## Chapter IV - Brother and Sister

Maggie was obliged to go to Tom's lodgings in the middle of the day, when he would be coming in to dinner, else she would not have found him at home. He was not lodging with entire strangers. Our friend Bob Jakin had, with Mumps's tacit consent, taken not only a wife about eight months ago, but also one of those queer old houses, pierced with surprising passages, by the water-side, where, as he observed, his wife and mother could keep themselves out of mischief by letting out two 'pleasure-boats,' in which he had invested some of his savings, and by taking in a lodger for the parlor and spare bedroom. Under these circumstances, what could be better for the interests of all parties, sanitary considerations apart, than that the lodger should be Mr Tom?

It was Bob's wife who opened the door to Maggie. She was a tiny woman, with the general physiognomy of a Dutch doll, looking, in comparison with Bob's mother, who filled up the passage in the rear, very much like one of those human figures which the artist finds conveniently standing near a colossal statue to show the proportions. The tiny woman curtsied and looked up at Maggie with some awe as soon as she had opened the door; but the words, 'Is my brother at home?' which Maggie uttered smilingly, made her turn round with sudden excitement, and say, -

'Eh, mother, mother - tell Bob! - it's Miss Maggie! Come in, Miss, for goodness do,' she went on, opening a side door, and endeavoring to flatten her person against the wall to make the utmost space for the visitor.

Sad recollections crowded on Maggie as she entered the small parlor, which was now all that poor Tom had to call by the name of 'home,' - that name which had once, so many years ago, meant for both of them the same sum of dear familiar objects. But everything was not strange to her in this new room; the first thing her eyes dwelt on was the large old Bible, and the sight was not likely to disperse the old memories. She stood without speaking.

'If you please to take the privilege o' sitting down, Miss,' said Mrs Jakin, rubbing her apron over a perfectly clean chair, and then lifting up the corner of that garment and holding it to her face with an air of embarrassment, as she looked wonderingly at Maggie.

'Bob is at home, then?' said Maggie, recovering herself, and smiling at the bashful Dutch doll.

'Yes, Miss; but I think he must be washing and dressing himself; I'll go and see,' said Mrs Jakin, disappearing.

But she presently came back walking with new courage a little way behind her husband, who showed the brilliancy of his blue eyes and regular white teeth in the doorway, bowing respectfully.

'How do you do, Bob?' said Maggie, coming forward and putting out her hand to him; 'I always meant to pay your wife a visit, and I shall come another day on purpose for that, if she will let me. But I was obliged to come to-day to speak to my brother.'

'He'll be in before long, Miss. He's doin' finely, Mr Tom is; he'll be one o' the first men hereabouts, - you'll see that.'

'Well, Bob, I'm sure he'll be indebted to you, whatever he becomes; he said so himself only the other night, when he was talking of you.'

'Eh, Miss, that's his way o' takin' it. But I think the more on't when he says a thing, because his tongue doesn't overshoot him as mine does. Lors! I'm no better nor a tilted bottle, I ar'n't, - I can't stop mysen when once I begin. But you look rarely, Miss; it does me good to see you. What do you say now, Prissy?' - here Bob turned to his wife, - 'Isn't it all come true as I said? Though there isn't many sorts o' goods as I can't over-praise when I set my tongue to't.'

Mrs Bob's small nose seemed to be following the example of her eyes in turning up reverentially toward Maggie, but she was able now to smile and curtsey, and say, 'I'd looked forrard like aenything to seein' you, Miss, for my husband's tongue's been runnin' on you, like as if he was light-headed, iver since first he come a-courtin' on me.'

'Well, well,' said Bob, looking rather silly. 'Go an' see after the taters, else Mr Tom 'ull have to wait for 'em.'

'I hope Mumps is friendly with Mrs Jakin, Bob,' said Maggie, smiling. 'I remember you used to say he wouldn't like your marrying.'

'Eh, Miss,' said Bob, 'he made up his mind to't when he see'd what a little un she was. He pretends not to see her mostly, or else to think as she isn't full-growed. But about Mr Tom, Miss,' said Bob, speaking lower and looking serious, 'he's as close as a iron biler, he is; but I'm a 'cutish chap, an' when I've left off carrying my pack, an' am at a loose end, I've got more brains nor I know what to do wi', an' I'm forced to busy myself wi' other folks's insides. An' it worrets me as Mr Tom'll sit by himself so glumpish, a-knittin' his brow, an' a-lookin' at the fire of a night. He should be a bit livelier now, a fine young fellow like him. My wife says, when she goes in sometimes, an' he takes no notice of her, he sits lookin' into the fire, and frownin' as if he was watchin' folks at work in it.'

