

## Chapter II - First Impressions

'He is very clever, Maggie,' said Lucy. She was kneeling on a footstool at Maggie's feet, after placing that dark lady in the large crimson-velvet chair. 'I feel sure you will like him. I hope you will.'

'I shall be very difficult to please,' said Maggie, smiling, and holding up one of Lucy's long curls, that the sunlight might shine through it. 'A gentleman who thinks he is good enough for Lucy must expect to be sharply criticised.'

'Indeed, he's a great deal too good for me. And sometimes, when he is away, I almost think it can't really be that he loves me. But I can never doubt it when he is with me, though I couldn't bear any one but you to know that I feel in that way, Maggie.'

'Oh, then, if I disapprove of him you can give him up, since you are not engaged,' said Maggie, with playful gravity.

'I would rather not be engaged. When people are engaged, they begin to think of being married soon,' said Lucy, too thoroughly preoccupied to notice Maggie's joke; 'and I should like everything to go on for a long while just as it is. Sometimes I am quite frightened lest Stephen should say that he has spoken to papa; and from something that fell from papa the other day, I feel sure he and Mr Guest are expecting that. And Stephen's sisters are very civil to me now. At first, I think they didn't like his paying me attention; and that was natural. It *does* seem out of keeping that I should ever live in a great place like the Park House, such a little insignificant thing as I am.'

'But people are not expected to be large in proportion to the houses they live in, like snails,' said Maggie, laughing. 'Pray, are Mr Guest's sisters giantesses?'

'Oh no; and not handsome, - that is, not very,' said Lucy, half-penitent at this uncharitable remark. 'But *he* is - at least he is generally considered very handsome.'

'Though you are unable to share that opinion?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Lucy, blushing pink over brow and neck. 'It is a bad plan to raise expectation; you will perhaps be disappointed. But I have prepared a charming surprise for *him*; I shall have a glorious laugh against him. I shall not tell you what it is, though.'

Lucy rose from her knees and went to a little distance, holding her pretty head on one side, as if she had been arranging Maggie for a portrait, and wished to judge of the general effect.

‘Stand up a moment, Maggie.’

‘What is your pleasure now?’ said Maggie, smiling languidly as she rose from her chair and looked down on her slight, aerial cousin, whose figure was quite subordinate to her faultless drapery of silk and crape.

Lucy kept her contemplative attitude a moment or two in silence, and then said, -

‘I can't think what witchery it is in you, Maggie, that makes you look best in shabby clothes; though you really must have a new dress now. But do you know, last night I was trying to fancy you in a handsome, fashionable dress, and do what I would, that old limp merino would come back as the only right thing for you. I wonder if Marie Antoinette looked all the grander when her gown was darned at the elbows. Now, if *I* were to put anything shabby on, I should be quite unnoticeable. I should be a mere rag.’

‘Oh, quite,’ said Maggie, with mock gravity. ‘You would be liable to be swept out of the room with the cobwebs and carpet-dust, and to find yourself under the grate, like Cinderella. Mayn't I sit down now?’

‘Yes, now you may,’ said Lucy, laughing. Then, with an air of serious reflection, unfastening her large jet brooch, ‘But you must change brooches, Maggie; that little butterfly looks silly on you.’

‘But won't that mar the charming effect of my consistent shabbiness?’ said Maggie, seating herself submissively, while Lucy knelt again and unfastened the contemptible butterfly. ‘I wish my mother were of your opinion, for she was fretting last night because this is my best frock. I've been saving my money to pay for some lessons; I shall never get a better situation without more accomplishments.’

Maggie gave a little sigh.

‘Now, don't put on that sad look again,’ said Lucy, pinning the large brooch below Maggie's fine throat. ‘You're forgetting that you've left that dreary schoolroom behind you, and have no little girls' clothes to mend.’

‘Yes,’ said Maggie. ‘It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backward and forward in that narrow space that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets a bad habit of being unhappy.’

'But I shall put you under a discipline of pleasure that will make you lose that bad habit,' said Lucy, sticking the black butterfly absently in her own collar, while her eyes met Maggie's affectionately.

