

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

By

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PREFACE

It is difficult, for these original stories, to declare the extent to which any assistance may have been rendered, because they are not, at least directly, the result of study or research. And yet it would not be true to say that there was no assistance given, but rather that it was of a nature impossible to pinpoint. The stories are original; their characters, their situations, were suggested by countless people, in countless ways, so that I cannot acknowledge them.

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ON A ONE-WAY STREET

It was one of those afternoons - strangely, mistily, personal, - when the air, thick with grey, sooty mist, seems weeping at the sorrows of the earth. All the buildings lean and sigh about the city streets, and mournfulness, like a genie, roams forlornly.

No one should be alone on such an afternoon. They were not alone, those two women, over near the confectionery counter, huddled at their cozy table in the cheerful little tea-shop, taking, delicately, morsels of toast and tea. Their tea had grown cold standing, you could tell it as they sipped, - dutifully, with little grimaces. No, they were not alone, -- bundles of shopping piled beside them -- but even so, they sighed. Did they dread the hour of parting?...did they, too, put off as long as possible their passing back into the street?

Amy Bromley, too, had her bundles on the seat beside her... She, too, - as well-dressed, well-bred as they - tried her tea-cup once more at her lips, and shuddering set it back again. She watched, half guiltily, the soiled black waitress, like a penguin with her long white collar, hover by the counter, ready to swoop down on her crumbs when she had gone.

Already the supper smells had begun to fill the room. The tea-shop was, but for the four of them, deserted, yet you felt in it impatience, preparation. They had had their hour, the women.... So, at last, still reluctantly, Amy Bromley took up her fur piece, - it had slipped very nearly to the floor - and, wrapping it tightly at her neck as she went, passed out the door, into the soiled and misty streets.

She went, first, irresolutely to the corner.... stood, irresolutely, looking up and down ... trying to decide if she wanted a bus, a taxi.... indeed, what it was she wanted, she was quite undecided, as she stood and watched, - more merely curious at the sight than personally concerned - the parade of clumsy buses, at some distance still from her post, come slowly, lumbering, toward her. A workman, brushing by, called out loudly, kindly enough, "Over there, lady, over there! He won't stop for you here!"

Amy simply stared after the workman, blankly, a little indignantly, - had she not passed her life, nearly all of it, in the city! - and did not move from her post. In the mist and the descending fog, as she looked, irresolutely up the darkening street, it seemed to her it was directions for some nether world she really needed.... this one, so rapidly, seemed to disappear....

So she merely watched the first parade of buses pass. Why do buses always congregate in a parade, and then, never another comes along for ages?... Are they gregarious?... Is there something that they dread, in a city's late afternoon, so that like ships at sea they seek to go in convoy through it?... Something of that, she thought idly, standing at her corner post. But when they had gone by, well-lighted, bustling, she had the feeling that, from sheer perversity, she had let something rather like the last ferry across the Styx go by without her... especially since, looking back along the muddy street from whence they had come, she saw nowhere any following.... Because of that man! --- she was indignant still, remembering... to call out to Amy Bromley, - who had spent her life in the city! - You have to get on the bus at the bus-stop... or something like that!

So she flagged her taxi.

"22 Pomeroy," she said, climbing in, rather wearily letting go her bundles.

"Is that Pomeroy and Vine?" the driver wanted to know, looking through the rear view mirror to catch her nod.

"Yes." Nodding, she said it, also.

"Bad afternoon," the driver said, going just then dashing by a stalled van, jolting to a stop at a red light. He used his horn before the light had changed.

Amy Bromley peered out through the grimy glass, into the grimy streets, and kept silent. She felt now suddenly like bursting into tears.... How ugly it all was! how grim the faces of the passers-by!

"Christmas!" the driver said, snorting, like an animal in pain. He did not care that she never spoke. He carried on a monologue, as happily, apparently, as he did anything. "Look at 'em, rushing out like sheep to make the merchants rich! Christmas -- when the Russians got an atom bomb ready for 'em, -- Christmas!" he snarled, philosophically.

Amy's parcels slid about the leather seat, as they jolted at the stop-signs, sped to make a green light, got caught a block or two behind a junk wagon - here, her driver's frustration steamed up the whole cab - and Amy simply sat, crouched in the corner, sore at heart, pervaded by the dreadful gloom that had all afternoon been haunting her, almost unbearably. She watched the impending nightfall go bowling, drunkenly, up the narrow little side-streets.... Truly she could see the darkness in great, misty black balls go rolling in...

"Who cares -- tell me, who cares -- " The cabby harped on it. He

wanted to make something of it, perhaps to argue, philosophically.

Amy hardly listened to him.

"Here!...." she called, suddenly grown earnest. She slipped forward on the leather seat to scrub her glove at the grimy glass, quite intensely, trying to make out just where she was. "Isn't it here...? Don't you turn...?"

"Tsa-one-way street, lady," he told her rudely, in a kind of sing-song, impatient at being interrupted. The philistines! Something like that he thought of her -- not of her, really, just of life...

"Oh is it...?" She looked about, doubtfully, for the sign. "How long has that been so?" she asked, truly curious.

He stared at her, through the mirror, and shrugged. Dames! he thought, disgustedly. She only confirmed what he knew anyway.... They don't care about philosophy... just about the fare....

"Since the city ordinance went in," he said, as wisely as if he answered her. He had no idea that he had not.

Yes, she saw it now... the cars parked, on both sides, all heading in one direction. They alone were moving on the street. Strangely, this little thing lifted her somewhat out of her gloom. She was quite excited -- as if it were a splendid thing to discover that, since she was lost out this way, they had done such a thing as change the whole course of a street! Yes, she saw it now! and remembered bits of it... she remembered that house! Surely she did.... She craned her head, for a backward look, ... she thought she did.. That tree... that low, iron grating, ... and yes, the street-lamp on the corner. She looked back lovingly on that, making sure of it before she lost it.... so helpful

was it to spot any landmark, ... as if it moored her, though only for a moment, to this time, this place, ... so easy was it otherwise to merely drift.

"22 ... 22 ..." she murmured to herself.

She scanned all the doorways, anxiously. The numbers were too small, she passed them by too quickly. She looked in her purse for the change, drew out instead distractedly her handkerchief, wiped her sooty face, deftly touched straight her good brown hat, poked back wisps of hair, ... all the time, straining forward on the seat, jounced and jolted, by the cobblestones, though she was hardly aware of it.

"Lady, it's gonna be in the next block, --- it's gonna be, " her surly cabby, shaking his head vehemently, rather patiently, for him, explained.

"Is it?" Suddenly she relaxed, she hardly knew why. "Well, you may be right, " she said, quite cheerfully. Now she did take out a bill, fished also for some change among a handful of it. In the glass, as she bent her neck, she caught a glimpse of her profile. She looked well, - straight, dignified, - even perhaps a little expensive ... Everything she had was good, ... her gloves, her shoes, her bag, especially the fur, falling carelessly, artfully, about her shoulders.

"This?"

She craned out, waiting, not yet quite believing. The cabby had pulled up to the side.

"This - is - it, lady, " he said emphatically. He reached over the seat a little roughly to release her door, and named his fare.

Solemnly, she handed him the money she had ready and, gathering up

her parcels in her arms, put her slender, silk legs out gingerly, fishing for the curb. She got out of the cab a little awkwardly, not having her arms free to balance her. Shortly, somewhat boldly as was his way, the cab-driver slammed the door and hurtled off, leaving the dark street still.

"Is this it...?" She started vaguely for the steps.

No, he had brought her up to 26. What a disagreeable person he had been! She shifted her bundles, stoutly, shunting him out of her mind.

Then, on the steps of 22, eagerly, if a little nervously, Amy Bromley awaited the response to her rap with the brass door-knocker.

For some moments, no one came. She took the time to look about her, though there was little she could see, - only the mist, hazing the street-lights -- the street became somehow cozy in the dark --- the cozy little pillared porches of the other houses, directly round --- that was all.

"Oh!" She laughed, a little startled. She had not seen the woman come to the door.

"Good evening!" she cried earnestly. "I come by appointment ... I think I am not late?"

"No. Come in, please." The woman stepped back, gravely, making room.

In the dimly-lighted little vestibule, into which she came, Amy noticed half jealously how gravely lovely the woman was. Her hair was black, her skin so pale, and large, pale eyes. Her face, her dress, looked foreign, intensely plain, quite exotic. Amy could not help it, that jealousy ... could not help it, that her eyes, as if amazed, kept

turning to that face, measuring, comparing it to her own. Though, a short while since, in the taxi, she had seen herself finely made, elegantly dressed, in this woman's glass, she saw herself as gross, overblown. Then she could scarcely listen, through these personal distractions, as the woman spoke.

"He will be with you soon," the woman had been saying. "He is tied up, just for the moment."

She guided the visitor to wait into a small, quiet bare room. The thing in it that took Amy's eye was the books, shelves and shelves of them. They covered nearly all the walls, crammed untidily, dustily, with leather volumes, the sort that she would use, if at all, to preserve a four-leaf clover ... so Amy thought, ruefully, playing on her frivolity to conceal, mostly from herself, her jumpiness. A smell of pipe smoke further invested the room with manly atmosphere.

"Nice," Amy murmured, greatly taken. "Oh, nice!"

The woman, just by the door, stopped politely, inquiringly. Her slightly dilated nostrils, part of her inquiry, added a watchful look to her grave face. She had not heard.

"Your room is charming," Amy, courteously, interpreted her exclamation so.

"Thank you."

Gravely, formally, the two women exchanged a pas de deux of smiles, and parted.

It was her habit, - not that she intended to - but very readily Amy assimilated the ways of those about her, and she was in such things a very keen observer, so that now, going to the book-shelves, though avidly,

still she stopped to move with stately grace. Before she had seen the woman, her step had been quite different.

She thought, now, of the man with whom her business was. "I wonder if his taste in literature is like his taste in waiting-rooms ... and women ... ?" The latter she added ruefully, smiling a little at herself. Disappointed, was she? ... jealous! like a silly school-girl! What had she thought of?

She was not like that, really, not really frivolous, nor careless ... but she was so nervous, now, her thoughts flitting round her kaleidoscopically, foolishly. Yet, even so, they hid from her very ill her truly desolate feeling, her always rising feeling, that the sea of strangeness lapped very near, very near the dark, terrible sea monsters palpable in it

She sampled curiously, and to distract herself, some titles of his books.

"Ch, dear!" So she summed them up, rapidly, though, her fine hands at her back, gloves drooping, she browsed more among them, self-consciously a scholar, spelling out the difficult titles.

"Shall I lend you some?" a voice behind asked humorously.

"Ch! don't, for goodness sake!" she cried, turning delightedly, rather graciously, to confront the man himself.

"I don't much blame you." He smiled so kindly, seemed so approving, while he laughed at her, that she laughed, gloriously, too.

It was the oddest thing For a moment, as they laughed, golden gates seemed opening up before them, flooding everything with light. Sometimes things happen so, in a blaze of light, so that in your memory

of them, afterward, you see no shadows.

What did she see at her first glimpse of the man? He was a shaggy fellow, his hair chalky, matted, his clothes also seemed matted and dusty. He looked as if you could shake him out, in a brisk wind, and much improve him. He stooped extravagantly, -- only so huge a man could waste his height so carelessly. He had a mariner's face, as if he had long had to squint, muscularly, cleanly, before the elements. His burned, grey eyes, as she first met them, disturbed her greatly.

For some reason, Amy strangely longed for the woman to return, longed for her sheltering presence.

"You can't mean," he said, at last, - his incredulity infinitely flattering to her, "You are looking for the kind of job I have to offer?"

"I thought I was," she said simply.

His eyes, - warmly, intimately laughing at her, generous, impersonal, - took stock first of her expensive things, her sleek, well-groomed, well-bred form, --- he paid attention to her form, but no more, and no more embarrassingly, than to her fine, quite handsome face.

"Why, do you need the money?" he asked kindly, curiously.

"No, not really," she confessed. She was warm and gracious in her manner. "Only the occupation ... "

"I understand. But this one's not for you," he said, so kindly, his voice so low and beautiful, that she was startled into thinking, Of all the men I ever met, him alone I could have adored!

"Not that I wouldn't like to have you, -- But I had in mind, when I advertised, some good-natured, husky girl -- perhaps a little stupid --

the work is, really, very dull - "

"Oh ... " She sighed, drawing it out, until it seemed the tongue of disappointment spoke.

He watched her quizzically. Such a warmth was on his face, - surely, she thought, he smiled? But no, she saw that he did not -- his face all kindness, sympathy.

"It must be lonely for you?" He seemed to put it as a question, after which, as she gave no answer, he went on sympathetically, interestedly, "I've often thought about what things nice women have to do, to pass their time. I never envied women," he said, quite seriously.

So they stood, serious together, thinking vaguely, companionably, their own thoughts, until he said, abruptly changing, "Come on, get your coat."

She was so disappointed -- but, of course, she knew she had to go, though it was the last thing in the world she wanted. She spoke a little coldly, distantly, because of it, "I have everything -- "

He, too, seemed distant. "How will you go? -- all right, I'll walk you to the bus-stop."

"You needn't, really," she said coldly, much hurt.

"My pleasure."

Firmly, authoritatively, he took his coat, fixed her fur for her, about her shoulders, -- (it seemed to her, mechanically, not really thinking of her) -- Then he took her parcels, guided her along the little, mustard passageway, out the door, down the steps ... Here he took her elbow... She was sorry, when at the sidewalk he let her go. They tramped, mostly silently, to the corner. As they crossed the street,

he took her arm again. This time, somehow, he did not drop it, So, as they walked, his hand just barely touched her arm. Yet it seemed almost to burn her. Carefully, she disdained his eyes, feeling them probing her face. For an instant - she could not help it - she felt so tender -- (all her body became terribly tender, so that she could barely stand) -- that she gave, yielding, a confused and wistful smile to him.

"Amy -- Aimee -- that's what your name really is - did you know?"

"Yes," she said.

"You are well-named."

"Oh --- "

They walked on, silently again, but the quality of the silence had changed, become intimate, tender, like a blessing on them.

"This is your stop," he said.

"Oh, is it?"

He smiled, very warmly, into her eyes. That smile of his, -- trembling, she thought. Surely it was half caress?

"We'll run into one another, perhaps, again -- somewhere -- "

"Yes, perhaps," she said politely, doubting.

"Here comes your bus!" He flagged it for her, loading her bundles back into her arms, drawing up her fur for her about her shoulders, - it had slipped into the crook of her arms. Here, his hand strayed lightly on her shoulder, as they said good-bye, --- perhaps it was a light caress, perhaps, merely, accident ...

"I hate to see you go."

While the bus was grinding to a stop, he called above the noise,

"Will you be all right? I hate to send you off alone like this -- such a lovely woman --- all these rowdy men abroad tonight -- "

She smiled and reassured him, hastily, now a little clumsily, distracted by the bus, the noise, the prying eyes... Then she was busied, clambering up, managing her parcels, her change.

On the corner, back a little from the light, the man waited until the bus bore her off. As they passed one another, seeing her framed in the grimy glass, pure and strange against the garish background of the bus, tenderly he half saluted her, delicately she bowed her head to him.

Then they disappeared from one another's sight, gulped by the black, foggy streets. Just so, ships at sea pass in the night, momentarily light one another's darkness, and then are gone.... So Amy Bromley was alone again, travelling on...

The Friend

"Wasn't that - ? -- I'm sure it was!" Mrs. Meadows thought, astonished. She stopped quickly and turned around. "Lena!" she called. Three girls spread loitering in front of her, and she had to move in tiny impatient steps for a moment. The woman she had recognized had gone on along the street. "Quickly!" she thought. In a moment she would lose her! She managed to push past the girls, glaring at them impersonally for a second.

Her face had been set with the look of the tourist who is determined to find everything interesting, but all the same, the sun is dreadfully hot, the cafes cluttered and dirty, and the unpleasant hum of incomprehensible voices seems quite sinister. She had been clutching her purse very securely, glancing about constantly, trying to hide her suspicions. But now at once her face had become more like itself, as it appeared over her own tea-table. The chance meeting had transported her magically back across the Channel, and she sighed in relief. She forgot everything but her desire to catch at this familiar straw. If she had lost her! she thought, nearly desperate, hating all these obstacles -- she pushed and shoved. But no! there she was! Mrs. Meadows almost collapsed in pleased relief.

"Lena!" she said.

The woman was standing irresolutely in front of a bazaar, letting some orange fabric slip through her fingers from a bolt of cloth she held crooked in her arm. She had not heard. Mrs. Meadows thought, as she stood there, Lena seemed tired, so alone. And her coat was a little careless, sloping loosely from her shoulders.

"Lena," Mrs. Meadows said again.

When she first turned, the woman's face was quite blank. And then it was an agonizing minute before her expression changed. "Oh!" she said then, holding out her hand. "I - I had no idea -- " she faltered. Her first color drained rapidly from her face, leaving her looking almost ill. She stared at Mrs. Meadows for a second, and then she dropped her eyes to the cobbled street. A piece of white tissue floated by, and she took a momentary interest in that. Then, she spoke again. "I did not know you were coming here."

"No, indeed," Mrs. Meadows said, her voice rising in cordiality. She looked, shuddering, along the street, and she turned back gladly to the English face, the English voice. "And I certainly had no idea you were here! When did you arrive? Are you staying long? Just travelling, resting? There is so much to see! I am having a delightful time taking in the sights! I am glad to have run into you, very glad! I only wish I had known --" Now that she had started, her words came gushing out uncontrollably. Her sense that the situation was perhaps a little awkward increased as she talked, and she tried to cover it. "Oh! I am so glad!" she said, her voice becoming a little shrill. "I have been so shut in on myself with no one to talk to! Don't you find it so?" Then, she realized what she had said, and she hurried on, a little embarrassed, trying to bury that slip under a torrent more. Finally she said, taking up the material Lena had been looking at, "This is very nice! Do you plan to have a dress made of it?"

Lena looked at her for a minute. "No," she said then bleakly. "Why would I wish a dress?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Meadows agreed, a little too quickly, too

emphatically. "Of course, how sleazy it is, when one comes to look at it! They praise these foreign goods, but I have never found them worth while!"

Lena went on flatly, as if she talked to herself. "An orange dress? No, I wouldn't want an orange dress." But then she looked up, smiling bleakly. "It's so hot!"

Mrs. Meadows heard her with relief. "Isn't it! Unbearable!" Looking around, she saw that the cafes were not now so bad as they had seemed. "Let's have an ice!"

"I'd like to," Lena said. "Yes, I believe I would like to."

From her first glimpse of this English face, Mrs. Meadows had quite returned to herself. Now she guided her friend past several tables, examining each judicially. On most of them she found bottles, saucers, crumbs light patches on the oilcloth where liquid had been standing. Those she passed, grimacing to show Lena what she thought of them. From time to time she stole a glimpse back at her. Poor thing! she thought kindly. She seemed so timid, quite unable to fend for herself. At last Mrs. Meadows found a table to her liking. "I think this will be all right," she announced, and Lena slipped at once onto the seat. She sat looking at the cloth while Mrs. Meadows removed her coat, summoned a small boy with a cloth, and directed the preparation of the table for them. The woman seemed to be afraid that people were looking at her, and when Mrs. Meadows sat down, she raised her eyes nervously to her face and held them there as if that was the only safe shelter for them.

"They say it is not safe to drink the water," Mrs. Meadows said richly. "Do you think --" she hesitated, trying to look quite wicked.

"Do you think we should be too improper if we ordered wine?"

Lena shook her head quickly. She seemed, now, so grateful for Mrs. Meadows' ability to make decisions that she could question nothing.

Mrs. Meadows ordered for them. Then she said, sighing as she relaxed, "You have no idea how glad I am to see you, my dear!" It seemed now to her that they had been the closest friends. "If I had only known you would be here!" she said in playful resentment. "We could have made plans to do things together!" As she sat there chatting, she tried to remember when she had first met Lena. Oh, yes! she smiled at the recollection. That gymkhana ... standing over the Fishpond, looking down on those flimsily wrapped pink and blue packages. Mary Nance had brought them together. She had an uncomfortable skill at that, introducing complete strangers, and then leaving them alone after a minute, trying to think of something to say. Then, remembering the scene quite clearly, Mrs. Meadows sighed gratefully for her good luck. Right at the start she had chosen to comment on Lena's lovely blouse. Quite by accident, like that, she had discovered Lena's deep interest! She sighed again over it. Dress-making, fabrics -- Mrs. Meadows had been re-decorating her hall then, needed suggestions for the upholstery. Lena had been very helpful, she had grown enthusiastic talking. Mrs. Meadows had thought she was so sensitive, so impressionable, just standing there, quivering, in some way even then a little apart from the activity of the gymkhana. But they had gotten along very well -- though she remembered being rather relieved when someone had joined them. She had been troubled about what she would do when fabrics had run out.

"Lena, dear," Mrs. Meadows said delightedly. "Have you been yet to

the cloisters? They say the whole trip is lost unless one goes! They are quite original! You haven't been? Then, let us go! Right now, why not? You have no plans? No, no, of course, you are just wandering, resting, You have been too much alone!" Mrs. Meadows smiled quite pointedly. She felt really very close to Lena now. She remembered, they had talked at the gymkhana about going together to shop for rugs. Lena had had such good ideas! Mrs. Meadows had said her professional touch would be very nice in the hall. At first it had been a polite suggestion, something to say for the occasion, and Mrs. Meadows was really a little surprised that it had been somehow turned into a serious appointment. But when they had actually met she had been delighted. They had shopped all morning, Lena appraising goods, prices. Lena's taste was really exceptional. Mrs. Meadows had found that out once when she went there for tea. It seemed so sad. Couldn't anything be done? she wondered. She beckoned to the boy with her rather dictatorial gesture. Turning confidentially to her friend, she said, "Let's have another glass! I feel much cooler, much more relaxed! It's your company, that's what it is! You had no right not to tell me you were coming!" She said it playfully, shaking her head, and then she laid her purse on her lap, looking the boy in the eye forbiddingly. "These foreigners!" she said, leaning sideways in her chair to avoid his arm as he set the glasses down. "One never knows!"

Lena herself had said very little. From time to time she smiled, and as she finished the wine, she looked around the cafe, into the little groups of people at neighboring tables. On the sidewalk, past the awning, the sun beat dryly on the uneven stones. There was a calm, almost a sense

of inertia in the air, as though in the mid-afternoon everything stood still for a little while. Lena smiled, vaguely, a smile more natural than she had managed before. She too seemed to be letting her troubles wait a little, while she sat with Mrs. Meadows. For the first time since they had met, she said, quite naturally, "I am glad you found me."

"You see, what did I tell you?" Mrs. Meadows said, patting her hand on the checked cloth. "You are too much alone!"

Lena smiled her vague smile and said nothing.

It was so too bad! Mrs. Meadows thought, glancing almost slyly at Lena's face across the table. Her friend was looking at the wine as she sipped it, and her face was quite blank, quite tired. There was no way of guessing what went on in her mind, Mrs. Meadows decided. She wished there was! She thought then of Lena in her living-room, Lena pouring tea. Mrs. Meadows felt that she had never really known her until she had seen her there. She had been so sweet, sitting with the tea-pot in her hand, calling out to Derek where he crawled along the carpet directing his trains. She had seemed so simple and quiet, so contented, and as the train went under the mossy bridge she had set the tea-pot down again, with her sweet smile, telling her friend that David had made the bridge for Derek's birthday.

"No, seriously, dear," Mrs. Meadows said, making a point of it, shaking her head playfully, pretending it was only some very light thing she had to say. "I know it's none of my business -- oh, I may be an old bull in a china shop!" she laughed, her woolly curls grey, matronly about her face, her glance for a moment piercing, still kind, with an anxious helpful look drawn on her forehead. "Haven't you wandered long enough?"

Won't you think of going home?"

Lena put down her glass with a little start. "Please!" she murmured. She looked frightened. She passed her hand in front of her eyes, and then she shut them tightly for a second. When she spoke again she was trembling, looking in her pocket for something. "Please!" she begged again. Then, with a sudden bleak smile, she said clearly, "Shall we go? I should like to see the cloisters, I think! Oh, yes, I should like to see them very much!" She had taken out her coin purse, but she seemed to have forgotten what she had wanted to do with it.

Kindly, Mrs. Meadows pressed her to put her money away, called the boy over, and then they started along the sidewalk. The street seemed less menacing now than Mrs. Meadows had found it earlier. "Isn't it always the way," she said, sighing, "When one is in a hurry one just can't get past -- do you know I almost missed you? And now I suppose they all have gone to have a siesta." When they came to the steps there was barely room for the two of them to walk abreast, Mrs. Meadows clinging heavily to the railing at the side. She climbed more and more slowly, panting, her face turning red. "Whew!" she said, stopping half way up. She took Lena's arm. "I am not so young as you, my dear!" Lena seemed hardly to have noticed the climb. They stood looking down, while Mrs. Meadows caught her breath. In front of them only the ocean itself extended. It looked from here as if the town had dropped over the sharp cliff, falling into the forms of the sentinel rocks, quite impersonal but somehow comforting. The silver, misty sun made white slivers over the face of the water, but except for them the surface was bare, quite motionless.

Staring at it absently, Lena said, a touch of bitterness in her voice, "It's like a mirror. But I am glad I need not see myself." She was quiet for several minutes. "Do you know, I almost believe I should have faith enough to walk on it -- "

Mrs. Meadows said, smiling, stealing a look at her coyly, "And would you walk back to England, then?"

Lena turned away quietly. She gave no answer, bending her head to watch the steps as she climbed on farther.

At the top they found they had to pay to enter the cloister itself. Mrs. Meadows thought that quite improper, she felt sure that in England it would not be so. But when Lena took out her coin purse, Mrs. Meadows looked into it and saw how empty it was. "My dear!" she said sharply.

"I have very little money," Lena said, flushing, avoiding Mrs. Meadows eyes. "I expected a check -- but I have been moving about so much --"

Mrs. Meadows immediately lifted a finger to stop her friend's apology, nodding agreeably. She counted out some bills. "Here," she said kindly. "Of course! Whatever you need, my dear. Oh, quite all right, you can pay me when we get back to England -- " She glanced at her friend, and then she added, "Though I'm not sure I'm quite kind to finance these travels ---"

Lena flushed more deeply.

