Chapter VII - Enter The Aunts And Uncles

The Dodsons were certainly a handsome family, and Mrs Glegg was not the least handsome of the sisters. As she sat in Mrs Tulliver's arm-chair, no impartial observer could have denied that for a woman of fifty she had a very comely face and figure, though Tom and Maggie considered their aunt Glegg as the type of ugliness. It is true she despised the advantages of costume, for though, as she often observed, no woman had better clothes, it was not her way to wear her new things out before her old ones. Other women, if they liked, might have their best thread-lace in every wash; but when Mrs Glegg died, it would be found that she had better lace laid by in the right-hand drawer of her wardrobe in the Spotted Chamber than ever Mrs Wooll of St. Ogg's had bought in her life, although Mrs Wooll wore her lace before it was paid for. So of her curled fronts: Mrs Glegg had doubtless the glossiest and crispest brown curls in her drawers, as well as curls in various degrees of fuzzy laxness; but to look out on the week-day world from under a crisp and glossy front would be to introduce a most dreamlike and unpleasant confusion between the sacred and the secular. Occasionally, indeed, Mrs Glegg wore one of her third-best fronts on a week-day visit, but not at a sister's house; especially not at Mrs Tulliver's, who, since her marriage, had hurt her sister's feelings greatly by wearing her own hair, though, as Mrs Glegg observed to Mrs Deane, a mother of a family, like Bessy, with a husband always going to law, might have been expected to know better. But Bessy was always weak!

So if Mrs Glegg's front to-day was more fuzzy and lax than usual, she had a design under it: she intended the most pointed and cutting allusion to Mrs Tulliver's bunches of blond curls, separated from each other by a due wave of smoothness on each side of the parting. Mrs Tulliver had shed tears several times at sister Glegg's unkindness on the subject of these unmatronly curls, but the consciousness of looking the handsomer for them naturally administered support. Mrs Glegg chose to wear her bonnet in the house to-day, - united and tilted slightly, of course - a frequent practice of hers when she was on a visit, and happened to be in a severe humor: she didn't know what draughts there might be in strange houses. For the same reason she wore a small sable tippet, which reached just to her shoulders, and was very far from meeting across her well-formed chest, while her long neck was protected by a *chevaux-de-frise* of miscellaneous frilling. One would need to be learned in the fashions of those times to know how far in the rear of them Mrs Glegg's slate-colored silk gown must have been; but from certain constellations of small yellow spots upon it, and a mouldy odor about it suggestive of a damp clothes-chest, it was probable that it belonged to a stratum of garments just old enough to have come recently into wear.

Mrs Glegg held her large gold watch in her hand with the many-doubled chain round her fingers, and observed to Mrs Tulliver, who had just returned from a visit to the kitchen, that whatever it might be by other people's clocks and watches, it was gone half-past twelve by hers.

'I don't know what ails sister Pullet,' she continued. 'It used to be the way in our family for one to be as early as another, - I'm sure it was so in my poor father's time, - and not for one sister to sit half an hour before the others came. But if the ways o' the family are altered, it sha'n't be *my* fault; *I'll* never be the one to come into a house when all the rest are going away. I wonder *at* sister Deane, - she used to be more like me. But if you'll take my advice, Bessy, you'll put the dinner forrard a bit, sooner than put it back, because folks are late as ought to ha' known better.'

'Oh dear, there's no fear but what they'll be all here in time, sister,' said Mrs Tulliver, in her mild-peevish tone. 'The dinner won't be ready till half-past one. But if it's long for you to wait, let me fetch you a cheesecake and a glass o' wine.'

'Well, Bessy!' said Mrs Glegg, with a bitter smile and a scarcely perceptible toss of her head, 'I should ha' thought you'd known your own sister better. I never *did* eat between meals, and I'm not going to begin. Not but what I hate that nonsense of having your dinner at half-past one, when you might have it at one. You was never brought up in that way, Bessy.'

'Why, Jane, what can I do? Mr Tulliver doesn't like his dinner before two o'clock, but I put it half an hour earlier because o' you.'

'Yes, yes, I know how it is with husbands, - they're for putting everything off; they'll put the dinner off till after tea, if they've got wives as are weak enough to give in to such work; but it's a pity for you, Bessy, as you haven't got more strength o' mind. It'll be well if your children don't suffer for it. And I hope you've not gone and got a great dinner for us, - going to expense for your sisters, as 'ud sooner eat a crust o' dry bread nor help to ruin you with extravagance. I wonder you don't take pattern by your sister Deane; she's far more sensible. And here you've got two children to provide for, and your husband's spent your fortin i' going to law, and's likely to spend his own too. A boiled joint, as you could make broth of for the kitchen,' Mrs Glegg added, in a tone of emphatic protest, 'and a plain pudding, with a spoonful o' sugar, and no spice, 'ud be far more becoming.'

With sister Glegg in this humor, there was a cheerful prospect for the day. Mrs Tulliver never went the length of quarrelling with her, any more than a water-fowl that puts out its leg in a deprecating manner

can be said to quarrel with a boy who throws stones. But this point of the dinner was a tender one, and not at all new, so that Mrs Tulliver could make the same answer she had often made before.

'Mr Tulliver says he always *will* have a good dinner for his friends while he can pay for it,' she said; 'and he's a right to do as he likes in his own house, sister.'

'Well, Bessy, *I* can't leave your children enough out o' my savings to keep 'em from ruin. And you mustn't look to having any o' Mr Glegg's money, for it's well if I don't go first, - he comes of a long-lived family; and if he was to die and leave me well for my life, he'd tie all the money up to go back to his own kin.'

