

## CHAPTER XXVI

The doctor rode up the climbing moorland road the next morning and paid a long visit to his patient. He was not portentous in manner and he did not confine his conversation to the subject of symptoms. He however included something of subtle cross examination in his friendly talk. The girl's thinness, her sometimes panting breath and the hollow eyes made larger by the black ring of her lashes startled him on first sight of her. He found that the smallness of her appetite presented to Dowie a grave problem.

"I'm trying to coax good milk into her by degrees. She does her best. But she can't eat." When they were alone she said, "I shall keep her windows open and make her rest on her sofa near them. I shall try to get her to walk out with me if her strength will let her. We can go slowly and she'll like the moor. If we could stop the awful crying in the night-- It's been shaking her to pieces for weeks and weeks-- It's the kind that there's no checking when it once begins. It's beyond her poor bit of strength to hold it back. I saw how hard she tried--for my sake. It's the crying that's most dangerous of all."

"Nothing could be worse," the doctor said and he went away with a grave face, a deeply troubled man.

When Dowie went back to the Tower room she found Robin standing at a

window looking out on the moorside. She turned and spoke and Dowie saw that intuition had told her what had been talked about.

"I will try to be good, Dowie," she said. "But it comes--it comes because--suddenly I know all over again that I can never see him any more. If I could only see him--even a long way off! But suddenly it all comes back that I can never see him again--Never!"

Later she begged Dowie not to come to her in the night if she heard sounds in her room.

"It will not hurt you so much if you don't see me," she said. "I'm used to being by myself. When I was at Eaton Square I used to hide my face deep in the pillow and press it against my mouth. No one heard. But no one was listening as you will be. Don't come in, Dowie darling. Please don't!"

All she wanted, Dowie found out as the days went by, was to be quiet and to give no trouble. No other desires on earth had been left to her. Her life had not taught her to want many things. And now--:

"Oh! please don't be unhappy! If I could only keep you from being unhappy--until it is over!" she broke out all unconsciously one day. And then was smitten to the heart by the grief in Dowie's face.

That was the worst of it all and sometimes caused Dowie's desperate hope

and courage to tremble on the brink of collapse. The child was thinking that before her lay the time when it would be "all over."

A patient who held to such thoughts as her hidden comfort did not give herself much chance.

Sometimes she lay for long hours on the sofa by the open window but sometimes a restlessness came upon her and she wandered about the empty rooms of the little castle as though she were vaguely searching for something which was not there. Dowie furtively followed her at a distance knowing that she wanted to be alone. The wide stretches of the moor seemed to draw her. At times she stood gazing at them out of a window, sometimes she sat in a deep window seat with her hands lying listlessly upon her lap but with her eyes always resting on the farthest line of the heather. Once she sat thus so long that Dowie crept out of the empty stone chamber where she had been waiting and went and stood behind her. At first Robin did not seem conscious of her presence but presently she turned her head. There was a faintly bewildered look in her eyes.

"I don't know why--when I look at the edge where the hill seems to end--it always seems as if there might be something coming from the place we can't see--" she said in a helpless-sounding voice. "We can only see the sky behind as if the world ended there. But I feel as if something might be coming from the other side. The horizon always looks

like that--now. There must be so much--where there seems to be nothing more. I want to go."

She tried to smile a little as though at her own childish fancifulness but suddenly a heavy shining tear fell on her hand. And her head dropped and she murmured, "I'm sorry, Dowie," as if it were a fault.

The Maccaurs watched her from afar with their own special order of silent interest. But the sight of the slowly flitting and each day frailer young body began to move them even to the length of low-uttered expression of fear and pity.

"Some days she fair frights me passing by so slow and thin in her bit black dress," Maggy said. "She minds me o' a lost birdie fluttering about wi' a broken wing. She's gey young she is, to be a widow woman--left like that."

The doctor came up the moor road every day and talked more to Dowie than to his patient. As the weeks went by he could not sanely be hopeful. Dowie's brave face seemed to have lost some of its colour at times. She asked eager questions but his answers did not teach her any new thing. Yet he was of a modern school.

"There was a time, Mrs. Dowson," he said, "when a doctor believed--or thought he believed--that healing was carried in bottles. For thinking men that time has passed. I know very little more of such a case as this

than you know yourself. You are practical and kind and watchful. You are doing all that can be done. So am I. But I am sorry to say that it seems as if only a sort of miracle--! If--as you said once--she would 'wake up'--there would be an added chance."