Quickly, Mrs. Meadows added, laughing, "I'm just teasing!" Then she pointed to a small fountain trickling in the center of the court, and she said, sighing, "How I should like a drink! But I suppose it's holy water!"

The cool grey stones of the cloisters arched delicately above their heads. There was no vegetation. In the sun the stones gleamed dryly. Yet it seemed infinitely old, infinitely peaceful. Mrs. Meadows took out her guide-book and consulted it about the date. Lena stood, looking at the square before her, the fountain dripping, the pigeons waddling.

"It's almost as if one could hear music without there being any, isn't it?" she said, turning to Mrs. Meadows, with her vague smile flickering uncertainly on her lips.

"Well! In a moment I expect they'll ring those bells," Mrs. Meadows said, pointing to the tower. "Aren't they always having some message to send out?"

Lena stared at the tower, as if she were waiting. There was a sweetness, a quiet, about the place, Mrs. Meadows thought, that was reflected on Lena's face.

Then, pretending to be chatting ordinarily, Mrs. Meadows began, "I saw David not too long ago, -- I ran into him in town, I was shopping, I had my arms full ---"

Lena said nothing for a minute. Oh dear, Mrs. Meadows thought, I shan't be able to approach her, she won't let me. She was really startled to hear Lena say, her voice surprisingly cold, "Yes? And who was he with?"

Mrs. Meadows thought for a second, looking puzzled. "Why, I don't remember. There was such a crowd -- and he seemed in a hurry, and certainly I was --" Then she said, darting a glance at Lena's face, "I suppose I reminded him of you -- he was a little awkward, I thought! --"

"Please!" Lena cried sharply. She turned hurriedly, starting into

the cloister.

Mrs. Meadows, watching her friend, saw her lift her handkerchief and blot her eyes. She felt, without quite wishing to, that she had Lena in her power here. But the grey sun, the airy light filtering through the arches, gave her a feeling of confidence. She joined her friend. They sat together on a stone bench in the cloister. "My dear," she said gently, taking her hand, "won't you confide in me, can't you let me help you? What is it," she said, coaxing. "won't you go home, won't you try to iron out your difficulties with David?"

"Oh!" Lena cried out. She sprang up. "You don't understand, you don't understand at all!" She stood for a second, her face working. Then she let the bills Mrs. Meadows had handed her drop on the stones. As she hurried away, leaving Mrs. Meadows all alone, something else fell among them. At her feet, as Mrs. Meadows looked down, completely astonished, she saw it was Lena's sodden handkerchief.

"But -- Lena! --" she called.

The Concert

Heinrich Horner got up from the piano bench and went to the window. It was already open, so that he had only to lean on the sill, and then his head and shoulders were in the sunlight. In the room it was cool. He had forgotten how hot the day was.

The house in which he stood faced a city street, but here in the back there was a court made by the houses standing around it. Under the window Marie had set her geranium pot, to air it in the hot sun. The smell of its leaves reached his nose, and he rocked himself back and forth, smiling, cocking his head at it, as though it were a red-lipped girl.

On the doorstep Marie herself sat, quiet, in the sunlight.

But out of the house that faced this one, like it, worn bricks and low, uneven windows at random in the walls, two boys came hurtling. One of them stopped the other, snatching at his arms. His chin worked over something he had just swallowed, and his face was etched sharp by a paste of dust and juice spilling through his teeth. Both of them looked as if they were made out of lines.

"Com'on, I'll fight ya," the shorter one said in a minute, stretching on his toes like a dancer, with a light fierce jab, as he darted away.

The old man called out to them from his position in the window, "You will turn into a soldier one day!"

The boys stopped to stare at him then, jagged legs apart. Their answer was only in the look of their arms, their grins. But then with a shrug between them they passed him out of their sight. In a minute then came back from the street rigid laughter, and the sounds of fists

hissing through clothes.

The old man laughed to himself. "Ah, yes, yes, soldiers, soldiers one day, soldiers!" Even as he stood there, he picked up his feet with light grace, in an imitation of a goose-step. "Soldiers, yes - " He hummed a little to himself, a Viennese march, and it reminded him of his work. He would have gone back to it, but he caught sight of Molly Fink's daughter coming from the corner door.

"Ah, good morning, liebchen!" he called, bobbing his head gallantly, and then suspending the motion so that he could mark her coming from under his sharp eyebrows. He had small-pitted eyes, flat, old, but the expression was in the brows and the motion of flesh around them.

When she heard him, she put a little conscious side-sway into her walk, and met him with a giggle.

"You are not going to school!" he said, as if it were the most incredible of things. "You are not going to school this morning!"

She giggled, looking at him with bold eyes through a blush that dressed her face. She was like a round loaf of bread, like something made small and delicate, but bloated with yeast. But still, with the giggle shaking her bright cheeks, she pleased the old man. "To school!" he repeated, turning his head sadly.

She had an orange skirt, and a tight black belt helped her stomach and her breasts to billow out.

"Ah, liebchen, to school on such a morning! You should go to buy dresses on such a morning, or walk in the park with a young man!" He took her hand, stroking it, part of his incredulity, hinting his regret that he was not a young man, and yet suggesting all the world of

things he did not regret.

He kissed her hand, and not hers only, but a myriad of hands, and as he waited, remembering the touch of a thousand soft fingers, she swelled with her increasing giggle, until she broke away, and ran with a half-skip, turning back to him to let her giggle loose. He watched her plump knees as her skirt shifted in her run.

He was filled with the pleasantness of the morning. All around him the smell of life came to him, like vegetables ripening in bins, in the court the fresh dung of dogs, flies buzzing over banana peels on the hot stones, the sounds of life, all coming together, to him, and all lifted and lighted in the hot morning sun. He waited for a minute, thinking of his music, lifting his hands as if to an orchestra, making his gestures to call out the final harmony. He listened eagerly, expectant, raising himself, with his arms rigid, like antennas waiting to receive, to transmit sound, all excited, happy, confident. Then he caught Marie in his glance, Marie sitting on the steps, and he remembered that there was no orchestra. He went back to the piano, where he sat doodling, making one-finger melodies, but he heard their empty, tinny chink against the sounds that passed his head.

"Marie!" he called out crossly. "Marie, come here!"

He heard the shrill noise of Molly Fink scolding the fish in the market, and he picked out crossly an A high on the keyboard, and banged it. Then he took a B and alternated the two, and began to chuckle, and then, high and low at once, the noise of the boys fighting over on the street, and a sound like the thin sweet wail of a violin, for lost hands and the smell of geranium leaves Then, as he heard Marie come in,

he played one still chord.

"There!" he was in a better humor now. But he watched her, knowing though it troubled him to understand, that first she would seek the Cross on the bare wall, and then she would turn to him. A puzzled hurt look made his face like that of a little boy whose mother speaks sharply. But he played a few low chords, a prayer he had made for her.

The room, cool and bare, reminded him of the smell of lemons. First, as he had known she would, she turned her face in an obeisance, to her ivory Cross where it hung, and then for a moment she looked out the window. When she turned to him, both the peace and the yearning were gone from her face.

"Yes, Papa?"

He had forgotten why he called her. He shrugged, trying to remember,

She walked quietly about the room, stopping from time to time to straighten a paper on the table, a rose in the tumbler. The small cracked panes of the house were curtained with hot grey light, so that no one could see inside, though the windows were bare. But inside, the sun picked out the cleanness of Marie's room. She stood by the window, ready to help him.

He could not think of what he had wanted with her. They were both relieved to hear a rap at the door, a rap that sounded with imperative courtesy.

"Dr. Strauss is here!" Marie said. When she used his name her face softened.

The man whom Marie let in wore a well-tailored suit, well-pressed. His mustache was almost nattishly clipped, but his face was stern.

"Good morning, good morning!" Heinrich Horner hurried up to seize the Doctor's hands, bowing over and over from the waist. "Ah good morning, Christian!" But then mischief filled his face, and he cocked his head. "Now you are here, it is not so good!"

The Doctor laughed. "I had hoped first we might visit! Marie, have you coffee for me?"

She hurried to fetch it. She had had it ready for a long time. Though he spoke of a visit, he did not like to be kept waiting. The old man stood watching her, and he could not resist smiling to see that now it was to the Doctor she looked, first, rather than to the Cross. Her face, he saw, believed in them both. She reminded him, as she hurried about her work, of an anxious hand.

The Doctor looked as though he had for a long time known more than other people and was tired of knowing. When Marie came with the coffee, he imprisoned her hand as he took the cup, looking into her face. She did not blush, having nothing to hide. "So, Marie," he said quietly. "Have you changed your mind yet?"

She looked up at him innocently, her lips a little parted, her eyes shining. But then she stepped a little back, turned her eyes downward and said simply, unhappily, "I cannot go. Papa cannot do without me."

"So, it is true," he said, letting her hand go. "Yet I have a place for you. It is the Convent of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is on a hill behind a white wall -- I myself have been there -- you would find the stones cool to your feet." For some reason, he found this ironically amusing.

The old man had lain down on the couch, and now he was waiting, paying no attention to Marie.

"Think of it, Marie!" the Doctor urged. He watched her face curiously, interested that it showed so much of the suffering denial inside her. He had never seen a face so sad.

When he went over to the couch, he took her with him. Heinrich sat up, to hold her by him, one hand gripping hers, and the other about her, so that he was absently fondling her waist, her slender thigh. He was proud of his daughter. He was proud of the delicate fineness of her.

"No, no, Christian, I cannot let her go."

The Doctor handled the old man as easily, as impersonally as though he were a sack of grain. "Well, Heinrich, times have changed." His tone was equal, without pity or enmity. He came because they were Austrian, because when they were boys they had met sometimes on the street in Vienna. He felt nothing for the old man. "You must get well," he said pleasantly. "I will have you come to play for me one Sunday. It will be like old times, eh?"

"Like old times," Heinrich agreed, trying to seize the chance, now, with this man leaning over him. He took his hand, finding urgent force as he shook it. He felt as if he had been drowning for a long time, and just come to realize it. "Like old times, like old times," he chuckled, the sound shaking his chest until he forgot the urgency in his merriment. "Like old times, eh, yes, yes, like old times!"

The Doctor left the needle in the old man's arm for a second, smiling with his mouth only, to himself, listening not to the words his patient spoke, since he understood them by the tone. Fierce energy impelled the old man's voice, speaking German now. The Doctor waited for the tone to mellow and soften with the drug. He murmured an occasional

answer, in their native tongue, accepting the man's hunger, as he ignored it. He took in Marie, too.

"Well, Marie, you do not want to end this?" he teased, watching the distortion of feeling in her face. "You do not want me to recommend him to the hospital?"

"Ah, no --" she said, infinitely sad, her tender face turned, pitying, on her father, "No, please." But she couldn't really control her voice, and in spite of her it tried to reach him with another meaning.

He pretended not to hear that. "No, of course not," he said politely. He was tired. He laid down the arm that he had been holding, soothing the slight resistance. "Ah, your coffee," he said, taking the cup. As he drank, he smiled to Marie. "You will have no more trouble. For a few weeks you will have peace. Then it will start again."

"I know."

"Well, I will come again when you need me. Call me when you wish."

She thanked him contritely, and as she opened the door, she hid pain in her glance, but still she knew that he had placed money on the table beside the couch. She pretended not to have seen.

When he went out the door, he noticed her geranium plant. Her faith, too, reminded him of something grown in a pot, a hot-house plant, too delicate for winter.

Heinrich lay dully on the couch, half asleep. His face was like an apple that has begun both to dry and rot. "Did you hear," he murmured through the fog to Marie, crossly, like a feverish child kept in bed after school is out. "Did you hear, he said I should play for him on Sunday. Mind you! get my things ready, get my frock coat." He murmured on, becoming incoherent, until suddenly he struggled to raise himself,

fighting his age and illness and the lazy drug. He asked her clearly, "What day is it?"

"It is Thursday, Papa."

"Thursday." The word lost its point, and he gave in to sleep.

He slept for a long time, until night. When he woke, he could sense Marie standing by the window. The moon in the dark gave her cold peace. It looked like a slice of pumpkin hung against dark blue paper, and it seemed to be moving, unwinding on a slow string.

The fog of half-sleep was on him, and as he lay struggling to pierce through it, he listened to the sounds of the night, things going by, all life, all sound going by. He heard foot-falls on the dark street, distant, present, fading, the canny hoots of boys, and somewhere from under the eaves of the corner house, came the giggle of Molly Pink's daughter, as she cuddled her boyfriend in the dark. And always under his ear was the sweet whisper of remembered violins. Sometimes it would seem that his fingers could control the sounds, his gestures bring them forth.

But, then, sometimes, they reminded him of orchestral instruments, isolated from sense, perverse sounds, each perpetually tuning up, never ready to play. Old sounds came tumbling back into his head. He felt music stirring in him, like a relentless parasite in its host, and he wanted to touch and grip and tear, and mould them all into one. He lay inside a fog of swirling sound, the pitiless clarity that music was to him. Craftily he tapped at the table in an effort to restore the precarious balance of illusion.

"Marie!"

She hurried anxiously to the couch, stooped to pick up the blanket

and placed it gently over him. "Papa! Did you have bad dreams?"

"Bad dreams, yes, yes, always bad dreams, after Strauss comes. I don't want to see him again!" He turned crossly on the couch. "It's too hot! I hear hissing in my dreams, hissing, hissing, hissing! They can't hear my music! No, I don't want Strauss again!"

She passed her hand anxiously over her severe hair, pain in her flat grey eyes. "O, Papa!"

In a minute, the streetlight showed her to him. She knelt before the ivory Cross, holding in her hands a string of beads. As he watched her, the beads turning in her hands, began turning in his head, and soon he saw her through a dark frame, the beads spinning about her, until the room itself seemed to be spinning, and he in it. Only she was safe and still.

"Marie!" he called crossly.

The Medicine Chest

From the divan, they could see when the medicine chest was being used, through the slats in the swinging door. It was, however, an incomplete view, an impression put together from knowing what Nurse Carmody was like, and the blob of white they could actually see. From the chair with the wicker bottom they could see her feet, clipping by along the hall. There was something comforting about her feet, in the sturdy, sensible white shoes, always spotless. On Wednesdays, the morning when the man came to wax the floors, for a few hours the green linoleum would be like a mirror, reflecting her shoes, so that she seemed to be walking in small white pools. For this reason, they liked best to sit in the wicker chair, although it was really less comfortable.

Sometimes Mr. Phillips was a little dour. Now he had been arguing all morning about the wicker-bottomed chair with Mr. Fiske, and he was disgruntled that it was his turn to lie on the divan.

When the nurse came in, she could see this, but she ignored it as she went to the window to adjust the venetian blind. "Is this better? Too much sun for you?" she asked. She had a stalwart face, with little yellow hairs growing across her upper lip. Her eyebrows, the hair on her head, and on her muscular arms, all matched.

The sunlight coming across the street through the trees in the school-yard seemed pleasant to her. Now most of the leaves had dropped from the trees, and those that were left were twisted and brown. She could hear the bell ring somewhere inside the school, as she stood for a moment, looking out. She had a great deal to do, so much that she had no idea of ever being able to do it all, and so she did not feel much pressure to try.

"Nurse!" Mr. Philips called out querulously.

"Yes?" She said vigorously, just as if she were greatly interested.

"Is it true," he asked, his tone severe, if it had not been so high, quavering up his wind-pipe with his chest ailment. "Is it true, Nurse Carmody?"

"Now, don't you worry about it, Mr. Philips," she said briskly. She had explained it over and over, but still they asked about it. She knew that they would, until something else happened. The sun on her face made her sleepy, so she left the window to get on with her work, efficient, more from habit, than conviction. "Since you sat in the chair yesterday, Mr. Philips, why don't we let Mr. Fiske have it today?" She meant it to distract his attention.

When she saw the disappointment settle on his face, increasing, like a layer of dust stirred up, the full extent at first not apparent, until it begins to light back into place, she said cheerfully, "I'll tell you what, I'll move the divan over here by the window, and then you can lie back and watch the children play."

"Can you see them?" Mr. Fiske asked wistfully, propping himself up on his elbow in bed. He had laid aside his pipe, and was cleaning out his mouth with his tongue. She pushed the spittoon across his bed-table to him, smiling for his thanks. Then he spit very carefully, and cleared his throat.

"Well, not right now," she admitted. "But you can see the windows ... let me see ..." She went back and peered out carefully. "Yes, I think you can see the teacher moving around in one of those classrooms.

And anyhow, you can see the pumpkins pasted on the glass."

As she stripped the sheet off him and folded his bathrobe over his legs, she noticed the plant on his stand. "Your flowers will be in bloom soon! They're coming along nicely ... you have so many plants, so many visitors!" She straightened with her fingers one of the stems that had started to droop.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, folks are good to me." When he thought about it there was some sad wistfulness in his face. "Yes, I used to have a good many plants and a good many friends. I used to keep a greenhouse, you know ... I had some pretty flowers"

She knew the way back into the past, and she closed the door on it for him. "This is a Christmas cactus, isn't it? It should be in blossom at Christmas time."

Then she helped him over to the chair. Really she carried him, holding him firmly with her stout arms around his waist, letting his legs dangle so that by shuffling them he thought that he was walking. She noticed that he seemed weaker today, that there was a pale pink light under his skin which she did not like to see. "Now then, we'll get you set for a while ... don't kick this blanket off, will you?" She tucked it firmly across his knees. She did it really more to hold him in than because he needed it for warmth, though it was beginning to grow colder in the late afternoon when the sun shifted.

He chuckled, thinking that was a fine joke, and she laughed with him, though she cut it short because she was in a hurry.

Seeing her in a good humor, he said mildly, "You will speak to them about it?"

She patted his arm briskly, not committing herself. She knew already it was useless to explain. Then she went out, and the door swung back and forth a few times, slowing down. They watched it, saying nothing, as the medicine chest grew less and less, until finally the door had stopped, and they could see nothing past it.

"There, she'll fix it up for us!" Mr. Fiske said confidently.

Mr. Philips did not say anything. He was staring out of the window, watching the school-yard. She had promised him he should see the teacher. He could see nothing, only the hot sun glazing the windows. Then he looked up at the tree, finding a leaf about to fall, and he waited, saying nothing, seeing it dangle by a limp stem, until a breeze picked it off. Then, the breeze gone, it drifted slowly down to the ground. On the sidewalk he could not tell which one it had been.

"Leaves almost gone, eh?" Mr. Fiske said after a little.

"Yes, almost gone."

"Well, I shan't live to see any more." He breathed slowly, his words slow, not shifting the pipe in his mouth.

They sat quietly, sometimes passing a remark back and forth, sometimes smoking, watching the air in the sunlight, the dust drifting across it.

Upstairs, old Mrs. Kelly grunted as Nurse Carmody lifted her in her arms to turn her over. "Might think I was a sack of meal!" she snorted crossly. "You looka here, young lady! I want to know what's going on around here!"

The nurse nodded pleasantly, scrubbing her back with alcohol, as she looked over at Miss Bainton, who was sitting upright in a rocking

chair, her face set away from them, refusing to have anything to do with Mrs. Kelly. She was like a bald old cat, Nurse Carmody thought, her face unpleasantly righteous.

Mrs. Kelly had been talking at her, spitting her remarks out. "What do they think they're doing to us! The idea! I pay my fifty dollars, every week, on the dot. Let them get after those that don't!" Here she sniffed suspiciously toward her neighbor.

The nurse started to explain, patiently.

"Time!" Mrs. Kelly snorted. "For fifty dollars, I could find time, yes I could! In my day, we knew what work was! I went to work every morning, every morning at five o'clock, and a long ... Ow!" she yelled, twisting herself around. "Stop that, stop it! What do you think I am? I've got feelings, ninety-odd as I be! Keep your needles for your sewing! I'm not dead yet!" She pushed with her fists, screaming, pain pressing at her back. "Well, pick me up, pick me up, don't stand there like a ninny!"

Nurse Carmody finished the injection, holding her down, plumping up her pillow, straightening the newspaper on the bed-stand. There were no flowers here. The old tartar paid for her life now, paid hard. Nurse Carmody opened the window for a minute, poking her head out to look down. Here all she could see was the back landing, the iron rungs of the fire-escape, and down below, on the cement base, two galvanized pails, one over-loaded with garbage. A cat was sneaking around it, sniffing. "Hist!" she called down. "Hist!"

"That mewling cat down there again?" Mrs. Kelly asked her crossly. "Wakes me up at three in the morning, howling out its mating tune! I

like it better than its sister, at that!" She pointed with her head toward Miss Bainton, sitting, her lips compressed, and even Nurse Carmody had hard work to control a smile, she looked so ready to spit, even her backbone bristling.

"Now, now," she said, Then three people passed outside the room, Mrs. Green and two men. They all knew the black trousers, they could smell the sanitary soap mixed with a sickish perfume, as they walked a few paces apart, evenly, so that the three women could tell they were carrying something heavy.

"Who's that?" Mrs. Kelly pointed out the door with her head, lifting it from the pillow to sniff. "Can't fool you with that smell, can they?" For a moment they had been brought together, all of them in the room, though Miss Bainton took no chances with shifting her gaze for that. She saw what she could without moving. She was disappointed that it was so little, that they did not stop, come in, perhaps, so that she see more.

Nurse Carmody straightened the shade, pulling it over the window. There was nothing pleasant out of this window to look at. She was at the door when she saw Miss Bainton's lips moving, and she went back to her quickly. She had to bend down to hear what it was she whispered.

"You -- you'll do -- what you can -- for us, won't you?" She spoke with such terror, the nurse could hardly understand her, but she assured her kindly. When she had finished, Miss Bainton shut her mouth tightly, and closed her eyes over it, sighing with relief for the effort made.

"Yes, yes," the nurse reassured. What did they think she was? She sighed too, knowing the uselessness of explaining.

All along the hall, she ran into the same thing. They kept after her, wanting to know, and in the end, they all confided in her, expecting that she would do something about it. She stood in the hall, resting against the radiator, thinking. She was almost tempted ... she could handle it, she could do it for them .. no, no, she could not, there was too much to do already, it would take her time, and then she could not do what they really needed. But, she asked herself, what did they really need, after all? What was it? Was it not flowers, for their bed-stands, was it not children playing in the yard, families come from away for a Sunday afternoon? Was not that really important, more than hypodermic needles? No, no, there was nothing she could do, she realized that, nothing that mattered at all She put it out of her mind, as she went into the staff lounge, lifting up her feet as she spread herself out on the couch. The flesh of her ankles puffed over the leather binding of her shoes a little, the laces loose, distended at the top.

Doctor Stacy laughed, seeing the irritable look of her face. "What is the matter? Have they been after you, too?"

"Yes," she said wearily. "Yes."

"Have you finished your rounds? I hardly dare make mine!" He stood up, stretching. "Well, I must be off! I'll leave it to you, what to do about it! I can't face them! Men are all right - but the women!"

Now Nurse Carmody's head ached, so that she did not really appreciate his joke, though she smiled as if she did. She liked the Doctor, liked Mrs. Green ... a very sensible woman, a well-run Nursing Home. But her head ached, from listening to them all, and there was the futility of it, depressing her. Perhaps a children's home, she thought ... but no,

no, they looked to her, these old people, What could one do? She shrugged, arguing in herself.

She started to say something, but then the school bell rang across the street, and in a second, the children came yelling out, and her words were lost. She went to the window, brightening, as she watched them. In a few minutes, the street and the yard were filled with little groups of children. She picked out one in a red sweater and saw her skip along the sidewalk, stooping after a stick that she flourished as she ran. Then she had turned the corner.

"Come, now!" the Doctor stood beside her, his hand on her shoulder, massaging the bones behind her neck with his strong fingers. "Don't let it get you. We can't afford to lose you ... if you take it all on yourself, we'll be getting the Black Box for you!"

"I know." She sighed, relaxing, letting the tingle in her muscles control her. "Um, that feels good. I'm so tired!"

"I know. That's why Mrs. Green decided on the change." He nodded, looking seriously at her face, at the thick creases in her chin.

Then she shook herself away, fighting the ease. "I know, I know, but what really matters, after all? Can you decide? You know what it means to them ... to have so little, so little left, that it could matter at all! Do my feet count, my head-ache? No, no!"

She turned back to the window, looking for the children, shrugging. "I don't know," she said, shaking her head. The children had mostly gone now, only a few moving slowly, already far down the street. The school yard had an empty look. "I don't like this time of day."

Then she went downstairs. Since she had a little time before taking

the supper trays around, she stopped in to see Mr. Fiske for a minute. She sat on the edge of his bed, reaching her hand to rest it on the arm of the wicker chair, patting his. She was startled as she touched it, so cold, almost transparent, like the skin of a plucked chicken. She noticed that there were the same kind of hairs on it too, long, wiry white ones, hard to see. She stroked it for a minute, biting her lip. She must not let herself like him too much, must not let herself become involved. It was all pain, all pain. She could not carry it all on her shoulders! The Doctor was right. She had been mistaken in coming down here, simply because this one helpless little man expressed everything to her, got up her sympathy. She thought of what this place was, what these people were here for, and it made her angry at everything, at life. A house full of people waiting to die! When Mrs. Green took away the early morning Coffee-hour, they came screaming to her! So petty, so petty! They had no consideration for her, they were unreasonable, demanding! No, no, she had been stupid, mistaken, quixotic. The Doctor was right. She wanted to get up, to fling open the doors, to let the sun in, and air out the sanitary smell. She wanted

Mr. Fiske had been talking. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Fiske?" At first she did not hear, and she looked, distracted, at him, trying to puzzle out from the quiet what it was. About their wretched Coffee-hour, she supposed, preparing her defense.

"We saw the children come out of the school today, didn't we, Ed?" Mr. Fiske said, leaning back, holding his pipe in his hands. "Thanksgiving in a few days, eh? Holiday for the children, I guess"

"Leaves almost gone," Mr. Philips, from his position by the window,

told her sagely, picking up the conversation where it had been hours before.

"Yes, there'll be snow soon," she agreed.

