

## Chapter VII - Philip Re-enters

The next morning was very wet, - the sort of morning on which male neighbors who have no imperative occupation at home are likely to pay their fair friends an illimitable visit. The rain, which has been endurable enough for the walk or ride one way, is sure to become so heavy, and at the same time so certain to clear up by and by, that nothing but an open quarrel can abbreviate the visit; latent detestation will not do at all. And if people happen to be lovers, what can be so delightful, in England, as a rainy morning? English sunshine is dubious; bonnets are never quite secure; and if you sit down on the grass, it may lead to catarrhs. But the rain is to be depended on. You gallop through it in a mackintosh, and presently find yourself in the seat you like best, - a little above or a little below the one on which your goddess sits (it is the same thing to the metaphysical mind, and that is the reason why women are at once worshipped and looked down upon), with a satisfactory confidence that there will be no lady-callers.

‘Stephen will come earlier this morning, I know,’ said Lucy; ‘he always does when it's rainy.’

Maggie made no answer. She was angry with Stephen; she began to think she should dislike him; and if it had not been for the rain, she would have gone to her aunt Glegg's this morning, and so have avoided him altogether. As it was, she must find some reason for remaining out of the room with her mother.

But Stephen did not come earlier, and there was another visitor - a nearer neighbor - who preceded him. When Philip entered the room, he was going merely to bow to Maggie, feeling that their acquaintance was a secret which he was bound not to betray; but when she advanced toward him and put out her hand, he guessed at once that Lucy had been taken into her confidence. It was a moment of some agitation to both, though Philip had spent many hours in preparing for it; but like all persons who have passed through life with little expectation of sympathy, he seldom lost his self-control, and shrank with the most sensitive pride from any noticeable betrayal of emotion. A little extra paleness, a little tension of the nostril when he spoke, and the voice pitched in rather a higher key, that to strangers would seem expressive of cold indifference, were all the signs Philip usually gave of an inward drama that was not without its fierceness. But Maggie, who had little more power of concealing the impressions made upon her than if she had been constructed of musical strings, felt her eyes getting larger with tears as they took each other's hands in silence. They were not painful tears; they had rather something of the same origin as the tears women and children shed when they have found some protection to cling to and look back on the threatened

danger. For Philip, who a little while ago was associated continually in Maggie's mind with the sense that Tom might reproach her with some justice, had now, in this short space, become a sort of outward conscience to her, that she might fly to for rescue and strength. Her tranquil, tender affection for Philip, with its root deep down in her childhood, and its memories of long quiet talk confirming by distinct successive impressions the first instinctive bias, - the fact that in him the appeal was more strongly to her pity and womanly devotedness than to her vanity or other egoistic excitability of her nature, - seemed now to make a sort of sacred place, a sanctuary where she could find refuge from an alluring influence which the best part of herself must resist; which must bring horrible tumult within, wretchedness without. This new sense of her relation to Philip nullified the anxious scruples she would otherwise have felt, lest she should overstep the limit of intercourse with him that Tom would sanction; and she put out her hand to him, and felt the tears in her eyes without any consciousness of an inward check. The scene was just what Lucy expected, and her kind heart delighted in bringing Philip and Maggie together again; though, even with all *her* regard for Philip, she could not resist the impression that her cousin Tom had some excuse for feeling shocked at the physical incongruity between the two, - a prosaic person like cousin Tom, who didn't like poetry and fairy tales. But she began to speak as soon as possible, to set them at ease.

'This was very good and virtuous of you,' she said, in her pretty treble, like the low conversational notes of little birds, 'to come so soon after your arrival. And as it is, I think I will pardon you for running away in an inopportune manner, and giving your friends no notice. Come and sit down here,' she went on, placing the chair that would suit him best, 'and you shall find yourself treated mercifully.'

'You will never govern well, Miss Deane,' said Philip, as he seated himself, 'because no one will ever believe in your severity. People will always encourage themselves in misdemeanors by the certainty that you will be indulgent.'

