since that evening when Lydgate had come down from the billiard room with Fred Vincy, Mr. Farebrother's thoughts about him had been rather gloomy. Playing at the Green Dragon once or oftener might have been a trifle in another man; but in Lydgate it was one of several signs that he was getting unlike his former self. He was beginning to do things for which he had formerly even an excessive scorn. Whatever certain dissatisfactions in marriage, which some silly tinklings of gossip had given him hints of, might have to do with this change, Mr. Farebrother felt sure that it was chiefly connected with the debts which were being more and more distinctly reported, and he began to fear that any notion of Lydgate's having resources or friends in the background must be quite illusory. The rebuff he had met with in his first attempt to win Lydgate's confidence, disinclined him to a second; but this news of the execution being actually in the house, determined the Vicar to overcome his reluctance.

Lydgate had just dismissed a poor patient, in whom he was much interested, and he came forward to put out his hand—with an open cheerfulness which surprised Mr. Farebrother. Could this too be a proud rejection of sympathy and help? Never mind; the sympathy and help should be offered.

"How are you, Lydgate? I came to see you because I had heard something which made me anxious about you," said the Vicar, in the tone of a good brother, only that there was no reproach in it. They were both seated by this time, and Lydgate answered immediately—

"I think I know what you mean. You had heard that there was an execution in the house?"

"Yes; is it true?"

"It was true," said Lydgate, with an air of freedom, as if he did not mind talking about the affair now. "But the danger is over; the debt is paid. I am out of my difficulties now: I shall be freed from debts, and able, I hope, to start afresh on a better plan."

"I am very thankful to hear it," said the Vicar, falling back in his chair, and speaking with that low-toned quickness which often follows the removal of a load. "I like that better than all the news in the 'Times.' I confess I came to you with a heavy heart."

"Thank you for coming," said Lydgate, cordially. "I can enjoy the kindness all the more because I am happier. I have certainly been a good deal crushed. I'm afraid I shall find the bruises still painful by-and-by," he added, smiling rather sadly; "but just now I can only feel that the torture-screw is off."

Mr. Farebrother was silent for a moment, and then said earnestly, "My dear fellow, let me ask you one question. Forgive me if I take a liberty."

"I don't believe you will ask anything that ought to offend me."

"Then—this is necessary to set my heart quite at rest—you have not—have you?—in order to pay your debts, incurred another debt which may harass you worse hereafter?"

"No," said Lydgate, coloring slightly. "There is no reason why I should not tell you—since the fact is so—that the person to whom I am indebted is Bulstrode. He has made me a very handsome advance—a thousand pounds—and he can afford to wait for repayment."

"Well, that is generous," said Mr. Farebrother, compelling himself to approve of the man whom he disliked. His delicate feeling shrank from dwelling even in his thought on the fact that he had always urged Lydgate to avoid any personal entanglement with Bulstrode. He added immediately, "And Bulstrode must naturally feel an interest in your welfare, after you have worked with him in a way which has probably reduced your income instead of adding to it. I am glad to think that he has acted accordingly."

Lydgate felt uncomfortable under these kindly suppositions. They made more distinct within him the uneasy consciousness which had shown its first dim stirrings only a few hours before, that Bulstrode's motives for his sudden beneficence following close upon the chilliest indifference might be merely selfish. He let the kindly suppositions pass. He could not tell the history of the loan, but it was more vividly present with him than ever, as well as the fact which the Vicar delicately ignored—that this relation of personal indebtedness to Bulstrode was what he had once been most resolved to avoid.

He began, instead of answering, to speak of his projected economies, and of his having come to look at his life from a different point of view.

"I shall set up a surgery," he said. "I really think I made a mistaken effort in that respect. And if Rosamond will not mind, I shall take an apprentice. I don't like these things, but if one carries them out faithfully they are not really lowering. I have had a severe galling to begin with: that will make the small rubs seem easy."

Poor Lydgate! the "if Rosamond will not mind," which had fallen from him involuntarily as part of his thought, was a significant mark of the yoke he bore. But Mr. Farebrother, whose hopes entered strongly into the same current with Lydgate's, and who knew nothing about him that could now raise a melancholy presentiment, left him with affectionate congratulation.

CHAPTER 71

Clown. . . . 'Twas in the Bunch of Grapes, where, indeed, you have a delight to sit, have you not?

Froth. I have so: because it is an open room, and good for winter.

Clo. Why, very well then: I hope here be truths.

—Measure for Measure.

Five days after the death of Raffles, Mr. Bambridge was standing at his leisure under the large archway leading into the yard of the Green Dragon. He was not fond of solitary contemplation, but he had only just come out of the house, and any human figure standing at ease under the archway in the early afternoon was as certain to attract companionship as a pigeon which has found something worth pecking at. In this case there was no material object to feed upon, but the eye of reason saw a probability of mental sustenance in the shape of gossip. Mr. Hopkins, the meek-mannered draper opposite, was the first to act on this inward vision, being the more ambitious of a little masculine talk because his customers were chiefly women. Mr. Bambridge was rather curt to the draper, feeling that Hopkins was of course glad to talk to *him*, but that he was not going to waste much of his talk on Hopkins. Soon, however, there was a small cluster of more important listeners, who were either deposited from the passers-by, or had sauntered to the spot expressly to see if there were anything going on at the Green Dragon; and Mr. Bambridge was finding it worth his while to say many impressive things about the fine studs he had been seeing and the purchases he had made on a journey in the north from which he had just returned. Gentlemen present were assured that when they could show him anything to cut out a blood mare, a bay, rising four, which was to be seen at Doncaster if they chose to go and look at it, Mr. Bambridge would gratify them by being shot "from here to Hereford." Also, a pair of blacks which he was going to put into the break recalled vividly to his mind a pair which he had sold to Faulkner in '19, for a hundred guineas, and which Faulkner had sold for a hundred and sixty two months later—any gent who could disprove this statement being offered the privilege of calling Mr. Bambridge by a very ugly name until the exercise made his throat dry.

When the discourse was at this point of animation, came up Mr. Frank Hawley. He was not a man to compromise his dignity by lounging at the Green Dragon, but happening to pass along the High Street and seeing Bambridge on the other side, he took some of his long strides across to ask the horsedealer whether he had found the first-rate gig-horse which he had engaged to look for. Mr. Hawley was requested to wait until he had seen a gray selected at Bilkley: if that did not meet his wishes to a hair, Bambridge did not know a horse when he saw it, which seemed to be the

highest conceivable unlikelihood. Mr. Hawley, standing with his back to the street, was fixing a time for looking at the gray and seeing it tried, when a horseman passed slowly by.

"Bulstrode!" said two or three voices at once in a low tone, one of them, which was the draper's, respectfully prefixing the "Mr.;" but nobody having more intention in this interjectural naming than if they had said "the Riverston coach" when that vehicle appeared in the distance. Mr. Hawley gave a careless glance round at Bulstrode's back, but as Bambridge's eyes followed it he made a sarcastic grimace.

"By jingo! that reminds me," he began, lowering his voice a little, "I picked up something else at Bilkley besides your gig-horse, Mr. Hawley. I picked up a fine story about Bulstrode. Do you know how he came by his fortune? Any gentleman wanting a bit of curious information, I can give it him free of expense. If everybody got their deserts, Bulstrode might have had to say his prayers at Botany Bay."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Hawley, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and pushing a little forward under the archway. If Bulstrode should turn out to be a rascal, Frank Hawley had a prophetic soul.

"I had it from a party who was an old chum of Bulstrode's. I'll tell you where I first picked him up," said Bambridge, with a sudden gesture of his fore-finger. "He was at Larcher's sale, but I knew nothing of him then—he slipped through my fingers—was after Bulstrode, no doubt. He tells me he can tap Bulstrode to any amount, knows all his secrets. However, he blabbed to me at Bilkley: he takes a stiff glass. Damme if I think he meant to turn king's evidence; but he's that sort of bragging fellow, the bragging runs over hedge and ditch with him, till he'd brag of a spavin as if it 'ud fetch money. A man should know when to pull up." Mr. Bambridge made this remark with an air of disgust, satisfied that his own bragging showed a fine sense of the marketable.

"What's the man's name? Where can he be found?" said Mr. Hawley.

"As to where he is to be found, I left him to it at the Saracen's Head; but his name is Raffles."

"Raffles!" exclaimed Mr. Hopkins. "I furnished his funeral yesterday. He was buried at Lowick. Mr. Bulstrode followed him. A very decent funeral." There was a strong sensation among the listeners. Mr. Bambridge gave an ejaculation in which "brimstone" was the mildest word, and Mr. Hawley, knitting his brows and bending his head forward, exclaimed, "What?—where did the man die?"

"At Stone Court," said the draper. "The housekeeper said he was a relation of the master's. He came there ill on Friday."

"Why, it was on Wednesday I took a glass with him," interposed Bambridge.

"Did any doctor attend him?" said Mr. Hawley

"Yes. Mr. Lydgate. Mr. Bulstrode sat up with him one night. He died the third morning."

"Go on, Bambridge," said Mr. Hawley, insistently. "What did this fellow say about Bulstrode?"

The group had already become larger, the town-clerk's presence being a guarantee that something worth listening to was going on there; and Mr. Bambridge delivered his narrative in the hearing of seven. It was mainly what we know, including the fact about Will Ladislaw, with some local color and circumstance added: it was what Bulstrode had dreaded the betrayal of—and hoped to have buried forever with the corpse of Raffles—it was that haunting ghost of his earlier life which as he rode past the archway of the Green Dragon he was trusting that Providence had delivered him from. Yes, Providence. He had not confessed to himself yet that he had done anything in the way of contrivance to this end; he had accepted what seemed to have been offered. It was impossible to prove that he had done anything which hastened the departure of that man's soul.

But this gossip about Bulstrode spread through Middlemarch like the smell of fire. Mr. Frank Hawley followed up his information by sending a clerk whom he could trust to Stone Court on a pretext of inquiring about hay, but really to gather all that could be learned about Raffles and his illness from Mrs. Abel. In this way it came to his knowledge that Mr. Garth had carried the man to Stone Court in his gig; and Mr. Hawley in consequence took an opportunity of seeing Caleb, calling at his office to ask whether he had time to undertake an arbitration if it were required, and then asking him incidentally about Raffles. Caleb was betrayed into no word injurious to Bulstrode beyond the fact which he was forced to admit, that he had given up acting for him within the last week. Mr. Hawley drew his inferences, and feeling convinced that Raffles had told his story to Garth, and that Garth had given up Bulstrode's affairs in consequence, said so a few hours later to Mr. Toller. The statement was passed on until it had quite lost the stamp of an inference, and was taken as information coming straight from Garth, so that even a diligent historian might have concluded Caleb to be the chief publisher of Bulstrode's misdemeanors.

Mr. Hawley was not slow to perceive that there was no handle for the law either in the revelations made by Raffles or in the circumstances of his death. He had himself ridden to Lowick village that he might look at the register and talk over the whole matter with Mr. Farebrother, who was not more surprised than the lawyer that an ugly secret should have come to light about Bulstrode, though he had always had justice enough in him to hinder his antipathy from turning into conclusions. But while they were talking another combination was silently going forward in Mr. Farebrother's mind, which foreshadowed what was soon to be loudly spoken of in Middlemarch as a necessary "putting of two and two together." With the reasons which kept

Bulstrode in dread of Raffles there flashed the thought that the dread might have something to do with his munificence towards his medical man; and though he resisted the suggestion that it had been consciously accepted in any way as a bribe, he had a foreboding that this complication of things might be of malignant effect on Lydgate's reputation. He perceived that Mr. Hawley knew nothing at present of the sudden relief from debt, and he himself was careful to glide away from all approaches towards the subject.

"Well," he said, with a deep breath, wanting to wind up the illimitable discussion of what might have been, though nothing could be legally proven, "it is a strange story. So our mercurial Ladislaw has a queer genealogy! A high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot made a likely enough stock for him to spring from, but I should never have suspected a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker. However, there's no knowing what a mixture will turn out beforehand. Some sorts of dirt serve to clarify."

"It's just what I should have expected," said Mr. Hawley, mounting his horse. "Any cursed alien blood, Jew, Corsican, or Gypsy."

"I know he's one of your black sheep, Hawley. But he is really a disinterested, unworldly fellow," said Mr. Farebrother, smiling.

"Ay, ay, that is your Whiggish twist," said Mr. Hawley, who had been in the habit of saying apologetically that Farebrother was such a damned pleasant good-hearted fellow you would mistake him for a Tory.

Mr. Hawley rode home without thinking of Lydgate's attendance on Raffles in any other light than as a piece of evidence on the side of Bulstrode. But the news that Lydgate had all at once become able not only to get rid of the execution in his house but to pay all his debts in Middlemarch was spreading fast, gathering round it conjectures and comments which gave it new body and impetus, and soon filling the ears of other persons besides Mr. Hawley, who were not slow to see a significant relation between this sudden command of money and Bulstrode's desire to stifle the scandal of Raffles. That the money came from Bulstrode would infallibly have been guessed even if there had been no direct evidence of it; for it had beforehand entered into the gossip about Lydgate's affairs, that neither his father-in-law nor his own family would do anything for him, and direct evidence was furnished not only by a clerk at the Bank, but by innocent Mrs. Bulstrode herself, who mentioned the loan to Mrs. Plymdale, who mentioned it to her daughter-in-law of the house of Toller, who mentioned it generally. The business was felt to be so public and important that it required dinners to feed it, and many invitations were just then issued and accepted on the strength of this scandal concerning Bulstrode and Lydgate; wives, widows, and single ladies took their work and went out to tea oftener than usual; and all public conviviality, from the Green Dragon to Dollop's, gathered a zest which could not be won from the question whether the Lords would throw out the Reform Bill.

