Book V - Wheat And Tares

Chapter I - In The Red Deeps

The family sitting-room was a long room with a window at each end; one looking toward the croft and along the Ripple to the banks of the Floss, the other into the mill-yard. Maggie was sitting with her work against the latter window when she saw Mr Wakem entering the yard, as usual, on his fine black horse; but not alone, as usual. Some one was with him, - a figure in a cloak, on a handsome pony. Maggie had hardly time to feel that it was Philip come back, before they were in front of the window, and he was raising his hat to her; while his father, catching the movement by a side-glance, looked sharply round at them both.

Maggie hurried away from the window and carried her work upstairs; for Mr Wakem sometimes came in and inspected the books, and Maggie felt that the meeting with Philip would be robbed of all pleasure in the presence of the two fathers. Some day, perhaps, she could see him when they could just shake hands, and she could tell him that she remembered his goodness to Tom, and the things he had said to her in the old days, though they could never be friends any more. It was not at all agitating to Maggie to see Philip again; she retained her childish gratitude and pity toward him, and remembered his cleverness; and in the early weeks of her loneliness she had continually recalled the image of him among the people who had been kind to her in life, often wishing she had him for a brother and a teacher, as they had fancied it might have been, in their talk together. But that sort of wishing had been banished along with other dreams that savored of seeking her own will; and she thought, besides, that Philip might be altered by his life abroad, - he might have become worldly, and really not care about her saying anything to him now. And yet his face was wonderfully little altered, - it was only a larger, more manly copy of the pale, small-featured boy's face, with the gray eyes, and the boyish waving brown hair; there was the old deformity to awaken the old pity; and after all her meditations, Maggie felt that she really *should* like to say a few words to him. He might still be melancholy, as he always used to be, and like her to look at him kindly. She wondered if he remembered how he used to like her eyes; with that thought Maggie glanced toward the square looking-glass which was condemned to hang with its face toward the wall, and she half started from her seat to reach it down; but she checked herself and snatched up her work, trying to repress the rising wishes by forcing her memory to recall snatches of hymns, until she saw Philip and his father returning along the road, and she could go down again.

It was far on in June now, and Maggie was inclined to lengthen the daily walk which was her one indulgence; but this day and the

following she was so busy with work which must be finished that she never went beyond the gate, and satisfied her need of the open air by sitting out of doors. One of her frequent walks, when she was not obliged to go to St. Ogg's, was to a spot that lay beyond what was called the 'Hill,' - an insignificant rise of ground crowned by trees, lying along the side of the road which ran by the gates of Dorlcote Mill. Insignificant I call it, because in height it was hardly more than a bank; but there may come moments when Nature makes a mere bank a means toward a fateful result; and that is why I ask you to imagine this high bank crowned with trees, making an uneven wall for some quarter of a mile along the left side of Dorlcote Mill and the pleasant fields behind it, bounded by the murmuring Ripple. Just where this line of bank sloped down again to the level, a by-road turned off and led to the other side of the rise, where it was broken into very capricious hollows and mounds by the working of an exhausted stone-quarry, so long exhausted that both mounds and hollows were now clothed with brambles and trees, and here and there by a stretch of grass which a few sheep kept close-nibbled. In her childish days Maggie held this place, called the Red Deeps, in very great awe, and needed all her confidence in Tom's bravery to reconcile her to an excursion thither, - visions of robbers and fierce animals haunting every hollow. But now it had the charm for her which any broken ground, any mimic rock and ravine, have for the eyes that rest habitually on the level; especially in summer, when she could sit on a grassy hollow under the shadow of a branching ash, stooping aslant from the steep above her, and listen to the hum of insects, like tiniest bells on the garment of Silence, or see the sunlight piercing the distant boughs, as if to chase and drive home the truant heavenly blue of the wild hyacinths. In this June time, too, the dog-roses were in their glory, and that was an additional reason why Maggie should direct her walk to the Red Deeps, rather than to any other spot, on the first day she was free to wander at her will, - a pleasure she loved so well, that sometimes, in her ardors of renunciation, she thought she ought to deny herself the frequent indulgence in it.

