

CHAPTER XXVII

And the next morning came the "waking up" for which Dowie had so long waited and prayed. But not as Dowie had expected it or in the way she had thought "Nature."

She had scarcely left her charge during the night though she had pretended that she had slept as usual in an adjoining room. She stole in and out, she sat by the bed and watched the face on the pillow and thanked God that--strangely enough--the child slept. She had not dared to hope that she would sleep, but before midnight she became still and fell into a deep quiet slumber. It seemed deep, for she ceased to stir and it was so quiet that once or twice Dowie became a little anxious and bent over her to look at her closely and listen to her breathing. But, though the small white face was always a touching sight, it was no whiter than usual and her breathing though low and very soft was regular.

"But where the strength's to come from the good God alone knows!" was Dowie's inward sigh.

The clock had just struck one when she leaned forward again. What she saw would not have disturbed her if she had not been overstrung by long anxiety. But now--after the woeful day--in the middle of the night with the echo of the clock's solitary sound still in the solitary room--in

the utter stillness of moor and castle emptiness she was startled almost to fright. Something had happened to the pitiful face. A change had come over it--not a change which had stolen gradually but a change which was actually sudden. It was smiling--it had begun to smile that pretty smile which was a very gift of God in itself.

Dowie drew back and put her hand over her mouth. "Oh!" she said "Can she be--going--in her sleep?"

But she was not going. Even Dowie's fright saw that in a few moments more. Was it possible that a mist of colour was stealing over the whiteness--or something near colour? Was the smile deepening and growing brighter? Was that caught breath something almost like a little sob of a laugh--a tiny ghost of a sound more like a laugh than any other sound on earth?

Dowie slid down upon her knees and prayed devoutly--clutching at the robe of pity and holding hard--as women did in crowds nearly two thousand years ago.

"Oh, Lord Jesus," she was breathing behind the hands which hid her face--"if she can dream what makes her smile like that, let her go on, Lord Jesus--let her go on."

When she rose to her chair again and seated herself to watch it almost awed, it did not fade--the smile. It settled into a still radiance and

stayed. And, fearful of the self-deception of longing as she was, Dowie could have sworn as the minutes passed that the mist of colour had been real and remained also and even made the whiteness a less deathly thing. And there was such a naturalness in the strange smiling that it radiated actual peace and rest and safety. When the clock struck three and there was no change and still the small face lay happy upon the pillow Dowie at last even felt that she dare steal into her own room and lie down for a short rest. She went very shortly thinking she would return in half an hour at most, but the moment she lay down, her tired eyelids dropped and she slept as she had not slept since her first night at Darreuch Castle.

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When she wakened it was not with a start or sense of anxiety even though she found herself sitting up in the broad morning light. She wondered at her own sense of being rested and really not afraid. She told herself that it was all because of the smile she had left on Robin's face and remembered as her own eyes closed.

She got up and stole to the partly opened door of the next room and looked in. All was quite still. Robin herself seemed very still but she was awake. She lay upon her pillow with a long curly plait trailing over one shoulder--and she was smiling as she had smiled in her sleep--softly--wonderfully. "I thank God for that," Dowie thought as she went in.

The next moment her heart was in her throat.

"Dowie," Robin said and she spoke as quietly as Dowie had ever heard her speak in all their life together, "Donal came."

"Did he, my lamb?" said Dowie going to her quickly but trying to speak as naturally herself. "In a dream?"

Robin slowly shook her head.

"I don't think it was a dream. It wasn't like one. I think he was here. God sometimes lets them come--just sometimes--doesn't he? Since the War there have been so many stories about things like that. People used to come to see the Duchess and sit and whisper about them. Lady Maureen Darcy used to go to a place where there was a woman--quite a poor woman--who went into a kind of sleep and gave her messages from her husband who was killed at Liège only a few weeks after they were married. The woman said he was in the room and Lady Maureen was quite sure it was true because he told her true things no one knew but themselves. She said it kept her from going crazy. It made her quite happy."