For hardly anybody doubted that some scandalous reason or other was at the bottom of Bulstrode's liberality to Lydgate. Mr. Hawley indeed, in the first instance, invited a select party, including the two physicians, with Mr Toller and Mr. Wrench, expressly to hold a close discussion as to the probabilities of Raffles's illness, reciting to them all the particulars which had been gathered from Mrs. Abel in connection with Lydgate's certificate, that the death was due to delirium tremens; and the medical gentlemen, who all stood undisturbedly on the old paths in relation to this disease, declared that they could see nothing in these particulars which could be transformed into a positive ground of suspicion. But the moral grounds of suspicion remained: the strong motives Bulstrode clearly had for wishing to be rid of Raffles, and the fact that at this critical moment he had given Lydgate the help which he must for some time have known the need for; the disposition, moreover, to believe that Bulstrode would be unscrupulous, and the absence of any indisposition to believe that Lydgate might be as easily bribed as other haughty-minded men when they have found themselves in want of money. Even if the money had been given merely to make him hold his tongue about the scandal of Bulstrode's earlier life, the fact threw an odious light on Lydgate, who had long been sneered at as making himself subservient to the banker for the sake of working himself into predominance, and discrediting the elder members of his profession. Hence, in spite of the negative as to any direct sign of guilt in relation to the death at Stone Court, Mr. Hawley's select party broke up with the sense that the affair had "an ugly look."

But this vague conviction of indeterminable guilt, which was enough to keep up much head-shaking and biting innuendo even among substantial professional seniors, had for the general mind all the superior power of mystery over fact. Everybody liked better to conjecture how the thing was, than simply to know it; for conjecture soon became more confident than knowledge, and had a more liberal allowance for the incompatible. Even the more definite scandal concerning Bulstrode's earlier life was, for some minds, melted into the mass of mystery, as so much lively metal to be poured out in dialogue, and to take such fantastic shapes as heaven pleased.

This was the tone of thought chiefly sanctioned by Mrs. Dollop, the spirited landlady of the Tankard in Slaughter Lane, who had often to resist the shallow pragmatism of customers disposed to think that their reports from the outer world were of equal force with what had "come up" in her mind. How it had been brought to her she didn't know, but it was there before her as if it had been "scored with the chalk on the chimney-board—" as Bulstrode should say, "his inside was *that black* as if the hairs of his head knowed the thoughts of his heart, he'd tear 'em up by the roots."

"That's odd," said Mr. Limp, a meditative shoemaker, with weak eyes and a piping voice. "Why, I read in the 'Trumpet' that was what the Duke of Wellington said when he turned his coat and went over to the Romans."

"Very like," said Mrs. Dollop. "If one raskill said it, it's more reason why another should. But hypocrite as he's been, and holding things with that high hand, as there

was no parson i' the country good enough for him, he was forced to take Old Harry into his counsel, and Old Harry's been too many for him."

"Ay, ay, he's a 'complice you can't send out o' the country," said Mr. Crabbe, the glazier, who gathered much news and groped among it dimly. "But by what I can make out, there's them says Bulstrode was for running away, for fear o' being found out, before now."

"He'll be drove away, whether or no," said Mr. Dill, the barber, who had just dropped in. "I shaved Fletcher, Hawley's clerk, this morning—he's got a bad finger—and he says they're all of one mind to get rid of Bulstrode. Mr. Thesiger is turned against him, and wants him out o' the parish. And there's gentlemen in this town says they'd as soon dine with a fellow from the hulks. 'And a deal sooner I would,' says Fletcher; 'for what's more against one's stomach than a man coming and making himself bad company with his religion, and giving out as the Ten Commandments are not enough for him, and all the while he's worse than half the men at the tread-mill?' Fletcher said so himself."

"It'll be a bad thing for the town though, if Bulstrode's money goes out of it," said Mr. Limp, quaveringly.

"Ah, there's better folks spend their money worse," said a firm-voiced dyer, whose crimson hands looked out of keeping with his good-natured face.

"But he won't keep his money, by what I can make out," said the glazier. "Don't they say as there's somebody can strip it off him? By what I can understan', they could take every penny off him, if they went to lawing."

"No such thing!" said the barber, who felt himself a little above his company at Dollop's, but liked it none the worse. "Fletcher says it's no such thing. He says they might prove over and over again whose child this young Ladislav was, and they'd do no more than if they proved I came out of the Fens—he couldn't touch a penny."

"Look you there now!" said Mrs. Dollop, indignantly. "I thank the Lord he took my children to Himself, if that's all the law can do for the motherless. Then by that, it's o' no use who your father and mother is. But as to listening to what one lawyer says without asking another—I wonder at a man o' your cleverness, Mr. Dill. It's well known there's always two sides, if no more; else who'd go to law, I should like to know? It's a poor tale, with all the law as there is up and down, if it's no use proving whose child you are. Fletcher may say that if he likes, but I say, don't Fletcher *me!*"

Mr. Dill affected to laugh in a complimentary way at Mrs. Dollop, as a woman who was more than a match for the lawyers; being disposed to submit to much twitting from a landlady who had a long score against him.

"If they come to lawing, and it's all true as folks say, there's more to be looked to nor money," said the glazier. "There's this poor creetur as is dead and gone; by what I can make out, he'd seen the day when he was a deal finer gentleman nor Bulstrode."

"Finer gentleman! I'll warrant him," said Mrs. Dollop; "and a far personabler man, by what I can hear. As I said when Mr. Baldwin, the tax-gatherer, comes in, a-standing where you sit, and says, 'Bulstrode got all his money as he brought into this town by thieving and swindling,'—I said, 'You don't make me no wiser, Mr. Baldwin: it's set my blood a-creeping to look at him ever sin' here he came into Slaughter Lane a-wanting to buy the house over my head: folks don't look the color o' the dough-tub and stare at you as if they wanted to see into your backbone for nothinkk.' That was what I said, and Mr. Baldwin can bear me witness."

"And in the rights of it too," said Mr. Crabbe. "For by what I can make out, this Raffles, as they call him, was a lusty, fresh-colored man as you'd wish to see, and the best o' company—though dead he lies in Lowick churchyard sure enough; and by what I can understan', there's them knows more than they *should* know about how he got there."

"I'll believe you!" said Mrs. Dallop, with a touch of scorn at Mr. Crabbe's apparent dimness. "When a man's been 'ticed to a lone house, and there's them can pay for hospitals and nurses for half the country-side choose to be sitters-up night and day, and nobody to come near but a doctor as is known to stick at nothinkk, and as poor as he can hang together, and after that so flush o' money as he can pay off Mr. Byles the butcher as his bill has been running on for the best o' joints since last Michaelmas was a twelvemonth—I don't want anybody to come and tell me as there's been more going on nor the Prayer-book's got a service for—I don't want to stand winking and blinking and thinking."

Mrs. Dollop looked round with the air of a landlady accustomed to dominate her company. There was a chorus of adhesion from the more courageous; but Mr. Limp, after taking a draught, placed his flat hands together and pressed them hard between his knees, looking down at them with blear-eyed contemplation, as if the scorching power of Mrs. Dollop's speech had quite dried up and nullified his wits until they could be brought round again by further moisture.

"Why shouldn't they dig the man up and have the Crowner?" said the dyer. "It's been done many and many's the time. If there's been foul play they might find it out."

"Not they, Mr. Jonas!" said Mrs Dollop, emphatically. "I know what doctors are. They're a deal too cunning to be found out. And this Doctor Lydgate that's been for cutting up everybody before the breath was well out o' their body—it's plain enough what use he wanted to make o' looking into respectable people's insides. He knows drugs, you may be sure, as you can neither smell nor see, neither before they're swallowed nor after. Why, I've seen drops myself ordered by Doctor Gambit, as is our club doctor and a good charikter, and has brought more live children into the

world nor ever another i' Middlemarch—I say I've seen drops myself as made no difference whether they was in the glass or out, and yet have griped you the next day. So I'll leave your own sense to judge. Don't tell me! All I say is, it's a mercy they didn't take this Doctor Lydgate on to our club. There's many a mother's child might ha' rued it."

The heads of this discussion at "Dollop's" had been the common theme among all classes in the town, had been carried to Lowick Parsonage on one side and to Tipton Grange on the other, had come fully to the ears of the Vincy family, and had been discussed with sad reference to "poor Harriet" by all Mrs. Bulstrode's friends, before Lydgate knew distinctly why people were looking strangely at him, and before Bulstrode himself suspected the betrayal of his secrets. He had not been accustomed to very cordial relations with his neighbors, and hence he could not miss the signs of cordiality; moreover, he had been taking journeys on business of various kinds, having now made up his mind that he need not quit Middlemarch, and feeling able consequently to determine on matters which he had before left in suspense.

"We will make a journey to Cheltenham in the course of a month or two," he had said to his wife. "There are great spiritual advantages to be had in that town along with the air and the waters, and six weeks there will be eminently refreshing to us."

He really believed in the spiritual advantages, and meant that his life henceforth should be the more devoted because of those later sins which he represented to himself as hypothetic, praying hypothetically for their pardon:—"if I have herein transgressed."

As to the Hospital, he avoided saying anything further to Lydgate, fearing to manifest a too sudden change of plans immediately on the death of Raffles. In his secret soul he believed that Lydgate suspected his orders to have been intentionally disobeyed, and suspecting this he must also suspect a motive. But nothing had been betrayed to him as to the history of Raffles, and Bulstrode was anxious not to do anything which would give emphasis to his undefined suspicions. As to any certainty that a particular method of treatment would either save or kill, Lydgate himself was constantly arguing against such dogmatism; he had no right to speak, and he had every motive for being silent. Hence Bulstrode felt himself providentially secured. The only incident he had strongly winced under had been an occasional encounter with Caleb Garth, who, however, had raised his hat with mild gravity.

Meanwhile, on the part of the principal townsmen a strong determination was growing against him.

A meeting was to be held in the Town-Hall on a sanitary question which had risen into pressing importance by the occurrence of a cholera case in the town. Since the Act of Parliament, which had been hurriedly passed, authorizing assessments for sanitary measures, there had been a Board for the superintendence of such measures appointed in Middlemarch, and much cleansing and preparation had been

concurrent in by Whigs and Tories. The question now was, whether a piece of ground outside the town should be secured as a burial-ground by means of assessment or by private subscription. The meeting was to be open, and almost everybody of importance in the town was expected to be there.

Mr. Bulstrode was a member of the Board, and just before twelve o'clock he started from the Bank with the intention of urging the plan of private subscription. Under the hesitation of his projects, he had for some time kept himself in the background, and he felt that he should this morning resume his old position as a man of action and influence in the public affairs of the town where he expected to end his days. Among the various persons going in the same direction, he saw Lydgate; they joined, talked over the object of the meeting, and entered it together.

It seemed that everybody of mark had been earlier than they. But there were still spaces left near the head of the large central table, and they made their way thither. Mr. Farebrother sat opposite, not far from Mr. Hawley; all the medical men were there; Mr. Thesiger was in the chair, and Mr. Brooke of Tipton was on his right hand.

Lydgate noticed a peculiar interchange of glances when he and Bulstrode took their seats.

After the business had been fully opened by the chairman, who pointed out the advantages of purchasing by subscription a piece of ground large enough to be ultimately used as a general cemetery, Mr. Bulstrode, whose rather high-pitched but subdued and fluent voice the town was used to at meetings of this sort, rose and asked leave to deliver his opinion. Lydgate could see again the peculiar interchange of glances before Mr. Hawley started up, and said in his firm resonant voice, "Mr. Chairman, I request that before any one delivers his opinion on this point I may be permitted to speak on a question of public feeling, which not only by myself, but by many gentlemen present, is regarded as preliminary."

Mr. Hawley's mode of speech, even when public decorum repressed his "awful language," was formidable in its curtness and self-possession. Mr. Thesiger sanctioned the request, Mr. Bulstrode sat down, and Mr. Hawley continued.

"In what I have to say, Mr. Chairman, I am not speaking simply on my own behalf: I am speaking with the concurrence and at the express request of no fewer than eight of my fellow-townsmen, who are immediately around us. It is our united sentiment that Mr. Bulstrode should be called upon—and I do now call upon him—to resign public positions which he holds not simply as a tax-payer, but as a gentleman among gentlemen. There are practices and there are acts which, owing to circumstances, the law cannot visit, though they may be worse than many things which are legally punishable. Honest men and gentlemen, if they don't want the company of people who perpetrate such acts, have got to defend themselves as they best can, and that is what I and the friends whom I may call my clients in this affair are determined to do. I don't say that Mr. Bulstrode has been guilty of shameful acts, but I call upon him

either publicly to deny and confute the scandalous statements made against him by a man now dead, and who died in his house—the statement that he was for many years engaged in nefarious practices, and that he won his fortune by dishonest procedures—or else to withdraw from positions which could only have been allowed him as a gentleman among gentlemen."

All eyes in the room were turned on Mr. Bulstrode, who, since the first mention of his name, had been going through a crisis of feeling almost too violent for his delicate frame to support. Lydgate, who himself was undergoing a shock as from the terrible practical interpretation of some faint augury, felt, nevertheless, that his own movement of resentful hatred was checked by that instinct of the Healer which thinks first of bringing rescue or relief to the sufferer, when he looked at the shrunken misery of Bulstrode's livid face.

The quick vision that his life was after all a failure, that he was a dishonored man, and must quail before the glance of those towards whom he had habitually assumed the attitude of a reprover—that God had disowned him before men and left him unscreened to the triumphant scorn of those who were glad to have their hatred justified—the sense of utter futility in that equivocation with his conscience in dealing with the life of his accomplice, an equivocation which now turned venomously upon him with the full-grown fang of a discovered lie:—all this rushed through him like the agony of terror which fails to kill, and leaves the ears still open to the returning wave of execration. The sudden sense of exposure after the re-established sense of safety came—not to the coarse organization of a criminal but to—the susceptible nerve of a man whose intensest being lay in such mastery and predominance as the conditions of his life had shaped for him.

But in that intense being lay the strength of reaction. Through all his bodily infirmity there ran a tenacious nerve of ambitious self-preserving will, which had continually leaped out like a flame, scattering all doctrinal fears, and which, even while he sat an object of compassion for the merciful, was beginning to stir and glow under his ashy paleness. Before the last words were out of Mr. Hawley's mouth, Bulstrode felt that he should answer, and that his answer would be a retort. He dared not get up and say, "I am not guilty, the whole story is false"—even if he had dared this, it would have seemed to him, under his present keen sense of betrayal, as vain as to pull, for covering to his nakedness, a frail rag which would rend at every little strain.

