

## CHAPTER XXXIX

Six weeks later Coombe was driven again up the climbing road to Darreuch. There was something less of colour than usual in his face, but the slightly vivid look of shock observing persons had been commenting upon had died out. As he had travelled, leaning back upon the cushions of the railway carriage, he had kept his eyes closed for the greater part of the journey. When at last he began to open them and look out at the increasingly beautiful country he also began to look rested and calm. He already felt the nearing peace of the shrine and added to it was an immense relaxing and uplift. A girl of a type entirely different from Robin's might, he knew, have made him feel during the past months as if he were taking part in a melodrama. This she had wholly saved him from by the clear simplicity of her natural acceptance of all things as they were. She had taken and given without a word. He was, as it were, going home to her now, as deeply thrilled and moved as a totally different type of man might have gone--a man who was simpler.

The things he might once have been and felt were at work within him. Again he longed to see the girl--he wanted to see her. He was going to the castle in response to a telegram from Dowie. All was well over. She was safe. For the rest, all calamity had been kept from her knowledge and, as he had arranged it, the worst would never reach her. In course of time she would learn all it was necessary that she should know of her

mother's death.

When Mrs. Macaur led him to one of his own rooms she glowed red and expectantly triumphant.

"The young lady, your lordship--it was wonderfu'!"

But before she had time to say more Dowie had appeared and her face was smooth and serene to marvellousness.

"The Almighty himself has been in this place, my lord," she said devoutly. "I didn't send more than a word, because she's like a schoolroom child about it. She wants to tell you herself." The woman was quivering with pure joy.

"May I see her?"

"She's waiting, my lord."

Honey scents of gorse and heather blew softly through the open windows of the room he was taken to. He did not know enough of such things to be at all sure what he had expected to see--but what he moved quickly towards, the moment after his entrance, was Robin lying fair as a wild rose on her pillows--not pale, not tragic, but with her eyes wide and radiant as a shining child's.

Her smiling made his heart stand still. He really could not speak. But she could and turned back the covering to show him what lay in her soft curved arm.

"He is not like me at all," was her joyous exulting. "He is exactly like Donal."

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The warm, tender breathing, semi-dormant, scarcely sentient-seeming thing might indeed have been the reincarnation of what had in the past so peculiarly reached bodily perfection. Robin, who mysteriously knew every line and curve of the new-born body, could point out how each limb and feature was an embryonic replica.

"Though he looks so tiny, he is not really little," was her lovely yearning boast. "He is really very big. Dowie has known hundreds of babies and they were none of them as big as he is. He is a giant--an angel giant," burying her face in the soft red neck.

"It seemed to change me into another type of man," Coombe once said to the Duchess.

The man into whom he had been transformed was he who lived through the next few days at Darreuch even as though life were a kindly faithful thing. Many other men, he told himself, must have lived as he did and he

wondered if any of them ever forgot it. It was a thing set apart.

He sat by Robin's side; they talked together; he retired to his own rooms or went out for a long walk, coming back to her to talk again, or read aloud, or to consider with her the marvel of the small thing by her side, examining curled hands and feet with curious interest.

"But though they look so little, they are not really," she always said.

"See how long his fingers are and how they taper. And his foot is long, too, and narrow and arched. Donal's was like it."

"Was," she said, and he wondered if she might not feel a pang as he himself did.

He wondered often and sometimes, when he sat alone in his room at night, found something more than wonder in his mind--something that, if she had not forbidden it, would have been fear because of strange things he saw in her.

He could not question her. He dared not even remotely touch on the dream. She was so well, her child was so well. She was as any young mother might have been who could be serene in her husband's absence because she knew he was safe and would soon return.

"Is she always as calm?" he once asked Dowie. "Does she never seem to be reminded of what would have been if he were alive?"

Dowie shook her head and he saw that the old anxiousness came back upon her.

"My lord, she believes he is alive when she sees him. That's what troubles me even in my thankfulness. I don't understand, God help me! I was afraid when she saw the child that it might all come over her again in a way that would do her awful harm. But when I laid the little thing down by her she just lay there herself and looked at it as if something was uplifting her. And in a few seconds she whispered, 'He is like Donal.' And then she said to herself, soft but quite clear, 'Donal, Donal!' And never a tear rose. Perhaps," hesitating over it, "it's the blessedness of time. A child's a wonderful thing--and so is time. Sometimes," a queer sigh broke from her, "when I've been hard put to it by trouble, I've said to myself, 'Well the Almighty did give us time--whatever else he takes away.'"

But Coombe mysteriously felt that it was not merely time which had calmed her, though any explanation founded on material reasoning became more remote each day. The thought which came to him at times had no connection with temporal things. He found he was gravely asking himself what aspect mere life would have worn if Alixe had come to him every night in such form as had given him belief in the absolute reality of her being. If he had been convinced that he heard the voice of Alixe--if she had smiled and touched him with her white hands as she had never touched him in life--if her eyes had been unafraid and they had spoken

together "only of happy things"--and had understood as one soul--what could the mere days have held of hurt? There was only one possible reply and it seemed to explain his feeling that she was sustained by something which was not alone the mere blessedness of time.

He became conscious one morning of the presence of a new expression in her eyes. There was a brave radiance in them and, before, he had known that in their radiance there had been no necessity for bravery. He felt a subtle but curious difference.

Her child had been long asleep and she lay like a white dove on her pillows when he came to make his brief good-night visit. She was very still and seemed to be thinking. Her touch on his arm was as the touch of a butterfly when she at last put out her hand to him.

"He may not come to-night," she said.

He put his own hand over hers and hoped it was done quietly.

"But to-morrow night?" trusting that his tone was quiet also. It must be quiet.

"Perhaps not for a good many nights. He does not know. I must not ask things. I never do."

"But it has been so wonderful that you know--"

On what plane was he--on what plane was she? What plane were they talking about with such undoubtingness? Heaven be praised his voice actually sounded natural.

"I do not know much--except that he is Donal. And I can never feel as if I were dead again--never."

"No," he answered. "Never!"

She lay so still for a few minutes that if her eyes had not been open he would have thought she was falling asleep. They were so dreamy that perhaps she was falling asleep and he softly rose to leave her.

"I think--he is trying to come nearer," she murmured. "Good-night, dear."