"I've heard of such things," said Dowie, valiantly determined to keep her voice steady and her expression unalarmed. "Perhaps they are true. Now that the other world is so crowded with those that found themselves there sudden--perhaps they are crowded so close to earth that they try

to speak across to the ones that are longing to hear them. It might be. Lie still, my dear, and I'll bring you a cup of good hot milk to drink. Do you think you could eat a new-laid egg and a shred of toast?"

"I will," answered Robin. "I will."

She sat up in bed and the faint colour on her cheeks deepened and spread like a rosy dawn. Dowie saw it and tried not to stare. She must not seem to watch her too fixedly--whatsoever alarming thing was happening.

"I can't tell you all he said to me," she went on softly. "There was too much that only belonged to us. He stayed a long time. I felt his arms holding me. I looked into the blue of his eyes--just as I always did. He was not dead. He was not an angel. He was Donal. He laughed and made me laugh too. He could not tell me now where he was. There was a reason. But he said he could come because we belonged to each other--because we loved each other so. He said beautiful things to me--" She began to speak very slowly as if in careful retrospection. "Some of them were like the things Lord Coombe said. But when Donal said them they seemed to go into my heart and I understood them. He told me things about England--needing new souls and new strong bodies--he loved England. He said beautiful--beautiful things."

Dowie made a magnificent effort to keep her eyes clear and her look straight. It was a soldierly thing to do, for there had leaped into her mind memories of the fears of the great physician who had taken charge

of poor young Lady Maureen.

"I am sure he would do that--sure of it," she said without a tremor in her voice. "It's only things like that he's thought of his whole life through. And surely it was love that brought him back to you--both."

She wondered if she was not cautious enough in saying the last word. But her fear was a mistake.

"Yes--both," Robin gave back with a new high bravery. "Both," she repeated. "He will never be dead again. And I shall never be dead. When I could not think, it used to seem as if I must be--perhaps I was beginning to go crazy like poor Lady Maureen. I have come alive."

"Yes, my lamb," answered Dowie with fine courage. "You look it. We'll get you ready for your breakfast now. I will bring you the egg and toast--a nice crisp bit of hot buttered toast."

"Yes," said Robin. "He said he would come again and I know he will."

Dowie bustled about with inward trembling. Whatsoever strange thing had happened perhaps it had awakened the stunned instinct in the girl--perhaps some change had begun to take place and she would eat the bit of food. That would be sane and healthy enough in any case. The test would be the egg and the crisp toast--the real test. Sometimes a patient had a moment of uplift and then it died out too quickly to do

good.

But when she had been made ready and the tray was brought Robin ate the small breakfast without shrinking from it, and the slight colour did not die away from her cheek. The lost look was in her eyes no more, her voice had a new tone. The exhaustion of the night before seemed mysteriously to have disappeared. Her voice was not tired and she herself was curiously less languid. Dowie could scarcely believe the evidence of her ears when, in the course of the morning, she suggested that they should go out together.

"The moor is beautiful to-day," she said. "I want to know it better. It seems as if I had never really looked at anything."

One of the chief difficulties Dowie often found she was called upon to brace herself to bear was that in these days she looked so pathetically like a child. Her small heart-shaped face had always been rather like a baby's, but in these months of her tragedy, her youngness at times seemed almost cruel. If she had been ten years old she could scarcely have presented herself to the mature vision as a more touching thing. It seemed incredible to Dowie that she should have so much of life and suffering behind and before her and yet look like that. It was not only the soft curve and droop of her mouth and the lift of her eyes--there was added to these something as indescribable as it was heart-moving. It was the thing before which Donal--boy as he was--had trembled with love and joy. He had felt its tenderest sacredness when he had knelt before

her in the Wood and kissed her feet, almost afraid of his own voice when he poured forth his pleading. There were times when Dowie was obliged to hold herself still for a moment or so lest it should break down her determined calm.

