PART II

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CHAPTER XVIII - THE GIRL SHE HAD BEEN

As they sat amid the smell of rosin on that summer day, she told him, with a glance that said, "Now you will laugh at me," what had brought her into Caddam Wood.

"I came to rub something out."

He reflected. "A memory?"

"Yes."

"Of me?"

She nodded.

"An unhappy memory?"

"Not to me," she replied, leaning on him. "I have no memory of you I would rub out, no, not the unhappiest one, for it was you, and that makes it dear. All memories, however sad, of loved ones become sweet, don't they, when we get far enough away from them?"

"But to whom, then, is this memory painful, Grizel?"

Again she cast that glance at him. "To her," she whispered.

"'That little girl'!"

"Yes; the child I used to be. You see, she never grew up, and so they are not distant memories to her. I try to rub them out of her mind by giving her prettier things to think of. I go to the places where she was most unhappy, and tell her sweet things about you. I am not morbid, am I, in thinking of her still as some one apart from myself? You know how it began, in the lonely days when I used to look at her in mamma's mirror, and pity her, and fancy that she was pitying me and entreating me to be careful. Always when I think I see her now, she seems to be looking anxiously at me and saying, 'Oh, do be careful!' And the sweet things I

tell her about you are meant to show her how careful I have become. Are you laughing at me for this? I sometimes laugh at it myself."

"No, it is delicious," he answered her, speaking more lightly than he felt. "What a numskull you make, Grizel, of any man who presumes to write about women! I am at school again, and you are Miss Ailie teaching me the alphabet. But I thought you lost that serious little girl on the doleful day when she heard you say that you loved me best."

"She came back. She has no one but me."

"And she still warns you against me?"

Grizel laughed gleefully. "I am too clever for her," she said. "I do all the talking. I allow her to listen only. And you must not blame her for distrusting you; I have said such things against you to her! Oh, the things I said! On the first day I saw you, for instance, after you came back to Thrums. It was in church. Do you remember?"

"I should like to know what you said to her about me that day."

"Would you?" Grizel asked merrily. "Well, let me see. She was not at church--she never went there, you remember; but of course she was curious to hear about you, and I had no sooner got home than she came to me and said, 'Was he there?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Is he much changed?' she asked. 'He has a beard,' I said. 'You know that is not what I really mean,' she said, and then I said, 'I don't think he is so much changed that it is impossible to recognize him again.'"

Tommy interrupted her: "Now what did you mean by that?"

"I meant that I thought you were a little annoyed to find the congregation looking at Gavinia's baby more than at you!"

"Grizel, you are a wretch, but perhaps you were right. Well, what more did the little inquisitor want to know?"

"She asked me if I felt any of my old fear of you, and I said No, and then she clapped her hands with joy. And she asked whether you looked at me as if you were begging me to say I still thought you a wonder, and I said I thought you did----"

"Grizel!"

"Oh, I told her ever so many dreadful things as soon as I found them out. I told her the whole story of your ankle, sir, for instance."

"On my word, Grizel, you seem to have omitted nothing!"

"Ah, but I did," she cried. "I never told her how much I wanted you to be admirable; I pretended that I despised you merely, and in reality I was wringing my hands with woe every time you did not behave like a god."

"They will be worn away, Grizel, if you go on doing that."

"I don't think so," she replied, "nor can she think so if she believes half of what I have told her about you since. She knows how you saved the boy's life. I told her that in the old Lair because she had some harsh memories of you there; and it was at the Cuttle Well that I told her about the glove."

"And where," asked Tommy, severely, "did you tell her that you had been mistaken in thinking me jealous of a baby and anxious to be considered a wonder?"

She hid her face for a moment, and then looked up roguishly into his. "I have not told her that yet!" she replied. It was so audacious of her that he took her by the ears.

"If I were vain," Tommy said reflectively, "I would certainly shake you now. You show a painful want of tact, Grizel, in implying that I am not perfect. Nothing annoys men so much. We can stand anything except that."

His merriness gladdened her. "They are only little things," she said, "and I have grown to love them. I know they are flaws; but I love them because----"

"Say because they are mine. You owe me that."