"Yes," Mr. Fiske said, quietly, quite content. "Yes, snow soon, snow soon. I shall like to go, when it snows. So quiet"

The Family

Through long habit he had learned to pick up his feet slowly and carefully, knowing the mud would be thick on his boots. He went into the shed, knocking his feet against the door as he did. The gesture did little good, since the mud was too wet to drop off, but he was satisfied that he had tried, and he went whistling in.

"Heyeh, Bess," he called after the dog who came out to meet him, with a gait that was very lame, but still showed good spirit. The dog stood, waving a shaggy tail against his legs. "What's the matter, Bess, mud, eh?" He said it cheerfully, shaking his head as he looked down at his feet, but again, his recognition of the fact that it was there was enough to satisfy him. "Yeaup, Nancy won't like it." He aimed a cuff at the dog's ears, and then chuckled to see how much she liked it. "Hey, Nan, how much wood you want?" he called into the kitchen.

There was no answer, so he picked up a few chunks, settling them easily in his arms. He was a big man, with thick red arms, and strong-matted dark hairs below the sleeves of his shirt. The shirt was faded from a bright plaid, but very clean, carefully patched by hand in one place. He stacked wood chunks, carelessly, but they landed squarely where he meant them to, and then he brushed his hand along his thighs to clean them. His overalls, like his shirt, were faded.

On the kitchen table he saw a letter, but he did not bother to open it, or even to glance at it very carefully. He looked around, not really hunting anything, but when the white enamel clock caught his attention, he realized how late it was. "Hey, Nan," he called. He went to the door and looked up the stairs to the landing. "Nan?"

When there was no answer, he let it be as it was, turning only to

the dog who had followed him in. With an upward stroke of his head he made a question, as though the dog could tell him. But he went ahead with his work, lifting the lid off the stove and putting a chunk of wood in, and poking it so that it fell into place on the ashes.

Next he sat down in a rocking chair and loosened his boots, then leaned back, closing his eyes. He was sitting that way when his mother came in. She always walked as though she carried a Bible on her head, upright, stern, -- and so, in a way she did. There was enough in her hands that worked for a living, in the body as useful, as sparing as her clothes, to show that this was her son.

"Shame on you, Lincoln!" she scolded, but still her scolding was mild. He was a good son and a good farmer. There was nothing more a woman could ask. Then she turned on the dog. "Git out!" she hissed, but there was no unpleasantness in her face, and none in her voice. Bessie skittered behind the chair where Lincoln sat, hesitated, and then slunk out the door, with one final wag of the shaggy tail.

"Git on, Bess," he reminded her. "Ye-ah," he sighed, stretching his arms, so that his shirt opened at the neck, dark and red and strong. "That dog's always coming in here." He said it with a grin, carrying on a pretence they had, that he minded when she talked. But both of them really knew that he didn't. It was something between them, something they knew about each other, when to count words and when not to. With eyes that were both tough and gentle, grey-blue, set in under a bone that crossed her face, she reminded him. "Nancy's upstairs. You better go on up."

He sat up, seeming not to hurry at all, but the strong muscles obeyed him so well that it was a moment only. "What's wrong?"

Her voice was very gentle, though it had the grit of a hard throat. "Nothing ... she had trouble with the stove."

He shrugged at that, annoyed. He was used to her tears and her tempers. The thought of them made him forget the feeling he had had earlier, when he had come in, looking for her to have his supper ready. Now he crossed his arms steadily and looked at his mother, not intending to move.

"Go on up, Lincoln! Go on up." Her face was plain and expressionless, her tone very quiet. It was the tone in which she said her prayers, bending with scored, horny hands resting against her hymnal.

He shrugged again, and though he did it, still stubbornly, rebelling, he went. He climbed the steps slowly, using the handrail because it was there, and from it through his fingers somehow a sense that did not come consciously into his thoughts reminded him of the men before him who had smoothed down the rail with tough hands. It had been his great-grandfather's house, made by men who had cleared the pastures out of rock, built the barns with their axes. Still the job was not done. Still in the winter the frost heaved up stones, and in the spring the tractor kicked them up into the plough. When he stopped at the turn in the landing, he could see the hill out of the pasture, the woodland, with snow still under the trees, and trickling down from behind the ridge of rocks, water from the melting ice. The snow was still clean up there. As he turned to look at the barn, he was glad to see the new tin roof shining in the late afternoon sun. He thought it was very pretty, it called to mind the jingling little bells Nancy put in her ears. He climbed farther up, taking two steps at a time, easily. He was heavy, but his step was

light, his motion like a well-bred bull, a thing of coordination and harnessed strength.

She sat up, when he opened the door and stood there looking at her. There was no expression in his face, and she did not know what he was thinking of her. Out of habit, she put her hands to her face, protecting her cheeks, although she left her eyes open, and he could see she had been crying.

He sat on the bed beside her and took one of her hands in his. He tried between the both of his making a sandwich out of it, and he was surprised to see how small it was, with such short fingers, but broad. "That's a good hand," he said. Then he lifted the index finger up from the knuckle, straining it.

"Ow!"

"I don't feel it," he said, really almost amazed, because he could see by the sharp blink of her eyes how she did. Then he looked at her, and began to laugh, rocking her hand back and forth.

She laughed, too, lightly, and he saw that she had the bells in her ears now.

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy," he said, sitting there looking at her, and his voice was amazed and pleased. They sat quietly, until he asked, "Where's John Paul?"

"Over to Varney's."

He did not demand an explanation, there was no change in his face as he sat in content, looking at her, admiring the little jingling motion of the bells, admiring the way it made all her face light and small.

But still she gave him an explanation. "I had a headache and he

was so noisy I just couldn't handle him, I kept telling him to keep quiet, I kept after him and after him, but you know he's got a voice like a hog-caller..."

"All right," he said, not much disturbed by that. He liked to look at the loose flesh of her upper arms, to play with it, but he knew it made her angry, and now she was likely to get upset at nothing. But as he looked at her body under the covers, he had to squeeze her shoulders, his hand under the neck of her blouse. His fingers were rough, and she bristled. He laughed at that. "Come on down now, Nancy. I'm hungry!"

She set her face, looking crossly at him, but under it she was pleased.

But his mother called then from the lower landing, "Supper!" Her voice was dry and clean.

"Come on, Nancy." He pulled her up by the hand, letting her loose when she stumbled in the covers.

Sometimes he thought she was the only toy he had ever had, and he did not like it that she was. But sometimes he liked it very much. Now he went ahead, wondering as he passed the landing if Clem Varney would make it over tonight, and if he didn't, it would be a long session milking again. As he passed the window, he stopped for a moment to fix in his mind the look of the sun, pink on the silver roof, and the clouds moving as if they were snow rolling down a slope.

In the room Nancy sat up, holding her hands to her head. Her palms were warm, pleasant, and she rubbed her face a little. Then she twisted her fingers through her hairs and helped herself up. She looked down at her stomach, coming up almost to meet her chin, it looked, as she

bent to put on her shoes. She pulled her blouse over it and patted the huge lump in herself.

"Bonnie," she said to herself, "Bonnie Mae." She crooned as she straightened the sheets, humming a little, in a high happy voice. She had forgotten the headache. It was Lincoln, Lincoln. She liked his smell, even the barn on him was sweet. And his mother, she hated it, Nancy thought, seeing how her face closed up like a turtle's when she scolded. She stopped by the window, leaning on the sill. Lincoln thought she was really mad when he fiddled with her arms, didn't he know nothing he did really made her mad? She laughed aloud, very softly, to herself, leaning rocking her belly against the sill.

The glass panes were low, small. She fitted her small round face inside one, as though it was a frame, and she a picture, and she shook her head so that the bells at her ears clinked on the glass. Oh, look, look! there was a pigeon, nesting up under the sloping roof of the shed. She must show it to John Paul. Why was John Paul so long at Varney's, she wondered, biting her lip. She told him to come back before supper, before his father started the milking! She knew Lincoln would scold her for letting him go. She had a speech ready for John Paul, and her forehead closed in tight, making her eyes small. Her nose puffed a little at the nostrils, but her mouth was very pink. She could have stood for hours, staring at the pigeon's nest, watching the vine growing around the shingles. She looked at the withered leaves. Then urgency came back into her, and she thickened, her face harder, as she stared down the mud road to see if John Paul was coming yet.

"I'm telling you, John Paul, if you get me into trouble you ain't

going out no more to play," she said, as seriously as though he was really there listening to her. And then, as she started to go, she saw the rug Lincoln had kicked up, and a spot of mud on it from his boots, beside the bed, and the tightness melted, her body all soft and ready. Oh Lincoln, Lincoln.

Downstairs, Lincoln sat at the table with his mother. Neither of them waited, but there was a pile of stew steaming, ready, in a spare plate. They didn't talk much, Lincoln reaching across the table all the way after the bread, rather than ask for it.

"Seen Clem Varney round?" he said, after he had almost finished his first plate of stew.

His mother took his plate and filled it again with a ladle from a pot on the stove. "No."

When he had almost finished his second plateful, she asked him, "Nancy comin' down?"

"Yeauh, I guess so, said she was."

"Her dinner's gettin' cold."

The clock on the wall ticked loudly, filling in their silences. But really there was no silence between them, each full of thoughts, many the same thoughts, not things they figured out, but things they knew, things that grew up in them from the earth out of long habit. They weren't people to waste things, not words either, and they knew really that words were no good, that they never reached anything with those. They knew more through their hands. Lincoln, with his dark burned hair, his eyes strangely light, very pale blue, sat cutting his meat, waiting with the clock. He had forgotten about Nancy when she came in. He

looked up at her without changing his expression.

She glared at him, her mood gone at once. She had come down smiling to herself, but that stopped. The room was so quiet, so dumb, and her head ached so! She turned the full flat anger of her face against his mother, snatching up her fork, eating without any pleasure.

The house was empty without John Paul. Suddenly she thought that was it. He was always underfoot, and then she scolded her fingers, squeezing the twisted fork, ached suddenly to catch him by the scruff of his hair. Why did she scold him so much, she really loved him so! These hard, silent people! For a moment she didn't know them, their eyes the same, their flat cold faces! She wanted to spit out the chunk of meat in her mouth. She hated stew, hated it, hated all plain things, things you had to chew to get your nourishment.

The clock striking reminded her. It was the first night of the Fair. Last year, she had gone down and worked, made some money. They didn't understand, those two, so alike, didn't understand at all, how your fingers wanted money, how your hands could get when they were empty, and you went by the store, and all the pretty things lay out, and no money in your fingers. Coins, pretty shiny round coins she loved money, she wanted it so bad, they'd never know! She bought John Paul a bright silver gun last year. He liked that! But they laughed at her. She could read in that face, what his mother thought, she could just hear her say, "That's what you get for marrying a city girl." Now she sat, fighting inside, eating plenty, though she thought she didn't like supper.

At six-thirty Bess, the dog, let out a whine, vicious but curbed.

In a minute Clem Varney came in without bothering to knock. He was dirty, his shirt hanging unbuttoned, his pants slipping down and the black hairs around his navel stuck out on a roll of fat above his belt. He looked first at Nancy, a coarse look, seeing how things were with her, then he leaned against the doorpost, waiting, not saying anything.

"John Paul come back with you?" Lincoln's mother brought him over a cup of coffee as she asked him.

"Nah. Ain't seen 'im."

"You didn't?" Only the tightening of a muscle around her eyes showed any emotion at that.

"Nah." He shrugged, drinking the coffee by stretching his mouth and pouring it in.

Then Nancy, frightened because she knew she would get a scolding, said, her voice high in fright, "He was over there playing, I sent him over there this afternoon to play."

"Bless ya, honey," Clem said, "I ain't seen him all day." He drawled deliberately, with a twinkle in his eye to see how mad it made her. He scratched his stubble-beard, opening his mouth, and worked his jaw a little, as if he was going on to say something more, but he didn't.

"Well, I sent him over! I told him to stay right there, not to go anywhere else, just to stay there!" she insisted, her face getting red.

He cleaned around his teeth with his tongue, and when he smiled, they were very white and even, showing in a broad grin. "Reckon he went on down to the Fair," he said pleasantly. He was in a good humor now, he liked to see her mad. "I did see 'im going down that way, come to think of it."

Lincoln stood watching her, his face thick with anger.

Clem grew lighter, smiling very pleasantly now. "Reckon he heard ya talkin' about the fair all day."

"No!" Nancy said, her voice shrill, scared. "No! I never did!" She turned angrily to Lincoln, daring him, just daring him to believe.

He looked at her, his eyes black, but his face otherwise unchanged. For a minute he said nothing, looking straight at her face, and she met him, as strong as he, as firm, only her eyes made small with her feeling. His face was red, streaked with the risen blood inside his head.

"Are you going after him?" she demanded, suddenly as though it was his fault.

"First I'm going to milk my cows." He had no choice. That was the way things were.

Clem stood, smiling, his face as simple and pleasant as a child's. He liked to see them put each other over the coals, Lincoln Wrightener and his wife from the city. He thought it was a great joke.

"I'm taking the truck then, I'm going on down myself," she told her husband.

"You stay right here til I'm ready."

"I'm going down there."

The two of them stood, both strong and red. Their faces looked almost alike, except for their eyes. Then he stamped out, leaving Clem to open the door again and follow behind him. He went to the gate by the barnyard, and stood there, staring at the mud, kicking his boot powerfully against the post, almost angry with it for not bending, but glad, because it was his work to drive the posts. He stood, full of the

hot blood feeling that he could not harness, listening to the engine of the truck stall three times. Then his mother came down beside him, her face the same as his.

"Shame on you, Lincoln Wrightener!" she scolded. "You go on down there with that girl. That's a tough road down there. She can't handle that truck, and you know it."

He made his hand into a fist and pounded it once against the post. "She oughtn't have let him go."

She shrugged, waiting for him to turn. There was no point to that. They both knew it.

"All right," he said. "Clem, you do the milking alone tonight."

He walked slowly and easily to the truck, and when Nancy saw him, she slid over on the seat. At first, she didn't know what to say, but then, the anger left them both, and he put his hand over hers where it lay on her knee.

She looked out her window. The moon was like a new little silver dime spinning on its side, and there was a spring breeze stirring a pool of water that had leaked into one of his footsteps in the mud. She smiled, happily, to herself.

The Fair

The tent was at the edge of the fair-ground, well settled into the mud because it had been there almost ten days. There was always a full quota of rain at fair-time. "If you want to lick the drought," Snooks' grandfather said every year at this time, "set up the Fair in the dry spell." Snooks' grandfather was an oracle. Like an oracle, he was silent about things you wanted to know, but full of things you'd rather not.

In the tent that was apart from the ring, Pinto watched Leo spill coffee on the right cuff of his red pants.

"Oh!" she gasped, putting her hand to her mouth. "Leo, you're on next! Wait, I'd better get a rag and wash it off!"

"You're a good kid," Leo said.

It was a sandlot, and benches about it. But no one sitting on them thought of that. At fair-time it was transfigured. All winter, and in the spring, people pointed at it when they passed by, and it was this they thought of.

Outside the tent, two children who had found a small hole in the canvas crouched, shushing each other. On the bench by the ring their mother sat, among the crowd, idly flipping the flies from the summer night, full of patience. She had an old, grim face, speckled with work and trouble, but her hands, when the flies let her be, were oddly peaceful, resting in her lap. Farther along the bench a woman in purple crinoline fidgeted, gestures half expressive, half for defense. But the hands of Snooks' mother waited. In the hot summer night she sat with Granny beside her, and neither of them fussed that the children had gone off. She saw for a moment the Fair's sparkle like a fire-cracker burst

over them and fall down, and begone, and she knew it was memories made in the lights and the dark, out of magical people wandering through the spotlight, - and then gone. Over by the tent where Snooks had run with Willie, the noise of the animals set up strange music, less strange than the band grinding a tinny tune. Tonight it had been touched with the magic of summer dark on a hot night, full of flies and firecrackers and eys of children.

"There ain't no animals," Willie said in disgust.

"Let me see, let me see again, let me see!" In the flicker of light as someone lifted a tent flap, the blue bow bobbed insistantly on her sticky brown curl.

Trouble had passed from Granny now. All things pass, all things rest in the Lord, her face said. Life was hard, but her time was come. She sat, and the children ran past her, but it was eternity she saw passing before her eyes, eternity, and here and there an apple core. She poked at one with her stick. Submission, a yoke to Snooks' mother, was none to her: it was the Lord's she wore, no longer the years!

"Men be coming back soon," Snooks' mother said to her, with no particular tone to it. "Hear that? Horse-drawing must be over."

"Ayeh," Granny said, "John allus liked horse-drawing."

"Anh."

From the tent Leo stepped out, strutting, as though he were himself in the ring. He never could tell the difference. His cigarette struck flamboyantly through the dark like a small meteor, coming back to his mouth in anticlimax. Pinto, hanging on his arm, moved as he moved, like dark brown coffee in a china cup, swaying with the cup as it moved. She was small and dark and brown, dressed in pink satin with a little, torn

ruffle. When he stopped, she stood too, only the toes of her left foot beating time to the music. Tawdry was the pink satin and the frill about it, tawdry the crimp at the ends of her hair, the skinny eyebrows, the rouge pinkening her darkness; but her face was love on a summer night, ripe for plucking. Leo glanced at her and knew that, knew there was no hurry. Her little dark passionate eyes found Leo's face a magnet, sending all her impatience coursing through her, finding expression only in the tapping toes, winding her up inside like a spinning top.

"Whisht!" Snooks breathed, a skinny trembling breath, and shut her eyes over it, half afraid, half wishing. "Look at that!"

In the ring the drummer stomped, making a place and a waiting silence for the clown who hovered in the shadows at the edge.

"When I grow up," Willie said, "I'm going to be a clown."

"Oh, boy," Snooks gurgled, "So am I."

"Don't be silly. Girls can't be clowns."

"They can too!"

"Cannot!"

"Can TOO!"

"Didya ever see a girl-clown?" Willie asked scornfully.

They crouched for a little, waiting breathlessly until the beautiful bright people by the tent passed along, and then they ran back to the bench, happy to be naughty, though nobody saw it.

"No, no," Leo was saying. "It won't do, Pinto. It just won't do."

A moment before, in the tent, Folsom had said, "It won't do, Leo." But neither Leo, pugnaciously arguing although there was no question about it, nor Pinto, nodding intense agreement in time to the music,

recognized the words now. At the edge of the field, peering like an eager little squirrel, moving her whole head to change the direction of her glance, Pinto watched Old Mudge in the sand-pit.

"It won't do," Leo still insisted, just as though she were denying it.

She waited then, stopping him so that she could concentrate, and all her body seemed to swell and fill and wait, rising, urging, begging with expression ... "Now ... now ..." she said, the sound part of her anguish, "now ..." she pleaded, her fingers tapping restraint on Leo's arm, begging him to help her wait. "Ohhh!" When it was over, she relaxed, suddenly limp, as though a breeze had dropped her over his arm. "I thought he wouldn't make it."

"You can see the strain," Leo said sententiously. "I'm sorry for him, but it just won't do."

"No," she agreed.

They stopped to listen to the murmur of the thin little voice in the ring, and they shook their heads together.

"Hear that?" When it quavered, Leo picked that out triumphantly.

She nodded, all her face sad. Then, because they felt a heavy rustle behind them, she drifted loosely out of his arm, for a moment looking as if she couldn't stand. Then she was tight again, like a banjo string, vibrating with a light guttural laugh. She cared none for that!

From behind them, Leo's wife yelled out, hands on hips, her heavy face still handsome in the dark, and flushed, "Come on in here, I see you hanging around! What do you think you are, you think I don't see

you stalking off for dark corners?" She yelled it out of herself, forgetting the audience, and when Leo's pomp crumbled as he followed her meekly, Pinto stood with her fists beating at the air.

"Shh," she heard Leo say. "People'll hear you."

She talked louder for that. Her face was florid, but handsome, her hair blonde, mostly, except at the side where it was scant, though for that there was still enough of it. Her arms were well moulded, strong, her bosom full under her red shirt almost to her waist. Pinto burned with angry pride - but still something shivered in her. She waited then, by herself, watching Old Mudge, and the dog with yellow feet and a blue tail who pounced for his shoulders. When he missed and tumbled into the mud, Pinto shivered valiantly, pretending it was only that to make her cold. She had seen Folsom with his fish-eyes, staring at Old Mudge, and she wanted to cry for him. Next time he tried it, the dog landed on his shoulders, and she breathed for him, Bravo.

On the bench the children jumped up and down, arguing, when they remembered it, through their joy.

"Girls can so be clowns! Can't they, Grampa? Can't they?"

Her grandfather looked at her, slow, the way he did, no use to hurry him, clearing his throat, preparing a place for his remark. "Ay, I guess so."

Her father laughed, good-natured. "Why don't you be a toe-dancer, like that pretty lady?" He pointed it out to her, where Pinto came twirling into the ring, past Old Mudge as he trailed the dog out. For a moment they met, and what she said to him no one else heard.

"Ohhh!" Snooks shivered in delight. "Look, Willie, it's the lady

we saw! We almost touched her, Grampa!" she said, then she clapped her hand over her mouth to snatch back the naughty secret.

"Now I don't want you hanging round over there," her mother chided, clucking as the grandmother did.

Willie glared at her, and for a full second she slumped onto the bench, but then the band blared out, heralding the lions in their cage, and all of them forgot everything else, even Grampa, fixing his look as carefully as he did his tongue.

Pinto, by the tent, was like a light-bulb after someone snapped on the switch. Her eyes were as young as Snooks', waiting. Then she saw Leo in his red trousers with one little dark coffee spot on the right cuff, that only she knew of. She saw the people jump up from the benches as though he held them on a string, but she claimed him with her eyes.

"They love him, they love him," she sobbed aloud to herself. With the flick of his whip she saw him control the people, just as he did the lions. She saw them all rise at once, and tremble, and shake in fear, as though it were they who faced the lion, they in the red trousers, and the gold stripe, fighting fear in the lighted circle.

She waited, and did not count the time.

The band, at the end, made him a background to bow against, in a deep dramatic gesture, full to the ground, and when he straightened up he marched proudly, surely, with a last flick of his whip before the spotlight deserted him. At the edge of the field over by the tent, Pinto ran to meet him, picking her feet high, skimming over the mud like a low swallow. When she reached him, she seemed to perch upon him, resting.

"You liked that?" he asked, short of breath, no question because he knew.

Beside the tent Old Mudge's dog sniffed at a peg and raised its hind leg. Pinto put her face away from it, consciously, hating it because it reminded her. "Oh Leo, they say once Old Mudge was so good!"

"What do you think about him for?" Leo asked, coarsely, holding her so that her ear was close against his mouth, receiving the air warmed in his throat, before it turned into anguished joy in her. He flicked his whip gently, a crack beside them, and wound it round her finger.

"Poor Old Mudge," she sighed, letting him make her head rest against him.

Leo tightened the whip about her finger, and she felt a pure white joy sear through her body, energy captive in her toes, tapping incessantly, unsatisfied. She blushed because it was her ring finger.

On the bench, Snooks, who never could sit still, jumped up, and the blue bow bobbed on her sticky brown curl.

Travellers

The two boys dashed in, just a moment, indeed, before the stranger himself was visible nearing the gate. All the same, they cupped their fists and raised excited 'hallooooos!', at the same time peering eagerly around for signs of life.

The hens set up a commotion, and the pig banged against the rickety boards of its pen, but no human voice took notice of the small messengers. "Halloo!" They tried again, making windmills of themselves with their arms, frantic ones, as if they had got caught in a gust. Again, only the animals made a racket for answer.

"Shush-oh!" the smaller boy hissed around the yard.

Then the two of them eyed the stranger with much interest, and took consultation. "I guess, she's up in the flower bed."

"Sure," the younger nodded seriously.

They stared at the stranger for a second longer. He was so close now that he had begun tentatively to beckon to them, but they dashed off once again, just in front of him, and he dropped his arm slowly, disappointed. He had begun to smile, and that too faded slowly. He stood, uncertainly looking back to the road he had just trudged up, and then he gripped his bag tightly and stood still, waiting for something to happen.

The two boys came puffing up to the old woman. When they had seen her, their excitement mounted higher, and in front of her they could hardly talk at all.

She stopped working and rested her hoe in her thorny hands, watching them sternly. She seemed, beside the hoe, to have much in common with it - she was stiff, thin, she had a straight back, an unbending

neck. She looked with a sly twinkle at the two boys in overalls that had descended to the present wearers along a line of brothers, and were now tucked up, patched, and hitched on with pins.

"All right!" she said abruptly. "Speak up, now, if you've something to say."

"Aunt - down there - in your yard - there's a stranger wanting work - "

"Eh, yes? How do you know it?" she asked, suspiciously eyeing them.

"Ben Adams said so."

She was not really their Aunt, but often she came to their door carrying baskets filled up with boots, woolens, eggs, and they had been taught to call her Aunt respectfully.

"All right," she said. She got ready to go on down, thinking about what they had told her, and they trotted along beside her happily. But after a few paces, she put a stop to that. "Since you're up here," she said, looking at them shrewdly, "You boys can fill up a couple of pails of water and carry them round for the flowers. It's hard work for me."

"Oh, Aunt!" they complained.

She kept on looking at them implacably.

The smaller one asked then, brightening tentatively, "If we do, can we have some apples?"

"Hmph!" she snorted, displeased. "You'll turn out wicked men after all! Asking pay to help a sick old woman!" Her frown was very formidable across her firm, heavy-browed face, above her sharp nose.

They wilted and stood disconsolately examining the ground as if they thought down there they might see the devil himself making a mark against them in his book.

"Well, well," she said cheerfully, "It might be, if you do a good job you'll find a ginger snap or two in the pantry - " Then she walked on by herself, ignoring the spurt of action her words had set off behind her, until she heard water splashing from hastily filled buckets. She turned around sharply and pointed at them. "Mind you don't waste that water!"

In spite of the fact that what the boys had told her with such excitement interested her a good deal, she did not think it necessary to hurry. The two boys, climbing hastily into the apple tree so they could look down on her, grew very impatient. They pushed each other in an effort to see, and then swung, when they felt quite safe from discovery, like large monkeys under the branches. After that they helped themselves to their pockets full of apples, and sat happily munching, their knees jammed to their chins.