Lucy gave some playful contradiction, but Philip did not hear what it was, for he had naturally turned toward Maggie, and she was looking at him with that open, affectionate scrutiny which we give to a friend from whom we have been long separated. What a moment their parting had been! And Philip felt as if he were only in the morrow of it. He felt this so keenly, - with such intense, detailed remembrance, with such passionate revival of all that had been said and looked in their last conversation, - that with that jealousy and distrust which in diffident natures is almost inevitably linked with a strong feeling, he thought he read in Maggie's glance and manner the evidence of a change. The very fact that he feared and half expected it would be

sure to make this thought rush in, in the absence of positive proof to the contrary.

'I am having a great holiday, am I not?' said Maggie. 'Lucy is like a fairy godmother; she has turned me from a drudge into a princess in no time. I do nothing but indulge myself all day long, and she always finds out what I want before I know it myself.'

'I am sure she is the happier for having you, then,' said Philip. 'You must be better than a whole menagerie of pets to her. And you look well. You are benefiting by the change.'

Artificial conversation of this sort went on a little while, till Lucy, determined to put an end to it, exclaimed, with a good imitation of annoyance, that she had forgotten something, and was quickly out of the room.

In a moment Maggie and Philip leaned forward, and the hands were clasped again, with a look of sad contentment, like that of friends who meet in the memory of recent sorrow.

'I told my brother I wished to see you, Philip; I asked him to release me from my promise, and he consented.'

Maggie, in her impulsiveness, wanted Philip to know at once the position they must hold toward each other; but she checked herself. The things that had happened since he had spoken of his love for her were so painful that she shrank from being the first to allude to them. It seemed almost like an injury toward Philip even to mention her brother, - her brother, who had insulted him. But he was thinking too entirely of her to be sensitive on any other point at that moment.

'Then we can at least be friends, Maggie? There is nothing to hinder that now?'

'Will not your father object?' said Maggie, withdrawing her hand.

'I should not give you up on any ground but your own wish, Maggie,' said Philip, coloring. 'There are points on which I should always resist my father, as I used to tell you. *That* is one.'

'Then there is nothing to hinder our being friends, Philip, - seeing each other and talking to each other while I am here; I shall soon go away again. I mean to go very soon, to a new situation.'

'Is that inevitable, Maggie?'

'Yes; I must not stay here long. It would unfit me for the life I must begin again at last. I can't live in dependence, - I can't live with my brother, though he is very good to me. He would like to provide for me; but that would be intolerable to me.'

Philip was silent a few moments, and then said, in that high, feeble voice which with him indicated the resolute suppression of emotion, -

'Is there no other alternative, Maggie? Is that life, away from those who love you, the only one you will allow yourself to look forward to?'

'Yes, Philip,' she said, looking at him pleadingly, as if she entreated him to believe that she was compelled to this course. 'At least, as things are; I don't know what may be in years to come. But I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving; I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do.'

'Now you are returning to your old thought in a new form, Maggie, - the thought I used to combat,' said Philip, with a slight tinge of bitterness. 'You want to find out a mode of renunciation that will be an escape from pain. I tell you again, there is no such escape possible except by perverting or mutilating one's nature. What would become of me, if I tried to escape from pain? Scorn and cynicism would be my only opium; unless I could fall into some kind of conceited madness, and fancy myself a favorite of Heaven because I am not a favorite with men.'

The bitterness had taken on some impetuosity as Philip went on speaking; the words were evidently an outlet for some immediate feeling of his own, as well as an answer to Maggie. There was a pain pressing on him at that moment. He shrank with proud delicacy from the faintest allusion to the words of love, of plighted love that had passed between them. It would have seemed to him like reminding Maggie of a promise; it would have had for him something of the baseness of compulsion. He could not dwell on the fact that he himself had not changed; for that too would have had the air of an appeal. His love for Maggie was stamped, even more than the rest of his experience, with the exaggerated sense that he was an exception, - that she, that every one, saw him in the light of an exception.

But Maggie was conscience-stricken.

'Yes, Philip,' she said, with her childish contrition when he used to chide her, 'you are right, I know. I do always think too much of my own feelings, and not enough of others', - not enough of yours. I had need have you always to find fault with me and teach me; so many things have come true that you used to tell me.'