You may see her now, as she walks down the favorite turning and enters the Deeps by a narrow path through a group of Scotch firs, her tall figure and old lavender gown visible through an hereditary black silk shawl of some wide-meshed net-like material; and now she is sure of being unseen she takes off her bonnet and ties it over her arm. One would certainly suppose her to be farther on in life than her seventeenth year - perhaps because of the slow resigned sadness of the glance from which all search and unrest seem to have departed; perhaps because her broad-chested figure has the mould of early womanhood. Youth and health have withstood well the involuntary and voluntary hardships of her lot, and the nights in which she has lain on the hard floor for a penance have left no obvious trace; the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and round, the full lips are

red. With her dark coloring and jet crown surmounting her tall figure, she seems to have a sort of kinship with the grand Scotch firs, at which she is looking up as if she loved them well. Yet one has a sense of uneasiness in looking at her, - a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent; surely there is a hushed expression, such as one often sees in older faces under borderless caps, out of keeping with the resistant youth, which one expects to flash out in a sudden, passionate glance, that will dissipate all the quietude, like a damp fire leaping out again when all seemed safe.

But Maggie herself was not uneasy at this moment. She was clamly enjoying the free air, while she looked up at the old fir-trees, and thought that those broken ends of branches were the records of past storms, which had only made the red stems soar higher. But while her eyes were still turned upward, she became conscious of a moving shadow cast by the evening sun on the grassy path before her, and looked down with a startled gesture to see Philip Wakem, who first raised his hat, and then, blushing deeply, came forward to her and put out his hand. Maggie, too, colored with surprise, which soon gave way to pleasure. She put out her hand and looked down at the deformed figure before her with frank eyes, filled for the moment with nothing but the memory of her child's feelings, - a memory that was always strong in her. She was the first to speak.

'You startled me,' she said, smiling faintly; 'I never meet any one here. How came you to be walking here? Did you come to meet *me?*'

It was impossible not to perceive that Maggie felt herself a child again.

'Yes, I did,' said Philip, still embarrassed; 'I wished to see you very much. I watched a long while yesterday on the bank near your house to see if you would come out, but you never came. Then I watched again to-day, and when I saw the way you took, I kept you in sight and came down the bank, behind there. I hope you will not be displeased with me.'

'No,' said Maggie, with simple seriousness, walking on as if she meant Philip to accompany her, 'I'm very glad you came, for I wished very much to have an opportunity of speaking to you. I've never forgotten how good you were long ago to Tom, and me too; but I was not sure that you would remember us so well. Tom and I have had a great deal of trouble since then, and I think *that* makes one think more of what happened before the trouble came.'

'I can't believe that you have thought of me so much as I have thought of you,' said Philip, timidly. 'Do you know, when I was away, I made a picture of you as you looked that morning in the study when you said you would not forget me.'

Philip drew a large miniature-case from his pocket, and opened it. Maggie saw her old self leaning on a table, with her black locks hanging down behind her ears, looking into space, with strange, dreamy eyes. It was a water-color sketch, of real merit as a portrait.

'Oh dear,' said Maggie, smiling, and flushed with pleasure, 'what a queer little girl I was! I remember myself with my hair in that way, in that pink frock. I really *was* like a gypsy. I dare say I am now,' she added, after a little pause; 'am I like what you expected me to be?'

The words might have been those of a coquette, but the full, bright glance Maggie turned on Philip was not that of a coquette. She really did hope he liked her face as it was now, but it was simply the rising again of her innate delight in admiration and love. Philip met her eyes and looked at her in silence for a long moment, before he said quietly, 'No, Maggie.'

The light died out a little from Maggie's face, and there was a slight trembling of the lip. Her eyelids fell lower, but she did not turn away her head, and Philip continued to look at her. Then he said slowly:

'You are very much more beautiful than I thought you would be.'

'Am I?' said Maggie, the pleasure returning in a deeper flush. She turned her face away from him and took some steps, looking straight before her in silence, as if she were adjusting her consciousness to this new idea. Girls are so accustomed to think of dress as the main ground of vanity, that, in abstaining from the looking-glass, Maggie had thought more of abandoning all care for adornment than of renouncing the contemplation of her face. Comparing herself with elegant, wealthy young ladies, it had not occurred to her that she could produce any effect with her person. Philip seemed to like the silence well. He walked by her side, watching her face, as if that sight left no room for any other wish. They had passed from among the fir-trees, and had now come to a green hollow almost surrounded by an amphitheatre of the pale pink dog-roses. But as the light about them had brightened, Maggie's face had lost its glow.

