

## CHAPTER XXVI--THE THREESOME

Whether or not I was to be so much blamed, or rather perhaps pitied, I must leave others to judge. My shrewdness (of which I have a good deal, too) seems not so great with the ladies. No doubt, at the moment when I awaked her, I was thinking a good deal of the effect upon James More; and similarly when I returned and we were all sat down to breakfast, I continued to behave to the young lady with deference and distance; as I still think to have been most wise. Her father had cast doubts upon the innocence of my friendship; and these, it was my first business to allay. But there is a kind of an excuse for Catriona also. We had shared in a scene of some tenderness and passion, and given and received caresses: I had thrust her from me with violence; I had called

aloud upon her in the night from the one room to the other; she had passed hours of wakefulness and weeping; and it is not to be supposed I had been absent from her pillow thoughts. Upon the back of this, to be awaked, with unaccustomed formality, under the name of Miss Drummond, and to be thenceforth used with a great deal of distance and respect, led her entirely in error on my private sentiments; and she was indeed so incredibly abused as to imagine me repentant and trying to draw off!

The trouble betwixt us seems to have been this: that whereas I (since I had first set eyes on his great hat) thought singly of James More, his return and suspicions, she made so little of these that I may say she scarce remarked them, and all her troubles and doings regarded what had passed between us in the night before.

This is partly to be explained by the innocence and boldness of her character; and partly because James More, having sped so ill in his interview with me, or had his mouth closed by my invitation, said no word to her upon the subject. At the breakfast, accordingly, it soon appeared we were at cross purposes. I had looked to find her in clothes of her own: I found her (as if her father were forgotten) wearing some of the best that I had bought for her, and which she knew (or thought) that I admired her in. I had looked to find her imitate my affectation of distance, and be most precise and formal; instead I found her flushed and wild-like, with eyes extraordinary bright, and a painful and varying expression, calling me by name with a sort of appeal of tenderness, and referring and deferring to my thoughts and wishes like an anxious or a suspected wife.

But this was not for long. As I behold her so regardless of her own interests, which I had jeopardised and was now endeavouring to recover, I redoubled my own coldness in the manner of a lesson to the girl. The more she came forward, the farther I drew back; the more she betrayed the closeness of our intimacy, the more pointedly civil I became, until even her father (if he had not been so engrossed with eating) might have observed the opposition. In the midst of which, of a sudden, she became wholly changed, and I told myself, with a good deal of relief, that she had took the hint at last.

All day I was at my classes or in quest of my new lodging; and though the hour of our customary walk hung miserably on my hands, I

cannot say but I was happy on the whole to find my way cleared, the girl again in proper keeping, the father satisfied or at least acquiescent, and myself free to prosecute my love with honour. At supper, as at all our meals, it was James More that did the talking. No doubt but he talked well if anyone could have believed him. But I will speak of him presently more at large. The meal at an end, he rose, got his great coat, and looking (as I thought) at me, observed he had affairs abroad. I took this for a hint that I was to be going also, and got up; whereupon the girl, who had scarce given me greeting at my entrance, turned her eyes upon me wide open with a look that bade me stay. I stood between them like a fish out of water, turning from one to the other; neither seemed to observe me, she gazing on the floor, he buttoning his coat: which vastly swelled my embarrassment. This appearance of

indifference argued, upon her side, a good deal of anger very near to burst out. Upon his, I thought it horribly alarming; I made sure there was a tempest brewing there; and considering that to be the chief peril, turned towards him and put myself (so to speak) in the man's hands.

"Can I do anything for YOU, Mr. Drummond?" says I.

He stifled a yawn, which again I thought to be duplicity. "Why, Mr. David," said he, "since you are so obliging as to propose it, you might show me the way to a certain tavern" (of which he gave the name) "where I hope to fall in with some old companions in arms."

There was no more to say, and I got my hat and cloak to bear him  
company.

"And as for you," say he to his daughter, "you had best go to your  
bed. I shall be late home, and EARLY TO BED AND EARLY TO RISE,  
GARS BONNY LASSES HAVE BRIGHT EYES."

Whereupon he kissed her with a good deal of tenderness, and ushered  
me before him from the door. This was so done (I thought on  
purpose) that it was scarce possible there should be any parting  
salutation; but I observed she did not look at me, and set it down  
to terror of James More.