It was to be faced this morning when Robin came down in her soft felt hat and short tweed skirt and coat for walking. Dowie saw Mrs. Macaur staring through a window at her, with slightly open mouth, as if suddenly struck with amazement which held in it a touch of shock. Dowie herself was obliged to make an affectionate joke.

"Your short skirts make such a child of you that I feel as if I was taking you out to walk in the park, and I must hold your hand," she said.

Robin glanced down at herself.

"They do make people look young," she agreed. "The Lady Downstairs looked quite like a little girl when she went out in them. But it seems so long since I was little."

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She walked with Dowie bravely though they did not go far from the Castle. It happened that they met the doctor driving up the road which twisted in and out among the heath and gorse. For a moment he looked

startled but he managed to control himself quickly and left his dogcart to his groom so that he might walk with them. His eyes--at once grave and keen--scarcely left her as he strolled by her side.

When they reached the Castle he took Dowie aside and talked anxiously with her.

"There is a change," he said. "Has anything happened which might have raised her spirits? It looks like that kind of thing. She mustn't do too much. There is always that danger to guard against in a case of sudden mental stimulation."

"She had a dream last night," Dowie began.

"A dream!" he exclaimed disturbedly. "What kind of dream?"

"The dream did it. I saw the change the minute I went to her this morning," Dowie answered. "Last night she looked like a dying thing--after one of her worst breakdowns. This morning she lay there peaceful and smiling and almost rosy. She had dreamed that she saw her husband and talked to him. She believed it wasn't a common dream--that it wasn't a dream at all. She believes he really came to her."

Doctor Benton rubbed his chin and there was serious anxiety in the movement. Lines marked themselves on his forehead.

"I am not sure I like that--not at all sure. In fact I'm sure I don't like it. One can't say what it may lead to. It would be better not to encourage her to dwell on it, Mrs. Dowson."

"The one thing that's in my mind, sir," Dowie's respectfulness actually went to the length of hinting at firmness--"is that it's best not to discourage her about anything just now. It brought a bit of natural colour to her cheeks and it made her eat her breakfast--which she hasn't been able to do before. They must be fed, sir," with the seriousness of experience. "You know that better than I do."

"Yes--yes. They must have food."

"She suggested the going out herself," said Dowie. "I'd thought she'd be too weak and listless to move. And they ought to have exercise."

"They must have exercise," agreed Doctor Benton, but he still rubbed his chin. "Did she seem excited or feverish?"

"No, sir, she didn't. That was the strange thing. It was me that was excited though I kept quiet on the outside. At first it frightened me. I was afraid of--what you're afraid of, sir. It was only her not being excited--and speaking in her own natural voice that helped me to behave as sense told me I ought to. She was happy--that's what she looked and what she was."

She stopped a moment here and looked at the man. Then she decided to go on because she saw chances that he might, to a certain degree, understand.

"When she told me that he was not dead when she saw him, she said that she was not dead any more herself--that she had come alive. If believing it will keep her feeling alive, sir, wouldn't you say it would be a help?"

The Doctor had ceased rubbing his chin but he looked deeply thoughtful. He had several reasons for thoughtfulness in connection with the matter. In the present whirl of strange happenings in a mad war-torn world, circumstances which would once have seemed singular seemed so no longer because nothing was any longer normal. He realised that he had been by no means told all the details surrounding this special case, but he had understood clearly that it was of serious importance that this girlish creature's child should be preserved. He wondered how much more the finely mannered old family nurse knew than he did.

"Her vitality must be kept up-- Nothing could be worse than inordinate grief," he said. "We must not lose any advantage. But she must be closely watched."

"I'll watch her, sir," answered Dowie. "And every order you give I'll obey like clockwork. Might I take the liberty of saying that I believe it'll be best if you don't mention the dream to her!"

