

CHAPTER XXIV--FULL STORY OF A COPY OF HEINECCIUS

The place found was in the upper part of a house backed on a canal.

We had two rooms, the second entering from the first; each had a chimney built out into the floor in the Dutch manner; and being alongside, each had the same prospect from the window of the top of a tree below us in a little court, of a piece of the canal, and of houses in the Hollands architecture and a church spire upon the further side. A full set of bells hung in that spire and made delightful music; and when there was any sun at all, it shone direct in our two chambers. From a tavern hard by we had good meals sent in.

The first night we were both pretty weary, and she extremely so.

There was little talk between us, and I packed her off to her bed as soon as she had eaten. The first thing in the morning I wrote word to Sprott to have her mails sent on, together with a line to Alan at his chief's; and had the same despatched, and her breakfast ready, ere I waked her. I was a little abashed when she came forth in her one habit, and the mud of the way upon her stockings. By what inquiries I had made, it seemed a good few days must pass before her mails could come to hand in Leyden, and it was plainly needful she must have a shift of things. She was unwilling at first that I should go to that expense; but I reminded her she was now a rich man's sister and must appear suitably in the part, and we had not got to the second merchant's before she was entirely charmed into the spirit of the thing, and her eyes shining. It pleased me to see her so innocent and thorough in this pleasure.

What was more extraordinary was the passion into which I fell on it myself; being never satisfied that I had bought her enough or fine enough, and never weary of beholding her in different attires.

Indeed, I began to understand some little of Miss Grant's immersion in the interest of clothes; for the truth is, when you have the ground of a beautiful person to adorn, the whole business becomes beautiful. The Dutch chintzes I should say were extraordinary cheap and fine; but I would be ashamed to set down what I paid for stockings to her. Altogether I spent so great a sum upon this pleasuring (as I may call it) that I was ashamed for a great while to spend more; and by way of a set-off, I left our chambers pretty bare. If we had beds, if Catriona was a little braw, and I had light to see her by, we were richly enough lodged for me.

By the end of this merchandising I was glad to leave her at the door with all our purchases, and go for a long walk alone in which to read myself a lecture. Here had I taken under my roof, and as good as to my bosom, a young lass extremely beautiful, and whose innocence was her peril. My talk with the old Dutchman, and the lies to which I was constrained, had already given me a sense of how my conduct must appear to others; and now, after the strong admiration I had just experienced and the immoderacy with which I had continued my vain purchases, I began to think of it myself as very hazarded. I bethought me, if I had a sister indeed, whether I would so expose her; then, judging the case too problematical, I varied my question into this, whether I would so trust Catriona in the hands of any other Christian being; the answer to which made my face to burn. The more cause, since I had been entrapped and had

entrapped the girl into an undue situation, that I should behave in it with scrupulous nicety. She depended on me wholly for her bread and shelter; in case I should alarm her delicacy, she had no retreat. Besides I was her host and her protector; and the more irregularly I had fallen in these positions, the less excuse for me if I should profit by the same to forward even the most honest suit; for with the opportunities that I enjoyed, and which no wise parent would have suffered for a moment, even the most honest suit would be unfair. I saw I must be extremely hold-off in my relations; and yet not too much so neither; for if I had no right to appear at all in the character of a suitor, I must yet appear continually, and if possible agreeably, in that of host. It was plain I should require a great deal of tact and conduct, perhaps more than my years afforded. But I had rushed in where angels

might have feared to tread, and there was no way out of that position save by behaving right while I was in it. I made a set of rules for my guidance; prayed for strength to be enabled to observe them, and as a more human aid to the same end purchased a study-book in law. This being all that I could think of, I relaxed from these grave considerations; whereupon my mind bubbled at once into an effervescency of pleasing spirits, and it was like one treading on air that I turned homeward. As I thought that name of home, and recalled the image of that figure awaiting me between four walls, my heart beat upon my bosom.

My troubles began with my return. She ran to greet me with an obvious and affecting pleasure. She was clad, besides, entirely in the new clothes that I had bought for her; looked in them beyond

expression well; and must walk about and drop me curtseys to
display them and to be admired. I am sure I did it with an ill
grace, for I thought to have choked upon the words.

"Well," she said, "if you will not be caring for my pretty clothes,
see what I have done with our two chambers." And she showed me the
place all very finely swept, and the fires glowing in the two
chimneys.

