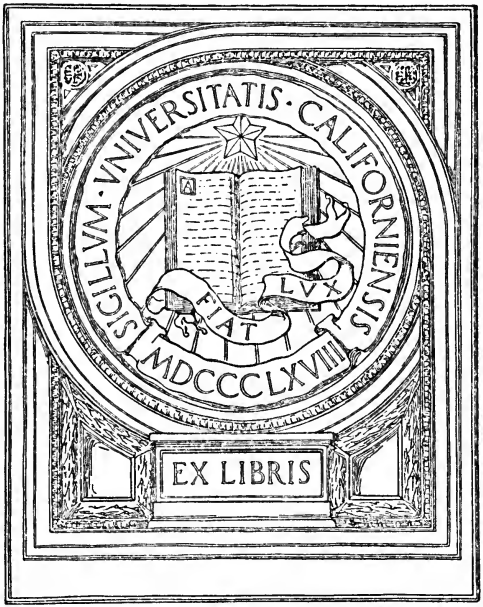

EDGEWATER PEOPLE

BOOKS BY

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

EDGEWATER PEOPLE
BY THE LIGHT OF THE SOUL
THE COPY-CAT
THE DEBTOR
EVELINA'S GARDEN
THE FAIR LAVINIA
GILES COREY, YEOMAN
THE GIVERS
A HUMBLE ROMANCE
JANE FIELD
JEROME—A POOR MAN
MADELON
A NEW ENGLAND NUN
PEMBROKE
THE PORTION OF LABOR
THE SHOULDERS OF ATLAS
SILENCE
SIX TREES
UNDERSTUDIES
THE WINNING LADY, AND OTHERS
YOUNG LUCRETIA

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
[ESTABLISHED 1817]

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NELLY EMERGED FROM THE FRONT DOOR AND MOVED TO MEET HIM

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BY

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN
Author of "THE PORTION OF LABOR",
"JEROME", "A NEW ENGLAND NUN", ETC.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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EDGEWATER PEOPLE

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EDGEWATER PEOPLE

FOREWORD

VILLAGES, as well as people, exist subject to laws of change, increase, final dissolution. They have character, complex, of course, still individual.

It is interesting to watch the inevitable result when a village of large area and restricted population increases in population as years go on. The one village becomes impossible. It is like a bulb of several years' growth. If life and bloom are to continue, separation into component parts is indicated. The original village becomes several, and yet the first characteristics are never entirely lost.

In the village of Barr exactly this process ensued with the increase of population. Instead of one sparsely populated village covering a large land area, there were four—Barr Center, the Barr Center, South Barr, Barr-by-the-Sea, and Leicester. Each had its own government, each village was an entity, and yet the original entity of Barr remained indestructible.

The Edgewater family stamped the four villages with their individuality; so did the Leicesters; so did the Sylvesters; so did all strongly rooted families.

The stories in this volume relate to families

living in patriarchal fashion, although not under one roof, under one village tree.

Not many in the four villages are entirely exempt from the hereditary influence of the original village. No dissensions, not even radical differences of character, were able to destroy the first strength of concerted growth. New-comers came under its sway, by marriage, or by the close neighborhood system of small communities.

These stories of four villages are stories of a fourfold individual standing out against his rural background, essentially the same, yet of a different aspect to each observer.

I may have succeeded in making this evident in this volume. I may have failed. In any case the situation is true, and the growth and multiplication of villages, according to the laws of all increase on earth, are worth studying.

EDGEWATER PEOPLE

SARAH EDGEWATER

DORENA went out of the room. She went airily, leaving a trail of strong perfume, her first minor assertion of real emancipation, and Sarah Edgewater realized that the beginning of the end, which she had secretly dreaded for years, had come.

Dorena had given notice.

She had given it regretfully, even emotionally. She was too much like her mother, who had lived and died in the service of the Edgewater family, not to feel loving misgivings at leaving her "Miss Sarah." But Dorena was in love with a handsome young man, as light-colored as she, and he was insistent.

"I'd rather be daid, than tell po' Miss Sarah," Dorena had wailed—but she had told her.

Sarah sitting, magazine in hand, had heard her with calm dignity and kindness. She was aware of the situation and respected it. When Dorena left she would be quite alone. She would fall to

depths of spiritual woe which she could not as yet fathom; but she showed no dismay.

"You may go up in the attic, Dorena," she said, "and select anything you would like; then Sam can come and take them away to your new house."

Sarah Edgewater was a good woman. In the midst of her dismay, her more than dismay, her utter panic, a thrill of pure pleasure in the delight of this other woman upon a threshold which she had herself never crossed, the threshold of complete earthly life, came over her. A smile enhanced the effect of her handsome face. Sarah Edgewater, although middle-aged, was a very handsome woman. Her thick dark hair rose strongly from her full temples in fine waves. Her color was clear red and white. She was a large woman, but not stout. Only her eyes might have betrayed her inmost self to an astute observer. They were of such a deep blue as to seem black, and they were set in wistful fashion, although their outlook was clear and level.

When she heard Dorena pounding about overhead, her eyes, despite her smile, were tragic. She realized what Dorena's going would mean. She, Sarah, would then be left alone in the great Edgewater house. She thought, in a sort of panic, of woman after woman, who might, who would, come to live with her. She knew, of course, the perfect practicability of obtaining another servant in Dorena's place. But along with Sarah's abnormal dread of solitude, was another trait even more insistent, the reluctance to admit strangers into

that solitude. Not one woman of whom she thought could ever be possible as a home sharer, and she shuddered at the thought of a strange servant. Dorena and her mother and grandmother, and two sisters and a brother, had been the only servants who had ever reigned in the Edgewater family. After dinner that night, when Dorena told her about a girl whom she might secure to fill her place, Sarah shook her head.

"We will not discuss that, Dorena," she said.

Dorena was half sobbing. "What will you do, Miss Sarah?" she lamented.

"I am glad you found so many things you like in the attic," said her mistress, sweetly.

Sarah Edgewater felt a thrill of real delight in the delight of another, and she enjoyed many such thrills during the next few weeks. She engineered the making of Dorena's trousseau and gave her a beautiful wedding.

"It has been just like white folks," Dorena said, with exultation, as she and her husband set off for their honeymoon.

Then the thrills were over for Sarah, also the pleasure in unselfishness. For a few days after the wedding sheer hard physical labor blinded her to the situation, but there came a day when the house was entirely set to rights, and she faced it. She faced it with head up. Sarah was no coward. She had won heights of physical and mental stress without flinching, but this was different. This was no cowardice, rather an idiosyncrasy deep-rooted in obscure heredity, which had been awakened and

grafted upon her very soul by untoward circumstance, a tragedy of life, years before.

Ever since her girlhood, there had been over the strong, handsome creature, the horror of solitude, of some day living alone. Now it had come. She reasoned with herself, but the situation was beyond reason. It was a primal fact. Many live and die without encountering primal facts which are beyond the power of humanity to evade. She might as well have reasoned with a rock-rib of the earth.

Sarah had been one of a large family. There had been many children. There had been uncles and aunts. Parents and grandparents had lived to ripe old ages. Now all were dead, except one brother whom Sarah never saw (he lived in the far West) and one sister, who meant worse than none to her.

This sister Laura had brought to Sarah the terrible tragedy of her life, the tragedy which had distorted her character. She was slightly Sarah's senior, and had never had a lover when Sarah, in their long-distant girlhoods, had come home from a visit to an aunt in a Middle West city with a lover in her wake. No girl but would have been proud of her conquest of this handsome young man, Thomas Ellerton, with his stately carriage of head, with his crest of fair hair tossing over his full forehead, with his ready wit, his good family, his profession in which he seemed sure to succeed. He was a physician, and, Doctor Edgewater having just retired, there was no regular practitioner in the village. Young Ellerton was to settle there, take

his father-in-law's practice, live in the Edgewater house, and have the elder physician's office.

But Thomas Ellerton did not marry Sarah. He married her sister Laura, and the indignant old father would not have him in the house and would have resumed his practice and ousted him from that had his health permitted. As it was he made the practice as small as he was able, without employing direct denunciation. Laura had been not only treacherous, but cruel and bold with regard to her treachery. She had known, the beautiful elder sister, who had never had lovers at her feet, that she could easily have her own way with her sister's. But the time was ripe when Sarah brought Thomas Ellerton home. In the first place, Laura had been indignant because Sarah, and not herself, had been invited to make the visit which had led to so much. Now, when another had had the chance, she thought it only fair play to seize the winnings.

Laura was so lovely that at the first glance poor Thomas, although he would have clung fast to honor, had no power to do so. If the loveliness had not been coupled with unscrupulousness there might have been a fair combat. But Laura's pretended coyness was the subtlest of advances. Since Dorena's mother, who was in charge then, had been ill, Laura assumed that, lover or no lover, it was Sarah's turn, after her vacation, to take charge of the housekeeping. The mother was delicate, an old grandmother was past work. Through hot, unbecoming days of that old summer, Sarah had drudged in the kitchen naïvely concocting tooth-

some dishes to please her lover, while Laura, clad in cool muslins, was teaching him lessons of love.

One day, Sarah, flushed with heat, her black hair stringy over her temples, her kitchen apron on, found them sitting, lover-wise, in the grape-arbor. A sudden suspicion had at last seized her. She had been frying crullers and had left the boiling fat on the stove: her father, passing through the kitchen, had rescued the house from the consequences. Suspicion had seized him also. He followed Sarah and saw a tableau in the grape-arbor. Flickered over by a green waltz of leaf shadows there sat Laura, angel-faced, with lovely folds of golden hair over her ears, in a blue muslin gown making her slim length ruffle to the wind like a blue flower. There sat Thomas Ellerton, deadly white, yet with a bold front, for he was a man in spite of his yielding to the wiles of beauty. His arm was around that tiny waist of Laura's. He had scorned to remove it. There stood Sarah, magnificent, silent, tousled, flushed, redolent of crullers, before them. She did not accuse. She only observed, with the silence which is as loud as a trumpet call. She was swallowing the awful wisdom of the world with regard to the falseness and treachery of love, but she was silent. Doctor Edgewater spoke. He was a choleric man with a ready tongue. He used language not in accordance with the tenets of the orthodox faith. Sarah looked at him. "Let them alone, Father," she said.

Then she returned to the house and the hot

kitchen. She cleaned the kettle which had been scorched; she put in more fat; and then she finished the crullers.

Laura continued sitting in the arbor. She was doing some fine embroidery on linen, and a queer smile altered the lovely contours of her face, which was not angelic as she sat temporarily unobserved. She was not in the least disturbed. Beside her, while she embroidered, sat the man, his head in his hands. He was overwhelmed. Laura was ready at a second's notice, if he should raise his head, to drop her embroidery and also be overwhelmed.

When at last Thomas raised his heavy head and glanced at her with shamed eyes, her embroidery slipped into her lap, her golden head drooped onto his shoulder. She sighed, a lovely sigh of womanly sorrow and remorse. Thomas, poor simpleton, thought he understood that exquisite sigh.

"We could not help it, could we, dearest?" he murmured, and the golden head against his breast moved in negation. "I know I have acted like a brute," said Thomas, and, to do him justice, not fatuously, but sincerely.

Laura reached up one slim hand and patted his cheek consolingly. She was full of such little tricks. Sarah had disdained them, and thereby rendered her fortress less impregnable. Now Laura's pat of lily-white hand seemed to set him back on his pedestal. "Of course, if I had seen you first——" he said.

"Love," whispered Laura, "goes where it is sent."

"I am sorry for her," said Thomas.

"Some think Sarah handsomer than I," murmured Laura, with subtle angling.

"Handsomer than you! Why, Laura!"

Laura smiled secretly against her lover's shoulder. She knew that in reality Sarah was handsomer. She reflected upon cosmetics and home-made aids to beauty, of which Sarah had no need, but—she also reflected with pleasure that Sarah, who knew, was to be trusted. At that moment there was the stain of ripe strawberries upon the soft curves of her cheeks, and the tip of her chin and lobes of her little ears. Her gold hair had been burnished with a fragrant oil, which Sarah had seen her preparing.

Laura was secure; but one thing she dreaded, and that was her father's continued wrath. When Thomas said presently that, under the circumstances, . . . she had better take the night stage-coach to an aunt of his, one Madam Lucretia Ellerton who lived only twenty-five miles away, that he of course would accompany her, and that they would be wedded as soon as might be from Madam Ellerton's, she made no demur. By nightfall both were gone.

After the wedding they returned and settled in the old Squire Amidon mansion. It was the only available house in the village, directly across the road from Doctor Edgewater's. Sarah could see from her window her sister in her bridal finery emerge from her front door with Thomas. Sarah saw; she scorned to evade the seeing. When her

mother, who was a gentle, mild-spirited soul, delicate in health, wept, Sarah cheered her.

"Do you think I mind, Mother?" she said. "Better to live unmarried than to have a husband who can so easily turn. 'Tis not a weathercock I thought to have, but a man."

"And Laura has not your looks," commented the mother gently, as she did everything. "Were it not for the——"

"Hush, Mother," said Sarah. "No need for you to weep, nor for Father to use strong words. Both shame me, and I have no need of pity."

Doctor Edgewater never spoke again to his daughter Laura. He never entered her home. However, he did not live long to cherish rancor. He died suddenly when Laura had not been married two years. No mention of her was made in her father's will. Her brother and other sisters had been given legacies, but to Sarah, after her mother, the old home and the bulk of the property was left.

Madam Edgewater lived to be very old, and Sarah cared for her. She saw her sister and Thomas enter and re-enter their home. She saw their children toddle about the doors. She seldom met any of them. Sarah did not often attend the simple village festivities, and Laura was kept very much at home by the care of her children. Moreover, her health became delicate. But whenever they did meet, the keenest of observers discerned nothing which was not faultless toward her recreant lover and the sister who had played her false.

But Sarah's manner was not Sarah. Underneath her calm dignity, even affability, was hatred of her sister so intense that at times it seemed even to her that she bore about with her a thing of evil. Thomas she did not hate. She thought of him not at all. When the war came and he went as surgeon, she saw him go away without a thrill. He came home soon, invalided. He took up his practice, but was not successful. He died not long after peace was declared. Laura was left with five children.

Then Sarah went across the street for the first time. It was her simple duty, not to be shirked. Her mother was dead by that time, and she was living alone with Dorena and Dorena's mother. Laura was helpless, still, in her helplessness there was triumph over her sister. Laura receiving benefits was despicable, a shame to herself. Sarah took up the youngest child to hush it, and Laura snatched it away.

"Old maids don't know how to handle children," said she.

"You are quite right," agreed Sarah. "They do not, and I am an old maid." The child, little Imogen, cried to return to her aunt, but Sarah put her gently away.

Sarah, hating Laura as she did, marveled at Laura's hatred of her when she had had her will and had despoiled her. She did not know what Laura knew, that deep in the heart of that dead man had never ceased to burn with a clear flame love for the woman who was true and worthy, and

that always he had classed his wife with himself, as betrayers and fellow-sinners. Also Sarah, with her direct hatred, did not suspect the existence of a hatred which is subtler and more deadly, the hatred of the wrong-doer for the victim of the wrong, which is the very boomerang of the soul. In that way Laura hated Sarah.

Laura was a foolish mother, but the fact of her utter selfishness made it possible for her untrained children to grow and be worth-while, for they learned self-reliance and self-denial early. The winter after the death of Thomas, the eldest girl, Amy, obtained a position in the village school. She had a meager salary. Tom, the one boy, was next in age to Amy. He gave up school and became a clerk in the village drug-store.

Tom was a singularly handsome, happy-natured boy. He had been quick in school, and his father had cherished the wish of a college course and a profession for him. The boy had his dreams, but when his father died he gave up dreaming with the loveliest unquestioning alacrity. Tom was one of the blessed of the earth, to whom the narrow way is the only one wherein he can turn his feet. Young Tom fairly danced in his narrow way.

He often waited upon his aunt Sarah Edgewater when she came to the drug-store. He was the only one of the family with whom she realized no constraint. He used, that good, happy, handsome, loving boy, to make a little dart of pleasure when she entered the door. She never hesitated to inquire

of him concerning his sister and the children. Young Tom was most optimistic.

"We are getting on like hot cakes, Aunt Sarah," was his favorite reply.

After Sarah was left alone he made a surreptitious call upon her one evening on his way home from the store. It was three days after Dorena's wedding. He saw the sitting-room in his aunt's house still lighted, and he ran up to the front door and clanged the knocker. Sarah opened the door speedily, and something in her face shocked the boy. She was ghastly white, but there was something else. In his aunt's great, dark eyes was almost inhuman terror, which leaped into immense relief at the sight of him.

"Come in, Tom," she said in a fervent voice, and the boy followed her in, wondering.

Sarah entertained young Tom with currant wine, ham sandwiches, and seed cakes. He ate with voracity. His fare at home was not so dainty. Sarah inquired for his mother and the children; how Amy got on with her school. Only with regard to Amy did the boy's wonderful optimism fail him for a moment. His laughing mouth drooped.

"I feel sorry for Amy, Aunt Sarah," he said.

"Why?"

"Oh, well, Walter Dinsmore, young Doctor Dinsmore, you know, has called on her, and he is trying to take Father's practice, but it is up-hill work. He is so young; still he gets on very well and he thinks a lot of Amy. He has talked it over

with me. Walter is straight. He does seem straight, don't you think so?"

Sarah nodded.

"Well, he is in earnest, and as far as Amy is concerned he could manage. He makes enough to get married and look out for her; but there are Mother and the children, and I don't begin to earn enough. I am only eighteen, you know, Aunt Sarah. Walter can't marry Amy as things are now. She wouldn't think so herself. Amy is a good girl. She wouldn't shirk her duty to Mother and the younger ones, but Walter doesn't think he ought to say anything to her or pay any more attention to her. He says she is so pretty that some rich man might fancy her, and she could get married. He says he's willing to wait till he's eighty, but he won't bind her. I tried to make him tell Amy, but he won't. And now he hasn't been near her for weeks, and I can see she is bothered, though she's got plenty of grit. Amy is the sort to do up her hair just as nice if she were going to be hung. But she doesn't know, and she does feel hurt. I promised Walter I wouldn't tell her, and I suppose after a while she'll get used to it?" Tom regarded his aunt anxiously with a question in his eyes.

"Girls like Amy always get used to it," she assured him, and there was something pitiful and grim in her voice. She thought Amy must be such a girl as she herself had been. She also thought that the young doctor would never wait until Amy's mother died and three young sisters became self-supporting.

However, Tom looked relieved. "I supposed girls like Amy did get over things," he said, comfortably. "I know I could."

Sarah regarded the boy devouring seed cakes, with a look of love. "It seems easy for you to give up anything," she said.

"It is," replied the boy, simply. "These cakes are good."

When Tom arose at last to go he started to see the expression of terror appear again in his aunt's eyes, at least the dawn of it. He did not dream what caused it.

"Don't you feel well?" he said. He even patted her large black silk shoulder, this adorable, loving boy who might have been her very own, her young bulwark between her and all the terrors of the world.

"I am very well," she said, and smiled, controlling her tremulous lips with an effort.

"I can come in now and then on my way from the store," stated the boy diffidently, "if you would like to have me, Aunt Sarah. I get out early two nights a week."

Sarah beamed at him. "Come whenever you can," said she, "and I will have a better luncheon to offer you than I had to-night."

"Oh, that was bully! Couldn't have been better," said Tom.

After he had gone down the front walk, Sarah sat down again, and the dreadful thing which had come to her on the first night of her utter loneliness in the house assailed her. It was beyond reason

that a woman of such strength of body and mind could be so overcome by nothing. She told herself that. She laughed, she sneered at herself, but it was of no avail. She prayed; it was of no avail. Sarah Edgewater was abject before the horror of which she had lived in horror all her life. She was simply alone in the house. That was all. The village was peaceful. The inhabitants were harmless. Seldom did a tramp appear at a door. Her sister's house, where that loving, ready boy dwelt, was within hearing distance of her dinner-bell. She had a telephone. She kept no valuables which could tempt thieves. There was absolutely no reason for her to fear material harm. She was not superstitious; she had no recognized fear of the immaterial, but nothing could alter the fact of her awful panic before solitude. And always the worst of it was—it was not what she had imagined solitude was, not what she had thought. Her wildest dreams had not compassed it. For solitude was in reality not solitude. It was its antithesis. Sarah, alone, was in the midst of cruelly pressing throngs. No room in the empty house was empty.

There was the horror. She had thought to be in deadly fear of vacancy, of emptiness, and there was none. Not a room in the house but she knew filled to the door, not a room but whose windows were crammed with faces. And it was the more terrible because of the strangeness and vagueness of the faces. She imagined none of the former inhabitants of the house, none of the old friends and

neighbors crowding those dreadful rooms, but throngs upon throngs of people whom she had never seen, whose faces and forms and personalities were wholly strange to her. They might not be evil, they might not be good. That did not seem to matter. What did matter was the throngs which people solitude to an imaginative soul crowding upon her very life, striving to press her out of her home and her life.

That night Sarah did not go to bed. She did not sleep. All through the weary hours she watched and shuddered, and vainly prayed, and knew herself dastardly, and yet could not get the victory. When at last dawn came she welcomed it like a lover. She realized that never before had she appreciated the incalculable blessing of the rising of the sun upon human despair and need, bringing with it a new opportunity. She stirred the kitchen fire, made coffee, cooked breakfast. She felt more herself, although still haunted, still sorely pressed by solitude. But solitude by day was not solitude by night. One could be borne for a long time without madness—the other, perhaps not. After Sarah had finished her breakfast she stood at the window of her sitting-room, watering some geraniums which stood in pots on a little stand. She started, for over the thick green foliage crowned with scarlet blossoms she saw the young doctor hurrying to the door of her sister's house opposite. Then Mrs. Widner, a neighbor who was a kind soul, ready to respond in case of illness, went running up the walk, then young Tom raced out and down the

street, and was soon back. Curtains in the windows of her sister's room slid up and down.

Sarah knew that Laura must be either seized with sudden illness or was dead. She watched, her heart beating hard. She expected every moment to see the undertaker drive up in his sad wagon, but after a while Miss Susan Bellows, who went out nursing, was driven up to the gate in a buggy from the livery-stable. Susan got out and hastened up the walk. Young Tom opened the door. Then, after a little, the doctor and Tom came out and went down the street. Sarah knew that Laura must be ill, and not at the point of death. She watched, and the doctor and Tom did not return. Sarah put on her hat and coat and hurried to the drug-store. Luckily young Tom was alone there. He was ready with the news in spite of the long feud between his mother and aunt. "Mother has had a shock, Aunt Sarah," he said, pantingly.

"A bad one?" Sarah was very pale.

"She will get over it, Dinsmore says. That is" —Tom hesitated—"she won't—die, but she will be helpless a long time. She won't be able to get up, and—oh, Aunt Sarah, you wouldn't know poor Mother."

All unconsciously, young Tom's face twitched. Sarah understood. Laura's face was piteously drawn to one side.

"You have Susan Bellows," she said.

"Yes, she was just home from a case."

"Let me know if I can do anything," said Sarah, and went out.

Young Tom gazed after her. He thought her rather abrupt, but never did he doubt her sympathy. Late in the afternoon she was there again. Tom told her in response to her question that his mother was quiet, there was no change.

That day a revelation had come to Sarah Edgewater. Sitting with solitude, she had for the first time understood the face of solitude. Perhaps her mental vision had been cleared by the shock of her sister's illness. She realized that the solitude before which she was appalled beyond reason was no bodily thing, but a matter of the inmost soul. She realized that what she had stood in such mortal dread of since her sister's betrayal of her was not the emptiness of closed chambers in a house made by hands, but the awful emptiness of a human soul meant by nature to be inhabited by love and tenderness and solicitude for others, and by that of others for her. She knew herself for the dreadful region of solitude, inhabited, in lieu of its rightful dwellers, by vague phantoms of wakeful dreams of horror. Then came, not love for her stricken sister, something better beyond love, a pity and forgiveness which gave the woman who had so wronged her the semblance of Christ Himself, knocking for admittance at her door of life.

Sarah, being essentially honest, could not even then admit that her sister had done no wrong. She had done wrong and, moreover, as one who loved it. Sarah saw her as she was—treacherous, wickedly exultant in treachery, cruel, petty—yet this heavenly feeling for her illuminated her heart.

Laura was dearer to her, she had more claim upon her than if she had never wronged her. Sarah had hated her, now she owed an enormous debt contracted by that hatred. The question was how to pay that debt. That very day she had been to see her lawyer, and a portion of her property was now settled upon her sister and her children. That afternoon, when Amy had come home from school, Sarah saw the lawyer's carriage before her sister's gate. When he came out he stopped for a minute to tell her.

"I did not see Mrs. Ellerton," he said, "but Miss Ellerton and the others seemed overjoyed. You have done a good deed, Miss Edgewater."

Sarah wondered if any of them would come over to see her. All of the children came as soon as Tom got home from the drug-store and had been told the news. Tom and his sister Amy headed the little procession. Tom was flushed and beaming, Amy was beautiful. She was a slender, flame-like young creature. She sprang to her aunt with outstretched arms and lips ready for kissing, and clung to her as she had never clung to her own mother. Amy had plenty of acumen. She had grasped the situation. She grasped it now. When she embraced her aunt she also embraced her own speedy happiness in life. Besides Amy, there were Margy, Violetta, and Imogen. Margy, a long-legged little girl with deep blue eyes of understanding and wistfulness beneath dark brows, was much like her aunt. To her Sarah's heart turned with utmost love from the first. She sat with Margy in her

lap while she talked with the others and made plans. Tom was to go to college, of course, and later practise medicine. Amy—well, they all knew about Amy. They laughed and Amy blushed. They talked about clothes, they talked of little pleasure trips. Still, all the time, the thought of Laura alone with her nurse across the road was with them. Tom wondered about that and blundered in his speech.

"But, Aunt Sarah," he stammered, "you—— Mother—— I thought——"

For the first and last time there was in his voice accusation of his mother. Tom loved her, but insensibly he knew her for just what she was—a woman of the type which perhaps shames women more than the really vicious of their sex. He knew his mother—weak, vain, selfish to self-idolatry, treacherous, gloating over her treachery—not a mother in the fullest sense of the word. He had never before admitted it. He now admitted it only by his voice, by a tone of an honest, boyish voice.

Sarah put Margy down. She stood up and faced the little group wisely, lovingly, kindly. All had known, however dimly, something of the matter. She spoke once for all.

"That," she said, "is past."

Tom moved toward her and kissed her, this dear boy who might have been her own.

Amy, who was a subtler female thing, stammered out something. "I don't think she——" she began.

Sarah, also female, understood. "She need not see me because of this," she said.

Amy flushed, and again threw her arms around her aunt.

Sarah watched them trooping home across the street; she turned about and faced her room in which they had chattered and laughed, but the awful loneliness was gone. That night she slept well, with a feeling that all the empty chambers were filled as they used to be.

After that the solitude oppressed her no more in the old way. Amy was married. Tom went to college, the younger children, especially Margy, ran in and out at will, yet all was not well with her. There was in the heart of the woman one last unconquered cell of loneliness. She knew why, but she did not know her best course. Day after day she studied the situation. Laura was better. She sat by the window in her old place. The nurse, Susan Bellows, remained. Laura would never be well again, but she was able to sit up for hours every day. The distortion of her face had disappeared. She could speak, but her poor little futile tasks of life no longer called her. There was no reason, as far as her health was concerned, why Sarah should not cross the street, as she longed to do, but she knew what Amy had meant by her stammering speech that night. She understood how cruel with a refinement of cruelty may be the sight of a benefactor whom one has injured. She understood that the metaphorical coals of fire may be the very coals of hell burning to torture past

human endurance. She knew why Laura might not want to see her, might not want her to carry out the plan which was dear to her, of having all under her own roof in the old Edgewater homestead, with Laura established in her old room, newly decorated with the dainty blue she had always loved. Amy and her husband could continue to live in the house opposite. In that she would make improvements. But the strongest reason for Sarah's hesitation was a subtler one. She had known her sister well. She wondered what the effect of her advance toward reconciliation would be. She wondered if the sight of her in her sister's house would bring upon that poor face the mean triumph which she had seen in it during bygone years, the mean triumph which had dishonored. Better she should never go, willing as she was, even suffering to go as she was, than to see that.

But there came a day one summer when she saw Laura at the window and knew her to be alone in the house. Tom had gone off with a tennis-racket. Amy had gone away with her husband. Margy was driving with Mrs. Widner in her little pony carriage. The other children had gone away with two little girl-friends to buy candy. Even Susan Bellows, the nurse, had strolled down the street, with her black sun umbrella bobbing overhead.

Sarah hesitated; she knew what it might mean: she was about to offer a pearl of pity, of regret, of forgiveness, and the offer might do incalculable harm. Then straight across the street she went.

Laura had been dozing. She did not see her sister until she stood before her. She looked at Sarah, great, handsome, mature woman. Sarah looked at her, fragile, still lovely. Her gold hair veiled with thin burnished glory her thin temples, her cheeks were delicately pink. Sarah gazed, Laura gazed. Sarah's expression was noble, wonderful, yet apprehensive. She watched fearfully for the look which she dreaded in her sister's face. It did not come. Instead, an expression resembling Sarah's own, in spite of the difference in features, stole over it. She smiled at Sarah. Sarah smiled at her.

"I thought I would come over," said Sarah.

"I am glad you did," replied Laura.

Sarah sat down in a chair opposite at the other window. A soft wind laden with the fragrance of roses in bloom out in the yard came through the open windows. "How are you feeling to-day?" asked Sarah.

It was commonplace, with healing in its wings.

"Better," said Laura.

THE OLD MAN OF THE FIELD

IT was in February when Margy Ellerton, sitting at her book with Miss Lucretia Norris, her governess, looked out of the window and cried in dismay, "Oh, they are carrying poor old Mr. Rice away to the almshouse. Brother Tom told Aunt Sarah yesterday that they were thinking of it."

Miss Norris had sentiment. "Poor old Mr. Rice!" she said. "How he will miss his home!" Lucretia Norris said this, regardless of the fact that she knew perfectly well Old Man Rice would be much better off in the almshouse, that he had bibulous tendencies which would easily involve his setting himself and his house on fire any night and being reduced to ashes before succor could reach him. She knew, also, from trustworthy sources that his house was squalid beyond description. But she pictured poor old Rice confined in the almshouse, unable to prowl about fields and woods, which were as much his natural haunts as those of any aged wild four-footed creature.

Margy was inconsolable. She wept. "Poor old Mr. Rice!" she lamented. "He has brought me flowers from the swamp every spring since I can

remember. I could never go for them myself because the swamp is so wet, and poor old Mr. Rice got his feet sopping wet."

"It was a wonder he did not have pneumonia," said Miss Norris.

"It was not so much the lovely things he brought, but he was so happy about it. It is wicked for people to take away an old man's happiness when it is a good happiness, like bringing wild flowers to me."

"You had better continue your lesson, dear," said Miss Norris, with a sigh. She was entirely of Margy's mind. Her heart ached when the poorhouse wagon had passed. In that wagon on a bed of straw lay Old Man Rice, covered with old gaily colored quilts, which were violently tumultuous, though he was sick with grip. Lucretia Norris, as well as Margy, thought how pitiful it would be if the old man, after he had recovered, were to be kept in captivity. Old Man Rice, alien to the world at large, a gentle reprobate, harming himself to the extent of his ability, and only harming his race by the mere fact of his being a derelict with whom collision would not result in disaster, only in annoyance, was, nevertheless, chosen comrade of Nature. Nature had her secrets all unveiled for Old Man Rice.

He knew that the shadows on the snow were of the loveliest blue; he knew that there were tints as of roses in grain-fields, and purple depths, like water depths, between ripening cornstalks. He knew where all the flowers lived and died and found

resurrection. Old Man Rice was a constant visitor on resurrection days of flowers and wild fruits.

Sarah Edgewater came in, and Margy told her. Anything which disturbed her beloved niece Margy disturbed her. When young Doctor Tom Ellerton came home she consulted him.

"It does seem a shame," said Sarah; "they might have left that poor old man in peace. He did nobody any harm, and he did take so much comfort roaming the fields."

"Not much roaming to be done now," said Tom, glancing out of the window. The broad field was covered with high lights of snow patches.

"I know that," admitted Sarah; "but spring is coming, and I am not sure that even now that old man might not get comfort going about hunting for signs of it."

"He has a bad case of grip," Tom replied, pleasantly. Tom was always pleasant. "He would have died up there. Aunt Sarah, that shack is indescribable."

"Will they let him out after he has recovered?"

"I don't believe they will. The town authorities think he ought to be taken care of."

"Town authorities!" repeated Sarah, with high old head. "Town authorities have always simply made me sick. When that poor old man is over the grip he has a perfect right to come home. It is home to him. He is happy there."

"Well, Aunt Sarah," said Tom, "they will keep him away from rum, too."

"What of that?" inquired Sarah, with reckless-

ness. "Oh yes, you can stare! Old Man Rice drinks no more rum than plenty of men who are not on the town, and when he drinks he always shows a great deal of sense. He carries it home and just stays in his house until he is over it."

Tom laughed a great laugh. "Aunt Sarah, you are shocking!" said he.

"I don't care, it's true," said Sarah.

"You can't deny," said Tom, "that there is great danger of the old man, during one of these sensible seclusions of his, setting his house on fire and being burned to ashes."

Sarah, as she grew old, had obstinacy which was unmovable. "We all have to die sometime," said she. "I say the town authorities have no right. Every human being should live just as he pleases as long as he harms nobody else. I believe in freedom. Besides, Margy is worrying herself sick over it," said she.

That afternoon Sarah and Miss Norris and Margy went to the almshouse to inquire for poor Old Man Rice. As they stopped before the building they distinctly heard him, for there was an upper window open. He was lamenting his fate. Now and then he coughed hoarsely. Then the wailing voice recommenced.

"Let me go home," was the burden of his tale. "I tell ye, I am going home. This is a free country. The Edgewaters let me squat on their field twenty-odd year ago, and I've got a right there. I tell ye I'm goin' home!"

Sarah hitched the bay mare and covered her.

She then left Margy and Miss Norris in the sleigh while she entered the almshouse for a talk with the matron. When she reappeared the matron, a large, very good-natured-looking woman, was with her.

"You will find that what I say is true," she said to Sarah, "if you go there and look."

"Won't they let him out?" Margy inquired, anxiously, as they drove away.

"No, Margy, they will not," replied her aunt. "And he is not fit to go now. He has considerable temperature, and——" Sarah hesitated. The matron of the almshouse had told her what were well-nigh unspeakable things for a New England housekeeper to mention. She repeated things in horrified whispers. Miss Norris shivered disgustedly, but Margy looked straight ahead with brave eyes of disbelief.

"I don't believe one word of it. They just don't want to let him go," said she, with fine disregard of the utter lack of benefit which Old Man Rice could confer to make his presence so desired, even in an almshouse.

"I asked Mrs. White," Sarah continued, "if she thought, when he got better and spring came, they would allow him to roam about the woods and fields, as he has always been accustomed to do, and she said that if Mr. Rice got well enough to tramp, he would have to work."

"He won't like to work in the house," lamented Margy. "He wants to pick flowers and wild berries!"

"Well, maybe they will let him," soothed her aunt.

But Margy wept. Then suddenly she sat up straight, and her mouth tightened. "They shall not keep him," she said to herself. There was much of her aunt Sarah in Margy. She felt entirely able to cope successfully with the town authorities.

Later, Margy, seated beside Miss Norris, working on a centerpiece with daisies in white silk, reflected. She had an odd little smile which made her childish face inscrutable. Margy was becoming pretty as rapidly as possible, considering the disadvantages of growth with its accompaniments of too much length in one place, and too little girth in another. Her face was already charming. She resembled her aunt Sarah, but with the delicacy and tender, appealing fragility of extreme youth. She had Sarah's coloring; her brilliant red and white, her massy darkness of hair and soft intensity of eyes which looked back under black brows. Margy wore a gown of blue wool, however, which insisted upon the blue of her eyes, and her hair was tied with wide blue ribbon in a great bow over her left ear.

The two little sisters next to Margy, Violetta and Imogen, were twelve and eleven years old, respectively, and so nearly of a size that they were often taken for twins. Following a fancy of their mother, Laura Ellerton, who lay peacefully helpless in her pretty room up-stairs, they had always dressed alike. Both wore brown frocks, brown

boots, and brown hair-ribbons. As they were pink-cheeked, golden-haired little girls, the brown suited them. They sat side by side, reading out of one book. They read at exactly the same rate of speed, and each was ready to turn a page at the same second. They agreed about many things, but Violetta had the stronger character of the two; in fact, she was possessed of a strangely adventurous spirit. It was at this adventurous little girl that Margy stole glances, reflective glances, as they all sat together that night in February after the ride to the almshouse. Margy pinned considerable faith on Violetta for assistance in her plans for the release, a little later on, of Old Man Rice.

She was obliged to wait until Saturday morning. Saturday was a fine day, warm for the season. The snow was melting and everywhere ran tiny brown rivulets. Once Margy, walking with Violetta to the post-office, thought she heard a bluebird, but Violetta insisted that it was a crow, and Margy, who had her mind intent upon more important things, yielded.

"Let it be a crow," said she.

"It was a crow," said Violetta. Violetta, in her usual brown, walked along on thin brown-stockinged legs with a little hopping gait. Margy, clad in dark blue, walked at her side with a long graceful stride like her aunt Sarah's.

"You feel with me that it must be done," said Margy.

"Of course," responded the hopping Violetta, briskly, "it must be done. Poor old Mr. Rice must

be taken away from that awful place. But I don't see how we can do much just yet."

Margy frowned reflectively. "I don't," said she. "I know Jacky Widner will help, but—that house of Mr. Rice's has to be cleaned, and we can't do that until it is a little later."

"It is real warm to-day," said Violetta, gazing at the brown rivulets—the earth seemed all in sinuous motion with them. "If March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb, then we can clean the house. While March is going out like a lamb, you know, Margy."

Then they reached the post-office, and Jacky Widner stood in the doorway.

"Hullo, Jacky!" said Violetta.

"Hullo!" returned Jacky. He took off his cap and said good-morning to Margy. He and Margy had passed beyond the childish halloos of greeting, although they were still children together.

"Jacky," whispered Violetta, "walk along a little way with Margy and me. We want to tell you something."

Jacky obeyed. He was a charming boy. He had curly hair, and, close-cropped though it was, the curliness showed. His head looked like a moiré pattern done in shades of brown. He had a ready, good-natured laugh, but his eyes were keen and steady, of a lighter blue than Margy's. The three walked on. They talked of Old Man Rice. Jacky agreed to do his part.

"When March is going out like a lamb," said Violetta, "we will clean poor old Mr. Rice's house.

I will steal soap and rags and kettles and things. We will get them all there gradually. Then we will watch our chance."

"I can get a broom up there, all right," said Jacky.

"We will set a day for it when nobody is likely to interfere," said Margy.

"When March is going out like a lamb," said Violetta, "Margy and I will have it all planned, and you will do the work we can't, Jacky."

"Of course," said Jacky.

There came a Saturday, when March was certainly going out like the mildest of lambs, when Violetta by a subtle course of hints had instigated Imogen to beg to be taken to Boston and Sarah Edgewater had yielded to the request for a holiday. Sarah with Imogen and Lucretia Norris started on the nine-o'clock train. Mrs. Ellerton's room was on the other side of the house, and Saturday was always a busy day with the nurse, Susan Bellows, who, moreover, was not curious, nor given to looking out of windows. Doctor Tom Ellerton had some out-of-town calls to make, and the coast was entirely clear. Jacky Widner, Margy, and Violetta streaked across the field with pails, soap, rags, and broom.

The three reached the little dingy hut in the midst of the yellow-green field. The snow had all gone, and the grass was spongy and deepening in color. A bluebird flew out of the distance and perched on a bit of broken fence. Spring was at hand.

"I heard frogs last night," said Jacky Widner.

He held the broom over his shoulder like a bayonet. He looked brave, but in spirit was bewildered. How was a boy to clean a house? Margy and Violetta, although they concealed it, felt a bit of dismay before that tightly closed little shack.

Jacky tried the door. It was locked. He took, with an air of importance, a large ring strung with keys. He had brought them from home. He tried key after key; not one fitted Old Man Rice's lock. "I'll have to get in a window," said he. The windows were fastened in the primitive fashion with sticks under the lower sashes. Jacky had finally to break a pane of glass in order to obtain entrance. "I can get another pane and some putty and fix it myself," he observed, as the glass shivered.

Margy looked resolute, but a little startled. Violetta realized delicious thrills of heretofore ungratified daring. She pressed forward eagerly to enter after Jacky, but he called out to her.

"You two keep back a minute," said he. "I want to see how it is in here. There may be mice."

"Huh! I am not afraid of mice," cried Violetta, but she realized Jacky as a boy on the highroad to manhood.

There were only three windows in the little building. The other two were flung up with vehemence. Jacky appeared, looking out of the one by which he had entered.

"You wait till a little fresh air gets in here," he commanded.

Old Man Rice's house, after being hermetically

closed for weeks, was not a bower of roses. Jacky, when he threw open the windows, admitted a flood of warm, damp air, and there was a conflict with the terribly stale atmosphere of the interior. Jacky leaned out of the window, panting.

"Let me go in," urged Violetta.

"You wait, you and Margy," said Jacky. "It's pretty close in here." His face began to look a little sick.

It was, in fact, pretty close when at last the two girls had clambered in and stood with the boy surveying things. It was also very, very dirty, and disorderly to a degree which none of them had dreamed disorder could reach.

"Some tramp must have got in here and used poor old Mr. Rice's things," half sobbed Margy.

"It was the way he lived," declared Violetta, with cruel firmness. "Mr. Rice is very untidy."

Untidy was a mild expression for the condition of that one room which had meant home for years to the old man. It did not resemble a human habitation. It was the degeneration of civilization; it was organism rent to its essential elements. The three stared. To the girls it was a hideous nightmare. The boy whistled. Margy pointed to one corner.

"His bed," she whispered.

Violetta pointed. "The stove where he cooked," said she.

"What is that over there?" queried Margy. She had one hand thrust through Jacky Widner's arm.

Jacky whistled. Suddenly he faced the situa-

tion. "Now look here, girls," he said, "it is an awful mess; not much worse than we ought to have expected, I suppose. No use for us to stand here staring. If we have come to clean up, we must begin."

Violetta grew alert. "I say so, too," she agreed. "Margy Ellerton, you look scared to death. What's a little dirt? We must begin right away."

Margy straightened herself. She remembered that she had organized this plan, and it was not for her to show the white feather. "The first thing to do," said she, "is to make a fire in that stove so we can heat water. Jacky can bring some water from the spring, and there is the clean kettle we brought."

Violetta eyed the stove. "It has three legs," said she. "It is tipped way over to one side."

Margy regarded them with the scorn of the instinctive New England housewife, fertile in expedients. "Neither of you see what he did," said she. "I don't call you very smart. He used a brick for the leg that is gone. There is the brick," she pointed.

Jacky whistled. He made for the brick in the mass of rubbish, and with the aid of the girls had the stove securely established. "Now I'll start a fire," he said. "Then I'll fill the kettle."

Margy, with set lips, had begun work. She wished she had brought gloves, but she handled things without a murmur.

Violetta was more outspoken. "I wish I had tongs," said she. She stood with protruding lips.

Then she made a dash out of the window. "I am going for some tongs," she cried, and fled across the field. Jacky set his kettle on the stove, which was beginning to fill the place with fervent heat, and settled down beside Margy in her corner.

"There's 'most everything here," he remarked. "I wonder where he got such a collection."

