

CHAPTER XXXIV

This was what she had been thinking of. This had been the meaning of the tender thought for him he had recognised uncomprehendingly in her look: it had been the cause of her desire to enfold him in healing and restful peace. When he had felt that she drew so close to him that they were scarcely separated by physical being, it was because she had suddenly awakened to a new comprehension. The awakening must have been a sudden one. He had known at the church that it had taken all her last remnant of strength to aid her to lay her cold hand in his and he had seen shrinking terror in her eyes when she lifted them to his as he put on her wedding ring. He had also known perfectly what memory had beset her at the moment and he had thrown all the force of his will into the look which had answered her--the look which had told her that he understood. Yes, the awakening must have been sudden and he asked himself how it had come about--what had made all clear?

He had never been a mystic, but during the cataclysmic hours through which men were living, many of them stunned into half blindness and then shocked into an unearthly clarity of thought and sight, he had come upon previously unheard of signs of mysticism on all sides. People talked--most of them blunderingly--of things they would not have mentioned without derision in pre-war days. Premonitions, dreams,

visions, telepathy were not by any means always flouted with raucous laughter and crude witticisms. Even unorthodox people had begun to hold tentatively religious views.

Was he becoming a mystic at last? As he walked by Robin's side on the moor, as he dined with her, talked with her, sat and watched her at her sewing, more than ever each hour he believed that her dream was no ordinary fantasy of the unguided brain. She had in some strange way seen Donal. Where--how--where he had come from--where he returned after their meeting--he ceased to ask himself. What did it matter after all if souls could so comfort and sustain each other? The blessedness of it was enough.

He wondered as Dowie had done whether she would reveal anything to him or remain silent. There was no actual reason why she should speak. No remotest reference to the subject would come from himself.

It was in truth a new planet he lived on during this marvel of a week. The child was wonderful, he told himself. He had not realised that a feminine creature could be so exquisitely enfolding and yet leave a man so wholly free. She was not always with him, but her spirit was so near that he began to feel that no faintest wish could form itself within his mind without her mysteriously knowing of its existence and realising it while she seemed to make no effort. She did pretty things for him and her gladness in his pleasure in them touched him to the core. He also knew that she wished him to see that she was well and strong and never

tired or languid. There was, perhaps, one thing she could do for him and she wanted to prove to him that he might be sure she would not fail him. He allowed her to perform small services for him because of the dearness of the smile it brought to her lips--almost a sort of mothering smile. It was really true that she wanted to be his little slave and he had imagination enough to guess that she comforted herself by saying the thing to herself again and again; childlike and fantastic as it was.

She taught him to sleep as he had not slept for a year; she gave him back the power to look at his food without a sense of being repelled; she restored to him the ability to sit still in a chair as though it were meant to rest in. His nerves relaxed; his deadly fatigue left him; and it was the quiet nearness of Robin that had done it. He felt younger and knew that on his return to London he should be more inclined to disbelieve exaggerated rumours than to believe them.

On the evening before he left Darreuch they sat at the Tower window again. She did not take her sewing from its basket, but sat very quietly for a while looking at the purple folds of moor.

"You will go away very early in the morning," she began at last.

"Yes. You must promise me that you will not awaken."

"I do not waken early. If I do I shall come to you, but I think I shall be asleep."

"Try to be asleep."

He saw that she was going to say something else--something not connected with his departure. It was growing in her eyes and after a silent moment or so she began.

"There is something I want to tell you," she said.

"Yes?"

"I have waited because I wanted to make sure that you could believe it. I did not think you would not wish to believe it, but sometimes there are people who cannot believe even when they try. Perhaps once I should not have been able to believe myself. But now--I know. And to-night I feel that you are one of those who can believe."

She was going to speak of it.

"In these days when all the forces of the world are in upheaval people are learning that there are many new things to be believed," was his answer.

She turned towards him, extending her arms that he might see her well.

"See!" she said, "I am alive again. I am alive because Donal came back

to me. He comes every night and when he comes he is not dead. Can you believe it?"

"When I look at you and remember, I can believe anything. I do not understand. I do not know where he comes from--or how, but I believe that in some way you see him."

She had always been a natural and simple girl and it struck him that her manner had never been a more natural one.

"I do not know where he comes from," the clearness of a bell in her voice. "He does not want me to ask him. He did not say so but I know. When he is with me we know things without speaking words. We only talk of happy things. I have not told him that--that I have been unhappy and that I thought that perhaps I was really dead. He made me understand about you--but he does not know anything--else. Yes--" eagerly, eagerly, "you are believing--you are!"

"Yes--I am believing."

