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The Border Country

Josephine Daskam Bacon

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In the Border Country

By the Same Author

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Smith College Stories
Sister's Vocation

On a low stool there sat an old women . . .

In the Border Country

by

Josephine · Daskam · Bacon ·

Clara · Elsene · Peck · Decorator ·

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The First Lesson

In the Border Country

THE HUT IN THE WOOD

THE woman who told me this, and other strange tales which I may one day try to put together, had no gift of writing, but only a pathetic regard for those who had. I say pathetic, because to me her extraordinary experiences so far outvalue the tinkling art of recording them as to make her simple admiration for the artist little short of absurd. She had herself a pretty talent for painting, of which I knew her to have made much in the years before we met. It was, indeed, because I remembered what hopes she had encouraged in her teachers in this and older countries, and how eagerly she had laboured at her craft, finding no trick of technique too slight, no repetition too arduous, no sacrifice too great, if only

they might justify their faith in her, that I asked her one day, when I had come to know her well, why it was that she had stopped so suddenly in the work that many of us had learned to know before we knew her. For now she paints only quaint toys for her many lovely children, or designs beautiful gardens for her husband, himself an able artist and her first teacher, or works at the wonderful robes in which he paints her, burning in the autumn woods or mist-like through spring boughs.

We sat, that morning, I remember, on the edge of the wood that finishes their wide estate among the hills, looking down its green mazy aisles, listening to the droning of the June air, lapped in the delicious peace of early summer. "Why did you?" I asked, "what happened?"

She gave me a long look.

"I have often thought I would tell you," she said, "for you can tell the others. When I hear this warm, droning noise,

this time of the year, it always reminds me ——"

She looked at me, but I knew that she saw something or someone else. After a long pause her lips began to form a word, when suddenly she drew a short, frightened breath.

"What — do you smell it, too? Am I going away again — *what* is that odour?"

I sniffed the air. A dull, sweet taste flavoured it, unpleasant, vaguely terrifying. I looked about carefully and caught sight of a wide-mouthed bottle lying on its side, the cork half loosened. A brown moth fluttered feebly in the bottle.

"It is only chloroform," I assured her, remembering that the two oldest children were collecting butterflies, and I tightened the cork.

"Oh, yes," she said, a deep and unaccountable relief in her voice, "I see. That odour has the strangest effect on me ever since ——" she waited a long time. At last she said she would try to tell me

something, if I would ask her questions to make it easier for her, and never discuss it afterward unless she should invite the discussion.

I do not, of course, pretend to tell the story as she told it to me. It was broken by long pauses and many questions on my part. Her phrasing, though wonderfully effective at times, was empty and inadequate at others, when she simply could not say what she meant, neither pen nor tongue being her natural medium of expression. But if the style that I have used is not hers, it best translates, at least, the mood into which she threw me.

. . . .

The surgeon, who knew her well, took her hand on the threshold of the operating room.

"Even now, dear friend," he said, "we may turn back. You know what I think of this."

"You promised me!" she cried eagerly.

"I have your word that I should not risk this."

"You have my word," said he, "that in your present state of mind and under the present conditions you should not risk it. But I am by no means sure that you could not change both your state of mind and the conditions. If you say you cannot, then, indeed, I will not let you risk it. But if you would only say you could! Then I would risk anything. Will you not say it?"

"I cannot say it," she said. "Open the door!"

"Listen!" said the surgeon; "if when you are on the table, if even when the ether is at your lips, you will raise your finger, I will stop it. Will you remember? For you, too, you know, run a risk in doing this."

"I shall remember," she said, "but I shall not raise my finger." And he opened the door.

Her mind was so busy with a rush of

memories and plans, crowded together at will to shut out her fear, that she was unconscious of the little bustle about her, the blunt, crude details of preparation.

"Breathe deeply, please," someone said in her ear, "harder, harder still — so!"

"I am breathing deeply, I am! How can I do this forever? I tell you I *am* breathing deeply!" she screamed to them, but they paid no attention. The surgeon's face looked sadly at her and receded, small and fine, to an infinite distance. Though she called loudly to them, she realized that in some way the sound did not reach them, that it was useless. She prayed that they might not think her unconscious, for she had never reasoned more clearly. Now her ankles were submerged, now her knees, now her hips, now it was at her chest, now her throat.

"It is all over — you can begin now!" she said deeply, and in order to save herself from a sickening struggle, she bent her soul, as one bends one's body to dive under

a combing breaker, and dipped under the wave that threatened her.

Just as one slips through the breathless surf she slipped through, and left them. She heard someone breathing heavily in the room she had left and hurried away from the horrid sound, intending to find her room and change the loose gray gown and the soft fur-lined boots she had put on for her journey to the terrible room. But the hoarse, heavy breathing followed her and threw her into a panic of fear, so that she turned into a side corridor and ran blindly down it, stumbling through a little narrow door at the end of it. The door swung to with a long sigh and she heard the breathing no more.

As she rested in the little room, which was perfectly empty, a door at the other side of it opened suddenly and a woman rushed in. She, too, had on a long gown, and her dark hair hung in two thick braids, one over each shoulder.

"Can you tell me the way out?" she

said quickly, "I can't stay here — I can't breathe."

"But you aren't dressed — we must find our rooms first."

"No, no! There are nurses everywhere. We shall be seen! Come this way," and she pointed, shaking, to a long window that opened on a fire escape. The steps were broad and easy; a moment and they were in the street.

"Here is my carriage — I saw it from the window. Let me take you where you want to go," said the woman; "home, directly, James."

The door of the carriage was swinging wide; they had only to step in. As they sank on the seat the fat coachman leaned out and slammed it.

"Drat that door!" he said loudly. "She'll have to go back to the factory again." The footman made some remark and the coachman swore angrily.

"I think I see myself standing here two hours!" he growled. "The gray's nervous

as it is. I'm going up through the Park and let them out a little at the other end."

The carriage started. The woman half rose in it and tapped imperiously on the glass.

"James! James!" she cried, but no one answered her. She pressed the knob of the door, but it did not turn.

"I can't make him hear?" she complained, "what shall I do? What do you think is the matter — he acts as if there were nobody in the carriage!"

They looked fearfully at each other.

"He will stop surely — somewhere," said the other, but her heart felt chilled. She could not think — she dared not.

They trotted swiftly on; her companion's eyes were fixed ahead of her, her lips moved.

"Hail Mary!" she muttered, and then, "now and at the hour of our death!"

"Don't say that, don't!" she begged the woman, but still the mutterings went on. The door of the carriage swung open; the

horses dropped to a walk. All around were trees and grass; great rocks lined the driveway.

"I could slip behind the bushes and my gown would not be noticed," she thought feverishly, "for I cannot bear to hear her," and as the carriage almost halted she swung herself easily down from the low step.

"Now and at the hour of our death!" she heard as the carriage rolled on, and shuddered when the coachman slammed the door upon that pale, crazed creature.

Behind the bushes she was well screened, and the few people that drove and walked through the wild, beautiful woodland never looked in her direction. Once a couple, intertwined and deep in each other's eyes, almost ran against her, but though she drew away, startled and apologizing, they walked on with no reply to her excuses.

Her heart sank strangely.

"I wish they had spoken to me," she whispered to herself. "I wish I could

think better — I know there is something wrong. The next person I meet I will ask ——"

But she walked steadily away from the great driveway, deeper and deeper into the wood.

"In a moment I will stop and think this out — in a moment," she murmured, but she did not stop; she ran like a hunted animal, farther and farther.

The wood was utterly quiet. Sometimes a little furry beast slipped across the narrow path she ran along, sometimes a large bird flapped heavily into the air ahead of her; but no person walked or called.

Soon a great fatigue seized her, and hunger. She moved languidly; her legs seemed to walk of themselves.

"I must eat — I must rest," she moaned, "but why did they not speak to me?"

At last she realized that she could drag herself no farther, that she was alone and lost, fearful and worn out, in a dense wood.

"I will get to that little path," she said,

trembling, "and there I will drop, and if I must think, I must."

She staggered up the little path, and it lead to a tiny hut, the colour of the four great trees that stood about it. Its door hung wide open, and in the middle of it, on a low stool, there sat an old woman, wrapped in a long cloak, looking kindly at her.

She threw herself across the threshold and fell upon the earthen floor.

"Oh, will *you* speak to me? Will *you* see me? Pray, pray answer me!" she cried.

"And why should I not see you, my child?" said the old woman.

She gasped with joy.

"I don't know — I thought — the coachman slammed the door — I don't know what I thought! It was terrible!" she panted.

"I know, I know," said the old woman; "but you are here now. You can rest now. It took you a long time, you are so strong. Look, I have a bed for you!"

She looked, and in the corner of the hut was a couch of pine boughs, odorous and soft.

"You may lie on my cloak," said the old woman, and spread it on the springy couch. She dropped on it.

"Oh, I ache! — every bone in me aches!" she sobbed, and for the first time she wept.

"That is right," said the old woman, and soothed her with her hand, "now sleep, and I will have something for you when you wake."

Her body sank, relaxed, upon the soft boughs, and it was as if a sponge were wiped across her mind, and she slept.

Time passed over her; she had no way of knowing if they were minutes or hours that ran by.

When she awoke, a gentle, steady humming filled the air; a murmurous, musical sound that calmed every sense. It was like the turning of a great wheel or the rocking of an old cradle.

"What is that?" she asked faintly.

"They are my bees, child," said the old woman. "They have come home."

She was slender, with brown eyes like brook water, and though she was wrinkled finely, she was straight and strong, for she lifted up her guest and half carried her to the opposite corner of the hut.

"Now wash," she said, "and then you must eat."

A cold, deep spring welled up in that corner, and as she plunged her face into it she opened her hot eyes to let the icy water cool them — and gazed at the white moon far below her and the small stars.

All space seemed spread before her and she drew out, frightened, but when she glanced quickly at the spring from above, she thought she must have dreamed, for it was like any other spring, only a little deeper. Then she washed her hands till they tingled and warmed. When she had braided her hair afresh she turned

and saw that the old woman had set out a meal for her on the low stool; a brown loaf, a comb of golden honey and an earthen jug of milk.

"Eat, my child," she said.

She fell upon the food and it was like wine and meat to her. The blood ran swiftly through her veins again and she forgot the terror and fatigue and the cloud in her mind.

"You are most kind to me, mother," she said, for she had lived in the old countries where it is easy to speak kindly to the old; "how do you happen to live here? I should have died but for you. All my courage had gone and it seemed that some terrible thing must be true, but I dared not think what it might be. Now I am strong again and I will thank you and go on."

"Where will you go, my child?" said the old woman.

She looked out of the door and saw that the wood was so dense that only a

dim light pierced through the boughs far above her head.

"It is always twilight here," said the old woman.

"But you can tell me the way, surely you know the way out?" she begged.

"I know my way," said the old woman, "but not your way. I come from the other side."

"And how do you come?" she asked, almost fearfully, for something about the old woman began to frighten her.

"I follow my bees," said the old woman.