She stood still when they were in the hollows, and looking at Philip again, she said in a serious, sad voice:

'I wish we could have been friends, - I mean, if it would have been good and right for us. But that is the trial I have to bear in everything; I may not keep anything I used to love when I was little. The old books went; and Tom is different, and my father. It is like death. I must part with everything I cared for when I was a child. And I must part with you; we must never take any notice of each other again. That was what I wanted to speak to you for. I wanted to let you know that Tom

and I can't do as we like about such things, and that if I behave as if I had forgotten all about you, it is not out of envy or pride - or - or any bad feeling.'

Maggie spoke with more and more sorrowful gentleness as she went on, and her eyes began to fill with tears. The deepening expression of pain on Philip's face gave him a stronger resemblance to his boyish self, and made the deformity appeal more strongly to her pity.

'I know; I see all that you mean,' he said, in a voice that had become feebler from discouragement; 'I know what there is to keep us apart on both sides. But it is not right, Maggie, - don't you be angry with me, I am so used to call you Maggie in my thoughts, - it is not right to sacrifice everything to other people's unreasonable feelings. I would give up a great deal for *my* father; but I would not give up a friendship or - or an attachment of any sort, in obedience to any wish of his that I didn't recognize as right.'

'I don't know,' said Maggie, musingly. 'Often, when I have been angry and discontented, it has seemed to me that I was not bound to give up anything; and I have gone on thinking till it has seemed to me that I could think away all my duty. But no good has ever come of that; it was an evil state of mind. I'm quite sure that whatever I might do, I should wish in the end that I had gone without anything for myself, rather than have made my father's life harder to him.'

'But would it make his life harder if we were to see each other sometimes?' said Philip. He was going to say something else, but checked himself.

'Oh, I'm sure he wouldn't like it. Don't ask me why, or anything about it,' said Maggie, in a distressed tone. 'My father feels so strongly about some things. He is not at all happy.'

'No more am I,' said Philip, impetuously; 'I am not happy.'

'Why?' said Maggie, gently. 'At least - I ought not to ask - but I'm very, very sorry.'

Philip turned to walk on, as if he had not patience to stand still any longer, and they went out of the hollow, winding amongst the trees and bushes in silence. After that last word of Philip's, Maggie could not bear to insist immediately on their parting.

'I've been a great deal happier,' she said at last, timidly, 'since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn't have my own will. Our life is determined for us; and it makes the mind very free when we give up

wishing, and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do.'

'But I can't give up wishing,' said Philip, impatiently. 'It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we *must* hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened? I delight in fine pictures; I long to be able to paint such. I strive and strive, and can't produce what I want. That is pain to me, and always *will* be pain, until my faculties lose their keenness, like aged eyes. Then there are many other things I long for,' - here Philip hesitated a little, and then said, - 'things that other men have, and that will always be denied me. My life will have nothing great or beautiful in it; I would rather not have lived.'

'Oh, Philip,' said Maggie, 'I wish you didn't feel so.' But her heart began to beat with something of Philip's discontent.

'Well, then,' said he, turning quickly round and fixing his gray eyes entreatingly on her face, 'I should be contented to live, if you would let me see you sometimes.' Then, checked by a fear which her face suggested, he looked away again and said more calmly, 'I have no friend to whom I can tell everything, no one who cares enough about me; and if I could only see you now and then, and you would let me talk to you a little, and show me that you cared for me, and that we may always be friends in heart, and help each other, then I might come to be glad of life.'

'But how can I see you, Philip?' said Maggie, falteringly. (Could she really do him good? It would be very hard to say 'good-by' this day, and not speak to him again. Here was a new interest to vary the days; it was so much easier to renounce the interest before it came.)

'If you would let me see you here sometimes, - walk with you here, - I would be contented if it were only once or twice in a month. *That* could injure no one's happiness, and it would sweeten my life. Besides,' Philip went on, with all the inventive astuteness of love at one-and-twenty, 'if there is any enmity between those who belong to us, we ought all the more to try and quench it by our friendship; I mean, that by our influence on both sides we might bring about a healing of the wounds that have been made in the past, if I could know everything about them. And I don't believe there is any enmity in my own father's mind; I think he has proved the contrary.'