Maggie was resting her elbow on the table, leaning her head on her hand and looking at Philip with half-penitent dependent affection, as she said this; while he was returning her gaze with an expression that, to her consciousness, gradually became less vague, - became charged with a specific recollection. Had his mind flown back to something that *she* now remembered, - something about a lover of Lucy's? It was a thought that made her shudder; it gave new definiteness to her present position, and to the tendency of what had happened the evening before. She moved her arm from the table, urged to change her position by that positive physical oppression at the heart that sometimes accompanies a sudden mental pang.

'What is the matter, Maggie? Has something happened?' Philip said, in inexpressible anxiety, his imagination being only too ready to weave everything that was fatal to them both.

'No, nothing,' said Maggie, rousing her latent will. Philip must not have that odious thought in his mind; she would banish it from her own. 'Nothing,' she repeated, 'except in my own mind. You used to say I should feel the effect of my starved life, as you called it; and I do. I am too eager in my enjoyment of music and all luxuries, now they are come to me.'

She took up her work and occupied herself resolutely, while Philip watched her, really in doubt whether she had anything more than this general allusion in her mind. It was quite in Maggie's character to be agitated by vague self-reproach. But soon there came a violent well-known ring at the door-bell resounding through the house.

'Oh, what a startling announcement!' said Maggie, quite mistress of herself, though not without some inward flutter. 'I wonder where Lucy is.'

Lucy had not been deaf to the signal, and after an interval long enough for a few solicitous but not hurried inquiries, she herself ushered Stephen in.

'Well, old fellow,' he said, going straight up to Philip and shaking him heartily by the hand, bowing to Maggie in passing, 'it's glorious to have you back again; only I wish you'd conduct yourself a little less like a sparrow with a residence on the house-top, and not go in and out constantly without letting the servants know. This is about the twentieth time I've had to scamper up those countless stairs to that painting-room of yours, all to no purpose, because your people thought you were at home. Such incidents embitter friendship.'

'I've so few visitors, it seems hardly worth while to leave notice of my exit and entrances,' said Philip, feeling rather oppressed just then by Stephen's bright strong presence and strong voice.

'Are you quite well this morning, Miss Tulliver?' said Stephen, turning to Maggie with stiff politeness, and putting out his hand with the air of fulfilling a social duty.

Maggie gave the tips of her fingers, and said, 'Quite well, thank you,' in a tone of proud indifference. Philip's eyes were watching them keenly; but Lucy was used to seeing variations in their manner to each other, and only thought with regret that there was some natural antipathy which every now and then surmounted their mutual goodwill. 'Maggie is not the sort of woman Stephen admires, and she is irritated by something in him which she interprets as conceit,' was the silent observation that accounted for everything to guileless Lucy. Stephen and Maggie had no sooner completed this studied greeting than each felt hurt by the other's coldness. And Stephen, while rattling on in questions to Philip about his recent sketching expedition, was thinking all the more about Maggie because he was not drawing her into the conversation as he had invariably done before. 'Maggie and Philip are not looking happy,' thought Lucy; 'this first interview has been saddening to them.'

'I think we people who have not been galloping,' she said to Stephen, 'are all a little damped by the rain. Let us have some music. We ought to take advantage of having Philip and you together. Give us the duet in 'Masaniello'; Maggie has not heard that, and I know it will suit her.'

'Come, then,' said Stephen, going toward the piano, and giving a foretaste of the tune in his deep 'brum-brum,' very pleasant to hear.

'You, please, Philip, - you play the accompaniment,' said Lucy, 'and then I can go on with my work. You *will* like to play, sha'n't you?' she added, with a pretty, inquiring look, anxious, as usual, lest she should have proposed what was not pleasant to another; but with yearnings toward her unfinished embroidery.

Philip had brightened at the proposition, for there is no feeling, perhaps, except the extremes of fear and grief, that does not find relief in music, - that does not make a man sing or play the better; and Philip had an abundance of pent-up feeling at this moment, as complex as any trio or quartet that was ever meant to express love and jealousy and resignation and fierce suspicion, all at the same time.