"But I cannot wait for your bees," she cried, vexed and alarmed. "I must get back — I was mad to have come here. I have work to do. Everything has gone wrong with me since — since — oh, I must go back and get at my work!"

"And what is your work?" the old woman asked.

"I am an artist," she said.

"What is that?"

"I paint pictures," she said.

"Why do you do that?" asked the old woman.

"Why? Why?" she repeated. "Why does anyone do his work? Because I am told by good workmen that I do it well, and that I shall every year do it better. Because I would give up food and sleep for it. Because I shall, if I live, some day do some one thing that will be remembered after I am past all work."

"You will never do that with a picture," said the old woman quietly.

She stamped her foot upon the earthen floor.

"How dare you say so, you?" she cried. "What do you know of art or the great world of cities beyond this horrible wood? What are you?"

"They call me the Bee-woman, in this part of the wood," she answered, "but I have many duties. What are yours?"

"I have told you," she said sullenly, for under the other's eyes her own fell.

"Not so," said the Bee-woman quickly,

a hand on her shoulder, "you have told me only your pleasures. I do not ask you for what you *would* sacrifice food and sleep — though you seem unable to go without either for very long — but for what you *should* sacrifice them?"

She clasped her hands and faced the Bee-woman proudly.

"Art is the one thing in this world that makes these two the same," said she, "to the artist his art is both his pleasure and his duty."

"That is the reason that artists are not women, then," replied the Bee-woman, "for their duties cannot be their pleasures very long or very often."

At this she would have run away, but her knees were still weak, and the thought of the trackless woods stopped her heart a moment with fear.

"A Bee-woman may know much of bees," she said coldly, "but the world beyond this wood has a wider space to overlook, and while you have been growing

old in the wood, mother, the humming of your charges has stopped your ears to the voices of the young who fill the world outside. They would tell you, if you could understand, that Art is the one word that is one for men and women."

"My child," said the Bee-woman, "so long as bees hive and trees root in the earth there will be no such word. For the words of the world were made to match the things of the world, and that is so in this wood and out of it."

She looked at the Bee-woman and felt troubled and on the eve of something great and sad.

"You are no common peasant woman, I am sure," she said gently, "and indeed, I have heard wiser and more travelled persons than you say very much the thing that I think you mean. But like you, they were old."

"That is to say, that they had seen more of the life they speak of, I suppose," said the Bee-woman.

"But the world moves, mother," she said.

"That is to say, that it runs round and round, I suppose," said the Bee-woman, "but not that it gets any farther from the sun."

"But women have learned many new things since you were young, mother."

"That is to say, that they have all the more to teach their children, I suppose," said the Bee-woman, "and they had more than a little, before."

"Who spoke of children?" she cried harshly, "not I! I spoke of work — the world's work, that I am free to do!"

"So long as bees hive and seeds fly on the wind," said the Bee-woman, "the world has one work for you to do, and you are bound, not free, to do it!"

Then she sank on the floor beside the old woman and began to beg her, for it seemed to her, as often it seems in dreams, that before she could go any farther she must win over this one who stood between her and where she would go.

"You think me vain," she cried, "but, indeed, with me this is no girlish fancy, mother. Men greater and wiser than I have told me that mine will be work for which the world will be the better."

"I think that they have spoken truly, my child," said the Bee-woman, "and that is why I was waiting for you."

"Then let me go and work!" she cried, and rose from her knees.

"Go quickly, indeed," said the Bee-woman, "but work with flesh and blood, as does God the Creator, not with paint and canvas, as does man, the mimic!"

Then this old bee woman grew tall and terrible to her, and she saw that she had been led into the wood as into a trap and that she must fight hard for her freedom.

"I do not know what you are!" she cried wildly, "but you talk like an old song mumbled over the hearthstone, and it is to the hearthstone that you would chain me. Was I given eyes that can sweep

the horizon only to turn them downward to that narrow hearth?"

"My child," said the old woman, and her voice was like a bell that tolls across the ancient fields, "so long as bees hive and fire burns on the hearths of men will the daughters of men walk in this wood and tell me that the hearth is narrow; and yet it is wider than the width of the womb whence all men come, and wider than the width of the grave whither all men go. And all men know this."

She put her hand over her heart, as one who covers a wound, and her hand touched a folded paper under her gray gown. She drew it out in triumph and her face grew bright.

"Not all men, mother, not all men!" she boasted. "See — I took this with me when I went in to the trial from which I escaped. (Though what I have suffered in this wood is worse than that from which I ran away.) Read this letter from

my husband, and you will see that not all men would chain their mates — that to-day the jailer himself throws away the key!"

"Read me the letter," said the Bee-woman. And she read:

"*I love you because you think my thoughts with me, because our work is the same and we understand each other. Let us work on together hand in hand.*"

"Now dip this letter in the spring," said the Bee-woman, "and read it to me again. For now the paper can show you only what the pen has written."

Wondering, she dipped it in the spring, and the writing, which had been black, turned blood red and was not the same when she read it:

"*I love you because your eyes are blue and have drowned my heart, because after I have done my work, which I cannot explain to you, I lie in your arms and cease to think. Give me a son with your eyes, for I shall never understand you.*"

She crushed the paper in her hand and flung it out of the door of the hut.

"Then he lied to me!" she said bitterly, "fool that I am!"

"If you had been a fool he would not have needed to lie to you," said the Bee-woman. "But you are one of those for whom no price is too great."

"Oh, oh!" she wept, "I am deceived! God and the world have deceived me! But I will not be beaten. I will show him — and you — that I am not the weak thing you think me. This very moment, if only I had the colours, I could paint as never before. I feel it. The very pain will help me. If only I had the colours!"

"There are always colours," said the Bee-woman, "if not of one kind, then of another. But you cannot get them for nothing."

"I will pay any price," she said.

"Will you take the crimson from the blood of your cheeks?" said the Bee-woman. "Will you take the fresh blue from your

eyes, the ivory white from your teeth, the ruddy gold from your hair, and the thick softness of it for brushes? Will you?"

She shuddered.

"I know what you mean," she said, "but oh, it is hard! I — I cannot."

"Then you are a fool," said the Bee-woman quietly. "There is no man living who would not give all that and give it with a smile, for his work. You are not a great artist."

She wrung her hands.

"You are right, you are right," she moaned, "and I am not worthy. If colours are my weapons to win fame, how should I grudge them? I will give them up."

"Then indeed you are a fool," said the Bee-woman sternly, "for you throw away your most powerful weapon before the fight begins. You are not a great woman."

She fell with her face to the earthen floor and lay quiet, while the bees hummed outside the hut like the turning of a great wheel or the rocking of an old cradle.

"Then all that I have learned," she muttered at last, "is useless? All that I have worked and anguished for? All that I have saved even my suffering for, prizing it and never grudging, because it would help my work? No man could do more."

"You think so?" said the Bee-woman. "Get up, my child, and look out of the latticed window at the back of my cottage. Do not think what you see there is close before you, for the glass of that window has strange properties and the part of the wood which it shows you is far, far from here."

She raised herself and walked to the casement, shading her eyes with her hand, for a red glow struck the single pane and blinded her.

"Before you look," said the Bee-woman, "tell me if you remember that picture of yours which you think the best?"

"Do I remember it?" she repeated, "can I ever forget it? A year of my life

The glass of that window has strange properties . . . . .

has gone into it. The year that I was married."

"Do you think it worth that year?" said the Bee-woman.

"It could not have been done with less," she said.

"Now look," said the Bee-woman, "and tell me what you see."

She went to the casement, and it seemed as if the aged trees formed a long, long aisle out from it, narrow and bright, and at the end was a sunny glade.

"I see a young man," she said, "laughing and singing to himself in the sun."

"Has he suffered?" asked the Bee-woman.

"No, he is hardly more than a boy. His hair curls like a boy's. His face has never known a care."

"What is he doing?" asked the Bee-woman.

"He is eating fruit and painting a picture on a white cottage wall. The children and the old men are watching him."

"Do you watch him, too," said the Bee-woman, folding her hands in her lap.

Soon she gave a little cry.

"What! what!" she murmured, "how can he do that — he is but a boy!"

"Is he weeping?" asked the Bee-woman. "Has he shut out the world?"

"He is smiling," she answered, "and as he works he talks. Oh! he is painting my picture, mine! Who is he? Mother, who is he?"

"Does he paint well?" asked the Bee-woman.

She did not answer.

"It is nearly done," she whispered, "and he smiles as he works. What blue, what glistening white! Mother, who is that boy?"

"Is it as well done as your picture?" asked the Bee-woman.

"It is better done," she whispered through her tears, "and he has gone and left it. He has given it to a village girl for a kiss! Oh, how could he leave it?"

"Because he can do many more, my

child," said the Bee-woman, "and life has not yet touched him."

"Tell me his name," she said, and turned from the window, pale and sad.

"His name neither the world or this wood has yet troubled to learn," said the Bee-woman, "but he will be called a great painter before long."

"How long?" she asked.

"I forget if you call them days or years," said the Bee-woman, "but they will not be many."

"Who taught him?" she asked.

"Everyone," said the Bee-woman, "the village girl, for one. But many will learn from him."

She knelt again upon the earthen floor and looked the woman in the eyes. . . .

"I do not know, my child," said the Bee-woman, "I can only tell you that you must paint what you have learned, with tears; he can paint he knows not what, and he smiles. I ask you, which of you will go furthest?"

"Ask me no more, mother," she said faintly, "but tell me this: why is life so cruel? For you know everything and this wood is not what I thought."

"Child," said the Bee-woman, "for I suppose you call it cruel because it does not please you, why life is as it is, I do not know; but that it is so no one can doubt who has tried to make it otherwise and failed. Now, what will you do?"

She bent her head before the eyes of the Bee-woman, ashamed, because in her deep brown eyes she saw reflected her lost years.

"What shall I do?" she asked meekly.

"Go back, child," said the Bee-woman, and her voice warmed like summer sunshine on the wall at noon, "go back and let men make pictures: do you make men!"

Then outside the door she saw the little path and suddenly she seemed to know where it would lead and how, and she had no fear at all of the wood.

"Good-bye, mother, God keep you!" she said and stepped over the threshold.

"So long as I keep my bees, child, God will doubtless keep me," said the Bee-woman, "and that is true in this wood and out of it. Now hurry back, for you have stayed almost too long."

She waved her hand and turned from the hut, threading her way among the trees.

"I must go back, I must go back!" she said to herself, and moved more and more quickly, for something drew her almost off the ground.

Once she thought she heard a low cry behind her, and as she looked back she saw some one running hotly through the wood across her track.

She called aloud to help the poor creature, for she saw that it was a woman in deadly terror, wrapped in a long gown, with two great braids of dark hair, that hit against her back like whips, who turned her pale, crazed face — and it was the

woman in whose carriage she had driven to the edge of the wood.

"Come back!" she called, "this is the way! Come back!"

But the runner clasped her shaking hands upon her heart and leaned hotly forward in one last burst of speed, and fell fainting across the threshold of the Bee-woman's hut.

Then a panic terror caught the woman who had left that hut, a terror to which her first fright was as nothing.