The sound of wheels while Mrs Glegg was speaking was an interruption highly welcome to Mrs Tulliver, who hastened out to receive sister Pullet; it must be sister Pullet, because the sound was that of a four-wheel.

Mrs Glegg tossed her head and looked rather sour about the mouth at the thought of the 'four-wheel.' She had a strong opinion on that subject.

Sister Pullet was in tears when the one-horse chaise stopped before Mrs Tulliver's door, and it was apparently requisite that she should shed a few more before getting out; for though her husband and Mrs Tulliver stood ready to support her, she sat still and shook her head sadly, as she looked through her tears at the vague distance.

'Why, whativer is the matter, sister?' said Mrs Tulliver. She was not an imaginative woman, but it occurred to her that the large toilet-glass in sister Pullet's best bedroom was possibly broken for the second time.

There was no reply but a further shake of the head, as Mrs Pullet slowly rose and got down from the chaise, not without casting a glance at Mr Pullet to see that he was guarding her handsome silk dress from injury. Mr Pullet was a small man, with a high nose, small twinkling eyes, and thin lips, in a fresh-looking suit of black and a white cravat, that seemed to have been tied very tight on some higher principle than that of mere personal ease. He bore about the same relation to his tall, good-looking wife, with her balloon sleeves, abundant mantle, and a large befeathered and beribboned bonnet, as a small fishing-smack bears to a brig with all its sails spread.

It is a pathetic sight and a striking example of the complexity introduced into the emotions by a high state of civilization, the sight of a fashionably dressed female in grief. From the sorrow of a Hottentot to that of a woman in large buckram sleeves, with several bracelets on

each arm, an architectural bonnet, and delicate ribbon strings, what a long series of gradations! In the enlightened child of civilization the abandonment characteristic of grief is checked and varied in the subtlest manner, so as to present an interesting problem to the analytic mind. If, with a crushed heart and eyes half blinded by the mist of tears, she were to walk with a too-devious step through a door-place, she might crush her buckram sleeves too, and the deep consciousness of this possibility produces a composition of forces by which she takes a line that just clears the door-post. Perceiving that the tears are hurrying fast, she unpins her strings and throws them languidly backward, a touching gesture, indicative, even in the deepest gloom, of the hope in future dry moments when cap-strings will once more have a charm. As the tears subside a little, and with her head leaning backward at the angle that will not injure her bonnet, she endures that terrible moment when grief, which has made all things else a weariness, has itself become weary; she looks down pensively at her bracelets, and adjusts their clasps with that pretty studied fortuity which would be gratifying to her mind if it were once more in a calm and healthy state.

Mrs Pullet brushed each door-post with great nicety, about the latitude of her shoulders (at that period a woman was truly ridiculous to an instructed eye if she did not measure a yard and a half across the shoulders), and having done that sent the muscles of her face in quest of fresh tears as she advanced into the parlor where Mrs Glegg was seated.

'Well, sister, you're late; what's the matter?' said Mrs Glegg, rather sharply, as they shook hands.

Mrs Pullet sat down, lifting up her mantle carefully behind, before she answered, -

'She's gone,' unconsciously using an impressive figure of rhetoric.

'It isn't the glass this time, then,' thought Mrs Tulliver.

'Died the day before yesterday,' continued Mrs Pullet; 'an' her legs was as thick as my body," she added, with deep sadness, after a pause. 'They'd tapped her no end o' times, and the water - they say you might ha' swum in it, if you'd liked.'

'Well, Sophy, it's a mercy she's gone, then, whoever she may be,' said Mrs Glegg, with the promptitude and emphasis of a mind naturally clear and decided; 'but I can't think who you're talking of, for my part.'

‘But *I* know,’ said Mrs Pullet, sighing and shaking her head; ‘and there isn't another such a dropsy in the parish. *I* know as it's old Mrs Sutton o' the Twentylands.’

‘Well, she's no kin o' yours, nor much acquaintance as I've ever heared of,’ said Mrs Glegg, who always cried just as much as was proper when anything happened to her own ‘kin,’ but not on other occasions.

‘She's so much acquaintance as I've seen her legs when they was like bladders. And an old lady as had doubled her money over and over again, and kept it all in her own management to the last, and had her pocket with her keys in under her pillow constant. There isn't many old *par*ish'ners like her, I doubt.’

‘And they say she'd took as much physic as 'ud fill a wagon,’ observed Mr Pullet.

‘Ah!’ sighed Mrs Pullet, ‘she'd another complaint ever so many years before she had the dropsy, and the doctors couldn't make out what it was. And she said to me, when I went to see her last Christmas, she said, 'Mrs Pullet, if ever you have the dropsy, you'll think o' me.' She *did* say so,’ added Mrs Pullet, beginning to cry bitterly again; ‘those were her very words. And she's to be buried o' Saturday, and Pullet's bid to the funeral.’

‘Sophy,’ said Mrs Glegg, unable any longer to contain her spirit of rational remonstrance, - ’Sophy, I wonder *at* you, fretting and injuring your health about people as don't belong to you. Your poor father never did so, nor your aunt Frances neither, nor any o' the family as I ever heard of. You couldn't fret no more than this, if we'd heared as our cousin Abbott had died sudden without making his will.’

Mrs Pullet was silent, having to finish her crying, and rather flattered than indignant at being upbraided for crying too much. It was not everybody who could afford to cry so much about their neighbors who had left them nothing; but Mrs Pullet had married a gentleman farmer, and had leisure and money to carry her crying and everything else to the highest pitch of respectability.

‘Mrs Sutton didn't die without making her will, though,’ said Mr Pullet, with a confused sense that he was saying something to sanction his wife's tears; ‘ours is a rich parish, but they say there's nobody else to leave as many thousands behind 'em as Mrs Sutton. And she's left no leggicies to speak on, - left it all in a lump to her husband's nevvy.’