"I think people must have given him things," said Margy. "Here are two old flour-sifters, and three teakettles with holes in the bottoms, and a lot of broken cups, and a bird-cage." Margy held up a battered object and regarded it wonderingly. "I don't see why anybody ever did give him this," said she.

"What is it?"

"It is an old lady's bonnet. I do think it is awful, Jacky."

Violetta rushed in and snatched with the tongs the forlorn thing streaming with black ribbons. "For goodness' sake, Margy Ellerton, don't touch with your hands such terrible things!" said she.

"I know what I think," said Jacky. "Old Man Rice is a sort of old crow. I think he just kept everything."

Margy stared pitifully at Jacky. "If that is so," said she, "we may be very cruel, Jacky."

"Why?"

"All these things may mean a great deal to poor old Mr. Rice. They may mean to him what riches mean to men. They are his only possessions on earth."

Violetta was back. "Now, don't be silly,

Margy," said she. "Possessions like these aren't good for anybody. We simply must clean up this place if we are to have that poor old man back."

Jacky arose. He looked resolute. "Margy, you climb out of that window," he ordered.

"What are you going to do?"

"The only thing that can be done. Go outside, and stand away from the door. I am going to force the lock with this old file."

Margy clambered out of the window. The door was soon flung open with a crash. Then before Jacky, vigorously wielding the broom, came flying out poor Old Man Rice's hoard.

Violetta shouted her approbation. "It is the very best way," she proclaimed.

Margy, with her mouth set, stood at one side, watching. Hers was a firm, yet enormously tender heart of a little woman. What all these useless, frightful things might mean to him! With no experience of life in its entirety, she realized the tragic truth that even despicable possessions are part of the nature of a man, and derive from it a species of sanctity.

"You needn't look so solemn, Margy," said Violetta. "It is dreadful rubbish."

Margy nodded with grim, sad acquiescence.

At last Jacky had cleared the house except for a lounge tipping drunkenly against the wall, one chair which had lost half its back, one old arm-chair, a table, and the stove. Jacky, Margy, and Violetta gazed at the accumulated mass. "We can't burn it. A lot of it won't burn," said Violetta.

"We must," said Margy, in a tragic voice, "bury it."

"I'll run and get our shovel and spade," cried Violetta. "They are in the woodshed."

Jacky regarded Margy with a certain wonder mixed with admiration and sympathy. He did not fully understand, but he respected the strange workings of her girl-heart. "Old Man Rice can't really care for all this truck, you know," he said.

"He does," said Margy, "but he can't have it." She looked away.

Jacky glanced at her, and said no more. He moved about, whistling. Violetta returned with the shovel and spade trundled in a wheelbarrow.

After that short work was made of Old Man Rice's property. It was taken in wheelbarrow-loads to a soft place in the meadow behind the field. Jacky and Margy and Violetta worked, and there was a queer grave filled with the absurd earthly riches of a poor old man. Then they returned to the house. Even then, entering from the fresh air, they sniffed unhappily.

"Don't believe we can ever get this place real clean," said Violetta.

The kettle was boiling. They set to work. They scrubbed. The little place grew hotter and hotter. The task became harder.

"It is no use," said Jacky. "I am awfully sorry, Margy, but the place will never be fit to live in."

Margy was pale. She stood silently gazing at the poor little house, the home-nest of a solitary

human being which they had despoiled and not bettered.

"Don't feel so bad, Margy," said Jacky. "You have done all you could."

"I wonder if—fumigation——" said Margy.

Jacky brightened. "The house is very tight. That might do. They say it kills all germs," he said.

"Let's fumigate it," cried Violetta, with glee. "Let's fumigate it right away. It will be lots of fun."

"You can't," replied Jacky; "you haven't got the stuff to do it with. We shall have to wait."

"I don't believe we can get a chance for three or four weeks," said Margy.

"Oh, well, the old man can't come home till the weather is more settled, anyway," said Jacky. "Come along, girls. I'll find out just how to fumigate, and we will do it the first chance we get. Then everything will be all right. I guess we had better burn up some of that furniture, though, right away!"

Jacky and the girls dragged the things out, and set them on fire in the meadow where it was damp and there was no danger of the grass catching. Then they went home. Margy was considerably cheered at the prospect of fumigation, but she was impatient.

It was the Saturday before the 1st of May before they got their second chance. The wide field was green and dotted with dandelions; the trees were casting their first shadows of the year. It was

very warm, and the air was heavy with fragrance and thrilling with bird notes. Jacky and Margy and Violetta stopped every crack and cranny in the little house and fixed their fumigating apparatus. Then all three went out, closed the door, and settled down under a wild apple-tree. Suddenly Jacky exclaimed. "There's a good deal of smoke!" he cried.

"Wouldn't there be?" asked Margy. The smoke was pouring from the little house. It stood in a violet haze.

"I—don't know," Jacky returned, doubtfully.

Then there was a sudden leap of flame from the roof. Jacky seized the two girls by an arm of each, and they all ran into the woods. When they were under the trees, out of sight, they stopped and looked at one another with round eyes of dismay. Margy was pale.

"We have set poor old Mr. Rice's house on fire!" she gasped out.

It was quite true. They heard distinctly the fire-gong. Then they heard bells and shouts. Suddenly they lost all sense of personal fear and ran to the fire. When they reached it the field was swarming with people and more were coming on a run. The engine was playing. Mr. Rice's little house was burning. The roof fell in, and there was a long-drawn cry from the people. "A mighty good thing," Margy heard a man say to another, who nodded. She gazed at him, her little face piteous and panic-stricken, but he did not see her.

All about people were saying that it was a good

thing the house had burned. Old Man Rice was well cared for in the almshouse. Now he could not return. "Not fit for rats to live in," the young people heard one woman say. She added that her husband had been one of the men who had carried Old Man Rice away, and she related boldly her information of conditions which the three had never openly told one another.

When Jacky, Margy, and Violetta went home across the field, poor Old Man Rice's house was simply a little bed of red coals, out of which rose a tiny blackened chimney. The three conferred as to what had better be done, with the result that Jacky told his mother as soon as he reached home, and Margy and Violetta told their aunt Sarah and their older brother, Doctor Tom. They were in Doctor Tom's office, and he told them to go out for a minute. It was not long before he recalled them.

"If you had deliberately set the house on fire, I can't say what would have been done," Doctor Tom said; "but as it is now, your aunt and I both think you had much better keep your own counsel. I shall stop at Mrs. Widner's and tell her the same thing. I am going over there now. You all meant well. It was accidental, and it is not necessary to set the whole village talking. Say absolutely nothing to anybody, not even to your sisters. You, of course, would not trouble your mother with it, and it is not necessary to tell Miss Norris."

"I do not approve of secrecy, generally," said Miss Sarah Edgewater, "but there are times when secrecy is simply common-sense, and this is one of

them. You both understand? Not a word about it!"

"Yes, Aunt Sarah," replied Violetta, who looked a little puzzled but not disturbed.

Margy was weeping. Sarah took her in her arms and smoothed back her brown hair.

"Don't worry," she whispered.

"Poor old Mr. Rice can't come back now," said Margy, with a little moan.

"Yes, he shall," promised Sarah. "I will have another nice little new house put right up for him, and you shall help furnish it."

Margy looked up, comforted.

"Jump into the car with your brother and have a little ride," said Sarah. "He is going over to Mrs. Widner's. Tell him I want him to bring home some asparagus for supper if he goes near the market in Barr-by-the-Sea."

Margy was hustled into her hat and coat and was off with Doctor Tom.

"Why don't you want us ever to tell, Aunt Sarah?" asked Violetta, with shrewd eyes on her aunt's face, after the others had gone.

"Because nobody would make trouble in the case of you three, but setting houses on fire is an offense against the law, unless it is proved accidental," replied Sarah, with some sharpness.

"Oh," said Violetta.

Presently she inquired, with a cheerfully speculative air, "Would they arrest us and put us in prison?"

"No," replied Sarah, "but it would all have to be

proved, the accidental part, I mean, and it would be a great annoyance to us all; and now I want to hear no more about it. But I absolutely forbid you to attempt anything like fumigating again."

"Yes, Aunt Sarah," replied Violetta, but she still looked interested.

"If you ever speak of it to any human being you will be severely punished and sent away to school," said Sarah.

Violetta was intimidated. She had an unreasoning dread of being sent away to school. "I will never tell, Aunt Sarah, honest," she said, and at last was impressed.

That evening Margy had a long conference with her aunt Sarah and her brother Tom about the new house that was to be built for Old Man Rice. She earnestly suggested many things. Tom Ellerton was interested in spite of himself by Margy's earnestness and solicitude. There was to be a bedroom with bath in the new house. Tom chuckled, but agreed.

It was later than usual when Margy went to bed. Her room faced the field over which she had gone on her futile errand that day. It lay exposed to the full moonlight and seemed almost, to the girl's excited fancy, like a white sea. There was a slight mist rising from the moist earth overgrown with young herbage, and one could easily imagine slight undulations like that of water. It was a very beautiful night. Margy drew in a long breath and looked. Then she went to bed. She had not been

in bed long before an old man appeared, wavering along the wagon-track in the field.

Old Man Rice had fled from the almshouse. He had been treated kindly, too kindly. Now, when the new grass was springing lustily, and wonderful things were happening in woods, and meadow, and swamp-lands, things in which Old Man Rice was vitally interested, which, indeed, formed a part of his higher self, he had been kept indoors, scraping paper off walls of rooms which were to be renovated. The matron had been over-zealous. She had been afraid of his taking cold. He had not been put to the outdoor tasks of the town farm, which, homely as they were, would have better satisfied him. At last, with growing strength of mind, if not of body, Old Man Rice rebelled. He had risen, clothed himself by the light of the moon, stolen down-stairs, and had sped away toward his old home.

Old Man Rice had come of a good family. He had been well educated. Nobody, probably not even he, knew by what gradual steps of degeneration the old man of the present had been evolved from the young man of the past. In the almshouse he had sprung back, impelled by some subtle law of environment, to a being more like his old self. He had been living on charity, associated with paupers and degenerates, but the life had been an impulse to higher ground, and he had not drunk at all. Old Man Rice was very clean of body, well-shaven, and clean of soul, except for old memories, which hardly touched him, as he sped along.

But the nearer he drew to his old haunts the more keenly a longing which had been subdued awoke. Poor Old Man Rice, well-nourished and free in the lovely night, had no need for that bottle which had been left in the little closet in his hut. When he had started he had thought of it not at all; but there was no living soul to welcome him in his squalid abode. He began, after he had traveled a way and his strength flagged, to think of the dreadful welcome in that bottle. He thought more and more of it. When he had reached home, he would find it. Then he would lie down upon his old lounge, molded to his body, and would be asleep. Next day, there would be the wide freedom of the fields and woods.

Old Man Rice reached the place where his home had been. The reek of smoke was in his nostrils. Before him glimmered with unholy light, beneath that celestial radiance of the sky, a dying bed of coals. He saw that his home was gone. He stood staring. He had not heard the fire alarm while he was engaged at his dull task of scraping wall-paper. Nobody had told him, and he had not heard. Since his attack of the grip his hearing had not been perfect. To-night, however, he heard everything. He saw everything. Suddenly his old eyes saw beyond the range of human vision. He stared at the smoking ruin of his old squalid home and became self-hypnotized by the glare. He saw deep swamps where he had loved to wander, swamps in whose lush growth his feet sank with a splash and rise of water, swamps bordered with great bushes cov-

ered with racemes of delicate white flowers, so sweet that they made one drowsy, great bushes laden with berries with a blue bloom, which he gathered and carried to little Margy Ellerton, the little girl who looked in the unkempt face of the old man with loving eyes. He saw meadows covered with white strawberry blossoms; he saw them rosy with fruit for the loving little girl. He saw also in the swamps that orchid so delicately made that its vivid tints are dulled by its grace. He filled his old hands with the purple-pink clusters of arethusa, and was bound to the home of the little girl who loved them, and looked at him as she looked at them—the child who could look at a poor besotted old man as she looked at a flower. Then Old Man Rice saw the wild mushrooms whose secrets of poison and health he knew well. He saw great flaming wild lilies. He saw goldenrod, and asters, and then he was back in the track of the seasons, and there was a wild apple-tree in the back field whose blossoms were rose-pink, and he could break off great branches.

In reality he was there under the apple-tree at last. He had wandered away from the flaming spot where his home had been, and lay on the silver herbage under the apple-tree. It was in full bloom and he breathed in wonderful sweetness. In the daytime it hummed with bees, but now the bees were in hive. Old Man Rice heard the field-nocturne of insects and wakeful birds, little notes and wing-rustles, and the rustle of leaves. He lay there, and the premonition, that was conviction, of enor-

mous joy about to come to him was over him, and untainted. His squalid possessions of earth had been cleaned by fire. Old Man Rice had never been cleaned as by fire. He felt strangely light of body. He had no regret for his home. He was sheltered by something beyond his farthest dreams of home. He considered, however, that he must presently stir himself and break off a blooming branch for the little girl, who would take it and look at him as if she loved him. Then he became aware that she was there. The young face was bending over him. The child—he always thought of her as the child—was bending over him, and he heard her saying so clearly that her voice woke like bell-chimes, that she had seen him from her window, that she had looked out and seen him, and Brother Tom must do something, must give him something. Poor old Mr. Rice, his home was all burned down. Then she said something about a new one, which seemed to him a true saying. He tried then to rise, and break off the blooming branch, but young Doctor Tom made him lie still.

Tom Ellerton knelt beside him, and listened at his chest, while the old man lay peacefully, his silver-white face shining as if luminous up at the blooming maze overhead. There was a boy there, too. Jacky Widner had seen him pass his house and had followed him. Old Man Rice lay there with the child bending over him and gazing at him with her eyes of kindness, and the boy beside her, and the young doctor, who had no skill to compare with the ancient healing power of the earth, which

was now being bestowed upon her erring, suffering, piteous son.

Tom shook his head. Margy sobbed softly. Old Man Rice heard her, and again tried to rise and break off that blooming branch above his head.

"Don't, dear," said Tom to Margy; "you will trouble him."

Margy bent down, and her lips touched the cold, white forehead of the old man, and he smiled. He thought then that he had broken the blooming branch and given it to her. He passed, thinking so. The old man whose best life had been in the simple wilds of the countryside, whose despicable life had been in the squalid travesty on civilization, now burned away from him, and the earth lay white and silent in his fitting resting-place. The Old Man of the Field lay dead in the field, and he had died with the belief that he had broken and given that blooming branch of spring which tossed above him against the radiant sky, giving out fragrance like a triumphal song, to the child who had looked alike at him and it, and he had not died intestate of all beauty and wealth, after all.

THE VOICE OF THE CLOCK

LEICESTER had been in the beginning West Barr. It had been rechristened because of the frankly expressed wish of the head of the Leicester family, old Marcus Leicester. All the members of the family had approved heartily of the decision of Marcus to offer to the village of West Barr a public library, a town hall, a high-school, improvement for the cemetery, and a soldiers' monument on the village green, on condition that West Barr be afterward known as Leicester. There had been a meeting of the selectmen of the village, and the vote of the majority had been for the change.

The only radical dissenters had been two brothers named Sylvester. The Sylvesters were as proud as the Leicesters; but they had been of late a notably unprosperous family. They as well as the Leicesters dated back to the beginning of the village, but they had not kept pace, as far as worldly prosperity was concerned, with the Leicesters.

The Sylvesters, as a family, urged by financial stress, had moved away from their native heath; they had sold, acre by acre, their ancestral lands,

until there were left only the two brothers and a small parcel of land. The brothers were elderly men, so nearly of an age that many thought them twins. One was William, the other Arthur. They kept a small shop devoted to the sale and repair of antiques in furniture and bric-à-brac.

William and Arthur Sylvester appreciated all they sold. They dealt in works of art—wonderful old pieces of Sheraton and Chippendale and Adam, brought in the holds of heaving sailing-vessels from overseas; pieces made by American cabinet-men, perhaps more wonderful still. Often the brothers discovered a treasure of such cabinet work which was individual and aroused in their sentimental breasts patriotic enthusiasm.

"Work could be done in this country, if people only knew it," William often said to Arthur. "There are plenty of Sheratons; but how many pieces like this old clock made by some fellow who came over in the *Mayflower?*"

He pointed to an ancient timepiece which stood directly before them.

"Yes," agreed William, "that is a clock; and yet people will buy clocks made in Germany and England and leave this standing here, this clock made in our own country when it first was a country. What if it hasn't quite so many ornaments, tricks to catch the eye? Look at the grain of the mahogany in that clock."

"It is like a picture of a Spanish forest," said Arthur. "And look at the lines! It is a wonderful clock."

"The face of that clock is wonderful, too," said William.

"It is as clear as the face of the splendid old history of the country," said Arthur, "and it was made in this country. It is an American clock, and yet Americans scorn it."

"It is true we have never been able to make it go," admitted William.

"What of that?" returned Arthur, irascibly. "That English clock we sold at such a figure last week would not go. It is made wrong; but it sold because it had so many brass topknots."

"I wonder," said William, thoughtfully, "if there is anything really wrong about this clock?"

"There is something wrong about the times," said Arthur. "The times are not suited to the clock. The question is whether the clock can ever be made to suit the times."

"Well," returned William, "you and I have tinkered this clock, and we have had Emerson over from the Center; he understands clocks; and we none of us have been able to make this clock go."

"I wonder what it sounds like when it strikes," said Arthur. "Marcus Leicester has many old clocks, and all of them go."

"None of them is American," returned William, with scorn.

"Sometimes I have wondered whether the works in his clocks were anything like the works in this," said Arthur, ponderingly.

William turned sharply. "You don't mean to say that you would ask to see the works of Marcus Leicester's clocks?" he demanded.

"Of course not, brother," said Arthur, meekly.

The brothers had to pass the old Leicester house on their way home. Marcus emerged from his front gate just as they came opposite. He lifted his hat in courtly fashion, displaying a thick bush of white hair. The Sylvesters were as courtly as he. They lifted their hats. "Good day, gentlemen," said Marcus.

"Good day, sir," responded William and Arthur.

"A fine day for the season," remarked old Marcus Leicester, and his tone fairly patronized the day and the season.

"Very fine," returned William, in a tone which disposed finally of the day and the weather. He and Arthur walked on.

Marcus moved in the opposite direction. He wore a magnificent coat of finest broadcloth and swung a gold-headed stick with perfectly regular motions, like a drum major.

"They have no more right," said William, as they moved on, "to name the town for him than for us. Sylvester would have been as good and as proud a name as Leicester. The Sylvesters came of just as good stock—better. All the difference is—money, just a little money."

"Yes, the Leicesters have been fortunate with regard to this world's goods," returned Arthur, a bit wearily. He was a delicate man; his brother harped a good deal on the same strain, and some-

times, although he never demurred, it tired him. He was glad when they reached home.

The Sylvester house was as fine a specimen of old Colonial architecture as any of the Leicesters'. It stood well back from the road, haughtily guarded by its deep front yard. Before the yard was a fretwork of iron fence as fine as Marcus Leicester's. The front door of the Sylvester house was the grandest in the village. Famous architects had begged permission to copy it. William and Arthur never failed to glance at it with pride.

Now there were left of the Sylvesters in the old house only the two brothers, and a late arrival. She was the unmarried daughter of the eldest of the Sylvesters, who had moved South before the Civil War and had died there. When his daughter, Adeline Sylvester, had written the two brothers of her delicate health and utter impecuniosity, they had at once replied and offered her a home; but they were of one mind with regard to her. "Of course she is not, cannot be, a real Sylvester," they agreed.

When she had arrived they were forced to admit grudgingly that Sylvester she was as far as looks went. Adeline was no longer young; neither was she old. She was not pretty, nor yet homely. She had the rare and singular charm of the Sylvesters; a delicacy and fineness of physique which was not illness, nor even weakness, but something distinguished and arresting. She had the aquiline features of the race, so cleanly cut that they verged on transparency, as to nostrils and temples. She

had the tall and slender grace of her father's family, and she moved with the firm suppleness of a willow bough in a wind. Poor Adeline Sylvester had been exposed to many winds of fate all her life. It was like the bitterness of death for her to write to her Northern uncles, but, after all, they were her kin, and a Sylvester could not appeal for aid to others than of her blood.

Adeline had arrived, and at first sight her uncles approved. Arrayed in amazing ancient garments, originally of such richness that they had withstood the years and were yet impressive, she got out of the train, and both William and Arthur, awaiting her on the station platform, had found a place for her in their hearts. That long face, strangely ungirlish, yet strangely girlish, regarding them through the embroidered flowers of her white Brussels lace veil, with a pale, gentle smile, won their hearts.

They still owned the old Sylvester carriage, lumbering and jolting, but with the family arms on the door. An old man, shaggy as to hair and beard, who tended the garden and cared for the old span of horses, held the lines. Adeline would have been surprised beyond bounds had there not been that much of state wherewith to greet her. She held out her long slim hand in its shabby glove, first to one uncle, then to the other, got into the carriage, and beneath the slants of the faded green silk curtains of the carriage window looked a true Sylvester face. William beside her, and Arthur opposite, regarded her with entire approval.

"You look like your father, our brother, niece," said William.

"So I have always understood," replied Adeline, in a curious voice which partook of the South and the North. It was a clean-cut voice, yet it drawled. She leaned back against the shabby cushions and drew her old velvet cloak around her over her thin knees. She had arrived in early spring, and the raw east wind smote her unkindly. When she entered the Sylvester house the wide warmth from the furnace awakened her to smiles. She spread out her hands with a childlike gesture of approval.

"It is warm," she said, and smiled, and with the smile her face became lovely.

"Our niece is very good-looking, brother," said Arthur, when she had gone upstairs to remove her wraps.

The door opened, and Hitty Fowler came in.

"Our niece has come, Hitty," said William, and there was in his look and tone slight intimidation. Hitty Fowler was the old servant woman of the Sylvester family. William and Arthur had worried a good deal concerning Hitty's attitude with regard to the niece, but the worry had been wasted. Hitty was devoted to Adeline from the first.

When the brothers entered the house by the side door that day of late spring after the conversation concerning the clock, they were met by Hitty, portentous and frowning with anxiety.

"What is the matter, Hitty?" asked William.

"She," stated Hitty, "has got another of them dreadful headaches. I think, for my part, that she

has entirely too many of them headaches. Strikes me it would be a good plan to telephone Doctor Ellerton over to the Center."

William looked anxiously at his brother, who was unexpectedly optimistic. "Don't you remember how many headaches mother used to have?" said he. "I think ladies quite generally have headaches."

"Mr. Marion Leicester was over here," said Hitty. She screwed up her face as if she had fired a gun and was waiting for the shock of the explosion.

However, neither of the brothers made any remark. While they felt antagonism toward the Leicesters, it was, after all, the antagonism of equals. To their comprehension, Marion Leicester was only a boy, although he was over thirty. He was younger than Adeline. They had no suspicion of a romance. They were covertly glad that a Leicester, old Marcus's youngest son, found the Sylvester house and a Sylvester woman attractive.

William and Arthur sat down in the dim old sitting-room and waited for supper. Arthur said, "It is a good thing for that Leicester boy that he likes to come over here to see our niece. She can improve him. Adeline has a very fine mind for a woman."

"I heard something about Doctor Ellerton's sister Margy and Marion a while ago," said William.

"Did you?" said Arthur indifferently. "It speaks well for a boy to like to visit a woman like our niece rather than a silly young girl. Adeline

is very well read. I dare say they talk about Emerson."

Then Adeline came gliding into the room. She looked startlingly young. In a sense she was young. The years, despite her monotonous, hard life, had not counted for this fragile, gently-thinking woman creature their full measure of days. She did not belong to the youth of the day, but she was hard-fast to the youth of her own day. There was no strenuous out-of-door life for Adeline. She was a lover of the ancient delights of womankind; she embroidered; she played on the piano—her uncles had bought a new one for her; —she loved to take little walks; she loved to sit, idly dreaming.

Perhaps it was because of this subtle, innocent youth that Marion Leicester had become so attracted by Adeline. However, he always maintained that Adeline was unusually beautiful. She certainly was at times beautiful, with a strange beauty beyond the physical, yet not separated from it. She was beautiful that afternoon as she glided into the room as her grandmother might have glided. Her old gown was very full in the skirts. Although her uncles gave her money, Adeline used none for her clothes. And now those skirts of hers, gathered about the waist, were beginning to partake of ultra fashion. Adeline's way of dressing her hair was quite according to the mode; it was looped softly over her ears and knotted midway of her head. Her profile was so fine that people compared her to a cameo; but she had color.

That afternoon her cheeks were vividly pink, her lips rosy, her eyes brilliantly blue. There was a slight frown of pain between the blue eyes, and a redness beneath them. Adeline had a headache, and she had been weeping. Marion Leicester had asked her to marry him, and she considered that as most unseemly. She considered herself entirely too old to marry Marion Leicester, or, indeed, to marry at all; but she was unhappy because of it. Adeline was much in love with Marion, and wondered what was the matter with her. She had declined Marion's offer of marriage, and sent him home, and then she had gone upstairs with a headache, and wept. The brothers arose when their niece entered. They inquired concerning her headache, which she said was not at all severe.

"You look feverish," said William.

Then all Adeline's delicate unlined face was rose-red, as she murmured that she was not feverish, and went out to supper with her uncles. Hitty Fowler eyed her shrewdly. Hitty never considered a woman beyond the reach of love and matrimony until she was in her tomb.

After supper that evening, when Adeline sat with her uncles under the trellised hood of the side porch, Mr. Marion Leicester, although he had been refused and dismissed that very afternoon, came again.

He swung along jauntily, with much the air of his father. He was a handsome young man; but when he calmly seated himself on the porch beside the astonished Adeline, removed his hat, and

lighted his cigar, he was clearly, although younger, older in appearance. Marion had lost the hair from the top of his head and his face was lined. He looked into Adeline's face of almost piteous astonishment, and laughed.

"How do you do this warm evening, Miss Adeline?" he inquired.

"Our niece has been suffering from a headache," replied William with some degree of pomposity.

Marion looked at Adeline whimsically and tenderly.

"I have no headache," she said shortly. All this was beyond her calculations. She had never known that rejected young men called again in the evening, and behaved precisely as if nothing had happened.

Marion said politely that he was very much pleased to hear it; then he talked politics with her uncles. The Sylvesters never mentioned business outside their shop. They were not ashamed of the shop; but they were Sylvesters, and Sylvesters before them had never been in trade. Consequently they did not carry the trade home, out of deference to their ancestors.

They did not dream of mentioning their business to Marion Leicester; but presently the young man himself broached the subject. "That is an amazing old clock you have in your stock, Mr. Sylvester," he said to William. "I was passing your shop this noon when you were at home, and I took a notion to stop and look in the window. That magnificent old clock looked back at me, and I felt as if I were

an intruder. He is superb! He might have stood in Governor Bradford's house."

"He is old enough," returned William, with a sudden flare of pride. "That is a magnificent old clock; American, too, and yet people will buy English and German clocks and pass that by."

"I wonder why," Marion said, with real interest. He had never thought of the matter before.

"Not enough ornament, for one thing," said William. Arthur hesitated. Then he said: "Well, brother, most of the clocks of foreign make which we have handled——" He paused before the look in his brother's face.

"What?" asked Marion Leicester.

"Go," said Arthur feebly.

"Doesn't that American clock go?"

William straightened himself. "The clock is not yet adjusted to the floor, probably," said he.

"All the old clocks require adjustment. They stood on floors which depended upon a center chimney in those old houses. The shop is rather a modern building. I am thinking of trying the clock in this house. It ought to work well here. This house dates back nearly as far as the clock."

Arthur regarded his brother with surprised delight.

"That is the very thing, brother," he declared.

"So I think," declared William, who had only that moment thought of it. "We will have the clock set up in the north room to-morrow."

"That will be lovely," said Adeline. The moon had come out, and Adeline in that pure light, lean-

ing back in her chair with her long gracefulness, was charming. Her face gleamed like a pearl between the folds of her fair hair. Her white muslin skirts fluttered around her feet in an occasional breeze.

Presently William and Arthur entered the house, bidding good night to Marion and their niece. They had no more idea of impropriety in leaving her alone with him than if she had been their mother.

Adeline arose as soon as her uncles were in the house.

"Oh, sit down," said Marion, with a light laugh.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Leicester," faltered Adeline.

"I know entirely well what you mean, Miss Adeline, and that is the solution of my conduct," replied Marion, and laughed again.

"After what passed only this afternoon," said Adeline, with an attempt at frigid dignity.

"That," stated Marion, "is precisely the reason why I came again to-night."

Adeline sank reluctantly back into her chair. "I don't understand," she murmured.

"I do, my dear Miss Adeline, perfectly."

"I have not had much experience," said Adeline, "but I thought——"

Marion laughed again. "You thought that men after they had been jilted had sense enough to stay away from the jilter?"

"Oh, Mr. Leicester, it is unkind to put it that way."

"Why? Didn't you jilt me?"

Marion leaned nearer Adeline. He bent over her. She trembled.

"You know it is not suitable," she whispered. She could hardly bring the words out.

"Because when I was six months old, you might possibly have been old enough to be trusted to wheel me out for an airing in my little carriage. Say, Adeline, you must have been a darling little girl. I know just what you were. You were too good to be true when you were a little girl, as you are now; and you always minded your mother, as now you are going to mind me."

"It is not suitable, Mr. Leicester."

"Say Marion."

"It is not suitable, Marion."

"Honestly, Adeline, is there any earthly reason besides that little difference in our ages?"

"Your family would not approve."

"I haven't any immediate family except Father. He would be horrified to have me marry out of Leicester, and out of one of the best families, and the Sylvesters are one of the best families."

"That is true," assented Adeline, with a slight upward toss of her fair head.

"Then what else? Would your uncles object?"

Adeline replied with sudden firmness. "They would think I had gone stark, staring mad," said she. "They think me as settled in——"

"In what?"

"In being an old maid," replied Adeline, with a

troubled accent. She just glanced into Marion's eyes. Then he kissed her. "You an old maid!" he whispered, fondly.

"You mustn't," Adeline said, faintly. "I must go in. It will never do. You must not come again."

"Well, I am coming again, all right," said Marion, gaily. "I'll drop in to-morrow to see that old American clock."

Marion kissed Adeline again, when she fled before him into the house. Then he went down the walk whistling.

Hitty Fowler was standing in the hall when Adeline entered. She eyed her severely. "It will never do!" said she, "for you to marry into the Leicester family."

Adeline leaned against the old landscape-papered wall.

"I wish it would," said Hitty, "for Mr. Marion is a fine gentleman, but Mr. William and Mr. Arthur have dreadful un-Christian feelings about that family, if I do say so."

Adeline cast a scared look of inquiry at her.

"I've often wished I darst speak my mind about it," said Hitty. "Your uncles are two as good gentlemen as ever lived, but it ain't showing Christian spirit to be so set against another family just because it has got more money and more glory in this world."

"I can't hear anything against my uncles," half sobbed Adeline.

"I ain't saying anything against your uncles.

I'm saying things against the way they feel about the Leicesters."

"I don't understand anything about it, Hitty," Adeline said, piteously.

Hitty softened. "There, don't you worry one mite about it," said she. "You just go to bed and to sleep, Miss Adeline. I set a glass of blackberry wine and a plate of cakes on your table. You drink that wine and eat the cake and go to sleep. It will come out all right. If you are meant by the Lord Almighty to marry Mr. Marion, you will; and if you ain't you won't. That's all there is to it."

The old American clock was brought over the next forenoon. It was set in a corner of the sitting-room, and William and Arthur, and Mr. Emerson, the jeweler from Barr Center, worked over it all day. Neither of the brothers went to the shop. They and the jeweler toiled over the clock. It was after sunset when the jeweler started for his home in Barr Center. Hitty Fowler met him just out of sight of the house, where the road turned. He stopped at her hail.

"Mr. Emerson, I want to know if that clock is ever going to go?" demanded Hitty.

"Hitty," replied Mr. Emerson—he was a dry old man with a light of sarcastic humor in his face—"that clock is as dead as the man that made it; and he's been about as dead as he can be for a mighty long time. That clock is dead. All things made by men have their times, though they outlive men, if men *are* made in the fear of the Lord and the beauty of holiness; but they have their ap-

pointed times. That old clock had his. He is dead."

"Land!" said Hitty.

That evening the brothers sat with Adeline in the room with the clock. Already it seemed a presence, silent, almost menacing. The brothers did not talk. They were tired and downcast. Then Marion arrived. Adeline rose to greet him. The brothers said good evening with stiff courtesy.

Marion looked at the clock; then at Adeline. She shook her head very slightly.

"It is a pleasant evening," said Marion.

Then, self-possessed as he was, he started, for suddenly William Sylvester awoke to the situation. "Are you coming here courting our niece?" he demanded.

Hitty Fowler was listening at the door.

Marion flushed; then he replied readily and pleasantly, "With her permission and yours, gentlemen."

"You will never have our permission!" shouted William.

"No," echoed his brother.

"Nor our niece's, if she has a particle of womanly pride and family pride," said William. "A woman older than you, and a Sylvester."

Then poor Adeline went rose-red from pure shame that she, little woman-child, had been summoned through the gate of earth-life a few years before her lover. It was shame so exquisite that it seemed to her she would die of it.

But Marion persisted. "Yes," he said, "with her

permission and yours, gentlemen. The difference in our ages is not enough to mention. I love your niece, and she is the woman I have chosen to be my wife, if she will have me, and if you will consent."

Marion put his protecting hand on poor Adeline's shoulder, but she began to weep softly. Then William spoke his mind, his long-restrained mind.

"Our niece can choose," said he; "but as for my brother and myself, we shall never consent. The Leicesters have enough. They own all the town except the Sylvesters; and the Sylvesters will never be owned by mortal man."

Marion looked honestly puzzled. William continued.

"I have lived right here in this town where I was born," said he, "and so has my brother. We are old men. We have seen the Leicesters lording it over everybody. They are no better than the Sylvesters."

"Nobody——" began Marion, but the old man's voice of terrible, jealous accusation stopped him. "They are not as good," shouted William. "The Leicesters are not of as good stock as we; but everything a Leicester has ever touched has succeeded, and everything a Sylvester has touched has failed. The Sylvesters never will knuckle down. Let the Leicesters have it all. Let even their clocks go, when the Sylvesters' American clock, which is an honor to the land, whether it goes or not, won't go an hour." William shook his clenched fist at Marion, then turned and shook it at the silent clock.

Arthur echoed him—"Yes, let the Leicester clocks go, when the Sylvesters' won't; even that little success denied us," said Arthur. "Let your family have everything, but you never shall have Sylvesters."

With that William, followed by Arthur, went stately-wise out of the room.

Marion stared at Adeline. "Don't cry," he said; "but what does it all mean?"

"They have been trying to make the clock go all day," she said, faintly. "They are nervous, and all wrought up, poor old gentlemen."

"I can see that," said Marion. "Don't cry, dear; but for the life of me, I can't understand why they hate my father so because his clocks go and this one won't."

"It is simply because the clock is the last straw," said Adeline.

"I don't understand there being any straws at all," said Marion. "Of course the Leicesters have always been a lucky set; but I really don't think any of us are especially set up about it. Father did want to have the town called after his family. I thought it rather a fool thing myself, but if he wanted it and the townspeople didn't object I could see no reason for objecting. I know, of course, your uncles did oppose it; but I did not know they felt so strongly about it—and now this old clock!" Marion rose and went over to the clock. He opened the door and tried to start the pendulum. It swung to and fro, and was still. "I wonder what does ail this clock."

Adeline rose. "You must go home, Mr. Leicester," she said. "I cannot remain longer here with you after what Uncle William said. It is treacherous. I owe everything to him and Uncle Arthur."

"But, Adeline——"

Adeline was gone. Her white skirts fluttered through the door. Marion gasped. Then Hitty Fowler came in. She hushed him with warning gestures; she beckoned. He followed, puzzled. When they were out of the house and a little way down the road she stopped him.

"Look here," she said, "how many old clocks has your father got, Mr. Marion?"

"Oh, I don't know. They stand round ticking and striking in almost every room in the house," replied Marion, impatiently. "Why in the world do the old Sylvester gentlemen care so much about that clock's not going, when ours do?"

"All your father's clocks go, you say, Mr. Marion?"

"Every one of them. What ails this clock of the Sylvesters'?"

"That clock," said Hitty solemnly, "is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, Mr. Emerson told me so. It never will go. It has stopped because it had to. It died. Now all your father's clocks are alive. Don't they ever put live organs into things when organs are dead in hospitals?" inquired Hitty.

Marion stared. Then he started. "By Jove!" said he. "Hitty, you have struck it! The live works go out of one of father's clocks and into that

dead one, and the dead works go into one of father's clocks!"

That night, Adeline, wakeful, thought she heard strange noises; then thought them due to the wind, which was fresh around the old house. She lay awake listening. At another time she might have been frightened, but that night she was too unhappy.

The next day the brothers went to the shop as usual. Adeline read and embroidered and played on the piano. The old clock stood silent in its corner. That evening she and her uncles sat in their usual places. The old gentlemen were reading the papers. Adeline was making a pretense of work. Hitty Fowler came to the door and said a man wanted to see Mr. William and Mr. Arthur about some business, and the brothers went out into the dining-room.

"Miss Adeline," whispered Hitty.

"What is it?"

"Go out on the porch, Miss Adeline."

"Why? What are you laughing about?"

Hitty did not reply. She was shaking with convulsions of mirth; she darted back into the room where the clock stood.

Adeline went out on the porch, and there was Marion. "Good evening," she said. "Oh, you ought not to have come!"

"Yes, I ought. You don't know. I hope, I think it will be all right now. Adeline, if only your uncles felt well disposed toward me you would——?"

"Hush, you know how they feel."

"Wait a moment. Don't go in."

"I must," said Adeline, firmly. She went in, and Marion followed her. The business errand had been a short one, the brothers had returned. When they saw Marion they greeted him with cold courtesy. He sat down beside Adeline on the sofa.

All at once William Sylvester started; Arthur started; Adeline started. Everybody stared at the clock. It was as if an actual living presence was in the room. All through the room came the heavy halting drone of the tick of the old clock.

"One of father's clocks has stopped," remarked Marion coolly. "I got Emerson over from Barr Center this afternoon to look at it, and he says it is worn out, cogs too smooth or something. I see you have your clock going—a magnificent old piece."

William and Arthur Sylvester rose and went to the clock.

William opened the door as if it were a court ceremony. The great pendulum swung regularly to and fro, the slightly halting tick was louder.

"It is going, after all," said William, in an awed tone.

"Yes, it is going," said Arthur.

William turned to Marion. "Did you say one of your father's clocks had stopped?" he asked.

"Yes, worn out. All things have their limit. I suppose that old clock has reached his."

"This has not," said William, proudly. "Ameri-

can clocks and American furniture, made by American patriots in the beginning of our history, were made on honor. It is the foreign pieces which are not to be depended on. American clocks go. This is an American clock."

Arthur, who was quite pale, nodded in solemn assent.

Then the old clock spoke. It struck nine, the old curfew hour. It pealed out the nine strokes with a silver and crystal resonance.

"What a beautiful voice," said William, in a sort of ecstasy. He turned to Marion with extended hand. "I am pleased to see you, sir," he said. "I offer you my hand, with congratulations to you and my niece."

"I also," said Arthur, advancing with extended hand. Marion rose and shook hands. Both brothers kissed Adeline upon the pure triangle of white forehead between her fair waves of hair. Then they went out, and the lovers were alone with the clock, whose tick sounded in their ears like the oldest love song of time, to be repeated forever while the world endures.

VALUE RECEIVED

PROBABLY many human beings are, whether conscious of it or not, possessed of a lively sense of duty, and especially human beings whose forefathers planted stubborn feet of purpose upon Plymouth Rock. Sarah Edgewater was no exception. In her mother's family—her mother was a Matthews of Barr-by-the-Sea—were two unmarried sisters who had for years been the recipients of her bounty. Dora and Ann Matthews were helpless and deserving females by means of whom the more prosperous of their kin were enabled to lay up credit for themselves in a better World.

Dora and Ann, in the beginning of things, had owned sufficient property for their needs; but they had fallen, when young and unsuspecting, into the hands of a local lawyer who had supplied the criminal distinction of his native village. He had pleasantly and cleverly robbed all whom he was able to rob, and had then absconded to a flourish of local trumpets. In a curious, topsy-turvy fashion the Barrs were rather proud of this villain. Nobody in the villages had ever achieved legitimate fame, and this illegitimate notoriety seemed, on

the whole, better than nothing. This lawyer had persuaded the two young Matthews girls, Dora and Ann, after their father died, to entrust their entire estate, with the exception of their home, to his care. He had promised a wonderful increase of income.

After the crash, Dora and Ann had no money, nothing in the world except the house, an old square building with a cupola and a garden sloping down to the water. The lawyer had his eye on that, but sufficient time to include it in his loot had been lacking.

The sisters had been well educated for the times. They immediately opened a private school for children, whose parents paid fifty cents per week for their gentle and lady-like initiation into the learning of the world. It had been considered in the Barrs quite the genteel thing to send children to the Misses Matthews' private school. In those days of cheap living the sisters had been supposed to be laying up money, but they had not. Nobody knew of a debt which their father had contracted and which, though outlawed, the sisters considered their own. Every penny above their small expenses was swallowed up by that debt. When it was cleared, the school had begun to lag. The great south parlor, which (furnished with small chairs and desks) had been used as a school-room, was scantily filled.

When East Barr became Barr-by-the-Sea, the prosperity of others became the disaster of the Matthews sisters—nobody would send children

to this gentle, old-fashioned school where none of the new methods was known. People naturally did not wish their children to be taught geography by means of out-of-date text-books, which the sisters regarded with unswerving faith in spite of changes of dynasties and frontiers.

Suddenly Dora and Ann Matthews found themselves hopelessly stranded in a backwater of the intensely genteel and decorous past. Finally there was not one little pupil left, not one fifty cents per week came into the exchequer.

It was then that Sarah Edgewater, several years before the Ellertons came to live with her, drove over one week and discovered the dire strait of the two sisters.

That weekly drive over to Barr-by-the-Sea to call upon Dora and Ann had been an established custom in the Edgewater family ever since Sarah could remember. She had always heard of her mother's cousins as making a brave struggle, although always under a covert cloud of family disapproval on account of their foolish long-ago faith in the Town-Villain. Sarah observed conscientiously the habit of that weekly call. She sometimes carried a basket of delicacies which it was evident the sisters could not afford. She always entered by the kitchen door, removed the packages from the basket, deposited it empty in her buggy and never mentioned her gift, which was held as a sacred, unmentionably delicate secret between the Matthewses and her. Later on, when it came to financial aid, this was managed in much the same

way. Sarah watched chances, and during the weekly visit deposited on a table an envelope containing the regular stipend.

The sisters took turns in opening the envelope. They never mentioned it to each other. After that terrible day when Sarah, coming over, had found them with no fire, although a high wind from the sea was raging round the house, when she had broken the barriers of reserve and questioned and demanded replies, the weekly stipend had arrived, and been used; but neither sister spoke of it to the other.

At that time Ann's health had failed, or Dora, the younger, might have found employment. She would at all events have persisted in her efforts to make herself and her sister independent. But when Ann caught the severe cold which settled for the rest of her life upon her chest, and was obliged to remain housed during most of the year, Dora was handicapped.

Sarah Edgewater, that day years ago when she had made her discovery, had seemed almost angry. She was not angry, but she was an intense woman and often her emotion gave the effect of indignation.

