

Autumn eBook

Autumn by Robert Nathan

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Page 1

MRS. GRUMBLE

On Sunday the church bells of Hillsboro rang out across the ripening fields with a grave and holy sound, and again at evening knocked faintly, with quiet sorrow, at doors where children watched for the first star, to make their wishes. Night came, and to the croaking of frogs, the moon rose over Barly Hill. In the early morning the grass, still wet with dew, chilled the bare toes of urchins on their way to school where, until four o'clock, the tranquil voice of Mr. Jeminy disputed with the hum of bees, and the far off clink of the blacksmith's forge in the village.

At four o'clock Mr. Jeminy, with a sigh, gathered his books together. He sighed because he was old, and because the day's work was done. He arose from his seat, and taking up his stick, passed out between the benches and went slowly down the road.

It was a warm spring day; the air was drowsy and filled with the scent of flowers. A thrush sang in the woods, where Mr. Jeminy heard before him the light voices of children. He thought: "How happy they are." And he smiled at his own fancies which, like himself, were timid and kind.

But gradually, as the afternoon shadows began to lengthen, he grew sad. It seemed to him as if the world, strange and contrary during the day, were again as it used to be when he was young.

When he crossed the wooden bridge over Barly Water, the minnows, frightened, fled away in shoals. Mr. Jeminy turned down toward the village, where he had an errand to attend to. As his footsteps died away, the minnows swam back again, as though nothing had happened. One, larger than the rest, found a piece of bread which had fallen into the water. "This is my bread," he said, and gazed angrily at his friends, who were trying to bite him. "I deserve this bread," he added.

Old Mr. Frye kept the general store in Hillsboro, and ran the post office. It was easy to see that he was an honest man; he kept his shop tidy, and was sour to everybody. Through his square spectacles he saw his neighbors in the form of fruits, vegetables, stick pins, and pieces of calico. Of Mr. Jeminy he used to say: "Sweet apples, but small, very small; small and sweet."

"Yes," said Farmer Barly, "but just tell me, who wants small apples?"

Mr. Frye nodded his head. "Ah, that's it," he agreed.

At that moment Mr. Jeminy himself entered the store. "I'd like to buy a pencil," he said. "The pencil I have in mind," he explained, "is soft, and writes easily, but has no eraser."

"There you are," said the storekeeper; "that's five cents."



“I used to pay four,” said Mr. Jeminy, looking for the extra penny.

“Well, perhaps you did,” said Mr. Frye, “but prices are very high now.” And he moved away to register the sale.

Farmer Barly, who was a member of the school board, cleared his throat, and blew on his nose. “Hem,” he remarked. “Good-day.”



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“Good-day,” said Mr. Jeminy politely, and went out of the store with his pencil. Left to themselves, Mr. Frye and Mr. Barly began to discuss him. “Jeminy is growing old,” said Mr. Frye, with a shake of his head.

Mr. Barly, although stupid, liked to be direct. “I was brought up on plus and minus,” he said, “and I’ve yet to meet the man who can get the better of me. Now what do you think of that, Mr. Frye?”

Mr. Frye looked up, down, and around; then he began to polish his spectacles. But he only said, “There’s some good in that.”

“There is indeed,” said Mr. Barly, closing one eye, and nodding his head a number of times. “There is indeed. But those days are over, Mr. Frye. When I was a child I had the fear of God put into me. It was put into me with a birch rod. But nowadays, Mr. Frye, the children neglect their sums, and grow up wild as nettles. I don’t know what they’re learning nowadays.”

And he blew his nose again, as though to say, “What a pity.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Frye, wisely, “there’s no good in *that*.”

Mr. Jeminy knew his own faults, and what was expected of him: he was not severe enough. As he walked home that evening, he said to himself: “I must be more severe; my pupils tease each other almost under my nose. To-day as I wrote sums on the black-board, I watched out of the corner of my eye. . . . Still, a tweaked ear is soon mended. And it’s true that when they learn to add and subtract, they will do each other more harm.”

The schoolmaster lived in a cottage on the hill overlooking the village. He lived alone, except for Mrs. Grumble, who kept house for him, and managed his affairs. Although they were simple, and easy to manage, they afforded her endless opportunities for complaint. She was never so happy as when nothing suited her. Then she carried her broom into Mr. Jeminy’s study, and looked around her with a gloomy air. “No, really, it’s impossible to go on this way,” she would say, and sweep Mr. Jeminy, his books and his papers, out of doors.

There, in the company of Boethius, he often considered the world, and watched, from above, the gradual life of the village. He heard the occasional tonk of cows on the hillside, the creak of a cart on the road, the faint sound of voices, blown by the wind. From his threshold he saw the afternoon fade into evening, and night look down across the hills, among the stars. He saw the lights come out in the valley, one by one through the mist, smelled the fresh, sweet air of evening; and promptly each night at seven, far off and sad, rolling among the hills, he heard the ghostly hooting of the night freight, leaving Milford Junction.



“Here,” he said to himself, “within this circle of hills, is to be found faith, virtue, passion, and good sense. In this valley youth is not without courage, or age without wisdom. Yet age, although wise, is full of sorrow.”

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While he was musing in this vein, the odor of frying bacon from the kitchen, warmed his nose. So he was not surprised to see Mrs. Grumble appear in the doorway soon afterward. "Your supper is ready," she said; "if you don't come in at once it will grow cold."

For supper, Mr. Jeminy had a bowl of soup, a glass of milk, bacon, potatoes, and a loaf of bread. When Mrs. Grumble was seated, he bent his head, and said: "Let us give thanks to God for this manifestation of His bounty."

During the meal Mrs. Grumble was silent. But Mr. Jeminy could see that she had something important to say. At last she remarked, "As I was on my way to the village, I met Mrs. Barly. She said, 'You'll have to buy your own milk after this, Mrs. Grumble.' I just stood and looked at her."

Mr. Jeminy nodded his head. "I am not surprised," he said. And, indeed, it did not surprise him. Now that the war was over, the neighbors no longer came to his cottage with gifts of vegetables, fruit, and milk. Mrs. Grumble looked at him thoughtfully, and while she washed the plates at the kitchen sink, sighed from the bottom of her soul. Although she liked Mr. Jeminy who, she declared, was a good man, she felt, nevertheless, that in his company her talents were wasted. "It is impossible to talk to Mr. Jeminy," she told Miss Beal, the dress-maker, "because he talks so much."

It was true; Mr. Jeminy liked to talk a great deal. But his conversation, which was often about such people as St. Francis, or Plotinus, did not seem very lively to Mrs. Grumble. "He talks about nothing but the dead," she said to Miss Beal; "mostly heathen."

"No," said Miss Beal. "How aggravating."

Now, Mr. Jeminy, unheeding the sighs of his housekeeper, continued: "But after all, I would not change places with Farmer Barly. For riches are a source of trouble, Mrs. Grumble; they crowd love out of the heart. A man is only to be envied who desires little."

"It is always the same," said Mrs. Grumble; "the rich have their pleasures, and the poor people their sorrows."

"That," said Mr. Jeminy, "is the mistake of ignorance. For Epictetus was a slave, and Saint Peter was a fisherman. They were poor; but they did not consider themselves unfortunate. More to be pitied than either Saint Peter or Epictetus, was Croesus, King of Lydia, who was probably not as rich as Mr. Gary. But he knew how to use his wealth. Therefore he was all the more disappointed when it was taken away from him by Cyrus, the Persian. No, Mrs. Grumble, what you can lose is no great good to any one."



“If you wish,” he added, “I will dry the dishes, and you can spend the evening in the village.”

As he stood above the sink, rubbing the dishes with a damp cloth, he thought: “When I die, I should like it said of me: By his own efforts, he remained a poor man.” And he stood still, the dishtowel in his hand, thinking of that wealthy iron-master, whose epitaph is said to read: Here lies a man who knew how to enlist in his service better men than himself.

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When the dishes were dried, Mr. Jeminy retired to his den. This little room, from whose windows it was possible to see the sky above Barly Hill, blue as a cornflower, boasted a desk, an old leather chair, and several shelves of books, among them volumes of history and travel, a King James' Bible, Arrian's Epictetus, Sabatier's life of Saint Francis, the Meditations of Antoninus, bound in paper, and a Jervas translation of Don Quixote. Here Mr. Jeminy was at home; in the evening he smoked his pipe, and read from the pages of Cervantes, whose humor, gentle and austere, comforted his mind so often vexed by the negligence of his pupils.

On the evening of which I am speaking, Mr. Jeminy knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and taking from his desk a bundle of papers, began to correct his pupils' exercises. He was still engaged at this task when Mr. Tomkins came to call.

"A fine evening," said Mr. Tomkins from the doorway.

"Come in, William," cried Mr. Jeminy, "come in. A fine evening, indeed. Well, this is very nice, I must say."

Mr. Tomkins was older than Mr. Jeminy. His once great frame was dried and bent; his face was lined with a thousand wrinkles, and his lips were drawn tight under the nose, until nose and chin almost met. But his eyes were bright and active. Now he sat in Mr. Jeminy's study, his large, knobby hands, brown and withered as leaves in autumn, grasping his hat.

"Another year, Jeminy," he said, in a voice shrill with age, "another year. Time to shingle old man Crabbe's roof again. I'm spry yet." And resting a lean finger alongside his nose, he gave sound to a laugh like a peal of broken bells.

In his old age Mr. Tomkins was still agile; he crawled out on a roof, ripped up rotted shingles, and put down new ones in their place. To see him climb to the top of a ladder, filled Mr. Jeminy with anxiety.

"You'll die," he said, "with a hammer in your hand."

"Then," said Mr. Tomkins, "I'll die as I've lived."

"That's strange enough," said Mr. Jeminy, "when you come to think of it. For men are born into this world hungry and crying. But they die in silence and slip away without touching anything."

Mr. Tomkins cleared his throat, and watched his fingers run around his hat's brim. He wanted to tell Mr. Jeminy some news; but it occurred to him that it was no more than a rumor. Finally he said: "There's a new school-ma'am over to North Adams." He cocked his head sidewise to look at the schoolmaster. "She knows more than you, Jeminy," he said.



Mr. Jeminy sat bowed and still, his hands folded in his lap. He remembered how he had come to Hillsboro thirty years before, a young man full of plans and fancies. He was soon to learn that what had been good enough for Great Grandfather Ploughman, was thought to be good enough for his grandson, also. Mr. Jeminy remained in Hillsboro, at first out of hope, later out of habit. At last it seemed to him as if Hillsboro were his home. "Where else should I go?" he had asked himself. "Here is all I have in the world. Here are my only friends. Well, after all," he said to himself more than once, "I am not wasted here, exactly." And he tried to comfort himself with this reflection.



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He had started out to build a new school in the wilderness. "I shall teach my pupils something more than plus and minus," he declared. He remembered a little verse he used to sing in those days:

Laws, manuals,
And texts incline us
To cheat with plus
And rob with minus.

But it had all slipped away, like sand through his fingers. Now he hoped to find one child to whom he could say what was in his mind.

One by one the brighter boys had drifted off to the county schools, leaving the little schoolhouse to the dull and to the young. Some were taken out of classes early, and added, like another pig, to the farms. Girls, when they were old enough, were kept at home to help their mothers; after a while they, too, married; then their education was over. In the winter they nailed the windows shut; in the summer they worked with the men, hoarded their pennies, and prayed to God at first, but only wished at last, to do better than their neighbors.

Of all whom Mr. Jeminy had taught reading, writing and arithmetic, not one was either better or happier than in childhood.

"Not one," said Mr. Jeminy, "is tidy of mind, or humble of heart. Not one has learned to be happy in poverty, or gentle in good fortune."

"There's no poverty to-day," said Mr. Tomkins simply. It really seemed to him as though every one were well off, because the war was over.

"There is more poverty to-day than ever before," said Mr. Jeminy.

"Hm," said Mr. Tomkins.

"Last fall," said Mr. Jeminy, "Sara Barly and Mrs. Grumble helped each other put up vegetables. And Anna Barly came to my cottage, holding out her apron, full of apples."

"My wife, too," said Mr. Tomkins, "put up a great many vegetables."

"But to-day," said Mr. Jeminy, "Mrs. Barly and Mrs. Grumble pass each other without speaking. And because we are no longer at war, the bit of land belonging to Ezra Adams, where, last spring, Mrs. Wicket planted her rows of corn, is left to grow its mouthful of hay, to sell to Mr. Frye."

"Ah," said Mr. Tomkins wisely, "that's it. Well, Mrs. Wicket, now. Still," he added, "he'll have a lot of nettles in that hay."



“The rich,” Mr. Jeminy continued, “quarrel with the poor, and the poor, by way of answer, with rich and poor alike. And rich or poor, every man reaches for more, like a child at table. That is why, William, there is poverty to-day; poverty of the heart, of the mind, and of the spirit.

“And yet,” he added stoutly a moment later, “I’ll not deny there is plenty of light; yes, we are wise enough, there is love in our hearts . . . Perhaps, William, heaven will be found when old men like you and me, who have lost our way, are dead.”

“Lost our way?” quavered Mr. Tomkins, “lost our way? What are you talking about, Jeminy?”

But the fire, burning so brightly before, was almost out. “Youth,” said Mr. Jeminy sadly . . . And he sat quite still, staring straight ahead of him.



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“Well,” said Mr. Tomkins, “I’ll be stepping on home.” Clapping his hat somewhat uncertainly onto his head, he rose to go. Mr. Jeminy accompanied him to the door.

“Good-night,” he said.

“Good-night,” said Mr. Tomkins. And off he went along the path, to tell his wife, as he got into bed, that she was a lucky woman. But Mr. Jeminy stood in the doorway, gazing out across the hills, like David over Hebron. Below him the last late lanterns of the village burned in the valley. He heard the shrill kreef kreefn kreefn of the tree frogs, the cheep of crickets, the lonely barking of a dog, ghostly and far away; he breathed the air of night, cold, and sweet with honeysuckle. Age was in bed; only the young moved and whispered in the shadows; youth, obscure and immortal; love and hope, love and sorrow. From the meadows ascended the choir of cicada: katy did, katy didn’t, katy did.

...

Mr. Jeminy turned and went indoors.

II

SCHOOL LETS OUT

The next day being a holiday, Mr. Jeminy lay in bed, watching, through his window, the branches of an oak tree, which is last of all to leaf. When he finally arose, the morning was already bright and hot; the rooms were swept; all was in order.

Later in the day he followed Mrs. Grumble to the schoolhouse, carrying a pail, soap, a scrubbing brush, and a broom. After Mr. Jeminy had filled the pail with water at the school pump, Mrs. Grumble got down on her knees, and began to scrub the floor. The schoolmaster went ahead with the broom. “Sweep in all the corners,” she said. “For,” she added, “it’s in the corners one finds everything.” As she spoke, the brush, under her freckled hands, pushed forward a wave of soapy water, edged with foam, like the sea.

Mr. Jeminy swept up and down with a sort of solemn joy; he even took pride in the little mountain of brown dirt he had collected with his broom, and watched it leap across the threshold with regret. He would have liked to keep it. . . . Then he could have said, “Well, at least, I took all this dirt from under the desks.”

The truth is that Mr. Jeminy was not a very good teacher. Although, as a young man, he had read, in Latin and Greek, the work of Stoics, Gnostics, and Fathers of the Church, and although he had opinions about everything, he was unable to teach his pupils what they wished to learn, and they, in turn, were unable to understand what he wanted them to know. But that was not entirely his fault, for they came to school with such questions as: “How far is a thousand miles?”

“It is the distance between youth and age,” said Mr. Jeminy. Then the children would start to laugh.

“A thousand miles,” he would begin. . . .

By the time he had explained it, they were interested in something else.

This summer morning, a dusty fall of sunlight filled the little schoolroom with dancing golden motes. It seemed to Mr. Jeminy that he heard the voices of innumerable children whispering together; and it seemed to him that one voice, sweeter than all the rest, spoke in his own heart. “Jeminy,” it said, “Jeminy, what have you taught my children?”



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Mr. Jeminy answered: "I have taught them to read the works of celebrated men, and to cheat each other with plus and minus."

"Ah," said another voice, with a dry chuckle like salt shaken in a saltcellar, "well, that's good."

"Who speaks?" cried Mr. Jeminy.