"In God's name," she screamed, "where am I? *What am I?* Who is that wrinkled woman with young eyes? What wood is this?"

So screaming she whirled about and missed her footing, and fell heavily over the root of a great tree, striking her head in the fall.

A sickening pain washed in great waves through every nerve, and she struggled, turning her head feebly from side to side, closing her eyes against the blinding light that pierced her brain like knives.

The tall trees swam and wavered before her, the boughs tossed and swayed and receded till they were like a forest seen in a picture. Then she saw that they were framed in a window, with empty space behind them, and that she was staring at them from a bed in a strange room.

Over her eyes bent two brown eyes, young and kind.

"Do you see me? Can you speak to me?" she heard.

"I do not hear the bees," she muttered, "I miss them. And yet you are the Bee-woman, are you not? I know your eyes ——"

"I am the nurse," said the voice, "there are no bees here. You hear the rumbling in the street below. I am glad to see you open your eyes — we were growing worried. You remember you are at the hospital, do you not? Would you like to see your husband? He is just outside the door."

She looked long at the nurse. "My

husband," she murmured. "Oh, yes. Does he know that I got away? How did you bring me back here? Tell the doctor that — that I could not bear it and that he must take me through without it. He — he will be glad —"

"The operation is over," said the nurse, "and you have nothing to bear, now. You are just coming out of the ether. Do you understand? Everything is all right. You have only to lie quiet, now, and you may see your husband, if you wish. He wanted to see you as soon as you were safely out of the wood, he said."

The tears gathered in her eyes, but she was too weak to wipe them.

"'Out of the wood,'" she whispered, "'out of the wood'! So that is what they mean! But he will never go into that wood . . . yes, call him in."

The Next Lesson

THE FARM BY THE FOREST

IT WAS years afterward, and in October, the very climax of a late and lingering autumn, that I sat by my friend one afternoon in the ripe orchard and knew suddenly that we were going to speak of one of those strange experiences of hers that, for me, set her more effectually apart from others than any of her many and varied gifts and graces. As before, we fell into the matter suddenly, with no warning, and at a light question from me the like of which I must have asked her many times with no such answer as I then got.

All about us lay the windfalls, piled evenly, rich heaps of sunset colour. The better fruit gleamed through the boughs like fairy lamps and great ladders leaned against these on which the men climbed, picking carefully. Below them the maid-servants, laughing and excited at this

pleasant change of labour, handed the baskets and filled the gaping barrels. And up the ladders and through the trees and among the tinted heaps raced and played the children of the house, sniffing the heady flavour of the rich fruit, teasing the maids, cajoling the men, staggering under the heavy baskets, pelting each other, even, with the crimson and yellow globes, bringing each specially large and perfect one to their mother for congratulation. She, stopping for the moment her strange, jewelled embroidery, that alone would have marked her for an artist of high powers, would lean over each boy and girl, murmuring her praise, soothing in the same breath the unlucky ones who had not found the most gorgeous fruit, warning the men not to trouble the yet unready apples, quieting the maids if they grew too boisterous, an eye and an ear for everyone and everything.

As the lowering sun struck full on the nearest heap of red and gold, and turned

the russet fruit on the bough to bronze nuggets wrapped in leaves of wonderfully wrought jade, a sudden thought tempted me and I spoke quickly, glancing slyly at her calm, contented face.

"Look at that colour!" I said, "does it not cry out to you to be painted? Does it not make you remember that spring orchard of yours that everyone praised so, and from which the great Master predicted your future? Would you not like to escape from all this pleasant, tiny bustle, this network of ceaseless demands upon your hands, your heart, your brain, and once again attack a real work?"

She looked curiously at me.

"A real work?" she repeated.

"I mean an enduring work," I explained, "a thing from which you can lift your hand some day and say, 'This is done. To the best of my power it is finished. Let it stand, and judge me by it.'"

She nodded her head slowly and I saw that she was not really looking at me,

though she seemed to be, but beyond me, across the splendid orchard piles, into the stacked gold of the corn far afield.

"That's it," she murmured, "that's just what I told her — 'an enduring work.' And what was it she said to me? Oh! I am going again — I am partly there now! Don't you see it? Is that the Lower Orchard? Are those the gray gables of the Farm?"

Her voice thrilled strangely and her eyes were staring, vague: it was as if she hung between sleep and waking. I looked where she pointed, but it was only an enormous ledge of gray rock, curiously slanted, and I said so, softly.

"It is only a rock, broken at the gable angle, dear."

Then she faced me, herself perfectly.

"Oh, you think so?" she answered me with a smile.

The words were strange enough in themselves, but without them her manner

would have taught me that she was going to speak of stranger things yet, and I was not disappointed.

"It was just such a day as this," she began, "and the smell of the apples always takes me back, though never as strongly as now. We were in the orchard . . . ah, my dear, you will tell it wonderfully well when I have told you, and many will learn as I have learned, but you can never make them see the Dame as I saw her!"

Then she told me the tale of that adventure.

. . . .

"What you need," said her friend, the great physician, "is change. Change and rest. Where can you go and be sure of absolute quiet?"

"I cannot tell you," she said wearily, "there is always something that I must do ——"

"—— or think that you must do," he interrupted her.

"It is all the same," she said.

He sighed, and looked at her quietly for a long time.

"It has taken me fifty years to learn that, my dear child," said he, "and you toss it at me in a moment's talk. Since you have learned it, why are you not well and happy?"

"Since I have learned it, I can never be," she told him, and again he looked long at her.

"What is that that you are trying to do?" he asked her at last. "Think carefully and tell me in one sentence."

"I have already thought carefully," she said, "and I can tell you. I am trying to live my husband's life, which I ought not to give up, my children's life, which I must not give up, and my own life, which I cannot give up."

He looked even longer than before at her and the late sun slipped down the polished fittings of his desk and down the gilded covers of the book-filled shelves behind him. Longer than before he looked

and the lines deepened in his face and his eyes seemed to grow deeper in his head as she looked back at him. At last he spoke.

"My child," he said, "if I were a poor and hungry doctor it is not to be doubted that I should give you something in a bottle and tell you to come to me again. But I am a wealthy physician and I can afford to tell you truth. I can do nothing for you. You must cure yourself, or fail to do it so completely that I shall be needed to enable you to fail again. When you have repeated this last process sufficiently, I shall no longer be thus enabled and you will die. That is all."

"Die?" said she; "I shall die?"

"You will die," he said, "with everything that the world calls good fortune in your lap. With no excuse for doing so, but with every reason to be glad that you are doing so. Leaving behind you someone who needed you and more whom you needed. Now go home and think, and before you go, drink this."

Silently he poured out for her a tiny glassful of some colourless, aromatic liquid and in silence she drank it and left the room, where the dying sun glinted upon the gilded books. It seemed to her that he touched a bell on the desk with his hand, and though the cordial had already begun to affect her head strangely, she was able to observe that it was in answer to this bell that his office nurse appeared at the door as she reached it and put a steadying arm behind her.

"Come this way," said the nurse, "and sit a moment; do you feel a little dizzy?"

"A little," she answered, and her voice seemed to come from far away; "I am afraid that drink was stronger than it should have been . . . if I could sit down . . . the doctor . . ."

She knew that the nurse was helping her to a couch in a tiny room she had never been in before; she knew that she sank upon it and that the nurse settled her upon a bright crimson cushion; she

heard her soothing murmur and nodded to show that she was not alarmed, only vexed at her own weakness, and then she ceased to struggle with the overwhelming drowsiness that oppressed her, and slept.

When she woke it was dark in the room. In the street the electric lights glowed, and the people passed steadily by the window; was it midnight, she wondered, or only early dusk? How strange that the doctor and the nurse had forgotten her!

"But, of course he would not have wished me waked," she said, and rose, straightened her dress, waited a moment, and then pulled impatiently at an old-fashioned bell-rope that hung by the door. There was no answer. Again she rang, but the house lay dark and silent. A little housemaid with brown, startled eyes, came at last, just as she was beginning to grow alarmed at the darkness and stillness, and stared at her.

"Was it you that rang, madam?" asked

this little housemaid; "the doctor is out: he will not be back to-night."

"And the nurse?" she inquired, vexed at this lack of thought of her.

"The nurse has gone long ago, madam, for the night."

A flood of nervous anger broke over her.

"How disgraceful!" she cried; "how unkind! To leave me here like this! What time is it, pray?"

"It is very late, madam; I could not tell you the hour."

The little housemaid yawned and pressed her tumbled cap straight.

She bit her lips to keep herself from angry tears and rushed through the heavy street door, down the stone steps, out upon the pavement. Angrily she sped along, brushing by the people, who, in turn, stumbled rudely against her. The jostling crowd brimmed her eyes; she walked as one in a mist.

"How cruel everyone is to me!" she whispered to herself and walked faster.

Suddenly a thought came to her. Where was she going? Surely she ought not to attempt to walk all the way to her home, so late at night? She must call a carriage. She fumbled vaguely in the little bag at her wrist, but no purse was there; only a few small coins.

"I must get into a street-car," she thought dully, and just then a noisy, lighted street-car rushed toward her on a cross-street and she entered it as it stopped to take in a group of workmen. They shouldered by her roughly, and one of them laid his greasy bundle half upon her lap; she shrunk into a corner. She held out her coin to the brisk collector, but he passed her by, took one from all of the others, and left her, shaking, haunted by a nameless dread.

"Here is my fare!" she called to him, but he, whistling, left her in her corner.

She hid her face in her hands and tried to control her whirling thoughts, but her brain raced like a mill stream and her

legs shook under her trailing skirt. All too late she remembered that her carriage was waiting for her at the doctor's: she ought not to have rushed into the street. She was giddy and confused, and knew that her mind was the mind of one in the grip of fever. On and on the street-car rumbled; one by one the workmen brushed by her and got out.

"Have I been here hours or minutes?" she wondered, but dared not speak.

Now she was alone in the car. She peered through the window and saw that it was passing over water; the lights blurred in the dark, shining mirror below.

"Oh, this is wrong! I should never have come this way!" she moaned, and knew that she was lost, lost and alone.

When she dared look through the window again the water was gone, and she felt the motion of the car to be slower. Soon it had stopped. Trembling, she rose from her corner and walked unsteadily to the door.

"Will you kindly tell me where we are? I have made a mistake," she said to the man who had refused to take her money.

He looked at her and spoke to his companion.

"I suppose we're booked for the usual half-hour wait, Jim," he said; "I don't see any green light."

She cried aloud and rushed out of it.

"I think I am mad!" she wept. "I wish I had died with my head on that crimson cushion! What will happen to me? That cruel doctor will have killed me!"

"What is it, madam? Can I help you?"

A soft voice spoke close to her and she grasped the arm of a slender, girlish creature who turned two brown, startled eyes up at her. Now it was for joy that she wept, and clung to the girl, whom her confused brain took to be the brown-eyed housemaid who had spoken to her last.

"Indeed, indeed, you can help me!" she cried. "I am lost — I have come into the country, it seems, a long way, in a terrible street-car where no one would speak to me, and I ought to be in the city, in my home, for I am afraid I am very ill: I seem to be in a sort of fever. Do you know where we are? I have never been here. When will it be day?"

