

## CHAPTER XIX - A TALE OF A GLOVE

So long as Jamie was not the lad, Jess twinkled gleefully over tales of sweethearting. There was little Kitty Lamby who used to skip in of an evening, and, squatting on a stool near the window, unwind the roll of her enormities. A wheedling thing she was, with an ambition to drive men crazy, but my presence killed the gossip on her tongue, though I liked to look at her. When I entered, the wag at the wa' clock had again possession of the kitchen. I never heard more than the end of a sentence:

"An' did he really say he would fling himsel into the dam, Kitty?"

Or--"True as death, Jess, he kissed me."

Then I wandered away from the kitchen, where I was not wanted, and marvelled to know that Jess of the tender heart laughed most merrily when he really did say that he was going straight to the dam. As no body was found in the dam in those days, whoever he was he must have thought better of it.

But let Kitty, or any other maid, cast a glinting eye on Jamie, then Jess no longer smiled. If he returned the glance she sat silent in her chair till Leeby laughed away her fears.

"Jamie's no the kind, mother," Leeby would say. "Na, he's quiet, but he sees through them. They dinna draw his leg (get over him)."

"Ye never can tell, Leeby. The laddies 'at's maist ill to get sometimes gangs up in a flame a' at aince, like a bit o' paper."

"Ay, weel, at ony rate Jamie's no on fire yet."

Though clever beyond her neighbours, Jess lost all her sharpness if they spoke of a lassie for Jamie.

"I warrant," Tibbie Birse said one day in my hearing, "'at there's some leddie in London he's thinkin' o'. Ay, he's been a guid laddie to ye, but i' the course o' nature he'll be settlin' dune soon."

Jess did not answer, but she was a picture of woe.

"Ye're lettin' what Tibbie Birse said lie on yer mind," Leeby remarked, when Tibbie was gone. "What can it maiter what she thinks?"

"I canna help it, Leeby," said Jess. "Na, an' I canna bear to think o' Jamie bein' mairit. It would lay me low to loss my laddie. No yet, no yet."

"But, mother," said Leeby, quoting from the minister at weddings, "ye wouldna be lossin' a son, but juist gainin' a dochter."

"Dinna haver, Leeby," answered Jess, "I want nane o' thae dochters; na, na."

This talk took place while we were still awaiting Jamie's coming. He had only been with us one day when Jess made a terrible discovery. She was looking so mournful when I saw her, that I asked Leeby what was wrong.

"She's brocht it on hersel," said Leeby. "Ye see she was up sune i' the mornin' to begin to the darnin' o' Jamie's stockins an' to warm his sark at the fire afore he put it on. He woke up, an' cried to her 'at he wasna accustomed to hae'n his things warmed for him. Ay, he cried it oot fell thrawn, so she took it into her head 'at there was something in his pouch he didna want her to see. She was even onaisy last nicht."

I asked what had aroused Jess's suspicions last night.

"Ou, ye would notice 'at she sat devourin' him wi' her een, she was so lifted up at hae'n 'im again. Weel, she says noo 'at she saw 'im twa or three times put his hand in his pouch as if he was findin' to mak sure 'at something was safe. So when he fell asleep again this mornin' she got haud o' his jacket to see if there was onything in't. I advised her no to do't, but she couldna help herself. She put in her hand, an' pu'd it oot. That's what's makkin' her look sae ill."

"But what was it she found?"

"Did I no tell ye? I'm ga'en dottle, I think. It was a glove, a woman's glove, in a bit paper. Ay, though she's sittin' still she's near frantic."

I said I supposed Jess had put the glove back in Jamie's pocket.

"Na," said Leeby, "'deed no. She wanted to fling it on the back o' the fire, but I wouldna let her. That's it she has aneath her apron."

Later in the day I remarked to Leeby that Jamie was very dull.

"He's missed it," she explained.

"Has any one mentioned it to him," I asked, "or has he inquired about it?"

"Na," said Leeby, "there hasna been a syltup (syllable) about it. My mother's fleid to mention't, an' he doesna like to speak about it either."

"Perhaps he thinks he has lost it?"

"Nae fear o' him," Leeby said. "Na, he kens fine wha has't."

I never knew how Jamie came by the glove, nor whether it had originally belonged to her who made him forget the window at the top of the brae. At the time I looked on as at play-acting, rejoicing in the happy ending. Alas! in the real life how are we to know when we have reached an end?

But this glove, I say, may not have been that woman's, and if it was, she had not then bedevilled him. He was too sheepish to demand it back from his mother, and already he cared for it too much to laugh at Jess's theft with Leeby. So it was that a curious game at chess was played with the glove, the players a silent pair.

Jamie cared little to read books, but on the day following Jess's discovery, I found him on his knees in the attic, looking through mine. A little box, without a lid, held them all, but they seemed a great library to him.

"There's readin' for a lifetime in them," he said. "I was juist takkin' a look through them."

His face was guilty, however, as if his hand had been caught in a money-bag, and I wondered what had enticed the lad to my books. I was still standing pondering when Leeby ran up the stair; she was so active that she generally ran, and she grudged the time lost in recovering her breath.