"Perhaps you are right. On the whole I think you are. It's not wise to pay attention to hallucinations."

He did not mention the dream to Robin, but his visit was longer than usual. After it he drove down the moor thinking of curious things. The agonised tension of the war, he told himself, seemed to be developing new phases--mental, nervous, psychic, as well as physiological. What unreality--or previously unknown reality--were they founded upon? It was curious how much one had begun to hear of telepathy and visions. He himself had been among the many who had discussed the psychopathic condition of Lady Maureen Darcy, whose black melancholia had been dispersed like a cloud after her visits to a little sewing woman who lived over an oil dealer's shop in the Seven Sisters Road. He also was a war tortured man mentally and the torments he must conceal beneath a steady professional calm had loosened old shackles.

"Good God! If there is help of any sort for such horrors of despair let them take it where they find it," he found himself saying aloud to the emptiness of the stretches of heath and bracken. "The old nurse will watch."

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Dowie watched faithfully. She did not speak of the dream, but as she went about doing kindly and curiously wise things she never lost sight

of any mood or expression of Robin's and they were all changed ones. On the night after she had "come alive" they talked together in the Tower room somewhat as they had talked on the night of their arrival.

A wind was blowing on the moor and making strange sounds as it whirled round the towers and seemed to cry at the narrow windows. By the fire there was drawn a broad low couch heaped with large cushions, and Robin lay upon them looking into the red hollow of coal.

"You told me I had something to think of," she said. "I am thinking now. I shall always be thinking."

"That's right, my dear," Dowie answered her with sane kindness.

"I will do everything you tell me, Dowie. I will not cry any more and I will eat what you ask me to eat. I will sleep as much as I can and I will walk every day. Then I shall get strong."

"That's the way to look at things. It's a brave way," Dowie answered.

"What we want most is strength and good spirits, my dear."

"That was one of the things Donal said," Robin went on quite naturally and simply. "He told me I need not be ill. He said a rose was not ill when a new bud was blooming on it. That was one of the lovely things he told me. There were so many."

"It was a beautiful thing, to be sure," said Dowie.

To her wholly untranscendental mind, long trained by patent facts and duties, any suggestion of the occult was vaguely ominous. She had spent her early years among people who regarded such things with terror. In the stories of her youth those who saw visions usually died or met with calamity. That their visions were, as a rule, gruesome and included pale and ghastly faces and voices hollow with portent was now a supporting recollection. "He was not dead. He was not an angel. He was Donal," Robin had said in her undoubting voice. And she had stood the test--that real test of earthly egg and buttered toast. Dowie was a sensible and experienced creature and had been prepared before the doctor's suggestion to lose no advantage. If the child began to sleep and eat her food, and the fits of crying could be controlled, why should she not be allowed to believe what supported her? When her baby came she'd forget less natural things. Dowie knew how her eyes would look as she bent over it--how they would melt and glow and brood and how her childish mouth would quiver with wonder and love. Who knew but that the Lord himself had sent her that dream to comfort her because she had always been such a loving, lonely little thing with nothing but tender goodness in her whole body and soul? She had never had an untender thought of anybody but for that queer dislike to his lordship-- And when you came to think of what had been forced into her innocent mind about him, who wondered?-- And she was beginning to see that differently too, in these strange days. She was nothing now but softness and sorrow. It seemed only right that some pity should be shown to her.

Dowie noticed that she did not stay up late that night and that when she went to bed she knelt a long time by her bedside saying her prayers. Oh! What a little girl she looked, Dowie thought,--in her white night gown with her long curly plait hanging down her back tied with a blue ribbon! And she to be the mother of a child--that was no more than one herself!

When all the prayers were ended and Dowie came back to the room to tuck her in, her face was marvellously still-looking and somehow remotely sweet as if she had not quite returned from some place of wonderful calm.

She nestled into the softness of the pillow with her hand under her cheek and her lids dropped quietly at once.

