

## **CHAPTER XII - IN WHICH A COMEDIAN CHALLENGES TRAGEDY TO BOWLS**

When Grizel opened the door of Corp's house she found husband and wife at home, the baby in his father's arms; what is more, Gavinia was looking on smiling and saying, "You bonny litlin, you're windy to have him dandling you; and no wonder, for he's a father to be proud o'." Corp was accepting it all with a complacent smirk. Oh, agreeable change since last we were in this house! oh, happy picture of domestic bliss! oh--but no, these are not the words; what we meant to say was, "Gavinia, you limmer, so you have got the better of that man of yours at last."

How had she contrived it? We have seen her escorting the old lady to the Dovecot, Corp skulking behind. Our next peep at them shows Gavinia back at her house, Corp peering through the window and wondering whether he dare venture in. Gavinia was still bothered, for though she knew now the story of Tommy's heroism, there was no glove in it, and it was the glove that maddened her.

"No, I ken nothing about a glove," the old lady had assured her.

"Not a sylup was said about a glove," maintained Christina, who had given her a highly coloured narrative of what took place in Mrs. McLean's parlour.

"And yet there's a glove in't as sure as there's a quirk in't," Gavinia kept muttering to herself. She rose to have another look at the hoddy-place in which she had concealed the glove from her husband, and as she did so she caught sight of him at the window. He bobbed at once, but she hastened to the door to scarify him. The clock had given only two ticks when she was upon him, but in that time she had completely changed her plan of action. She welcomed him with smiles of pride. Thus is the nimbleness of women's wit measured once and for all. They need two seconds if they are to do the thing comfortably.

"Never to have telled me, and you behaved so grandly!" she cried, with adoring glances that were as a carpet on which he strode pompously into the house.

"It wasna me that did it; it was him," said Corp, and even then he feared that he had told too much. "I kenna what you're speaking about," he added loyally.

"Corp," she answered, "you needna be so canny, for the laddie is in the town, and Mr. Sandys has confessed all."

"The whole o't?"

"Every risson."

"About the glove, too?"

"Glove and all," said wicked Gavinia, and she continued to feast her eyes so admiringly on her deceived husband that he passed quickly from the gratified to the dictatorial.

"Let this be a lesson to you, woman," he said sternly; and Gavinia intimated with humility that she hoped to profit by it.

"Having got the glove in so solemn a way," he went on, "it would have been ill done of me to blab to you about it. Do you see that now, woman?"

She said it was as clear as day to her. "And a solemn way it was," she added, and then waited eagerly.

"My opinion," continued Corp, lowering his voice as if this were not matter for the child, "is that it's a love-token frae some London woman."

"Behear's!" cried Gavinia.

"Else what," he asked, "would make him hand it to me so solemn-like, and tell me to pass it on to her if he was drowned? I didna think o' that at the time, but it has come to me, Gavinia; it has come."

This was a mouthful indeed to Gavinia. So the glove was the property of Mr. Sandys, and he was in love with a London lady, and--no, this is too slow for Gavinia; she saw these things in passing, as one who jumps from the top of a house may have lightning glimpses through many windows on the way down. What she jumped to was the vital question, Who was the woman?

But she was too cunning to ask a leading question.

"Ay, she's his lady-love," she said, controlling herself, "but I forget her name. It was a very wise-like thing o' you to speir the woman's name."

"But I didna."

"You didna!"

"He was in the water in a klink."

Had Gavinia been in Corp's place she would have had the name out of Tommy, water or no water; but she did not tell her husband what she thought of him.

"Ay, of course," she said pleasantly. "It was after you helped him out that he telled you her name."

"Did he say he telled me her name?"

"He did."

"Well, then, I've fair forgot it."

Instead of boxing his ears she begged him to reflect. Result of reflection, that if the name had been mentioned to Corp, which he doubted, it began with M.

Was it Mary?

That was the name.

Or was it Martha?

It had a taste of Martha about it.

It was not Margaret?

It might have been Margaret.

Or Matilda?

It was fell like Matilda.

And so on. "But wi' a' your wheedling," Corp reminded his wife, bantering her from aloft, "you couldna get a scraping out o' me till I was free to speak."

He thought it a good opportunity for showing Gavinia her place once and for all. "In small matters," he said, "I gie you your ain way, for though you may be wrang, thinks I to mysel', 'She's but a woman'; but in important things, Gavinia, if I humoured you I would spoil you, so let this be a telling to you that there's no diddling a determined man"; to which she replied by informing the baby that he had a father to be proud of.