"Very soon, madam," said the little maid, supporting her firmly for all her slenderness, "and I know well where we are. Come home with me; Karen and I plan to be at the Farm by daybreak."

She looked, and there beside them stood a tiny donkey, saddled with a sort of leather chair, and almost at the level of his rough, thin shoulder stood a great sleek-coated hound.

"Let me help you into the saddle, madam," the little maid went on, "and you will find how well you sit there. I am very strong, and I can walk beside."

As in a dream she let the girl half lift

her into the seat, and the donkey walked easily along, the hound stepping nobly by them, his mistress leading the sure-footed beast.

There were no lights but the great moon and the kindly little stars, and no streets but narrow lanes, winding through feathery maples and stocky oaks that would be sulphur-yellow and iron-red with the sun behind them, but were now only their own whispering ghosts.

"This must be far from the city," she said softly, and the little maid answered:

"I do not know, madam; I was never there. We have come far, Karen and I, but not from the way you were running. We are going to the Farm to help in the orchard. The Dame sent for me and father always wishes to oblige the Dame. So we came at once."

"And can you send someone back with me?"

"I do not know, madam. The Dame will take care of it."

"I will pay whatever is right—I am not poor," she muttered, holding to one side of the saddle.

"The Dame will know, madam," the little maid repeated, and they went on their way under a lightening sky, for the dawn was coming up white, and even now the moon was paling.

She had no way of telling how long that journey was, for more than once her head nodded forward on her breast and she knew that she fell into a kind of sleep that was not wholly sleep, for she was aware of the little donkey's gentle gait, of the winding, leaf-strewn paths, of the winking stars. Once they went through a bit of rolling pasture-land where the cattle drowsed, dim, misty bulks on either hand, and the steaming breath of a curious horse bathed her startled face. He galloped away and his hurrying feet woke her to the sense that the dawn was upon them. The light was now a pale rosy glow and straight from its heart a beaming arrow

There were no lights but the great moon

struck upon a long brown gable that she took for one of the great ledges of massive rock that time and again had risen beside them. But the little maid knew better, and skipped beside the hound.

"See, madam," she cried, "here is the Farm! And there is my little window in the roof! And there are the doves above the long barn."

She looked and saw that all these things were so, but great weariness filled her and she could think of nothing but the long way back, for she knew that they had come a great way from the city.

"This may all be well for you, child, but it is not the same to me," she said sadly.

"And why not, madam? The Dame is kind to all," the little maid replied, and urged the donkey on.

"What is your name?" she asked, looking for the first time at her guide in the full light of early day. The girl was quaintly dressed, she saw, with a black

bodice laced across her young body, a shorter skirt than grown girls wear now, and a scarlet ribbon twisted among the long, dark braids that hung down her shoulders. She had travelled much in older countries than her own and to her eyes this girl had the air of a winsome little peasant that knew her simple station and was happy in it.

"Joan is my name, madam — and I have been told that the miller's Dyrk has called the new brown foal for me — the finest one at the Farm!" she said with a bubble of laughter.

"Now, madam, we are here at last. Let me help you down, and we will surprise the Dame for once, for not often does one catch her asleep. She will be the first always — and here she is!"

They were in the very dooryard of a thriving, deep-eaved farm-house. Asters glistened with dew about the doorstep, a straw-filled kennel for the great hound stood close by, the cocks welcomed in the

day from behind a trim green hedge, and slowly across the back-stretching meadow came home a file of sleek, heavy-uddered cattle. She stared at them unseeing, for her head reeled, but Joan mistook her staring and began to prattle:

"You are surprised, no doubt, madam, to see the cows come in from the pasture this early, but here at the Farm the air is so dry and pure that they leave them in the fields all night, and the milk tastes of honey and meadow grass, the miller's Dyrk does say ——"

"Child, child, will you never be done with your chatter? The stranger is sick — too sick, I see, to mind herself of the Farm's cows. Help me to take her in!"

"You must be the Dame," she said, and tried to look steadily at the woman who came out of the oaken door to lead her in. She was a strong, sturdy woman, neither tall nor short, with brown, smooth hair and a brown, smooth skin with red blood beneath. Her eyes were like brook water

in the sun, that runs over clean pebbles, and she was deep-chested, and stood firm in her quaintly buckled shoes. She wore a chintz gown dyed with little red and yellow flowers that was looped up over the hips, and at her waist hung a bunch of heavy, wrought keys.

"Nay, now, never try to talk," she said, and put a strong arm about her drooping guest. "You are past talking, poor thing! You have done far too much — for others, I'll be bound. Rest first, and then talk after that. Help her up the stairs, now, Joan, and hush thy chatter."

"But you do not know why I am here," she murmured, leaning hard upon the black oaken rail of the polished stair.

"I know you are here, do I not?" the Dame answered quietly; "I should not get you to bed the quicker, whatever I knew. Softly, Joan; softly!"

One last effort and they stood within a long, low-beamed chamber, whose leaded panes shone no more brightly than the

polished floor below them. In the centre a great posted bed reared its snowy canopy. and copper jars of water and piles of linen and other washing gear reminded her that she was unworthy of that white bed. On the deep window-sill bloomed pots of gay flowers, and the tall chairs with winged backs were covered with dim prints pictured with strange birds and lions.

"Now," said the Dame, "undress her and into the bed!"

"But I am not clean," she said; "I am dusty from the street."

"Then we will wash you clean," said the Dame. "Joan, go get warm water, child, and the great copper, and make haste with fresh sheets; Lotte will help you."

Deftly she was undressed and her chilled body was chafed and rubbed till Joan and another girl came staggering under a great copper bowl a yard wide. They filled it with steaming water which, as she crouched in it, the Dame poured over her shaking shoulders.

"How white she is," the girls whispered; "how soft her skin must be!"

"Run Lotte," cried the Dame, "and bring me the ruby cordial from the cordial-room, and you, Joan, get the little copper pannikin and heat that bit of broth by the hob and warm the bedgown with the lace your mother made for me!"

The ruby cordial was poured into the bath and a sweet and penetrating odour filled the room. It seemed that her bones ceased to ache from that moment, and when, wrapped in the warmed gown, nestled in fragrant sheets, she sipped at the hot broth Joan held to her lips while Lotte braided her long hair, a peace she had not known fell down upon her, and pillowing her head gently she fell into a deep and restful sleep.

She was wakened by the cooing of many doves and the broad sun of middle-morning that streamed across her white bed. Her mind was as clear as the mind of a child and she laughed a little as she

sprang from the great deep bed and put on the clean short petticoat and buckled shoes that lay beside it, glad that her own dusty garments were not there. She wound her long braids about her head and pinned a blue kerchief over her shoulders, then she slipped down the stairs and through the great kitchen with its twinkling pans and sanded stone floor. A woman, bent over the wide fireplace, turned her head in its white cap and spoke to her:

"Dame is in the dairy — 'tis built over the brook. Perhaps you will take this with you?"

She lifted the willow-woven basket in her hand and went out through the door across the barnyard, where the doves preened themselves among the clean straw, and found the little stone house above the brook. All about her she heard the busy noises of the country morning; soft voices, men's calls, the stamping of farm horses, the clatter of the household ware, the splash of cleansing water poured, the

hissing kettle; but she saw no one. It seemed to her that eyes were upon her and that pauses in the cheery bustle followed her as she walked, but whenever she stopped and tried to meet these eyes there was no one. She moved alone among the unseen workers, and yet she knew they watched her.

In the cool stone dairy the Dame stood at work, pressing and patting at the soft coloured butter. Beaded brown jars of cream were by her and great, fair pans of milk, mounds and balls of primrose-tinted butter, white cheeses wrapped in grape-leaves, clotted cream that quivered at a touch, tall pitchers of whey, loppered milk ready for the spoon and buttermilk in new-washed churns. Through the moist freshness of the stone room the brook ran, chuckling and lapping; great stones roughly mortared together made the floor on either side of it; the Dame stood high on wooden clogs and hummed a ballad wherein the birds sang in the morning,

The Dame stood high on wooden clogs and hummed a ballad . . . .

but at night the eggs were broken, and the wind was high and scattered the fledglings.

Even the freshness of her late rest in her heart, her eyes filled at the Dame's song, and often afterward she thought of it when the wind was rising.

"And did you rest well?" said the Dame to her when the song was done.

"Never so well since I was a child," she said. "I have come to thank you for all your care, and to ask you when you can send me home, for I have no idea where I am, and I am sure I have come a long way."

"A long way, indeed!" said the Dame, and looked at her strangely, but when she questioned her this busy Dame only smiled, and told her that it was good to hear of her freshening sleep but no surprise, since all made the same report of the Farm.

"It seems the air here is so pure that a few hours of it do more for the body than days of other parts of the countryside,"

she said, and when her visitor asked again, "But where am I?" she only answered:

"But are you not ready for your breakfast, then?"

"Indeed I am," said she, "but I fear I have come away from it, to find you."

"Nay," said the Dame, "you have brought it with you," and pointed to the basket. She opened it and spread the wheaten rolls, the jar of honey, the brown, new-laid egg and the clean, homespun napkin upon the Dame's table and ate with wonderful relish, supplying herself with sweet butter and yellow milk from the stores about her, and while she ate and the Dame worked, they talked.

"You must be very busy, Dame, to be up with the dawn," she said.

"Why, that is so," said the Dame, "but women must needs be busy, as you know well, I have no doubt."

She sighed and twisted her idle hands.

"I do not know that I can truly say I am always busy," she said thoughtfully,

"but I know that I have much to do — so much that I cannot do it," and again she sighed.

"Why, that is odd," said the Dame, patting her butter; "I have so much to do that I *must* do it."

She knit her brows and tried to think of an answer, but the answers that came to her mind had a foolish sound as she tried them over, so she said nothing.

"The Farm lets no one rest," the Dame went on, "and you must know that everything you brought with you this morning, the willow basket, the napkin, the egg, the wheaten flour, the honey, all were made here, and that means much work for many hands."

Now this put her in mind of something she had thought of before.

"But surely this is not the usual fashion in this country," she said curiously, "nor your quaint-figured gowns, nor much else about the place, for that matter. All this labour in flax and willow and dairy-house

seems like some old picture or some ancient song — who has devised it, pray?"

"Aye, we keep the old ways," said the Dame quietly; "there must be some to do it or they will be lost, I am thinking."

"But so near the city," she said, and again the Dame looked strangely at her.

"Are we so near, then?" said she.

She knit her brows and it seemed that her mind, so clear since she woke, was clouded as to all before that; only the feeling of some great trouble, some dusty hurry, some ruinous failure haunted her. Also for the first time that day she found herself afraid.

"You have not yet told me the name of this town," she said, trying to be calm.

"It is not a town, my dear, it is called the Farm," said the Dame, putting the finished rolls of butter in a brown crock; "there is no town near us."

"But there must be!" she persisted; "you are teasing me. There are always

towns, and they are never far from each other in these parts."

"I do not know them, then," said the Dame, gathering her keys and leaving the dairy, "though in truth, my dear, I am a poor judge of such matters, for beyond the Farm — and it is large — I do not go, being too busy always."