"What," exclaimed the voice, "don't you know me, old friend? I am plus and minus; I am weights and measures. . . ."

"Lord ha' mercy," cried Mrs. Grumble from the floor, "have you gone mad? Whatever are you doing, standing there, with your mouth open?"

"Eh!" said Mr. Jeminy, stupidly. "I was dreaming."

A red squirrel sped across the path, and stopped a moment in the doorway, his tail arched above his back, his bright, black eyes peering without envy at Mrs. Grumble, as she bent above the pail of soap-suds. Then, with a flirt of his tail, he hurried away, to hide from other squirrels the nuts, seeds, and acorns strewn by the winds of the autumn impartially over the earth.

In the afternoon, Mr. Jeminy went into his garden, and began to measure off rows of vegetables. "Two rows of beans," he said, "and two of radishes; they grow anywhere. I'll get Crabbe to give me onion sets, cabbages, and tomato plants. Two rows of peas, and one of lettuce; I must have fine soil for my lettuce, and I must remember to plant my peas deeply. A row of beets. . . ."

"Where," said Mrs. Grumble, who stood beside him, holding the hoe, "are you going to plant squash?"

". . . and carrots," continued Mr. Jeminy hurriedly. . . .

"We must certainly have a few hills of squash," said Mrs. Grumble firmly.

"Oh," said Mr. Jeminy, "squash. . . ."

He had left it out on purpose, because he disliked it. "You see," he said finally, looking about him artlessly, "there's no more room."

"Go away," said Mrs. Grumble.

From his seat under a tree, to which he had retired, Mr. Jeminy watched Mrs. Grumble mark the rows, hoe the straight, shallow furrows, drop in the seeds, and cover them with earth again. As he watched, half in indignation, he thought: "Thus, in other times,



Ceres sowed the earth with seed, and, like Mrs. Grumble, planted my garden with squash. I would have asked her rather to sow melons here." Just then Mrs. Grumble came to the edge of the vegetable garden.

"Seed potatoes are over three dollars a bushel," she said: "it's hardly worth while putting them in."

"Then let's not put any in," Mr. Jeminy said promptly, "for they are difficult to weed, and when they are grown you must begin to quarrel with insects, for whose sake alone, I almost think, they grow at all."

"The bugs fall off," said Mrs. Grumble, "with a good shaking."

"Fie," said Mr. Jeminy, "how slovenly. It is better to kill them with lime. But it is best of all not to tempt them; then there is no need to kill them."



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And as Mrs. Grumble made no reply, he added:

“That is something God has not learned yet.”

“Please,” said Mrs. Grumble, “speak of God with more respect.”

After supper Mr. Jeminy sat in his study reading the story of Saint Francis, the Poor Brother of Assisi. One day, soon after the saint had left behind him the gay affairs of town, to embrace poverty, for Jesus’ sake, and while he was still living in a hut of green branches near the little chapel of Saint Damian, he beheld his father coming to upbraid him for what he considered his son’s obstinate folly. At once Saint Francis, who was possessed of a quick wit, began to gather together a number of old stones, which he tried to place one on top of the other. But as fast as he put them up, the stones, broken and uneven, fell down again. “Aha,” cried old Bernadone, when he came up to his son, “I see how you are wasting your time. What are you doing? I am sick of you.”

“I am building the world again,” said Francis mildly; “it is all the more difficult because, for building material, I can find nothing but these old stones.”

Mr. Jeminy gave his pupils their final examination in a meadow below the schoolhouse. There, seated among the dandelions, with voices as shrill as the crickets, they answered his questions, and watched the clouds, like great pillows, sail on the wind from west to east. Under the shiny sky, among the warm, sweet fields, Mr. Jeminy looked no more important than a robin, and not much wiser. Had the children been older, they would have tried all the more to please him, but because they were young, they laughed, teased each other, blew on blades of grass, and made dandelion chains. Mr. Jeminy examined the Fifth Reader. “Bound the United States,” he said.

“On the west by the Pacific Ocean,” began a red-cheeked plowboy, to whom the ocean was no more than hearsay.

“Where is San Francisco?”

“San Francisco is in California.”

“Where is Seattle?”

But no one knew. Then Mr. Jeminy thought to himself, “I am not much wiser than that. For I think that Seattle is a little black period on a map. But to them, it is a name, like China, or Jerusalem; it is here, or there, in the stories they tell each other. And I believe their Seattle is full of interesting people.”

“Well, then,” he said, “let me hear you bound Vermont.”

That was something everybody knew.



He took the First and Second Reader through their sums. "Two apples and two apples make . . ."

"Four apples."

"And three apples from eight apples leave . . ."

"Five apples."

When spelling time came, the children, going down to the foot, rolled over each other in the grass, with loud shouts. At last only two were left to dispute the letters in asparagus, elephant, constancy, and philosophical. Then Mr. Jeminy gathered the children about him.



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“The year is over,” he said, “and you are free to play again. But do not forget over the summer what you learned with so much difficulty during the winter. Let me say to you who will not return to school: I have taught you to read, to write, to add and subtract; you know a little history, a little geography. Do not be proud of that. There are many things to learn; but you would not be any happier for having learned them.

“You will ask me what this has to do with you. I would like to teach you to be happy. For happiness is not in owning much, but in owning little: love, and liberty, the work of one’s hands, fellowship, and peace. These things have no value; they are not to be bought; but they alone are worth having. Do not envy the rich man, for cares destroy his sleep. And do not ask the poor man not to sing, for song is all he has.

“Love poverty, and labor, the poverty of love, the wealth of the heart.

“Be wise and honest farmers.

“School is over. You may go.”

The children ran away, laughing; the boys hurried off together to the swimming hole, their casual shouts stealing after them down the road. Mr. Jeminy, lying on his back in the grass, listened to them sadly. As the voices grew fainter and fainter, it seemed to him as if they were saying: “School is over, school is over.” And he thought: “They are counting the seasons. But to the old, the year is never done.”

Mr. Frye, who had been sitting quietly by the road during Mr. Jeminy’s little speech to the children, now got up, and went back to the village, shaking his head solemnly with every step.

III

THE BARLYS

The two hired men on Barly’s farm rose in the dark and crept downstairs. By sun-up, Farmer Barly was after them, in his brown overalls; he came clumping into the barn, dusty with last year’s hay, and peered about him in the yellow light. He opened the harness room, and took out harness for the farm wagons; he went to ask if the horses had been watered.

The cows were in pasture; in the wagon shed the two men, before a tin basin, plunged their arms into water, flung it on their faces, and puffed and sighed. The shed was cold, and redolent of earth. Outside, the odor of coffee, drifting from the house, mingled in the early morning air with clover and hay, cut in the fields, but not yet stored.



Anna Barly, from her room, heard her mother moving in the kitchen, and sat up in bed. The patch-work quilt was fallen on the floor, where it lay as sleepy as its mistress. She tossed her hair back from her face; it spread broad and gold across her shoulders, and the wide sleeves of her nightdress, falling down her arms, bared her round, brown elbows as she caught it up again.

In the kitchen, the two hired men, their faces wet and clean, poured sugar over their lettuce, and talked with their mouths full.



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"I hear tell of a borer, like an ear-worm, spoiling the corn. . . . But there's none in our corn, so far as I can see."

"Never been so much rain since I was born."

"A bad year."

"Well," said Mrs. Barly, "that's no wonder, either, with prices what they are, and you two eating your heads off, for all the work you do."

"Now, then," said her husband hastily, "that's all right, too, mother."

Anna stood at the sink, and washed the dishes. Her hands floated through the warm, soapy water like lazy fish, curled around plates, swam out of pots; while her thoughts, drowsy, sunny in her head, passed, like her hands, from what was hardly seen to what was hardly felt.

"Look after the milk, Anna," said her mother, "while I go for some kindlings." She went out, thin, stooped, her long, lean fingers fumbling with her apron; and she came back more bent than before. She put the wood down with a sigh. "A body's never done," she said.

Anna looked after the milk, all in a gentle phlegm. Her mother cooked, cleaned, scrubbed, carried water, fetched wood, set the house to rights; in order to keep Anna fresh and plump until she was married. Anna, plump and wealthy, was a good match for any one: old Mr. Frye used to smile when he saw her. "Smooth and sweet," he used to say: "molasses . . . hm . . ."

Now she stood dreaming by the stove, until her mother, climbing from the cellar, woke her with a clatter of coal. "Why, you big, awkward girl," cried Mrs. Barly, "whatever are you dreaming about?"

Anna thought to herself: "I was dreaming of a thousand things. But when I went to look at them . . . there was nothing left."

"Nothing," she said aloud.

"Then," said her mother doubtfully, "you might help me shell peas."

The two women sat down together, a wooden bowl between them. The pods split under their fingers, click, cluck; the peas fell into the bowl like shot at first, dull as the bowl grew full. Click, cluck, click, cluck . . . Anna began to dream again. "Oh, do wake up," said her mother; "one would think . . ."

Anna's hands went startled into the peas. "I must be in love," she said with half a smile.



Mrs. Barly sighed. “Ak,” she said.

Anna began to laugh. After a while she asked, “Do you think I’m in love?”

“Like as not,” said her mother.

“Well, then,” Anna cried, “I’m not in love at all—not now.”

Mrs. Barly let her fingers rest idly along the rim of the bowl. “When I was a girl . . .” she began. Then it was Anna’s turn to sigh.

“It seems like yesterday,” remarked Mrs. Barly, who wanted to say, “I am still a young woman.”

Anna split pods gravely, her eyes bent on her task. The tone of her mother’s voice, tart and dry, filled her mind with the sulky thoughts of youth. “There’s fewer alive to-day,” she said, “than when you were a girl.”



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Mrs. Barly knew very well what her daughter meant. "Be glad there's any left," she replied, as she turned again to her shelling.

Anna's round, brown finger moved in circles through the peas. "I'm too young to marry," she said, at last.

"No younger than what I was."

But it seemed to Anna as though life had changed since those days. For every one was reaching for more. And Anna, too, wanted more . . . more than her mother had had. "If I wait," she said in a low voice, "to . . . see a bit of life . . . what's the harm?"

The pod in Mrs. Barly's hand cracked with a pop, and trembled in the air, split open like the covers of a book. "I declare," she exclaimed, "I don't know what to think . . . well . . . wait . . . I suppose you want to be like Mrs. Wicket?"

"No, I don't," said Anna.

"Yes," said Mrs. Barly, in a shaking voice, "yes . . . wait . . . you'll see a bit of something . . . a taste of the broom, perhaps. . . ."

While the two women looked after the house, the hired men worked in the fields, under the hot sun, their wet, cotton shirts open at the neck, their faces shaded with wide straw hats. Farmer Barly leaned against one side of a tumbled-down wooden fence, and old Mr. Crabbe against the other.

"This year," said Farmer Barly, "I'm going to put up a silo in my barn. And instead of straw to cover it, I'm going to plant oats on top."

"Go along," said Mr. Crabbe.

"Well, it's a fact," said Mr. Barly. "I'm building now, back of the cows."

"Digging, you might say," corrected Mr. Crabbe.

"Building, by God," said Mr. Barly.

Mr. Crabbe tilted back his head and cast a look of wonder at the sky. "A hole is a hole," he said finally.

"So it is," agreed Mr. Barly, "so it is. It takes a Republican to find that out." And, greatly amused at his own wit, Mr. Barly, who was a Democrat, slapped his knee and burst out laughing.



“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Crabbe solemnly, with pious joy, “I’m a Republican . . . a good Republican, Mr. Barly, like my father before me.” He smote his fist into his open palm. “I’ll vote the Democrats blue in the face. If a man can’t vote for his own advantage, what’s the ballot for? I say let’s mind our own business. And let me get my hands on what I want.”

“Get what you can,” said Mr. Barly.

“And the devil take the hindmost.”

“It’s all the same to me,” quoth Mr. Barly, “folks being mostly alike as two peas.”

Mr. Crabbe spat into the stubble. “The way I look at it,” he said, “it’s like this: first, there’s me; and then there’s you. That’s the way I look at it, Mr. B.”

And he went home to repeat to his wife what he had said to Farmer Barly. “I gave it to him,” he declared.

In another field, Abner and John Henry, who had been to war, also discussed politics. They agreed that the pay they received for their work was inadequate. It seemed to them to be the fault of the government, which was run for the benefit of others besides themselves.



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That afternoon, Mr. Jeminy, with Boethius under his arm, came into Frye's General Store, to buy a box of matches for Mrs. Grumble. As he paid for them, he said to Thomas Frye, who had been his pupil in school: "These little sticks of wood need only a good scratch to confuse me, for a moment, with the God of Genesis. But they also encourage Mrs. Grumble to burn, before I come down in the morning, the bits of paper on which I like to scribble my notes."

At that moment, old Mrs. Ploughman entered the store to buy a paper of pins. "Well," she cried, "don't keep me waiting all day." But when Mr. Jeminy was gone, she said to Thomas Frye, "I guess I don't want any pins. What was it I wanted?"

Presently she went home again, without having bought anything. "It's all the fault of that old man," she said to herself; "he mixes a body up so."

On his way home Mr. Jeminy passed, at the edge of the village, the little cottage where the widow Wicket lived with her daughter. Seeing Mrs. Wicket in the garden, he stopped to wave his hand. Under her bonnet, the young woman looked up at him, her plain, thin face flushed with her efforts in the garden patch. "I've never seen such weeds," she cried. "You'd think . . . I don't know what you'd think. They grow and grow . . ."

Mr. Jeminy went up the hill toward his house, carrying the box of matches. As he walked, the little white butterflies, which danced above the road, kept him company; and all about him, in the meadows, among the daisies, the beetles, wasps, bees, and crickets, with fifes, flutes, drums, and triangles, were singing joyously together the Cantic of the Sun:

"Praised be the Lord God with all his creatures, but especially our brother, the sun . . . fair he is, and shines, with a very great splendor . . ."

"Praised be the Lord for our sister, the moon, and for the stars, which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.

". . . (and) for our brother, the wind, and for air and cloud, calm and all weather . . ."

". . . (and) for our mother, the earth, which does sustain us and keep us . . ."

"Praised be the Lord for all those who pardon one another . . . and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably shall endure . . ."

Slowly, to the tonkle of herds in pasture, the crowing of cocks, and the thin, clear clang of the smithy, the full sun sank in the west. For a time all was quiet, as night, the shadow of the earth, crept between man and God.

After supper Thomas Frye, in his father's wagon, went to call on Anna Barly.



From her porch where she sat hidden by vines which gave forth an odor sweeter than honey, the night was visible, pale and full of shadows. To the boy beside her, timid and ardent, the silence of her parents seemed, like the night, to be full of opinions.

“Well . . . shall we go for a ride?”



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Anna called in to her mother, "I'm going for a ride with Tom."

"Don't be late," said her mother.

The two went down the path, and climbed into the buggy; soon the yellow lantern, swung between its wheels, rolled like a star down the road to Milford.

"Why so quiet, Tom?"

"Am I, Ann?"

"Angry?"

"Just thinking . . . so to say."

"Oh." And she began to hum under her breath.

"I was just thinking," he said again.

Then, solemnly, he added, "about things."

"About you and me," he wound up finally.

When she offered him a penny for his thoughts, he said, "Well . . . nothing."

"Dear me."

At his hard cluck the wagon swept forward. "You know what I was thinking," he said.

"Do I?" asked Anna innocently.

"Don't you?"

"Perhaps."

So they went on through the dark, under the trees, to Milford. When their little world, smelling of harness, came to a halt in front of the drug store, they descended to quench their thirst with syrup, gas, milk, and lard. Then, with dreamy faces, they made their way to the movies.

Now their hands are clasped, but they do not notice each other. For they do not know where they are; they imagine they are acting upon the screen. It is a mistake which charms and consoles them both. "How beautiful I am," thinks Anna drowsily, watching Miss Gish. "And how elegant to be in love."

Later Anna will say to herself: "Other people's lives are like that."



On the way home she sat smiling and dreaming. The horse ran briskly through the night mist; and the wheels, rumbling over the ground, turned up the thoughts of simple Thomas Frye, only to plow them under again.

“Ann,” he said when they were more than half-way home, “don’t you care for me . . . any more?” As he spoke, he cut at the black trees with his long whip.