For a few moments there was total silence, while every man in the room was looking at Bulstrode. He sat perfectly still, leaning hard against the back of his chair; he could not venture to rise, and when he began to speak he pressed his hands upon the seat on each side of him. But his voice was perfectly audible, though hoarser than usual, and his words were distinctly pronounced, though he paused between sentence as if short of breath. He said, turning first toward Mr. Thesiger, and then looking at Mr. Hawley—

"I protest before you, sir, as a Christian minister, against the sanction of proceedings towards me which are dictated by virulent hatred. Those who are hostile to me are glad to believe any libel uttered by a loose tongue against me. And their consciences become strict against me. Say that the evil-speaking of which I am to be made the victim accuses me of malpractices—" here Bulstrode's voice rose and took on a more biting accent, till it seemed a low cry—"who shall be my accuser? Not men whose own lives are unchristian, nay, scandalous—not men who themselves use low instruments to carry out their ends—whose profession is a tissue of chicanery—who have been spending their income on their own sensual enjoyments, while I have been devoting mine to advance the best objects with regard to this life and the next."

After the word chicanery there was a growing noise, half of murmurs and half of hisses, while four persons started up at once—Mr. Hawley, Mr. Toller, Mr. Chichely, and Mr. Hackbutt; but Mr. Hawley's outburst was instantaneous, and left the others behind in silence.

"If you mean me, sir, I call you and every one else to the inspection of my professional life. As to Christian or unchristian, I repudiate your canting palavering Christianity; and as to the way in which I spend my income, it is not my principle to maintain thieves and cheat offspring of their due inheritance in order to support religion and set myself up as a saintly Killjoy. I affect no niceness of conscience—I have not found any nice standards necessary yet to measure your actions by, sir. And I again call upon you to enter into satisfactory explanations concerning the scandals against you, or else to withdraw from posts in which we at any rate decline you as a colleague. I say, sir, we decline to co-operate with a man whose character is not cleared from infamous lights cast upon it, not only by reports but by recent actions."

"Allow me, Mr. Hawley," said the chairman; and Mr. Hawley, still fuming, bowed half impatiently, and sat down with his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"Mr. Bulstrode, it is not desirable, I think, to prolong the present discussion," said Mr. Thesiger, turning to the pallid trembling man; "I must so far concur with what has fallen from Mr. Hawley in expression of a general feeling, as to think it due to your Christian profession that you should clear yourself, if possible, from unhappy aspersions. I for my part should be willing to give you full opportunity and hearing. But I must say that your present attitude is painfully inconsistent with those principles which you have sought to identify yourself with, and for the honor of which I am bound to care. I recommend you at present, as your clergyman, and one who hopes for your reinstatement in respect, to quit the room, and avoid further hindrance to business."

Bulstrode, after a moment's hesitation, took his hat from the floor and slowly rose, but he grasped the corner of the chair so totteringly that Lydgate felt sure there was not strength enough in him to walk away without support. What could he do? He

could not see a man sink close to him for want of help. He rose and gave his arm to Bulstrode, and in that way led him out of the room; yet this act, which might have been one of gentle duty and pure compassion, was at this moment unspeakably bitter to him. It seemed as if he were putting his sign-manual to that association of himself with Bulstrode, of which he now saw the full meaning as it must have presented itself to other minds. He now felt the conviction that this man who was leaning tremblingly on his arm, had given him the thousand pounds as a bribe, and that somehow the treatment of Raffles had been tampered with from an evil motive. The inferences were closely linked enough; the town knew of the loan, believed it to be a bribe, and believed that he took it as a bribe.

Poor Lydgate, his mind struggling under the terrible clutch of this revelation, was all the while morally forced to take Mr. Bulstrode to the Bank, send a man off for his carriage, and wait to accompany him home.

Meanwhile the business of the meeting was despatched, and fringed off into eager discussion among various groups concerning this affair of Bulstrode—and Lydgate.

Mr. Brooke, who had before heard only imperfect hints of it, and was very uneasy that he had "gone a little too far" in countenancing Bulstrode, now got himself fully informed, and felt some benevolent sadness in talking to Mr. Farebrother about the ugly light in which Lydgate had come to be regarded. Mr. Farebrother was going to walk back to Lowick.

"Step into my carriage," said Mr. Brooke. "I am going round to see Mrs. Casaubon. She was to come back from Yorkshire last night. She will like to see me, you know."

So they drove along, Mr. Brooke chatting with good-natured hope that there had not really been anything black in Lydgate's behavior—a young fellow whom he had seen to be quite above the common mark, when he brought a letter from his uncle Sir Godwin. Mr. Farebrother said little: he was deeply mournful: with a keen perception of human weakness, he could not be confident that under the pressure of humiliating needs Lydgate had not fallen below himself.

When the carriage drove up to the gate of the Manor, Dorothea was out on the gravel, and came to greet them.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Brooke, "we have just come from a meeting—a sanitary meeting, you know."

"Was Mr. Lydgate there?" said Dorothea, who looked full of health and animation, and stood with her head bare under the gleaming April lights. "I want to see him and have a great consultation with him about the Hospital. I have engaged with Mr. Bulstrode to do so."

"Oh, my dear," said Mr. Brooke, "we have been hearing bad news—bad news, you know."

They walked through the garden towards the churchyard gate, Mr. Farebrother wanting to go on to the parsonage; and Dorothea heard the whole sad story.

She listened with deep interest, and begged to hear twice over the facts and impressions concerning Lydgate. After a short silence, pausing at the churchyard gate, and addressing Mr. Farebrother, she said energetically—

"You don't believe that Mr. Lydgate is guilty of anything base? I will not believe it. Let us find out the truth and clear him!"



BOOK 8. SUNSET AND SUNRISE

CHAPTER 72

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."

CHAPTER 73

Pity the laden one; this wandering woe

May visit you and me.

When Lydgate had allayed Mrs. Bulstrode's anxiety by telling her that her husband had been seized with faintness at the meeting, but that he trusted soon to see him better and would call again the next day, unless she sent for him earlier, he went directly home, got on his horse, and rode three miles out of the town for the sake of being out of reach.

He felt himself becoming violent and unreasonable as if raging under the pain of stings: he was ready to curse the day on which he had come to Middlemarch. Everything that had happened to him there seemed a mere preparation for this hateful fatality, which had come as a blight on his honorable ambition, and must make even people who had only vulgar standards regard his reputation as irrevocably damaged. In such moments a man can hardly escape being unloving. Lydgate thought of himself as the sufferer, and of others as the agents who had injured his lot. He had meant everything to turn out differently; and others had thrust themselves into his life and thwarted his purposes. His marriage seemed an unmitigated calamity; and he was afraid of going to Rosamond before he had vented himself in this solitary rage, lest the mere sight of her should exasperate him and make him behave unwarrantably. There are episodes in most men's lives in which their highest qualities can only cast a deterring shadow over the objects that fill their inward vision: Lydgate's tenderheartedness was present just then only as a dread lest he should offend against it, not as an emotion that swayed him to tenderness. For he was very miserable. Only those who know the supremacy of the intellectual life—the life which has a seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it—can understand the grief of one who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances.

How was he to live on without vindicating himself among people who suspected him of baseness? How could he go silently away from Middlemarch as if he were retreating before a just condemnation? And yet how was he to set about vindicating himself?

For that scene at the meeting, which he had just witnessed, although it had told him no particulars, had been enough to make his own situation thoroughly clear to him. Bulstrode had been in dread of scandalous disclosures on the part of Raffles. Lydgate could now construct all the probabilities of the case. "He was afraid of some betrayal in my hearing: all he wanted was to bind me to him by a strong obligation: that was why he passed on a sudden from hardness to liberality. And he may have

tampered with the patient—he may have disobeyed my orders. I fear he did. But whether he did or not, the world believes that he somehow or other poisoned the man and that I winked at the crime, if I didn't help in it. And yet—and yet he may not be guilty of the last offence; and it is just possible that the change towards me may have been a genuine relenting—the effect of second thoughts such as he alleged. What we call the 'just possible' is sometimes true and the thing we find it easier to believe is grossly false. In his last dealings with this man Bulstrode may have kept his hands pure, in spite of my suspicion to the contrary."

There was a benumbing cruelty in his position. Even if he renounced every other consideration than that of justifying himself—if he met shrugs, cold glances, and avoidance as an accusation, and made a public statement of all the facts as he knew them, who would be convinced? It would be playing the part of a fool to offer his own testimony on behalf of himself, and say, "I did not take the money as a bribe." The circumstances would always be stronger than his assertion. And besides, to come forward and tell everything about himself must include declarations about Bulstrode which would darken the suspicions of others against him. He must tell that he had not known of Raffles's existence when he first mentioned his pressing need of money to Bulstrode, and that he took the money innocently as a result of that communication, not knowing that a new motive for the loan might have arisen on his being called in to this man. And after all, the suspicion of Bulstrode's motives might be unjust.

But then came the question whether he should have acted in precisely the same way if he had not taken the money? Certainly, if Raffles had continued alive and susceptible of further treatment when he arrived, and he had then imagined any disobedience to his orders on the part of Bulstrode, he would have made a strict inquiry, and if his conjecture had been verified he would have thrown up the case, in spite of his recent heavy obligation. But if he had not received any money—if Bulstrode had never revoked his cold recommendation of bankruptcy—would he, Lydgate, have abstained from all inquiry even on finding the man dead?—would the shrinking from an insult to Bulstrode—would the dubiousness of all medical treatment and the argument that his own treatment would pass for the wrong with most members of his profession—have had just the same force or significance with him?

That was the uneasy corner of Lydgate's consciousness while he was reviewing the facts and resisting all reproach. If he had been independent, this matter of a patient's treatment and the distinct rule that he must do or see done that which he believed best for the life committed to him, would have been the point on which he would have been the sturdiest. As it was, he had rested in the consideration that disobedience to his orders, however it might have arisen, could not be considered a crime, that in the dominant opinion obedience to his orders was just as likely to be fatal, and that the affair was simply one of etiquette. Whereas, again and again, in his time of freedom, he had denounced the perversion of pathological doubt into

moral doubt and had said—"the purest experiment in treatment may still be conscientious: my business is to take care of life, and to do the best I can think of for it. Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma. Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breath of science is a contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive." Alas! the scientific conscience had got into the debasing company of money obligation and selfish respects.

"Is there a medical man of them all in Middlemarch who would question himself as I do?" said poor Lydgate, with a renewed outburst of rebellion against the oppression of his lot. "And yet they will all feel warranted in making a wide space between me and them, as if I were a leper! My practice and my reputation are utterly damned—I can see that. Even if I could be cleared by valid evidence, it would make little difference to the blessed world here. I have been set down as tainted and should be cheapened to them all the same."

Already there had been abundant signs which had hitherto puzzled him, that just when he had been paying off his debts and getting cheerfully on his feet, the townsmen were avoiding him or looking strangely at him, and in two instances it came to his knowledge that patients of his had called in another practitioner. The reasons were too plain now. The general black-balling had begun.

No wonder that in Lydgate's energetic nature the sense of a hopeless misconstruction easily turned into a dogged resistance. The scowl which occasionally showed itself on his square brow was not a meaningless accident. Already when he was re-entering the town after that ride taken in the first hours of stinging pain, he was setting his mind on remaining in Middlemarch in spite of the worst that could be done against him. He would not retreat before calumny, as if he submitted to it. He would face it to the utmost, and no act of his should show that he was afraid. It belonged to the generosity as well as defiant force of his nature that he resolved not to shrink from showing to the full his sense of obligation to Bulstrode. It was true that the association with this man had been fatal to him—true that if he had had the thousand pounds still in his hands with all his debts unpaid he would have returned the money to Bulstrode, and taken beggary rather than the rescue which had been sullied with the suspicion of a bribe (for, remember, he was one of the proudest among the sons of men)—nevertheless, he would not turn away from this crushed fellow-mortal whose aid he had used, and make a pitiful effort to get acquittal for himself by howling against another. "I shall do as I think right, and explain to nobody. They will try to starve me out, but—" he was going on with an obstinate resolve, but he was getting near home, and the thought of Rosamond urged itself again into that chief place from which it had been thrust by the agonized struggles of wounded honor and pride.

How would Rosamond take it all? Here was another weight of chain to drag, and poor Lydgate was in a bad mood for bearing her dumb mastery. He had no impulse

to tell her the trouble which must soon be common to them both. He preferred waiting for the incidental disclosure which events must soon bring about.



CHAPTER 74

"Mercifully grant that we may grow aged together."

—*BOOK OF TOBIT: Marriage Prayer.*

In Middlemarch a wife could not long remain ignorant that the town held a bad opinion of her husband. No feminine intimate might carry her friendship so far as to make a plain statement to the wife of the unpleasant fact known or believed about her husband; but when a woman with her thoughts much at leisure got them suddenly employed on something grievously disadvantageous to her neighbors, various moral impulses were called into play which tended to stimulate utterance. Candor was one. To be candid, in Middlemarch phraseology, meant, to use an early opportunity of letting your friends know that you did not take a cheerful view of their capacity, their conduct, or their position; and a robust candor never waited to be asked for its opinion. Then, again, there was the love of truth—a wide phrase, but meaning in this relation, a lively objection to seeing a wife look happier than her husband's character warranted, or manifest too much satisfaction in her lot—the poor thing should have some hint given her that if she knew the truth she would have less complacency in her bonnet, and in light dishes for a supper-party. Stronger than all, there was the regard for a friend's moral improvement, sometimes called her soul, which was likely to be benefited by remarks tending to gloom, uttered with the accompaniment of pensive staring at the furniture and a manner implying that the speaker would not tell what was on her mind, from regard to the feelings of her hearer. On the whole, one might say that an ardent charity was at work setting the virtuous mind to make a neighbor unhappy for her good.