"No; but because they are weaknesses I don't have. I have others, but not those, and it is sweet to me to know that you are weak in some matters in which I am strong. It makes me feel that I can be of use to you."

"Are you insinuating that there are more of them?" Tommy demanded, sitting up.

"You are not very practical," she responded, "and I am."

"Go on."

"And you are--just a little--inclined to be senti----"

"Hush! I don't allow that word; but you may say, if you choose, that I am sometimes carried away by a too generous impulse."

"And that it will be my part," said she, "to seize you by the arm and hold you back. Oh, you will give me a great deal to do! That is one of the things I love you for. It was one of the things I loved my dear Dr. McQueen for." She looked up suddenly. "I have told him also about you."

"Lately, Grizel?"

"Yes, in my parlour. It was his parlour, you know, and I had kept nothing from him while he was alive; that is to say, he always knew what I was thinking of, and I like to fancy that he knows still. In the evenings he used to sit in the arm-chair by the fire, and I sat talking or knitting at his feet, and if I ceased to do anything except sit still, looking straight before me, he knew I was thinking the morbid thoughts that had troubled me in the old days at Double Dykes. Without knowing it I sometimes shuddered at those times, and he was distressed. It reminded him of my mamma."

"I understand," Tommy said hurriedly. He meant: "Let us avoid painful subjects."

"It is years," she went on, "since those thoughts have troubled me, and it was he who drove them away. He was so kind! He thought so much of my future that I still sit by his arm-chair and tell him what is happening to his Grizel. I don't speak aloud, of course; I scarcely say the words to myself even; and yet we seem to have long talks together. I told him I had given you his coat."

"Well, I don't think he was pleased at that, Grizel. I have had a feeling for some time that the coat dislikes me. It scratched my hand the first time I put it on. My hand caught in the hook of the collar, you will say; but no, that is not what I think. In my opinion, the deed was maliciously done. McQueen always distrusted me, you know, and I expect his coat was saying, 'Hands off my Grizel.'"

She took it as quite a jest. "He does not distrust you now," she said, smiling. "I have told him what I think of you, and though he was surprised at first, in the end his opinion was the same as mine."

"Ah, you saw to that, Grizel!"

"I had nothing to do with it. I merely told him everything, and he had to agree with me. How could he doubt when he saw that you had made me so happy! Even mamma does not doubt."

"You have told her! All this is rather eerie, Grizel."

"You are not sorry, are you?" she asked, looking at him anxiously. "Dr. McQueen wanted me to forget her. He thought that would be best for me. It was the only matter on which we differed. I gave up speaking of her to him. You are the only person I have mentioned her to since I became a woman; but I often think of her. I am sure there was a time, before I was old enough to understand, when she was very fond of me. I was her baby, and women can't help being fond of their babies, even though they should never have had them. I think she often hugged me tight."

"Need we speak of this, Grizel?"

"For this once," she entreated. "You must remember that mamma often looked at me with hatred, and said I was the cause of all her woe; but sometimes in her last months she would give me such sad looks that I trembled, and I felt that she was picturing me growing into the kind of woman she wished so much she had not become herself, and that she longed to save me. That is why I have told her that a good man loves me. She is so glad, my poor dear mamma, that I tell her again and again, and she loves to hear it as much as I to tell it. What she loves to hear most is that you really do want to marry me. She is so fond of hearing that because it is what my father would never say to her."

Tommy was so much moved that he could not speak, but in his heart he gave thanks that what Grizel said of him to her mamma was true at last.

"It makes her so happy," Grizel said, "that when I seem to see her now she looks as sweet and pure as she must have been in the days when she was an innocent girl. I think she can enter into my feelings more than any other person could ever do. Is that because she was my mother? She understands how I feel just as I can understand how in the end she was willing to be bad because he wanted it so much."

"No, no, Grizel," Tommy cried passionately, "you don't understand that!"

She rocked her arms. "Yes, I do," she said; "I do. I could never have cared for such a man; but I can understand how mamma yielded to him, and I have no feeling for her except pity, and I have told her so, and it is what she loves to hear her daughter tell her best of all."