"This shall not go on another week. It is terrible," she had said. She had driven down the road, her old horse breaking into a gallop, and there had been a ten-dollar bill left on the table. The sisters had looked at each other, and the bitterness of death was in their two aging faces. Then Dora had risen, passed the table, swept the

ten-dollar bill with her like an angry breeze, put on her old cloak and bonnet and gone out. An hour later the room was warm and an odor of broiling meat and tea came from the kitchen. The sisters were warmed and fed. They were comfortable as to their bodies; but their hearts had lost the sense of independence and ached with emptiness.

Sarah had come when affairs were desperate. Dora had resolved to raise money on the home the next day, despite her memory of her father's saying: "Whatever you do, keep the old home and never mortgage it. A mortgage is a disgrace."

After the weekly stipend had commenced Dora and Ann had made their wills, and left the old Matthews place to Sarah Edgewater and her heirs after her. For a time, then, they had felt reinstated in their self-esteem; but when years had passed, and they reckoned that the aggregate sum bestowed upon them, and the interest of it, far exceeded the value of the old place in an undesirable situation in the summer resort, the old humiliation was over them again. Nobody knew, Sarah Edgewater least of all, how they dreaded her weekly visits. She called with the money, often at great inconvenience, rather than send a check and betray the fact of the gift. It would have been inconceivable to her had she dreamed of the rancor with which the sisters regarded her as she drove up to their gate. Each was abashed before it. Each realized the call for gratitude, each realized the enormity of her failure to respond.

Often after Sarah had gone, and Dora had pre-

pared supper, neither sister could eat. They sat regarding each other angrily.

"Why don't you eat?" Dora would ask Ann. "This is a good bit of steak. I took extra pains about cooking it. Why don't you eat?"

"Why don't you?" Ann would retort. They often went to bed supperless and ate the warmed-over meat the next day after Sarah's visit.

Dora often spoke of a means by which she might have earned her livelihood and her sister's, and evaded such straits.

"If I had had common-sense, and put the silly family pride behind me, I would have learned the milliners' trade, and earned enough to support us, instead of keeping school and being paid so little," she would say. She would nod her head forcibly as she spoke. Dora still had beautiful dark hair, although her face was heavily lined. Ann, lying back in her rocking-chair, was a delicate shadow of a woman, gray-haired, her long countenance pearly gray between the folds of a white lace scarf which she always wore draped over her head. Her hands, clasped in her lap, looked like veined ivory.

"Yes," she said, "you might have, but——"

"I know what you mean," returned Dora. "Never one woman of our family has been in trade, never one man, for that matter; but I could have made beautiful hats and bonnets if I had learned the trade, and that would have lasted longer than the school. I could have kept up with the fashion in hats and bonnets."

"I noticed that Cousin Sarah wore a hat instead

of a bonnet when she came over last week," said Ann.

"I noticed it, too, and I must say that I wonder a little at Sarah's leaving off bonnets and putting on a hat, as old as she is, even if the hat is trimmed with pansies."

"I think she felt rather uneasy about it herself," said Ann.

"When you were out of the room she laughed and said she never thought she would come to wearing a hat, but the milliner in Barr Center simply would not make bonnets. I think she felt that the hat might seem to us unbecoming."

"It was," said Dora decidedly. "Why didn't she try a milliner here?"

"I asked her, and she said she couldn't do any better. She said the milliners didn't seem to know how to make bonnets. She said one on Beach Street here showed her one, and it was a sight."

"I do believe I could make a bonnet for her," said Dora.

"I don't know but you could."

"Of course, I haven't had a really new bonnet for years, but I have made mine over."

"And they are as pretty as bonnets need to be," said Ann warmly. She regarded her sister lovingly. Ann was very proud of Dora. However, she gasped slightly at Dora's next remark. It savored of the extreme daring of genius; it might have been made by the founder of a new school of art.

"I am almost sure I could make beautiful flowers and leaves and feathers," said Dora.

"Out of what?"

"I have," said Dora, "an idea."

Ann looked at her questioningly.

"Wait until I see what I can do," returned Dora with proud secrecy.

The very next day Sarah Edgewater made her weekly visit to leave that envelope covertly tucked under a book on the table. Sarah wore still another hat, and this time it was trimmed quite brazenly with dark red roses. Sarah felt uncomfortable before the gentle wonder in the sisters' eyes.

"I know you think I am wearing a hat entirely too young for me," said she; "but the fact is, Margy bought this hat and insisted on my wearing it, and I could not refuse the child. I think myself that red roses for a woman of my age are not suitable, but Margy thinks I can wear anything, and now when she is going to leave me so soon I believe I would wear a basket of turnips on my head to please her."

Margy was Margy Ellerton, Sarah's niece, and she was soon to be married to Jack Widner and go away to live in Boston.

"The roses are not very bright," Ann said, mildly.

"That is what Margy said," replied Sarah. "She said they were very subdued." Sarah's handsome face was flushed; she knew perfectly well that she was shocking her cousins, and she had a horror of seeming to strive after her vanished youth, whose departure did not in reality disturb her at all.

Sarah had driven over to Barr-by-the-Sea con-

scious of her rose-wreathed hat. She would have been glad to have gone with her nephew, Doctor Tom Ellerton, in his automobile, which would have rendered in Margy's opinion some other headgear suitable; but Tom had gone to Boston and Margy was on the watch, and Sarah had to drive over arrayed in her gay hat. Margy and Jack Widner were both delighted when she came down-stairs, rustling in her long black silk coat, crowned with the hat.

"Just look, Jack dear," said Margy. "Isn't Aunt Sarah lovely in that hat? I gave it to her. She has worn those hideous old-lady bonnets long enough, and even the last hat she bought was entirely too old. It was trimmed with pansies. Aunt Sarah is not old, anyway, and doesn't look old."

"Indeed she does not!" agreed the devoted Jack.

"And if she were," said Margy, conclusively, "what of that? The earth is never too old for roses, and no mortal woman is as old as the earth."

The two young creatures laughed delightedly. Both thought that speech very clever; but Sarah Edgewater, forced by love back into the attire of girlhood which she had discarded, drove away at the same time pleased and ill at ease. She dreaded the expressions upon her cousins' faces when they should see those juvenile roses. The expressions came exactly as she had surmised. She was more abashed about wearing her pretty rose-decked hat than if she had been guilty of some real misdemeanor. After she had left the Matthews house, she stopped at a store and purchased a gray veil,

which she tied over the hat. She explained to Margy, when she reached home, that the road had been very dusty.

Margy was lovely. She and her two younger sisters, Violetta and Imogen, were all on the shady porch sewing on wedding finery. Jack had just gone. All three girls were pretty, but Margy, just then, was by far the prettiest, because her face was radiant with the wonder and delight of love. She was to be married in just one month from that day. Her sisters were to be bridesmaids, but it was to be a very quiet wedding. Margy had always declared that she would be married in her traveling costume, and she persisted in spite of her sisters' remonstrances.

"The very best we can do," said Violetta, "is to wear pale-blue silk suits, and I had set my heart on a regular bridesmaid costume.

"And blue is not becoming to me—at least not very," said Violetta.

"As becoming as it is to me," returned Imogen, "and both of us have to wear light blue silk suits, because only blue looks well with that fawn shade of Margy's dress. And poor Aunt Sarah, she could have such a stunning silver-gray satin trimmed with white lace."

Sarah came to the rescue of her dear Margy. "You forget that I have my handsome new black lace to wear," said she, "and you forget that Margy has a right to dress as she pleases now, if never before, and never after, in her life."

Violetta had a strain of malice. "I suppose you

will be perfectly contented to go up the church aisle wearing a hat trimmed with forget-me-nots to go with Imogen's gown and mine," said she.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Violetta Ellerton," cried Margy, indignantly.

"I would just like to know what pale-blue flowers, except forget-me-nots, Aunt Sarah *can* wear?" persisted Violetta.

"That is true," said Imogen, although she looked a little scared.

"Don't talk such nonsense, children," said Sarah, entering the house to remove her wraps. She had dropped into a chair on the porch for a few minutes after her return from her drive.

Sarah spoke with composure and dignity, but in reality she felt somewhat uneasy. The question of her headgear at Margy's wedding had not occurred to her. Would Margy insist upon a hat? She probably would—but with blue flowers? Sarah quailed before forget-me-nots, and she could think of no pretty blue flowers except forget-me-nots, and she knew that an entirely black hat would not be suitable for the occasion. How could she—a large, stately, elderly woman, appear at her niece's wedding in a hat trimmed with forget-me-nots, like a little child's?

Sarah Edgewater lay awake that night endeavoring to plan a hat which would please her beloved Margy and at the same time not render herself ridiculous. She came to the conclusion before she fell asleep that there were singularly few blue flowers in all creation which had been reproduced for

milliners' use. She thought vaguely of bachelor's buttons, but they seemed on the whole to her more idiotic than forget-me-nots. The very next morning she drove over again to Barr-by-the-Sea and consulted the most fashionable milliner there, and directly everything was solved to her entire satisfaction. There were to be no flowers at all on her hat with the exception of a wonderful long-stemmed white rose. The hat itself was to be a creation of pale blue veiled with silver, with judicious touches of jet. Sarah felt contented. On her way home she stopped for a few minutes at the Matthews house. She felt that it was a gracious thing to call when she had not the purpose of bestowing alms. She told Dora and Ann about the hat.

"I was certainly puzzled," said she. "Margy did not want me to wear an entirely black costume, and her sisters are to wear blue, which harmonizes with her fawn-colored traveling suit; and I did not wish to disturb the color scheme, and for the life of me, I could not think of any artificial flowers in blue except forget-me-nots and bachelor's buttons, and they did seem ridiculous for a woman of my age; but now this milliner is to make a lovely, perfectly suitable hat of pale dull blue and black and silver, with just one rose, a white rose. She is a perfect artist, that milliner; but of course that follows necessarily on account of the class of people she has to cater to in the summer."

Dora and Ann looked at each other. "Is it to be a hat, and not a bonnet?" said Dora.

"Oh yes. Why, the milliner simply laughed at me when I proposed a bonnet! She says she will not make bonnets at any price for anybody."

"It seems to me there ought to be a milliner who will make bonnets," remarked Ann, meekly.

Sarah laughed. "It seemed so to me," she replied, "but it looks as if bonnets belonged to history. You will have to come to hats yourself, Dora." A sudden thought struck Sarah. "Dora," she exclaimed, "do, just to please me, go to that milliner and have a hat made to wear to Margy's wedding, and have it put on my bill." Sarah did not notice Dora's pursed lips of obstinacy.

"Thank you, Sarah," said Dora.

"I will stop and speak to her about it on my way home," said Sarah. "She will get up something lovely for you. With that dark hair of yours, she will insist on a pale pink probably."

Dora looked at Sarah and her face was set. "I," said she, "shall wear a bonnet."

"But she will not make a bonnet."

"I shall wear a bonnet, or not go at all."

"Oh, Dora dear, you must go, or Margy will be heartbroken!"

"Then I shall wear a bonnet."

"But that milliner——"

"Thank you very much, Sarah," said Dora with intense dignity, "but I think I would rather not go to your milliner. I know of a milliner who makes very pretty bonnets indeed, very suitable and very pretty."

"Then—" began Sarah, but Dora anticipated her.

"Thanks to your generosity, I am abundantly able to purchase the bonnet myself," said she.

Sarah laughed pleasantly. "You are entirely too proud, dear," she said.

After Sarah had gone Dora looked at Ann and Ann looked at Dora. Their faces were as eloquent as speech. "Think of Sarah's wearing a hat, a hat made of blue and silver, with a rose!" said Dora's face.

"Only think of it!" said Ann's face.

"I am sorry for her," Dora said, suddenly, with strong emphasis. Tears were actually in her eyes. Sarah's utter kindness and ignorance of the true state of affairs, as the sisters understood it, had touched Dora. She realized gratitude with no tang of bitterness. "I am going to make a bonnet for poor Sarah myself," said she.

Ann looked at her with admiration. "I know you can make a beauty," said she.

"I will make one. Sarah Edgewater, good as she has been to us, shall not make a spectacle of herself at that wedding."

Ann nodded, but strangely enough, that mild invalid face of hers did not relax with loving-kindness and forgiveness for benefits received as entirely as her sister's. "And for once, just once, Sarah Edgewater will have to take, and we can give," said she. Her eyes gleamed under her lace scarf.

Dora's face suddenly reflected her sister's. "Yes," she returned, "for once Sarah Edgewater

can find out what it means to take. It will do her good."

Ann raised herself on her couch with unusual strength. "I am so glad you are going to do this," she said, with emphasis. "I have not spoken; but as the years have gone, the bread of charity has seemed more and more bitter to me. If I had not been so helpless!"

"You will make yourself sick. You are not to blame," said Dora.

"I know it, but it has been bitter, bitter. Now we can give, you and I."

"Yes, for the first time, we can."

Ann looked at her sister, and her wan face gathered intensity. Her cheeks bloomed; her eyes brightened. "And," said she, very slowly, with almost terrible emphasis, *"if Sarah Edgewater does not take that bonnet and wear it to the wedding——"*

"Yes," repeated Dora; *"if Sarah Edgewater does not take that bonnet and wear it to the wedding—"*

"We will never again touch a penny of her money," said Ann, completing the sentence. Her face looked pitiless toward herself and her sister.

"You would starve to death," said Dora.

"So would you, but—*we would.*"

"And then they would—*find out,*" said Dora, with a strange exultation.

Ann nodded. Both meant that before Sarah had commenced her weekly gratuities, every piece of furniture, every article of value, not in immediate

use by the sisters, had been sold. The old Matthews house was stripped except for three rooms. The others were kept locked, with shades drawn. Their emptiness was a secret to be guarded against an army of curiosity.

"I wonder if Sarah has ever thought we might sell some old furniture instead of taking so much money?" said Ann.

"She does not know," replied Dora, "and in any case Sarah would not think of our selling."

"Have you thought," asked Ann, "that we ought to make Margy Ellerton a wedding present?"

Dora looked at Ann indignantly. "You go too far, Ann," she replied. "You know we cannot make Margy a wedding present unless we use her aunt's money to buy it, and that would be ridiculous."

"Go into the bedroom and open my drawer in the bureau, my top drawer, and bring out something wrapped in tissue-paper in the left back corner," said Ann.

Dora obeyed. When she returned, she bore a bumpy parcel wrapped in tissue-paper. "What is it, Ann?" she asked.

"Open it."

There was revealed a glass shade containing a stiff group of wax flowers—tuberoses and lilies-of-the-valley.

"I kept that hidden away, and it wasn't sold that time when the man from New York was here asking if we had any old shades of wax flowers or funeral wreaths to sell," said Ann, triumphantly.

"I hid that. You made it, you know. It was the first wax thing you ever made. We sold the others, and you wondered where this was."

"Yes, I remember," said Dora.

"This was out in the woodshed under a washtub," said Ann. "I made up my mind we would keep a few things. The man wasn't going to pay much for this, anyway, and I did admire it. I always thought the tuberoses were prettier than the natural ones, and they haven't any scent, either, and you know I never liked the scent of tuberoses. Every single petal on these tuberoses is as even as a die." Ann regarded the thing lovingly.

Dora set it carefully on the table, but she looked a bit doubtful. "Don't you remember what that lady from Boston said about wax flowers?" she inquired.

"I don't care what she said."

"But you must remember. She said wax flowers had been a most decadent feature of a decadent age of household decoration. She said that she classed wax flowers and worsted mottoes and gilded spades and funeral wreaths together in an appalling list. She spoke so decidedly and was so much of a lady, coming from one of the best families of Boston, that I remember, although I did not agree with her, looking at the little bright place on the wallpaper that was behind that last funeral wreath we sold, and feeling rather glad it was not there to be despised."

"If she had had funeral wreaths associated with

her loved ones who had departed, she could not have spoken so," said Ann.

"Suppose Margy has such ideas," said Dora, hesitatingly. For once in her life she did not agree with Ann.

Ann looked at her firmly. "If," said she, "Margy Ellerton does not accept these wax flowers as a wedding present, and have them set out with her other presents, I will never eat another morsel of bread purchased with her aunt's money. You will give Sarah the bonnet; I will give the wax flowers. They are mine, you know. You made them, but you gave them to me. It is time you and I gave, if we continue to receive. If we do not, we shall not continue to receive."

Dora started. "You know what that would mean?"

"Starvation," replied Ann, calmly. "I don't know exactly how you feel, Dora. But I do know how I feel. I have been taking so long that I cannot endure it another month without losing my self-respect. I must give something, and it must be taken. You can do exactly as you choose. I shall not take or benefit by another dollar of Sarah Edgewater's money, unless she takes something from me."

Dora looked tragically thoughtful. "I wonder if we are ungrateful and wicked, Ann," said she.

"I suppose we are," Ann replied, calmly; "but I can't help it if we are. My mind is made up. There is something about the way that envelope with the money is slipped into a book on the table

every week, and nobody saying anything, that is making me lose my reason, if I do nothing."

"But poor Sarah gives in that way so as to spare our feelings. She knows it would be awful if we had to cash a check or anything like that. And she does not want to hand the money right out. She does it all in the very best way she knows. I could not manage it any better; neither could you."

"Don't you suppose I know that? Do you think I am unjust enough to blame Sarah? I am not unjust; I suppose I am wicked and ungrateful."

"Well, I suppose I am, too," said Dora slowly, "for I feel just as you do. If Sarah doesn't take the bonnet, I will never take another dollar of her money."

Ann nodded. Her shadowy face sharpened suddenly with an intense thought. "Do you think it would be suicide?" she asked.

"I don't know; I do know my mind is made up."

"So is mine," said Ann. "There is some narrow white ribbon in the right-hand corner of that drawer. Please get it for me. I want to do up these flowers."

"There is time enough."

"I know, but I don't want the shade put back in the drawer. I am afraid something will happen to it; I have always been afraid it would get broken. It would just go in by laying it on its side. When Sarah comes over next time I shall give it to her. She need not open it until a week before the wedding. Then she can give it to Margy."

"I had better wash the shade," said Dora. "It looks a little dusty."

Dora washed and polished the shade. When it was replaced, if one could banish one's opinion concerning false art, the whole was in reality not unpleasing. Those wax flowers had been very well and daintily made. The small symmetrical pyramid of waxen bloom beneath the crystal shade, although obsolete and probably bound to awaken merriment, was no worse in effect than many gifts spread on the display-tables on Margy Ellerton's wedding day.

Dora had sent the shade by Sarah as planned, and the week before the wedding had presented Sarah herself with the bonnet in an ancient bandbox, freshly papered with remnants of the white-and-gold parlor paper.

"Mine is a wedding present for Margy," Ann said with a peculiar expression, almost aggressive, at least defiant.

Dora, when she presented the bandbox, had the same look on her face. "This is my present to you, Cousin Sarah," she said. "It is for you to wear to the wedding. Ann and I feel that we have been taking so much all these years, that we must do a little in return."

Sarah Edgewater had great command over her features. Her face did not indicate the dismay in her heart. "You ought not to have done anything," she said.

"We take pleasure in it," replied Dora, firmly, "and they—the gifts—have cost us nothing. We

are both sensible of the absurdity of purchasing gifts for you with your own money."

"After it has passed into your hands it is no longer my money," said Sarah, almost angrily. She was in reality angry. It seemed to her that she had given so freely and delicately that her anger was justified. "Of course," she added, "I realize that I give far too little, only enough to just keep the wolf from the door." She tossed her head slightly. She gathered up the gifts preparatory to leaving.

"Be careful of my present," charged Ann. "It is something that can be broken easily."

"I will hold it until you get into the buggy," said Dora.

When Sarah was seated in the buggy, with the shade carefully disposed on the seat beside her and the bandbox on the floor at her feet, she spoke again. "Why did you take so much trouble, Dora dear?" said she. "Of course Margy will be delighted, and of course I will, but why?"

Dora's face and her reply were alike inscrutable. "It takes more than money to keep the wolf from the door, sometimes," said she.

"I don't think I know what you mean."

"What I say."

Sarah, driving home, reflected deeply. As a result, when she delivered Ann's gift to Margy, she said, "Now, Margy, whatever you and Violetta and Imogen and Tom think of this, act pleased. There are times when deceit is like one of the commandments. I think this is one of those times."

"What is it, Aunt Sarah?" demanded Violetta.

"I don't know. I suspect. Remember what I have said."

Margy removed the paper from the shade. There was a simultaneous gasp. Mirth passed like a fleeting light-ray over all the intent faces, even Sarah's. Then intense goodness took its place, intense goodness and ready understanding. Tears stood in Margy's pretty eyes.

"Poor old souls," she said; "they gave me all they had. They must have made these years ago and treasured them."

They were in Margy's mother's room; Laura Ellerton, although the years had softened and improved her, was not a woman of the finest grain.

"They might have given Margy some of the beautiful old-fashioned furniture which I have seen there and which they can never use themselves," she said, bluntly.

Sarah leaned forward and whispered.

Laura stared back at her with a shocked face. "When?" said she.

"A long time ago. Don't speak of it, Laura. They don't know that I know. I saw some of the things in Sylvesters' antique shop in Leicester."

" I did not know it was ever so bad with them as that," murmured Laura. She looked at the wax flowers. "I don't care what people say," she averred, "I always thought wax flowers were pretty."

"I think they are perfectly lovely," said Margy. She looked at the tuberoses, and her lip trembled.

She was very happy, and very tender toward all unhappiness. She thought of the two old sisters living their monotonous solitary lives, and of the wax flowers which they had caused to bloom in their long-past youth and had now given her, and the true inward sweetness of the gift reached the girl's heart. She did not say it aloud, but she said to herself that the old sisters had given her for a bridal gift something which money could not buy. They had given her a part of their own youth.

But Sarah did not display her present until the wedding-day. Then she called the family into the flower-decked parlor, where the bridal gifts were set out on long white-covered tables, and the great bandbox pasted over with white and gold wall paper was in the middle of the room. She made a little speech before she opened it. Tom Ellerton was there, and Margy and Jack Widner and Violetta and Imogen, and Jack Widner's mother and Amy Dinsmore, Margy's married sister, who lived across the street. It was near noon and luncheon-time. All had been at work during the morning decorating the house and the church where the ceremony was to be observed. "I have something to show you," said Sarah. She began taking off the lid of the bandbox.

"Another present?" laughed Jack Widner. He was nervous that morning and laughed a good deal.

"A present; but for me," said Sarah Edgewater. Her voice was so serious that they all stared at her.

"A present for me," repeated Sarah Edgewater. "I am to wear it at the wedding this afternoon,

and—I don't want to hear one laugh, one word against it. Dora Matthews gave it to me. She made it; I am going to wear it."

Violetta gasped. "Is it a hat?" she said. "I thought you had that beauty, Aunt Sarah."

"It is a bonnet."

"A bonnet!"

"Hush, Violetta, not one word. Dora gave it to me. She made it. It means more to her and her sister than any of you know, perhaps more than I know myself, although I have been thinking a good deal about it."

Sarah removed the lid of the bandbox amid a wondering silence. She withdrew the bonnet and held it up. A murmur like a breeze swept over the room. Sarah exhibited the bonnet with a challenging air. The curious thing about it was, if one could divest it of associations, it was intrinsically pretty. It was a graceful affair of flowery black and shimmering silver and long floating black ribbons. Dora Matthews must have had some talent for the making of feminine headgear.

Sarah held up the bonnet. The others stared. Tom Ellerton spoke first. He did not laugh, but his mouth twitched. "What in creation is it? A candy bonnet, Aunt Sarah?" he asked.

"Hush, Tom! It is trimmed with grasses dipped in alum-water. It makes them look like crystal. And the lace is real old thread. The shape is one Dora must have had for years. It has really come in style again. It is almost as large as a hat."

"But they don't wear bonnets now much, any-

way," said Violetta; "and, oh, Aunt Sarah, your hat is such a beauty! This will just spoil Margy's wedding."

"No, it will not," said Margy. "It is lovely, Aunt Sarah. I want you to wear it."

"It will spoil Margy's wedding," repeated Violetta.

"It will not," said Sarah, "and even if it did, there are things in life which it is more important not to spoil than weddings." Sarah looked strangely wise and reflective. A knowledge had come to her that the one who gives has a duty aside from giving—a sacred duty to the receiver of the gift. She knew that the old sisters had quailed in spirit before her benefits. Now it was her turn. She owed it to them to endure the humiliation which she included—whether she would or not—in her weekly gift to the sisters. They had not given with such a thought in mind. They had had the simple wish to establish their tottering sense of independence by becoming themselves givers. They had admired the bonnet with all their hearts. But Sarah received more than they knew, a taste of the undersmart of dependence which she gave them every week of their lives, and she understood.

"I can get away from the alum, and the bonnet is beautiful; it will not spoil my wedding," declared Margy.

"You darling," whispered Jack Widner, in Margy's ear.

Margy was right. That strange bonnet, con-

cocted by obsolete feminine imagination, did not spoil the wedding. People, of course, looked at it sharply as Sarah, trailing her black laces, swept up the church aisle with those alum-crystallized grasses shimmering on her erect head. They wondered; they surmised. It was rumored all through the Barrs that Sarah Edgewater's bonnet had been ordered from a celebrated milliner in Paris, and must have been beautiful and very expensive, although it did look a little odd if you had never seen one like it. In reality, Sarah's bonnet in that blossom-trimmed church in the midst of the soft pastel-tints of the wedding party, the bride's cream lace and fawn, the bridesmaid's pale blue shimmer of silk, was like a delicious note of discord which accentuated the harmony of the whole.

Dora Matthews in an ancient, blue-lavender silk, sweeping wide folds over her thin knees, with a bonnet made of the rest of the black thread lace, with only a jet tuft for ornament, sat beside Sarah and realized a happiness as great as she wished for on earth. After the reception Tom drove her home in his car, laden with wedding-cake and ices and flowers. When she entered the sitting-room Ann looked up at her. Ann's face in the midst of her lace drapery was pearl-pale, her mouth gaping like a child's, her blue eyes wide with vital questioning.

"Your wax flowers were on the middle table with the best wedding presents," said Dora, immediately, "and I heard Violetta and Imogen pointing them out to a lot of people as being the gift

which Margy valued most, because wax flowers are so very rare nowadays."

"Did anybody laugh?"

"Not a soul."

Then Ann looked at her sister with eager eyes, revealing the poor, proud soul of a gentlewoman tormented by receiving when she would fain be giving.

"She wore it," said Dora.

THE FLOWERING BUSH

PEOPLE as well as flowers escape from gardens, and legitimate environments. They stroll, either from perversity or idle wantonness, outside palings and specified abiding-places, and remain outside through the generations. No particular stigma attaches to them for so doing. The birth-bar is not sinister, simply mildly differential.

Old Man Edgewater lived in South Barr, and everybody in the four villages of Barr Center, Barr-by-the-Sea, Leicester, and South Barr knew that he was related to the real Edgewaters of Barr Center, although few could trace the relationship. Years before, one Eli Edgewater had slipped off the Family Tree and taken feeble, still tenacious, root as a thing apart. Old Man Eli Edgewater of the present day was like a small no-account sprout from the grand old family root.

Eli had never married. In his youth he had made futile efforts toward matrimony. He had aspired to Mrs. Augustus Cæsar Whittemore's mother. She had been the prettiest girl in the village, and had afterward married a Dunn from Leicester. Everybody had laughed at Eli for that, and the girl

had been shamed and indignant. Later, he made sheepish efforts toward courting a lovely girl in Barr Center, and exposed himself again to ridicule. Eli had been incapable of turning his fancy toward a girl of his own lazy, shiftless type who might lazily and shiftlessly have accepted him. In his love-affairs the Edgewater blood had seemed to tell. He had therefore married nobody.

Now Eli was an old man, and his niece, his dead sister's daughter, kept house for him. She was a childless widow, named Deborah Glass. Deborah Glass had come of a family of a similar type to Eli's, only the Glass family had never been inside garden pales. They had not broken loose from stately and progressive rules of life. They had always been simple and ineffectual, although good enough. Deborah Glass was of a pious disposition, devoted to church-going and a religious paper. She was clean, but not orderly. Eli's house was scrubbed daily, but was chaotic. Eli would have preferred order to cleanliness, although he did not exactly realize it. He would regard with a puzzled, sad expression the impossible sitting-room, with every cheap picture hung at different angles, with the books and papers looking as if they had been hurled by some fiend of disrule at the table, whose cloth dragged dismally on one side, at the chairs set as if they had just emerged from a violent collision, at the mantel-shelf immaculately dusted, but decked with kerosene-lamps and vases and a clock at such degrees of variance that an effect of positive immorality was achieved. Eli

would sigh, not knowing exactly what the matter was, and look out of the window. Then his face would clear. It was always charming at all seasons, that window outlook.

There was a broad front yard, and in the midst stood a superb oak-tree. That tree was a delight. It clung to its splendid rags of beauty nearly through the winter, and when at last its leaves were fallen, it stood in a gorgeous russet mat of them, and birds' nests on its magnificent branches were disclosed. It was late about putting forth leaves in the spring, but at last it was a triumphant song of vernal bass, and the wonder of that tree in the autumn was almost enough to content the soul of one old man with earth.

There was only one drawback about the oak—Eli was quite sure that its wide circle of shadow hindered the growth and bloom of his rhododendron-bush. Old Man Edgewater had a great rhododendron-bush which was his high light of existence. The oak meant much, so did the deep yard and road beyond, which circled gracefully just there, and the pretty Whittemore house across the way, but that bush was the star in the opal, the eye of the ruby, the expression unto himself of his own soul.

It was really a wonderful thing, that bush. When, late in spring, it was in full bloom, it stood forth like a white angel, arresting the almost awed attention of all who saw. Old Man Eli used to sit on his door-step and watch the passers-by stop and stare, and the pride of life, of which he had

known so little, quickened within him. When the bush was at the full tide of its glorious bloom, Old Man Edgewater reached the high-water mark of his race. He was for a little while as fine an Edgewater as any of them. He thought well of himself, looked, and was, another person. He was a Man. Then Deborah Glass insensibly respected him. She was far from realizing why, but her whole manner toward him changed. Usually she treated him as a rather troublesome child whom Providence had intrusted to her care. Hers was entirely a duty-task, for Eli paid her nothing. But Deborah Glass had lived all her life under an autocracy of Duty without thought of revolution. She paid the mortgage on Eli's house, she had it repaired. Then she lived there and cared for the old man.

Eli had a tiny income, just enough to buy his clothes and pay for his food. Sarah Edgewater in Barr Center had settled that upon him years before. Sarah seldom came to see him, but she would not allow him to suffer materially. After Deborah went to live there she called on her, but the untidiness of the house and Deborah's extreme tension of duty rather wearied her. She thought Deborah very good, but she did not wish to see much of her.

One afternoon in spring, when the bush was in full glory, Sarah drove over to South Barr with her married niece. Both exclaimed, and praised the bush. Old Man Edgewater exulted.

Going home, Sarah Edgewater and her niece

Margy remarked upon his manner. "He seemed more like one of our family than I have ever seen him," said Sarah. She, a large, majestic, richly dressed woman, was driving, lines held high.

"He must have been handsome when he was young," said the younger woman.

"Handsome? Yes, he was."

"He is handsome now for an old man—and he did not look so very old, either."

"No; when I come to think of it, not so much older than I; but generally he does look old, and although he was handsome, he never had the appearance of being able to keep up with his looks."

"He did to-day."

"Yes, he did to-day."

"His bush is marvelous."

"Yes, the most beautiful one of the kind in the country, I believe."

After his callers had gone, Old Man Edgewater sat on his front door-step and imbibed to his spiritual growth the beauty of his blooming bush. He was alone, for the day before Deborah Glass had been called away by the illness of a cousin who lived in Barr-by-the-Sea. The cousin had been taken ill suddenly, and since she lived alone, Deborah's narrow path of duty branched.

"I hate to leave you, Uncle Eli," she said; "but Lizzie is sick and she's all alone, and I don't see any way but to go. I'll be back as soon as I can. There's plenty of bread baked, and cake and pie and doughnuts, and that cold lamb."

"I can get along all right," returned Eli, ab-

sently. He was obsessed by his bush and hardly grasped anything else.

That afternoon Eli forgot that Deborah was not there. When she did not call him to supper, he did not think of it. He did not feel hunger. He sat staring at the bush, and realized complete nourishment of soul and body. There was a full moon, and the bush gleamed like a thing of Heaven plumed with silver. It was not fragrant, of course, but that was better, although the old man did not realize it. A great flood of fragrance from the marvelous bush would have made it more of earth. He sat on the door-step, beside his beloved bush, and worshiped until very late. When at last he rose, he bent over the splendor of white bloom, as if saluting it. He cast a last loving look at it before closing and locking the door.

The next morning Old Man Edgewater, who waked early, as is the habit of age, opened the front door at dawn, and the bush was despoiled. Not only the flowers had been broken off, but great branches. Never again while Old Man Edgewater was out of his grave would the bush be what it had been the night before. It was a piteous, mangled thing. The old man stood gazing at it in a dazed fashion. He put his hand to his head, he rubbed his eyes. He tottered down the steps, and went close to the insulted floral beauty. It was true. At last, he realized. The poor old man's face crumpled up with grief like a child's. Tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks. His dim blue eyes were pools of sorrow.

Then he looked around, and comprehended to the full the miserable wrong. The magnificent blossoms had not been even valued enough to be taken away by the thief. All torn and stamped into the mold, they lay about. It was incredible, the gratuitous insult. There had not been even the excuse of temptation to own beauty. Beauty had been ruined and slain through sheer wantonness. Old Man Edgewater wept aloud.

Suddenly he heard a thin, mocking voice, "Cry-baby."

His face changed marvelously. It was no longer sorrowful, it was malignant with the terrible malignancy of the aged, robbed by the years of the power of self-protection. He looked around. Just outside the circles of ruined blossoms and broken branches lay a boy. He was a small boy for his age, which might have been nine or ten. His expression was old. He was lying on the dew-soaked grass in a curiously weak attitude, but his blue eyes twinkled and his peaked face was impish with glee.

"Cry-baby!" he squeaked again.

Old Man Edgewater gathered himself together. When young he had been spare but muscular. Now a strange force of that passed youth seemed to inform his old muscles. He was upon the gibing boy in the dewy grass; he had him by the collar of his little jacket; he shook him. The fabric of the garment was so frail it gave way. The boy fell again on the grass, but his impish little face looked up at the old man grinning and unconquered. Eli

had him again, firm grip of knotted hands on his shoulders this time. Old Man Edgewater shook and shook. He retained his hold with one hand, then he cuffed and spanked with the other.

"Got 'nough?" he snarled. He let go, and the boy rolled at his feet quite unconscious.

Old Man Edgewater stood staring at him. He touched him, not very gently, with one foot. "Playin' 'possum, be ye?" he inquired.

The boy remained perfectly still.

Eli touched him again, more gently. "Git up and quit this tomfoolery," he ordered.

The boy made no response. His pale profile lay motionless along the grass.

Old Man Edgewater began to be frightened. He bent over the boy, cautiously. He suspected a feint. The old man lifted a grimy claw of a hand. It was flaccid.

"I swan!" said Old Man Edgewater, in a scared whisper. "Git up, can't ye?" he said again, but quaveringly. "Lord-a-massy, I 'ain't killed him, have I?" he muttered.

The boy stirred. Instantly the old man was on guard again. His terror left him. "Knowed ye was playin' 'possum, ye young varmint," said he.

The boy gazed at him, and all the impishness was gone from his face; he looked pitiful.

"What d'ye mean?" inquired Old Man Edgewater, in a doubtful voice.

There was a faint murmur in response.

"Hey?" said Old Man Edgewater.

"I didn't mean nothin'," was faintly audible.

"Yes, you did, too. What did ye sp'ile my bush for, hey? Tell me ye didn't mean nothin'!"

The boy's face was still very white, but a twinkle leaped into his blue eyes. He winked at Old Man Edgewater.

The old man almost danced with rage. "Sp'iled that bush! Wa'n't another in the hull town to tech it!" he screamed at the boy. "Tore off all them blooms and tore 'em to bits! What did ye do it for? Answer me! No more playin' 'possum. That don't go down."

Old Man Edgewater shook the boy again, with different result. This time the boy did not become insensible. He whimpered feebly and the twinkle of his blue eyes was dulled with gathering tears of self-pity.

"I'm 'most starved," he muttered, sullenly.

"'Most starved, be ye? Funny way to get a meal of vittles, sp'ilin' my bush! Durn ye, that bush was worth enough more 'n 't you be, do ye know that—hey?"

The boy wept like a little child.

"I swan!" said Old Man Edgewater.

He looked about him. It was still very early. The two seemed alone in the world. The curtains were drawn in the Whittemore house opposite, not even the milk-wagon was in sight. The grass was bending with dewdrops like lilies-of-the-valley. Cobwebs sparkling like wheels of diamonds were everywhere. Somewhere a cock crew, then another answered him. There was a chorus of birds at the left.

"I swan!" said Old Man Edgewater.

He was still angry, but not angry enough to have quite as much strength as when he had picked up the boy and shaken him.

"I'll get ye in out of the wet grass, durn ye!" said he; "but you've got to help all ye can. Can't lift no dead weight. I'm an old man."

However, almost by main strength Old Man Edgewater dragged the boy, whose knees visibly bent under him, although he made an effort to walk. Once in the house, Eli stood holding to the boy's thin arm.

"Durned if I know what to do with him," he muttered.

"Seems as if nobody did," returned the boy, in a weak voice.

"Hey?"

"Seems as if nobody did."

Eli stared at him. "Durned if I know," he said, again.

"Why don't ye lock me up?" suggested the boy. His mouth twisted slightly as if beginning a smile.

"Say, who be ye, anyhow? What's your name?" asked Old Man Edgewater.

"Name's Wash Townsley," replied the boy, sulkily.

"Huh! one of that Townsley tribe."

"Ain't no tribe."

"Hey?"

"Ain't no tribe. There ain't no other Townsley 'cept me."

"Where's your pa?"

"Dunno. He's dead."

"Where's your ma?"

"Dunno. She's dead, too."

"When did she die, hey?"

" 'Fore I can remember; then Pop married again, a widder with three children, and then Pop and the widder had three more—"

"Hold your hosses. Ain't those children's name Townsley?"

"Used to be. Dunno what 'tis now."

"Why don't you know?"

"They died, too, just as quick as they could. The last was a baby with curls. I used to tend her." The boy swallowed hard.

"I swan!"

"Then Pop died. He was killed in that railroad smash-up, and then the widder she married again, and he had two children, and then they had one more, and then she died, and now he's married again and she's got a few children."

"I swan, you stop!"

"Both of 'em is kind of ugly, and he drinks, and she don't wash the dishes."

"I swan!"

"And they told me to git and I got," said the boy, simply and uncomplainingly.

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"What you been doin' since?"

"I went over to Barr Center to enlist."

"Enlist?"

The boy nodded. His face flushed angrily.

"The captain told me to git, too," he said. "He told me I wa'n't any use to send over there, that I was only the kind they killed, that was all—couldn't fight. I'd like to show him. I whopped the Muggins kid, and he's twict as big as me. I whopped him, and he bawled and run home to his ma. Huh!"

Old Man Edgewater grinned. "So ye tried to enlist."

"You bet I did, and he told me to git."

"What ye been doing since?"

"Nothin', 'cept bein' told to git."

"Don't see why that made ye sp'ile my bush."

The boy looked at the man, and the most terrible revolt and defiance of all creation, that of the created against the Creator, was evident in his miserable little face. "I was bound to fight somethin'," he said, between closed teeth.

"Lord-a-massy, my bush wa'n't fightin' ye."

"It was there, and all covered with flowers," said the boy, decisively.

"I never see such a boy as ye be," said Old Man Edgewater.

The boy yawned as if bored. "Wish ye'd lock me up, so I can set down. I'm wore out," he said.

"You said ye was 'most starved, too, didn't ye?"

"That don't make no odds," the boy said, dully. "Guess I've 'most got over that. I jest want to set somewhere." He dropped as he spoke.

"You come right in here," said Old Man Edgewater. He opened the door into the little room

in the center of the house called the "dark bedroom," because there was no window in it. There was a close but not unpleasant odor in the room; lavender was a part of it.

Eli piloted the boy to a large rocking-chair covered with red cotton, and adorned with a netted tidy. "Set down!" he ordered.

The boy obeyed. Eli went out and locked the door. The boy was then in a soft gloom, only broken by a narrow strip of light at the top of the door, which sagged on its hinges.

Soon the key turned in the lock and the old man appeared. He carried a tray on which were arranged a plate of doughnuts, a section of apple pie, a plate of bread, and a wedge of butter and a tumbler of milk.

"Better eat this," advised Old Man Edgewater. He stood over Wash Townsley as he ate. The boy was ravenous.

"I swan! ye didn't lie when ye said ye was 'most starved," said the old man.

"Try it yourself," retorted the boy.

"Now, don't you be sassy."

The boy had devoured all the food on the tray. He stuck out his tongue at Old Man Edgewater, and it was as if he stuck out a tongue of rebellion at Providence.

"You be a bad little boy," said the old man. He went out and locked the door again. He returned to the front door-step and his demolished bush. He picked up one of the ravished white blossoms and regarded it pitifully. A horror of the young

creature who could do such a wanton deed was over him. Never in his whole life had the possibility of such deeds under any circumstances been in his own nature. He sat down and reflected. The shades at the opposite windows were now up, and filmy lace curtains swayed in the morning breeze. Pretty Mrs. Whittemore came out with a little golden-haired boy at heel, and cut some pink roses. Wagons and automobiles passed. The village was awake. Old Man Edgewater had not eaten any breakfast himself. He was too disturbed. He was shaken out of his rut of life, and all his little details of existence were chaotic.

"Durned if I know what to do with him," he muttered to himself. He wished that he had somebody whom he could consult. He felt injured because Deborah Glass was not there. As well as he knew Deborah Glass, he had not the slightest conception as to her probable conduct in such a case. The boy was so small and wretched, although he had done such a dreadful thing, and Deborah was a woman. Nobody ever knew what a woman might do when a miserable child was in question.

The grass no longer glittered with its web of dew. The sun was rising hotly, the sky was purple along the horizon.

"Goin' to be a br'ilin' day," said Old Man Edgewater. A moist whiff of heat came in his face. "There ain't one mite of air in that bedroom," he muttered. "That good-for-nothin' boy might faint away in there, he's so dead beat."

Old Man Edgewater got up and shuffled into the

house. He unlocked the door of the dark bedroom and peered in. There was no movement. A thrill of horror came over him. Then he heard steady, delicate breathing. The boy was fast asleep in a little coil on the braided mat.

"Git up," said Old Man Edgewater.

Those two words had immediate effect upon the boy named Wash Townsley. He had responded to them as to the sting of a lash so often that he got up, half awake. He was so sleepy he staggered.

"What do ye want?" he murmured, thickly. His head wagged to one side like a baby's. He stood before the old man and slept standing. He drew a long breath of slumber.

"Come, you've got to git out of this close place or you'll be sick," said the old man.

The boy slept.

"You've got to git out of here, durn ye," said the old man.

The boy woke and regarded him with blinking blue eyes in which tears stood. His mouth quivered, then he stuck out his tongue languidly. "You put me in here," he mumbled, defensively.

"Who said I didn't? Now I say you've got to git out."

The boy emerged staggeringly. Old Man Edgewater took him by the arm, noting how small it was, and led him across the sitting-room into his own bedroom. It was a large bedroom with three windows.

"Set down here," said the old man. He pushed

the boy into a chair, then he straightened the bed.

When he turned the boy was asleep again. The old man had some difficulty in getting him to the bed. The minute the childish head touched the pillow the room was filled with the hum of complete slumber. The old man pulled off the boy's shoes. They were dreadful shoes; one had a flapping sole.

"Now lay there, and git your sleep out, durn ye," said he.

