

## Chapter VIII - Wakem in a New Light

Before three days had passed after the conversation you have just overheard between Lucy and her father she had contrived to have a private interview with Philip during a visit of Maggie's to her aunt Glegg. For a day and a night Philip turned over in his mind with restless agitation all that Lucy had told him in that interview, till he had thoroughly resolved on a course of action. He thought he saw before him now a possibility of altering his position with respect to Maggie, and removing at least one obstacle between them. He laid his plan and calculated all his moves with the fervid deliberation of a chess-player in the days of his first ardor, and was amazed himself at his sudden genius as a tactician. His plan was as bold as it was thoroughly calculated. Having watched for a moment when his father had nothing more urgent on his hands than the newspaper, he went behind him, laid a hand on his shoulder, and said, -

'Father, will you come up into my sanctum, and look at my new sketches? I've arranged them now.'

'I'm getting terrible stiff in the joints, Phil, for climbing those stairs of yours,' said Wakem, looking kindly at his son as he laid down his paper. 'But come along, then.'

'This is a nice place for you, isn't it, Phil? - a capital light that from the roof, eh?' was, as usual, the first thing he said on entering the painting-room. He liked to remind himself and his son too that his fatherly indulgence had provided the accommodation. He had been a good father. Emily would have nothing to reproach him with there, if she came back again from her grave.

'Come, come,' he said, putting his double eye-glass over his nose, and seating himself to take a general view while he rested, 'you've got a famous show here. Upon my word, I don't see that your things aren't as good as that London artist's - what's his name - that Leyburn gave so much money for.'

Philip shook his head and smiled. He had seated himself on his painting-stool, and had taken a lead pencil in his hand, with which he was making strong marks to counteract the sense of tremulousness. He watched his father get up, and walk slowly round, good-naturedly dwelling on the pictures much longer than his amount of genuine taste for landscape would have prompted, till he stopped before a stand on which two pictures were placed, - one much larger than the other, the smaller one in a leather case.

'Bless me! what have you here?' said Wakem, startled by a sudden transition from landscape to portrait. 'I thought you'd left off figures. Who are these?'

'They are the same person,' said Philip, with calm promptness, 'at different ages.'

'And what person?' said Wakem, sharply fixing his eyes with a growing look of suspicion on the larger picture.

'Miss Tulliver. The small one is something like what she was when I was at school with her brother at King's Lorton; the larger one is not quite so good a likeness of what she was when I came from abroad.'

Wakem turned round fiercely, with a flushed face, letting his eye-glass fall, and looking at his son with a savage expression for a moment, as if he was ready to strike that daring febleness from the stool. But he threw himself into the armchair again, and thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets, still looking angrily at his son, however. Philip did not return the look, but sat quietly watching the point of his pencil.

'And do you mean to say, then, that you have had any acquaintance with her since you came from abroad?' said Wakem, at last, with that vain effort which rage always makes to throw as much punishment as it desires to inflict into words and tones, since blows are forbidden.

'Yes; I saw a great deal of her for a whole year before her father's death. We met often in that thicket - the Red Deeps - near Dorlcote Mill. I love her dearly; I shall never love any other woman. I have thought of her ever since she was a little girl.'

'Go on, sir! And you have corresponded with her all this while?'

'No. I never told her I loved her till just before we parted, and she promised her brother not to see me again or to correspond with me. I am not sure that she loves me or would consent to marry me. But if she would consent, - if she *did* love me well enough, - I should marry her.'

'And this is the return you make me for all the indulgences I've heaped on you?' said Wakem, getting white, and beginning to tremble under an enraged sense of impotence before Philip's calm defiance and concentration of purpose.

'No, father,' said Philip, looking up at him for the first time; 'I don't regard it as a return. You have been an indulgent father to me; but I have always felt that it was because you had an affectionate wish to give me as much happiness as my unfortunate lot would admit, not

that it was a debt you expected me to pay by sacrificing all my chances of happiness to satisfy feelings of yours which I can never share.'