“Yes, I do, Tom.”

“As much as you did?”

“Just as much.”

“More, Ann?”

“Maybe.”

“Then . . . will you? Say, will you, Ann?”

“I don’t know, Tom. Don’t ask me. Please.”

“But I’ve got to ask you,” he cried.

“Oh, what’s the good.” And she looked away, to where the faint light of the lantern fled along beside them, over the trees.

“Is it,” he said slowly, “is it no?”

“Well, then—no.”

Thomas was silent. At last he asked, “Is it a living man, Ann?”

“No,” said Anna.

“Is it a dead man, now?”

Anna moved uneasily. “No, it isn’t,” she said. “Tisn’t anybody.”

But Thomas persisted. “Would it be Noel, if he warn’t dead in France?”

“Maybe.”

“You’re not going to keep on thinking of him, are you?”

“I don’t plan to.”

“Then—” and Thomas came back to the old question once more, “why not?”



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“Why not what?”

“Take me, then?”

“Well,” she said vaguely, “I’m too young.”

“I’d wait.”

“Wouldn’t help any. I want so much, Tom . . . you couldn’t give me all I want.”

He said, “What is it I couldn’t give you?”

“I don’t know, Tom . . . I want what other people have . . . experiences . . .”

At his bitter laugh, she was filled with pity for herself. “Is it so funny?” she asked. “I don’t care.”

“Whatever’s got into you, Ann?”

“I don’t know there’s anything got into me beyond I don’t want to grow old—and dry. . . .”

“I don’t see as you can help it any.”

But Anna was tipsy with youth: she swore she’d be dead before she was old.

“Hush, Ann.”

“Why should I hush?” she asked. “It’s the truth.”

“It’s a lie, that’s what it is,” said Thomas.

“Do you hate me, Tom?” she said. And she sat looking steadily before her.

“I don’t know what’s got into you. You act so queer.”

“I want to be happy,” she whispered.

“Then . . . you can do as you like for all of me.”

But as they rode along in silence, wrapped in mist, she drew closer to him, all her reckless spirit gone. “There . . . you’ve made me cry,” she said, and put her hand, cold and moist, into his.

“Aren’t you going to kiss me, Tom?”



He slapped the reins bitterly across his horse's back. "What's the good of that?" he asked, in turn.

"Perhaps," she said faintly, "there isn't any. Oh, I don't know . . . what's the difference?"

And so they rode on in silence, with pale cheeks and strange thoughts.

IV

MR. JEMINY BUILDS A HOUSE OUT OF BOXES

Mr. Jeminy liked to call on Mrs. Wicket, whose little cottage, at the edge of the village, on the way to Milford, had belonged to Eben Wicket for nearly fifty years. Now it belonged to the widow of Eben's son, John. Mr. Jeminy remembered John Wicket as a boy in school. He was a rogue; his head was already so full of mischief, that it was impossible to teach him anything. So he was not much wiser when he left school, than when he entered it. However, Mr. Jeminy was satisfied with his instruction. "With more knowledge," the old schoolmaster thought to himself, "he might do a great deal of harm in the world. So perhaps it is just as well for him to be ignorant." And he consoled himself with this reflection.

A year later John Wicket ran away from home, taking with him the money which his father kept in a stone jug in the kitchen. Old Mr. Wicket refused to send after him. "I didn't need the money," he said, "and I don't need him. Well, they're both gone."

But after a while, since his son was no longer there to plague him, he began to feel proud of him. "An out and out scamp," he said, with relish. "Never seen the like."

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John Wicket was gone for three years, no one knew where. At last Eben received news of him again. His son, who had been living all this time in a nearby village, fell from a ladder and broke his neck. "Just," said Eben Wicket, "as I expected."

No one, however, expected to see his widow come to live with her father-in-law. The old man himself went to fetch her and her year-old child. She proved to be a small, plain body, with an air of fright about her, as though life had surprised her. Out of respect for Eben, as they put it, the gossips went to call. They found her shy, and inclined to be silent; they drank their tea, and examined her with curiosity, while she, for her part, seemed to want to hide away.

"As who wouldn't, in her place," said Mrs. Ploughman.

It was agreed that, having married an out-and-out rascal, she ought to be willing to spend the remainder of her life quietly. So she was left to herself, which seemed, on the face of it, to be about what she wanted. She tended Eben's house, drove the one cow to pasture, and sang to little Juliet from morning till night the songs she remembered from her own childhood.

During that time no one had any fault to find with her, excepting old Mrs. Crabbe, who thought she should have called her child Mary instead of Juliet. "It's not a proper name," she said to Mrs. Tomkins. "It isn't in the Bible, Mrs. Tomkins. You'd do as well to call the child Salomy. Salomy's in the Bible."

When Eben Wicket died, early in 1917, he left his house and about an acre of land to his daughter-in-law. She was poor; still, she had enough to get along on. She was young, but every one thought of her as a woman whose life was over. So when Noel Ploughman took to keeping company with her, the gossips were all aflitter. It was June; the regulars were on their way to France; and what with the war, and Mrs. Wicket, the village had plenty to talk about. Old Mrs. Ploughman said nothing, but regarded her friends with a gloomy and thoughtful air. On the other hand, Miss Beal, the dressmaker, saw no reason to keep her opinions to herself. "It's a scandal," she said to her friend Mrs. Grumble; "what with Eben Wicket scarcely cold in his grave, and John a thief, with his neck broke and heaven only knows what else besides."

Nevertheless, that summer Noel Ploughman's sober, honest face was often to be seen in Mrs. Wicket's garden patch, among the beans and the lettuces. Who can say what they found in one another to admire? In his company she was both happy and regretful, while he, seeing her by turns quiet and gay, could not determine which he found more charming. They talked over the weather together, and discussed the crops. Love comes slowly in the north; there is time for every one to take a hand in it. August passed without either having mentioned what was in their hearts. Then Mrs. Ploughman made up her mind to put an end to it. One day, when Noel was in Milford, she came to call on Mrs. Wicket. One can imagine what she said to the young woman,



who was already a mother and a widow. The next day Mrs. Wicket appeared in her garden, pale and composed. Those who had occasion to pass the little cottage at the edge of the village, remarked that she no longer hummed under her breath the gay tunes of her childhood.



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“Her sin has found her out,” said Miss Beal. “She’s fallen by the way.”

“You’d think,” said Mrs. Crabbe, “she’d behave herself a speck, after the life she’s had.”

Mrs. Grumble also was of the opinion that Mrs. Wicket had done wrong in allowing herself to care for Noel Ploughman. For it seemed to the gossips that Mrs. Wicket’s life was, by rights, no longer her own to do with. She was the earthly remains of a sinner; she had no right to enjoy herself.

Two days later Noel Ploughman enlisted, “for the duration of the war.” His grandmother accepted the congratulations of Mrs. Crabbe and the sympathy of Mrs. Barly with equal satisfaction. It seemed to her that she had done her duty as she saw it. But when Noel was killed in France a year later, she felt that Mrs. Wicket had killed him. “Now,” she croaked to Mrs. Crabbe, “I hope she’s satisfied.”

She seemed to be; she took the news of Noel’s death with curious calm. It was almost as if she had been expecting it, looking for it . . . one might have thought she had been waiting for it. . . . After a while, she began to sing again. Her voice, as she crooned to Juliet, was musical, but quavery. It provoked the good women of the village, who began to think that perhaps, after all, she had “had her way.” “There’s this much about it,” said Miss Beal; “no one else will have him now.”

Mrs. Grumble agreed with her. She disliked Mrs. Wicket because Mr. Jeminy liked her. He pitied the young woman who had had the misfortune to marry a thief, and he forgave her for wanting to be happy, because it did not seem to him that to have been the wife of a good-for-nothing was much to settle down on. In his opinion, life owed her more than she had got.

“She is simple and kind,” he said to Mrs. Grumble. “She has had very little to give thanks for.”

“She’ll have more, then, if she can,” replied Mrs. Grumble with a toss of her head as though to say, “it’s you who are simple.”

And she looked the other way, when they met on the road. Mr. Jeminy, on the other hand, often went to call at the little house at the edge of the village. The young widow, who had no other callers, felt that one friend was enough when he talked as much as Mr. Jeminy. While he laid open before her the great books of the past, illuminating their pages with his knowledge and reflections, she listened with an air of tranquil pleasure. She counted the stitches on her sewing, and answered “sakes alive,” in the pauses.

One day in April she put on her best dress, and took the stage to Milford. When she came home again, in the evening, she brought with her a decorated shell for her friend. But it happened that Thomas Frye also came home from Milford, by the same stage.



That was what Mrs. Grumble was waiting for. “Now she’s at it again,” said Mrs. Grumble. “She’s bound to have some one,” she declared; “one or another, it’s all the same.” And she gazed meaningly at Mr. Jeminy, who started at once for his den, as though he were looking for something.

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Then she was delighted with herself, and retired to the kitchen.

It was useless for Mr. Jeminy to retreat to his den. For sooner or later, Mrs. Grumble always found something to do there. She would come in with her broom and her mop, and look around. Then Mr. Jeminy would walk hastily out of the house and descend to the village. There, it would occur to him to call on Mrs. Wicket, because he happened to have with him a book he thought she would like to look at, or a flower for Juliet. Mrs. Wicket received each book with gratitude, and looked to see if there were any pictures in it, before giving it back again. Juliet, on the other hand, wished to know the names of all the flowers. When Mr. Jeminy repeated their names in Latin, from the text-book on botany, she clapped her hands, and jumped up and down, because it was so comical.

Now, in August, Mr. Jeminy was building her a doll's house in Mrs. Wicket's tumbledown barn. It was the sort of work he liked to engage in; no one expected him to be accurate, it was only necessary to use his imagination. But Juliet, swinging her legs on top of the feed bin, regarded him with round and serious eyes. For in Juliet's opinion, Mr. Jeminy was involved in a difficult task; and she was afraid he might not be able to go through with it.

"How many rooms," she said, "is my doll's house going to have?"

"I had counted," said Mr. Jeminy, "on two." And he went over the plans, using his hammer as a pointer. "Here is the bedroom," he said, "and there is the kitchen. There's where the stove is going to be."

Juliet followed him without interest. It was apparent that she was disappointed.

"Where's the parlor?" she demanded.

"Must there be a parlor?" asked Mr. Jeminy, in surprise.

"What do you think?" said Juliet. "I have to have a place for Anna to keep company in."

Anna was the youngest of her three dolls; that is to say, Anna was smaller than either Sara or Margaret. It seemed to Juliet that to be without a parlor was to lack elegance. Mr. Jeminy rubbed his chin. "Isn't Anna very young," he asked, "to keep company in the parlor?"

"No, she isn't," said Juliet.

Then, as Mr. Jeminy made no reply, she added, "She's six, going on seven."

Mr. Jeminy sighed. "Is she indeed?" he remarked absently. "It is a charming age. I wish I were able to see the world again through the eyes of six, going on seven. What a noble world it would seem, full of pleasant people."

“So,” declared Juliet, “we have to have a parlor.”

However, she could not sit still very long.

Presently she hopped down from the feed bin. “Look,” she said, “this is the way to fly.” She began to dance about, waving her arms. “This,” she declared, “is the way the bees go.” And she ran up and down, crying “buzz, buzz.”

She decided to play house, by herself. Arranging her three dolls, made of rags and sawdust, on top of the bin, she stood before them, with her fingers in her mouth. Then all at once she began to play.



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“My goodness,” she exclaimed, “I’m surprised at you. Look at your clothes, every which way. Margaret, do sit up. And Sara—you’ll be the death of me, with all my work to do yet, and everything.”

“How do you do, Mrs. Henry Stove,” she added, addressing a three-legged stool, “come right in and sit down.

“Terrible hot weather we’re having. Worst I ever see.”

She moved busily about, humming a song to herself. “I declare, it’s time you went to school, children,” she said finally, stopping to look at her family.

Without trouble, she became the school teacher. Propping her three dolls more firmly against the wall, she took her stand directly in front of them. “Do you know your lessons, children?” she asked. Then she squeaked back to herself, “Yes, ma’am.”

“Well, then, Margaret, what’s the best cow for butter?”

Mr. Jeminy began to laugh. But almost at once he became serious and confused. For it occurred to him that he did not know what cow was best for butter. “This child,” he thought, “who cannot tell me why it is necessary to take two apples from four apples, is nevertheless able to distinguish between one cow and another. She is wiser than I am.”

He stood gazing thoughtfully at Juliet, and smiling. The sun of late afternoon, already about to sink in the west, was shining through the window, covered with dust and cobwebs. And Mr. Jeminy, watching the dust dancing in the sun, thought to himself: “I should like to stay here; it is peaceful and friendly. I should like to help Mrs. Wicket plant her little garden in the spring, and plow it under in the autumn. Now it is growing late and I must go home again.”

Juliet had tired of her play. “Tell me a story,” she said. “Tell me about the war, Mr. Jeminy. Tell me about Noel Ploughman.”

But Mr. Jeminy shook his head. “No,” he said, “it is time to drive your mother’s cow home from the fields. Some other day I will tell you about the great wars of old, fought for no other reason than glory and empire, which disappointed no one, except the vanquished. But there is no time now. Come; we will go for the cow together.”

Hand in hand they went down the road toward Mr. Crabbe’s field, where Mrs. Wicket rented pasturage for her cow. The sun was sinking above the trees; and they heard, about them, in the fields, the silence of evening, the song of the crickets and cicadas.

They found the cows gathered at the pasture bars, with sweet, misty breath, their bells clashing faintly as they moved. “Go ’long,” cried Juliet, switching her little rod, to single out her own. And to the patter of hoofs and the tonkle of bells, they started home again.

Mrs. Wicket, in the kitchen, watched them from her window, in the clear, fading light. "How good he is," she thought. And she turned, with a smile and a sigh, to set the table for Juliet's supper.



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Juliet was singing along the roadside. "A tisket," she sang, "a tasket, a green and yellow basket . . ." And she chanted, to a tune of her own, an old verse she had once heard Mr. Jeminy singing:

When I was a young man,
I said, bright and bold,
I would be a great one,
When I was old.

When I was a young man,
But that was long ago,
I sang the merry old songs
All men know.

When I was a young man,
When I was young and smart,
I think I broke a mirror,
Or a girl's heart.

Mr. Jeminy walked in the middle of the road, under the dying sky, already lighted by the young moon, in the west. As he walked, the fresh air of evening, blowing on his face, with its sweet odors, the twilight notes of birds among the leaves, the faint acclaim of bells, and Juliet's childish singing, filled his heart with unaccustomed peace, moved him with gentle and deliberate joy. He remembered the voices he had heard in the little schoolhouse in the spring.

"Jeminy, what are you doing?"

Then Mr. Jeminy raised his head to the sky, in which the first stars of night were to be seen.

"I am very busy now," he said, proudly.

V

RAIN

From her dormer window, Anna Barly peered out at the wet, gray morning. The ground was sopping, the trees black with the night's drenching. In the orchard a sparrow sang an uncertain song; and she heard the comfortable drip, drip, drip from the eaves. It was damp and fresh at the window; the breeze, cold and fragrant after rain, made her shiver. She drew her wrapper closer about her throat, and sat staring out across the sodden lawn, with idle thoughts for company.



She thought that she was young, and that the world was old: that rain belonged to youth. Old age should sit in the sun, but youth was best of all in bad weather. "There's no telling where you are in the rain. And there's no one spying, for every one's indoors, keeping dry." Yes, youth is quite a person in the rain.

With slim, lazy fingers, she began to braid her long, fair hair. It seemed to her that folks were always peering and prying, to make sure that every one else was like themselves. "You're doing different than what I did," they said.

Anna wanted to "do different." Yet she was without courage or wisdom. And because she was sulky and heedless, Mrs. Ploughman called her Sara Barly's rebellious daughter. As Mrs. Ploughman belonged to the Methodist side of the town, Mrs. Tomkins was usually ready to disagree with her. But on this occasion, all Mrs. Tomkins could think to say, was: "Well, that's queer."

"But what's she got to be rebellious over?" she asked, peering brightly at Mrs. Ploughman.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Ploughman, "she's sorry she wasn't born a boy."

"Well," cried Mrs. Tomkins, "I never heard of such a thing."