'You dear, tiny thing,' said Maggie, in one of her bursts of loving admiration, 'you enjoy other people's happiness so much, I believe you would do without any of your own. I wish I were like you.'

'I've never been tried in that way,' said Lucy. 'I've always been so happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble; I never had any but poor mamma's death. You *have* been tried, Maggie; and I'm sure you feel for other people quite as much as I do.'

'No, Lucy,' said Maggie, shaking her head slowly, 'I don't enjoy their happiness as you do, else I should be more contented. I do feel for them when they are in trouble; I don't think I could ever bear to make any one *unhappy*; and yet I often hate myself, because I get angry sometimes at the sight of happy people. I think I get worse as I get older, more selfish. That seems very dreadful.'

'Now, Maggie!' said Lucy, in a tone of remonstrance, 'I don't believe a word of that. It is all a gloomy fancy, just because you are depressed by a dull, wearisome life.'

'Well, perhaps it is,' said Maggie, resolutely clearing away the clouds from her face with a bright smile, and throwing herself backward in her chair. 'Perhaps it comes from the school diet, - watery rice-pudding spiced with Pinnock. Let us hope it will give way before my mother's custards and this charming Geoffrey Crayon.'

Maggie took up the 'Sketch Book,' which lay by her on the table.

'Do I look fit to be seen with this little brooch?' said Lucy, going to survey the effect in the chimney-glass.

'Oh no, Mr Guest will be obliged to go out of the room again if he sees you in it. Pray make haste and put another on.'

Lucy hurried out of the room, but Maggie did not take the opportunity of opening her book; she let it fall on her knees, while her eyes wandered to the window, where she could see the sunshine falling on the rich clumps of spring flowers and on the long hedge of laurels, and beyond, the silvery breadth of the dear old Floss, that at this distance seemed to be sleeping in a morning holiday. The sweet fresh garden-scent came through the open window, and the birds were busy flitting and alighting, gurgling and singing. Yet Maggie's eyes began to fill with tears. The sight of the old scenes had made the rush of memories so painful that even yesterday she had only been able to rejoice in her

mother's restored comfort and Tom's brotherly friendliness as we rejoice in good news of friends at a distance, rather than in the presence of a happiness which we share. Memory and imagination urged upon her a sense of privation too keen to let her taste what was offered in the transient present. Her future, she thought, was likely to be worse than her past, for after her years of contented renunciation, she had slipped back into desire and longing; she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder; she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for, and despaired of, becoming more and more importunate. The sound of the opening door roused her, and hastily wiping away her tears, she began to turn over the leaves of her book.

'There is one pleasure, I know, Maggie, that your deepest dismalness will never resist,' said Lucy, beginning to speak as soon as she entered the room. 'That is music, and I mean you to have quite a riotous feast of it. I mean you to get up your playing again, which used to be so much better than mine, when we were at Laceham.'

'You would have laughed to see me playing the little girls' tunes over and over to them, when I took them to practise,' said Maggie, 'just for the sake of fingering the dear keys again. But I don't know whether I could play anything more difficult now than 'Begone, dull care!'

'I know what a wild state of joy you used to be in when the glee-men came round,' said Lucy, taking up her embroidery; 'and we might have all those old glees that you used to love so, if I were certain that you don't feel exactly as Tom does about some things.'

'I should have thought there was nothing you might be more certain of,' said Maggie, smiling.

'I ought rather to have said, one particular thing. Because if you feel just as he does about that, we shall want our third voice. St. Ogg's is so miserably provided with musical gentlemen. There are really only Stephen and Philip Wakem who have any knowledge of music, so as to be able to sing a part.'

Lucy had looked up from her work as she uttered the last sentence, and saw that there was a change in Maggie's face.

'Does it hurt you to hear the name mentioned, Maggie? If it does, I will not speak of him again. I know Tom will not see him if he can avoid it.'

'I don't feel at all as Tom does on that subject,' said Maggie, rising and going to the window as if she wanted to see more of the landscape. 'I've always liked Philip Wakem ever since I was a little girl, and saw him at Lorton. He was so good when Tom hurt his foot.'