‘There wasn't much good i' being so rich, then,’ said Mrs Glegg, ‘if she'd got none but husband's kin to leave it to. It's poor work when

that's all you've got to pinch yourself for. Not as I'm one o' those as 'ud like to die without leaving more money out at interest than other folks had reckoned; but it's a poor tale when it must go out o' your own family.'

'I'm sure, sister,' said Mrs Pullet, who had recovered sufficiently to take off her veil and fold it carefully, 'it's a nice sort o' man as Mrs Sutton has left her money to, for he's troubled with the asthmy, and goes to bed every night at eight o'clock. He told me about it himself - as free as could be - one Sunday when he came to our church. He wears a hareskin on his chest, and has a trembling in his talk, - quite a gentleman sort o' man. I told him there wasn't many months in the year as I wasn't under the doctor's hands. And he said, 'Mrs Pullet, I can feel for you.' That was what he said, - the very words. Ah!' sighed Mrs Pullet, shaking her head at the idea that there were but few who could enter fully into her experiences in pink mixture and white mixture, strong stuff in small bottles, and weak stuff in large bottles, damp boluses at a shilling, and draughts at eighteenpence. 'Sister, I may as well go and take my bonnet off now. Did you see as the cap-box was put out?' she added, turning to her husband.

Mr Pullet, by an unaccountable lapse of memory, had forgotten it, and hastened out, with a stricken conscience, to remedy the omission.

'They'll bring it upstairs, sister,' said Mrs Tulliver, wishing to go at once, lest Mrs Glegg should begin to explain her feelings about Sophy's being the first Dodson who ever ruined her constitution with doctor's stuff.

Mrs Tulliver was fond of going upstairs with her sister Pullet, and looking thoroughly at her cap before she put it on her head, and discussing millinery in general. This was part of Bessy's weakness that stirred Mrs Glegg's sisterly compassion: Bessy went far too well dressed, considering; and she was too proud to dress her child in the good clothing her sister Glegg gave her from the primeval strata of her wardrobe; it was a sin and a shame to buy anything to dress that child, if it wasn't a pair of shoes. In this particular, however, Mrs Glegg did her sister Bessy some injustice, for Mrs Tulliver had really made great efforts to induce Maggie to wear a leghorn bonnet and a dyed silk frock made out of her aunt Glegg's, but the results had been such that Mrs Tulliver was obliged to bury them in her maternal bosom; for Maggie, declaring that the frock smelt of nasty dye, had taken an opportunity of basting it together with the roast beef the first Sunday she wore it, and finding this scheme answer, she had subsequently pumped on the bonnet with its green ribbons, so as to give it a general resemblance to a sage cheese garnished with withered lettuces. I must urge in excuse for Maggie, that Tom had laughed at her in the bonnet, and said she looked like an old Judy. Aunt Pullet,

too, made presents of clothes, but these were always pretty enough to please Maggie as well as her mother. Of all her sisters, Mrs Tulliver certainly preferred her sister Pullet, not without a return of preference; but Mrs Pullet was sorry Bessy had those naughty, awkward children; she would do the best she could by them, but it was a pity they weren't as good and as pretty as sister Deane's child. Maggie and Tom, on their part, thought their aunt Pullet tolerable, chiefly because she was not their aunt Glegg. Tom always declined to go more than once during his holidays to see either of them. Both his uncles tipped him that once, of course; but at his aunt Pullet's there were a great many toads to pelt in the cellar-area, so that he preferred the visit to her. Maggie shuddered at the toads, and dreamed of them horribly, but she liked her uncle Pullet's musical snuff-box. Still, it was agreed by the sisters, in Mrs Tulliver's absence, that the Tulliver blood did not mix well with the Dodson blood; that, in fact, poor Bessy's children were Tullivers, and that Tom, notwithstanding he had the Dodson complexion, was likely to be as ‘contrairy’ as his father. As for Maggie, she was the picture of her aunt Moss, Mr Tulliver's sister, - a large-boned woman, who had married as poorly as could be; had no china, and had a husband who had much ado to pay his rent. But when Mrs Pullet was alone with Mrs Tulliver upstairs, the remarks were naturally to the disadvantage of Mrs Glegg, and they agreed, in confidence, that there was no knowing what sort of fright sister Jane would come out next. But their *tete-a-tete* was curtailed by the appearance of Mrs Deane with little Lucy; and Mrs Tulliver had to look on with a silent pang while Lucy's blond curls were adjusted. It was quite unaccountable that Mrs Deane, the thinnest and sallowest of all the Miss Dodsons, should have had this child, who might have been taken for Mrs Tulliver's any day. And Maggie always looked twice as dark as usual when she was by the side of Lucy.

She did to-day, when she and Tom came in from the garden with their father and their uncle Glegg. Maggie had thrown her bonnet off very carelessly, and coming in with her hair rough as well as out of curl, rushed at once to Lucy, who was standing by her mother's knee. Certainly the contrast between the cousins was conspicuous, and to superficial eyes was very much to the disadvantage of Maggie though a connoisseur might have seen ‘points’ in her which had a higher promise for maturity than Lucy's natty completeness. It was like the contrast between a rough, dark, overgrown puppy and a white kitten. Lucy put up the neatest little rosebud mouth to be kissed; everything about her was neat, - her little round neck, with the row of coral beads; her little straight nose, not at all snubby; her little clear eyebrows, rather darker than her curls, to match hazel eyes, which looked up with shy pleasure at Maggie, taller by the head, though scarcely a year older. Maggie always looked at Lucy with delight.

