

## Chapter VIII - Daylight On The Wreck

It was a clear frosty January day on which Mr Tulliver first came downstairs. The bright sun on the chestnut boughs and the roofs opposite his window had made him impatiently declare that he would be caged up no longer; he thought everywhere would be more cheery under this sunshine than his bedroom; for he knew nothing of the bareness below, which made the flood of sunshine importunate, as if it had an unfeeling pleasure in showing the empty places, and the marks where well-known objects once had been. The impression on his mind that it was but yesterday when he received the letter from Mr Gore was so continually implied in his talk, and the attempts to convey to him the idea that many weeks had passed and much had happened since then had been so soon swept away by recurrent forgetfulness, that even Mr Turnbull had begun to despair of preparing him to meet the facts by previous knowledge. The full sense of the present could only be imparted gradually by new experience, - not by mere words, which must remain weaker than the impressions left by the *old* experience. This resolution to come downstairs was heard with trembling by the wife and children. Mrs Tulliver said Tom must not go to St. Ogg's at the usual hour, he must wait and see his father downstairs; and Tom complied, though with an intense inward shrinking from the painful scene. The hearts of all three had been more deeply dejected than ever during the last few days. For Guest & Co. had not bought the mill; both mill and land had been knocked down to Wakem, who had been over the premises, and had laid before Mr Deane and Mr Glegg, in Mrs Tulliver's presence, his willingness to employ Mr Tulliver, in case of his recovery, as a manager of the business. This proposition had occasioned much family debating. Uncles and aunts were almost unanimously of opinion that such an offer ought not to be rejected when there was nothing in the way but a feeling in Mr Tulliver's mind, which, as neither aunts nor uncles shared it, was regarded as entirely unreasonable and childish, - indeed, as a transferring toward Wakem of that indignation and hatred which Mr Tulliver ought properly to have directed against himself for his general quarrelsomeness, and his special exhibition of it in going to law. Here was an opportunity for Mr Tulliver to provide for his wife and daughter without any assistance from his wife's relations, and without that too evident descent into pauperism which makes it annoying to respectable people to meet the degraded member of the family by the wayside. Mr Tulliver, Mrs Glegg considered, must be made to feel, when he came to his right mind, that he could never humble himself enough; for *that* had come which she had always foreseen would come of his insolence in time past 'to them as were the best friends he'd got to look to.' Mr Glegg and Mr Deane were less stern in their views, but they both of them thought Tulliver had done enough harm by his hot-tempered crotchets and ought to put them

out of the question when a livelihood was offered him; Wakem showed a right feeling about the matter, - *he* had no grudge against Tulliver.

Tom had protested against entertaining the proposition. He shouldn't like his father to be under Wakem; he thought it would look mean-spirited; but his mother's main distress was the utter impossibility of ever 'turning Mr Tulliver round about Wakem,' or getting him to hear reason; no, they would all have to go and live in a pigsty on purpose to spite Wakem, who spoke 'so as nobody could be fairer.' Indeed, Mrs Tulliver's mind was reduced to such confusion by living in this strange medium of unaccountable sorrow, against which she continually appealed by asking, 'Oh dear, what *have* I done to deserve worse than other women?' that Maggie began to suspect her poor mother's wits were quite going.

'Tom,' she said, when they were out of their father's room together, 'we *must* try to make father understand a little of what has happened before he goes downstairs. But we must get my mother away. She will say something that will do harm. Ask Kezia to fetch her down, and keep her engaged with something in the kitchen.'

Kezia was equal to the task. Having declared her intention of staying till the master could get about again, 'wage or no wage,' she had found a certain recompense in keeping a strong hand over her mistress, scolding her for 'moithering' herself, and going about all day without changing her cap, and looking as if she was 'mushed.' Altogether, this time of trouble was rather a Saturnalian time to Kezia; she could scold her betters with unreprieved freedom. On this particular occasion there were drying clothes to be fetched in; she wished to know if one pair of hands could do everything in-doors and out, and observed that *she* should have thought it would be good for Mrs Tulliver to put on her bonnet, and get a breath of fresh air by doing that needful piece of work. Poor Mrs Tulliver went submissively downstairs; to be ordered about by a servant was the last remnant of her household dignities, - she would soon have no servant to scold her. Mr Tulliver was resting in his chair a little after the fatigue of dressing, and Maggie and Tom were seated near him, when Luke entered to ask if he should help master downstairs.

'Ay, ay, Luke; stop a bit, sit down,' said Mr Tulliver pointing his stick toward a chair, and looking at him with that pursuant gaze which convalescent persons often have for those who have tended them, reminding one of an infant gazing about after its nurse. For Luke had been a constant night-watcher by his master's bed.

'How's the water now, eh, Luke?' said Mr Tulliver. 'Dix hasn't been choking you up again, eh?'

'No, sir, it's all right.'

