

CHAPTER VII - Anice at the Cottage

ANICE went to see Liz. Perhaps if the truth were told, she went to see Joan more than to visit Joan's protégée though her interest extended from the one to the other. But she did not see Joan, she only heard of her. Liz met her visitor without any manifestations of enthusiasm. She was grateful, but gratitude was not often a powerful emotion with her. But Anice began to attract her somewhat before she had been in the house ten minutes. Liz found, first, that she was not one of the enemy, and did not come to read a homily to her concerning her sins and transgressions; having her mind set at ease thus far, she found time to be interested in her. Her visitor's beauty, her prettiness of toilet, a certain delicate grace of presence, were all virtues in Liz's eyes. She was so fond of pretty things herself, she had been wont to feel such pleasure and pride in her own beauty, that such outward charms were the strongest of charms to her. She forgot to be abashed and miserable, when, after talking a few minutes, Anice came to her and bent over the child as it lay on her knee. She even had the courage to regard the material of her dress with some degree of interest.

"Yo'n getten that theer i' Lunnon," she ventured, wistfully touching the pretty silk with her finger. "Theer's noan sich i' Riggan."

"Yes," answered Anice, letting the baby's hand cling to her fingers. "I bought it in London."

Liz touched it again, and this time the wistful-ness in her touch crept up to her eyes, mingled with a little fretfulness.

"Ivverything's fine as comes fro' Lunnon," she said. "It's the grandest place i' th' world. I dunnot wonder as th' queen lives theer. I wur happy aw th' toime I wur theer. I nivver were so happy i' my life. I--I canna hardly bear to think on it--it gi'es me such a wearyin' an' long-in'; I wish I could go back, I do"--ending with a sob.

"Don't think about it any more than you can help," said Anice gently. "It is very hard I know; don't cry, Liz."

"I canna help it," sobbed Liz; "an' I can no more help thinkin' on it, than th' choild theer can help thinkin' on its milk. I'm hungerin' aw th' toime--an' I dunnot care to live; I wakken up i' th' noight hungerin' an' cryin' fur--fur what I ha' not got, an' nivver shall ha' agen."

The tears ran down her cheeks and she whimpered like a child. The sight of the silk dress had brought back to her mind her lost bit of paradise as nothing else would have done--her own small store of finery, the gayety and novelty of London sounds and sights.

Anice knelt down upon the flagged floor, still holding the child's hand.

"Don't cry," she said again. "Look at the baby, Liz. It is a pretty

baby. Perhaps if it lives, it may be a comfort to you some day."

"Nay! it wunnot," said Liz, regarding it resentfully. "I nivver could tak' no comfort in it. It's nowt but a trouble. I dunnot loike it. I canna. It would be better if it would na live. I canna tell wheer Joan Lowrie gets her patience fro'. I ha' no patience with the little marred thing mysen--allus whimperin' an' cry in'; I dunnot know what to do wi' it half th' toime."

Anice took it from her lap, and sitting down upon a low wooden stool, held it gently, looking at its small round face. It was a pretty little creature, pretty with Liz's own beauty, or at least, with the baby promise of it. Anice stooped and kissed it, her heart stirred by the feebly-strong clasp of the tiny fingers.

During the remainder of her visit, she sat holding the child on her knee, and talking to it as well as to its mother. But she made no attempt to bring Liz to what Mr. Barholm had called, "a fitting sense of her condition." She was not fully settled in her opinion as to what Liz's "fitting sense" would be. So she simply made an effort to please her, and awaken her to interest, and she succeeded very well. When she went away, the girl was evidently sorry to see her go.

"I dunnot often want to see folk twice," she said, looking at her shyly, "but I'd loike to see yo'. Yo're not loike th' rest. Yo' dunnot harry me wi' talk. Joan said yo' would na."

"I will come again," said Anice.

During her visit, Liz had told her much of Joan. She seemed to like to talk of her, and certainly Anice had been quite ready to listen.

"She is na easy to mak' out," said Liz, "an' p'r'aps that's th' reason why folks puts theirsens to so much trouble to mak' her out."

When he passed the cottage on the Knoll Road in going home at night, Fergus could not help looking out for Joan. Sometimes he saw her, and sometimes he did not. During the warm weather, he saw her often at the door, or near the gate; almost always with the child in her arms. There was no awkward shrinking in her manner at such times, no vestige of the clumsy consciousness usually exhibited by girls of her class. She met his glance with a grave quietude, scarcely touched with interest, he thought; he never observed that she smiled, though he was uncomfortably conscious now and then that she stood and calmly watched him out of sight.