There were hardly any wives in Middlemarch whose matrimonial misfortunes would in different ways be likely to call forth more of this moral activity than Rosamond and her aunt Bulstrode. Mrs. Bulstrode was not an object of dislike, and had never consciously injured any human being. Men had always thought her a handsome comfortable woman, and had reckoned it among the signs of Bulstrode's hypocrisy that he had chosen a red-blooded Vincy, instead of a ghastly and melancholy person suited to his low esteem for earthly pleasure. When the scandal about her husband was disclosed they remarked of her—"Ah, poor woman! She's as honest as the day—*she* never suspected anything wrong in him, you may depend on it." Women, who were intimate with her, talked together much of "poor Harriet," imagined what her feelings must be when she came to know everything, and conjectured how much she had already come to know. There was no spiteful disposition towards her; rather, there was a busy benevolence anxious to ascertain what it would be well for her to feel and do under the circumstances, which of course kept the imagination occupied with her character and history from the times when she was Harriet Vincy till now.

With the review of Mrs. Bulstrode and her position it was inevitable to associate Rosamond, whose prospects were under the same blight with her aunt's. Rosamond was more severely criticised and less pitied, though she too, as one of the good old Vincy family who had always been known in Middlemarch, was regarded as a victim to marriage with an interloper. The Vincys had their weaknesses, but then they lay on the surface: there was never anything bad to be "found out" concerning them. Mrs. Bulstrode was vindicated from any resemblance to her husband. Harriet's faults were her own.

"She has always been showy," said Mrs. Hackbutt, making tea for a small party, "though she has got into the way of putting her religion forward, to conform to her husband; she has tried to hold her head up above Middlemarch by making it known that she invites clergymen and heaven-knows-who from Riverston and those places."

"We can hardly blame her for that," said Mrs. Sprague; "because few of the best people in the town cared to associate with Bulstrode, and she must have somebody to sit down at her table."

"Mr. Thesiger has always countenanced him," said Mrs. Hackbutt. "I think he must be sorry now."

"But he was never fond of him in his heart—that every one knows," said Mrs. Tom Toller. "Mr. Thesiger never goes into extremes. He keeps to the truth in what is evangelical. It is only clergymen like Mr. Tyke, who want to use Dissenting hymn-books and that low kind of religion, who ever found Bulstrode to their taste."

"I understand, Mr. Tyke is in great distress about him," said Mrs. Hackbutt. "And well he may be: they say the Bulstrodes have half kept the Tyke family."

"And of course it is a discredit to his doctrines," said Mrs. Sprague, who was elderly, and old-fashioned in her opinions.

"People will not make a boast of being methodistical in Middlemarch for a good while to come."

"I think we must not set down people's bad actions to their religion," said falcon-faced Mrs. Plymdale, who had been listening hitherto.

"Oh, my dear, we are forgetting," said Mrs. Sprague. "We ought not to be talking of this before you."

"I am sure I have no reason to be partial," said Mrs. Plymdale, coloring. "It's true Mr. Plymdale has always been on good terms with Mr. Bulstrode, and Harriet Vincy was my friend long before she married him. But I have always kept my own opinions and told her where she was wrong, poor thing. Still, in point of religion, I must say, Mr. Bulstrode might have done what he has, and worse, and yet have been a man of no

religion. I don't say that there has not been a little too much of that—I like moderation myself. But truth is truth. The men tried at the assizes are not all over-religious, I suppose."

"Well," said Mrs. Hackbutt, wheeling adroitly, "all I can say is, that I think she ought to separate from him."

"I can't say that," said Mrs. Sprague. "She took him for better or worse, you know."

"But 'worse' can never mean finding out that your husband is fit for Newgate," said Mrs. Hackbutt. "Fancy living with such a man! I should expect to be poisoned."

"Yes, I think myself it is an encouragement to crime if such men are to be taken care of and waited on by good wives," said Mrs. Tom Toller.

"And a good wife poor Harriet has been," said Mrs. Plymdale. "She thinks her husband the first of men. It's true he has never denied her anything."

"Well, we shall see what she will do," said Mrs. Hackbutt. "I suppose she knows nothing yet, poor creature. I do hope and trust I shall not see her, for I should be frightened to death lest I should say anything about her husband. Do you think any hint has reached her?"

"I should hardly think so," said Mrs. Tom Toller. "We hear that he is ill, and has never stirred out of the house since the meeting on Thursday; but she was with her girls at church yesterday, and they had new Tuscan bonnets. Her own had a feather in it. I have never seen that her religion made any difference in her dress."

"She wears very neat patterns always," said Mrs. Plymdale, a little stung. "And that feather I know she got dyed a pale lavender on purpose to be consistent. I must say it of Harriet that she wishes to do right."

"As to her knowing what has happened, it can't be kept from her long," said Mrs. Hackbutt. "The Vincys know, for Mr. Vincy was at the meeting. It will be a great blow to him. There is his daughter as well as his sister."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Sprague. "Nobody supposes that Mr. Lydgate can go on holding up his head in Middlemarch, things look so black about the thousand pounds he took just at that man's death. It really makes one shudder."

"Pride must have a fall," said Mrs. Hackbutt.

"I am not so sorry for Rosamond Vincy that was as I am for her aunt," said Mrs. Plymdale. "She needed a lesson."

"I suppose the Bulstrodes will go and live abroad somewhere," said Mrs. Sprague. "That is what is generally done when there is anything disgraceful in a family."

"And a most deadly blow it will be to Harriet," said Mrs. Plymdale. "If ever a woman was crushed, she will be. I pity her from my heart. And with all her faults, few women are better. From a girl she had the neatest ways, and was always good-hearted, and as open as the day. You might look into her drawers when you would—always the same. And so she has brought up Kate and Ellen. You may think how hard it will be for her to go among foreigners."

"The doctor says that is what he should recommend the Lydgates to do," said Mrs. Sprague. "He says Lydgate ought to have kept among the French."

"That would suit *her* well enough, I dare say," said Mrs. Plymdale; "there is that kind of lightness about her. But she got that from her mother; she never got it from her aunt Bulstrode, who always gave her good advice, and to my knowledge would rather have had her marry elsewhere."

Mrs. Plymdale was in a situation which caused her some complication of feeling. There had been not only her intimacy with Mrs. Bulstrode, but also a profitable business relation of the great Plymdale dyeing house with Mr. Bulstrode, which on the one hand would have inclined her to desire that the mildest view of his character should be the true one, but on the other, made her the more afraid of seeming to palliate his culpability. Again, the late alliance of her family with the Tollers had brought her in connection with the best circle, which gratified her in every direction except in the inclination to those serious views which she believed to be the best in another sense. The sharp little woman's conscience was somewhat troubled in the adjustment of these opposing "bests," and of her griefs and satisfactions under late events, which were likely to humble those who needed humbling, but also to fall heavily on her old friend whose faults she would have preferred seeing on a background of prosperity.

Poor Mrs. Bulstrode, meanwhile, had been no further shaken by the oncoming tread of calamity than in the busier stirring of that secret uneasiness which had always been present in her since the last visit of Raffles to The Shrubs. That the hateful man had come ill to Stone Court, and that her husband had chosen to remain there and watch over him, she allowed to be explained by the fact that Raffles had been employed and aided in earlier-days, and that this made a tie of benevolence towards him in his degraded helplessness; and she had been since then innocently cheered by her husband's more hopeful speech about his own health and ability to continue his attention to business. The calm was disturbed when Lydgate had brought him home ill from the meeting, and in spite of comforting assurances during the next few days, she cried in private from the conviction that her husband was not suffering from bodily illness merely, but from something that afflicted his mind. He would not allow her to read to him, and scarcely to sit with him, alleging nervous susceptibility to sounds and movements; yet she suspected that in shutting himself up in his private room he wanted to be busy with his papers. Something, she felt sure, had happened. Perhaps it was some great loss of money; and she was kept in the dark.

Not daring to question her husband, she said to Lydgate, on the fifth day after the meeting, when she had not left home except to go to church—

"Mr. Lydgate, pray be open with me: I like to know the truth. Has anything happened to Mr. Bulstrode?"

"Some little nervous shock," said Lydgate, evasively. He felt that it was not for him to make the painful revelation.

"But what brought it on?" said Mrs. Bulstrode, looking directly at him with her large dark eyes.

"There is often something poisonous in the air of public rooms," said Lydgate.

"Strong men can stand it, but it tells on people in proportion to the delicacy of their systems. It is often impossible to account for the precise moment of an attack—or rather, to say why the strength gives way at a particular moment."

Mrs. Bulstrode was not satisfied with this answer. There remained in her the belief that some calamity had befallen her husband, of which she was to be kept in ignorance; and it was in her nature strongly to object to such concealment. She begged leave for her daughters to sit with their father, and drove into the town to pay some visits, conjecturing that if anything were known to have gone wrong in Mr. Bulstrode's affairs, she should see or hear some sign of it.

She called on Mrs. Thesiger, who was not at home, and then drove to Mrs. Hackbutt's on the other side of the churchyard. Mrs. Hackbutt saw her coming from an up-stairs window, and remembering her former alarm lest she should meet Mrs. Bulstrode, felt almost bound in consistency to send word that she was not at home; but against that, there was a sudden strong desire within her for the excitement of an interview in which she was quite determined not to make the slightest allusion to what was in her mind.

Hence Mrs. Bulstrode was shown into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Hackbutt went to her, with more tightness of lip and rubbing of her hands than was usually observable in her, these being precautions adopted against freedom of speech. She was resolved not to ask how Mr. Bulstrode was.

"I have not been anywhere except to church for nearly a week," said Mrs. Bulstrode, after a few introductory remarks. "But Mr. Bulstrode was taken so ill at the meeting on Thursday that I have not liked to leave the house."

Mrs. Hackbutt rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other held against her chest, and let her eyes ramble over the pattern on the rug.

"Was Mr. Hackbutt at the meeting?" persevered Mrs. Bulstrode.

"Yes, he was," said Mrs. Hackbutt, with the same attitude. "The land is to be bought by subscription, I believe."

"Let us hope that there will be no more cases of cholera to be buried in it," said Mrs. Bulstrode. "It is an awful visitation. But I always think Middlemarch a very healthy spot. I suppose it is being used to it from a child; but I never saw the town I should like to live at better, and especially our end."

"I am sure I should be glad that you always should live at Middlemarch, Mrs. Bulstrode," said Mrs. Hackbutt, with a slight sigh. "Still, we must learn to resign ourselves, wherever our lot may be cast. Though I am sure there will always be people in this town who will wish you well."

Mrs. Hackbutt longed to say, "if you take my advice you will part from your husband," but it seemed clear to her that the poor woman knew nothing of the thunder ready to bolt on her head, and she herself could do no more than prepare her a little. Mrs. Bulstrode felt suddenly rather chill and trembling: there was evidently something unusual behind this speech of Mrs. Hackbutt's; but though she had set out with the desire to be fully informed, she found herself unable now to pursue her brave purpose, and turning the conversation by an inquiry about the young Hackbutts, she soon took her leave saying that she was going to see Mrs. Plymdale. On her way thither she tried to imagine that there might have been some unusually warm sparring at the meeting between Mr. Bulstrode and some of his frequent opponents—perhaps Mr. Hackbutt might have been one of them. That would account for everything.

But when she was in conversation with Mrs. Plymdale that comforting explanation seemed no longer tenable. "Selina" received her with a pathetic affectionateness and a disposition to give edifying answers on the commonest topics, which could hardly have reference to an ordinary quarrel of which the most important consequence was a perturbation of Mr. Bulstrode's health. Beforehand Mrs. Bulstrode had thought that she would sooner question Mrs. Plymdale than any one else; but she found to her surprise that an old friend is not always the person whom it is easiest to make a confidant of: there was the barrier of remembered communication under other circumstances—there was the dislike of being pitied and informed by one who had been long wont to allow her the superiority. For certain words of mysterious appropriateness that Mrs. Plymdale let fall about her resolution never to turn her back on her friends, convinced Mrs. Bulstrode that what had happened must be some kind of misfortune, and instead of being able to say with her native directness, "What is it that you have in your mind?" she found herself anxious to get away before she had heard anything more explicit. She began to have an agitating certainty that the misfortune was something more than the mere loss of money, being keenly sensitive to the fact that Selina now, just as Mrs. Hackbutt had done before, avoided noticing what she said about her husband, as they would have avoided noticing a personal blemish.

She said good-by with nervous haste, and told the coachman to drive to Mr. Vincy's warehouse. In that short drive her dread gathered so much force from the sense of

darkness, that when she entered the private counting-house where her brother sat at his desk, her knees trembled and her usually florid face was deathly pale. Something of the same effect was produced in him by the sight of her: he rose from his seat to meet her, took her by the hand, and said, with his impulsive rashness—

"God help you, Harriet! you know all."

That moment was perhaps worse than any which came after. It contained that concentrated experience which in great crises of emotion reveals the bias of a nature, and is prophetic of the ultimate act which will end an intermediate struggle. Without that memory of Raffles she might still have thought only of monetary ruin, but now along with her brother's look and words there darted into her mind the idea of some guilt in her husband—then, under the working of terror came the image of her husband exposed to disgrace—and then, after an instant of scorching shame in which she felt only the eyes of the world, with one leap of her heart she was at his side in mournful but unrepublishing fellowship with shame and isolation. All this went on within her in a mere flash of time—while she sank into the chair, and raised her eyes to her brother, who stood over her. "I know nothing, Walter. What is it?" she said, faintly.

He told her everything, very inartificially, in slow fragments, making her aware that the scandal went much beyond proof, especially as to the end of Raffles.

"People will talk," he said. "Even if a man has been acquitted by a jury, they'll talk, and nod and wink—and as far as the world goes, a man might often as well be guilty as not. It's a breakdown blow, and it damages Lydgate as much as Bulstrode. I don't pretend to say what is the truth. I only wish we had never heard the name of either Bulstrode or Lydgate. You'd better have been a Vincy all your life, and so had Rosamond." Mrs. Bulstrode made no reply.