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"There's lots you never heard of, Mrs. Tomkins," said Mrs. Ploughman.

"And plenty I never hope to hear," said Mrs. Tomkins promptly. "My life!"

After breakfast, Anna helped her mother with the housework. She took a hand in making the beds, and put her own room in order by tumbling everything into the closet and shutting the door. Then she went into the kitchen to help with the lunch. When Mrs. Barly saw her dreaming over the carrots, she asked:

"What are you gaping at now?"

"Nothing."

Then Mrs. Barly grew vexed. "You're not feeble-minded, I hope," she said.

"No, I'm not," said Anna.

"I'm glad of that," said Mrs. Barly.

When Anna said that she was not thinking of anything, she believed that she was telling the truth. But as a matter of fact, she was thinking of Thomas Frye. She wanted him to be in love with her, although she said to herself: "I am not in love with any one." Sometimes she thought that her heart was buried in France, with Noel Ploughman. However, she was mistaken. The tear she dropped in secret over his death, was for her own youth, out of her timid, clumsy, sweet-and-sour feelings.

In the afternoon she went for a walk. The rain, starting again after breakfast, had stopped, but the sky was still overcast, the air damp and searching. From the trees overhead as she passed, icy drops rained down upon her; she felt the silence all about her, and saw, from the rises, the gray hills, the rolling mist, and the low clouds, trailing above the woods, now light, now dark.

She was disappointed because life was no different than it was. She had hoped to find it as delightful as in those happy days before the war, when she played at kissing games and twined dandelion wreaths in her hair. But now it did not amuse her to play at post-office; she was sad because she was no longer able to be gay. As she passed the little cottage belonging to Mrs. Wicket, she thought to herself: "Yes, you've seen something of life. But not what I want to see, exactly. Look at you." Like Mrs. Grumble, she believed that Mrs. Wicket had nothing more to live for. "There you are," she said, "and there you'll be. Life doesn't mean even as much as a hayride, so far as you're concerned.

"You, God," she cried, "put something in my way, just once."



At that moment Juliet, who had been peeking out from behind the house, came skipping down the path to the road. As she drew near, her progress became slower; finally she stood still, and balanced herself on one leg, like a stork.

“Hello,” she said. Then she looked up and down the road, to see what there was to talk about.

“I have a little house Mr. Jeminy made me out of boxes,” she said at last.

“No,” said Anna.

“Well, that’s a fact,” said Juliet, who had once heard Mr. Frye say, “Well, that’s a fact,” to Mr. Crabbe.



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“My goodness,” said Anna, “isn’t that elegant?” And she looked down at Juliet, who was staring solemnly up at her.

“Yes, it is,” said Juliet.

“What were you doing,” asked Anna, “when I came along?”

“I was playing going to Milford,” said Juliet. “Do you want to play with me?”

It seemed to Juliet that playing was something for any one to do.

Anna began to laugh. She had a mind to say, “Do you think I’m as little as you are?” But instead, she found herself thinking, “Oh, my, wouldn’t it be fun.”

“Why,” she cried, “I declare, I do want to play with you.”

“All right,” said Juliet. And she turned soberly back to the barn, behind the house. But Anna sat down in the grass. “Just you wait,” she said, “till I get my shoes and stockings off. I’m going to play proper.”

Presently their happy voices, linked in laughter, rose from behind the house, where Juliet was showing Anna how to play store. She tied her apron around her little belly, and came forward rubbing her hands. “Would you like some nice licorice?” she asked. “Everything’s very dear.”

When she was tired of playing store, she began to imitate old Mrs. Tomkins, the carpenter’s wife. “This is the way to have the rheumatism,” she said. And she hopped around on one foot.

After they were through playing, they sat quietly together in the hay, in the barn, without anything more to say. Anna was warm and happy; she wanted to hug Juliet, to hold her tight, to rock up and down with her. “There,” she thought, “if I only had one like her.”

“What are you thinking about?” she asked, to tease her.

“I was just thinking,” said Juliet, “it’s fun to play with people.”

Anna felt her heart give a sudden twist. “Why, you dear, odd little thing,” she cried. And taking the child in her arms, she covered the tiny head with kisses. But Juliet drew away.

“I’m not little,” she said. “I’m old.”



“So am I old,” said Anna. She felt the joy run out of her; it left her empty. “I expect everybody in the world is old,” she said. She watched her hands move about in the hay like great spiders.

“Is it fun to be old, do you think?” asked Juliet.

“I don’t know,” said Anna. “I don’t expect it is, much.”

“Mother is old,” said Juliet. “What do old people do?”

Anna looked out through the barn door across the wet fields, the drenched hillsides, shrouded in mist. “I don’t know,” she said. And she got up to go home.

“Well, good-by,” said Juliet.

Just then Mrs. Wicket came in from the road, with a basket on her arm. When she saw Anna standing in front of the barn she grew pink and confused. For she thought that Anna had come to call on her. “Good afternoon,” she said. “I was out. I’m real sorry. Won’t you come in?”

“Oh, no,” said Anna. “I was going on . . . I only stopped for a minute. . . .”



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And without another word she ran down the path, and out of the gate. Mrs. Wicket stood looking after her in silence. Then, with a sigh, she turned, and went indoors. But Anna ran and ran until she was tired. As she ran she kept saying to herself, over and over, "I won't be like that, I won't, I won't."

It seemed to her as though she were running away from Hillsboro itself, running away from Mrs. Wicket, from her mother, from Thomas Frye, from Anna Barly, from everything she wouldn't be. . . .

"I won't," she cried, "I won't, I won't, I won't, I won't."

"Never."

Mr. Jeminy, who was seated on his coat by the side of the road, got up with a smile. "Well, Anna Barly," he said.

"Ak," she whispered, clapping both hands to her mouth, "how you scared me." She could feel her heart beating with fright; her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears. She stood staring at Mr. Jeminy, who stared gravely back at her. "Are you going to run away from me, too?" he asked, at last.

"No," said Anna. Then, all at once, she burst out crying. "I can't help it," she cried, between her sobs. "I can't help it. Don't look at me."

"No," said Mr. Jeminy, "I won't." And he gazed up at the tree tops, dark and sharp against the cold, gray sky.

Anna cried herself out. Then pale and ashamed, she started home again with Mr. Jeminy. "I don't know what got into me," she said. "I don't know what you'll think."

"I think," declared Mr. Jeminy, looking up at the sky, "I think—why, I think this wet weather will pass, Anna Barly. Yes, to-morrow will be cold and clear."

Anna did not answer him. She was tired; she had played, she had cried, now she wanted to rest.

In Frye's General Store, Mr. Frye and Mr. Crabbe were disputing a game of checkers. They sat opposite each other, stared at the checkerboard, and stroked their chins. Farmer Barly stood watching them. He puffed on his pipe, and nodded his head at every move. But all the while he was thinking about Anna. "Pretty near time she was settling down," he thought.

Mr. Frye jumped over two, and leaned back in his chair with a satisfied smile. The hops of his own men put him into the best of humor. It was not that he wanted to win; he only wanted to do all the jumping. "Let me do the taking," he would have said, "and you can



do the winning.” When Mr. Crabbe hopped over three in a row, Mr. Frye became gloomy. He felt that Mr. Crabbe was getting all the pleasure. “You’re too spry for me,” he said. “You’re like a flea. Well. . . .”

“It’s your turn, Mr. F.,” said Mr. Crabbe.

Mr. Frye looked at the board with distaste. There were no more jumps for him to make. He pushed a round black checker forward.

“There you are,” he said.

“Here I go,” declared Mr. Crabbe. And he began hopping again.

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Mr. Frye shook his head. "I don't know as I'm feeling very good to-day," he told Farmer Barly.

As he was speaking, Anna Barly entered the store, on her way home. Thomas Frye, who was behind the counter, came forward to meet her. When she saw him, her cheeks, which were pale, grew red. "He can see I was crying," she thought. "Well, I don't care. I hate him. What did I stop for?"

She remembered that her mother had wanted a spool of white cotton. "Number eleven," she said.

When she saw her father and Mr. Frye in the corner, she grew sulkier than ever. "They're just laying to settle me down," she thought. And turning to hide her face, still stained with tears, she made believe to wave to some one, out the window.

Mr. Crabbe took another man. "Tsck," said Mr. Frye; "maybe I'd better go and see what Anna wants. Thomas don't appear to know what he's about."

"Leave them be," said Mr. Crabbe, "leave them be." And he winked first at Mr. Barly, and then at Mr. Frye. "Don't go spoiling things," he said.

Mr. Frye allowed his mouth to droop in a thin smile. "Young people are slow to-day," he remarked. "They act like they had something on their minds. Green fruit . . . slow to ripe. In my time we went at it smarter." And he looked thoughtfully at Anna Barly. He saw her in the form of acres of land, live stock, farm buildings, and money in the bank. "Molasses," he thought; "yes, sir, molasses. Maple sugar." But when he looked at his son Thomas, he frowned. "Go on," he wanted to say, "go on, you slowpoke."

Farmer Barly also frowned at Thomas Frye. He felt that he was being hurried. "She's well enough where she is," he thought. "She's young yet. A year or two more . . ."

"Well," said Mr. Crabbe, "I look forward to the day." And he waved his hand kindly in the air. "It's your move, Mr. F."

Mr. Frye arose, and walked toward the door, where Thomas was bidding Anna good-by. "See you to-night," Thomas whispered; "heh, Anna?"

"Please yourself," said Anna. And off she went, without looking at Mr. Frye, who had come to speak to her. When she was gone, Mr. Frye gave his son a keen glance. In it was both curiosity and malice. But Thomas turned away. It seemed to him that women must have been easier to understand when his father was young. For no one could understand them now.



While the storekeeper's back was turned, Mr. Crabbe rearranged the checkerboard. He took up two of Mr. Frye's men and put them in his pocket. Then he winked at Mr. Barly, as though to say: "I'm just a leetle too smart for him."

Farmer Barly winked back. It amused him to have Mr. Frye beaten unfairly. Mr. Frye wanted to get his daughter away from him. "Well," he said in his mind, to Mr. Frye, "just go easy. Just go easy, Mr. Frye." And he winked again at Mr. Crabbe. "That's right," he said, "give it to him."

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When Mr. Jeminy left Anna, at the edge of the village, he went to call on Grandmother Ploughman. He found her in the company of old Mrs. Crabbe, who had brought her knitting over, for society's sake. Mrs. Ploughman received him with quiet dignity, due to a sense of the wrong she had suffered, for which she blamed Mrs. Wicket, and the Democratic Party. Mr. Ploughman, she often said, had been a good Republican all his life. Unfortunately, he was dead; otherwise, things would have been different.

It seemed to her that the country was being run by a set of villains. "The world is in a bad way," she declared. "I don't know what we're coming to." And an expression of bleak satisfaction illuminated her face, wrinkled with age.

"Yes," said Mr. Jeminy, "these are unhappy times. I am afraid we are leaving behind us a difficult task for those who follow. They had a right to expect better things of us, Mrs. Ploughman."

"I've not left anything behind," said Mrs. Ploughman decidedly; "not yet."

"I should hope not," ejaculated Mrs. Crabbe. "No."

"It's the young," said Mrs. Ploughman, "who get the old into trouble. Nothing ever suits them until they're in mischief; and then it's up to their elders to pull them out again. I know, for I've seen it, father and son."

"It is the old," said Mr. Jeminy, "who get the young into trouble."

"Is it, indeed?" said Mrs. Ploughman.

"Well, I don't believe it." And she gave Mr. Jeminy a bright, peaked look.

"Then," she continued, "when you've done for them, year in and year out, off they go, and that's the end of it."

"Ah, yes," croaked Mrs. Crabbe; "off they go."

"If it isn't one thing," said Mrs. Ploughman, "it's another. Trouble and death—that's a woman's lot in this world, like the Good Book says."

"Death is the end of everything," remarked Mrs. Crabbe.

"I'm not afraid to die," Mrs. Ploughman declared. "There's things to do the other side of the grave, same as here. And it's a joy to do them, in the light of the Lord. I can tell you, Mrs. Crabbe, I won't be sorry to go. My folks are waiting there for me." Her voice trembled, and she rocked up and down to compose herself. "He needn't try to mix me up," she thought to herself; "not in my own home. No."



“Then,” said Mr. Jeminy, “you believe in an after life, Mrs. Ploughman?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Ploughman firmly, directing her remarks to Mrs. Crabbe, “I do. I believe there’s a life hereafter, when our sorrows will be repaid us. There weren’t all those hearts broke for nothing, Mrs. Crabbe, nor for what’s going on here now, with strikes, and famine, and bloody murders.”

“That’s real edifying, Mrs. Ploughman,” said Mrs. Crabbe, “real edifying. Yes,” she exclaimed with energy, “these are terrible times. Now they give me tea without sugar in it. For there’s no sugar to be had. Well, I won’t drink it. I spit it out, when nobody’s looking.”



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And she plied her needles with vigor, to show what she thought of such an arrangement.

“As I was saying,” said Mrs. Ploughman, “it’s the young who get the old into trouble. And artful folk, who’d ought to know better, with the life they’ve had. I’ve had no peace in this life. But I’ll have it hereafter.”

At this reflection upon Mrs. Wicket, Mr. Jeminy rose to go. “You are right,” he said; “no one will disturb you.” And he went home to Mrs. Grumble.

“Where have you been all day?” she demanded.

Mr. Jeminy smiled. He knew that Mrs. Grumble thought he had been spending the afternoon at Mrs. Wicket’s. “I have been to call on Mrs. Ploughman,” he said. “There I met old Mrs. Crabbe.”

Then Mrs. Grumble hurried out into the garden to pick a mess of young beans for supper, because Mr. Jeminy liked them better than squash. The bowl of squash she returned to the ice box. “I’ll eat it myself, to-morrow,” she thought.

“Supper will be a little late,” she said to Mr. Jeminy, “because the stove won’t draw in wet weather.”

VI

HARVEST

Mr. Jeminy, clad in a pair of brown, earthy overalls, a blue, cotton shirt, and a straw hat, full of holes, was helping Mr. Tomkins dig potatoes, up on Barly Hill. From the field on the slopes above the village, he could see the hills across the valley, misted in the sun. Above him stretched the shining sky, thronged with its winds, the low clouds of early autumn trailing their shadows across the woods. All was peace; he saw September’s yellow fields, and felt, on his face, the cool fall wind, with its smoke of burning leaves, mingled with the odor of spaded earth, and fresh manure.

With every toss of his fork he covered with earth the little piles of straw and ordure which Mr. Tomkins had spread on the ground. As he advanced in this manner, small flocks of sparrows rose before him, and flew away with dissatisfied cries. “Come,” he said to them, “the world does not belong to you. I believe you have never read the works of Epictetus, who says, ‘true education lies in learning to distinguish what is ours, from what does not belong to us.’ However, you have a more modern spirit; for you believe that whatever you see belongs to you, providing you are able to get hold of it.”



He was happy; in the warm, noon-day drowse, he felt, like Abraham, the grace of God within him, and found even in the humblest sparrow enough to afford him an opportunity to discuss morals with himself.

“There’ll be potatoes,” said Mr. Tomkins, “enough to last all winter for the two of us. That’s riches, Jeminy; where’s your talk now of the world being poor?”

“Some of these potatoes,” said Mr. Jeminy, bending over, “are rotted from the wet weather.”

“To-morrow,” said Mr. Tomkins, “I’ll borrow a harrow from Farmer Barly. And next spring I’ll plant corn here on the hill. Table corn, that is. Then we’ll have a corn-husking, Jeminy; you and I, and the rest of the young ones.” And he burst out laughing, in his high, cracked voice.

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“Do you remember the last corn-husking?” asked Mr. Jeminy. “It was in the autumn before the war. Anna Barly and Alec Stove lost themselves in the woods. And Elsie Cobbler burned her fingers. How she cried and carried on; Anna came running back, to see what it was all about. But before the evening was over, she was off again, with Noel Ploughman.”

Mr. Tomkins nodded his head. Timid in the presence of Mr. Jeminy’s books, he was happy and hearty in his own potato patch. “I remember,” he said. “I remember more than you do, Jeminy. I can look back to the first husking bee I ever was at. That was in ’62. A year later I shouldered a gun, and went off with the drafts of ’63. Your speaking of Noel put me in mind of it.