‘He thinks so much about business,’ said Maggie.

‘Ay,’ said Bob, speaking lower; ‘but do you think it's nothin' else, Miss? He's close, Mr Tom is; but I'm a 'cute chap, I am, an' I thought tow'rt last Christmas as I'd found out a soft place in him. It was about a little black spaniel - a rare bit o' breed - as he made a fuss to get. But since then summat's come over him, as he's set his teeth again' things more nor iver, for all he's had such good luck. An' I wanted to tell *you*, Miss, 'cause I thought you might work it out of him a bit, now you're come. He's a deal too lonely, and doesn't go into company enough.’

‘I'm afraid I have very little power over him, Bob,’ said Maggie, a good deal moved by Bob's suggestion. It was a totally new idea to her mind that Tom could have his love troubles. Poor fellow! - and in love with Lucy too! But it was perhaps a mere fancy of Bob's too officious brain. The present of the dog meant nothing more than cousinship and gratitude. But Bob had already said, ‘Here's Mr Tom,’ and the outer door was opening.

‘There is no time to spare, Tom,’ said Maggie, as soon as Bob left the room. ‘I must tell you at once what I came about, else I shall be hindering you from taking your dinner.’

Tom stood with his back against the chimney-piece, and Maggie was seated opposite the light. He noticed that she was tremulous, and he had a presentiment of the subject she was going to speak about. The presentiment made his voice colder and harder as he said, ‘What is it?’

This tone roused a spirit of resistance in Maggie, and she put her request in quite a different form from the one she had predetermined on. She rose from her seat, and looking straight at Tom, said, -

‘I want you to absolve me from my promise about Philip Wakem. Or rather, I promised you not to see him without telling you. I am come to tell you that I wish to see him.’

‘Very well,’ said Tom, still more coldly.

But Maggie had hardly finished speaking in that chill, defiant manner, before she repented, and felt the dread of alienation from her brother.

‘Not for myself, dear Tom. Don't be angry. I shouldn't have asked it, only that Philip, you know, is a friend of Lucy's and she wishes him to come, has invited him to come this evening; and I told her I couldn't see him without telling you. I shall only see him in the presence of other people. There will never be anything secret between us again.’

Tom looked away from Maggie, knitting his brow more strongly for a little while. Then he turned to her and said, slowly and emphatically, -

'You know what is my feeling on that subject, Maggie. There is no need for my repeating anything I said a year ago. While my father was living, I felt bound to use the utmost power over you, to prevent you from disgracing him as well as yourself, and all of us. But now I must leave you to your own choice. You wish to be independent; you told me so after my father's death. My opinion is not changed. If you think of Philip Wakem as a lover again, you must give up me.'

'I don't wish it, dear Tom, at least as things are; I see that it would lead to misery. But I shall soon go away to another situation, and I should like to be friends with him again while I am here. Lucy wishes it.'

The severity of Tom's face relaxed a little.

'I shouldn't mind your seeing him occasionally at my uncle's - I don't want you to make a fuss on the subject. But I have no confidence in you, Maggie. You would be led away to do anything.'

That was a cruel word. Maggie's lip began to tremble.

'Why will you say that, Tom? It is very hard of you. Have I not done and borne everything as well as I could? And I kept my word to you - when - when - - My life has not been a happy one, any more than yours.'

She was obliged to be childish; the tears would come. When Maggie was not angry, she was as dependent on kind or cold words as a daisy on the sunshine or the cloud; the need of being loved would always subdue her, as, in old days, it subdued her in the worm-eaten attic. The brother's goodness came uppermost at this appeal, but it could only show itself in Tom's fashion. He put his hand gently on her arm, and said, in the tone of a kind pedagogue, -

'Now listen to me, Maggie. I'll tell you what I mean. You're always in extremes; you have no judgment and self-command; and yet you think you know best, and will not submit to be guided. You know I didn't wish you to take a situation. My aunt Pullet was willing to give you a good home, and you might have lived respectably amongst your relations, until I could have provided a home for you with my mother. And that is what I should like to do. I wished my sister to be a lady, and I always have taken care of you, as my father desired, until you were well married. But your ideas and mine never accord, and you will not give way. Yet you might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows

better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you.'

