

## CHAPTER XXVIII - Warned

It was even later than usual this evening when Fergus Derrick left the Rectory. When Mr. Barholm was in his talkative mood, it was not easy for him to break away. So Derrick was fain to listen and linger, and then supper was brought in and he was detained again, and at eleven o'clock Mr. Barholm suddenly hit upon a new topic.

"By the by," he said, "where is that fellow, Lowrie? I thought he had left Riggan."

"He did leave Riggan," answered Derrick.

"So I heard," returned the Rector, "and I suppose I was mistaken in fancying I caught sight of him to-day. I don't know the man very well and I might easily be deceived. But where is he?"

"I think," said Derrick, quietly, "that he is in Riggan. I am not of the opinion that you were mistaken at all. I am sure he is here, but for reasons of his own he is keeping himself quiet. I know him too well to be deceived by any fancied resemblance."

"But what are his reasons?" was the next question. "That looks bad, you know. He belongs to a bad crew."

"Bad enough," said Derrick.

"Is it a grudge? He is just the rascal to bear a grudge."

"Yes," said Derrick. "It is a grudge against me."

He looked up then across the table at Anice and smiled reassuringly.

"You did not tell us that you had seen him," she said.

"No. You think I ought to be afraid of him, and I am too vain to like to admit the possibility that it would be better to fear any man, even a Riggan collier."

"But such a man!" put in Mrs. Barholm. "It seems to me he is a man to be feared."

"I can thrash him," said Derrick. He could not help feeling some enjoyment in this certainty. "I did thrash him upon one occasion, you know, and a single combat with a fellow of that kind is oftener than not decisive."

"Yes," said the Rector, "that is the principal cause of his grudge, I think. He might forgive you for getting him into trouble, but he will never forgive you for thrashing him."

They were still sitting at the table discussing the matter, when Anice,

who sat opposite a window, rose from her seat, and crossing the room to it, drew aside the curtain and looked out.

"There was somebody there," she said, in answer to the questioning in the faces of her companions. "There was a face pressed close against the glass for a minute, and I am sure it was Jud Bates."

Derrick sprang from his chair. To his mind, it did not appear at all unlikely that Jud Bates had mischief in hand. There were apples enough in the Rectory garden to be a sore trial to youthful virtue.

He opened the door and stepped into the night, and in a short time a sharp familiar yelp fell upon the ears of the listeners. Almost immediately after, Derrick returned, holding the trespasser by the arm.

It was Jud Bates, but he did not look exactly like a convicted culprit, though his appearance was disordered enough. He was pale and out of breath, he had no cap on, and he was holding Nib, panting and excited, in his arms.

"Jud," exclaimed Anice, "what have you been doing? Why did you come to the window?"

Jud drew Nib closer, and turned, if possible, a trifle paler.

"I coom," he said, tremulously, "to look in."

Nobody smiled.

"To look in?" said Anice. "Why, whom did you want to see?"

Jud jerked his elbow at Derrick.

"It was him" he answered. "I wanted to see if he had gone home yet."

"But why?" she asked again.

He shuffled his feet uneasily and his eyes fell. He looked down at Nib's head and faltered.

"I--" he said. "I wanted to stop him. I--I dunnot know----" And then the rest came in a burst. "He munnot go," he cried, trembling afresh. "He mun keep away fro' th' Knoll Road."

The party exchanged glances.

"There is mischief in hand," said Mr. Barholm; "that is plain enough."

"He munnot go," persisted Jud; "he mun keep away fro' th' Knoll Road. I'm gettin' myself i' trouble," he added, the indifference of despair in his pale face. "If I'm fun out they'll mill me."

Derrick stepped aside into the hall and returned with his hat in his hand. He looked roused and determined.

"There are two or three stout colliers in Riggan who are my friends, I think," he said, "and I am going to ask them to face the Knoll Road with me. I should like to settle this matter to-night. If I give these fellows the chance to attack me, they will be the more easily disposed of. A few years in jail might have a salutary effect upon Lowrie."

In his momentary heat, he forgot all but the strife into which he was forced. He did not question Jud closely. He knew Riggan and the mining districts too well not to have a clear enough idea of what means of vengeance would be employed.

But when he got out into the night he had not gone many yards before a new thought flashed upon him, and quickened his pulse. It was not a pleasant thought because it checked him, and he was in a mood to feel impatient of a check. But he could not throw it off. There arose within his mind a picture of a silent room in a cottage,--of a girl sitting by the hearth. He seemed to see quite clearly the bent head, the handsome face, the sad eyes. He had a fancy that Liz was not with her to-night, that the silence of the room was only broken by the soft breathing of the child upon Joan's knee.

He stopped with an impatient gesture.

"What was I thinking of?" he demanded of himself, "to have forgotten her, and what my madness would bring upon her? I am a selfish fool! Let it go. I will give it up. I will stay in Riggan for the future--it will not be long, and she need torture herself no more. I will give it up. Let them think I am afraid to face him. I am afraid--afraid to wound the woman I--yes--the woman I love'."