“When I got home again,” he continued, “there was nothing for me to do. In those days folks did their own work. Then there was time for everything. But the days are not as long as they used to be when I was young. Now there’s no time for anything.

“But Noel was a good man. He was handy, and amiable. He could lay a roof, or mend a thresher, it was all the same to him. What do you think, Jeminy? Anna Barly won’t forget him in a hurry—heh?”

“No,” said Mr. Jeminy; “no, Anna won’t forget him in a hurry. That is as it should be, William. She believes that she has suffered. And if she fools herself a little, I, for one, would be inclined to forgive her.”

“She won’t fool herself any,” said Mr. Tomkins; “not Anna. Wait and see.”

The shadows of late afternoon stretched half across the field when Mr. Jeminy laid down his fork, and started to return home. As he followed Mr. Tomkins down the hill, he saw the tops of the clouds lighted by the descending sun, and heard, across the valley, the harsh notes of a cow’s horn, calling the hands on Ploughman’s Farm in from the fields.

He stopped a moment at a shadowy spring, hidden away among the ferns, for a cup of cold, clear water. Holding the cup, made of tin, to his lips, he observed:

“Thus, of old, the farmer stooped to refresh himself. When he was done, he gave thanks to the rustic god, who watched his house, and protected his flocks. They were the best of friends; each was modest and reasonable. To-day God is like a dead ancestor; there is no way to argue with him.”

“I’m glad,” said Mr. Tomkins, “that the minister isn’t here to listen to you. Come along now; I’ve plenty still to do before supper. The widow Wicket’s gate is down. But I’ve promised to set a fence for Farmer Barly first.”



“You need help, William,” remarked Mr. Jeminy thoughtfully; “you need help. I must see what I can do.” And he went home, down the hill, after Mr. Tomkins.

The next day he started out early in the morning. When Mrs. Grumble asked him where he was going, he replied, “I must step over to Mr. Tomkins, to help him with something.”



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From Mr. Tomkins he borrowed a saw, a plane, a hammer, and a box of nails. Then he hurried off to mend Mrs. Wicket's gate. On the way he stopped to gather an armful of goldenrod for his friend, and also to pick a yellow aster for himself, from Mrs. Cobbler's garden.

When he arrived at Mrs. Wicket's cottage, the widow's pale face and listless manner, filled him with alarm. "I've been up with Juliet," she said. "The child has a touch of croup. It's nothing. She's better this morning." And she gave him her hand, still cold with the chill of night.

"Good heavens," exclaimed Mr. Jeminy; "I am sure Mrs. Grumble would have been glad to keep you company."

Mrs. Wicket smiled. But she did not answer this declaration, which Mr. Jeminy knew in his heart to be untrue.

Putting down his tools, he began to examine the gate. "Hm," he said. "Hm. Yes, I'll soon have this fixed for you." Mrs. Wicket stood watching him with a gentle smile. "You're very kind," she said. "It's very kind of you, Mr. Jeminy. Most folks are too proud to turn a hand for me, no matter what was to happen."

"Tut," said Mr. Jeminy.

"Well, it's a fact," said Mrs. Wicket gravely. "I've never felt loneliness like I do here. Not ever. Because I've had trouble, Mr. Jeminy, and known sorrow, folks leave me alone. I'd go away . . . only where would I go?"

"Sorrow," said Mr. Jeminy, "is a good friend, Mrs. Wicket. Sorrow and poverty are close to our hearts. They teach the spirit to be resolute and indulgent.

"One must also learn," he added, "to bear sorrow without being vexed by it."

"I've never had sorrow without being vexed by it," said Mrs. Wicket. "To my way of thinking, sorrow comes so full of troubles, it's hard to tell what's one, and what's the other."

"Sorrow," said Mr. Jeminy, "comes only to the humble and the wise. It is the emotion of a gentle and courageous spirit. But wherever trouble is found, there is also to be found envy, pride, and vanity. It is good to be humble, Mrs. Wicket; in humility lie the forces of peace. The humble heart is an impregnable fortress."

And he tapped his breast, as though to say, "Here is a whole army."

"Yes," she mused, "yes . . . but the heart's liable to break, too, after a while."



“Not the humble heart,” said Mr. Jeminy firmly. “No . . . you cannot break the humble heart.”

Mrs. Wicket stood gazing at the ground, twisting her apron with her hands. On her face was a look of pity for Mr. Jeminy, because she had heard that he was not to teach school any longer. “It will be a hard blow to him,” she thought.

“Few,” continued Mr. Jeminy, “go very long without their share of sorrow. And sorrow is not a light thing to bear, Mrs. Wicket. Poverty, also, falls to the lot of most of us; and it is not easy to be poor. Yet to be poor, to be sad, and to be brave, is indeed the best of life. He who wants little for himself, is a happy man. If he is wise, he will pity those who have more than they need. He will not envy them; he will see the trouble they are making for themselves. There is no end of pity in this world, Mrs. Wicket; like love, it makes rich men of us all.”



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Mrs. Wicket nodded her head. “Yes,” she said, “it’s a blessing to feel pity. It makes you strong, like. The humble heart is a power of strength.”

And she went back to Juliet, who had begun to cough again. Left to himself, Mr. Jeminy regarded the gate-post with a thoughtful air. But inwardly he was very much pleased with himself.

That year they kept harvest home before September was fairly done. In the meadows the hay, gathered in stacks, shone in the moonlight like little hills of snow; and in the shadows the crickets hopped and sang, repeating with shrill voices, the murmurs of lovers, hidden in the woods.

Anna Barly and her friends watched the moon come up along the road to Adams’ Forge. In Ezra Adams’ haywagon they were singing the harvest in. Their voices rolled across the fields in lovely glees, rose in the old, familiar songs, broke into laughter, and died away in whispers. Thus they renewed their interrupted youth, and celebrated the return of peace.

It was a cold, still night, with dew white as frost over the ground. Anna, huddled in the hay, could see her breath go out in fog; while the moon, shining in her face, seemed to veil in shadow the forms of her companions—Elsie Cobbler with her round, soft elbow over Brandon Adam’s face, Susie Ploughman murmuring to Alec Stove . . . She was chilly and wakeful; and watching the moon through miles of empty sky, heard, as if from far away, the singing up front, back of the driver’s seat, and Thomas, whispering at her side.

“What a grand night. Clear as a bell.”

“Yes,” said Anna, “It’s lovely.”

She lay back against the posts of the haywagon, her young face lifted to the sky. Her heart was full; the beauty of the night, the hoarse, familiar sounds, the shining, silent fields, and the pale, lofty sky, filled her with longing and regret. She closed her eyes; was it Noel, there, or Thomas? It was love, it was youth to be loved, to be held, to be hugged to her breast.

“Listen . . . they’re singing Love’s Old Sweet Song.”

The song died out, leaving the night quiet as before, cold, silvery, urgent. She drew nearer to him; he breathed the simple fragrance of her hair, and felt the faint warmth of her body, close to his. Then silence seized upon Thomas Frye; he grew sad without knowing why. The figures at his side, curled in the hay, seemed to him ghostly as a dream. Poor Thomas; he was addled with moonlight; moonlight over Anna, over him,



moonlight over the hills, over the road, and voices unseen in the shadows, and shadows unheard all around him.

“I could go on like this till the end of time.”

“Could you?”

“I could ride like this forever and ever.”

Anna lay quiet, lulled by the cold and the gentle movement of the wagon, now fast, now slow. “Together?” she asked. “Like this?”

“That’s what I mean.”



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His hand touched hers; their fingers twined about each other. "I know," said Anna. She, too, could have gone on forever, dreaming in the moonlight. Noel . . . Thomas . . . what was the difference? "Don't talk. Look at the trees, up against the moon. Look at my breath; there's a regular fog of it."

"Are you cold?" He bent to wrap the heavy blanket more snugly about her. He wanted to say: "You belong to me, and I belong to you." And at that moment, with all her heart, Anna wanted to belong to some one, wanted some one to belong to her . . .

"Thanks, Tom—dear."

The haywagon crossed the first rise, south of the village. Below the road, a rocky field swept downward to the woods, pale green and silver in the moonlight; and beyond, far off and faint, rose Barly Hill, with Barly's lamp burning as bright for all the distance, as if it hung just over those trees, still, and faint with shadows.

"See," said Anna, "there's our light."

But Thomas did not even lift his head to look. In the chilly, solemn, night air, he was warm and drowsy with his own silence, which being all too full of things to say was like to turn him into sugar with pure sorrow. And Anna, her round lips parted with desire, waited for him to speak, and held his hand tighter and tighter.

"Starlight," she murmured, "starbright, very first star I see to-night, wish I may, wish I might . . ."

"Sky's full of stars," said Thomas.

"Do you know what I wished?"

"Do I?"

"Don't you?"

He looked at her in silence; awkwardly, then, she drew him down, until her lips brushed his cheek.

"Look at Elsie," she murmured. "Did you ever?"

But Thomas would not look at Elsie; not until Anna had told him her wish. "Wish I may, wish I might . . ."

"Have the wish . . ."

But she would only whisper it in his ear.



Miles away, in Mrs. Wicket's cottage, Mr. Jeminy sat dreaming, and rocking up and down. He had come to keep an eye on Juliet, so that Mrs. Wicket could sit with Mrs. Tomkins, who was feeling poorly. While Juliet, at his feet, played with her dolls, Mr. Jeminy gave himself up to reflection. He thought: "The little insects which run about my garden paths at home, and eat what I had intended for myself, are not more lonely than I am. For here, within the walls of my mind, there is only myself. And you, Anna Barly, you cannot give poor Thomas Frye what he wishes. Do not deceive yourself; when you are gone, he will be as lonely as before. Come, confess, in your heart that pleases you; you would not have it otherwise. We are all lenders and borrowers until we die; it is only the dead who give."

When Juliet was tired of playing, she put her dolls to bed, and settled herself in Mr. Jeminy's lap. There, while the lamplight danced across the walls, drowsy with sleep, she ended her day. "Tell me a story. Tell me about the big, white bull, who swam over the sea."



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“Hm . . . well . . . once upon a time there was a great white bull . . .”

Then Mr. Jeminy rehearsed again the story of long, long ago, while the bright eyes closed, and the tired head drooped lower and lower; while the autumn moon rose up above the hills, and the haywagon rumbled along the road, to the sound of laughter and cries.

But Thomas Frye and Anna Barly were no longer seated in the hay, watching the harvest in. Unobserved by the others, they had stolen away before the wagon reached Milford. Now they were lying in a field, looking up at the stars, quieter than the crickets, which were singing all about them.

VII

MRS. GRUMBLE GOES TO THE FAIR

September's round moon waned; Indian summer was over. One morning in October Miss Beal, the dressmaker, had taken her sewing to Mr. Jeminy's, in order to spend the day with Mrs. Grumble. There, as she sat rocking up and down in the kitchen, the fall wind brought to her nose the odor of grapes ripening in the sun. The corn stood gathered in the fields, and in the yellow barley stubble the grasshopper, old and brown, leaped full of love upon his neighbor. Mrs. Grumble, beside a pile of Mr. Jeminy's winter clothes, sorted, mended, and darned, while the sun fell through the window, bright and hot across her shoulders. She kept one eye on the oven where her biscuits were baking, counted stitches, and listened to Miss Beal, who tilted solemnly forward in her chair when she had anything to say, and moved solemnly back again when it was over.

“Mrs. Stove,” declared Miss Beal, leaning forward and looking up at Mrs. Grumble, “won't have a new dress this year. Well, she's right, material is dreadful to get. As I said to her: Mrs. Stove, your old dress will do; just let me fix it up a little. No, she says, she'll wear it as it is.”

“Look at me,” said Mrs. Grumble. “Here's an old rag. But I get along.”

“Indeed you do,” said Miss Beal. “Still,” she added, speaking for herself, “one has to live.”

“Oh, I don't know,” said Mrs. Grumble airily.

“Goodness,” exclaimed the dressmaker. “Gracious, Mrs. Grumble.”

“I declare,” avowed Mrs. Grumble, “what with things costing what they do, and every one so mean, I'd die as glad as not, out of spite.”



“I wouldn’t want to die,” said Miss Beal slowly. “It’s too awful. I want to stay alive, looking around.”

“You’re just as curious,” said Mrs. Grumble. “Well, there, I’m not. Men are a bad lot. You can’t trust a one of them. Not for long.”

“Yes,” sighed Miss Beal, “there’s a good deal I want to see. I’d like to see Niagara Falls, Mrs. Grumble.”

“Lor’,” said Mrs. Grumble, “a lot of water.”

“All coming down,” said the dressmaker, “crashing and falling.”

“I’d rather see a circus,” declared Mrs. Grumble.



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“Would you now?” asked Miss Beal, and her fingers ran in and out, in and out, faster than ever, “would you, now? Well, then . . . there’s a fair at Milford this blessed afternoon.”

“Would you go along?” asked Mrs. Grumble.

“Glory,” said Miss Beal.

“I was going anyhow,” said Mrs. Grumble.

Then Miss Beal began to giggle. “Well, I declare,” she remarked, “I feel that young.”

“Go away,” said Mrs. Grumble; “to hear you talk . . .” She was in the best of humor.

“All the young folks will be there,” said Miss Beal. “I heard as how Alec Stove was going with Susie Ploughman. And there’s Thomas Frye . . . and Anna Barly . . .”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Grumble.

Miss Beal held up her thread against the light. “There’s a queer thing,” she admitted. “I can’t make head nor tail of it. Do you think there’s an understanding between them, Mrs. Grumble?”

“If there is,” said Mrs. Grumble, “then Thomas has more sense than I gave him credit for. Because how any one could have an understanding with that wild thing, is more than I can see.”

“How she carries on,” agreed Miss Beal, “first with Noel, when he was alive, and now with him.”

“Ah,” remarked Mrs. Grumble, “those are the new ideas. She has her head full of them. Only the other day, down to the store, I heard her say to Mr. Frye: ‘It’s the old who are always getting the young into trouble.’”

“Just think of that,” said Miss Beal.

“To my way of thinking,” continued Mrs. Grumble, “the shoe is on the other foot. What with the young folks growing up so wild, we must all be as busy as thieves to keep what belongs to us.”

“And what belongs to us, Mrs. Grumble?” asked the dressmaker, lifting from her lap a dress designed for Mrs. Sneath, the butcher’s wife.

“No more than what we can get,” replied Mrs. Grumble, with a shake of her head. “And that’s little enough.”



“Then,” said Miss Beal, “what do you think Anna Barly meant by saying ’twas the old had got her into trouble?”

“Why, bless your soul,” said Mrs. Grumble.

Miss Beal, from the front of her chair, regarded her friend with round and serious eyes. “I don’t rightly know, Mrs. Grumble,” she said, “but I came on her yesterday, and I declare if she hadn’t been crying. Last night I dreamed old Mrs. Tomkins died. And you know, Mrs. Grumble, dream of the dead . . .”

“Go away,” said Mrs. Grumble.

“Mind,” quoth Miss Beal, “I don’t mean to say there’s anything as shouldn’t be. Still, nothing would surprise me.”

“There’s no use talking,” cried Mrs. Grumble, “because I don’t believe a word of it.” But she felt it her duty to add: “For all I never saw Anna look so poorly.”

“A touch of influenza,” answered Miss Beal, “so Sara Barly says. Lord save us: a big healthy girl like Anna.”



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"It's the healthy ones who get it," said Mrs. Grumble with a sigh. "God moves in a mysterious way."

"His wonders to perform."

Mrs. Grumble arose and placed a kettle of water on the stove. "We'll have some tea," she said, "and I'll cook you some fritters. Jeminy is out. Then we'll go to the fair."

"Glory," said Miss Beal.

After lunch the two women put on their bonnets and went to take their seats in the Milford stage. As the wagon set out, creaking and crowded, everyone began to talk; and so, with cheeks reddened by the wind, rolled, still talking, into Milford.