She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy, with a little crown on her head, and a little sceptre in her hand - only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy's form.

'Oh, Lucy,' she burst out, after kissing her, 'you'll stay with Tom and me, won't you? Oh, kiss her, Tom.'

Tom, too, had come up to Lucy, but he was not going to kiss her - no; he came up to her with Maggie, because it seemed easier, on the whole, than saying, 'How do you do?' to all those aunts and uncles. He stood looking at nothing in particular, with the blushing, awkward air and semi-smile which are common to shy boys when in company, - very much as if they had come into the world by mistake, and found it in a degree of undress that was quite embarrassing.

'Heyday!' said aunt Glegg, with loud emphasis. 'Do little boys and gells come into a room without taking notice of their uncles and aunts? That wasn't the way when *I* was a little gell.'

'Go and speak to your aunts and uncles, my dears,' said Mrs Tulliver, looking anxious and melancholy. She wanted to whisper to Maggie a command to go and have her hair brushed.

'Well, and how do you do? And I hope you're good children, are you?' said Aunt Glegg, in the same loud, emphatic way, as she took their hands, hurting them with her large rings, and kissing their cheeks much against their desire. 'Look up, Tom, look up. Boys as go to boarding-schools should hold their heads up. Look at me now.' Tom declined that pleasure apparently, for he tried to draw his hand away. 'Put your hair behind your ears, Maggie, and keep your frock on your shoulder.'

Aunt Glegg always spoke to them in this loud, emphatic way, as if she considered them deaf, or perhaps rather idiotic; it was a means, she thought, of making them feel that they were accountable creatures, and might be a salutary check on naughty tendencies. Bessy's children were so spoiled - they'd need have somebody to make them feel their duty.

'Well, my dears,' said aunt Pullet, in a compassionate voice, 'you grow wonderful fast. I doubt they'll outgrow their strength,' she added, looking over their heads, with a melancholy expression, at their mother. 'I think the gell has too much hair. I'd have it thinned and cut shorter, sister, if I was you; it isn't good for her health. It's that as makes her skin so brown, I shouldn't wonder. Don't you think so, sister Deane?'

‘I can't say, I'm sure, sister,’ said Mrs Deane, shutting her lips close again, and looking at Maggie with a critical eye.

‘No, no,’ said Mr Tulliver, ‘the child's healthy enough; there's nothing ails her. There's red wheat as well as white, for that matter, and some like the dark grain best. But it 'ud be as well if Bessy 'ud have the child's hair cut, so as it 'ud lie smooth.’

A dreadful resolve was gathering in Maggie's breast, but it was arrested by the desire to know from her aunt Deane whether she would leave Lucy behind. Aunt Deane would hardly ever let Lucy come to see them. After various reasons for refusal, Mrs Deane appealed to Lucy herself.

‘You wouldn't like to stay behind without mother, should you, Lucy?’

‘Yes, please, mother,’ said Lucy, timidly, blushing very pink all over her little neck.

‘Well done, Lucy! Let her stay, Mrs Deane, let her stay,’ said Mr Deane, a large but alert-looking man, with a type of *physique* to be seen in all ranks of English society, - bald crown, red whiskers, full forehead, and general solidity without heaviness. You may see noblemen like Mr Deane, and you may see grocers or day-laborers like him; but the keenness of his brown eyes was less common than his contour.

He held a silver snuff-box very tightly in his hand, and now and then exchanged a pinch with Mr Tulliver, whose box was only silver-mounted, so that it was naturally a joke between them that Mr Tulliver wanted to exchange snuff-boxes also. Mr Deane's box had been given him by the superior partners in the firm to which he belonged, at the same time that they gave him a share in the business, in acknowledgment of his valuable services as manager. No man was thought more highly of in St. Ogg's than Mr Deane; and some persons were even of opinion that Miss Susan Dodson, who was once held to have made the worst match of all the Dodson sisters, might one day ride in a better carriage, and live in a better house, even than her sister Pullet. There was no knowing where a man would stop, who had got his foot into a great mill-owning, shipowning business like that of Guest & Co., with a banking concern attached. And Mrs Deane, as her intimate female friends observed, was proud and ‘having’ enough; *she* wouldn't let her husband stand still in the world for want of spurring.

‘Maggie,’ said Mrs Tulliver, beckoning Maggie to her, and whispering in her ear, as soon as this point of Lucy's staying was settled, ‘go and

get your hair brushed, do, for shame. I told you not to come in without going to Martha first, you know I did.'

'Tom come out with me,' whispered Maggie, pulling his sleeve as she passed him; and Tom followed willingly enough.

'Come upstairs with me, Tom,' she whispered, when they were outside the door. 'There's something I want to do before dinner.'

'There's no time to play at anything before dinner,' said Tom, whose imagination was impatient of any intermediate prospect.

'Oh yes, there is time for this; *do* come, Tom.'

Tom followed Maggie upstairs into her mother's room, and saw her go at once to a drawer, from which she took out a large pair of scissors.

'What are they for, Maggie?' said Tom, feeling his curiosity awakened.

Maggie answered by seizing her front locks and cutting them straight across the middle of her forehead.

'Oh, my buttons! Maggie, you'll catch it!' exclaimed Tom; 'you'd better not cut any more off.'

Snip! went the great scissors again while Tom was speaking, and he couldn't help feeling it was rather good fun; Maggie would look so queer.

'Here, Tom, cut it behind for me,' said Maggie, excited by her own daring, and anxious to finish the deed.

'You'll catch it, you know,' said Tom, nodding his head in an admonitory manner, and hesitating a little as he took the scissors.

'Never mind, make haste!' said Maggie, giving a little stamp with her foot. Her cheeks were quite flushed.

