

CHAPTER IV - "Love Me, Love My Dog"

Mr. Barholm had fallen into the habit of turn-ing to Anice for it, when he required information concerning people and things. In her desultory pilgrimages, Anice saw all that he missed, and heard much that he was deaf to. The rough, hard-faced men and boisterous girls who passed to and from their work at the mine, drew her to the window whenever they made their appearance. She longed to know something definite of them--to get a little nearer to their unprepossessing life. Sometimes the men and women, passing, caught glimpses of her, and, asking each other who she was, decided upon her relationship to the family.

"Hoo's th' owd parson's lass," somebody said. "Hoo's noan so bad lookin' neyther, if hoo was na sich a bit o' a thing."

The people who had regarded Mr. Barholm with a spice of disfavor, still could not look with ill-nature upon this pretty girl. The slatternly women nudged each other as she passed, and the playing children stared after their usual fashion; but even the hardest-natured matron could find nothing more condemnatory to say than, "Hoo's noan Lancashire, that's plain as th' nose on a body's face;" or, "Theer is na much on her, at ony rate. Hoo's a bit of a weakly-like lass wi'out much blood i' her."

Now and then Anice caught the sound of their words, but she was used to being commented upon. She had learned that people whose lives have a

great deal of hard, common discomfort and struggle, acquire a tendency to depreciation almost as a second nature. It is easier to bear one's own misfortunes, than to bear the good-fortune of better-used people. That is the insult added by Fate to injury.

Riggan was a crooked, rambling, cross-grained little place. From the one wide street with its jumble of old, tumble-down shops, and glaring new ones, branched out narrow, up-hill or down-hill thoroughfares, edged by colliers' houses, with an occasional tiny provision shop, where bread and bacon were ranged alongside potatoes and flabby cabbages; ornithological specimens made of pale sweet cake, and adorned with startling black currant eyes, rested unsteadily against the window-pane, a sore temptation to the juvenile populace.

It was in one of these side streets that Anice met with her first adventure.

Turning the corner, she heard the sharp yelp of a dog among a group of children, followed almost immediately by a ringing of loud, angry, boyish voices, a sound of blows and cries, and a violent scuffle. Anice paused for a few seconds, looking over the heads of the excited little crowd, and then made her way to it, and in a minute was in the heart of it. The two boys who were the principal figures, were fighting frantically, scuffling, kicking, biting, and laying on vigorous blows, with not unscientific fists. Now and then a fierce, red, boyish face was to be seen, and then the rough head ducked and the fight waxed fiercer

and hotter, while the dog--a small, shrewd sharp-nosed terrier--barked at the combatants' heels, snapping at one pair, but not at the other, and plainly enjoying the excitement.

"Boys!" cried Anice. "What's the mat-ter?"

"They're feighten," remarked a philosophical young by-stander, with placid interest,--"an' Jud Bates'll win."

It was so astonishing a thing that any outsider should think of interfering, and there was something so decided in the girlish voice addressing them, that almost at the moment the combatants fell back, panting heavily, breathing vengeance in true boy fashion, and evidently resenting the unexpected intrusion.

"What is it all about?" demanded the girl. "Tell me."

The crowd gathered close around her to stare, the terrier sat down breathless, his red tongue hanging out, his tail beating the ground. One of the boys was his master, it was plain at a glance, and, as a natural consequence, the dog had felt it his duty to assist to the full extent of his powers. But the other boy was the first to speak.

"Why could na he let me a-be then?" he asked irately. "I was na doin' owt t' him."

"Yea, tha was," retorted his opponent, a sturdy, ragged, ten-year-old.

"Nay, I was na."

"Yea, tha was."

"Well," said Anice, "what was he doing?"

"Aye," cried the first youngster, "tha tell her if tha con. Who hit th' first punse?" excitedly doubling his fist again. "I didna."

"Nay, tha didna, but tha did summat else. Tha punsed at Nib wi' thy clog, an' hit him aside o' th' yed, an' then I punsed thee, an' I'd do it agen fur--"

"Wait a minute," said Anice, holding up her little gloved hand. "Who is Nib?"

"Nib's my dog," surlily. "An' them as punses him, has gotten to punse me."

Anice bent down and patted the small animal.

"He seems a very nice dog," she said. "What did you kick him for?"

Nib's master was somewhat mollified. A person who could appreciate the

virtues of "th' best tARRIER i' Riggan," could not be regarded wholly with contempt, or even indifference.

"He kicked him fur nowt," he answered. "He's allus at uther him or me. He bust my kite, an' he cribbed my marvels, didn't he?" appealing to the by-standers.

