

CHAPTER III - The Reverend Harold Barholm

When the Reverend Paul entered the parlor at the Rectory, he found that his friend had arrived before him. Mr. Barholm, his wife and Anice, with their guest, formed a group around the fire, and Grace saw at a glance that Derrick had unconsciously fallen into the place of the centre figure. He was talking and the others were listening--Mr. Barholm in his usual restless fashion, Mrs. Barholm with evident interest, Anice leaning forward on her ottoman, listening eagerly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Barholm, when the servant announced the visitor, "this is fortunate. Here is Grace. Glad to see you, Grace. Take a seat We are talking about an uncommonly interesting case. I dare say you know the young woman."

Anice looked up.

"We are talking about Joan Lowrie," she said. "Mr. Derrick is telling us about her."

"Most interesting affair--from beginning to end," continued the Rector, briskly. "Something must be done for the young woman. We must go and see her,--I will go and see her myself."

He had caught fire at once, in his usual inconsequent, self-secure

style. Ecclesiastical patronage would certainly set this young woman right at once. There was no doubt of that. And who was so well qualified to bestow it as himself?

"Yes, yes! I will go myself," he said. "That kind of people is easily managed, when once one understands them. There really is some good in them, after all. You see, Grace, it is as I have told you--only understand them, and make them understand you, and the rest is easy."

Derrick glanced from father to daughter. The clear eyes of the girl rested on the man with a curious expression.

"Do you think," she said quickly, "that they like us to go and see them in that sort of way, papa? Do you think it is wise to remind them that we know more than they do, and that if they want to learn they must learn from us, just because we have been more fortunate? It really seems to me that the rebellious ones would ask themselves what right we had to be more fortunate."

"My dear," returned the Rector, somewhat testily--he was not partial to the interposition of obstacles even in suggestion--"My dear, if you had been brought into contact with these people as closely as I have, or even as Grace has, you would learn that they are not prone to regard things from a metaphysical stand-point. Metaphysics are not in their line. They are more apt to look upon life as a matter of bread and bacon than as a problem."

A shadow fell upon Anice's face, and before the visit ended, Derrick had observed its presence more than once. It was always her father who summoned it, he noticed. And yet it was evident enough that she was fond of the man, and in no ordinary degree, and that the affection was mutual. As he was contented with himself, so Barholm was contented with his domestic relations. He was fond of his wife, and fond of his daughter, as much, perhaps, through his appreciation of his own good taste in wedding such a wife, and becoming the father of such a daughter, as through his appreciation of their peculiar charms. He was proud of them and indulgent to them. They reflected a credit on him of which he felt himself wholly deserving.

"They are very fond of him," remarked Grace afterward to his friend; "which shows that there must be a great deal of virtue in the man. Indeed there is a great deal of virtue in him. You yourself, Derrick, must have observed a certain kindness and--and open generosity," with a wistful sound in his voice.

There was always this wistful appeal in the young man's tone when he spoke of his clerical master--a certain anxiety to make the best of him, and refrain from any suspicion of condemnation. Derrick was always reminded by it of the shadow on Anice's face.

"I want to tell you something," Miss Barholm said this evening to Grace at parting. "I do not think I am afraid of Riggan at all. I think I

shall like it all the better because it is so new. Everything is so earnest and energetic, that it is a little bracing--like the atmosphere. Perhaps--when the time comes--I could do something to help you with that girl. I shall try at any rate." She held out her hand to him with a smile, and the Reverend Paul went home feeling not a little comforted and encouraged.

The Rector stood with his back to the fire, his portly person expressing intense satisfaction.

"You will remind me about that young woman in the morning, Anice," he said. "I should like to attend to the matter myself. Singular that Grace should not have mentioned her before. It really seems to me, you know, that now and then Grace is a little deficient in interest, or energy."

"Surely not interest, my dear," suggested Mrs. Barholm, gently.

"Well, well," conceded the Rector, "perhaps not interest, but energy or--or appreciation. I should have seen such a fine creature's superiority, and mentioned it at once. She must be a fine creature. A young woman of that kind should be encouraged. I will go and see her in the morning--if it were not so late I would go now. Really, she ought to be told that she has exhibited a very excellent spirit, and that people approve of it. I wonder what sort of a household servant she would make if she were properly trained?"