The fair grounds were in a meadow, bounded on one side by a stream, and, beyond it, a wood already brown and blue with cold. Over the dead grass the bright colors of the fair shone in the sun; one could hear the music and the voices almost a mile away. On the other side of the field rose a gentle slope covered with goldenrod and white and purple blooms in which the bees and wasps were still busy. There, above the crowd of men and women, the happy insects were bringing to a close their own bazaar, begun amid the showers of early spring. Here was the bee, with his milch-cow, the ant with her souvenir, and the mild cricket, amused like Miss Beal by everything. Here, also, the wealthy spider, slung upon her twig, waited in patience for the homeless fly. And as, in comfort, she fed upon his juices, she exclaimed: "The right to fasten my web to this twig is a serious matter. For without me the fly would be wasted, and would not obtain a proper burial."

"I am very comfortable here," she added, "and I believe I have a right to this place, which, but for me, would be only a twig, and of no use to anybody."

Below, in the meadow, our two friends went arm in arm about the fair grounds; Miss Beal bought, as her first purchase, a spool of ribbon; and Mrs. Grumble had her fortune told. They rode on the carousel, all the while thinking: "This is really too silly." As Mrs. Grumble climbed down from her wooden horse, she said to herself: "I'm having as good a time as that little girl with the pigtails, who is going around for the fifth time."

If they turned west, their eyes were filled with the afternoon sun; when they looked east, they saw the maples, yellow and green, against the farther woods, the autumn sky, swept by its bright winds. All about them men and women rejoiced in the sunshine, told each other it was a fine day, and looked for some cause of dispute.

"The races are going to begin," said Mrs. Grumble, and taking her friend by the arm, made her way toward the track, where she could see the horses going gravely up and down. "There is a good one," she said; "see how he jumps about."



The drivers wheeled into line, and sped away with a rush; the band played and the spectators shouted.

“Oh, my,” said Miss Beal, “look there.” And she pointed to where Mr. Jeminy, close to the fence, was dancing up and down, waving his hat in the air. “Why, the old fool,” said Mrs. Grumble.



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“At his age,” echoed Miss Beal.

But it did not amuse Mrs. Grumble to hear anyone else find fault with Mr. Jeminy. “He’s enjoying himself,” she said. “I don’t know as how we’ve any call to make remarks.”

“I only said ‘at his age,’” replied Miss Beal hastily. But when she thought it over, it occurred to her that she was right, and Mrs. Grumble was wrong. Without courage on her own account, she was able to defend with energy the general opinion. “I said ‘at his age,’” she repeated more firmly.

Mrs. Grumble folded her hands, and assumed a forbidding expression. “I expect,” she said, “that Mr. Jeminy is old enough to do as he pleases.”

“Maybe he is,” answered the dressmaker, nettled by her friend’s tone, “maybe he is. And maybe there’s others old enough to know what’s right in a man of his years, Mrs. Grumble.”

“At any rate,” remarked Mrs. Grumble, “it’s not for you to say.”

“It’s not alone me is saying it,” replied Miss Beal. “What’s more,” she added, “for all I don’t like to repeat this to you, Mrs. Grumble, there’s many think Mr. Jeminy is too old to teach school any longer. There’s some would like to see a young woman at the schoolhouse.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Grumble.

Miss Beal laid her hand on her friend’s arm in a gesture at once triumphant and consoling. “Never you mind,” she said; “trouble comes to all.”

Mr. Jeminy went home from the fair with a light heart. He started early, because he liked to walk; and he carried in his hand a bit of lace for Mrs. Grumble. As he went down the road, beneath the turning leaves, and through the shadows cast by the descending sun, he began to sing, out of the fullness of his heart, the following song:

The Lord of all things,
With liberalitee,
Maketh the small birds,
To sing on every tree.

The Lord of all things,
He maketh also me;
Giveth me no wings,
Giveth me no words.



When Mr. Jeminy had sung as much as he liked, he went on to say: "In autumn the birds go south by easy stages; to-day their songs are departed from these woods, where there is none left but the catbird, to creak upon the bough. Soon snow will cover the earth, in which nothing is growing. But you, happy song birds, will build your nests far away, in green and windy trees, and your quarrels will fill distant valleys with music."

When Mr. Jeminy was nearly home he looked behind him and saw Thomas Frye and Anna Barly returning from the fair. He drew aside to let them pass, and with the sun shining in his eyes, he thought to himself, "Only the young are happy to-day."

VIII

THE TURN OF THE YEAR



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A fortnight later, the dress-maker was called in haste to Barly Farm, to sew coarse and fine linen, and a dress for Anna to be married in. But it all had to be done within the week, towels, sheets, pillow-cases, table-cloths, and aprons. "More than a body could sew in a month," she declared. For Anna was going to have a baby. "Do what you can," said Mrs. Barly, "and we'll have to get along with that." And so we find Miss Beal at the farm by eight each morning, wishing the day were longer, to enable her tongue to catch up to her fingers; for she thought that she knew a thing or two, and could see what was directly in front of her nose. "I'm nobody's fool," she said, as she guided the cloth, snapped the thread, and rocked the treadle of the sewing machine; and she sang to herself from morning to evening. As the only songs she knew were from the hymnal, she sang, with a heart overflowing with praise:

Ah how shall fallen man
Be just before his God?
If He contend in righteousness,
We sink beneath His rod. Amen.

or again:

Who place on Sion's God their trust
Like Sion's rock shall stand,
Like her immovable be fixed
By His almighty hand. Amen.

She was happy; it seemed to her that God, to whom she lifted up her prayers, was wise and active, watching every sparrow. She was satisfied that young folks were no better off than in her own day, but might expect to find themselves, if they fell from grace, as wretched as in the past. When Sara Barly had made the dress-maker comfortable in the spare room, she went down to the kitchen in search of Anna. But Anna was in the barn with Tabitha, the cat, whose new-born kittens filled her with glee. Mrs. Barly stood in the middle of the kitchen, as idle as her pots, and looked out through the window at the brown and yellow fields. When she had tied her apron on, she felt dull and tired; it seemed to her as if she were no longer virtuous, yet had not received anything in return for what she had given. And because she felt as if she had been cheated, she, also, lifted up her voice to God. "Oh, God," she said, "all my life I never did anything like that."

By way of answer, she heard the low hum of the sewing machine, and the alleluias of the dressmaker, singing as though she were in church.

Farmer Barly was down in the south pasture, with the schoolmaster's friend, Mr. Tomkins; he wanted to put up a swinging gate between the south field and the road. But all at once he felt like saying: "I don't want a gate at all; I want a fence to shut



people out.” For when he thought of Anna, in the gay autumn weather, he felt old and moldy.

“A bad year,” said Mr. Tomkins; “still, I guess you’re not worrying. I understand you put a silo in your barn. But I suppose you have your own reasons for doing it. A good year for cows, what with the grass. I hear you’re thinking of buying Crabbe’s Jersey bull. A fine animal; I’d like him myself.”



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"You're welcome to him," said Mr. Barly.

"Ah," said Mr. Tomkins, "he's beyond me, Mr. Barly, beyond my means. I'm not a rich man. But I have my health."

"What are riches?" asked Mr. Barly. "They're a source of trouble, Mr. Tomkins. They teach a young girl to waste her time."

"Well, trouble," said Mr. Tomkins.

"But what's trouble? Between you and me, a bit of trouble is good for us all. Then we're liable to know better."

Mr. Barly shook his head wearily. "I don't know," he said; "folks are queer crotchets."

"Why, then," said Mr. Tomkins, "so they are; and so would I be, as crotchety as you like, if I owned anything beyond the little I have."

"Small good it would do you," said Mr. Barly. "Life is a heavy cross, having or not having, what with other people doing as they please." And taking leave of Mr. Tomkins, he went home, thinking that in a world where people robbed their neighbors, it were better not to possess anything.

As he passed the potato patch, he heard Abner singing, without much tune to his voice, a song he had learned in the army. "Ay," muttered Mr. Barly, "go on—sing. You've learned that much, anyway. I may as well sing, myself, for all the good I've ever had attending to my business. I'll sing a good one; then I'll be right along with everybody, and let come what may."

Anna, too, heard Abner singing, as she knelt in front of the basket where the mother cat lay with her four blind kittens. "You see, Tabby," she said, "people still sing. A lot of them learned to sing in the war, and now they're home, they may as well sing as cry. Oh, Tabby, I wanted to sing, too . . . now look at me.

"I went out so grand," she said. "I was going to find all sorts of things. But what did I find?"

At that moment, John Henry entered the barn, smoking his corn-cob pipe. When the smell of smoke reached Anna, she grew weak and ill, and stumbling back to the house, went upstairs to rest. But even to climb the stairs made her catch her breath. Now, before breakfast of a morning, she was deathly sick; afterwards she was tired, and ready to cry over anything. Poor Anna; she was dumb with shame. "I'm worse than Mrs. Wicket," she said to herself, over and over again. "I'm worse than Mrs. Wicket. My life is ruined. I'd be better dead."



And what of honest Thomas? He was pale with fright. It seemed to him as if the devil had reached up, and caught him by the leg. He was in for it. But like a fly in a web, he could not believe that it was not some other fly. "Oh, God," he prayed, "look down . . . say something to me."

When Mr. Jeminy was told that Thomas Frye and Anna Barly were to be married, he exclaimed: "What a shame.

"Yes," he continued with energy, "what a shame, Mrs. Grumble. They did as they were bid. Now they know that love is a trap to catch the young, and tie them up once and for all, close to the kitchen sink."



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“No one bade them do what they’d no right to do,” said Mrs. Grumble.

“They did,” replied Mr. Jeminy sensibly, “only what they were meant to do. Youth was not made for the chimney corner, Mrs. Grumble. And love is not all one piece. We make it so, because we are timid and indolent. We like to think that one rule fits everything; that everything is simple and familiar. Even God, Mrs. Grumble, in your opinion, is an old man, like myself.”

“He is not,” said Mrs. Grumble.

“Yes,” continued Mr. Jeminy, “you believe that God is an old man, insulted by everything. Now he has been insulted by Anna Barly, who did as she had a mind to. Well, well . . .”

“No matter,” said Mrs. Grumble comfortably, “there’s the baby; you can’t get around that.”

“Mrs. Grumble,” said Mr. Jeminy earnestly, “I am going to Farmer Barly. I am going to say to him, ‘Let me have Anna’s baby, and we’ll say no more about it.’ Yes, that is what I am going to do.”

“Well,” gasped Mrs. Grumble, throwing herself back in her chair, “well, I never . . . so that’s it . . . I can tell you this: the day that baby comes into this house, I go out of it. Why, who ever heard of such a thing? No, indeed.”

“There,” she thought to herself, “that’s what comes of people like Mrs. Wicket.”

“Mrs. Grumble,” said Mr. Jeminy.

“I’ve no more to say,” said Mrs. Grumble.

“Mrs. Grumble,” pleaded Mr. Jeminy, “I am an old man. There is nothing left for me to do in the world any more. I am sure you would be pleased with Anna’s baby. Let us do this much for youth; for the new world.”

“I declare,” cried Mrs. Grumble, “you’ll drive me clean out of my wits. The new world . . . you mean Sodom and Gomorrah, more like. The new world . . . sakes alive.”

“Mrs. Grumble,” said Mr. Jeminy, “the old world is dead and gone. Let the young be free to build a new world. It will be happier than ours. It will be a world of love, and candor. Perhaps it will be also a world of poverty. That would not do any harm, Mrs. Grumble.”

“A fine world,” said Mrs. Grumble. “At least, I won’t live to see much of it, I’ve that to be thankful for.”



“Finer than what it is,” retorted Mr. Jeminy, losing his temper, “finer than what it is. Not the same, sad pattern.”

“The old pattern is good enough for me,” replied Mrs. Grumble.

“You’re a fossil,” said Mr. Jeminy.

Then Mrs. Grumble raised her voice in prayer. “Lord,” she prayed, “don’t let me forget myself. Because if I do . . .”

“Yes, that’s it,” cried Mr. Jeminy, “stop up your ears . . .” And out he went in a rage. Mrs. Grumble, left alone, looked after him with flashing eyes and a heaving bosom. “Oh,” she breathed, “if I could only lay my hands on him.”

But when she did, at last, lay hands on him, it was not in the way she looked for, as she sat rocking up and down, waiting for him to come home again.



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IX

*The schoolmaster leaves Hillsboro,
his work there seemingly at an end*

Mr. Jeminy came slowly out of the post-office, and turned up the road leading to his house. In one hand, crumpled in his pocket, he held his dismissal from Hillsboro school: "On account of age," it said. Next morning, at nine o'clock, the new teacher was coming to take over the little schoolhouse, with its splintered desks, the dusty blackboard, and the colored maps.

As he walked, the sun sank in the west, and evening crept up the road after him. The air was damp; he could see his breath pass out in fog before his face. The wind, blowing above his head, showered down the last dried, yellow leaves upon his path; before him he saw the chilly sky with its faint, lonely star, and over him the half moon, like a slice; and he heard the autumn wind, steady and cold. "You fields," he said, "you trees, you meadows and little paths, I do not believe you wanted to dismiss me. You must have enjoyed the daisy chains my pupils used to weave for you in the spring. Now they will learn the use of figures and percents, and the names of cities I have forgot. I will never hear again the voices of children at the playhour come tumbling in through the school windows. For at my age one does not begin to teach again. But it is ridiculous to say that I am an old man."

It grew darker and darker, the trees creaked and popped in the cold, or groaned like bass viols; and all along the roadside Mr. Jeminy could see the feeble glimmer of fireflies, fallen among the leaves. He said to them, "Little creatures, my flame is also spent. But I do not intend, like you, to lie by the roadside in the wind, and keep myself warm with memories. Now I am going where I can be of use to others. For I am brisk and tough, and do not hope to gain by my efforts more than I deserve."

Thus, following his thoughts, Mr. Jeminy passed, without knowing it, the house where Mrs. Grumble, sitting by the stove, awaited his return. The moon, riding out the wind above his head, peered down at him between the branches, as he stepped from shadow into moonlight, and again into shadow. Under the trees the dry, fallen leaves stirred about his feet, and other leaves, which he could not see, fell near him in the dark. As he passed the little orchard belonging to Mrs. Wicket, he heard the ripe apples dropping in the night.

In the gray of dawn, he found himself approaching a farmhouse somewhere south of Milford, whose lighted lamp, pale yellow in the early twilight, drew him from the road, across the fields. As he turned through the tumbled gate, a woman came to the door, her dress billowing back from her in the breeze.



“Come in, old man,” she said.

X



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BUT HE IS SOUGHT AFTER ALL

In Mrs. Tomkin's garden the hydrangeas were already pink with frost, and the leaves of the maples, fallen upon the ground, covered the earth with patches of yellow and red. By the side of the road, piles of leaves, raked together by Mr. Tomkins, were set on fire; they burned with a crackle and a roar, and gave off an odor at once pungent and regretful, which mingled in the fresh autumn air with the fragrance of grapes and cider, as the last apples of the season, too old and ripe to keep, went to the press back of the barn.

Juliet liked to play in Mrs. Tomkins' garden, where the hens, each anxious to be not the first, but the second, ran after each other as though to say, "You go and see, and I'll come and look."

Now she sat on the steps of Mrs. Tomkins' porch with her doll Sara, while her mother, Mrs. Wicket, watched at the bedside of Mrs. Grumble, who was very ill. Juliet did not realize how ill she was; she thought Mrs. Grumble might have croup. But Mrs. Ploughman, who sat on the porch with Mrs. Tomkins, knew that Mrs. Grumble had pneumonia. "Got," she explained, "by setting up that night, when Mr. Jeminy never came home."

"No," said Mrs. Tomkins, "he never came home. If it had been me, in Mrs. Grumble's place, I'd have gone to bed, instead of parading around with a lantern all night, catching my death."

"Mr. Jeminy," said Mrs. Ploughman, "was a queer man, and no mistake. I remember the day he stepped in to pay me a call. Mrs. Crabbe was with me. 'Mrs. Ploughman,' he said, 'and you, Mrs. Crabbe, we're leaving a lot of trouble behind us.' Fancy that, Mrs. Tomkins—as though I'd up and go any minute. 'Mr. Jeminy,' I said, 'I'm not afraid to die. When my time comes, I'll go joyfully.'"

"No doubt you will," said Mrs. Tomkins comfortably.

"Well," said Mrs. Ploughman, "it's a good thing, in my opinion, he was made to give up teaching school. It's a wonder the children know anything at all, Mrs. Tomkins. I declare, it used to mix me up something terrible, just to listen to him."