"But you must bear up as well as you can, Harriet. People don't blame *you*. And I'll stand by you whatever you make up your mind to do," said the brother, with rough but well-meaning affectionateness.

"Give me your arm to the carriage, Walter," said Mrs. Bulstrode. "I feel very weak."

And when she got home she was obliged to say to her daughter, "I am not well, my dear; I must go and lie down. Attend to your papa. Leave me in quiet. I shall take no dinner."

She locked herself in her room. She needed time to get used to her maimed consciousness, her poor lopped life, before she could walk steadily to the place allotted her. A new searching light had fallen on her husband's character, and she could not judge him leniently: the twenty years in which she had believed in him and venerated him by virtue of his concealments came back with particulars that made them seem an odious deceit. He had married her with that bad past life hidden behind him, and she had no faith left to protest his innocence of the worst that was

imputed to him. Her honest ostentatious nature made the sharing of a merited dishonor as bitter as it could be to any mortal.

But this imperfectly taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her—now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him. There is a forsaking which still sits at the same board and lies on the same couch with the forsaken soul, withering it the more by unloving proximity. She knew, when she locked her door, that she should unlock it ready to go down to her unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I will mourn and not reproach. But she needed time to gather up her strength; she needed to sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her life. When she had resolved to go down, she prepared herself by some little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of wearing her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down and put on a plain bonnet-cap, which made her look suddenly like an early Methodist.

Bulstrode, who knew that his wife had been out and had come in saying that she was not well, had spent the time in an agitation equal to hers. He had looked forward to her learning the truth from others, and had acquiesced in that probability, as something easier to him than any confession. But now that he imagined the moment of her knowledge come, he awaited the result in anguish. His daughters had been obliged to consent to leave him, and though he had allowed some food to be brought to him, he had not touched it. He felt himself perishing slowly in unpitied misery. Perhaps he should never see his wife's face with affection in it again. And if he turned to God there seemed to be no answer but the pressure of retribution.

It was eight o'clock in the evening before the door opened and his wife entered. He dared not look up at her. He sat with his eyes bent down, and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller—he seemed so withered and shrunken. A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave, and putting one hand on his which rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder, she said, solemnly but kindly—

"Look up, Nicholas."

He raised his eyes with a little start and looked at her half amazed for a moment: her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling about her mouth, all said, "I know;" and her hands and eyes rested gently on him. He burst out crying and they cried together, she sitting at his side. They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-

minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness, as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, "How much is only slander and false suspicion?" and he did not say, "I am innocent."

CHAPTER 75

"Le sentiment de la fausseté des plaisirs présents, et l'ignorance de la vanité des plaisirs absents causent l'inconstance."—PASCAL.

Rosamond had a gleam of returning cheerfulness when the house was freed from the threatening figure, and when all the disagreeable creditors were paid. But she was not joyous: her married life had fulfilled none of her hopes, and had been quite spoiled for her imagination. In this brief interval of calm, Lydgate, remembering that he had often been stormy in his hours of perturbation, and mindful of the pain Rosamond had had to bear, was carefully gentle towards her; but he, too, had lost some of his old spirit, and he still felt it necessary to refer to an economical change in their way of living as a matter of course, trying to reconcile her to it gradually, and repressing his anger when she answered by wishing that he would go to live in London. When she did not make this answer, she listened languidly, and wondered what she had that was worth living for. The hard and contemptuous words which had fallen from her husband in his anger had deeply offended that vanity which he had at first called into active enjoyment; and what she regarded as his perverse way of looking at things, kept up a secret repulsion, which made her receive all his tenderness as a poor substitute for the happiness he had failed to give her. They were at a disadvantage with their neighbors, and there was no longer any outlook towards Quillingham—there was no outlook anywhere except in an occasional letter from Will Ladislaw. She had felt stung and disappointed by Will's resolution to quit Middlemarch, for in spite of what she knew and guessed about his admiration for Dorothea, she secretly cherished the belief that he had, or would necessarily come to have, much more admiration for herself; Rosamond being one of those women who live much in the idea that each man they meet would have preferred them if the preference had not been hopeless. Mrs. Casaubon was all very well; but Will's interest in her dated before he knew Mrs. Lydgate. Rosamond took his way of talking to herself, which was a mixture of playful fault-finding and hyperbolic gallantry, as the disguise of a deeper feeling; and in his presence she felt that agreeable titillation of vanity and sense of romantic drama which Lydgate's presence had no longer the magic to create. She even fancied—what will not men and women fancy in these matters?—that Will exaggerated his admiration for Mrs. Casaubon in order to pique herself. In this way poor Rosamond's brain had been busy before Will's departure. He would have made, she thought, a much more suitable husband for her than she had found in Lydgate. No notion could have been falser than this, for Rosamond's discontent in her marriage was due to the conditions of marriage itself, to its demand for self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband; but the easy conception of an unreal Better had a sentimental charm which diverted her ennui. She constructed a little romance which was to vary the flatness of her life: Will

Ladislaw was always to be a bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes. His departure had been a proportionate disappointment, and had sadly increased her weariness of Middlemarch; but at first she had the alternative dream of pleasures in store from her intercourse with the family at Quellingham. Since then the troubles of her married life had deepened, and the absence of other relief encouraged her regretful rumination over that thin romance which she had once fed on. Men and women make sad mistakes about their own symptoms, taking their vague uneasy longings, sometimes for genius, sometimes for religion, and oftener still for a mighty love. Will Ladislaw had written chatty letters, half to her and half to Lydgate, and she had replied: their separation, she felt, was not likely to be final, and the change she now most longed for was that Lydgate should go to live in London; everything would be agreeable in London; and she had set to work with quiet determination to win this result, when there came a sudden, delightful promise which inspirited her.

It came shortly before the memorable meeting at the town-hall, and was nothing less than a letter from Will Ladislaw to Lydgate, which turned indeed chiefly on his new interest in plans of colonization, but mentioned incidentally, that he might find it necessary to pay a visit to Middlemarch within the next few weeks—a very pleasant necessity, he said, almost as good as holidays to a schoolboy. He hoped there was his old place on the rug, and a great deal of music in store for him. But he was quite uncertain as to the time. While Lydgate was reading the letter to Rosamond, her face looked like a reviving flower—it grew prettier and more blooming. There was nothing unendurable now: the debts were paid, Mr. Ladislaw was coming, and Lydgate would be persuaded to leave Middlemarch and settle in London, which was "so different from a provincial town."

That was a bright bit of morning. But soon the sky became black over poor Rosamond. The presence of a new gloom in her husband, about which he was entirely reserved towards her—for he dreaded to expose his lacerated feeling to her neutrality and misconception—soon received a painfully strange explanation, alien to all her previous notions of what could affect her happiness. In the new gayety of her spirits, thinking that Lydgate had merely a worse fit of moodiness than usual, causing him to leave her remarks unanswered, and evidently to keep out of her way as much as possible, she chose, a few days after the meeting, and without speaking to him on the subject, to send out notes of invitation for a small evening party, feeling convinced that this was a judicious step, since people seemed to have been keeping aloof from them, and wanted restoring to the old habit of intercourse. When the invitations had been accepted, she would tell Lydgate, and give him a wise admonition as to how a medical man should behave to his neighbors; for Rosamond had the gravest little airs possible about other people's duties. But all the invitations were declined, and the last answer came into Lydgate's hands.

"This is Chichely's scratch. What is he writing to you about?" said Lydgate, wonderingly, as he handed the note to her. She was obliged to let him see it, and, looking at her severely, he said—

"Why on earth have you been sending out invitations without telling me, Rosamond? I beg, I insist that you will not invite any one to this house. I suppose you have been inviting others, and they have refused too." She said nothing.

"Do you hear me?" thundered Lydgate.

"Yes, certainly I hear you," said Rosamond, turning her head aside with the movement of a graceful long-necked bird.

Lydgate tossed his head without any grace and walked out of the room, feeling himself dangerous. Rosamond's thought was, that he was getting more and more unbearable—not that there was any new special reason for this peremptoriness. His indisposition to tell her anything in which he was sure beforehand that she would not be interested was growing into an unreflecting habit, and she was in ignorance of everything connected with the thousand pounds except that the loan had come from her uncle Bulstrode. Lydgate's odious humors and their neighbors' apparent avoidance of them had an unaccountable date for her in their relief from money difficulties. If the invitations had been accepted she would have gone to invite her mamma and the rest, whom she had seen nothing of for several days; and she now put on her bonnet to go and inquire what had become of them all, suddenly feeling as if there were a conspiracy to leave her in isolation with a husband disposed to offend everybody. It was after the dinner hour, and she found her father and mother seated together alone in the drawing-room. They greeted her with sad looks, saying "Well, my dear!" and no more. She had never seen her father look so downcast; and seating herself near him she said—

"Is there anything the matter, papa?"

He did not answer, but Mrs. Vincy said, "Oh, my dear, have you heard nothing? It won't be long before it reaches you."

"Is it anything about Tertius?" said Rosamond, turning pale. The idea of trouble immediately connected itself with what had been unaccountable to her in him.

"Oh, my dear, yes. To think of your marrying into this trouble. Debt was bad enough, but this will be worse."

"Stay, stay, Lucy," said Mr. Vincy. "Have you heard nothing about your uncle Bulstrode, Rosamond?"

"No, papa," said the poor thing, feeling as if trouble were not anything she had before experienced, but some invisible power with an iron grasp that made her soul faint within her.

Her father told her everything, saying at the end, "It's better for you to know, my dear. I think Lydgate must leave the town. Things have gone against him. I dare say he couldn't help it. I don't accuse him of any harm," said Mr. Vincy. He had always before been disposed to find the utmost fault with Lydgate.

The shock to Rosamond was terrible. It seemed to her that no lot could be so cruelly hard as hers to have married a man who had become the centre of infamous suspicions. In many cases it is inevitable that the shame is felt to be the worst part of crime; and it would have required a great deal of disentangling reflection, such as had never entered into Rosamond's life, for her in these moments to feel that her trouble was less than if her husband had been certainly known to have done something criminal. All the shame seemed to be there. And she had innocently married this man with the belief that he and his family were a glory to her! She showed her usual reticence to her parents, and only said, that if Lydgate had done as she wished he would have left Middlemarch long ago.

"She bears it beyond anything," said her mother when she was gone.

"Ah, thank God!" said Mr. Vincy, who was much broken down.

But Rosamond went home with a sense of justified repugnance towards her husband. What had he really done—how had he really acted? She did not know. Why had he not told her everything? He did not speak to her on the subject, and of course she could not speak to him. It came into her mind once that she would ask her father to let her go home again; but dwelling on that prospect made it seem utter dreariness to her: a married woman gone back to live with her parents—life seemed to have no meaning for her in such a position: she could not contemplate herself in it.

The next two days Lydgate observed a change in her, and believed that she had heard the bad news. Would she speak to him about it, or would she go on forever in the silence which seemed to imply that she believed him guilty? We must remember that he was in a morbid state of mind, in which almost all contact was pain. Certainly Rosamond in this case had equal reason to complain of reserve and want of confidence on his part; but in the bitterness of his soul he excused himself;—was he not justified in shrinking from the task of telling her, since now she knew the truth she had no impulse to speak to him? But a deeper-lying consciousness that he was in fault made him restless, and the silence between them became intolerable to him; it was as if they were both adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other.

He thought, "I am a fool. Haven't I given up expecting anything? I have married care, not help." And that evening he said—

"Rosamond, have you heard anything that distresses you?"

"Yes," she answered, laying down her work, which she had been carrying on with a languid semi-consciousness, most unlike her usual self.

"What have you heard?"

"Everything, I suppose. Papa told me."

"That people think me disgraced?"

"Yes," said Rosamond, faintly, beginning to sew again automatically.

There was silence. Lydgate thought, "If she has any trust in me—any notion of what I am, she ought to speak now and say that she does not believe I have deserved disgrace."

But Rosamond on her side went on moving her fingers languidly. Whatever was to be said on the subject she expected to come from Tertius. What did she know? And if he were innocent of any wrong, why did he not do something to clear himself?

This silence of hers brought a new rush of gall to that bitter mood in which Lydgate had been saying to himself that nobody believed in him—even Farebrother had not come forward. He had begun to question her with the intent that their conversation should disperse the chill fog which had gathered between them, but he felt his resolution checked by despairing resentment. Even this trouble, like the rest, she seemed to regard as if it were hers alone. He was always to her a being apart, doing what she objected to. He started from his chair with an angry impulse, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked up and down the room. There was an underlying consciousness all the while that he should have to master this anger, and tell her everything, and convince her of the facts. For he had almost learned the lesson that he must bend himself to her nature, and that because she came short in her sympathy, he must give the more. Soon he recurred to his intention of opening himself: the occasion must not be lost. If he could bring her to feel with some solemnity that here was a slander which must be met and not run away from, and that the whole trouble had come out of his desperate want of money, it would be a moment for urging powerfully on her that they should be one in the resolve to do with as little money as possible, so that they might weather the bad time and keep themselves independent. He would mention the definite measures which he desired to take, and win her to a willing spirit. He was bound to try this—and what else was there for him to do?

He did not know how long he had been walking uneasily backwards and forwards, but Rosamond felt that it was long, and wished that he would sit down. She too had begun to think this an opportunity for urging on Tertius what he ought to do. Whatever might be the truth about all this misery, there was one dread which asserted itself.

Lydgate at last seated himself, not in his usual chair, but in one nearer to Rosamond, leaning aside in it towards her, and looking at her gravely before he reopened the sad subject. He had conquered himself so far, and was about to speak with a sense

of solemnity, as on an occasion which was not to be repeated. He had even opened his lips, when Rosamond, letting her hands fall, looked at him and said—

"Surely, Tertius—"

"Well?"

"Surely now at last you have given up the idea of staying in Middlemarch. I cannot go on living here. Let us go to London. Papa, and every one else, says you had better go. Whatever misery I have to put up with, it will be easier away from here."