Eli sat again beside his demolished bush, and reflected. Responsibility weighed upon him heavily. "No use tellin' his folks; he 'ain't got any," he said, aloud. He wished Deborah Glass would come home. Then suddenly a fear seized him lest she should come. "Most likely that boy's dretful dirty," he said, "and Deborah she's so awful clean, there's no tellin' what she might take it into her head to do." Eli considered uneasily how very miserable the boy's clothes had looked. "What's she goin' to say when she sees him sleepin' right in the bed with them dirty clothes on?" he thought.

Finally Old Man Edgewater shuffled into the house again. He unlocked the bedroom door. The boy stirred slightly. He had been so badgered and driven about that suspicion never completely slept in his young mind. He stirred, and slept again. Eli bent over him. The boy asleep looked a mere baby. He had heavy yellow lashes and they lay damply upon his white cheeks. His hands were flung out helplessly.

Old Man Edgewater tiptoed out across the sit-

ting-room into the kitchen and returned with a basin of water and a dish-cloth. He approached the boy, wrung out the dish-cloth, and wiped the lightly curved young cheek streaked with tears. He did it so gently that the boy did not wake. He sighed once, and that was all. Tears welled up in the old man's eyes and rolled down his cheek furrows; his old mouth quivered with pity and tenderness like a woman's.

When his task was finished he went and rummaged in his bureau drawers. He drew out a clean nightshirt and regarded it doubtfully. It was made of coarse cotton, untrimmed. Old Man Edgewater shook his head. "Nothin' but a little baby boy," he said. "Ought to be suthin' softer. All right for my old hide; his skin's like a little baby's."

Old Man Edgewater finally mounted the stairs to the room where Deborah Glass slept. There he rummaged in her bureau. He glanced fearfully over his shoulder as he did so. He found in one corner of the lowest drawer a package of especially fine underwear. He could not dream of it, but Deborah, lonely woman, had designed these fine articles for her burial wear, and the cousin whom she was nursing knew of the little feminine cache, pitiful vanity and daintiness, for the last toilet of earth. Old Man Edgewater selected a nightgown of finest lawn trimmed with fine lace and white ribbons. It was sweet with lavender. He gathered it under his arm in a crumpled mass and hobbled stiffly downstairs.

He had a task before him: to undress the boy,

bathe him, and clothe him in Deborah Glass's best nightgown. He could not accomplish it without awakening his charge, but the child was so spent that he slept again and waked again and slept again, and only whimpered faint protests, making no struggle. Finally he lay cleanly and softly robed in fine lawn, and drew beautiful, long, contented breaths of slumber.

Then Old Man Edgewater sat once more on the door-step. The day was growing hotter. The village street beyond the shady green yard swam in heat in long undulations. Eli reflected how very hot the bedroom where the boy slept would be presently. It therefore happened that by the time the torrid sunlight reached the bedroom where the boy lay, Eli was there, pulling and coaxing him out of bed, then leading him staggeringly through the cool parlor, and pushing him into the cool softness of the best-room bed.

Wash remembered once to stick out his tongue at the old man; then he was so tired he whimpered a bit, and he slept as he was led.

"You must be hungry ag'in," said Eli. The boy made no reply.

Eli went out into the woodshed where the ice-box stood, and got a glass of cool milk. He returned, and had to shake the boy and pull at his thin shoulders to induce him to sit up and drink. Then he sank back and slept with his mouth still milky, like a young child's. Now that he was resting and fed, and not badgered by his little crowd of tormenting circumstances, the boy's face showed

small and fair and sweet, and his mouth was childishly lovely.

Old Man Edgewater wiped his eyes when he sat again on the door-step. "Poor little feller! no real folks, nothin' but steps, kicked round from pillar to post, no wonder he was mad to see my bush all over flowers so much better off than he was," he muttered. Eli Edgewater was a simple old soul, but to him as he sat there came a clear realization of the rebellion wreaking itself insanely upon cherished beauty. It was the primitive revolt of the human soul deprived, or rather never being given, its share of the sweets of the life into which it had been summoned without consultation. Old Man Edgewater did not reason it out any more than the boy had. He merely regarded the ravished bush of beauty, and understood. Finally he himself dropped off asleep as he sat there. He slept quite soundly, and did not wake until a rather sweet, but thin voice, with possibilities of anger in it, smote his ears.

"What ails that bush?" demanded the voice.

Eli stirred. "Hey?" he said, half awake.

"What ails the bush? Who tore all the blooms off? Wake up, Uncle Eli."

Eli woke up. Deborah Glass had returned. Immediately a great fear smote him. What would she say about the little boy asleep in the best bedroom? He looked up at her rather pretty middle-aged face and said nothing. He smiled vacantly.

Deborah Glass, a tall, thin woman with smooth curves of light hair looped over her ears, and a

pale, clear complexion, bent over him. This time there was an impatient note in her voice.

"What on earth ails you?" said she. She was so much younger that she often treated him as if he were imbecile with age. "Who broke all the blooms on that bush?" she demanded again.

"Guess likely some child."

"Some child? Some imp. Why, I never saw anything like it. The blooms are all trampled into the grass. Whoever broke them off didn't even want them; just pure destruction, pure and simple. Lots of the branches are broke off. Eli Edgewater, that bush is about ruined. When did you first see it?"

"This mornin' when I come out here," replied Eli, meekly.

Deborah Glass stared at him. "You say a child did it?" she asked.

"Guess some child must have done it."

"Well, I just wish I had hold of that child once. No child round here would have done such a thing. Child, my goodness! Who ever heard of a child going into a strange yard and ruining such a beautiful bush as that was?"

Eli said nothing.

"Eli Edgewater, are you sick, or what does ail you?" asked Deborah Glass, explosively.

"No, Deborah, I ain't sick."

"Then what in creation does ail you? Why, you don't act as if you cared a mite about that bush, and yet I'd thought you set the world by it."

"Bushes ain't everything," said Old Man Edge-

water, with such a strange accent for him that the woman regarded him with alarm.

"Did you eat your breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes, Deborah."

"Of course you haven't had dinner. I've brought a nice little piece of beefsteak; and Lizzie's better. She told me to go out in her garden before I started and get a good mess of peas, and a summer squash, and some beets, and I'm going to put them right on. I haven't had any dinner myself."

Old Man Edgewater thought that the boy would like some of that good dinner, and a sparkle of life came into his distrait face.

"Want me to shell the peas?"

"No, they're young peas, and it won't take long to get dinner."

Deborah Glass went into the house. Eli leaned his head against the jamb and tried to sleep again, but could not. He listened eagerly. He expected every minute to hear an exclamation. He thought the boy would surely wake, that Deborah would enter the best bedroom for something and discover him. Eli was horribly frightened, but not disposed to abandon his post of protector to the forlorn child.

"Arter all, it's my house," he muttered, after a while.

"What's that?" asked Deborah. She had come up behind him, and he had not heard.

Old Man Edgewater started violently.

"What's that? What were you saying to yourself?" persisted Deborah.

"Nothin'."

"It's no sort of a habit you've got, talking to yourself; seems sort of crazy," said Deborah. She regarded him in a puzzled way. Eli raised his old eyes to her face, then lowered them. He colored, and hitched uneasily. What Deborah next asked was unexpected.

"Who's been here?" she said.

"I didn't say anybody had been here."

Deborah lifted high, thin nostrils and sniffed. She had an uncannily keen sense of smell. "The house smells different, somehow," said she. "Anybody been to the door?"

Eli thought with a gasp of relief who had been to the door besides the boy. Mrs. John Cummings had called and asked if Deborah were home. "Mis' Cummin's," said he.

Deborah sniffed. "It was never Alma Cummings," said she. "She's always been frying doughnuts. I can always tell her. She didn't go in the house, either, did she?"

"She stood here and asked if you was home."

"That smell I smell is all through the sitting-room and the dark bedroom. I went in there to lay my things away till I had a chance to go upstairs."

"Mebbe you brought it from the electric car," ventured Eli.

Deborah shook her head. She was so keen of smell that she was easily convinced of error. Sometimes it seemed to lapse into the realm of imagination. "Maybe I imagined it," she said.

"I've smelled roses when the snow was two feet deep, and I knew there were no roses within smelling distance. Dinner 'll be ready before long now."

Deborah re-entered the house and soon Eli sniffed beefsteak broiling.

He was prepared for almost anything, but not for what happened. Suddenly, with a leap as of a young girl and a soft flop of skirts, Deborah had passed him, as he sat on the door-step, and stood facing him. She was deadly pale, but in her eyes was an expression he had never seen in them. It was incredible, but it seemed an expression of exulting joy, past belief.

"Who——?" said Deborah. Then she stopped.

Eli also was pale. He stared up at her.

"Who——?" began Deborah again. She did not finish for the second time. To Eli's utter astonishment, she pushed past him again. "Come right in when I call you," said she. "I don't want the things to get cold."

"I swan!" muttered Old Man Edgewater.

It was not long before Deborah called him, and he rose promptly and obeyed her summons. Deborah hardly gave him time to eat his beefsteak and vegetables before she shoved his plate aside for another with a wedge of pie. Eli himself felt hurried. He was in momentary anticipation that Wash Townsley would wake and appear, clad in Deborah's best nightgown. He felt cold when he thought of it. He was glad when the meal was over and he was back on the door-step.

He was soon astonished again, for Deborah came out with her sun-hat on. "I'm going down to Coleman's store a minute," said she. "I've got an errand. I sha'n't be gone long. I'm going to leave the dishes until I come back."

When she was out of sight, Eli rose and stole into the house and the parlor bedroom. He heard a low, peaceful murmur, not a snore, but the song of youthful slumber, like the purr of a comfortable little animal. Eli looked at the little creature in the bed, and started. Sleep and peace and rest had now changed the boy marvelously. His cheeks looked round like a baby's. Long golden lashes lay upon them in violet hollows. His hair, moist with heat, lay in little rings over his full temples, his mouth was slightly parted, his hands had the fingers curled like vine tendrils. Poor little Wash Townsley was charming. He was a darling little cherub of a child and years had rolled from him. He was no longer defiant and tiptoeing to heights of age. He lay cuddled in sleep, a sight for a mother's rapture. He was sweet and innocent. It was inconceivable that the little pink tongue had ever been impudent or been thrust out in derision.

Eli had thought the boy ten years old, now he thought certainly he was not over eight, small and babyish for his age at that.

As Old Man Edgewater gazed at the young sleeper, a great love which he had never known swept over his suddenly awakened heart. It seemed to him that he, for the first time, really

knew that he had a heart. He saw before him a gift of life of which he had not dreamed, except vaguely, back in his youth, and the dreams had long ceased.

"That little feller ain't never goin' away, not if I know it," he muttered.

Deborah was not gone long. Presently he saw her come hurrying along laden with great parcels. She flushed like a girl when he spoke. "What in creation you got there?" said he.

Deborah hesitated.

"Been buying something for him?" asked Eli.

Deborah came straight to him. "Then you know all about it?" she panted.

"Course, I know. How did you think he got in?"

Deborah flushed again, then paled. An awed expression was on her face. "I didn't know," she said. "I went in there, and there he was. He looked like a little angel."

Eli eyed her. "He's little Wash Townsley," he said.

"That poor little boy!" said Deborah, in a beautiful voice. "I heard only the other day how he was treated. Nothing except stepfolks, knocked about from pillar to post. How did he happen to come here?"

Old Man Edgewater looked at the bush, then at Deborah.

"You don't mean——" she began. Then she threw her head back. "What's that?" she de-

manded, with the rancor of a mother defying justice itself for her child. "Children are all like that," said Deborah, in her beautiful voice.

Old Man Edgewater nodded. "He ain't goin' to be turned adrift if I know it," said he.

"If you turn him out I shall go too," said Deborah.

"Lord A'mighty, who's goin' to turn him out?"

"I ain't, for one."

"And I ain't, for two," said Eli. He cackled a little, but tears rolled down his cheeks.

"I hear him," said Deborah, and pushed past into the house.

She returned in about half an hour, and Wash Townsley was with her. He was clad in a charming little-boy suit. He even wore silk socks. His fair hair shone. He was a dear little boy, almost a baby boy. He clung fast to the woman's hand and his face was complex with emotions. It was at once defiant, timid, pleading, sullen, grateful, shamed, delighted, loving, angry—everything that a child's face could be when he was utterly surprised, and uncertain of what might be coming to him.

He stood directly in front of the demolished bush. There was a scared silence. Then a voice like the chirp of a bird broke it. "I'm sorry I did it," chirped the voice.

Eli and Deborah gazed at each other with a look of awe. For a second it seemed to both of them that they saw the bush again in its full glory of

bloom. Then both faces lit like lamps with tenderness, for they knew they saw the shining head of the child blooming for them in the place of the bush.

THE OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE

BARR CENTER almost always excited the amusement of strangers. "Why Barr Center?" they would inquire, and follow up the query, if they were facetious, with another: "The center of what?"

In reality, Barr Center, the little village where lived the Edgewaters, the Ellertons, the Dinsmores, and a few more very good old New England families, was hardly anything but a center, and almost, regarded geographically, the mere pinprick of a center of four villages. As a matter of fact, the apex of a triangle would have been a more accurate description. The village came first on the old turnpike from the city; Barr-by-the-Sea was on the right, three miles away; Leicester, which had formerly been West Barr, was three miles to the left; South Barr was three miles to the south.

There was a popular saying that Barr Center was three miles from everywhere. All four villages had, of course, been originally one, the Precinct of Barr. Leicester had been the first to revolt and establish a separate township and claim a

different name. Leicester was the name of the one wealthy old family of the village, which had bestowed its soldiers' monument, its town hall, and its library, and had improved the cemetery and contributed half of the high school.

Barr-by-the-Sea came next, and that had serious and legitimate reasons for individuality. From being a mere summer colony of tents and rude cottages it had grown to be almost a city, frequented by wealthy city folk, who had beautiful residences along the shore. Barr-by-the-Sea was so large and important that it finally made an isosceles triangle of the original Precinct of Barr. All summer long it hummed with gay life, ending in the autumn with a carnival as a grand crescendo. Barr-by-the-Sea was, however, not the center. It boasted no old family, resident all the year round, as did Barr Center.

South Barr was the least important of all. It was simply the petering out of the Barrs. It was a little farming hamlet, which humbly sold butter, fresh eggs, and garden truck to Barr-by-the-Sea for the delectation of the rich folk who dwelt in the hotels and boarding-houses and stately residences on the ocean front.

Barr-by-the-Sea was an exclusive summer resort. Its few permanent inhabitants were proud of it, and none were prouder than old Captain Joe Dickson and his wife, Martha. The Dicksons lived in a tiny house beyond the fashionable limits. They were on the opposite side of the road from the sea. The house stood in a drift of sandy soil,

pierced by coarse beach grass like green swords. Captain Joe, however, had reclaimed a little garden from the easily conquered waste, and his beans, his cucumbers, and his tomatoes were flourishing.

In front of the house Martha had two great tubs of hydrangeas, which she colored a ghastly blue with bluing water from her weekly wash. Captain Joe did not approve of the unnatural blue.

"Why didn't ye leave the posies the way the Lord made 'em?" he inquired.

"They have them this way at a lot of the grand places," replied Martha. "The big-bugs color them."

"Ruther guess the big-bugs ain't any bigger than the Lord A'mighty," returned Captain Joe. "I guess if He had thought them posies would look better blue He would have made 'em blue in the fust place."

Captain Joe, having spoken his mind, puffed his pipe amiably over the tops of the blue flowers. He sat on his bit of a porch, tipping back comfortably in his old chair.

Martha did not prolong the discussion. She was not much of a talker. Captain Joe always claimed that a voyage with him around the world in a sailing-vessel had cured her of talking too much in her youth.

"Poor Marthy used to be a regular buzz-saw at the talk," he would say, "but rockin' round the world with such a gale that she couldn't hear her own tongue wag, and bein' scared 'most to death, cured her."

Whether the great, primeval noises of the world had, in fact, subdued the woman to silence, rendering her incapable of much sounding of her own little note all through her life, or not, she was a very still woman. She went silently about her household tasks. When they were done there was much mending while her husband smoked.

Over across the road the littered, wave-marked beach sloped broadly to the sea. There were several boats anchored. One was Captain Joe's, the *Martha Dickson.* He had been out in it fishing that very morning, had had a good catch, and sold well to the customers who flocked on the beach when the fishing-boats came in. The rich people sent their servants with baskets for the fresh fish.

Joe had sold his catch, with the exception of one fine cod, which Martha was making into a savory chowder. Captain Joe sniffed with pleasure the odor of frying onions which were to make the foundation of the good dish. He gazed at the sea, which now and then lapped into view with a foaming crest over the beach. There was no passing, as a rule. The fine road for driving and motoring stopped several yards before Joe's house was reached. He was mildly surprised, therefore, when a runabout with a red cross on the front, with a young man at the wheel and a pretty young girl by his side, came skidding over the sand and stopped.

"Any fresh fish?" inquired the young man, who was Dr. Tom Ellerton.

Joe shook his head.

"Know where I can get any?"

"Guess mebbe you can get a cod at the third house from me. He was late gettin' in, and didn't sell the hull. But you'll capsize if you try to go there in that."

Tom eyed the road billowing with sand. "Sit here while I find out," he told Margy, his sister. She nodded.

After Tom had gone, plowing through the sand, Captain Joe rose stiffly. He was not a very old man, but a broken leg had not been set properly, and kept him from his life-work of cruising the high seas.

He limped up to the car. "Pooty hot day," he remarked.

"Very," replied Margy.

"Wish I'd had the fish. Sold all my catch except the cod Marthy's cookin'."

Margy sniffed appreciatively. "A chowder?" she inquired.

Joe nodded. "About the only way to cook a cod. Goin' to have yourn cooked that way?"

"It isn't for us," explained Margy. "My brother is trying to find some really fresh fish for an old lady who is ill. My brother is a doctor. He has just been to see her. She wanted fresh fish, and he said he would try to find some. Their servants are all busy because they are closing the house. They are going to sail for Europe to-morrow."

"What house?" inquired Joe, eagerly.

"The very large house on the ocean side of the road, about half a mile back."

"The one with all them yaller flowers in the front yard, and a garden of 'em on the roof, with vines hangin' over?"

Margy nodded. "That sounds like it," said she. "There are two square towers, one on each side, then the flowers and vines are on the balcony between; and there is a roof-garden, too; and there are quantities of beautiful flowers on the grounds. It is a lovely place."

"Know the name of the folks that live there?"

"Willard," replied Margy. She eyed Joe with surprise.

"Lord!" said he. "They goin' away so soon?"

He paid no more attention to Margy, but limped into the house, and the girl heard loud exclamations. Then she saw Tom coming with a fine glistening fish in each hand.

"I have one for us, too," he said as he got into the car. "They are fine fish."

Tom put on power, as he wished not only to deliver the fish to the Willards fresh, but to reach home with his own in good condition, and it was a scorching day. Margy clung to her side of the car as they spun along. After the fish had been left at the grand Willard house, and a beautiful young lady in a pale-blue gown had thanked the young doctor charmingly, and they were on a smooth road, Margy asked Tom why he thought the lame man, of whom he had inquired about the fish, had been so interested in the Willard family.

"Oh, probably he is one of the old residents here. I discovered some time ago that they feel a queer interest in the comings and goings of the summer folk," said Tom. "Their lives are pretty narrow eight months of the year. They have to be interested in something outside themselves. I think lots of them have a feeling that they own a good deal that they only have liberty to look at."

"I can see how a fisherman can feel that he owns the sea," said Margy. "Maybe it is because so many of them are fishermen."

She looked reflective with her deep-set blue eyes. Tom cast a quick glance at her. "Maybe," he said.

Tom was not imaginative. When Margy said things like that he always wondered if she were well. He began to plan a prescription for her as they sped along.

He did not know how intensely Margy had felt that she owned the sea, just from looking at it, when she had sat in the car waiting for him when he was making professional calls, and that her reasoning was quite logical and not unnecessarily imaginative. If she considered that she owned the sea, which is the vast untaxed asset of the world, how much more would the fisherman who got his daily bread from it?

Meantime, the fisherman with whom she had talked was in excited colloquy with his wife in the kitchen and living-room of the little house. The room, though comfortable and clean, was poorly equipped, with the exception of various articles that were at direct odds with all else. There was

a cooking-stove, on which the chowder was steaming. There was a kitchen table, set for a meal with the commonest utensils, save that in the center, ready for the chowder, was a bowl of old Japanese pottery which would have adorned a palace. Martha did not think much of this bowl, which Joe had brought home from one of his voyages. She considered the decorations ugly, and used it to save a lovely one from the ten-cent store, decorated with pink rosebuds. Martha could understand pink rosebuds, but she could not fathom dragons and ugly, grinning faces of Oriental fancy.

There was a lounge with a hideous cover, two old chairs worn into hollows of comfort, two kitchen chairs, an old clock, and a superb teakwood table. Martha did not care for that, either. The contortions of the carved wood gave her a vague uneasiness. She kept it covered with an old fringed spread, and used to set her bread to rise on it. On the mantel, besides the clock and three kerosene-lamps, was a beautiful old Satsuma vase, and a pressed glass one, which Martha loved. The glass one was cracked, and she told Joe she did not see why the other vase could not have suffered instead. Joe agreed with her. He did not care much for the treasures which he had brought from foreign ports, except the shells—lovely, pinked-lipped ones that were crowded on the shelf between the other things, and completely filled more shelves which Joe had made expressly to hold them. The shelves were in three tiers, and the shells were mounted on them, catching the light from broken

surfaces of rose and pearl and silver. Martha privately considered that the shells involved considerable work. She washed them carefully, and kept them free from dust, but she also admired them.

In front of the outer door was a fine old prayer-rug of dull, exquisite tones. Martha kept it there for Joe to wipe his feet on, because it was so faded, but she had a bright red one in the center of the room. Joe never stepped on that until his shoes were entirely clean. He had made quite sure there was not a speck of dust to injure this brilliant rug before he entered to give Martha the intelligence.

"They are goin' away from Our House to-morrow," said he.

Martha, standing over the chowder, turned, spoon in hand. She waved the spoon as if it were a fan. "Before the carnival?" said she.

Martha was a small, wide-eyed woman with sleek hair. She was not pretty, but had a certain effect of being exactly in place which gave the impression of prettiness to some people.

"They are goin' to sail for Europe," said Joe.

"I suppose for His health," said Martha. Nobody could excel the air of perfect proprietorship with which she uttered the masculine pronoun. The man indicated might have been her own father, or her brother, or her son.

"I guess so," said Joe. "He has looked pooty bad lately when I've seen him."

"I suppose They are goin'?"

"I s'pose so, because they are closin' the house. That young doctor from the Center stopped out

here just now, and wanted to know where he could get fresh fish, and I told him I guessed Mac had some left; and whilst he was gone his sister—she was with him—told me they were closin' the house, and Old Lady Willard wanted fresh fish, and they were out huntin' for it, because all the help was busy."

"That means Old Lady Willard's goin', and Him, and his Wife, and the three girls, Grace and Marie and Maud, and the two little boys."

"Yes."

"And they will take the ladies'-maids, and His man. Maybe that pretty young lady that visits there so much will go, too."

"Maybe; and the lady that teaches the little boys will go."

"O Lord, yes! They couldn't get on without her. My! there will be 'most enough to fill the ship."

"About enough to sink my old one I sailed around when you was aboard," said Joe, and laughed.

Martha never laughed. The seriousness of New England was in her very soul. She was happy and good-natured, but she saw nothing whatever to laugh at in all creation. She never had.

"Land, yes!" said she. "You know there wa'n't any room in that little cabin."

"Not more'n enough to hold you and your Bible and sewin'-machine," said Captain Joe. He cast a glance at the old sewing-machine as he spoke, and laughed again. It was perfectly useless because of

that long-ago voyage, and the fact always amused him. Martha considered it no laughing matter. The sewing-machine was dear to her, even in its wrecked state. She kept the Bible on it, and a little cup and saucer.

"The chowder's done," said she. "Draw up, Joe."

Joe drew up a chair to the table. "Smells prime," said he.

"Guess it's all right."

"Ef your chowders ever wa'n't all right I'd think the sun was goin' to rise in the west next mornin'," said Joe.

Martha ladled the chowder into the beautiful bowl, then into heavy, chipped plates. The two ate with relish.

"To-morrow's Saturday," said Joe. "That means we can go to Our House come Sunday."

Martha nodded. Her good mouth widened in the semblance of a smile. Her steady eyes gleamed with happy intelligence at her husband.

"It will seem nice," said she. "Land! I'd been thinkin' we might have to wait till 'way into October, the way we did last year, and now it's only the first of August."

"I'm feelin' jest as set up as you be about it," said Joe.

That night all the family from the great house where Tom Ellerton had called went by train to Boston. They were to stay in the city overnight to be ready for the steamer. Not one of the numerous company even noticed Captain Joe Dickson

and his wife Martha, who were at the station watching them closely, hearing everything that was said, noting all details—the baggage, the host of servants.

All the servants were to be out of the house next day, the Dicksons heard Her tell another lady who inquired. "Only a caretaker, the same old colored man we always employ," stated Mrs. Richard Willard, tall, elegant, a bit weary of manner. "The servants will finish closing the house to-morrow, then some of them have vacations, and the rest will be in our Boston house. We take only our maids and Mr. Willard's man up to-night. We shall not go to the city house at all ourselves. It will be much more sensible to stay at the hotel."

"Of course," said the lady. Then she said something about an unexpected start, and so early in the season, and Mrs. Willard replied that to her nothing was ever unexpected. That had ceased with her youth, and Mr. Willard was not quite well, and there were seasons all over creation. She said that with a pleasant smile—weary, however.

Martha eyed her keenly when she and Joe, after the train with all the Willards on board had pulled out, were walking home.

"She said that She didn't look none too strong, and she guessed it was a good thing She was going." Martha said that as if Mrs. Richard Willard, who had never heard of her, was her dearly beloved friend or relative.

Joe nodded solemnly. "She did look sorter peaked," he agreed. "As for Him, he didn't look

no worse than usual to me, but I guess it's jest as well for them they're off, let alone us."

The remark seemed enigmatic, but Martha understood. They walked home from the station. They passed the Willard house, standing aloof from the highway like a grand Colonial lady.

"The awnin's are down," said Martha, "and they've begun to board up the winders."

Joe nodded.

"It is unlooked for, as far as we are concerned," said Martha, with a happy widening of her lips.

"Day arter to-morrer—only think of it!" said Captain Joe.

"Goin' out fishin' to-morrer?"

"Reckon not; got in considerable to-day, and I want to git my hair cut to-morrer."

"I'm goin' to trim my bunnit over, and fix my best dress a little, too; and I guess your best suit needs brushin'."

"There's a spot on the coat."

"I'll git it off. Land! I do hope Sunday is pleasant."

"Goin' to be. It's a dry moon," declared Joe.

However, Sunday, although fair, was one of those fervid days of summer which threatened storm.

"It's goin' to shower," declared Martha. She was clad in her best black silk, hot, and tightly fitted, trimmed with cascades of glittering jet. A jet aigrette on her bonnet caught the light. She had fastened a vivid rose on one side of the bonnet to do honor to the occasion. Crowning glory—she

wore her white gloves, her one pair, which was the treasure of her wardrobe.

"Better take the umbrell', I guess," said Joe.

"Guess you'd better."

Joe held his head stiffly because of his linen collar. He wore a blue suit much too large for him, but it was spotless. He took the umbrella from behind the door. It was distinctly not worthy of the occasion, although it was entirely serviceable. Still, it was large, and greenish-black, and bulged determinedly from its mooring of rubber at the top.

Martha, as they walked along, looked uncomfortably at the umbrella. "Can't ye roll the umbrell' up tight, the way I see 'em?" she inquired.

Joe stopped, unfastened the rubber strap, and essayed to roll it. It was in vain. "The umbrell' is too thick," he said. "No use, Marthy. It's a good umbrell'. If it showers it will keep it off, but I can't make it look slim."

"Well, don't show it any more than you can help," admonished Martha.

Joe henceforth carried the umbrella between himself and Martha. It continually collided with their legs, but Martha's black-silk skirt flopped over its green voluminousness and it was comparatively unseen.

"I declare; it does seem like showerin'," said Joe.

"You said it was a dry moon."

"Ef thar's anything in nature to be depended on least of anything else it's a dry moon," said Joe,

with an air of completely absolving himself from all responsibility in the matter of the moon.

"Of course in such hot weather nobody can tell when a thunder-tempest is goin' to come up," said Martha. She was extremely uncomfortable in her tight black raiment. Drops of perspiration stood on her forehead.

"If we were goin' anywhere else I'd take off my gloves," said she.

"Well, Marthy, long as it's the first time this year, reckon you'd better stand it, if you can," returned Joe. "My collar is about chokin' me, but it's the first time this year we're goin' there, you know, Marthy."

"That's just the way I feel," agreed Martha.

The sun beat upon their heads. "Ef the umbrell' was a little better-lookin' I'd h'ist her," said Joe.

"Now, Joe, you know you can't."

"I know it, Marthy. I can't."

They were now in the midst of a gay, heterogeneous Sunday throng. The church-bells were ringing. A set of chimes outpealed the rest. Elegantly arrayed people—the ladies holding brilliant parasols at all angles above their heads crowned with plumes and flowers; the gentlemen in miraculously creased trousers, many of them moving with struts, swinging sticks—met and went their way. The road was filled with a never-ending procession of motor-cars, carriages, horses, and riders. Barr-by-the-Sea was displaying her charms like a beauty at a ball.

Many were bound for church; more for pleasure.

There were country people dressed in cheap emulation of the wealthy, carrying baskets with luncheon, who had come to Barr-by-the-Sea to spend Sunday and have an outing. They were silent, foolishly observant, and awed by the splendors around them.

Joe Dickson and his wife Martha moved as the best of them. There was no subserviency in them. They had imbibed the wide freedom and lordliness of the sea, and at any time moved among equals; but to-day their errand made them move as lords. By what childlike sophistry it had come to pass none could tell, but Joe Dickson, poor ex-captain of a sailing-vessel, and his wife Martha were, in their own conviction, on their way to re-establishment in the best mansion on that coast, inhabited by the wealthy of the country.

When they reached the Willard house Joe and Martha ducked under the iron chain across the carriage-drive, and proceeded along the glittering smoothness bordered by brilliant flowers, having no realization of the true state of affairs.

"I declare, it does seem good to get back," said Joe.

"It certainly does," said Martha, "and so much earlier than we'd looked forward to."

"I calculated they might stay till late in October, the way they did last year," said Joe, joyously. "Just see that red-geranium bed, Marthy."

"Them ain't geraniums; them is begonias," said Martha, haughtily.

"It always seems to me as if all the flowers was geraniums," said Joe. He laughed.

Martha did not smile. "They ain't," said she.

They passed around to the back of the grand house. The wide veranda was cleared except for two weather-beaten old chairs. The windows, except one on the second floor, were boarded over. The house looked as if asleep, with closed eyes, before that magnificent ocean, a vast brilliance as of gemlike facets reflecting all the glory of the whole earth and the heavens above the earth. The tide was coming in. Now and then a wave broke with a rainbow toss, quite over the sea wall of the beach. The coast in places—and this was one of them—was treacherous.

Captain Joe and his Martha sat down in the rude chairs. Martha sighed a sigh of utter rapture.

"Land! it is certainly nice to be here again," said she.

Joe, however, scowled at the sea wall. "They had ought to have seen to that wall afore they went off," he said.

"Land! It's safe, ain't it?"

"I dunno. Nobody never knows nothin' when the sea's consarned. Ef they had asked me I'd said: 'Hev a lot of men on the job, and make sure there ain't no shaky places in that 'ere wall; and whilst you're about it, build it up about six foot higher. It wouldn't cut off your view none.' The hull of it is, the sea never quits the job. Everything on earth quits the job, one way or t'other, but that sea is right on, and she's goin' to be right on it; and bein' right on the job, and never

quittin', means somethin' doin' and somethin' bein' done, and nobody knows just what."

"I guess it's all right," said Martha. "It ain't likely that They would have gone off and left this house unless it was; and money ain't no object."

"Sometimes folks with money gits the wrong end of the bargain," said Joe. "Money don't mean nothin' to the sea. It's swallowed more'n the hull earth holds, and it's ready to swallow till the day of jedgment. That wall had ought to be looked arter."

There was a sound of the one unboarded window being opened, and it immediately framed an aged colored face, with a fringe of gray beard like wool. The owner of the face could not be seen, and, because of the veranda roof, he could not see, but, his ears being quick to note sounds above the rush of the waters, he heard Joe and Martha talking on the veranda. Presently he came up the veranda steps. He was the caretaker, and his door of entrance and exit was in the basement, under the veranda. He was a tall old colored man with an important mien.

When his head appeared above the veranda floor Joe and Martha rose. "Good day, Sam," they said almost in concert.

Sam bowed with dignity. "I 'lowed it was you," he said, then sat down on a fixed stone bench near the chairs.

"So they've gone," said Joe, as he and Martha resumed their seats.

"Yassir. Mr. Richard is kind of pindlin', and

the doctor 'lowed he'd better get away. They went day before yesterday, and all the help last night."

Joe nodded. Martha nodded. They all sat still, watching the waves dash at the sea wall and break over it.

"They had ought to have looked at that wall," said Joe, presently.

The colored man laughed with the optimism of his race. "That wall has held more'n twenty year —eber since the house was built," said he. "Wall all right."

"Dunno," said Joe.

Martha was not as optimistic as the colored man, but she was entirely happy. "Seems sorter nice to be settin' here ag'in, Sam," said she.

"Yes'm," said Sam.

"We've got a baked fish for dinner, and some fresh beans," said Martha. "We thought you'd come and have dinner with us, the way you always do the first day."

"I 'lowed you'd ask me, thank ye, marm," said Sam, with his wonderful dignity.

"Seems nice to be settin' here ag'in," repeated Martha, like a bird with one note.

"Yes'm." Sam's own face wore a pleased expression. He, too, felt the charm of possession. All three, the man and wife and the colored retainer, realized divine property rights. The outside of that grand house was as much theirs as it was any soul's on the face of the earth. They owned that and the ocean. Only Joe's face was now and then disturbed when a wave, crested in

foam, came over the sea wall. He knew the sea well enough to love and fear it, while he owned it.

The three sat there all the morning. Then they all went away to the little Dickson house. The thunder was rumbling in the northwest. They walked rapidly. Joe spread the umbrella, but no rain came. There was a sharp flash of lightning and a prodigious report. All three turned about and looked in the direction of the Willard house.

"Struck somewheres, but it didn't strike thar," said Joe.

When they reached home Martha immediately changed her dress and set about preparing dinner. The two men sat on Joe's upturned boat, on the sloping beach opposite, and smoked and watched the storm. It did not rain for a long time, although the thunder and lightning were terrific. The colored man cringed at the detonations and flashes, but Joe was obdurate. He had sailed stormy seas too much to be anything but a cool critic of summer showers. However, after each unusual flash and report the two stared in the direction of the Willard house.

"Seems as if I had ought to have stayed there," remarked Sam, trembling, after one great crash.

"What could you have done? That didn't strike no house. Struck out at sea. I'm keepin' an ear out for the fire-alarm," said Joe.

"Have you got it ready?" inquired Sam, mysteriously.

Joe nodded. He flushed slightly. Sam was under orders to keep secret the fact that the poor old

sailorman had the preceding year purchased a fire-extinguisher, with a view to personally protecting the House. "You can run faster than I can, and you know how to use it," said Joe.

Then another storm came up swiftly. Martha came to the door. "It's another!" cried she.

Joe rose. "Get it for me, Marthy," said he.

Martha brought the fire-extinguisher.

"Guess you and me had better be on the bridge ef another's comin'," said Joe, grimly, to Sam.

The two disappeared down the road in a gray drive of rain. Martha screamed to Joe to take the umbrella, his best suit would get wet, but he did not hear her. Sam went on a run and Joe hobbled after. They stood on the Willard veranda and kept watch. Both men were drenched. The waves broke over the sea wall, and the salt wind drove the rain in the faces of the men.

At last it was over, and they went back to the Dickson house. The odor of fish and beans greeted them. Martha had continued her dinner preparations. She was not in the least afraid of storms. She, too, only thought of danger to the grand house, but she had great faith in her husband and the fire-extinguisher, whose unknown virtues loomed gigantic to her feminine mind.

She made Joe change his best suit, which she hung carefully to dry on the clothes-line, and she gave Sam a ragged old suit, and hung up his drenched attire also. "You couldn't do much about taking care of things if you got the rheumatiz," said she.

They ate their dinner in comfort, for the thunder-storm had conquered the heat. Afterward, while Martha cleared away, the men sat on the porch and went to sleep. Martha herself slept on the old lounge. She dreamed that she was on the veranda of the Willard house and she awoke to no disillusion. Next day, and all the following days, for nearly a whole year, she and Joe could be there if they chose. They were in possession; for so long that dispossession seemed unreality.

That was the happiest summer Joe and Martha had ever known in Barr-by-the-Sea. There were long afternoons, when Joe had been out and sold his catch; there were wonderful moonlit nights, when they lived on the outside of the beautiful house and inherited the earth.

The fall was late that year. Long into October, and even during warm days in November, they could assemble on the veranda and enjoy their wealth. There came a storm in October, however, which increased Joe's fears concerning the stanchness of the sea wall. He conferred with Sam. Sam was hard to move from his position that the past proved the future, but finally his grudging assistance was obtained. The two worked hard. They did what they could, but even then Joe would look at the wall and shake his head.

"She ought to be six foot higher," he told Martha.

If Sam could have written, he would have pleaded with him to write the Willards abroad, urging that they order the raising of the wall, but

Sam could not write. Joe went to a real-estate agent and talked, but the man laughed at him.

"Don't butt in, Joe," he advised. "Nobody is going to thank you. I think the wall is all right."

"It ain't," declared Joe.

Joe was right. In December there came the storm and the high tide. Joe was up at two o'clock in the morning, awakened by the wild cry of the sea, that wildest of all creation, which now and then runs amuck and leaps barriers and makes men dream of prehistoric conditions.

He hastened along the road, with that terrible menace in his ears, dragging a great length of rope. Martha stayed behind on her knees, praying. Nobody ever knew quite what happened; that is, all the details. They did know that in some miraculous fashion the sea wall of the Willard house had been strengthened by frantic labor of poor men who owned not a stick as valuable as the poorest beam in the house, and that they were urged on by Captain Joe Dickson, with his lame leg and his heart of a lover and a hero. They knew that strange things had been piled against that wall; all the weighty articles from the basement of the Willard house—wood, boats, sandbags, stones, everything which had power to offer an ounce of resistance. They knew that the wall stood and the house was saved, and old Sam was blubbering over old Captain Joe Dickson lying spent almost to death on the veranda where he had been carried.

"Tell Marthy Our House is safe," stammered old Captain Joe. Then he added something which

was vaguely made out to be a note of triumph. "The sea didn't git me."

When they took him home to Martha she was very calm. All her life, since she had married Joe, she had had in her heart the resolution which should be in the hearts of the wives of all poor sailormen and fishermen, who defy the splendid, eternal danger of the sea to gain their sustenance.

It was Dr. Tom Ellerton, spinning over from Barr Center, at the risk of his neck and his car, who saved Captain Joe, although the old man was saved only to spend the rest of his life in bed or wheel-chair, and never could sail the seas again. It was Dr. Tom Ellerton who told the Willards, and it was they who sent the wheel-chair and gave Joe a pension for saving their house. Mrs. Richard Willard (Richard had died during their stay abroad) came out on purpose to see Joe. She was sad, and weary, and elegant in her deep black.

She told Joe and Martha what was to be done, and they thanked her and gave her daughter some of their choicest shells. They were quite dignified and grateful about her bounty. On the train going home Mrs. Willard told her daughter that they were evidently superior people. "They belong to the few who can take with an air of giving and not offend," said Mrs. Willard.

Neither of them dreamed of the true state of the case: that subtly and happily the old man and his wife possessed what they called their own home in a fuller sense than they ever could. More than the announcement of the comfortable annuity had

meant Mrs. Willard's statement that they would not open the House at all next summer; they would visit with relatives in the Berkshires, then go abroad.

Joe and Martha looked at each other, and their eyes said: "We can go to Our House as soon as you can wheel me over there. We can stay there as much as we like, all one year."

Mrs. Willard saw the look, and did not understand. How could she? It was inconceivable that these two people should own the outside of her home to such an extent that their tenure became well-nigh immortal.

THE LIAR

TWO women sat in Mrs. J. B. Dickerman's parlor in Barr Center. One was Mrs. Dickerman, the other Mrs. Selma Woodsum from Leicester. Mrs. Dickerman was knitting gray mittens.

"I don't know what I would do if it wasn't for knitting," she observed, with a covert air of satisfaction. "I feel as if I were working along the same lines as my Sammy fighting."

Selma Woodsum was no younger than the other woman, but she looked young enough to be her daughter. She was a small woman, delicately rounded, with a curious face for a grown woman. It was pretty, with often the sulky prettiness of a child balked of her own way or confronted with something which irritated her. She had that expression of sulky, irritated prettiness, when Mrs. Dickerman made the remark about the knitting. She spoke in a thin, sweetly shrill voice.

"He isn't fighting. Your son is only playing," said she. She fairly pouted her little red mouth at Mrs. Dickerman.

Mrs. Dickerman looked unaccountably embar-

rassed. "Oh, of course, Selma, I know my case isn't like yours, with your son right now in the trenches at that awful battle-front," said she.

Selma crimsoned, but her sulky, defiant expression remained.

"It must be dreadful for you," said Mrs. Dickerman.

Selma answered, with sudden firmness, "Of course it is dreadful."

"I should think you would go wild thinking of all the terrible things that can happen to him. I suppose Leon wears a gas-mask."

"I understand they all have to."

"Didn't he write you he wore one?"

Selma hesitated. She looked frightened.

"Didn't he?"

"I don't know as he did."

"Why, I should think you'd want to know."

"Folks can't put everything in letters," said Selma, with a falter in her speech.

"Well, the censor might not let it go through," returned Mrs. Dickerman. "I hope you hear often."

"Pretty often."

"Of course, with all the ship-sinkings and everything you can't expect to hear as if your Leon was just out West or down South."

Selma started.

"What's the matter?"

"I—guess I'm nervous."

Just then a sudden strain of blatant music cut the still afternoon air. Selma covered her start

with an allusion to that. "What's coming?" she said.

Mrs. Dickerman got up and ran to the window. "It is that old circus coming to town!" she cried, excitedly.

"What circus?" asked Selma in a faint voice. She was very white.

"Oh, the 'World's Greatest Show' that's been advertised for the last month. Haven't you seen the advertisement?"

"No."

"Well, it has. The procession's going by on the other road. The selectmen wouldn't let it come on this street, and I'm glad of it. I wouldn't go a step out of my way to see it, and I'm always afraid when those things come to town. I see to it the house is locked up, and the hen-house, too. So many stragglers, let alone the circus people. I suppose they are about as bad as they make them."

"I was brought up to—think so," said Selma in a curious, faltering, weak voice.

"So was I." Mrs. Dickerman turned and looked at Selma. "For goodness' sake, Selma! Are you sick?"

"No; I'm—all right."

"You look as white as a ghost."

"I'm all—right."

"Don't you want a drink of water or something?"

"*No;* I'm—all right."

"Well, I hope you are. You do look better now. Guess I'll sit down again. No use craning my neck

to see that old procession across the field." Mrs. Dickerman sat down and began to knit. "I wish you had brought your knitting," said she.

"I would, but I didn't expect to stay long, and I'm going to call at Sarah Edgewater's before I take the trolley home, anyway. I must go in a minute now. When I heard your Sammy had been home I thought I must just drop in."

