

## CHAPTER XXXIII - THE LITTLE GODS RETURN WITH A LADY

Grizel's clear, searching eyes, that were always asking for the truth, came back to her, and I seem to see them on me now, watching lest I shirk the end.

Thus I can make no pretence (to please you) that it was a new Tommy at last. We have seen how he gave his life to her during those eighteen months, but he could not make himself anew. They say we can do it, so I suppose he did not try hard enough; but God knows how hard he tried.

He went on trying. In those first days she sometimes asked him, "Did you do it out of love, or was it pity only?" And he always said it was love. He said it adoringly. He told her all that love meant to him, and it meant everything that he thought Grizel would like it to mean. When she ceased to ask this question he thought it was because he had convinced her.

They had a honeymoon by the sea. He insisted upon it with boyish eagerness, and as they walked on the links or sat in their room he would exclaim ecstatically: "How happy I am! I wonder if there were ever two people quite so happy as you and I!"

And if he waited for an answer, as he usually did, she might smile lightly and say: "Few people have gone through so much."

"Is there any woman in the world, Grizel, with whom you would change places?"

"No, none," she said at once; and when he was sure of it, but never until he was sure, he would give his mind a little holiday; and then, perhaps, those candid eyes would rest searchingly upon him, but always with a brave smile ready should he chance to look up.

And it was just the same when they returned to Double Dykes, which they added to and turned into a comfortable home--Tommy trying to become a lover by taking thought, and Grizel not letting on that it could not be done in that way. She thought it was very sweet of him to try so hard--sweeter of him than if he really had loved her, though not, of course, quite so sweet to her. He was a boy only. She knew that, despite all he had gone through, he was still a boy. And boys cannot love. Oh, who would be so cruel as to ask a boy to love?

That Grizel's honeymoon should never end was his grand ambition, and he took elaborate precautions against becoming a matter-of-fact husband. Every morning he ordered himself to gaze at her with rapture, as if he had wakened to the glorious thought that she was his wife.

"I can't help it, Grizel; it comes to me every morning with the same shock of delight, and I begin the day with a song of joy. You make the world as fresh and interesting to me as if I had just broken like a chicken through the egg shell." He rose at the earliest hours. "So that I can have the longer day with you," he said gaily.

If when sitting at his work he forgot her for an hour or two he reproached himself for it afterwards, and next day he was more careful. "Grizel," he would cry, suddenly flinging down his pen, "you are my wife! Do you hear me, madam? You hear, and yet you can sit there calmly darning socks! Excuse me," he would say to his work, "while I do a dance."

He rose impulsively and brought his papers nearer her. With a table between them she was several feet away from him, which was more, he said, than he could endure.

"Sit down for a moment, Grizel, and let me look at you. I want to write something most splendiferous to-day, and I am sure to find it in your face. I have ceased to be an original writer; all the purple patches are cribbed from you."

He made a point of taking her head in his hands and looking long at her with thoughts too deep for utterance; then he would fall on his knees and kiss the hem of her dress, and so back to his book again.

And in time it was all sweet to Grizel. She could not be deceived, but she loved to see him playing so kind a part, and after some sadness to which she could not help giving way, she put all vain longings aside. She folded them up and put them away like the beautiful linen, so that she might see more clearly what was left to her and how best to turn it to account.

He did not love her. "Not as I love him," she said to herself,--"not as married people ought to love; but in the other way he loves me dearly." By the "other way" she meant that he loved her as he loved Elspeth, and loved them both just as he had loved them when all three played in the Den.

"He would love me if he could." She was certain of that. She decided that love does not come to all people, as is the common notion; that there are some who cannot fall in love, and that he was one of them. He was complete in himself, she decided.

"Is it a pity for him that he married me? It would be a pity if he could love some other woman, but I am sure he could never do that. If he could love anyone it would be me, we both want it so much. He does not need a wife, but he needs someone to take care of him--all men need that; and I can do it much better than any other person. Had he not married me he never would have married; but he may fall ill, and then how useful I shall be to him! He will grow old, and perhaps it won't be quite so lonely to him when I am there. It would have been a pity for him to marry me if I had been a foolish woman who asked for more love than he can give; but I shall never do that, so I think it is not a pity.

"Is it a pity for me? Oh, no, no, no!