'Oh, I'm so glad!' said Lucy. 'Then you won't mind his coming sometimes, and we can have much more music than we could without him. I'm very fond of poor Philip, only I wish he were not so morbid about his deformity. I suppose it is his deformity that makes him so sad, and sometimes bitter. It is certainly very piteous to see his poor little crooked body and pale face among great, strong people.'

'But, Lucy - - ' said Maggie, trying to arrest the prattling stream.

'Ah, there is the door-bell. That must be Stephen,' Lucy went on, not noticing Maggie's faint effort to speak. 'One of the things I most admire in Stephen is that he makes a greater friend of Philip than any one.'

It was too late for Maggie to speak now; the drawingroom door was opening, and Minny was already growling in a small way at the entrance of a tall gentleman, who went up to Lucy and took her hand with a half-polite, half-tender glance and tone of inquiry, which seemed to indicate that he was unconscious of any other presence.

'Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Tulliver,' said Lucy, turning with wicked enjoyment toward Maggie, who now approached from the farther window. 'This is Mr Stephen Guest.'

For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall, dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair; the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person toward whom she herself was conscious of timidity.

This new experience was very agreeable to her, so agreeable that it almost effaced her previous emotion about Philip. There was a new brightness in her eyes, and a very becoming flush on her cheek, as she seated herself.

'I hope you perceive what a striking likeness you drew the day before yesterday,' said Lucy, with a pretty laugh of triumph. She enjoyed her lover's confusion; the advantage was usually on his side.

'This designing cousin of yours quite deceived me, Miss Tulliver,' said Stephen, seating himself by Lucy, and stooping to play with Minny, only looking at Maggie furtively. 'She said you had light hair and blue eyes.'

'Nay, it was you who said so,' remonstrated Lucy. 'I only refrained from destroying your confidence in your own second-sight.'

'I wish I could always err in the same way,' said Stephen, 'and find reality so much more beautiful than my preconceptions.'

'Now you have proved yourself equal to the occasion,' said Maggie, 'and said what it was incumbent on you to say under the circumstances.'

She flashed a slightly defiant look at him; it was clear to her that he had been drawing a satirical portrait of her beforehand. Lucy had said he was inclined to be satirical, and Maggie had mentally supplied the addition, 'and rather conceited.'

'An alarming amount of devil there,' was Stephen's first thought. The second, when she had bent over her work, was, 'I wish she would look at me again.' The next was to answer, -

'I suppose all phrases of mere compliment have their turn to be true. A man is occasionally grateful when he says 'Thank you.' It's rather hard upon him that he must use the same words with which all the world declines a disagreeable invitation, don't you think so, Miss Tulliver?'

'No,' said Maggie, looking at him with her direct glance; 'if we use common words on a great occasion, they are the more striking, because they are felt at once to have a particular meaning, like old banners, or every-day clothes, hung up in a sacred place.'

'Then my compliment ought to be eloquent,' said Stephen, really not quite knowing what he said while Maggie looked at him, 'seeing that the words were so far beneath the occasion.'

'No compliment can be eloquent, except as an expression of indifference,' said Maggie, flushing a little.

Lucy was rather alarmed; she thought Stephen and Maggie were not going to like each other. She had always feared lest Maggie should appear too old and clever to please that critical gentleman. 'Why, dear Maggie,' she interposed, 'you have always pretended that you are too fond of being admired; and now, I think, you are angry because some one ventures to admire you.'

'Not at all,' said Maggie; 'I like too well to feel that I am admired, but compliments never make me feel that.'

'I will never pay you a compliment again, Miss Tulliver,' said Stephen.

'Thank you; that will be a proof of respect.'