'Oh, yes,' he said, seating himself at the piano, 'it is a way of eking out one's imperfect life and being three people at once, - to sing and make

the piano sing, and hear them both all the while, - or else to sing and paint.'

'Ah, there you are an enviable fellow. I can do nothing with my hands,' said Stephen. 'That has generally been observed in men of great administrative capacity, I believe, - a tendency to predominance of the reflective powers in me! Haven't you observed that, Miss Tulliver?'

Stephen had fallen by mistake into his habit of playful appeal to Maggie, and she could not repress the answering flush and epigram.

'I *have* observed a tendency to predominance,' she said, smiling; and Philip at that moment devoutly hoped that she found the tendency disagreeable.

'Come, come,' said Lucy; 'music, music! We will discuss each other's qualities another time.'

Maggie always tried in vain to go on with her work when music began. She tried harder than ever to-day; for the thought that Stephen knew how much she cared for his singing was one that no longer roused a merely playful resistance; and she knew, too, that it was his habit always to stand so that he could look at her. But it was of no use; she soon threw her work down, and all her intentions were lost in the vague state of emotion produced by the inspiring duet, - emotion that seemed to make her at once strong and weak; strong for all enjoyment, weak for all resistance. When the strain passed into the minor, she half started from her seat with the sudden thrill of that change. Poor Maggie! She looked very beautiful when her soul was being played on in this way by the inexorable power of sound. You might have seen the slightest perceptible quivering through her whole frame as she leaned a little forward, clasping her hands as if to steady herself; while her eyes dilated and brightened into that wide-open, childish expression of wondering delight which always came back in her happiest moments. Lucy, who at other times had always been at the piano when Maggie was looking in this way, could not resist the impulse to steal up to her and kiss her. Philip, too, caught a glimpse of her now and then round the open book on the desk, and felt that he had never before seen her under so strong an influence.

'More, more!' said Lucy, when the duet had been encored. 'Something spirited again. Maggie always says she likes a great rush of sound.'

'It must be 'Let us take the road,' then,' said Stephen, - 'so suitable for a wet morning. But are you prepared to abandon the most sacred duties of life, and come and sing with us?'

'Oh, yes,' said Lucy, laughing. 'If you will look out the 'Beggar's Opera' from the large canterbury. It has a dingy cover.'

'That is a great clue, considering there are about a score covers here of rival dinginess,' said Stephen, drawing out the canterbury.

'Oh, play something the while, Philip,' said Lucy, noticing that his fingers were wandering over the keys. 'What is that you are falling into? - something delicious that I don't know.'

'Don't you know that?' said Philip, bringing out the tune more definitely. 'It's from the 'Sonnambula' - 'Ah! perche non posso odiarti.' I don't know the opera, but it appears the tenor is telling the heroine that he shall always love her though she may forsake him. You've heard me sing it to the English words, 'I love thee still.'"

It was not quite unintentionally that Philip had wandered into this song, which might be an indirect expression to Maggie of what he could not prevail on himself to say to her directly. Her ears had been open to what he was saying, and when he began to sing, she understood the plaintive passion of the music. That pleading tenor had no very fine qualities as a voice, but it was not quite new to her; it had sung to her by snatches, in a subdued way, among the grassy walks and hollows, and underneath the leaning ash-tree in the Red Deeps. There seemed to be some reproach in the words; did Philip mean that? She wished she had assured him more distinctly in their conversation that she desired not to renew the hope of love between them, *only* because it clashed with her inevitable circumstances. She was touched, not thrilled by the song; it suggested distinct memories and thoughts, and brought quiet regret in the place of excitement.

'That's the way with you tenors,' said Stephen, who was waiting with music in his hand while Philip finished the song. 'You demoralize the fair sex by warbling your sentimental love and constancy under all sorts of vile treatment. Nothing short of having your heads served up in a dish like that mediaeval tenor or troubadour, would prevent you from expressing your entire resignation. I must administer an antidote, while Miss Deane prepares to tear herself away from her bobbins.'