"That would not do at all," put in Anice, decisively. "From the pit's mouth to the kitchen would not be a natural transition."

"Well, well, as usual, perhaps you are right. There is plenty of time to think of it, however. We can judge better when we have seen her."

He did not need reminding in the morning. He was as full of vague plans for Joan Lowrie when he arose as he had been when he went to bed. He came down to the charming breakfast-room in the most sanguine of moods. But then his moods usually were sanguine. It was scarcely to be wondered at. Fortune had treated him with great suavity from his earliest years. Wellborn, comfortably trained, healthy and easy-natured, the world had always turned its pleasant side to him. As a young man, he had been a strong, handsome fellow, whose convenient patrimony had placed him beyond the possibility of entire dependence upon his profession. When a curate he had been well enough paid and without private responsibilities; when he married he was lucky enough to win a woman who added to his comfort; in fact, life had gone smoothly with him for so long that he had no reason to suspect Fate of any intention to treat him ill-naturedly. It was far more likely that she would reserve her scurvy tricks for some one else.

Even Riggan had not perplexed him at all. Its difficulties were not such as would be likely to disturb him greatly. One found ignorance, and vice, and discomfort among the lower classes always; there was the same thing to contend against in the agricultural as in the mining districts.

And the Rectory was substantial and comfortable, even picturesque. The house was roomy, the garden large and capable of improvement; there were trees in abundance, ivy on the walls, and Anice would do the rest. The break-fast-room looked specially encouraging this morning. Anice, in a pretty pale blue gown, and with a few crocuses at her throat, awaited his coming behind the handsomest of silver and porcelain, reading his favorite newspaper the while. Her little pot of emigrant violets exhaled a faint, spring-like odor from their sunny place at the window; there was a vase of crocuses, snow-drops and ivy leaves in the centre of the table; there was sunshine outside and comfort in. The Rector had a good appetite and an unimpaired digestion. Anice rose when he entered, and touched the bell.

"Mamma's headache will keep her upstairs for a while," she said. "She told me we were not to wait for her." And then she brought him his newspaper and kissed him dutifully.

"Very glad to see you home again, I am sure, my dear," remarked the Rector. "I have really missed you very much. What excellent coffee this is!--another cup, if you please." And, after a pause,

"I think really, you know," he proceeded, "that you will not find the place unpleasant, after all. For my part, I think it is well enough--for such a place; one cannot expect Belgravian polish in Lancashire miners, and certainly one does not meet with it; but it is well to make the best of things. I get along myself reasonably well with the people. I do not

encounter the difficulties Grace complains of."

"Does he complain?" asked Anice; "I did not think he exactly complained."

"Grace is too easily discouraged," answered the Rector in off-handed explanation. "And he is apt to make blunders. He speaks of, and to, these people as if they were of the same fibre as himself. He does not take hold of things. He is deficient in courage. He means well, but he is not good at reading character. That other young fellow now--Derrick, the engineer--would do twice as well in his place. What do you think of that young fellow, by the way, my dear?"

"I like him," said Anice. "He will help Mr. Grace often."

"Grace needs a support of some kind," returned Mr. Barholm, frowning slightly, "and he does not seem to rely very much upon me--not so much as I would wish. I don't quite understand him at times; the fact is, it has struck me once or twice, that he preferred to take his own path, instead of following mine."

"Papa," commented Anice, "I scarcely think he is to blame for that. I am sure it is always best, that conscientious, thinking people--and Mr. Grace is a thinking man--should have paths of their own."

Mr. Barholm pushed his hair from his forehead. His own obstinacy

confronted him sometimes through Anice in a finer, more baffling form.

"Grace is a young man, my dear," he said, "and--and not a very strong-minded one."

"I cannot believe that is true," said Anice. "I do not think we can blame his mind. It is his body that is not strong. Mr. Grace himself has more power than you and mamma and myself all put together."

One of Alice's peculiarities was a certain pretty sententiousness, which, but for its innate refinement, and its sincerity, might have impressed people as being a fault. When she pushed her opposition in that steady, innocent way, Mr. Barholm always took refuge behind an inner consciousness which "knew better," and was fully satisfied on the point of its own knowledge.

When breakfast was over, he rose from the table with the air of a man who had business on hand. Anice rose too, and followed him to the hearth.

"You are going out, I suppose," she said.

