

## CHAPTER XXXIX - A Testimonial

Joan went back to her lodgings at the Thwaites' and left Mrs. Barholm and Anice to fill her place.

Too prostrate to question his nurses, Derrick could only lie with closed eyes helpless and weary. He could not even keep himself awake long enough to work his way to any very clear memories of what had happened. He had so many half recollections to tantalize him. He could remember his last definite sensation,--a terrible shock flinging him to the ground, a second of pain and horror, and then utter oblivion. Had he awakened one night and seen Joan Lowrie by the dim fire-light and called out to her, and then lost himself? Had he awakened for a second or so again and seen her standing close to his pillow, looking down at him with an agony of dread in her face?

In answer to his question, Grace had told him that she had been with him from the first How had it happened? This he asked himself again and again, until he grew feverish over it.

"Above all things," he heard the doctor say, "don't let him talk and don't talk to him."

But Grace comprehended something of his mental condition.

"I see by your look that you wish to question me," he said to him. "Have

patience for a few days and then I will answer every question you may ask. Try to rest upon that assurance."

There was one question, however, which would not wait. Grace saw it lying in the eager eyes and answered it.

"Joan Lowrie," he said, "has gone home."

Joan's welcome at the Thwaites' house was tumultuous. The children crowded about her, neighbors dropped in, both men and women wanting to have a word with her. There were few of them who had not met with some loss by the explosion, and there were those among them who had cause to remember the girl's daring.

"How's th' engineer?" they asked. "What do th' doctors say o' him?"

"He'll get better," she answered. "They say as he's out o' danger."

"Wur na it him as had his head on yo're knee when yo' come up i' th' cage?" asked one woman.

Mrs. Thwaite answered for her with some sharpness. They should not gossip about Joan, if she could help it.

"I dunnot suppose as she knowd th' difference betwixt one mon an' another," she said. "It wur na loikely as she'd pick and choose. Let th'

lass ha' a bit o' quiet, wenches. Yo' moither her wi' yo're talk."

"It's an ill wind as blows nobody good," said Thwaite himself. "Th' explosion has done one thing--it's made th' mesters change their minds. They're i' th' humor to do what th' engineer axed fur, now."

"Ay," said a tired-looking woman, whose poor attempt at mourning told its own story; "but that wunnot bring my mester back."

"Nay," said another, "nor my two lads."

There had been a great deal of muttered discontent among the colliers before the accident, and since its occurrence there had been signs of open rebellion. Then, too, results had proved that the seasonable adoption of Derrick's plan would have saved some lives at least, and, in fact, some future expenditure. Most of the owners, perhaps, felt somewhat remorseful; a few, it is not impossible, experienced nothing more serious than annoyance and embarrassment, but it is certain that there were one or two who were crushed by a sense of personal responsibility for what had occurred.

It was one of these who made the proposition that Derrick's plan be accepted unreservedly, and that the engineer himself should be requested to resume his position and undertake the management of the work. There was some slight demurring at first, but the catastrophe was so recent that its effect had not had time to wear away, and finally the agreement

was made.

But at that time Derrick was lying senseless in the bedroom over the parlor, and the deputation from the company could only wait upon Grace, and make an effort at expressing their sympathy.

After Joan's return to her lodgings, she, too, was visited. There was some curiosity felt concerning her. A young and handsome woman, who had taken so remarkable a part in the tragedy, was necessarily an object of interest.

Mr. Barholm was so fluently decided in his opinion that something really ought to be done, that a visit to the heroine of the day was the immediate result. There was only one form the appreciation of a higher for a lower social grade could take, and it was Mr. Barholm who had been, naturally, selected as spokesman. He explained to Joan the nature of the visit. His friends of the Company had heard the story of her remarkable heroism, and had felt that something was due to her--some token of the admiration her conduct had inspired in them. They had agreed that something ought to be done, and they had called this evening to present her with a little testimonial.

The bundle of crisp bank-notes burned the hand of the man who held them, as Joan Lowrie listened to this speech. She stood upright before them, resting one hand upon the back of a chair, but when the bearer of the testimonial in question rose, she made a step forward. There was more

of her old self in her gesture than she had shown for months. Her eyes flashed, her face hardened, a sudden red flew to her cheek.

"Put it up," she said. "I wunnot tak' it."

The man who had the money laid it upon the table, as if he were anxious to be rid of it. He was in a glow of anger and shame at the false step they had made.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I see we have made a mistake."

"Ay," she said, "yo' ha' made a mistake. If yo' choose to tak' that an' gi'e it to th' women an' childer as is left to want bread, yo' may do it an' welcome."