
GEORGE ELIOT

The Mill on the Floss Published in 1860, *The Mill on the Floss* draws on George Eliot's Warwickshire childhood. Beginning in 1829, when its heroine, Maggie, is ten years old (as Eliot was in that year), the novel portrays in idealized form Eliot's relationship with her brother, Isaac, in Maggie and Tom Tulliver. Like many of Eliot's novels, *The Mill on the Floss* portrays a passionate, rapidly developing consciousness in conflict with a conservative social order. It is also, however, a panoramic depiction, at once nostalgic and critical, of a rural middle class whose values were undergoing transformation. The setting—the northeast of England in the Reform era—draws its specificity from the detailed depiction of rural life; the meticulous rendering of characters' dialect speech; and Eliot's affectionate but ironic representation of provincial attitudes toward education, woman's position, religion, and money. The conflict between those attitudes and Maggie's independence leads not to resolution but to an impasse. Rare among Victorian novels, *The Mill on the Floss* has a tragic ending: the story closes with the epitaph "In their death they were not divided."

We have chosen to include the first five chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* because they compose so coherent a unit. Beginning with the narrator's nostalgic vision of Maggie standing on the banks of the Floss and ending with her meditation on the importance of childhood in establishing our affective bonds to the earth, these chapters give novelistic form to Wordsworth's conception of the role that memories of childhood play in the construction of the self. The novel also has a tie to another master of retrospective vision, Marcel Proust. *The Mill on the Floss* was, for Proust, the best loved of books; two pages of it, he said, "reduce me to tears." But it is not only the preciousness of memory that shapes Maggie's later life. In these early chapters, Eliot also establishes Maggie's conflicts with her brother, the narrowness of her society's vision of women, and the elements of Maggie's character that will play their role in her final destiny.

*From The Mill on the Floss**From Book First. Boy and Girl*

CHAPTER I. OUTSIDE DORLCOTE MILL

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships — laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal — are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures, and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn.¹ There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of beehive ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees: the distant ships seem to be lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails close among the branches of the spreading ash. Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge.

And this is Dorlcote Mill. I must stand a minute or two here on the bridge and look at it, though the clouds are threatening, and it is far on in the afternoon. Even in this leafless time of departing February it is pleasant to look at — perhaps the chill damp season adds a charm to the trimly-kept, comfortable dwelling-house, as old as the elms and chestnuts that shelter it from the northern blast. The stream is brimful now, and lies high in this little withy² plantation, and half drowns the grassy fringe of the croft³ in front of the house. As I look at the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright-green powder softening the outline of the great trunks and branches that gleam from under the bare purple boughs, I am in love with moistness, and envy the white ducks

1. Wheat.

2. Willow.

3. A patch of farmland adjacent to a house or cottage.

that are dipping their heads far into the water here among the withes, unmindful of the awkward appearance they make in the drier world above.

The rush of the water, and the booming of the mill, bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond. And now there is the thunder of the huge covered waggon coming home with sacks of grain. That honest waggoner is thinking of his dinner, getting sadly dry in the oven at this late hour; but he will not touch it till he has fed his horses, — the strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts, who, I fancy, are looking mild reproach at him from between their blinkers, that he should crack his whip at them in that awful manner as if they needed that hint! See how they stretch their shoulders up the slope towards the bridge, with all the more energy because they are so near home. Look at their grand shaggy feet that seem to grasp the firm earth, at the patient strength of their necks, bowed under the heavy collar, at the mighty muscles of their struggling haunches! I should like well to hear them neigh over their hard-earned feed of corn, and see them, with their moist necks freed from the harness, dipping their eager nostrils into the muddy pond. Now they are on the bridge, and down they go again at a swifter pace, and the arch of the covered waggon disappears at the turning behind the trees.

Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again, and watch the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too: she has been standing on just the same spot at the edge of the water ever since I paused on the bridge. And that queer white cur with the brown ear seems to be leaping and barking in ineffectual remonstrance with the wheel; perhaps he is jealous, because his playfellow in the beaver bonnet is so rapt in its movement. It is time the little playfellow went in, I think; and there is a very bright fire to tempt her: the red light shines out under the deepening grey of the sky. It is time, too, for me to leave off resting my arms on the cold stone of this bridge. . . .

Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair, and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver were talking about, as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour, on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of.

CHAPTER 2. MR. TULLIVER, OF DORLCOTE MILL,
DECLARES HIS RESOLUTION ABOUT TOM

“What I want, you know,” said Mr. Tulliver—“what I want is to give Tom a good eddication; an eddication as’ll be a bread to him.⁴ That was what I was thinking of when I gave notice for him to leave the academy at Ladyday. I mean to put him to a downright good school at Midsummer.⁵ The two years at th’ academy ’ud ha’ done well enough, if I’d meant to make a miller and farmer of him, for he’s had a fine sight more schoolin’ nor *I* ever got: all the learnin’ *my* father ever paid for was a bit o’ birch at one end and the alphabet at th’ other. But I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholar, so as he might be up to the tricks o’ these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish. It ’ud be a help to me wi’ these lawsuits, and arbitrations, and things. I wouldn’t make a downright lawyer o’ the lad—I should be sorry for him to be a raskill—but a sort o’ engineer, or a surveyor, or an auctioneer and vallyer,⁶ like Riley, or one o’ them smartish businesses as are all profits and no outlay, only for a big watch-chain and a high stool.⁷ They’re pretty nigh all one, and they’re not far off being even wi’ the law, *I* believe; for Riley looks Lawyer Wakem i’ the face as hard as one cat looks another. *He’s* none frightened at him.”

Mr. Tulliver was speaking to his wife, a blond comely woman in a fan-shaped cap (I am afraid to think how long it is since fan-shaped caps were worn—they must be so near coming in again. At that time, when Mrs. Tulliver was nearly forty, they were new at St. Ogg’s, and considered sweet things).

“Well, Mr. Tulliver, you know best: *I’ve* no objections. But hadn’t I better kill a couple o’ fowl and have th’ aunts and uncles to dinner next week, so as you may hear what sister Glegg and sister Pullet have got to say about it? There’s a couple o’ fowl *wants* killing!”

“You may kill every fowl i’ the yard, if you like, Bessy; but I shall ask neither aunt or uncle what I’m to do wi’ my own lad,” said Mr. Tulliver, defiantly.

“Dear heart!” said Mrs. Tulliver, shocked at this sanguinary rhetoric, “how can you talk so, Mr. Tulliver? But it’s your way to speak disrespectful o’ my family; and sister Glegg throws all the blame upo’ me, though I’m sure I’m as

4. There was no standardized system of secondary education in the period. By removing Tom from his “academy” (day school) and sending him to board with a private tutor, Mr. Tulliver hopes to better his son’s prospects.

5. June 24. “Ladyday”: March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation.

6. Valuer, appraiser.

7. In the 19th century, businessmen commonly sat on high stools in their offices in order to consult their ledgers.

innocent as the babe unborn. For nobody's ever heard *me* say as it wasn't lucky for my children to have aunts and uncles as can live independent. Howiver, if Tom's to go to a new school, I should like him to go where I can wash him and mend him; else he might as well have calico as linen, for they'd be one as yallow as th' other before they'd been washed half-a-dozen times. And then, when the box is goin' backards and forrards, I could send the lad a cake, or a pork-pie, or an apple; for he can do with an extry bit, bless him, whether they stint him at the meals or no. My children can eat as much victuals as most, thank God."

"Well, well, we won't send him out o' reach o' the carrier's cart, if other things fit in," said Mr. Tulliver. "But you mustn't put a spoke i' the wheel about the washin', if we can't get a school near enough. That's the fault I have to find wi' you, Bessy; if you see a stick i' the road, you're allays thinkin' you can't step over it. You'd want me not to hire a good waggoner, 'cause he'd got a mole on his face."

"Dear heart!" said Mrs. Tulliver, in mild surprise, "when did I iver make objections to a man because he'd got a mole on his face? I'm sure I'm rether fond o' the moles; for my brother, as is dead an' gone, had a mole on his brow. But I can't remember your iver offering to hire a waggoner with a mole, Mr. Tulliver. There was John Gibbs hadn't a mole on his face no more nor you have, an' I was all for having you hire *him*; an' so you did hire him, an' if he hadn't died o' th' inflammation, as we paid Dr. Turnbull for attending him, he'd very like ha' been driving the waggon now. He might have a mole somewhere out o' sight, but how was I to know that, Mr. Tulliver?"