'Yes, I know, dear Tom,' said Maggie, still half-sobbing, but trying to control her tears. 'I know you would do a great deal for me; I know how you work, and don't spare yourself. I am grateful to you. But, indeed, you can't quite judge for me; our natures are very different. You don't know how differently things affect me from what they do you.'

'Yes, I *do* know; I know it too well. I know how differently you must feel about all that affects our family, and your own dignity as a young woman, before you could think of receiving secret addresses from Philip Wakem. If it was not disgusting to me in every other way, I should object to my sister's name being associated for a moment with that of a young man whose father must hate the very thought of us all, and would spurn you. With any one but you, I should think it quite certain that what you witnessed just before my father's death would secure you from ever thinking again of Philip Wakem as a lover. But I don't feel certain of it with you; I never feel certain about anything with *you*. At one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another you have not resolution to resist a thing that you know to be wrong.'

There was a terrible cutting truth in Tom's words, - that hard rind of truth which is discerned by unimaginative, unsympathetic minds. Maggie always writhed under this judgment of Tom's; she rebelled and was humiliated in the same moment; it seemed as if he held a glass before her to show her her own folly and weakness, as if he were a prophetic voice predicting her future fallings; and yet, all the while, she judged him in return; she said inwardly that he was narrow and unjust, that he was below feeling those mental needs which were often the source of the wrong-doing or absurdity that made her life a planless riddle to him.

She did not answer directly; her heart was too full, and she sat down, leaning her arm on the table. It was no use trying to make Tom feel that she was near to him. He always repelled her. Her feeling under his words was complicated by the allusion to the last scene between her father and Wakem; and at length that painful, solemn memory surmounted the immediate grievance. No! She did not think of such things with frivolous indifference, and Tom must not accuse her of that. She looked up at him with a grave, earnest gaze and said, -

'I can't make you think better of me, Tom, by anything I can say. But I am not so shut out from all your feelings as you believe me to be. I see as well as you do that from our position with regard to Philip's father -

not on other grounds - it would be unreasonable, it would be wrong, for us to entertain the idea of marriage; and I have given up thinking of him as a lover. I am telling you the truth, and you have no right to disbelieve me; I have kept my word to you, and you have never detected me in a falsehood. I should not only not encourage, I should carefully avoid, any intercourse with Philip on any other footing than of quiet friendship. You may think that I am unable to keep my resolutions; but at least you ought not to treat me with hard contempt on the ground of faults that I have not committed yet.'

'Well, Maggie,' said Tom, softening under this appeal, 'I don't want to overstrain matters. I think, all things considered, it will be best for you to see Philip Wakem, if Lucy wishes him to come to the house. I believe what you say, - at least you believe it yourself, I know; I can only warn you. I wish to be as good a brother to you as you will let me.'

There was a little tremor in Tom's voice as he uttered the last words, and Maggie's ready affection came back with as sudden a glow as when they were children, and bit their cake together as a sacrament of conciliation. She rose and laid her hand on Tom's shoulder.

'Dear Tom, I know you mean to be good. I know you have had a great deal to bear, and have done a great deal. I should like to be a comfort to you, not to vex you. You don't think I'm altogether naughty, now, do you?'

Tom smiled at the eager face; his smiles were very pleasant to see when they did come, for the gray eyes could be tender underneath the frown.

'No, Maggie.'

'I may turn out better than you expect.'

'I hope you will.'

'And may I come some day and make tea for you, and see this extremely small wife of Bob's again?'

'Yes; but trot away now, for I've no more time to spare,' said Tom, looking at his watch.

'Not to give me a kiss?'

Tom bent to kiss her cheek, and then said, -

‘There! Be a good girl. I've got a great deal to think of to-day. I'm going to have a long consultation with my uncle Deane this afternoon.’

‘You'll come to aunt Glegg's to-morrow? We're going all to dine early, that we may go there to tea. You *must* come; Lucy told me to say so.’

‘Oh, pooh! I've plenty else to do,’ said Tom, pulling his bell violently, and bringing down the small bell-rope.

‘I'm frightened; I shall run away,’ said Maggie, making a laughing retreat; while Tom, with masculine philosophy, flung the bell-rope to the farther end of the room; not very far either, - a touch of human experience which I flatter myself will come home to the bosoms of not a few substantial or distinguished men who were once at an early stage of their rise in the world, and were cherishing very large hopes in very small lodgings.