

"They have always seemed to be watching me, and often there was such a wistful look in them--it reminded me of the past."

"You thought I was still afraid of you! Say it," said Grizel, stamping her foot. But he would not say it. It was not merely fear that he thought he had seen in her eyes, you remember. This was still his comfort, and, I suppose, it gave the touch of complacency to his face that made Grizel merciless. She did not mean to be merciless, but only to tell the truth. If some of her words were scornful, there was sadness in her voice all the time, instead of triumph. "For years and years," she said, standing straight as an elvint, "I have been able to laugh at all the ignorant fears of my childhood; and if you don't know why I have watched you and been unable to help watching you since you came back, I shall tell you. But I think you might have guessed, you who write books about women. It is because I liked you when you were a boy. You were often horrid, but you were my first friend when every other person was against me. You let me play with you when no other boy or girl would let me play. And so, all the time you have been away, I have been hoping that you were growing into a noble man; and when you came back, I watched to see whether you were the noble man I wanted you so much to be, and you are not. Do you see now why my eyes look wistful? It is because I wanted to admire you, and I can't."

She went away, and the great authority on women raged about the room. Oh, but he was galled! There had been five feet nine of him, but he was shrinking. By and by the red light came into his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

GALLANT BEHAVIOUR OF T. SANDYS

There were now no fewer than three men engaged, each in his own way, in the siege of Grizel, nothing in common between them except insulted vanity. One was a broken fellow who took for granted that she preferred to pass him by in the street. His bow was also an apology to her for his existence. He not only knew that she thought him wholly despicable, but agreed with her. In the long ago (yesterday, for instance) he had been happy, courted, esteemed; he had even esteemed himself, and so done useful work in the world. But she had flung him to earth so heavily that he had made a hole in it out of which he could never climb. There he lay

damned, hers the glory of destroying him--he hoped she was proud of her handiwork. That was one Thomas Sandys, the one, perhaps, who put on the velvet jacket in the morning. But it might be number two who took that jacket off at night. He was a good-natured cynic, vastly amused by the airs this little girl put on before a man of note, and he took a malicious pleasure in letting her see that they entertained him. He goaded her intentionally into expressions of temper, because she looked prettiest then, and trifled with her hair (but this was in imagination only), and called her a quaint child (but this was beneath his breath). The third--he might be the one who wore the jacket--was a haughty boy who was not only done with her for ever, but meant to let her see it. (His soul cried, Oh, oh, for a conservatory and some of society's darlings, and Grizel at the window to watch how he got on with them!) And now that I think of it, there was also a fourth: Sandys, the grave author, whose life (in two vols. 8vo.) I ought at this moment to be writing, without a word about the other Tommies. They amused him a good deal. When they were doing something big he would suddenly appear and take a note of it.

The boy, who was stiffly polite to her (when Tommy was angry he became very polite), told her that he had been invited to the Spittal, the seat of the Rintoul family, and that he understood there were some charming girls there.

"I hope you will like them," Grizel said pleasantly.

"If you could see how they will like me!" he wanted to reply; but of course he could not, and unfortunately there was no one by to say it for him. Tommy often felt this want of a secretary.

The abject one found a glove of Grizel's, that she did not know she had lost, and put it in his pocket. There it lay, unknown to her. He knew that he must not even ask them to bury it with him in his grave. This was a little thing to ask, but too much for him. He saw his effects being examined after all that was mortal of T. Sandys had been consigned to earth, and this pathetic little glove coming to light. Ah, then, then Grizel would know! By the way, what would she have known? I am sure I cannot tell you. Nor could Tommy, forced to face the question in this vulgar way, have told you. Yet, whatever it was, it gave him some moist moments. If Grizel saw him in this mood, her reproachful look implied that he was sentimentalizing again. How little this chit understood him!