"No, no, Bessy; I didn't mean justly the mole; I meant it to stand for summat else; but niver mind—it's puzzling work, talking is. What I'm thinking on, is how to find the right sort o' school to send Tom to, for I might be ta'en in again, as I've been wi' th' academy. I'll have nothing to do wi' a 'cademy again: whatever school I send Tom to, it shan't be a 'cademy; it shall be a place where the lads spend their time i' summat else besides blacking the family's shoes, and getting up the potatoes.⁸ It's an uncommon puzzling thing to know what school to pick."

Mr. Tulliver paused a minute or two, and dived with both hands into his breeches pockets as if he hoped to find some suggestion there. Apparently he was not disappointed, for he presently said, "I know what I'll do—I'll talk it over wi' Riley: he's coming to-morrow, t' arbitrate about the dam."

8. Cf. Wakford Squeer's Academy in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, chap. 8.

“Well, Mr. Tulliver, I’ve put the sheets out for the best bed and Kezia’s got ’em hanging at the fire. They aren’t the best sheets, but they’re good enough for anybody to sleep in, be he who he will; for as for them best Holland sheets, I should repent buying ’em, only they’ll do to lay us out in. An’ if you was to die to-morrow, Mr. Tulliver, they’re mangled⁹ beautiful, an’ all ready, an’ smell o’ lavender as it ’ud be a pleasure to lay ’em out; an’ they lie at the left-hand corner o’ the big oak linen-chest at the back: not as I should trust anybody to look ’em out but myself.”

As Mrs. Tulliver uttered the last sentence, she drew a bright bunch of keys from her pocket, and singled out one, rubbing her thumb and finger up and down it with a placid smile while she looked at the clear fire. If Mr. Tulliver had been a susceptible man in his conjugal relation, he might have supposed that she drew out the key to aid her imagination in anticipating the moment when he would be in a state to justify the production of the best Holland sheets. Happily he was not so; he was only susceptible in respect of his right to water-power; moreover, he had the marital habit of not listening very closely, and since his mention of Mr. Riley, had been apparently occupied in a tactile examination of his woollen stockings.

“I think I’ve hit it, Bessy,” was his first remark after a short silence. “Riley’s as likely a man as any to know o’ some school; he’s had schooling himself, an’ goes about to all sorts o’ places—arbitratin’ and vallyin’ and that. And we shall have time to talk it over to-morrow night when the business is done. I want Tom to be such a sort o’ man as Riley, you know—as can talk pretty nigh as well as if it was all wrote out for him, and knows a good lot o’ words as don’t mean much, so as you can’t lay hold of ’em i’ law; and a good solid knowledge o’ business too.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Tulliver, “so far as talking proper, and knowing everything, and walking with a bend in his back, and setting his hair up, I shouldn’t mind the lad being brought up to that. But them fine-talking men from the big towns mostly wear the false shirt-fronts; they wear a frill till it’s all a mess, and then hide it with a bib; I know Riley does. And then, if Tom’s to go and live at Mudport, like Riley, he’ll have a house with a kitchen hardly big enough to turn in, an’ niver get a fresh egg for his breakfast, an’ sleep up three pair o’ stairs—or four, for what I know—an’ be burnt to death before he can get down.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Tulliver, “I’ve no thoughts of his going to Mudport: I

9. Pressed.

mean him to set up his office at St. Ogg's, close by us, an' live at home. But," continued Mr. Tulliver after a pause, "what I'm a bit afraid on is, as Tom hasn't got the right sort o' brains for a smart fellow. I doubt he's a bit slowish. He takes after your family, Bessy."

"Yes, that he does," said Mrs. Tulliver, accepting the last proposition entirely on its own merits; "he's wonderful for liking a deal o' salt in his broth. That was my brother's way, and my father's before him."

"It seems a bit of a pity, though," said Mr. Tulliver, "as the lad should take after the mother's side instead o' the little wench. That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't. The little un takes after my side, now: she's twice as 'cute¹ as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid," continued Mr. Tulliver, turning his head dubiously first on one side and then on the other. "It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep—she'll fetch none the bigger price for that."

"Yes, it *is* a mischief while she's a little un, Mr. Tulliver, for it all runs to naughtiness. How to keep her in a clean pinafore two hours together passes my cunning. An' now you put me i' mind," continued Mrs. Tulliver, rising and going to the window, "I don't know where she is now, an' it's pretty nigh tea-time. Ah, I thought so—wanderin' up an' down by the water, like a wild thing: she'll tumble in some day."

Mrs. Tulliver rapped the window sharply, beckoned, and shook her head,—a process which she repeated more than once before she returned to her chair.

"You talk o' 'cuteness, Mr. Tulliver," she observed as she sat down, "but I'm sure the child's half an idiot i' some things; for if I send her up-stairs to fetch anything, she forgets what she's gone for, an' perhaps 'ull sit down on the floor i' the sunshine an' plait her hair an' sing to herself like a Bedlam creatur',² all the while I'm waiting for her down-stairs. That niver run i' my family, thank God, no more nor a brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter. I don't like to fly i' the face o' Providence, but it seems hard as I should have but one gell, an' her so comical."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said Mr. Tulliver, "she's a straight black-eyed wench as anybody need wish to see. I don't know i' what she's behind other folks's children; and she can read almost as well as the parson."

"But her hair won't curl all I can do with it, and she's so franzy³ about having

1. Acute, clever.

2. Inmate of Bedlam (a corruption of Bethlehem), a name for a former lunatic asylum in London.

3. Frenzied.

it put i' paper, and I've such work as never was to make her stand and have it pinched with th' irons."

"Cut it off—cut it off short," said the father, rashly.

"How can you talk so, Mr. Tulliver? She's too big a gell, gone nine, and tall of her age, to have her hair cut short; an' there's her cousin Lucy's got a row o' curls round her head, an' not a hair out o' place. It seems hard as my sister Deane should have that pretty child; I'm sure Lucy takes more after me nor my own child does. Maggie, Maggie," continued the mother, in a tone of half-coaxing fretfulness, as this small mistake of nature entered the room, "where's the use o' my telling you to keep away from the water? You'll tumble in and be drowned some day, an' then you'll be sorry you didn't do as mother told you."

Maggie's hair, as she threw off her bonnet, painfully confirmed her mother's accusation: Mrs. Tulliver, desiring her daughter to have a curled crop, "like other folks's children," had had it cut too short in front to be pushed behind the ears; and as it was usually straight an hour after it had been taken out of paper, Maggie was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes—an action which gave her very much the air of a small Shetland pony.

"O dear, O dear, Maggie, what are you thinkin' of, to throw your bonnet down there? Take it up-stairs, there's a good gell, an' let your hair be brushed, an' put your other pinafore on, an' change your shoes—do, for shame; an' come an' go on with your patch-work, like a little lady."

"O mother," said Maggie, in a vehemently cross tone, "I don't *want* to do my patchwork."

"What! not your pretty patchwork, to make a counterpane for your aunt Glegg?"

"It's foolish work," said Maggie, with a toss of her mane,—"tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again. And I don't want to do anything for my aunt Glegg—I don't like her."

Exit Maggie, dragging her bonnet by the string, while Mr. Tulliver laughs audibly.

"I wonder at you, as you'll laugh at her, Mr. Tulliver," said the mother, with feeble fretfulness in her tone. "You encourage her i' naughtiness. An' her aunts will have it as it's me spoils her."

Mrs. Tulliver was what is called a good-tempered person—never cried, when she was a baby, on any slighter ground than hunger and pins; and from the cradle upwards had been healthy, fair, plump, and dull-witted; in short, the

flower of her family for beauty and amiability. But milk and mildness are not the best things for keeping, and when they turn only a little sour, they may disagree with young stomachs seriously. I have often wondered whether those early Madonnas of Raphael,⁴ with the blond faces and somewhat stupid expression, kept their placidity undisturbed when their strong-limbed, strong-willed boys got a little too old to do without clothing. I think they must have been given to feeble remonstrance, getting more and more peevish as it became more and more ineffectual.

CHAPTER 3. MR. RILEY GIVES HIS ADVICE
CONCERNING A SCHOOL FOR TOM

The gentleman in the ample white cravat and shirt-frill, taking his brandy-and-water so pleasantly with his good friend Tulliver, is Mr. Riley, a gentleman with a waxen complexion and fat hands, rather highly educated for an auctioneer and appraiser, but large-hearted enough to show a great deal of *bon-homme*⁵ towards simple country acquaintances of hospitable habits. Mr. Riley spoke of such acquaintances kindly as “people of the old school.”