Stephen rolled out, with saucy energy, -

'Shall I, wasting in despair, Die because a woman's fair?'

and seemed to make all the air in the room alive with a new influence. Lucy, always proud of what Stephen did, went toward the piano with laughing, admiring looks at him; and Maggie, in spite of her resistance to the spirit of the song and to the singer, was taken hold of and



shaken by the invisible influence, - was borne along by a wave too strong for her.

But, angrily resolved not to betray herself, she seized her work, and went on making false stitches and pricking her fingers with much perseverance, not looking up or taking notice of what was going forward, until all the three voices united in 'Let us take the road.'

I am afraid there would have been a subtle, stealing gratification in her mind if she had known how entirely this saucy, defiant Stephen was occupied with her; how he was passing rapidly from a determination to treat her with ostentatious indifference to an irritating desire for some sign of inclination from her, - some interchange of subdued word or look with her. It was not long before he found an opportunity, when they had passed to the music of 'The Tempest.' Maggie, feeling the need of a footstool, was walking across the room to get one, when Stephen, who was not singing just then, and was conscious of all her movements, guessed her want, and flew to anticipate her, lifting the footstool with an entreating look at her, which made it impossible not to return a glance of gratitude. And then, to have the footstool placed carefully by a too self-confident personage, - not *any* self-confident personage, but one in particular, who suddenly looks humble and anxious, and lingers, bending still, to ask if there is not some draught in that position between the window and the fireplace, and if he may not be allowed to move the work-table for her, - these things will summon a little of the too ready, traitorous tenderness into a woman's eyes, compelled as she is in her girlish time to learn her life-lessons in very trivial language. And to Maggie such things had not been every-day incidents, but were a new element in her life, and found her keen appetite for homage quite fresh. That tone of gentle solicitude obliged her to look at the face that was bent toward her, and to say, 'No, thank you'; and nothing could prevent that mutual glance from being delicious to both, as it had been the evening before.

It was but an ordinary act of politeness in Stephen; it had hardly taken two minutes; and Lucy, who was singing, scarcely noticed it. But to Philip's mind, filled already with a vague anxiety that was likely to find a definite ground for itself in any trivial incident, this sudden eagerness in Stephen, and the change in Maggie's face, which was plainly reflecting a beam from his, seemed so strong a contrast with the previous overwrought signs of indifference, as to be charged with painful meaning. Stephen's voice, pouring in again, jarred upon his nervous susceptibility as if it had been the clang of sheet-iron, and he felt inclined to make the piano shriek in utter discord. He had really seen no communicable ground for suspecting any unusual feeling between Stephen and Maggie; his own reason told him so, and he wanted to go home at once that he might reflect coolly on these false

images, till he had convinced himself of their nullity. But then, again, he wanted to stay as long as Stephen stayed, - always to be present when Stephen was present with Maggie. It seemed to poor Philip so natural, nay, inevitable, that any man who was near Maggie should fall in love with her! There was no promise of happiness for her if she were beguiled into loving Stephen Guest; and this thought emboldened Philip to view his own love for her in the light of a less unequal offering. He was beginning to play very falsely under this deafening inward tumult, and Lucy was looking at him in astonishment, when Mrs Tulliver's entrance to summon them to lunch came as an excuse for abruptly breaking off the music.

'Ah, Mr Philip!' said Mr Deane, when they entered the dining-room, 'I've not seen you for a long while. Your father's not at home, I think, is he? I went after him to the office the other day, and they said he was out of town.'

'He's been to Mudport on business for several days,' said Philip; 'but he's come back now.'

'As fond of his farming hobby as ever, eh?'

'I believe so,' said Philip, rather wondering at this sudden interest in his father's pursuits.

'Ah!' said Mr Deane, 'he's got some land in his own hands on this side the river as well as the other, I think?'

'Yes, he has.'

'Ah!' continued Mr Deane, as he dispensed the pigeonpie, 'he must find farming a heavy item, - an expensive hobby. I never had a hobby myself, never would give in to that. And the worst of all hobbies are those that people think they can get money at. They shoot their money down like corn out of a sack then.'