"I'll put yer books richt," she said, making her word good as she spoke. "I kent Jamie had been ransackin' up here, though he came up rale canny. Ay, ye would notice he was in his stockin' soles."

I had not noticed this, but I remembered now his slipping from the room very softly. If he wanted a book, I told Leeby, he could have got it without any display of cunning.

"It's no a book he's lookin' for," she said, "na, it's his glove."

The time of day was early for Leeby to gossip, but I detained her for a moment.

"My mother's hodded (hid) it," she explained, "an he winna speir nae queistions. But he's lookin' for't. He was ben in the room searchin' the drawers when I was up i' the toon in the forenoon. Ye see he pretends no to be carin' afore me, an' though my mother's sittin' sae quiet-like at the window she's hearkenin' a' the time. Ay, an' he thocht I had hod it up here."

But where, I asked, was the glove hid.

"I ken nae mair than yersel," said Leeby. "My mother's gien to hoddin' things. She has a place aneath the bed whaur she keeps the siller, an' she's no speakin' about the glove to me noo, because she thinks Jamie an' me's in comp (company). I speired at her whaur she had hod it, but she juist said, 'What would I be doin' hoddin't?' She'll never admit to me 'at she hods the siller either."

Next day Leeby came to me with the latest news.

"He's found it," she said, "ay, he's got the glove again. Ye see what put him on the wrang scent was a notion 'at I had put it some gait. He kent 'at if she'd hod it, the kitchen maun be the place, but he thocht she'd gi'en it to me to hod. He came upon't by accident. It was aneath the paddin' o' her chair."

Here, I thought, was the end of the glove incident, but I was mistaken. There were no presses or drawers with locks in the house, and Jess got hold of the glove again. I suppose she had reasoned out no line of action. She merely hated the thought that Jamie should have a woman's glove in his possession.

"She beats a' wi' 'cuteness," Leeby said to me. "Jamie didna put the glove back in his pouch. Na, he kens her ower weel by this time. She was up, though, lang afore he was wauken, an' she gaed almost strecht to the place whaur he had hod it. I believe she lay waukin a' nicht thinkin' oot

whaur it would be. Ay, it was aneath the mattress. I saw her hodden't i' the back o' the drawer, but I didna let on."

I quite believed Leeby when she told me afterwards that she had watched Jamie feeling beneath the mattress.

"He had a face," she said, "I assure ye, he had a face, when he discovered the glove was gone again."

"He maun be terrible ta'en up about it," Jess said to Leeby, "or he wouldna keep it aneath the mattress."

"Od," said Leeby, "it was yersel 'at drove him to't."

Again Jamie recovered his property, and again Jess got hold of it. This time he looked in vain. I learnt the fate of the glove from Leeby.

"Ye mind 'at she keepit him at hame frae the kirk on Sabbath, because he had a cauld?" Leeby said. "Ay, me or my father would hae a gey ill cauld afore she would let's bide at hame frae the kirk; but Jamie's different. Weel, mair than ance she's been near speakin' to 'im about the glove, but she grew fleid aye. She was so terrified there was something in't.

"On Sabbath, though, she had him to hersel, an' he wasna so bright as usual. She sat wi' the Bible on her lap, pretendin' to read, but a' the time she was takkin' keeks (glances) at him. I dinna ken 'at he was broodin' ower the glove, but she thocht he was, an' just afore the kirk came oot she couldna stand it nae langer. She put her hand in her pouch, an pu'd oot the glove, wi' the paper round it, just as it had been when she came upon't.

"That's yours, Jamie," she said; 'it was ill-dune o' me to tak it, but I couldna help it.'

"Jamie put oot his hand, an' syne he drew't back. 'It's no a thing o' nae consequence, mother, he said.

"Wha is she, Jamie?' my mother said.

"He turned awa his heid--so she telt me. 'It's a lassie in London,' he said, 'I dinna ken her muckle.'

"Ye maun ken her weel,' my mother persisted, 'to be carryin' aboot her glove; I'm dootin' ye're gey fond o' her, Jamie?"

"Na,' said Jamie, 'am no. There's no naebody I care for like yersel, mother.'

"Ye wouldna carry aboot onything o' mine, Jamie,' my mother said; but he says, 'Oh, mother, I carry aboot yer face wi' me aye; an' sometimes at nicht I kind o' greet to think o' ye.'

"Ay, after that I've nae doot he was sittin' wi' his airms aboot her. She didna tell me that, but weel he kens it's what she likes, an' she maks nae pretence o' its no bein'. But for a' he said an' did, she noticed him put the glove back in his inside pouch.

"It's wrang o' me, Jamie,' she said, 'but I canna bear to think o' ye carryin' that aboot sae carefu'. No, I canna help it.'

"Weel, Jamie, the crittur, took it oot o' his pouch an' kind o' hesitated. Syne he lays't on the back o' the fire, an' they sat thegither glowerin' at it.

"Noo, mother,' he says, 'you're satisfied, are ye no'?"

"Ay," Leeby ended her story, "she said she was satisfied. But she saw 'at he laid it on the fire fell fond-like."