

## CHAPTER V - Outside the Hedge

Deeply as Anice was interested in Joan, she left her to herself. She did not go to see her, and still more wisely, she managed to hush in her father any awakening tendency toward parochial visits. But from Grace and Fergus Derrick she heard much of her, and through Grace she contrived to convey work and help to Liz, and encouragement to her protectress. From what source the assistance came, Joan did not know, and she was not prone to ask questions.

"If she asks, tell her it is from a girl like herself," Anice had said, and Joan had accepted the explanation.

In a very short time from the date of their first acquaintance, Fergus Derrick's position in the Barholm household had become established. He was the man to make friends and keep them. Mrs. Barholm grew fond of him; the Rector regarded him as an acquisition to their circle, and Anice was his firm friend. So, being free to come and go, he came and went, and found his unceremonious visits pleasant enough. On his arrival at Riggan, he had not anticipated meeting with any such opportunities of enjoyment. He had come to do hard work, and had expected a hard life, softened by few social graces. The work of opening the new mines was a heavy one, and was rendered additionally heavy and dangerous by unforeseen circumstances. A load of responsibility rested upon his shoulders, to which at times he felt himself barely equal, and which men of less tough fibre would have been glad to shift upon others.

Naturally, his daily cares made his hours of relaxation all the more pleasant Mrs. Barholm's influence upon him was a gentle and soothing one, and in Anice he found a subtle inspiration. She seemed to understand his trials by instinct, and even the minutiae of his work made themselves curiously clear to her. As to the people who were under his control, she was never tired of hearing of them, and of studying their quaint, rough ways. To please her he stored up many a characteristic incident, and it was through him that she heard most frequently of Joan. She did not even see Joan for fully two months after her arrival in Riggan, and then it was Joan who came to her.

As the weather became more spring-like she was oftener out in the garden. She found a great deal to do among the flower-beds and shrubbery, and as this had always been considered her department, she took the management of affairs wholly into her own hands. The old place, which had been rather neglected in the time of the previous inhabitant, began to bloom out into fragrant luxuriance, and passing Rigganites regarded it with admiring eyes. The colliers who had noticed her at the window in the colder weather, seeing her so frequently from a nearer point of view, felt themselves on more familiar terms. Some of them even took a sort of liking to her, and gave her an uncouth greeting as they went by; and, more than once, one or another of them had paused to ask for a flower or two, and had received them with a curious bashful awe, when they had been passed over the holly hedge.

Having gone out one evening after dinner to gather flowers for the

house, Anice, standing before a high lilac bush, and pulling its pale purple tassels, became suddenly conscious that some one was watching her--some one standing upon the roadside behind the holly hedge. She did not know that as she stopped here and there to fill her basket, she had been singing to herself in a low tone. Her voice had attracted the passer-by.

This passer-by--a tall pit girl with a handsome, resolute face--stood behind the dark green hedge, and watched her. Perhaps to this girl, weary with her day's labor, grimed with coal-dust, it was not unlike standing outside paradise. Early in the year as it was, there were flowers enough in the beds, and among the shrubs, to make the spring air fresh with a faint, sweet odor. But here too was Anice in her soft white merino dress, with her basket of flowers, with the blue bells at her belt, and her half audible song. She struck Joan Lowrie with a new sense of beauty and purity. As she watched her she grew discontented--restless--sore at heart. She could not have told why, but she felt a certain anger against herself. She had had a hard day. Things had gone wrong at the pit's mouth; things had gone wrong at home. It was hard for her strong nature to bear with Liz's weakness. Her path was never smooth, but to-day it had been at its roughest. The little song fell upon her ear with strong pathos.

"She's inside o' th' hedge," she said to herself in a dull voice. "I'm outside, theer's th' difference. It a'most looks loike the hedge went aw' around an' she'd been born among th' flowers, and theer's no way out

for her--no more than their's a way in fur me."

Then it was that Anice turned round and saw her. Their eyes met, and, singularly enough, Anice's first thought was that this was Joan. Derrick's description made her sure. There were not two such women in Riggan. She made her decision in a moment. She stepped across the grass to the hedge with a ready smile.

"You were looking at my flowers," she said. "Will you have some?"

Joan hesitated.

"I often give them to people," said Anice, taking a handful from the basket and offering them to her across the holly. "When the men come home from the mines they often ask me for two or three, and I think they like them even better than I do--though that is saying a great deal."

Joan held out her hand, and took the flowers, holding them awkwardly, but with tenderness.

"Oh, thank yo'," she said. "It's kind o' yo' to gi' 'em away."