"Do you mean," she cried, following through the barnyard, "that you spend all the seasons on this Farm? It is not possible!"

"And why is it not possible?" the Dame asked, looking at her for the first time a little sternly, and she saw that in spite of her smooth country skin she was a woman of middle age; "the seasons are all full. In the spring there is planting, in the summer there is picking, in the autumn there is storing, in the winter there is spinning."

Now these were simple words and plain to understand, and yet something about them troubled her greatly and she felt

that she must find an answer for them or know no peace at all.

"That is all very well," she said quickly, "but you are leaving out something without which all the seasons are empty and the year a dull affair."

"And what is that, then?" asked the Dame.

"Pleasure," she said.

"I find pleasure in them all," the Dame said, "and so do those about me."

"But they are all work — they are things that must be done!" she cried, tugging at the Dame's sleeve as she crossed the kitchen threshold; "true pleasure is a thing apart — we must have both, surely."

The Dame blew a little silver whistle hanging among her keys and at once there was a bustle and a running and some dozen maids came hurrying from all parts of the rambling farm-house to hear her orders. But before she busied herself with these she spoke to her guest.

"My dear," she said, "if you come to my time of life and have not found your pleasure in your work, you will never find it in this world. Sit down and think of this."

She sat down upon a carven chest by the open window, where the asters sent out a spicy odour and the hum of bees was not too far distant, and dropped her chin into the cup of her hands and thought.

Meantime, the Dame laid out for each girl her task, not hurried nor yet slow, but so that each was started fairly.

"You, Lotte, order the cordial-room so that there is room for the new bottles and write them down in the store-book. Remember to leave no drippings nor spillings, nor do I look to see my best napkins used for this. Janet, find Big Hans and make the apple-cellar ready for the barrels. Lois, I warn you that I shall go through all the chambers soon, and if all is as well there as when last I peeped under the beds and through the panes and looked

at my face in the coppers, when the shoemaker comes, after Michaelmas, there shall be a pair of trim red shoes for those busy feet, and no cost to your father. Trude, the old hen-wife has more of her aches and pains to-day, and you must feed the pullets their extra grain and see to the eggs. Elspeth, the linen is all in to-day and 'tis for you to count it. Joan, if thy sparrow's tongue can hold still for an hour, thou shalt come with me and give out the stores for the pantry and kitchen. Perhaps a bit of potted quince will hold thy teeth together. Hannah, I know, is wise and trusty, and can busy herself as I would, with no telling what and where. But I could not trust you two, Margot and Mary, and old Greta must keep you by her with the candle-work. And should she box your ears, come not into my storeroom with your cryings, but work the harder for it. You others, help in the kitchen, and make ready for the men when they are done with the apples, and

hungry. If Will comes to ask about the ale, he may see me in the pantry, but I have no time for Dyrk and his accounts to-day. Nay, now, Sparrow, there is no need to pull at my skirt! 'Tis strange, indeed, that the miller's matters must always be looked into when thou art with me."

They scattered each to her work, and some sang together in rounds and catches and some were silent, but all grew quickly busy. There was but one idle, and she, ashamed of this and trying to still the fear that hung behind her thoughts, fol-fowed the fair-haired Elspeth to the linen-room and watched her lift the fragrant white matters from the deep willow crates and pile them on the deeper shelves among twists of blue lavender and strewings of old roses.

"Shall I trouble you by talking?" she asked her, and Elspeth shook her head shyly and answered:

"No, madam, except when I must count the piles, and then I will tell you."

"Do you always do this work?" she said.

"No, madam," Elspeth answered her, "the Dame will have each girl learn all manner of work, so we take it turn about. Before this I was at the washing, and beat the linen on the brook-stones — oh, it was fine to see the fresh air blow through it and sweeten all so quickly! Then Margot and Mary taught me clear-starching. Last year I tied the herbs and tended the herb-attic; I grew the rosemary and sweet-basil in my own garden, and Big Hans brought us marjoram. There is no thyme and summer savoury like the Dame's, though."

"And what does the Dame pay you for all this?" she asked.

"Each of us has a great piece of the fine weaving — enough for body-linen," said Elspeth, "and some of the coarser to lay aside for our chests; a gown and shoes at Christmas; a goose to send home at Michaelmas (and Dame always adds a good flitch of bacon — she is so generous,

the Dame!) and a gold piece at Easter. When little Myrta was married she had a silk gown and a great bag of fine flour and pillows and mattress for her bed. And it is well known that Joan will have a silver porringer and spoons and the carved chest with real Damask napkins."

"And you have no sports — no games? You slave here the year round for a flitch of bacon and a bit of linen?"

"No, indeed, madam; it is not so! We are always having a treat! Why, think now: at Christmas, the holidays, the gifts, the carols and the games, with fiddler and spiced wine and all manner of cakes; at harvest, the great dance, the prizes, the ale; at Easter, the church trimming, the gold-pieces sent home and the pick of the lambs for the one that does best at Catechism (but that is the little ones); at midsummer, the fairings ——"

"And who come to these fairs?" she asked quickly.

Elspeth hung her head and coloured, glancing about as one caught in a trap.

"Enough of this nonsense!" the woman cried, upsetting the spotless linen angrily. "Tell me where I am and what game you play here! I will go myself and soon be quit of this wonderful Farm of yours and this masquerading Dame!"

"Elspeth," said the grave voice of the Dame herself, "you will be always at the talk, my child, and now you have made trouble, and you, my dear, if I were to tell you where you were, how would it help you to go elsewhere? Listen to me. Through yonder door you may go at this moment, but I advise you not to go without the great hound, for much is on the moors that is far from safe. And at the end he will only bring you here, for he knows no other way, and you would wander endlessly there."

She looked, and around the edge of the tilled land she saw mile upon mile of desolate moor. Rushing to the win-

dow at the end of the hall, she saw the pasture-land she had come through and beyond that a deep forest.

"But I came over water . . ." she murmured, and the Dame said gravely:

"I know. All who come here come over water. But they do not go back over it."

Then her eyes grew wide with terror, not at the Dame's simple words, but at something strange that seemed to lie behind them, and she gave her hand to the Dame and walked quietly beside her to the orchard.

Here among the ripe fruit they sat down, the Dame busy at knitting, herself with twisted, idle hands, and she fought away her fear as she saw the stalwart men and the merry girls at work upon the clover-scented piles.

"Why am I afraid? These are simple people working — they are real; they talk and sing!" she said to herself, but her hands trembled and the high sun seemed

to her more like the unreal glory of the coloured windows in some great church than the sun she knew.

Hardly was the Dame seated when two fine young boys ran toward her, struggling with each other to reach her first.

"Oh, mother, I have learned my book!" cried one, and the other, "Oh, dear mother, I can do the sum now!"

She kissed them fondly and told them she would hear them soon.

"And where are your sisters?" she asked them.

"Alda is among her doves and Grizel is coming to you for help with the hood she is knitting," said one, and the other:

"But May Ellen is with Joan down in the nut-bins, and mother, they are quarrelling about young Dyrk! Each will have it that he likes her best, the foolish things!"

"Run, then, Roger, and bring them to me," said the Dame; "they are o'er young for such quarrels. We will set them at the apples."

Now, before the Dame had gone once around her knitting she was called from it ten times. Would the Dame have them bring in the russets first? Would the Dame look to the new honey, for they dared not take off the bees alone? Would the Dame hear a sum? Would the Dame say which of two disputants had the right? Would the Dame see the miller? Would she take the pay for the gray mare? And such like questionings that left her alone not a moment.

She who sat idle plucked at the Dame's sleeve and spoke timidly to her.

"One could not work at some great matter, Dame, with so many calls aside from it, I think."

"I think so, too, my dear," the Dame answered her, "and that is why I will be knitting, which is no great matter from which to be called aside."

She bit her lip, and thought, and spoke again.

"Great laws must be made, Dame, and

these who make them must keep away from these stinging gnats."

"I know that well," said the Dame, and looked straight at her, "but I, thank God, need never make great laws, but only teach my household to obey them."

She sighed, but spoke again.

"It is not only laws, Dame, but beautiful things the world over must not be disturbed in the making. You could not make a great picture or a great song with Roger and Grizel pulling you here and there."

"And that is true, too," the Dame said, "but I need not make great songs, thank God, but only teach them to my children."

"And still there must be great songs," she said.

"And still there must be great children," said the Dame.

"I know, I know!" she cried, and pressed her hands to her forehead. "I learned that once — in a deep wood. And I have

the children. But I would make great pictures, too. Not instead of the children, but with them, Dame, with them!"

"You cannot, nor any other woman," said the Dame, and turned to her knitting.

"But if I tried, if I tried . . ." she pleaded.

"It is not by trying that these things are done," said the Dame coldly, "Lotte will not lift the load of russets yonder though she break her back at it, little fool. See, now she is so tired that Hans must carry both them and her."

"She is a country girl," said the pale woman, eagerly.

"Outside and inside she is made after the pattern of yourself and all other women," said the Dame, "and the one truth is true for us all."

"Good Dame," she said, after a moment, while the wagons creaked through the orchard and the girls laughed as the sun slipped lower, "what if I strove no more for greatness, but only made me little

pictures to pleasure a few that love me and myself?"

"Why, as for that," said the Dame more kindly—"have a care there, Roger, you will hurt your sister if you play too roughly with her!—as for that, I can see no harm in it. Neither can I see how it should be worth any woman's while, if the thing be not great, and she knows it. It is a child's game."

"That is true," she said bitterly, "though how you should know it who pass your days on a petty farm, far from the great world, I cannot see."

"If you come to my time of life, my dear, and still think that the world is great or petty by so much as it is near a farm or far from it, you will not be having much content in your old age," said the Dame. "Now I must put my mind upon the heel of this stocking."

She wept aloud and saw now that not for nothing had she come upon this secret Farm and that in this glowing orchard

she was to learn her hardest lesson. The Dame spoke again, and finally.

"Listen!" she said, "for this is the way of it. No woman living will ever do a great work who could not have borne great children, and if she can bear great children she can do no other great work. Else she would be as God Almighty, who has made both the poet and the poem, the painter and his picture. For He made it before the painter could see it. Now, go and help them with the apples, for the sun is setting and there are yet a few to gather."

She stumbled forward and threw herself upon the fragrant heaps and toiled till the breath left her, nor did she talk any more to Elspeth, who worked beside her, nor to Joan who picked behind. Her back ached and her arms wearied with their load; her legs began again to tremble and her breath came short. And all the time her brows were knotted with a teasing thought and her lips moved ceaselessly.

Suddenly she rushed toward the placid Dame and fell on her knees before her.

"Oh, Dame," she cried, "must we always labour so? Can we never achieve, but must we ever do those tasks which the night will undo again? These apples will not stand for the world to see that I picked them; your dairy work is unwoven like a dream. Must it be so?"

