

OH! CHRISTINA!

A DIALOGUE FOR TWO LADIES

Miss Purvis—"I wonder where Christina is? Oh, here she comes, learning her lessons."

"I presume," said *Miss Purvis*, slowly and solemnly, "I presume, Christina, that you are taught grammar at school."

"Uh-ha," said Christina lightly, looking up from the latest number of *The Society Novelist*.

Miss Purvis adopted a tone of voice which she understood was quite withering.

"Perhaps I ought to have said, Christina, that an attempt has been made to teach you grammar at school."

"Hooch ay," returned Christina placidly. "Ha'e ye read this yin, auntie?" she inquired, tapping the novelette. "It's a fair corker. It's aboot a bewtyus young leddy that's supposed to ha'e gi'ed her granny poison in her gruel for to get her siller to gi'e to her young man that's a crackt officer in a dashin' regiment. The young man's in debt, ye see, an' she——"

"That will do, Christina. How often have I told you that you are too young to read novels? Give it to me, and attend to what I say." *Miss Purvis* held out her hand for the novelette, which her niece resigned with reluctance.

"Now," continued *Miss Purvis*, "I am going to give you a lesson in grammar. It seems to me that grammar is not properly taught nowadays. When I was a girl at school I got a prize for grammar alone——"

"They're no' sae free wi' the prizes nooadays," remarked Christina.

Miss Purvis rose with dignity, and from a small shelf on the wall took down a slim volume, bound in black cloth and rebacked with strips of linen.

"This," she said "is my old grammar."

"I thocht it was maybe yer prize, auntie," said Christina. "Ye've no' kep' it extra weel."

Miss Purvis ignored the observation. "I intend to give you a short lesson from this book every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening——"

"Murder! polis!" cried Christina.

"Christina! Don't dare to use that expression in my presence!"

"Weel, I've plenty lessons already. An' I've got ma ain grammar," said the girl protestingly. "Gi'e's a chance, auntie."

"My child," returned the spinster more gently, yet still firmly, "you must learn to speak properly. It isn't your shocking expressions alone that grieve me, it is your utter disregard of all the rules of grammar. You may find the lessons hard just now, but you will thank me some day."

"What d'ye want me to dae?" Christina asked in a dull voice.

"I wish you to attend to me. . . . Now we shall begin at the very beginning." Miss Purvis opened the book.

"Haud on a meenute, auntie!"

"Say, 'Wait a minute, please,'" Miss Purvis said patiently.

"Wait a meenute, please," the girl repeated.

"Certainly," said the aunt, with grave politeness.

"What do you wish to say, Christina?"

Christina smiled. "Did ye say I was to get a lesson on Monday, Wednesday, an' Friday?"

"Yes, dear."

"Aweel, this is Thursday!" Christina's tone was triumphant.

"That is true," said Miss Purvis, recovering herself.

"But we may as well make a beginning to-night, and perhaps miss a lesson some night later on. Now, pay attention, Christina. . . . The first thing we have to do is to learn what grammar is. What is grammar?"

"Dear knows," Christina gloomily replied.

"Christina!"

"Ach, weel, I dinna ken, an' I'm no' heedin'," Christina said, with some irritation.

"I ask you once more—what is grammar?" Miss Purvis spoke as sternly as she could. "What is grammar?"

The girl picked up the poker, and began to toy with it.

"Put down the poker at once, Christina!"

Christina dropped it clattering on the fender.

"Pick it up and lay it down quietly," said Miss Purvis.

Christina picked it up and laid it down with a single bang.

"I said quietly, Christina."

"I heard ye."

There was a long silence.

At last Christina picked up the poker again, and laid it down without a sound.

"Onything for peace," she muttered. Then catching sight of her aunt's countenance, which was more sad than angry, she repented. "Tell us what grammar is, auntie," she said respectfully.

The simple soul of Miss Purvis was at once touched and gratified.

"I'll tell you with pleasure, my dear," she said kindly. "And Christina, you must not think that I am going to give you lessons just to give you trouble. It is for your own good. Don't you believe that?"

"Uh-ha," said Christina awkwardly. "I ken ye mean weel."

Miss Purvis nodded cheerfully, and lifted the battered book from her lap.

"Now for our definition of grammar, Christina! Grammar," she began, opening the book, "Grammar is——"

"Grammar, Christina," she resumed feebly, "Grammar is——"

Not for the life of her could she recollect the definition which she had once learned from the now missing page.

Christina regarded her with sympathetic concern.

"Dinna fash yersel'," she said, at last softly. "It's nae odds to me. 'I'm no heedin'. Grammar's jist grammar, an' that's a' about it. Eh?"

Miss Purvis passed a hand over her brow. "It's very extraordinary," she murmured; "but somehow I seem to have forgotten the exact words. Grammar is— Grammar is— No! I cannot remember them." And she fell to gazing at her own name, written on the inside of the cover in a school-girl hand, and followed by the undoubtedly full address of her residence: "Mary Jane Purvis, 12 Blyth Street, Pilrig, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland, Great Britain, Europe, The World."

She could not help smiling at her youthful folly, and almost before she knew, Christina was looking over her shoulder.

"Oh, Jamaica!" exclaimed Christina. "Was't you that drew thur funny wee men, auntie?"

"Funny wee men!" Miss Purvis cried in horror, her eyes lighting on several tiny pencil sketches above and below her name and address.

She made to close the book, but Christina caught hold of it, pulled it from her, skipped across the room in an ecstasy of mirth, and finally fell into a chair with peals of laughter.

"Oh, the funny wee men!" she gasped. "My! it's you for the comic, auntie, it's you for the comic!"