It was some distance to that tavern. He talked all the way of

matters which did not interest me the smallest, and at the door dismissed me with empty manners. Thence I walked to my new lodging, where I had not so much as a chimney to hold me warm, and no society but my own thoughts. These were still bright enough; I did not so much as dream that Catriona was turned against me; I thought we were like folk pledged; I thought we had been too near and spoke too warmly to be severed, least of all by what were only steps in a most needful policy. And the chief of my concern was only the kind of father-in-law that I was getting, which was not at all the kind I would have chosen: and the matter of how soon I ought to speak to him, which was a delicate point on several sides.

In the first place, when I thought how young I was I blushed all over, and could almost have found it in my heart to have desisted; only that if once I let them go from Leyden without explanation, I



might lose her altogether. And in the second place, there was our very irregular situation to be kept in view, and the rather scant measure of satisfaction I had given James More that morning. I concluded, on the whole, that delay would not hurt anything, yet I would not delay too long neither; and got to my cold bed with a full heart.

The next day, as James More seemed a little on the complaining hand in the matter of my chamber, I offered to have in more furniture; and coming in the afternoon, with porters bringing chairs and tables, found the girl once more left to herself. She greeted me on my admission civilly, but withdrew at once to her own room, of which she shut the door. I made my disposition, and paid and dismissed the men so that she might hear them go, when I supposed

she would at once come forth again to speak to me. I waited yet

awhile, then knocked upon her door.

"Catriona!" said I.

The door was opened so quickly, even before I had the word out,

that I thought she must have stood behind it listening. She

remained there in the interval quite still; but she had a look that

I cannot put a name on, as of one in a bitter trouble.

"Are we not to have our walk to-day either?" so I faltered.

"I am thanking you," said she. "I will not be caring much to walk,

now that my father is come home."

"But I think he has gone out himself and left you here alone," said

I.

"And do you think that was very kindly said?" she asked.

"It was not unkindly meant," I replied. "What ails you, Catriona?

What have I done to you that you should turn from me like this?"

"I do not turn from you at all," she said, speaking very carefully.

"I will ever be grateful to my friend that was good to me; I will

ever be his friend in all that I am able. But now that my father

James More is come again, there is a difference to be made, and I

think there are some things said and done that would be better to

be forgotten. But I will ever be your friend in all that I am

able, and if that is not all that . . . . if it is not so much . .

. . Not that you will be caring! But I would not have you think of

me too hard. It was true what you said to me, that I was too young

to be advised, and I am hoping you will remember I was just a

child. I would not like to lose your friendship, at all events."

She began this very pale; but before she was done, the blood was in

her face like scarlet, so that not her words only, but her face and

the trembling of her very hands, besought me to be gentle. I saw,

for the first time, how very wrong I had done to place the child in

that position, where she had been entrapped into a moment's

weakness, and now stood before me like a person shamed.

"Miss Drummond," I said, and stuck, and made the same beginning once again, "I wish you could see into my heart," I cried. "You would read there that my respect is undiminished. If that were possible, I should say it was increased. This is but the result of the mistake we made; and had to come; and the less said of it now the better. Of all of our life here, I promise you it shall never pass my lips; I would like to promise you too that I would never think of it, but it's a memory that will be always dear to me. And as for a friend, you have one here that would die for you."

"I am thanking you," said she.

We stood awhile silent, and my sorrow for myself began to get the upper hand; for here were all my dreams come to a sad tumble, and

my love lost, and myself alone again in the world as at the beginning.

"Well," said I, "we shall be friends always, that's a certain thing. But this is a kind of farewell, too: it's a kind of a farewell after all; I shall always ken Miss Drummond, but this is a farewell to my Catriona."

I looked at her; I could hardly say I saw her, but she seemed to grow great and brighten in my eyes; and with that I suppose I must have lost my head, for I called out her name again and made a step at her with my hands reached forth.

She shrank back like a person struck, her face flamed; but the

blood sprang no faster up into her cheeks, than what it flowed back upon my own heart, at sight of it, with penitence and concern. I found no words to excuse myself, but bowed before her very deep, and went my ways out of the house with death in my bosom.