Poor Maggie! She was so unused to society that she could take nothing as a matter of course, and had never in her life spoken from the lips merely, so that she must necessarily appear absurd to more experienced ladies, from the excessive feeling she was apt to throw into very trivial incidents. But she was even conscious herself of a little absurdity in this instance. It was true she had a theoretic objection to compliments, and had once said impatiently to Philip that she didn't see why women were to be told with a simper that they were beautiful, any more than old men were to be told that they were venerable; still, to be so irritated by a common practice in the case of a stranger like Mr Stephen Guest, and to care about his having spoken slightingly of her before he had seen her, was certainly unreasonable, and as soon as she was silent she began to be ashamed of herself. It did not occur to her that her irritation was due to the pleasanter emotion which preceded it, just as when we are satisfied with a sense of glowing warmth an innocent drop of cold water may fall upon us as a sudden smart.

Stephen was too well bred not to seem unaware that the previous conversation could have been felt embarrassing, and at once began to talk of impersonal matters, asking Lucy if she knew when the bazaar was at length to take place, so that there might be some hope of seeing her rain the influence of her eyes on objects more grateful than those worsted flowers that were growing under her fingers.

'Some day next month, I believe,' said Lucy. 'But your sisters are doing more for it than I am; they are to have the largest stall.'

'Ah yes; but they carry on their manufactures in their own sitting-room, where I don't intrude on them. I see you are not addicted to the fashionable vice of fancy-work, Miss Tulliver,' said Stephen, looking at Maggie's plain hemming.

'No,' said Maggie, 'I can do nothing more difficult or more elegant than shirt-making.'

'And your plain sewing is so beautiful, Maggie,' said Lucy, 'that I think I shall beg a few specimens of you to show as fancy-work. Your exquisite sewing is quite a mystery to me, you used to dislike that sort of work so much in old days.'

'It is a mystery easily explained, dear,' said Maggie, looking up quietly. 'Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by, so I was obliged to try and do it well.'

Lucy, good and simple as she was, could not help blushing a little. She did not quite like that Stephen should know that; Maggie need not have mentioned it. Perhaps there was some pride in the

confession, - the pride of poverty that will not be ashamed of itself. But if Maggie had been the queen of coquettes she could hardly have invented a means of giving greater piquancy to her beauty in Stephen's eyes; I am not sure that the quiet admission of plain sewing and poverty would have done alone, but assisted by the beauty, they made Maggie more unlike other women even than she had seemed at first.

'But I can knit, Lucy,' Maggie went on, 'if that will be of any use for your bazaar.'

'Oh yes, of infinite use. I shall set you to work with scarlet wool tomorrow. But your sister is the most enviable person,' continued Lucy, turning to Stephen, 'to have the talent of modelling. She is doing a wonderful bust of Dr. Kenn entirely from memory.'

'Why, if she can remember to put the eyes very near together, and the corners of the mouth very far apart, the likeness can hardly fail to be striking in St. Ogg's.'

'Now that is very wicked of you,' said Lucy, looking rather hurt. 'I didn't think you would speak disrespectfully of Dr. Kenn.'

'I say anything disrespectful of Dr. Kenn? Heaven forbid! But I am not bound to respect a libellous bust of him. I think Kenn one of the finest fellows in the world. I don't care much about the tall candlesticks he has put on the communion-table, and I shouldn't like to spoil my temper by getting up to early prayers every morning. But he's the only man I ever knew personally who seems to me to have anything of the real apostle in him, - a man who has eight hundred a-year and is contented with deal furniture and boiled beef because he gives away two-thirds of his income. That was a very fine thing of him, - taking into his house that poor lad Grattan, who shot his mother by accident. He sacrifices more time than a less busy man could spare, to save the poor fellow from getting into a morbid state of mind about it. He takes the lad out with him constantly, I see.'

'That is beautiful,' said Maggie, who had let her work fall, and was listening with keen interest. 'I never knew any one who did such things.'

'And one admires that sort of action in Kenn all the more,' said Stephen, 'because his manners in general are rather cold and severe. There's nothing sugary and maudlin about him.'

'Oh, I think he's a perfect character!' said Lucy, with pretty enthusiasm.



'No; there I can't agree with you,' said Stephen, shaking his head with sarcastic gravity.

'Now, what fault can you point out in him?'

'He's an Anglican.'

'Well, those are the right views, I think,' said Lucy, gravely.

