

CHAPTER XXXVIII - Recognition

The turning-point was reached at last. One evening, at the close of his usual visit, the doctor said to Grace:

"To-morrow, I think, you will see a marked alteration. I should not be surprised to find on my next visit that his mind had become permanently cleared. The intervals of half consciousness have become lengthened. Unless some entirely unlooked-for change occurs, I feel sure that the worst is over. Give him close attention to-night. Don't let the young woman leave the room."

That night Anice watched with Joan. It was a strange experience through which these two passed together. If Anice had not known the truth before, she would have learned it then. Again and again Derrick went the endless round of his miseries. How must it end? How could it end? What must he do? How black and narrow the passages were! There she was, coming toward him from the other end,--and if the props gave way-----! They were giving way!--Good God! the light was out, and he was held fast by the mass which had fallen upon him. What must he do about her whom he loved, and who was separated from him by this horrible wall? He was dying, and she would never know what he wanted to tell her. What was it that he wanted to say,--That he loved her,--loved her,--loved her! Could she hear him? He must make her hear him before he died,--"Joan! Joan!"

Thus he raved hour after hour; and the two sat and listened, often in dead silence; but at last there rose in Joan Lowrie's face a look of such intense and hopeless pain, that Anice spoke.

"Joan! my poor Joan!" she said.

Joan's head sank down upon her hands.

"I mun go away fro' Riggan," she whispered. "I mun go away afore he knows. Theer's no help fur me."

"No help?" repeated Anice after her.

She did not understand.

"Theer's none," said Joan. "Dunnot yo' see as ony place wheer he is con be no place fur me? I thowt--I thowt the trouble wur aw on my side, but it is na. Do yo' think I'd stay an' let him do hissen a wrong?"

Anice wrung her hands together.

"A wrong?" she cried. "Not a wrong, Joan--I cannot let you call it that."

"It would na be nowt else. Am I fit wife fur a gentlemon? Nay, my work's done when the danger's ower. If he wakes to know th' leet o' day

to-morrow morning, it's done then."

"You do not mean," said Anice, "that you will leave us?"

"I conna stay i' Riggan; I mun go away."

Toward morning Derrick became quieter. He muttered less and less until his voice died away altogether, and he sank into a profound slumber. Grace, coming in and finding him sleeping, turned to Joan with a look of intense relief.

"The worst is over," he said; "now we may hope for the best."

"Ay," Joan answered, quietly, "th' worst is ower--fur him."

At last darkness gave way to a faint gray light, and then the gray sky showed long slender streaks of wintry red, gradually widening and deepening until all the east seemed flushed.

"It's mornin'," said Joan, turning from the window to the bed. "I mun gi' him th' drops again."

She was standing near the pillow when the first flood of the sunlight poured in at the window. At this moment Derrick awoke from his sleep to a full recognition of all around him. But the strength of his delirium had died out; his prostration was so utter, that for the moment he had

no power to speak and could only look up at the pale face hopelessly. It seemed as if the golden glow of the morning light transfigured it.

"He's awake," Joan said, moving away and speaking to those on the other side of the room. "Will one on yo' pour out th' medicine? My hand's noan steady."

Grace went to the bedside hurriedly.

"Derrick," he said, bending down, "do you know me?"

"Yes," Derrick answered in a faltering whisper, and as he said it the bedroom door closed. Both of them heard it. A shadow fell upon the sick man's face. His eyes met his friend's with a question in them, and the next instant the question put itself into words:

"Who--went out?"

Grace bent lower.

"It was Joan Lowrie."

He closed his eyes and waited a little as if to gain fresh strength.

There rose a faint flush upon his hollow cheeks and his mouth trembled.

"How"--he said next--"how--long?"

"You mean to ask me," said Grace, "how long she has been here?"

A motion of assent.

"She has been here from the first."

He asked no further questions. His eyes closed once more and he lay silent.