‘Come, my dear,’ said her aunt, laughing in a shamed fashion, ‘give me back the book. I think I can remember the definition now.’

But Christina, turning to the end of the volume, found more sketches.

‘Here yin wi’ bowly legs!’ she announced, ‘an’ here anither wi’——’

‘Christina!’ the spinster remonstrated.

But Christina was beyond control. ‘Wha was Maister M’Fadyen?’ she enquired.

‘Mr M’Fadyen,’ replied Miss Purvis, restraining herself, ‘was my most respected master. He taught English an——’

‘Fine ham! He’s the bowly-leggit yin, an’ ye’ve wrote ablow him, ‘Mr M’Fadyen is a pig!’ My! but it’s you for the comic! Was ye no’ feart to write thur things on yer book, eh?’

Miss Purvis rose, trembling.

‘Christina, give me the book at once.’

The girl looked at her aunt. ‘I didna mean to vex ye, auntie,’ she said remorsefully, and did as requested.

‘Christina,’ continued Miss Purvis, her anger evaporating at once. ‘I’m thinking of doing some tidying up in the shop before bed-time. Would you like to help me?’

‘Fine!’

‘And,’ added Miss Purvis, with an effort, ‘We’ll begin our grammar lesson in earnest next Monday.’

‘Hooch ay!’ said Christina cheerfully. ‘But did you no’ think grammar lessons was rubbidge when you was at the schule, auntie?’ she asked in a confidential whisper.

‘*Were,*’ corrected Miss Purvis. ‘Grammar lessons *were* rubbish, Christina,’ she said, never suspecting the trap set for her.

‘I thoct that!’ cried Christina. ‘My, it’s you for the comic!’

"Christina I have been thinking lately that it would be very pleasant if you were to read something aloud to me every evening, my dear."

"Right you are!" said Christina, opening the novelette.

"No; not that kind of reading. I mean good reading. Now, if you go to the shelf, you will find a little book—a little green book—called *Gems of Poesie*. You might bring it to me."

Christina rose without much eagerness, and brought her aunt the volume mentioned.

"I got this as a prize when I was at school, Christina."

"It's no much o' a prize; what did ye get it for? Punctuality, eh?"

"For good conduct, Christina."

"Come on, noo! Ye're trying to cod me!"

"To what?"

"Och, never heed. I beg yer paurdon. I see 'for good conduct' on the front page, richt enough. Is't poetry?"

"The finest of poetry. That is why it is called *Gems of Poesie*. Now, what will you read to me?"

"You read first, auntie," said Christina backing away.

"Certainly," said Miss Purvis agreeably. She turned over the pages. "Ah! here is a beautiful poem. Sit down, Christina, and pay great attention."

Christina sat down and began to whistle softly.

"Hush! Listen to this beautiful poem. It is by William Wordsworth. It is called 'We are Seven.'" Miss Purvis emitted several delicate coughs.

"Did you say seven or seventy, auntie?" inquired her niece.

"Seven, Christina. 'We are Seven.' Now attend!—

I met a little cottage girl:
She was eight years old, she said——"

"Och, I ken that!" Christina interrupted. "It was in ma last year's reader. I ken it fine."

"Then, perhaps since you know it so well," said Miss Purvis, somewhat snappily, "you can tell me what comes after the two lines I have just read."

"Hooch ay!—

I met a little cottage girl,
She was eight years old, she said;
She took her little porringer
An' stuck it on her head!"

And Christina laughed heartily.

"Christina!" gasped her aunt. "I'm surprised at you!"

"That was the wey yin o' the lassies used to say it. Is there nae love-poetry in that prize o' yours?"

Miss Purvis ignored the inquiry. "If you are going to make a mock of these beautiful verses I shall not read another line."

"Oh, read anither, please, auntie."

After some hesitation the spinster began—

"Oft have I heard of Lucy Gray——"

"Same here," said Christina, "but fire awa'."

Miss Purvis shut the book, laid it aside, and resumed her knitting.

A minute went slowly past.

"Auntie!"

"Yes?" very coldly.

"Auntie!"

"What is it?"

"I— I didna mean to offend ye. Gi's anither chance. I couldna help kennin' about the little cottage girl an' Miss Gray. They were baith in ma lesson book. Read anither, if ye please, auntie. I'll haud my tongue this time."

Miss Purvis relaxed from the stiff attitude she had assumed

"Well, Christina, if you will promise not to interrupt, I might read you 'Lord Ullin's Daughter.' It is by Thomas Campbell——"

"That's the name o' the sclater in Kilmabeg."

"Never mind that. 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' is an exceedingly fine poem."

"Was she young or auld?"

"She was young——"

"As young as me?"

"Oh, no; she was a young lady who ran away with her lover——"

"Her lover! Oh, my! Please read it, auntie," cried Christina, and, curling one leg round the other, settled herself to listen.

Miss Purvis was frankly delighted.

"Now, I'm sure that such a poem is far more worth reading than trashy novels, my dear. How would you like to learn 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' by heart?"

Christina smiled doubtfully.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," cried Miss Purvis, with a sudden inspiration. "If you can repeat the poem correctly to me by Thursday night, I'll take you to the moonlight cruise on Friday—provided that the weather is fine. Now, what do you say to that?"

The girl jumped up. "I'm on!" she shouted, and fell upon her aunt's neck.

Miss Purvis—"Well now, you go and learn the poem, Christina."

"Auntie, d'ye think it'll be fine on Friday?"

"Friday? Oh yes—yes, I hope it will be fine."

"I'm thinkin' it'll be a queer suck for me if Friday's wat. I canna unlearn the pome, Auntie!"

J. J. BELL.

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