The black locks were so thick, nothing could be more tempting to a lad who had already tasted the forbidden pleasure of cutting the pony's mane. I speak to those who know the satisfaction of making a pair of scissors meet through a duly resisting mass of hair. One delicious grinding snip, and then another and another, and the hinder-locks fell heavily on the floor, and Maggie stood cropped in a jagged, uneven manner, but with a sense of clearness and freedom, as if she had emerged from a wood into the open plain.

‘Oh, Maggie,’ said Tom, jumping round her, and slapping his knees as he laughed, ‘Oh, my buttons! what a queer thing you look! Look at yourself in the glass; you look like the idiot we throw out nutshells to at school.’

Maggie felt an unexpected pang. She had thought beforehand chiefly at her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action; she didn't want her hair to look pretty, - that was out of the question, - she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl, and not to find fault with her. But now, when Tom began to laugh at her, and say she was like an idiot, the affair had quite a new aspect. She looked in the glass, and still Tom laughed and clapped his hands, and Maggie's cheeks began to pale, and her lips to tremble a little.

‘Oh, Maggie, you'll have to go down to dinner directly,’ said Tom. ‘Oh, my!’

‘Don't laugh at me, Tom,’ said Maggie, in a passionate tone, with an outburst of angry tears, stamping, and giving him a push.

‘Now, then, spitfire!’ said Tom. ‘What did you cut it off for, then? I shall go down: I can smell the dinner going in.’

He hurried downstairs and left poor Maggie to that bitter sense of the irrevocable which was almost an every-day experience of her small soul. She could see clearly enough, now the thing was done, that it was very foolish, and that she should have to hear and think more about her hair than ever; for Maggie rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse, and then saw not only their consequences, but what would have happened if they had not been done, with all the detail and exaggerated circumstance of an active imagination. Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened, that though he was much more wilful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty. But if Tom did make a mistake of that sort, he espoused it, and stood by it: he ‘didn't mind.’ If he broke the lash of his father's gigwhip by lashing the gate, he couldn't help it, - the whip shouldn't have got caught in the hinge. If Tom Tulliver whipped a gate, he was convinced, not that the whipping of gates by all boys was a justifiable act, but that he, Tom Tulliver, was justifiable in whipping that particular gate, and he wasn't going to be sorry. But Maggie, as she stood crying before the glass, felt it impossible that she should go down to dinner and endure the severe eyes and severe words of her aunts, while Tom and Lucy, and Martha, who waited at table, and perhaps her father and her uncles, would laugh at her; for if Tom had

laughed at her, of course every one else would; and if she had only let her hair alone, she could have sat with Tom and Lucy, and had the apricot pudding and the custard! What could she do but sob? She sat as helpless and despairing among her black locks as Ajax among the slaughtered sheep. Very trivial, perhaps, this anguish seems to weather-worn mortals who have to think of Christmas bills, dead loves, and broken friendships; but it was not less bitter to Maggie - perhaps it was even more bitter - than what we are fond of calling antithetically the real troubles of mature life. 'Ah, my child, you will have real troubles to fret about by and by,' is the consolation we have almost all of us had administered to us in our childhood, and have repeated to other children since we have been grown up. We have all of us sobbed so piteously, standing with tiny bare legs above our little socks, when we lost sight of our mother or nurse in some strange place; but we can no longer recall the poignancy of that moment and weep over it, as we do over the remembered sufferings of five or ten years ago. Every one of those keen moments has left its trace, and lives in us still, but such traces have blent themselves irrecoverably with the firmer texture of our youth and manhood; and so it comes that we can look on at the troubles of our children with a smiling disbelief in the reality of their pain. Is there any one who can recover the experience of his childhood, not merely with a memory *of* what he did and what happened to him, of what he liked and disliked when he was in frock and trousers, but with an intimate penetration, a revived consciousness of what he felt then, when it was so long from one Midsummer to another; what he felt when his school fellows shut him out of their game because he would pitch the ball wrong out of mere wilfulness; or on a rainy day in the holidays, when he didn't know how to amuse himself, and fell from idleness into mischief, from mischief into defiance, and from defiance into sulkiness; or when his mother absolutely refused to let him have a tailed coat that 'half,' although every other boy of his age had gone into tails already? Surely if we could recall that early bitterness, and the dim guesses, the strangely perspectiveless conception of life, that gave the bitterness its intensity, we should not pooh-pooh the griefs of our children.

'Miss Maggie, you're to come down this minute,' said Kezia, entering the room hurriedly. 'Lawks! what have you been a-doing? I never *see* such a fright!'

'Don't, Kezia,' said Maggie, angrily. 'Go away!'

'But I tell you you're to come down, Miss, this minute; your mother says so,' said Kezia, going up to Maggie and taking her by the hand to raise her from the floor.

'Get away, Kezia; I don't want any dinner,' said Maggie, resisting Kezia's arm. 'I sha'n't come.'

‘Oh, well, I can't stay. I've got to wait at dinner,’ said Kezia, going out again.

‘Maggie, you little silly,’ said Tom, peeping into the room ten minutes after, ‘why don't you come and have your dinner? There's lots o' goodies, and mother says you're to come. What are you crying for, you little spooney?’

Oh, it was dreadful! Tom was so hard and unconcerned; if *he* had been crying on the floor, Maggie would have cried too. And there was the dinner, so nice; and she was *so* hungry. It was very bitter.

But Tom was not altogether hard. He was not inclined to cry, and did not feel that Maggie's grief spoiled his prospect of the sweets; but he went and put his head near her, and said in a lower, comforting tone, -

‘Won't you come, then, Magsie? Shall I bring you a bit o' pudding when I've had mine, and a custard and things?’