'That settles the question in the abstract,' said Stephen, 'but not from a parliamentary point of view. He has set the Dissenters and the Church people by the ears; and a rising senator like myself, of whose services the country is very much in need, will find it inconvenient when he puts up for the honor of representing St. Ogg's in Parliament.'

'Do you really think of that?' said Lucy, her eyes brightening with a proud pleasure that made her neglect the argumentative interests of Anglicanism.

'Decidedly, whenever old Mr Leyburn's public spirit and gout induce him to give way. My father's heart is set on it; and gifts like mine, you know' - here Stephen drew himself up, and rubbed his large white hands over his hair with playful self-admiration - 'gifts like mine involve great responsibilities. Don't you think so, Miss Tulliver?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, smiling, but not looking up; 'so much fluency and self-possession should not be wasted entirely on private occasions.'

'Ah, I see how much penetration you have,' said Stephen. 'You have discovered already that I am talkative and impudent. Now superficial people never discern that, owing to my manner, I suppose.'

'She doesn't look at me when I talk of myself,' he thought, while his listeners were laughing. 'I must try other subjects.'

Did Lucy intend to be present at the meeting of the Book Club next week? was the next question. Then followed the recommendation to choose Southey's 'Life of Cowper,' unless she were inclined to be philosophical, and startle the ladies of St. Ogg's by voting for one of the Bridgewater Treatises. Of course Lucy wished to know what these alarmingly learned books were; and as it is always pleasant to improve the minds of ladies by talking to them at ease on subjects of which they know nothing, Stephen became quite brilliant in an account of Buckland's Treatise, which he had just been reading. He was rewarded by seeing Maggie let her work fall, and gradually get so absorbed in his wonderful geological story that she sat looking at him, leaning forward with crossed arms, and with an entire absence of self-

consciousness, as if he had been the snuffiest of old professors, and she a downy-lipped alumna. He was so fascinated by the clear, large gaze that at last he forgot to look away from it occasionally toward Lucy; but she, sweet child, was only rejoicing that Stephen was proving to Maggie how clever he was, and that they would certainly be good friends after all.

'I will bring you the book, shall I, Miss Tulliver?' said Stephen, when he found the stream of his recollections running rather shallow. 'There are many illustrations in it that you will like to see.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Maggie, blushing with returning self-consciousness at this direct address, and taking up her work again.

'No, no,' Lucy interposed. 'I must forbid your plunging Maggie in books. I shall never get her away from them; and I want her to have delicious do-nothing days, filled with boating and chatting and riding and driving; that is the holiday she needs.'

'Apropos!' said Stephen, looking at his watch. 'Shall we go out for a row on the river now? The tide will suit for us to the Tofton way, and we can walk back.'

That was a delightful proposition to Maggie, for it was years since she had been on the river. When she was gone to put on her bonnet, Lucy lingered to give an order to the servant, and took the opportunity of telling Stephen that Maggie had no objection to seeing Philip, so that it was a pity she had sent that note the day before yesterday. But she would write another to-morrow and invite him.

'I'll call and beat him up to-morrow,' said Stephen, 'and bring him with me in the evening, shall I? My sisters will want to call on you when I tell them your cousin is with you. I must leave the field clear for them in the morning.'

'Oh yes, pray bring him,' said Lucy. 'And you *will* like Maggie, sha'n't you?' she added, in a beseeching tone. 'Isn't she a dear, noble-looking creature?'

'Too tall,' said Stephen, smiling down upon her, 'and a little too fiery. She is not my type of woman, you know.'

Gentlemen, you are aware, are apt to impart these imprudent confidences to ladies concerning their unfavorable opinion of sister fair ones. That is why so many women have the advantage of knowing that they are secretly repulsive to men who have self-denyingly made ardent love to them. And hardly anything could be more distinctively characteristic of Lucy than that she both implicitly believed what

