

ill. Now I saw the marks of more than a bodily pain. The delicate skin under her eyes had withered and discolored. The expression of her mouth had changed from the curve of gentle pride to a hard line of repression. She recognized me with a slow surprise that faded into an almost sullen expectancy.

"Esther," I said, "your mother asked me to come to see you. I promised her I would."

She opened the door wider to let me in, but as she drew back she gathered the baby closer to her breast. I stepped into the front room of the cottage—for there was no hall—and she closed the door with her shoulder and stood rigid, silent, inhospitable.

I said: "If you don't want to see me—"

She drew up the shawl that was slipping from her shoulder, and without moving her eyes from their steadfast gaze at me, she replied deliberately: "I do. Yes. I have wanted to see you. Won't you sit down?"