"My dear," said the Dame, and her smile was sweeter than the sunlight through the coloured boughs, "it must be always so. Even as the day dies every night and is born with the dawn; even as the orchard leaves but to blossom and blossoms but to fruit, and all is to do another year; even as God makes the harvest for us to spoil, and smiles and makes another; so must women weave what the year will wear and wash what the day will soil. And man, her greatest work, will one day die and moulder into roses that other men shall one day pick. Our men-children finish their lovely toys and set them on the

shelf, but our work is too great that we should ever finish it; it is so great that it must needs be made of many tiny matters, done now and again like the growing rains and sheltering snows. We can never be at rest — till God himself rests. Do you understand what I would be saying?"

She wept and laid her head in the Dame's lap and the yellow apples fell about her knees as she knelt. But she answered:

"Yes, dear Dame, I understand. But, oh, Dame, why is it so?"

"I do not know, my dear," answered the Dame, "but I know that we must learn it or we cannot live in the world. Now sleep, for you have been almost too long at the Farm."

She felt the Dame's strong hands upon her head, she heard the voices of the maids and the men, crying, "Sing us a song, dear Dame! Will you not sing us a song?"

Then the Dame began an old, sad ballad

of a knight that loved a lady and went for her sake to fight the Pagans; but the moon rose cold over her marble tomb when he came back, and her falcon wailed beneath his hood. There was much more of this quaint sorrow and though she never could remember it she thought of it always when she walked in orchards.

Then she felt that she was being lifted, and in her dream she heard the Dame's deep voice:

"Push her through the wicket — hurry, Joan, she must be off the Farm soon or it will be too late, poor child! Is Karen saddled? Push her! — make haste, make haste! I hear the river — make haste, there! Push!"

"I will not leave the Farm! I will not!" she muttered and struggled to wake and fight with Joan. The red sun cut her opening eyes like a knife, she fought the arms that held her arms and struggled awake, staring into Joan's brown eyes.

But was it Joan? Joan wore no white

cap, no tight black dress. The red glow in her eyes, was it the sun or a crimson cushion beneath her head? Whose stern, bearded lips unbent and smiled at her?

"Push, keep pushing!" he said, and raised and lowered her arms.

"Smell this, dear friend," and a strong, smarting odour filled her nostrils, so that she coughed and choked.

"That is better," said someone; "we were frightened. Why did you not tell us your heart was weaker than usual?"

The office nurse fanned her; a strong light was in her face.

"The doctor felt terribly about you — that cordial was not so very strong, he thought. You are all right, now?"

"It was Lotte that kept the cordial-room," she said vaguely, but with speaking her mind cleared and she came to herself again.

"Was I — was it for long?" she asked.

"It was longer than we liked," said the nurse; "of course, you had no idea

of what was happening to you. We tried everything."

"I know that a great deal happened," she said; "let me see the doctor before I go."

The Last Lesson

THE CASTLE ON THE DUNES

I SAW much of my friend as the years hurried by us; years in which I seemed to myself to lag shamefully, sometimes, and win nothing new out of life, but from which she drew fresh vigour of spirit with every season.

Many things she taught me, and of them all I best remember the one she told me last, when I had known her twenty years. She was at that time fully sixty, with a fine crown of silver hair, a tall, full figure and piercing dark eyes, for as she grew older her whole regard grew, as it seemed to me, keener and more commanding, and not, as with some women, softer and less powerful.

I had been with her all the white winter evening, on one of those errands of discerning charity that occupied so many of her hours and thoughts — dangerously many,

as we who loved her would often say, considering that she spent herself unnecessarily upon much for which others might well have acted deputy. The sun had set early, for it was midwinter, and white points of winter stars were pricking through the frozen sky. The snow, iced over with a glistening crust, sent back pale reflections to the bars of cold green and thin rosy glows that stood for sunset, and a threatening wind began to rise, that shook down little icicles from the window ledge and made the stiff, chill branches of the oaks and beeches creak warningly.

I shivered to myself with pleasure and thanked sincerely the slender girl that brought hot tea to me and unwrapped my long furs. It was not my friend's daughter — the youngest of these was now happily married, and she would have been alone, were it not for the girls that she kept with her, training and guiding them into some of the wisdom and charm that distinguished her gracious self — a sort of unchartered

school, where less gifted mothers sought eagerly to install their daughters.

As she accepted the services of two of these, and dispatched by a messenger some comforts to be sent to the suffering creature we had just returned from visiting, I lingered by the window and saw the first shadowy flakes of a new storm. The wind rose quickly to a howl, an icy branch tapped at the pane; we had narrowly escaped a dangerous home-coming. I could not resist a somewhat pettish complaint.

"Don't you think," I began, "that you have earned a rest from these expeditions, these insistent girls of yours, this constant responsibility? You are magnificently strong and well — yes; but even your vitality has its limits and too many people hang upon you, my dear! Do you shake us all off for a while and do something for yourself, your own pleasure and relaxation. Surely at your age you deserve rest! Your own have ceased to need you — why invite others?"

She looked strangely at me and in the dusk I saw her face white.

"There!" I went on, "you have harrowed yourself unnecessarily with that poor creature's pain and want — surely you could have sent money? There are people whose sole business it is to attend to such cases, and their nerves are coarser than yours — they are not so wrung by what is daily work to them."

At that moment a great fall of snow slid from one of the sloping roofs, so that the air was white before us. It swept to the ground with a dense, rushing crash and heaped itself into fantastic towers and walls; close by a red lantern shone out; the wind moaned sadly.

"Look! look!" she cried, one hand at her side, "the Dunes again! Surely you see that Castle, too? Or is it the sign — Oh, I am ready! Believe me, I am ready!"

I caught her hand.

"Those are no dunes, my dear friend, only black shadows on the snow of your own

lands," I assured her, "and it is one of your own men with a lantern going on your own errand. It is the fallen snow that takes those strange spire-like shapes — no castle. This wind wails too much for your nerves. Look in, at the fire and the warm hall."

"No, no," she said quietly, "I love to look out — I am not afraid. I never know when I may see the Castle. And what you said about my rest . . . Well, it seems to open my lips. It was on just such a night . . . how cold the stars were! And I had nearly lost myself — hunting for my rest! When the moon rises I will tell you."

And then I knew that I was to hear one of those strange experiences of hers. As always, she spoke quickly, often halting for long between swift gushes of narrative, now as one who reads from an old book about a stranger, now like the adventurer himself. She did not always or steadily employ the style into which I have thrown her words,

but she wrapped me in an atmosphere, and from that and the remembrance of a rising winter moon and a still, cold night, I write.

. . . .

Her old friend the great physician, who now, in the evening of his busy life, attended only upon those whose necessities baffled the less experienced, pursed his lips and stared at her out of a grizzle of white hair.

"And what will you do," he asked abruptly, "when I have convinced them that you are unable to keep up these various relations that have been so many years a-building? Where will you go for this great rest?"

"Somewhere where I can be alone," she answered him, firmly, "where I can fold my hands by some quiet, lonely river, and think, where I can realize what I am; a widow, lonely for her best and life-long friend, a mother whose children need her no longer, a woman who has tasted life long enough and paid her debt to the world, and

would slip out of it quietly. Surely that is little to ask?"

"I should say that the fact of your living showed you had not yet paid your debt to life," he said drily, "and I confess that I cannot see any great value in realizing these things you speak of. If they are so, they are so. Let them be."

"Oh, you are a man!" she cried bitterly.

"And I know, therefore, what a woman needs," he said, "and you, especially, who have many gifts denied, mostly, to your sex. Believe me, there is only one river for you — it is, literally, the River of Life."

"It is Lethe," she said obstinately, "and you shall not deny it to me. I tell you I am weary of my thoughts, and all the business of this River of yours. I have gained the bank; it is philosophy. Before I am driven far Inland — where even you cannot come and get me — and lose it altogether, I claim the right to begin the journey of my own accord. I want you to give me again that delicious, soothing

treatment, that electric whirring, that takes away my thoughts — will you?"

He mused a while, seemed to have forgotten her.

"No, I will not," he said at length. And it was in vain that she urged him for he held to the refusal.

"Ours is no time of life to soothe away thought, dear friend," he said, "you need no treatment of mine."

While she begged him there came an urgent call from an inner office and he left the room quickly, asking her to wait. And as she sat there, baffled and a little resentful, the sight of the bright, mysterious machine so obedient there and always ready with its delicious oblivion, put a wild idea into her brain.

"We are old friends," she said to herself, "I know how he does it — why not? He will soon be here!"

And she pressed the well-known knob and watched the great discs begin to whir softly around under their glass dome.

At the familiar sound her hunger for the coming comfort mounted fiercely, and she seized the long, supple, silk-wrapped cords and pressed the bulbs to either temple. A slight shock ran through her blood and with the realization of her folly came the knowledge that she could not take down her hands. The whirring grew, doubled, multiplied in volume; the room seemed to sway and rock; a low rumbling, like thunder, filled the air. Blind terror seized her, and shame for what she had done and could not undo, and as the office door flew open and a sharp, angry exclamation rose above the roaring, she summoned all her strength of will, tore away her hands, and fled, sick with fear, through a door covered by a velvet curtain. Through a small passage she stumbled, and then, as hurrying feet sounded behind her, and the roaring and whirring grew momently, she wove her way among a network of back stairs and halls and fell upon a small door under some steps, thinking it must lead to a cellar and

stupidly remembering the safety of such spots in explosions and earthquakes — for now the whole house was quivering with the throbs of the terrible force she had set in motion. Down the narrow stair she plunged and hurried through the dim, earthy cellar, past bins of coal and great coiling pipes and drains. The jar seemed lessened here, but her humiliation and fright were no less.

"I can never meet his eyes again!" she murmured. "Will he ever forgive me? I must find a way out, down here."

But in the dim light and her utter ignorance of that part of the house, she could find no way out, though she went steadily away, during many minutes, from the stair she had descended. A great rat whisked across her foot and with a shriek of disgust she pressed the knob of a low door, forced it open, and found herself at the head of another flight of steps, of heavy stone. This would be a sub-cellar, she reasoned, and drew back, but the clattering feet of the

rat behind her scared away all judgment and she plunged downward; the door closed heavily behind her.

These steps seemed interminable, twisted like a tower, and wearied the muscles of her legs terribly. At last they ended, and she found herself in a great arched vault like some ancient catacomb, empty, so far as she could see, but for cobwebs and dust. At least it was utterly silent; there was no more of that throbbing, and her eyes had by now accustomed themselves to the dimness. How broad this cellar might be she dared not adventure to find out, for a few paces from the wall the darkness swallowed everything.

"It must be that all the houses are connected at this depth," she thought, her mind still so confused from the shock she had sustained and all her hurry and fright, that she did not perceive the folly of her wandering farther, "for I have certainly gone far beyond the length of a city block, even. Perhaps I am in the heart of a

great aqueduct system — it is all walled and ceiled with stone."

At last the dim glow faded and she was in the utter dark. But she dared not go back, for she had no clew to the stone stairs and had lost all her reckoning.

A piercing chill grew in the dead air; the silence was terrifying. But just as her brain cleared and fear began to creep into her blood, such fatigue had laid hold on her that the fear could not choke her — she was too far spent.