'Ay, I thought not; he won't be in a hurry at that again, now Riley's been to settle him. That was what I said to Riley yesterday - I said - - '

Mr Tulliver leaned forward, resting his elbows on the armchair, and looking on the ground as if in search of something, striving after vanishing images like a man struggling against a doze. Maggie looked at Tom in mute distress, their father's mind was so far off the present, which would by-and-by thrust itself on his wandering consciousness! Tom was almost ready to rush away, with that impatience of painful emotion which makes one of the differences between youth and maiden, man and woman.

'Father,' said Maggie, laying her hand on his, 'don't you remember that Mr Riley is dead?'

'Dead?' said Mr Tulliver, sharply, looking in her face with a strange, examining glance.

'Yes, he died of apoplexy nearly a year ago. I remember hearing you say you had to pay money for him; and he left his daughters badly off; one of them is under-teacher at Miss Firniss's, where I've been to school, you know.'

'Ah?' said her father, doubtfully, still looking in her face. But as soon as Tom began to speak he turned to look at *him* with the same inquiring glances, as if he were rather surprised at the presence of these two young people. Whenever his mind was wandering in the far past, he fell into this oblivion of their actual faces; they were not those of the lad and the little wench who belonged to that past.

'It's a long while since you had the dispute with Dix, father,' said Tom. 'I remember your talking about it three years ago, before I went to school at Mr Stelling's. I've been at school there three years; don't you remember?'

Mr Tulliver threw himself backward again, losing the childlike outward glance under a rush of new ideas, which diverted him from external impressions.

'Ay, ay,' he said, after a minute or two, 'I've paid a deal o' money - I was determined my son should have a good eddication; I'd none myself, and I've felt the miss of it. And he'll want no other fortin, that's what I say - if Wakem was to get the better of me again - - '

The thought of Wakem roused new vibrations, and after a moment's pause he began to look at the coat he had on, and to feel in his side-

pocket. Then he turned to Tom, and said in his old sharp way, 'Where have they put Gore's letter?'

It was close at hand in a drawer, for he had often asked for it before.

'You know what there is in the letter, father?' said Tom, as he gave it to him.

'To be sure I do,' said Mr Tulliver, rather angrily. 'What o' that? If Furley can't take to the property, somebody else can; there's plenty o' people in the world besides Furley. But it's hindering - my not being well - go and tell 'em to get the horse in the gig, Luke; I can get down to St. Ogg's well enough - Gore's expecting me.'

'No, dear father!' Maggie burst out entreatingly; 'it's a very long while since all that; you've been ill a great many weeks, - more than two months; everything is changed.'

Mr Tulliver looked at them all three alternately with a startled gaze; the idea that much had happened of which he knew nothing had often transiently arrested him before, but it came upon him now with entire novelty.

'Yes, father,' said Tom, in answer to the gaze. 'You needn't trouble your mind about business until you are quite well; everything is settled about that for the present, - about the mill and the land and the debts.'

'What's settled, then?' said his father, angrily.

'Don't you take on too much bout it, sir,' said Luke. 'You'd ha' paid iverybody if you could, - that's what I said to Master Tom, - I said you'd ha' paid iverybody if you could.'

Good Luke felt, after the manner of contented hard-working men whose lives have been spent in servitude, that sense of natural fitness in rank which made his master's downfall a tragedy to him. He was urged, in his slow way, to say something that would express his share in the family sorrow; and these words, which he had used over and over again to Tom when he wanted to decline the full payment of his fifty pounds out of the children's money, were the most ready to his tongue. They were just the words to lay the most painful hold on his master's bewildered mind.

'Paid everybody?' he said, with vehement agitation, his face flushing, and his eye lighting up. 'Why - what - have they made me a *bankrupt*?'

'Oh, father, dear father!' said Maggie, who thought that terrible word really represented the fact; 'bear it well, because we love you; your children will always love you. Tom will pay them all; he says he will, when he's a man.'

She felt her father beginning to tremble; his voice trembled too, as he said, after a few moments:

'Ay, my little wench, but I shall never live twice o'er.'

'But perhaps you will live to see me pay everybody, father,' said Tom, speaking with a great effort.

'Ah, my lad,' said Mr Tulliver, shaking his head slowly, 'but what's broke can never be whole again; it 'ud be your doing, not mine.' Then looking up at him, 'You're only sixteen; it's an up-hill fight for you, but you mustn't throw it at your father; the raskills have been too many for him. I've given you a good eddication, - that'll start you.'

Something in his throat half choked the last words; the flush, which had alarmed his children because it had so often preceded a recurrence of paralysis, had subsided, and his face looked pale and tremulous. Tom said nothing; he was still struggling against his inclination to rush away. His father remained quiet a minute or two, but his mind did not seem to be wandering again.

'Have they sold me up, then?' he said more clamly, as if he were possessed simply by the desire to know what had happened.

'Everything is sold, father; but we don't know all about the mill and the land yet,' said Tom, anxious to ward off any question leading to the fact that Wakem was the purchaser.

'You must not be surprised to see the room look very bare downstairs, father,' said Maggie; 'but there's your chair and the bureau; *they're* not gone.'

