

## CHAPTER XXXIII - THERE IS SOME ONE TO LOVE GRIZEL AT LAST

Corp was sitting on the Monypenny dyke, spitting on a candlestick and then rubbing it briskly against his orange-colored trousers. The doctor passing in his gig, both of them streaked, till they blended, with the mud of Look-about-you road (through which you should drive winking rapidly all the way), saw him and drew up.

"Well, how is Grizel?" he asked. He had avoided Double Dykes since the funeral, but vain had been his attempts to turn its little inmate out of his mind; there she was, against his will, and there, he now admitted to himself angrily or with a rueful sigh, she seemed likely to remain until someone gave her a home. It was an almost ludicrous distrust of himself that kept him away from her; he feared that if he went to Double Dykes her lonely face would complete his conquest. For oh, he was reluctant to be got the better of, as he expressed it to himself. Maggy Ann, his maid, was the ideal woman for a bachelor's house. When she saw him coming she fled, guiltily concealing the hated duster; when he roared at her for announcing that dinner was ready, she left him to eat it half cold; when he spilled matches on the floor and then stepped upon them and set the rug on fire, she let him tell her that she should be more careful; she did not carry off his favorite boots to the cobbler because they were down at heel; she did not fling up her arms in horror and cry that she had brushed that coat just five minutes ago; nor did she count the treasured "dottels" on the mantelpiece to discover how many pipes he had smoked since morning; nor point out that he had stepped over the door-mat; nor line her shelves with the new Mentor; nor give him up his foot for sitting half the night with patients who could not pay--in short, he knew the ways of the limmers, and Maggy Ann was a jewel. But it had taken him a dozen years to bring her to this perfection, and well he knew that the curse of Eve, as he called the rage for the duster, slumbered in her rather than was extinguished. With the volcanic Grizel in the house, Maggy Ann would once more burst into flame, and the horrified doctor looked to right of him, to left of him, before him and behind him, and everywhere he seemed to see two new brooms bearing down. No, the brat, he would not have her; the besom, why did she bother him; the witches take her, for putting the idea into his head, nailing it into his head indeed. But nevertheless he was forever urging other people to adopt her, assuring them that they would find her a treasure, and even shaking his staff at

them when they refused; and he was so uneasy if he did not hear of her several times a day that he made Monypenny the way to and from everywhere, so that he might drop into artful talk with those who had seen her last. Corp, accordingly, was not surprised at his "How is Grizel?" now, and he answered, between two spits, "She's fine; she gave me this."

It was one of the Painted Lady's silver candlesticks, and the doctor asked sharply why Grizel had given it to him.

"She said because she liked me," Corp replied, wonderingly. "She brought it to my auntie's door soon after I loused, and put it into my hand: ay, and she had a blue shawl, and she telled me to give it to Gavinia, because she liked her too."

"What else did she say?"

Corp tried to think. "I said, 'This cows, Grizel, but thank you kindly,'" he answered, much pleased with his effort of memory, but the doctor interrupted him rudely. "Nobody wants to hear what you said, you dottrel; what more did she say?" And thus encouraged Corp remembered that she had said she hoped he would not forget her. "What for should I forget her when I see her ilka day?" he asked, and was probably about to divulge that this was his reply to her, but without waiting for more, McQueen turned his beast's head and drove to the entrance to the Double Dykes. Here he alighted and hastened up the path on foot, but before he reached the house he met Dite Deuchars taking his ease beneath a tree, and Dite could tell him that Grizel was not at home. "But there's somebody in Double Dykes," he said, "though I kenna wha could be there unless it's the ghost of the Painted Lady hersel'. About an hour syne I saw Grizel come out o' the house, carrying a bundle, but she hadna gone many yards when she turned round and waved her hand to the east window. I couldna see wha was at it, but there maun have been somebody, for first the crittur waved to the window and next she kissed her hand to it, and syne she went on a bit, and syne she ran back close to the window and nodded and flung more kisses, and back and forrit she went a curran times as if she could hardly tear hersel' awa'. 'Wha's that you're so chief wi'? I speired when she came by me at last, but she just said, 'I won't tell you,' in her dour wy, and she hasna come back yet."

Whom could she have been saying good-by to so demonstratively, and whither had she gone? With a curiosity that for the moment took the place of his uneasiness, McQueen proceeded to the house, the door of which was shut but not locked. Two glances convinced him that there was no one here, the kitchen was as he had seen it last, except that the long mirror had been placed on a chair close to the east window. The doctor went to the outside of the window, and looked in, he could see nothing but his own reflection in the mirror, and was completely puzzled. But it was no time, he felt, for standing there scratching his head, when there was reason to fear that the girl had gone. Gone where? He saw his selfishness now, in a glaring light, and it fled out of him pursued by curses.

He stopped at Aaron's door and called for Tommy, but Tommy had left the house an hour ago. "Gone with her, the sacket; he very likely put her up to this," the doctor muttered, and the surmise seemed justified when he heard that Grizel and Tommy had been seen passing the Fens. That they were running away had never struck those who saw them, and McQueen said nothing of his suspicions, but off he went in his gig on their track and ran them down within a mile of Tilliedrum. Grizel scurried on, thinking it was undoubtedly her father, but in a few minutes the three were conversing almost amicably, the doctor's first words had been so "sweet."

