

## CHAPTER XL - Going South

The first day Fergus Derrick was allowed to spend an hour in an easy-chair by the fire, he heard the story of his rescue from the lips of his friend, listening to it as he rested against the propping cushions.

"Don't be afraid of exciting me," he had said to Grace. "I have conjectured until I am tired of it. Tell me the whole story. Let me hear the end now."

Derrick's breath came quick and short as he listened, and his haggard face flushed. It was not only to his friend he owed his life, but to Joan Lowrie.

"I should like to see her," he said when Grace had finished. "As for you, Grace--well--words are poor things."

"They are very poor things between friends," was Grace's answer; "so let us have none of them. You are on this side of the grave, dear fellow--that is enough."

During the rest of the day Derrick was silent and abstracted, but plainly full of active thought.

By nightfall a feverish spot burned upon his cheek, and his pulse had

quicken'd dangerously.

"I must wait," he said to Grace, "and it is hard work."

Just at that time Anice was sitting in her room at the Rectory, thinking of Joan also, when there came to her the sound of footsteps in the passage and then a summons to the door.

"You may come in," she said.

But it was not a servant, as she had supposed; it was Joan, with a bundle upon her arm.

"You are going away, Joan?" she said. "Tonight?"

"Ay," Joan answered, as she came and stood upon the hearth. "I'm goin' away to-neet."

"You have quite made up your mind?"

"Ay," said Joan. "I mun break loose. I want to get as far fro' th' owd life as I con. I'd loike to forget th' most on it. I'm goin' to-neet, because I dunnot want to be axed questions. If I passed thro' th' town by day-leet, theer's them as ud fret me wi' their talk."

"Have you seen Mr. Grace?" Anice asked.

"No. I shanna ha' th' chance to say good-by to him. I coom partly to ax yo' to say it fur me."

"Yes, I will say it I wish there were no need that I should, though. I wish I could keep you."

There was a brief silence. Joan knelt on one knee by the fender.

"I ha' bin thinkin' o' Liz," she said. "I thowt I'd ax yo'--if it wur to happen so as she'd drift back here agen while I wur away--as yo'd say a kind word to her, an' tell her about th' choild, an' how as I nivver thowt hard on her, an' as th' day nivver wur as I did na pity her fro' th' bottom o' my soul. I'm goin' toward th' south," she said again after a while. "They say as th' south is as different fro' th' north as th' day is fro' the neet. I ha' money enow to help me on, an' when I stop I shall look fur work."

Anice's face lighted up suddenly.

"To the south!" she said. "Why did I not think of that before? If you go toward the south, there is Ashley-Wold and grandmamma, Mrs. Galloway. I will write to her now, if you will let me," rising to her feet.

"If yo'll gi' me th' letter, I'll tak' it an' thank yo'," said Joan. "If she could help me to work or th' loike, I should be glad enow."

Anice's mother's mother had always been her safest resource in the past, and yet, curiously enough, she had not thought of turning toward her in this case until Joan's words had suggested such a course.

Joan took the letter and put it in the bosom of her dress.

"Theer's no more danger fur him?" she said. "Thwaite towd me he wur better."

She spoke questioningly, and Anice answered her--

"Yes, he is out of danger. Joan, what am I to say to him?"

"To say to him!"

She started slightly, but ended with a strained quietness of manner.

"Theer's nowt to say," she added, rising, and preparing to go.

Anice rose also. She held out both her hands, and Joan took them.

"I will go downstairs with you," said Anice; and they went out together.

When they reached the front door, they kissed each other, and Anice stood in the lighted hall and watched the girl's departure.

"Good-by!" she said; "and God bless you!"

Early in the morning, Derrick called his friend to his bedside.

"I have had a bad night," he said to him.

"Yes," Grace answered. "It is easy enough to see that."

There was an unnatural sparkle in the hollow eyes, and the flush upon the cheek had not faded away.

Derrick tried to laugh, and moved restlessly upon his pillow.

"So I should imagine," said he. "The fact is--well you see I have been thinking."

"About--"

"Yes--yes--Grace, I cannot wait--I must hear something. A hundred things might happen. I must at least be sure she is not far away. I shall never regain strength as long as I have not the rest that knowledge will bring me. Will you go to her and take her a few words of gratitude from me?"

"Yes, readily."

"Will you go now?"

"Yes."

Grace would have left the room, but Derrick stretched out his hand and touched him.

"Stay--" he said.

Grace turned to him again.

"You know"--in the old resolute way--"you know what I mean the end to be, if it may be?"

"I think I do."

Grace appeared at the Rectory very soon afterward, and asked for Miss Barholm. Anice came down into the parlor to meet him at once. She could not help guessing that for some reason or other he had come to speak of Joan, and his first words confirmed her impression.

"I have just left the Thwaites'," he said. "I went there to see Joan Lowrie, and find that she is not there. Mrs. Thwaite told me that she had left Riggan. Is that true?"

"Yes. She went away last night She came here to bid me good-by, and

leave a farewell message for you."

Grace was both troubled and embarrassed.

"I----" he faltered. "Do you understand it?"

"Yes," Anice answered.

Their eyes met, and she went on:

"You know we have said that it was best that she should break away entirely from the past. She has gone to try if it is possible to do it. She wants another life altogether."

"I do not know what I must do," said Grace. "You say she has gone away, and I--I came to her from Derrick."

"From Mr. Derrick!" Anice exclaimed; and then both relapsed into silence.

It was Anice who spoke first

"Mamma was going to send some things to Mr. Derrick this morning," she said. "I will have the basket packed and take it myself. If you will let me, I will go with you as soon as I can have the things prepared."