

CHAPTER XXXI - "THE MAN WITH THE GREETIN' EYES"

For many days she lay in a fever at the doctor's house, seeming sometimes to know where she was, but more often not, and night after night a man with a drawn face sat watching her. They entreated, they forced him to let them take his place; but from his room he heard her moan or speak, or he thought he heard her, or he heard a terrible stillness, and he stole back to listen; they might send him away, but when they opened the door he was there, with his drawn face. And often they were glad to see him, for there were times when he alone could interpret her wild demands and soothe those staring eyes.

Once a scream startled the house. Someone had struck a match in the darkened chamber, and she thought she was in an arbour in St. Gian. They had to hold her in her bed by force at times; she had such a long way to walk before night, she said.

She would struggle into a sitting posture and put her hands over her ears.

Her great desire was not to sleep. "I should wake up," she explained fearfully.

She took a dislike to Elspeth, and called her "Alice."

These ravings, they said to each other, must have reference to what happened to her when she was away, and as they thought he knew no more of her wanderings than they, everyone marvelled at the intuition with which he read her thoughts. It was he who guessed that the striking of matches somehow terrified her; he who discovered that it was a horrid roaring river she thought she heard, and he pretended he heard it too, and persuaded her that if she lay very still it would run past. Nothing she said or did puzzled him. He read the raving of her mind, they declared admiringly, as if he held the cipher to it.

"And the cipher is his love," Mrs. McLean said, with wet eyes. In the excitement of those days Elspeth talked much to her of Tommy's love for Grizel, and how she had refused him, and it went round the town with embellishments. It was generally believed now that she really had gone to

London to see her father, and that his heartless behaviour had unhinged her mind.

By David's advice, Corp and Gavinia did not contradict this story. It was as good as another, he told them, and better than the truth.

But what was the truth? they asked greedily.

"Oh, that he is a noble fellow," David replied grimly.

They knew that, but--

He would tell them no more, however, though he knew all. Tommy had made full confession to the doctor, even made himself out worse than he was, as had to be his way when he was not making himself out better.

"And I am willing to proclaim it all from the market-place," he said hoarsely, "if that is your wish."

"I daresay you would almost enjoy doing that," said David, rather cruelly.

"I daresay I should," Tommy said, with a gulp, and went back to Grizel's side. It was not, you may be sure, to screen him that David kept the secret; it was because he knew what many would say of Grizel if the nature of her journey were revealed. He dared not tell Elspeth, even; for think of the woe to her if she learned that it was her wonderful brother who had brought Grizel to this pass! The Elspeths of this world always have some man to devote himself to them. If the Tommies pass away, the Davids spring up. For my own part, I think Elspeth would have found some excuse for Tommy. He said so himself to the doctor, for he wanted her to be told.

"Or you would find the excuse for her in time," David responded.

"Very likely," Tommy said. He was humble enough now, you see. David could say one thing only which would rouse him, namely, that Grizel was not to die in this fever; and for long it seemed impossible to say that.

"Would you have her live if her mind remains affected?" he asked; and Tommy said firmly, "Yes."

"You think, I suppose, that then you would have less for which to blame yourself!"

"I suppose that is it. But don't waste time on me, Gemmell, when you have her life to save, if you can."

Well, her life was saved, and Tommy's nursing had more to do with it than David's skill. David admitted it; the town talked of it. "I aye kent he would find a wy," Corp said, though he had been among the most anxious. He and Aaron Latta were the first admitted to see her, when she was able once more to sit in a chair. They had been told to ask her no questions. She chatted pleasantly to them, and they thought she was quite her old self. They wondered to see Tommy still so sad-eyed. To Ailie she spoke freely of her illness, though not of what had occasioned it, and told her almost gleefully that David had promised to let her sew a little next week. There was one thing only that surprised Ailie. Grizel had said that as soon as she was a little stronger she was going home.

"Does she mean to her father's house?" Ailie asked.

This was what started the report that, touched no doubt by her illness, Grizel's unknown father had, after all, offered her a home. They discovered, however, what Grizel meant by home when, one afternoon, she escaped, unseen, from the doctor's house, and was found again at Double Dykes, very indignant because someone had stolen the furniture.

She seemed to know all her old friends except Elspeth, who was still Alice to her. Seldom now did she put her hands over her ears, or see horrible mountains marching with her. She no longer remembered, save once or twice when she woke up, that she had ever been out of Thrums. To those who saw her casually she was Grizel--gone thin and pale and weak intellectually, but still the Grizel of old, except for the fixed idea that Double Dykes was her home.