"I'm glad you did. He only had two days' furlough, and ever since he went back I've been lonesomer than ever. J. B. is all day at the store, you know, and lately one of the clerks has been laid up with rheumatism, and he has been down to the store 'most every evening. They are taking account of stock."

"Sammy went day before yesterday?"

"Yes, poor boy. He tried to put a brave face on, but he did hate to leave mother; and my, how much he talked about his good soft bed!"

"He's safe where he is," said Selma, meekly—"and well."

"Oh my, yes; of course Sammy fares well enough with his cot. That ain't goin' to hurt him. He looks as well as ever I have seen him. He ain't quite so stout, but his flesh looks hard. He looks handsome, too, if I do say it, and he's got a new khaki suit. He had an accident happen to the old one. The captain was talking to him, giving orders or something, and he had a telegram to write in a hurry, and Sammy waited till he got it done, and I don't know exactly how it happened. Sammy, he laughed fit to kill when he told his father and

me about it. Somehow the captain happened to stand up with the ink-bottle in his hand, and his dog came capering round him, and jumped up and hit the ink-bottle. I don't know just how, but the ink got spilled over Sammy's uniform, and the captain couldn't get mad except at the dog, and Sammy he got a brand-new one. He brought home the other, and I've tried to get the ink stains out, but couldn't so they don't show a little. Goodness!"—Eliza's eyes followed the gaze of Selma's—"did I bring that in here? Why, I must have had it in my hands when you rang the bell. I run in here to peek behind the lace curtains and see who it was, and I must have given it a toss on the sofa. Well, it looks nice in here. Who's that coming, Selma?"

"I guess it's a boy from the butcher's shop. Yes, there's the wagon."

"Well, I'll run out and take the meat and get it on the ice. I'll be right back."

Mrs. J. B. Dickerman scuttled out of the room. Immediately Selma Woodsum began to act strangely. She had a straw suit-case. She opened it furtively. She rose, peeped out of the door, then made a swift, crouching rush for the sofa and the khaki suit. When Eliza Dickerman returned Selma was standing in the front doorway, suit-case in hand, ready to go.

Eliza exclaimed, "Why, Selma, you ain't going so soon?"

Selma looked at her from under her black hat-brim. Her blue eyes were very clear; her expres-

sion was as guileless as a child's. "I've got to if I mean to catch that trolley and get home to Leicester before dark, and look in a minute on Sarah."

"What did you bring that suit-case for this hot day?"

"I brought over my gray-silk dress to the dressmaker's. She's going to make it a little shorter. I'm too old to try to keep up with the styles, but when they mean going around without holding up your skirts, or letting them trail in the dust, I believe in following them no matter how old you are."

Eliza nodded. "That's what I say. I've just had my new black satin made three inches from the ground. She wanted to make it five. I wish you could stay to supper. I'm going to have beefsteak and hot biscuits and strawberries. Why can't you stay? You've nothing to call you home?"

"I am afraid to be out after dark. It's quite a walk from the end of the trolley line."

Eliza laughed meaningly. "And I don't suppose Luke Gleason will be there to meet you, Selma."

Selma took it coolly. "He can't to-night, for he's going to drill. He might otherwise. Sometimes he does, of course. He knows it's a lonely walk and I'm timid."

"Drill! You don't mean to say Luke Gleason's drilling? What for?"

Selma looked mildly indignant. "Why shouldn't he drill if he wants to?"

"Well, as far as that goes, I don't know as

there's any reason why old Grandpa Green, who's ninety, shouldn't drill if he wants to, but I don't see any sense in it. Luke's too old to go to war. They wouldn't look at him."

"Older men than Luke are going to war on the other side."

"It ain't going to be like that on this side."

"None of us *know,*" said Selma, with rather dreadful solemnity. "It is just as well that every man, no matter how old he is, should know enough to fight if he has to."

"Luke Gleason drilling," said Eliza Dickerman as Selma, after saying good-by rather stiffly, had gone. "My!"

It was almost dark when Selma Woodsum, hurrying along the country road between the dusty bushes, came in sight of her own house. It was on the outskirts of Leicester, but the village began at once and thickly at that point. The decent—not opulent, but decent—houses had an air of suddenly crowding together the very second a certain place in the road was reached.

Selma saw the house lights gleaming when she came in sight. She drew a sigh, for she was really a timid woman, and was glad to be past the lonely stretch of road. She glanced at her own house, and her heart leaped, then seemed to stand still before it beat again. She had expected to see only a soft mass of shadow, deeper shadow looming up out of the dusk on her home lot, and instead she saw windows full of soft yellow light.

Selma broke into a weak run. She fairly fell

upon the kitchen door before she could open it, and a man's glad voice hailed from within:

"Hello, there! That you, mother?"

Selma opened the door. She had left it locked. She entered. In the rocking-chair by the window sat a young man. He looked ghastly, but his eyes twinkled with indomitable cheer—even mirth.

"Well, mother!" he hailed again. His voice was pitifully weak, but charming in its affection and delight.

"That you, Leon?"

"Now, mother, who else could it be? Come here and give a fellow a kiss. My, but I'm glad to get here, and see you. Say, mother, you're just as pretty as ever."

Selma kissed the man and stood over him. "Are you sick?"

He hesitated. "Not so very now, I guess. I have been. Had a fever. I thought I was all right, but when I got seated here I wasn't quite so sure. I had a hard trip from Chicago—pretty hot, you know, and I guess I was pretty weak when I started. I couldn't keep up with the show; had to light out for home and mother to be nursed. Say, mother, ain't you glad to see a feller?"

For answer Selma knelt down beside the man, bent her face over his thin hand and began to weep.

Leon laughed tenderly. "Poor mother! Too much for her, wasn't it?" he crooned. He made shift to smooth her hair with his other hand. "Don't you cry, poor little soul," he went on,

weakly. "I'll be all right when I've had a week of your——" He broke off suddenly. His head lopped over on one shoulder.

Selma rolled frightened blue eyes up at him. Instantly she was on her feet and across the room and back, and the scent of camphor became evident.

Soon Leon looked up and laughed—his irrepressible laugh. "Don't be scared, mother," he whispered. "I've been toppling over like a kid's doll-baby this way for some time. All the show got used to it. They'd fling cold water at me and go right on about their business. Don't you be scared. Say, mother, what have you got in the house to eat?"

"Lamb broth. I'll warm it right up. Then I'll fix your bed."

"That's the talk. Say, do you know I believe I'd never keeled over in the first place if I'd had anything decent to eat. The grub in some of those little Western towns where we played was weird. Many's the time I've hankered after your lamb broth. Onion in it?"

Selma nodded. "And turnip."

"Now you're talkin'."

Selma began hurrying about. All her agitation had disappeared. She heated lamb broth, fed her son with it—he was much too weak to feed himself—then made his bed ready in his old room. When he was settled in bed she felt of his forehead.

Leon laughed again. "Of course it's a bit hot," he said. "One can't get over a fever in a second."

Selma went down and put some herbs on to steep. She was rather a wise woman about nursing. Leon was not asleep when she carried her bowl of herb brew up-stairs. He was evidently suffering, but his ready laugh came.

"Well, I declare! Just what I expected," he said. "I knew what I was in for. Same old bitter, awful good for fever, just the same."

Selma covered her son warmly. *"Now don't you throw off one quilt,"* she ordered.

"Trust your good little boy," said Leon.

Selma went down-stairs. Soon she heard voices. She was sitting in a front room whose windows were under Leon's open ones. She could hear if he called. She saw the switching skirts of two women coming up her front walk, and knew Aggy Leach and Mrs. Edward Sylvester were going to call on her. She rose and lit her lamp, and went to the door. She knew that they knew her son had returned. She had her finger on her lip. They entered noiselessly and seated themselves.

Mrs. Sylvester's silk skirt rustled a little, and she put a smoothing hand upon it as if to quiet it. "I was over calling on young Mrs. Leicester," she whispered, "and she said her maid told her she saw a young man that looked sick getting off the train, and she thought it was Leon."

Mrs. Sylvester was related to the fine old Sylvester family by marriage, and was very pretty. She looked wonderingly at Selma, and Aggy Leach, a young woman who taught school, looked at her with eager curiosity. Aggy was attractive

and loverless, and the victim of dreams. Leon Woodsum had shown her a little attention before he went away, three years ago. Aggy had cherished those attentions in spite of others which had been bestowed upon her later on. Aggy cherished all attentions and wove them into a beautiful fabric on her loom of fancy.

Selma nodded. "And turnip."

"Is—he wounded?" gasped Aggy.

Selma looked at her and said nothing.

Aggy's pretty face assumed a heroic expression. "Blind, or—disfigured?"

Selma straightened herself. "He is not disfigured," she said in rather too loud a voice in case the man overhead were awake.

Aggy touched her own eyes with a look of horror and valor.

Selma had recovered herself. She regarded Aggy with a stony expression.

The two callers, on their homeward way, could not remember that Selma had in reality told them anything definite, had they been pressed, but both were under the firm impression that poor, gallant Leon Woodsum had returned wounded from the front, and had lost the sight of one eye, if not both.

"Mrs. Leicester said her maid said he walked as if he couldn't tell where he was going," mused Mrs. Sylvester.

"Stone-blind! A young man, too! It is dreadful!" sighed Aggy. Then she moved along silently. Before she reached home she had in her dreams married poor, blind Leon, was teaching to sup-

port him, and spending her evenings reading and singing to him, until he was blissfully happy.

The next afternoon all Leicester knew that Leon Woodsum had returned home from the European battle-front all but dead from mysterious wounds, with his sight forever gone.

Leon was not so well that day. Selma muffled the door-bell and nursed assiduously. Leon fell asleep after dark, and Selma, watching at a front window, saw Luke Gleason coming. Luke was a very tall man, and walked with long strides, with purposeful strides. Nobody seeing Luke Gleason walking could think for one moment that he had not a very fixed objective; that he was not walking to get somewhere.

Selma was standing in the doorway when Luke came up the front walk bordered with blue iris. She stood in an attitude which in some mysterious way implied the necessity of caution.

Luke began to tread gingerly, encroaching upon the border of the gravel walk. When he reached the woman in the doorway he did not speak. He extended a hand, which was softly grasped, then at once relinquished.

Selma led and Luke followed. They passed through a front room, then into another, the dining-room at the back. Selma closed the doors carefully. Then she spoke in a thin voice, hardly more than a thread of sound.

"He is in the front chamber on the other side," she said.

She sat down in a dining-chair, and Luke also.

Selma glanced at him, then away again. She looked like a scared little girl. Luke was not much older than she, but he might have been her father. He gazed at her tenderly, whimsically, reproachfully. Selma shrugged away from his keen blue gaze; she almost whimpered.

"Whatever possessed you, child?" said Luke.

"Perhaps I don't know what you mean." Selma's voice had a sulky inflection.

"Oh, you do know exactly what I mean. Don't worry. I'm hardly whispering—he can't hear. Selma, what made you tell such a perfect tissue of lies about him?"

Selma faced him fiercely. "You ask why!" she exclaimed. "You ask why! Luke Gleason, you know why."

"I suppose I know why you thought you had to do it, but I don't know your reason for it. I never have, Selma."

"Of course not. If you were a woman, and your only son——"

"But, after all, what is it all about?"

Selma looked at him, and her eyes flashed. Red spots blazed out on her cheeks. She stammered. "About? about? Leon, my son, my own son, going about with a third-rate circus show! About?"

Luke looked at her gravely and quizzically. "But," he said, slowly—he spoke with a slight drawl—"after all, you know I made inquiries. As far as I could find, the show is as respectable as most things of the sort; in fact, rather more so. The principal trouble seemed to be lack of capital.

The wild beasts and horses, and the whole set, were not, so to speak, of the expensive variety. Your Leon was the best of the lot. Leon can get in with one of the best shows on the road when he is a little older. He is really pretty good. He did his stunts well, Selma. He brought the house down. I can't really understand why you feel so desperate as to—well, do as you do, and—say the things you do say."

"My son is in a third-rate show! You know how I feel about circuses. My folks would no more have let me go to a circus than turned me into a den of wild beasts. Mother used to say there wasn't much difference between the awful beasts of prey and those terrible men and women all dressed up in all the colors of the rainbow, riding around. A circus always meant to me something dreadful. We hardly even spoke of one when it was in town, and father and mother never let us go to see the procession."

"But, Selma, after all it is the respectability which counts most, and the show is rather unusual in that respect. The manager had his wife with him. She was his wife, all right, and she wasn't in the show; and she spent her time mending and sewing like any decent woman. She makes the costumes."

"Costumes!"

"Oh, well, my dear child, if you think the costumes were any worse than I have seen the women and girls right here in Leicester getting round in for the last few years, you are mistaken. They

were enough sight fuller in the skirts—left you in more doubt, you know—and that was when I saw them; and I don't believe to-day they are much shorter than the skirts I saw Mrs. Henry Tisdale and Mrs. Erastus Dodd wearing to-day. They came into the post-office, and Mrs. Tisdale wore pink stockings, and Mrs. Dodd wore bright blue, and both those women have grandchildren and weigh close to two hundred."

"Luke Gleason, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I? Maybe so."

"Everybody wears their skirts short now."

"You don't."

"Pretty short."

"Not like that, I'm glad to say. If I saw——"

"Luke, I will not hear another word."

"All right, child. All I'm driving at is, I can't for the life of me see what you are so upset about Leon for."

"I am. I feel disgraced. He is disgraced."

"Oh, bosh!"

"It is true, whether you own up to it or not. I was calling on Mrs. J. B. Dickerman to-day. Her Sammy is in the army. He has just been home. She has some reason to be proud of her son."

"He may get killed."

"So may Leon. He goes up in aeroplanes in that awful show, and I know the aeroplane is rickety if it is such a cheap show."

"Guess they look out for their star performers all right. See here, Selma, what is this I hear

about your having a khaki suit out on your line, and everybody peeking and telling all round it's covered with blood stains?"

Selma colored.

"I've heard it about fifty times to-day. You can't have any khaki suit."

"Why not?" Selma pouted.

"Leon? He was seen getting off the train, and he wasn't dressed in khaki."

"He might have had it in his trunk."

"Didn't have any baggage. Poor chap got home dead broke. I know that as well as you do, Selma. You haven't got any khaki suit."

Selma rose with a jerk. "Just haven't I?" She rushed out and was back in a second with a mass of mustard-colored stuff stiffly carried in her arms. "What do you call this?"

"Where did you get it?" asked Luke, dryly, after a minute.

"Leon——"

"Bosh! Now, child, don't you try to work me. What are those spots?"

"Stains."

"Stains of what?"

Luke stared steadily at Selma. She hung her head.

"Bosh!" he cried suddenly. "I know what you mean! Selma, now aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Suddenly Selma broke down. She threw the stiff khaki on the floor, sat down, put her head on the dining-table, encircled it with her clasped

arms, and wept. Her slender shoulders heaved with sobs like a school-girl's.

Luke patted her head. "Now quit that, Selma," he said. "You'll make yourself sick. Out with it! Tell me where you got that."

Selma sobbed out her confession. "I—couldn't help it!" she gasped.

"If," said Luke Gleason, after a pause, "if you had ever really grown up, I should scold you. What does Mrs. Dickerman think of it?"

"I heard to-day. She—thinks a tramp stole it, a—German spy. She thinks he wanted a khaki suit to spy in."

"Lord! But, Selma, you must know you—stole it."

Selma raised her head and looked at him. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, but she tossed her head. "I did not," said she.

"What in the name of common sense did you do, then?"

"I took it."

Luke grinned. "All right," said he. "Then, after you had taken it, you hung it out on the line for the folks to see, and you told them it was Leon's, and he had fought at the front in it, and been wounded, and those—ink spots were blood stains. What other name do you use for a lie, Selma?"

"I did not tell them," said Selma. "They said so."

"But you did not tell them the truth?"

"I didn't tell them lies."

"You just kept still and let them talk, and didn't tell them they were wrong?"

"I don't see that I did anything so very dreadful. I have suffered everything since Leon went off with that circus, and Mrs. Dickerman was so set up about her Sammy. If Leon was really in the army he could do anything. He would be an officer in no time. And to think of that slow-witted Sammy Dickerman, and my Leon——" Suddenly Selma collapsed again. She wept. "Oh dear!" she sobbed out. "Of course you are right, Luke. I have been very wicked. I have stolen and lied, and all because I was proud; and, after all, Leon is a good boy, and handsome and smart, and—oh, Luke, he is worse, and I am scared to death about him!"

"Call Doctor Ellerton over."

"I—don't want to."

"Selma, I am ashamed of you. You wouldn't rather the boy died than have it come out? And, besides, Ellerton wouldn't talk."

"He would know. Leon talks."

"Great Scott! He isn't delirious?"

"A little now and then. His mind wanders, and he talks about the show. He doesn't know where he is."

Luke sprang to his feet. "You stay right here. I'm going up to see Leon."

Luke went. He was not gone long. When he came back he again patted Selma's bowed head. "I really don't think it is anything serious," he said. "The boy took that journey when he wasn't able,

and has a temporary relapse. He hasn't much temperature. His delirium is more from nerve exhaustion than fever. At first he wasn't quite right when he saw me, then he was as sane as I was. Lucky I had my thermometer. That medical training poor father made me take is of some use now and then, if I never did practise and never did lose my money, as father thought I might. Now Selma, I'm going home first, then I'm coming back, and I'm going to stay with Leon to-night; and you go to bed and go to sleep. You'll be worn out."

Selma gave a look of intense gratitude at him. Then she flushed and stammered. "What—will they think?"

"Think, nothing. They all know Leon is home, and they know I took a medical course. You go to bed right off, and you leave the lamps lighted and the front door open. I shall be back in a few minutes. I shall tell everybody I meet just what I am going to do, too. If nothing is underhanded, they will think it is all right, as it is."

"Oh, Luke, I am grateful. I know you are right. Oh, I shall be so glad to have you, and I'll fix a nice little lunch for you."

"All right, then. Now you can go to bed and to sleep, and put it all off your mind."

Selma did not go to bed, however, until Luke returned. She arranged a lunch for him in a room which opened out of Leon's, and sat by the boy, who was quite rational.

"Uncle Luke's a brick!" said Leon. "He's coming back so you can go to sleep, mother. You

could, anyway; I should be all right. But you wouldn't; you'd sit up and worry. There isn't a bit of need of it. That confounded journey was too much for me, that was all. If only the management had let me take the plane, goodness! I'd have sailed home, and been like a fighter. When I get rich I'll have a plane and take you up with me, mother. It's grand. You wouldn't be afraid. It's just like climbing mountains on wings instead of feet, and floating down instead of taking headers. I shall be all right in a day or two—no need to worry. I know you don't like the show, but it won't be that all my life. That's just a step. I wish I could stay here and go into a store or something on your account, but you know I can't, don't you, mother?"

It was a week before Leon was able to be downstairs, nearly another week before he was outdoors, and could go to the post-office and visit his old haunts in the grocery-store and Sylvester's Antique Shop.

Selma watched him set out, and she looked unaccountably worried, Leon thought.

"What's the matter now, mother?" he said. "Here you look as glum as an owl, with your pretty face all drawn down, and your darling boy well enough to be outdoors. What's up, lady?"

Selma tried to laugh. "Nothing," she said. "I wouldn't stay too long, if—I were you, the first time."

"Oh no, of course not; but I'm all right, mother."

"It's the first time you have been out."

"Save us! mother, if you don't act as if you thought it might be my last! What's the matter?"

Selma laughed stiffly. "Nothing, of course. Don't try to talk too much. You haven't got your strength back yet."

"Strength enough to take you up in one hand and shake you if you don't stop worrying," Leon called back, gaily. He was a handsome, well-set-up lad. Selma eyed him adoringly as he swung down the street. Still the look of abject worry was in her face.

Leon was gone all the morning. When he came home he looked sober. He ate his dinner with an appetite, but did not talk much. Every now and then he seemed on the verge of asking a question, then checked himself.

After dinner Leon went out again. She tried to prevent him, but he was almost curt with her: "I am going to call on Mrs. Edward Sylvester. I met her with my old girl, Aggy Leach, and Mrs. Sylvester asked me to come over and play tennis on her new court. She asked me to dinner, but I told her I had to go home and eat fatted-calf hash."

Leon laughed gaily at his own joke. Then he opened his mouth as if to ask a question. Selma visibly cringed, and paled.

Leon gave her a curious look, kissed her and went out. Late in the afternoon he entered the post-office. Luke Gleason was there. There was

no one in the office except the two. Luke came out of his sanctum, locking the door. He was rather over-punctilious with regard to his Government job. He came out in the large, dirty, littered room where Leon stood, and motioned him to the settee.

"Sit down here. Don't stand up," said Luke. "What's the matter, Leon?"

Leon gazed around cautiously.

"Not a soul within gunshot," said Luke. "As far as anybody coming in, two nights out of three I might as well go home as keep this open till eight o'clock. What's up, Leon?"

The boy burst out desperately.

"Everything!" he gasped.

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything. Uncle Luke, what has mother been doing and saying?"

Luke looked soberly at him. "I suppose I know what you mean," he said, "but I guess you had better tell me right out."

"Well, I have been all over Leicester to-day, and everybody's been asking me the most tom-fool questions."

"Tom-fool questions?"

"Yes. I'd like to know what they all mean. Say they all think I've been fighting in the trenches over there at the European war-front, with France and England, you know; and they think I'm wounded, and blind, and I declare if Aggy Leach didn't try to lead me, and she asked how could I manage to get round so well when I was blind, and she thought

it was wonderful, and the way she and Mrs. Sylvester wondered when they found I could play tennis well, and asked me if I had been to the training-schools for the blind in Paris, and once Mrs. Sylvester grabbed me when she thought I didn't see a stone and was going to stumble over it when I started to go. What in the name of common sense does it mean?"

"What do you think it means?"

Leon colored. "Oh, hang it all! I know, I suppose. I never felt like such a fool. I declare, I couldn't even say positively I wasn't blind for fear I'd—do her mischief—give her away. Uncle Luke, what possessed mother?"

"She has always felt dreadfully about your being connected with that circus, you know," Luke replied, soberly.

"Mother's a fool!" said the boy.

"You shouldn't speak that way about your own mother, Leon."

"Well, I can't help it because she is my mother, can I? She is an awful fool. Then, you know, she's been telling all round that I've been in the European war—our war now, but at the European front—and come home wounded, and blind."

"I don't think she exactly said so," Luke replied, hesitatingly.

"But she let them think so. Just the same thing. And what's all this fool stuff about my blood-stained khaki suit? I never owned one, much less a blood-stained one. Did mother have one out on the clothes-line? I heard that, and I was struck

dumb, couldn't say a word. What is that nonsense?"

Luke told him.

"Great Scott!" said Leon, and sat staring before him, seeing nothing. "What did possess her?" he said, presently.

"Now look here, Leon, you mustn't feel hard about your mother. It isn't right. She isn't like the new-fashioned woman. You can't judge her like you could a man or one of those women. She's just a woman. You've got to make allowances."

"But what in the name of common sense am I going to do? Lord! I owe something to myself. I can't stand this reputation for glory which I haven't got. Why, hang it! I can't even say I can see as well as a hawk, for fear of giving my own mother away. Of course she's a fool, but she's my mother, and I've got to stand all this, but it makes me out an awful liar myself. Don't you understand what an awful fix I'm in? I simply can't tell the truth because if I do they will know she—well, you know. I won't say it about poor mother. And I can't even deny things. Well, I suppose all I can do is to light out, go back to that confounded show, and it was getting too rank for me, that's the truth. One thing that made me sick—they've got some people in this season that I can't stand for. But I've got to go back. I'd enlist to-morrow if I wouldn't have to tell the truth to be accepted, and give mother away. I can't even do that."

Luke regarded the boy steadily.

Leon looked inquiringly at him. "What is it, Uncle Luke?"

"There is something you can do, if you are in earnest about enlisting."

"In earnest! Of course I am, but how can I? Even if the conscription bill were passed, I'd give mother away if I stayed here. They'd find out. Of course I'd have to register. There wasn't a blamed thing the matter with me—it's a hole I'm in. Don't you see? And back of my mind when I was coming home was that idea of enlisting, if mother wouldn't make too much fuss. Lord! I begin to think she wouldn't!"

"No, she wouldn't. You are right there."

"Mother wouldn't make a fuss about my enlisting and going to France to fight in the trenches, and maybe never set eyes on me again, and yet she could—Lord! Uncle Luke, women are queer! Well, she's made it impossible for me to do anything but go back to that beastly show. Hope I get drafted out there so they don't find out what she did."

"It's easier than that."

Leon looked at him eagerly. "What do you mean?"

"I've got considerable property, and no relations, and——"

"What do you mean, Uncle Luke?"

"You could fly an aeroplane, couldn't you?"

"Better than I can do anything else. I'd thought of that. Say, the stunts I did in the plane in that

show would count over there! I ain't saying it to brag, but—I can fly, Uncle Luke."

"Then why shouldn't you?"

The two talked, their heads close together.

When Leon reached home his mother met him at the door. She looked scared, but his gay salutation made her smile with relief.

"Think you'd lost your treasure, mother?" he called out.

"Your supper's getting cold," she responded in her sweet, rather weak voice. She smiled when her son kissed her, but when the smile faded she looked queer to him.

"What's the matter, mother?" he asked, turning and looking down at her as they entered the house.

"Nothing."

"You don't look like yourself. Been doing your hair a different way? No, it isn't that. You do look sort of used up, mother. Don't you feel well?"

"Perfectly well," replied Selma; but her lips quivered and tears rolled over her cheeks.

"Now, mother, what in the name of common sense are you crying for? Say, you didn't get worried about me because I stayed so late, did you?"

Selma shook her head, speechless.

"Then what is it?"

"Your supper is cold," Selma stammered in a choking voice.

"And that's what you're crying about? Mother,

you never grew up. What were they thinking about to let you get married? And here you've got a grown-up son, you not grown up. Lord! mother, I'll have to adopt you. Say, how'd you like that, eh?"

Selma tried to laugh, and presently her worried expression disappeared.

"Better primp a little, mother," he advised. "I saw Uncle Luke. I dropped in at the post-office, and I reckon he'll be around. Say, mother, that was a jim-dandy supper all right, and I feel good. Go and put on that lavender dress of yours."

Selma did not color. "Are you sure he's coming?"

"Yes, he said he was."

"If he comes, I've got to see him alone," said Selma, abruptly.

Leon laughed. "All right, mother. I'll make myself scarce." Leon went out; then he returned: "Say, mother, I'm going to tell you, myself. First I thought I'd let Uncle Luke. What do you say to my going—to France, to the front in France?"

Selma looked up at him. Her blue eyes seemed black in her white face. "To France?"

"Yes, Uncle Luke is going to manage it for me. He has a cousin who married an English army officer in Canada. He is going to fix it all up. I'm going to Canada, then ho for France! and your smart son flying an aeroplane, and covering himself with glory thick as eagle feathers, and you as proud as Punch, when he comes home with his coat so covered with badges of honor and things there

won't be room for a scarf-pin. Eh, mother? You aren't going to show the white feather now? Say, mother, you aren't——"

"No," said Selma, quite clearly, "I am not. Go up-stairs and read your paper. I'll leave the dishes."

"You're the mother for a brave son who is going to fly for the right to be proud of," said Leon, rather hoarsely. He shook her little shoulders, but did not kiss her; then he went out.

"When are you going?" Selma called after him.

"Not before a week. Oh, you won't need to shake when you get the papers for an age yet."

"I shall have time to see to your mending, and get your clothes in order," said Selma. She said it with a certain note of comfort.

Leon marveled at the ways of women as he went up-stairs. He sat beside the window reading the paper when Luke came—it was not long. Leon reflected that he hoped his mother would marry Luke. He did not like his mother to live alone, but he could not stay home with his unclipped wings of restlessness. "A pretty mess of it I'd make," he thought, as he sat there and heard the murmur of greeting at the door below. "I'd most likely take to drink. A little town like Leicester is not for me. Lord! I was born with the purpose to get out of it."

The boy was right. A little New England village with conservatism as its backbone was not for him. He was alien to it. He could not live in narrow, monotonous environments and remain true to his instincts. No man who lives contrary to his

instincts of life makes a success of living. Small wonder that the boy had fled when that little traveling show had struck its shabby tents in the vacant lot below the house three years before. Small wonder that the little show could not hold him. Leon had a nature equipped with wings for large flights. Now the first great flight of the whole world beckoned him. He was elate, enraptured. He had done wonderful, harebrained things with a plane, and come triumphantly gliding down the long aerial slant of life instead of the dreadful perpendicular of death.

He felt himself a master of the new air-craft, and with reason. Sitting there by the window, he dreamed of the aid he would give brave, insulted France.

Down-stairs in the sitting-room Selma and Luke were talking. Luke had hardly been seated before Selma went over to her desk, drew out a sheet of paper and handed it to him. She was silent; her face was quite impassive. She knew that he knew, and no shame of disclosure was over her.

Luke read, then he turned upon her sternly. "You mean——" he began.

"I mean to have it published in the Leicester *News* Thursday."

"You cannot do it."

"I must."

"You mean to confess in this way that you have —lied about your son, and—stolen?"

Selma nodded. She was pale now.

"You can't do it, Selma."

"What can I do, then?" she pleaded, piteously. "I lied; you know I did. And I stole that suit, and when people thought what they did I let them think it. I've got to confess, and I can't go all over Leicester and Barr Center and Barr-by-the-Sea and South Barr, from house to house, and confess. I can't think of any other way but to have it published in the Leicester *News*. I wrote it while Leon was out this afternoon."

Luke tore the sheet of paper into bits. "Where's your waste-paper basket?" said he.

"What else can I do?"

"You don't seem to think of your son. What would he do if this came out?"

Selma stared at him.

"He would stand by you, of course, but do you think it's fair?"

Selma was silent a second. Then she faltered, "I never thought——"

"No, you didn't, child; but you can't saddle all this foolishness onto Leon."

Selma looked at him with eyes through which the soul of a little naughty, perplexed girl seemed to look.

The man looked lovingly. "What a goose you are, Selma!" he said.

"You don't think I ought?"

"Why, of course you ought not."

"Then what can I do?"

"Do nothing, and make the best of it."

"And not confess?"

"Not to four villages. I reckon the Almighty,

and your son and your husband will be about enough, and if they are not, you've got to take your medicine, child."

"Does Leon know?" gasped Selma.

"Of course he knows, and can't tell. You've put him in a lie, too."

"I haven't got any husband," Selma said in a queer voice.

"You are going to have—me. I have stood all the nonsense I'm going to. You've got to be taken care of whether you want to or not. I am going to marry you right away."

Selma looked at him helplessly.

"I don't pretend it can be the same that it might have been at first, when you and I were both young, and you had not married another man, now, when you've been through all that and have got a grown-up son, and I've been through what I have. It can't be the same. We won't pretend it can be. The nightingales and moonlights of life are over for both of us, but I reckon there's a lot left. We hear a lot about ideals for nations nowadays. I reckon there's ideals for men and women as well as nations, and we've got them left, and they're worth more than we are."

"You want to marry me after I—told those lies?"

"I've torn them up. They are scraps of paper." Luke laughed.

Luke did not stay long. When he left he bent over and kissed Selma and told her to say her prayers, and go to bed and to sleep and not worry.

Luke had not gone very far down the road before he heard a quick step behind him, and halted. "Well, son?" he said as Leon came up with him.

"Well?"

"I am going to marry your mother, son."

"Well, I am glad, for I didn't like to leave her alone."

"Some women never should be left alone—some good women, too."

"I don't see why mother hasn't married you before," said Leon.

Luke laughed. "I never asked her," he said. "Somehow, I can't reason it out, this last made me feel as if I couldn't wait another minute till I did."

"You never asked her?" repeated Leon. He flushed.

"Oh, I mean since she married and your father died. Of course I asked her before that. I was good friends with her, and liked her, and stood by her, but I don't know as I should ever have really thought of marrying her at this date if—she hadn't done such a darn-fool thing."

Leon looked at the older man, and his gay look and manner were gone. He spoke a little sternly. "After all," he said, "I make excuses for her, and in reality she does not seem to me to be as responsible as some women. Mother is like a child, and somehow I've always loved her better for it; but, since you are going to marry mother, I owe it to her, and to you, to say I am sorry for her and for me that she—told those—stories."

Luke Gleason looked steadily and lovingly at the young man. "You are going to make the stories true, my son," said he. "There are more reasons than one for going to war."

SOUR SWEETINGS

JULIUS CÆSAR WHITTEMORE married Nelly Dunn. Miss Sarah Edgewater's mother's maiden name had been Dunn, and Nelly was her niece, her brother's daughter. Nelly and Julius had been born in adjoining houses in South Barr, and had lived next door to each other all their lives. Their marriage had been a foregone conclusion when they were children and attended district school. There had been little romance connected with it. Nelly had simply been the only girl in South Barr whom a young man who esteemed himself as Julius Cæsar Whittemore esteemed himself could marry, and Nelly, who had not much imagination, and very seldom went away from home to meet young men, did not dream of the possibility of marrying another man. Julius's father had died when he was a child; since then his mother had run the farm, and in a masterly manner. Julius was well-to-do. Nelly's father and mother, who were not especially prosperous, although they had enough to live on, were calmly pleased that their only daughter was to marry well as far as this world's goods were concerned. The week before

the marriage, Mrs. Oliver Dunn, Nelly's mother, had driven her old gray horse over to Barr Center, and called on Sarah Edgewater.

"I am glad Nelly is to marry Julius," she said. "He is a likely young man, and there is considerable property. It will all come to Julius after his mother dies."

"I am glad Nelly is doing so well," said Sarah. She was very fond of Nelly, and had given her a goodly stock of linen for a wedding present.

"There is only one thing which troubles me at all," said Nelly's mother. "The Whittemores, and Julius Cæsar especially, do have such a great idea of themselves—of the Whittemores—that I wonder, sometimes, if Nelly won't have considerable to put up with. Nelly has almost too good a disposition, if she is my daughter. I am afraid she will get real mushy and be afraid to say her soul is her own, before the Whittemores."

Sarah Edgewater sat up majestically. "Who," said she, "are the Whittemores, that they should put themselves up on a pinnacle above the Dunns? The Dunns are as good a family as ever lived in Barr. I don't except even the Leicesters, or the Edgewaters, or the Widners. What have the Whittemores done?"

"I really don't know, except be Whittemores," admitted Mrs. Oliver Dunn. She was a mild little woman, and in reality was somewhat intimidated herself by the Whittemores.

"That," declared Miss Sarah Edgewater, "is

nonsense. I will admit that Mrs. Jane Whittemore has proved herself a smart business woman. The way she has run the farm and made a success of it since her husband died is a wonder; but we all know that Sam Whittemore, while he was a good, God-fearing man, was not one to set the river on fire; and as for her, she was a Quimby, from Barr-by-the-Sea, and her folks were poor, and her father used to keep a fish-market. He failed, too. Jane has shown herself smart, but she was only a Quimby, and the Quimbys were never thought so much of even before Barr-by-the-Sea was what it is now. Old Josh Quimby used to come over here every Tuesday and Friday, peddling fish. He was a good, honest man, but Jane has no reason to set herself up because of her own family, and as for the Whittemores—the Whittemores have just lived in South Barr ever since anybody can remember. Julius Cæsar's great-grandfather and his grandfather kept the grocery-store there."

"Well," said Mrs. Dunn, "I must say I am sorry that they do feel quite so much above other folks, because Nelly is easy put upon for a long while, then when she does get to asserting herself she is more set about it than a great many people who are flying out in a temper every other minute. But Nelly and Julius have grown up together, and they do think a lot of each other, and Julius is a good, steady young man, and of course I am glad he has some property."

"Yes," said Sarah, "love is all very well, and I have never believed in marriage without it, but

property does keep love from getting into snarls sometimes."

Mrs. Oliver Dunn rose to go. "Of course you will not repeat what I have said about the Whittemores, Sarah," said she.

"I have never repeated anything except the multiplication table," replied Sarah with dignity.

"Because I am really pleased about it. I am glad to have Nelly settled. Her father hasn't got much, and Nelly isn't the kind of girl to battle with the world. It is all right, and what we have expected all these years, and very likely Julius, although he does seem to hold his head pretty high, may be easy to get on with. He sets his eyes by Nelly, and as for Nelly, well, she thinks Julius is just about right; but——"

"But what?"

Mrs. Dunn looked puzzled before her own reflections. "I don't know," said she, "but sometimes I wonder if it isn't safer for people to marry when they haven't known each other so long. I know they say it's just the other way around, but I don't know. Sometimes it seems to me that Julius and Nelly don't make any more of getting married than they used to of going to school together. Both of them are as calm as clocks about it. They have always ticked, and they go right on ticking. Nelly never gets all wrought up because Julius doesn't come over, or is late, and I don't think Julius would get jealous if she walked right off to meeting with another man before his eyes. There isn't one bit of romance about it."

"I never did think much of romance."

"You never got married."

A queer expression came over Sarah Edgewater's handsome elderly face. She was thinking of her own life. "Maybe that is the reason," she agreed. "I am glad the wedding-dress has turned out all right."

"It is beautiful!" declared Nelly's mother with enthusiasm. "Of course Nelly and I thought it would be more sensible for her to be married either in a traveling costume or something simple that she could wear afterward, but Julius and his mother were set on the white satin and lace for the church wedding, and Nelly is young, and she looks lovely in it. It will be a pity to lay it away, that beautiful satin, for she can never wear it in South Barr."

"No, she can't," said Sarah. "She might as well think of wearing a crown and scepter. But I'll give a party in her honor, and she can wear it in Barr Center once, anyway."

Nelly's mother beamed. "That is real good of you, Sarah," she said.

When Mrs. Dunn told her daughter Nelly after her return, Nelly, who was sewing on some wedding finery, did not seem much elated.

"I think that white-satin dress is too much dress for Barr Center," said she.

"Your aunt Sarah will have a large party, I think, dear."

"I don't care. Not one girl has anything as fine as that white satin to wear, and I don't think I shall wear mine."

"Oh, well, you can wear that pretty white net, with the blue sash," said Mrs. Dunn.

"That will be much more suitable," said Nelly.

Nelly was a lovely girl, very blonde, with a sweet expression. It was only very seldom that a sudden firm set of her mouth, and a steady look in her pretty blue eyes, hinted of possible resources of firmness in her character. When she alluded to the white-satin dress her mouth was set and her blue eyes were steady. She did not at all approve of the white satin. She had yielded because it was her time for yielding, but she had never approved.

"After the ceremony that white satin will be folded away," said she, "and it will never be worn again; I have told Julius so."

"What did he say?"

"Only laughed. He doesn't care. He has his way about it." Nelly spoke half caressingly, half sarcastically.

"He is a man, and men are different," said her mother. "And he wants you to look nice, and so does his mother."

"His mother wants me to look nice because I am marrying her son," declared Nelly. "I suppose Julius does want me to look nice because he is fond of me—but his mother!"

Mrs. Dunn looked anxiously at Nelly. She was sorry that the young married pair were to live with Julius's mother. She would have been equally sorry if they had been going to live with her. Much as she loved her daughter, she had a prejudice against such arrangements. However, there was

no way out of it; Mrs. Jane Whittemore could not be banished from her own property, nor could Julius build another house.

Nelly was married in the church—the little white Congregational meeting-house in South Barr. She swept up the aisle in her white-satin dress to a jiggling wedding-march played on the little melodeon by one of her schoolmates, Etta Briggs. She heard people whisper. She was aware that she was ridiculous, but of course she was happy.

She was glad when the ceremony was over, and the reception, which Julius had insisted upon having in the large parlor of his mother's house, with a caterer and colored waiters from Leicester. Then she could slip out of her gorgeous wedding array into her blue-cloth traveling-suit, with a chiffon blouse.

After the wedding journey Sarah Edgewater gave the promised party for Nelly. It was then that Nelly was guilty of her first deception toward her husband. Not a word had been said about it, but she knew that he expected her to wear her white-satin wedding-dress. After supper she slipped across the yard; there was a narrow strip of yard between the Dunn and Whittemore places, and in the yard stood an old but prolific apple-tree. It was in full bloom when Nelly hurried under its spreading scented boughs. She had said that she wanted her mother to fasten her dress. Both Julius and his mother, Jane Whittemore, thought she referred to the white satin. But Nelly clad herself in the white net, with the pale-blue sash and girdle,

and returned to her new home enveloped in her pongee motor-coat.

Julius was waiting for her. He wore a linen duster over his dress-suit, and sat at the wheel in his touring-car.

"You had better sit on the back seat on account of your white-satin dress," said Julius. "There may be some oil in front." Nelly said not a word. She got into the tonneau, and sat there waiting for her mother-in-law, who soon came out in her long black-silk coat over the black-lace gown she had worn at the wedding.

"Take care of your white satin, Nelly," she said.

Nelly was saved the necessity of replying, for her own mother came hurrying across the yard and got in. Nelly's father was not well. Indeed, it was the beginning of the illness of which he died six months later, although then it was regarded as only a slight ailment. Nelly's mother, who had been a beauty, and was still charming, wore a lavender silk which dated back to her girlhood and had been made over for the wedding. She had no proper wrap to cover it, nothing except a plain little black coat. Mrs. Whittemore eyed her with veiled disdain.

"It is a pity you have to sit on the front seat, or else crush Nelly's white satin," she said, "for there is always likely to be oil in the front of the car."

Nelly made an involuntary movement, then checked herself. In her gentle fashion she was a fearless soul, but she was becoming intimidated be-

fore the situation. It would not injure her dress, not in the least; she preferred to sit beside Julius, but she lacked courage to say so.

Her mother bent her head, covered with an ancient white Brussels-lace scarf, and got on the front seat. She gathered up her lavender skirts carefully. "I don't think there is any oil on the seat," she remarked with a gentle quaver. She also was becoming intimidated before the situation. What would Jane Whittemore say, what would Julius Whittemore say, when Nelly's coat was removed and it was discovered that she was not wearing the white satin? It was worse because the material had been given to Nelly by her prospective mother-in-law. What would be said?

Nelly and her mother were the first comers. When they removed their wraps in Sarah Edgewater's spare chamber Mrs. Dunn looked at Nelly, lovely in her delicate white net and blue, which brought out the blue of her eyes.

"What will they say?" she quavered.

Nelly smiled mildly. "I don't know," she said.

"I almost wish you had worn the white satin."

"I don't," replied Nelly, firmly. "Nobody else who is coming will wear anything so elegant. Eva Dennison, who is a bride, too, has nothing except a light-blue muslin. The white satin is not suitable."

"I don't know what they will say," said Mrs. Dunn, uneasily.

Mrs. Dunn, who had lived near the Whittemores

for years, had failed to understand them, or Jane Quimby, who had married a Whittemore. If she had understood them, she would not have wondered concerning what they would say. She would have known that they would say nothing. Silence was the weapon in the armory of the Whittemore family. It was subtle, powerful, almost deadly.

When Nelly and her mother went down-stairs, into the pretty old room where Sarah Edgewater, her niece Amy Dinsmore, with her husband, Dr. Dinsmore, Dr. Tom Ellerton, her nephew, and his young sisters, Margy, Violetta, and Imogen, were assembled with Nelly's husband and mother-in-law, Jane Whittemore, there occurred at once a curious thing, partaking of the nature of a full stop in a musical composition. Mrs. Dunn had been relieved that Jane Whittemore, who had a weak heart and did not like to climb stairs, had removed her wraps in the hall below, thereby postponing matters. Now she wished that the discovery had been made in the dressing-room, with only the three present.

