

CHAPTER XXVI - GRIZEL ALL ALONE

It was Tommy who was the favoured of the gods, you remember, not Grizel.

Elsbeth wondered to see her, after the publication of that book, looking much as usual. "You know how he loved you now," she said, perhaps a little reproachfully.

"Yes," Grizel answered, "I know; I knew before the book came out."

"You must be sorry for him?"

Grizel nodded.

"But proud of him also," Elspeth said. "You have a right to be proud."

"I am as proud," Grizel replied, "as I have a right to be."

Something in her voice touched Elspeth, who was so happy that she wanted everyone to be happy. "I want you to know, Grizel," she said warmly, "that I don't blame you for not being able to love him; we can't help those things. Nor need you blame yourself too much, for I have often heard him say that artists must suffer in order to produce beautiful things."

"But I cannot remember," Elspeth had to admit, with a sigh, to David, "that she made any answer to that, except 'Thank you.'"

Grizel was nearly as reticent to David himself. Once only did she break down for a moment in his presence. It was when he was telling her that the issue of the book had been stopped.

"But I see you know already," he said. "Perhaps you even know why-- though he has not given any sufficient reason to Elspeth."

David had given his promise, she reminded him, not to ask her any questions about Tommy.

"But I don't see why I should keep it," he said bluntly.

"Because you dislike him," she replied.

"Grizel," he declared, "I have tried hard to like him. I have thought and thought about it, and I can't see that he has given me any just cause to dislike him."

"And that," said Grizel, "makes you dislike him more than ever."

"I know that you cared for him once," David persisted, "and I know that he wanted to marry you--"

But she would not let him go on. "David," she said, "I want to give up my house, and I want you to take it. It is the real doctor's house of Thrums, and people in need of you still keep ringing me up of nights. The only door to your surgery is through my passage; it is I who should be in lodgings now."

"Do you really think I would, Grizel!" he cried indignantly.

"Rather than see the dear house go into another's hands," she answered steadily; "for I am determined to leave it. Dr. McQueen won't feel strange when he looks down, David, if it is only you he sees moving about the old rooms, instead of me."

"You are doing this for me, Grizel, and I won't have it."

"I give you my word," she told him, "that I am doing it for myself alone. I am tired of keeping a house, and of all its worries. Men don't know what they are."

She was smiling, but his brows wrinkled in pain. "Oh, Grizel!" he said, and stopped. And then he cried, "Since when has Grizel ceased to care for housekeeping?"

She did not say since when. I don't know whether she knew; but it was since she and Tommy had ceased to correspond. David's words showed her too suddenly how she had changed, and it was then that she broke down before him--because she had ceased to care for housekeeping.

But she had her way, and early in the new year David and his wife were established in their new home, with all Grizel's furniture, except such as was needed for the two rooms rented by her from Gavinia. She would have liked to take away the old doctor's chair, because it was the bit of him left behind when he died, and then for that very reason she did not. She no longer wanted him to see her always. "I am not so nice as I used

to be, and I want to keep it from you," she said to the chair when she kissed it good-bye.

Was Grizel not as nice as she used to be? How can I answer, who love her the more only? There is one at least, Grizel, who will never desert you.

Ah, but was she?

I seem again to hear the warning voice of Grizel, and this time she is crying: "You know I was not."

She knew it so well that she could say it to herself quite calmly. She knew that, with whatever repugnance she drove those passions away, they would come back--yes, and for a space be welcomed back. Why does she leave Gavinia's blue hearth this evening, and seek the solitary Den? She has gone to summon them, and she knows it. They come thick in the Den, for they know the place. It was there that her mother was wont to walk with them. Have they been waiting for you in the Den, Grizel, all this time? Have you found your mother's legacy at last?

Don't think that she sought them often. It was never when she seemed to have anything to live for. Tommy would not write to her, and so did not want her to write to him; but if that bowed her head, it never made her rebel. She still had her many duties. Whatever she suffered, so long as she could say, "I am helping him," she was in heart and soul the Grizel of old. In his fits of remorse, which were many, he tried to produce work that would please her. Thus, in a heroic attempt to be practical, he wrote a political article in one of the reviews, quite in the ordinary style, but so much worse than the average of such things that they would never have printed it without his name. He also contributed to a magazine a short tale,--he who could never write tales,--and he struck all the beautiful reflections out of it, and never referred to himself once, and the result was so imbecile that kindly people said there must be another writer of the same name. "Show them to Grizel," Tommy wrote to Elspeth, inclosing also some of the animadversions of the press, and he meant Grizel to see that he could write in his own way only. But she read those two efforts with delight, and said to Elspeth, "Tell him I am so proud of them."

Elspeth thought it very nice of Grizel to defend the despised in this way (even Elspeth had fallen asleep over the political paper). She did not

understand that Grizel loved them because they showed Tommy trying to do without his wings.