"You must not humour her in that delusion," David said sternly to Tommy; "when we cease to fight it we have abandoned hope."

So the weapon he always had his hand on was taken from Tommy, for he would not abandon hope. He fought gallantly. It was always he who brought her back from Double Dykes. She would not leave it with any other person, but she came away with him.

"It's because she's so fond o' him," Corp said.

But it was not. It was because she feared him, as all knew who saw them together. They were seen together a great deal when she was able to go

out. Driving seemed to bring back the mountains to her eyes, so she walked, and it was always with the help of Tommy's arm. "It's a most pitiful sight," the people said. They pitied him even more than her, for though she might be talking gaily to him and leaning heavily on him, they could see that she mistrusted him. At the end of a sweet smile she would give him an ugly, furtive look.

"She's like a cat you've forced into your lap," they said, "and it lies quiet there, ready to jump the moment you let go your grip."

They wondered would he never weary. He never wearied. Day after day he was saying the same things to her, and the end was always as the beginning. They came back to her entreaty that she should be allowed to go home as certainly as they came back to the doctor's house.

"It is a long time, you know, Grizel, since you lived at Double Dykes--not since you were a child."

"Not since I was a child," she said as if she quite understood.

"Then you went to live with your dear, kind doctor, you remember. What was his name?"

"Dr. McQueen. I love him."

"But he died, and he left you his house to live in. It is your home, Grizel. He would be so grieved if he thought you did not make it your home."

"It is my home," she said proudly; but when they returned to it she was loath to go in. "I want to go home!" she begged.

One day he took her to her rooms in Corp's house, thinking her old furniture would please her; and that was the day when she rocked her arms joyously again. But it was not the furniture that made her so happy; it was Corp's baby.

"Oh, oh!" she cried in rapture, and held out her arms; and he ran into them, for there was still one person in Thrums who had no fear of Grizel.

"It will be a damned shame," Corp said huskily, "if that woman never has no bairns o' her ain."

They watched her crooning over the child, playing with him for a long time. You could not have believed that she required to be watched. She

told him with hugs that she had come back to him at last; it was her first admission that she knew she had been away and a wild hope came to Tommy that along the road he could not take her she might be drawn by this little child.

She discovered a rent in the child's pinafore and must mend it at once. She ran upstairs, as a matter of course, to her work-box, and brought down a needle and thread. It was quite as if she was at home at last.

"But you don't live here now, Grizel," Tommy said, when she drew back at his proposal that they should go away; "you live at the doctor's house."

"Do I, Gavinia?" she said beseechingly.

"Is it here you want to bide?" Corp asked, and she nodded her head several times.

"It would be so much more convenient," she said, looking at the child.

"Would you take her back, Gavinia," Tommy asked humbly, "if she continues to want it?"

Gavinia did not answer.

"Woman!" cried Corp.

"I'm mortal wae for her," Gavinia said slowly, "but she needs to be waited on hand and foot."

"I would come and do the waiting on her hand and foot, Gavinia," Tommy said.

And so it came about that a week afterwards Grizel was reinstalled in her old rooms. Every morning when Tommy came to see her she asked him, icily how Alice was. She seemed to think that Alice, as she called her, was his wife. He always replied, "You mean Elspeth," and she assented, but only, it was obvious, because she feared to contradict him. To Corp and Gavinia she would still say passionately, "I want to go home!" and probably add fearfully, "Don't tell him."

Yet though this was not home to her, she seemed to be less unhappy here than in the doctor's house, and she found a great deal to do. All her old skill in needlework came back to her, and she sewed for the child such exquisite garments that she clapped her hands over them.

One day Tommy came with a white face and asked Gavinia if she knew whether a small brown parcel had been among the things brought by Grizel from the doctor's house.

"It was in the box sent after me from Switzerland," he told her, "and contained papers."

Gavinia had seen no such package.

"She may have hidden it," he said, and they searched, but fruitlessly. He questioned Grizel gently, but questions alarmed her, and he desisted.

"It does not matter, Gavinia," he said, with a ghastly smile; but on the following Sunday, when Corp called at the doctor's house, the thought "Have they found it?" leaped in front of all thought of Grizel. This was only for the time it takes to ask a question with the eyes, however, for Corp was looking very miserable.

"I'm sweer to say it," he announced to Tommy and David, "but it has to be said. We canna keep her."

Evidently something had happened, and Tommy rose to go to Grizel without even asking what it was. "Wait," David said, wrinkling his eyebrows, "till Corp tells us what he means by that. I knew it might come, Corp. Go on."