"If everything were as it used to be--I should see him and talk to him in the day time. Now I see him and talk to him at night instead. You see, it is almost the same thing. But we are really happier. We are afraid of nothing and we only tell each other of happy things. We know how wonderful everything is and that it was meant to be like that. You don't know how beautiful it is when you only think and talk about joyful

things! The other things fly away. Sometimes we go out onto the moor together and the darkness is not darkness--it is a soft lovely thing as beautiful as the light. We love it--and we can go as far as we like because we are never tired. Being tired is one of the things that has flown away and left us quite light. That is why I feel light in the day and I am never tired or afraid. I remember all the day."

As he listened, keeping his eyes on her serenely radiant face, he asked himself what he should have been thinking if he had been a psychopathic specialist studying her case. He at the same time realised that a psychopathic specialist's opinion of what he himself--Lord Coombe--thought would doubtless have been scientifically disconcerting. For what he found that he thought was that, through some mysteriously beneficent opening of portals kept closed through all the eons of time, she who was purest love's self had strangely passed to places where vision revealed things as they were created by that First Intention--of which people sometimes glibly talked in London drawing-rooms. He had not seen life so. He was not on her plane, but, as he heard her, he for the time believed in its existence and felt a remote nostalgia.

"Dowie is very brave and tries not to be frightened," she went on; "but she is really afraid that something may happen to my mind. She thinks it is only a queer dream which may turn out unhealthy. But it is not. It is Donal."

"Yes, it is Donal," he answered gravely. And he believed he was speaking

a truth, though he was aware of no material process of reasoning by which such a conclusion could be reached. One had to overleap gaps--even abysses--where material reasoning came to a full stop. One could only argue that there might be yet unknown processes to be revealed. Mere earthly invention was revealing on this plane unknown processes year by year--why not on other planes?

"I wanted to tell you because I want you to know everything about me. It seems as if I belong to you, Lord Coombe," there was actual sweet pleading in her voice. "You watched and made my life for me. I should not have been this Robin if you had not watched. When Donal came back he found me in the house you had taken me to because I could be safe in it. Everything has come from you.... I am yours as well as Donal's."

"You give me extraordinary comfort, dear child," he said. "I did not know that I needed it, but I see that I did. Perhaps I have longed for it without knowing it. You have opened closed doors."

"I will do anything--everything--you wish me to do. I will obey you always," she said.

"You are doing everything I most desire," he answered.

"Then I will try more every day."

She meant it as she had always meant everything she said. It was her

innocent pledge of faithful service, because, understanding at last, she had laid her white young heart in gratitude at his feet. No living man could have read her more clearly than this one whom half Europe had secretly smiled at as its most finished debauchée. When she took her pretty basket upon her knee and began to fold its bits of lawn delicately for the night, he felt as if he were watching some stainless acolyte laying away the fine cloths of an altar.

Though no one would have accused him of being a sentimentalist or an emotional man, his emotions overpowered him for once and swept doubt of emotion and truth into some outer world.

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The morning rose fair and the soft wind blowing across the gorse and heather brought scents with it. Dowie waited upon him at his early breakfast and took the liberty of indulging in open speech.

"You go away looking rested, my lord," she respectfully ventured. "And you leave us feeling safe."

"Quite safe," he answered; "she is beautifully well."

"That's it, my lord--beautifully--thank God. I've never seen a young thing bloom as she does and I've seen many."

The cart was at the door and he stood in the shadows of the hall when a slight sound made him look up at the staircase. It was an ancient winding stone descent with its feudal hand rope for balustrade. Robin was coming down it in a loose white dress. Her morning face was wonderful. It was inevitable that he should ask himself where she had come from--what she had brought with her unknowing. She looked like a white blossom drifting from the bough--like a feather from a dove's wing floating downward to earth. But she was only Robin.

"You awakened," he reproached her.

She came quite near him.

"I wanted to awake. Donal wanted me to."

She had never been quite so near him before. She put out a hand and laid it on the rough tweed covering his breast.

"I wanted to see you. Will you come again--when you are tired? I shall always be here waiting."

"Thank you, dear child," he answered. "I will come as often as I can leave London. This is a new planet."

He was almost as afraid to move as if a bird had alighted near him.

But she was not afraid. Her eyes were clear pools of pure light.

"Before you go away--" she said as simply as she had said it to Dowie years before, "--may I kiss you, Lord Coombe? I want to kiss you."

His old friend had told him the story of Dowie and it had extraordinarily touched him though he had said but little. And now it repeated itself. He had never seen anything so movingly lovely in his life as her sweet gravity.

She lifted her slight arms and laid them around his neck as she kissed him gently, as if she had been his daughter--his own daughter and delight--whose mother might have been Alixe.