Mrs. Tomkins gazed at her sewing with thoughtful pleasure. "It was a hard blow to him," she said. "He did his best. Maybe he was a little queer. But he harmed no one. He used to tell the children stories.

"How is Mrs. Grumble," she asked, "to-day?"

"Weak," said Mrs. Ploughman; "very weak, out of her mind part of the time with the fever."



“Do you calculate she’ll die, Mrs. Ploughman?”

“I don’t know. But I don’t calculate she’ll live, Mrs. Tomkins. Still, we must hope for the best. This is the way it was; first the influenza, and then the pneumony. Double pneumony, the doctor says. There’s a lot of it around again, like last year. It takes the young and the hardy. It won’t get me. No.

“There’s nothing to do for it,” she added, “nothing, that is, beyond nursing.”



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"If it wasn't for Mrs. Wicket," said Mrs. Tomkins, "I expect she'd have been dead before this. Mrs. Wicket's a capable woman in things like that. Capabler than Miss Beal. There was no one else ever made me so comfortable. I have to say that about her; Mrs. Grumble's getting the best of care. And I'm looking after Juliet. Not that she's any trouble; she's as quiet as a mouse, playing all day long with her dolls."

But Mrs. Ploughman could not find it in her heart to forgive Mrs. Wicket for having been the cause of her grandson Noel's death. "Yes," she said, "I expect Mrs. Grumble's getting good care. But when a body's dying, 'tisn't so much care you want, as salvation. I wouldn't want any Jezebel hanging over my deathbed, Mrs. Tomkins, thank you."

Mrs. Tomkins, who attended each Sunday the little Baptist church at Adams' Forge, did not believe that she and Mrs. Ploughman would meet in heaven. However, she did not choose this moment to mention it. "It may be as you say, Mrs. Ploughman," she remarked, "or it may be that we've been too hard oh Mrs. Wicket. Mind you, I don't speak for her life with that bad egg of Eben Wicket's. But we ought to forgive others as we would have others forgive us."

"You needn't quote Gospels to me," declared Mrs. Ploughman; "I'm as easy to forgive as the next one, where there's a reason for it. I don't hold it against Mrs. Wicket that she drove my Noel to his death. No. I forgive her for it. And I don't blame Mr. Jeminy for going off, if he had a mind to, and leaving Mrs. Grumble to catch the pneumony."

"No," said Mrs. Tomkins.

"But there's this much queer," said Mrs. Ploughman: "The way she takes on in the fever. She does nothing but call him back, Mrs. Tomkins. 'Mr. Jeminy,' she hollers, 'where's the old rascal?' she says. Then she goes on about his being in some trouble, and she has to get him out of it. 'He's in the toils,' she says; 'he's with the scarlet woman.'"

"My life!" exclaimed Mrs. Tomkins.

"I declare," said Mrs. Ploughman, "I wouldn't be Mrs. Wicket, or Miss Beal, not for a thousand dollars."

Mrs. Tomkins sighed. "It's real sad," she said. "I'd like to find Mr. Jeminy; it would ease the old woman's last hours. But he's likely far away by this time. And there's no one could spare the time to go after him, even if a body knew where he was. Though I've an idea he went south, through Milford. Walking, I should say."

"The ole vagabone," exclaimed Mrs. Ploughman.



“Yes,” Mrs. Tomkins declared with energy, “it’s a wicked sin, Mrs. Ploughman, for him to be away now, and Mrs. Grumble taken down mortal. He’s been a good friend to William for nigh on twenty years. I’d go after him myself, if it weren’t for my rheumatism.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Ploughman, “I never heard of such a thing.”

“There’s lots you never heard of, Mrs. Ploughman,” said Mrs. Tomkins. And folding her hands, she gazed at her friend with quiet satisfaction.



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Little Juliet, playing on the steps with her doll Sara, missed none of this conversation, only a part of which, however, she understood. While she dressed and undressed her child, made of rags and sawdust, put her to sleep and woke her up again, she was listening with attention first to Mrs. Tomkins, and then to Mrs. Ploughman.

“Let’s play you’re Mrs. Grumble,” she told Sara. And she covered the doll with her handkerchief. Sara did not mind the square piece of cambric, which Juliet often used to carry small handfuls of earth from one place to another. “I’m mother,” said Juliet. Rising to her feet, she went out into the garden, and returned again. “My dear Mrs. Grumble,” she exclaimed, “how do you feel to-day?”

“Very poorly, thank you,” replied Sara, in that curious squeak with which all of Juliet’s children answered their mother.

“Well, that’s too bad,” said Juliet. “Where does it hurt you, Mrs. G.?”

“In the stummick,” squeaked Sara.

Juliet shook her head soberly. “Dear me,” she said. “Well, cheer up, Mrs. Grumble; what would you like to have?”

“Ice cream,” said Sara hopefully, “and fritters.”

“All right,” said Juliet. She went back into the garden, whence she presently returned with a few dead leaves and some mud. “Here,” she said; “here’s the ice cream. And here’s the fritters. Don’t get sick, now, will you?”

“No,” said Sara.

Her mother gazed at her with sympathy. “What else would you like?” she inquired.

“I’d like Mr. Jeminy,” squeaked Sara. “He’s in the toils.”

“I’ll go and see if I can find him,” said Juliet. And she began to look about for a twig, or a small branch, suitable for Jeminy. But all at once she grew thoughtful. It had occurred to her that to look for Mr. Jeminy in the flesh would be a delightful adventure. It would please every one. She sat down on the porch steps to think it over.

In the first place, it would be necessary to slip off unobserved. For although Mrs. Tomkins, by her own account, would be glad to have Mr. Jeminy back again, Juliet felt that she could not explain to Mrs. Tomkins exactly what she intended to do. As for the trip, an umbrella in case of rain, and the company of Sara would be sufficient. Then it was only a question of walking in the direction of Milford, before she came on Mr. Jeminy in the middle of the road; so Mrs. Tomkins had said.



With Sara under her arm, she tiptoed around to the rear of the house, skipped through the yard, climbed the low fence, and hurried home. There she put on her best bonnet, and took her mother's umbrella from the closet. Then she went back to her own room and took down her penny bank. Holding it upside down, she began to shake it as hard as she could. But only five pennies fell out. "That's enough," she decided. It seemed to her that with five pennies she could buy almost anything.



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When she went to bid good-by to her family, she decided that Sara was not the doll she would take along with her, after all. For Anna had a bonnet, whereas Sara had none. Anna also wore a new dress, made for her by Mrs. Wicket out of an old petticoat. Sara was better company, but Anna would be more respected along the road.

"I guess I'll take you, Anna," said Juliet. "No use your pulling a face, Sara," she added; "it won't get you anything. You can't go. So you may as well know it. Maybe if you're good, I'll bring you something back."

And off she went down the road to Milford, Anna under one arm and the umbrella under the other.

For a while, as she walked, she told herself stories. She believed that she was the princess of one of Mr. Jeminy's fairy tales; then Anna became a duchess, or an old queen. The fact that nothing unusual happened to her, did not seem to her of any importance; she saw the russet fields, the bare woods, the solemn clouds, and far off shine and shadow; and walked with serious pomp for her own delight, as long as she was able.

But after a while she grew tired, and sat down by the roadside to rest. As she sat there, the sun sank lower, and the gathering chill of evening made itself felt in the air. Then for the first time doubt as to the wisdom of her course presented itself to her.

"We're going to catch it when we get home," she told Anna.

With a feeling of dismay, she remembered how far away from home she was. The hush of evening, the silence of the fields, filled her head with vague fears. She held her doll tightly to her breast for comfort. The little red squirrel, flirting along the low stone wall, seemed to peer at her as though to say; "This is where I live. But where do you live? You can't live here; I won't have it." Juliet began to shiver with cold.

"Oh, goodness," she whispered to Anna, "I'm going to catch it when I get home."

But to start for home again in the gloom, took more courage than she had left her. Grasping her umbrella, her five pennies, and her doll, she retreated to the middle of the road. "Mr. Jeminy," she cried, "Mr. Jeminy, where are you?"

The silence, more ghostly than before, was not to be endured. "Mr. Jeminy," she called at the top of her voice, "Mr. Jeminy, Mr. Jeminy, Mr. Jeminy."

"Oh, please come back."

She was saved the ignominy of tears. For at that moment she heard from down the road a sound of wheels, and the beat of hoofs. And presently a farm wagon, drawn by an old white horse, approached her in the twilight.



“Well, bite me,” said the farmer, peering at her over the front of the wagon. “Are you lost, child?”

“No, sir,” said Juliet. Now that she was found, she was in the best of spirits, all sprightliness and wheedle. “I’m not lost. I’m looking for somebody.”

“Do tell,” said the farmer. “A friend of yourn?”



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“An old man,” said Juliet. “An old, old man. He’s a friend of mine. I have to tell him to come home as fast as he can, because it’s a wicked sin.”

“Does he live hereabouts?” asked the farmer.

“He used to,” said Juliet, “but he ran away. Now Mrs. Grumble’s sick, he ought to come home again, and ease her last hours.”

The farmer began to chuckle. “What’s the old gaffer’s name?”

“Mr. Jeminy,” said Juliet.

“Hop in,” said the farmer. “I’ll take you along. He’s been stopping with Aaron Bade, over to the Forge. I declare, if that don’t beat all. Curl up in the hay, child, it’ll keep you warm. What were you doing, hollering for him?”

“Yes, sir,” said Juliet.

The farm wagon started on again, through the rapidly falling dusk. Juliet, under a blanket in the hay, looked up at the tall figure of the farmer, set like a giant above her.

“Mister,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Did he come with a scarlet woman, did you hear?”

“Not so far as I know. No, he came all alone, early in the morning. Wasn’t anybody with him.”

Beneath her blanket, Juliet hugged Anna to her breast. “There, you see,” she whispered. And in her fresh, young voice, she began to sing, while the wagon rattled down the road to Milford, a song she had heard her mother singing the year Noel Ploughman died.

“Love is the first thing,
Love goes past.
Sorrow is the next thing,
Quiet is the last.

Love is a good thing,
Quiet isn’t bad,
But sorrow is the best thing
I’ve ever had.”



XI

AND IS FOUND IN GOOD HANDS

From the Bade farmhouse, a mile below Hemlock Mountain, the road winds down to Adams' Forge, past Aaron Bade's stony fields. To the north lies Milford; but to the south lies that enchanting land, blue in the distance, misty in the sun, which the heart delights to call its home.

It is the land we see from any hilltop. As we gaze at its far off rises, its hazy, shadowy valleys, we feel within us a longing and a faint melancholy. There, we think, dwell the friends who would love us, if we were known to them, and there, too, must be found the beauty and the happiness that we have failed to discover where we are. It seems to us that there, in the distance, we should be happier, we should be more amiable and more dignified.

Aaron Bade, tied to his rocky farm on the slopes above Adams' Forge, remembered with a feeling of pleasure his one journey as far south as Attleboro. He had been obliged to return home before he had found the happiness which he had expected to find. However, once he was home, he realized that he had left it behind him, in Attleboro, or just a little further south . . .

Now, at forty, he was neither happy nor unhappy, but turned back in his mind to the fancies of his youth, and enjoyed, in imagination, the travels denied him in reality.



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He had no love for the farm, which had belonged to his father; an old flute, on which his father used to play, was more of a treasure to him. Often in summer, as day faded, and the dews of night descended; when the clear lights in the valley were set twinkling one by one, leaving the uplands to the winds and stars, Aaron Bade, perched upon his pasture bars, piped to the faintly glowing sky his awkward thoughts and clumsy feelings.

In the morning he took leave of his wife, and with his hoe slung over his shoulder, made his way down to the cornfield. There, seated upon a stone, he saw himself in Attleboro again, pictured to himself the countryside beyond, and before noon, was half way round the world, leaving friends behind him in every land. Then, with a sigh, he would go in among the corn with his weeder, only to stand dreaming at every rustle of wind, seeing, in his mind, the smoke of distant cities, hearing, in fancy, the booming of foreign seas.

His wife was no longer a young woman. As a girl she had also had hopes for herself. It seemed to her, when she chose Aaron Bade, that in his company, life would be surprising and delightful. She expected to see something of the world—he spoke of it so much. But she was mistaken. For Aaron's travels were all of the mind. And she soon discovered that the more he talked, the more there remained for her to do. Thus her hopes died away; between the stove and the chickens, and what with cleaning, washing, sweeping and dusting, she rarely found time nowadays for more than a shake of her head, never very pretty, and at last no longer young, at the thought of what she had looked for, what she had meant to find. In short, from hopeful girl, Margaret Bade was, sensibly enough, turned practical woman; and when, on clear afternoons, with his work still to do, Aaron would take his flute down into the fields, she did his chores, as well as her own, with the wise remark that after all, they had to be done.

Nevertheless, when the dishes were washed—when the shadows of evening crept in past the lamp, no longer able to exclude them, she began to feel lonely and sad. And as the notes of Aaron's flute mingled with the night sounds, the chirp of crickets, the hum of insects, she felt, rather than thought, "Life is so much spilt milk. And all that comes of fancies, is Aaron's flute, playing down there in the pasture."

It was to this family that Mr. Jeminy came in the chilly dawn, on his way, apparently, to the ends of the earth, and, after breakfast, fell asleep in the hayloft, leaving them both gaping with pleasure and curiosity. For he came, Aaron had to admit, like a tramp; but spoke, Margaret thought, like the Gospels. "He's from roundabout," she said; "I hope he doesn't think to try and sell us anything. Men with something to sell always talk like the minister first."

But Aaron, with his mind on the far off world across the smoky autumn hills, was pained at such a suggestion. "You're wrong, mother," he said solemnly. "No, sirree. He's not from roundabout. And he's no common tramp either. He's come a distance, I believe."

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"Then," said Margaret with regret, "I suppose he'll be going on again."

Aaron Bade stared attentively at one brown hand. "We could use a man on the farm," he said.

It gave his wife no pleasure to be obliged to agree with him.

"There's plenty still for a man to do, after you're done," she said. But she smiled almost at once; for like the women of that north country, crabbed and twisted as their own apple trees, she loved her husband for the trouble he gave her.

"It's a queer thing," said Aaron; "he has the look of a bookish man. Like old St. John Deakan down to the Forge, only St. John don't know anything, for all his looks."

"His talk was elegant," Mrs. Bade agreed. She stood still for a moment, looking down at her pots and pans. "He's seen a deal of life, I dare say," she added casually—so casually as to make one almost think that she herself had seen all she wanted to see.

"Well," said Aaron, "that's what schooling does for a man. It gives him a manner of talking, along with something to say."

Margaret, bent over her work again, plunged her red, wet arms up to the elbow in hot, soapy water. "You'll never lack talk, Aaron," she remarked; "or suffer for want of something to say. But it isn't washing my pots for me, nor bringing in the corn . . ."

"I'm going along now," said Aaron. "If the old man wakes before I'm back again, don't hurry him off, mother; I'd be glad to talk with him a bit before he goes."

"Who said anything about hurrying him off?" cried Mrs. Bade. "He can stay till doomsday, for all I care. He can sit and talk to me, while you're blowing on your flute. It'll be real companionable."

And she turned back to her pots and pans, a faint smile causing her mouth to curl down at one end, and up at the other.

Mr. Jeminy awoke in the afternoon. It was the nature of this kind and simple man to accept without question the hospitality of people he had never seen before; for he felt friendly toward every one. As he sat down to supper with the Bades, he bowed his head, and offered up a grace, with all his heart:

"Abide, O Lord, in this house; and be present at the breaking of bread, in love and in kindness. Amen."

During the meal, Aaron Bade asked Mr. Jeminy many questions, to discover what the old man hoped to do. "I suppose," he said, "you've come a good distance."



“Yes,” said Mr. Jeminy gravely, “I have come a good distance.”

Aaron Bade gave his wife a look which said plainly, “There, you see, mother.”

“Where is your home, old man?” asked Mrs. Bade kindly.

“I have no home,” said Mr. Jeminy.

Aaron Bade cleared his throat. “Are you bound anywhere in particular?” he asked.

“No,” said Mr. Jeminy.

“Then,” said Aaron Bade, “we’d admire to have you stay with us, if it’s agreeable to you.”