The conversation had come to a pause. Mr. Tulliver, not without a particular reason, had abstained from a seventh recital of the cool retort by which Riley had shown himself too many for Dix, and how Wakem had had his comb cut⁶ for once in his life, now the business of the dam had been settled by arbitration, and how there never would have been any dispute at all about the height of water if everybody was what they should be, and Old Harry⁷ hadn't made the lawyers. Mr. Tulliver was, on the whole, a man of safe traditional opinions; but on one or two points he had trusted to his unassisted intellect, and had arrived at several questionable conclusions; among the rest, that rats, weevils, and lawyers were created by Old Harry. Unhappily he had no one to tell him that this was rampant Manichæism,⁸ else he might have seen his error. But to-day it was clear that the good principle was triumphant: this affair of the water-power had been a tangled business somehow, for all it seemed—look at it one way—as plain as water's water; but, big a puzzle as it was, it hadn't got the better of Riley. Mr. Tulliver took his brandy-and-water a little stronger than

4. Italian Renaissance painter (1483–1520).

5. Affability.

6. Was humiliated (like a rooster's having his comb cut off).

7. The devil.

8. Dualistic religious system, taught by Manes, 3rd-century Persian prophet, which holds that God and Satan are coequal powers.

usual, and, for a man who might be supposed to have a few hundreds lying idle at his banker's, was rather incautiously open in expressing his high estimate of his friend's business talents.

But the dam was a subject of conversation that would keep; it could always be taken up again at the same point, and exactly in the same condition; and there was another subject, as you know, on which Mr. Tulliver was in pressing want of Mr. Riley's advice. This was his particular reason for remaining silent for a short space after his last draught, and rubbing his knees in a meditative manner. He was not a man to make an abrupt transition. This was a puzzling world, as he often said, and if you drive your waggon in a hurry, you may light on an awkward corner. Mr. Riley, meanwhile, was not impatient. Why should he be? Even Hotspur,⁹ one would think, must have been patient in his slippers on a warm hearth, taking copious snuff, and sipping gratuitous brandy-and-water.

"There's a thing I've got i' my head," said Mr. Tulliver at last, in rather a lower tone than usual, as he turned his head and looked steadfastly at his companion.

"Ah!" said Mr. Riley, in a tone of mild interest. He was a man with heavy waxen eyelids and high-arched eyebrows, looking exactly the same under all circumstances. This immovability of face, and the habit of taking a pinch of snuff before he gave an answer, made him trebly oracular to Mr. Tulliver.

"It's a very particular thing," he went on; "it's about my boy Tom."

At the sound of this name, Maggie, who was seated on a low stool close by the fire, with a large book open on her lap, shook her heavy hair back and looked up eagerly. There were few sounds that roused Maggie when she was dreaming over her book, but Tom's name served as well as the shrillest whistle: in an instant she was on the watch, with gleaming eyes, like a Skye terrier suspecting mischief, or at all events determined to fly at any one who threatened it towards Tom.

"You see, I want to put him to a new school at Midsummer," said Mr. Tulliver; "he's comin' away from the 'cademy at Ladyday, an' I shall let him run loose for a quarter; but after that I want to send him to a downright good school, where they'll make a scholar of him."

"Well," said Mr. Riley, "there's no greater advantage you can give him than a good education. Not," he added, with polite significance — "not that a man

9. In *I Henry IV* Hotspur was the nickname of Sir Henry Percy, noted for his hotheadedness.

can't be an excellent miller and farmer, and a shrewd sensible fellow into the bargain, without much help from the schoolmaster."

"I believe you," said Mr. Tulliver, winking, and turning his head on one side, "but that's where it is. I don't *mean* Tom to be a miller and farmer. I see no fun i' that: why, if I made him a miller an' farmer, he'd be expectin' to take to the mill an' the land, an' a-hinting at me as it was time for me to lay by an' think o' my latter end. Nay, nay, I've seen enough o' that wi' sons. I'll never pull my coat off before I go to bed. I shall give Tom an eddication an' put him to a business, as he may make a nest for himself, an' not want to push me out o' mine. Pretty well if he gets it when I'm dead an' gone. I shan't be put off wi' spoon-meat¹ afore I've lost my teeth."

This was evidently a point on which Mr. Tulliver felt strongly, and the impetus which had given unusual rapidity and emphasis to his speech, showed itself still unexhausted for some minutes afterwards, in a defiant motion of the head from side to side, and an occasional "Nay, nay," like a subsiding growl.

These angry symptoms were keenly observed by Maggie, and cut her to the quick. Tom, it appeared, was supposed capable of turning his father out of doors, and of making the future in some way tragic by his wickedness. This was not to be borne; and Maggie jumped up from her stool, forgetting all about her heavy book, which fell with a bang within the fender; and going up between her father's knees, said, in a half-crying, half-indignant voice—

"Father, Tom wouldn't be naughty to you ever; I know he wouldn't."

Mrs. Tulliver was out of the room superintending a choice supper-dish, and Mr. Tulliver's heart was touched; so Maggie was not scolded about the book. Mr. Riley quietly picked it up and looked at it, while the father laughed with a certain tenderness in his hard-lined face, and patted his little girl on the back, and then held her hands and kept her between his knees.

"What! they mustn't say any harm o' Tom, eh?" said Mr. Tulliver, looking at Maggie with a twinkling eye. Then, in a lower voice, turning to Mr. Riley, as though Maggie couldn't hear, "She understands what one's talking about so as never was. And you should hear her read—straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand. And allays at her book! But it's bad—it's bad," Mr. Tulliver added, sadly, checking this blamable exultation; "a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt. But, bless you!"—here the exultation was clearly recovering the mastery—"she'll read the books and understand 'em better nor half the folks as are growed up."

1. Soft foods for spoon feeding invalids or infants.

Maggie's cheeks began to flush with triumphant excitement: she thought Mr. Riley would have a respect for her now; it had been evident that he thought nothing of her before.

Mr. Riley was turning over the leaves of the book, and she could make nothing of his face, with its high-arched eyebrows; but he presently looked at her and said,

"Come, come and tell me something about this book; here are some pictures—I want to know what they mean."

Maggie with deepening colour went without hesitation to Mr. Riley's elbow and looked over the book, eagerly seizing one corner, and tossing back her mane, while she said,

"O, I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? But I can't help looking at it. That old woman in the water's a witch—they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned—and killed, you know—she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman.² But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose, she'd go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. And this dreadful blacksmith with his arms akimbo, laughing—oh, isn't he ugly?—I'll tell you what he is. He's the devil *really*" (here Maggie's voice became louder and more emphatic), "and not a right blacksmith; for the devil takes the shape of wicked men, and walks about and sets people doing wicked things, and he's oftener in the shape of a bad man than any other, because, you know, if people saw he was the devil, and he roared at 'em, they'd run away, and he couldn't make 'em do what he pleased."

Mr. Tulliver had listened to this exposition of Maggie's with petrifying wonder.

"Why, what book is it the wench has got hold on?" he burst out, at last.

"The History of the Devil,' by Daniel Defoe;³ not quite the right book for a little girl," said Mr. Riley. "How came it among your books, Tulliver?"

Maggie looked hurt and discouraged, while her father said,

"Why, it's one o' the books I bought at Partridge's sale. They was all bound alike—it's a good binding, you see—and I thought they'd be all good books. There's Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living and Dying'⁴ among 'em; I read in it often of a Sunday" (Mr. Tulliver felt somehow a familiarity with that great writer

2. Cf. William Morris, *The Haystack in the Floods*, lines 105–115.

3. Religious polemic, first published in 1726.

4. Book of religious counsel (1650–51) by the chaplain to Charles I.

because his name was Jeremy); “and there’s a lot more of ’em, sermons mostly, I think; but they’ve all got the same covers, and I thought they were all o’ one sample, as you may say. But it seems one mustn’t judge by th’ outside. This is a puzzlin’ world.”

“Well,” said Mr. Riley, in an admonitory patronising tone, as he patted Maggie on the head, “I advise you to put by the ‘History of the Devil,’ and read some prettier book. Have you no prettier books?”

“O yes,” said Maggie, reviving a little in the desire to vindicate the variety of her reading, “I know the reading in this book isn’t pretty—but I like the pictures, and I make stories to the pictures out of my own head, you know. But I’ve got ‘Æsop’s Fables,’ and a book about Kangaroos and things, and the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’ . . .”

“Ah, a beautiful book,” said Mr. Riley; “you can’t read a better.”

“Well, but there’s a great deal about the devil in that,” said Maggie, triumphantly, “and I’ll show you the picture of him in his true shape, as he fought with Christian.”⁵

Maggie ran in an instant to the corner of the room, jumped on a chair, and reached down from the small bookcase a shabby old copy of Bunyan, which opened at once, without the least trouble of search, at the picture she wanted.

“Here he is,” she said, running back to Mr. Riley, “and Tom coloured him for me with his paints when he was at home last holidays—the body all black, you know, and the eyes red, like fire, because he’s all fire inside, and it shines out at his eyes.”