But the old woman was still preoccupied. She had not yet seen the stranger, and she didn't trouble with conjectures. So she went on telling herself that there must be a way to get water around to the row of bulbs. Already hard cracks had begun to open at the roots, and she found herself beating the soil futilely into chunks. Now, thinking of it, she shook her fist at the blue sterile gleam around her. She felt there was something against her, making these long bright days and dry nights. The grass at her feet was brown stubble, scarcely covering the bare hard soil. There was too much to fight ... no, she thought then, sternly reminding herself, it must be as it must, though it was too bitter and too hard. Nothing, she thought, nothing will be asked more than can be given. At times like this she imagined Michael was beside her, and she nodded

quietly, agreeing, It was good you went when you did, a good thing --- it would have been too hard for you, to see me drying up, the land drying up --- well, she said, if the bulbs die, there are the apples, and if the apples fall, the grapes are thick on the vines ... and the pumpkins glossy in the fields --- Still, she had stirred up an old angry ache. but she settled that back down again when she saw the stranger still rapping patiently at the back door.

"Hullo!" she called. "You were looking for me?"

At the sight of her, the troubled, undecided look flickered from the stranger's face, and a delighted smile took its place.

"You are Jeannette Canna?" he asked, and he seemed incredulous, whether to find her so old or so young, so stern or so strong, he didn't say.

"I am."

"I've come after a job," he said, bobbing his head, still with the childlike delight, as he examined the bare clapboards of the small house, the weathered sheds, and the pig grunting at the interruption. It was as if he had just gotten there that moment, and was seeing it for the first time. As he moved his head energetically, the red ends of his dotted tie flapped. There was something incongruously gay about him, in that place.

At once she liked him and didn't trust him. "I don't intend to pay much," she said abruptly, warning him off. "Five dollars a week, a room to yourself, and I'd fix up your meals with mine."

"That's all right," he said eagerly. "I need a place to stay. I'm tired of travelling --- I like it here, I like it very much!" He spoke with a little popping emphasis to each word.

She wished now she had said three dollars. But still she was suspicious. "I won't have drink on my place," she said.

"Oh, I don't mind that!" he said brightly. "On a Saturday night, I can go into town, I expect? -- I like to sit around, talk, listen --- but don't worry! No, I'm not one of those fellows with a flask in his back pocket!" He laughed so cheerfully that she decided she did like him.

"All right, then," she said. "Come in."

She led him first into the kitchen over boards that had settled unevenly. Around the room was a wainscoting done in grained veneer. There was an impression of smallness and darkness, completed rather than broken by the sun coming into the room past the grape-vine. Then she had the stranger follow her into a room off the kitchen, next to the bathroom. It was a very plainly furnished room, containing a bed with high brass steads, off which she snatched a dust covering and revealed a rather faded quilt whose colors were predominantly bronze. There was a straight chair, and a rocker beside the single window. Next to that was a high-boy with a marble top, and right beside the bed itself, a washstand, and on it a pitcher set in a bowl. The linoleum was a glazed brown, and cracked across in several places. To pull the light on, she reached out for a string dangling down above the bed, and having shown him the electricity, she pulled it off again.

He set his bag down on the bed. "Yes," he sighed, looking the room over completely, nodding to himself, and then to her as she stood watching him. "Yes," he scratched his chin, and for a minute a gloomy, indecipherable expression came into his face. "I know this room," he said,

nodding at the washstand, at the brass bedposts, the cloudy marble.

"I know this room well -- I slept in this room as a boy --"

She stared at him sharply, but he went on to himself. His face was limp and weary, his eyes faded.

"Some things there are back of all our lives - " he seemed sad, almost bitter, to be reminded. " - Grandfathers, Sunday Schools, upright pianos - these bedrooms - yes, yes, I know it well - this room -- it's my past - " Then he dropped off the dreamy manner and chuckled, and his face changed, turned expectant, "I was brought up on a farm myself."

He started to unpack his bag, and she watched, fascinated, while he pulled out three heavy books, a little knot of bright ties, and a small pile of underthings. He saw her staring at them, and he explained, a little sheepishly. "Encyclopedias, you see?" he held one of the books toward her, but she shook her head and he put it down again. He shook his head too, then, very wearily, and for a moment again his face seemed to loosen, discouraged. "No one wants it," he said sadly. "Full of knowledge, lots of information -- but no one wants to buy it -" Then he pulled out another, a large blue book with pages swelling fatter than the binding, and there was one of those instantaneous changes that already she had learned to expect in him. "See?" he waved the book in front of her. "Stamp album!" he almost shouted triumphantly. "I call this my legacy, my treasure! All the world's pasted in here - see?" He flicked the pages, and bright reds and yellows and cerise and blacks flashed crazily in front of her. "Yes! See? - Liberia! Morocco! Zanzibar! the Yukon! ... all the world, my treasure ... all my life's pasted in here ... everywhere I've been ... every dream" He hugged it lovingly to his chest,

and he nodded to her.

She had an uneasy feeling about him, but he was polite, neat, his face was cheerful, and he looked honest. She put aside her misgivings. A little odd -- but she had no patience with that! There were some who called her odd! She reached into a drawer and took out a worn towel with most of its nap gone.

"There," she said, "If there's anything you need, I'll get it for you. I expect you're tired."

"I am," he said gratefully. "I am tired. I've had a weary long walk."

"I hope you'll stay," she said.

"I'd like to."

Just then the two boys, who thought they had kept away a safe time, started rapping impatiently at her door.

"Aunt Jeannette! Aunt Jeannette!" they called, their faces pressed against the screen. They were blinking into the dark house because the sun still filled their eyes.

"All right! Come in, and don't make such a racket," she ordered.

They came in, hesitantly, when they noticed the stranger, the smaller one sinking behind his brother for shelter.

"Help yourself to a cookie in the pantry," she said, meaning to cut them off. For some reason, she didn't want them to have anything to do with the new man. But as soon as he saw them, he smiled broadly, and she realized her fears were foolishness. He went up to them, holding out his hands in a welcome. "well!" he said. "well, well, well!"

They stared at him with a good deal of interest, but the old woman hurried them on by. When they came out of the pantry, the smaller one

had two cookies balanced in his mouth, and his hands full. The other boy munched on one seriously. In his back pocket were several more.

"Take your brother on home now, Teddy," she said sharply. "I'm going to fix lunch."

She shoosed the two boys out. When they were gone the door slapped a few times against the jamb, and as she watched them gallop off, an apple bounced from one of their pockets and rolled along the ground.

A curious smile played across the man's expressive face. She wished she knew what to make of him.

When she got out a milk bottle, he said, "I would have guessed you'd keep a cow."

She grunted, not answering for a few minutes. Then she set down the bottle and went closer to him. "See these?" She held out her hands, displaying the bumpy, arthritic fingers. "Do they look like dairy-maid's hands?"

"No, no, I see," he said, blinking apologetically, at once. His smile was hurt.

When she noticed that she said more comfortably, "I sold them off a couple of years ago." There was a certain strain in her voice, and she sighed deeply.

He imitated the sound, cocking his head to one side, and there was such an immediate effect of limp sadness about him that she laughed abruptly. Her laugh was a sharp burst with no grace. There was about her in everything a sharpness, a singularity. All her face was like a brown nutskin, dried in the sun, her eyes shrivelled too. He clapped

his hands in delight, seeing her amused.

After lunch, she took him up on the hill to show him her flower bed. As they walked, she pointed to the ground. "The pastures are cruel hard in the sun," she said. "Up here I had a pump set in. I can draw the water up here from the well. But it's hard work for me, lifting and carrying. That's a job I want you to do."

He looked around him, at the rows in which gladiolus spikes bristled, and a dim smile flickered about his mobile mouth. "I see, I see! You are like Jason! Plant the bloody teeth, and there! a thousand soldiers spring up!"

She stared at him.

"Oh! fancy," he said, smiling and nodding. "Fancies, all fancies you mustn't mind. I'll tend them, don't fear that! You'll see, I'll tend them well," he reassured her.

She pointed to the buckets the boys had left sprawling on the grass. Then she grunted and stooped to set them straight, but he took them up, bowing almost formally to excuse himself, and then, humming some wild tune, he dipped them under the pump spout and began to work the handle with a graceful rhythm. As soon as she saw that he would do the work well, she turned to go back down.

"I see these are dear to you," he called after her, winking. "I'll be good to them!"

The last glimpse she had of him, his bright tie was flapping at his chest, and he made a happy figure, as busily he set about the work. He did it skillfully, cheerfully.

As she went on down, she muttered aloud to herself. "Dear to me!"

Dear to me, indeed!" All the way to the house she kept repeating it. Then she nodded companionably to the hens as she passed.

The next day, her new man worked hard, loosening the dirt around the bulbs, and she was pleased. But when she went up to call him for his lunch, she found the two boys sitting on buckets, turned upside, their chins propped in their hands, as they listened to him shiny-eyed. The smaller one kept a half-eaten apple in his lap, and he grinned at her unashamed.

"So!" she said. "You again! Haven't you chores enough of your own?"

The man set down the hoe, smiling, shaking his head mysteriously. "Yes --- isn't it strange ... at home, dullness - boredom ... but cross the street, and there's adventure!"

"Hmph!" she snorted to the boys. "Adventure yourselves on home!"

Then the boys went scampering off, and soon the two of them disappeared down over the hill. A look of disappointment came into the man's mild face. When the boys were gone he was entirely dejected.

He spent the afternoon hammering new shingles around the chimney where the roof leaked, and when he came into the house at four o'clock he said he was tired and stiff, so she let him sit down by himself. She noticed that first he smoked a pipeful of stale, dry tobacco from a pouch, and then he went in and sat in his own room in the rocking chair. In his lap, she saw he held the stamp album, and in a few minutes, he asked her for glue.

Soon, Jeannette began to discover that her man was handy in a good many ways. She set him to painting the shady side of the house, when he

had worked long enough in the hot sun. Sometimes the boys would come over and sit on the grass beside him. From time to time she looked out. She saw them dancing attendance on him, handing up the paint, helping him shift the ladder. He got more work out of them than she could ever do! she thought and was in some way grateful.

In a very short time, she had grown completely used to him. It was almost as if she were no longer self-sufficient. She got out of bed more happily, mornings, since there was someone to talk to, she ate more gladly, for someone to urge a second bowl of porridge on. She made plans, for the sheds, for mending fences, for expanding the garden into the pastures, perhaps starting up her dairy again. She even talked of painting his room! And on Saturday nights, she took to getting him a clean shirt ready, and waving after as he set off by himself for town. Then she fussed about the house, doing things because they might please him, and gradually she became surprised to see how good life was.

But he was moody. Sometimes he would be fretful for hours at a time, and go about complaining. Sometimes he would talk vaguely, of distant places, distant things. "Lads your age," he would say, turning absently to the boys who were sitting there listening, "Lads your age, in the rice-paddy fields ... wading barefoot ..." Sometimes he would talk vaguely of his dissatisfactions and mention the farm where he was a boy himself, and moan that he had left it. Once the old woman asked him about it, and he sighed wretchedly, shaking his head, and said, "It was the mud, the mud - a man like a vegetable planted in mud -- no, no, I went looking for a pavement to my feet! listen! Stand up in the pastures evenings, listen to the cows driven in ... that sound, that sound!" he said,

screwing up his face, "... tinkly bells ... silly herd, mooing, mooing -- I can tell you I ached for the sound of a human tongue! ..."

Sometimes they teased to know where he came from, but he shook his head sadly, almost vacantly, and said, No, no, that was all done, all gone now ...

One afternoon he had let down a ladder and was mending the sides of the well. The boys leaned over it, calling down to him, their images reflected in the water.

"Can we come down?"

"No, no no, go away, go away," he said almost crossly. When he had finished the job and climbed back up, he stood beside them, resting heavily on rigid arms, staring at his image in the water. He was both shivering, and sweating, from the job, the clammy confinement. "Yes, yes --- faces in the water -- when I was a boy," he said fiercely, almost sneering at them as a gust of emotion took him, "No well kept me! I was off to sea, at your age! You!" He pointed to the older boy, flashing his finger in his face. "I stared out for the North Star! I saw harbor lights go under the rim of the sea! I was off for New Guinea! You - off for school!" His scorn was inexpressible. He gathered up venom and spat.

Then he went on down to the house, and still they followed him, momentarily subdued, entirely fascinated, and in a little while he sighed more gently and reached for the stamp album, and then he showed them the stamp he had from that time. " --- Yes, yes, these are easier times," he said, in a tired nostalgia. He chewed dreamily on his pipe-stem. The light had gone out. "Get me a match, my boy," he said, " -- easier times - "

The boys grew more and more like wild creatures. After a little,

only the stranger could do anything with them. But it seemed, almost, that he had only to frown, to sigh, to point, and they would understand his wishes. The older boy had begun to change, inside, an inexplicable, lost ache started in him, and it was just as if he had woken up all at once, into a strange, dark room.

And so the summer passed. The old woman was a shrewd and careful farmer. The season was good. She marketed her flowers very well, and when she was in town, on an impulse she bought a large turkey and two pineapples.

But all the same, in some subtle way, it became clear to her that the stranger would leave her soon. Neither of them spoke of it, and sometimes, still, firecelly, she would carry on making her plans, for next year, the garden, the market, but she knew really very well that none of that would come to pass. Sometimes she would glare, resentful, at him, sometimes she would wheedle him with some new dish for his supper. But she knew it was useless, and the old feeling came back on her again, that she was drying up, the land was drying up. Mostly she bowed her face down, and all the time she was waiting, just waiting for time to be done with her.

One morning the stranger packed his bag, and then, carrying it into the kitchen, he came nervously to speak to her.

"You must have seen it coming," he apologized. "I don't seem to be any good to myself, or any other ---- I think I'll try a change --- if you won't hold it too much against me." She only grunted. Disappointment ached in her, like a sharp, jabbing pain. She wanted only to be done with it, to be left alone to wait in peace. "Oh, be off with you,

be off with you, then," she said crossly. She felt now that she was very old. She showed the stranger out, as if he were one of the boys, half angrily. Only when she stood in the doorway, watching him, relenting, she called out affectionately, "Good luck to you, my dear!"

He turned back to wave, and she could still see the fresh instantaneous delight cross into his face. She trudged alone, up on the hill, and tried to talk aloud to Michael, believing, as she sometimes did, that he was still beside her, and she told him confidently, "I'm an old fool, an old fool," and she felt that it didn't matter.

Suffer Little Children

Henry had been poking through the dry straw along the roost when his grandmother opened the top half of the kitchen door, leaned her big dipping bosom over the sill, and spoke to him sharply.

"Henry, come in to your breakfast! Do you want to keep your Aunt Ursula waiting?"

He stopped at once, his heart in his small chest bouncing like a rubber ball on a drum, and trotted past the sunlighted patch into the cool, clean smelling kitchen. About his grandmother herself there was always the smell of strong soap and sweat. She walked on her heels, rocking after each step, as if she had to stop to adjust her great bulk again after the motion, and as she moved, her deep bosom shook, her shoes creaked, she puffed noisily. When she reached for the single egg he handed her, layers of soft white flesh, like milk curdled solid, shook and rippled along her elbow to her wrist.

"That's all, eh?" she asked him, staring with her little eyes as if she didn't really believe it.

He nodded seriously. She could not have been so formidable as she seemed, because he climbed to his stool without paying much attention to her muttering.

"Moulting, moulting -- will they never have done! Eh, well, if it's not one thing it's another --"

He sat pushing the little puddle of melted honey from one dip in his porridge to another, but when his aunt came in, he sat bolt up, gripped the spoon tighter, and pretended to be eating hungrily.

She stood in the doorway watching the scene. He could not fool her! She gripped her elbows, crossing her arms at her chest, and drummed

with her foot at the doorsill. There were reinforcements at the heel of her sturdy shoe, so that she kept up a metallic click for him to eat by. She consulted the watch in the palm of her hand. "I simply cannot understand," she said, brushing back her wispy hair impatiently from her forehead, "how you can dawdle so!" She looked untidy and harrassed already. But she was one of those busy women. When she moved, there was always a little jiggle of flesh, her skirts swished, her heels clicked, so that there always seemed to be a great deal going on about her.

The grandmother seemed to be ignoring them both, going about muttering to herself, but then she turned, rocking dangerously, to the little boy, and said shrewdly, "Eh, then, you've got your stomach made up in knots?" nodding at the bowl.

His rigid littlebody was quivering with pleasure. He set down his spoon.

"Bless me, bless me -- " she clucked to herself. "Too excited, too excited for his porridge -- best to keep him here with me --"

When he yelped as if he had been bitten, she shook herself all over, and the eyes she turned on him were dark and twinkling. "Why, then, child, what will you have in the city?" She dropped her mouth open, her chin jiggling, incredulously. For a second she stopped her tongue, poising it on her tiny lower lip, and she darted a sharp look over at Ursula. Then she went ahead boldly, lifting her head, in a fit of unaccustomed daring -- after all, it was a holiday! she should say what she liked! They went off to the city -- all right! She turned her twinkling eyes on him. "Why, you've been to the city before! You don't remember, eh? Your mama fetched you up to find your papa -- no, no,"

she hurried to add, rapidly, surprised herself at her daring, "No, no, you won't remember, -- you were no bigger than that!" She pretended to strike off her round arm at the elbow, and shook it, chuckling, watching Ursula secretly, enjoying the wait to see what she would say to that!

"Mother!" Ursula almost shrieked, raising her hand to her face, shocked, as if she were warding off the unclean thought from striking her physically. "Mother, how can you say such things!" She gathered her skirt, her watch, her distractions, about her, turned sharply, and called over her shoulder, "Henry, come at once! We shall miss the train!" But she herself went upstairs.

The grandmother shook and chuckled to herself, muttering, satisfied, ignoring the child who drooped his head, red with shame. He did not really understand why he felt ashamed, but he had learned it. The grandmother muttered on to herself, slapping the lid down on the tea cannister for retribution, scolding the loaf of bread, indignantly facing the eggs, pointing her cruel bread knife at the beanpot, "She thinks there can be babies without fathers! So pure! She thinks she came, may be, off the counter in the dime-store, like a little rubber bladder! Well, I can tell her better!" She snorted angrily. "She thinks I picked her up, eh, blew a little wind and there, -- she started screeching! Well, may be I wish she had! -- " Then she swooped down on the child, her face scarlet, and she squeezed and pinched him against her bosom, moaning, "Oh Beatrice, my Beatrice! I'd give them all to have you back! You had natural feelings, -- you were like a woman should be!" She hugged him as if she wanted her flesh to swallow him up, and she shook her head, groaning, "Oh, my soul! My soul! A houseful of maidly daughters! What if it happened out there in the haystack! What if he left you!

You were natural, you gave me a child for my old age!" In the turmoil of her feelings, groaning for the hurt, the shame, the loss, she set him down, and she mopped the sweat from her hot, distorted face. She turned, an idea striking her, and full of the bitterness she had worked up against Ursula, she reached secretly behind the tea cannister for the pile of coins she kept there, the egg money. She grasped several and stood grimly weighing them in her red fist, and then she let most of them loose, jingling back on the small pile. But three she kept, and she came to the boy who stared at her, amazed, and she put them into his hand. "Now my lovey," she said almost savagely, "You shall buy yourself a duck -- I know how you want a duck -- I've seen you over there to Peter Estey's, staring at his! You want one, eh?" She looked at him shrewdly, growing calmer.

Speechless, his eyes shining, he nodded with a queer staring look of unbelief.

"Well then, so you shall!" she said recklessly. Already it had become an adventure to her, fooling Ursula. She thought for a second, poising her tongue on her tiny lower lip, and then she told him, shaking him as if she could press it into him through his small shoulder, what he should do. Rapidly she urged him, "Tell your Aunt Clara you want to go to the market, tell her I want you to go to the market. There! they have a row of ducks the street long, going racketsy racketsy, -- you'll see!" Then she told him quickly how in the city may be his Aunt Clara would take him to a little shop for hot chocolate, with a blob of cream and a bun as big as her red fist, and as she talked she soothed herself.

When Ursula came in, her face set and stiff, the mother looked at

it, a little ashamed, to see if she had been crying, but she could not tell for the white powder sifting under her eyes. She stood by the door, sheepish, now, her anger quite passed, and as they walked hurriedly along the path by the clump of gooseberry bushes, she shook her white arm after them, happily nursing her secret, and she called, twinkling, "Give my love to Clara!"

Henry trotted after his aunt, but he was thinking of his duck, imagining it, and he didn't hear something she said to him. Sometimes he let his silver pieces roll in his hand, and then he clutched them tighter, his secret!

While they waited in the station for the train, and then as his aunt prodded him through the corridors, in search of a suitable carriage -- there must be no fat gentlemen with cigars, no babies screaming, no country women with lunches in a basket -- he thought half dreamily of the journey itself, though his stomach was bunched up in excitement, and he thought ecstatically of coming back with the duck in a box under his arm. He hopped up unguardedly towards his aunt, too excited, but she had the time-table laid out in her lap, and was exclaiming that Henry must remember to hang to her skirt, along the street, but if he got lost he must go to the police immediately, speak to no one first -- and he pressed his nose back against the window, watching with great excitement the pigmy trees, the houses backed up against the track, with the laundry flapping like white ducks' feathers on the lines.

The train was late. When it arrived, shortly after three, Clara had been growing annoyed for several minutes, and before she greeted her sister and her small nephew, she said that on such a hot day, they

had no idea what unpleasant sorts of people brushed by one, perspiring horridly. Then she gave her cheek to her sister, and stooped to let Henry press her hand. After that she warmed up, and soon she was chattering of her lesson, of the metronome ticking on Madame's piano, that quite put her off, only when she mentioned it, Madame had discovered that she did not understand the words, asked to have it repeated, and finally threw up her hands, dismissing it in a crescendo of Italian. She had discovered, Clara said, since living in the city, that people often did not understand what they did not wish to understand. Then! the parakeet, the green impudent bird, flopping from the curtain rod to the music rack, flapping its wings at her! It could hardly be expected, she said indignantly, that she could enter the spirit of Mimi, in such a melee! The lesson had not gone well. Madame had criticised her breathing.

"Oh!" she said then, turning to her sister. "How is mother? And my sisters?"

Henry followed along beside them, in an ecstasy of anticipation. He wanted to ask immediately about the market, with its row of ducks the street long, going rackets, rackets! But his aunts talked at each other animatedly.

Ursula said, "You cannot imagine! How shocked I was to discover the janitors have been sweeping without moving the desks! You may be sure I pointed it out at once!"

Just as Henry found his tongue to ask, Clara turned to her sister and began telling her about the music, the soul of the city that flooded hers at night when she walked along the embankment, listening to the water, gazing raptly into the lighted houses, thinking how cozy, but how

dull, they were, insensitive to the life, the art, that passed by! And she clasped her hands intensely, and cried out that only music -- she meant the free, lyrical, passionate human voice -- she thought, a full contralto -- oh! she could not express herself!

At last Henry tugged at his aunt's skirt, and they stopped to look at him, surprised, as if they had forgotten he was there. But he said, then, only that he needed to go to the bathroom.

After that, they decided to ride on the ferry across the river. Henry liked that very much, leaping up the gang-plank, leaning over the rail, making his head spin with the white bubbles churning at the propeller. He liked the smoke-stack's hollow mournful warning as it emitted its black clouds. He liked the gulls circling around the boat, swooping on the trail of bubbles and scum, and he thought of his duck again, something like the gulls. He was enjoying himself very much, and he was waiting patiently. Aunt Clara, in a puff of pride over him, bought him a small-sized bag of popcorn. Too much, both the sisters agreed, would make him sick. Sometimes his Aunt Clara would wind her arm around him and ask him if he was quite, quite happy. He nodded, and she smiled sadly, enigmatically, turning over in her mind telling her sister that she wished she, too, might drop her wisdom and suffering -- the two were inseparable! -- for one moment of such joy, but she decided Ursula was too provincial to understand. She could not imagine.

"You cannot imagine!" she said intensely, clasping her sister's arm, "How I have suffered since coming to the city! I feel I am being sacrificed to my art -- yet, art alone can save me! Is it not strange?" she laughed mysteriously, deprecatingly, and she caught at her throat with her well-gloved hand.

After they had ridden the ferry across the river, walked a little on the promenade -- Henry found that tiresome, they wouldn't let him go paddle in the water, and he was hungry, -- he let them take him back again. He ran around the deck a little more, climbing the ladder up and down, up and down. But the gulls tired him, now. He really wanted only his duck, and his hot chocolate and the bun as big as Grandma's fist.

"Please," he said, as the ferry bumped its huge rope pads against the dock. He tugged his aunt's skirt, and she thought, Oh heavens! he wants the washroom again! But he said quickly, "Can I see the market? Grandma said I was to see the market."

"Of course!" Clara said, delighted. A look of fatigue, nearly boredom, had begun to seep over her face. Ursula understood nothing, nothing! A chance to please the small boy aroused her. "Certainly! We will go at once!" Besides, it would cost practically nothing! She was delighted with the suggestion. "Mother is a dear, an old dear! I have always loved her enormously," she confided to her sister.

As soon as he began to smell the fish lying open on white counters, in a little narrow, cobbled street, he knew it was the market! His face lit up, he forgot he was hungry, he listened intently for the sound he would know, in a moment -- the rickety rickety. There were funny little battered men crying "Puppets! Mechanical toys!" all around him, but he shut his eyes to the siren-song, listening only for the rickety, rickety. There were long loaves of bread, cylinders of salami, bunches of grapes, dishes, dolls, little Japanese dresses hanging on strings, and carts in the street loaded with china cups. Soon now, soon now -- in his excitement he pinched the three silver coins, making certain, but when he

loosened his grip, one slipped away! His Aunt Clara stooped at once after it.

"Why!" she cried. "What's this?"

He stared at the coin in a spasm of fear. "Grandma gave it to me," he admitted at last. He thought she would say he had done something wrong.

"The idea!" Ursula exclaimed angrily. "I never heard of such a thing!"

His Aunt Clara laughed gaily and dropped it back into his hand. It clinked against the others. Then she waved her sister's protests aside, "If she wants to! --" They walked along together, examining the things spread out, the silks from India, the Japanese sandals, bamboo with ribbons, fans painted on rice-paper. Ursula grumbled a little, but Clara laughed at her, toying with the things as she passed. The city, her city! She was filled with love for it, for everything, for everybody, so alive, so breathing, so trembling! She felt, it was all in tune with her. She fairly danced along, her skirt flitting gaily, her little hat bobbing on her glossy head. She took Henry's hand warmly.