Then another trifle by him appeared, shorter even than the others; but no man in England could have written it except T. Sandys. It has not been reprinted, and I forget everything about it except that its subject was love. "Will not the friends of the man who can produce such a little masterpiece as this," the journals said, "save him from wasting his time on lumber for the reviews, and drivelling tales?" And Tommy suggested to Elspeth that she might show Grizel this exhortation also.

Grizel saw she was not helping him at all. If he would not fight, why should she? Oh, let her fall and fall, it would not take her farther from him! These were the thoughts that sent her into solitude, to meet with worse ones. She could not face the morrow. "What shall I do to-morrow?" She never shrank from to-day--it had its duties; it could be got through: but to-morrow was a never-ending road. Oh, how could she get through to-morrow?

Her great friend at this time was Corp; because he still retained his faith in Tommy. She could always talk of Tommy to Corp.

How loyal Corp was! He still referred to Tommy as "him." Gavinia, much distressed, read aloud to Corp a newspaper attack on the political article, and all he said was, "He'll find a wy."

"He's found it," he went upstairs to announce to Grizel, when the praises of the "little masterpiece" arrived.

"Yes, I know, Corp," she answered quietly. She was sitting by the window where the plant was. Tommy had asked her to take care of it, without telling her why.

Something in her appearance troubled the hulking, blundering man. He could not have told what it was. I think it was simply this--that Grizel no longer sat erect in her chair.

"I'm nain easy in my mind about Grizel," he said that evening to Gavinia. "There's something queery about her, though I canna bottom 't."

"Yea?" said Gavinia, with mild contempt.

He continued pulling at his pipe, grunting as if in pleasant pain, which was the way Corp smoked.

"I could see she's no pleased, though he has found a wy," he said.

"What pleasure should she be able to sook out o' his keeping ding-ding-danging on about that woman?" retorted Gavinia.

"What woman?"

"The London besom that gae him the go-by."

"Was there sic a woman!" Corp cried.

"Of course there was, and it's her that he's aye writing about."

"Havers, Gavinia! It's Grizel he's aye writing about, and it was Grizel that gae him the go-by. It's town talk."

But whatever the town might say, Gavinia stuck to her opinion. "Grizel's no near so neat in her dressing as she was," she informed Corp, "and her hair is no aye tidy, and that bonnet she was in yesterday didna set her."

"I've noticed it," cried Corp. "I've noticed it this while back, though I didna ken I had noticed it, Gavinia. I wonder what can be the reason?"

"It's because nobody cares," Gavinia replied sadly. "Trust one woman to know another!"

"We a' care," said Corp, stoutly.

"We're a' as nothing, Corp, when he doesna care. She's fond o' him, man."

"Of course she is, in a wy. Whaur's the woman that could help it?"

"There's many a woman that could help it," said Gavinia, tartly, for the honour of her sex, "but she's no are o' them." To be candid, Gavinia was not one of them herself. "I'm thinking she's terrible fond o' him," she said, "and I'm nain sure that he has treated her weel."

"Woman, take care; say a word agin him and I'll mittle you!" Corp thundered, and she desisted in fear.

But he made her re-read the little essay to him in instalments, and at the end he said victoriously, "You blethering crittur, there's no sic woman. It's just another o' his ploys!"

He marched upstairs to Grizel with the news, and she listened kindly. "I am sure you are right," she said; "you understand him better than any of them, Corp," and it was true.

He thought he had settled the whole matter. He was burning to be downstairs to tell Gavinia that these things needed only a man. "And so you'll be yoursel' again, Grizel," he said, with great relief.

She had not seen that he was aiming at her until now, and it touched her. "Am I so different, Corp?"

Not at all, he assured her delicately, but she was maybe no quite so neatly dressed as she used to be, and her hair wasna braided back so smooth, and he didna think that bonnet quite set her.

"Gavinia has been saying that to you!"

"I noticed it mysel', Grizel; I'm a terrible noticher."

"Perhaps you are right," she said, reflecting, after looking at herself for the first time for some days. "But to think of your caring, Corp!"

"I care most mighty," he replied, with terrific earnestness.

"I must try to satisfy you, then," she said, smiling. "But, Corp, please don't discuss me with Gavinia."

This request embarrassed him, for soon again he did not know how to act. There was Grizel's strange behaviour with the child, for instance. "No, I won't come down to see him to-day, Corp," she had said; "somehow children weary me."

Such words from Grizel! His mouth would not shut and he could say nothing. "Forgive me, Corp!" she cried remorsefully, and ran downstairs, and with many a passionate caress asked forgiveness of the child.

Corp followed her, and for the moment he thought he must have been dreaming upstairs. "I wish I saw you wi' bairns o' your ain, Grizel," he said, looking on entranced; but she gave him such a pitiful smile that he could not get it out of his head. Deprived of Gavinia's counsel, and afraid

to hurt Elspeth, he sought out the doctor and said bluntly to him, "How is it he never writes to Grizel? She misses him terrible."

