

CHAPTER IV - GRIZEL OF THE CROOKED SMILE

To expose Tommy for what he was, to appear to be scrupulously fair to him so that I might really damage him the more, that is what I set out to do in this book, and always when he seemed to be finding a way of getting round me (as I had a secret dread he might do) I was to remember Grizel and be obdurate. But if I have so far got past some of his virtues without even mentioning them (and I have), I know how many opportunities for discrediting him have been missed, and that would not greatly matter, there are so many more to come, if Grizel were on my side. But she is not; throughout those first chapters a voice has been crying to me, "Take care; if you hurt him you will hurt me"; and I know it to be the voice of Grizel, and I seem to see her, rocking her arms as she used to rock them when excited in the days of her innocent childhood. "Don't, don't, don't!" she cried at every cruel word I gave him, and she, to whom it was ever such agony to weep, dropped a tear upon each word, so that they were obliterated; and "Surely I knew him best," she said, "and I always loved him"; and she stood there defending him, with her hand on her heart to conceal the gaping wound that Tommy had made.

Well, if Grizel had always loved him there was surely something fine and rare about Tommy. But what was it, Grizel? Why did you always love him, you who saw into him so well and demanded so much of men? When I ask that question the spirit that hovers round my desk to protect Tommy from me rocks her arms mournfully, as if she did not know the answer; it is only when I seem to see her as she so often was in life, before she got that wound and after, bending over some little child and looking up radiant, that I think I suddenly know why she always loved Tommy. It was because he had such need of her.

I don't know whether you remember, but there were once some children who played at Jacobites in the Thrums Den under Tommy's leadership. Elspeth, of course, was one of them, and there were Corp Shiach, and Gavinia, and lastly, there was Grizel. Had Tommy's parents been alive she would not have been allowed to join, for she was a painted lady's child; but Tommy insisted on having her, and Grizel thought it was just sweet of him. He also chatted with her in public places, as if she were a respectable character; and oh, how she longed to be respectable! but, on the other hand, he was the first to point out how superbly he was

behaving, and his ways were masterful, so the independent girl would not be captain's wife; if he said she was captain's wife he had to apologize, and if he merely looked it he had to apologize just the same.

One night the Painted Lady died in the Den, and then it would have gone hard with the lonely girl had not Dr. McQueen made her his little housekeeper, not out of pity, he vowed (she was so anxious to be told that), but because he was an old bachelor sorely in need of someone to take care of him. And how she took care of him! But though she was so happy now, she knew that she must be very careful, for there was something in her blood that might waken and prevent her being a good woman. She thought it would be sweet to be good.

She told all this to Tommy, and he was profoundly interested, and consulted a wise man, whose advice was that when she grew up she should be wary of any man whom she liked and mistrusted in one breath. Meaning to do her a service, Tommy communicated this to her; and then, what do you think? Grizel would have no more dealings with him! By and by the gods, in a sportive mood, sent him to labour on a farm, whence, as we have seen, he found a way to London, and while he was growing into a man Grizel became a woman. At the time of the doctor's death she was nineteen, tall and graceful, and very dark and pale. When the winds of the day flushed her cheek she was beautiful; but it was a beauty that hid the mystery of her face. The sun made her merry, but she looked more noble when it had set; then her pallor shone with a soft, radiant light, as though the mystery and sadness and serenity of the moon were in it. The full beauty of Grizel came out only at night, like the stars.

I had made up my mind that when the time came to describe Grizel's mere outward appearance I should refuse her that word "beautiful" because of her tilted nose; but now that the time has come, I wonder at myself. Probably when I am chapters ahead I shall return to this one and strike out the word "beautiful," and then, as likely as not, I shall come back afterwards and put it in again. Whether it will be there at the end, God knows. Her eyes, at least, were beautiful. They were unusually far apart, and let you look straight into them, and never quivered; they were such clear, gray, searching eyes, they seemed always to be asking for the truth. And she had an adorable mouth. In repose it was, perhaps, hard, because it shut so decisively; but often it screwed up provokingly at one side, as when she smiled, or was sorry, or for no particular reason; for

she seemed unable to control this vagary, which was perhaps a little bit of babyhood that had forgotten to grow up with the rest of her. At those moments the essence of all that was characteristic and delicious about her seemed to have run to her mouth; so that to kiss Grizel on her crooked smile would have been to kiss the whole of her at once. She had a quaint way of nodding her head at you when she was talking. It made you forget what she was saying, though it was really meant to have precisely the opposite effect. Her voice was rich, with many inflections. When she had much to say it gurgled like a stream in a hurry; but its cooing note was best worth remembering at the end of the day. There were times when she looked like a boy. Her almost gallant bearing, the poise of her head, her noble frankness--they all had something in them of a princely boy who had never known fear.