‘Ye-e-es,’ said Maggie, beginning to feel life a little more tolerable.

‘Very well,’ said Tom, going away. But he turned again at the door and said, ‘But you'd better come, you know. There's the dessert, - nuts, you know, and cowslip wine.’

Maggie's tears had ceased, and she looked reflective as Tom left her. His good nature had taken off the keenest edge of her suffering, and nuts with cowslip wine began to assert their legitimate influence.

Slowly she rose from amongst her scattered locks, and slowly she made her way downstairs. Then she stood leaning with one shoulder against the frame of the dining-parlour door, peeping in when it was ajar. She saw Tom and Lucy with an empty chair between them, and there were the custards on a side-table; it was too much. She slipped in and went toward the empty chair. But she had no sooner sat down than she repented and wished herself back again.

Mrs Tulliver gave a little scream as she saw her, and felt such a ‘turn’ that she dropped the large gravy-spoon into the dish, with the most serious results to the table-cloth. For Kezia had not betrayed the reason of Maggie's refusal to come down, not liking to give her mistress a shock in the moment of carving, and Mrs Tulliver thought there was nothing worse in question than a fit of perverseness, which was inflicting its own punishment by depriving Maggie of half her dinner.

Mrs Tulliver's scream made all eyes turn towards the same point as her own, and Maggie's cheeks and ears began to burn, while uncle Glegg, a kind-looking, white-haired old gentleman, said, -

'Heyday! what little gell's this? Why, I don't know her. Is it some little gell you've picked up in the road, Kezia?'

'Why, she's gone and cut her hair herself,' said Mr Tulliver in an undertone to Mr Deane, laughing with much enjoyment. 'Did you ever know such a little hussy as it is?'

'Why, little miss, you've made yourself look very funny,' said Uncle Pullet, and perhaps he never in his life made an observation which was felt to be so lacerating.

'Fie, for shame!' said aunt Glegg, in her loudest, severest tone of reproof. 'Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread and water, - not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles.'

'Ay, ay,' said uncle Glegg, meaning to give a playful turn to this denunciation, 'she must be sent to jail, I think, and they'll cut the rest of her hair off there, and make it all even.'

'She's more like a gypsy nor ever,' said aunt Pullet, in a pitying tone; 'it's very bad luck, sister, as the gell should be so brown; the boy's fair enough. I doubt it'll stand in her way i' life to be so brown.'

'She's a naughty child, as'll break her mother's heart,' said Mrs Tulliver, with the tears in her eyes.

Maggie seemed to be listening to a chorus of reproach and derision. Her first flush came from anger, which gave her a transient power of defiance, and Tom thought she was braving it out, supported by the recent appearance of the pudding and custard. Under this impression, he whispered, 'Oh, my! Maggie, I told you you'd catch it.' He meant to be friendly, but Maggie felt convinced that Tom was rejoicing in her ignominy. Her feeble power of defiance left her in an instant, her heart swelled, and getting up from her chair, she ran to her father, hid her face on his shoulder, and burst out into loud sobbing.

'Come, come, my wench,' said her father, soothingly, putting his arm round her, 'never mind; you was i' the right to cut it off if it plagued you; give over crying; father'll take your part.'

Delicious words of tenderness! Maggie never forgot any of these moments when her father 'took her part'; she kept them in her heart,

and thought of them long years after, when every one else said that her father had done very ill by his children.

'How your husband does spoil that child, Bessy!' said Mrs Glegg, in a loud 'aside,' to Mrs Tulliver. 'It'll be the ruin of her, if you don't take care. *My* father never brought his children up so, else we should ha' been a different sort o' family to what we are.'

Mrs Tulliver's domestic sorrows seemed at this moment to have reached the point at which insensibility begins. She took no notice of her sister's remark, but threw back her capstrings and dispensed the pudding, in mute resignation.

With the dessert there came entire deliverance for Maggie, for the children were told they might have their nuts and wine in the summer-house, since the day was so mild; and they scampered out among the budding bushes of the garden with the alacrity of small animals getting from under a burning glass.

Mrs Tulliver had her special reason for this permission: now the dinner was despatched, and every one's mind disengaged, it was the right moment to communicate Mr Tulliver's intention concerning Tom, and it would be as well for Tom himself to be absent. The children were used to hear themselves talked of as freely as if they were birds, and could understand nothing, however they might stretch their necks and listen; but on this occasion Mrs Tulliver manifested an unusual discretion, because she had recently had evidence that the going to school to a clergyman was a sore point with Tom, who looked at it as very much on a par with going to school to a constable. Mrs Tulliver had a sighing sense that her husband would do as he liked, whatever sister Glegg said, or sister Pullet either; but at least they would not be able to say, if the thing turned out ill, that Bessy had fallen in with her husband's folly without letting her own friends know a word about it.

'Mr Tulliver,' she said, interrupting her husband in his talk with Mr Deane, 'it's time now to tell the children's aunts and uncles what you're thinking of doing with Tom, isn't it?'

'Very well,' said Mr Tulliver, rather sharply, 'I've no objections to tell anybody what I mean to do with him. I've settled,' he added, looking toward Mr Glegg and Mr Deane, - 'I've settled to send him to a Mr Stelling, a parson, down at King's Lorton, there, - an uncommon clever fellow, I understand, as'll put him up to most things.'

There was a rustling demonstration of surprise in the company, such as you may have observed in a country congregation when they hear an allusion to their week-day affairs from the pulpit. It was equally

astonishing to the aunts and uncles to find a parson introduced into Mr Tulliver's family arrangements. As for uncle Pullet, he could hardly have been more thoroughly obfuscated if Mr Tulliver had said that he was going to send Tom to the Lord Chancellor; for uncle Pullet belonged to that extinct class of British yeoman who, dressed in good broadcloth, paid high rates and taxes, went to church, and ate a particularly good dinner on Sunday, without dreaming that the British constitution in Church and State had a traceable origin any more than the solar system and the fixed stars.