'I think most sons would share their father's feelings in this case,' said Wakem, bitterly. 'The girl's father was an ignorant mad brute, who was within an inch of murdering me. The whole town knows it. And the brother is just as insolent, only in a cooler way. He forbade her seeing you, you say; he'll break every bone in your body, for your greater happiness, if you don't take care. But you seem to have made up your mind; you have counted the consequences, I suppose. Of course you are independent of me; you can marry this girl to-morrow, if you like; you are a man of five-and-twenty, - you can go your way, and I can go mine. We need have no more to do with each other.'

Wakem rose and walked toward the door, but something held him back, and instead of leaving the room, he walked up and down it. Philip was slow to reply, and when he spoke, his tone had a more incisive quietness and clearness than ever.

'No; I can't marry Miss Tulliver, even if she would have me, if I have only my own resources to maintain her with. I have been brought up to no profession. I can't offer her poverty as well as deformity.'

'Ah, *there* is a reason for your clinging to me, doubtless,' said Wakem, still bitterly, though Philip's last words had given him a pang; they had stirred a feeling which had been a habit for a quarter of a century. He threw himself into the chair again.

'I expected all this,' said Philip. 'I know these scenes are often happening between father and son. If I were like other men of my age, I might answer your angry words by still angrier; we might part; I should marry the woman I love, and have a chance of being as happy as the rest. But if it will be a satisfaction to you to annihilate the very object of everything you've done for me, you have an advantage over most fathers; you can completely deprive me of the only thing that would make my life worth having.'

Philip paused, but his father was silent.

'You know best what satisfaction you would have, beyond that of gratifying a ridiculous rancor worthy only of wandering savages.'

'Ridiculous rancor!' Wakem burst out. 'What do you mean? Damn it! is a man to be horsewhipped by a boor and love him for it? Besides, there's that cold, proud devil of a son, who said a word to me I shall not forget when we had the settling. He would be as pleasant a mark for a bullet as I know, if he were worth the expense.'

'I don't mean your resentment toward them,' said Philip, who had his reasons for some sympathy with this view of Tom, 'though a feeling of revenge is not worth much, that you should care to keep it. I mean your extending the enmity to a helpless girl, who has too much sense and goodness to share their narrow prejudices. *She* has never entered into the family quarrels.'

'What does that signify? We don't ask what a woman does; we ask whom she belongs to. It's altogether a degrading thing to you, to think of marrying old Tulliver's daughter.'

For the first time in the dialogue, Philip lost some of his self-control, and colored with anger.

'Miss Tulliver,' he said, with bitter incisiveness, 'has the only grounds of rank that anything but vulgar folly can suppose to belong to the middle class; she is thoroughly refined, and her friends, whatever else they may be, are respected for irreproachable honor and integrity. All St. Ogg's, I fancy, would pronounce her to be more than my equal.'

Wakem darted a glance of fierce question at his son; but Philip was not looking at him, and with a certain penitent consciousness went on, in a few moments, as if in amplification of his last words, -

'Find a single person in St. Ogg's who will not tell you that a beautiful creature like her would be throwing herself away on a pitiable object like me.'

'Not she!' said Wakem, rising again, and forgetting everything else in a burst of resentful pride, half fatherly, half personal. 'It would be a deuced fine match for her. It's all stuff about an accidental deformity, when a girl's really attached to a man.'

'But girls are not apt to get attached under those circumstances,' said Philip.

'Well, then,' said Wakem, rather brutally, trying to recover his previous position, 'if she doesn't care for you, you might have spared yourself the trouble of talking to me about her, and you might have spared me the trouble of refusing my consent to what was never likely to happen.'

Wakem strode to the door, and without looking round again, banged it after him.

Philip was not without confidence that his father would be ultimately wrought upon as he had expected, by what had passed; but the scene had jarred upon his nerves, which were as sensitive as a woman's. He

determined not to go down to dinner; he couldn't meet his father again that day. It was Wakem's habit, when he had no company at home, to go out in the evening, often as early as half-past seven; and as it was far on in the afternoon now, Philip locked up his room and went out for a long ramble, thinking he would not return until his father was out of the house again. He got into a boat, and went down the river to a favorite village, where he dined, and lingered till it was late enough for him to return. He had never had any sort of quarrel with his father before, and had a sickening fear that this contest, just begun, might go on for weeks; and what might not happen in that time? He would not allow himself to define what that involuntary question meant. But if he could once be in the position of Maggie's accepted, acknowledged lover, there would be less room for vague dread. He went up to his painting-room again, and threw himself with a sense of fatigue into the armchair, looking round absently at the views of water and rock that were ranged around, till he fell into a doze, in which he fancied Maggie was slipping down a glistening, green, slimy channel of a waterfall, and he was looking on helpless, till he was awakened by what seemed a sudden, awful crash.

