

## Chapter IV - A Vanishing Gleam

Mr Tulliver, even between the fits of spasmodic rigidity which had recurred at intervals ever since he had been found fallen from his horse, was usually in so apathetic a condition that the exits and entrances into his room were not felt to be of great importance. He had lain so still, with his eyes closed, all this morning, that Maggie told her aunt Moss she must not expect her father to take any notice of them.

They entered very quietly, and Mrs Moss took her seat near the head of the bed, while Maggie sat in her old place on the bed, and put her hand on her father's without causing any change in his face.

Mr Glegg and Tom had also entered, treading softly, and were busy selecting the key of the old oak chest from the bunch which Tom had brought from his father's bureau. They succeeded in opening the chest, - which stood opposite the foot of Mr Tulliver's bed, - and propping the lid with the iron holder, without much noise.

'There's a tin box,' whispered Mr Glegg; 'he'd most like put a small thing like a note in there. Lift it out, Tom; but I'll just lift up these deeds, - they're the deeds o' the house and mill, I suppose, - and see what there is under 'em.'

Mr Glegg had lifted out the parchments, and had fortunately drawn back a little, when the iron holder gave way, and the heavy lid fell with a loud bang that resounded over the house.

Perhaps there was something in that sound more than the mere fact of the strong vibration that produced the instantaneous effect on the frame of the prostrate man, and for the time completely shook off the obstruction of paralysis. The chest had belonged to his father and his father's father, and it had always been rather a solemn business to visit it. All long-known objects, even a mere window fastening or a particular door-latch, have sounds which are a sort of recognized voice to us, - a voice that will thrill and awaken, when it has been used to touch deep-lying fibres. In the same moment, when all the eyes in the room were turned upon him, he started up and looked at the chest, the parchments in Mr Glegg's hand, and Tom holding the tin box, with a glance of perfect consciousness and recognition.

'What are you going to do with those deeds?' he said, in his ordinary tone of sharp questioning whenever he was irritated. 'Come here, Tom. What do you do, going to my chest?'

Tom obeyed, with some trembling; it was the first time his father had recognized him. But instead of saying anything more to him, his

father continued to look with a growing distinctness of suspicion at Mr Glegg and the deeds.

'What's been happening, then?' he said sharply. 'What are you meddling with my deeds for? Is Wakem laying hold of everything? Why don't you tell me what you've been a-doing?' he added impatiently, as Mr Glegg advanced to the foot of the bed before speaking.

'No, no, friend Tulliver,' said Mr Glegg, in a soothing tone. 'Nobody's getting hold of anything as yet. We only came to look and see what was in the chest. You've been ill, you know, and we've had to look after things a bit. But let's hope you'll soon be well enough to attend to everything yourself.'

Mr Tulliver looked around him meditatively, at Tom, at Mr Glegg, and at Maggie; then suddenly appearing aware that some one was seated by his side at the head of the bed he turned sharply round and saw his sister.

'Eh, Gritty!' he said, in the half-sad, affectionate tone in which he had been wont to speak to her. 'What! you're there, are you? How could you manage to leave the children?'

'Oh, brother!' said good Mrs Moss, too impulsive to be prudent, 'I'm thankful I'm come now to see you yourself again; I thought you'd never know us any more.'

'What! have I had a stroke?' said Mr Tulliver, anxiously, looking at Mr Glegg.

'A fall from your horse - shook you a bit, - that's all, I think,' said Mr Glegg. 'But you'll soon get over it, let's hope.'

Mr Tulliver fixed his eyes on the bed-clothes, and remained silent for two or three minutes. A new shadow came over his face. He looked up at Maggie first, and said in a lower tone, 'You got the letter, then, my wench?'

'Yes, father,' she said, kissing him with a full heart. She felt as if her father were come back to her from the dead, and her yearning to show him how she had always loved him could be fulfilled.

'Where's your mother?' he said, so preoccupied that he received the kiss as passively as some quiet animal might have received it.

'She's downstairs with my aunts, father. Shall I fetch her?'

'Ay, ay; poor Bessy!' and his eyes turned toward Tom as Maggie left the room.

'You'll have to take care of 'em both if I die, you know, Tom. You'll be badly off, I doubt. But you must see and pay everybody. And mind, - there's fifty pound o' Luke's as I put into the business, - he gave me a bit at a time, and he's got nothing to show for it. You must pay him first thing.'

Uncle Glegg involuntarily shook his head, and looked more concerned than ever, but Tom said firmly:

'Yes, father. And haven't you a note from my uncle Moss for three hundred pounds? We came to look for that. What do you wish to be done about it, father?'

'Ah! I'm glad you thought o' that, my lad,' said Mr Tulliver. 'I allays meant to be easy about that money, because o' your aunt. You mustn't mind losing the money, if they can't pay it, - and it's like enough they can't. The note's in that box, mind! I allays meant to be good to you, Gritty,' said Mr Tulliver, turning to his sister; 'but you know you aggravated me when you would have Moss.'

At this moment Maggie re-entered with her mother, who came in much agitated by the news that her husband was quite himself again.

'Well, Bessy,' he said, as she kissed him, 'you must forgive me if you're worse off than you ever expected to be. But it's the fault o' the law, - it's none o' mine,' he added angrily. 'It's the fault o' raskills. Tom, you mind this: if ever you've got the chance, you make Wakem smart. If you don't, you're a good-for-nothing son. You might horse-whip him, but he'd set the law on you, - the law's made to take care o' raskills.'

Mr Tulliver was getting excited, and an alarming flush was on his face. Mr Glegg wanted to say something soothing, but he was prevented by Mr Tulliver's speaking again to his wife. 'They'll make a shift to pay everything, Bessy,' he said, 'and yet leave you your furniture; and your sisters'll do something for you - and Tom'll grow up - though what he's to be I don't know - I've done what I could - I've given him a eddication - and there's the little wench, she'll get married - but it's a poor tale - -'

The sanative effect of the strong vibration was exhausted, and with the last words the poor man fell again, rigid and insensible. Though this was only a recurrence of what had happened before, it struck all present as if it had been death, not only from its contrast with the completeness of the revival, but because his words had all had reference to the possibility that his death was near. But with poor

Tulliver death was not to be a leap; it was to be a long descent under thickening shadows.

Mr Turnbull was sent for; but when he heard what had passed, he said this complete restoration, though only temporary, was a hopeful sign, proving that there was no permanent lesion to prevent ultimate recovery.

Among the threads of the past which the stricken man had gathered up, he had omitted the bill of sale; the flash of memory had only lit up prominent ideas, and he sank into forgetfulness again with half his humiliation unlearned.

But Tom was clear upon two points, - that his uncle Moss's note must be destroyed; and that Luke's money must be paid, if in no other way, out of his own and Maggie's money now in the savings bank. There were subjects, you perceive, on which Tom was much quicker than on the niceties of classical construction, or the relations of a mathematical demonstration.