"If it hadna been for the bairn," said Corp, "we would hae tholed wi' her, however queer she was; but wi' the bairn I tell you it's no mous. You'll hae to tak' her awa'."

"Whatever she has been to others," Tommy said, "she is always an angel with the child. His own mother could not be fonder of him."

"That's it," Corp replied emphatically. "She's no the mother o' him, but there's whiles when she thinks she is. We kept it frae you as long as we could."

"As long as she is so good to him----" David began.

"But at thae times she's not," said Corp. "She begins to shiver most terrible, as if she saw fearsome things in her mind, and syne we see her looking at him like as if she wanted to do him a mischief. She says he's her brat; she thinks he's hers, and that he hasna been well come by."

Tommy's hands rose in agony, and then he covered his face with them.

"Go on, Corp," David said hoarsely; "we must have it all."

"Sometimes," Corp went on painfully, "she canna help being fond o' him, though she thinks she shouldna hae had him. I've heard her saying, 'My brat!' and syne birsing him closer to her, as though her shame just made him mair to her. Women are so queer about thae things. I've seen her sitting by his cradle, moaning to hersel', 'I did so want to be good! It would be sweet to be good! and never stopping rocking the cradle, and a' the time the tears were rolling down."

Tommy cried, "If there is any more to tell, Corp, be quick."

"There's what I come here to tell you. It was no langer syne than jimply an hour. We thocht the bairn was playing at the gavle-end, and that Grizel was up the stair. But they werena, and I gaed straight to Double Dykes. She wasna there, but the bairn was, lying greetin' on the floor. We found her in the Den, sitting by the burn-side, and she said we should never see him again, for she had drowned him. We're sweer, but you'll need to tak' her awa'."

"We shall take her away," David said, and when he and Tommy were left together he asked: "Do you see what it means?"

"It means that the horrors of her early days have come back to her, and that she is confusing her mother with herself."

David's hands were clenched. "That is not what I am thinking of. We have to take her away; they have done far more than we had any right to ask of them. Sandys, where are we to take her to?"

"Do even you grow tired of her?" Tommy cried.

David said between his teeth: "We hope there will soon be a child in this house, also. God forgive me, but I cannot bring her back here."

"She cannot be in a house where there is a child!" said Tommy, with a bitter laugh. "Gemmell, it is Grizel we are speaking of! Do you remember what she was?"

"I remember."

"Well, where are we to send her?"

David turned his pained eyes full on Tommy.

"No!" Tommy cried vehemently.

"Sandys," said David, firmly, "that is what it has come to. They will take good care of her." He sat down with a groan. "Have done with heroics," he said savagely, when Tommy would have spoken. "I have been prepared for this; there is no other way."

"I have been prepared for it, too," Tommy said, controlling himself; "but there is another way: I can marry her, and I am going to do it."

"I don't know that I can countenance that," David said, after a pause. "It seems an infernal shame."

"Don't trouble about me," replied Tommy, hoarsely; "I shall do it willingly."

And then it was the doctor's turn to laugh. "You!" he said with a terrible scorn as he looked Tommy up and down. "I was not thinking of you. All my thoughts were of her. I was thinking how cruel to her if some day she came to her right mind and found herself tied for life to the man who had brought her to this pass."

Tommy winced and walked up and down.

"Desire to marry her gone?" asked David, savagely.

"No," Tommy said. He sat down. "You have the key to me, Gemmell," he went on quietly. "I gave it to you. You know I am a man of sentiment only; but you are without a scrap of it yourself, and so you will never quite know what it is. It has its good points. We are a kindly people. I was perhaps pluming myself on having made an heroic proposal, and though you have made me see it just now as you see it, as you see it I shall probably soon be putting on the same grand airs again. Lately I discovered that the children who see me with Grizel call me 'the Man with the Greetin' Eyes.' If I have greetin' eyes it was real grief that gave them to me; but when I heard what I was called it made me self-conscious, and I have tried to look still more lugubrious ever since. It seems monstrous to you, but that, I believe, is the kind of thing I shall always be doing. But it does not mean that I feel no real remorse. They were greetin' eyes before I knew it, and though I may pose grotesquely as a fine fellow for finding Grizel a home where there is no child and can

never be a child, I shall not cease, night nor day, from tending her. It will be a grim business, Gemmell, as you know, and if I am Sentimental Tommy through it all, why grudge me my comic little strut?"

David said, "You can't take her to London."

"I shall take her to wherever she wants to go."

"There is one place only she wants to go to, and that is Double Dykes."

"I am prepared to take her there."