Lydgate felt miserably jarred. Instead of that critical outpouring for which he had prepared himself with effort, here was the old round to be gone through again. He could not bear it. With a quick change of countenance he rose and went out of the room.

Perhaps if he had been strong enough to persist in his determination to be the more because she was less, that evening might have had a better issue. If his energy could have borne down that check, he might still have wrought on Rosamond's vision and will. We cannot be sure that any natures, however inflexible or peculiar, will resist this effect from a more massive being than their own. They may be taken by storm and for the moment converted, becoming part of the soul which enwraps them in the ardor of its movement. But poor Lydgate had a throbbing pain within him, and his energy had fallen short of its task.

The beginning of mutual understanding and resolve seemed as far off as ever; nay, it seemed blocked out by the sense of unsuccessful effort. They lived on from day to day with their thoughts still apart, Lydgate going about what work he had in a mood of despair, and Rosamond feeling, with some justification, that he was behaving cruelly. It was of no use to say anything to Tertius; but when Will Ladislaw came, she was determined to tell him everything. In spite of her general reticence, she needed some one who would recognize her wrongs.



CHAPTER 76

"To mercy, pity, peace, and love

All pray in their distress,

And to these virtues of delight,

Return their thankfulness.

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For Mercy has a human heart,

Pity a human face;

And Love, the human form divine;

And Peace, the human dress.

—WILLIAM BLAKE: *Songs of Innocence*.

Some days later, Lydgate was riding to Lowick Manor, in consequence of a summons from Dorothea. The summons had not been unexpected, since it had followed a letter from Mr. Bulstrode, in which he stated that he had resumed his arrangements for quitting Middlemarch, and must remind Lydgate of his previous communications about the Hospital, to the purport of which he still adhered. It had been his duty, before taking further steps, to reopen the subject with Mrs. Casaubon, who now wished, as before, to discuss the question with Lydgate. "Your views may possibly have undergone some change," wrote Mr. Bulstrode; "but, in that case also, it is desirable that you should lay them before her."

Dorothea awaited his arrival with eager interest. Though, in deference to her masculine advisers, she had refrained from what Sir James had called "interfering in this Bulstrode business," the hardship of Lydgate's position was continually in her mind, and when Bulstrode applied to her again about the hospital, she felt that the opportunity was come to her which she had been hindered from hastening. In her luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, her thought was going out over the lot of others, and her emotions were imprisoned. The idea of some active good within her reach, "haunted her like a passion," and another's need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless. She was full of confident hope about this interview with Lydgate, never heeding what was said of his personal reserve; never heeding that she was a very young woman. Nothing could have

seemed more irrelevant to Dorothea than insistence on her youth and sex when she was moved to show her human fellowship.

As she sat waiting in the library, she could do nothing but live through again all the past scenes which had brought Lydgate into her memories. They all owed their significance to her marriage and its troubles—but no; there were two occasions in which the image of Lydgate had come painfully in connection with his wife and some one else. The pain had been allayed for Dorothea, but it had left in her an awakened conjecture as to what Lydgate's marriage might be to him, a susceptibility to the slightest hint about Mrs. Lydgate. These thoughts were like a drama to her, and made her eyes bright, and gave an attitude of suspense to her whole frame, though she was only looking out from the brown library on to the turf and the bright green buds which stood in relief against the dark evergreens.

When Lydgate came in, she was almost shocked at the change in his face, which was strikingly perceptible to her who had not seen him for two months. It was not the change of emaciation, but that effect which even young faces will very soon show from the persistent presence of resentment and despondency. Her cordial look, when she put out her hand to him, softened his expression, but only with melancholy.

"I have wished very much to see you for a long while, Mr. Lydgate," said Dorothea when they were seated opposite each other; "but I put off asking you to come until Mr. Bulstrode applied to me again about the Hospital. I know that the advantage of keeping the management of it separate from that of the Infirmary depends on you, or, at least, on the good which you are encouraged to hope for from having it under your control. And I am sure you will not refuse to tell me exactly what you think."

"You want to decide whether you should give a generous support to the Hospital," said Lydgate. "I cannot conscientiously advise you to do it in dependence on any activity of mine. I may be obliged to leave the town."

He spoke curtly, feeling the ache of despair as to his being able to carry out any purpose that Rosamond had set her mind against.

"Not because there is no one to believe in you?" said Dorothea, pouring out her words in clearness from a full heart. "I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonorable."

It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on Lydgate's ears. He drew a deep breath, and said, "Thank you." He could say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him.

"I beseech you to tell me how everything was," said Dorothea, fearlessly. "I am sure that the truth would clear you."

Lydgate started up from his chair and went towards the window, forgetting where he was. He had so often gone over in his mind the possibility of explaining everything without aggravating appearances that would tell, perhaps unfairly, against Bulstrode, and had so often decided against it—he had so often said to himself that his assertions would not change people's impressions—that Dorothea's words sounded like a temptation to do something which in his soberness he had pronounced to be unreasonable.

"Tell me, pray," said Dorothea, with simple earnestness; "then we can consult together. It is wicked to let people think evil of any one falsely, when it can be hindered."

Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and saw Dorothea's face looking up at him with a sweet trustful gravity. The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.

"I don't want," he said, "to bear hard on Bulstrode, who has lent me money of which I was in need—though I would rather have gone without it now. He is hunted down and miserable, and has only a poor thread of life in him. But I should like to tell you everything. It will be a comfort to me to speak where belief has gone beforehand, and where I shall not seem to be offering assertions of my own honesty. You will feel what is fair to another, as you feel what is fair to me."

"Do trust me," said Dorothea; "I will not repeat anything without your leave. But at the very least, I could say that you have made all the circumstances clear to me, and that I know you are not in any way guilty. Mr. Farebrother would believe me, and my uncle, and Sir James Chettam. Nay, there are persons in Middlemarch to whom I could go; although they don't know much of me, they would believe me. They would know that I could have no other motive than truth and justice. I would take any pains to clear you. I have very little to do. There is nothing better that I can do in the world."

Dorothea's voice, as she made this childlike picture of what she would do, might have been almost taken as a proof that she could do it effectively. The searching tenderness of her woman's tones seemed made for a defence against ready accusers. Lydgate did not stay to think that she was Quixotic: he gave himself up, for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous sympathy, without any check of proud reserve. And he told her everything, from the time when, under the pressure of his difficulties, he unwillingly made his first application to Bulstrode; gradually, in the relief of speaking, getting into a more thorough utterance of what had gone on in his mind—entering fully into the fact that

his treatment of the patient was opposed to the dominant practice, into his doubts at the last, his ideal of medical duty, and his uneasy consciousness that the acceptance of the money had made some difference in his private inclination and professional behavior, though not in his fulfilment of any publicly recognized obligation.

"It has come to my knowledge since," he added, "that Hawley sent some one to examine the housekeeper at Stone Court, and she said that she gave the patient all the opium in the phial I left, as well as a good deal of brandy. But that would not have been opposed to ordinary prescriptions, even of first-rate men. The suspicions against me had no hold there: they are grounded on the knowledge that I took money, that Bulstrode had strong motives for wishing the man to die, and that he gave me the money as a bribe to concur in some malpractices or other against the patient—that in any case I accepted a bribe to hold my tongue. They are just the suspicions that cling the most obstinately, because they lie in people's inclination and can never be disproved. How my orders came to be disobeyed is a question to which I don't know the answer. It is still possible that Bulstrode was innocent of any criminal intention—even possible that he had nothing to do with the disobedience, and merely abstained from mentioning it. But all that has nothing to do with the public belief. It is one of those cases on which a man is condemned on the ground of his character—it is believed that he has committed a crime in some undefined way, because he had the motive for doing it; and Bulstrode's character has enveloped me, because I took his money. I am simply blighted—like a damaged ear of corn—the business is done and can't be undone."

"Oh, it is hard!" said Dorothea. "I understand the difficulty there is in your vindicating yourself. And that all this should have come to you who had meant to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways—I cannot bear to rest in this as unchangeable. I know you meant that. I remember what you said to me when you first spoke to me about the hospital. There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that—to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail."

"Yes," said Lydgate, feeling that here he had found room for the full meaning of his grief. "I had some ambition. I meant everything to be different with me. I thought I had more strength and mastery. But the most terrible obstacles are such as nobody can see except oneself."

"Suppose," said Dorothea, meditatively,— "suppose we kept on the Hospital according to the present plan, and you stayed here though only with the friendship and support of a few, the evil feeling towards you would gradually die out; there would come opportunities in which people would be forced to acknowledge that they had been unjust to you, because they would see that your purposes were pure. You may still win a great fame like the Louis and Laennec I have heard you speak of, and we shall all be proud of you," she ended, with a smile.

"That might do if I had my old trust in myself," said Lydgate, mournfully. "Nothing galls me more than the notion of turning round and running away before this slander, leaving it unchecked behind me. Still, I can't ask any one to put a great deal of money into a plan which depends on me."

"It would be quite worth my while," said Dorothea, simply. "Only think. I am very uncomfortable with my money, because they tell me I have too little for any great scheme of the sort I like best, and yet I have too much. I don't know what to do. I have seven hundred a-year of my own fortune, and nineteen hundred a-year that Mr. Casaubon left me, and between three and four thousand of ready money in the bank. I wished to raise money and pay it off gradually out of my income which I don't want, to buy land with and found a village which should be a school of industry; but Sir James and my uncle have convinced me that the risk would be too great. So you see that what I should most rejoice at would be to have something good to do with my money: I should like it to make other people's lives better to them. It makes me very uneasy—coming all to me who don't want it."

A smile broke through the gloom of Lydgate's face. The childlike grave-eyed earnestness with which Dorothea said all this was irresistible—blent into an adorable whole with her ready understanding of high experience. (Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, poor Mrs. Casaubon had a very blurred shortsighted knowledge, little helped by her imagination.) But she took the smile as encouragement of her plan.

"I think you see now that you spoke too scrupulously," she said, in a tone of persuasion. "The hospital would be one good; and making your life quite whole and well again would be another."

Lydgate's smile had died away. "You have the goodness as well as the money to do all that; if it could be done," he said. "But—"

He hesitated a little while, looking vaguely towards the window; and she sat in silent expectation. At last he turned towards her and said impetuously—

"Why should I not tell you?—you know what sort of bond marriage is. You will understand everything."

Dorothea felt her heart beginning to beat faster. Had he that sorrow too? But she feared to say any word, and he went on immediately.

"It is impossible for me now to do anything—to take any step without considering my wife's happiness. The thing that I might like to do if I were alone, is become impossible to me. I can't see her miserable. She married me without knowing what she was going into, and it might have been better for her if she had not married me."

"I know, I know—you could not give her pain, if you were not obliged to do it," said Dorothea, with keen memory of her own life.

"And she has set her mind against staying. She wishes to go. The troubles she has had here have wearied her," said Lydgate, breaking off again, lest he should say too much.

"But when she saw the good that might come of staying—" said Dorothea, remonstrantly, looking at Lydgate as if he had forgotten the reasons which had just been considered. He did not speak immediately.

"She would not see it," he said at last, curtly, feeling at first that this statement must do without explanation. "And, indeed, I have lost all spirit about carrying on my life here." He paused a moment and then, following the impulse to let Dorothea see deeper into the difficulty of his life, he said, "The fact is, this trouble has come upon her confusedly. We have not been able to speak to each other about it. I am not sure what is in her mind about it: she may fear that I have really done something base. It is my fault; I ought to be more open. But I have been suffering cruelly."

"May I go and see her?" said Dorothea, eagerly. "Would she accept my sympathy? I would tell her that you have not been blamable before any one's judgment but your own. I would tell her that you shall be cleared in every fair mind. I would cheer her heart. Will you ask her if I may go to see her? I did see her once."

"I am sure you may," said Lydgate, seizing the proposition with some hope. "She would feel honored—cheered, I think, by the proof that you at least have some respect for me. I will not speak to her about your coming—that she may not connect it with my wishes at all. I know very well that I ought not to have left anything to be told her by others, but—"

He broke off, and there was a moment's silence. Dorothea refrained from saying what was in her mind—how well she knew that there might be invisible barriers to speech between husband and wife. This was a point on which even sympathy might make a wound. She returned to the more outward aspect of Lydgate's position, saying cheerfully—

"And if Mrs. Lydgate knew that there were friends who would believe in you and support you, she might then be glad that you should stay in your place and recover your hopes—and do what you meant to do. Perhaps then you would see that it was right to agree with what I proposed about your continuing at the Hospital. Surely you would, if you still have faith in it as a means of making your knowledge useful?"

Lydgate did not answer, and she saw that he was debating with himself.

"You need not decide immediately," she said, gently. "A few days hence it will be early enough for me to send my answer to Mr. Bulstrode."

Lydgate still waited, but at last turned to speak in his most decisive tones.

"No; I prefer that there should be no interval left for wavering. I am no longer sure enough of myself—I mean of what it would be possible for me to do under the changed circumstances of my life. It would be dishonorable to let others engage themselves to anything serious in dependence on me. I might be obliged to go away after all; I see little chance of anything else. The whole thing is too problematic; I cannot consent to be the cause of your goodness being wasted. No—let the new Hospital be joined with the old Infirmary, and everything go on as it might have done if I had never come. I have kept a valuable register since I have been there; I shall send it to a man who will make use of it," he ended bitterly. "I can think of nothing for a long while but getting an income."

"It hurts me very much to hear you speak so hopelessly," said Dorothea. "It would be a happiness to your friends, who believe in your future, in your power to do great things, if you would let them save you from that. Think how much money I have; it would be like taking a burthen from me if you took some of it every year till you got free from this fettering want of income. Why should not people do these things? It is so difficult to make shares at all even. This is one way."

