

John listened to them as he sat smoking on the back door-steps. He looked over the potato-field; the arms of the cherry-tree leaned around the corner of the house toward him; the chickens came up and pecked confidently at his boots, but the rooster disliked tobacco, and kept at a distance. Tommy came out and strangled him from behind with two little green-checked arms. The child's kisses produced the effect of a vertigo upon the man. He got up to put away his pipe, and stood staggering.

His wife came out and talked about the cherries and the chickens. She hung upon him, and they wandered about the little yard and garden till the sun sank behind the meeting-house belfry, and the currant leaves looked no longer like thin gold, but like thick agate or lava, and drooped with dew. In the sky, purple forms, like banners, came up and on, and the mists in the valley moved solemnly, as if they had been thoughts. In the fading of the day the woman's face seemed to grow shrunken and desolate.

"You look thin," said John.

"I don't *feel* thin," said Mary.

It seemed she was not thinking about the sunset, but about the potatoes. She had many questions. Should they plant pink-eyes next year? How did the new fertilizer affect the cabbages? Mightn't she have a fuschia and three geraniums under the L window? Tommy must have a swing on the cherry tree. In the fall where should we put Sissy's teeter-board? She'd been promised one in September. And when should the chicken-house be painted red? And, John, could we get a rabbit for Tom? And, John, did Sissy grow so fast that we must cut her hair?

"Don't you think it's getting a little damp?" asked John.

He spoke in the high throat-voice his wife was used to when he had the tooth-ache. She said:

"What! that old wisdom at it again?

Poor fellow!" and reached up to pat him upon the cheek before she took the boy in.

He watched them as they went. Tommy, half asleep, leaned heavily, tugging at his mother's bright calico dress, which in the dusk had faded to a gloomy color.

Mary half lifted, half led the little fellow. The baby woke, and cried faintly from the dark house.

John True stood under the cherry tree and stared after them. He did not smoke any more. He felt the delicate white blossoms falling to the ground around him.

He was a man to whom nothing had ever happened. The impossibility of change was like the remoteness of death. He tried to fix his mind upon the passing hour. He thought of little things. It occurred to him that he would go into the house and look at the green check on Tommy's apron.

The lamps were lighted before he got in, and he groped dizzily toward them through the heavy, sweet-scented night air, across the narrow yard. His wife glanced at him as he came in, but did not at the moment speak. She had brown eyes and brown hair, and always looked prettier by lamp-light. She had put the cinnamon rose into her hair because the baby snatched at it.

John sat down on the hair-cloth sofa in the sitting-room while Tommy was being put to bed. He felt like a visitor in his own house. Tommy kissed him good night hilariously, and said his prayers for Pupper in a metrical manner, closely resembling the tune of "Three Little Kittens," and replacing by an emphatic Amen the historic "basket of saw-aw-dust."

Then Sissy came home from the picnic. Sissy was a tall, bleached girl with freckles, and wore her hair in two long braids behind. She did not look like her mother or her father, but like a queer great-aunt who made an unfortunate marriage. It was necessary to talk a great deal about