"Now, what will you buy?" she asked, pointing to things. She had almost talked him into a Mexican serape -- she thought she had, draping it across his shoulder, not noticing he was protesting, stiff, -- But then! she saw it! She could not help it! There it was! She nearly flew across the street, reached with a trembling, awed hand for it, held it incredulously in the air, showing it to them both, nodding regally at the shop-tender. The hat, the hat! Nothing but a band of

black velvet, and a filmy, golden feather! "I must, must have it!" she cried, tears in her eyes. "See?" she bounced it in the air, trying it. The shop-keeper grew ecstatic, rubbing his hands. "Oh Henry, Henry love," she begged, stooping as if she meant to go on her knees in the street, "Henry, will you not buy this for your Aunt Clara? Is that not what you want to do?" Her expressive, dark eyes hypnotized him, her voice wheedled, she was lovely, irresistible, she knew she was, in the spell of the hat!

She unclenched his hand with coaxing fingers and took out the money, giving it proudly to the shop-tender. There was very little change, so she slipped it into her pocket. Then proudly, half dreamily, she patted Henry's shoulder with one hand, and held the hat in the other. "You are so gallant! You will grow up a little gentlemen, beautiful ladies will love you!" she cried ecstatically. Turning to her sister, coaxingly, she said, "Mother probably meant me to have it, I am sure she sent it up to me. The boy never needed it!" But then she stared wholly at the hat, again, in a kind of trance.

Ursula said crossly, "That was far too dear for the hat. I should have bargained with that man."

"Ugh!" Clara waved her hand extravagantly.

"But -- the ducks --" Henry mumbled.

"WHAT?" Ursula looked toward him absently. Then her face turned sharper, as she fixed her gaze on the hat. "I believe it is only a duck's feather dyed," she said.

The Coquette

The shore curved quietly outward, like a dish that appeared at one point flat, and only showed its true shape when viewed as a whole. The young woman standing, with her mouth partly open looking at it, noticed this quality, and thought fleetingly that she would have to do something inceramics with the idea. She had a habit of standing with her mouth partly open, gazing at things. If there was anyone watching, she would look up, quite startled.

"Delightful!" she said, turning to the old man who waited behind her. "I shall love it here!" She breathed deeply, filling her small chest with the clean salt air. To do this, she stood on tiptoe, closing her eyes, and jutting her head forward. She must try to capture all this! She wished she had brought her work with her, after all! Then she walked along after him, stopping constantly to gaze, saying each time, in surprised delight, "Such peace!"

Since he carried her suitcase which was very heavy, bulging, held together by canvas straps, and she had only a small wicker basket dangling from her arm, she could walk much more easily than he. She did not notice him stumble on the sandy path, as she moved lightly, her legs in a step free from her hips, and her full skirt swinging with a little rustle around her. She had passed the man by some distance, when she asked, "Is it near here? Are we almost there?"

When he did not answer she turned impatiently, and saw him still coming along. She noticed then that he leaned to one side, that one leg was shorter than the other, and she was delighted by the hop it caused. She stood waiting for him, her impatience quite gone, the habitual look of surprise about her.

When he came up, she shortened her step so that she would not leave him behind again. "Is it far? I am so pleased! I shall love it! May I get a boat here?" She pointed with all her arm, fair, but already a little flushed with the sun coming down on it. She let her body follow the arm until she turned herself about in a circle parallel to the bay. From here, the curve was sharper, accentuated by the cliff that had risen between them and the beach. Still, she could see the stones on the sand, and the straggling line of seaweed and pieces of debris, cork, driftwood, left at the tide-mark. Since the tide was low, down near the water the shore was covered with a mud film. Resting on this were the flat-bottomed boats, hitched to stakes driven into the sand. It was this that made her think of it. But she did not stop her questions for him to answer any of them. "I shall lie all day in the boat! I shall drift wherever the tide wishes! Is it safe? I am sure it is very mild here. See! there are no waves."

The water itself was gray in the sun. The sky too was gray, though there were no clouds. The only motion apparent in the sea was the reflected gleams shifting on it. Sometimes gulls would fly low around the two of them as they walked, and then the girl held out her arm, crying that she wished she had a crust of bread!

The sand they walked on was hard, dried in the sun. The thick grass that spread over it, isolated pieces with two joints, like spider's legs, cut the bare parts of her feet inside her sandals.

"Oh!" She sat down, beckoning to him to sit with her. "Let's rest a little! I am tired! Do you walk this far often?"

He had learned already that she did not mean to have an answer to

her questions, and so he stood beside her without speaking. He did not put the suitcase down.

"You have no idea," she said brightly, looking at him seriously, her hazel eyes unblinking as she turned her face to avoid the sun. There were a few freckles already on her nose, but they were small, charming. "How much I wish I had brought my work! I meant to do none! I came only to rest! But already my nerves are soothed! I am always so disturbed in the city, so distracted! But here you have such peace, how I envy you!"

Then she jumped up with surprising vivacity, and set off along the path, forgetting his lame, slow step. At the end of the path she saw a small house, with weathered shingles. The door was made out of two thick boards joined vertically. A rusted iron latch was the only ornament that had ever touched them. She ran around to the back, and when she saw the small window coming out from the dried, shrunken shingles of the roof, she could scarcely contain her delight, until he came to her.

"I must have that room!" Her attitude was so insistent, and yet full of such delighted astonishment, that no one could have been displeased with her. "I must have it! I shall simply sit there, hour after hour, and stare out of that window! The sea, the sea, how I love it!"

She waited at one side while he opened the door, setting her suitcase on the flat stones that were the only decoration in the yard. She bobbed her head about, looking here, looking there. "So simple! So natural!" she told him. She pointed to the flat shingles. "I would have planted a rose here, a rambler rose! But you are an artist! You are

quite right to leave it bare!"

For the first time he spoke to her. "My wife -- she keeps a garden -- out there --" He pointed for her, beside the house, and when she saw the grape arbor that lead into it, she gasped.

"Perfect! Yes, yes, you are an artist!" She ran over to the arbor, and came immediately back, carrying a bunch of grapes flat in her palm so that she could admire them. She put one into her mouth, but spit it out at once. She dangled them by the stem in the sun, shaking her head over and over.

Then when the door itself opened, she dropped them, startled, to gaze at the old woman who stood inside, and they popped on the stones. She thought she had never seen anyone so motherly in her life! She sprang forward to embrace the woman, brushing her lips past one of her hard brown ears, sun-dried, the skin firm over the muscle. It reminded her of a flattened prune. She hugged her warmly, laughing in her delight, and she could feel the little roll of flesh under her dress, where the top of her corset came. It gave her such an intimate, homely feeling! She laid her head on the old woman's shoulder for a second, sighing deeply.

"You must forgive me!" she insisted, as she stood back again, looking, her face a little scorched from the sun, but so clean, so fresh!" I have fallen in love with you already! You and your husband are so alike! You are both artists, one can see that! Your face! One can see you belong to each other! It is true, then, marriage turns two people into one!"

She fiddled in the small basket on her arm, but she took nothing

out of it, as she stood there, looking at one, looking at the other, admiring ecstatically their ears, and the little round nuggets of their chins that reminded her of dried prunes. She sniffed, drawing into her chest the smell of clean fish, of salt air.

"You must forgive me!" she begged, putting out her hands to both of them at once, shaking them with affectionate vigor. "I am Annette Gongo. I am so delighted, so pleased!" Then she drifted airily into the room, stopping before a table to pick up and examine a pewter pot, moving to the window, leaving a smudge on the pane from her nose, and then she stopped in front of the grandfather's clock, bobbing her head in time to the brass pendulum. "Charming!" she decided.

"May I go upstairs? May I have the room?"

Having seen the staircase already, she flew up, very light on her feet, almost like a bird, her skirt lifting about her. The old woman followed her more slowly, and she rested her chin on the railing while she waited. In the small room under a sloping ceiling, she found dust on the marble-topped bureau. She pushed her finger over it, making a little track. Then, noticing a picture of a small boy, she stooped, sitting on her feet, putting her face level with it, so that it seemed to her to be returning her gaze. Charming! She liked the freckles, the straight, unruly hair, the upper front teeth with a space between them. She felt suddenly that she loved him, that she knew him well!

"Who is he?" she asked, the question intensely important.

"He was our son," the woman told her, not stopping as she laid out towels on the wash-stand by the bed, and dusted over the top of the bedstead. She smoothed the spread, now faded to a musty cream, but it

did no good because Annette flung herself onto it, lifting her feet in the air, stretching her arms a little wildly.

"He is so alive in the picture! I feel as though I knew him!"

"He is gone to California," the old woman said. "He has children of his own now, older than that."

"Oh!" Annette cried. "Oh, how can you bear it! There is nothing lasting in this life!" She then sank into the pillow. It had been such a long time since she slept on a feather bed. How it soothed her! She looked at the marble wash-stand, at the porcelain bowl full of small cracks in the glaze, at the pitcher with etched roses patterned on it, the broken spout. She had not known that people still used such things! It was charming, charming! How it soothed her! "I shall sleep for a little, I think," she decided, folding her arms across her face. It was only a minute after she said it until she was really asleep.

As the days passed, she found how delightful it was to eat poached eggs every morning at the same time! She would sit chattering over cups of black coffee, thinking that she was listening to the old woman's philosophy of life, while she did her work before the morning sun had grown too hot. Annette would sit, sometimes, just staring, astonished at such peace. Then she would spring up, and go walking along the beach by herself, her hair tied up in a scarf, her skirt swinging freely about her legs. Sometimes she would stoop to pick up shells, wishing, fleetingly, that she had brought her work, so that she could catch their grace!

It was when she ran into the storm one afternoon and stood gazing at the sea that she decided ceramics was too static a form. Just like

that, it came to her! An inspiration! She must take up painting. After that she teased the old man until he took her out into the shed, and she stood, her face propped in her hands, watching his skill with the jig-saw, the plane, as he made her a pallet. When she had it, she dashed out with it, hardly waiting to thank him, and ran to the store to buy herself some paints. She set up her easel among the flat-bottomed boats, sitting on the edge of one, her feet bare, the warm mud oozing up between her toes, and the water slapping at the boat mildly. She could see from here a shack on the wharf, where a young fisherman sat cross-legged before a pile of clams, opening them with his knife. She stared at him, forgetting her work as his easy rhythm fascinated her. She could not take her eyes off him! At once she saw that this was life.

Every day now she came down here, forgetting the walks, forgetting the morning coffee and talk of the old woman. It had grown tiresome to her, so placid, how could one bear it! Here she felt the vigor, the motion of life! Here, among the clams, the fishing boats, the nets spread out in the sun to dry, she could see that one should live simply, naturally, the controlling tide, the elements ...! She became ecstatic! Sometime children would run up to her, asking her about what she was doing, admiring the colors on her pallet. She had difficulty with the strokes, but she felt that she was learning.

She bought a few oysters from the fisherman, meaning to have them for her lunch. He opened them solemnly, handing them to her in the deep brown pit of his hand, and she could scarcely pick them up for some reason, as they slipped in her small fingers, and she dug them out of the salt brine. His hand was almost like a bowl! Fascinating, fascinat-

ing! She squealed in delight.

"I should like to paint you!" she told him. "You have such hands, so natural, so simple! You must forgive me! I am Annette Gongo, I am an artist." She held out her hand to him.

Now the poached egg existence seemed very flat, and before that, the era of wine at noon, far away, so bohemian, so untrue! She saw that just life as it came was what really mattered. She felt that there was a controlling destiny in her life, just like a tide in the sea!

Later, she did not even bother to wait for the old man at all, and he stumbled with his uneven hop along the path while she ran, free as a bird, picking up her feet, delighted with the sun, her brown arms, the sand hot at the soles of her feet! She had packed away the sandals!

At the door to the shack she rapped with such delight, her mouth a little open, her charming nose sniffing out the combined smells of clams, the salt-air, the low-tide mud. She looked about at the wharf, at the high spindling posts that held it over the water, the green moss at their bases dotted with barnacles. She did not for a moment see that the young fisherman had already opened the door. "Oh, Tom!" she said, a cloud crossing her face, as she fumbled in her small wicker basket. "I am out of money! Have you some? I must give him something, he has been so good to me! Well, never mind!" Instead she stood on tiptoe and put her arms around the old man's neck, after he had set down her suitcase. Then she kissed him on the mouth. "You have been so good to me, you two! I shall never forget you, never!" Then, as he went away, walking unevenly, Tom took up her suitcase, bulging under the canvas strap. She stood on the wharf, filling her chest with the air, for a

moment. She must try to capture all this! She was filled with such energy, such enthusiasm!

A Woman's Tale

From the lower barn on the Tyler property, a young man set out alone, going down the road. He did not follow it far, before he turned off into another, hardly more than parallel tracks kept open by farm-machinery and the milk-truck passing along it daily. The farm to which it led was back some distance from the hill-road itself. The buildings were not prepossessing, though it was a good frame of a house. All the wood-work badly needed painting, some shingles were missing along the north side where the worst of the winds lashed it. Machinery stood in the yard, heaven only sheltered it, and badly. There was a sag in the barn roof. Vines left from another tenancy shambled about the bleak porch, protruding from two sides of the house.

The young man looked around for signs of life. He was some minutes discovering anyone.

When he hit on the figure in the milkhouse doorway, bristling, silently glaring at him, he started.

"Oh! I thought ... I was looking -- Is he here?" To his shame, the color rose in his face.

She turned her back on him, only grunting Uh-huh, and took up again the milk-can she had been working on.

Unsatisfied, he did not go. Shyness and indignation upset him as she ignored him, going on working joylessly. Dislike tautened his senses, so that the crash of the milk pail on the stone slab seemed ominous. And the rag, wilting as she wrung it, slapped brutally at the pail.

Finally, sick of his presence, she hurled an impatient nod toward one of the buildings. Viciously she said "In the barn -- you can go around, if you want to --"

He turned on his heel, stubbornly, fiercely.

Why can't he stay to home, the woman blamed him sulkily. She stood, chewing at her thumb, brooding, savage, scared. As he disappeared behind a building, she said cursing, "I hope he don't make trouble, -- get Joe all worked up, and me with enough on my mind --" She picked on the milk-can she had been scrubbing, sloshed the water around it viciously, grunting.

Angry voices brewed in the barn.

"Listen -- " The surly, bull-necked man drove his anger harder as he talked, whipping himself up, snarling like a savage dog. "You don't want me to come around here with those tales. You get off'n my land, if that's the way you're gonna talk. You want that rake, you give me fi' dollars for it."

He had a hot temper. The young man's silence, his contemptuous stare, maddened him. Writhing, blinded by rage, he seized a pitchfork, swung flailing. He writhed as if a huge snake had him in its coils.

"You can get on out of here," he hissed.

"That rake is mine."

"God damn" the man howled, sobbing.

"You give it back --"

Choked, the man howled as if a hammer mashed his thumb.

Contempt and righteous indignation leapt like lightening through the young man's body. They tensed to hurl themselves on one another. Only a greasy, slick little man who had been waiting nervously off to one side, effacing himself up to this point, prevented them. Now he

sidled up to Joe and took his arm loosely, joshing him, scared himself. "Hey!" he cried, pretending to joke, his eyes scared glassy, darting. He looked ready to spring back himself, or turn on the boy, - go wherever safety lay. Still, he did cry, "Take it easy, Joe! He's just a kid!"

He turned on the visitor, half snarling, half placating him. "You better get out of here --" He showed his teeth, seeming amiable, truly vicious.

Not from fear did the young man go. Only, suddenly, the whole thing soured for him. The air around that man seemed foul, the sight of him intolerable to decent eyes. So, loftily, proudly, the young man left. His rage blazed, silent, frozen in him, unsatisfied.

Joe's anger, crooning, hurled itself at his back. At the door, white sunlight pricked his eyes. "Damn fool ... damn fool I ever see him here again, I'll nail him to the barn"

The young man staggered, sobbing dryly. As if his blood had turned to buttermilk, it shot thickly at his mind, sank clabbered, cold with loathing, along his veins. For a long time, his thoughts goaded him, as he tramped along the stony road.

Even after a while, when the rage had settled somewhat, fitful violence still racked him, like gusts of wind, prolonging the storm's subsiding, shaking a beaten tree.

Here, a wooden shed turned black as tar stood derelict in an empty field. Light gaped through the rotting timbers. A choir of crows strung on a ruined oak screamed bitterly as he passed, disturbing the peace. The sunlight glittered in the bleak fields. When he passed under white birches, their shadows trespassed like hope on the bare

road, echoing his despair.

Sick with worry, Mrs. Tyler lurked by the window, watching her son. As soon as she caught sight of him, she shut her eyes, as if it blinded her.

"Thank God, thank God --"

She stood still, her head bowed, her face laid on one broad hand, and shuddered.

But when he came across the porch, still aching, her face changed, grew deeply, warmly troubled. She met him at the step, turned, rounding with him, and stopped face to face with him opposite the kitchen table.

"Let it be, Burton, let it be," she begged, coming into a passion herself. "I hate this trouble between neighbors!"

"Neighbors!"

"What is it all about? An old rake, that's likely no use anyways, --"

"After the time he's had it, no!"

"Oh, Burton, let it go! I don't like it" Her weary grey face strained at her emotion.

But he set his face, glaring angrily, painfully at her. Neither of them really supposed they were angry at one another, though consciously they half pretended so, giving themselves a scapegoat for their feelings.

"He stole that rake. He's no better than a thief. He ought to be in jail. We've let him treat us this way long enough."

"What is one to do?" As she despaired, she grew more gentle.

"I won't stand it any longer." His passion, also despairing, rose

again as hers fell.

"Never mind it, Burton." She watched him closely. Somewhat bitterly, she said, "I've had to stand for these things, far longer than you."

"But it's not fair. It's not fair," he protested angrily.

She turned on him warmly, crying, "Fair! Why, nothing's fair, love! Did you think it was?" Her tone was bantering, a little scorn-
ing him. "We should not have made things so, eh, -- you and I?"

His face worked so bitterly that she was shamed. But she could not help him.

He turned to go away darkly. His suffering blazed through him, dark, unbearable. He spent a little of it, threatening - as if he threatened her, "Let him set one foot on our land, and I'll kill him."

"Oh!" she cried, putting her hand crossly to her heart, feeling it whack her chest. She thought, It was unfair of him, to cause her such anguish.

When he had gone, her head ached, her steps were heavy as she went on about her work. She moved the dishes clumsily from the sideboard to the table, twice piled them incorrectly, and hardly noticed that. She moved again to the window, where she stood, watching the slow clouds bear their burden of rain toward the most distant of the hills. Nearby, in their pastures, scrawny cows grazed over the rough stubble left from hay-
ing, and pigeons fluttered up, before they settled on the ridgepole of the barn. From the bay window in the kitchen, only part of the barns were visible. For the rest, the pastures fanned out, coming quickly to the hills.

Soon she heard Rose slip out of the pantry by the back way, go cautiously, timidly, up the back stairs. Just at first, feeling malicious, Mrs. Tyler went toward the lower landing, tempted to call out. Her mouth shut tightly, she grumbled in her throat.

Gone to comfort him, she thought acidly.

But immediately, sighing, she moved back inside. It was not for her to interfere, she scolded herself. And yet she was rather out of sorts for a long time, so that when Robert came in she spoke sharply. She found fault with his muddy boots, even his cheery whistling upset her. But with him those things went right on by. She heard herself scolding thin air, and began to feel ashamed. Soon her ill feeling had evaporated, though she continued acting cross some while longer, to taper off.

By the time the family collected again in the kitchen, her spirits had risen. Now everything around her seemed to rejoice. The kitchen was hot, delightful to them as they came in separately. The wind was biting now, since the sun had dropped. And upstairs, where there was no heat, the small, untidy, sloping rooms were always chilly, this time of year. Mrs. Tyler had the kettle on the front of the black iron stove, the steam joining with the smoke leaking out. Above it, the cracked, grimy ceiling blistered. Though the room was large, it had a cluttered look. A number of bottles stood about on the shelf, and on the floor a huge preserving kettle. On the table were several piles of clean wash, waiting for ironing. And the pile of wood by the stove had collapsed, dust and splinters spewing around. The stove-pipe, going half across the room, was scorched, misshapen, hung on thin strands of wire from the

ceiling.

Now Mrs. Tyler greeted them, glowing. She and Burton mirrored one another in their faces, meeting, opposite, the same bright look of penitence and joy. She gave a smile of peace to Rose, and spoke kindly. Though her enmity had been her secret, all the same she made her amends public.

Everybody felt the tide of joyfulness pass through the kitchen. For a while they talked and laughed particularly brightly, having been touched by it.

And even after it sank into a general drowsiness that came over the room, still no discord marred it. All the sounds issuing from the room were somnolent, comfortable. Without voices the silence was broken, by the occasional scraping of a chair, the heavy tread of Mrs. Tyler's feet as she moved about, Burton, turning the pages of a book. And intermittently, in dreams the old dog snorted wisply.

Once the dog's ribs shivered in a flux of tremors. In his sleep he lurched sideways, wheezing, at imaginary rabbits. When his shivers grew too violent, Burton nudged him gently, and softly spoke his name, to ease him.

From time to time Mrs. Tyler, dozing in her chair, started groggily.

And after a while, sleepily, Robert looked over Burton's shoulder, where he was lying on the rug in front of the stove. Burton had the grating open a crack, staring in at the red glowing wood. He poked at it now and then to send sparks flying up, so that he could watch them turn into white papery ashes and drift back onto the wood, covering it like first snow. His book was open between his elbows, but mostly he was dreaming, staring into the fire. Robert knelt beside his brother.

"I can't read Burton's book," he called over his shoulder to his mother. "What's that say, Burton?" he asked, interestedly.

"It's Latin."

"Latin? You got to do lessons? In vacation? Then I'm never going off to college!"

"Well, - no. I was just reading."

"Reading Latin!"

His mother, sitting in the rocking chair with her needles moving clumsily, laughed. "He must be in love with his Latin teacher."

She had been joking, but Burton flushed to his ears and paid close attention to his book for the next few minutes. Rose glowered at Mrs. Tyler. When Rose knew from the wry mouth that Mrs. Tyler was aware of her, she set her teased face stubbornly, though she flushed. But Burton shut the book and stared only into the fire. The mother, handling her knitting clumsily in her lap, watched them closely, and she shook her head, her mouth moving in a warm smile. Her hands were work-broken, large, brown hands.

Soon Burton got to his feet. When he met her glance, he flushed again, and turned aside. "I guess it's time to start chores," he said.

"I guess it is."

The grey night crept over their figures as the young men crossed the yard, going down to the barn. Already a faint star blinked lidlessly, cold as the eye of a fish.

Another afternoon during the vacation, the house was very quiet, seeming emptied. Only Rose was about in the kitchen. A bolt of sun fanned out across the linoleum by her knees, as she, leaning her elbows on the sill, kneeled on the floor at the window, dreaming.

When she heard a step, she turned to see who came. The sun, and the impress of her palms on her cheeks, had flushed her face. A brightness hovered about her, her eyes still distant, dreaming, as she first lifted her face to the door.

"Oh!" Seeing Burton, she started, blushing still deeper.

"Hello. Are you alone?"

"Your mother's resting."

"Oh, is she?" he asked idly, coming to stand beside her. He rested one shoulder, lightly, on the window frame, half turning to her idly. He took the direction of her eyes to gaze with her, at the rising pasture. Now she studied it most diligently. She held herself tightly, feeling her flush fall, consciously, through all her body, in terror lest he see it.

With his finger he tapped the glass, pointing at the brilliant banks of sunlight. A whiteness too intense hurt her eyes and forced her to withdraw them from the hill. She was hard put where to look. Now there was a light come in she had not seen before. All the room seemed to mirror him, and if she looked down, she only saw joy, falling at her feet, like sunlight.

He stood with his hands in his pockets, quietly, until he shifted restlessly at last.

"I think I'll go for a walk. Will you come?"

"Oh ...! Where are you going?"

"Oh only on the hill --"

She stayed quite still, feeling the joy lap over her. But she did not say anything about it.

In a minute he had to ask again, "Well -- do you want to?"

"Oh! no," she said - who knows why she said it. No sooner had he gone, than she began to suffer for it, torturing herself, thinking of going after, and still hesitating, lingering, - thinking wishfully of his coming back a second time she pricked her ears, waiting the silence entombed her. Feeling as if the floor had turned to ice below her, still she stayed on her knees, shivering, berating herself, unforgiving.

Even when he had gone for some weeks from the farm, still she flayed herself, burning to think of her foolishness, that time. Often and often she thought of it, torturing herself by imagining, alongside of it, a different ending to that story, if she had just risen from her knees, just said, Oh, yes, and gone along

In winter the house seemed heavy, grey, depleted. Since he had gone so far from here, Burton seemed past their imagining. Their understanding fell short, so that when they tried to imagine him, they could not, really.

Yet there were letters, in which he spoke of classes and of friends,

of work, always of work. Sometimes he sounded homesick for the farm. Sometimes there were long lapses, in which he did not write at all.

"He never writes of any girl," Mrs. Tyler remarked, one evening.

Nobody answered her, though from their faces, doubtless they were thinking.

"I wonder if that's because he's got one, or because he hasn't," she said, and smiled a little to herself, thinking of her son.

The scorched photographs hanging above the white wainscoting on the bedroom wall arrested Mrs. Tyler as she prepared for bed. She stood on the round braided rug beside her bed, unfastening her blouse, shaking loose her hair, and as she looked about at the old family likenesses, she paused at the one of herself. There she was slender, carried a red silk parasol. How the boys used to smile, to think of their mother with a red silk parasol! Well, she never will carry another, she thought then, her rather grim humor coming up in her mind, - Unless it rains, and I get a black umbrella for my burying day!

Her bedroom was very dainty, set about with a slender-spined rocking chair, her glowing lavender dishes, dimity curtains starched, bouffant. On the first shelf of her washstand, she kept a rose washbowl, on the second, her Bible. But there was nothing incongruous about the large, strong-boned woman, there among her dainty things. There was in her also a strain of deep quiet, of rare sweetness. She knelt beside her bed to say her prayers.