Stephen said, and was determined that Maggie should not know it. But you, who have a higher logic than the verbal to guide you, have already foreseen, as the direct sequence to that unfavorable opinion of Stephen's, that he walked down to the boathouse calculating, by the aid of a vivid imagination, that Maggie must give him her hand at least twice in consequence of this pleasant boating plan, and that a gentleman who wishes ladies to look at him is advantageously situated when he is rowing them in a boat. What then? Had he fallen in love with this surprising daughter of Mrs Tulliver at first sight? Certainly not. Such passions are never heard of in real life. Besides, he was in love already, and half-engaged to the dearest little creature in the world; and he was not a man to make a fool of himself in any way. But when one is five-and-twenty, one has not chalk-stones at one's finger-ends that the touch of a handsome girl should be entirely indifferent. It was perfectly natural and safe to admire beauty and enjoy looking at it, - at least under such circumstances as the present. And there was really something very interesting about this girl, with her poverty and troubles; it was gratifying to see the friendship between the two cousins. Generally, Stephen admitted, he was not fond of women who had any peculiarity of character, but here the peculiarity seemed really of a superior kind, and provided one is not obliged to marry such women, why, they certainly make a variety in social intercourse.

Maggie did not fulfil Stephen's hope by looking at him during the first quarter of an hour; her eyes were too full of the old banks that she knew so well. She felt lonely, cut off from Philip, - the only person who had ever seemed to love her devotedly, as she had always longed to be loved. But presently the rhythmic movement of the oars attracted her, and she thought she should like to learn how to row. This roused her from her reverie, and she asked if she might take an oar. It appeared that she required much teaching, and she became ambitious. The exercise brought the warm blood into her cheeks, and made her inclined to take her lesson merrily.

'I shall not be satisfied until I can manage both oars, and row you and Lucy,' she said, looking very bright as she stepped out of the boat. Maggie, we know, was apt to forget the thing she was doing, and she had chosen an inopportune moment for her remark; her foot slipped, but happily Mr Stephen Guest held her hand, and kept her up with a firm grasp.

'You have not hurt yourself at all, I hope?' he said, bending to look in her face with anxiety. It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind, graceful manner by some one taller and stronger than one's self. Maggie had never felt just in the same way before.

When they reached home again, they found uncle and aunt Pullet seated with Mrs Tulliver in the drawing-room, and Stephen hurried away, asking leave to come again in the evening.

‘And pray bring with you the volume of Purcell that you took away,’ said Lucy. ‘I want Maggie to hear your best songs.’

Aunt Pullet, under the certainty that Maggie would be invited to go out with Lucy, probably to Park House, was much shocked at the shabbiness of her clothes, which when witnessed by the higher society of St. Ogg's, would be a discredit to the family, that demanded a strong and prompt remedy; and the consultation as to what would be most suitable to this end from among the superfluities of Mrs Pullet's wardrobe was one that Lucy as well as Mrs Tulliver entered into with some zeal. Maggie must really have an evening dress as soon as possible, and she was about the same height as aunt Pullet.

‘But she's so much broader across the shoulders than I am, it's very ill-convenient,’ said Mrs Pullet, ‘else she might wear that beautiful black brocade o' mine without any alteration; and her arms are beyond everything,’ added Mrs Pullet, sorrowfully, as she lifted Maggie's large round arm, ‘She'd never get my sleeves on.’

‘Oh, never mind that, aunt; send us the dress,’ said Lucy. ‘I don't mean Maggie to have long sleeves, and I have abundance of black lace for trimming. Her arms will look beautiful.’

‘Maggie's arms *are* a pretty shape,’ said Mrs Tulliver. ‘They're like mine used to be, only mine was never brown; I wish she'd had *our* family skin.’

‘Nonsense, aunty!’ said Lucy, patting her aunt Tulliver's shoulder, ‘you don't understand those things. A painter would think Maggie's complexion beautiful.’

‘Maybe, my dear,’ said Mrs Tulliver, submissively. ‘You know better than I do. Only when I was young a brown skin wasn't thought well on among respectable folks.’

‘No,’ said uncle Pullet, who took intense interest in the ladies' conversation as he sucked his lozenges. ‘Though there was a song about the 'Nut-brown Maid' too; I think she was crazy, - crazy Kate, - but I can't justly remember.’

‘Oh dear, dear!’ said Maggie, laughing, but impatient; ‘I think that will be the end of *my* brown skin, if it is always to be talked about so much.’