Maggie shook her head slowly, and was silent, under conflicting thoughts. It seemed to her inclination, that to see Philip now and then, and keep up the bond of friendship with him, was something not only innocent, but good; perhaps she might really help him to find

contentment as she had found it. The voice that said this made sweet music to Maggie; but athwart it there came an urgent, monotonous warning from another voice which she had been learning to obey, - the warning that such interviews implied secrecy; implied doing something she would dread to be discovered in, something that, if discovered, must cause anger and pain; and that the admission of anything so near doubleness would act as a spiritual blight. Yet the music would swell out again, like chimes borne onward by a recurrent breeze, persuading her that the wrong lay all in the faults and weaknesses of others, and that there was such a thing as futile sacrifice for one to the injury of another. It was very cruel for Philip that he should be shrunk from, because of an unjustifiable vindictiveness toward his father, - poor Philip, whom some people would shrink from only because he was deformed. The idea that he might become her lover or that her meeting him could cause disapproval in that light, had not occurred to her; and Philip saw the absence of this idea clearly enough, saw it with a certain pang, although it made her consent to his request the less unlikely. There was bitterness to him in the perception that Maggie was almost as frank and unconstrained toward him as when she was a child.

'I can't say either yes or no,' she said at last, turning round and walking toward the way she come; 'I must wait, lest I should decide wrongly. I must seek for guidance.'

'May I come again, then, to-morrow, or the next day, or next week?'

'I think I had better write,' said Maggie, faltering again. 'I have to go to St. Ogg's sometimes, and I can put the letter in the post.'

'Oh no,' said Philip eagerly; 'that would not be so well. My father might see the letter - and - he has not any enmity, I believe, but he views things differently from me; he thinks a great deal about wealth and position. Pray let me come here once more. *Tell* me when it shall be; or if you can't tell me, I will come as often as I can till I do see you.'

'I think it must be so, then,' said Maggie, 'for I can't be quite certain of coming here any particular evening.'

Maggie felt a great relief in adjourning the decision. She was free now to enjoy the minutes of companionship; she almost thought she might linger a little; the next time they met she should have to pain Philip by telling him her determination.

'I can't help thinking,' she said, looking smilingly at him, after a few moments of silence, 'how strange it is that we should have met and talked to each other, just as if it had been only yesterday when we parted at Lorton. And yet we must both be very much altered in those

five years, - I think it is five years. How was it you seemed to have a sort of feeling that I was the same Maggie? I was not quite so sure that you would be the same; I know you are so clever, and you must have seen and learnt so much to fill your mind; I was not quite sure you would care about me now.'

'I have never had any doubt that you would be the same, whenever I migh see you,' said Philip, - 'I mean, the same in everything that made me like you better than any one else. I don't want to explain that; I don't think any of the strongest effects our natures are susceptible of can ever be explained. We can neither detect the process by which they are arrived at, nor the mode in which they act on us. The greatest of painters only once painted a mysteriously divine child; he couldn't have told how he did it, and we can't tell why we feel it to be divine. I think there are stores laid up in our human nature that our understandings can make no complete inventory of. Certain strains of music affect me so strangely; I can never hear them without their changing my whole attitude of mind for a time, and if the effect would last, I might be capable of heroisms.'

'Ah! I know what you mean about music; *I* feel so,' said Maggie, clasping her hands with her old impetuosity. 'At least,' she added, in a saddened tone, 'I used to feel so when I had any music; I never have any now except the organ at church.'

'And you long for it, Maggie?' said Philip, looking at her with affectionate pity. 'Ah, you can have very little that is beautiful in your life. Have you many books? You were so fond of them when you were a little girl.'

They were come back to the hollow, round which the dog-roses grew, and they both paused under the charm of the faery evening light, reflected from the pale pink clusters.

'No, I have given up books,' said Maggie, quietly, 'except a very, very few.'

Philip had already taken from his pocket a small volume, and was looking at the back as he said:

'Ah, this is the second volume, I see, else you might have liked to take it home with you. I put it in my pocket because I am studying a scene for a picture.'

Maggie had looked at the back too, and saw the title; it revived an old impression with overmastering force.

"The Pirate,'" she said, taking the book from Philip's hands. 'Oh, I began that once; I read to where Minna is walking with Cleveland, and I could never get to read the rest. I went on with it in my own head, and I made several endings; but they were all unhappy. I could never make a happy ending out of that beginning. Poor Minna! I wonder what is the real end. For a long while I couldn't get my mind away from the Shetland Isles, - I used to feel the wind blowing on me from the rough sea.'