“Go, go!” said Mr. Tulliver, peremptorily, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable at these free remarks on the personal appearance of a being powerful enough to create lawyers; “shut up the book, and let’s hear no more o’ such talk. It is as I thought—the child ’ull learn more mischief nor good wi’ the books. Go, go and see after your mother.”

Maggie shut up the book at once, with a sense of disgrace, but not being inclined to see after her mother, she compromised the matter by going into a dark corner behind her father’s chair, and nursing her doll, towards which she had an occasional fit of fondness in Tom’s absence, neglecting its toilette, but lavishing so many warm kisses on it that the waxen cheeks had a wasted unhealthy appearance.

“Did you ever hear the like on’t?” said Mr. Tulliver, as Maggie retired. “It’s a pity but what she’d been the lad—she’d ha’ been a match for the lawyers,

5. Protagonist of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

she would. It's the wonderful'st thing"—here he lowered his voice—"as I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute—bein' a good-looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing."

Mr. Riley's gravity gave way, and he shook a little under the application of his pinch of snuff, before he said—

"But your lad's not stupid, is he? I saw him, when I was here last, busy making fishing-tackle; he seemed quite up to it."

"Well, he isn't not to say stupid—he's got a notion o' things out o' door, an' a sort o' common-sense, as he'd lay hold o' things by the right handle. But he's slow with his tongue, you see, and he reads but poorly, and can't abide the books, and spells all wrong, they tell me, an' as shy as can be wi' strangers, an' you never hear him say 'cute things like the little wench. Now, what I want is to send him to a school where they'll make him a bit nimble with his tongue and his pen, and make a smart chap of him. I want my son to be even wi' these fellows as have got the start o' me with having better schooling. Not but what, if the world had been left as God made it, I could ha' seen my way, and held my own wi' the best of 'em; but things have got so twisted round and wrapped up i' unreasonable words, as aren't a bit like 'em, as I'm clean at fault, often an' often. Everything winds about so—the more straightfarrard you are, the more you're puzzled."

Mr. Tulliver took a draught, swallowed it slowly, and shook his head in a melancholy manner, conscious of exemplifying the truth that a perfectly sane intellect is hardly at home in this insane world.

"You're quite in the right of it, Tulliver," observed Mr. Riley. "Better spend an extra hundred or two on your son's education, than leave it him in your will. I know I should have tried to do so by a son of mine, if I'd had one, though, God knows, I haven't your ready-money to play with, Tulliver; and I have a houseful of daughters into the bargain."

"I daresay, now, you know of a school as 'ud be just the thing for Tom," said Tulliver, not diverted from his purpose by any sympathy with Mr. Riley's deficiency of ready cash.

Mr. Riley took a pinch of snuff, and kept Mr. Tulliver in suspense by a silence that seemed deliberative, before he said—

“I know of a very fine chance for any one that’s got the necessary money, and that’s what you have, Tulliver. The fact is, I wouldn’t recommend any friend of mine to send a boy to a regular school, if he could afford to do better. But if any one wanted his boy to get superior instruction and training, where he would be the companion of his master, and that master a first-rate fellow—I know his man. I wouldn’t mention the chance to everybody, because I don’t think everybody would succeed in getting it, if he were to try; but I mention it to you, Tulliver—between ourselves.”

The fixed inquiring glance with which Mr. Tulliver had been watching his friend’s oracular face became quite eager.

“Ay, now, let’s hear,” he said, adjusting himself in his chair with the complacency of a person who is thought worthy of important communications.

“He’s an Oxford man,” said Mr. Riley, sententiously, shutting his mouth close, and looking at Mr. Tulliver to observe the effect of this stimulating information.

“What! a parson?”⁶ said Mr. Tulliver, rather doubtfully.

“Yes, and an M.A. The bishop, I understand, thinks very highly of him: why, it was the bishop who got him his present curacy.”

“Ah?” said Mr. Tulliver, to whom one thing was as wonderful as another concerning these unfamiliar phenomena. “But what can he want wi’ Tom, then?”

“Why, the fact is, he’s fond of teaching, and wishes to keep up his studies, and a clergyman has but little opportunity for that in his parochial duties. He’s willing to take one or two boys as pupils to fill up his time profitably. The boys would be quite of the family—the finest thing in the world for them; under Stelling’s eye continually.”

“But do you think they’d give the poor lad twice o’ pudding?”⁷ said Mrs. Tulliver, who was now in her place again. “He’s such a boy for pudding as never was; an’ a growing boy like that—it’s dreadful to think o’ their stintin’ him.”

“And what money ’ud he want?” said Mr. Tulliver, whose instinct told him that the services of this admirable M.A. would bear a high price.

“Why, I know of a clergyman who asks a hundred and fifty with his youngest pupils, and he’s not to be mentioned with Stelling, the man I speak of. I know,

6. Many graduates of Oxford (and Cambridge) chose to become clergymen of the Church of England and served in parishes.

7. A second helping of dessert.

on good authority, that one of the chief people at Oxford said, ‘Stelling might get the highest honours if he chose.’ But he didn’t care about university honours. He’s a quiet man — not noisy.”

“Ah, a deal better — a deal better,” said Mr. Tulliver; “but a hundred and fifty’s an uncommon price. I never thought o’ payin’ so much as that.”

“A good education, let me tell you, Tulliver — a good education is cheap at the money. But Stelling is moderate in his terms — he’s not a grasping man. I’ve no doubt he’d take your boy at a hundred, and that’s what you wouldn’t get many other clergymen to do. I’ll write to him about it, if you like.”

Mr. Tulliver rubbed his knees, and looked at the carpet in a meditative manner.

“But belike he’s a bachelor,” observed Mrs. Tulliver in the interval, “an I’ve no opinion o’ housekeepers. There was my brother, as is dead an’ gone, had a housekeeper once, an’ she took half the feathers out o’ the best bed an’ packed ’em up an’ sent ’em away. An’ it’s unknown the linen she made away with — Stott her name was. It ’ud break my heart to send Tom where there’s a housekeeper, an’ I hope you won’t think of it, Mr. Tulliver.”

“You may set your mind at rest on that score, Mrs. Tulliver,” said Mr. Riley, “for Stelling is married to as nice a little woman as any man need wish for a wife. There isn’t a kinder little soul in the world; I know her family well. She has very much your complexion — light curly hair. She comes of a good Mudport family, and it’s not every offer that would have been acceptable in that quarter. But Stelling’s not an everyday man. Rather a particular fellow as to the people he chooses to be connected with. But I *think* he would have no objection to take your son — I *think* he would not, on my representation.”

“I don’t know what he could have *against* the lad,” said Mrs. Tulliver, with a slight touch of motherly indignation, “a nice fresh-skinned lad as anybody need wish to see.”

“But there’s one thing I’m thinking on,” said Mr. Tulliver, turning his head on one side and looking at Mr. Riley, after a long perusal of the carpet. “Wouldn’t a parson be almost too high-learnt to bring up a lad to be a man o’ business? My notion o’ the parsons was as they’d got a sort o’ learning as lay mostly out o’ sight. And that isn’t what I want for Tom. I want him to know figures, and write like print, and see into things quick, and know what folks mean, and how to wrap things up in words as aren’t actionable.⁸ It’s an uncom-

8. Expressions so contrived that the speaker could not be sued for libel.

mon fine thing, that is," concluded Mr. Tulliver, shaking his head, "when you can let a man know what you think of him without paying for it."

"O my dear Tulliver," said Mr. Riley, "you're quite under a mistake about the clergy; all the best schoolmasters are of the clergy. The schoolmasters who are not clergymen, are a very low set of men generally. . . ."

"Ay, that Jacobs is, at the 'cademy," interposed Mr. Tulliver.

"To be sure — men who have failed in other trades, most likely. Now a clergyman is a gentleman by profession and education, and besides that, he has the knowledge that will ground a boy, and prepare him for entering on any career with credit. There may be some clergymen who are mere book-men; but you may depend upon it, Stelling is not one of them — a man that's wide awake, let me tell you. Drop him a hint, and that's enough. You talk of figures, now; you have only to say to Stelling, 'I want my son to be a thorough arithmetician,' and you may leave the rest to him."

Mr. Riley paused a moment, while Mr. Tulliver, somewhat reassured as to clerical tutorship, was inwardly rehearsing to an imaginary Mr. Stelling the statement, "I want my son to know 'rethmetic."

"You see, my dear Tulliver," Mr. Riley continued, "when you get a thoroughly educated man, like Stelling, he's at no loss to take up any branch of instruction. When a workman knows the use of his tools, he can make a door as well as a window."

