

# The Tale of Holly How: An Excerpt

## Chapter Five

### Sarah Barwick Makes a Mess

The afternoon had turned overcast and sultry, and Sawrey drowsed in the growing July heat. Clouds of tiny midges—thunderflies, people called them—very small and black, and thought to be a sign of a coming storm, gathered in the air all over the village. In the garden of Tower Bank House, they annoyed Dimity Woodcock no end. She had tucked a sprig of rue behind one ear and a sprig of southernwood behind the other, hoping that the herbs' strong scents would fend them off, but to no avail. And whilst thunderflies didn't bite or sting, they got in one's eyes and one's mouth and were certainly aggravating.

The garden had been without rain for too long, and Dimity was trying to catch up with the gardening chores, which probably seemed as overwhelming to old Fred Phinn (who came twice a week to putter around the borders) as they did to her. The lettuces, past their prime, were ready to bolt; the parched-looking roses and lupines, drooping with heat exhaustion, pleaded for a good sprinkle; and the couch grass, chickweed, and groundsel, always especially insubordinate at this time of year, were clearly plotting a major invasion of the flower borders.

But between the thunderflies getting into her eyes and the disagreeable recollection of Lady Longford's words still ringing in her ears—not to mention the ominous cloud of second thoughts regarding the Flower show that hung over her head—Dimity could not keep her attention on her tasks.

At last, with a sigh of exasperation, she threw down her garden trowel, got to her feet, and brushed the leaves off her skirt. There was no use in trying to work when she was vexed—and she was certainly vexed this afternoon. What she needed was a cup of tea and some good, strong, mind-rattling conversation. And the only place in the village where she could get both together was just on the other side of the stone wall along the edge of the garden, at Anvil Cottage, where Sarah Barwick lived.

Sarah Barwick was a newcomer to Sawrey. In the previous autumn, she had inherited Anvil Cottage upon the death of Miss Agnes Tolliver, an elderly lady who had been greatly respected for her many good works. The villagers were astonished when they learned that Miss Tolliver had not left the cottage to her nephew, as everyone naturally expected, but to the daughter of a man whom she had loved in her youth and been forbidden to marry. Most people in Sawrey had an inborn wariness when it came to "off-comers" like Miss Barwick and Miss Potter, who had purchased Hill Top Farm at about the same time that Anvil Cottage landed so unexpectedly in Sarah's lap.

However, the villagers understood that such things, whilst regrettable, were beyond their control, and most had had settled

into a cautious acceptance of their two new neighbors.

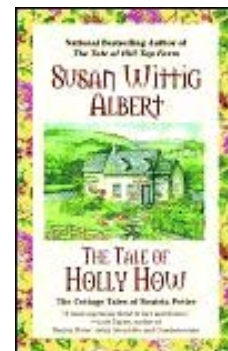
But if the village thought that Miss Barwick might become another Miss Agnes Tolliver, they were mightily mistaken, for it soon became clear that she was one of those "New Women" who were always pointing out ways that women could take charge of their lives and change things for the better.

The most striking evidence of this was her appearance, for Miss Barwick, whilst she occasionally dressed like all the other respectable Sawrey ladies in a dark serge skirt and a white cotton blouse, much preferred to wear trousers. In fact, she had several pairs in different colors—black, brown, blue, and dark green—all fully cut for maximum comfort, and she wore them on every possible occasion. Dimity privately thought that Sarah looked quite smart in her trousers, and even her brother Miles had been heard to comment that it was rather a sensible get-up, if somewhat outlandish. But the rest of the village could express nothing but consternation.

The second thing that had alarmed the village was Miss Barwick's green bicycle. Bicycles had long since ceased to be a novelty, of course. Henry Stubbs bicycled to and from his work at the ferry landing every day, and the boy who carried the newspaper from Hawkshead came on a bicycle, as did several of the men who worked on outlying farms. And there was the Esthwaite Vale Cycling Club, sporting gentlemen who cycled as fast and as far as they could through the moors and fells. Sarah Barwick, however, was the only female in the district who regularly rode a bicycle, and in *trousers*! The village was shocked, and several had forcefully suggested to the vicar that he discuss the matter with Miss Barwick, which he wisely declined to do.

Dimity herself suspected that behind this criticism was the recognition that women who rode bicycles enjoyed an unusual degree of mobility, and that mobility led to independence, and *that*—as all of the men in the village very well knew—might create all sorts of problems. Why, a wife who rode a bicycle to Hawkshead in the afternoon might not arrive back home in time to cook her poor husband's supper, and him bone-weary after a day's hard work. And if she was gadding about on her bicycle, who would iron his shirts or scrub the floor?

Yes, indeed, in more ways than one, Miss Barwick was a danger. . . .



*All at once, at his elbow, a little voice spoke. "My name is Pigwig. Make me more porridge, please!"*

*Pigwig Bland*  
By Beatrix Potter  
1913

## How to Make Pigwig's Porridge

For each person:

2 tablespoons of coarse or medium oatmeal  
1 cup water  
Salt  
Creamy milk  
Cinnamon

Bring the water to a boil in a saucepan and add the oatmeal, stirring. When boiling resumes, lower the heat and simmer for ten minutes, then add salt and stir. Cover again and simmer very gently for another ten minutes. Serve with creamy milk and a sprinkle of cinnamon.