I was glad of a chance to seem a little more severe than I quite
felt. "Catriona," said I, "I am very much displeas'd with you, and
you must never again lay a hand upon my room. One of us two must
have the rule while we are here together; it is most fit it should
be I who am both the man and the elder; and I give you that for my

command."

She dropped me one of her curtseys; which were extraordinary taking. "If you will be cross," said she, "I must be making pretty manners at you, Davie. I will be very obedient, as I should be when every stitch upon all there is of me belongs to you. But you will not be very cross either, because now I have not anyone else."

This struck me hard, and I made haste, in a kind of penitence, to blot out all the good effect of my last speech. In this direction progress was more easy, being down hill; she led me forward, smiling; at the sight of her, in the brightness of the fire and with her pretty becks and looks, my heart was altogether melted.

We made our meal with infinite mirth and tenderness; and the two

seemed to be commingled into one, so that our very laughter sounded

like a kindness.

In the midst of which I awoke to better recollections, made a lame

word of excuse, and set myself boorishly to my studies. It was a

substantial, instructive book that I had bought, by the late Dr.

Heineccius, in which I was to do a great deal reading these next

few days, and often very glad that I had no one to question me of

what I read. Methought she bit her lip at me a little, and that

cut me. Indeed it left her wholly solitary, the more as she was

very little of a reader, and had never a book. But what was I to

do?

So the rest of the evening flowed by almost without speech.

I could have beat myself. I could not lie in my bed that night for rage and repentance, but walked to and fro on my bare feet till I was nearly perished, for the chimney was gone out and the frost keen. The thought of her in the next room, the thought that she might even hear me as I walked, the remembrance of my churlishness and that I must continue to practise the same ungrateful course or be dishonoured, put me beside my reason. I stood like a man between Scylla and Charybdis: WHAT MUST SHE THINK OF ME? was my one thought that softened me continually into weakness. WHAT IS TO BECOME OF US? the other which steeled me again to resolution. This was my first night of wakefulness and divided counsels, of which I was now to pass many, pacing like a madman, sometimes weeping like a childish boy, sometimes praying (I fain would hope) like a

Christian.

But prayer is not very difficult, and the hitch comes in practice.

In her presence, and above all if I allowed any beginning of

familiarity, I found I had very little command of what should

follow. But to sit all day in the same room with her, and feign to

be engaged upon Heineccius, surpassed my strength. So that I fell

instead upon the expedient of absenting myself so much as I was

able; taking out classes and sitting there regularly, often with

small attention, the test of which I found the other day in a note-

book of that period, where I had left off to follow an edifying

lecture and actually scribbled in my book some very ill verses,

though the Latinity is rather better than I thought that I could

ever have compassed. The evil of this course was unhappily near as

great as its advantage. I had the less time of trial, but I

believe, while the time lasted, I was tried the more extremely.

For she being so much left to solitude, she came to greet my return

with an increasing fervour that came nigh to overmaster me. These

friendly offers I must barbarously cast back; and my rejection

sometimes wounded her so cruelly that I must unbend and seek to

make it up to her in kindness. So that our time passed in ups and

downs, tiffs and disappointments, upon the which I could almost say

(if it may be said with reverence) that I was crucified.

The base of my trouble was Catriona's extraordinary innocence, at

which I was not so much surprised as filled with pity and

admiration. She seemed to have no thought of our position, no

sense of my struggles; welcomed any mark of my weakness with

responsive joy; and when I was drove again to my retrenchments, did not always dissemble her chagrin. There were times when I have thought to myself, "If she were over head in love, and set her cap to catch me, she would scarce behave much otherwise;" and then I would fall again into wonder at the simplicity of woman, from whom I felt (in these moments) that I was not worthy to be descended.

There was one point in particular on which our warfare turned, and of all things, this was the question of her clothes. My baggage had soon followed me from Rotterdam, and hers from Helvoet. She had now, as it were, two wardrobes; and it grew to be understood between us (I could never tell how) that when she was friendly she would wear my clothes, and when otherwise her own. It was meant for a buffet, and (as it were) the renunciation of her gratitude;

and I felt it so in my bosom, but was generally more wise than to appear to have observed the circumstance.