"Ay, that's true," said Mr. Tulliver, almost convinced now that the clergy must be the best of schoolmasters.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do for you," said Mr. Riley, "and I wouldn't do it for everybody. I'll see Stelling's father-in-law, or drop him a line when I get back to Mudport, to say that you wish to place your boy with his son-in-law, and I daresay Stelling will write to you, and send you his terms."

"But there's no hurry, is there?" said Mrs. Tulliver; "for I hope, Mr. Tulliver, you won't let Tom begin at his new school before Midsummer. He began at the 'cademy at the Ladyday quarter, and you see what good's come of it."

"Ay, ay, Bessy, never brew wi' bad malt upo' Michaelmas day, else you'll have a poor tap," said Mr. Tulliver, winking and smiling at Mr. Riley with the natural pride of a man who has a buxom wife conspicuously his inferior in intellect. "But it's true there's no hurry — you've hit it there, Bessy."

"It might be as well not to defer the arrangement too long," said Mr. Riley, quietly, "for Stelling may have propositions from other parties, and I know he would not take more than two or three boarders, if so many. If I were you, I think I would enter on the subject with Stelling at once: there's no necessity

for sending the boy before Midsummer, but I would be on the safe side, and make sure that nobody forestalls you.”

“Ay, there’s summat in that,” said Mr. Tulliver.

“Father,” broke in Maggie, who had stolen unperceived to her father’s elbow again, listening with parted lips, while she held her doll topsy-turvy, and crushed its nose against the wood of the chair—“Father, is it a long way off where Tom is to go? shan’t we ever go to see him?”

“I don’t know, my wench,” said the father, tenderly. “Ask Mr. Riley; he knows.”

Maggie came round promptly in front of Mr. Riley, and said, “How far is it, please, sir.”

“O, a long long way off,” that gentleman answered, being of opinion that children, when they are not naughty, should always be spoken to jocosely. “You must borrow the seven-leagued boots to get to him.”

“That’s nonsense!” said Maggie, tossing her head haughtily, and turning away, with the tears springing in her eyes. She began to dislike Mr. Riley: it was evident he thought her silly and of no consequence.

“Hush Maggie, for shame of you, asking questions and chattering,” said her mother. “Come and sit down on your little stool and hold your tongue, do. But,” added Mrs. Tulliver, who had her own alarm awakened, “is it so far off as I couldn’t wash him and mend him?”

“About fifteen miles, that’s all,” said Mr. Riley. “You can drive there and back in a day quite comfortably. Or—Stelling is a hospitable, pleasant man—he’d be glad to have you stay.”

“But it’s too far off for the linen, I doubt,” said Mrs. Tulliver, sadly.

The entrance of supper opportunely adjourned this difficulty, and relieved Mr. Riley from the labour of suggesting some solution or compromise—a labour which he would otherwise doubtless have undertaken; for, as you perceive, he was a man of very obliging manners. And he had really given himself the trouble of recommending Mr. Stelling to his friend Tulliver without any positive expectation of a solid, definite advantage resulting to himself, notwithstanding the subtle indications to the contrary which might have misled a too sagacious observer. For there is nothing more widely misleading than sagacity if it happens to get on a wrong scent; and sagacity, persuaded that men usually act and speak from distinct motives, with a consciously proposed end in view, is certain to waste its energies on imaginary game. Plotting covetousness, and deliberate contrivance, in order to compass a selfish end, are nowhere abundant but in the world of the dramatist: they demand too intense a mental action

for many of our fellow-parishioners to be guilty of them. It is easy enough to spoil the lives of our neighbours without taking so much trouble: we can do it by lazy acquiescence and lazy omission, by trivial falsities for which we hardly know a reason, by small frauds neutralised by small extravagancies, by maladroit flatteries, and clumsily improvised insinuations. We live from hand to mouth, most of us, with a small family of immediate desires—we do little else than snatch a morsel to satisfy the hungry brood, rarely thinking of seed-corn or the next year's crop.

Mr. Riley was a man of business, and not cold towards his own interest, yet even he was more under the influence of small promptings than of far-sighted designs. He had no private understanding with the Rev. Walter Stelling; on the contrary he knew very little of that M.A. and his acquirements—not quite enough perhaps to warrant so strong a recommendation of him as he had given to his friend Tulliver. But he believed Mr. Stelling to be an excellent classic, for Gadsby had said so, and Gadsby's first cousin was an Oxford tutor; which was better ground for the belief even than his own immediate observation would have been, for though Mr. Riley had received a tincture of the classics at the great Mudport Free School, and had a sense of understanding Latin generally, his comprehension of any particular Latin was not ready. Doubtless there remained a subtle aroma from his juvenile contact with the *De Senectute*⁹ and the Fourth Book of the *Æneid*, but it had ceased to be distinctly recognisable as classical, and was only perceived in the higher finish and force of his auctioneering style. Then, Stelling was an Oxford man, and the Oxford men were always—no, no, it was the Cambridge men who were always good mathematicians. But a man who had had a university education could teach anything he liked; especially a man like Stelling who had made a speech at a Mudport dinner on a political occasion, and had acquitted himself so well that it was generally remarked, this son-in-law of Timpson's was a sharp fellow. It was to be expected of a Mudport man, from the parish of St. Ursula, that he would not omit to do a good turn to a son-in-law of Timpson's, for Timpson was one of the most useful and influential men in the parish, and had a good deal of business, which he knew how to put into the right hands. Mr. Riley liked such men, quite apart from any money which might be diverted, through their good judgment, from less worthy pockets into his own; and it would be a satisfaction to him to say to Timpson on his return home, "I've secured a

9. Book of moral philosophy on the subject of old age by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), Roman statesman and orator.

good pupil for your son-in-law." Timpson had a large family of daughters; Mr. Riley felt for him; besides, Louisa Timpson's face, with its light curls, had been a familiar object to him over the pew wainscot on a Sunday for nearly fifteen years: it was natural her husband should be a commendable tutor. Moreover, Mr. Riley knew of no other schoolmaster whom he had any ground for recommending in preference: why then should he not recommend Stelling? His friend Tulliver had asked him for an opinion: it is always chilling in friendly intercourse, to say you have no opinion to give. And if you deliver an opinion at all, it is mere stupidity not to do it with an air of conviction and well-founded knowledge. You make it your own in uttering it, and naturally get fond of it. Thus, Mr. Riley, knowing no harm of Stelling to begin with, and wishing him well, so far as he had any wishes at all concerning him, had no sooner recommended him than he began to think with admiration of a man recommended on such high authority, and would soon have gathered so warm an interest on the subject, that if Mr. Tulliver had in the end declined to send Tom to Stelling, Mr. Riley would have thought his "friend of the old school" a thoroughly pig-headed fellow.

If you blame Mr. Riley very severely for giving a recommendation on such slight grounds, I must say you are rather hard upon him. Why should an auctioneer and appraiser thirty years ago, who had as good as forgotten his free-school Latin, be expected to manifest a delicate scrupulosity which is not always exhibited by gentlemen of the learned professions, even in our present advanced state of morality?

Besides, a man with the milk of human kindness in him can scarcely abstain from doing a good-natured action, and one cannot be good-natured all round. Nature herself occasionally quarters an inconvenient parasite on an animal towards whom she has otherwise no ill-will. What then? We admire her care for the parasite. If Mr. Riley had shrunk from giving a recommendation that was not based on valid evidence, he would not have helped Mr. Stelling to a paying pupil, and that would not have been so well for the reverend gentleman. Consider, too, that all the pleasant little dim ideas and complacencies—of standing well with Timpson, of dispensing advice when he was asked for it, of impressing his friend Tulliver with additional respect, of saying something, and saying it emphatically, with other inappreciably minute ingredients that went along with the warm hearth and the brandy-and-water to make up Mr. Riley's consciousness on this occasion—would have been a mere blank.

CHAPTER 4. TOM IS EXPECTED

It was a heavy disappointment to Maggie that she was not allowed to go with her father in the gig when he went to fetch Tom home from the academy; but the morning was too wet, Mrs. Tulliver said, for a little girl to go out in her best bonnet. Maggie took the opposite view very strongly, and it was a direct consequence of this difference of opinion that when her mother was in the act of brushing out the reluctant black crop, Maggie suddenly rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water standing near—in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day.

“Maggie, Maggie,” exclaimed Mrs. Tulliver, sitting stout and helpless with the brushes on her lap, “what is to become of you if you’re so naughty? I’ll tell your aunt Glegg and your aunt Pullet when they come next week, and they’ll never love you any more. O dear, O dear! look at your clean pinafore, wet from top to bottom. Folks ’ull think it’s a judgment on me as I’ve got such a child—they’ll think I’ve done summat wicked.”