"It's a pleasure to me," said Anice, picking out a delicate pink hyacinth. "Here's a hyacinth." Then as Joan took it their eyes met. "Are you Joan Lowrie?" asked the girl.

Joan lifted her head.

"Aye," she answered, "I'm Joan Lowrie."

"Ah," said Anice, "then I am very glad."

They stood on the same level from that moment. Something as indescribable as all else in her manner, had done for Anice just what she had simply and seriously desired to do. Proud and stubborn as her nature was, Joan was subdued. The girl's air and speech were like her song. She stood inside the hedge still, in her white dress, among the flowers, looking just as much as if she had been born there as ever, but some fine part of her had crossed the boundary.

"Ah! then I am glad of that," she said.

"Yo' are very good to say as much," she answered, "but I dunnot know as I quite understand--"

Anice drew a little nearer.

"Mr. Grace has told me about you," she said. "And Mr. Derrick."

Joan's brown throat raised itself a trifle, and Anice thought color showed itself on her cheek.

"Both on 'em's been good to me," she said, "but I did na think as--"

Anice stopped her with a little gesture, "It was you who were so kind to Liz when she had no friend," she began.

Joan interrupted her with sudden eagerness.

"It wur yo' as sent th' work an' th' things fur th' choild," she said.

"Yes, it was I," answered Anice. "But I hardly knew what to send. I hope I sent the right things, did I?"

"Yes, miss; thank yo'." And then in a lower voice, "They wur a power o' help to Liz an' me. Liz wur hard beset then, an' she's only a young thing as canna bear sore trouble. Seemed loike that th' thowt as some un had helped her wur a comfort to her."

Anice took courage.

"Perhaps if I might come and see her," she said. "May I come? I should like to see the baby. I am very fond of little children."

There was a moment's pause, and then Joan spoke awkwardly.

"Do yo' know--happen yo' dunnot--what Liz's trouble is? Bein' as yo're so young yorsen, happen they did na tell yo' all. Most o' toimes folk is

na apt to be fond o' such loike as this little un o' hers."

"I heard all the story."

"Then come if yo' loike,--an' if they'll let yo', some ud think there wur harm i' th' choild's touch. I'm glad yo' dunna."

She did not linger much longer. Anice watched her till she was out of sight. An imposing figure she was--moving down the road in her rough masculine garb--the massive perfection of her form clearly outlined against the light. It seemed impossible that such a flower as this could blossom, and decay, and die out in such a life, without any higher fruition.

"I have seen Joan Lowrie," said Anice to Derrick, when next they met.

"Did she come to you, or did you go to her?" Fergus asked.

"She came to me, but without knowing that she was coming."

"That was best," was his comment.

Joan Lowrie was as much a puzzle to him as she was to other people. Despite the fact that he saw her every day of his life, he had never found it possible to advance a step with her. She held herself aloof from him, just as she held herself aloof from the rest. A common

greeting, and oftener than not, a silent one, was all that passed between them. Try as he would, he could get no farther;--and he certainly did make some effort. Now and then he found the chance to do her a good turn, and such opportunities he never let slip, though his way of doing such things was always so quiet as to be unlikely to attract any observation. Usually he made his way with people easily, but this girl held him at a distance, almost ungraciously. And he did not like to be beaten. Who does? So he persevered with a shade of stubbornness, hidden under a net-work of other motives. Once, when he had exerted himself to lighten her labor somewhat, she set aside his assistance openly.

"Theer's others as needs help more nor me," she said. "Help them, an' I'll thank yo'."

In course of time, however, he accidentally discovered that there had been occasions when, notwithstanding her apparent ungraciousness, she had exerted her influence in his behalf.

The older colliers resented his youth, the younger ones his authority. The fact that he was "noan Lancashire" worked against him too, though even if he had been a Lancashire man, he would not have been likely to find over-much favor. It was enough that he was "one o' th' mesters." To have been weak of will, or vacillating of purpose, would have been death to every vestige of the authority vested in him; but he was as strong mentally as physically--strong-willed to the verge of stubbornness. But



if they could not frighten or subdue him, they could still oppose and irritate him, and the contention was obstinate. This feeling even influenced the girls and women at the "mouth." They, too, organized in petty rebellion, annoying if not powerful.

"I think yo' will find as yo' may as well leave th' engineer be," Joan would say dryly. "Yo' will na fear him much, an' yo'll tire yo'rsens wi' yo're clatter. I donna see the good o' barkin' so much when yo' canna bite."

"Aye," jeered one of the boldest, once, "leave th' engineer be. Joan sets a power o' store by th' engineer."