"Is he sorry he did it? At times, is he just a weeny bit sorry?" She watched him, and decided rightly that he was not sorry the weeniest bit. It was a sweet consolation to her. "Is he really happy? Yes, of course he is happy when he is writing; but is he quite contented at other times? I do honestly think he is. And if he is happy now, how much happier I shall be able to make him when I have put away all my selfish thoughts and think only of him."

"The most exquisite thing in human life is to be married to one who loves you as you love him." There could be no doubt of that. But she saw also that the next best thing was the kind of love this boy gave to her, and she would always be grateful for the second best. In her prayers she thanked God for giving it to her, and promised Him to try to merit it; and all day and every day she kept her promise. There could not have been a brighter or more energetic wife than Grizel. The amount of work she found to do in that small house which his devotion had made so dear to her that she could not leave it! Her gaiety! Her masterful airs when he wanted something that was not good for him! The artfulness with which she sought to help him in various matters without his knowing! Her satisfaction when he caught her at it, as clever Tommy was constantly doing! "What a success it has turned out!" David would say delightedly to himself; and Grizel was almost as jubilant because it was so far from being a failure. It was only sometimes in the night that she lay very still,

with little wells of water on her eyes, and through them saw one--the dream of woman--whom she feared could never be hers. That boy Tommy never knew why she did not want to have a child. He thought that for the present she was afraid; but the reason was that she believed it would be wicked when he did not love her as she loved him. She could not be sure--she had to think it all out for herself. With little wells of sadness on her eyes, she prayed in the still night to God to tell her; but she could never hear His answer.

She no longer sought to teach Tommy how he should write. That quaint desire was abandoned from the day when she learned that she had destroyed his greatest work. She had not destroyed it, as we shall see; but she presumed she had, as Tommy thought so. He had tried to conceal this from her to save her pain, but she had found it out, and it seemed to Grizel, grown distrustful of herself, that the man who could bear such a loss as he had borne it was best left to write as he chose.

"It was not that I did not love your books," she said, "but that I loved you more, and I thought they did you harm."

"In the days when I had wings," he answered, and she smiled. "Any feathers left, do you think, Grizel?" he asked jocularly, and turned his shoulders to her for examination.

"A great many, sir," she said, "and I am glad. I used to want to pull them all out, but now I like to know that they are still there, for it means that you remain among the facts not because you can't fly, but because you won't."

"I still have my little fights with myself," he blurted out boyishly, though it was a thing he had never meant to tell her, and Grizel pressed his hand for telling her what she already knew so well.

The new book, of course, was "The Wandering Child." I wonder whether any of you read it now? Your fathers and mothers thought a great deal of that slim volume, but it would make little stir in an age in which all the authors are trying who can say "damn" loudest. It is but a reverie about a child who is lost, and his parents' search for him in terror of what may have befallen. But they find him in a wood singing joyfully to himself because he is free; and he fears to be caged again, so runs farther from them into the wood, and is running still, singing to himself because he is free, free, free. That is really all, but T. Sandys knew how to tell it. The

moment he conceived the idea (we have seen him speaking of it to the doctor), he knew that it was the idea for him. He forgot at once that he did not really care for children. He said reverently to himself, "I can pull it off," and, as was always the way with him, the better he pulled it off the more he seemed to love them.

"It is myself who is writing at last, Grizel," he said, as he read it to her.

She thought (and you can guess whether she was right) that it was the book he loved rather than the children. She thought (and you can guess again) that it was not his ideas about children that had got into the book, but hers. But she did not say so; she said it was the sweetest of his books to her.

I have heard of another reading he gave. This was after the publication of the book. He had gone into Corp's house one Sunday, and Gavinia was there reading the work to her lord and master, while little Corp disported on the floor. She read as if all the words meant the same thing, and it was more than Tommy could endure. He read for her, and his eyes grew moist as he read, for it was the most exquisite of his chapters about the lost child. You would have said that no one loved children quite so much as T. Sandys. But little Corp would not keep quiet, and suddenly Tommy jumped up and boxed his ears. He then proceeded with the reading, while Gavinia glowered and Corp senior scratched his head.

On the way home he saw what had happened, and laughed at the humour of it, then grew depressed, then laughed recklessly. "Is it Sentimental Tommy still?" he said to himself, with a groan. Seldom a week passed without his being reminded in some such sudden way that it was Sentimental Tommy still. "But she shall never know!" he vowed, and he continued to be half a hero.