"God bless you, Mrs. Casaubon!" said Lydgate, rising as if with the same impulse that made his words energetic, and resting his arm on the back of the great leather chair he had been sitting in. "It is good that you should have such feelings. But I am not the man who ought to allow himself to benefit by them. I have not given guarantees enough. I must not at least sink into the degradation of being pensioned for work that I never achieved. It is very clear to me that I must not count on anything else than getting away from Middlemarch as soon as I can manage it. I should not be able for a long while, at the very best, to get an income here, and—and it is easier to make necessary changes in a new place. I must do as other men do, and think what will please the world and bring in money; look for a little opening in the London crowd, and push myself; set up in a watering-place, or go to some southern town where there are plenty of idle English, and get myself puffed,—that is the sort of shell I must creep into and try to keep my soul alive in."

"Now that is not brave," said Dorothea,—"*to give up the fight.*"

"No, it is not brave," said Lydgate, "*but if a man is afraid of creeping paralysis?*" Then, in another tone, "Yet you have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you; and if you can clear me in a few other minds, especially in Farebrother's, I shall be deeply grateful. The point I wish you not to mention is the fact of disobedience to my orders. That would soon get distorted. After all, there is no evidence for me but people's opinion of me beforehand. You can only repeat my own report of myself."

"Mr. Farebrother will believe—others will believe," said Dorothea. "I can say of you what will make it stupidity to suppose that you would be bribed to do a wickedness."

"I don't know," said Lydgate, with something like a groan in his voice. "I have not taken a bribe yet. But there is a pale shade of bribery which is sometimes called prosperity. You will do me another great kindness, then, and come to see my wife?"

"Yes, I will. I remember how pretty she is," said Dorothea, into whose mind every impression about Rosamond had cut deep. "I hope she will like me."

As Lydgate rode away, he thought, "This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her. She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her. Casaubon must have raised some heroic hallucination in her. I wonder if she could have any other sort of passion for a man? Ladislaw?—there was certainly an unusual feeling between them. And Casaubon must have had a notion of it. Well—her love might help a man more than her money."

Dorothea on her side had immediately formed a plan of relieving Lydgate from his obligation to Bulstrode, which she felt sure was a part, though small, of the galling pressure he had to bear.

She sat down at once under the inspiration of their interview, and wrote a brief note, in which she pleaded that she had more claim than Mr. Bulstrode had to the satisfaction of providing the money which had been serviceable to Lydgate—that it would be unkind in Lydgate not to grant her the position of being his helper in this small matter, the favor being entirely to her who had so little that was plainly marked out for her to do with her superfluous money.

He might call her a creditor or by any other name if it did but imply that he granted her request. She enclosed a check for a thousand pounds, and determined to take the letter with her the next day when she went to see Rosamond.



CHAPTER 77

*"And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot,
To mark the full-fraught man and best indued
With some suspicion."
—Henry V.*

The next day Lydgate had to go to Brassing, and told Rosamond that he should be away until the evening. Of late she had never gone beyond her own house and garden, except to church, and once to see her papa, to whom she said, "If Tertius goes away, you will help us to move, will you not, papa? I suppose we shall have very little money. I am sure I hope some one will help us." And Mr. Vincy had said, "Yes, child, I don't mind a hundred or two. I can see the end of that." With these exceptions she had sat at home in languid melancholy and suspense, fixing her mind on Will Ladislaw's coming as the one point of hope and interest, and associating this with some new urgency on Lydgate to make immediate arrangements for leaving Middlemarch and going to London, till she felt assured that the coming would be a potent cause of the going, without at all seeing how. This way of establishing sequences is too common to be fairly regarded as a peculiar folly in Rosamond. And it is precisely this sort of sequence which causes the greatest shock when it is sundered: for to see how an effect may be produced is often to see possible missings and checks; but to see nothing except the desirable cause, and close upon it the desirable effect, rids us of doubt and makes our minds strongly intuitive. That was the process going on in poor Rosamond, while she arranged all objects around her with the same nicety as ever, only with more slowness—or sat down to the piano, meaning to play, and then desisting, yet lingering on the music stool with her white fingers suspended on the wooden front, and looking before her in dreamy ennui. Her melancholy had become so marked that Lydgate felt a strange timidity before it, as a perpetual silent reproach, and the strong man, mastered by his keen sensibilities towards this fair fragile creature whose life he seemed somehow to have bruised, shrank from her look, and sometimes started at her approach, fear of her and fear for her rushing in only the more forcibly after it had been momentarily expelled by exasperation.

But this morning Rosamond descended from her room upstairs—where she sometimes sat the whole day when Lydgate was out—equipped for a walk in the town. She had a letter to post—a letter addressed to Mr. Ladislaw and written with charming discretion, but intended to hasten his arrival by a hint of trouble. The servant-maid, their sole house-servant now, noticed her coming down-stairs in her

walking dress, and thought "there never did anybody look so pretty in a bonnet poor thing."

Meanwhile Dorothea's mind was filled with her project of going to Rosamond, and with the many thoughts, both of the past and the probable future, which gathered round the idea of that visit. Until yesterday when Lydgate had opened to her a glimpse of some trouble in his married life, the image of Mrs. Lydgate had always been associated for her with that of Will Ladislaw. Even in her most uneasy moments—even when she had been agitated by Mrs. Cadwallader's painfully graphic report of gossip—her effort, nay, her strongest impulsive prompting, had been towards the vindication of Will from any sullyng surmises; and when, in her meeting with him afterwards, she had at first interpreted his words as a probable allusion to a feeling towards Mrs. Lydgate which he was determined to cut himself off from indulging, she had had a quick, sad, excusing vision of the charm there might be in his constant opportunities of companionship with that fair creature, who most likely shared his other tastes as she evidently did his delight in music. But there had followed his parting words—the few passionate words in which he had implied that she herself was the object of whom his love held him in dread, that it was his love for her only which he was resolved not to declare but to carry away into banishment. From the time of that parting, Dorothea, believing in Will's love for her, believing with a proud delight in his delicate sense of honor and his determination that no one should impeach him justly, felt her heart quite at rest as to the regard he might have for Mrs. Lydgate. She was sure that the regard was blameless.

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. "If you are not good, none is good"—those little words may give a terrific meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse.

Dorothea's nature was of that kind: her own passionate faults lay along the easily counted open channels of her ardent character; and while she was full of pity for the visible mistakes of others, she had not yet any material within her experience for subtle constructions and suspicions of hidden wrong. But that simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the great powers of her womanhood. And it had from the first acted strongly on Will Ladislaw. He felt, when he parted from her, that the brief words by which he had tried to convey to her his feeling about herself and the division which her fortune made between them, would only profit by their brevity when Dorothea had to interpret them: he felt that in her mind he had found his highest estimate.

And he was right there. In the months since their parting Dorothea had felt a delicious though sad repose in their relation to each other, as one which was inwardly whole and without blemish. She had an active force of antagonism within her, when the antagonism turned on the defence either of plans or persons that she

believed in; and the wrongs which she felt that Will had received from her husband, and the external conditions which to others were grounds for slighting him, only gave the more tenacity to her affection and admiring judgment. And now with the disclosures about Bulstrode had come another fact affecting Will's social position, which roused afresh Dorothea's inward resistance to what was said about him in that part of her world which lay within park palings.

"Young Ladislaw the grandson of a thieving Jew pawnbroker" was a phrase which had entered emphatically into the dialogues about the Bulstrode business, at Lowick, Tipton, and Freshitt, and was a worse kind of placard on poor Will's back than the "Italian with white mice." Upright Sir James Chettam was convinced that his own satisfaction was righteous when he thought with some complacency that here was an added league to that mountainous distance between Ladislaw and Dorothea, which enabled him to dismiss any anxiety in that direction as too absurd. And perhaps there had been some pleasure in pointing Mr. Brooke's attention to this ugly bit of Ladislaw's genealogy, as a fresh candle for him to see his own folly by. Dorothea had observed the animus with which Will's part in the painful story had been recalled more than once; but she had uttered no word, being checked now, as she had not been formerly in speaking of Will, by the consciousness of a deeper relation between them which must always remain in consecrated secrecy. But her silence shrouded her resistant emotion into a more thorough glow; and this misfortune in Will's lot which, it seemed, others were wishing to fling at his back as an opprobrium, only gave something more of enthusiasm to her clinging thought.

She entertained no visions of their ever coming into nearer union, and yet she had taken no posture of renunciation. She had accepted her whole relation to Will very simply as part of her marriage sorrows, and would have thought it very sinful in her to keep up an inward wail because she was not completely happy, being rather disposed to dwell on the superfluities of her lot. She could bear that the chief pleasures of her tenderness should lie in memory, and the idea of marriage came to her solely as a repulsive proposition from some suitor of whom she at present knew nothing, but whose merits, as seen by her friends, would be a source of torment to her:—"somebody who will manage your property for you, my dear," was Mr. Brooke's attractive suggestion of suitable characteristics. "I should like to manage it myself, if I knew what to do with it," said Dorothea. No—she adhered to her declaration that she would never be married again, and in the long valley of her life which looked so flat and empty of waymarks, guidance would come as she walked along the road, and saw her fellow-passengers by the way.

This habitual state of feeling about Will Ladislaw had been strong in all her waking hours since she had proposed to pay a visit to Mrs. Lydgate, making a sort of background against which she saw Rosamond's figure presented to her without hindrances to her interest and compassion. There was evidently some mental separation, some barrier to complete confidence which had arisen between this wife and the husband who had yet made her happiness a law to him. That was a trouble

which no third person must directly touch. But Dorothea thought with deep pity of the loneliness which must have come upon Rosamond from the suspicions cast on her husband; and there would surely be help in the manifestation of respect for Lydgate and sympathy with her.

"I shall talk to her about her husband," thought Dorothea, as she was being driven towards the town. The clear spring morning, the scent of the moist earth, the fresh leaves just showing their creased-up wealth of greenery from out their half-opened sheaths, seemed part of the cheerfulness she was feeling from a long conversation with Mr. Farebrother, who had joyfully accepted the justifying explanation of Lydgate's conduct. "I shall take Mrs. Lydgate good news, and perhaps she will like to talk to me and make a friend of me."

Dorothea had another errand in Lowick Gate: it was about a new fine-toned bell for the school-house, and as she had to get out of her carriage very near to Lydgate's, she walked thither across the street, having told the coachman to wait for some packages. The street door was open, and the servant was taking the opportunity of looking out at the carriage which was pausing within sight when it became apparent to her that the lady who "belonged to it" was coming towards her.

"Is Mrs. Lydgate at home?" said Dorothea.

"I'm not sure, my lady; I'll see, if you'll please to walk in," said Martha, a little confused on the score of her kitchen apron, but collected enough to be sure that "mum" was not the right title for this queenly young widow with a carriage and pair. "Will you please to walk in, and I'll go and see."

"Say that I am Mrs. Casaubon," said Dorothea, as Martha moved forward intending to show her into the drawing-room and then to go up-stairs to see if Rosamond had returned from her walk.

They crossed the broader part of the entrance-hall, and turned up the passage which led to the garden. The drawing-room door was unlatched, and Martha, pushing it without looking into the room, waited for Mrs. Casaubon to enter and then turned away, the door having swung open and swung back again without noise.

Dorothea had less of outward vision than usual this morning, being filled with images of things as they had been and were going to be. She found herself on the other side of the door without seeing anything remarkable, but immediately she heard a voice speaking in low tones which startled her as with a sense of dreaming in daylight, and advancing unconsciously a step or two beyond the projecting slab of a bookcase, she saw, in the terrible illumination of a certainty which filled up all outlines, something which made her pause, motionless, without self-possession enough to speak.

Seated with his back towards her on a sofa which stood against the wall on a line with the door by which she had entered, she saw Will Ladislaw: close by him and

turned towards him with a flushed tearfulness which gave a new brilliancy to her face sat Rosamond, her bonnet hanging back, while Will leaning towards her clasped both her upraised hands in his and spoke with low-toned fervor.

Rosamond in her agitated absorption had not noticed the silently advancing figure; but when Dorothea, after the first immeasurable instant of this vision, moved confusedly backward and found herself impeded by some piece of furniture, Rosamond was suddenly aware of her presence, and with a spasmodic movement snatched away her hands and rose, looking at Dorothea who was necessarily arrested. Will Ladislaw, starting up, looked round also, and meeting Dorothea's eyes with a new lightning in them, seemed changing to marble: But she immediately turned them away from him to Rosamond and said in a firm voice—

"Excuse me, Mrs. Lydgate, the servant did not know that you were here. I called to deliver an important letter for Mr. Lydgate, which I wished to put into your own hands."

She laid down the letter on the small table which had checked her retreat, and then including Rosamond and Will in one distant glance and bow, she went quickly out of the room, meeting in the passage the surprised Martha, who said she was sorry the mistress was not at home, and then showed the strange lady out with an inward reflection that grand people were probably more impatient than others.

Dorothea walked across the street with her most elastic step and was quickly in her carriage again.

"Drive on to Freshitt Hall," she said to the coachman, and any one looking at her might have thought that though she was paler than usual she was never animated by a more self-possessed energy. And that was really her experience. It was as if she had drunk a great draught of scorn that stimulated her beyond the susceptibility to other feelings. She had seen something so far below her belief, that her emotions rushed back from it and made an excited throng without an object. She needed something active to turn her excitement out upon. She felt power to walk and work for a day, without meat or drink. And she would carry out the purpose with which she had started in the morning, of going to Freshitt and Tipton to tell Sir James and her uncle all that she wished them to know about Lydgate, whose married loneliness under his trial now presented itself to her with new significance, and made her more ardent in readiness to be his champion. She had never felt anything like this triumphant power of indignation in the struggle of her married life, in which there had always been a quickly subduing pang; and she took it as a sign of new strength.

"Dodo, how very bright your eyes are!" said Celia, when Sir James was gone out of the room. "And you don't see anything you look at, Arthur or anything. You are going to do something uncomfortable, I know. Is it all about Mr. Lydgate, or has something else happened?" Celia had been used to watch her sister with expectation.

"Yes, dear, a great many things have happened," said Dodo, in her full tones.

"I wonder what," said Celia, folding her arms cozily and leaning forward upon them.

"Oh, all the troubles of all people on the face of the earth," said Dorothea, lifting her arms to the back of her head.

"Dear me, Dodo, are you going to have a scheme for them?" said Celia, a little uneasy at this Hamlet-like raving.