It is melancholy, but true, that Mr Pullet had the most confused idea of a bishop as a sort of a baronet, who might or might not be a clergyman; and as the rector of his own parish was a man of high family and fortune, the idea that a clergyman could be a schoolmaster was too remote from Mr Pullet's experience to be readily conceivable. I know it is difficult for people in these instructed times to believe in uncle Pullet's ignorance; but let them reflect on the remarkable results of a great natural faculty under favoring circumstances. And uncle Pullet had a great natural faculty for ignorance. He was the first to give utterance to his astonishment.

'Why, what can you be going to send him to a parson for?' he said, with an amazed twinkling in his eyes, looking at Mr Glegg and Mr Deane, to see if they showed any signs of comprehension.

'Why, because the parsons are the best schoolmasters, by what I can make out,' said poor Mr Tulliver, who, in the maze of this puzzling world, laid hold of any clue with great readiness and tenacity. 'Jacobs at th' academy's no parson, and he's done very bad by the boy; and I made up my mind, if I send him to school again, it should be to somebody different to Jacobs. And this Mr Stelling, by what I can make out, is the sort o' man I want. And I mean my boy to go to him at Midsummer,' he concluded, in a tone of decision, tapping his snuff-box and taking a pinch.

'You'll have to pay a swinging half-yearly bill, then, eh, Tulliver? The clergymen have highish notions, in general,' said Mr Deane, taking snuff vigorously, as he always did when wishing to maintain a neutral position.

'What! do you think the parson'll teach him to know a good sample o' wheat when he sees it, neighbor Tulliver?' said Mr Glegg, who was fond of his jest, and having retired from business, felt that it was not only allowable but becoming in him to take a playful view of things.

'Why, you see, I've got a plan i' my head about Tom,' said Mr Tulliver, pausing after that statement and lifting up his glass.

‘Well, if I may be allowed to speak, and it's seldom as I am,’ said Mrs Glegg, with a tone of bitter meaning, ‘I should like to know what good is to come to the boy by bringin' him up above his fortin.’

‘Why,’ said Mr Tulliver, not looking at Mrs Glegg, but at the male part of his audience, ‘you see, I've made up my mind not to bring Tom up to my own business. I've had my thoughts about it all along, and I made up my mind by what I saw with Garnett and *his* son. I mean to put him to some business as he can go into without capital, and I want to give him an eddication as he'll be even wi' the lawyers and folks, and put me up to a notion now an' then.’

Mrs Glegg emitted a long sort of guttural sound with closed lips, that smiled in mingled pity and scorn.

‘It 'ud be a fine deal better for some people,’ she said, after that introductory note, ‘if they'd let the lawyers alone.’

‘Is he at the head of a grammar school, then, this clergyman, such as that at Market Bewley?’ said Mr Deane.

‘No, nothing of that,’ said Mr Tulliver. ‘He won't take more than two or three pupils, and so he'll have the more time to attend to 'em, you know.’

‘Ah, and get his eddication done the sooner; they can't learn much at a time when there's so many of 'em,’ said uncle Pullet, feeling that he was getting quite an insight into this difficult matter.

‘But he'll want the more pay, I doubt,’ said Mr Glegg.

‘Ay, ay, a cool hundred a year, that's all,’ said Mr Tulliver, with some pride at his own spirited course. ‘But then, you know, it's an investment; Tom's eddication 'ull be so much capital to him.’

‘Ay, there's something in that,’ said Mr Glegg. ‘Well well, neighbor Tulliver, you may be right, you may be right:

'When land is gone and money's spent, Then learning is most excellent.'

‘I remember seeing those two lines wrote on a window at Buxton. But us that have got no learning had better keep our money, eh, neighbor Pullet?’ Mr Glegg rubbed his knees, and looked very pleasant.

‘Mr Glegg, I wonder *at* you,’ said his wife. ‘It's very unbecoming in a man o' your age and belongings.’

‘What's unbecoming, Mrs G.?’ said Mr Glegg, winking pleasantly at the company. ‘My new blue coat as I've got on?’

‘I pity your weakness, Mr Glegg. I say it's unbecoming to be making a joke when you see your own kin going headlongs to ruin.’

‘If you mean me by that,’ said Mr Tulliver, considerably nettled, ‘you needn't trouble yourself to fret about me. I can manage my own affairs without troubling other folks.’

‘Bless me!’ said Mr Deane, judiciously introducing a new idea, ‘why, now I come to think of it, somebody said Wakem was going to send *his* son - the deformed lad - to a clergyman, didn't they, Susan?’ (appealing to his wife).

‘I can give no account of it, I'm sure,’ said Mrs Deane, closing her lips very tightly again. Mrs Deane was not a woman to take part in a scene where missiles were flying.

‘Well,’ said Mr Tulliver, speaking all the more cheerfully, that Mrs Glegg might see he didn't mind her, ‘if Wakem thinks o' sending his son to a clergyman, depend on it I shall make no mistake i' sending Tom to one. Wakem's as big a scoundrel as Old Harry ever made, but he knows the length of every man's foot he's got to deal with. Ay, ay, tell me who's Wakem's butcher, and I'll tell you where to get your meat.’

‘But lawyer Wakem's son's got a hump-back,’ said Mrs Pullet, who felt as if the whole business had a funereal aspect; ‘it's more nat'ral to send *him* to a clergyman.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr Glegg, interpreting Mrs Pullet's observation with erroneous plausibility, ‘you must consider that, neighbor Tulliver; Wakem's son isn't likely to follow any business. Wakem 'ull make a gentleman of him, poor fellow.’