Mrs. Tyler pulled the sheets down from the line, dropping the clothespins into a basket on the porch. The sheets flapped a little, in the breeze, and the cat arched itself about her thick feet, weaving by her ankles in the sunlight. She tested a corner of one of the blankets she had hung out to air. It was too heavy for her to carry in. Rose would have to do it. She shook it out a little, where it was wrinkled. It smelled still of moth-balls. She had got to have them packed up, for Burton to take back to college with him. She sighed, going back into her kitchen. For a moment, the glare of the sunlight blinded her, and she stood, blinking, in the door, seeing the room all dark.

She carried her washing into the kitchen, dumping it in a heap on the round table, and proceeded to sort it out. Sometimes she raised a piece to her nose, crumpling it against her face. It was still warm, with the sweet smell of sun-dried cloth. She folded up each piece, smoothing it under her cracked, heavy hands. When she had a pile of sheets, she carried them into her bedroom and put them up in the drawer, handling them as carefully as if it was her life she laid away.

"Don't you lift those, Mother Tyler!" Rose called, half scolding. "I'll get to that in a minute."

She said crossly, "You'll have me good for nothing, long before my time!"

Rose laughed, leaning across the ironing board, resting the black flatiron on a crease in Burton's shirt.

Out in the fields, the men were haying.

"High noon, chow time." Hank stopped working, jabbed his pitchfork into the hay.

Bob, a forkful reached up to him, stared for a second, then he dropped it at his feet. He stuck his fork in the ground. The single thrust of hay, beside it, looked meager.

Hank, pushing his knees against the board sides of the wagon, at the back where it was still empty, felt the blood throbbing at his knee-caps. He stood, leaning on his pitchfork. The blood knocked at his temples. He panted as he stood up there, sweat dropping across his face.

Burton, looking up, caught the heat in his face, coming off the sun like blades, piercing into his eyes.

"Look out below!" Hank sang out.

The two young men looked up, seeing him leap from the wagon, land squatting. He stretched his arms, twisting the bones of his shoulders in their sockets, lifting them up, and then he folded his arms behind his neck, yawning all across his face.

"Hot enough, eh, Burton?" He yawned again, creasing up his cheeks against his eyes, and the muscles swelled in his shoulders as he pressed his neck back against his locked hands. "Got nothin' to fear when ya die, Bob," he said easily. "Cain't get no hotter than this is."

The two young men laughed.

Bob listened seriously, concentrating. He admired the great heat. He made a mild, diagonal nod, to be agreeable. Then, as he considered some more, he believed he had located the source of the heat, and he began to stare up at the sun, as if he had just realized it was there. He stood, watching the sun drop prickles across his face.

Hank grinned. He lay himself down on the ground, next to Burton's pitchfork, up against the wagon. He began to play with the prongs of

the fork, and he laughed, watching Bob take in the fact of the sun's heat.

His chest, his face, glistened with fresh sweat. A smell came off his body, like steam. He lay on his back, and scratched his head against the ground, once. He plucked a blade of grass, moved his mouth around it a bit, and then spat it out. "Lawd god amighty, but it's hot."

Burton watched his brother pull off his dripping shirt. When he had finished, the two young men smiled at one another, and Robert leaned across to cuff his brother lightly on the back, because it was good to have him there.

Robert took up one of the flasks of cold water, shook it by his ear, and drank a little. The flask was half empty already. The water tasted of earth. Then he handed the flask to his brother, but Burton shook his head, and Robert put it back beside the wagon.

"Come on, Bob!"

Bob stared at them, waiting patiently for this sound to come back to him, passed through the cottoy process of thought. When it came at last, he took it humbly, as if it was a miracle, - that was his name! Slowly, he began to grin, until it spread over his face, from ear to ear, creasing even the white patch of skin above his left ear. Then he sat on the ground, resting his back against the wagon.

The horses twitched a little, standing patiently in harness.

"Whoa on!" Hank warned, lazily, sending his voice back over his shoulder. He knew they weren't going anywhere.

The two young men ate silently. Now and then, one of them

flapped at his ears, shooing off flies.

Bob chewed carefully. He thought about his meat, he pondered his bread. Each time his jaw cracked, he listened to it, concentrating, waiting to see if it would turn out to mean anything. His body went on working, and he grinned, mildly, sometimes, at the other three men, and sometimes, when a sound disappointed him, he shook his head. All sound seemed to him a miracle. He never could get over it, that noise turned out to signify something. But his body worked on and on, steadily, though his mind was busy with thinking.

"Some job, eh?" Hank said lazily.

"I guess so!"

"Hey, Bob?" Hank grinned. He watched him take that in, shuffling it through his mind, and he laughed. To him, everything was a joke. He thought life was a huge joke, and he leaned back and laughed again.

Hank measured the work with his eyes, squinting off across the fields. "Ain't so bad," he said. "Finish up this field today, maybe."

Burton measured the fields for himself, stiffening at the hired hand's tone.

"Sure," Hank said, looking again. He turned again, lazily, and called past his shoulder, "Whoa there, whoa there, ya - " He reached his hand under his pants, scratching himself seriously. Blissfully he looked out, into the clouds.

The four of them were sitting close together to fit into the small space of dark ground behind the wagon where the sun was blocked

from them. The sweet, fresh smell of the hay rose from behind. The horses dropped dung. The men, eating their food, listened to it seriously. The smell from the dung came back pleasant, ripe. All through the fields, the flies buzzed, and birds dipped into the freshly cut hay, lying out to dry in the sun.

"It's been good, here, this summer," Burton said, dreamily, lulled by everything around.

Robert grinned back at him lazily. He had no need to say anything.

"Somehow, I hate to go"

The two brothers rolled over onto their stomachs, smiling at one another.

After a while, Robert said with satisfaction, thinking of their work, "Everything is going well."

Burton kept still, thinking.

"Remember that summer when it rained, in the middle of haying?" Robert said cheerfully.

"I remember. The sky went so black, I thought the sun had gone forever"

"And everybody's hay, around, was ruined! I remember ours!"

Hank broke in. "When was that?"

"Three, four years ago?" Robert turned to Burton.

"Five."

"Was it so long?" Robert asked, incredulously. "I'll never forget that winter."

"Nor will I."

Hank spat out a piece of rind. Bob scratched above his ear, losing a good many sounds, chasing humbly after others.

"Hey, Bob, what say?" Hank asked sometimes, lazily, and then he spat out laughter. He had the sleepest eyes, so beautiful.

In a little while they got up, started to work again. Hank stood for a moment in the sun, admiring the rise of his muscles under his shining skin. His back, his chest, glistened, polished with sweated oils. Then he climbed back up on the wagon, packing down the hay.

The four of them worked steadily, handing up hay, loading the wagon, shifting the horses every now and then.

The sun struck their backs with sharp blades of heat, raking up the blood under the skin. The horses switched their tails, raising and clomping down again their heavy feet, shifting with imperturbable patience. There was a rhythm in the work, for the men, an even motion, done again and again, until their bodies learned it, let go their minds. They belonged to the work, unaware of the pain in their backs, their heads buzzing, empty, their motions steady, unchanging. They baptized the work in sweat.

When they had the wagon loaded high, thrusts of hay falling across the sides, wisps drifting back to the ground, Hank started up the horses and they headed back toward the barn.

All the way across the fields, the orchard, the men holloed the horses, crying out oaths, encouragement, announcing their coming to the farmhouse, and when they were nearest to it, before they began the slope down into the barnyard, Robert waved toward the house.

Mrs. Tyler stood in the bay window, watching the wagon come in from the hayfield. She could make out her sons, stretching lazily on top of the load, and she stopped her kneeding to look after them. She set her bowl down on the table, wiped her floury hands on her apron. Let the sun stand up there by itself, a quarter hour, she said, looking up at it, glittering beyond the glass. Let the earth spin a few turns, without my aid! She took a rest, lowering herself into her rocking-chair, balancing first on a wicker arm that creaked under her weight. Her flesh jogged a little, as she first settled into the chair, and then she crossed her feet, crossed her arms, and rocked herself, looking out of the bay window into the pastures.

As they came up to the board fence, Burton climbed down from the wagon, helped to get the horses into the barnyard, lashing at them to bring them round, straining at the harness. Robert managed the reins from the top. The mother closed her eyes, resting her head against the wicker roll at the back of her chair. She shook her head a little, as if it was too high a burden, all her thankfulness. As if she must give a little of it up to God, she moved her mouth in prayer. Those sons of hers made up for a great deal, she guessed they made up for everything.

When Mrs. Tyler got her son's letter, she opened it eagerly. She had to hold it close to her eyes to focus it, and then she moved it off a little, squinting, and still she shifted her head to get it right so she could see it.

Rose, her hands soapy in the dishpan, took them out and pushed the

suds down from her wrist, lazily, dropping them into the sink. "Want I should read it to you, Mother Tyler?"

"No, no no, that I don't," she said crossly. She didn't like anybody to take notice of her eyes going bad, or her lameness. She held the letter up in the air, toward the window, seeing the ink against the paper made transparent in the sun. "There. I guess I can read what Burton has to say, yet a while." She read it to herself, moving her lips, turning her head slightly to follow the lines along the page. "Why!" she gave a small ejaculation, and she held the paper up again, scrutinizing it more carefully.

"What's the matter, Mother Tyler?" Rose asked, dropping the soap suds she had been dawdling in, wiping her hands across her apron, as she came nearer. She left a dark wet smear across her stomach. She came and stood behind the old woman's chair, leaning her hand on the knob of the back. She peered closer, her head next to the old woman's ear, to read.

"It looks like - it looks like - Burton's gone and gotten married."

"Married!" Rose took the letter from the old woman's hand, that had begun to shake a little. "Burton? - Married? Let me see." She looked at the letter, three times. It was a very short letter, but she stood, in the bay window, holding the transparent paper to the sunlight, seeing only marks swimming on the page. Behind the glass, the hill reached out, to the line of maple trees above the steep brown rocks. There were white cloud puffs, pushing on slowly across the bright sky. In the window, the geraniums bloomed in wicker stands, and Wandering Jew dropped to the linoleum. Flying back and forth across the porch, robins perched

on the clothes-line, and the kittens dipped into the thick Morning Glory vine, growing about the lattice. Rose looked out, dazzling her eyes in the sunlight. As if she were a nun taking a vow, she thought, Now I will never marry.

In the chair, the mother sat, rocking steadily, her hands clasped in her broad lap. She rubbed her thumb, over and over, across the gnarled brown knuckles of her other hand.

When the men came in at five for their supper, the mother told them, "Burton's married."

"Married!" They stared at her incredulously. Robert, washing up, stopped with the towel gagging him, drops of water splashing down into his eyes, his ears. "Who has he married?"

"A woman teacher there," the mother said quietly.

"No!" Robert stared at her, in consternation. Hank began to grin. Bob scratched the white patch of skin, the scar tissue, above his ear.

"No," Robert said slowly, meeting his mother's eyes steadily. The two of them shared misery for a moment. "She must be an old woman!"

"I guess she's not so old," Rose said, from her place at the sink.

"I imagine she's a very nice woman," the mother said quietly.

Robert said nothing until he finished wiping his face, his neck, his hands. Then he hung the towel back up on the peg. He had made a grey patch spreading all across the center of the towel. Rose snatched the three men's towels off the pegs and dunked them furiously in her pail of soapy water. She began to rub them rhythmically, furiously, standing

there rocking herself with the energy she put into her work.

Hank, grinning, leaned over next to her, his speech hot against her cheek. "What's eatin' you?" he said. "Ya'd think them towels had got to wipe the holy ghost." He watched her bite her lip and grow red.

Robert, across the room, said to his mother, both their faces grave, "What do you think he did that for?"

"I expect he was lonely."

"You think so?" He swallowed deeply.

"That's a very lonely boy," she said. "And I'm afraid he always will be."

As they approached by the front walk, solemnly, between the rows of bushes, Rose cried, "They're here! they're here!" She ran into the front parlor, overcome with shyness, and watched them secretly through a crack in the lowered shade.

The front door was kept bolted, not so much to prevent anyone from entering by it, as to keep it from rattling in the wind. Agitation slowed Mrs. Tyler as she worked at the bolt. One thought troubled her, even as she told herself she was being foolish, - Why does he come in by the front door? --- He knows only strangers use it. On the front step, silently, they waited, so near she almost thought she heard them breathe. Her eager, clumsy hands put her out of patience. She cried gruffly, disgusted with herself, "Rose! come see if you can't do this quicker! My old fingers are all thumbs - "

The girl came slowly, dragging her unwilling feet. By the time

she got there, Mrs. Tyler herself had the bolt undone. When the door was open, she faced even Burton for a second almost cautiously. He also seemed strange, and was uncertain. The change in things took the place of time and made them, for a moment, strangers. But when he moved to come to her, a little cry of joy broke from her mouth, and she put her arms freely around his neck and clung to him for a moment. Tears came into their eyes, so that they turned aside, ashamed.

Gruffly, she said, "What are you crying for?"

"You are crying too."

"Am I? --- Ain't I foolish ..."

They looked at one another again, the love that brimmed in their eyes startling them both. Then they turned quickly, shyly, to Burton's wife.

For seconds that seemed to drag on far longer, they two faced one another on the stone steps, without speaking, the stranger humbly patient under Mrs. Tyler's close scrutiny.

"So you are she," Mrs. Tyler said quietly.

"I'm afraid I disappoint you!"

The stranger's face took on a cast of anxiety, as she hovered on the step, moving her right elbow uncertainly, not knowing whether her hand was wanted for a greeting.

"No. No," Mrs. Tyler said slowly, "I don't think of disappointment."

As she stood, blocking the door, not lifting her arms from her sides, the stranger darted her hand back painfully, ashamed of her offering. But the awkward motion caught the mother's eye. She was touched for the stranger. She reached to take the doubtful hand in both of hers and,

out of shame, began to chafe it. As she searched the waiting face, the mother smiled, but the younger woman let herself be read, without responding, though something almost like belligerence flickered through her eyes uneasily. Mrs. Tyler, seeing, more absently chafed the hand, withdrawing a little.

"Come in, come in," she said at last, rousing herself abruptly, ashamed. "I ought not keep you standing -- you must be cold, and tired, from your journey." Then, smiling more hospitably, she let go, and stepped back to make room.

The stranger entered behind her young husband, her head lowered to avoid their eyes, though she tried to seem only to be watching her step closely. The brothers, sharing the luggage, led her in through the house. As they passed by Rose half-hid in the corner, so that with the shadow and the bustle Burton missed her. "Where's Rose? Where's Hank? So you let Bob go!" Burton cried to his brother gladly, as they passed along the hall.

Mrs. Tyler started after the others. Rose, in the lonely hall, stooped over the bolt to fasten the door again. Only, the old woman remembered her, when she had gone a little way, and came back again.

Coming silently, through the dark hall, she startled the girl by placing a hand on her shoulder lightly. Wanting to find some words of comfort, the old woman sighed heavily, but finding none, she only said at last, gently, removing her hand, "Well --- Come when you feel you can."

The girl lifted her face with thanks at the kindness, her eyes brimming tears. Neither did she say anything, though as the old woman left, the lonely hall filled up with understanding.

The bolt fastened, Rose stayed a little longer, looking out at the front yard. Now it seemed strangely empty, forbidding, as if, there being nothing now to wait for, it had closed in, the sky drawn down upon it. The windows, perpendicular beside the door, were very narrow, and what daylight entered, came in through shrubbery growing along the front of the house. The kitchen itself shone with white sunlight, coming in at an angle to strike across the ceiling. As someone moved before the window, shadows swam on the plaster. The ceiling was low, the angles uneven. The boards of the floor sagged, the whole floor sloped outward. In one place, the boards quivered to a foot-step.

At the sight of a cat, coming out from under a chair, the stranger's set face eased a little. Forgetting herself, she stooped to hold out her arm invitingly, scratching at the pad of her thumb, entreating, "Here, puss-puss-puss-puss --" With her other hand, she clutched her purse, tightly, in her lap.

The cat ignored her. The woman watched it cross the room, her face falling, disappointed, she watched it fold itself into a chair, the tail last, twined about its feet. Then it began to lick one paw, its tongue darting. The woman got to her feet, feeling a host of eyes beseiging her.

"I'm so fond of cats!" she said, flushing.

When Burton came for her coat, she had some difficulty removing it because of her pocket-book. She had not thought to set it down, but, loosing first one arm, then handing the purse to herself, she managed to get free. Again, she felt a shower of eyes magnify her awkwardness.

Moving to the bay window, she admired the geranium leaves, dutifully,

blankly, As she looked back, suddenly, she caught the old woman's eyes on her, and turned pale. Then she moved on about the room, jerkily admiring things, though she kept looking back, imploring the door to return her husband to her. When he did not come immediately, the silence dismayed her. She thought the clock, ticking ever louder, must soon explode. Turning to Mrs. Tyler, she gasped wretchedly, "What a view from the win .. window!"

Mrs. Tyler, leaning on the side-board, jarred the silver spoons in their tray, hardly able to speak for anguish.

Burton had to come again, before the two women were rescued from one another. The intensity of their feelings had settled, like a lead weight, on their tongues. He took his wife upstairs, left his mother laying the table alone.

Now that was wrong of me, Mrs. Tyler thought, distressed, as she worked about alone Why didn't I open my arms to her, why did I leave her so long to feel unwelcome? What will she think of me? ... These thoughts troubled her, so that she kept coming back to them.

The room was grey and still. From outside, tremendous quiet billowed in, like a great white swan, harboring the room in its wings. Mrs. Tyler stopped to listen to it. She thought she was laying the table -- but she only put down the same fork twice, and took it up again, three times over.

Mrs. Tyler looked bleak and even haggard to her son, when he came in the room again, this time alone. She did not hear him. Working at

the stove, she stood with her back to the door. Once, when she struck her wrist on the steaming kettle, she muttered sharply, but went on with what she was doing. Watching her, for the first time Burton saw how the years had chewed her up. He had never seen a change in her before. A pang of love for her rose in him. But like a backwash to that wave, guilt followed, seeping over him. To dispel or hide it, he went over to the window, and as he did, the floor creaked loudly.

"Hallo, it's you!" she said, turning. "Let me look at you." She put her hands on her hips, her face changing, lighting, growing grave again. "You are a sight for sore eyes." Then, narrowing, thickly she added, "Thanks for asking us to your wedding."

He reddened as if he had been stung. For some, long minutes she let him suffer, watching him narrowly. "Well, never mind," she said, sighing, at last. Politely, remembering her guest, she asked, "Was there everything upstairs she wanted?"

"Oh, yes."

"Good girl, good girl Rose did everything." She passed her hand across her forehead. "I don't go climbing stairs, now, more than I need. I'm not what I was, Burton, I'm not what I was. Well, well!" She broke off, rather harshly, shaking her head, as if she shook all that away for the time being. "I mustn't go on like that, must I! With you here, and it being a holiday ... So she is a teacher." She winked pleasantly, "I guess we'll have to watch our aitches, eh?" Eagerly, rather shyly, she asked, "Did you tell her I taught school a year or so? No, no," she added quickly, "Don't! It was nothing in those days! -- only a little country school - Well ..."

Since she seemed looking around for another job, he said anxiously, "Can't you sit down, Mother?"

"Yes, all right." She seemed pleased that he had suggested it. "There's nothing left to do, really. Rose has taken care of everything. I don't know what I'd do, without that girl. She's been a blessing -- I was never sorry that we took her." Sighing, comfortably, feeling free, she heaved through her sighing, "I shall lose her, someday." Her eyes, narrowing, ruefully, she fixed on him, falling into a brown study. "I had thought sometimes Well!" She shook herself free again. "I mustn't talk like that, now! That will never do! Poor child -- Well! here she is, now!" Mrs. Tyler stopped short, smiling guiltily, hastily rising from her chair to greet Winifred as she came hesitating in.

"Am I interrupting anything?"

"No! Not at all!" Mrs. Tyler cried.

Burton too sprang up, his face glowing, uneasily.

"Perhaps you'd like to take your wife for a look around," Mrs. Tyler said, her voice glowing with hospitality, kindly, warmly. Still, the room had changed again, on Winifred's coming in. Work came back, riding on her shoulders. "The supper's not quite ready -- and Robert's not in, yet, from his milking --"

Burton steered her off. Mrs. Tyler went back to work. She listened to them go, stooping, herself, for a block of wood from the coal-hod behind the stove. Then she took the round iron lid off the stove, plunged in the wood, jabbed at the old charred pieces until they gave way under the new one. The new wood was slightly damp. She watched the fire steam a moment, before she replaced the lid. Only Rose, rattling the dishes

in the pantry, and the damp wood giving a loud hiss sometimes in the stove made any sound.

When they returned together to the kitchen, Robert was there. Smiling, shyly, he pulled a chair nearer the stove for Winifred, nodding politely to her thanks, then turned to his brother, shiny with pleasure. Now the stranger seemed happier, less ill at ease. The terrors had gone from the room. "I can't get over these plants of yours!" she cried, admiringly, stooping again to sniff at them, though there was no blossom. Crossing vaguely toward her chair, she stopped again, to try her hand once more with the cat. "Here, kitty, kitty -- No, she won't come, will she -- cats are so independent! I am very fond of cats!" Then she took her chair. Her glance came always back to Burton and fluttered on him hopefully, but, before his family, she could not make him meet her eye. On the floor, her large black pocket-book stood sentinel beside her chair. In her lap her fingers laced tightly into a ball. She smiled about, unflagging, all through the afternoon, until daylight shrank back from the corners of the kitchen, and the bloom had gone from everything.

Mrs. Tyler said, "The night will be colder."

The others turned to look with her, and as one they shivered. Now the distant hills made only a heavy bar of grey, fading mistily into the sky. Cold grey rocks loomed in the near pastures. A sudden whip of wind sent clouds lurching darkly across the horizon. As the night closed in, they turned back again to one another, and stirred the fire.

The face of night rubbed blackly on the windows, seeming, as the

evening drained to its last dregs, and the last of the allotted wood settled in the stove, more and more to bare its teeth. The room grew colder. Somewhere outside a strange dog bayed, circling under the moon. They half imagined the sound to issue from the throat of the night itself. They shrank back from it, as if the night, like a beggar, crazed, denied, hurled itself at the door.

The dog howled nearer. From the direction of the barns, the sound of lowing cattle came. The two brothers looked at one another, both judging the noise.

"Do you think that dog is worrying the cows?"

"Shall I get a lantern and go see?"

"Wait, I'll go with you."

While they lingered, the disturbance died. Then the silence seemed more ominous still, as if, having lost its voice, now the beggar loomed in stealth.

Winifred, though she hugged the stove, still put her thin arms about herself, to choke the trembling shivers that attacked her. She kept turning to see what was behind, like a scared child, always hearing giant, pursuing steps Now her eyes were glazed with weariness. She made of her yawns, when she felt anybody watching, queer, twisted smiles.

Once she cried, terror riding in her voice. "How quiet it is! Deathly still! Not a human sound from anywhere!" She looked strangely around the room, as if she struggled through a fog, and could not clearly make out any landmarks. "Do you never find it lonesome here?" she asked, her smile a pale straining of her narrow lips.

"Oh, I guess we're used to it," Mrs. Tyler said pleasantly.

The stranger turned vaguely to see where that came from. Only fright, darting by her eyes, distracted her. She had no more impression of Mrs. Tyler's face than if a hood had shrouded it.

"I was never at one," Mrs. Tyler said, "But I daresay a city can be lonesome too?"

"No one knows that more than I!" their guest cried.

So the hours dragged on. Still the family clung to their places, as if to a life-raft. The icy air of the adjoining rooms lapped at the stove, freezing it, and the blackness hurled in shadows through the windows, like stones. At last the family drifted off, one by one, reluctant as if they went to be drowned.

Only Mrs. Tyler, risen over the stove, absently went through the motions of warming her hands, though even the embers now were black. "Well -- I'll see you again in the morning, God willing -- " To Winifred, particularly kindly, she said, "Goodnight, -- sleep well - "

Still Burton lingered, irresolutely, by the door. Seeing that, before she had gone three steps, yawning, patting her mouth indulgently with the broad back of her hand, Mrs. Tyler stopped. An odd smile broke crookedly across her face, now became all tenderness. "Come and let me kiss you You are not too old for that yet, are you? No, no, not too old," she said, her voice breaking. She held him in her arms, her cheek by his ear. While she stroked his head, his face burrowed at her shoulder. "A married man, a married man " She shook her head, again and again, as if she thought there was some flaw in her, that she could not grasp it. "My son, a married man My little Burton"

The floor creaked. Looking quickly round, as if they had been

caught at something shameful, they started guiltily on seeing Winifred left in the hall. Skulking nervously in the background, she perched on one leg, like a frantic hen, hopping with the cold. All her body seemed to knock, as if her bones, like her teeth, were chattering. Her anxiety was like a tame hen's, at their discovery of her.

"I lost my way," she cried pitifully, her eyes starting out of her white face, gawping from one to another, desperately anxious, miserably cold.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Mrs. Tyler clapped her hand to her mouth, abashed at her thoughtlessness toward her guest, casting in her mind for some way to make amends.

"But how could you! You've been up three times!"

Why, there's nothing there to be so angry at! ... Mrs. Tyler thought, withdrawing a little, feeling herself in the way, looking with growing concern from one to the other.

Winifred shrank from his blazing face. "I always lose my way --" she said pitifully.

"But why do you?"

"Why do you get so worked up?" she cried.

He only made an answer like a swallowed roar, burst by her, up the steps three at a time. On the halfway landing, he turned to say with agonized insistence, "Well - come on -- "

Like a shivering little ghost she glided after.

Neither of them thought of the mother, sinking back, scorched at that blaze. From the upper landing she heard them at one another. As if she were trapped, she stood there, feeling the anger in their voices

like a hot tide lap and buffet round her, flooding all her senses. Then they passed along the landing, and she caught no more of it.

Gone to her room, she sat for some time, mulling these things over aware only of the loud clock, and of her own chesty breathing hardly knowing what she thought as if, out of a melting-pot of feelings, she could have picked any number, no one more compelling than a hundred others Until she spoke aloud, she did not know what she was going to lay it aside with, "If that is love, heaven be praised that I --- ah well, ah well!" A wry smile was wrung from her.