Before this remonstrance was finished, Maggie was already out of hearing, making her way towards the great attic that ran under the old high-pitched roof, shaking the water from her black locks as she ran, like a Skye terrier escaped from his bath. This attic was Maggie’s favourite retreat on a wet day, when the weather was not too cold; here she fretted out all her ill-humours, and talked aloud to the worm-eaten floors and the worm-eaten shelves, and the dark rafters festooned with cobwebs; and here she kept a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks; but was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie’s nine years of earthly struggle; that luxury of vengeance having been suggested to her by the picture of Jael destroying Sisera¹ in the old Bible. The last nail had been driven in with a fiercer stroke than usual, for the Fetish on that occasion represented aunt Glegg. But immediately afterwards Maggie had reflected that if she drove many nails in, she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor to comfort it, and make believe to poultice it, when her fury was abated; for even aunt Glegg would be pitiable when she had been hurt very much, and thoroughly humiliated, so as to beg

1. Judges 4.7–22, 5.24–31. Sisera, the leader of an invasion against Israel, was slain by a woman, Jael, who hammered a nail into his head.

her niece's pardon. Since then she had driven no more nails in, but had soothed herself by alternately grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimneys that made two square pillars supporting the roof. That was what she did this morning on reaching the attic, sobbing all the while with a passion that expelled every other form of consciousness—even the memory of the grievance that had caused it. As at last the sobs were getting quieter, and the grinding less fierce, a sudden beam of sunshine, falling through the wire lattice across the worm-eaten shelves, made her throw away the Fetish and run to the window. The sun was really breaking out; the sound of the mill seemed cheerful again; the granary doors were open; and there was Yap, the queer white-and-brown terrier, with one ear turned back, trotting about and sniffing vaguely, as if he were in search of a companion. It was irresistible. Maggie tossed her hair back and ran downstairs, seized her bonnet without putting it on, peeped, and then dashed along the passage lest she should encounter her mother, and was quickly out in the yard, whirling round like a Pythoness,² and singing as she whirled, "Yap, Yap, Tom's coming home!" while Yap danced and barked round her, as much as to say, if there was any noise wanted he was the dog for it.

"Heh, heh, Miss, you'll make yourself giddy, an' tumble down i' the dirt," said Luke, the head miller, a tall broad-shouldered man of forty, black-eyed and black-haired, subdued by a general mealiness, like an auricula.³

Maggie paused in her whirling and said, staggering a little, "O no, it doesn't make me giddy, Luke; may I go into the mill with you?"

Maggie loved to linger in the great spaces of the mill, and often came out with her black hair powdered to a soft whiteness that made her dark eyes flash out with new fire. The resolute din, the unresting motion of the great stones, giving her a dim delicious awe as at the presence of an uncontrollable force—the meal for ever pouring, pouring—the fine white powder softening all surfaces, and making the very spider-nets look like a faery lace-work—the sweet pure scent of the meal—all helped to make Maggie feel that the mill was a little world apart from her outside everyday life. The spiders were especially a subject of speculation with her. She wondered if they had any relatives outside the mill, for in that case there must be a painful difficulty in their family intercourse—a fat and floury spider, accustomed to take his fly well dusted with meal, must suffer a little at a cousin's table where the fly was *au naturel*, and

2. Priestess or prophetess.

3. Covered with dust from grinding grain in the mill, thus resembling the powdery yellow flowers of a primrose.

the lady-spiders must be mutually shocked at each other's appearance. But the part of the mill she liked best was the topmost story—the corn-hutch, where there were the great heaps of grain, which she could sit on and slide down continually. She was in the habit of taking this recreation as she conversed with Luke, to whom she was very communicative, wishing him to think well of her understanding, as her father did.

Perhaps she felt it necessary to recover her position with him on the present occasion, for, as she sat sliding on the heap of grain near which he was busying himself, she said, at that shrill pitch which was requisite in mill-society—

“I think you never read any book but the Bible—did you, Luke?”

“Nay, Miss—an' not much o' that,” said Luke, with great frankness. “I'm no reader, I aren't.”

“But if I lent you one of my books, Luke? I've not got any *very* pretty books that would be easy for you to read; but there 'Pug's Tour of Europe'⁴—that would tell you all about the different sorts of people in the world, and if you didn't understand the reading, the pictures would help you—they show the looks and ways of the people, and what they do. There are the Dutchmen, very fat, and smoking, you know—and one sitting on a barrel.”

“Nay, Miss, I'n no opinion o' Dutchmen. There ben't much good i' knowin' about *them*.”

“But they're our fellow-creatures, Luke—we ought to know about our fellow-creatures.”

“Not much o' fellow-creatur, I think, Miss; all I know—my old master, as war a knowin' man, used to say, says he, 'If e'er I sow my wheat wi'out brinin',⁵ I'm a Dutchman,' says he; an' that war as much as to say as a Dutchman war a fool, or next door. Nay, nay, I aren't goin' to bother mysen about Dutchmen. There's fools enoo—an' rogues enoo—wi'out lookin' i' books for 'em.”

“O, well,” said Maggie, rather foiled by Luke's unexpectedly decided views about Dutchmen, “perhaps you would like 'Animated Nature'⁶ better—that's not Dutchmen, you know, but elephants, and kangaroos, and the civet cat, and the sun-fish, and a bird sitting on its tail—I forget its name. There are countries full of those creatures, instead of horses and cows, you know. Shouldn't you like to know about them, Luke?”

“Nay, Miss, I'n got to keep count o' the flour an' corn—I can't do wi' knowin'”

4. *Pug's Tour Through Europe; or the Travell'd Monkey* (1824), an anonymous illustrated book of doggerel verse. The monkey's final visit is to Holland.

5. Burning.

6. Oliver Goldsmith's popular *History of Animated Nature* was published in 1774.

so many things besides my work. That's what brings folks to the gallows—knowin' everything but what they'n got to get their bread by. An' they're mostly lies, I think, what's printed i' the books: them printed sheets are, anyhow, as the men cry i' the streets."

"Why, you're like my brother Tom, Luke," said Maggie, wishing to turn the conversation agreeably; "Tom's not fond of reading. I love Tom so dearly, Luke—better than anybody else in the world. When he grows up, I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together. I can tell him everything he doesn't know. But I think Tom's clever, for all he doesn't like books: he makes beautiful whipcord and rabbit-pens."

"Ah," said Luke, "but he'll be fine an' vexed, as the rabbits are all dead."

"Dead!" screamed Maggie, jumping up from her sliding seat on the corn. "O dear, Luke! What! the lop-eared one, and the spotted doe that Tom spent all his money to buy?"

"As dead as moles," said Luke, fetching his comparison from the unmistakable corpses nailed to the stable-wall.

"O dear, Luke," said Maggie, in a piteous tone, while the big tears rolled down her cheek; "Tom told me to take care of 'em and I forgot. What *shall* I do?"

"Well, you see, Miss, they were in that far tool-house, an' it was nobody's business to see to 'em. I reckon Master Tom told Harry to feed 'em, but there's no countin' on Harry—*he's* an offal creatur as iver come about the primises, he is. He remembers nothing but his own inside—an' I wish it 'ud gripe him."

"O, Luke, Tom told me to be sure and remember the rabbits every day; but how could I, when they didn't come into my head, you know? O, he will be so angry with me, I know he will, and so sorry about his rabbits—and so am I sorry. O, what *shall* I do?"

"Don't you fret, Miss," said Luke, soothingly, "they're nash⁷ things, them lop-eared rabbits—they'd happen ha' died, if they'd been fed. Things out o' natur niver thrive: God A'mighty doesn't like 'em. He made the rabbits' ears to lie back, an' it's nothin' but contrairiness to make 'em hing down like a mastiff dog's. Master Tom 'ull know better nor buy such things another time. Don't you fret, Miss. Will you come along home wi' me, and see my wife? I'm a-goin' this minute."

The invitation offered an agreeable distraction to Maggie's grief, and her tears gradually subsided as she trotted along by Luke's side to his pleasant

7. Soft, delicate.

cottage, which stood with its apple and pear trees, and with the added dignity of a lean-to pig-sty at the other end of the Mill fields. Mrs. Moggs, Luke's wife, was a decidedly agreeable acquaintance. She exhibited her hospitality in bread and treacle, and possessed various works of art. Maggie actually forgot that she had any special cause of sadness this morning, as she stood on a chair to look at a remarkable series of pictures representing the Prodigal Son in the costume of Sir Charles Grandison,⁸ except that, as might have been expected from his defective moral character, he had not, like that accomplished hero, the taste and strength of mind to dispense with a wig. But the indefinable weight the dead rabbits had left on her mind caused her to feel more than usual pity for the career of this weak young man, particularly when she looked at the picture where he leaned against a tree with a flaccid appearance, his knee-breeches unbuttoned and his wig awry, while the swine, apparently of some foreign breed, seemed to insult him by their good spirits over their feast of husks.