"Aye, he did. I seed him crib th' marvels my-sen. He wur mad 'cos Jud wur winnen, and then he kicked Nib."

Jud bent down to pat Nib himself, not without a touch of pride in his manifold injuries, and the readiness with which they were attested.

"Aye," he said, "an' I did na set on him at first neyther. I nivver set on him till he punsed Nib. He may bust my kite, an' steal my marvels, an' he may ca' me ill names, but he shanna kick Nib. So theer!"

It was evident that Nib's enemy was the transgressor. He was grievously in the minority. Nobody seemed to side with him, and everybody seemed ready--when once the tongues were loosed--to say a word for Jud and "th' best tARRIER i' Riggan." For a few minutes Anice could scarcely make herself heard.

"You are a good boy to take care of your dog," she said to Jud--"and though fighting is not a good thing, perhaps if I had been a boy," gravely deciding against moral suasion in one rapid glance at the

enemy--"perhaps if I had been a boy, I would have fought myself. You are a coward," she added, with incisive scorn to the other lad, who slinked sulkily out of sight.

"Owd Sammy Craddock," lounging at his window, clay pipe in hand, watched

Anice as she walked away, and gave vent to his feelings in a shrewd chuckle.

"Eh! eh!" he commented; "so that's th' owd parson's lass, is it? Wall, hoo may be o' th' same mate, but hoo is na o' th' same grain, I'll warrant. Hoo's a rare un, hoo is, fur a wench."

"Owd Sammy's" amused chuckles, and exclamations of "Eh! hoo's a rare un--that hoo is--fur a wench," at last drew his wife's attention. The good woman pounced upon him sharply.

"Tha'rt an owd yommer-head," she said. "What art tha ramblin' about now? Who is it as is siccan a rare un?"

Owd Sammy burst into a fresh chuckle, rubbing his knees with both hands.

"Why," said he, "I'll warrant tha could na guess i' tha tried, but I'll gi'e thee a try. Who dost tha think wur out i' th' street just now i' th' thick of a foight among th' lads? I know thou'st nivver guess."

"Nay, happen I canna, an' I dunnot know as I care so much, neyther," testily.

"Why," slapping his knee, "th' owd parson's lass. A little wench not much higher nor thy waist, an' wi' a bit o' a face loike skim-milk, but steady and full o' pluck as an owd un."

"Nay now, tha dost na say so? What wor she doin' an' how did she come theer? Tha mun ha' been dreamin'!"

"Nowt o' th' soart. I seed her as plain as I see thee an' heerd ivery word she said. Tha shouldst ha' seen her! Hoo med as if hoo'd lived wi' lads aw her days. Jud Bates and that young marplot o' Thorme's wur feightin about Nib--at it tooth and nail--an' th' lass sees 'em, an' marches into th' thick, an' sets 'em to reets. Yo' should ha' seen her! An' hoo tells Jud as he's a good lad to tak' care o' his dog, an' hoo does na know but what hoo'd fowt hersen i' his place, an' hoo ca's Jack Thorme a coward, an' turns her back on him, an' ends up wi' tellin' Jud to bring th' tarrier to th' Rectory to see her."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Craddock, "did yo' iwer hear th' loike!"

"I wish th' owd parson had seed her," chuckled her spouse irreverently.

"That soart is na i' his loine. He'd a waved his stick as if he'd been king and council i' one, an' rated 'em fro' th' top round o' th' ladder. He canna get down fro' his perch. Th' owd lad'll stick theer till he

gets a bit too heavy, an' then he'll coom down wi' a crash, ladder an' aw'--but th' lass is a different mak'."

Sammy being an oracle among his associates, new-comers usually passed through his hands, and were condemned, or approved, by him. His pipe, and his criticisms upon society in general, provided him with occupation. Too old to fight and work, he was too shrewd to be ignored. Where he could not make himself felt, he could make himself heard. Accordingly, when he condescended to inform a select and confidential audience that the "owd parson's lass was a rare un, lass as she was"--(the masculine opinion of Riggan on the subject of the weaker sex was a rather disparaging one)--the chances of the Rector's daughter began, so to speak, to "look up." If Sammy Craddock found virtue in the new-comer, it was possible such virtue might exist, at least in a negative form,--and open enmity was rendered unnecessary, and even impolitic. A faint interest began to be awakened. When Anice passed through the streets, the slatternly, baby-laden women looked at her curiously, and in a manner not absolutely unfriendly. She might not be so bad after all, if she did have "Lunnon ways," and was smiled upon by Fortune. At any rate, she differed from the parson himself, which was in her favor.