It was the opening of the door, and he could hardly have dozed more than a few moments, for there was no perceptible change in the evening light. It was his father who entered; and when Philip moved to vacate the chair for him, he said, -

'Sit still. I'd rather walk about.'

He stalked up and down the room once or twice, and then, standing opposite Philip with his hands thrust in his side pockets, he said, as if continuing a conversation that had not been broken off, -

'But this girl seems to have been fond of you, Phil, else she wouldn't have met you in that way.'

Philip's heart was beating rapidly, and a transient flush passed over his face like a gleam. It was not quite easy to speak at once.

'She liked me at King's Lorton, when she was a little girl, because I used to sit with her brother a great deal when he had hurt his foot. She had kept that in her memory, and thought of me as a friend of a long while ago. She didn't think of me as a lover when she met me.'

'Well, but you made love to her at last. What did she say then?' said Wakem, walking about again.

'She said she *did* love me then.'

'Confound it, then; what else do you want? Is she a jilt?'

'She was very young then,' said Philip, hesitatingly. 'I'm afraid she hardly knew what she felt. I'm afraid our long separation, and the idea that events must always divide us, may have made a difference.'

'But she's in the town. I've seen her at church. Haven't you spoken to her since you came back?'

'Yes, at Mr Deane's. But I couldn't renew my proposals to her on several grounds. One obstacle would be removed if you would give your consent, - if you would be willing to think of her as a daughter-in-law.'

Wakem was silent a little while, pausing before Maggie's picture.

'She's not the sort of woman your mother was, though, Phil,' he said, at last. 'I saw her at church, - she's handsomer than this, - deuced fine eyes and fine figure, I saw; but rather dangerous and unmanageable, eh?'

'She's very tender and affectionate, and so simple, - without the airs and petty contrivances other women have.'

'Ah?' said Wakem. Then looking round at his son, 'But your mother looked gentler; she had that brown wavy hair and gray eyes, like yours. You can't remember her very well. It was a thousand pities I'd no likeness of her.'

'Then, shouldn't you be glad for me to have the same sort of happiness, father, to sweeten my life for me? There can never be another tie so strong to you as that which began eight-and-twenty years ago, when you married my mother, and you have been tightening it ever since.'

'Ah, Phil, you're the only fellow that knows the best of me,' said Wakem, giving his hand to his son. 'We must keep together if we can. And now, what am I to do? You must come downstairs and tell me. Am I to go and call on this dark-eyed damsel?'

The barrier once thrown down in this way, Philip could talk freely to his father of their entire relation with the Tullivers, - of the desire to get the mill and land back into the family, and of its transfer to Guest & Co. as an intermediate step. He could venture now to be persuasive and urgent, and his father yielded with more readiness than he had calculated on.

'I don't care about the mill,' he said at last, with a sort of angry compliance. 'I've had an infernal deal of bother lately about the mill. Let them pay me for my improvements, that's all. But there's one

thing you needn't ask me. I shall have no direct transactions with young Tulliver. If you like to swallow him for his sister's sake, you may; but I've no sauce that will make him go down.'

I leave you to imagine the agreeable feelings with which Philip went to Mr Deane the next day, to say that Mr Wakem was ready to open the negotiations, and Lucy's pretty triumph as she appealed to her father whether she had not proved her great business abilities. Mr Deane was rather puzzled, and suspected that there had been something 'going on' among the young people to which he wanted a clew. But to men of Mr Deane's stamp, what goes on among the young people is as extraneous to the real business of life as what goes on among the birds and butterflies, until it can be shown to have a malign bearing on monetary affairs. And in this case the bearing appeared to be entirely propitious.