I have no wish to hide her defects; I would rather linger over them, because they were part of Grizel, and I am sorry to see them go one by one. Thrums had not taken her to its heart. She was a proud-purse, they said, meaning that she had a haughty walk. Her sense of justice was too great. She scorned frailties that she should have pitied. (How strange to think that there was a time when pity was not the feeling that leaped to Grizel's bosom first!) She did not care for study. She learned French and the pianoforte to please the doctor; but she preferred to be sewing or dusting. When she might have been reading, she was perhaps making for herself one of those costumes that annoyed every lady of Thrums who employed a dressmaker; or, more probably, it was a delicious garment for a baby; for as soon as Grizel heard that there was a new baby anywhere, all her intellect deserted her, and she became a slave. Books often irritated her because she disagreed with the author; and it was a torment to her to find other people holding to their views when she was so certain that hers were right. In church she sometimes rocked her arms; and the old doctor by her side knew that it was because she could not get up and contradict the minister. She was, I presume, the only young lady who ever dared to say that she hated Sunday because there was so much sitting still in it.

Sitting still did not suit Grizel. At all other times she was happy; but then her mind wandered back to the thoughts that had lived too closely with her in the old days, and she was troubled. What woke her from these reveries was probably the doctor's hand placed very tenderly on her shoulder, and then she would start, and wonder how long he had been

watching her, and what were the grave thoughts behind his cheerful face; for the doctor never looked more cheerful than when he was drawing Grizel away from the ugly past, and he talked to her as if he had noticed nothing; but after he went upstairs he would pace his bedroom for a long time; and Grizel listened, and knew that he was thinking about her. Then, perhaps, she would run up to him, and put her arms around his neck. These scenes brought the doctor and Grizel very close together; but they became rarer as she grew up, and then for once that she was troubled she was a hundred times irresponsible with glee, and "Oh, you dearest, darlingest," she would cry to him, "I must dance,--I must, I must!--though it is a fast-day; and you must dance with your mother this instant--I am so happy, so happy!" "Mother" was his nickname for her, and she delighted in the word. She lorded it over him as if he were her troublesome boy.

How could she be other than glorious when there was so much to do? The work inside the house she made for herself, and outside the doctor made it for her. At last he had found for nurse a woman who could follow his instructions literally, who understood that if he said five o'clock for the medicine the chap of six would not do as well, who did not in her heart despise the thermometer, and who resolutely prevented the patient from skipping out of bed to change her pillow-slips because the minister was expected. Such tyranny enraged every sufferer who had been ill before and got better; but what they chiefly complained of to the doctor (and he agreed with a humourous sigh) was her masterfulness about fresh air and cold water. Windows were opened that had never been opened before (they yielded to her pressure with a groan); and as for cold water, it might have been said that a bath followed her wherever she went--not, mark me, for putting your hands and face in, not even for your feet; but in you must go, the whole of you, "as if," they said indignantly, "there was something the matter with our skin."

She could not gossip, not even with the doctor, who liked it of an evening when he had got into his carpet shoes. There was no use telling her a secret, for she kept it to herself for evermore. She had ideas about how men should serve a woman, even the humblest, that made the men gaze with wonder, and the women (curiously enough) with irritation. Her greatest scorn was for girls who made themselves cheap with men; and she could not hide it. It was a physical pain to Grizel to hide her feelings; they popped out in her face, if not in words, and were always in advance

of her self-control. To the doctor this impulsiveness was pathetic; he loved her for it, but it sometimes made him uneasy.

He died in the scarlet-fever year. "I'm smitten," he suddenly said at a bedside; and a week afterwards he was gone.

"We must speak of it now, Grizel," he said, when he knew that he was dying.

She pressed his hand. She knew to what he was referring. "Yes," she said, "I should love you to speak of it now."

"You and I have always fought shy of it," he said, "making a pretence that it had altogether passed away. I thought that was best for you."

"Dearest, darlingest," she said, "I know--I have always known."

"And you," he said, "you pretended because you thought it was best for me."

She nodded. "And we saw through each other all the time," she said.

"Grizel, has it passed away altogether now?"

Her grip upon his hand did not tighten in the least. "Yes," she could say honestly, "it has altogether passed away."