They put the subject from them, and she told him what it was that she had come to rub out in Caddam. If you have read of Tommy's boyhood you may remember the day it ended with his departure for the farm, and that he and Elspeth walked through Caddam to the cart that was to take him from her, and how, to comfort her, he swore that he loved her with his whole heart, and Grizel not at all, and that Grizel was in the wood and heard. And how Elspeth had promised to wave to Tommy in the cart as long as it was visible, but broke down and went home sobbing, and how Grizel took her place and waved, pretending to be Elspeth, so that he might think she was bearing up bravely. Tommy had not known what Grizel did for him that day, and when he heard it now for the first time from her own lips, he realized afresh what a glorious girl she was and had always been.

"You may try to rub that memory out of little Grizel's head," he declared, looking very proudly at her, "but you shall never rub it out of mine."

It was by his wish that they went together to the spot where she had heard him say that he loved Elspeth only--"if you can find it," Tommy said, "after all these years"; and she smiled at his mannish words--she had found it so often since! There was the very clump of whin.

And here was the boy to match. Oh, who by striving could make himself a boy again as Tommy could! I tell you he was always irresistible then. What is genius? It is the power to be a boy again at will. When I think of him flinging off the years and whistling childhood back, not to himself only, but to all who heard, distributing it among them gaily, imperiously calling on them to dance, dance, for they are boys and girls again until they stop--when to recall him in those wild moods is to myself to grasp for a moment at the dear dead days that were so much the best, I cannot wonder that Grizel loved him. I am his slave myself; I see that all that was wrong with Tommy was that he could not always be a boy.

"Hide there again, Grizel," he cried to her, little Tommy cried to her, Stroke the Jacobite, her captain, cried to the Lady Griselda; and he disappeared, and presently marched down the path with an imaginary Elspeth by his side. "I love you both, Elspeth," he was going to say, "and

my love for the one does not make me love the other less"; but he glanced at Grizel, and she was leaning forward to catch his words as if this were no play, but life or death, and he knew what she longed to hear him say, and he said it: "I love you very much, Elspeth, but however much I love you, it would be idle to pretend that I don't love Grizel more."

A stifled cry of joy came from a clump of whin hard by, and they were man and woman again.

"Did you not know it, Grizel?"

"No, no; you never told me."

"I never dreamed it was necessary to tell you."

"Oh, if you knew how I have longed that it might be so, yes, and sometimes hated Elspeth because I feared it could not be! I have tried so hard to be content with second place. I have thought it all out, and said to myself it was natural that Elspeth should be first."

"My tragic love," he said, "I can see you arguing in that way, but I don't see you convincing yourself. My passionate Grizel is not the girl to accept second place from anyone. If I know anything of her, I know that."

To his surprise, she answered softly: "You are wrong. I wonder at it myself, but I had made up my mind to be content with second place, and to be grateful for it."

"I could not have believed it!" he cried.

"I could not have believed it myself," said she.

"Are you the Grizel----" he began.

"No," she said, "I have changed a little," and she looked pathetically at him.

"It stabs me," he said, "to see you so humble."

"I am humbler than I was," she answered huskily, but she was looking at him with the fondest love.

"Don't look at me so, Grizel," he implored. "I am unworthy of it. I am the man who has made you so humble."

"Yes," she answered, and still she looked at him with the fondest love. A film came over his eyes, and she touched them softly with her handkerchief.

"Those eyes that but a little while ago were looking so coldly at you!" he said.

"Dear eyes!" said she.

"Though I were to strike you----" he cried, raising his hand.

She took the hand in hers and kissed it.

"Has it come to this!" he said, and as she could not speak, she nodded. He fell upon his knees before her.

"I am glad you are a little sorry," she said; "I am a little sorry myself."