A father to be proud of! They were the words heard by Grizel as she entered. She also saw Gavinia looking admiringly at her man, and in that doleful moment she thought she understood all. It was Corp who had done it, and Tommy had been the looker-on. He had sought to keep the incident secret because, though he was in it, the glory had been won by another (oh, how base!), and now, profiting by the boy's mistake, he was swaggering in that other's clothes (oh, baser still!). Everything was revealed to her in a flash, and she stooped over the baby to hide a sudden tear. She did not want to hear any more.

The baby cried. Babies are aware that they can't do very much; but all of them who knew Grizel were almost contemptuously confident of their power over her, and when this one saw (they are very sharp) that in his presence she could actually think of something else, he was so hurt that he cried.

Was she to be blamed for thinking so meanly of Tommy? You can blame her with that tear in her eye if you choose; but I can think only of the gladness that came afterwards when she knew she had been unjust to him. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" the bird sang to its Creator when the sun came out after rain, and it was Grizel's song as she listened to Corp's story of heroic Tommy. There was no room in her exultant heart for remorse. It would have shown littleness to be able to think of herself at all when she could think so gloriously of him. She was more than beautiful now; she was radiant; and it was because Tommy was the man she wanted him to be. As those who are cold hold out their hands to the fire did she warm her heart at what Corp had to tell, and the great joy that was lit within her made her radiant. Now the baby was in her lap, smiling back to her. He thought he had done it all. "So you thought you could resist me!" the baby crowed.

The glove had not been mentioned yet. "The sweetest thing of all to me," Grizel said, "is that he did not want me to hear the story from you, Corp, because he knew you would sing his praise so loudly."

"I'm thinking," said Gavinia, archly, "he had another reason for not wanting you to question Corp. Maybe he didn't want you to know about the London lady and her glove. Will you tell her, man, or will I?"

They told her together, and what had been conjectures were now put forward as facts. Tommy had certainly said a London lady, and as certainly he had given her name, but what it was Corp could not remember. But "Give her this and tell her it never left my heart"--he could swear to these words.

"And no words could be stronger," Gavinia said triumphantly. She produced the glove, and was about to take off its paper wrapping when Grizel stopped her.

"We have no right, Gavinia." "I suppose we haven't, and I'm thinking the pocket it came out of is feeling gey toom without it. Will you take it back to him?"

"It was very wrong of you to keep it," Grizel answered, "but I can't take it to him, for I see now that his reason for wanting me not to come here was to prevent my hearing about it. I am sorry you told me. Corp must take it back." But when she saw it being crushed in Corp's rough hand, a pity for the helpless glove came over her. She said: "After all, I do know about it, so I can't pretend to him that I don't. I will give it to him, Corp"; and she put the little package in her pocket with a brave smile.

Do you think the radiance had gone from her face now? Do you think the joy that had been lit in her heart was dead? Oh, no, no! Grizel had never asked that Tommy should love her; she had asked only that he should be a fine man. She did not ask it for herself, only for him. She could not think of herself now, only of him. She did not think she loved him. She thought a woman should not love any man until she knew he wanted her to love him.

But if Tommy had wanted it she would have been very glad. She knew, oh, she knew so well, that she could have helped him best. Many a noble woman has known it as she stood aside.

In the meantime Tommy had gone home in several states of mind--reckless, humble, sentimental, most practical, defiant, apprehensive. At one moment he was crying, "Now, Grizel, now, when it is too late, you will see what you have lost." At the next he quaked and implored the gods to help him out of his predicament. It was apprehension that, on the whole, played most of the tunes, for he was by no means sure that Grizel would not look upon the affair of the glove as an offer of his hand, and accept him. They would show her the glove, and she would, of course, know it to be her own. "Give her this and tell her it never left my heart." The words thumped within him now. How was Grizel to understand that he had meant nothing in particular by them?

I wonder if you misread him so utterly as to believe that he thought himself something of a prize? That is a vulgar way of looking at things of which our fastidious Tommy was incapable. As much as Grizel herself, he loathed the notion that women have a thirsty eye on man; when he saw them cheapening themselves before the sex that should hold them beyond price, he turned his head and would not let his mind dwell on the subject. He was a sort of gentleman, was Tommy. And he knew Grizel so well that had all the other women in the world been of this kind, it would not have persuaded him that there was a drop of such blood in her. Then, if he feared that she was willing to be his, it must have been because he thought she loved him? Not a bit of it. As already stated, he thought he had abundant reason to think otherwise. It was remorse that he feared might bring her to his feet, the discovery that while she had been gibing at him he had been a heroic figure, suffering in silence, eating his heart for love of her. Undoubtedly that was how Grizel must see things now; he must seem to her to be an angel rather than a mere man; and in sheer remorse she might cry, "I am yours!" Vain though Tommy was, the picture gave him not a moment's pleasure. Alarm was what he felt.

Of course he was exaggerating Grizel's feelings. She had too much self-respect and too little sentiment to be willing to marry any man because she had unintentionally wronged him. But this was how Tommy would have acted had he happened to be a lady. Remorse, pity, no one was so good at them as Tommy.