The man of the world sometimes came upon the glove in his pocket, and laughed at it, as such men do when they recall their callow youth. He took walks with Grizel without her knowing that she accompanied him; or rather, he let her come, she was so eager. In his imagination (for bright were the dreams of Thomas!) he saw her looking longingly after him, just as the dog looks; and then, not being really a cruel man, he would call over his shoulder, "Put on your hat, little woman; you can come." Then he conceived her wandering with him through the Den and Caddam Wood, clinging to his arm and looking up adoringly at him. "What a loving little soul it is!" he said, and pinched her ear, whereat she glowed with pleasure. "But I forgot," he would add, bantering her; "you don't admire me. Heigh-ho! Grizel wants to admire me, but she can't!" He got some satisfaction out of these flights of fancy, but it had a scurvy way of deserting him in the hour of greatest need; where was it, for instance, when the real Grizel appeared and fixed that inquiring eye on him?

He went to the Spittal several times, Elspeth with him when she cared to go; for Lady Rintoul and all the others had to learn and remember that, unless they made much of Elspeth, there could be no T. Sandys for them. He glared at anyone, male or female, who, on being introduced to Elspeth, did not remain, obviously impressed, by her side. "Give pleasure to Elspeth or away I go," was written all over him. And it had to be the right kind of pleasure, too. The ladies must feel that she was more innocent than they, and talk accordingly. He would walk the flower-garden with none of them until he knew for certain that the man walking it with little Elspeth was a person to be trusted. Once he was convinced of this, however, he was very much at their service, and so little to be trusted himself that perhaps they should have had careful brothers also. He told them, one at a time, that they were strangely unlike all the other women he had known, and held their hands a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, and then went away, leaving them and him a prey to conflicting and puzzling emotions.

Lord Rintoul, whose hair was so like his skin that in the family portraits he might have been painted in one colour, could never rid himself of the feeling that it must be a great thing to a writing chap to get a good dinner; but her ladyship always explained him away with an apologetic smile which went over his remarks like a piece of india-rubber, so that in the end he had never said anything. She was a slight, pretty woman of nearly forty, and liked Tommy because he remembered so vividly her

coming to the Spittal as a bride. He even remembered how she had been dressed--her white bonnet, for instance.

"For long," Tommy said, musing, "I resented other women in white bonnets; it seemed profanation."

"How absurd!" she told him, laughing. "You must have been quite a small boy at the time."

"But with a lonely boy's passionate admiration for beautiful things," he answered; and his gravity was a gentle rebuke to her. "It was all a long time ago," he said, taking both her hands in his, "but I never forget, and, dear lady, I have often wanted to thank you." What he was thanking her for is not precisely clear, but she knew that the artistic temperament is an odd sort of thing, and from this time Lady Rintoul liked Tommy, and even tried to find the right wife for him among the families of the surrounding clergy. His step was sometimes quite springy when he left the Spittal; but Grizel's shadow was always waiting for him somewhere on the way home, to take the life out of him, and after that it was again, oh, sorrowful disillusion! oh, world gone gray! Grizel did not admire him. T. Sandys was no longer a wonder to Grizel. He went home to that as surely as the labourer to his evening platter.

And now we come to the affair of the Slugs. Corp had got a holiday, and they were off together fishing the Drumly Water, by Lord Rintoul's permission. They had fished the Drumly many a time without it, and this was to be another such day as those of old. The one who woke at four was to rouse the other. Never had either waked at four; but one of them was married now, and any woman can wake at any hour she chooses, so at four Corp was pushed out of bed, and soon thereafter they took the road. Grizel's blinds were already up. "Do you mind," Corp said, "how often, when we had boasted we were to start at four and didna get roaded till six, we wriggled by that window so that Grizel shouldna see us?"

"She usually did see us," Tommy replied ruefully. "Grizel always spotted us, Corp, when we had anything to hide, and missed us when we were anxious to be seen."

"There was no jouking her," said Corp. "Do you mind how that used to bother you?" a senseless remark to a man whom it was bothering still--or shall we say to a boy? For the boy came back to Tommy when he heard the Drumly singing; it was as if he had suddenly seen his mother looking

young again. There had been a thunder-shower as they drew near, followed by a rush of wind that pinned them to a dike, swept the road bare, banged every door in the glen, and then sank suddenly as if it had never been, like a mole in the sand. But now the sun was out, every fence and farm-yard rope was a string of diamond drops. There was one to every blade of grass; they lurked among the wild roses; larks, drunken with song, shook them from their wings. The whole earth shone so gloriously with them that for a time Tommy ceased to care whether he was admired. We can pay nature no higher compliment.