Yet she sat, still a while, hearing the house grow quiet, her wide capacious hands open in her lap. She held her hands, cupped as if to receive a fresh portion of sorrow, from that night's work. Is it so ... is it so? ... she kept thinking, as she got up and moved about, taking off her clothes, laying them on the rocking chair, the shoes paired on the braided rug. She felt as if she had descended into a dark cellar, where was stored suffering, and loss, and disappointment. She closed the trap-door over her head, put out her light. In the darkness, she sank on her knees by her bed, but she did not feel like praying.

Long after there was no one left on the road, Mrs. Tyler stood, silently, looking after. Robert shared the last stone step with her.

"Well, they are gone."

She clasped her hands to her chest, chafing them for warmth, hunching her old torn sweater to her sides with her elbows. The two of them stood for some longer, too cold at heart to turn away, though there was

nothing now to meet their eyes. The wind was gone down, the clouds misting, became lost in the grey air. The line of hills lay before them, like a stone face, the land become an effigy of itself in the bare winter morning. The mother stood, carefully, kneading at her flesh with her fingers.

"I think she is a good and decent woman," she said, sadly, "What it is so troubles me I hardly know --- I hardly know ---"

As they turned to go back in, Robert gave her his arm to help her mount the steps again. She leaned on him very heavily. All her strength seemed gone. Her mind also was numb, her vision fettered, as she passed back into the house. Work must be done, she had too long already left it. Only she gripped Robert's arm, tightly, returning dazed into the grey, depleted house.

One day when Mrs. Tyler was at the back door with a neighbor, a man came up the road toward them, visible for some minutes before he was close enough to hail. While he came they waited, suspending their talk. The neighbor held the screen door ajar. Mrs. Tyler herself stopped just inside, on the threshold, her arms crossed comfortably, resting at her chest.

The man saluted them, wafting an arm broadly through the air, as though it were a signal flag. Scarcely stopping, he shouted from the road, "Will I see you at the Church tonight?"

On the porch the two women politely waited for one another to reply. After seconds, when neither did, though each glanced invitingly at the

other, the neighbor poked a bony elbow at Mrs. Tyler. "You go ahead, he's asking you --" she hissed furtively.

Faintly harrassed, Mrs. Tyler called out, "No, I guess not - though the young people may be down - "

"Good, good!"

He waved again, and soon was gone from sight. The bare, sleepy road absorbed the impression of his passing, as easily as the face of a pond on a falling stone.

Though her constant apologies at letting in the flies might have bought her pardon for worse sins, still the neighbor did not shut the door, nor did she go, as she had been for half an hour promising and threatening to do.

She said dolefully, "I guess if you won't come, you won't We'd stopped by for you, though, and gladly --"

"No, I thank you."

"Just as you say." The neighbor wondered first whether the refusal was not an affront. Deciding no one could affront so humble a person as she, she sighed meekly, repeating, "Just as you say."

They parted sighing.

Though the sun was already far over in the sky, the day had still a long way to go. Lilacs blazed about the porch. The birds were winsome, flying by. All along the lower hillside the long silk fields galloped in the wind, their backs arched as if to take a hurdle. Shad-bush, rising like white smoke from the hills, sent heaven signals, out of the belly of summer.

Though Mrs. Tyler did not go herself, the young people did. As she prowled about the silent house, she was sorry that she had not after all gone with them, and her neighbor. There were few Church Suppers she had missed. She kept thinking of them down there, and could not rest, here, as she had intended. The silence itself seemed hungry for their voices, the long shadows slow in falling, as if they too were reluctant to fold up the summer day without them. She kept coming to the door, looking restlessly through the golden air, to see why dusk had not yet fallen.

She was still up when the young people returned. Jealously, she wanted to hear all about it, of her friends, of everything she had missed. They sat down joyfully to tell her. Though she had to keep rubbing her eyelids to stay awake, eagerly she listened to them.

"And Mother, guess what!" Robert interrupted her questions. He tilted his bright head to look boldly, teasingly, at Rose.

The girl turned scarlet, an air of delight and triumph flitting round her. "No! Don't believe him!" she cried.

So odd a look passed between the two of them, closely intimate, proud and shy and teasing, that an idea came to Mrs. Tyler to strike her dumb, so quickly she had no time to judge it, before it showed up on her face. A little foolishly she looked from one to the other. Is that the way the wind lies? she wondered.

A scarlet Rose, seeing her mistake, hastily corrected her by the mortified look of her face.

"What?" Robert caught of that passage only the flurry, missing its cause. He looked a little mystified, waiting some explanation. Receiving none, he gave his news triumphantly. "She's got an admirer!"

"Why shouldn't she have?" Mrs. Tyler said, smiling.

"I haven't, either!"

"You have too!" Grinning delightedly, Robert turned to his mother, good-naturedly imagining he bothered Rose, as he half did. "Everywhere she turned, he moved his chair to keep an eye on her!"

"I didn't see him," Rose said daintily. She was like a wispy kitten, preening, delighted at herself.

"Then you were the only one."

As if it were transparent, with a candle placed behind, her face shone and quivered. Her hair was dark, and all about her seemed lighted.

"Why shouldn't she, --" Mrs. Tyler said strangely. "A half a dozen of them, and it might be no miracle."

The old woman fell in love with the girl, looking at her face. From it, a sense of sadness pierced her, so sharply, she wanted to raise her head and whinny at the pain. She turned away, wondering what mist had blinded her, thinking how her eyes had grown suddenly weary.

By morning the spell had gone. In the pale grey light, as they hurried silently through breakfast, nothing remained of those things. They were all half ashamed of having had the strange, strong feelings. They did not like meeting one another's eyes, while they remembered. And when Robert had gone out to the barn, the house seemed colder, greyer, as the two women worked, clattering dishes, the smell of solidified bacon grease, rising up to make their penance.

Neither of them thought of the incident, in connection with a visitor who came rapping at the door. By then, it was high forenoon, and they were so immersed in their work they had no thoughts for anything else. They were boiling tubs of water on the stove for washing. The windows, and all the room, were steamed up so thickly they could hardly see in it.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Tyler said crossly, when she heard the rapping at the back door. "What now? Rose? Can you go?"

"Oh, no, I can't," Rose said, distractedly looking around.

Her arms were wet and red, up to her elbows, she was loading herself with the snarls of washing as they came from the wringer. She was wet, hot, dishevelled. She had on an old pair of the hired man's overalls, folded double at her waist, hitched in by a tight apron.

Well, you're pretty as a picture all the same, Mrs. Tyler said to herself. What she said aloud was, "All right, I'll go."

She opened the door on one of the farmers from the other side of the town, a man she barely knew by sight. She stared at him incredulously, none too pleased at first to see him, -- not that she had any reason to dislike him, but his visit was not timely. But in a moment, with an effort making herself friendly, she asked him in.

He would not stop. He stepped into the dark little back hallway, while he explained that he brought over a bushel of sickel pears to them. He said they were drops, some were withered, but there was still good to be got out of them, if anyone wanted to take the trouble to go after it. He seemed to want Mrs. Tyler to have them. If she would send one

of her men to lift them out of his truck His back was bad, he did not lift heavy things, he explained.

She called toward the barn for Hank. As they waited, she told him it was very kind of him, to bring the pears. She could use them certainly. She had had a poor crop herself. Trying to feel cordial toward him, still unable to discern what he had really come for, she asked him in again, but he would not come, though he seemed to be looking around suspiciously for something.

When the barrel had been transferred to her back pantry, waiting transport to the cellar later, when the men were not so busy, her strange visitor still lingered in the back hallway. He had come in his working clothes, but he was very clean for this time of day. He wore khaki colored rubber boots, with black lacings that closed over ballooning khaki pants. His shirt was a thick hunting check, black and red, and on his head he had placed a cloth cap, which he had not once removed. He was a small man, made even smaller than he was by his stoop. Not a smile tickled his face. He had watchful, suspicious eyes, working all the time that he was there. His skin was sallow, unhealthy. His features hung, as if disgruntled, slightly awry, so that Mrs. Tyler, seeing them so close, had to repress a desire to straighten them, as one would a picture.

"You'll sit down for a while, Mr. Mahon, before you go," she said.

But he would not. He went away, seeming satisfied, and Mrs. Tyler had still no inkling of what he had, truly, come for.

"That's mighty queer," she said to herself, as she listened to the truck roar off. She meant to hurry and tell Rose all about it, only she

smelled the pea soup scorching on the stove. Hastening to take care of that, the other went clean from her mind.

Neither did she tell of it at lunch, as she might have done, had not something so discouraging happened, elsewhere, on the farm, as to leave not one of them the heart for talking.

Robert had been all the forenoon in the east field, cultivating the seed potatoes. That field was off by itself. Out here, the birds themselves seemed to fly within a prison of air, circling round, dashing at the limits, recovering to spiral upward, only to repeat the act time and time again, as if, trapped in the field, they could not contact anything outside of it.

At noon, the job still unfinished, Robert had unhitched the horses, turned them loose into the pasture, laid the parallel bars back into place, and gone off whistling. At the brow of the hill his whistle died. The corn field lay waste before him. Off in the distance, close to the clabbered sky, a herd of cows grazed, seeming stationary. But in the blighted cornfield, the ground had been pock-marked by their hoofs, and pancakes of brown dung lay everywhere.

At first, dreaming that he dreamt the holocaust, Robert stared at it disbelieving. But he could not rid himself of it. All on the one side, where the cows had come and gone, the fence lay slack, in some parts broken. Keening, he passed it by, sick at heart he came to the house.

Mrs. Tyler took one look at him and felt a vise turn in her chest. To her frightened gaze, he said, "Limoge's cows got in the corn." "Did they -- do much damage?" she asked.

"They destroyed it."

"Destroyed ..?" she repeated, startled, sinking. "All the field?"

"Not a stalk is standing."

"Oh, oh, oh."

She laid a hand on the laddered back of a chair to support herself, staring at him.

Hank was already at the table, gripping his spoon in his huge left hand, as if he had a paw for fingers. He looked up, showing his white teeth. In the desolation of their faces, he saw something to grin at.

So by accident the visit of Mr. Mahon, and the pears, were forgotten, until Robert stumbled over them at six o'clock, going in the back pantry to wash up from his milking. He moved them out of the way idly, and thought no more of them. All the afternoon his mind had been working on what he ought to do about Limoge. Though all he thought of was to take down their fences, let their cows loose to roam in his fields, he feared some injury to the cows as a result of that. He would not put it past Joe Limoge to mistreat or cripple them for retaliation.

Finally, seething, but thinking of nothing better, in the long daylight left after supper, he took out the plough and chewed up the blighted ground, so that he need look at it no longer. If we had a father, he thought, he could have taught us what to do. For himself, Robert could not see what was best to be done. He worked as somberly as if he dug a graveyard. The corn was a great loss to them.

When he came dragging in, so late, Mrs. Tyler laid aside her mending. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, up in the -- up in the field."

"Oah --" She shifted, grunting, her face like his somber.

"I ploughed it under."

"Aie, that's about all there is to do," she said simply, somberly.

Robert moved to the darkened window, scratching at a crack with his thumb. His back was broad, his shoulders hunching. The back of his neck was brightly burned. A sandy beard covered his jaw and chin. He scowled into the darkness. God knows I hate that man, and I will until I die, he promised himself, and felt a little better.

At the expression of his mother's face, he asked, a little sheepishly, "What?"

"I was thinking how like you are to Burton, in some ways," she said.

"Oh?" he said, so pleased he colored.

The following morning Mr. Mahon returned. When the door opened on him, seeing in the dim light a smaller figure than yesterday's, he peered more closely, squinting, twisting his head with his face, until he could be certain that he was not again cheated.

A slow gleam came on his face, that was none too ready with expression at the best of times. Still, he did grunt and rub his hands, satisfied, if somewhat glum. Though he had let no grass grow under his feet in this expedition, he resented having been obliged to make it twice, and only hoped it would not turn out to be a wild goose chase in the end.

Since it must be done, he schooled himself to get on with it, and since it ought to be done pleasantly, he grinned.

"Well, Miss Rose," he said slyly, "How are you today? Feelin' pretty good?"

Wondering, she looked at him, too nonplussed to realize that she ought to answer. That did not bother him.

He had already one foot in the door, and now, barging by her uninvited, forced her to scuttle, to let him by without being brushed. The black hall was very dark and narrow. At the corner, where he had to choose the kitchen or the parlor, he stopped.

"Well, well, well," he said, winking, supposing he made himself sociable. "Pretty good little housekeeper, eh?"

Bolting down a desire to giggle, she nearly choked for answer.

"Well, which is it to be?"

He let her walk by him, leading to the parlor.

"Well, all right, then," he said, trailing her.

Sociably he pantomimed the act of wiping his soles by the door, winking broadly, as he caught her eye. "Don't want a rough man soiling your carpets, do you? You women don't like that." Suddenly sharp, he asked intently, "You particular about that sort of thing?"

Startled, caught out by his look, she nodded hastily, turning crimson, and feeling that it was her foolishness, not his, that made her want to laugh at him.

"You women are all alike," he said, taking a bantering tone.

They spent some moments uncomfortably. A smell of smoke clinging to the room jarred his complacency. A fire in the stove in August, he grumbled He was satisfied with her on one or two points, but he did not like the look of that so well. Thanksgiving was plenty soon

enough to get them started. While he was thinking, she was thoughtless.

"Mrs. Tyler is gone out," she said, at last. "But wait, I'll see if she's not coming."

"Do as you've a mind to."

He was scantily polite as she fled without any urging. She delayed as long as possible her return.

While she was gone, he paced grumbling, his wrists laid one on the other, and sinking down his back, his shoulders stooping, like a tiny, grey Napoleon.

Halting, the girl returned, bereaved of her hope. Mrs. Tyler was nowhere in sight. Strangely, her news did not upset him, though she grew more and more uneasy.

"Well, come and sit down," he said, a little shortly. He did not see any need for tricks and modesty.

"But it may be hours!" she protested, bright and pitiful, as if she pleaded for her life. "Mrs. Tyler may not be back for hours!"

"So much the better," he said complacently.

She could think of no reply. Increasingly she felt shy and ill at ease with him.

"We want to get acquainted, and see how we like one another," he said, bantering, coarsely.

"But she may, -- Why, I don't know what may keep her!" she cried unhappily, her eyes startled.

"What of that," he said rudely. "I came to see you."

"To see me?" she repeated, disbelieving.

Her protests, born in laughter, died in dismay. As if she were a

bird, fixed by a snake, terror would not let her go. Startled, wondering, she intercepted a gaze that flooded her with shame. She thought -- surely --- she hoped that she was wrong, that it was she herself at fault, misjudging him. All the same, she cried unhappily, "I wish you'd go!"

He folded his wiry arms, grinning a little, foolishly, having no intention of it. Being now in good humor, he sloughed off her female tricks, easily contemptuous of them, leering at her to do his part in that game.

"Now, you're not so bad-looking," he told her kindly. "I don't think you are, -- good enough for me, anyway. At my time of life, I'd look plenty foolish, hanging round, hoping for better. No, Miss Rose, you suit me fine."

She was not so grateful for the compliment as she might have been. A frozen look joined in with her disconcerted air, but she was no more vocal, no less horribly fascinated, for it. She felt at once detached and trapped, as if her spirit had fled her body, taken to a refuge, where it sat, and in safety marvelled, having left a shell as hostage.

"You'll know me again when you see me," he said, for the first time with a twinkle, reminding her that her gaze had been fixed a long time now, straight, aghast, and curious, on his face.

"Oh! yes," she said, disconcerted, hastily lowering her dark, startled eyes.

"That's all right, take a look -- take a good hard look ---" he instructed her, kindly.

She only stood in the middle of the floor, feeling immensely foolish,

thoroughly disconcerted, wishing the floor would sink below her, or the carpet rise and bear her off. A curious, electric lassitude seemed to fill her, as if, were anything to aid her, it must be inanimate, exterior, since she herself was powerless. All her feelings had been wiped away, but curiosity, and a troubled, fearful sense that she must not show herself as startled, and as foolish, as she felt. At this moment, she scarcely knew, and cared not at all, what she thought of him, but only, desperately, what he thought of her.

"Well, Miss Rose? What do you think," he asked, winking wisely, "Will we make a pair?"

"Oh ---- a ----" she stumbled, feeling anything but wise herself.

"Hey?"

"Oh --- a---" she replied brightly. In her trouble she held out her hand, cupping and loosing the fingers, hoping a narrow smile would seem to tell him things she did not want to say.

Perhaps it did. He sat and looked her up and down, increasingly satisfied with her, increasingly pleased with himself.

"Yup, I think we'll suit fine," he said, rising, feeling along the sofa for his hat.

His road crossed Robert's in the yard. They touched hats hurriedly, in passing, a look of elation concentrated in the face of each. Mrs. Tyler was not far behind Robert in coming in, eagerly, to demand of the girl news of her visitor.

"That was him! That was him! I told you so!" Robert cried tri-

umphantly. Striking his fist at his palm, happy with gratification, he demanded, "Didn't I tell you he had his eye on you?"

"Oh, was it he?" the girl asked simply.

Her face spoke so of disappointment, neither of them teased her any more.

Mr. Mahon came frequently to the house, from then on, and even when he was not there, they were not rid of him. Rose kept plaguing Mrs. Tyler for her opinion, as to what she ought to do, teasing Robert for his judgment on the man, not liking it if he made fun of him, but scoffing at his praise. And she kept talking of him, using his name, -- a hundred times talking herself into love with him, a hundred times out again.

"But tell me what you really think," Rose begged, and begged again.

"What I really think?" Mrs. Tyler took a long time over it. Then, with a sideways, glancing smile, she said, "I think that you had best make up your mind."

Since she knew that her opinion was likely to become the girl's opinion, she could not give it lightly. She knew little of Mr. Mahon himself, -- his person did not, perhaps, much recommend him; she did not know his disposition; but she thought she knew his character. She had seen how he kept his yard, year in, year out; therefore she knew he could be counted a sober, moral man. She did not underestimate those things in a husband. Then, too, her feet were firmly on the ground: there had been too little security in her life for her to overlook it. She could not hastily advise Rose to let it go. On the other hand, she

saw, or thought she saw, there could be little love for Rose, at least at first, with Mr. Mahon. But she believed that he would keep Rose safe. Love might come, - Mrs. Tyler hoped so - but if not, duty and respect would do. The house and barns those at any rate were certain, perhaps, young children And so, she could not easily credit Rose's first feelings of aversion. She thought there was much in it to make Rose seem fortunate.

If she seemed hard in her reasoning, she was so on purpose. She meant to do the proposal justice. And she was afraid that her own revulsion to the man came from selfishness. She loved Rose, but she was also used to her, and needed her. Therefore, when antipathy came, she mistrusted it. She tried to think of facts; and when she put aside her feelings, she could not help it if, sometimes, she put aside Rose's also, in her struggle to be fair. She did not sleep well, at night, she fell into doubt and sadness, thinking of Rose gone. But its being so very unpleasant inclined her rather more to think it her duty, and she struggled to resign herself. Neither pity for the girl, nor hope for other, kinder prospects, flourished in that soil.

She brought about their meetings. She spoke favorably of Mr. Mahon, when she justly could. But she was slow to give her opinion, wanting Rose to come to it for herself.

Robert, too, thought there was a good deal in it. He was shy of Mr. Mahon himself, and never could talk to him, yet he could not help but respect a man with stalls and pasture enough for seventy cows, though his herd was down now. Rose would never want. That had to be considered. His shyness prevented him from seeing the man himself

clearly, but he thought well of the situation.

Sometimes, when Rose and Mrs. Tyler were working round, the thoughts of both of them would break into words.

"I won't go, I won't go with him!" Rose cried. In a few moments, she looked up again, " --- will I?"

Mrs. Tyler kind of smiled. "That's up to you."

"I know. But oh --" She sighed, looking through the dearest of bay windows, beyond the kindest of chairs, out to the rocks she had always loved, - the cliff she had climbed, so many times a year, so many years It was a day between snow-storms, the ground was mostly bare. She did not want to leave here! "I suppose I ought to go " she said, sighing pitifully.

Another time, looking up shyly, her face flushed, she moaned, "What will become of me?"

Mrs. Tyler could not tell her.

All the same Rose did her hair particularly on Sundays, for Church. She stopped before the glass, sometimes, making smiles, though she was too shy of Mr. Mahon to use them on him. When she was with him, she never thought of anything to say. If he called her a little mouse, her silence turned stony. Neither did she like to hear him talk. Yet when he was not there, her imagination painted things much brighter. She imagined Mr. Mahon changed, grown taller, younger Then she danced at her work, her spirits quickened and she sang, in love, a little, with herself. When she was not with him, she believed she must, perhaps, at least a little, be in love with him.

Sometimes Mrs. Tyler too grew vacant at her work. She stood watch-

ing Rose, and if the girl looked up, blushing, conscious, supposing her thoughts had been seen, Mrs. Tyler smiled at her. "Bless you, my dear," she said gently, "Bless you, bless you."

At other times she was more sober. She said, thoughtfully, "He's a God-fearing man. He'll do what's right by you."

But while they sat together, this day they were mostly silent, full of other things than one another. Mrs. Tyler was chopping onions in a wooden bowl, grunting frequently with the exertion. Rose had a lapful of corn, a needle and some thread. When she pricked the pad of her thumb, she cried, "Oh! Look at that!"

Mrs. Tyler looked impatiently toward her. She too had been absorbed, chopping at her dissatisfactions, mashing the bits of onion in the bowl.

The girl held up the crooked twist of the string to show her.

"Why, what's wrong with that?"

"I can't do it properly!"

"It won't show on the tree."

But Rose, taking no comfort, dropped it back into her lap, yanked the pieces off the string, and shovelled with her fingers through the corns for fresh. She felt hopeless, deserted, in a doldrum of indecision, generally dissatisfied. At last words came as if wrenched out of her, so that she herself was surprised at them.

"I've been thinking I'd write, about that advertisement."

"What advertisement was that?"

"About that job, nursing."

Mrs. Tyler tightened her mouth and continued working, refusing to be taken in. She had enough troubling her now, without that to think of. Her arms ached, the chopper hung heavily, everything set too heavily. She couldn't rouse herself to please the girl.

Rose tried again, more shyly, only wanting to be argued with. "I think I won't marry him. I think I'll go to work instead.

"Have it your way," Mrs. Tyler said drily.

"I think I will."

If she had thought the girl meant that, she would have talked it over with her seriously, little as she wanted to. But she said, only, "You must do as you choose."

At that, the girl took up again the string of corn that she was threading, in a crooked tangle, and stared at it, her eyes filling with vexed tears.

Mrs. Tyler, sighing, watched the girl, her mouth pursing with dry humor. So she might not have the world to herself, put in its place, even for a quarter hour!

"I think I hear the men coming up, outside," she said, drily. "I think I'd wash my face before they come, if I was you."

Rose jumped up, biting her lip, blushing. She set down the bowl, and ran lightly into the back pantry. There it was very cold. She pushed up the pump handle a few times, before she drew water. When she had a thick stream coming, she let the handle finish of itself, putting her cupped hands under to catch the icy water. She dipped her face to her hands, groped for a towel off the rack, her eyes clenched shut, her

teeth already chattering. When her face was dry, she stood there, in the cold pantry, wrapping her slight chest in her long arms, shivering, her teeth rattling, and waited for the men.

Hank came in stomping snow from his boots, beating at his sides for warmth, grinning. After him, Robert brought the tree.

"What do you think of it?" he asked the girl. He set it on the floor, and balanced it, so that his hands were free to plump his ears.

"Nice! Are you frozen?"

"We had to go clear up to the night pasture after it. Oh, it was cold!"

He handed his gloves to her with a brotherly swat. His fingers were blunted by the cold, his face chafed, raw, winded. He shook his hands, trying to stir up the blood in them, as if it were frozen solid.

"Was it?" She clapped the gloves together over the sink. A heap of snow fell from them, and she stood, her head bent, watching it turn gray as it dissolved slowly in the cold water. The look of him hurt her, his face so bright with joy. She concentrated on the greying snow, so that she need not see him.

He went on, into the kitchen. She heard, as he took the tree to his mother, those two together, happiness wrapping them round like a shell, and she felt kept out, treated unfairly. She caught up a sob from it into her throat, a hot bitter cry.

Hank, moving like a cat, surprised her. He stood in the door silently watching her. "Missing your man?" he asked softly, pretending sympathy, ducking, smiling gloriously, as she spun on him furiously.

"Let me be! Let me be!"

With Mrs. Tyler, Robert asked, "What's wrong with Rose?"

"Oh ---- well," her reluctant, shamed glow, her wise smile half told him. "I guess it's nothing won't be mended when she's made up her mind, once for all, to marry."

"Well, I wish she'd do it soon. He's going to get tired of waiting."

"Well, well."

She smiled as Rose came back. "Well, child!" she said, shrewdly.

The girl blushed, much happier now, a little ashamed. Robert's face was bright, absorbed. The mother sat, crumbing the bread in her lap, trying not to think what changes had already come on them, watching her son, and as she kept him close with her eyes, she thought her heart was heavy with love, oozing through her, taking its sluggish track along her viens. Now and then she looked into the bowl, mashing at the mixture with her fingers. Sometimes she took up a pinch and set it on her tongue, testing the essence of its flavor against her palate. She sat as if suspended, out of time, for a moment, gauging exactly the taste of her mash. She tried a little more, unsatisfied. Then she swallowed, and the tang of spice passed from her tongue, along her throat, her tongue warmed for a moment.

"What do you think - Does it look all right, - or should I -"

Robert started to move the tree across the floor in its bucket.

"No, no! Not so near the fire!"

She shook her head, and he smiled, joining with her in her scolding. He brushed back a shock of his light hair with the back of his hand, leaving the charcoal smudge on his cheek. "What do you think Rose? There?"

The girl smiled quickly as she met his eyes, nodding almost shyly.

"Yes."

Across the room, the windows were thick with frost. The three of them were closed in together, the world seemed impenetrable beyond. For a moment, they believed in nothing beyond, all life was cupped here, in this low, warm, smoky room, thick with love and charcoal and the Christmas.

"It'll want a sheet."

"I'll get one."