Tommy explained that they were out for a walk, but Grizel could not lie, and in a few passionate sentences she told McQueen the truth. He had guessed the greater part of it, and while she spoke he looked so sorry for her, such a sweet change had come over his manner, that she held his hand.

"But you must go no farther," he told her, "I am to take you back with me," and that alarmed her. "I won't go back," she said, determinedly, "he might come."

"There's little fear of his coming," McQueen assured her, gently, "but if he does come I give you my solemn word that I won't let him take you away unless you want to go."

Even then she only wavered, but he got her altogether with this: "And should he come, just think what a piece of your mind you could give him, with me standing by holding your hand."

"Oh, would you do that?" she asked, brightening.

"I would do a good deal to get the chance," he said.

"I should just love it!" she cried. "I shall come now," and she stepped light-heartedly into the gig, where the doctor joined her. Tommy, who had been in the background all this time, was about to jump up beside them, but McQueen waved him back, saying maliciously, "There's just room for two, my man, so I won't interfere with your walk."

Tommy, in danger of being left, very hot and stout and sulky, whimpered, "What have I done to anger you?"

"You were going with her, you blackguard," replied McQueen, not yet in full possession of the facts, for whether Tommy was or was not going with her no one can ever know.

"If I was," cried the injured boy, "it wasna because I wanted to go, it was because it wouldna have been respectable for her to go by hersel'."

The doctor had already started his shalt, but at these astonishing words he drew up sharply. "Say that again," ha said, as if thinking that his ears must have deceived him, and Tommy repeated his remark, wondering at its effect.

"And you tell me that you were going with her," the doctor repeated, "to make her enterprise more respectable?" and he looked from one to the other.

"Of course I was," replied Tommy, resenting his surprise at a thing so obvious; and "That's why I wanted him to come," chimed in Grizel.

Still McQueen's glance wandered from the boy to the girl and from the girl to the boy. "You are a pair!" he said at last, and he signed in silence to Tommy to mount the gig. But his manner had alarmed Grizel, ever watching herself lest she should stray into the ways of bad ones, and she asked anxiously, "There was nothing wrong in it, was there?"

"No," the doctor answered gravely, laying his hand on hers, "no, it was just sweet."

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What McQueen had to say to her was not for Tommy's ears, and the conversation was but a makeshift until they reached Thrums, where he sent the boy home, recommending him to hold his tongue about the escapade (and Tommy of course saw the advisability of keeping it from Elspeth); but he took Grizel into his parlor and set her down on the buffet stool by the fire, where he surveyed her in silence at his leisure. Then he tried her in his old armchair, then on his sofa; then he put the Mentor into her hand and told her to hold it as if it were a duster, then he sent her into the passage, with instructions to open the door presently and announce "Dinner is ready;" then he told her to put some coals on the fire; then he told her to sit at the window, first with an open book in her hand, secondly as if she was busy knitting; and all these things she did wondering exceedingly, for he gave no explanation except the incomprehensible one, "I want to see what it would be like."

She had told him in the gig why she had changed the position of the mirror at Double Dykes, it was to let "that darling" wave good-by to her from the window; and now having experimented with her in his parlor he drew her toward his chair, so that she stood between his knees. And he asked her if she understood why he had gone to Double Dykes.

"Was it to get me to tell you what were the names in the letter?" she said, wistfully. "That is what everyone asks me, but I won't tell, no, I won't;" and she closed her mouth hard.

He, too, would have liked to hear the names, and he sighed, it must be admitted, at sight of that determined mouth, but he could say truthfully, "Your refusal to break your promise is one of the things that I admire in you."

Admire! Grizel could scarce believe that this gift was for her. "You don't mean that you really like me?" she faltered, but she felt sure all the time that he did, and she cried, "Oh, but why, oh, how can you!"

"For one reason," he said, "because you are so good."

"Good! Oh! oh! oh!" She clapped her hands joyously.

"And for another--because you are so brave."

"But I am not really brave," she said anxiously, yet resolved to hide nothing, "I only pretend to be brave, I am often frightened, but I just don't let on."

That, he told her, is the highest form of bravery, but Grizel was very, very tired of being brave, and she insisted impetuously, "I don't want to be brave, I want to be afraid, like other girls."

"Ay, it's your right, you little woman," he answered, tenderly, and then again he became mysterious. He kicked off his shoes to show her that he was wearing socks that did not match. "I just pull on the first that come to hand," he said recklessly.

"Oh!" cried Grizel.

On his dusty book-shelves he wrote, with his finger, "Not dusted since the year One."

"Oh! oh!" she cried.

He put his fingers through his gray, untidy hair. "That's the only comb I have that is at hand when I want it," he went on, regardless of her agony.

"All the stud-holes in my shirts," he said, "are now so frayed and large that the studs fall out, and I find them in my socks at night."