In his perturbation he was also good at maidenly reserve. He felt strongly that the proper course for Grizel was not to refer to the glove--to treat that incident as closed, unless he chose to reopen it. This was so

obviously the correct procedure that he seemed to see her adopting it like a sensible girl, and relief would have come to him had he not remembered that Grizel usually took her own way, and that it was seldom his way.

There were other ways of escape. For instance, if she would only let him love her hopelessly. Oh, Grizel had but to tell him there was no hope, and then how finely he would behave! It would bring out all that was best in him. He saw himself passing through life as her very perfect knight. "Is there no hope for me?" He heard himself begging for hope, and he heard also her firm answer: "None!" How he had always admired the outspokenness of Grizel. Her "None!" was as splendidly decisive as of yore.

The conversation thus begun ran on in him, Tommy doing the speaking for both (though his lips never moved), and feeling the scene as vividly as if Grizel had really been present and Elspeth was not. Elspeth was sitting opposite him.

"At least let me wait, Grizel," he implored. "I don't care for how long; fix a time yourself, and I shall keep to it, and I promise never to speak one word of love to you until that time comes, and then if you bid me go I shall go. Give me something to live for. It binds you to nothing, and oh, it would make such a difference to me."

Then Grizel seemed to reply gently, but with the firmness he adored: "I know I cannot change, and it would be mistaken kindness to do as you suggest. No, I can give you no hope; but though I can never marry you, I will watch your future with warm regard, for you have to-day paid me the highest compliment a man can pay a woman."

(How charmingly it was all working out!)

Tommy bowed with dignity and touched her hand with his lips. What is it they do next in Pym and even more expensive authors? Oh, yes! "If at any time in your life, dear Grizel," he said, "you are in need of a friend, I hope you will turn first to me. It does not matter where your message reaches me, I will come to you without delay."

In his enthusiasm he saw the letter being delivered to him in Central Africa, and immediately he wheeled round on his way to Thrums.

"There is one other little request I should like to make of you," he said huskily. "Perhaps I ask too much, but it is this: may I keep your glove?"

She nodded her head; she was so touched that she could scarcely trust herself to speak. "But you will soon get over this," she said at last; "another glove will take the place of mine; the time will come when you will be glad that I said I could not marry you."

"Grizel!" he cried in agony. He was so carried away by his feelings that he said the word aloud.

"Where?" asked Elspeth, looking at the window.

"Was it not she who passed just now?" he replied promptly; and they were still discussing his mistake when Grizel did pass, but only to stop at the door. She came in.

"My brother must have the second sight," declared Elspeth, gaily, "for he saw you coming before you came"; and she told what had happened, while Grizel looked happily at Tommy, and Tommy looked apprehensively at her. Grizel, he might have seen, was not wearing the tragic face of sacrifice; it was a face shining with gladness, a girl still too happy in his nobility to think remorsefully of her own misdeeds. To let him know that she was proud of him, that was what she had come for chiefly, and she was even glad that Elspeth was there to hear. It was an excuse to her to repeat Corp's story, and she told it with defiant looks at Tommy that said, "You are so modest, you want to stop me, but Elspeth will listen; it is nearly as sweet to Elspeth as it is to me, and I shall tell her every word, yes, and tell her a great deal of it twice."

It was not modesty which made Tommy so anxious that she should think less of him, but naturally it had that appearance. The most heroic fellows, I am told, can endure being extolled by pretty girls, but here seemed to be one who could not stand it.

"You need not think it is of you we are proud," she assured him lightly; "it is really of ourselves. I am proud of being your friend. Tomorrow, when I hear the town ringing your praises, I shall not say, 'Yes, isn't he wonderful?' I shall say, 'Talk of me; I, too, am an object of interest, for I am his friend.'"

"I have often been pointed out as his sister," said Elspeth, complacently.

"He did not choose his sister," replied Grizel, "but he chose his friends."

For a time he could suck no sweetness from it. She avoided the glove, he was sure, only because of Elspeth's presence. But anon there arrived to cheer him a fond hope that she had not heard of it, and as this became conviction, exit the Tommy who could not abide himself, and enter another who was highly charmed therewith. Tommy had a notion that certain whimsical little gods protected him in return for the sport he gave them, and he often kissed his hand to them when they came to the rescue. He would have liked to kiss it now, but gave a grateful glance instead to the corner in the ceiling where they sat chuckling at him. Grizel admired him at last. Tra, la, la! What a dear girl she was! Into his manner there crept a certain masterfulness, and instead of resisting it she beamed. Rum-ti-tum!

"If you want to spoil me," he said lazily, "you will bring me that footstool to rest my heroic feet upon." She smiled and brought it. She even brought a cushion for his heroic head. Adoring little thing that she was, he must be good to her.