But when they came to the Slugs! The Slugs of Kenny is a wild crevice through which the Drumly cuts its way, black and treacherous, into a lovely glade where it gambols for the rest of its short life; you would not believe, to see it laughing, that it had so lately escaped from prison. To the Slugs they made their way--not to fish, for any trout that are there are thinking for ever of the way out and of nothing else, but to eat their luncheon, and they ate it sitting on the mossy stones their persons had long ago helped to smooth, and looking at a roan-branch, which now, as then, was trailing in the water.

There were no fish to catch, but there was a boy trying to catch them. He was on the opposite bank; had crawled down it, only other boys can tell how, a barefooted urchin of ten or twelve, with an enormous bagful of worms hanging from his jacket button. To put a new worm on the hook without coming to destruction, he first twisted his legs about a young birch, and put his arms round it. He was after a big one, he informed Corp, though he might as well have been fishing in a treatise on the art of angling.

Corp exchanged pleasantries with him; told him that Tommy was Captain Ure, and that he was his faithful servant Alexander Bett, both of Edinburgh. Since the birth of his child, Corp had become something of a humourist. Tommy was not listening. As he lolled in the sun he was turning, without his knowledge, into one of the other Tommies. Let us watch the process.

He had found a half-fledged mavis lying dead in the grass. Remember also how the larks had sung after rain.

Tommy lost sight and sound of Corp and the boy. What he seemed to see was a baby lark that had got out of its nest sideways, a fall of half a foot only, but a dreadful drop for a baby. "You can get back this way," its

mother said, and showed it the way, which was quite easy, but when the baby tried to leap, it fell on its back. Then the mother marked out lines on the ground, from one to the other of which it was to practise hopping, and soon it could hop beautifully so long as its mother was there to say every moment, "How beautifully you hop!" "Now teach me to hop up," the little lark said, meaning that it wanted to fly; and the mother tried to do that also, but in vain; she could soar up, up, up bravely, but could not explain how she did it. This distressed her very much, and she thought hard about how she had learned to fly long ago last year, but all she could recall for certain was that you suddenly do it. "Wait till the sun comes out after rain," she said, half remembering. "What is sun? What is rain?" the little bird asked. "If you cannot teach me to fly, teach me to sing." "When the sun comes out after rain," the mother replied, "then you will know how to sing." The rain came, and glued the little bird's wings together. "I shall never be able to fly nor to sing," it wailed. Then, of a sudden, it had to blink its eyes; for a glorious light had spread over the world, catching every leaf and twig and blade of grass in tears, and putting a smile into every tear. The baby bird's breast swelled, it did not know why; and it fluttered from the ground, it did not know how. "The sun has come out after the rain," it trilled. "Thank you, sun; thank you, thank you! Oh, mother, did you hear me? I can sing!" And it floated up, up, up, crying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" to the sun. "Oh, mother, do you see me? I am flying!" And being but a baby, it soon was gasping, but still it trilled the same ecstasy, and when it fell panting to earth it still trilled, and the distracted mother called to it to take breath or it would die, but it could not stop. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" it sang to the sun till its little heart burst.

With filmy eyes Tommy searched himself for the little pocket-book in which he took notes of such sad thoughts as these, and in place of the book he found a glove wrapped in silk paper. He sat there with it in his hand, nodding his head over it so broken-heartedly you could not have believed that he had forgotten it for several days.

Death was still his subject; but it was no longer a bird he saw: it was a very noble young man, and his white, dead face stared at the sky from the bottom of a deep pool. I don't know how he got there, but a woman who would not admire him had something to do with it. No sun after rain had come into that tragic life. To the water that had ended it his white face seemed to be saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." It was the

old story of a faithless woman. He had given her his heart, and she had played with it. For her sake he had striven to be famous; for her alone had he toiled through dreary years in London, the goal her lap, in which he should one day place his book--a poor, trivial little work, he knew (yet much admired by the best critics). Never had his thoughts wandered for one instant of that time to another woman; he had been as faithful in life as in death; and now she came to the edge of the pool and peered down at his staring eyes and laughed.