CHAPTER XIX

OF THE CHANGE IN THOMAS

To find ways of making David propose to Elspeth, of making Elspeth willing to exchange her brother for David--they were heavy tasks, but Tommy yoked himself to them gallantly and tugged like an Arab steed in the plough. It should be almost as pleasant to us as to him to think that love was what made him do it, for he was sure he loved Grizel at last, and that the one longing of his heart was to marry her; the one marvel to him was that he had ever longed ardently for anything else. Well, as you know, she longed for it also, but she was firm in her resolve that until Elspeth was engaged Tommy should be a single man. She even made him promise not to kiss her again so long as their love had to be kept secret. "It will be so sweet to wait," she said bravely. As we shall see presently, his efforts to put Elspeth into the hands of David were apparently of no avail, but though this would have embittered many men, it drew only to the surface some of Tommy's noblest attributes; as he suffered in silence he became gentler, more considerate, and acquired a new command over himself. To conquer self for her sake (this is in the "Letters to a Young Man") is the highest tribute a man can pay to a woman; it is the only real greatness, and Tommy had done it now. I could give you a score of proofs. Let us take his treatment of Aaron Latta.

One day about this time Tommy found himself alone in the house with Aaron, and had he been the old Tommy he would have waited but a moment to let Aaron decide which of them should go elsewhere. It was thus that these two, ever so uncomfortable in each other's presence, contrived to keep the peace. Now note the change.

"Aaron," said Tommy, in the hush that had fallen on that house since quiet Elspeth left it, "I have never thanked you in words for all that you have done for me and Elspeth."

"Dinna do it now, then," replied the warper, fidgeting.

"I must," Tommy said cheerily, "I must"; and he did, while Aaron scowled.

"It was never done for you," Aaron informed him, "nor for the father you are the marrows o'."

"It was done for my mother," said Tommy, reverently.

"I'm none so sure o't," Aaron rapped out. "I think I brocht you twa here as bairns, that the reminder of my shame should ever stand before me."

But Tommy shook his head, and sat down sympathetically beside the warper. "You loved her, Aaron," he said simply. "It was an undying love that made you adopt her orphan children." A charming thought came to him. "When you brought us here," he said, with some elation, "Elspeth used to cry at nights because our mother's spirit did not come to us to comfort us, and I invented boyish explanations to appease her. But I have learned since why we did not see that spirit; for though it hovered round this house, its first thought was not for us, but for him who succoured us."

He could have made it much better had he been able to revise it, but surely it was touching, and Aaron need not have said "Damn," which was what he did say.

One knows how most men would have received so harsh an answer to such gentle words, and we can conceive how a very holy man, say a monk, would have bowed to it. Even as the monk did Tommy submit, or say rather with the meekness of a nun.

"I wish I could help you in any way, Aaron," he said, with a sigh.

"You can," replied Aaron, promptly, "by taking yourself off to London, and leaving Elspeth here wi' me. I never made pretence that I wanted you, except because she wouldna come without you. Laddie and man, as weel you ken, you were aye a scunner to me."

"And yet," said Tommy, looking at him admiringly, "you fed and housed and educated us. Ah, Aaron, do you not see that your dislike gives me the more reason only to esteem you?" Carried away by desire to help the old man, he put his hand kindly on his shoulder. "You have never respected yourself," he said, "since the night you and my mother parted at the Cuttle Well, and my heart bleeds to think of it. Many a year ago, by your kindness to two forlorn children, you expiated that sin, and it is blotted out from your account. Forget it, Aaron, as every other person has forgotten it, and let the spirit of Jean Myles see you tranquil once again."

He patted Aaron affectionately; he seemed to be the older of the two.

"Tak' your hand off my shuther," Aaron cried fiercely.

Tommy removed his hand, but he continued to look yearningly at the warper. Another beautiful thought came to him.

"What are you looking so holy about?" asked Aaron, with misgivings.

"Aaron," cried Tommy, suddenly inspired, "you are not always the gloomy man you pass for being. You have glorious moments still. You wake in the morning, and for a second of time you are in the heyday of your youth, and you and Jean Myles are to walk out to-night. As you sit by this fire you think you hear her hand on the latch of the door; as you pass down the street you seem to see her coming towards you. It is for a moment only, and then you are a gray-haired man again, and she has been in her grave for many a year; but you have that moment."

Aaron rose, amazed and wrathful. "The de'il tak' you," he cried, "how did you find out that?"

Perhaps Tommy's nose turned up rapturously in reply, for the best of us cannot command ourselves altogether at great moments, but when he spoke he was modest again.