There was a shout of laughter, but it died out when Joan confronted the speaker with dangerous steadiness of gaze.

"Save thy breath to cool thy porridge," she said. "It will be better for thee."

But it was neither the first nor the last time that her companions flung out a jeer at her "sweetheartin'." The shrewdest among them had observed Derrick's interest in her. They concluded, of course, that Joan's handsome face had won her a sweetheart. They could not accuse her of encouraging him; but they could profess to believe that she was softening, and they could use the insinuation as a sharp weapon against her, when such a course was not too hazardous.

Of this, Derrick knew nothing. He could only see that Joan set her face persistently against his attempts to make friends with her, and the recognition of this fact almost exasperated him at times. It was quite natural that, seeing so much of this handsome creature, and hearing so much of her, his admiration should not die out, and that opposition should rather invite him to stronger efforts to reach her.

So it was that hearing Miss Barholm's story he fell into unconscious reverie. Of course this did not last long. He was roused from it by the fact that Anice was looking at him. When he looked up, it seemed as if she awakened also, though she did not start.

"How are you getting on at the mines?" she asked.

"Badly. Or, at least, by no means well. The men are growing harder to deal with every day." "And your plans about the fans?" The substitution of the mechanical fan for the old furnace at the base of the shaft, was one of the projects to which Derrick clung most tenaciously. During a two years' sojourn among the Belgian mines, he had studied the system earnestly. He had worked hard to introduce it at Riggan, and meant to work still harder. But the miners were bitterly opposed to anything "newfangled," and the owners were careless. So that the mines were worked, and their profits made, it did not matter for the rest. They were used to casualties, so well used to them in fact, that unless a fearful loss of life occurred, they were not alarmed or even roused. As

to the injuries done to a man's health, and so on--they had not time to inquire into such things. There was danger in all trades, for the matter of that. Fergus Derrick was a young man, and young men were fond of novelties.

Opposition was bad enough, but indifference was far more baffling. The colliers opposed Derrick to the utmost, the Company was rather inclined to ignore him--some members good-naturedly, others with an air of superiority, not unmixed with contempt. The colliers talked with rough ill-nature; the Company did not want to talk at all.

"Oh," answered Derrick, "I do not see that I have made one step forward; but it will go hard with me before I am beaten. Some of the men I have to deal with are as bat-blind as they are cantankerous. One would think that experience might have taught them wisdom. Would you believe that some of those working in the most dangerous parts of the mine have false keys to their Davys, and use the flame to light their pipes? I have heard of the thing being done before, but I only discovered the other day that we had such madmen in the pits here. If I could only be sure of them I would settle the matter at once, but they are crafty enough to keep their secret, and it only drifts to the master as a rumor."

"Have you no suspicion as to who they are?" asked Anice.

"I suspect one man," he answered, "but only suspect him because he is a bad fellow, reckless in all things, and always ready to break the rules.

I suspect Dan Lowrie."

"Joan's father?" exclaimed Anice in distress.

Derrick made a gesture of assent.

"He is the worst man in the mines," he said, "The man with the worst influence, the man who can work best if he will, the man whose feeling against any authority is the strongest, and whose feeling against me amounts to bitter enmity."

"Against you? But why?"

"I suppose because I have no liking for him myself, and because I will have orders obeyed, whether they are my orders or the orders of the owners. I will have work done as it should be done, and I will not be frightened by bullies."

"But if he is a dangerous man--"

"He would knock me down from behind, or spoil my beauty with vitriol as coolly as he would toss off a pint of beer, if he had the opportunity, and chanced to feel vicious enough at the time," said Derrick, "But his mood has not quite come to that yet. Just now he feels that he would like to have a row,--and really, if we could have a row, it would be the best thing for us both. If one of us could thrash the other at the

outset, it might never come to the vitriol."

He was cool enough himself, and spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way, but Anice suddenly lost her color. When, later, she bade him goodnight--

"I am afraid of that man," she said, as he held her hand for the moment.

"Don't let him harm you."

"What man?" asked Derrick. "Is it possible you are thinking about what I said of Lowrie?"

"Yes. It is so horrible. I cannot bear the thought of it. I am not used to hear of such things. I am afraid for you."

"You are very good," he said, his strong hand returning her grasp with warm gratitude. "But I am sorry I said so much, if I have frightened you. I ought to have remembered how new such things were to you. It is nothing, I assure you." And bidding her good-night again, he went away quite warmed at heart by her innocent interest in him, but blaming himself not a little for his indiscretion.