"Yes, sir," Dowie answered. "If she would. But it seems as if her mind has stopped thinking about things that are to come. You see it in her face. She can only remember. The days are nothing but dreams to her."

Dowie had written weekly letters to Lord Coombe in accordance with his request. She wrote a good clear hand and her method was as clear as her calligraphy. He invariably gathered from her what he most desired to know and learned that her courageous good sense was plainly to be counted upon. From the first her respectful phrases had not attempted to conceal from him the anxiety she had felt.

"It was the way she looked and that I hadn't expected to see such a change, that took the strength out of me the first time I saw her. And what your lordship had told me. It seemed as if the two things together were too much for her to face. I watch over her day and night though I try to hide from her that I watch so close. If she could be made to eat something, and to sleep, and not to break her little body to pieces with those dreadful fits of crying, there would be something to hold on to. But I shall hold on to her, my lord, whether there is anything to hold on to or not."

He knew she would hold on but as the weeks passed and she faithfully told him what record the days held he saw that in each she felt that she had less and less to grasp. And then came a letter which plainly could not conceal ominous discouragement in the face of symptoms not to be denied--increasing weakness, even more rapid loss of weight, and less sleep and great exhaustion after the convulsions of grief.

"It couldn't go on and not bring on the worst. It is my duty to warn your lordship," the letter ended.

For she had not "wakened up" though somehow Dowie had gone on from day

to day wistfully believing that it would be only "Nature" that she should. Dowie had always believed strongly in "Nature." But at last there grew within her mind the fearsome thought that somehow the very look of her charge was the look of a young thing who had done with Nature--and between whom and Nature the link had been broken.

There were beginning to be young lambs on the hillside and Jock Macaur was tending them and their mothers with careful shepherding. Once or twice he brought a newborn and orphaned one home wrapped in his plaid and it was kept warm by the kitchen fire and fed with milk by Maggy to whom motherless lambs were an accustomed care.

There was no lamb in his plaid on the afternoon when he startled Dowie by suddenly appearing at the door of the room where she sat sewing-- It

was a thing which had never happened before. He had kept as closely to his own part of the place as if there had been no means of egress from the rooms he and Maggy lived in. His face sometimes wore an anxious look when he brought back a half-dead lamb, and now though his plaid was empty his weather-beaten countenance had trouble in it--so much trouble that Dowie left her work quickly.

"I was oot o' the moor and I heard a lamb cryin'," he said uncertainly. "I thought it had lost its mither. It was cryin' pitifu'. I searched an' couldna find it. But the cryin' went on. It was waur than a lamb's cry--It was waur--" he spoke in reluctant jerks. "I followed until I cam' to it. There was a cluster o' young rowans with broom and gorse thick under them. The cryin' was there. It was na a lamb cryin'. It was the young leddy--lyin' twisted on the heather. I daurna speak to her. It was no place for a man body. I cam' awa' to ye, Mistress Dowson. You an' Maggy maun go to her. I'll follow an' help to carry her back, if ye need me."

Dowie's colour left her.

"I thought she was asleep on her bed," she said. "Sometimes she slips away alone and wanders about a bit. But not far and I always follow her. To-day I didn't know."

\* \* \* \* \*

The sound like a lost lamb's crying had ceased when they reached her. The worst was over but she lay on the heather shut in by the little thicket of gorse and broom--white and with heavily closed lids. She had not wandered far and had plainly crept into the enclosing growth for utter seclusion. Finding it she had lost hold and been overwhelmed. That was all. But as Jock Macaur carried her back to Darreuch, Dowie followed with slow heavy feet and heart. They took her to the Tower room and laid her on her sofa because she had faintly whispered.

"Please let me lie by the window," as they mounted the stone stairs.

"Open it wide," she whispered again when Macaur had left them alone.

"Are you--are you short of breath, my dear?" Dowie asked opening the window very wide indeed.

"No," still in a whisper and with closed eyes. "But--when I am not so tired--I want to--look--"

She was silent for a few moments and Dowie stood by her side and watched her.

--At the end of the heather," the faint voice ended its sentence after a pause. "I feel as if--something is there." She opened her eyes, "Something--I don't know what. 'Something.' Dowie!" frightened, "Are you--crying?"



Dowie frankly and helplessly took out a handkerchief and sat down beside her. She had never done such a thing before.

"You cry yourself, my lamb," she said. "Let Dowie cry a bit."