"It was sympathy that told me," he explained; "and, Aaron, if you will only believe me, it tells me also that a little of the man you were still

clings to you. Come out of the moroseness in which you have enveloped yourself so long. Think what a joy it would be to Elspeth."

"It's little she would care."

"If you want to hurt her, tell her so."

"I'm no denying but what she's fell fond o' me."

"Then for her sake," Tommy pleaded.

But the warper turned on him with baleful eyes. "She likes me," he said in a grating voice, "and yet I'm as nothing to her; we are all as nothing to her beside you. If there hadna been you I should hae become the father to her I craved to be; but you had mesmerized her; she had eyes for none but you. I sent you to the herding, meaning to break your power over her, and all she could think o' was my cruelty in sindering you. Syne you ran aff wi' her to London, stealing her frae me. I was without her while she was growing frae lassie to woman, the years when maybe she could hae made o' me what she willed. Magerful Tam took the mother frae me, and he lived again in you to tak' the dochter."

"You really think me masterful--me!" Tommy said, smiling.

"I suppose you never were!" Aaron replied ironically.

"Yes," Tommy admitted frankly, "I was masterful as a boy, ah, and even quite lately. How we change!" he said musingly.

"How we dinna change!" retorted Aaron, bitterly. He had learned the truer philosophy.

"Man," he continued, looking Tommy over, "there's times when I see mair o' your mother than your father in you. She was a wonder at making believe. The letters about her grandeur that she wrote to Thrums when she was starving! Even you couldna hae wrote them better. But she never managed to cheat hersel'. That's whaur you sail away frae her."

"I used to make believe, Aaron, as you say," Tommy replied sadly. "If you knew how I feel the folly of it now, perhaps even you would wish that I felt it less.

"But we must each of us dree his own weird," he proceeded, with wonderful sweetness, when Aaron did not answer. "And so far, at least,

as Elspeth is concerned, surely I have done my duty. I had the bringing up of her from the days when she was learning to speak."

"She got into the way o' letting you do everything for her," the warper responded sourly. "You thought for her, you acted for her, frae the first; you toomed her, and then filled her up wi' yoursel'."

"She always needed some one to lean on."

"Ay, because you had maimed her. She grew up in the notion that you were all the earth and the wonder o' the world."

"Could I help that?"

"Help it! Did you try? It was the one thing you were sure o' yoursel'; it was the one thing you thought worth anybody's learning. You stood before her crowing the whole day. I said the now I wished you would go and leave her wi' me: but I wouldna dare to keep her; she's helpless without you; if you took your arm awa frae her now, she would tumble to the ground."

"I fear it is true, Aaron," Tommy said, with bent head. "Whether she is so by nature, or whether I have made her so, I cannot tell, but I fear that what you say is true."

"It's true," said Aaron, "and yours is the wite. There's no life for her now except what you mak'; she canna see beyond you. Go on thinking yoursel' a wonder if you like, but mind this: if you were to cast her off frae you now, she would die like an amputated hand."

To Tommy it was like listening to his doom. Ah, Aaron, even you could not withhold your pity, did you know how this man is being punished now for having made Elspeth so dependent on him! Some such thought passed through Tommy's head, but he was too brave to appeal for pity. "If that is so," he said firmly, "I take the responsibility for it. But I began this talk, Aaron, not to intrude my troubles on you, but hoping to lighten yours. If I could see you smile, Aaron----"

"Drop it!" cried the warper; and then, going closer to him: "You would hae seen me smile, ay, and heard me laugh, gin you had been here when Mrs. McLean came yont to read your book to me. She fair insistit on reading the terrible noble bits to me, and she grat they were so sublime;

but the sublimer they were, the mair I laughed, for I ken you, Tommy, my man, I ken you."

He spoke with much vehemence, and, after all, our hero was not perfect. He withdrew stiffly to the other room. I think it was the use of the word Tommy that enraged him.