"So," David thought, "Grizel's dejection is becoming common talk."
"Damn him!" he said, in a gust of fury.

But this was too much for loyal Corp. "Damn you!" he roared.

But in his heart he knew that the doctor was a just man, and henceforth, when he was meaning to comfort Grizel, he was often seeking comfort for himself.

He did it all with elaborate cunning, to prevent her guessing that he was disturbed about her: asked permission to sit with her, for instance, because he was dull downstairs; mentioned as a ludicrous thing that there were people who believed Tommy could treat a woman badly, and waited anxiously for the reply. Oh, he was transparent, was Corp, but you may be sure Grizel never let him know that she saw through him. Tommy could not be blamed, she pointed out, though he did not care for some woman who perhaps cared for him.

"Exac'ly," said Corp.

And if he seemed, Grizel went on, with momentary bitterness, to treat her badly, it could be only because she had made herself cheap.

"That's it," said Corp, cheerfully. Then he added hurriedly, "No, that's no it ava. She's the last to mak' hersel' cheap." Then he saw that this might put Grizel on the scent. "Of course there's no sic woman," he said artfully, "but if there was, he would mak' it a' right. She mightna see how it was to be done, but kennin' what a crittur he is, she maun be sure he would find a wy. She would never lose hope, Grizel."

And then, if Grizel did not appease him instantly, he would say appealingly, "I canna think less o' him, Grizel; no, it would mak' me just terrible low. Grizel," he would cry sternly, "dinna tell me to think less o' that laddie."

Then, when she had reassured him, he would recall the many instances in which Tommy as a boy had found a way. "Did we ever ken he was finding it, Grizel, till he did find it? Many a time I says to mysel', says I, 'All is over,' and syne next minute that holy look comes ower his face, and he stretches out his legs like as if he was riding on a horse, and all

that kens him says, 'He has found a wy.' If I was the woman (no that there is sic a woman) I would say to mysel', 'He was never beat,' I would say, 'when he was a laddie, and it's no likely he'll be beat when he's a man'; and I wouldna sit looking at the fire wi' my hands fauded, nor would I forget to keep my hair neat, and I would wear the frock that set me best, and I would play in my auld bonny wy wi' bairns, for says I to mysel', 'I'm sure to hae bairns o' my ain some day, and--'"

But Grizel cried, "Don't, Corp, don't!"

"I winna," he answered miserably, "no, I winna. Forgive me, Grizel; I think I'll be stepping"; and then when he got as far as the door he would say, "I canna do 't, Grizel; I'm just terrible wae for the woman (if sic a woman there be), but I canna think ill o' him; you mauna speir it o' me."

He was much brightened by a reflection that came to him one day in church. "Here have I been near blaming him for no finding a wy, and very like he doesna ken we want him to find a wy!"

How to inform Tommy without letting Grizel know? She had tried twice long ago to teach him to write, but he found it harder on the wrists than the heaviest luggage. It was not safe for him even to think of the extra twirl that turned an n into an m, without first removing any knick-knacks that might be about. Nevertheless, he now proposed a third set-to, and Grizel acquiesced, though she thought it but another of his inventions to keep her from brooding.

The number of words in the English tongue excited him, and he often lost all by not confining the chase to one, like a dog after rabbits. Fortunately, he knew which words he wanted to bag.

"Change at Tilliedrum!" "Tickets! show your tickets!" and the like, he much enjoyed meeting in the flesh, so to speak.

"Let's see 'Find a wy,' Grizel," he would say. "Ay, ay, and is that the crittur!" and soon the sly fellow could write it, or at least draw it.

He affected an ambition to write a letter to his son on that gentleman's first birthday, and so "Let's see what 'I send you these few scrapes' is like, Grizel." She assured him that this is not essential in correspondence, but all the letters he had ever heard read aloud began thus, and he got his way.

Anon Master Shiach was surprised and gratified to receive the following epistle: "My dear sir, I send you these few scrapes to tell you as you have found a way to be a year of age the morn. All tickets ready in which Gavinia joins so no more at present I am, sir, your obed't father Corp Shiach."

The fame of this letter went abroad, but not a soul knew of the next. It said: "My dear Sir, I send you these few scrapes to tell you as Grizel needs cheering up. Kindly oblige by finding a way so no more at present. I am sir your obed't Serv't Corp Shiach."