"I am going to see Joan Lowrie," he said complacently. "And I have several calls to make besides. Shall I tell the young woman that you will call on her?"

Anice looked down at the foot she had placed on the shining rim of the steel fender.

"Joan Lowrie?" she said reflectively.

"Certainly, my dear. I should think it would please the girl to feel that we are interested in her."

"I should scarcely think--from what Mr. Grace and his friend say--that she is the kind of a girl to be reached in that way," said Anice.

The Rector shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear," he answered, "if we are always to depend upon what Grace says, we shall often find ourselves in a dilemma. If you are going to wait until these collier young women call on you after the manner of polite society, I am afraid you will have time to lose interest in them and their affairs."

He had no scruples of his own on the subject of his errand. He felt very comfortable as usual, as he wended his way through the village toward Lowrie's cottage, on the Knoll Road. He did not ask himself what he should say to the collier young woman, and her unhappy charge. Orthodox phrases with various distinct flavors--the flavor of encouragement, the flavor of reproof, the flavor of consolation,--were always ready with the man; he never found it necessary to prepare them beforehand. The

flavor of approval was to be Joan's portion this morning; the flavor of rebuke her companion's. He passed down the street with ecclesiastical dignity, bestowing a curt, but not unamiable word of recognition here and there. Unkempt, dirty-faced children, playing hop-sotch or marbles on the flag pavement, looked up at him with a species of awe, not un-mingled with secret resentment; women lounging on door-steps, holding babies on their hips, stared in critical sullenness as he went by.

"Theer's th' owd parson," commented one sharp-tongued matron. "Hoo's goin' to teach some one summat, I warrant What th' owd lad dunnott know is na worth knowin'. Eh! hoo's a graidely foo', that hoo is. Our Tommy, if tha dost na let Jane Ann be, tha'lt be gettin' a hidin'."

Unprepossessing as most of the colliers' homes were, Lowrie's cottage was a trifle less inviting than the majority. It stood upon the roadside, an ugly little bare place, with a look of stubborn desolation, its only redeeming feature a certain rough cleanliness. The same cleanliness reigned inside, Barholm observed when he entered; and yet on the whole there was a stamp upon it which made it a place scarcely to be approved of. Before the low fire sat a girl with a child on her knee, and this girl, hearing the visitor's footsteps, got up hurriedly, and met him with a half abashed, half frightened look on her pale face.

"Lowrie is na here, an' neyther is Joan," she said, without waiting for him to speak. "Both on 'em's at th' pit. Theer's no one here but me," and she held the baby over her shoulder, as if she would like to have

hidden it.

Mr. Barholm walked in serenely, sure that he ought to be welcome, if he were not.

"At the pit, are they?" he answered. "Dear me! I might have remembered that they would be at this time. Well, well; I will take a seat, my girl, and talk to you a little. I suppose you know me, the minister at the church--Mr. Barholm?"

Liz, a slender slip of a creature, large-eyed, and woe-begone, stood up before him, staring at him irresolutely as he seated himself.

"I--I dunnot know nobody much now," she stammered. "I--I've been away fro' Riggan sin' afore yo' comn--if yo're th' new parson," and then she colored nervously and became fearfully conscious of her miserable little burden, "I've heerd Joan speak o' th' young parson," she faltered.

Her visitor looked at her gravely. What a helpless, childish creature she was, with her pretty face, and her baby, and her characterless, frightened way. She was only one of many--poor Liz, ignorant, emotional, weak, easily led, ready to err, unable to bear the consequences of error, not strong enough to be resolutely wicked, not strong enough to be anything in particular, but that which her surroundings made her. If she had been well-born and well brought up, she would have been a pretty, insipid girl, who needed to be taken care of; as it was, she had

"gone wrong." The excellent Rector of St. Michael's felt that she must be awakened.

"You are the girl Elizabeth?" he said.

"I'm 'Lizabeth Barnes," she answered, pulling at the hem of her child's small gown, "but folks nivver calls me nowt but Liz."

Her visitor pointed to a chair considerately. "Sit down," he said, "I want to talk to you."

Liz obeyed him; but her pretty, weak face told its own story of distaste and hysterical shrinking. She let the baby lie upon her lap; her fingers were busy plaiting up folds of the little gown.

"I dunnot want to be talked to," she whimpered. "I dunnot know as talk can do folk as is i' trouble any good--an' th' trouble's bad enow wi'out talk."