But in a very few minutes he scorned himself, and was possessed by a pensive wonder that one so tragically fated as he could resent an old man's gibe. Aaron misunderstood him. Was that any reason why he should not feel sorry for Aaron? He crossed the hallan to the kitchen door, and stopped there, overcome with pity. The warper was still crouching by the fire, but his head rested on his chest; he was a weary, desolate figure, and at the other side of the hearth stood an empty chair. The picture was the epitome of his life, or so it seemed to the sympathetic soul at the door, who saw him passing from youth to old age, staring at the chair that must always be empty. At the same moment Tommy saw his own future, and in it, too, an empty chair. Yet, hard as was his own case, at least he knew that he was loved; if her chair must be empty, the fault was as little hers as his, while Aaron----

A noble compassion drew him forward, and he put his hand determinedly on the dear old man's shoulder.

"Aaron," he said, in a tremble of pity, "I know what is the real sorrow of your life, and I rejoice because I can put an end to it. You think that Jean Myles never cared for you; but you are strangely wrong. I was with my mother to the last, Aaron, and I can tell you, she asked me with her dying breath to say to you that she loved you all the time."

Aaron tried to rise, but was pushed back into his chair. "Love cannot die," cried Tommy, triumphantly, like the fairy in the pantomime; "love is always young----"

He stopped in mid-career at sight of Aaron's disappointing face. "Are you done?" the warper inquired. "When you and me are alane in this house there's no room for the both o' us, and as I'll never hae it said that I made Jean Myles's bairn munt, I'll go out mysel'."

And out he went, and sat on the dyke till Elspeth came home. It did not turn Tommy sulky. He nodded kindly to Aaron from the window in token of forgiveness, and next day he spent a valuable hour in making a

cushion for the old man's chair. "He must be left with the impression that you made it," Tommy explained to Elspeth, "for he would not take it from me."

"Oh, Tommy, how good you are!"

"I am far from it, Elspeth."

"There is a serenity about you nowadays," she said, "that I don't seem to have noticed before," and indeed this was true; it was the serenity that comes to those who, having a mortal wound, can no more be troubled by the pinpricks.

"There has been nothing to cause it, has there?" Elspeth asked timidly.

"Only the feeling that I have much to be grateful for," he replied. "I have you, Elspeth."

"And I have you," she said, "and I want no more. I could never care for anyone as I care for you, Tommy."

She was speaking unselfishly; she meant to imply delicately that the doctor's defection need not make Tommy think her unhappy. "Are you glad?" she asked.

He said Yes bravely. Elspeth, he was determined, should never have the distress of knowing that for her sake he was giving up the one great joy which life contains. He was a grander character than most. Men have often in the world's history made a splendid sacrifice for women, but if you turn up the annals you will find that the woman nearly always knew of it.

He told Grizel what Aaron had said and what Elspeth had said. He could keep nothing from her now; he was done with the world of make-believe for ever. And it seemed wicked of him to hope, he declared, or to let her hope. "I ought to give you up, Grizel," he said, with a groan.

"I won't let you," she replied adorably.

"Gemmell has not come near us for a week. I ask him in, but he avoids the house."

"I don't understand it," Grizel had to admit; "but I think he is fond of her, I do indeed."

"Even if that were so, I fear she would not accept him. I know Elspeth so well that I feel I am deceiving you if I say there is any hope."

"Nevertheless you must say it," she answered brightly; "you must say it and leave me to think it. And I do think it. I believe that Elspeth, despite her timidity and her dependence on you, is like other girls at heart, and not more difficult to win.

"And even if it all comes to nothing," she told him, a little faintly, "I shall not be unhappy. You don't really know me if you think I should love to be married so--so much as all that."

"It is you, Grizel," he replied, "who don't see that it is myself I am pitying. It is I who want to be married as much as all that."

Her eyes shone with a soft light, for of course it was what she wanted him to say. These two seemed to have changed places. That people could love each other, and there the end, had been his fond philosophy and her torment. Now, it was she who argued for it and Tommy who shook his head.

"They can be very, very happy."

"No," he said.

"But one of them is."

"Not the other," he insisted; and of course it was again what she wanted him to say.