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Mr. Jeminy looked about him at the homely kitchen, with its brown crockery set away neatly on the shelves. "If I stay with you," he said, "I should like to work in the fields, and help with the sowing and the harvesting."

"So you may," said Aaron Bade.

Mr. Jeminy looked at Margaret. "And you, madam?" he asked. "Would you care for the company of a garrulous old man at evening in your kitchen?"

Margaret blushed with pleasure. "Yes," she said.

"Very well," said Mr. Jeminy; "I will stay."

In this fashion Mr. Jeminy settled down at Bade's Farm, as farm hand to Aaron Bade. At the end of a week he felt that he had nothing to regret. He was active and spry, and believed himself to be useful. In fact, he could not remember when he had been so happy. High on his hill, he heard October's skyey gales go by above his head, and in the noonday drowse, watched, from the shade of a tree, the crows fly out across the valley, with creaking wings and harsh, discordant cries. In the early morning, he came tip-toeing down the stairs; from the open doorway he marked day rise above the east in bands of yellow light, and saw the foggy clouds of dawn slip quietly away, rising from the valleys, drifting across the hills; in the afternoon he labored in the fields, and at night, his tired body filled his mind with comfortable thoughts.

On his way to lunch, he stopped at the woodpile to get an armful of kindling for Mrs. Bade. The sober way she looked at him as he came in, hid from all but herself the almost voluptuous pleasure it gave her merely to be waited on, a pleasure she was more than half afraid to enjoy, for fear at jealous heaven might take it away, and leave her with all her work to do, and bad habits besides.

Therefore, as she ladled out potatoes, two to a plate, she seemed, to look at her, busier than ever; and far from being grateful, might have been used to favors every day of her life, whereas all the while she was saying ecstatically to herself, "Lord, make me humble."

For she saw in Mr. Jeminy all she had fancied as a girl, and lost hope in as a woman. Life . . . life was, then, to be had—leastways, a view of it, a good view of it—was to be heard of, by special act of Grace, on Bade's Farm, at Adams' Forge—of all places. So she dressed in her neatest, and was kinder than ever to Aaron, who was missing it. For she felt it was all just for her; she alone saw Mr. Jeminy for what he was, a grand, unusual peephole on the world. It was her own private peep, she thought. But she was wrong. Aaron was peeping as hard as she, and pitying her, as she was pitying him, for all he thought she was missing.



As for Mr. Jeminy, he let them think what they pleased. At first he was silent, out of shame. But later he enjoyed it as much as they did. "In Ceylon," he would say, "the tea fields . . ."

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One day, a week after his arrival, Mr. Jeminy took the plow horse, Elijah, to the village to be shod. There the fragrance of wood fires mingled with a sweeter smell from barns and kitchens. As it was the hour when school let out, the yard in front of the schoolhouse was filled with children on their way home; laughing and calling each other, their voices rose in minor glees along the road, like the squabble of birds. And Mr. Jeminy, in front of the smithy, watched them go by, while his thoughts as follows:

“There,” he said to himself, “its arms of texts, goes the new world. Within those careless heads and happy hearts we must look for courage, for wisdom and for sacrifice. Yet I believe they have the same thoughts as anybody else. That is to say, they suppose it is God’s business to look after them. Yes, they are like their parents: they are carried away by what they are doing, which they do not believe could be done otherwise. One can see with what coldness, or even blows, they receive the advances of other little children, who wish to play with them. Well, as for those others, they go off at once, and play by themselves. One of them, whose hat has been taken by the rest, is digging in the earth with a bent twig, sharpened at one end. Possibly he is digging for a treasure, which will be of no value to anybody but himself. When he is older, he will be sorry he is not a child again.”

At this point, Elijah being shod and ready, he ceased his reflections and went call for Aaron at the post-office. As the rode home together, the old schoolmaster, sunk in reverie, remained silent. But Aaron wanted to talk, now that he had some one to talk to.

“We’ll get around to the wood to-morrow, and lay in another cord or two.”

“As you like.”

“They’re saying down to the store that feed will be higher than ever this winter. I suppose we’d better lay in a store. I can’t sell a few barrels of potatoes, though I did want to save them.”

Mr. Jeminy roused himself with an effort. “I had the horse shod all around,” he said.

Aaron nodded. “I guess it’s just as well,” he replied. “Did you ask about fixing the harrow?”

“It will take a week,” said Mr. Jeminy. “I said to go ahead, figuring that we had the whole winter before us.”

“We could do with a new harrow,” said Aaron, “only there’s no way to pay for it.”

Mr. Jeminy shook the reins over Elijah’s back. “I have a little money,” he began, “laid away . . .”



“You’re very kind,” said Aaron, “but I don’t figure to take advantage of it. Still, living’s hard; so much trouble. Take me; here I am bound down to a farm’s got as many rocks in it as anything else. I’ve been as far south as Attleboro, but I’ve never had a view of the world, like you’ve had. I’ll die as I’ve lived, without anything to be grateful for, so far as I can see.”

“You’ve had more to be grateful for than I ever had,” said Mr. Jeminy simply, “and I’m not complaining.”



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“Go along,” said Aaron; “you’re speaking out of kindness. But it doesn’t fool me any. I know you’ve led a wandering life, Mr. Jeminy. But I’d admire to see a little something of the world myself.”

Above them the smoke from Aaron’s chimney, thin and blue, rose bending like an Indian pipe in the still air. And Mr. Jeminy gazed at it in silence, before replying:

“You have had the good things of life, Aaron Bade.”

“Have I?” said Aaron bitterly. “I’m sure I didn’t know it. What are the good things of life, Mr. Jeminy?”

“Love,” said Mr. Jeminy, “peace, quiet of the heart, the work of one’s hands. Perhaps it is human to wish for more. But to be human is not always to be wise. Do you desire to see the world, Aaron Bade? Soon you would ask to be home again.”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” said Aaron.

“Ah,” said Mr. Jeminy, “love is best of all.”

And once again he relapsed into silence. In the evening he drove the cows in. High up on Hemlock, Aaron, among his slow, thin tunes, thought to himself: “There go the cows. Mr. Jeminy understands me; he’s a traveled man.” And he played his flute harder than ever, because Mr. Jeminy, who had seen, as Aaron thought, all Aaron had wanted to see, breathed the airs of foreign lands, and sailed the seven seas, was setting Aaron’s cows to right, in Aaron’s tumbled barn.

In the kitchen, Margaret, going to light the lamp, smiled at her thoughts, which were timid and gay. She was happy because Mr. Jeminy, who had seen so many elegant women, helped her with her apple jellies, and brought her kindlings for the stove.

When the cows were milked, Mr. Jeminy came out of the barn, and stood looking up at the sky, yellow and green, with its promise of frost. “A cold night,” he said to himself, “and a bright morning.” He could hear the wind rising in the west. “Winter is not far off,” he said, and he carried the two warm, foaming milkpails into the kitchen.

As he was eating his supper, a wagon came clattering down the road and stopped at the door. “There’s Ellery Deakan back from Milford,” said Margaret at the window. “I wonder what he wants at this time of night. Looks to be somebody with him. Go and see, Mr. Jeminy. I’ve the pudding to attend to.”

XII

MRS. WICKET



Mrs. Grumble was dying. She lay without moving, one wasted hand holding tightly to the fingers of Mrs. Wicket, who sat beside the bed. There, where Mrs. Grumble had worked and scolded for twenty years, all was still; while the clock on the dresser, like a solemn footstep, seemed to deepen the silence with its single, hollow beat.

But if it was quiet in the schoolmaster's house, it was far from being quiet in the village, where Mrs. Tomkins was going hurriedly from house to house in search of Mrs. Wicket's runaway daughter. Mrs. Wicket, who was dozing, did not hear the anxious voices calling everywhere for Juliet. To Mrs. Grumble, the sound was like the dwindling murmur of a world with which she was nearly done. She felt that her end was approaching, and remarked:



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"I hope I haven't given you too much trouble, Mrs. Wicket."

Mrs. Wicket tried to assure Mrs. Grumble that she had not been any trouble to her. But Mrs. Grumble said weakly:

"Maybe when I was out of my head . . ."

"Don't you fret yourself a mite about that," cried Mrs. Wicket; "for that's all over. Now you're going to get well."

"No," said Mrs. Grumble, "no, I'm not going to get well. I'm going to die." She thought over, in silence, what she had just said, and it appeared to satisfy her. At the thought of death she was calm and willing. "I remember," she remarked, "how I used to have a horror of dying. I was afraid to die, without having done anything to make me out different from anybody else. But I guess nobody's any different when it comes to dying, Mrs. Wicket. It feels easy and natural."

"Don't you so much as even think of it," said Mrs. Wicket.

Mrs. Grumble smiled. "There's no use trying to fool me," she declared. "I'm not afraid any more. I'd like to see Mr. Jeminy before I go. I'd like to know he was in good hands. I'd like to think you'd look after him a bit, Mrs. Wicket, when I'm gone."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wicket, "set your mind at rest."

"You've been very kind to me," said Mrs. Grumble, with difficulty. "You've had a hard time of it here in Hillsboro. You're a good woman, Mrs. Wicket. I'm glad you'll be here for him when he comes home. I took care of him for twenty years. As though he were my own."

"I'll care for him the same," said Mrs. Wicket, "as though he were my own."

Mrs. Grumble seemed to be content with this promise, for she remained for some time sunk in silence. At last she said, "He'll come in time for me to see him again. He won't leave me to die alone, not after I took care of him for twenty years."

"I remember the time he brought me a bit of lace from the fair over to Milford. He used to give me a lot of trouble. But he didn't forget to bring me home a piece of lace from the fair. I put it on my petticoat."

"He's on his way home now, Mrs. Wicket: yes, I can feel he's coming home."

Mrs. Wicket, who had been up with Mrs. Grumble the night before, let her head droop forward on her breast. "I don't doubt it," she said. And in the silence of the sickroom, she presently fell asleep. Mrs. Grumble lay with wide open eyes, staring at the door



through which Mr. Jeminy was to come. She felt quiet and happy; it seemed to her that her pain was already over and done with. Framed in the doorway, in the yellow lamplight, she beheld the fancies of her youth, the memories of the past. She saw again the woman she had been, and watched, with eyes filled with compassion, her early sorrows, and the troubles of her later years. "It was all of no account," she said to herself, "but it doesn't matter now." And she set herself to wait in patience for Mr. Jeminy, who she never doubted would come to help her die.



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Meanwhile the schoolmaster, in Aaron Bade's wagon, was rattling along the road, with Juliet tight asleep in his arms. As he drew near his home, he saw in the distance Barly Hill, and the lights of Barly Farm shining across the valley. "I am coming home again," he said to them; "I have no longer any pride. So now I know that I am an old man."

But later a feeling of peace took possession of his heart. "Yes," he said, "I am an old man. The world is not my affair any more. I belong to yesterday, with its triumphs and its failures; I must share in the glory, such as it is, of what has been done. The future is in the hands of this child, sound asleep by my side. It is in your hands, Anna Barly, and yours, Thomas Frye. But you must do better than I did, and those with whom I quarreled. To youth is given the burden and the pain. Only the old are happy to-day.

"Children, children, what will become of you?"

When Mr. Jeminy, with Juliet in his arms, strode in through Mrs. Grumble's door, Mrs. Wicket rose to her feet, her hands pressed to her bosom with delight and alarm. Mr. Jeminy gave Juliet to her mother. "Take the child home," he said. Then with timid, hesitant steps, he approached Mrs. Grumble's bed.

"You've been a long time coming," she said. "I'm tired."

"I'm here now," replied Mr. Jeminy; "I am not going away any more."

"No," said Mrs. Grumble, "you'd better stay home and attend to things. I won't be here much longer."

Mr. Jeminy wanted to say "nonsense," but he was unable to speak. Instead he took Mrs. Grumble's hand in both of his. "Are you going to leave me, dear friend?" he asked.

Mrs. Grumble smiled; then she gave a sigh. "Look what you called me," she said. And they were both silent, thinking of the past together. In the distance the crisp footsteps of Mrs. Wicket died away down the hill. And presently nothing was to be heard but the steady ticking of the clock on the mantel. Then Mr. Jeminy, for once, could find nothing to say. It seemed to him that instead of the clock's ticking, he heard the footsteps of death in the house, on the stair . . . tik, tok, tik, tok . . . And he sighed, with sadness and horror, "Ah, my friend," he thought, "are you as frightened as I am?"

Presently he saw that Mrs. Grumble was trying to lift herself up in bed. "I'm going now," she said. Her voice was low, but resonant. "Mrs. Wicket will look after you. She's a good woman, Mr. Jeminy. My mind's at peace. I never knew death was so simple and ordinary. It's almost like nothing."

She sank back; her voice gave out and she began to cough. "You will only tire yourself by talking," said Mr. Jeminy. "Rest now. Then in the morning . . ."



“No,” said Mrs. Grumble faintly, “there’ll be no morning for me, unless it’s the morning of the Lord. Not where I’m going.”

“You are going where I, too, must go,” said Mr. Jeminy. “You are going a little before me. Soon I shall come hurrying after you.”



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"It's nearly over," said Mrs. Grumble. "I did what I could." Her mind began to wander; she spoke some words to herself.

"You, God," said Mr. Jeminy aloud, "this is your doing. Then come and be present; receive the forgiveness of this good woman, to whom you gave, in this life, poverty and sacrifice."

"Please," whispered Mrs. Grumble, "speak of God with more respect." They were her last words; it was the end. A spasm of coughing shook her; for a moment she seemed anxious to speak. But as Mr. Jeminy bent over her, her breath failed; her head fell back, and with a single, frightened glance, Mrs. Grumble passed away, without saying what she had intended.

Mr. Jeminy closed her eyes, and folded her hands across her breast. "She is gone already," he thought; "she is far away. She has pressed ahead, so swiftly, beyond sight or hearing."

He bent his head. "You made me comfortable in my life, Mrs. Grumble," he said, "yet at the end I could do nothing for you. But you will not think badly of me for that.

"Now you are hurrying through eternity. To you, these few slow hours before the dawn are no different from to-morrow or yesterday; they will never pass.

"Do you see, at last, the meaning of the spectacle you have just quitted? Do you understand what I, for all my wisdom, do not understand? You are free to ask God to explain it to you; you can say, 'I saw armies with banners, and scholars with their books.' Perhaps he will tell you the meaning of it. But for us, who remain, it has no meaning. Well, we say, this is life. We laugh, applaud, talk together, and think about ourselves. And one by one we slip away, no wiser than before.

"We are like the bees, who work from dawn till dark, gathering honey in the fields and in the woods. But we are not as wise as the bees, for each one grasps what he can, and cries, 'this is mine.' Then seeing that it is of no use to him, he adds, 'What will you give me for it?'"

And he began to think of the past. It seemed to him that he was in school again. It was spring; and the children came romping into the schoolroom, their arms full of books and flowers. Summer passed; he saw Anna Barly crying by the roadside, under the gray sky. He heard himself saying to Mrs. Grumble: "Yes, that's right, stop up your ears . . ." And he saw himself walking toward Milford in the moonlight, under the falling leaves. "Who, now," he thought, "will drive me out of doors because my room is in disorder, or burn, when I am away, the scraps of paper on which I have scribbled my memoranda?"



He bowed his head. “Rest quietly, Mrs. Grumble,” he said. “Your troubles are over. For you there is neither doubt nor grief; life does not matter to you any more. Nor does it matter very much to me. For there is no one now to care what I do. I am no trouble to anybody.”

The chilly breath of morning filled the valley with mist, fine, gray, imperceptible in the faint light of dawn. And a farmer’s cart, as it rattled down the road, woke, in his chair, the old schoolmaster from the reverie into which he had fallen.



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Faint and clear the early lights of the village went out, leaving the valley empty and cold. A freight train whistled at the junction, and crept, with tolling bell, over the switches, to the south.

The sun, rising, poured its yellow light into Mrs. Grumble's room, illuminating the bed, with its silent burden, and the still figure huddled in the chair. Slowly, and with difficulty, Mr. Jeminy got to his feet and crossed to the window. There his gaze encountered Mrs. Wicket, coming up the hill.

Blowing on his hands, Mr. Jeminy went to meet her in the early sunshine.

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