"And you have no more fear?"

"No, none."

It was his great reward for all that he had done for Grizel.

"I know what you are thinking of," she said, when he did not speak. "You are thinking of the haunted little girl you rescued seven years ago."

"No," he answered; "I was thanking God for the brave, wholesome woman she has grown into; and for something else, Grizel--for letting me live to see it."

"To do it," she said, pressing his hand to her breast.

She was a strange girl, and she had to speak her mind. "I don't think God has done it all," she said. "I don't even think that He told you to do it. I think He just said to you, 'There is a painted lady's child at your door. You can save her if you like.'"

"No," she went on, when he would have interposed; "I am sure He did not want to do it all. He even left a little bit of it to me to do myself. I love to think that I have done a tiny bit of it myself. I think it is the sweetest thing about God that He lets us do some of it ourselves. Do I hurt you, darling?"

No, she did not hurt him, for he understood her. "But you are naturally so impulsive," he said, "it has often been a sharp pain to me to see you so careful."

"It was not a pain to me to be careful; it was a joy. Oh, the thousand dear, delightful joys I have had with you!"

"It has made you strong, Grizel, and I rejoice in that; but sometimes I fear that it has made you too difficult to win."

"I don't want to be won," she told him.

"You don't quite mean that, Grizel."

"No," she said at once. She whispered to him impulsively: "It is the only thing I am at all afraid of now."

"What?"

"Love."

"You will not be afraid of it when it comes."

"But I want to be afraid," she said.

"You need not," he answered. "The man on whom those clear eyes rest lovingly will be worthy of it all. If he were not, they would be the first to find him out."

"But need that make any difference?" she asked. "Perhaps though I found him out I should love him just the same."

"Not unless you loved him first, Grizel."

"No," she said at once again. "I am not really afraid of love," she whispered to him. "You have made me so happy that I am afraid of nothing."

Yet she wondered a little that he was not afraid to die, but when she told him this he smiled and said: "Everybody fears death except those who are dying." And when she asked if he had anything on his mind, he said: "I leave the world without a care. Not that I have seen all I would fain have seen. Many a time, especially this last year, when I have seen the mother in you crooning to some neighbour's child, I have thought to myself, 'I don't know my Grizel yet; I have seen her in the bud only,' and I would fain--" He broke off. "But I have no fears," he said. "As I lie here, with you sitting by my side, looking so serene, I can say, for the first time for half a century, that I have nothing on my mind.

"But, Grizel, I should have married," he told her. "The chief lesson my life has taught me is that they are poor critturs--the men who don't marry."

"If you had married," she said, "you might never have been able to help me."

"It is you who have helped me," he replied. "God sent the child; He is most reluctant to give any of us up. Ay, Grizel, that's what my life has taught me, and it's all I can leave to you." The last he saw of her, she was holding his hand, and her eyes were dry, her teeth were clenched; but there was a brave smile upon her face, for he had told her that it was thus he would like to see her at the end. After his death, she continued to live at the old house; he had left it to her ("I want it to remain in the family," he said), with all his savings, which were quite sufficient for the needs of such a manager. He had also left her plenty to do, and that was a still sweeter legacy.

And the other Jacobites, what of them? Hi, where are you, Corp? Here he comes, grinning, in his spleet new uniform, to demand our tickets of us. He is now the railway porter. Since Tommy left Thrums "steam" had arrived in it, and Corp had by nature such a gift for giving luggage the twist which breaks everything inside as you dump it down that he was inevitably appointed porter. There was no travelling to Thrums without a ticket. At Tilliedrum, which was the junction for Thrums, you showed your ticket and were then locked in. A hundred yards from Thrums. Corp leaped upon the train and fiercely demanded your ticket. At the station he asked you threateningly whether you had given up your ticket. Even his wife was afraid of him at such times, and had her ticket ready in her hand.

His wife was one Gavinia, and she had no fear of him except when she was travelling. To his face she referred to him as a doited sumph, but to Grizel pleading for him she admitted that despite his warts and quarrelsome legs he was a great big muckle sonsy, stout, buirdly well set up, wise-like, havoring man. When first Corp had proposed to her, she gave him a clout on the head; and so little did he know of the sex that this discouraged him. He continued, however, to propose and she to clout him until he heard, accidentally (he woke up in church), of a man in the Bible who had wooed a woman for seven years, and this example he determined to emulate; but when Gavinia heard of it she was so furious that she took him at once. Dazed by his good fortune, he rushed off with it to his aunt, whom he wearied with his repetition of the great news.