"I'm very glad his father took him back again — aren't you, Luke?" she said. "For he was very sorry, you know, and wouldn't do wrong again."

"Eh, Miss," said Luke, "he'd be no great shakes, I doubt, let's feyther do what he would for him."

That was a painful thought to Maggie, and she wished much that the subsequent history of the young man had not been left a blank.

CHAPTER 5. TOM COMES HOME

Tom was to arrive early in the afternoon, and there was another fluttering heart besides Maggie's when it was late enough for the sound of the gig-wheels to be expected; for if Mrs. Tulliver had a strong feeling, it was fondness for her boy. At last the sound came — that quick light bowling of the gig-wheels — and in spite of the wind, which was blowing the clouds about, and was not likely to respect Mrs. Tulliver's curls and cap-strings, she came outside the door, and even held her hand on Maggie's offending head, forgetting all the griefs of the morning.

"There he is, my sweet lad! But, Lord ha' mercy! he's got never a collar on; it's been lost on the road, I'll be bound, and spoilt the set."

Mrs. Tulliver stood with her arms open; Maggie jumped first on one leg and

8. The illustration of the story of the Prodigal Son (cf. Luke 15.11–32) features him wearing 18th-century costume such as had been worn by the title character of Samuel Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754).

then on the other; while Tom descended from the gig, and said, with masculine reticence as to the tender emotions, "Hallo! Yap—what! are you there?"

Nevertheless he submitted to be kissed willingly enough, though Maggie hung on his neck in rather a strangling fashion, while his blue-grey eyes wandered towards the croft and the lambs and the river, where he promised himself that he would begin to fish the first thing to-morrow morning. He was one of those lads that grow everywhere in England, and, at twelve or thirteen years of age, look as much alike as goslings:—a lad with light-brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows—a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character of boyhood; as different as possible from poor Maggie's phiz, which Nature seemed to have moulded and coloured with the most decided intention. But that same Nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies. Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross, she conceals some of her most rigid, inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters; and the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink-and-white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features.

"Maggie," said Tom, confidentially, taking her into a corner, as soon as his mother was gone out to examine his box, and the warm parlour had taken off the chill he had felt from the long drive, "you don't know what I've got in *my* pockets," nodding his head up and down as a means of rousing her sense of mystery.

"No," said Maggie. "How stodgy they look, Tom! Is it marls (marbles) or cobnuts?" Maggie's heart sank a little, because Tom always said it was "no good" playing with *her* at those games—she played so badly.

"Marls! no; I've swopped all my marls with the little fellows, and cobnuts are no fun, you silly, only when the nuts are green. But see here!" He drew something half out of his right-hand pocket.

"What is it?" said Maggie, in a whisper. "I can see nothing but a bit of yellow."

"Why it's . . . a . . . new . . . guess, Maggie!"

"O, I *can't* guess, Tom," said Maggie, impatiently.

"Don't be a spitfire, else I won't tell you," said Tom, thrusting his hand back into his pocket, and looking determined.

"No, Tom," said Maggie, imploringly, laying hold of the arm that was held

stiffly in the pocket. "I'm not cross, Tom; it was only because I can't bear guessing. *Please* be good to me."

Tom's arm slowly relaxed, and he said, "Well, then it's a new fishline—two new uns—one for you, Maggie, all to yourself. I wouldn't go halves in the toffee and gingerbread on purpose to save the money; and Gibson and Spouncer fought with me because I wouldn't. And here's hooks; see here! . . . I say, *won't* we go and fish to-morrow down by the Round Pool? And you shall catch your own fish, Maggie, and put the worms on, and everything—won't it be fun?"

Maggie's answer was to throw her arms round Tom's neck and hug him, and hold her cheek against his without speaking, while he slowly unwound some of the line, saying, after a pause,

"Wasn't I a good brother, now, to buy you a line all to yourself? You know, I needn't have bought it, if I hadn't liked."

"Yes, very, very good. . . . I *do* love you, Tom."

Tom had put the line back in his pocket, and was looking at the hooks one by one, before he spoke again.

"And the fellows fought me, because I wouldn't give in about the toffee."

"O dear! I wish they wouldn't fight at your school, Tom. Didn't it hurt you?"

"Hurt me? no," said Tom, putting up the hooks again, taking out a large pocket-knife, and slowly opening the largest blade, which he looked at meditatively as he rubbed his finger along it. Then he added—

"I gave Spouncer a black eye, I know—that's what he got by wanting to leather *me*; I wasn't going to go halves because anybody leathered me."

"O how brave you are, Tom! I think you're like Samson.⁹ If there came a lion roaring at me, I think you'd fight him—wouldn't you, Tom?"

"How can a lion come roaring at you, you silly thing? There's no lions, only in the shows."

"No; but if we were in the lion countries—I mean in Africa, where it's very hot—the lions eat people there. I can show it you in the book where I read it."

"Well, I should get a gun and shoot him."

"But if you hadn't got a gun—we might have gone out, you know, not thinking—just as we go fishing; and then a great lion might run towards us roaring, and we couldn't get away from him. What should you do, Tom?"

9. Cf. Judges 14–16.

Tom paused, and at last turned away contemptuously, saying, "But the lion *isn't* coming. What's the use of talking?"

"But I like to fancy how it would be," said Maggie, following him. "Just think what you would do, Tom."

"O don't bother, Maggie! you're such a silly—I shall go and see my rabbits."

Maggie's heart began to flutter with fear. She dared not tell the sad truth at once, but she walked after Tom in trembling silence as he went out, thinking how she could tell him the news so as to soften at once his sorrow and his anger; for Maggie dreaded Tom's anger of all things—it was quite a different anger from her own.

"Tom," she said, timidly, when they were out of doors, "how much money did you give for your rabbits?"

"Two half-crowns and a sixpence," said Tom, promptly.

"I think I've got a deal more than that in my steel purse up-stairs. I'll ask mother to give it you."

"What for?" said Tom. "I don't want *your* money, you silly thing. I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy. I always have half-sovereigns and sovereigns for my Christmas boxes, because I shall be a man, and you only have five-shilling pieces, because you're only a girl."

"Well, but, Tom—if mother would let me give you two half-crowns and a sixpence out of my purse to put into your pocket and spend, you know; and buy some more rabbits with it?"

"More rabbits? I don't want any more."

"O, but, Tom, they're all dead."

Tom stopped immediately in his walk and turned round towards Maggie. "You forgot to feed 'em, then, and Harry forgot?" he said, his colour heightening for a moment, but soon subsiding. "I'll pitch into Harry—I'll have him turned away. And I don't love you, Maggie. You shan't go fishing with me to-morrow. I told you to go and see the rabbits every day." He walked on again.

"Yes, but I forgot—and I couldn't help it, indeed, Tom. I'm so very sorry," said Maggie, while the tears rushed fast.

"You're a naughty girl," said Tom, severely, "and I'm sorry I bought you the fish-line. I don't love you."

"O, Tom, it's very cruel," sobbed Maggie. "I'd forgive you, if *you* forgot anything—I wouldn't mind what you did—I'd forgive you and love you."

"Yes, you're a silly—but I never *do* forget things—I don't."

"O, please forgive me, Tom; my heart will break," said Maggie, shaking with sobs, clinging to Tom's arm, and laying her wet cheek on his shoulder.

Tom shook her off, and stopped again, saying in a peremptory tone, "Now, Maggie, you just listen. Aren't I a good brother to you?"

"Ye-ye-es," sobbed Maggie, her chin rising and falling convulsedly.

"Didn't I think about your fish-line all this quarter, and mean to buy it, and saved my money o' purpose, and wouldn't go halves in the toffee, and Spouncer fought me because I wouldn't?"

"Ye-ye-es . . . and I . . . lo-lo-love you so, Tom."

"But you're a naughty girl. Last holidays you licked the paint off my lozenge box, and the holidays before that you let the boat drag my fish-line down when I'd set you to watch it, and you pushed your head through my kite, all for nothing."

"But I didn't mean," said Maggie; "I couldn't help it."

"Yes, you could," said Tom, "if you'd minded what you were doing. And you're a naughty girl, and you shan't go fishing with me to-morrow."

With this terrible conclusion, Tom ran away from Maggie towards the mill, meaning to greet Luke there, and complain to him of Harry.

Maggie stood motionless, except from her sobs, for a minute or two; then she turned round and ran into the house, and up to her attic, where she sat on the floor, and laid her head against the worm-eaten shelf, with a crushing sense of misery. Tom was come home, and she had thought how happy she should be—and now he was cruel to her. What use was anything, if Tom didn't love her? O, he was very cruel! Hadn't she wanted to give him the money, and said how very sorry she was? She knew she was naughty to her mother, but she had never been naughty to Tom—had never *meant* to be naughty to him.