"And your work?"

"It must take second place now. I must write; it is the only thing I can do. If I could make a living at anything else I would give up writing altogether."

"Why?"

"She would be pleased if she could understand, and writing is the joy of my life--two reasons."

But the doctor smiled.

"You are right," said Tommy. "I see I was really thinking what a fine picture of self-sacrifice I should make sitting in Double Dykes at a loom!"

They talked of ways and means, and he had to admit that he had little money. But the new book would bring in a good deal, David supposed.

"The manuscript is lost," Tommy replied, crushing down his agitation.

"Lost! When? Where?"

"I don't know. It was in the bag I left behind at St. Gian, and I supposed it was still in it when the bag was forwarded to me here. I did not look for more than a month. I took credit to myself for neglecting my manuscript, and when at last I looked it was not there. I telegraphed and wrote to the innkeeper at St. Gian, and he replied that my things had been packed at his request in presence of my friends there, the two ladies you know of. I wrote to them, and they replied that this was so, and said they thought they remembered seeing in the bottom of the bag some such parcel in brown paper as I described. But it is not there now, and I have given up

all hope of ever seeing it again. No, I have no other copy. Every page was written half a dozen times, but I kept the final copy only."

"It is scarcely a thing anyone would steal."

"No; I suppose they took it out of the bag at St. Gian, and forgot to pack it again. It was probably flung away as of no account."

"Could it have been taken out on the way here?"

"The key was tied to the handle so that the custom officials might be able to open the bag. Perhaps they are fonder of English manuscripts than one would expect, or more careless of them."

"You can think of no other way in which it might have disappeared?"

"None," Tommy said; and then the doctor faced him squarely.

"Are you trying to screen Grizel?" he asked. "Is it true, what people are saying?"

"What are they saying?"

"That she destroyed it. I heard that yesterday, and told them your manuscript was in my house, as I thought it was. Was it she?"

"No, no. Gavinia must have started that story. I did look for the package among Grizel's things."

"What made you think of that?"

"I had seen her looking into my bag one day. And she used to say I loved my manuscripts too much ever to love her. But I am sure she did not do it."

"Be truthful, Sandys. You know how she always loved the truth."

"Well, then, I suppose it was she."

After a pause the doctor said: "It must be about as bad as having a limb lopped off."

"If only I had been offered that alternative!" Tommy replied.

"And yet," David mused, better pleased with him, "you have not cried out."

"Have I not! I have rolled about in agony, and invoked the gods, and cursed and whimpered; only I take care that no one shall see me."

"And that no one should know poor Grizel had done this thing. I admire you for that, Sandys."

"But it has leaked out, you see," Tommy said; "and they will all be admiring me for it at the wedding, and no doubt I shall be cocking my greetin' eyes at them to note how much they are admiring."

But when the wedding-day came he was not doing that. While he and Grizel stood up before Mr. Dishart, in the doctor's parlour, he was thinking of her only. His eyes never left her, not even when he had to reply "I do." His hand pressed hers all the time. He kept giving her reassuring little nods and smiles, and it was thus that he helped Grizel through.

Had Mr. Dishart understood what was in her mind he would not have married them. To her it was no real marriage; she thought they were tricking the minister, so that she should be able to go home. They had rehearsed the ceremony together many times, and oh, she was eager to make no mistake.

"If they were to find out!" she would say apprehensively, and then perhaps giggle at the slyness of it all. Tommy had to make merry with her, as if it was one of his boyish plays. If he was overcome with the pain of it, she sobbed at once and wrung her hands.

She was married in gray silk. She had made the dress herself, as beautifully as all her things were made. Tommy remembered how once, long ago, she had told him, as a most exquisite secret, that she had decided on gray silk.

Corp and Gavinia and Ailie and Aaron Latta were the only persons asked to the wedding, and when it was over, they said they never saw anyone stand up by a woman's side looking so anxious to be her man; and I am sure that in this they did Tommy no more than justice.

It was a sad day to Elspeth. Could she be expected to smile while her noble brother did this great deed of sacrifice? But she bore up bravely, partly for his sake, partly for the sake of one unborn.

The ring was no plain hoop of gold; it was garnets all the way round. She had seen it on Elspeth's finger, and craved it so greedily that it became her wedding-ring. And from the moment she had it she ceased to dislike Elspeth, and pitied her very much, as if she thought happiness went with the ring. "Poor Alice!" she said when she saw Elspeth crying at the wedding, and having started to go away with Tommy, she came back to say again, "Poor, poor Alice!"

Corp flung an old shoe after them.