Once, indeed, I was betrayed into a childishness greater than her own; it fell in this way. On my return from classes, thinking upon her devoutly with a great deal of love and a good deal of annoyance in the bargain, the annoyance began to fade away out of my mind; and spying in a window one of those forced flowers, of which the Hollanders are so skilled in the artifice, I gave way to an impulse and bought it for Catriona. I do not know the name of that flower, but it was of the pink colour, and I thought she would admire the same, and carried it home to her with a wonderful soft heart. I had left her in my clothes, and when I returned to find her all changed and a face to match, I cast but the one look at her from

head to foot, ground my teeth together, flung the window open, and
my flower into the court, and then (between rage and prudence)
myself out of that room again, of which I slammed the door as I
went out.

On the steep stair I came near falling, and this brought me to
myself, so that I began at once to see the folly of my conduct. I
went, not into the street as I had purposed, but to the house
court, which was always a solitary place, and where I saw my flower
(that had cost me vastly more than it was worth) hanging in the
leafless tree. I stood by the side of the canal, and looked upon
the ice. Country people went by on their skates, and I envied
them. I could see no way out of the pickle I was in no way so much
as to return to the room I had just left. No doubt was in my mind

but I had now betrayed the secret of my feelings; and to make things worse, I had shown at the same time (and that with wretched boyishness) incivility to my helpless guest.

I suppose she must have seen me from the open window. It did not seem to me that I had stood there very long before I heard the crunching of footsteps on the frozen snow, and turning somewhat angrily (for I was in no spirit to be interrupted) saw Catriona drawing near. She was all changed again, to the clocked stockings.

"Are we not to have our walk to-day?" said she.

I was looking at her in a maze. "Where is your brooch?" says I.

She carried her hand to her bosom and coloured high. "I will have forgotten it," said she. "I will run upstairs for it quick, and then surely we'll can have our walk?"

There was a note of pleading in that last that staggered me; I had neither words nor voice to utter them; I could do no more than nod by way of answer; and the moment she had left me, climbed into the tree and recovered my flower, which on her return I offered her.

"I bought it for you, Catriona," said I.

She fixed it in the midst of her bosom with the brooch, I could have thought tenderly.

"It is none the better of my handling," said I again, and blushed.

"I will be liking it none the worse, you may be sure of that," said

she.

We did not speak so much that day; she seemed a thought on the reserve, though not unkindly. As for me, all the time of our walking, and after we came home, and I had seen her put my flower into a pot of water, I was thinking to myself what puzzles women were. I was thinking, the one moment, it was the most stupid thing on earth she should not have perceived my love; and the next, that she had certainly perceived it long ago, and (being a wise girl with the fine female instinct of propriety) concealed her knowledge.

We had our walk daily. Out in the streets I felt more safe; I relaxed a little in my guardedness; and for one thing, there was no Heineccius. This made these periods not only a relief to myself, but a particular pleasure to my poor child. When I came back about the hour appointed, I would generally find her ready dressed, and glowing with anticipation. She would prolong their duration to the extreme, seeming to dread (as I did myself) the hour of the return; and there is scarce a field or waterside near Leyden, scarce a street or lane there, where we have not lingered. Outside of these, I bade her confine herself entirely to our lodgings; this in the fear of her encountering any acquaintance, which would have rendered our position very difficult. From the same apprehension I would never suffer her to attend church, nor even go myself; but

made some kind of shift to hold worship privately in our own chamber--I hope with an honest, but I am quite sure with a very much divided mind. Indeed, there was scarce anything that more affected me, than thus to kneel down alone with her before God like man and wife.

One day it was snowing downright hard. I had thought it not possible that we should venture forth, and was surprised to find her waiting for me ready dressed.

"I will not be doing without my walk," she cried. "You are never a good boy, Davie, in the house; I will never be caring for you only in the open air. I think we two will better turn Egyptian and dwell by the roadside."

That was the best walk yet of all of them; she clung near to me in the falling snow; it beat about and melted on us, and the drops stood upon her bright cheeks like tears and ran into her smiling mouth. Strength seemed to come upon me with the sight like a giant's; I thought I could have caught her up and run with her into the uttermost places in the earth; and we spoke together all that time beyond belief for freedom and sweetness.

It was the dark night when we came to the house door. She pressed my arm upon her bosom. "Thank you kindly for these same good hours," said she, on a deep note of her voice.

The concern in which I fell instantly on this address, put me with

the same swiftness on my guard; and we were no sooner in the chamber, and the light made, than she beheld the old, dour, stubborn countenance of the student of Heineccius. Doubtless she was more than usually hurt; and I know for myself, I found it more than usually difficult to maintain any strangeness. Even at the meal, I durst scarce unbuckle and scarce lift my eyes to her; and it was no sooner over than I fell again to my civilian, with more seeming abstraction and less understanding than before. Methought, as I read, I could hear my heart strike like an eight-day clock.