And he was not always despairing. He tried hard to find a way of bringing David to Elspeth's feet, and once, at least, the apparently reluctant suitor almost succumbed. Tommy had met him near Aaron's house, and invited him to come in and hear Elspeth singing. "I did not know she sang," David said, hesitating.

"She is so shy about it," Tommy replied lightly, "that we can hear her by stealth only. Aaron and I listen at the door. Come and listen at the door."

And David had yielded and listened at the door, and afterwards gone in and remained like one who could not tear himself away. What was more, he and Elspeth had touched upon the subject of love in their conversation, Tommy sitting at the window so engrossed in a letter to

Pym that he seemed to hear nothing, though he could repeat everything afterwards to Grizel.

Elspeth had said, in her shrinking way, that if she were a man she could love only a woman who was strong and courageous and helpful--such a woman as Grizel, she had said.

"And yet," David replied, "women have been loved who had none of those qualities."

"In spite of the want of them?" Elspeth asked.

"Perhaps because of it," said he.

"They are noble qualities," Elspeth maintained a little sadly, and he assented. "And one of them, at least, is essential," she said. "A woman has no right to be loved who is not helpful."

"She is helpful to the man who loves her," David replied.

"He would have to do for her," Elspeth said, "the very things she should be doing for him."

"He may want very much to do them," said David.

"Then it is her weakness that appeals to him. Is not that loving her for the wrong thing?"

"It may be the right thing," David insisted, "for him."

"And at that point," Tommy said, boyishly, to Grizel, "I ceased to hear them, I was so elated; I felt that everything was coming right. I could not give another thought to their future, I was so busy mapping out my own. I heard a hammering. Do you know what it was? It was our house going up--your house and mine; our home, Grizel! It was not here, nor in London. It was near the Thames. I wanted it to be upon the bank, but you said No, you were afraid of floods. I wanted to superintend the building, but you conducted me contemptuously to my desk. You intimated that I did not know how to build--that no one knew except yourself. You instructed the architect, and bullied the workmen, and cried for more store-closets. Grizel, I saw the house go up; I saw you the adoration and terror of your servants; I heard you singing from room to room."

He was touched by this; all beautiful thoughts touched him.

But as a rule, though Tommy tried to be brave for her sake, it was usually she who was the comforter now, and he the comforted, and this was the arrangement that suited Grizel best. Her one thought need no longer be that she loved him too much, but how much he loved her. It was not her self-respect that must be humoured back, but his. If hers lagged, what did it matter? What are her own troubles to a woman when there is something to do for the man she loves?

"You are too anxious about the future," she said to him, if he had grown gloomy again. "Can we not be happy in the present, and leave the future to take care of itself?" How strange to know that it was Grizel who said this to Tommy, and not Tommy who said it to Grizel!

She delighted in playing the mother to him. "Now you must go back to your desk," she would say masterfully. "You have three hours' work to do to-night yet."

"It can wait. Let me stay a little longer with you, Grizel," he answered humbly. Ha! it was Tommy who was humble now. Not so long ago he would not have allowed his work to wait for anyone, and Grizel knew it, and exulted.

"To work, sir," she ordered. "And you must put on your old coat before you sit down to write, and pull up your cuffs so that they don't scrape on the desk. Also, you must not think too much about me."

She tried to look businesslike, but she could scarce resist rocking her arms with delight when she heard herself saying such things to him. It was as if she had the old doctor once more in her hands.

"What more, Grizel? I like you to order me about."

"Only this. Good afternoon."

"But I am to walk home with you," he entreated.

"No," she said decisively; but she smiled: once upon a time it had been she who asked for this.

"If you are good," she said, "you shall perhaps see me to-morrow."

"Perhaps only?" He was scared; but she smiled happily again: it had once been she who had to beg that there should be no perhaps.

"If you are good," she replied,--"and you are not good when you have such a long face. Smile, you silly boy; smile when I order you. If you don't I shall not so much as look out at my window to-morrow."

He was the man who had caused her so much agony, and she was looking at him with the eternally forgiving smile of the mother. "Ah, Grizel," Tommy cried passionately, "how brave and unselfish and noble you are, and what a glorious wife God intended you to be!"

She broke from him with a little cry, but when she turned round again it was to nod and smile to him.