Maggie spoke rapidly, with glistening eyes.

'Take that volume home with you, Maggie,' said Philip, watching her with delight. 'I don't want it now. I shall make a picture of you instead, - you, among the Scotch firs and the slanting shadows.'

Maggie had not heard a word he had said; she was absorbed in a page at which she had opened. But suddenly she closed the book, and gave it back to Philip, shaking her head with a backward movement, as if to say 'avaunt' to floating visions.

'Do keep it, Maggie,' said Philip, entreatingly; 'it will give you pleasure.'

'No, thank you,' said Maggie, putting it aside with her hand and walking on. 'It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be; it would make me long to see and know many things; it would make me long for a full life.'

'But you will not always be shut up in your present lot; why should you starve your mind in that way? It is narrow asceticism; I don't like to see you persisting in it, Maggie. Poetry and art and knowledge are sacred and pure.'

'But not for me, not for me,' said Maggie, walking more hurriedly; 'because I should want too much. I must wait; this life will not last long.'

'Don't hurry away from me without saying 'good-by,' Maggie,' said Philip, as they reached the group of Scotch firs, and she continued still to walk along without speaking. 'I must not go any farther, I think, must I?'

'Oh no, I forgot; good-by,' said Maggie, pausing, and putting out her hand to him. The action brought her feeling back in a strong current to Philip; and after they had stood looking at each other in silence for a few moments, with their hands clasped, she said, withdrawing her hand:

'I'm very grateful to you for thinking of me all those years. It is very sweet to have people love us. What a wonderful, beautiful thing it seems that God should have made your heart so that you could care about a queer little girl whom you only knew for a few weeks! I remember saying to you that I thought you cared for me more than Tom did.'

'Ah, Maggie,' said Philip, almost fretfully, 'you would never love me so well as you love your brother.'

'Perhaps not,' said Maggie, simply; 'but then, you know, the first thing I ever remember in my life is standing with Tom by the side of the Floss, while he held my hand; everything before that is dark to me. But I shall never forget you, though we must keep apart.'

'Don't say so, Maggie,' said Philip. 'If I kept that little girl in my mind for five years, didn't I earn some part in her? She ought not to take herself quite away from me.'

'Not if I were free,' said Maggie; 'but I am not, I must submit.' She hesitated a moment, and then added, 'And I wanted to say to you, that you had better not take more notice of my brother than just bowing to him. He once told me not to speak to you again, and he doesn't change his mind - Oh dear, the sun is set. I am too long away. Good-by.' She gave him her hand once more.

'I shall come here as often as I can till I see you again, Maggie. Have some feeling for *me* as well as for others.'

'Yes, yes, I have,' said Maggie, hurrying away, and quickly disappearing behind the last fir-tree; though Philip's gaze after her remained immovable for minutes as if he saw her still.

Maggie went home, with an inward conflict already begun; Philip went home to do nothing but remember and hope. You can hardly help blaming him severely. He was four or five years older than Maggie, and had a full consciousness of his feeling toward her to aid him in foreseeing the character his contemplated interviews with her would bear in the opinion of a third person. But you must not suppose that he was capable of a gross selfishness, or that he could have been satisfied without persuading himself that he was seeking to infuse some happiness into Maggie's life, - seeking this even more than any direct ends for himself. He could give her sympathy; he could give her help. There was not the slightest promise of love toward him in her manner; it was nothing more than the sweet girlish tenderness she had shown him when she was twelve. Perhaps she would never love him; perhaps no woman ever *could* love him. Well, then, he would endure that; he should at least have the happiness of seeing her, of

feeling some nearness to her. And he clutched passionately the possibility that she *might* love him; perhaps the feeling would grow, if she could come to associate him with that watchful tenderness which her nature would be so keenly alive to. If any woman could love him, surely Maggie was that woman; there was such wealth of love in her, and there was no one to claim it all. Then, the pity of it, that a mind like hers should be withering in its very youth, like a young forest-tree, for want of the light and space it was formed to flourish in! Could he not hinder that, by persuading her out of her system of privation? He would be her guardian angel; he would do anything, bear anything, for her sake - except not seeing her.