I think it was about five days that followed without any change. I saw her scarce ever but at meals, and then of course in the company of James More. If we were alone even for a moment, I made it my devoir to behave the more distantly and to multiply respectful attentions, having always in my mind's eye that picture of the girl shrinking and flaming in a blush, and in my heart more pity for her than I could depict in words. I was sorry enough for myself, I need not dwell on that, having fallen all my length and more than all my height in a few seconds; but, indeed, I was near as sorry

for the girl, and sorry enough to be scarce angry with her save by fits and starts. Her plea was good; she had been placed in an unfair position; if she had deceived herself and me, it was no more than was to have been looked for.

And for another thing she was now very much alone. Her father, when he was by, was rather a caressing parent; but he was very easily led away by his affairs and pleasures, neglected her without compunction or remark, spent his nights in taverns when he had the money, which was more often than I could at all account for; and even in the course of these few days, failed once to come to a meal, which Catriona and I were at last compelled to partake of without him. It was the evening meal, and I left immediately that I had eaten, observing I supposed she would prefer to be alone; to



which she agreed and (strange as it may seem) I quite believed her.

Indeed, I thought myself but an eyesore to the girl, and a reminder

of a moment's weakness that she now abhorred to think of. So she

must sit alone in that room where she and I had been so merry, and

in the blink of that chimney whose light had shone upon our many

difficult and tender moments. There she must sit alone, and think

of herself as of a maid who had most unmaidenly proffered her

affections and had the same rejected. And in the meanwhile I would

be alone some other place, and reading myself (whenever I was

tempted to be angry) lessons upon human frailty and female

delicacy. And altogether I suppose there were never two poor fools

made themselves more unhappy in a greater misconception.

As for James, he paid not so much heed to us, or to anything in

nature but his pocket, and his belly, and his own prating talk.

Before twelve hours were gone he had raised a small loan of me;

before thirty, he had asked for a second and been refused. Money

and refusal he took with the same kind of high good nature.

Indeed, he had an outside air of magnanimity that was very well

fitted to impose upon a daughter; and the light in which he was

constantly presented in his talk, and the man's fine presence and

great ways went together pretty harmoniously. So that a man that

had no business with him, and either very little penetration or a

furious deal of prejudice, might almost have been taken in. To me,

after my first two interviews, he was as plain as print; I saw him

to be perfectly selfish, with a perfect innocency in the same; and

I would hearken to his swaggering talk (of arms, and "an old

soldier," and "a poor Highland gentleman," and "the strength of my

country and my friends") as I might to the babbling of a parrot.

The odd thing was that I fancy he believed some part of it himself, or did at times; I think he was so false all through that he scarce knew when he was lying; and for one thing, his moments of dejection must have been wholly genuine. There were times when he would be the most silent, affectionate, clinging creature possible, holding Catriona's hand like a big baby, and begging of me not to leave if I had any love to him; of which, indeed, I had none, but all the more to his daughter. He would press and indeed beseech us to entertain him with our talk, a thing very difficult in the state of our relations; and again break forth in pitiable regrets for his own land and friends, or into Gaelic singing.

"This is one of the melancholy airs of my native land," he would say. "You may think it strange to see a soldier weep, and indeed it is to make a near friend of you," says he. "But the notes of this singing are in my blood, and the words come out of my heart. And when I mind upon my red mountains and the wild birds calling there, and the brave streams of water running down, I would scarce think shame to weep before my enemies." Then he would sing again, and translate to me pieces of the song, with a great deal of boggling and much expressed contempt against the English language. "It says here," he would say, "that the sun is gone down, and the battle is at an end, and the brave chiefs are defeated. And it tells here how the stars see them fleeing into strange countries or lying dead on the red mountain; and they will never more shout the call of battle or wash their feet in the streams of the valley.

But if you had only some of this language, you would weep also because the words of it are beyond all expression, and it is mere mockery to tell you it in English."

Well, I thought there was a good deal of mockery in the business, one way and another; and yet, there was some feeling too, for which I hated him, I think, the worst of all. And it used to cut me to the quick to see Catriona so much concerned for the old rogue, and weeping herself to see him weep, when I was sure one half of his distress flowed from his last night's drinking in some tavern.

There were times when I was tempted to lend him a round sum, and see the last of him for good; but this would have been to see the last of Catriona as well, for which I was scarcely so prepared; and besides, it went against my conscience to squander my good money on

one who was so little of a husband.