To his bewilderment, this produced no effect, though only because Tommy never got it, and he wrote again, more sternly, requesting his hero to find a way immediately. He was waiting restlessly for the answer at a time when Elspeth called on Grizel to tell her of something beautiful that Tommy had done. He had been very ill for nearly a fortnight, it appeared, but had kept it from her to save her anxiety. "Just think, Grizel; all the time he was in bed with bronchitis he was writing me cheerful letters every other day pretending there was nothing the matter with him. He is better now. I have heard about it from a Mrs. Jerry, a lady whom I knew in London, and who has nursed him in the kindest way." (But this same Mrs. Jerry had opened Corp's letters and destroyed them as of no importance.) "He would never have mentioned it himself. How like him, Grizel! You remember, I made him promise before he went back to London that if he was ill he would let me know at once so that I could go to him, but he is so considerate he would not give me pain. He wrote those letters, Grizel, when he was gasping for breath."

"But she seemed quite unmoved," Elspeth said sadly to her husband afterwards.

Unmoved! Yes; Grizel remained apparently unmoved until Elspeth had gone, but then--the torture she endured! "Oh, cruel, cruel!" she cried, and she could neither stand nor sit; she flung herself down before the fire and rocked this way and that, in a paroxysm of woe. "Oh, cruel, cruel!"

It was Tommy who was cruel. To be ill, near to dying, apparently, and not to send her word! She could never, never have let him go had he not made that promise to Elspeth; and he kept it thus. Oh, wicked, wicked!

"You would have gone to him at once, Elspeth! You! Who are you, that talks of going to him as your right? He is not yours, I tell you; he is mine! He is mine alone; it is I who would go to him. Who is this woman that dares take my place by his side when he is ill!"

She rose to go to him, to drive away all others. I am sure that was what gave her strength to rise; but she sank to the floor again, and her passion lasted for hours. And through the night she was crying to God that she would be brave no more. In her despair she hoped he heard her.

Her mood had not changed when David came to see her next morning, to admit, too, that Tommy seemed to have done an unselfish thing in concealing his illness from them. Grizel nodded, but he thought she was looking strangely reckless. He had a message from Elspeth. Tommy had asked her to let him know whether the plant was flourishing.

"So you and he don't correspond now?" David said, with his old, puzzled look.

"No," was all her answer to that. The plant, she thought, was dead; she had not, indeed, paid much attention to it of late; but she showed it to David, and he said it would revive if more carefully tended. He also told her its rather pathetic history, which was new to Grizel, and of the talk at the wedding which had led to Tommy's taking pity on it. "Fellow-feeling, I suppose," he said lightly; "you see, they both blossomed prematurely."

The words were forgotten by him as soon as spoken; but Grizel sat on with them, for they were like a friend--or was it an enemy?--who had come to tell her strange things. Yes, the doctor was right. Now she knew why Tommy had loved this plant. Of the way in which he would sit looking wistfully at it, almost nursing it, she had been told by Aaron; he had himself begged her to tend it lovingly. Fellow-feeling! The doctor was shrewder than he thought.

Well, what did it matter to her? All that day she would do nothing for the plant, but in the middle of the night she rose and ran to it and hugged it, and for a time she was afraid to look at it by lamplight, lest Tommy was dead. Whether she had never been asleep that night, or had awakened from a dream, she never knew, but she ran to the plant, thinking it and Tommy were as one, and that they must die together. No such thought had ever crossed his mind, but it seemed to her that she had been told it by him, and she lit her fire to give the plant warmth, and often desisted,

to press it to her bosom, the heat seemed to come so reluctantly from the fire. This idea that his fate was bound up with that of the plant took strange possession of the once practical Grizel; it was as if some of Tommy's nature had passed into her to help her break the terrible monotony of the days.

And from that time there was no ailing child more passionately tended than the plant, and as spring advanced it began once more to put forth new leaves.

And Grizel also seemed glorified again. She was her old self. Dark shapes still lingered for her in the Den, but she avoided them, and if they tried to enter into her, she struggled with them and cast them out. As she saw herself able to fight and win once more, her pride returned to her, and one day she could ask David, joyously, to give her a present of the old doctor's chair. And she could kneel by its side and say to it, "You can watch me always; I am just as I used to be."

Seeing her once more the incarnation of vigor and content, singing gaily to his child, and as eager to be at her duties betimes as a morning in May, Corp grunted with delight, and was a hero for not telling her that it was he who had passed Tommy the word. For, of course, Tommy had done it all.

"Somebody has found a wy, Grizel!" he would say, chuckling, and she smiled an agreement.

"And yet," says he, puzzled, "I've watched, and you hinna haen a letter frae him. It defies the face o' clay to find out how he has managed it. Oh, the crittur! Ay, I suppose you dinna want to tell me what it is that has lichted you up again?"

She could not tell him, for it was a compact she had made with one who did not sign it. "I shall cease to be bitter and despairing and wicked, and try every moment of my life to be good and do good, so long as my plant flourishes; but if it withers, then I shall go to him--I don't care what happens; I shall go to him."

It was the middle of June when she first noticed that the plant was beginning to droop.