Lucy felt a little nervous under her father's apparently gratuitous criticism of Mr Wakem's expenditure. But it ceased there, and Mr Deane became unusually silent and meditative during his luncheon. Lucy, accustomed to watch all indications in her father, and having reasons, which had recently become strong, for an extra interest in what referred to the Wakems, felt an unusual curiosity to know what had prompted her father's questions. His subsequent silence made her suspect there had been some special reason for them in his mind.

With this idea in her head, she resorted to her usual plan when she wanted to tell or ask her father anything particular: she found a reason for her aunt Tulliver to leaving the dining-room after dinner,

and seated herself on a small stool at her father's knee. Mr Deane, under those circumstances, considered that he tasted some of the most agreeable moments his merits had purchased him in life, notwithstanding that Lucy, disliking to have her hair powdered with snuff, usually began by mastering his snuff-box on such occasions.

'You don't want to go to sleep yet, papa, *do* you?' she said, as she brought up her stool and opened the large fingers that clutched the snuff-box.

'Not yet,' said Mr Deane, glancing at the reward of merit in the decanter. 'But what do *you* want?' he added, pinching the dimpled chin fondly, - 'to coax some more sovereigns out of my pocket for your bazaar? Eh?'

'No, I have no base motives at all to-day. I only want to talk, not to beg. I want to know what made you ask Philip Wakem about his father's farming to-day, papa? It seemed rather odd, because you never hardly say anything to him about his father; and why should you care about Mr Wakem's losing money by his hobby?'

'Something to do with business,' said Mr Deane, waving his hands, as if to repel intrusion into that mystery.

'But, papa, you always say Mr Wakem has brought Philip up like a girl; how came you to think you should get any business knowledge out of him? Those abrupt questions sounded rather oddly. Philip thought them queer.'

'Nonsense, child!' said Mr Deane, willing to justify his social demeanor, with which he had taken some pains in his upward progress. 'There's a report that Wakem's mill and farm on the other side of the river - Dorlcote Mill, your uncle Tulliver's, you know - isn't answering so well as it did. I wanted to see if your friend Philip would let anything out about his father's being tired of farming.'

'Why? Would you buy the mill, papa, if he would part with it?' said Lucy, eagerly. 'Oh, tell me everything; here, you shall have your snuff-box if you'll tell me. Because Maggie says all their hearts are set on Tom's getting back the mill some time. It was one of the last things her father said to Tom, that he must get back the mill.'

'Hush, you little puss,' said Mr Deane, availing himself of the restored snuff-box. 'You must not say a word about this thing; do you hear? There's very little chance of their getting the mill or of anybody's getting it out of Wakem's hands. And if he knew that we wanted it with a view to the Tulliver's getting it again, he'd be the less likely to part with it. It's natural, after what happened. He behaved well

enough to Tulliver before; but a horsewhipping is not likely to be paid for with sugar-plums.'

'Now, papa,' said Lucy, with a little air of solemnity, 'will you trust me? You must not ask me all my reasons for what I'm going to say, but I have very strong reasons. And I'm very cautious; I am, indeed.'

'Well, let us hear.'

'Why, I believe, if you will let me take Philip Wakem into our confidence, - let me tell him all about your wish to buy, and what it's for; that my cousins wish to have it, and why they wish to have it, - I believe Philip would help to bring it about. I know he would desire to do it.'

'I don't see how that can be, child,' said Mr Deane, looking puzzled. 'Why should *he* care?' - then, with a sudden penetrating look at his daughter, 'You don't think the poor lad's fond of you, and so you can make him do what you like?' (Mr Deane felt quite safe about his daughter's affections.)

'No, papa; he cares very little about me, - not so much as I care about him. But I have a reason for being quite sure of what I say. Don't you ask me. And if you ever guess, don't tell me. Only give me leave to do as I think fit about it.'

Lucy rose from her stool to seat herself on her father's knee, and kissed him with that last request.

'Are you sure you won't do mischief, now?' he said, looking at her with delight.

'Yes, papa, quite sure. I'm very wise; I've got all your business talents. Didn't you admire my accout-book, now, when I showed it you?'

'Well, well, if this youngster will keep his counsel, there won't be much harm done. And to tell the truth, I think there's not much chance for us any other way. Now, let me go off to sleep.'