

"You never were hard, I could swear," Coombe said. "But perhaps you have changed--as I have. If he had not thought I was hard he might have told me-- Shall we go to him at once?"

Together they went without a moment's delay.

CHAPTER XLII

The dream had come back and Robin walked about the moor carrying her baby in her arms, even though Dowie followed her. She laid him on the heather and let him listen to the skylarks and there was in her face such a look, that, in times past if she had seen it, Dowie would have believed that it could only mean translation from earth.

But when Lord Coombe came for a brief visit he took Dowie to walk alone with him upon the moor. When they set out together she found herself involuntarily stealing furtive sidelong glances at him. There was that in his face which drew her eyes in spite of her. It was a look so intense and new that once she caught her breath, trembling. It was then that he turned to look at her and began to talk. He began--and went on--and as she listened there came to her sudden flooding tears and more than once a loud startled sob of joy.

"But he begs that she shall not see him until he is less ghastly to behold. He says the memory of such a face would tell her things she must never know. His one thought is that she must not know. Things happen to a man's nerves when he has seen and borne the ultimate horrors. Men have gone mad under the prolonged torture. He sometimes has moments of hideous collapse when he cannot shut out certain memories. He is more afraid of such times than of anything else. He feels he must get hold of himself."

Dowie's step slackened until it stopped. Her almost awed countenance told him what she felt she must know or perish. He felt that she had her rights and one of them was the right to be told. She had been a strong tower of honest faith and love.

"My lord, might I ask if you have told him--all about it?"

"Yes, Dowie," he answered. "All is well and no one but ourselves will ever know. The marriage in the dark old church is no longer a marriage. Only the first one--which he can prove--stands."

The telling of his story to Donal had been a marvellous thing because he had so controlled its drama that it had even been curiously undramatic. He had made it a mere catalogued statement of facts. As Donal had lain listening his heart had seemed to turn over in his breast.

"If I had known you!" he panted low. "If we had known each other! We

did not!"

Later, bit by bit, he told him of Jackson--only of Jackson. He never spoke of other things. When put together the "bit by bit" amounted to this:

"He was a queer, simple sort of American. He was full of ideals and a kind of unbounded belief in his country. He had enlisted in Canada at the beginning. He always believed America would come in. He was sure the Germans knew she would and that was why they hated Americans. The more they saw her stirred up, the more they hated the fellows they caught--and the worse they treated them. They were hellish to Jackson!"

He had stopped at this point and Coombe had noted a dreaded look dawning in his eyes.

"Don't go on, my boy. It's bad for you," he broke in.

Donal shook his head a little as if to shake something away.

"I won't go on with--that," he said. "But the dream--I must tell you about that. It saved me from going mad--and Jackson did. He believed in a lot of things I'd not heard of except as jokes. He called them New Thought and Theosophy and Christian Science. He wasn't clever, but he believed. And it helped him. When I'm stronger I'll try to tell you.

Subconscious mind and astral body came into it. I had begun to see things--just through starvation and agony. I told him about Robin when I scarcely knew what I was saying. He tried to hold me quiet by saying her name to me over and over. He'd pull me up with it. He began to talk to me about dreaming. When your body's not fed--you begin to see clear--if your spirit is not held down."

He was getting tired and panting a little. Coombe bent nearer to him.

"I can guess the rest. I have been reading books on such subjects. He told you how to concentrate on dreaming and try to get near her. He helped you by suggestion himself--"

"He used to lie awake night after night and do it--and I began to dream-- No, it was not a dream. I believe I got to her-- He did it--and they killed him!"

"Hush! hush!" cried Coombe. "Of all men he would most ardently implore you to hold yourself still--"

Donal made some strange effort. He lay still.

"Yes, he would! Yes--of all the souls in the other world he'd be strongest. He saved me--he saved Robin--he saved the child--you--all of us! Perhaps he's here now! He said he'd come if he could. He believed he could."

He lay quiet for a few seconds and then the Donal smile they had all adored lighted up his face.

"Jackson, old chap!" he said. "I can't see you--but I'll do what you want me to do--I'll do it."

He fainted the next minute and the doctors came to him.

The facts which came later still were that Jackson had developed consumption, and exposure and brutality had done their worst. And Donal had seen his heart wringing end.

"But he knew America would come in. I believed it too, because he did. Just at the right time. 'All the rest have fought like mad till they're tired--though they'll die fighting,' he said. 'America's not tired. She's got everything and she sees red with frenzy at the bestiality. She'll burst in--just at the right time!' Jackson knew!"

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"I must not go trembling to her," Donal said on the morning when at last--long last, it seemed--he drove with Coombe up the moor road to Darreuch. "But," bravely, "what does it matter? I'm trembling because I'm going to her!"

He had been talking about her for weeks--for days he had been able to talk of nothing else-- Coombe had listened as if he heard echoes from a past when he would have so talked and dared not utter a word. He had talked as a boy lover talks--as a young bridegroom might let himself pour his joy forth to his most sacredly trusted friend.

Her loveliness, the velvet of her lifting eyes--the wonder of her trusting soul--the wonder of her unearthly selfless sweetness!

"It was always the same kind of marvel every time you saw her," he said boyishly. "You couldn't believe there could be such sweetness on earth--until you saw her again. Even her eyes and her little mouth and her softness were like that. You had to tell yourself about them over and over again to make them real when she wasn't there!"

He was still thin, but the ghastly hollows had filled and his smile scarcely left his face--and he had waited as long as he could.

"And to see her with a little child in her arms!" he had murmured.

"Robin! Holding it--and being careful! And showing it to me!"

After he first caught sight of the small old towers of Darreuch he could not drag his eyes from them.

"She's there! She's there! They're both there together!" he said over and over. Just before they left the carriage he wakened as it were and

spoke to Coombe.

"She won't be frightened," he said. "I told her--last night."

Coombe had asked himself if he must go to her. But, marvellously even to him, there was no need.

When they stood in the dark little hall--as she had come down the stone stairway on the morning when she bade him her sacred little good-bye, so she came down again--like a white blossom drifting down from its branch--like a white feather from a dove's wing.--But she held her baby in her arms and to Donal her cheeks and lips and eyes were as he had first seen them in the Gardens.

He trembled as he watched her and even found himself spellbound--waiting.

"Donal! Donal!"

And they were in his arms--the soft warm things--and he sat down upon the lowest step and held them--rocking--and trembling still more--but with the gates of peace open and earth and war shut out.

THE END