"To your bed wi' you," she said, yawning.

"Bed!" cried Corp, indignantly. "And so, auntie, says Gavinia, 'Yes,' says she, 'I'll hae you.' Those were her never-to-be-forgotten words."

"You pitiful object," answered his aunt. "Men hae been married afore now without making sic a stramash."

"I daursay," retorted Corp; "but they hinna married Gavinia." And this is the best known answer to the sneer of the cynic.

He was a public nuisance that night, and knocked various people up after they had gone to bed, to tell them that Gavinia was to have him. He was eventually led home by kindly though indignant neighbours; but early morning found him in the country, carrying the news from farm to farm.

"No, I winna sit down," he said; "I just cried in to tell you Gavinia is to hae me." Six miles from home he saw a mud house on the top of a hill, and ascended genially. He found at their porridge a very old lady with a nut-cracker face, and a small boy. We shall see them again. "Auld wifie," said Corp, "I dinna ken you, but I've just stepped up to tell you that Gavinia is to hae me."

It made him the butt of the sportive. If he or Gavinia were nigh, they gathered their fowls round them and then said: "Hens, I didna bring you here to feed you, but just to tell you that Gavinia is to hae me." This flustered Gavinia; but Grizel, who enjoyed her own jokes too heartily to

have more than a polite interest in those of other people, said to her:
"How can you be angry! I think it was just sweet of him."

"But was it no vulgar?"

"Vulgar!" said Grizel. "Why, Gavinia, that is how every lady would like a man to love her."

And then Gavinia beamed. "I'm glad you say that," she said; "for, though I wouldna tell Corp for worlds, I fell likit it."

But Grizel told Corp that Gavinia liked it.

"It was the proof," she said, smiling, "that you have the right to marry her. You have shown your ticket. Never give it up, Corp."

About a year afterwards Corp, armed in his Sunday stand, rushed to Grizel's house, occasionally stopping to slap his shiny knees. "Grizel," he cried, "there's somebody come to Thrums without a ticket!" Then he remembered Gavinia's instructions. "Mrs. Shiach's compliments," he said ponderously, "and it's a boy."

"Oh, Corp!" exclaimed Grizel, and immediately began to put on her hat and jacket. Corp watched her uneasily. "Mrs. Shiach's compliments," he said firmly, "and he's ower young to be bathed yet; but she's awid to show him off to you," he hastened to add. "'Tell Grizel,' was her first words."

"Tell Grizel"! They were among the first words of many mothers. None, they were aware, would receive the news with quite such glee as she. They might think her cold and reserved with themselves, but to see the look on her face as she bent over a baby, and to know that the baby was yours! What a way she had with them! She always welcomed them as if in coming they had performed a great feat. That is what babies are agape for from the beginning. Had they been able to speak they would have said "Tell Grizel" themselves.

"And Mrs. Shiach's compliments," Corp remembered, "and she would be windy if you would carry the bairn at the christening."

"I should love it, Corp! Have you decided on the name?"

"Lang syne. Gin it were a lassie we were to call her Grizel--"

"Oh, how sweet of you!"

"After the finest lassie we ever kent," continued Corp, stoutly. "But I was sure it would be a laddie."

"Why?" "Because if it was a laddie it was to be called after Him," he said, with emphasis on the last word; "and thinks I to mysel', 'He'll find a way.' What a crittur he was for finding a way, Grizel! And he lookit so holy a' the time. Do you mind that swear word o' his--'stroke'? It just meant 'damn'; but he could make even 'damn' look holy."

"You are to call the baby Tommy?"

"He'll be christened Thomas Sandys Shiach," said Corp. "I hankered after putting something out o' the Jacobites intil his name; and I says to Gavinia, 'Let's call him Thomas Sandys Stroke Shiach,' says I, 'and the minister'll be nane the wiser'; but Gavinia was scandalized."

Grizel reflected. "Corp," she said, "I am sure Gavinia's sister will expect to be asked to carry the baby. I don't think I want to do it."

"After you promised!" cried Corp, much hurt. "I never kent you to break a promise afore."

"I will do it, Corp," she said, at once.

She did not know then that Tommy would be in church to witness the ceremony, but she knew before she walked down the aisle with T.S. Shiach in her arms. It was the first time that Tommy and she had seen each other for seven years. That day he almost rivalled his namesake in the interests of the congregation, who, however, took prodigious care that he should not see it--all except Grizel; she smiled a welcome to him, and he knew that her serene gray eyes were watching him.