

MACMILLAN READERS

UPPER LEVEL

GEORGE ELIOT

Middlemarch

Retold by Margaret Turner

 **MACMILLAN**

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Two Sisters

‘Dorothea, dear, why don’t you stop working for a minute?’ Celia asked her elder sister when they were sitting together one afternoon. ‘You know that your eyes are not strong and you have been drawing those plans for over an hour.’

‘But they are for Sir James. I must finish them,’ Dorothea replied. ‘I am so glad that he asked me to make the plans for the new cottages¹¹ in Freshitt village. I want to show him how well I can do it.’

Celia sighed. Then she said, ‘There is something that I’d like to do, if you’re not too busy.’

‘What is it, dear?’ Dorothea asked. ‘Is anything wrong?’

‘No, of course not. But I thought we could look at mamma’s jewels¹²,’ Celia replied, ‘You have the key to her jewellery box in your desk. Don’t you remember? Our uncle gave us the jewels exactly six months ago and we still haven’t looked at them.’

Dorothea looked at her sister in surprise. ‘Why do you want to see them?’ she asked. ‘We don’t need to see mamma’s jewels to be reminded of her, Celia.’

Celia blushed¹³ and she turned her pretty face away. ‘I was wondering if we could wear them sometimes,’ she said quietly, ‘to show that we haven’t forgotten mamma. And... our uncle is having guests for dinner tonight, as you know. One of them is Sir James Chettam. We should try to look our best.’

Dorothea opened her beautiful eyes very wide. ‘I see. I didn’t know that you wanted to wear the jewels,’ she said with a smile.

She put down her pencil and stood up, then walked across the room to her desk and took out the key. She picked up the beautiful wooden jewellery box and carried it carefully across the room.

‘There you are, Celia,’ Dorothea said, putting the big box on the table and unlocking it.

Soon the table was covered with sparkling jewels. Dorothea picked up a beautiful gold necklace set with purple amethysts.

‘This will suit you, dear,’ she said to her sister. ‘Let me put it on for you.’

Celia looked at herself in the mirror. The purple jewels shone with a clear light against the gold.

‘Yes, I shall wear this necklace tonight,’ Celia said. ‘But what about you, Dorothea? You must wear something pretty too. Look, these pearls do not shine so much, but they are very lovely.’

Dorothea shook her head and opened a smaller box. Inside, was a ring set with emeralds and diamonds and there was a bracelet with the same stones too.

At that moment, the sun came out and shone on the bright jewels.

‘They are like green fire!’ Dorothea exclaimed. She put on the ring and then took it off quickly.

‘I shall keep this ring and the bracelet, but I shall not wear them,’ she said.

‘But how can I wear jewels when you don’t?’ Celia cried.

‘Because we are very different, my dear,’ Dorothea said kindly. ‘I can’t help thinking of the poor people who had to dig these jewels out of the ground. And I like to dress plainly. While women think only of their beauty, no one will ever praise¹⁴ their minds.’

The two sisters had been orphans¹⁵ for more than seven years. Their uncle, Mr Brooke, who had never married, was their guardian¹⁶. He had sent his nieces to live with good families in England and Switzerland. There they had been taught by governesses¹⁷ until their uncle decided that they were old enough to live with him at Tipton Manor.

Mr Brooke was very fond of Dorothea and Celia and although he knew very little about women, he was happy to look after his nieces.

Both girls had inherited¹⁸ a little money from their parents. As Dorothea was the elder sister, any future son she might have would inherit Mr Brooke's wealth too. Of course, the Brooke sisters were expected to make good marriages to rich men who owned land and had a big house and many servants. The girls' lives would be spent looking after their husbands and, later on, their children.

Neither of the girls was well-educated. Very few women received a good education in 1829. Yet everyone agreed that Dorothea was clever. She was beautiful too, with long dark hair and large dark eyes. She always dressed very plainly and she wore her hair in an old-fashioned way, but somehow, that only made her look even more lovely.

Dorothea had very strong opinions about many things and she sometimes had strange ideas too. She wanted to use her mind and think for herself, but she also tried to learn as much as she could from other people. She wanted to use her money to make the little world of Middlemarch a better place.

Celia Brooke was very pretty, with light brown hair and brown eyes. She enjoyed wearing fashionable clothes and curling her hair. She was not as serious as her elder sister. But everyone said that Celia was more sensible than the beautiful Dorothea.

Mr Brooke had invited two guests to dinner that evening – the Reverend¹⁹ Mr Casaubon of Lowick Manor, who was a scholar²⁰, and Sir James Chettam, who lived at Freshitt Hall.

Celia wore the amethysts with her new white dress and she looked very pretty. Dorothea did not wear any jewellery and her dress, as usual, was very plain. But this made her look more beautiful than ever.

Sir James was a handsome young man, who was often a guest at Tipton Grange. Like Mr Brooke, Sir James owned a large estate and a fine house. And, like Mr Brooke, Sir James was a very wealthy man. He had decided that he would ask Dorothea to

marry him and he was sure that she would say yes. Mr Brooke was fond of his young neighbour and he hoped that Dorothea would agree.

However, Dorothea was not at all interested in Sir James. She believed that he came to Tipton to see her sister, Celia. Dorothea did think of marriage, of course, but not to a young man. Her idea of a husband was an intelligent, older man who would guide her and teach her, like a father.

Dorothea had never met Mr Casaubon before, but she had immediately become interested in his serious conversation. By the side of Sir James, Mr Casaubon looked old and pale. His hair was partly grey and his eyes had deep shadows under them. But Dorothea, listening to the older man's slow careful voice, took no notice of these things.

In answer to a question from Mr Brooke, Mr Casaubon was speaking about his own work.

'I am happy to tell you about it,' he said with a smile. 'I have been studying the subject for many years. In preparation, I have read all the Latin and Greek authors and others too, of course. My aim is to put together all the greatest thoughts on the myths²¹ and world religions. I plan to show that they are all part of the same knowledge – of one great plan. My book will be called "The Key to All Mythologies".'

Then Mr Casaubon sighed. 'I still have a great deal of information to put in order before I start writing the book,' he added. 'My health is not always good and I sometimes think that I will die before my work is finished.'

'That would be terrible!' Dorothea said quickly. 'Perhaps you need a secretary to help you arrange your notes. I try to put my uncle's papers in order sometimes, but he won't let me.'

'Well, a woman's mind, you know,' Mr Brooke said with a laugh. 'Women are not trained to do these things, are they, Mr Casaubon?'

When the two girls were alone, after dinner, Celia said,