There was something terrifying in this hushed and mysterious gathering. Mrs. Jane Whittemore merely looked at Nelly, slim and pretty and girlish in her simple white net and blue ribbons, but the look was formidable. Julius also looked, and from their expressions, which so exactly resembled each other, he and his mother might have been one soul. Neither said a word. Not at that time nor at any future time did Jane Whittemore say one word about Nelly's not wearing her white-satin dress,

and not for years did Julius say one word. After that almost infinitesimal suspense, which was comprehended by only four people, there came a general greeting and conversation. The other guests arrived, and nothing ominous happened. Julius Whittemore's manner toward his young wife was quite what it should have been, so that people going home from the party that night said that Nelly Dunn had certainly married well, that she had a loving, handsome husband, and that his mother evidently welcomed her as her own daughter.

Nelly and her mother, going home with Julius and his mother in the car, talked of the party, of the people who had been present, of Sarah's kindness in giving it. Mrs. Dunn began to feel relieved. When she was in her own home she told her husband, Oliver Dunn, that she had felt a little anxious because Nelly had not worn her white satin when it was so evident that Julius and his mother had expected it, but she guessed it was all right.

"What did they say?" asked Oliver Dunn, hollow-eyed and flushed with the fever which had begun to sap his life.

"Nothing."

Oliver frowned. "When Whittemores say nothing, look out," he said.

His wife looked anxious. "You don't think——?"

"I think it will be a long time before something worth more than that white-satin dress is forgotten. Nelly had better have worn it."

"She thought it looked too grand—as if she were

putting on airs before people about marrying a rich man."

"What Julius thinks and what his mother thinks is what Nelly has to consider now," said her father. "I wish she had worn it."

The next morning Nelly came over. Julius had gone to Barr-by-the-Sea, and his mother to Boston. Nelly was alone with her mother for quite a while. When she came down-stairs she kept her face averted so that her father should not see that she had been weeping. She hurried home. She said she had to see to the luncheon before Julius got home. Everybody in South Barr except the Whittemores had dinner at noon. They had luncheon. Poor Oliver Dunn had seen Nelly's tear-stained face, and the minute she was out of hearing asked:

"What is the matter—the white-satin dress?"

Mrs. Dunn sat down opposite her husband and returned his anxious look.

"I suppose it is," she said. "Oh dear! How people do act over nothing!"

"You *suppose?* Don't you know? Doesn't Nelly know?"

"No, she doesn't. She thinks it is that, because there's nothing else. She says they went right on talking pleasant enough last night, but when she and Julius went up-stairs—you know Jane sleeps down on account of her heart—Julius just went into their room and began gathering together his brush and comb and business suit that he was going to wear this morning, and she said, 'Why;

Julius, what are you taking all those things away for?' And Julius says, real pleasant: 'Oh, I want them early in the morning. I must go over to Barr-by-the-Sea before nine.' And Nelly says, sort of wondering, 'But what has that got to do with moving your things?'—she says she never dreamed anything, he and his mother had fooled her so, appearing so pleasant. Then Julius said, 'Why, I want them in the north chamber, where I'm going to sleep to-night. I want to have them handy, of course.'

"Nelly said she just stood staring at him, and he kissed her and said good night, with his arms full of clothes, and went out and into the north chamber, and she heard him turn the key in the lock. She says she wouldn't have gone near that door to save her life, but his turning the key in the lock about broke her heart. She just cried all night, and fell asleep toward morning, and the automobile going out of the drive woke her up. She says his mother acted just the same as ever at breakfast, but all the time she had a feeling as if there was something underneath. Mrs. Whittemore came to her to see if her bonnet was on straight before the carriage came to take her to the train, and said good-by, and wanted to know if she had errands for her to do in Boston. You couldn't have told what it was, but there was *something*. Nelly says if they would only *talk;* if they would only scold her for not wearing that white satin, she wouldn't mind, but this is awful."

"It is what I was afraid of all the time," said

Nelly's father. "The Whittemores have got for temper what corresponds to dumb ague."

"It does seem as if a woman had a right to say what dress she would wear," said Mrs. Dunn, pitifully.

"Of course she had a right, and the right to wear it, too. That isn't the question. The question is whether having your own way about such a little thing is worth what I'm afraid the poor child has got to suffer to pay for it."

"Nelly has a will of her own, too," declared Mrs. Dunn. "She will stand a lot, but there was always a limit with Nelly."

"Yes, there was, but she'll be pretty fine ground down before she gets to it," said Oliver Dunn. He looked pale, and his wife got some port wine for him.

"Don't you worry, father," said she.

"If the worst comes to the worst, she can come home," said Oliver, faintly, sipping the wine. "There isn't much, but there'll be enough for you two if you're prudent."

Mrs. Dunn said nothing. She rose and went out of the room. In the kitchen she leaned against the wall and wept silently. She was much alarmed about Oliver's health, and with reason. He died in about six months' time. The last words he said to his wife were about Nelly.

"Don't let her put up with too much," he whispered. "She is married, and she must put up with all she can, but don't let them smother all the life out of poor Nelly. Take her home."

Nelly's mother promised, and wept. There was no need to conceal her tears then. Oliver and his wife had known the truth for months. After the funeral Mrs. Dunn told Nelly what her father had said.

"Father thought that, of course, you ought to put up with everything reasonable," she said. "Your poor father and I—and I hope you feel the same way—always considered marriage vows very binding and sacred, but——"

"You know I do, mother," interrupted Nelly.

"Listen, dear, to what I have to say. I think your father felt a little afraid that matters might go too far—that you might lose your spirit—and he told me, and I want to tell you, that he felt and I feel that in such a case your old home is open to you."

"I married Julius," said Nelly, "and I can't let such a silly thing as my wearing or not wearing a white-satin dress make a difference between us so far as I am concerned. Of course I can't help what Julius does, or his mother."

"Is it just the same?"

Nelly nodded. She did not look particularly cast down. She had become accustomed to things, and, besides, she was a brave girl.

"They don't say anything?"

"Not one word. Julius just occupies the north chamber. He has moved all his clothes there, and as for his mother, she has gone back to her old place at the table."

"You don't sit at the head opposite Julius?"

"No. I came down to breakfast weeks ago and found her in my place. I never told you. I didn't say anything. I sat down at the side. Everybody was pleasant, but I knew they were watching me. I knew Abby, waiting on table, was watching me. That is one of the worst things about it—the servants gossip and watch, but they hear nothing." Nelly raised her head proudly. "I never say one word any more than the Whittemores do," she said. "And I am perfectly pleasant. The worst of it is I know they don't like that. They want me to ask questions and complain and cry, and I am afraid that in the end this ridiculous playing at being enemies will come true. I am afraid Julius won't care so much for me, but I can't give up when I know I am not in the wrong."

"You never said a word about the white-satin dress?"

Nelly flushed. "I did just once. One night when Julius was going into the north chamber I said—and I spoke loud, so anybody who was listening could hear—I said, 'If I had dreamed that you felt so strongly about it, I would have worn that white-satin dress to the party.' Then I just said, 'Good night, Julius,' and he said 'Good night,' and his voice sounded like ice slivering. Then he shut his door, and that was all."

"I think you have said enough."

"I do, too, and I did not put on mourning for poor father because I knew Julius and his mother don't approve of mourning. Here I am wearing bright colors."

"Your father would think that was best."

"Yes, I know he would," half sobbed Nelly. Then she said, "I have more to mourn for than poor father, perhaps."

"Perhaps you haven't. They always treat you pleasantly?"

"Yes, but the pleasantness has stings, and they make me feel it. Oh, mother, a girl is safer with her own father and mother. Nobody ever cares quite so much."

"It isn't right for you to talk so; you are married."

Nelly in her pale-pink muslin, sitting opposite her mother, looked suddenly old and stern. "Yes," she said, "I am married; and I know that married love is sacred and marriage vows are sacred, but married love can be cruel in ways that other love would never dream of." Suddenly Nelly's face relaxed. She smiled across at her mother. "After all, mother," she said, "it might be so much worse. I really don't mind a bit not sitting at the head of the table, and I don't mind Julius's mother running the house as if I were visiting there, and I don't mind Julius's being so queer in little ways, as I did at first. I think it will all come right in the end, mother," she said, and rose to go home.

When she entered the Whittemore house, however, she found a more active grievance. The Whittemores certainly had strange tempers. It was as if they had grown weary of subtle animosity, which had seemed to fail of its mark. Nelly

found the house in disorder; the two maids, under the superintendence of Jane Whittemore, were moving her clothes and all her personal belongings from her chamber to another, a small one exposed to the western sun; and they all knew that Nelly, who was of a nervous temperament, dreaded the hot afternoons and nights of summer. Directly under the windows of this new chamber was a tin roof which reflected the sunlight. The heat would be almost intolerable at times. Nelly stood still, watching the maids carrying her clothes across the hall to this small room, from which emanated a close, hot smell. She was deadly pale.

"Abby and Susan are moving your clothes, my dear," said Jane Whittemore, pleasantly.

"Why?" said Nelly, in a quiet voice.

"Your husband thinks it better for you to occupy the west room," replied Jane Whittemore, and not a discord disturbed the even cadence of her voice. She was a large, handsome woman, with her rippling hair and her voluminous skirts so finely disposed that she gave the effect of a statue.

Julius came up-stairs, and stopped and stared.

"I am telling Nelly that you think the west chamber is a better room for her," said his mother.

For one second Julius was man enough to flinch. Then he nodded, made an inarticulate noise in his throat, went into the north chamber, and slammed the door. Had Julius not slammed the door, Nelly would have gone home to her mother that night.

Tossing, unable to sleep in her hot room, she said to herself:

"Poor Julius, he is sorry for me. He can't quarrel with his mother, and he can't give up because he is a Whittemore."

She could not realize that her whole duty as a wife seemed to her husband and his mother to hang upon those shimmering satin draperies.

The next morning she looked forlorn as she sat at the breakfast-table. Julius cast a sly glance at her, and his face lengthened, but Nelly did not see it.

It was a very hot summer. Nelly's room was intolerable. During the days, whenever she could, she stole across the yard to her mother's and lay on the sofa in the cool north parlor. She did not tell her mother about her change of rooms. Julius's slamming the door had made her jealous of his honor with regard to that.

But as the hot days passed one after another, and the terrible close nights, and Nelly's room became as a furnace with the direct heat of the sun and the reflection of the tin roof, she grew noticeably thinner and her beauty waned. Her pretty face was blotched and discolored; her blue eyes were red-rimmed. One unusually hot night, as Nelly was passing into her room, Julius, who had gone up some time before, stood in the door of her old one. Nelly had lingered as long as she dared down on the front porch because she so dreaded entering her heated room.

"You sleep in your old room to-night, Nelly,"

said Julius in a curious voice. It was more like the voice of a reluctantly relenting father than that of a husband—a father who feels that he should chide, yet yields through sheer pity.

Nelly looked piteously up in Julius's face. He stood aside to allow her to pass.

"I have taken your dressing-things in there myself," he said, awkwardly, and went suddenly, with a muttered "Good night," into his own room.

Nelly's old room was filled with a cool wind. She was so spent by the heat that she undressed quickly and got into bed, grateful for the release from her martyrdom in the roasting chamber opposite. She was almost asleep when she heard a quick step on the stairs—a quick, heavy step that seldom sounded there—that of her mother-in-law. She heard the door of the opposite room opened and shut, then the door of her husband's room. She heard quite distinctly Jane Whittemore say to Julius, as if he had been a little boy in knickerbockers:

"Julius Whittemore, get up and come down-stairs; I want to talk to you."

She heard a growl of remonstrance, then again the insistent voice: "Julius Cæsar Whittemore, you get up at once and come down-stairs."

Then Nelly heard Jane go down, and presently Julius following her. The windows were all open. Immediately a storm of tongues raged in the room below. For once the silent rage of the Whittemores was broken. Nelly could not distinguish anything except an occasional word, but she lis-

tened to a stormy nocturne of temper and obstinacy. Then, after a long time, she heard Julius come up-stairs and enter his room, and she fell asleep.

The Whittemores' man was dragging trunks down from the attic early the next morning. The maids left the housework after breakfast and assisted Jane Whittemore with her packing. Nelly, frightened, ran across the yard to her mother's house. Julius had hardly even said good morning to her, and looked deadly pale, as did his mother. Nelly sped under the great sweet-apple-tree, whose branches hung over both yards, and entered her mother's kitchen. Mrs. Dunn was making little sponge-cakes after an old recipe which Nelly loved. Nelly sat down and said nothing. She looked spent.

Her mother pulled a chair up beside her, sat down, and took her hands. "Now, Nelly Dunn," she said, "you tell your own mother what is the matter."

"I don't know," Nelly replied in a listless voice.

"Don't know?"

"I don't know. That is the worst of it. I have always heard that when people thought other people acted crazy, they were crazy themselves."

"What have they done now?" inquired Mrs. Dunn in a resigned voice.

"I don't know."

"Why, you must know something."

Nelly hesitated. She did not want to tell her mother about her being forced to sleep in the hot

west chamber. She remembered that angry, sympathizing bang of Julius's door, and she felt disloyal.

"Julius was really not to blame," said she.

"I never have thought he was the main one to blame," said Mrs. Dunn. "Jane Whittemore can stir up as much mischief as the Evil One."

"Well," said Nelly, "Julius's mother moved my things into the west chamber."

"Not that hot little room?" Mrs. Dunn's delicate old face flushed angrily. "When?"

"A few weeks ago."

"And you have been sleeping in that stifling little room all through this terrible weather, when you have always felt the heat so much?"

Nelly nodded miserably. "Julius did not like my being there," she said.

"Then why didn't he stop it?"

"I don't know."

"I know. Everybody has always knuckled down to Jane Whittemore. But this about the room is nothing new, then. What is it now?"

"Last night it was so hot that Julius told me to go back to my old room, and she was terribly upset about it. They quarreled a long time. She called Julius down-stairs and had it out with him. And now, this morning, she is packing all her trunks. She is putting in everything she owns. I even saw her packing vases and books, and—I don't believe she will ever come back! I suppose she is going to live with her sister out West—her sister Clara, who lost her husband awhile ago."

"I don't see why on earth you are upset, if Jane Whittemore is going away," said Mrs. Dunn. "I should think you would feel as if now you had a little chance of living in peace with your husband."

Nelly shook her head hopelessly.

"Why not?"

"Julius is his mother's son. He is harder to me this morning than I have ever known him. He hasn't said a word, but he acts and looks hard. He will never forgive me for coming between him and his mother."

"Coming between! Looks to me as if you had been taken by the shoulders and fairly pushed between. I don't see what you have done, Nelly. I think it is time for you to come home."

Nelly shook her head. "Not yet. I must wait a little longer, mother; it is a dreadful step to take."

"Well, maybe you are right," agreed her mother.

When Nelly returned to the Whittemore house she heard voices; Abby and Susan, the maids, were talking. Nelly entered quickly, and the voices stopped. She was so comforted by the kind looks of the girls that she nearly lost her self-control.

As she went out of the room she heard Susan say, "Poor little thing," and Abby reply, "For my part, I am glad the old lady has gone."

Nelly was not sure whether she was glad or not. It was something to feel that she would not have to encounter that subtle smiling disapproval and antagonism, but she feared lest Julius, who,

after all, was his mother's son, and must regret her leaving home, might not visit it all upon his wife. Soon she was to know that he did.

He never uttered a word of reproach. Nelly was reinstated in her own room; she became the mistress of the house; she sat at the head of her table; but she knew, as well as if Julius had shouted the words in her ears, that he felt he had made a mistake in marrying her. She had brought, according to his reasoning, dissension into his home. He went quietly about; he attended to his farm; he read the newspaper and books on gardening of an evening. He retired early to his north room, and his light shone out until late at night under the door-sill.

Julius read much in these days. He never spoke unkindly to Nelly. He never even gave her an unkind look; but cold politeness was worse than open unkindness.

Nelly bore with the situation a year; then when the summer had come again, and the apples on the tree in the yard were just forming, she spoke out. It was after dinner one hot night. She called Julius into the parlor, which was rather a magnificent room after Jane Whittemore's ideas. It was resplendent with red-silk damask, lace draperies, one or two really good oil-paintings, Royal Worcester vases, and a Parian marble statue in a corner. Nelly almost never entered it. She called Julius in there now because it was the most isolated room in the house. Thin and pale and pretty in her pale-blue muslin, she stood before her hus-

band at the end of the faintly glowing room, and spoke.

"Julius," she said, "I think the time has come for me to speak. I have been silent a long time."

Julius stared at the wall over her head. The paper had large gold and silver arabesques. "Well?" he said.

"I think you had better send for your mother to come home, Julius."

Julius lowered his eyes to her face. "Why?"

"Because I am going over to mother's to live."

Then Julius spoke. His voice was terrible, although not raised above conversational pitch.

"Go," he said. The room faced the yard, and the old apple-tree tossed its fruit-laden branches in the gathering dusk. Julius looked at it. "When that sweet-apple-tree has sour apples under it, then I will ask you to come back."

"Yes, Julius," said Nelly.

"I will allow you enough to live on."

"My father left enough for mother and me to live on," Nelly replied, with mild pride, and fluttered out of the room. She gathered a few belongings together and crossed the yard to her mother's.

"I have come home at last, mother," she said. She was curiously calm, although her mother wept.

"I knew you couldn't stand it," sobbed Mrs. Dunn.

"You must never think Julius said or did an unkind thing," said Nelly.

"I don't know what you call unkind; I don't suppose he *beat* you."

"I am going to live with you here, mother, and we shall be happy together, but we must never talk about Julius," said Nelly.

Mrs. Dunn pursed her lips. "I suppose I can ask if Jane Whittemore is coming back?" she remarked in a slightly aggrieved tone.

"I suppose she is; I told Julius he had better send for her. He ought to have somebody to keep the house."

"I should think Abby could do it."

"I suppose she could, but it seems natural that Julius should want his mother back and would send for her."

"I wonder if he will," said Mrs. Dunn, with a queer expression.

For a while South Barr hummed with gossip. Then it was quiet. Julius did not send for his mother. At all events, she did not come.

Sometimes Nelly watched furtively when Julius moved about his yard. It seemed to her he grew thin, and that the elasticity went from his step. She herself looked better than she had. One day during the next winter, Julius in his car met her walking, with her cheeks glowing pink above her dark furs. He thought her lovelier than he had ever seen her.

Julius was wretchedly unhappy. His mother wrote, proposing that she return. He sent her a large check and advised her to remain with her sister. It seemed to him that he could not endure the mere sight of his mother's handsome, complacently triumphant face.

Winter passed, and spring and summer. The sweet-apple-tree in the yard was bent low with ripe fruit, and the ground was covered with windfalls before the end came. There was a moonlight night when Nelly could not sleep, and got up and put on a white wrapper and wandered about the upper part of her mother's house. She came into the spare chamber which faced the Whittemore house, and stood at the window, shrinking back behind a fold of the muslin curtain, staring. Down in the yard a man was working furiously beneath the old apple-tree. He was gathering up the windfalls in a basket, and wheeling them away in a barrow.

Nelly watched, wondering. She recognized Julius. He continued to work with a sort of frenzy. Finally the ground beneath the tree was quite clear on his side of the fence. Then, to Nelly's intense wonder, he came wheeling more apples, which he scattered on the ground. It was nearly dawn before he stopped and entered the house. Nelly put a dark cloak over her white wrapper and stole down-stairs softly. She crept along the fence, crouching low that she might not be seen. She caught up an apple from the ground, where Julius had strewn them, and fled back to her room. She locked herself in; she tested the apple. It was sour, with an intense sourness, but it seemed to Nelly to have the sweetness of the whole world, and life itself, typifying, as it did, the surrender of a human soul to love.

When morning came there was a hoar-frost over

the earth; everything was as brilliant as if powdered with jewels. Nelly's mother remarked that she was glad that they had gathered the last flowers in the garden the night before and filled the vases.

"It is a perfectly beautiful morning," said Nelly, and her voice sounded as if she were singing.

Her mother regarded her wonderingly. She thought Nelly was growing prettier and prettier—that now she could not be grieving for Julius Whittemore.

After the breakfast dishes were cleared away Nelly went up-stairs to her room. She stole into the spare chamber and peered out. She knew, without seeing, that Julius's eyes were on the house, watching. With the foolishness of a man, the childish foolishness which she loved, he was actually watching for her to go out and pick up one of those sour apples and taste it.

Presently Nelly came down, clad magnificently in her white wedding gown. Her mother stared and paled.

"Nelly Dunn, are you out of your senses?" she cried.

"Listen, mother," said Nelly; and she related the incident of the apples.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Dunn.

Nelly emerged from the front door. At the same time the door in the next house opened, and Julius, pale and trembling and smiling, came out.

Nelly moved to meet him under the apple branches, tall and stately and beautiful, shimmering in her white-satin wedding gown, her golden head gleaming, her face full of love.

BOTH CHEEKS

"I THINK you ought to present that demand note of Uncle Abel's for collection," said James Lord.

His old uncle Zenas sighed heavily.

"I think we have talked that matter over enough, don't you?" he returned.

The square old room in the low light of the gathering night was lovely, lovelier than in broad daylight, when its shabbiness, which was almost sordid, offended. Now soft shadows lay over it, and there were little pools of dim radiance here and there from polished surfaces of old furniture; an engraving over the mantel gleamed out like a sheet of silver, and right across the floor lay a mysterious beam of reflection beyond tracing. James saw that every night before the lamp was lit, and had never been able to trace its source. The glass over the engraving showing silver was simple enough. The street light caused that. The beam across the floor defied him. He gazed at it now as he talked with his uncle. Zenas was his paternal uncle. The Abel to whom he referred was on his mother's side of the family, Abel Car-

son. He was a rich old man and Zenas held his demand note, but would not make any effort to collect it.

"No, Uncle Zenas, I don't think we have talked enough until we have talked to some purpose," said James Lord. "If you had that money I could enlist."

"Do you think that is a reason for me to collect?"

Suddenly the boy rose and was across the room. His wiry young figure stood over the old man in the chair.

"Yes, I do," he said, vehemently. "I do, and you ought to think so. You are an old man, Uncle Zenas, but I am ashamed for you. God knows, in time of peace I would be willing to stay here in Leicester and work in the Sylvesters' antique-store till I died, to support you; but this is different. If you had the money which that note represents you would have plenty if the war continued four years, and I could save a little out of my pay for you; but now here I am tied hand and foot. I see all the others going, and I am pinned down here because I am your sole support when you could get enough money to-morrow to set me free."

"You know how I feel about this war," said the old man, and there was a terrible inflexibility in his voice.

"Know how you feel! I should think so! I know to my shame and disgrace, and all the town knows. But I would go, for all that, Uncle Zenas,

and I would feel right about going if you had enough money to live on."

"You really mean that you would go to war when you know how I feel about the wickedness of war and how I am convinced that love and peace would take its place?"

"I love peace enough to fight for it," the young voice rang out. "I don't love it enough to stay in a safe place and talk about it while the other fellows are getting hit. Uncle Zenas, for God's sake, why won't you collect that note? Uncle Abel has plenty of money. He is just laughing in his sleeve because you don't."

"I have never had any quarrel with your uncle Abel," said the old voice, inexorably.

"And you won't try to collect because Uncle Abel has such a devilish temper and hates to pay out money like poison."

"I cannot have a quarrel, James."

"Uncle Zenas——"

The old man said nothing.

"Look here, Uncle Zenas, could you get on with what I could save from my pay if I did enlist? Have you got anything besides that note?"

The old man was silent.

"Is this house mortgaged?"

There was no reply.

"You could mortgage the house and set me free," said the young voice, with a burst of courage.

"Mortgage the house where your grandfather was born!"

"Well, I suppose that would come sort of hard for you, but I would pay it as soon as I could after the war."

"Young men often never return from war, and often when they do return it is to be burdens rather than agents to remove them. You can't guarantee anything when you go to war—you know that, James Lord."

"Uncle Zenas, haven't you anything besides?"

Then the old man spoke with cold fury:

"If I had a million in bank-notes here this minute I would put it in the fire and make you stay at home and support me. You shall not go to war, James Lord!"

"Uncle Zenas, if you were young and able-bodied, do you mean to say you would not go?"

"I would not! I would settle the whole peaceably."

"No man can settle matters peaceably when there is no peace."

The boy's voice rang high, then he hushed suddenly. He struck a match and lit the lamp on the table and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Zenas.

"Over to the Sylvesters'. I see Thomas Dodd coming in here, and I don't want to stay and hear the old argument, when I am on Dodd's side and can't say so because you are my uncle. I don't like Dodd, either."

James went out of the room, and at the same time the knocker clanged and a dog barked. The dog barked with a volley of shrill yelps.

Zenas rose and went to the front door. A large stout man stood there and a fox-terrier was snapping at his heels. The large man kicked out at the dog, but did not hit him, and entered.

"Why in the name of common sense don't you tell Sam Buzzy to keep that nasty little cur of his at home?" he demanded. "He always hangs round your door, don't he?"

"I think he does a good deal," admitted Zenas.

"Why don't you tell Buzzy to tie him up?"

"I like to live on good terms with my neighbors."

"Oh, my Lord!" snarled the stout man. "And so you let your friends take chances of being bitten by mad dogs rather than have a row with a neighbor!" The man seated himself and the chair creaked.

"This old relic won't let me down with a broken bone, will it?" he growled.

"I think it is fairly strong."

"It isn't as if you had steam heat. Steam heat is the very dickens for old furniture. You ought to have it, though. Only thing for a house as big as this. Hot-air furnace don't begin to heat it."

"It does, except when the wind is in certain directions."

"Strange the wind ain't as accommodating as you peace folks. Sort of queer nature seems to go on such strikes."

Zenas flushed. He was a handsome, small old man, with delicate but strong features and a small, closely set mouth.

"When are you going to start your peace delegation?" said the other. His voice hissed with aggravation.

Zenas said nothing.

"Ain't you going to send a peace delegation to Europe pretty soon?" demanded Thomas Dodd.

Zenas spoke sharply.

"Would to God I could do that very thing and stop this frightful slaughter!" said he.

"H'm! Suppose you think a peace delegation, with the women wearing stuffed doves on their hats, and the men with olive sprigs in their buttonholes, and the whole lot preaching and praying, could do more than the armies of the Allies and the United States, now we are in it. H'm!"

"I certainly do," said Zenas, firmly.

The argument was on.

Thomas rose and towered over Zenas ponderously. He shook the index finger of his right hand in his face:

"You believe that right against Scripture?"

Zenas looked at Thomas and his small face seemed as hard as flint.

"I think that is Scripture."

"What do you make of this saying from the Gospel, 'I came not to send peace, but a sword'? What do you think of that, eh?"

Zenas spoke with tense firmness:

" 'If any man strike you on one cheek I say unto you turn the other also.' "

Thomas Dodd openly sneered. "If I were you

I would quote Scripture correctly," said he. Then he fairly shouted, " 'But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' "

"The meaning is the same," returned Zenas, firmly.

"You know what is said if anybody changes just one word in the Bible, I suppose," sneered Thomas Dodd.

Zenas did not answer. He was a gentleman, and Dodd lacked some of the traits of one. That gave Zenas a certain dignity.

Thomas dimly recognized the fact. His great face blazed red. He shook his finger in the other man's face.

"You traitor, you!" he shouted. "That's what you are, a damn traitor!"

"If believing in saving the sons of my country from quarrel and bloodshed is treachery, then I am a traitor," replied Zenas.

He gazed straight at the index finger, which nearly touched his delicate nose. Zenas looked more high-bred than usual in contrast with Thomas Dodd. His face did not flush. It was slightly paler and his features stood out more distinctly.

"Damn traitor!" said Thomas Dodd.

Zenas said nothing.

"You really mean you would be content to let those crowing fools—for they are fools, and history is going to show it—sink our ships, and murder Americans, and make plots against our government, and try to get us into war with other

nations, and into civil war, and blow up our factories and our bridges—and not fight?"

"I believe in peace."

"Hang peace! Why, there isn't any peace! How in Sam Hill can you want to keep what isn't in existence? There hasn't been any peace in this happy-go-lucky country, bless it, since those doggoned Germans goose-stepped over the Belgian frontier! Peace! Huh!"

"I do not defend the invasion of Belgium," stated Zenas, mildly. "I admit I feel that the principle is wrong and——"

"Who cares a cat's hind leg about principle, now the United States has finally reared and is shaking all her flags out, and getting her men and her guns and her ships into the ring?" shouted Thomas Dodd. He fairly danced up and down. "Don't I know that principle is behind the whole devilish mess? But now we have taken our stand on principle for granted, and are saying, 'Look here, Bill Hohenzollern, you have hit us; now we hit you.' Lord-a-mighty, it was all well enough to talk principle and high-mindedness when we begun, but now it is hit back, and sit on the whole crew like our fathers sat on the Indians. I tell you now, Zenas Lord, it is hit! Do ye hear me? Hit! Hit!"

"I believe in peace," said Zenas.

"Do you actually sit there and say, you whose folks did some tall fighting in the little baby wars we used to have, that you would stand for that usage any longer, and let them go on hitting us and turn the other cheek?"

"I believe in following the lead of Scripture," said Zenas.

"Well, here goes!" shouted Thomas Dodd. "I'll give you one chance to practise what you preach!" With that Thomas Dodd gave the man in the chair a mighty slap on his right cheek. Directly over its delicate pallor red finger-marks blazed out. Zenas said nothing. Slowly and with dignity he turned the other cheek. Thomas Dodd nearly knocked him out of his chair with a blow on the left jaw.

Then there was a crash. Zenas Lord's chair fell over backward and he was fighting Thomas Dodd. Zenas landed a terrible blow on the right cheek of Thomas, then on the left, with little fists that seemed as hard as steel. Zenas was a small man, but small men sometimes make mighty fighters. Zenas had always known he could fight. He would not, perhaps, have been a pacifist if he had not known that. Deep in his mind had lurked the knowledge of restrained power. For an old man he was amazing. He fairly seemed a blur of motion, so fast he rained blow after blow upon the other man.

Thomas Dodd was no coward. He had been taken by surprise. It was as if a dove had attacked him like a tiger; but he soon began to defend himself. Nothing except defense, and that only to a limited extent, was possible. As well attack a buzz-saw as that fierce old man who had turned from his precepts of peace.

Zenas simply could not be hit. When the blow landed he was not there, and immediately Thomas

received one. The two were all over the room. The table and the lamp and a vase of flowers went over, and water and oil trickled over the carpet.

The fighters collided against the silver-gleaming picture over the low mantel, and that crashed down. Zenas pushed Thomas against a gilt-framed mirror, and it cracked, and stars and fizzures appeared with noises of explosions.

Always Thomas was on the defense, trying to dodge those blows off the steely little fists of the peaceful man, and never got in one blow himself. Thomas's nose was bleeding, his mouth was puffing, his eyes were closing. He was panting terribly. He was game withal. Never once did he whimper, but he was being worsted.

At last both men crashed down on the floor, and Zenas was sitting on Thomas and pounding the floor with Thomas's great head. Zenas was now beyond himself. The blood which had been held so long in check by laws of peace was over the dam, in flood tide. He was dangerous and terrible.

Zenas pounded the floor with the head of Thomas, and Thomas was gasping when the two old Sylvester brothers, who lived next door, came rushing in. With them was their niece Adeline and her husband, Marion Leicester.

For a moment not one trusted vision. The whole was monstrous and incredible. That little old Zenas Lord, who had antagonized everybody in Leicester and the Barrs by his peaceful attitude when the world was at fighting-point, was himself

fighting and, it seemed, ready to murder another man, was unbelievable.

Marion Leicester, who wore the khaki and was home on furlough, stared. They all stared. Then Marion made a spring.

"You'll kill him if you don't stop that!" he called, and grasped Zenas's shoulders. They felt like shoulders of steel. Marion was strong, but he could not move those dreadful shoulders of rage. "Let up, for God's sake, man! You don't want to kill him!" he shouted.

Old Zenas twisted round a terrible face of white wrath. "That is just what I want to do," said he. "I want to kill him!"

Zenas made as if to give the floor another pound with the head of Thomas, but Adeline Leicester was before him. Thomas's head came down upon a very large feather cushion which Adeline had snatched from the sofa.

"Take away that damned thing!" screamed Zenas.

He snatched it away himself, and again raised the head. The two Sylvesters and Marion Leicester tugged at Zenas, but all three were not sufficient to prevent another thud.

"He'll kill him!" cried Adeline. She was sobbing and poising the sofa cushion when James Lord came in at a run.

"What in time——" he began.

"James! James!" gasped Adeline. "Your uncle has gone crazy! He's killing Mr. Dodd!"

Zenas unexpectedly spoke in a collected voice.

"I am not killing Thomas Dodd. I am killing war," said he.

"For Heaven's sake, give us a hand, Jim," gasped Marion Leicester, "or I believe in my soul your uncle will kill him! He's like a man made of steel."

As he spoke he again endeavored to get a hold on the old man's shoulders, but such awful tenacity of nerve and will was beyond his strength to overcome.

James was as small as his uncle and of about the same build, and he was young. Finally the four men forced Zenas into a chair, and Marion and James held him while the Sylvesters and Adeline attended to Thomas Dodd.

Presently Thomas Dodd was lying on the sofa, the blood washed from his face, a bandage soaked with linament on his left jaw and another wet with ice-water on his eye. He was still game. As soon as he could speak he turned his right eye in the direction of old Zenas, held in his chair like a restrained charge of dynamite.

"What in tunket possessed you?" he demanded.

Zenas glared at him.

"You're licked!" he proclaimed, in a high voice of triumph.

James stared at him. He really thought his uncle had gone stark mad.

"What made you fly in the face of Scripture?" snarled the old man on the sofa.

"Scripture doesn't say what's to be done when the second cheek is hit," declared Zenas.

"Hum!" demanded the old man on the sofa. "Do you mean to say the second cheek of your own country wasn't hit when Germany tried her devilish plots and blew up our factories and more ships, after the *Lusitania?*"

Zenas was silent.

"And wasn't more than both cheeks of every decent country on the face of the earth hit after Belgium, anyhow?" demanded Thomas Dodd. "Wasn't all humanity hit? Wasn't—God Almighty himself hit?"

After another silence Zenas spoke in a queer, shocked voice.

"Maybe you are right," he said.

"Of course I'm right! But you had to have both your own cheeks hammered, and behave like Germany yourself, making out you were the injured one and pitching into your friend, before you could get it into your hard head. Yes, sir, the United States of America had both cheeks hit, and her heart hit, and the God in whom she believes hit, before she sailed in. Now she's going to hit, and I guess Germany will be on the sofa before long about as beat out as I am. Well, it was worth it. If you hadn't owned up you could have used my head for a tack-hammer till you were convinced I did a good thing when I boxed you. When a man's hit himself it sort of drives things home."

"You are right," said Zenas. He was very pale, and his face wore a strange expression.

He looked shocked and exalted. He also had

been vanquished, although he bore not a mark on his wiry old body. Thomas Dodd had been subtly victorious. Zenas realized a soreness of his very soul, harder to be borne than all the bruises which he had inflicted on the other's body.

"It isn't Germany's body alone, but her soul we are fighting," he groaned, as if to himself.

"We are going to win," said Marion.

"Win fast enough," said Zenas, "but it's got to be a terrible victory. Germany on the sofa, body and soul!"

Suddenly he turned very pale and James caught him. The old pacifist had exhausted himself. He was helped into his bedroom and Adeline brought him a glass of port wine. He looked up at her after he had swallowed it.

"Sam Buzzy has got to keep his dog at home," said he.

"Lie still now and don't worry," said Adeline, soothingly.

"I am going to collect that demand note," said Zenas.

Adeline did not know what he meant.

"That's all right, so you shall. Don't worry," said she.

"How is Thomas going to get home?"

"Marion will drive him in the car."

"I didn't hurt him much?"

"No. Don't you worry."

After the Sylvesters had gone, and Marion had driven off, with Thomas Dodd propped up in the tonneau of the car, James Lord sat by himself in

the outer room. He thought it wiser to leave his uncle alone. The bedroom door was ajar and he could hear if he stirred.

James sat with a bewildered face until he heard the Leicester car return; then he jumped up and opened the door for Marion. Both men tiptoed back into the room.

"I think he's asleep," whispered James.

The two stood looking at each other.

"What possessed him?" whispered Marion.

"Hanged if I know. Say, Marion, it's hard luck. I want to enlist. I don't want to hang around here when it's a war like this war. I'm disgraced for life if I don't enlist."

"I suppose you have to——"

"Support him, yes. But if he would collect a demand note that's due him he would have enough to set me free."

Marion gave a low whistle.

"A demand note?"

"Yes, my uncle Abel's."

"He ought to pay."

"Of course he ought. He would pay, too, but of course he'd get mad. Uncle Abel never paid for anything without raising Cain, and Uncle Zenas is all for peace."

Marion tapped his head significantly.

"I don't know," said James. "Sometimes I wonder myself."

"You needn't wonder," said a voice. "I'm just as right in my head as you are." He was still very pale, old Zenas, standing there in the bedroom

door, but he spoke firmly. "I've made up my mind to fight a little for my own rights," said Zenas. "My fight with Thomas turned me clean round. I'm for every man that's able fighting for the country, and fighting for his own rights if he's able. Sam Buzzy has got to keep that dog of his home, and I'm going to collect that note, and—— Look here, James Lord, I've got money besides that. You go and enlist, and there will be plenty for you to buy yourself a good kit, everything you want, and you can stay in the army, for all me, as long as you live. Maybe you'll get promoted. I've had money enough all along, only I wouldn't tell because I didn't approve of war. Better hurry and enlist before the war's over."

James looked at him, frightened.

Old Zenas laughed.

"You needn't think I'm crazy," said he. "You enlist, and you fight for all you are worth, if you think anything of me."

"I don't know how to thank you, uncle," said James, in a bewildered fashion.

Zenas looked at the man in khaki, then at his nephew. A strange light was in his eyes. His peaceful acquiescence with the buffets of the century of wrath and terror was gone forever. He was now of his day, the dreadful Day for all the world. He understood. He could not fight the common foe as he had fought Thomas Dodd; he was too old. The din of battle and trench life was not for him, but in him blazed like a torch the war spirit.

"How can I ever thank you, uncle?" James said, again.

"The head of Germania on a charger," said old Zenas Lord.

THE SOLDIER MAN

TWO men sat at the study windows of the one large, pretentious house on the main street. One was Lawyer Jennings; the other, Dr. Wayne. They had been talking; now they sat gazing out of the windows at Henry Ludd. A little farther up the street was a small house painted green; at the right were rows of hothouses glistening in the sun with great patches of blinding light. In and out of the hothouses dashed Henry Ludd. He carried flower-pots and garden utensils, moving always with such intensity of velocity that it was fairly startling.

"That man is a psychological problem," said Wayne. "Theoretically he is not strong enough to do a day's work at the rate he is working now, but he does the work of ten men. He lacks physical strength, but he never gives in. No wonder they call him the Soldier Man. Sometimes it seems to me as if he were wound up to go a certain length of time like a mechanical toy soldier and nothing on earth can stop him. He can't even stop himself."

"He does go like a soldier," Jennings returned.

"He holds himself like one, walks as if he were drilling, and runs on the double-quick. They tell me he has had a hard life."

Jennings had lived in the village only a few years. Wayne and Henry Ludd had lived there all their lives.

"He has had nothing but a hard life from the time he drew his first breath," said Wayne. "He inclines one to believe in births under adverse stars. No use going over it all. The disasters would sound petty, but they were cataclysms to him. Henry's father came of an overwrought strain—as complex a network of intermarriages as if he had sprung from a royal dynasty. He died under forty, simply not enough strength to live. Henry's mother is of another type. Her race has for generations been possessed of an exceptional vitality of body and an abnormal vitality of mind, which has, in individual cases, amounted to menace. Sophia Ludd was a Jennings, and for two generations the Jenningses have been terrors. Sophia is one of the queerest of them. She seems to be a good woman, one that completely outdoes the wicked women in pure cussedness. She has kept all the Commandments to do them all the days of her life and tempted most people who have come within a stone's-throw of her to break them. Henry adores her. There he goes now, in to dinner. I don't believe he will eat enough to keep him alive. He gets thinner and thinner, but he must have a strong strain in him. He keeps on his little war-path."

"He is coming out again and going to the hothouse," said Jennings.

"He must have forgotten the flower for his mother. The poor devil is cursed with sentimentality with all the rest; always a fresh flower beside his mother's plate every meal. My housekeeper had it from Mrs. Jordan—the cousin who lives there."

"Yes, there he comes with a daffodil," said Jennings.

The men watched Henry dash into the house, bearing the long-stemmed golden flower.

Henry stopped in the kitchen to wash his hands and face at the sink. Lizzie Jordan, his father's second cousin, who lived with the Ludds, was taking some steaming vegetables from the stove. She cast a glance at the flower which Henry had laid carefully on the table while he was washing. She was an elderly woman, with a long, pale face which took on an expression of extreme scorn and impatience. She sniffed delicately with thin nostrils.

When Henry turned, after wiping his dripping face on the roller-towel, she spoke pleasantly enough. "Feel any more appetite this noon?" she asked.

"I guess so, Lizzie. I eat enough, anyway."

"You don't eat enough to keep a cat alive, and you know it, Henry Ludd!"

Henry laughed. His weary face was extremely sweet when he laughed. Lizzie felt a throb of affection for him. "It is the cat's own fault,

when the cooking is as good as yours, Lizzie," he said.

"More than cookin's needed sometimes."

"Now, Lizzie!"

"You work too hard."

"Nonsense!"

"And it ain't altogether the work. Every laborer is worthy of his hire. You don't get your hire, Henry Ludd."

"Nonsense, Lizzie!"

"You have never had your hire," repeated the woman, firmly. "This is some of your own new asparagus, and I do hope you relish that."

Henry looked disturbed. "You know how many bunches I have promised to sell," he said. "Of course I want Mother to have some, but——"

"I counted the stalks," replied Lizzie. "That's all right." She was arranging the asparagus on toast. She held her face, which wore a queer expression, averted from Henry.

When Lizzie summoned the others to dinner, there was a tall vase of flowers directly in front of Sophia Ludd's plate, concealing it from her son. Henry had eaten his asparagus, which had tempted his poor appetite before he noticed something; his mother had pushed her plate aside and was gazing at it with a scornful, catlike majesty.

"Why, what is the matter, Mother?" asked Henry, anxiously.

"Nothing," replied Sophia Ludd, in a thin voice of strained sweetness like a bird's. She said "Nothing" as if it were the universe.

Henry peered around the vase of flowers. "Why, Mother!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "You have all the ends. I must have had the tips myself." He looked reproachfully at Lizzie.

She met his eyes unflinchingly. She lied without a qualm. "My goodness!" said she. "I made a mistake. I mixed up the plates."

"And I have eaten up all the good asparagus," said Henry, mournfully. He eyed his empty plate, then his mother. He whitened a little before her direct, dark gaze. Sophia Ludd had magnificent dark eyes in her old woman's head.

Lizzie took another slice of bread. She always said she did not care for asparagus, until there was so much in the garden that Henry did not care to sell all of it. Lizzie lied a good deal, but had no moral scruples regarding it. She claimed that lies were a necessity if she lived with Sophia.

"I will get some more asparagus, and Lizzie will cook it," declared Henry. He half rose from his chair.

"Set down," said Sophia.

Henry sat down with an air of conciliation and alarm. "I am real sorry, Mother," he said, tenderly.

"Queer how I came to mix the plates," said Lizzie. Her tone was perfect. Nobody in his senses could have suspected a woman with that pale, almost stern, face of cherishing in the depths of her soul a fairly malignant impishness. Even Sophia, keen old woman, suspicious by nature, did not suspect Lizzie Jordan. She was, however, coldly in-

dignant with her. She refused with a glare a proffer of custard pie.

"Poor Mother didn't eat any dinner at all," Henry said to Lizzie afterward when they were alone in the kitchen.

