

## That Lass o' Lowrie's.

A STORY OF THE LANCASHIRE COAL MINES

By FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

## CHAPTER XL

JOAN LEAVES RIGGAN.

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 proping cushions.

"Don't be afraid of exciting me," he 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 quickened 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 *she* who came, as she had supposed; it was Joan, with a bundle on her arm.

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

"To-night!"

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

"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 can. I'd loike to forget th' most on it. I'm goin' to-night, because I dunnot want to be asked questions. If I passed thro' the town by dayleat, their'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-bye 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, and then Joan knelt on one knee by the bender.

"If ha' bin thinkin' o' Liz," she said, "I thowt I'd ax yo'—if it wu' to happen so as she drifts back again while I war away—ay, to say a kind word to her, an' tell her about th' chold. How as I niver thowt hard on her, as as th' day niver war as bad. I nigher ward th' bottom o' my soul. I nigher ward th' south," she said again after a while.

"They say as th' south is as different fro' th' north as th' day is fro' th' 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 enough."

Anice's mother had always been her safest resource in the past, and yet, curiously enough, she had not thought of turning towards 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.

"Thee'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 her.

"Stay—"

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 Barlow. Anice came down into the parlour 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 that impression.

"I have just left the Thwaite's," 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-bye, and leave a farewell message for you."

Grace was both troubled and embarrassed.

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

"Yes," Grace 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."

CHAPTER XLII.

SAM CRADDOCK CHANGES HIS OPINION.

The interview between Anice and Derrick was a long one. When, in answer to Derrick's queries, Anice said, "She has gone to Ashley-Wold," Derrick replied—

"Then I shall go to Ashley-Wold also."

Grace had been called out almost immediately after her return to the house; but on his way home Anice met him, and having something to say about the school, he turned toward the Rectory with her.

They had not gone far, however, before they were joined by a third party—Mr. Sammy Craddock, who was wending his way homeward. Seeing them, Mr. Craddock hesitated for a moment, as if feeling somewhat doubtful; but as they approached him, he pulled off his hat.

"I dunnot know," he said, "after aw, if it would not be as well to ha' a witness. Hope yo' nicely, Miss," affably; "an' th' same to yo', Parson. Would yo'" clearing his throat, "would yo' mind shakin' hands wi' a chap?"

Grace gave him his hand.

"Thank yo', Parson," said "Owd Sammy." "It's th' first toime, yo' know, if it shan't be th' last, if yo' dunnot see owt agen it. Th' truth is, as it's summatt as has been on my moind for soome toime—iver sencth' th' accident i' fact. Pluck's pluck, yo' see, whether yo' fur a mon or agen him. Yo're not much to look at. Yo' mowt be hand-somer, an' yo' dunnot look as if yo' wur like to be mi' i' argument; but yo're getten a backbone o' yore own—I'm clearin' his throat, "would yo' mind shakin' hands wi' a chap?"

"There is something a little remark-able about her," she said. "She certainly does not belong to Ashley-Wold."

Then Joan stopped by the hedge and saw her face and uttered a low exclamation of surprise at its beauty. She drew nearer to the window and looked out at her.

"She must be very cold," said Mrs. Galloway, sitting at her work-table near the window, had found her attention attracted a few moments before by a tall young woman coming down the road which passed on one side of the hedge.

"There is something a little remark-able about her," she said. "She certainly does not belong to Ashley-Wold."

She looked haggard and weary, but the eyes she raised to her hostess were resolute.

"Theer's summat as I ha' held back fro' sayin' to yo,'" she said, "an' th' more I think on it, th' more I see as I mun tell yo', if I mean to begin fair an' clear. I ha' a trouble as I'm fair to hide; it's a trouble as I ha' fowt wi' an' ha' n'a helped myself agen. It's na' a shame," straightening herself; "it's a trouble such as any woman might bear an' honest. I coom away fro' Riggan to be out o' th' way on it—not to forget it for I conn—a but so as I shall ha' no se to near to—th' hurt on it."

"I do not need another word," Mrs. Galloway answered. "If you had chosen to keep it a secret as long as you chose that it should be so. There is nothing more you need? Very well, Good-night, my dear."

[CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.]

"The mistess had seen her from the window and thought she looked cold and tired. Would she come into the house to rest?"

Joan answered with a tinge of colour on her cheek. She felt a little like a beggar.

"Thank yo', I'll come," she said. "If th' mistess is Mrs. Galloway, I ha' a letter for her."

Mrs. Galloway met them on the threshold.

"The young woman, ma'am," said the servant, "has a letter from Lancashire."

"From Lancashire!" said Mrs. Galloway.

"Fro' Riggan, mistress," said Joan. "Fro' Miss Anice. I'm Joan Lowrie."

That Joan Lowrie was a name familiar to her was evident by the change in Mrs. Galloway's face. A faint flush of pleasure warmed it, and she spoke quickly.

"Joan Lowrie," she said. "My dear child's friend! Then I know you very well. Come into the room, my dear."

"Another lie nailed," as the wag remarked when the merchant tacked up a sign "At cost."

"Noan on 'em can say as I wur na fair," he said, shaking his head as he led her into the room and closed the door.

communed with himself. "I could na ha' done no fairer. He deserved a bit o' commendation, an' I let him ha' it. Be fair wi' a mon, say I, parson or no. An' he is na th' wrong sort, after aw."

He was so well pleased with himself, that he even carried his virtue into the Crown, and diffused it abroad over his pint of sippenny. He found it not actually unpleasant to display himself as a magnate, who, having made a most unusual merit, had been too independent and "straightforward" to let the matter rest, and consequently had gone to the magnificent length of apologetic explanation.

"I ha' bin havin' a word or so wi' th' little parson," he said. "I ha' ben tellin' him what I thowt o' what he did th' day o' th' blow-up. I changed my mind about th' little chap that day, an' ha' ben tellin' him so."

"Yo' ha'," in an amazed chorus. "Well, now that th'ne wu' a turn, Sammy."

"Ay, it wu'." 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."

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