But Sir James came in again, ready to accompany Dorothea to the Grange, and she finished her expedition well, not swerving in her resolution until she descended at her own door.



CHAPTER 78

*"Would it were yesterday and I 'i' the grave,
With her sweet faith above for monument"*

Rosamond and Will stood motionless—they did not know how long—he looking towards the spot where Dorothea had stood, and she looking towards him with doubt. It seemed an endless time to Rosamond, in whose inmost soul there was hardly so much annoyance as gratification from what had just happened. Shallow natures dream of an easy sway over the emotions of others, trusting implicitly in their own petty magic to turn the deepest streams, and confident, by pretty gestures and remarks, of making the thing that is not as though it were. She knew that Will had received a severe blow, but she had been little used to imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes; and she believed in her own power to soothe or subdue. Even Tertius, that most perverse of men, was always subdued in the long-run: events had been obstinate, but still Rosamond would have said now, as she did before her marriage, that she never gave up what she had set her mind on.

She put out her arm and laid the tips of her fingers on Will's coat-sleeve.

"Don't touch me!" he said, with an utterance like the cut of a lash, darting from her, and changing from pink to white and back again, as if his whole frame were tingling with the pain of the sting. He wheeled round to the other side of the room and stood opposite to her, with the tips of his fingers in his pockets and his head thrown back, looking fiercely not at Rosamond but at a point a few inches away from her.

She was keenly offended, but the Signs she made of this were such as only Lydgate was used to interpret. She became suddenly quiet and seated herself, untying her hanging bonnet and laying it down with her shawl. Her little hands which she folded before her were very cold.

It would have been safer for Will in the first instance to have taken up his hat and gone away; but he had felt no impulse to do this; on the contrary, he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond with his anger. It seemed as impossible to bear the fatality she had drawn down on him without venting his fury as it would be to a panther to bear the javelin-wound without springing and biting. And yet—how could he tell a woman that he was ready to curse her? He was fuming under a repressive law which he was forced to acknowledge: he was dangerously poised, and Rosamond's voice now brought the decisive vibration. In flute-like tones of sarcasm she said—

"You can easily go after Mrs. Casaubon and explain your preference."

"Go after her!" he burst out, with a sharp edge in his voice. "Do you think she would turn to look at me, or value any word I ever uttered to her again at more than a dirty feather?—Explain! How can a man explain at the expense of a woman?"

"You can tell her what you please," said Rosamond with more tremor.

"Do you suppose she would like me better for sacrificing you? She is not a woman to be flattered because I made myself despicable—to believe that I must be true to her because I was a dastard to you."

He began to move about with the restlessness of a wild animal that sees prey but cannot reach it. Presently he burst out again—

"I had no hope before—not much—of anything better to come. But I had one certainty—that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done about me, she believed in me.—That's gone! She'll never again think me anything but a paltry pretence—too nice to take heaven except upon flattering conditions, and yet selling myself for any devil's change by the sly. She'll think of me as an incarnate insult to her, from the first moment we—"

Will stopped as if he had found himself grasping something that must not be thrown and shattered. He found another vent for his rage by snatching up Rosamond's words again, as if they were reptiles to be throttled and flung off.

"Explain! Tell a man to explain how he dropped into hell! Explain my preference! I never had a *preference* for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living."

Rosamond, while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence. She had no sense of chill resolute repulsion, of reticent self-justification such as she had known under Lydgate's most stormy displeasure: all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before. What another nature felt in opposition to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness. When Will had ceased to speak she had become an image of sickened misery: her lips were pale, and her eyes had a tearless dismay in them. If it had been Tertius who stood opposite to her, that look of misery would have been a pang to him, and he would have sunk by her side to comfort her, with that strong-armed comfort which, she had often held very cheap.

Let it be forgiven to Will that he had no such movement of pity. He had felt no bond beforehand to this woman who had spoiled the ideal treasure of his life, and he held himself blameless. He knew that he was cruel, but he had no relenting in him yet.

After he had done speaking, he still moved about, half in absence of mind, and Rosamond sat perfectly still. At length Will, seeming to bethink himself, took up his hat, yet stood some moments irresolute. He had spoken to her in a way that made a phrase of common politeness difficult to utter; and yet, now that he had come to the point of going away from her without further speech, he shrank from it as a brutality; he felt checked and stultified in his anger. He walked towards the mantel-piece and leaned his arm on it, and waited in silence for—he hardly knew what. The vindictive fire was still burning in him, and he could utter no word of retractation; but it was nevertheless in his mind that having come back to this hearth where he had enjoyed a caressing friendship he had found calamity seated there—he had had suddenly revealed to him a trouble that lay outside the home as well as within it. And what seemed a foreboding was pressing upon him as with slow pincers:—that his life might come to be enslaved by this helpless woman who had thrown herself upon him in the dreary sadness of her heart. But he was in gloomy rebellion against the fact that his quick apprehensiveness foreshadowed to him, and when his eyes fell on Rosamond's blighted face it seemed to him that he was the more pitiable of the two; for pain must enter into its glorified life of memory before it can turn into compassion.

And so they remained for many minutes, opposite each other, far apart, in silence; Will's face still possessed by a mute rage, and Rosamond's by a mute misery. The poor thing had no force to fling out any passion in return; the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness.

Will wished that she would speak and bring some mitigating shadow across his own cruel speech, which seemed to stand staring at them both in mockery of any attempt at revived fellowship. But she said nothing, and at last with a desperate effort over himself, he asked, "Shall I come in and see Lydgate this evening?"

"If you like," Rosamond answered, just audibly.

And then Will went out of the house, Martha never knowing that he had been in.

After he was gone, Rosamond tried to get up from her seat, but fell back fainting. When she came to herself again, she felt too ill to make the exertion of rising to ring the bell, and she remained helpless until the girl, surprised at her long absence, thought for the first time of looking for her in all the down-stairs rooms. Rosamond said that she had felt suddenly sick and faint, and wanted to be helped up-stairs. When there she threw herself on the bed with her clothes on, and lay in apparent torpor, as she had done once before on a memorable day of grief.

Lydgate came home earlier than he had expected, about half-past five, and found her there. The perception that she was ill threw every other thought into the background. When he felt her pulse, her eyes rested on him with more persistence than they had done for a long while, as if she felt some content that he was there. He

perceived the difference in a moment, and seating himself by her put his arm gently under her, and bending over her said, "My poor Rosamond! has something agitated you?" Clinging to him she fell into hysterical sobbings and cries, and for the next hour he did nothing but soothe and tend her. He imagined that Dorothea had been to see her, and that all this effect on her nervous system, which evidently involved some new turning towards himself, was due to the excitement of the new impressions which that visit had raised.

CHAPTER 79

"Now, I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended their talk, they drew nigh to a very miry slough, that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond."—BUNYAN.

When Rosamond was quiet, and Lydgate had left her, hoping that she might soon sleep under the effect of an anodyne, he went into the drawing-room to fetch a book which he had left there, meaning to spend the evening in his work-room, and he saw on the table Dorothea's letter addressed to him. He had not ventured to ask Rosamond if Mrs. Casaubon had called, but the reading of this letter assured him of the fact, for Dorothea mentioned that it was to be carried by herself.

When Will Ladislaw came in a little later Lydgate met him with a surprise which made it clear that he had not been told of the earlier visit, and Will could not say, "Did not Mrs. Lydgate tell you that I came this morning?"

"Poor Rosamond is ill," Lydgate added immediately on his greeting.

"Not seriously, I hope," said Will.

"No—only a slight nervous shock—the effect of some agitation. She has been overwrought lately. The truth is, Ladislaw, I am an unlucky devil. We have gone through several rounds of purgatory since you left, and I have lately got on to a worse ledge of it than ever. I suppose you are only just come down—you look rather battered—you have not been long enough in the town to hear anything?"

"I travelled all night and got to the White Hart at eight o'clock this morning. I have been shutting myself up and resting," said Will, feeling himself a sneak, but seeing no alternative to this evasion.

And then he heard Lydgate's account of the troubles which Rosamond had already depicted to him in her way. She had not mentioned the fact of Will's name being connected with the public story—this detail not immediately affecting her—and he now heard it for the first time.

"I thought it better to tell you that your name is mixed up with the disclosures," said Lydgate, who could understand better than most men how Ladislaw might be stung by the revelation. "You will be sure to hear it as soon as you turn out into the town. I suppose it is true that Raffles spoke to you."

"Yes," said Will, sardonically. "I shall be fortunate if gossip does not make me the most disreputable person in the whole affair. I should think the latest version must

be, that I plotted with Raffles to murder Bulstrode, and ran away from Middlemarch for the purpose."

He was thinking "Here is a new ring in the sound of my name to recommend it in her hearing; however—what does it signify now?"

But he said nothing of Bulstrode's offer to him. Will was very open and careless about his personal affairs, but it was among the more exquisite touches in nature's modelling of him that he had a delicate generosity which warned him into reticence here. He shrank from saying that he had rejected Bulstrode's money, in the moment when he was learning that it was Lydgate's misfortune to have accepted it.

Lydgate too was reticent in the midst of his confidence. He made no allusion to Rosamond's feeling under their trouble, and of Dorothea he only said, "Mrs. Casaubon has been the one person to come forward and say that she had no belief in any of the suspicions against me." Observing a change in Will's face, he avoided any further mention of her, feeling himself too ignorant of their relation to each other not to fear that his words might have some hidden painful bearing on it. And it occurred to him that Dorothea was the real cause of the present visit to Middlemarch.

The two men were pitying each other, but it was only Will who guessed the extent of his companion's trouble. When Lydgate spoke with desperate resignation of going to settle in London, and said with a faint smile, "We shall have you again, old fellow." Will felt inexpressibly mournful, and said nothing. Rosamond had that morning entreated him to urge this step on Lydgate; and it seemed to him as if he were beholding in a magic panorama a future where he himself was sliding into that pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance, which is a commoner history of perdition than any single momentous bargain.

We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our own figures led with dull consent into insipid misdoing and shabby achievement. Poor Lydgate was inwardly groaning on that margin, and Will was arriving at it. It seemed to him this evening as if the cruelty of his outburst to Rosamond had made an obligation for him, and he dreaded the obligation: he dreaded Lydgate's unsuspecting good-will: he dreaded his own distaste for his spoiled life, which would leave him in motiveless levity.

CHAPTER 80

*"Stern lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
 The Godhead's most benignant grace;
 Nor know we anything so fair
 As is the smile upon thy face;
 Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
 And fragrance in thy footing treads;
 Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong;
 And the most ancient Heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong.*

—WORDSWORTH: *Ode to Duty.*

When Dorothea had seen Mr. Farebrother in the morning, she had promised to go and dine at the parsonage on her return from Freshitt. There was a frequent interchange of visits between her and the Farebrother family, which enabled her to say that she was not at all lonely at the Manor, and to resist for the present the severe prescription of a lady companion. When she reached home and remembered her engagement, she was glad of it; and finding that she had still an hour before she could dress for dinner, she walked straight to the schoolhouse and entered into a conversation with the master and mistress about the new bell, giving eager attention to their small details and repetitions, and getting up a dramatic sense that her life was very busy. She paused on her way back to talk to old Master Bunney who was putting in some garden-seeds, and discoursed wisely with that rural sage about the crops that would make the most return on a perch of ground, and the result of sixty years' experience as to soils—namely, that if your soil was pretty mellow it would do, but if there came wet, wet, wet to make it all of a mummy, why then—

Finding that the social spirit had beguiled her into being rather late, she dressed hastily and went over to the parsonage rather earlier than was necessary. That house was never dull, Mr. Farebrother, like another White of Selborne, having continually something new to tell of his inarticulate guests and proteges, whom he was teaching the boys not to torment; and he had just set up a pair of beautiful goats to be pets of the village in general, and to walk at large as sacred animals. The evening went by cheerfully till after tea, Dorothea talking more than usual and dilating with Mr. Farebrother on the possible histories of creatures that converse compendiously with their antennae, and for aught we know may hold reformed

parliaments; when suddenly some inarticulate little sounds were heard which called everybody's attention.

"Henrietta Noble," said Mrs. Farebrother, seeing her small sister moving about the furniture-legs distressfully, "what is the matter?"

"I have lost my tortoise-shell lozenge-box. I fear the kitten has rolled it away," said the tiny old lady, involuntarily continuing her beaver-like notes.

"Is it a great treasure, aunt?" said Mr. Farebrother, putting up his glasses and looking at the carpet.

"Mr. Ladislaw gave it me," said Miss Noble. "A German box—very pretty, but if it falls it always spins away as far as it can."

"Oh, if it is Ladislaw's present," said Mr. Farebrother, in a deep tone of comprehension, getting up and hunting. The box was found at last under a chiffonier, and Miss Noble grasped it with delight, saying, "it was under a fender the last time."

"That is an affair of the heart with my aunt," said Mr. Farebrother, smiling at Dorothea, as he reseated himself.

"If Henrietta Noble forms an attachment to any one, Mrs. Casaubon," said his mother, emphatically,— "she is like a dog—she would take their shoes for a pillow and sleep the better."

"Mr. Ladislaw's shoes, I would," said Henrietta Noble.

Dorothea made an attempt at smiling in return. She was surprised and annoyed to find that her heart was palpitating violently, and that it was quite useless to try after a recovery of her former animation. Alarmed at herself—fearing some further betrayal of a change so marked in its occasion, she rose and said in a low voice with undisguised anxiety, "I must go; I have overtired myself."

Mr. Farebrother, quick in perception, rose and said, "It is true; you must have half-exhausted yourself in talking about Lydgate. That sort of work tells upon one after the excitement is over."

He gave her his arm back to the Manor, but Dorothea did not attempt to speak, even when he said good-night.

The limit of resistance was reached, and she had sunk back helpless within the clutch of inescapable anguish. Dismissing Tantripp with a few faint words, she locked her door, and turning away from it towards the vacant room she pressed her hands hard on the top of her head, and moaned out—

"Oh, I did love him!"

Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

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