Rose ran from the room, her heart light, butterflies bursting in her chest as she skipped up the steps. Here it was cold enough to see her breath. She watched it fall out of her mouth, blowing out thick breaths to see it. She picked up an old sheet out of the chest, dropped it across her arm, ran back down again.

In the room she bent low, under the tree.

"Mind if I eat these?" Robert had taken up a handful of her popcorn, that she had been threading.

"I'll run short."

"I'll do you some more."

"All right."

They smiled at one another, Under his teeth the hard kernels cracked. He coughed, when one of the hard metallic flakes cut at the skin under his tongue. He fished after it with his finger.

"And those hands wanting washing," his mother said.

He laughed at her. When he had the flakes out, he sucked up saliva in his mouth and swilled it around before he swallowed again. Then he went over and stood in front of the window, his hands in his pockets, and looked out steadily, his face growing thoughtful. When he turned

again, there was trouble under his good humor. "Mother - " he broke out suddenly, "Hadn't she better - "

She made No with her mouth and nodded quickly, warningly, to where Rose stood with her back to them. He sighed heavily, putting his question away. But they could feel it, hovering about them, settling on the two of them, for a moment, like a greedy black crow that could not be flapped off from a field of ripe corn. The mother sighed with him, bending over her bowl, chopping steadily. The smell of onions rich under her blade stung at her nostrils, bringing water up at her eyes. Then with the wooden handle she beat down chicken gizzards in the bowl, adding to the onions the warm sticky smell of fresh blood, oozing into the bread.

She took up a little on the edge of her blade, licked it off with her tongue delicately. "I don't know what to think about this!" she said testily. "Here - you try it, Rose."

"Oh, no!" Rose turned, shivering, though she smiled quite happily. "I don't like to eat the raw blood."

"Oh, pshaw! And you wanting to go for a nurse!"

The girl blushed quickly, pretending to be very taken with her work. Robert said nothing, whether he heard or not. He stepped up to the coating of frost on the window impatiently, scraping at it with his thumbnail, but he could not dent it.

"Good King Wenceslas last looked out -" he sang, softly, and then turned, smiling at his mother. "Here, I'll try it for you."

"You'd eat anything!" But she waited anxiously. "What do you think? Does it need any more thyme? Salt --?"

"It tastes all right to me," he said cheerfully, going back across the room to help Rose again.

"Oh!" the mother said, disgusted. "You wouldn't know if I left the thyme out!"

He grinned cheerfully.

But she was gone again, into the world of her senses.

The black smoke drifted from cracks on the face of the stove, the tangy dressing that she was making was rich in the room, the barn smell coming off the jacket Hank had slung across the chair-back, the odors of the fresh pine boughs, the minty bark, all combined. He sang his song, listening to his mother's chair creaking, her mallet pounding at the chicken gizzards.

"...gathering winter fu-u-el ... There!" Robert broke off his song to ask the girl kneeling beside him over the box of tinselly ornaments, "How's that for a start?"

"Oh!" she cried happily, "I forgot we had that!"

"At the very top, eh?"

"Yes!"

Creaking steadily in her chair, Mrs. Tyler watched them, the young man and the girl, laughing together, joyously, kneeling by the tinsel, plotting to make things beautiful. Her heart ached sharply for Rose, seeing the soft shy joy of her face. Robert was red, his lazy arms sure of their strength. Life was kind, all the same, the mother thought Well, Thy will be done, not mine Who can tell, it may be, all three of them will teach this old ghost to laugh, when I myself have been a long time gone

Frequently, Mrs. Tyler turned from all of this, that was too much with her, at times to thoughts of her other son, at times back further, and to the past. Burton's letters came infrequently. To her troubled mind they seemed evasive, signed with restlessness.

Always, now, the thought lay not far back in her mind, Likely they would not meet again. Not at any rate this side heaven,... she always added ruefully.

One day she said to Rose, - the letter lying torn open in her lap showed of whom she spoke -, "I fear it will be long, before they get back here again." She spoke slowly, quietly, stilling her chair in the bay window. She had been caught by the sunlight blazing off the snow. Cold brightness shimmered in the air. In places where the sunlight did not fall, the snow turned blue.

Mrs. Tyler smiled a little sadly, peering out the window. When she spoke again, it was in the train of thought to which the land before her had given rise.

"I think the loveliest sight I ever saw, was up that hill, where the trillium bloomed, so thickly, in the clearing, -- up high, I used to think, only the sun ever went higher ----- Is there no clearing now Has it all grown up to woods, I wonder? I should like to see it, just once more -- to see if it is still the same as I remember. Do you know -" For a moment she grew eager, leaned forward, "I think if Robert would harness up the horses -- Ah, no - too many trees. Too many trees, now -" She settled back again, more calmly, smiling. "And once I flew up like a bird, as you may now. If I was wanting anything to humble me,

that should do it When I set to thinking" She shook her head, spinning out her sigh, until it came to seem an ache that happened to the room, not a human sound. "I don't know why it hurts, to think of that clearing on the hill," she said. "And yet, it strangely hurts --"

As she thought of it, suddenly the image came so strongly, that it was as if that were reality, inside her head, that only some clumsy membrane, some coarseness of the body, a failure in physical perception, withheld it from her outer eyes, and so deceived her with the room, the chair, the nooning hour. Feeling as if she bit on pain, through her coarse senses, thrashing for the image blindly, she cried, "Where is it? Where?" And then she marvelled, "Can it be, flesh knows how to bear parting with such things? Why then, flesh is wonderful. I should not know how. What! Oh, child, how I have gone on!" she cried suddenly. "Forgive me! Please, forgive me. Ah, you are a good girl, dear. These things will pass, that plague us. I hope you may be happy yet, -- why shouldn't you? Why shouldn't you?"

"Pack up anything that strikes your fancy," Mrs. Tyler called in from the other room.

Rose stopped to listen, a dish resting in her hands, the linen cloth left in a dishevelled heap on the pantry shelf, as Mrs. Tyler went on talking.

"I shan't be needing them - and if the boys ever want anything, I guess there'll be enough to go around. So take what you like. You might as well have those glasses, if you want them. I always thought

they would come to you, sooner or later. You might as well have them now. It looks to me like Burton never means to settle in one place long enough to want them, and Robert - well, time will take care of him. So take whatever you like, Rose, take whatever you like."

"I won't take much," Rose called back, too softly. Mrs. Tyler did not hear. "He has a house full already," she added, louder.

She heard the creak of Mrs. Tyler's rocker for some time, before her voice came again. Then she said, rather sadly, and tiredly, "Yes, that's right, I guess he does." After another pause she said again, "But still, you may like to have some familiar things. Well, do as you like, - But take the bowl - you can call that my present to you."

That brought Rose to the door, to protest. "Oh, Mother Tyler, - don't you want -- one of them to have the bowl?"

The old woman's face softened, without a smile, into even deeper sadness. "No. No, I mean it for you."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, her face for a moment distorted, as she stood, without speaking.

"Now is that the face of a girl -" Mrs. Tyler began a gentle rail-lery, but she stopped abruptly, to finish with an earnest cry, "Ah, child, child! Don't make yourself so unhappy!"

Rose took up the dish and held it to her chest, looking earnestly at the markings glazed on the bottom, and beyond that to the room, all the angles, all the objects, firm and bright. She said curiously, starting back to the pantry, thinking better of it, remaining to linger in the sunlight, "It's funny --- A moment ago, in the pantry, I was quite happy."

"Were you?"

A strange look passed over the girl's face, a look of love and torture.

"I was cleaning everything in sight -- not thinking of my going --- but only of your face, when you should see what I had done -- and I could imagine, if you should not see it til I had gone, how you would say, She didn't have to go and do all that! -- and think well of me."

"Why, child!" Mrs. Tyler said, touched to shame. "I always did think well of you."

"I know, but not --" Rose stopped abruptly.

Mrs. Tyler met her look, strangely honest, disquieted, she finished with the girl's meaning for her, simply. "But, - you think - not dear to me as my own. No, perhaps Yet dear."

"Oh, if that is true, then why -" Rose cried, tortured, but having lost control, rather than go on, she turned and fled from the room, this time going upstairs, to lock herself in, alone, behind her door.

"I hope it's not a cruel thing that we have done," Mrs. Tyler said to Robert, later, still with the same, disquieted air, "I think he will be good to her, -- don't you?"

She asked it anxiously, scanning his face, as if she asked for alms.

Curiously, brightly, he turned to say, "Why, it's a good thing for her, - isn't it?"

She shook her head, several times, lifting her heavy eyebrows, then lowering, clenching them, instead to nod. "Yes, --- I know it is, I suppose it is --"

But yet, that evening, as Rose stayed a long time away upstairs, and Robert wandered, increasingly dispirited, ill at ease, through the lower rooms, stopping frequently before a window, it began to dawn on him strongly that all was not well.

Once he said to his mother curiously - it was a question she had always, before, shunted brusquely off - "Howwill you get on, without her?"

"I don't know."

Like a sentry at his post, Robert twice paced off the room. From the far end, abruptly, on the turn, he mustered up the strength to say explosively, "Well, if she didn't want to go --" He petered out, embarrassed, at her sudden, sharp look. "Well, she does want to, doesn't she?" he said, blustering. To deal in feelings was so hard for him.

For a moment Mrs. Tyler sat quite still. It seemed to her a great deal hung on her reply, and she did not want to give it. She did not want to be held responsible, any longer, for happiness, or unhappiness, or any of that business.

But all the same, she said at last, "No. I don't believe she does."

Robert stared at her, taking time to understand, taking longer still to understand his sudden feeling of joyfulness, as if a heavy yoke had just dropped from him. When he had it, clearly, a smile burst like dawn across his face, and, bolting by his mother, his hand glancing off her shoulder warmly, thanking her, - for what, as yet, he hardly knew - he hurled himself at the stairs, and mounting called joyfully ahead, up to the rafters, "Rose! Rose! Unpack your things! You're not going anywhere!"

Miss Willey

The school-teacher looked neither left nor right as she marched along the early morning street. Not that she was go grim by half as she appeared, -- but she had formed a habit, through the years. As if she were a working horse, equipped with blinders, just so, she always marched, --- just so, indeed, did everything. She had a good deal of backbone at her command.

For many years, - more than she cared to count - she had got through her difficulties thus, avoiding nothing, turning aside for nothing, neither going on any wild goose chase. And yet it was difficult still for her to enter the school-house, every fresh morning, when the day was still bare as a clean slate, --- and so much seemed possible, --- the secret wishes of her heart bare. For they are night-blooming, these wishes, perverse sun-flowers, that wilt in the strong daylight. But not yet, It was hard to go inside, and shut them out. It seemed a kind of blasphemy.

And yet she did it, bravely, only once, at the very door, stopping to look back along the street whence she had come. She looked back and back it seemed as if she saw the street as she had seen it first, as she had seen it every day since then, -- and really saw, instead, time itself, made tangible. How sad it seemed, that simple street, through its mirage of time! She felt, for an instant, terribly sad, greatly distressed, seeing it so, herself cloudy, with tears, welling up.

The street was bare, the leaves had started falling. She shivered, even in the heat of Indian summer. More than one of us comes along that road, she thought, strangely, more than one of us.....

But then she thought, And who am I, that I may be granted self-pity? She shook it out of her head, as if she took a broom up firmly and

obliterated a cob-web. Wool-gathering, she scolded herself wool-gathering. Let me not wind my loom with that wool.

Then she went into the school-room.

At noon recess she let the children out. As they filed past, into the yard, she kept one boy back. Inside, she smiled, seeing the desperate look he cast after his freedom.

"You're getting later every morning, David."

He shifted, his feet toeing in, balancing up on the sides of his broken shoes. "Well -- it's an awful long walk down --"

"That's true enough," she said, more sharply. "But it doesn't get longer by the day, does it?"

"Well, no." He teetered uneasily.

"Better start a little sooner, then."

"Yes, ma'm."

She sent him off with a smile, seeing him wriggle under his worn overalls, and the smile remained absently on her pleasant face as she stood in the door.

She watched him go out to join the others. Somebody hurled him the ball, as hard as he could, and rocked back on his heels, yelling laughter. David stopped it, hurled it back. She saw, a broad smile aging, lighting, her face, he had their sympathy. She turned her eyes, then, about the yard. A small girl sat in the swing, sucking her cheeks moodily. Mary never joined in much, she noticed. The teacher's eyes rested on her, disturbed, for a few moments. All at once, the child dashed her heels, hard, running back inside the board, higher, higher,

rocking her body out to raise her, in a sudden frenzy of motion. She rocked in the sunlighted yard, raising herself up through heaven in her thrust, kicking the sun out of the bright air, each time she passed it by.

So Belle Willey stood, in the sleepy noon sun, counting her children. She numbered them to herself, listening to their shouts, seeing their squirming bodies going after the ball. She wished they put a tenth of that into their lessons. In the sun they were all hot and dusty. When she rang the bell, they would come trooping in, chattering, and it would be a good ten minutes before she could get any order again.

Then she went back into the school-room.

Standing up in front of her class, she waited for them to finish the exercise. Moving to the window, she poked her shirtwaist back into her black skirt, absently. The sun caught the pink of her neck, her hands. She looked at her fingers, as she rested them a moment on the sill, and she smiled at a memory. Her father used to tell her she was made for babies. He had said there was a young man somewhere, for every girl - had kept on saying it - for a good many years. Well, she thought drily, if he's coming, my Lochinvar, let him come soon!

She turned back into the room. "Well?" she said. "Come, come, What is it?"

She pushed the chalk across the quotient bar, shredding the white chalk dust along the sleeve of her shirt. She looked at her children from her platform. They kept her eyes glued to the bench diligently,

as if they expected the answer to pop up there any time, and they hated to miss it. Why don't they pick up their heads and think? she asked herself, becoming impatient. Some of them had good heads, enough, though some of them would miss a cow, if they had to see it in writing! She let them turn to water under her judgment. She refused to help them.

Almost crossly, she poked the pins back into the bun of her hair, brushed the chalk from her sleeve. From her hair, she would never brush that white away again. For a moment, with a dry little smile on her mouth, she imagined what her father would have said, if he had seen her. He used to say, she heard him still, What in tarnation can a woman want with reading? All foolishness -- Oh, Pa, - her heart twisted. Well! she thought then, drily, if Lochinvar comes with a big Adam's apple, he can turn right around again.

"All right," she said then, calmly. "You can finish that problem after school."

Then she put Arithmetic aside and took out Geography, ignoring the grumble that spread through the class-room.

So she was late, returning home.

The four o'clock sun fell in a low slant along the ground, as she did up the school-room door. She felt, as she always did, a sense of loss, at the vacancy of the yard, the silence of the afternoon air, the unused sunlight. But it was pleasant, too, quiet to ease her tiredness.

She trudged on home, crossing the street, nodding "Good-day" to some-one, mounted the steps of the Jasper's square, white house. The sun had gone to the back, now, the front got little sun in the afternoon. Going on from the front porch, the coolness, the darkness, met her. She was

glad to see them. They were old friends. The rooms seemed empty.

"Anybody home?" she called. Her voice fell in the still house. Mrs. Jasper was hard of hearing.

She sat down for a moment in her chair, resting her books in her lap, kicking accidentally the braided rug along the slippery floor. When she first came in from school, she always felt that here she was a guest, that her life was the school, - her room locked in for the night, her furniture the globe, the blackboard.

She sat, rocking, in the bare frame seat, as formal, as serene, as if she were the guest of the clock, the marble table, the hand-worked quilt. She sighed, imagining, - her father would have said, I guess the old man knew a thing or two, eh? Yes, Pa, yes, she sighed, conciliatory, out of habit. But he would go on talking, she couldn't stop him, trembling his pipe in his hands for laughter, the ashes falling down across his vest, his swollen abdomen, - I never had much schooling, he would say, even his voice trembling, - but mercy, mercy, Dolly, I could have told you!

Then, still smiling, she set her books on the marble, went out into the kitchen to help Mrs. Jasper get supper.

Miss Wrenn

Every morning, after she had hurriedly passed a dry kiss across her mother's cheek, Phyllis Wrenn closed the door behind her quietly. As soon as she was outside, she breathed fully, even as she hurried along past the street of houses, all connected, all alike, and portioned out a flat to a family just like a long loaf of crumbling, yellow cake, made into slices. But she never noticed them, she was so intent on reaching the station. Once there, she joined the mass of people much like herself, even her jaunty red scarf, her felt hat decently dented and topped with a red feather, even these chosen marks of identity, aped all around her. Then, among a surge of bodies, she was half lifted onto the train, and swayed hanging to the strap, clutching with her other hand her purse, crushed in a rhythmic beat of bodies, and sometimes in her fancies she could not say that the big garlicky belly that cushioned her was not in some way a part of herself, nor could she have been quite certain that she could have picked out her own hand and pulled it loose from the swarm of hands clutching the railing. Then, after exactly thirty-four minutes, she was born off again by this flood tide, and lifted finally to the street level of the great city, where she was left, like a piece of driftwood, to gasp herself into shape and form again, to jiggle her skirt seams round, press her soft felt hat down to her ears, and start off, a completely new woman, into the glorious privacy of the early morning streets. Since she headed uptown, toward the expensive residential area, she soon left the mass of people who kept coming in on the trains behind. Here, she breathed deeply, full of vigorous purpose, and glanced only in passing at the shop windows discreetly laid over with shadows and small striped awnings. The eastern sun left a

kind of amber cast on the windows, and as she glanced about from those to the occasional houses, with their dignified brass doorbells, the sparrows sang in the trees at the edge of the sidewalk.

She was completely a city woman. Day after day, as she came along here, she felt that she was being recreated. Nights, after she joined the ebb tide back to the suburbs, the bedroom of the great city, she could never catch herself up again after she had been pressed and pummelled out of it, and she sank into the twilight world, full of vague rebellious yearnings. But in these fresh mornings, she felt that she had an entirely new world to deal with, and she pressed her hands together, delighted that it had come. She always felt, too, some humility, some surprise - as though she had not really thought it would come at all, and that it had was a quite personal favour. So she sniffed at the daffodils bordering the small park as she passed it, and watched the birds twit the grass for being only stationary life, and then flutter upward, and in some way she would always feel that she too fluttered upward, and soon, soon, she would reach something higher, more glorious, more golden When she came to the Doctor's house, she climbed the steps. Using her key, her free hand resting on the huge brass knob, she stopped to look back once again, before she entered. And every morning as she did, she looked on the life as huge, untrammelled, golden glory. Only, she had to go inside

When she first stepped in on gloom, the chilly, slumbering air of the hall, resentment rose in her, as if they trespassed on her morning, and on her freedom. But as she began her ritual, hanging up her coat and hat, laying her purse away in the drawer, she became accustomed to

it, and shortly, in the calmer, quieter light coming in through the French windows from the garden, she sensed the airy morning spirit of the house as it stirred in welcome. When she heard dishes clattering, though muffled by two doors, she smiled. The Doctor and his wife were still at breakfast, then. She took her time putting on her smock. Then, back in the hall, she read through the day's appointments, though she had them by heart already But she hated to break in on him, letting the two of them prolong, while the clock would, their privacy. As she listened to their voices, she was moved to laugh at herself after all, it was she who trespassed on their morning, and their freedom. So she waited quietly, until the front door-bell jarred her into motion. The first patient seemed always an intruder. The Doctor stayed out of sight, even after the second bell, until Miss Wrenn herself had to go remind him, anxiously, that Miss Mowbray waited. Leaning on the door, she held it open for him, seeing him grab his coat and come bounding along the hall, brushing by her, with a groan for a good-morning. As she turned from the closing door, Miss Wrenn stole a glance at his wife. With the sunlight falling on her face, she sat quite still, as if she made happiness wait for her a little longer, before it left her table.

The second ring of the door-bell meant that Mrs. Briggs, the morning-cleaner, had arrived. Then Mrs. Appleton herself came out, with directions for the day. But she stopped, first, and spent a moment with Miss Wrenn, doing the weather -- then she hurried on to Mrs. Briggs, her laundry list in one hand, pointing out spots and corners with the other, laughing, turning with Mrs. Briggs. When the Doctor came out from his first patient, he was always in a better humour. Then, after

that, as business began spilling in, Miss Wrenn no longer regretted the early mornings, she never looked back wistfully on the glory of the vacant streets, when all things had seemed, for a little while, possible

She seemed now to wallow in life itself, cut into human dimensions, manageable, her skill rising with every crisis, filling her with pride....

"You will never know, nobody will ever know, what I go through," drab Miss Piggott said, drearily, and for a moment, listening, grey pain fettered Miss Wrenn. Then, as he passed she caught a glimpse of the Doctor's back, and his light, indomitable step liberated her.

"Oh," she said cheerfully, clearing her lungs of Miss Piggott's cloud, "I am sure he will be able to help you."

"Do you think so..." Miss Piggott looked all mild despair.

"I am sure of it."

All morning she listened to them. When Mrs. Jasper came in, steaming, her features blunted like pats of butter left in the noon-sun, complaining as she fanned herself, even her ostrich feather falling limp across her cheek, "Whew! next time you make me an appointment on a day like this, you'll have to cancel it!" She stopped on the doorstep to point at the offending sun. "It's a very warm day," she said loudly, glaring at Miss Wrenn.

By noon the day piled up on itself, so that she forgot if she were coming or going. Often, she ate her lunch on the run. In the afternoon, when things had begun to slacken again, the Doctor stopped by to make his peace, looking over her shoulder at the appointment book, checking on his day. Meeting one name, he grimaced, and then, catching in Miss Wrenn's face a fellow feeling, he sighed, stretching his arms quite

wearily, grinding back his shoulders, "It must be nice, not to have to work for your living, -- I'd like to try it for a while, shouldn't you?"

"Yes, sir," she said, smiling.

By now, when she went to the door, the sky blazed down at her, and all the street was filled with noise, tramcars clattering, the next street over, bells ringing, workmen crying. When she let Wesley Hammer out, she stood for a moment, seeing him go down the street, and she shook her head. At the crossing someone stepped out of his way to let him pass. Yes, yes, march on, she thought but she did not like it that there was nothing to get in his way. Weariness grew in her.

When Mrs. Appleton had been out, returning she always stopped for an instant with Miss Wrenn to receive commiseration, her face dragged out, her arms full of bundles. "What a day! Such a crush in all the shops! You're lucky you weren't in town! I wish I'd been right here!" She smiled absently, preoccupied, climbing up the stairs with her parcels.

When she had gone again, she left Miss Wrenn dispirited and listless. As the afternoon drew on, the hall turned to a dungeon. This time of day ... late afternoon ... whatever it was, a time one could not put one's finger on ... always saddened her. She hated to be alone in it. Somehow it gave her a queer feeling that there was really nothing left for her. At the same time she had a sense of almost frantic urgency, before it was too late. She got up, pacing back and forth, listlessly, yet strangely restless wondering why, suddenly, she was so tired why, all at once, she ached with fear of what was to come, despairing of everything. Bleakness drifted across her, out of her life,

making her a stranger to the woman she had been. Now she could hardly bear to sit alone. She got up, went into the cloakroom. Soon the clock would free her - but the thought of those angry streets dismayed her ... She tried to blot the distant, pleasant voices from her ears, - they drove her wild with longing. Turning out the light in the cloakroom, she hovered there, in pitch darkness, trying not to listen, as if she had been banished from all joy. And yet, lonely as she was, remembering there was one more patient still to come, she thought she could not face him. Her tongue seemed turned to cotton, her face to steel -- Then she returned to work, left only with the dregs of the day, and desolation.

But when the Doctor came to ask her, kindly, "Won't you go along, now? Mrs. Appleton can finish up here with me..." though she said, "Thank you. I will, then," she did not want to go at all. She hardly had strength left for wanting anything. But she forced herself to rise, smiling. When he had gone, she went to the cloak-room for her things, put on her bright hat, hung up her smock on its hook. From the third floor she heard again laughter, the Doctor's mood expansive, joyful, with the end of the day. How strange it was! she thought, despairing. What a difference the hours made, to different people! She walked by herself to the door, then closed it quietly behind her, going to the street. The hollow pavement rang her footsteps.

But, as she turned the corner and looked back along the Doctor's street, one last time, she always felt a pang of quiet anguish. Whether because she was so soon to yield up all the day had been and return to those cramped rooms, her ailing mother - they could not help but chafe

at one another - whether it was the angle of the lowering sun across the jagged roofs and chimneys, - or just that she was weary -- she could never distinguish. But there it was. She felt, then, as if her world so constricted her, closing in around her, that she nearly gasped in panic. But she grasped her purse and the evening newspaper under her arm, hurried on, grimly, toward the station. She had no eyes now for anyone. The shops spewed out their crowds in torrents, washing, whirling, along the street, all in one direction, like waters in a flood. Poking, jabbing, she made her way among them, trodden down, born along. Sometimes she fought back grimly. But the crowd moved her on, in its unruly discipline. When she reached the station, she fought for her train, for her place, and sank, exhausted, on the hard rush seat, jolted to the marrow of her bones. When people crowding on jabbed at her, she stood her ground infuriated. When she got off the train, the crowds had thinned.

As she went on down the hill after a bow-legged woman in heels - she smiled a little, seeing heads turn after her - she came to the theatres. Once again, she shivered - those humble lines of people, lingering, subdued, infinitely patient, waiting only to put down their two shillings and be entertained. And in the last sunlight! Sometimes, walking among them, she wanted to fling up her purse - that would move them! - and cry out, You are not ciphers, you are not nothing! You live, you live, you are human!

Then, happily, she would pass that, into the park, and there she lingered, rattling her purse, glad she had kept her decorum. But she would smile and nod, and everybody seemed friendly again, like herself, warm, happy, walking in the last sun --- middle-aged men, carrying an

umbrella and a sprig of autumn oak, following their wives, --- old men in pairs, with canes and wide fabric caps, chattering schoolboys, oh, and a school-girl with a dog and a diary --- she smiled to herself, and in a way she was happy, as she looked at the people. But when she turned into the street of shambling yellow houses she lost them completely. Then she was oddly lonesome. As she walked, she took one last look above the grim slate roofs, at the sun, like a dab of mustard on the drifting evening grey, and as, quite wearily, she climbed the stairs, she gladly heard the tea-kettle sing to welcome her.