Oh! oh! he was killing her, he was, but what cared he? "Look at my clothes," said the cruel man, "I read when I'm eating, and I spill so much gravy that--that we boil my waistcoat once a month, and make soup of it!"

To Grizel this was the most tragic picture ever drawn by man, and he saw that it was time to desist. "And it's all," he said, looking at her sadly, "it's all because I am a lonely old bachelor with no womankind to look after him, no little girl to brighten him when he comes home dog-tired, no one to care whether his socks are in holes and his comb behind the wash-stand, no soft hand to soothe his brow when it aches, no one to work for, no one to love, many a one to close the old bachelor's eyes when he dies, but none to drop a tear for him, no one to--"

"Oh! oh! oh! That is just like me. Oh! oh!" cried Grizel, and he pulled her closer to him, saying, "The more reason we should join together; Grizel, if you don't take pity on me, and come and bide with me and be my little housekeeper, the Lord Almighty only knows what is to become of the old doctor."

At this she broke away from him, and stood far back pressing her arms to her sides, and she cried, "It is not out of charity you ask me, is it?" and then she went a little nearer. "You would not say it if it wasn't true, would you?"

"No, my dawtie, it's true," he told her, and if he had been pitying himself a little, there was an end of that now.

She remembered something and cried joyously, "And you knew what was in my blood before you asked me, so I don't need to tell you, do I? And you are not afraid that I shall corrupt you, are you? And you don't think it a pity I didn't die when I was a tiny baby, do you? Some people think so, I heard them say it."

"What would have become of me?" was all he dared answer in words, but he drew her to him again, and when she asked if it was true, as she had heard some woman say, that in some matters men were all alike, and did what that one man had done to her mamma, he could reply solemnly, "No, it is not true; it's a lie that has done more harm than any war in any century."

She sat on his knee, telling him many things that had come recently to her knowledge but were not so new to him. The fall of woman was the subject, a strange topic for a girl of thirteen and a man of sixty. They don't become wicked in a moment, he learned; if they are good to begin with, it takes quite a long time to make them bad. Her mamma was good to begin with. "I know she was good, because when she thought she was the girl she used to be, she looked sweet and said lovely things." The way the men do is this, they put evil thoughts into the woman's head, and say them often to her, till she gets accustomed to them, and thinks they cannot be bad when the man she loves likes them, and it is called corrupting the mind.

"And then a baby comes to them," Grizel said softly, "and it is called a child of shame. I am a child of shame."

He made no reply, so she looked up, and his face was very old and sad. "I am sorry too," she whispered, but still he said nothing, and then she put her fingers on his eyes to discover if they were wet, and they were wet. And so Grizel knew that there was someone who loved her at last.

The mirror was the only article of value that Grizel took with her to her new home; everything else was roused at the door of Double Dykes; Tommy, who should have been at his books, acting as auctioneer's clerk for sixpence. There are houses in Thrums where you may still be told who got the bed and who the rocking-chair, and how Nether Drumgley's wife dared him to come home without the spinet; but it is not by the sales that the rousing is best remembered. Curiosity took many persons into Double Dykes that day, and in the room that had never been furnished they saw a mournful stack of empty brandy bottles, piled there by the auctioneer who had found them in every corner, beneath the bed, in presses, in boxes, whither they had been thrust by Grizel's mamma, as if to conceal their number from herself. The counting of these bottles was a labor, but it is not even by them that the rousing is remembered. Among them some sacrilegious hands found a bundle of papers with a sad blue ribbon round them. They were the Painted Lady's love-letters, the letters she had written to the man. Why or how they had come back to her no one knew.

Most of them were given to Grizel, but a dozen or more passed without her leave into the kists of various people, where often since then they have been consulted by swains in need of a pretty phrase; and Tommy's school-fellows, the very boys and girls who hooted the Painted Lady, were in time--so oddly do things turn out--to be among those whom her letters taught how to woo. Where the kists did not let in the damp or careless fingers, the paper long remained clean, the ink but little faded. Some of the letters were creased, as if they had once been much folded, perhaps for slipping into secret hiding-places, but none of them bore any address or a date. "To my beloved," was sometimes written on the cover, and inside he was darling or beloved again. So no one could have arranged them in the order in which they were written, though there was a three-cornered one which said it was the first. There was a violet in it, clinging to the paper as if they were fond of each other, and Grizel's mamma had written, "The violet is me, hiding in a corner because I am so happy." The letters were in many moods, playful, reflective, sad, despairing, arch, but all were written in an ecstasy of the purest love, and most of them were cheerful, so that you seemed to see the sun dancing on the paper while she wrote, the same sun that afterwards showed up her painted cheeks. Why they came back to her no one ever discovered, any more than how she who slipped the violet into that three-cornered one and took it out to kiss again and wrote, "It is my first love-letter, and I love it so much I am



reluctant to let it go," became in a few years the derision of the Double Dykes. Some of these letters may be in old kists still, but whether that is so or not, they alone have passed the Painted Lady's memory from one generation to another, and they have purified it, so that what she was died with her vile body, and what she might have been lived on, as if it were her true self.