He had got thus far when a shout from Corp brought him, dazed, to his feet. It had been preceded by another cry, as the boy and the sapling he was twisted round toppled into the river together, uprooted stones and clods pounding after them and discolouring the pool into which the torrent rushes between rocks, to swirl frantically before it dives down a narrow channel and leaps into another caldron.

There was no climbing down those precipitous rocks. Corp was shouting, gesticulating, impotent. "How can you stand so still?" he roared.

For Tommy was standing quite still, like one not yet thoroughly awake. The boy's head was visible now and again as he was carried round in the seething water; when he came to the outer ring down that channel he must infallibly go, and every second or two he was in a wider circle.

Tommy was awake now, and he could not stand still and see a boy drown before his eyes. He knew that to attempt to save him was to face a terrible danger, especially as he could not swim; but he kicked off his boots. There was some gallantry in the man.

"You wouldna dare!" Corp cried, aghast.

Tommy hesitated for a moment, but he had abundance of physical courage. He clenched his teeth and jumped. But before he jumped he pushed the glove into Corp's hand, saying, "Give her that, and tell her it never left my heart." He did not say who she was; he scarcely knew that he was saying it. It was his dream intruding on reality, as a wheel may revolve for a moment longer after the spring breaks.

Corp saw him strike the water and disappear. He tore along the bank as he had never run before, until he got to the water's edge below the Slugs, and climbed and fought his way to the scene of the disaster. Before he reached it, however, we should have had no hero had not the sapling, the

cause of all this pother, made amends by barring the way down the narrow channel. Tommy was clinging to it, and the boy to him, and, at some risk, Corp got them both ashore, where they lay gasping like fish in a creel.

The boy was the first to rise to look for his fishing-rod, and he was surprised to find no six-pounder at the end of it. "She has broke the line again!" he said; for he was sure then and ever afterwards that a big one had pulled him in.

Corp slapped him for his ingratitude; but the man who had saved this boy's life wanted no thanks. "Off to your home with you, wherever it is," he said to the boy, who obeyed silently; and then to Corp: "He is a little fool, Corp, but not such a fool as I am." He lay on his face, shivering, not from cold, not from shock, but in a horror of himself. I think it may fairly be said that he had done a brave if foolhardy thing; it was certainly to save the boy that he had jumped, and he had given himself a moment's time in which to draw back if he chose, which vastly enhances the merit of the deed. But sentimentality had been there also, and he was now shivering with a presentiment of the length to which it might one day carry him.

They lit a fire among the rocks, at which he dried his clothes, and then they set out for home, Corp doing all the talking. "What a town there will be about this in Thrums!" was his text; and he was surprised when Tommy at last broke silence by saying passionately: "Never speak about this to me again, Corp, as long as you live. Promise me that. Promise never to mention it to anyone. I want no one to know what I did to-day, and no one will ever know unless you tell; the boy can't tell, for we are strangers to him."

"He thinks you are a Captain Ure, and that I'm Alexander Bett, his servant," said Corp. "I telled him that for a divert."

"Then let him continue to think that."

Of course Corp promised. "And I'll go to the stake afore I break my promise," he swore, happily remembering one of the Jacobite oaths. But he was puzzled. They would make so much of Tommy if they knew. They would think him a wonder. Did he not want that?

"No," Tommy replied.

"You used to like it; you used to like it most mighty."

"I have changed."

"Ay, you have; but since when? Since you took to making printed books?"

Tommy did not say, but it was more recently than that. What he was surrendering no one could have needed to be told less than he; the magnitude of the sacrifice was what enabled him to make it. He was always at home among the superlatives; it was the little things that bothered him. In his present fear of the ride that sentimentality might yet goad him to, he craved for mastery over self; he knew that his struggles with his Familiar usually ended in an embrace, and he had made a passionate vow that it should be so no longer. The best beginning of the new man was to deny himself the glory that would be his if his deed were advertised to the world. Even Grizel must never know of it--Grizel, whose admiration was so dear to him. Thus he punished himself, and again I think he deserves respect.