‘Mr Glegg,’ said Mrs G., in a tone which implied that her indignation would fizz and ooze a little, though she was determined to keep it corked up, ‘you'd far better hold your tongue. Mr Tulliver doesn't want to know your opinion nor mine either. There's folks in the world as know better than everybody else.’

‘Why, I should think that's you, if we're to trust your own tale,’ said Mr Tulliver, beginning to boil up again.

‘Oh, *I* say nothing,’ said Mrs Glegg, sarcastically. ‘My advice has never been asked, and I don't give it.’

‘It'll be the first time, then,’ said Mr Tulliver. ‘It's the only thing you're over-ready at giving.’

‘I've been over-ready at lending, then, if I haven't been over-ready at giving,’ said Mrs Glegg. ‘There's folks I've lent money to, as perhaps I shall repent o' lending money to kin.’

‘Come, come, come,’ said Mr Glegg, soothingly. But Mr Tulliver was not to be hindered of his retort.

‘You've got a bond for it, I reckon,’ he said; ‘and you've had your five per cent, kin or no kin.’

‘Sister,’ said Mrs Tulliver, pleadingly, ‘drink your wine, and let me give you some almonds and raisins.’

‘Bessy, I'm sorry for you,’ said Mrs Glegg, very much with the feeling of a cur that seizes the opportunity of diverting his bark toward the man who carries no stick. ‘It's poor work talking o' almonds and raisins.’

‘Lors, sister Glegg, don't be so quarrelsome,’ said Mrs Pullet, beginning to cry a little. ‘You may be struck with a fit, getting so red in the face after dinner, and we are but just out o' mourning, all of us, - and all wi' gowns craped alike and just put by; it's very bad among sisters.’

‘I should think it *is* bad,’ said Mrs Glegg. ‘Things are come to a fine pass when one sister invites the other to her house o' purpose to quarrel with her and abuse her.’

‘Softly, softly, Jane; be reasonable, be reasonable,’ said Mr Glegg.

But while he was speaking, Mr Tulliver, who had by no means said enough to satisfy his anger, burst out again.

‘Who wants to quarrel with you?’ he said. ‘It's you as can't let people alone, but must be gnawing at 'em forever. *I* should never want to quarrel with any woman if she kept her place.’

‘My place, indeed!’ said Mrs Glegg, getting rather more shrill. ‘There's your betters, Mr Tulliver, as are dead and in their grave, treated me with a different sort o' respect to what you do; *though* I've got a husband as'll sit by and see me abused by them as 'ud never ha' had the chance if there hadn't been them in our family as married worse than they might ha' done.’

‘If you talk o' that,’ said Mr Tulliver, ‘my family's as good as yours, and better, for it hasn't got a damned ill-tempered woman in it!’

‘Well,’ said Mrs Glegg, rising from her chair, ‘I don't know whether you think it's a fine thing to sit by and hear me swore at, Mr Glegg; but I'm not going to stay a minute longer in this house. You can stay behind, and come home with the gig, and I'll walk home.’

‘Dear heart, dear heart!’ said Mr Glegg in a melancholy tone, as he followed his wife out of the room.

‘Mr Tulliver, how could you talk so?’ said Mrs Tulliver, with the tears in her eyes.

‘Let her go,’ said Mr Tulliver, too hot to be damped by any amount of tears. ‘Let her go, and the sooner the better; she won't be trying to domineer over *me* again in a hurry.’

‘Sister Pullet,’ said Mrs Tulliver, helplessly, ‘do you think it 'ud be any use for you to go after her and try to pacify her?’

‘Better not, better not,’ said Mr Deane. ‘You'll make it up another day.’

‘Then, sisters, shall we go and look at the children?’ said Mrs Tulliver, drying her eyes.

No proposition could have been more seasonable. Mr Tulliver felt very much as if the air had been cleared of obtrusive flies now the women were out of the room. There were few things he liked better than a chat with Mr Deane, whose close application to business allowed the pleasure very rarely. Mr Deane, he considered, was the ‘knowingest’ man of his acquaintance, and he had besides a ready causticity of tongue that made an agreeable supplement to Mr Tulliver's own tendency that way, which had remained in rather an inarticulate condition. And now the women were gone, they could carry on their serious talk without frivolous interruption. They could exchange their views concerning the Duke of Wellington, whose conduct in the Catholic Question had thrown such an entirely new light on his character; and speak slightingly of his conduct at the battle of Waterloo, which he would never have won if there hadn't been a great many Englishmen at his back, not to speak of Blucher and the Prussians, who, as Mr Tulliver had heard from a person of particular knowledge in that matter, had come up in the very nick of time; though here there was a slight dissidence, Mr Deane remarking that he was not disposed to give much credit to the Prussians, - the build of their vessels, together with the unsatisfactory character of transactions in Dantzic beer, inclining him to form rather a low view of Prussian pluck generally. Rather beaten on this ground, Mr Tulliver

proceeded to express his fears that the country could never again be what it used to be; but Mr Deane, attached to a firm of which the returns were on the increase, naturally took a more lively view of the present, and had some details to give concerning the state of the imports, especially in hides and spelter, which soothed Mr Tulliver's imagination by throwing into more distant perspective the period when the country would become utterly the prey of Papists and Radicals, and there would be no more chance for honest men.

Uncle Pullet sat by and listened with twinkling eyes to these high matters. He didn't understand politics himself, - thought they were a natural gift, - but by what he could make out, this Duke of Wellington was no better than he should be.