"To die like a rat in a drain!" she whimpered. "To stifle underground! Oh, I am too old for it! He might have let me die in my bed!"

Just then she saw ahead of her — she could not say if it were far or near — an arch, the outline of a low door, lighted through the cracks of it, and she drove her weary feet toward this and bent upon it, but uselessly, for it was thick stone. With her last remnant of strength she set her mouth to the crack and screamed, and it

seemed to her that three loud knocks upon the other side answered her in some sort. She screamed again. Again came the three knocks and close against the crack a voice whispered.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I adjure you, wandering soul, be quiet!"

The voice was shaking with a fear as great as her own, and this gave her courage. She put her lips to the crack and cried:

"I am no wandering soul, but a poor woman! I am lost in this great vault — open, and let me out!"

"Do you swear this by the Holy Trinity, the Wounds of Christ and — and the Sorrows of Mary?"

"I swear it by anything you wish," she called, "if you will open the door and see how little you have to fear from me! But I shall soon be as dead as you think me, unless you make haste, for I am nearly frozen."

Now a rusty key grated, and after much tugging and panting from the other side, the door opened a little way and the scared head of a brown friar, such as one sees in the old countries, hooded and tonsured, peeped out.

"Mother of us all!" he cried fearfully, "and what — who art thou, then?"

"Only a woman, father," she said gently, for he was clearly ready to shut her back into the dark. "I am here by mistake. I only ask to be put on my way again, and I will not trouble your monastery."

For she had travelled much abroad and though she supposed herself to have entered through the cellar some church-school or cathedral establishment, of which there were not a few in her city, unconsciously she spoke of a monastery, as if she had met this holy brother in such a place.

"Monastery!" he repeated, but more assured now and opening the door wider, "why do you speak of that, my daughter? Who looks for a monastery on the Dunes?"

So simple and sincere he seemed that she could not doubt him and stared around her, to see herself in a rich, if small chapel, of rough stone, with coloured windows and a carved altar. The candles were but half alight; her cries had stopped this friar in his pious task, evidently. Holly was twined about among the carvings, and the effigy of a knight in full armour, his crossed feet upon a crouched hound, had candles on either side and the choicest berries and glossiest leaves upon his breastplate, but she did not stop to look at these but rushed to the only door she saw besides the one she had entered, the monk watching her curiously the while.

This door led to a narrow passage, that in turn to a broader, hung with rich tapestry, lighted with torches, set alternately with branching deer horns. This would never take her out, certainly, and she turned in confusion to the waiting friar.

"Is there no door to the street?" she said, impatiently.

He stared curiously at her.

"The street? The street," he repeated, "my daughter, what are you thinking of? Look through this pane and recollect your whereabouts."

He pointed to an empty pane among the coloured pieces of the window through which, now and then, the wind blew powdery snow. She put her eyes to it and looked out upon a great bare moorland, white under a cold winter moon. Here and there sprang a fir tree, but for the most part the land stretched away to the horizon, empty as death — and as chill. So close to her eye that she must hold her head back in order to see it, rose a great square tower with stretches of tiled roof, mostly snow-covered, spreading out below it; this chapel was the end of the building, it was plain.

Now a strange, uncertain doubt fell over her, and forgetting the terrors of the dark cellar and the long vaults, she turned to the little door again.

"Open that," she said, "and I will try

my luck at getting back. For I have come farther than I knew, it seems."

The friar crossed himself. "Back!" he cried, "back through those ancient tombs, Christ knows where? Never dream of it, my daughter! Besides," as she rushed to the door, "it would be impossible. The old key broke in the lock even as I laboured over it, and ten men could not stir it now."

"Tombs?" she murmured, fearfully, "what do you mean by tombs? I came through a cellar . . . "

"My daughter in Christ," said the friar, advancing firmly toward her and holding out with shaking hands an ivory crucifix so that it touched her breast, "if thou art a mad-woman only, God pity thee, but if thou art more — and worse — then know this sign, before Whom all devils tremble, and vanish! For thou art covered inches deep with the dust of tombs so old that they are forgotten utterly of us who tend the ashes of their descendants, and the cobweb that drapes thy body like a shawl so that I cannot

tell for my life the fashion of thy garments, or if thou art young or old, maid or widow, has been a-thickening these hundred years and more!"

At this the moon struck sharply through the empty pane and she saw herself for what he had said and swooned with the cold and her deadly fear.

She came to herself in a soft whispering and rustling of skirts, and knew that women were moving around her.

"What will happen to her?" said one voice, "I had not thought such things possible, hadst thou, Alys?"

"I know that old Ursula who was here in the old Countess's day told of something like it, and that the old Countess ordered a bath made ready, *such,* she said, *as her grandmother had ordered.* It seems they are always prepared."

"Be still, girls, she is stirring at the eyelids! How is it with you, madam?"

She opened her eyes and saw three or four young women in fanciful dresses

looped up with chains, with jewelled nets upon their heads, and seed pearls braided into their hair. Their gowns of brocaded silk clung closely to the body and left the neck and shoulders bare.

"This is evidently no monastery," she said, and then, "where am I? I am so cold!"

"Soon you will be warm, madam," said the tallest of the girls, with two long braids of dark hair over her shoulders and a wine-red gown trimmed with black fur; "could you find it possible to walk between two of us, think you? Come, Mawdlyn, your arm!"

But little Mawdlyn shrank back. "I am in great fear of all that cobweb, cousin Alys," she whimpered, and no scowls availed to move her.

"Let me help you, Mistress Alys," said, very gravely, a young boy, stepping forward with a plumed cap in his hand and a short hunting knife at his leather girdle.

The tired woman leaned heavily on his arm, and it was he that led her gently and

carefully along the great hall between the moving tapestries. Before a curtained door he paused.

"I can go no farther, madam, but if I may ever serve you, which is my true hope, call for me. You will see me on the instant," he said softly, and Alys led her behind the curtain.

Upon a daïs sat a very beautiful young woman with deep eyes like brown stars and two great braids of hair like the inner side of chestnuts when they fall apart. She was all in shot-gold silk and on her dark hair lay a twisted golden coronet with rubies studded in it. A big ruby hung on a golden chain around her warm white neck. Below her lay a great silver bath full to the brim of steaming water, and as the two entered, she rose, took a carved ivory box from an old serving woman beside her, and sprinkled a handful of what looked to be white sea sand from it into the bath, which bubbled and clouded and turned milky like an opal.

"Quickly, quickly, Alys!" she cried, "give her to me!"

And as the woman tottered and drew back from the steamy clouds, she of the coronet hastened toward her, took her in her young powerful arms as if she had been an infant, and lifted her over the silver edge. Now the warmth restored her a little and she resisted feebly and protested.

"But I am dressed — I am not ready for a bath — who are you that expect me here and masquerade so strangely? Let me see ——"

For she perceived that she was being held so as to prevent her looking into the bath.

"Ah, madam, be guided, be guided! The Countess would not have you look!" cried Alys, but she turned in the strong arms that held her and peered into the milky waves, that smelt of roses, and her heart turned in her, for the bath had no bottom at all, and below the waves were the rocks of the sea itself, white and ribbed, stretching out endlessly! Great masts of

ships were there and huge fishes oaring their way, and as the water touched her she did not feel it warm, but cold and salt. She struggled, but it reached her lips and she felt the Countess thrust her down, down.

"Push her, push her, Alys!" cried this cruel Countess, "press down her feet!" and she sank, gasping.

The water drew through her nostrils and the air was full of deep, tolling bells and at last a steady hum, as of bees. She knew nothing more.

At last, as one might waken after death, she breathed again, and felt herself being lifted from a warm, sweet bath and held, naked as a new child, on the knees of one who dried her softly with a towel of finest linen that smelt of roses.

"See how clean, my lady! Everything has gone!" She heard the voice of Alys, and peeped beneath her lids at where she had been plunged: it was but a great silver bath, clear, now, to the bottom, and quite empty.

"Where are my clothes?" she whispered, feeling strangely light and strong, "I am not cold any more; I can go on."

"Surely, if you will," said she whom they called the Countess, "but not till you have eaten and drunk and had of us new wear in the stead of that my bath has washed away."

And so, almost before she knew it, Alys and the old serving woman had put on her soft, fine linen and a shot-silver robe, looped up with a silver chain, and dressed her hair nobly. Over her neck and shoulders, no longer smoothly full like her own, this countess fastened a sort of cape of lace and silver, and on her feet the old woman fitted pointed velvet shoes. She watched them gravely, tingling still from that strange bath, trying to shape out in her mind what she would say to lead them to explain to her the place she had fallen upon, and why they played this pretty jest, and spoke and dressed so quaintly.

Now the Countess touched a silver bell

and the old woman drew a heavy curtain before the bath and the daïs and placed a carved chair, and when Alys had led her to it, the same youth appeared with a tray in his hand, holding fine wheat bread and a graceful flagon of rosy wine and a fragment of honeycomb. He knelt before her, seriously, with eyes never raised above his silken knees, but his very presence moved her strangely and she put her hand softly on his head when he said, "Will you eat, madam, and refresh yourself?" and hastened to taste of all on his tray before he could be offended.

"And now, Alys, where is your mistress?" she said, when her strength was stayed and her eyes and voice bright again with the comforting wine, "for I must talk with her."

"Presently, madam, presently," said the girl, "none may speak with her at the moment, for she is gone to Mass — 'tis the Count's name-day and the night, too, when God and St. Michael took him, fighting, and we have been out all day for

holly for the chapel. We are all to go — will you come with us?"

"No," she said, thinking to make her way out when they were all gone and find out where this wild tract could be, "no, I will wait here. I am not of your religion, Alys."

The girl sprang back from her with frightened eyes and crossed herself.

"Madam!" she cried, "never speak so! If they thought a Moslem here — and to-night — hush, there go the men!"

There was a great tramping, and along the tapestries, before the drawn curtain, came a company of men-at-arms, clanking in full armour, with set, hard faces under the helmets.

She grasped at the arms of her oak chair wildly; these harsh men sent a chill through her — was some horrid treachery thus hinted to her? Then as Alys sped along behind them she felt her hand kissed softly and the little page-boy was there.

"There is none to hurt you — if you stay

quiet here," he said softly, and she knew she dared not move or spy about.

Now arose a low chanting and then murmured prayers, and soon a smell of incense reached them. Then at last the mystic bell struck mellow on the night air and she knew that God was made and that men, maids, and Countess-widow were bowed before this mystery. The page bent low and crossed himself and a strange jealousy rushed over her that he should be of this sort, when she was not, for she loved the boy unreasonably.

"Your mother is a good Catholic, I see," she said, when the chant grew louder and covered her voice.

"I do not know, madam," he said.

"You do not know?" she cried, "and why not?"

"Because I do not know my mother, dear madam," he answered, and flushed to where his slim neck was hidden by his long hair.

Then a keen trouble rose in her and grew

ever stronger, and the boy's eyes frightened her and yet she must watch him. Steadily she looked at him and sat as one in a dream and thought no more of going away, but when the Countess and her train came back and the men had vanished and the maids-in-waiting were whispering around the great fireplace, she put out her hand and caught the young widow's silken gown.