"We must remember whence the trouble comes," answered the minister, "and

if the root lies in ourselves, and springs from our own sin, we must bear our cross meekly, and carry our sorrows and iniquities to the fountain head. We must ask for grace, and--and sanctification of spirit."

"I dunnot know nowt about th' fountain head," sobbed Liz aggrieved.

"I amna religious an' I canna see as such loike helps foak. No Methody nivver did nowt for me when I war i' trouble an' want Joan Lowrie is na a Methody."

"If you mean that the young woman is in an unawakened condition, I am sorry to hear it," with increased gravity of demeanor. "Without the redeeming blood how are we to find peace? If you had clung to the Cross you would have been spared all this sin and shame. You must know, my girl, that this," with a motion toward the frail creature on her knee, "is a very terrible thing."

Liz burst into piteous sobs--crying like an abused child:

"I know it's hard enow," she cried; "I canna get work neyther at th' pit nor at th' factories, as long as I mun drag it about, an' I ha' not got a place to lay my head, on'y this. If it wur na for Joan, I might starve, and the choild too. But I'm noan so bad as yo'd mak' out. I--I wur very fond o' him--I wur, an' I thowt he wur fond o' me, an' he wur a gentleman too. He were no laboring-man, an' he wur kind to me, until he got tired. Them sort allus gets tired o' yo' i' time, Joan says. I wish I'd ha' tow'd Joan at first, an' axed her what to do."

Barholm passed his hand through his hair uneasily. This shallow, inconsequent creature baffled him. Her shame, her grief, her misery, were all mere straws eddying on the pool of her discomfort It was not

her sin that crushed her, it was the consequence of it; hers was not a sorrow, it was a petulant unhappiness. If her lot had been prosperous outwardly, she would have felt no inward pang.

It became more evident to him than ever that something must be done, and he applied himself to his task of reform to the best of his ability.

But he exhausted his repertory of sonorous phrases in vain. His grave exhortations only called forth fresh tears, and a new element of resentment; and, to crown all, his visit terminated with a discouragement of which his philosophy had never dreamed.

In the midst of his most eloquent reproof, a shadow darkened the threshold, and as Liz looked up with the explanation--"Joan!" a young woman, in pit girl guise, came in, her hat pushed off her forehead, her throat bare, her fus-tian jacket hanging over her arm. She glanced from one to the other questioningly, knitting her brows slightly at the sight of Liz's tears. In answer to her glance Liz spoke querulously.

"It's th' parson, Joan," she said. "He comn to talk like th' rest on 'em an' he maks me out too ill to burn."

Just at that moment the child set up a fretful cry and Joan crossed the room and took it up in her arms.

"Yo've feart th' choild betwixt yo'," she said, "if yo've managed to do nowt else."

"I felt it my duty as Rector of the parish," explained Barholm somewhat curtly, "I felt it my duty as Rector of the parish, to endeavor to bring your friend to a proper sense of her position."

Joan turned toward him.

"Has tha done it?" she asked.

The Reverend Harold felt his enthusiasm concerning the young woman dying out.

"I--I--" he stammered.

Joan interrupted him.

"Dost tha see as tha has done her any good?" she demanded. "I dunnot mysen."

"I have endeavored to the best of my ability to improve her mental condition," the minister replied.

"I thowt as much," said Joan; "I mak' no doubt tha'st done thy best, neyther. Happen tha'st gi'en her what comfort tha had to spare, but if yo'd been wiser than yo' are, yo'd ha' let her alone. I'll warrant theer

is na a parson 'twixt here an' Lunnon, that could na ha' towd her that she's a sinner an' has shame to bear; but happen theer is na a parson 'twixt here an' Lunnon as she could na ha' towd that much to, hersen. Howivver, as tha has said thy say, happen it 'll do yo' fur this toime, an' yo' can let her be for a while."

Mr. Barholm was unusually silent during dinner that evening, and as he sat over his wine, his dissatisfaction rose to the surface, as it invariably did.

"I am rather disturbed this evening, Anice," he said.

Anice looked up questioningly.

"Why?" she asked.

"I went to see Joan Lowrie this morning," he answered hesitatingly, "and I am very much disappointed in her. I scarcely think, after all, that I would advise you to take her in hand. She is not an amiable young woman. In fact there is a positive touch of the vixen about her."