His name was once more in many mouths. "Come back and be made of more than ever!" cried that society which he had once enlivened. "Come and hear the pretty things we are saying about you. Come and make the prettier replies that are already on the tip of your tongue; for oh, Tommy, you know they are! Bring her with you if you must; but don't you think that the nice, quiet country with the thingumbobs all in bloom would suit her best? It is essential that you should run up to see your publisher, is it not? The men have dinners for you if you want them, but we know you don't. Your yearning eyes are on the ladies, Tommy; we are making up theatre-parties of the old entrancing kind; you should see our

new gowns; please come back and help us to put on our cloaks, Tommy; there is a dance on Monday--come and sit it out with us. Do you remember the garden-party where you said--Well, the laurel walk is still there; the beauties of two years ago are still here, and there are new beauties, and their noses are slightly tilted, but no man can move them; ha, do you pull yourself together at that? We were always the reward for your labours, Tommy; your books are move one in the game of making love to us; don't be afraid that we shall forget it is a game; we know it is, and that is why we suit you. Come and play in London as you used to play in the Den. It is all you need of women; come and have your fill, and we shall send you back refreshed. We are not asking you to be disloyal to her, only to leave her happy and contented and take a holiday."

He heard their seductive voices. They danced around him in numbers, for they knew that the more there were of them the better he would be pleased; they whispered in his ear and then ran away looking over their shoulders. But he would not budge.

There was one more dangerous than the rest. Her he saw before the others came and after they had gone. She was a tall, incredibly slight woman, with eyelashes that needed help, and a most disdainful mouth and nose, and she seemed to look scornfully at Tommy and then stand waiting. He was in two minds about what she was waiting for, and often he had a fierce desire to go to London to find out. But he never went. He played the lover to Grizel as before--not to intoxicate himself, but always to make life sunnier to her; if she stayed longer with Elspeth than the promised time, he became anxious and went in search of her. "I have not been away an hour!" she said, laughing at him, holding little Jean up to laugh at him. "But I cannot do without you for an hour," he answered ardently. He still laid down his pen to gaze with rapture at her and cry, "My wife!"

She wanted him to go to London for a change, and without her, and his heart leaped into his mouth to prevent his saying No; yet he said it, though in the Tommy way.

"Without you!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Grizel, do you think I could find happiness apart from you for a day? And could you let me go?" And he looked with agonized reproach at her, and sat down, clutching his head.

"It would be very hard to me," she said softly; "but if the change did you good----"

"A change from you! Oh, Grizel, Grizel!"

"Or I could go with you?"

"When you don't want to go!" he cried huskily. "You think I could ask it of you!"

He quite broke down, and she had to comfort him. She was smiling divinely at him all the time, as if sympathy had brought her to love even the Tommy way of saying things. "I thought it would be sweet to you to see how great my faith in you is now," she said.

This was the true reason why generous Grizel had proposed to him to go. She knew he was more afraid than she of Sentimental Tommy, and she thought her faith would be a helping hand to him, as it was.

He had no regard for Lady Pippinworth. Of all the women he had dallied with, she was the one he liked the least, for he never liked where he could not esteem. Perhaps she had some good in her, but the good in her had never appealed to him, and he knew it, and refused to harbour her in his thoughts now; he cast her out determinedly when she seemed to enter them unbidden. But still he was vain. She came disdainfully and stood waiting. We have seen him wondering what she waited for; but though he could not be sure, and so was drawn to her, he took it as acknowledgment of his prowess and so was helped to run away.

To walk away would be the more exact term, for his favourite method of exorcising this lady was to rise from his chair and take a long walk with Grizel. Occasionally if she was occupied (and a number of duties our busy Grizel found to hand!) he walked alone, and he would not let himself brood. Someone had once walked from Thrums to the top of the Law and back in three hours, and Tommy made several gamesome attempts to beat the record, setting out to escape that willowy woman, soon walking her down and returning in a glow of animal spirits. It was on one of these occasions, when there was nothing in his head but ambition to do the fifth mile within the eleven minutes, that he suddenly met her Ladyship face to face.

We have now come to the last fortnight of Tommy's life.