"O, he is cruel!" Maggie sobbed aloud, finding a wretched pleasure in the hollow resonance that came through the long empty space of the attic. She never thought of beating or grinding her Fetish; she was too miserable to be angry.

These bitter sorrows of childhood! when sorrow is all new and strange, when hope has not yet got wings to fly beyond the days and weeks, and the space from summer to summer seems measureless.

Maggie soon thought she had been hours in the attic, and it must be tea-time, and they were all having their tea, and not thinking of her. Well, then, she would stay up there and starve herself—hide herself behind the tub, and stay there all night; and then they would all be frightened, and Tom would be sorry. Thus Maggie thought in the pride of her heart, as she crept behind the tub; but presently she began to cry again at the idea that they didn't mind her being there. If she went down again to Tom now—would he forgive her?—

perhaps her father would be there, and he would take her part. But, then, she wanted Tom to forgive her because he loved her, not because his father told him. No, she would never go down if Tom didn't come to fetch her. This resolution lasted in great intensity for five dark minutes behind the tub; but then the need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature, began to wrestle with her pride, and soon threw it. She crept from behind her tub into the twilight of the long attic, but just then she heard a quick footstep on the stairs.

Tom had been too much interested in his talk with Luke, in going the round of the premises, walking in and out where he pleased, and whittling sticks without any particular reason, except that he didn't whittle sticks at school, to think of Maggie and the effect his anger had produced on her. He meant to punish her, and that business having been performed, he occupied himself with other matters, like a practical person. But when he had been called in to tea, his father said, "Why, where's the little wench?" and Mrs. Tulliver, almost at the same moment, said, "Where's your little sister?" — both of them having supposed that Maggie and Tom had been together all the afternoon.

"I don't know," said Tom. He didn't want to "tell" of Maggie, though he was angry with her; for Tom Tulliver was a lad of honour.

"What! hasn't she been playing with you all this while?" said the father. "She'd been thinking o' nothing but your coming home."

"I haven't seen her this two hours," says Tom, commencing on the plumcake.

"Goodness heart! she's got drowned," exclaimed Mrs. Tulliver, rising from her seat and running to the window. "How could you let her do so?" she added, as became a fearful woman, accusing she didn't know whom of she didn't know what.

"Nay, nay, she's none drowned," said Mr. Tulliver. "You've been naughty to her, I doubt, Tom?"

"I'm sure I haven't, father," said Tom, indignantly. "I think she's in the house."

"Perhaps up in that attic," said Mrs. Tulliver, "a-singing and talking to herself, and forgetting all about meal-times."

"You go and fetch her down, Tom," said Mr. Tulliver, rather sharply, his perspicacity or his fatherly fondness for Maggie making him suspect that the lad had been hard upon "the little un," else she would never have left his side. "And be good to her, do you hear? Else I'll let you know better."

Tom never disobeyed his father, for Mr. Tulliver was a peremptory man,

and, as he said, would never let anybody get hold of his whip-hand; but he went out rather sullenly, carrying his piece of plumcake, and not intending to reprieve Maggie's punishment, which was no more than she deserved. Tom was only thirteen, and had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic, regarding them for the most part as open questions, but he was particularly clear and positive on one point—namely, that he would punish everybody who deserved it: why, he wouldn't have minded being punished himself, if he deserved it; but, then, he never *did* deserve it.

It was Tom's step, then, that Maggie heard on the stairs, when her need of love had triumphed over her pride, and she was going down with her swollen eyes and dishevelled hair to beg for pity. At least her father would stroke her head and say, "Never mind, my wench." It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love—this hunger of the heart—as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world.

But she knew Tom's step, and her heart began to beat violently with the sudden shock of hope. He only stood still at the top of the stairs and said, "Maggie, you're to come down." But she rushed to him and clung round his neck, sobbing, "O Tom, please forgive me—I can't bear it—I will always be good—always remember things—do love me—please, dear Tom!"

We learn to restrain ourselves as we get older. We keep apart when we have quarrelled, express ourselves in well-bred phrases, and in this way preserve a dignified alienation, showing much firmness on one side, and swallowing much grief on the other. We no longer approximate in our behaviour to the mere impulsiveness of the lower animals, but conduct ourselves in every respect like members of a highly civilised society. Maggie and Tom were still very much like young animals, and so she could rub her cheek against his, and kiss his ear in a random, sobbing way; and there were tender fibres in the lad that had been used to answer to Maggie's fondling; so that he behaved with a weakness quite inconsistent with his resolution to punish her as much as she deserved: he actually began to kiss her in return, and say—

"Don't cry, then, Magsie—here, eat a bit o' cake."

Maggie's sobs began to subside, and she put out her mouth for the cake and bit a piece: and then Tom bit a piece, just for company, and they ate together and rubbed each other's cheeks and brows and noses together, while they ate, with a humiliating resemblance to two friendly ponies.

"Come along, Magsie, and have tea," said Tom at last, when there was no more cake except what was down-stairs.

So ended the sorrows of this day, and the next morning Maggie was trotting

with her own fishing-rod in one hand and a handle of the basket in the other, stepping always, by a peculiar gift, in the muddiest places, and looking darkly radiant from under her beaver-bonnet because Tom was good to her. She had told Tom, however, that she should like him to put the worms on the hook for her, although she accepted his word when he assured her that worms couldn't feel (it was Tom's private opinion that it didn't much matter if they did). He knew all about worms, and fish, and those things; and what birds were mischievous, and how padlocks opened, and which way the handles of the gates were to be lifted. Maggie thought this sort of knowledge was very wonderful — much more difficult than remembering what was in the books; and she was rather in awe of Tom's superiority, for he was the only person who called her knowledge "stuff," and did not feel surprised at her cleverness. Tom, indeed, was of opinion that Maggie was a silly little thing; all girls were silly — they couldn't throw a stone so as to hit anything, couldn't do anything with a pocket-knife, and were frightened at frogs. Still he was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong.

They were on their way to the Round Pool — that wonderful pool, which the floods had made a long while ago: no one knew how deep it was; and it was mysterious, too, that it should be almost a perfect round, framed in with willows and tall reeds, so that the water was only to be seen when you got close to the brink. The sight of the old favourite spot always heightened Tom's good-humour, and he spoke to Maggie in the most amicable whispers, as he opened the precious basket, and prepared their tackle. He threw her line for her, and put the rod into her hand. Maggie thought it probable that the small fish would come to her hook, and the large ones to Tom's. But she had forgotten all about the fish, and was looking dreamily at the glassy water, when Tom said, in a loud whisper, "Look, look, Maggie!" and came running to prevent her from snatching her line away.

Maggie was frightened lest she had been doing something wrong, as usual, but presently Tom drew out her line and brought a large tench bouncing on the grass.

Tom was excited.

"O Magsie! you little duck! Empty the basket."

Maggie was not conscious of unusual merit, but it was enough that Tom called her Magsie, and was pleased with her. There was nothing to mar her delight in the whispers and the dreamy silences, when she listened to the light dipping sounds of the rising fish, and the gentle rustling, as if the willows and

the reeds and the water had their happy whisperings also. Maggie thought it would make a very nice heaven to sit by the pool in that way, and never be scolded. She never knew she had a bite till Tom told her; but she liked fishing very much.

It was one of their happy mornings. They trotted along and sat down together, with no thought that life would ever change much for them: they would only get bigger and not go to school, and it would always be like the holidays; they would always live together and be fond of each other. And the mill with its booming—the great chestnut-tree under which they played at houses—their own little river, the Ripple, where the banks seemed like home, and Tom was always seeing the water-rats, while Maggie gathered the purple plummy tops of the reeds, which she forgot and dropped afterwards—above all, the great Floss, along which they wandered with a sense of travel, to see the rushing spring-tide, the awful Eagre,¹ come up like a hungry monster, or to see the Great Ash which had once wailed and groaned like a man—these things would always be just the same to them. Tom thought people were at a disadvantage who lived on any other spot of the globe; and Maggie, when she read about Christiana² passing “the river over which there is no bridge,” always saw the Floss between the green pastures by the Great Ash.

Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it,—if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lipping to ourselves on the grass—the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows—the same redbreasts that we used to call “God’s birds,” because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known?

The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white starflowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet—what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home-scene? These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these fur-

1. “A tidal wave of unusual height, caused by the rushing of the tide up a narrow estuary” [NED].

2. Protagonist of the second part of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. “The river over which there is no bridge” is Bunyan’s river of death.

rowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass to-day, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love.

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