"Good night, Dowie dear," she murmured. "I am going to sleep."

To sleep in a moment or so Dowie saw she went--with the soft suddenness of a baby in its cradle.

But it could not be said that Dowie slept soon. She found herself lying awake listening to the wind whirling and crying round the tower. The sound had something painfully human in it which made her conscious of a shivering inward tremor.

"It sounds as if something--that has been hurt and is cold and lonely

wants to get in where things are human and warm," was her troubled thought.

It was a thought so troubled that she could not rest and in spite of her efforts to lie still she turned from side to side listening in an abnormal mood.

"I'm foolish," she whispered. "If I don't get hold of myself I shall lose my senses. I don't feel like myself. Would it be too silly if I got up and opened a tower window?"

She actually got out of her bed quietly and crept to the tower room and opened one. The crying wind rushed in and past her with a soft cold sweep. It was not a bitter wind, only a piteous one.

"It's--it's come in," she said, quaking a little, and went back to her bed.

When she awakened in the morning she realised that she must have fallen asleep as quickly as Robin had, for she remembered nothing after her head had touched the pillow. The wind had ceased and the daylight found her herself again.

"It was silly," she said, "but it did something for me as silliness will sometimes. Walls and shut windows are nothing to them. If he came, he came without my help. But it pacified the foolish part of me."

She went into Robin's room with a sense of holding her breath, but firm in her determination to breathe and speak as a matter of fact woman should.

Robin was standing at her window already dressed in the short skirt and soft hat. She turned and showed that her thin small face was radiant.

"I have been out on the moor. I wakened just after sunrise, and I heard a skylark singing high up in the sky. I went out to listen and say my prayers," she said. "You don't know what the moor is like, Dowie, until you stand out on it at sunrise."

She met Dowie's approach half way and slipped her arms round her neck and kissed her several times. Dowie had for a moment quailed before a thought that she looked too much like a young angel, but her arms held close and her kisses were warm and human.

"Well, well!" Dowie's pats on her shoulder took courage. "That's a good sign--to get up and dress yourself and go into the open air. It would give you an appetite if anything would."

"Perhaps I can eat two eggs this morning," with a pretty laugh.

"Wouldn't that be wonderful?" and she took off her hat and laid it aside on the lounge as if she meant to go out again soon.

Dowie tried not to watch her too obviously, but she could scarcely keep her eyes from her. She knew that she must not ask her questions at the risk of "losing an advantage." She had, in fact, never been one of the women who must ask questions. There was however something eerie in remembering her queer feeling about the crying of the wind, silly though she had decided it to be, and something which made it difficult to go about all day knowing nothing but seeing strange signs. She had been more afraid for Robin than she would have admitted even to herself. And when the girl sat down at the table by the window overlooking the moor and ate her breakfast without effort or distaste, it was far from easy to look quite as if she had been doing it every morning.

Then there was the look in her eyes, as if she was either listening to something or remembering it. She went out twice during the day and she carried it with her even when she talked of other things. Dowie saw it specially when she lay down on the big lounge to rest. But she did not lie down often or long at a time. It was as though she was no longer unnaturally tired and languid. She did little things for herself, moving about naturally, and she was pleased when a messenger brought flowers, explaining that his lordship had ordered that they should be sent every other day from the nearest town. She spent an hour filling crystal bowls and clear slim vases with them and the look never left her.

But she said nothing until she went out with Dowie at sunset. They only walked for a short time and they did not keep to the road but went on to the moor itself and walked among the heath and bracken. After a little

while they sat down and gave themselves up to the vast silence with here and there the last evening twitter of a bird in it. The note made the stillness greater. The flame of the sky was beyond compare and, after gazing at it for a while, Dowie turned a slow furtive look on Robin.

But Robin was looking at her with clear soft naturalness--loving and untroubled and kindly sweet.

"He came back, Dowie. He came again," she said. And her voice was still as natural as the good woman had ever known it.