"I set her pie in the pantry," said Lizzie, coolly. "Don't you worry, Henry. I guess your mother will eat it by and by. She 'most always eats a bite between meals."

"I hope she will," Henry said, pitifully.

"She will," said Lizzie.

After Henry had returned to his work, Lizzie laughed to herself over her dishes. "He got that asparagus down, anyhow," said she, quite aloud. She had good nerves. She did not start when Sophia, close at her side, said, "Hey?"

"Hey what?" said Lizzie.

"What did you say?"

"Me say? I didn't say anything. What's the matter, Sophia?"

"You were talkin'."

"Guess you were dreamin'. Who was I talkin' to? There ain't a soul here. Didn't think I was talkin' to the teakettle, did you?"

Sophia looked dazed. She was slightly deaf, and that made her less confident. She shook her head and rustled away. Sophia, old woman, very old woman though she was, had never capitulated to black raiment. She wore a gown of thin wool, bright blue in color, sprinkled with little crimson roses. It was an ancient fabric, but still in fair condition. The nice, white ruche at the throat was

fastened by a large hair brooch, set askew. There was always one askew note about Sophia. Her hair had never turned gray. It was auburn and smoothly crimped, and laid over her ears, fastened by a carved comb in the back. Her face was triumphantly beautiful, with a strange stateliness of beauty. Her skin was thick but very clear, and rose-tinged on the cheeks; her eyes were very large, dark, and clear. Her mouth was set in a smile which was unswerving. Sophia had smiled through life. It was a mask-smile, but few realized that. They said Mrs. Ludd always looked so serene and pleasant. The constant smile had produced some hard lines around her mouth, but the firmness of her skin modified them. She was very erect, although she carried herself with a slight stiffness. She seated herself beside a front window and folded her hands in her lap. They were smooth and white and showed no prominent veins. Sophia kept glancing at them. She was proud of her hands, which were not the hands of an old woman. Sophia used no beauty devices to preserve her youth, but she fought age with a steady, forbidding front of mind. Her one concession was in the matter of idleness. She was perfectly aware that physical ravages of years could no longer be held in check should she attempt to perform the tasks of youth or middle-age. She therefore sat quite still during the greater part of her days.

Henry passed the window, rake in hand. He glanced up at his mother, half worshipfully, half anxiously. His mind was still on the asparagus.

Sophia understood quite well what the look signified. She looked back at him with her unvarying smile.

Not long afterward she heard Lizzie go out. The kitchen door always banged. She knew she was taking the dinner scraps to feed the chickens. Sophia rose, stole stealthily out to the pantry. She found her custard pie and devoured it greedily. She then washed the plate at the kitchen sink and returned to her station at the window. The woman was in reality a queer character. Beyond an unswerving concern for her own welfare and pride in her own personality, she might hardly be said to exist. She never read; she never used her fingers for light feminine tasks. It seemed doubtful if she even thought, but she commanded from her son adoration, love, and the utmost sacrifice. She must have been aware of that, though it apparently afforded her no satisfaction. Henry, and his father before him, had always stepped and spoken as she wished. She was an unopposed creature, absolute in her petty place. She was primeval in her simplicity of self-interest. Henry years ago had fallen in love with Adela Dyce. Then Sophia had shown the subtlety which usually accompanies intense self-esteem. She had not made the least opposition. She had invited Adela to the house; she had talked about her as a daughter; she had made much of the girl; and Adela a few months later had told Henry flatly that she would never marry him unless he could furnish a separate establishment—that she refused to live with his mother.

Poor Henry Ludd had been overcome. When he had asked faintly if his mother had not treated Adela well, the girl had replied, dryly, "Well enough, but I won't live with her."

The engagement was broken. Henry could not afford the separate establishment and would not in any case have left his mother. Sophia had had her own way. Adela had not married. She was a music-teacher, and flitted about the village with a music-roll, prettily dressed and alert. Henry often met her, and she greeted him, but hurriedly. It was as if Adela feared lest Henry should renew his wooing. Nothing could have been farther from his thoughts. He still loved her, but he had renounced her. When he heard of some other man paying her attention, he felt even a sad delight. He thought it hard that she should not be married and have her own home, but spend her life teaching music to other people's children. Henry had at first suffered at the collapse of his love-dream. Now he suffered no longer. Adela had become to him as a sweet past day of youth.

He wondered still concerning her attitude toward his mother. He had expressed that wonder to Lizzie Jordan at the time the engagement was broken. "Don't ever speak of it, Lizzie," he had said, "for it would break poor Mother's heart, but Adela thought she couldn't live with Mother. Mother was as nice and loving to her as could be, too. I don't understand it."

"Yes, it does seem strange," assented Lizzie.

When Henry then had gone out, Lizzie, who

was a rather young widow, her husband having just died, shook her thin fist at the parlor where Sophia sat. "Live with you and married to your son!" said she. "Lord! I'd as soon marry the old Harry himself and live with his mother!"

As the years went by many people who had blamed Adela Dyce for her attitude toward Sophia and her treatment of Henry gradually took another view. In some way Sophia had been at least partly found out. Lizzie Jordan had perhaps dropped a few hints. People began to say that Adela had shown sense in not marrying Henry and going to live with his mother. She was still pretty and popular. She sang in the church choir. Sunday after Sunday Henry heard Adela's soprano soaring in the lilt of sacred song. He heard it peacefully. Occasionally he glanced at her, seated before them all in her Sunday bravery, and there was peace and courage in his look. It would have torn his heart had Adela looked sad and old and ill-kempt, as if she had ceased to value herself. He was glad that she was prosperous. He had a curious pride in her which his mother never offended.

Sophia seldom spoke of her; when she did, it was with praise and a sympathetic undertone for her son. "She is a real smart girl," she said one day when she had watched Adela trip past the house in her pretty gray suit, with roses nodding on her hat. "I suppose a lot of girls like her that can earn money do hate to marry and settle down to housework, and they may back out and hurt feelings without realizing what they're doing."

"Guess you are right, Mother," said Henry.

When he went out in the kitchen and saw Lizzie over the cook-stove with her face flushed, he tried to feel glad that she was not Adela. He thought how sweet his mother was, how kind and understanding. He returned, with no repining, to his back-breaking labor.

Gradually the epithet "Soldier Man" was fastened upon him. It may have been from his almost painful erectness of carriage, as if he would disavow all the burdens of his life and keep in step with the rank and file of the successful who had lived to see the fulfilment of their hopes of youth; it may have been from his speed of movement, which suggested attack upon labor itself with a stern purpose of conquest; it may have been for some subtler reason in the character of the man which people recognized but could not specify. It is certain that, laboring year in and out without the personal benefit which a man has a right to expect from his toil, he labored like one under marching orders, which were not for him to disregard or question, but to obey with his cheerful might. He charged the fertile ground with seeds. His flowers and vegetables, standing in brave order of life, might have been a host which he commanded, not for self, but for something beyond his humble outlook.

Henry unquestionably derived much pleasure from his brilliant flower-beds and his glass houses steaming with the green breaths of lusty plants, from his vegetable garden which was wonderful

and brought him considerable profit, and mostly from the comforts and luxuries which he added every year to his mother's possessions. He furnished the little parlor anew in a manner which to him savored of magnificence. He bought a talking-machine on the instalment plan, and it gave him intense delight. Although Sophia liked it, the fixed smile on her face did not intensify while the thing sang and made music and talked, but in her watching son's face was a rapture which was almost holy.

The machine was not a very good one. Poor Henry had been cheated. Lizzie Jordan knew, but she lied and praised it as a wonder. Lizzie was not quite old enough to be Henry's mother, but she loved him as if he were her son, carpingly, adoringly. She thought him at once a fool and perfection. Lizzie alone made Henry's home for him, although he did not know it. The complacent old creature in the parlor window filled to his mind all the requirements of home. Sophia was as a lily of the field, made self-conscious of its own importance. She sat in her parlor as in a crystal of regal isolation. There was something stupendous about so much satisfaction and so much pride over so little. Sophia Ludd was as complacent with her life as any woman could be, until the cold winter of the catastrophe. The catastrophe was the burning to the ground of poor Henry Ludd's greenhouses and the destruction of their flowers and ferns and palms. It was the more cruel because it happened just before Easter, and hundreds of stately Easter

lilies were sacrificed. Henry saved a few, almost at the risk of his life. He felt as if he were saving children as he carried them into the house. The house was never in danger because the wind was blowing a gale away from it. Sophia stood at a window and watched the fire. On her face was a curious expression—the combination of her unswerving smile and a balked rage of eyes and brows. Sophia did not wish the hothouses to be burned. She could not understand why, since she did not wish it, they should be burned. She was very quiet. Nothing could excite her, at least on the surface. When Henry came bringing in his rescued lilies, she observed, calmly, "Put some water on that fire and put it out."

"Land sake! 'ain't she got any sense, standin' there and seein' our fire company and the two others they sent for playin' on it and not puttin' it out because they can't?" said Lizzie.

Either Sophia did not hear her or did not choose to admit she did. "Put some water on that fire," she ordered again.

"Don't you worry, Mother," said Henry. He stifled a groan as he went out. He carried no insurance, and he faced a great calamity. Still he moved with his usual erectness, and did not for a moment lose his self-control. He saved what he could, and worked to as good purpose as he could with the crash of glass in his ears and the dreadful sight of his cherished nurslings shriveling in white heat. When it was all over and the fire companies had gone, and only a few sympathiz-

ing neighbors were left, he maintained his steady bearing.

"It's a shame, Henry," said one man. Another clapped him on the shoulder and bade him not be discouraged. Henry smiled. Then his face stiffened into a new expression which it wore the rest of his life. His mouth looked like that of a hurt and wondering child; the upper part of his face dominated it with a stern invincibility. The neighbors stared at him as he went into the house. "Pretty hard luck, I call it," said one. "Henry has worked like a slave all his life and he 'ain't got anything out of it. He built those greenhouses himself, poor feller!" said another.

The door opened, and Lizzie Jordan came with cups and saucers and sugar and milk on a tray. Henry followed, bearing a great tin coffee-pot. Lizzie had made the coffee. It was a cheap brand and boiled—not a delicious beverage, but the neighbors, who had worked hard to save Henry's property, had never drank much better, and they were grateful. Henry, still with that new expression on his face, followed Lizzie about, filling the cups. There were both men and women in the throng. Some of the women wept as they sipped the coffee. "Poor feller!" they whispered to one another, "thinkin' of givin' us coffee when he's met such a dreadful loss!"

After the people had all gone, Henry watched the glowing bed of coals where his beloved hothouses had stood. He feared lest the wind should change and there be danger for the house. He did

not go in until the east was pale with dawn and the wind had gone down. His mother was in her bed in her room off the parlor, and she called him. "Henry Ludd, you come here," said she.

Henry obeyed. He stood beside the high, white billow of bed and looked down at the beautiful, old, accusing face. Sophia still smiled, but her eyes were like black ice covering terrible depths of self.

"Why didn't you put water on and put that fire out?" said she.

"Don't you worry, Mother. We all did the best we could. There were three fire companies, and they worked hard."

Sophia snorted. "Better have tried to put that fire out with my teakettle," said she. "Fire companies! They don't know how to put out fires."

"Don't you worry, Mother."

"What you goin' to do now, Henry Ludd?"

"Just the best I can. Don't you worry, Mother."

"You 'ain't got anything to sell, except them few lilies you brought in. What you goin' to do?"

"Don't you worry, Mother."

"That ain't answerin' me. What be you goin' to do? You have got outdoors left, and when summer comes you'll have things to sell out of the garden, but you 'ain't got them greenhouses. What be you goin' to do?"

"I am goin' to build some new greenhouses, Mother; have them up in a jiffy. Don't you worry."

Suddenly Sophia Ludd sat up in bed and stared at him. "Stand in front of me. I want to look

at you, Henry Ludd," she ordered. Henry obeyed. "What have you been doin' to your face, Henry Ludd?"

Henry passed a hand over his face in a bewildered fashion. "Is it black?" he asked.

"No, it ain't black; but you don't look natural. What makes you look that way, Henry Ludd?"

"I guess I don't know what you mean, Mother. Don't you worry. It is going to be all right."

Sophia sank back on her pillows. "Well, if none of all you men couldn't put water on that fire and put it out before everything burned up, I can't help it," said she. "I'm goin' to try and get a little sleep. You hadn't ought to have had the fire in the first place. You might have known how it would upset me."

"I can't think how it started," Henry said, thoughtfully.

"It don't make much difference now how it started," said his mother, with asperity. "What made the difference was, it burnt down with a lot of men standin' round and lettin' of it. Shut my door when you go out, Henry Ludd."

Henry went out, closing the door softly.

Lizzie Jordan was waiting for him. "You come right in and have your nice hot breakfast. I've made some fresh coffee for you," she said. Henry obeyed with a sort of stern apathy. Lizzie watched his face in a puzzled way as he ate. "Don't you take it to heart too much, Henry," she said.

"Oh no, I won't take it to heart too much, Lizzie," replied Henry. "Don't you worry. I am

sorry about poor Mother. I had planned to build a bay-window in the parlor for her this spring and have the piazza screened. I can build the greenhouses again. I shall catch up all right. But I am sorry about poor Mother. Somehow she doesn't seem to sense it just right."

"No, she don't," agreed Lizzie, dryly.

"She keeps on asking why we didn't put the fire out. Everything was done that could be. Poor Mother doesn't understand."

"No, I guess she don't. Have you any idea how that fire started, Henry?"

Henry regarded her in a puzzled way. "Why, no, I haven't the slightest idea. I left everything all right. Of course it is nonsense to think they were set on fire."

Lizzie Jordan looked at Henry Ludd. At times her long, pale face had the expression of a mystic. It had now. "I think your greenhouses were set on fire, Henry," she said, firmly.

"Lizzie!"

"I think they were set on fire. I think the fire was 'lotted out to you just as other hard things have been. You were born to bad luck, Henry. No use talkin'; you know it. You fight your luck and you're goin' to win out in the end, because you're a born fighter, but you were born to bad luck. It was your bad luck set that fire."

"Lizzie!"

"It is so. When folks are born to bad luck just such things happen. Your greenhouses were set on fire by your bad luck. They burned up because

they were *yours,* and you were made so you wouldn't own you were beat, but would set to and build 'em up again. Maybe they'll burn again. You will keep on buildin' and fightin' and—you sort of like it."

Henry regarded her with his strange new expression—that of a fighter of the world, made up of the unquestioning obedience and wonder, before fate, of a child and of the indomitable purpose of a man. "Maybe you're right, Lizzie," he said. "To tell the truth, I don't feel as discouraged as I should think I would, and I'm going to see about new glass and lumber this morning."

"Eat a good breakfast," said Lizzie.

Henry ate heartily, and was off.

It was later than usual when Sophia Ludd rose. She came out in the kitchen, in her nice gray skirt covered with a lace-trimmed white apron, with her blue-flannel dressing-sack. Her hair was carefully arranged, and she smiled as usual, but her face looked hard, almost cruel.

"I'll get your breakfast ready in a minute," said Lizzie. "Pretty hard lines for poor Henry, ain't it?"

"He had ought to have seen to it that the fire was put out," said Sophia, firmly. She sat down in the rocking-chair by the south window, and the sunlight illumined her crinkly auburn hair. She gazed out at the lamentable ruins of her son's hothouses. They still smoked, and here and there fire gleamed out in a gust of wind. "After I've had my breakfast," said Sophia, "I wish you would bring them

lilies Henry lugged out of the fire, in here. They are so sweet they are sickish all through the front of the house."

"All right," said Lizzie.

"Whose little boy is that comin' in the yard?" asked Sophia.

"Why, that's Sammy Harkins. I guess he's comin' with your paper. I guess he's been down to the post-office and his folks told him to get it, because they thought Henry would be busy this mornin'. Mis' Harkins is real thoughtful." Lizzie went to the door and returned with a letter.

Sophia reached out for the letter. She scrutinized it carefully, but did not open it. After Lizzie had set her breakfast out on the kitchen table she ate. Then she went into her parlor. Lizzie had moved the lilies, but the room was still sweet with them. Sophia sniffed angrily, still smiling. She sat beside the window, holding the still unopened letter. Neighbors began to come in. They talked about the fire and condoled with her. Many brought offerings of cake and pies and tumblers of jelly. They told her not to worry herself sick about the fire, and Sophia smiled and regarded them with her hard eyes, and observed that the fire ought to have been put out. She seemed not to hear the assurances that everything possible to extinguish it had been done.

She did not open the letter until noon. Lizzie came in and saw that Sophia had opened it. She said nothing. She paused imperceptibly, but the other woman gave no information. Lizzie went

out with a little flounce. "Let her keep her letter to herself if she wants to," she muttered. Sometimes Sophia's deafness was an unworthy source of satisfaction to Lizzie Jordan.

Henry came home at noon. He looked tired but unconquerable. He did not talk much. Sophia said nothing about her letter. She did not tell him until that evening. Lizzie went to evening meeting, and when she returned Sophia had gone to bed, and Henry met her in the kitchen.

"Mother, it seems, had a letter this morning," he began, abruptly.

Lizzie nodded.

"She has just been telling me about it. Has she told you?"

"No, she hasn't."

"Well, it seems that Aunt Jane, out in Ohio—Mother's only sister, you know——"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, her daughter has just married a very rich man and gone to California to live, and Aunt Jane didn't want to give up her own home. She is pretty well fixed, you know."

"Yes, I know. Jane is the same relation to me that your mother is. I always knew she married a man that made money."

"Well, it seems that she has a nice place and plenty to run it, and keeps two girls and a man and horse and carriage, and she is sort of lonesome since Cousin Clara got married, and she wants Mother to come on and make her a long visit. Mother seems to want to go."

Lizzie looked at Henry. "Why, Henry Ludd, you poor man!" she said. She saw Henry's tired, brave eyes shining with tears.

Henry gave his head a quick lift. "Oh, it's all right," he said, steadily. "I can see how poor Mother feels. She hasn't seen her sister for years, and Aunt Jane lives nicely, and, now I've got to build up again, I can't do as much as I would like to for her. Aunt Jane says she knows a man that's coming on this way on business, and he'll take charge of Mother out there, and Aunt Jane sent a check for expenses."

"Henry Ludd!"

"What is it, Lizzie?"

"Your mother hasn't been writing Jane that she hasn't had enough done for her!"

"Mother wouldn't dream of such a thing!" said Henry. "Lizzie, I'm ashamed of you."

Lizzie said nothing.

"I guess Mother'd better go," said Henry.

"When?"

"Two weeks from to-day, Mother says; the man will stop here on his way and take her along. Mother seems—quite—pleased. She hasn't had much, no change at all for years."

"Neither have you."

"I have my work. All poor Mother has had has been to sit there by that window day in and out. It will do her good. First I thought she was too old to take such a trip, but Mother seems a good deal younger than she is, and I guess it will do her good."

After Henry went out, Lizzie said to herself, "She wrote to Jane just as soon as she heard Clara was married."

Sophia went. The man from the Ohio village created a furore by motoring out from the city and taking her and her little trunk in to catch the Western train. Henry went to see his mother off. She looked strange, seated in her section in the sleeping-car, strange and very remote. Poor Henry felt himself beneath his beautiful old mother traveling in state. Sophia smiled as ever when Henry bade her good-by. She showed no regret whatever.

Henry, returning home, called upon all his store of courage. When he walked up from the station, the neighbors, looking out of windows, remarked that they guessed it was a sort of relief to poor Henry to have Sophia go.

Lizzie had a nice supper ready for Henry, but he could not eat much. When Lizzie was washing the dishes she wept a little, softly, out of pity for him.

The next day Henry worked as if for his life. He had been obliged to mortgage his house to obtain money for his new hothouses. When Sophia had been called upon to sign the mortgage she had made no demur, but Henry felt mortally ashamed. Henry did most of the work himself. Then Lizzie Jordan's half-brother Tom came and offered to work for his board. He was a silent, elderly man and a good worker. Henry was glad to have him.

The hothouses were finished and affairs moving much as before the fire when a letter came from Sophia. Jane wished her to remain there as long

as she lived if she only would; Sophia realized that she had been a great expense to Henry, and now there was the mortgage and the interest to pay, and she had everything she wanted and was more comfortable than she could be at home, and she knew how much Henry would think of that.

Henry turned ghastly white when he read the letter, but he told the news to Lizzie and her brother Tom without a flinch. "You see, it is pleasanter for poor Mother out there," he said. "She always wanted a bath-room, and she has one just for herself; and she has a screened piazza to sit on, and she is waited on hand and foot."

"She was here," Lizzie could not help interpolating.

"Of course she was, Lizzie, but there is more to do with there. And Mother always liked nice things, poor woman! She writes about the beautiful things she has to eat, and she goes out to ride every pleasant day. I don't blame her for wanting to stay."

Henry walked just a bit unsteadily as he left the room. "A saint with a pig for a mother if ever there was one!" Lizzie said to Tom. "How in the world Sophia Ludd ever had such a son as Henry!"

Tom grunted. He was a very silent man, but very much attached to his sister and Henry.

It was not long after that when Adela Dyce stopped and spoke to Henry. They were both coming out of the post-office. Adela inquired for his mother, and Henry replied that she was well and enjoying herself.

"Is it true what I hear, that she is going to live out there?" asked Adela. Then she flushed a deep crimson, and Henry saw it, and his schooled heart stirred.

They walked along together, and he told her about his mother. Adela decided that Sophia would most certainly live out there. She glanced up at Henry. Once she had loved him, or thought she had. He was not a bad figure of man, with his erect carriage and his expression denoting depths of firm character. Although he went rather shabby, his clothes were neat. Adela was growing older and had no suitor. When they parted, she asked Henry to call and see her.

Henry did not go. He scarcely realized that she was serious in her invitation; besides, he did not yet exactly care about going.

Soon they met again at the post-office, and Henry had just read another letter from his mother. The letter sounded fairly snobbish with pride and delight in her mode of life. There was something wistful in the man's attitude as he listened again to the woman he had expected to marry. He went to call on her that evening.

It was not long before everybody knew that Henry and Adela were to be married, after all. Henry told Lizzie. "We want you to stay here just the same," he said. "You and Tom. Adela doesn't want to give up her music scholars. She says that, after all these years, she has got her hand out of housekeeping, and she feels she had better keep on with the music. I don't

quite like to have her, but she seems set on it, somehow."

"Most women you have anything to do with do seem set," retorted Lizzie. Her face was flushed and there was anger in her voice. She disliked Adela Dyce.

Henry looked anxiously at her. "You don't mean you won't stay, Lizzie?"

"Oh, I've stood a good deal, and I guess I can stand a little more," said Lizzie.

When Henry had gone to see Adela that evening she spoke her mind to her brother. "Land! it's bad enough for a man that's a mix betwixt a saint and a soldier of the Lord to have a pig for a mother without having a pig for a wife," said she.

Tom grunted and looked melancholy.

However, the general feeling in the village was one of kindly congratulation. His friends agreed that they were glad that at last poor Henry Ludd was to have some good luck. Even people who had not entirely liked Adela saw her glorified by Henry's long, faithful love, and approved.

Unexpectedly Henry's business affairs took on a more prosperous aspect. A contract to supply a large city market with vegetables was offered him, and Henry's vegetable garden was more successful than ever that season. He saw his way clear to soon paying the mortgage. He was going to marry Adela in the fall. Insensibly he had ceased to regret his mother's absence. There was apparently no reason why Henry Ludd should not be happy, and yet he did not look as well as he had done.

Something seemed missing which had tended to his retention of more than the strength of youth—the fighting strength of the man. He no longer walked soldier-wise. He stooped slightly. He no longer moved as if in a swift charge upon untoward circumstances. People observed with wonder that Henry Ludd did not look as young and well now that he was happy and things were going his way at last.

Then came the letter from Sophia, informing him that she was coming home. She insinuated gently that her sister Jane was not easy to live with, also that she missed her dear son.

The true reason for the return Lizzie Jordan did not doubt. She had told her brother Tom, soon after Henry's engagement, "You mark my words, Sophia Ludd ain't goin' to stay out West and have Adela Dyce here usin' her things."

Henry read the letter calmly. He told Lizzie calmly. He showed no disturbance, if he felt any. That evening he told Adela. The two were sitting in Adela's studio, where she had her music classes. "Mother is coming home," he said, abruptly.

"To stay?" asked Adela. She immediately knew that she was brutal, but the situation was brutal for herself.

"Yes," replied Henry. When he spoke he knew that his romance was now over for all time. He did not even ask Adela if she would live with his mother. He accepted the fact. "I am sorry, Adela, that it must happen again," he said, quite simply.

Adela looked at him in a stunned fashion. She was not altogether an unselfish woman; she was not of an affectionate nature, but such love as she had to give she gave Henry. She gave in larger measure than before. The man now represented more than he had done years ago. Henry looked at her white shocked face. Adela was still pretty. The expression in her blue eyes clutched at his heart. "I know it don't seem fair to you—the second time,'" he said.

Adela looked about the studio. "Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose," she said, in a despairing, listless voice.

"Adela.'"

"Yes, Henry."

"I don't see quite why you feel as you do about Mother."

Adela did not answer.

"She treated you real well, it seemed to me."

Adela looked at him. She was a shrewd woman. She understood the man's mother. The man loved *her,* and Sophia was not there. She opened her mouth to speak. Then she closed it. There was something noble about her face. "She was never unkind to me," she said.

"Then——?"

"It is no use, Henry. I think a great deal of you, but I know it can't be," said Adela, firmly. She rose and stood before Henry, tall and pale and pretty in her blue dress. She put her hands on the man's shoulders and drew his face down. He kissed her. "There," said Adela, "we must make

the best of the snarl of life we are in. Cutting the snarl would be worse than you know, and trying to unsnarl would only make the cutting inevitable. You will have your mother, and your love for her is the best thing about you. Though I feel as I do, I am not sure that I don't think more of you just because of that. You will have your mother, and I have my work."

"Music means a great deal to you?" asked Henry, wistfully.

"Yes, a great deal," said Adela.

He went soon afterward. He did not feel as unhappy as he had expected, not even although he knew that his contract with the city market was at an end. Some man had underbid him. He felt dimly the return of something—of some superlatively good thing which he had missed during his weeks of happiness and success. If he had heretofore walked like a soldier, he now walked like a general at the head of an army which spelled victory.

The next morning when he went out a man said to another, "Henry Ludd looks like himself this morning."

Lizzie Jordan watched him when he entered the yard at noontime, and said to herself, in her colloquial mutter: "Henry has had bad news about business and he ain't goin' to be married. He looks like himself." Then she added, thinking of her own personal interest, "Well, I know what I have to put up with livin' with Sophia Ludd, but I was kind of in the dark about Adela Dyce."

Henry came in and ate his dinner. He told his news calmly. "Well, it seems Adela and I have thought better about getting married," said he, "and Mother is coming home."

After dinner Henry attacked his work with his old magnificent energy. Some souls are truly themselves and truly at home only on the battlefields, great or petty, of their lives. Henry was one of them. Steeled to meet disaster, he had a strange weakness, which might in time have tended to deterioration before ease and happiness. He harked eagerly back to the fight, which was, after all, the love of his life.

THE RING WITH THE GREEN STONE

ANN LIVINGSTONE sat swaying back and forth in her green cane rocker on her front porch. About her was such strength of green light of tree-boughs, ruffling in a southwest wind, that even the folds of her black-silk skirt showed faint reflexes of that color. Her smooth, blond hair had a greenish cast. It was, of all her fair, slender, middle-aged figure, as if it were seen through depths of levels of green water, like a mermaid's. It may be that people, like landscapes, have their color-schemes. Ann had always loved the soothing background color of the earth-green. She had surrounded herself with it. Her home was vine-screened and surrounded by trees and hedges. In her youth she had worn green gowns; now she wore black, and left the green to her daughter Ruth, who had inherited her mother's love of the color.

The porch was sweet with blooming roses and elder-flowers, and other indefinite odors, blending in a bouquet of perfume. Presently there cut through it a pungent odor of tobacco. Ann glanced over her shoulder and saw her brother Stephen's

face framed in a window. It was a large, handsome, elderly face, white-bearded and keen-eyed.

"Has Ruth come?" the man asked.

"No. I am waiting for her. You know she stayed at Jim Gordon's mother's longer than she expected. Charlotte Gordon was perfectly sweet when Jim became engaged to Ruth; she insisted that he should use the setting of her own engagement-ring for the one he gave Ruth, and it was too small and had to be enlarged."

"What became of the stone in Jim's mother's own ring?"

"She must have lost it, I suppose. Anyway, the setting is hand-wrought Indian gold and very beautiful."

"What is the stone?"

"Oh, an emerald, of course. Ruth is as much a crank over green as her old mother. Here she comes now. She will be so delighted to see you."

The man lounged out as a car rolled up, and a girl sprang out. She was fair, like her mother, very pretty, and clad in pale green like a fairy. She fluttered lightly up the steps, kissed her mother, and made round blue eyes of interrogation at the man.

"Your uncle Stephen, dearest," said Ann. "He has left the West for good, and is going to stay here with us."

The girl made a dart at the man. She flung her arms around his neck. She was curiously child-like in her ways. Her voice even struck unexpectedly sudden high, sweet cadences, like a child's.

"I am so glad you have come, Uncle Stephen!" said she.

Ruth's hair was of a light, feathery quality, fluffed about her small face. She stood looking at her uncle smilingly, and teetered a little on her toes, with an effect of dancing.

"Does she look like me, Stephen?" asked Ann.

"She looks like herself, and nobody else on earth, unless it is a queer kind of humming-bird," said Stephen.

He held the girl off and shook her slender shoulders and regarded her with tenderness, this little, slight beauty of a girl, who looked at him with the questioning eyes of a child, ready to be loved, ready to shrink if flouted. Suddenly a serious expression came over her face.

"You know about Jim?" she asked. "Mother has told you?"

"She has told me you were going to leave just as I got where I could see a little of you and your mother after all these years," said Stephen. He looked rather grave. His own romance of life had failed.

"Jim and I are always to spend our summers here," said Ruth; "and if you stay with mother, everything will be just complete. All that troubled me was leaving mother, winters. Of course she will stay a great deal in the city with Jim and me. And now you can come, too, Uncle Stephen. I am not going to leave."

"Girls like you are born to leave," said Stephen, laughing. "What are wings for?"

Ruth, starting quickly, stood away and gazed intently at her left hand.

"What is the matter, Ruth?" asked her mother.

"My ring doesn't shine as much as I thought it did," Ruth answered.

"It is only because it is so dark in here. You must remember this porch is always twilight with the vines."

"I suppose that is it. But it startled me all of a sudden. It had always blazed up in my eyes like a green dewdrop, and then it did not."

"Nonsense," said Ann. "You forget that no jewel except a diamond will show much light in a gloomy place."

"And not all diamonds," said Stephen. His shrewd eyes looked shrewder. "May I see your ring now, Ruth?" he asked.

Ruth extended her hand simply. She looked at him for admiration. Stephen bent over the little hand, on which was the ring with the large green stone. He gave a hardly perceptible start.

"Isn't it a beauty, Uncle Stephen?"

"Do you object to taking the ring off, dear?" asked Stephen.

Ruth laughed. "Oh, goodness, no! I am not superstitious, and, anyway, the ring has been off since Jim put it on a number of times. The setting was Mrs. Gordon's, Jim's mother's. It was too large, and it had to be altered. I was without any engagement-ring for several days while I was away."

Ruth took the ring from her finger and handed

it to her uncle. He rose leisurely and went down the steps into the broad sunlight. When he returned he looked pale, but he was smiling.

Ruth held out her hand for the ring. "Isn't it wonderful, Uncle Stephen?" she cried, eagerly.

"Yes, very wonderful. Nothing like an emerald for beauty among the whole list of gems," replied Stephen.

While his niece was readjusting the ring he made a slight gesture to his sister.

"You had better go to your room and change your dress for dinner, dear," Ann said immediately.

After the girl had gone Stephen turned to his sister, and her face was as pale as his. "What is it, Stephen?"

"Ann, you must simply call up your courage."

"I am ready," said she, steadily.

"That stone is not an emerald. It is only a clever imitation."

"Stephen!"

"I am positive. I know quite a good deal about gems. It is a clever imitation; I have never seen one just like it. When the child spoke about its not shining I began to suspect. When I had it down there in the sunlight, I knew."

"Stephen, do you realize the full import if it is not?"

"Yes, I am afraid I do. Can the child hear?"

"No; her room is on the other side."

"It means a good deal more than a fake gem. It means a fake man."

"Stephen, there must be some mistake. Jim Gordon is the soul of honor. He cannot know."

"Where did he buy the stone?"

"At Lord & Lovejoy's."

"The best and most reliable firm in the city. Are you sure?"

"He said so. He said, and laughed, that he had to take their word for it; that he knew nothing about precious stones. He said that they declared it was the finest emerald that had ever come into their possession."

Stephen Ward looked grim. "I will make it my business to see these gentlemen to-morrow," said he. "I will take the ring in and ask a few questions."

"Stephen, Ruth will suspect."

"She will have to know finally, I fear, in simple justice to her and her future life. But she will not suspect to-morrow. The stone is a little loose in the setting. Queer work that is for a firm like Lord & Lovejoy."

"Stephen."

"What, dear? Don't look so pale."

"There may be a dishonest salesman."

"Yes, there may be. I intend to find out."

"It is not, of course, the value of the stone," said Ann in a low, distressed voice. "It is the imputation cast upon——"

"The man who gave it to her? Yes."

"Jim is rich. He can afford anything. But if he were poor—to give her an imitation gem and tell her it was an emerald——"

"It means, of course, that the man ranks with the spurious stone," said Stephen Ward.

"Don't tell Ruth."

"Why, Ann, would you dare not tell her?"

"It would break her heart."

"It might be a cleaner break than she would get if she married the man."

"It may be the salesman. You know there are dishonest salesmen. You know there are, Stephen."

"Yes, there are. We will call it the salesman to-night. We won't let the child suspect. There is no sense in doing that until I have made sure." Stephen sat staring gloomily. He was reflecting. "A firm like Lord & Lovejoy does not employ dishonest salesmen." The sentence rang in his mental consciousness; however, he concealed it.

The next morning it was easy enough to tell Ruth that he had discovered when he had examined the ring the night before that the setting was loose, and that he was going to the city on business, and would take the ring to the jeweler's and have it attended to, and bring it back with him that night.

Ruth agreed in a panic. "Oh," she cried, "how perfectly dreadful it would be if I had lost my beautiful emerald the way Jim's mother lost the stone from this same setting! Oh, do take it, Uncle Stephen, and be sure they fix it to-day, because Jim may be here to-morrow, and I don't want him to find me without it."

When Stephen returned that night he found his sister alone on the porch.

"Ruth has gone out in the Waites' car," she said.

"I am glad," said Stephen, settling heavily into a chair and wiping his forehead. The day had been warm.

Ann looked at him, with apprehension.

"It is pretty bad, Ann. That is, it looks pretty bad."

"The salesman?"

"I was at once assured, with no questions on my part, by the senior member of the firm, that of course no one in their employ could be for a second suspected. I had to agree. The supposition is as practically impossible, with people like that, as spurious stones."

"Then——?"

"I saw Mr. Lord and his son, and Mr. Lovejoy and others. I stayed an hour in their private office. A magnificent emerald was put in the setting of this ring."

Stephen took the little box from his pocket, opened it, and removed the ring. The green stone, exactly the color of an emerald, greeted their scrutiny like a defiant eye of mystery. "They said a great deal about the beauty of the setting," Stephen remarked, gloomily.

"And the stone?"

"They said very little. I said very little. What could I say? The members of that old firm are gentlemen. Besides, my position was peculiar. I could not accuse them of selling an imitation emerald to the man engaged to be married to my own niece. You understand very well that——"

Ann's face paled, and took on an expression as of one who faced fire. "I understand perfectly that a counter-accusation might have been made; and yet, Jim Gordon——"

"Jim is no more of a gentleman, he has no greater reputation for honor, than the members of that old and honorable commercial house."

"Jim simply could not knowingly have given Ruth a spurious emerald for a betrothal ring," Ann said.

"No; I agree with you. He could not. He did not. And yet——"

"You think Ruth must be told?"

"It is imperative that Ruth be told."

"She will not be in the least influenced. Her faith in Jim will not waver a hair."

"All the same, in simple justice to the child, she must be told."

Ann leaned her head back on her chair. "You will have to tell her, Stephen," she said, faintly. "Ruth must not associate her own mother with this horrible thing."

"Very well, I will tell her," replied Stephen. "It is not an enviable task, but I agree with you. She must not have the first shock from her mother. It is monstrous."

"She will be home before long," said Ann. She regarded her brother pitifully.

"You go to your room, old girl, and lie down, and leave me to face the music," Stephen said, kindly.

He was sitting alone on the porch, smoking,

when Ruth returned. Her uncle thought he had never seen her look so lovely and so radiantly happy.

"Such a ride!" she cried. "And I have had a note from Jim, and he is coming to-night."

"Here is your ring, my dear," said Stephen. There was nothing unusual in his voice. Ruth held out her hand readily for the ring. She looked at the green stone and frowned a little.

"Strange how dim the emerald looks in here," she said.

"Do you want me to tell you why, my dear?"

Ruth gazed at him. "Why? I don't understand what you mean, Uncle Stephen."

"You know that I am rather wise about gems?"

"Yes, of course. Mother has told me. I know you have a valuable collection."

"Are you sure you want me to tell you?"

"To tell why my emerald looks so very dim in this light? Yes."

"My dear Ruth, it is not an emerald."

"What is it?"

"A very clever imitation."

Ruth's face did not change color, but all the lines seemed to harden. It was like watching the petrifaction of a rose.

Suddenly Ann's face appeared in the doorway. Her anxiety had not allowed her to remain absent. She listened, pale and breathless.

"Why do you think that?" Ruth asked in an even voice.

"I know considerable about gems. I have the

opinions of Lord & Lovejoy and a recognized expert. That stone is not an emerald. They did not sell that stone. Moreover, that firm never allowed a ring to leave their house as badly set as that was yesterday."

Ruth turned slightly and saw her mother. "Will Lord & Lovejoy or anybody else make this public?" she asked.

"I have their word of honor that they will not, and you know that neither your mother nor I will, but Ruth——"

Ruth faced them both in a sudden whirl of defiance. "Listen," she said in her voice with the high, childish note—"listen. I do not care what Lord & Lovejoy say; I do not care what anybody on earth says; I do not care now; I shall never care. I do not care whether this green stone in this ring is an emerald or not. It does not concern me. All that concerns me is Jim. All the world and all the precious stones in the world can never make any difference with me. I do not know anything about this green stone. I do not know how it got in the ring. Understand, mother; understand, Uncle Stephen, I do not care. You are never to speak to me of this again."

"But, Ruth, you—must believe——" Ann began, faintly.

"I believe nothing, either one way or the other," replied Ruth, with a sort of fierce radiance. "It is only that I do not care. It all means nothing to me. I love Jim, and he loves me. That is all. No green stone can separate us."

Ruth kissed her mother and passed her, going into the house.

A ghastly expression was over Ann's face. "She will go on and marry him," she said. "She will not speak of it to Jim. She knows nobody else will. As a matter of fact, I don't see how anybody ever can. There is no possible substantiality back of it. Jim Gordon never changed a real emerald for a false one and gave it to my girl."

"I suppose that is true," Stephen said, thoughtfully. "I don't really think one man at Lord & Lovejoy's suspected him. As a matter of fact, I wonder if they were not much nearer suspecting me. We cannot say one word to Jim, and yet, Ann, to let this marriage go on——"

"I am her mother," said Ann, in a tragic voice.

"Ruth tells me that Jim is coming to-night."

"Is he? She has heard, then. I thought he would come. Well, nothing can be done to-night. We must wait. Something may throw light on the matter. I must go and dress now. We simply have to wait developments."

"I suppose you are right," assented Stephen, "but sometimes it has seemed to me that developments needed the lash and spur more than anything on God's earth." He sighed, and followed his sister into the house.

Stephen was right about his estimate of the slowness of developments. Nothing whatever developed concerning the ring. The engagement was to be a short one. Ruth went on with her prepara-

tions. Jim was often at the house. The more Stephen saw of him, the more it seemed impossible to suspect him.

One evening shortly before the day set for the marriage, Jim unconsciously strengthened his own cause. He had been watching Ruth's slender hand move as she was sewing, and suddenly he said: "Give me your hand a second, Ruth. No; rather, take the emerald off. I want to look at it."

Ruth obeyed. Then she bent her head closely over her work. Jim held the ring up to the light. He shook his head.

"I know absolutely nothing about gems," he said, "but if I had not bought this emerald from Lord & Lovejoy's I would most certainly think I had been cheated. Of course it must be the magnificent emerald they told me it was, but I must say I would never dream it. Mr. Ward, you look at the thing. You are a connoisseur. You tell me what you think of it."

Ruth shot one glance at her uncle as he took the ring. It was rather a terrible glance. It was full of deadly terror, of fierce command. Stephen nodded slightly at her. He held the ring up to the light.

"Of course it must be all right, coming from such a firm as that," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so, but how does it look to you?"

"It has the perfect emerald color," Stephen said.

"I know that, but somehow, to me—of course I am no judge—it lacks life."

"How can you, Jim?" said Ruth, sharply. "It is perfectly beautiful. Jewels are not alive."

"That is just it," said Jim. "I had a vague idea that they were. What do you think, Mr. Ward?"

"The perfect emerald tint," Stephen repeated. "As for the rest, I don't pretend to be exactly an expert on precious stones, though I might assume that I was on semi-precious."

"I have half a mind to take that ring to Lord & Lovejoy's to-morrow," said Jim, as he gave it back to Ruth.

She started and paled. "Jim, you can't," she cried.

"I hardly see how you can," said Stephen. "Lord & Lovejoy have such a reputation that it would amount to an insult."

"I suppose you are right," Jim said, doubtfully. "I suppose it would not do, and the stone must be just what they represented. I am no judge. Sometimes I think that education, generally speaking, should provide knowledge of things of such value."

"It is a magnificent ring," said Ruth, "and I shall refuse to take it off many more times. I shall begin to be superstitious."

After Jim and Ruth had gone for a little stroll in the moonlight, Ann looked at her brother. "What did you think of that?" she asked.

"He is either absolutely above suspicion or the cleverest impostor of his generation," said Stephen. "Personally I have no doubt. The man simply does not know. Sometimes I wonder if——"

"What?"

"If he ought not, in common justice, to be told."

"Stephen, how could he be told without implying suspicion?"

"I confess I don't see," replied Stephen, thoughtfully. "If it was anything on earth except an engagement-ring, and if we were not so absolutely sure, in spite of this evidence, that the man is all right! I am sure of that. At first, before I had seen so much of him—I did not own it to you—but I doubted. Now I am as sure of him as I am of myself; perhaps I am surer. I am inclined to think a jury would find the case rather strong against me." Stephen laughed.

"Don't laugh, brother. It is dreadful, in spite of everything. How do you account for it?"

"I don't account for it. I have a firm opinion that there is a large class of incidents in this world beyond all known laws of accountability. I think poor Ruth's bogus emerald belongs to that class. We must simply put it out of our minds as much as possible, Ann."

"I see no other way, with the wedding next week," said Ann, miserably. "I hope everything will be right, and Ruth will be happy; but she is my only child, and to begin her matrimonial life with a sham gem for her betrothal-ring—— Oh, Stephen, are you sure it *is* sham?"

"I wish I were not sure," Stephen said, fervently.

Ruth was married the next week. Not one word

had been said to her about the ring after her conversation with her uncle. She had seemed radiantly happy. If she had a shade of distrust, she did not betray it; but she probably had none. Ruth was essentially feminine. She placed affection and emotion in the vanguard of her life. She was even capable of entirely dismissing reason and logic for the sake of preserving in integrity her affection and trust.