"Who — who is his mother?" she asked eagerly.

"Who should be?" the Countess answered strangely, "whom hath he a look of, guest of mine?"

The boy lifted his face as she put a shaking finger under his round chin and turned his eyes up to her, and a shiver ran through her — for they were her own eyes.

"This — this is no boy of mine!" she gasped, shaking with more than terror.

"He might have been," said the young Countess with grave gentleness, "but you would not have him. So that he must come to us."

"But that — all that was long ago," she whispered, thinking that she spoke aloud, her eyes lost in the boy's.

"Here they grow slowly, being nearly soulless when they come," said the Countess. "He would have been your oldest son, had he stayed with you."

"'Here!' In God's name, where am I?" she cried. "Am I dead, then, at last? But I had not thought — I had hoped for peace. I had counted on rest."

"Rest?" the Countess echoed her, "and why should you look for that, my guest? What, in all the worlds of God, rests? You are a strange people, beyond the Dunes. . . . But you are not dead. No dead come here."

She took her by the hand, the boy clinging to the other, and walked with her to the great fire. Here they sat down to tapestry work, green and blue and russet weavings, and the woman folded her hands in her lap and watched them moodily. At last she spoke.

Here they sat down to tapestry work, green and blue and russet weavings.

"You will never make a hunstman at that rate, Alys — one would think him standing on his horse."

"Help her, then," said the Countess, and her guest took a piece of charcoal and drew out a fair pattern for the girl.

"And mine, madam?" "And mine?" cried the others, and she leaned over the shoulder of each and made her a true picture for her work. But her eye was often on the boy and when the girls were all busy at last, she spoke softly to him.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Madam, they call me Gildres," said he.

"And what do you do, Gildres, in this strange castle?"

"Is it strange?" said the boy. "I do not know. I am to be squire to the lord, my lady's brother, soon, and now I learn falconry and the care of his armour and sometimes I serve the Mass. I wait on my lady herself, too, for I must learn that. But I like best to colour the missals with Father Petrus — you should see the phœnix

I did, madam, and the leopard, last week! He said it was brave work — all blue and stars with red pierced hearts in the border, madam — and that the church needed me."

She put her hand on his dark head and sighed.

"If I had kept you with me, you should have made your leopards, dear," she said gently, "but now I have no right in you."

"Nay, but you may help him," said the Countess briskly, "run and get thy phœnix, boy, and she will show thee where even that wondrous bird is at fault."

And when they had worked over the great volume, lettered every letter by a patient hand and clasped with silver, it was the hour for bed.

"The Countess is tired," whispered Alys to their guest, "for she has been twice on the Dunes; once to tend a poor woodcutter of a broken leg and again when one of the shepherd's wives was found to be a-dying."

"In the city — which I have just left, we do these things differently now," said the woman. "There is so much pain and sickness that one woman's hands — or one hundred — would avail little enough to stem the tide. So it is organized and attended to by a few who do nothing else, and thus the others are left free."

"Free for what?" said the Countess, suddenly; "to seek rest?"

The woman looked coldly at her. "I do not know who you are," she said, "nor what you do here, but it is plain to see, at least, that you are a young woman. I am not. At your age, believe me, I did not rest. I have done better work of its kind than your tapestries. I have done other work, too — I have borne and reared children and they have children of their own. I have tended to his death a good man and laid him in his grave. My work is done. Now I look for some quiet room with a window to face the autumn sunsets, that I may sit by it, and think, and find out what life may be,

perhaps, before I leave it. Why do you goad me on and seem to seek to prevent me?"

The Countess ran to her and kneeled by her and seized her hand.

"I goad you because I must, dear guest," she said; "believe me, I know — none better — what you have done. The tapestry which you drew to-day shall meet eyes you do not dream on now; the phœnix that made pattern for our Gildres here shall teach more than him. And it is in such that you must rest. For women were not made to sit and think what life may be — trust me for it. We are running streams, that muddy if we settle. We have to live, and find life out in living. Did it not seem clearer to you, what time you leaned so wisely over my heedless little Mawdlyn?"

Now the woman breathed hard, as one who runs a race, and stared at her who spoke.

"Yes, it did — I knew it did!" she cried, "but who are you that tell me this so young? And if you have learned so much, you are

far too wise and necessary to those you teach to risk your life in this terrible cold, visiting wood-cutters!"

"If I am young, dear guest, I am yet not so young that I have not known this," said she of the coronet, "that I learned what I know on just such visitings! Mothers of Sorrow are we all, dear friend, and if we hold ourselves too far from sorrow, we are no true mothers of the world we make. If all did a little, there would be no need of a few who should do all — or so it seems to us on the Dunes."

"But we think — in my city — that these unhappy ones, the poor, the sick, the ignorant, gain more from the few who should do all," she argued.

"Maybe. But you gain the less who fail to do them," said the Countess.

"Child," said the woman, sternly, "the poor were not created for our discipline."

"I do not know how you know that," said the Countess.

At this the woman's eyes grew wide,

and she stared at the embroidery frames and the stags' heads and the arras, and all the quiet maidens in their looped skirts, with eyes that saw them not. At last she sighed and rose from her carved chair humbly.

"Thank God, I am not too old to learn!" she said; "I see I have not earned my rest, while so many of the world lack theirs. Perhaps in heaven, if I win there, I may take it. But it is hard. Once in my life, yes, and twice, I was all for urging on and doing, and two women, in strange places, one very old and one of middle age, taught me sharply that it might not be, and bridled and haltered my young strength. Now that I am content to be nothing, you, a young woman, urge me on. Are you the third, then? How many more must there be?"

Then the Countess rose and threw herself on her knees before her and kissed her trembling hand.

"No more, no more, O mother of six!" she cried, sobbing, "and be sure that only

the fine gold must needs be so harried by the great Smithy! But it could not be that such as thou shouldst end at a sunset window. Rather die fighting as did my good lord, and leave the quiet for them that mourn!"

"I will do so," said the woman, "but how have you learned such wisdom, being so young?"

"When my lord died," said the Countess, "I was as one mad, and set myself toward the convent, to end there, praying for him. But a very holy hermit that lives beneath Merlin Oak, in the very midst and heart of the Dunes, to whom I brought a relic from Jerusalem as a pious offering, set me right and told me I was not made for a religious. 'It may be, my daughter, that in too much thought on your religion you will lose it,' he said, 'and end in tears and kissings of the Feet, for which not many of the saints have power, for long. Make of thy deep heart a crystal spring, with continual bubbling, which is despised of the wise fools of

this world, but ordained forever from the Throne.' "

"And yet he learned his wisdom from meditating in solitude, and freedom from the cares of every day?" said the woman softly.

"He was a man," said the Countess, "and it is permitted to them to go into the desert and think. Ah, consider only, dear friend, for how little time had that good man of yours to do, or your father, with that seed of life which you and your mother must bear for days and months of days, till it should be born indeed! One hour with him—and he hath given you work for years. And hath he sleepless nights and breathless days, then? Nay, indeed! He is off to new dreams by morning, and there is only you to watch that they shall be no dreams, but realities. And when that watch is over, then look for the dawn indeed — but not this side the Dunes!"

"Then let me go back," said the woman quietly, "and do for the sake of the doing

what once I longed to do for the sake of the world. Though now my powers are less and I doubt I shall accomplish very much."

"Have no fear," said the Countess gladly, "have no fear, my sister. Alys, bring what you know for my sister," and Alys went out and returned with a silver coronet on a cushion, studded with sapphires. The young Gildres knelt low to offer it, and as the Countess bade her, she herself put it upon her own head, and they walked stately together, lighted by the page and attended by the maidens, to a great beamed bed-chamber with a crucifix on the wall and a high carved bed of state raised upon a daïs, and with pillows of silk and curtains of rich tapestry.

"Now rest, dear sister, and say good-bye to me," said this Countess, and when they had laid her, robed and crowned, upon the bed, she kissed her on the mouth.

"Shall I never see you again?" said the woman.

"Ask rather if you never saw me before," said she, and then, "look at me!"

The cold moon shone through the leaded pane and struck her face full, and as the woman looked it seemed that wrinkles grew about her eyes and that the moonlight turned her hair as white as snow.

"You are the Bee-woman!" she cried.

"Look again," said the Countess.

And now her cheeks were like warm russet apples and her shoulders were broad.

"You are the Dame at the Farm!" said the woman, "and I thought you young!"

"It may be, dear sister, that when we meet again I shall be younger still," she said, and her voice was like the tolling of sweet bells across the autumn fields, "for then age will be neither here nor there!"

Now she was again the young Countess among her maidens, and what had passed might have been a dream.

Yet as she of the silver coronet passed slowly into a sweet sleep, where bees hummed and soft chanting from the chapel

mourned the dead, she caught the hand of her who stood by the bed and questioned her.

"Tell me, mother and sister," she whispered, "why in my lessons, I must ever find the truth under such strange forms? Why do you who must teach me wear the garments of another age, another country?"

Now a trouble came over the face of the Countess and she shivered in the moonlight.

"Ask me not, sister and daughter — and yet I must answer if thou ask me, who wearest a crown. I cannot tell why this is laid upon me — although it is well known to be so. Nor have any but a wonderful and holy few learned in any other wise. I cannot tell . . . sometimes I think that though the lessons were set in each dish and coat and friendly hand of everyday — as Our Lady knows they are, for the matter of that!—you cannot read them, out there. They are too plain, perhaps. So all must be put before the eyes too full for sight in a manner (as one should call it) quaint.

Though truly one thing has never been more quaint than another! But I do not speak clearly. . . . Good night, my sister."

Now she heard a sob and knew it was from young Gildres.

"Shall I never see her again, then, my lady?" he whispered.

"Why, that is as may be, Gildres," said the Countess, "but I do think so. It comes to me that when this my sister sets forth she shall pass through here, and thou shalt accompany her farther on. Do then thy service here the more diligently, as in the hope of it."

"Madam, I will," said he joyfully, and she,

"Now soothe her hand, Alys, with me, for she should be sleeping now."

Then they took each a hand and stroked it, and she lost herself in sleep, dreamless, save for the winter moonlight and the chanting and the hum of bees.

When she woke her hand was still held,

but very firmly, and the humming was seen to be the revolving of light discs under their dome of glass.

"Ah! Now we have a steady pulse," said the doctor, "and you — too dear a friend to lose by your own folly! — I shall not scold you yet. But what a fright to give me! A little more and you would have found your Lethe oversoon, old friend."

She shook her head and smiled. "No longer, no longer!" she said. "So long as the current bears me, I am for that River of Life that you and I must keep at flood."

. . . .

Now that she has dropped these strange tales, and gone too far for me to hear her voice, I find that in picking them up they have lost much of the force and clearness her telling gave them. Yet I cannot see that I have left anything out. It may be that my dull pen has clouded them. Blame me, then, and not the tales, for they were made most wonderfully plain to me.

That things very real occurred to her, no

one could doubt who could hear her relate them. And if they have grown unreal and feeble in the telling, the fault must be wholly mine — the imperfect and unsuccessful scribe.

THE END

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