He was now looking forward eagerly to walking home with her. I can't tell you how delicious he meant to be. When she said she must go, he skipped upstairs for his hat, and wafted the gods their kiss. But it was always the unexpected that lay in wait for Tommy. He and she were no sooner out of the house than Grizel said, "I did not mention the glove, as I was not sure whether Elspeth knew of it."

He had turned stone-cold.

"Corp and Gavinia told me," she went on quietly, "before I had time to stop them. Of course I should have preferred not to know until I heard it from yourself."

Oh, how cold he was!

"But as I do know, I want to tell you that it makes me very happy."

They had stopped, for his legs would carry him no farther. "Get us out of this," every bit of him was crying, but not one word could Tommy say.

"I knew you would want to have it again," Grizel said brightly, producing the little parcel from her pocket, "so I brought it to you."

The frozen man took it and held it passively in his hand. His gods had flown away.

No, they were actually giving him another chance. What was this Grizel was saying? "I have not looked at it, for to take it out of its wrapping would have been profanation. Corp told me she was a London girl; but I know nothing more, not even her name. You are not angry with me for speaking of her, are you? Surely I may wish you and her great happiness."

He was saved. The breath came back quickly to him. He filled like a released ball. Had ever a heart better right to expand? Grizel, looking so bright and pleased, had snatched him from the Slugs. Surely you will be nice to your preserver, Tommy. You will not be less grateful than a country boy?

Ah me! not even yet have we plumed his vanity. But we are to do it now. He could not have believed it of himself, but in the midst of his rejoicings he grew bitter, and for no better reason than that Grizel's face was bright.

"I am glad," he said quite stiffly, "that it is such pleasant news to you."

His tone surprised her; but she was in a humble mood, and answered, without being offended: "It is sweet news to me. How could you think otherwise?"

So it was sweet to her to think that he was another's! He who had been modestly flattering himself a few moments ago that he must take care not to go too far with this admiring little girl! O woman, woman, how difficult it is to know you, and how often, when we think we know you at last, have we to begin again at the beginning! He had never asked an enduring love from her; but surely, after all that had passed between them, he had a right to expect a little more than this. Was it maidenly to bring the glove and hand it to him without a tremor? If she could do no more, she might at least have turned a little pale when Corp told her of it, and then have walked quietly away. Next day she could have referred to it, with just the slightest break in her voice. But to come straight to him, looking delighted--

"And, after all, I am entitled to know first," Grizel said, "for I am your oldest friend."

Friend! He could not help repeating the word with bitter emphasis. For her sake, as it seemed to him now, he had flung himself into the black waters of the Drumly. He had worn her glove upon his heart. It had been the world to him. And she could stand there and call herself his friend. The cup was full. Tommy nodded his head sorrowfully three times.

"So be it, Grizel," he said huskily; "so be it!" Sentiment could now carry him where it willed. The reins were broken.

"I don't understand."

Neither did he; but, "Why should you? What is it to you!" he cried wildly. "Better not to understand, for it might give you five minutes' pain, Grizel, a whole five minutes, and I should be sorry to give you that."

"What have I said! What have I done!"

"Nothing," he answered her, "nothing. You have been most exemplary; you have not even got any entertainment out of it. The thing never struck you as possible. It was too ludicrous!"

He laughed harshly at the package, which was still in his hand. "Poor little glove," he said; "and she did not even take the trouble to look at you. You might have looked at it, Grizel. I have looked at it a good deal. It meant something to me once upon a time when I was a vain fool. Take it and look at it before you fling it away. It will make you laugh."

Now she knew, and her arms rocked convulsively. Joy surged to her face, and she drove it back. She looked at him steadfastly over the collar of her jacket; she looked long, as if trying to be suspicious of him for the last time. Ah, Grizel, you are saying good-bye to your best friend!

As she looked at him thus there was a mournfulness in her brave face that went to Tommy's heart and almost made a man of him. It was as if he knew that she was doomed.

"Grizel," he cried, "don't look at me in that way!" And he would have taken the package from her, but she pressed it to her heart.

"Don't come with me," she said almost in a whisper, and went away.

He did not go back to the house. He wandered into the country, quite objectless when he was walking fastest, seeing nothing when he stood still and stared. Elation and dread were his companions. What elation

whispered he could not yet believe; no, he could not believe it. While he listened he knew that he must be making up the words. By and by he found himself among the shadows of the Den. If he had loved Grizel he would have known that it was here she would come, to the sweet Den where he and she had played as children, the spot where she had loved him first. She had always loved him--always, always. He did not know what figure it was by the Cuttle Well until he was quite close to her. She was kissing the glove passionately, and on her eyes lay little wells of gladness.