'Let us go; help me down, Luke, - I'll go and see everything,' said Mr Tulliver, leaning on his stick, and stretching out his other hand toward Luke.

'Ay, sir,' said Luke, as he gave his arm to his master, 'you'll make up your mind to't a bit better when you've seen iverything; you'll get used to't. That's what my mother says about her shortness o' breath, - she says she's made friends wi't now, though she fought again' it sore when it just come on.'

Maggie ran on before to see that all was right in the dreary parlor, where the fire, dulled by the frosty sunshine, seemed part of the general shabbiness. She turned her father's chair, and pushed aside the table to make an easy way for him, and then stood with a beating heart to see him enter and look round for the first time. Tom advanced before him, carrying the leg-rest, and stood beside Maggie on the hearth. Of those two young hearts Tom's suffered the most unmixed pain, for Maggie, with all her keen susceptibility, yet felt as if the sorrow made larger room for her love to flow in, and gave breathing-space to her passionate nature. No true boy feels that; he would rather go and slay the Nemean lion, or perform any round of heroic labors, than endure perpetual appeals to his pity, for evils over which he can make no conquest.

Mr Tulliver paused just inside the door, resting on Luke, and looking round him at all the bare places, which for him were filled with the shadows of departed objects, - the daily companions of his life. His faculties seemed to be renewing their strength from getting a footing on this demonstration of the senses.

'Ah!' he said slowly, moving toward his chair, 'they've sold me up - they've sold me up.'

Then seating himself, and laying down his stick, while Luke left the room, he looked round again.

'They've left the big Bible,' he said. 'It's got everything in, - when I was born and married; bring it me, Tom.'

The quarto Bible was laid open before him at the fly-leaf, and while he was reading with slowly travelling eyes Mrs Tulliver entered the room, but stood in mute surprise to find her husband down already, and with the great Bible before him.

'Ah,' he said, looking at a spot where his finger rested, 'my mother was Margaret Beaton; she died when she was forty-seven, - hers wasn't a long-lived family; we're our mother's children, Gritty and me are, - we shall go to our last bed before long.'

He seemed to be pausing over the record of his sister's birth and marriage, as if it were suggesting new thoughts to him; then he suddenly looked up at Tom, and said, in a sharp tone of alarm:

'They haven't come upo' Moss for the money as I lent him, have they?'

'No, father,' said Tom; 'the note was burnt.'

Mr Tulliver turned his eyes on the page again, and presently said:

'Ah - Elizabeth Dodson - it's eighteen year since I married her - - '

'Come next Ladyday,' said Mrs Tulliver, going up to his side and looking at the page.

Her husband fixed his eyes earnestly on her face.

'Poor Bessy,' he said, 'you was a pretty lass then, - everybody said so, - and I used to think you kept your good looks rarely. But you're sorely aged; don't you bear me ill-will - I meant to do well by you - we promised one another for better or for worse - - '

'But I never thought it 'ud be so for worse as this,' said poor Mrs Tulliver, with the strange, scared look that had come over her of late; 'and my poor father gave me away - and to come on so all at once - - '

'Oh, mother!' said Maggie, 'don't talk in that way.'

'No, I know you won't let your poor mother speak - that's been the way all my life - your father never minded what I said - it 'ud have been o' no use for me to beg and pray - and it 'ud be no use now, not if I was to go down o' my hands and knees - - '

'Don't say so, Bessy,' said Mr Tulliver, whose pride, in these first moments of humiliation, was in abeyance to the sense of some justice in his wife's reproach. 'It there's anything left as I could do to make you amends, I wouldn't say you nay.'

'Then we might stay here and get a living, and I might keep among my own sisters, - and me been such a good wife to you, and never crossed you from week's end to week's end - and they all say so - they say it 'ud be nothing but right, only you're so turned against Wakem.'

'Mother,' said Tom, severely, 'this is not the time to talk about that.'

'Let her be,' said Mr Tulliver. 'Say what you mean, Bessy.'

'Why, now the mill and the land's all Wakem's, and he's got everything in his hands, what's the use o' setting your face against him, when he says you may stay here, and speaks as fair as can be, and says you may manage the business, and have thirty shillings a-week, and a horse to ride about to market? And where have we got to put our heads? We must go into one o' the cottages in the village, - and me and my children brought down to that, - and all because you must set your mind against folks till there's no turning you.'

Mr Tulliver had sunk back in his chair trembling.

'You may do as you like wi' me, Bessy,' he said, in a low voice; 'I've been the bringing of you to poverty - this world's too many for me - I'm nought but a bankrupt; it's no use standing up for anything now.'

'Father,' said Tom, 'I don't agree with my mother or my uncles, and I don't think you ought to submit to be under Wakem. I get a pound a-week now, and you can find something else to do when you get well.'

'Say no more, Tom, say no more; I've had enough for this day. Give me a kiss, Bessy, and let us bear one another no ill-will; we shall never be young again - this world's been too many for me.'