

It was Ruth.

Eli stopped speechless with astonishment.

"I did not know it was your field," said she in a low tone. "I would not have come if I had. I never gleaned before. I did not know it was against the rules. See, I am going now."

She hurriedly took up her boy, and would have rushed away,—anywhere to get away from Eli; but her limbs trembled, the boy was strong and struggled out of her arms, and she fell on her knees with her eyes starting with fear, and full of tears that dimmed her sight.

Eli stood breathing hard, his heart beating wildly. He cursed his own slowness of thought and speech, and the shyness that kept him from saying what he wished, to relieve Ruth's fear. The boy came to his relief. He ran up to him, and clamored for a ride. Ruth in vain called to him, and Eli, taking the boy in his arms, sat down on a bundle of coats the reapers had laid aside. He pulled an apple from his pocket, and the boy clutched it and ate it as only one half famished can do. And Ruth rose and brushed away her tears and came near, half afraid of Eli, half jealous of the boy's clinging to him and refusal to come back to her side. Finally she sat down too. Eli looked only on the boy.

"His hair is like yours," he said presently, turning to Ruth.

"Yes," said Ruth, tremulously. Then she added, "His father died when *he* was a baby."

There was a long silence, so long that the boy leaned his head on Eli's shoulder and fell asleep. Eli did not know how the time sped—he was wondering, dreaming.

"We must go home," said Ruth timidly.

"Home! Where do you live, then?"

"With my husband's mother. She is very good to us; she gave us a home when we were friendless."

"And you have been ill," said Eli gently.

"Yes," said Ruth, the tears filling her eyes, "I was ill all the spring time, but I am well now, and able to work. Oh! so able to work. I feel I can do anything."

Eli slowly turned and looked into her face; only its expression, and the ruddy glow of her hair in the sunlight, told him it was Ruth, so wasted and worn had she become. And she, did she know Eli? Had she ever known him look so gentle and so kind before?

"You think me changed," said Ruth; I have had a great deal of trouble since I left your house."

"You should have staid with us always," he said gently, "we should have learnt how to show you that we loved you in time."

Ruth was going to say, "I thought you would be glad," but when she saw how Eli was looking at her, she did not dare. She rose, and said Grannie would be wondering where she was, and wanted to take her boy from Eli.

"I'll carry him home," said Eli, shyly, then seeing that Ruth set off without the sheaf of wheat she had picked up, he lifted that too, and carried it on the other arm.

The home where Ruth dwelt was very poor, and yet was beautifully clean and neat. Grannie was sitting at the window, watching eagerly for Ruth to come.

"You are late," she said, with some anxiety in her voice.

As Ruth answered, she invited Eli indoors, and told him she had often heard Ruth speak of him. The garrulous old lady forgot in what way, or of what occurrences, and turned to Ruth to supply the deficiencies in her recital. Ruth colored and was much confused, but Eli came quietly to her aid.

"I am sure it is not worth repeating," he said gently. Then as he rose to go away, he added, "May I come and see you again?"