Hard as I feigned to study, there was still some of my eyesight that spilled beyond the book upon Catriona. She sat on the floor by the side of my great mail, and the chimney lighted her up, and shone and blinked upon her, and made her glow and darken through a wonder of fine hues. Now she would be gazing in the fire, and then

again at me; and at that I would be plunged in a terror of myself,
and turn the pages of Heineccius like a man looking for the text in
church.

Suddenly she called out aloud. "O, why does not my father come?"
she cried, and fell at once into a storm of tears.

I leaped up, flung Heineccius fairly in the fire, ran to her side,
and cast an arm around her sobbing body.

She put me from her sharply, "You do not love your friend," says
she. "I could be so happy too, if you would let me!" And then,
"O, what will I have done that you should hate me so?"

"Hate you!" cries I, and held her firm. "You blind less, can you not see a little in my wretched heart? Do you not think when I sit there, reading in that fool-book that I have just burned and be damned to it, I take ever the least thought of any stricken thing but just yourself? Night after night I could have grat to see you sitting there your lone. And what was I to do? You are here under my honour; would you punish me for that? Is it for that that you would spurn a loving servant?"

At the word, with a small, sudden motion, she clung near to me. I raised her face to mine, I kissed it, and she bowed her brow upon my bosom, clasping me tight. I saw in a mere whirl like a man drunken. Then I heard her voice sound very small and muffled in my clothes.

"Did you kiss her truly?" she asked.

There went through me so great a heave of surprise that I was all
shook with it.

"Miss Grant?" I cried, all in a disorder. "Yes, I asked her to
kiss me good-bye, the which she did."

"Ah, well!" said she, "you have kissed me too, at all events."

At the strangeness and sweetness of that word, I saw where we had
fallen; rose, and set her on her feet.

"This will never do," said I. "This will never, never do. O

Catrine, Catrine!" Then there came a pause in which I was debarred

from any speaking. And then, "Go away to your bed," said I. "Go

away to your bed and leave me."

She turned to obey me like a child, and the next I knew of it, had

stopped in the very doorway.

"Good night, Davie!" said she.

"And O, good night, my love!" I cried, with a great outbreak of my

soul, and caught her to me again, so that it seemed I must have

broken her. The next moment I had thrust her from the room, shut

to the door even with violence, and stood alone.

The milk was spilt now, the word was out and the truth told. I had crept like an untrusty man into the poor maid's affections; she was in my hand like any frail, innocent thing to make or mar; and what weapon of defence was left me? It seemed like a symbol that Heineccius, my old protection, was now burned. I repented, yet could not find it in my heart to blame myself for that great failure. It seemed not possible to have resisted the boldness of her innocence or that last temptation of her weeping. And all that I had to excuse me did but make my sin appear the greater--it was upon a nature so defenceless, and with such advantages of the position, that I seemed to have practised.

What was to become of us now? It seemed we could no longer dwell

in the one place. But where was I to go? or where she? Without either choice or fault of ours, life had conspired to wall us together in that narrow place. I had a wild thought of marrying out of hand; and the next moment put it from me with revolt. She was a child, she could not tell her own heart; I had surprised her weakness, I must never go on to build on that surprisal; I must keep her not only clear of reproach, but free as she had come to me.

Down I sat before the fire, and reflected, and repented, and beat my brains in vain for any means of escape. About two of the morning, there were three red embers left and the house and all the city was asleep, when I was aware of a small sound of weeping in the next room. She thought that I slept, the poor soul; she

regretted her weakness--and what perhaps (God help her!) she called
her forwardness--and in the dead of the night solaced herself with
tears. Tender and bitter feelings, love and penitence and pity,
struggled in my soul; it seemed I was under bond to heal that
weeping.

"O, try to forgive me!" I cried out, "try, try to forgive me. Let
us forget it all, let us try if we'll no can forget it!"

There came no answer, but the sobbing ceased. I stood a long while
with my hands still clasped as I had spoken; then the cold of the
night laid hold upon me with a shudder, and I think my reason
reawakened.

"You can make no hand of this, Davie," thinks I. "To bed with you
like a wise lad, and try if you can sleep. To-morrow you may see
your way."