Ann thought sometimes that she did in this case. After the wedding, when the young couple had gone, she spoke of it to her brother.

"I really wonder if Ruth believes what you told her," she said. The two were sitting alone in the room sweet with Ruth's bridal flowers.

"She believes it, but she has hidden the belief from herself," said Stephen. "I know that type of woman, and Ruth is a perfect specimen of it."

"I hope she will be happy."

"It will take more than a sham emerald to make her unhappy with a man whom she loves as she loves Jim," replied Stephen. "If there is any alchemy in faith and love, Ruth will have that stone pure emerald before she has done with it. She will be happy. Don't worry, Ann."

Stephen was right. Ruth was entirely happy in her new life. She and Jim had been married nearly two years before the next unexplainable thing happened about the ring with the green stone. Ruth and Jim had just come to Ann's place for the summer, and Stephen noticed at once that Ruth was not wearing the ring. She spoke about it to him

the next day. She looked confused, which was unusual for her.

"Are you going to the city to-day, Uncle Stephen?" she said.

Jim had already left on an early train, and she and her uncle were alone on the porch. Ann was busy in the house. Stephen detected an anxious note in the girl's voice.

"Why, yes, I thought I would go," he replied. "I have a little matter of business to attend to, and it is a good day, not too hot. Anything you want me to do?"

Ruth hesitated. She even flushed a little. "If you are sure it will not bother you, I do wish you would leave my ring, my engagement-ring, you know"—Ruth's voice was hesitant—"at Lord & Lovejoy's. My finger is larger. You know I have gained a little flesh. Lately, when Jim has not been at home to notice it, I have not worn it. It has hurt me. I could not get it on yesterday. Jim did not notice, and I was glad. I want the setting enlarged just a little. I have the piece which they took from the original setting, you know. They said it had better be kept in case it ever needed changing."

"I will be glad to take the ring to Lord & Lovejoy's, my dear," said Stephen. Inwardly he realized a rueful sensation. He had been almost convinced that he had been an object of suspicion to some of the gentlemen in that jewelry firm. He made no comment on the fact that Jim had not been told of the tightness of the ring, and had not

been commissioned to do the errand. "Get the ring, my dear," said Stephen. "I am going on the eleven-five train."

Before leaving, Stephen had a chance for a word with his sister. He told her of Ruth's request.

Ann looked anxious. "Somehow I dislike to have that ring taken anywhere, or brought into discussion again," said she. "Ruth seems so perfectly happy in her married life, and that ring with its green stone has always seemed to me a danger-mark."

"Don't worry, Ann," said Stephen. "Nothing can come of it unless Lord & Lovejoy have me arrested on suspicion."

"Oh, Stephen!"

"I don't think they will," said Stephen, reassuringly. "I was really the only person whom Ruth could ask to do the errand, you know."

"Yes, I do know," said Ann, "but it is rather hard on you, Stephen. Why don't you take the ring to another place?"

"Oh, it is a particular piece of work, and that is the best place in the city. And, besides, on the whole, I find it rather amusing to be suspected."

Stephen grinned and got into the car which was to take him to the station. He returned on an unexpectedly early train. He found the house very quiet. The day had proved warm, after all. Everybody except the servants was lying down. Stephen went directly to his sister's door and rapped.

"It is Stephen," he said, warily. "Put on a

dressing-gown and come down to the library. I have something important to tell you."

When Ann in her white-silk negligée entered the library, her brother spoke at once. "Ann," he said, "I verily believe Satan himself has a finger in that affair of the ring with the green stone. What do you think has happened now?"

"What?" Ann gasped.

"Don't be frightened. I don't think it is anything to be frightened about unless you are scared of the occult. However, the affair has savored of the occult all through. Ann, that green stone is an emerald!"

Ann stared at him, her face paling.

"And not only that, but *the* emerald, the original emerald."

"Stephen!"

"All suspicion seems now removed from me, but, unluckily, it centers elsewhere. I was even asked very delicately concerning poor Jim's success in his profession. It was hinted, so delicately as to suggest the thought of butterflies' wings, that money could have been raised on such a valuable stone, and then, when the financial pressure was removed, the stone restored."

"Stephen, that is monstrous. What did you say?"

"I also used butterflies' wings for defense, and, I believe, swerved suspicion from Jim. I am inclined to think that now Lord & Lovejoy share my opinion concerning a large number of unexplainable events in the world. Mr. Lovejoy even went

the length of saying that jewels were queer things, and that queer things happened. I left the firm titillated by mystery."

"Shall you tell Ruth?"

"I ask you that."

"Stephen, I don't know. Her faith in Jim is so beautiful. She has believed so, in spite of the evidence of reason and common sense, that I am not sure she has not been wearing a jewel more precious than any on earth. She will, of course, say, when she knows, that everybody has been mistaken. All that wonderful faith, in the face of everything, will lose its value. Stephen, are you sure you were right?"

"Sure that the stone I first saw was not an emerald? I wish I were as sure of anything else. Ann, I *know*. That was no emerald which I carried to Lord & Lovejoy's two years ago."

"But you don't think that Jim——"

"Pawned it? Not for a second. It is simply another incident of that unexplainable class. Shall I tell Ruth?"

"Let me think of it overnight."

But Ann thought of it longer, for that night Jim and Ruth were summoned by a telegram to the little suburban village where Charlotte Gordon had her permanent home. She had been staying with her son in the city for several weeks, and had gone home when they went for the summer to Ruth's mother's place.

Charlotte Gordon had been seized by her last illness. She died in a week's time, and it was two

weeks before the family were settled into a saddened peace for the summer. Jim had worshiped his mother, and Ruth had grown very fond of her.

It was three weeks after Charlotte had been buried that the third incident happened with regard to the ring, or as all, with the exception of Jim himself, thought with regard to the ring. He did not know. He never knew.

One evening he came down-stairs bringing a tiny box. He went to Stephen with it. "I found this in poor mother's jewel-casket," he said. "She had some valuable jewelry; not much, but good. This puzzled me. It was in a box by itself. See what you think of it, Uncle Stephen."

Stephen opened the box. Inside was a tiny twist of green tissue-paper on a bed of green jeweler's cotton. Stephen carefully untwisted the paper. They were all out on the vine-screened porch. They crowded around to look. Stephen held between his thumb and forefinger a large, green stone. He felt a thrill of horror. He knew that stone. He glanced at Ann. She looked pale and frightened. Ruth looked excited. Jim was the only one who wore the natural expression of simple curiosity.

"Is it an emerald?" Jim asked. "It is the same color as Ruth's emerald."

"It is the same color, but it is not an emerald," replied Stephen.

"The light is very dim here," said Ruth.

"That makes no difference. It is not an emerald."

Ruth looked triumphantly at the ring on her finger. "Then—this——" she began.

Ann interrupted her daughter. She held a letter in her hand. She looked pale and solemn. "I have a letter here which I must read," she said. She turned to Jim. "It is from your mother," she said. "She had it sent to me with the request that I read it to all of you. It is not exactly a letter, but a statement. I hesitate to read it because, although she excuses him, it may involve your father, Jim."

Jim started. "Read it," he said, grimly. His father had died when he was a mere boy. His memory of him was loyal, but not wholly tending to admiration. "It is high time this ghastly green mystery is cleared up if it can be," said Jim Gordon. "It now concerns the living, and the living are more to be considered than the dead. And, after all, the dead are protected by the consideration of all honorable souls."

Ann read. There were only a few lines. There was no preface. It began abruptly:

"I think it was an emerald at first. I am sure my lover then, my husband now, did not give me a spurious stone. I must always hold to that belief. He had plenty of money. His family had the reputation of miserliness, but he could not have given me at the very first an imitation emerald. Everything points like a dreadful finger straight at my common sense that he did, but I will not believe. He bought it at Lord & Lovejoy's. I will not believe. Then the ring was too tight. I took it myself to a jeweler—not Lord & Lovejoy's—another. He told me. I had the setting enlarged. I wore the ring. I never spoke. The child came. My hus-

band died. I waited a little while; then I went to the same jeweler, an old man with whom my own father used to deal. He took this poor green stone out of the setting, and I wore the setting without it. People wondered, but I did not care. The setting at least was good, even wonderful. People thought I had lost the stone. Then Jim became engaged to Ruth. I wanted to prove the girl. I wanted my son to have a better than his poor father had. Loyalty is worth more than any gem on earth. I should have kept my poor husband beyond suspicion in my own heart, since I was his wife. I had my chance. I went to my jeweler. Ruth has stood the test. Now she has the emerald, I leave the stone which I had taken from my own ring, unworthily taken, with the injunction that he believe in the unbelievable, that he believes in reasons so great to justify everything that he holds sacred the memory of his father for the sake of his mother who failed him.

"And I bid him thank God for his wife, who holds him above the evidence of her own reason triumphant over the sins which he might have committed."

It ended abruptly. Suddenly the situation became illuminated by a light which sanctified it. They all saw the poor woman who had finished her life on earth, who had been deceived, and whose love had not stood the test of deception, that last fiery test for love of first water. They saw her putting another woman to that same test, and proving the possibility of a love past all logic and reason, the most precious gem of the earth.

Ruth held up her hand, and the great emerald gleamed wonderfully. In its green depths, which seemed fathomless, could be imagined tossing seas, magic springtide of youth, all gracious fancies and romances for which the lovely color served as keynote.

"Put away your poor mother's stone very carefully," said Ruth, with tears in her eyes. "It seems to me that her love and suffering and death have made it a real emerald, after all, and made it true that your father gave it to her. Put away your mother's emerald very carefully, Jim dear, just as she kept it."

"A RETREAT TO THE GOAL"

HE tramped slowly yet sturdily. He had set for himself exactly the sort of pace which a shrewd mind had ordained that his well-worn bones and muscles could keep up for a tramp of many miles. He kept to the pace.

He was a prodigal of a new variety. He had been on the verge of success. The least said about the quality of that success the better; yet success it would have been. And at the very threshold the man had turned himself about and beat that most ignominious and most glorious retreat of humanity, the retreat of the sinner from the strongholds and fleshpots of sin.

John Dunn could not have told why he had turned about. It was as if some power outside himself, yet projected by himself, had exerted a compelling force before which he was helpless. The day before he had not even dreamed of taking this course. He had been with comrades, enjoying to the full that glimpse of the verge of ill-wrought success.

The man had risen before dawn with his new resolve upon him. He had risen and set forth.

He had the clothes he wore, and a little money in his pocket. Secure as he had been of the golden shower, he had lost recklessly at cards the night before. His clothes were unbefitting his manner of return. As soon as the shops were opened he stopped and made a purchase and sale. He emerged from the shop clad in the rough garb of a countryman, with not so much money in his pocket.

He was hardly past middle age; but he looked old with the keen light of the spring morning in his face.

Suddenly he was aware of a soft, padding movement behind him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw a small mongrel dog, brown and thin, with hide glistening in the sun. The dog looked up at him as if he were a god. He was so pathetically humble and beseeching and worshipful that the man started. His own unworthiness of anything like that, even in the understanding of a poor little mongrel dog, smote him fully for the first time. In the eyes of the dog he saw himself, and was shamed to the core.

The dog lay down and rolled in the spring grass, four little paws waving imploringly. The man spoke kindly, and the dog rose. He leaped to the man's caressing hand. John remembered a dog of his childhood, and he immediately named this stranger. "Hullo, Rover!" said he. The dog acted as if he had always followed the call of love and mastery by that name.

John Dunn's face was happier as he walked on

with the dog at heel. He thought of the superstition of his boyhood—"It is good luck to have a dog follow one."

The man and the dog progressed until high noon. Then they stopped in a place of sheer beauty. The man, gazing about, had a dazed feeling that it was unreal. The man and the dog sat beside a clear brook flowing, with breaks to the light like facets of brown jewels, over a bed of smooth pebbles. The brook flowed through a meadowland, and its banks were blue with violets.

John Dunn had stopped at a country grocery and bought crackers and cheese. He divided with the dog. Then both ate, the dog with nose buried in violets. Then the man hollowed a hand and drank of the brook, which was sweet and cold. The dog crept close to the gently flowing water and lapped, too. Then the man lay back among the violets, the dog snuggled close, and both slept.

After an hour they woke and resumed their march. High purpose had so strengthened in the soul of the man that he felt almost intoxicated by it. Every now and then he broke from his even pace and almost leaped along. At such times the dog would scurry ahead and return with lithe bounds, barking.

They went on until near sunset. It was true country now, a rolling farming land, with small villages pricked out by white church-spires, then farm-houses on the outskirts. John Dunn began to think about a place for the night. As with all wayfarers, his mind turned instinctively to a barn

or a haystack. He had not enough money to pay for a lodging. He began to scrutinize the wayside. He saw no straw-stacks. He approached a large, white farm-house, with well-kept outbuildings. He decided that this could be no place for him. It had too prosperous a look.

As he passed the cow-barn a man with milk-pails crossed the yard to the house. He had closed the doors upon the rows of switching tails of sleek Jerseys and Holsteins. Everything was being made snug for the peaceful night.

John Dunn, as he came opposite the gate in the trim white fence which inclosed the front yard of the farm-house, was arrested by a woman's voice, shrill, tense, yet sweet.

"Good evening," came the words, as if addressed to a well-known neighbor.

A tall, thin, elderly woman, with a strange, unquenchable youth in her eager blue eyes, was standing at the gate.

John Dunn lifted his hat. "Good evening, madam," he returned.

The woman seemed greatly flattered. Never in all her life had she been dubbed "madam." She smiled tightly with her thin lips. She opened the gate. "Goin' far?" she inquired, with almost fierce friendliness.

John Dunn heard a spit of hostility, and saw a large Maltese cat, back up and tail enormous, waving like a battle-flag, with great eyes of fear and hatred upon his dog. The dog got behind him, tail between its legs. The woman picked up a stick

and shooed the cat, which fled like a gray shadow close to the ground, then clawed up a tree.

"He'll stay up there all night," remarked the woman. "He always does when he sees a dog. It won't hurt him. It ain't cold. We don't keep no dog, and the cat is awful scared of one. I like dogs. I'd have a dog, but Pa don't like dogs. I'd like a dog, as this place is rather lonesome, and tramps come along. You don't look like a tramp."

The woman ended her statement with a faint, apologetic note of interrogation, and John Dunn looked at her perplexedly. He wondered if he were a tramp.

The woman continued hastily. "I'm sorry I spoke so," said she. "Of course I kin see you ain't no tramp. Do come right in. Where did you say you was goin'?"

"To Bixby Corners," replied John Dunn.

"Why, you don't say so!" cried the woman. "Why, I've got folks there! I was there two months ago. But that's over fifty miles away. You don't mean to walk there?"

John said something feebly about taking his time. The woman nodded knowingly and laughed.

"Oh, I see," said she. "You're one of them over-stout folks tryin' to walk it off. But you can't git to Bixby Corners to-night. You come right in. Pa and me and Billy have had our supper, but it ain't no trouble at all to git you something."

"If," said John, "you could let me sleep in the barn——"

The woman tossed her head affrontedly. "Me

and my husband don't ask folks to sleep in no barn," said she, "when we've got two nice, clean spare chambers. You walk right in." She pushed the gate open.

John Dunn walked in, with his dog following. The woman led the way around the house to the side-door. She opened it and entered. John hesitated. He looked doubtfully at the poor little cringing dog.

"Oh, land sake! let the dog come in, too," said the woman. "He can go out in the kitchen, and Abby will give him some supper. Billy has just brought in the milk, too, and he will like some of that. He's a dreadful thin dog. What's his name?"

"Rover."

"Rover, Rover, Rover," called the woman. The dog came at her call, shaking his lean hind quarters and wagging violently.

"He acts like a real nice dog," said the woman, "and Abby and Billy set a lot by dogs."

She opened a door at her left. "Abby," said she, "here's a dog that belongs to this gentleman. Give him plenty of supper, and the gentleman 'ain't had no supper, either. Jest mix up a few more flapjacks, while I set a plate for him in the dinin'-room. Come right in, mister."

John followed the woman into a room where a very large old man sat, quite filling up a great rocking-chair.

"Here, Pa. I've brought you company," said the woman. "I stopped this gentleman from goin'

to the Elm House at Wayne. He's goin' to stay here."

"How do you find yourself?" came a gruff voice from the chair. John saw a rather vague face, fringed with a white beard and smiling. Pa was always ready with his smile.

John said something indistinctly about kindness and hesitating to accept so much hospitality.

"Ma is tickled to death to hev comp'ny," said he. "She's sort of lonesome, 'specially sence our daughter Laury married an' went away. Billy is a good boy, but he ain't no talker, and Ma likes to hev talkin'. I wa'n't never no talker myself, an' Billy takes arter me, I reckon. Laury was a real lively talker. Set down."

John Dunn sat down. He had never been so absolutely embarrassed in his life as he was before these simple people and their simple hospitality.

The woman ran in and lit a lamp. "Here's a lamp, and you kin see enough to talk," said she. "Supper will be ready before long. Your dog was 'most starved."

The old man stirred uneasily. "Dog?" said he.

"Now, Pa," said the woman, "don't you git excited. It's a real nice, safe little dog; and your cat's up the apple-tree, and thar ain't no call for you to worry."

The woman flew out, her cotton skirts swishing. John Dunn looked about him. A sudden memory smote him with a pang. He might have been in his old boyhood home.

He sat silent, while the old man at the window

nodded approvingly at him. "I see you ain't much more of a talker than I be," he said. "Wall, that's right. Let the wimmen folks talk. Men ain't so much given that way. Natur' is natur'."

Then the woman came in with a joyful stir and announced supper, and John followed her into the dining-room, and again history repeated itself, almost to his undoing. Oh, how many suppers like that he had eaten before his wild blood had leaped barriers and his feet had gone astray!

It required all the man's resolution to overmaster that uncanny sense of having eaten recently this identical meal, but he was equal to it. He was, in reality, hungry, and his boyhood relish for boyhood food came back in a flood. He ate, and the woman watched, in the homely rapture of her kind, the feeding of a male creature.

Billy, the son, came in, and she said, simply, "This is my son; Billy, this is the gentleman who is goin' to stay here to-night."

"Glad to see ye," said the man. He was an old-young man who looked like his mother and spoke like his father.

Suddenly John Dunn remembered that these kindly people did not know his name. He also remembered in a flash that the woman had said she knew people in Bixby Corners. He had lied many times in his life, but never had a lie come so hard as the lie he now told.

"You don't even know my name," said he.

Mother and son nodded, and looked interrogatively at him.

"My name," said John Dunn, "is David Mann."

The door opened, and a woman of about the same age as his hostess entered. She was tightly trussed in starched calico.

"Abby, this gentleman is Mr. Mann," said the other woman.

"Abby is some relation to me on my mother's side," said the woman. "She lives with me, and we do the work together. I ain't able to do it alone, and it is so much nicer than keepin' a hired girl." She regarded Abby affectionately. The shadow of a smile flickered over Abby's face.

John Dunn finished his supper. Then he returned to the sitting-room and remained there in absolute silence with the old man and Billy, listening to the faint click of the supper-dishes being washed. Then the woman and Abby entered and seated themselves, and a very strange thing happened. John Dunn, sitting there, heard the story of his own life, up to a certain point, from the woman. He listened, and realized a queer torture, as from viewing himself in some awful mirror of absolute truth.

The woman talked, with no intermission. She discoursed of the village of Bixby Corners, where John Dunn had been born. Her daughter Laura had married and gone there to live; and she had had an uncle who had lived there during a long life, and brought up a large family. John remembered them.

The woman discoursed upon the family into which her daughter had married, the Upton family,

and John remembered them. Then the woman gave a summary of the whole village. She had often visited there in her youth. John began to have a vague impression of having seen her there. She knew about everything, either first-hand or from hearsay, that had happened in Bixby Corners for half a century.

And—she knew about John Dunn! He sat there and listened, with that sensation of strange torture, when she got to that.

"Old Gorham Dunn keeps the store in Bixby Corners," said she. "He's so old he can't do much now, but he gits there every morning and sets. His son Frank tends mostly to the business now, but they say he 'ain't got no business head, though he's as stiddy as a clock an' means real well. Laury says the business is all runnin' behind. Laury said she pitied old Mis' Dunn an' old Mr. Dunn, an' Minnie, too; thar's a daughter. They had a real nice place, a big house with a tower and two bay-windows in front; an' it 'ain't been painted for years, an' the roof leaks. They had a son named John, an' they give him every advantage. They sent him to college, an' had him l'arn a profession—had to mortgage the place to git the money.

"And Laury says folks don't think they've been keepin' up with the interest, an' them poor old folks will lose their home. It is real pitiful, Laury says, but that good-for-nothin' boy's ma don't never speak of him. It's been years sence he run wild and went off, and they never heard any good

of him till they begun to hear nothin' at all. They don't know whether he's alive or dead, but Laury says that folks say that his ma has kep' his room up for him—had that papered and the plaster mended when the paper an' plaster was droppin' off every other room in the house. I guess there ain't no doubt them poor old folks is jest livin' in the hopes that that miserable poor tool will come back an' be petted jest the way the one was in the Bible."

The woman paused for breath, and Abby unexpectedly spoke.

"I never took no stock at all in that prodigal son," said she. "Eatin' a fatted calf, an' bein' dressed up. Hm! He'd been better wuth while if he'd hustled 'round an' put on overalls, an' done the chores, an' sold that calf an' made his pa and ma buy somethin' they'd been doin' without on account of his foolishness."

"Scripter is Scripter," said Abby's mistress, "and what don't seem sense to us is jest because we don't understand. It don't make much odds, nohow, I guess. I reckon that scalawag ain't never goin' to go back, nor let his poor old pa and ma pass away easy, nohow."

The old man snored explosively in his chair. John welcomed the guttural snort. The woman ceased talking about Bixby Corners. She sprang up.

"It's past Pa's bedtime; an' the gentleman must be all tuckered out, too," she said.

Pa woke up. "I 'ain't been asleep," he said. "I heard every word ye've said. Ye've talked a real

stiddy streak, Ma, but you don't often git such a chance."

"I don't see much company," agreed the woman. "I'd like it if somebody would drop in this way oftener."

In a few moments John Dunn found himself in what was evidently the very best guest-room in the house. It duplicated the best guest-room in his father's house—but not his own room. He had had that fitted up, after he went to college, in a fashion that aroused both admiration and alarm among Bixby Corners people.

John heard the house astir at an early hour, and he rose. That morning his determination was so tense that it almost seemed evident. After breakfast he bade the people good-by, with shamed gratitude, and took again to the highway with his dog.

That night he and the dog slept in a barn. They reached Bixby Corners two days later, in the afternoon. John walked straight to the store, the queer store of such nondescript merchandise as to be almost incredible. Over the door of the long frame building was the sign:

GORHAM DUNN.
GROCERIES AND DRYGOODS.
Hay and Feed. Brooms. Tin and Wooden Ware.

John had often laughed at the sign, designed by his poor father to be comprehensive of what was almost incomprehensible. He did not laugh now. He saw a child's gaily trimmed hat in one

of the windows, beside tomato-cans, a bolt of calico, and a stack of brooms and gardening utensils, and his stern mouth did not relax. He even remembered how a discarded pulpit from the Congregational church had been kept in the back of the store, without the slightest reversion to the old mirth.

The day was quite warm. The store door stood open. Two men sat on a settee on the sloping piazza. One sat on a keg beside the door.

John advanced and looked blankly at the old man, who looked blankly at him. Then John saw his own father also in the door, seated farther back in an arm-chair. Gorham Dunn's old head lopped over on his breast. He was napping.

"Hullo!" said the other old man, and Gorham roused himself. He looked at his own son with absolute lack of recognition.

"Hullo, Frank!" he called, rather feebly.

John Dunn's brother Frank, lean and lank and homely, with an expression of patience that was almost forcible, came forward. He did not know his brother. He gave the usual interrogative grunt of the country merchant to an unknown customer.

John spoke. "I don't want to buy anythin'," said he, instinctively adopting the dialect. "I want a job in the store."

His father straightened up and looked at him. The other old man stopped chewing and stared at him with dim blue eyes. The men on the settee rose and came forward. Frank Dunn and his father looked at each other.

"Ask him if he knows anythin' about keepin' store," said the old man. His mouth trembled a little and his eyes twitched. Frank asked.

"Orter," replied David Mann, who had been John Dunn. "Brung up in the business. My own father kep' a store like enough to this to be its own brother."

"Ask him ef he used to tend store fur his father," said Gorham Dunn. Frank asked.

"Hed to when I was a young man," replied David Mann. "Got a whalin' ef I didn't."

"Ask him ef he's kep' on tendin' store," said the old man. Frank asked.

"Been in business for myself in town," replied David. "Pardner wasn't no good. He lit out, and I've come huntin' a job, when I'm gittin' over bein' young, too."

The loafers laughed at the feeble joke.

Gorham Dunn and his son Frank talked apart. The old man had risen from his arm-chair and the two had withdrawn to the back of the store. The old man's voice was heard, quite strong and shrill. "Ask him what he wants fur pay."

Frank shambled forward and asked.

"Gosh-a-mighty! 'Most anythin' that 'll keep me from starvin'," replied David. The little dog, snuggled close to him, wagged propitiatingly, as if he understood every word.

Finally David Mann, otherwise John Dunn, was engaged to work in his father's store.

Gorham Dunn was a bit distrustful. He wished to keep this stranger under his own roof. It was

arranged that David was to occupy an attic room, unfinished but comfortable enough, which he remembered well. The hired man used to occupy it; but the days of hired men for the Dunn family were over.

Gorham and Frank had discussed putting David in one of the spare rooms, but had met with strenuous objection.

"Ef," said David, "you ain't got some sort of hole under the ruff where you can stow me away, me and my dog will light out. Room up in the garret was plenty good enough for the man that tended my father's store when I was a boy, an' I guess it's good enough for me."

David took off his coat. A wagon laden with bags of seed-corn had drawn up in front of the store. He helped his brother and the farmer who brought the corn to unload; then he and his brother stowed it away, and he assisted in selling the farmer some groceries. He was secretly elated at his own handiness. He was also surprised, but he need not have been. It was that very versatility, that power of adaptation to all situations, which had been largely instrumental in the wreck of his life. It was not at all wonderful that the same agency which had wrecked might build.

When David went home with his father that night he was conscious of an almost childish fear. Suppose his mother should recognize him? Suppose his sister Minnie should? He had learned that Minnie was still at home, unmarried. Old Man Dunn was garrulous.

"Minnie was keepin' company with a real likely young man when she was a girl," he told his new assistant. "Then somethin' come up. Minnie was real proud and high-strung an' she wouldn't stand much. She wouldn't give in an inch, and that was the end on't. I reckon she felt it some, but she never let on. Dunno what her ma and me would hev done without her ef she had got married and gone away, though."

The Dunn house had been originally one of the finest and most pretentious in the village. Now the returning son viewed it with a pang. It was suffering, as human dwellings seem actually to suffer, from premature old age. Gorham Dunn had built the house before his beloved son had come of age. The son knew well enough that it represented his poor father's old proud hopes of him and their decline. The returning man looked at the house, and seemed to see in its dingy walls from which the glossy white paint had either disappeared or was evident in blisters of decay, in its sagging roof from which a zigzag weather stain of some old, fierce storm came down the south wall, in a chimney which needed topping, in the door-step which creaked beneath his unworthy feet, a faithful symbol of himself in his utter failure.

"Go easy on that step," advised his father. "Frank has got to fix it, now you've come. He 'ain't had a minute. That step ain't safe. It 'll land somebody with a broken leg ef it ain't fixed."

"I kin fix it," said the new-comer, eagerly. "I'll

git up early to-morrer an' fix it, ef you'll give me a hammer an' some nails an' ends of boards."

"Then you're handy?"

"Always was."

The old man sighed. "My other son was," he said. "He was born handy. He went to college an' learned a profession, so he didn't naturally do much with his hands, but he was born handy." The old man pointed to something in an apple-tree near the door. "See that bird-house?" he said. "My other son made that. It's got two rooms, an' the wrens come back to it every year."

The man looked. How he remembered! The memory seemed to tear his heart. Then they entered the house. "Come right in," said old man Dunn.

David followed him. The side-door led into an entry. There was a black-walnut tree for hats and wraps. That black-walnut tree seemed, to the returned wanderer, a menace of memory. How many times he had hung his hat on it as he hung it now! On the left of the entry was the dining-room. David heard the clink of dishes.

"Minnie is gettin' supper," old man Dunn remarked. David understood there was no maid. He remembered two, always, before he had dissipated the family fortune.

On the right was the sitting-room. David followed his father in there. His mother sat beside the window.

"We've got a new man to work in the store, Ma," said Old Man Dunn. "He's used to tendin'

store, an' it's goin' to take a heap off Frank and me."

The old woman beside the window looked up, and her returning son saw in her something very exquisite. The mother of them all had changed the most, but she had changed for wonderful beauty, surpassing that of youth and prime. The son, who had not seen her for twenty years, started and paled. He would not have known his mother. All her pleasant, matronly curves were gone. She looked shorter. She was not such a very old woman, but she seemed to represent age fixed beyond any change until the final one, death. She was very slight. Her features were very small and clear. Her hair, still abundant, covered her little head like a cap of silver. She wore a soft black dress with a little pearl brooch at the throat. Her hands, in her lap, were not wrinkled, but so delicate and thin that they looked like pale flowers. The old woman suggested at once the most fragile loveliness and a wonderful strength that could enable such fragility to exist at all. She was like some delicate field-flower which, even to the winter winds and storms, will not completely yield up its personality, but still stands, a silvery semblance of its summer self, yielding yet unyielding.

The man's mother looked up at him, and he dropped his eyes before the dim blue outlook of hers.

"I'm glad you've got somebody to help, Pa," she said. Her voice had grown very thin. It was like a sweet wind-whisper through meadow-reeds,

Then she added, directly to the man, "I hope you will make yourself at home."

He remembered that his mother had always spoken more correctly than his father. She had been fond of books. He remembered also his unspoken childish conviction that whatever discipline he had came from her, not from his adoring father.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said. Then the two pairs of eyes met. If she recognized her son, she made no sign.

"He says he wants to have the garret room, Ma," said Old Man Dunn.

"I think he will find it comfortable," said the old woman. "I remember Jane liked it. Jane was a hired girl we had for twelve years."

"He has a little dog, but you like dogs," said Old Man Dunn.

"I think there was a bone left from dinner," said the old woman, in her sweet, thin voice.

A bell rang. "Supper's ready," said Gorham Dunn.

David found his hardest encounter where he least expected it. Minnie had changed hardly at all. It was wonderful how little Minnie had changed in twenty years. She had kept her figure and her complexion and her pretty hair. Of course, Minnie was much younger than he. She had been a mere girl when he had left home, but —twenty years of wear and tear upon the fine skin of a woman, upon her silky hair, upon her tender figure—and to find her like this! David, looking at Minnie, and finding her so little changed, except

in size, felt that she surely must at once recognize him.

But Minnie did not. If there were a lingering doubt about the mother, there was none about the sister. David sat at the table and ate supper with his own father and mother and sister, and, so far as any outward sign went, was absolutely unknown and unsuspected. However, the strain upon him was so great that he resolved, and was able to carry out his resolve, that in future Frank should eat with the family, and he would be the one to keep store and eat at the second table.

He had never been so relieved in his life as he was to find himself back at the store. Not many customers came before Frank returned from his own supper. By this time David knew that a rival grocery had been established a little farther down the road. He remembered the man who owned it as a fat boy, much freckled. His name was Silas Towns. Gorham Dunn and his son Frank were much perturbed by this competition, which was of recent date.

"Guess there won't be many customers; not so many but you can handle 'em," Frank told his brother as he set out for home. "Silas Towns is getting some of our best ones away. He don't keep any better stuff than we do, and he don't sell no cheaper, but his store is new and sort of fancy, and it don't take much to tole folks away."

Frank's voice rang sadly. He looked old and tired, and had the expression of those who have not tasted the savor of the joys of this life, only

its duties. After he had gone David reflected that probably because of him his brother had missed his own birthright; had not married, nor had a glimpse of the world outside the little village and the rank old store.

David walked about the place, and did some thinking. He was a shrewd man, exceedingly quick-witted and full of expedients. It had been so much more to his discredit that he had made such a failure of his life. All the time he had known better and had been perfectly able to do better.

Finally he was disturbed by a customer. A man wanted to buy a bag of flour. David was perfectly competent to conclude that transaction.

"Goin' to clerk it here?" asked the man—a dry, lank fellow who owned a little farm on the river road. David remembered him.

"Reckon I'll make a try at it," he said.

"Well, I'm glad Frank and the old man hev got some help," said the customer. "Old man's been failin' lately, and Frank wa'n't never exactly cut out for storekeepin', though he's as good as they make 'em. He's 'most too good, and he 'ain't never had anything but drudgery. His folks spent everything on that good-for-nothin' John that went off and wa'n't never heard of afterward. Reckon he wound up in state prison. Everything had to go for him. T'other son didn't git nothin' but the hard work, an' nothin for doin' it. And Minnie, she lost her beau because he insinnerated somethin' about that good-for-nothin' brother of hern, an'

she flared up. Ain't none of the hull family anybody ever darse say anythin' ag'in' him to; an' it's as much as twenty year since he went to the devil. Bad rubbish!"

The man went out, carrying his flour-bag, and David resumed his examination of the store. It was difficult, because the place was poorly lit with oil-lamps. David found a lantern, and used that. The old store was a species of museum. In it was seen enormous waste. David shook his head. Gorham Dunn's business methods must have sorely slackened since his son John's boyhood, and poor Frank could not have been especially fitted for his task. However, as the man examined, a scheme grew in his head. Suddenly he knew that, had he remained right there, that honorable old store would not have borne its present aspect. In him was the true business instinct. It had lain latent. Now it suddenly reared its head.

"Father's store is going to pay!" said John Dunn. And he was right. The little village was fairly agape over the changes suddenly worked in Gorham Dunn's old store. Much was done very early in the morning. Much was done at night. Secrecy was observed as far as possible. It seemed miraculous when Dunn's old country store became spick and span. The very settee for the village loungers was changed for a new one. The sagging roof of the piazza showed plumb-lines and glistened with new shingles. Vines were planted around the new pillars which supported the roof.

Inside, the change was more marked. By de-

grees, so as not to interfere with the trade, a new floor was laid. A new board ceiling replaced the hideously bulging one of smoke-blackened plaster. There were even new counters, and an old cabinet-maker who lived in the village had constructed stools and arm-chairs out of the old Congregational pulpit. The new man had visions of a soda-fountain, but for that there was need to wait. All the good stock of the store was arranged in a manner to do credit to an artist. The walls containing tinned goods were studies in color. The dry-goods counter was a revelation to the village women.

Then—came the prize-packages! That was the new man's pet scheme; but he needed assistance, and he got it from his sister Minnie. He privately concluded that Minnie and he were the business heads of the family. One evening he had a long talk with her in the kitchen, and, the next day being Sunday, they made a surreptitious visit of inspection to the store. Minnie looked keenly at the sugar, the flour, the chocolate and cocoa, and other things which had been dismissed from the up-to-date stock. She cocked her pretty brown head on one side, and her bright eyes shone indignantly.

"It takes a woman to run some things," said she. "Land! If I had known Pa and Frank were letting things go to waste so! Here are yards and yards of faded gingham, too. Why did they let it stay in the window so long? And look at all this fly-specked ribbon. It is clear waste."

Her unrecognized brother regarded her shrewdly. "Struck me a woman like you might do some-

thin' to a lot of this truck so it wouldn't be waste," he remarked.

Minnie looked at him. He explained his ideas. The woman's cheeks bloomed pink. She looked years younger with sheer enthusiasm.

The prize-packages at Dunn's, tied up daintily and given with every dollar's worth of merchandise sold, were from the first a great success. Minnie's little cakes and bags of home-made candies, her aprons, old lady Dunn's iron-holders and knitted washcloths, and so on, all heaped together in a great clothes-basket that was trimmed with fringed pink and green tissue paper, and all tied up nicely with pretty blue tape, met with wild approval. Dunn's customers doubled in a week.

Old Gorham Dunn was tremulous with delight. "That new feller knows jest how to take hold," he told his son Frank, who nodded happily.

There was not an envious strain in Frank Dunn's whole make-up. He was only too glad to have the burden lifted from his faithful but inefficient shoulders.

At the end of some weeks the new man, after a colloquy with Gorham and Frank, sought out Silas Towns in his rival store and made certain propositions to him which were accepted without much hesitation. Silas Towns had the making of a shrewd business man in him. He made a good deal with Gorham for his own stock-in-trade, and became an interested, though silent, partner.

Strangely enough, Old Lady Dunn was the only one who evinced no especial pleasure. When Min-

nie suggested that Dave be given her recreant brother John's old room, she fairly cowered before her mother's gaze.

"No man ever goes into that room to sleep until he's proved himself worthy," said the old woman, in her sweet, reedy voice.

She was almost uncanny in her fragility and hardness. Minnie reflected that her mother had always been the severe one of the family about the beloved recreant son and brother. The mother had often chastised with that thin, lady-hand of hers when the lad had been a child, Minnie remembered. She had not even defended him when he had fallen from his high estate of proud and honored youth in his father's house. In her own family she was so stern that they had almost considered her unfeeling. Once her husband had taken her to task.

"Anybody would think the poor boy wa'n't your son at all, Ma, the way you act," Gorham had said, and his wife had faced him proudly.

"Anybody would think him my son for that very reason," said she. "Do you think I am going to take the part of my own son when I know he doesn't deserve it?"

"You were always sort of hard with him, Ma."

"I wish I had been harder," John Dunn's mother had said. "If I had been harder it would have proved I loved him better than I loved myself. Now, sometimes, I don't know. But I do know that if I have been a selfish mother, it is no reason for me to shame my son more than he has shamed himself, by denying he has done wrong."

After that John had seldom been mentioned in the family. Scrupulously, twice a year, the boy's room had been cleaned. Then it was closed, and the curtains drawn, as if some one lay in death behind them.

The man in the store, whenever he passed this closed door, realized a little pang. He could not control it. He had overheard his mother deny his right to his old room. He had admired her for it. He admired the exquisite, strong old woman more and more, and she daily gained more power to give him pain, and she used her power.

Finally her husband, her daughter, and her other son were aghast at her treatment of the person whom they knew as David Mann. Old Gorham talked to Minnie about it.

"You'll have to say a leetle to your Ma, I guess, Minnie," he said. "First thing we know, Dave won't stand so much, an' he'll be leavin'; an' I dunno what Frank an' me would do without him, that's a fact."

Minnie and her father and Frank were in the kitchen after supper, and Minnie was washing the dishes. It was Sunday night, and all were at home.

"I feel sort of worried myself," said Frank. "I can't think what's got into Ma."

With that he took up a great pail of refuse and was going out to feed the pig, when a sweet, reedy little voice came from behind him.

"Just set down that swill," said Old Lady Dunn, and her voice and manner dignified the homely little speech. "Let Dave do it."

Frank stared at his mother. She called, remorselessly: "Dave, Dave, come here. It's time to feed the pig."

David Mann, in his Sunday clothes, heard her. He was sitting on the front piazza. He came around through the side-door, took the pail from the other man's hand, and went out with it.

"Ma, it won't do!" gasped old Gorham.

"Frank has fed the pig long enough. It's another man's turn," said the inexorable old lady.

"He'll leave."

"If he leaves, he's not worth keeping," responded the old lady. Then she went back to her place in the sitting-room. But always after that David Mann did the menial tasks about the place, instead of Frank. Ordered by his mother, he milked, cleaned the barn, chopped wood, and performed the tasks of a servant, although both his father and brother remonstrated.

"It beats all what has got into Ma," Gorham told the man whom he knew as David. "The way she orders you around don't suit the rest of us. We know it ain't your place to do all them chores."

David laughed. "Reckon it's my place to do anythin' I kin do," he said.

"Ma seems to hev somethin' ag'in' you, an' you 'ain't done nothin' but be a godsend to us ever sence you come," said Gorham. "You won't think of leavin' because she seems so sort of queer? Women is queer."

"I ain't likely to leave because she asks me to do anythin' I kin do," said the man.

He and his father had been talking out in the yard. It was six months since he had come. The apple-tree which held the bird-house tossed yellow branches over their heads. The house wherein the Dunns dwelt had been painted, and the roof patched. The unrecognized son could hear his sister singing as she cleared up the supper-dishes. Recently a lover had come to her, a very good man who had loved her always, and she had loved him, making no sign. She had forgotten, years and years, the love of her youth. Minnie had refused to listen while affairs were so adverse with their family. Now it was different. The mortgage would soon be paid. A maid could be kept.

The brother heard the happy little song, and smiled. He went out to the barn to finish the milking. His little dog followed him. He milked and carried the last pail to the house. Then he returned to close the barn for the night.

He started. Old Lady Dunn stood there. Her shawl flew out in the wind like sharply pointed gray wings. Her hair stood up like an aureole around her delicate face, an aureole of live silver. The little dog left his master and wagged affectionately around her. Despite her treatment of David, the dog always left him for her. She patted the silky brown head.

"Here," she said to David, "you haven't finished your chores. Go an' pick some of the windfalls and give them to the cows. They like apples."

The man obeyed. He took off his hat, passed around to the orchard behind the barn, returned

with his hat full of apples, and fed them to the cows.

"Get another," ordered the old lady. David obeyed.

When he emerged from the barn after feeding the cows for the second time he looked interrogatively at the woman. She nodded.

"That will do," said she. "Now you can fasten up the barn."

David obeyed. Then he looked with actual timidity at the frail little woman-creature who dominated him. She lifted her right hand, and a white diamond gleamed. He had given her that diamond when he was a boy. He had saved the money for it out of his allowance. He had never seen her wear it since his return.

She held out her hand and moved toward the house, and the man followed. Minnie saw them coming and opened the door. Gorham and Frank were there. Old Lady Dunn and the man they called Dave entered. Old Lady Dunn looked at them; then she turned and pointed at the man, and the diamond gleamed.

"This is my own son. He has come home," she said, and her voice rang out silvery with triumph, like a fine trumpet.

The others exclaimed. The old woman faced them, dauntless. "I knew him all the time," said she. "None of the rest of you knew him but I am his mother. I knew."

"Is it you, John?" queried old Gorham in a shaking voice.

John bowed his head. His face was working.

Frank sprang forward and took him by the hand. Frank was choking with repressed tears. Minnie came forward and kissed him; then she sank into a chair and wept aloud.

Old Gorham put his hand, trembling as if with palsy, on the man's shoulder. "Is it you, John?" John bowed his head again.

Old Gorham suddenly waxed radiant. "He's come home! My son's come home!" he cried out in a great voice. "My son's come home, an' he's made good! I'll show 'em. I guess nobody's goin' to say nothin' more ag'in' my son. He's the smartest man in these parts, I don't keer who he is!" Old Gorham shook his son John back and forth by his passive shoulders. "He's come home, home!" he shouted. Then he turned to the old lady. "What in Sam Hill made you treat him so durned mean fur, Ma," he demanded, "when you knew all the time?"

Old Lady Dunn lifted her head. She looked like a queen throned upon the trials of her whole life. A lovely color came into her soft old cheeks; her eyes shone with blue light. That old flower of life's field which had remained intact as to its flower-shape, though smitten hard by winds of time and grief, seemed suddenly, by virtue of some fine strength of individuality almost beyond the mortal, to bloom anew. She gazed at her son, and the fragrance of the love and sorrow and infinite patience of a woman for her child sweetened the very soul of the man. She smiled a heavenly smile.

"I wanted to make sure that my son had come back," said she. Then she turned to Minnie. "I opened the windows in your brother John's room this morning," said she. "Now I think you had better go and make up the bed."

THE END