

she perchance hope that he would disregard her hot words and plead forgiveness? If so, she was disappointed. When she came down to breakfast she found the fire lighted and the milk strained as usual; and he was standing, very tall and strange looking, by the kitchen table.

"I just wanted to say one word to you," said he, not raising his eyes, glowering at the buckle on her belt. "You don't need to lock your door; I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole, now I know you think more of another man than you do of me!"

Aggie's lips parted, yet she did not speak. She did think more of Adam, who was always kind to beasts, than of this torturer of her dog. And while she hesitated, he darted at her one strange, tormented look and strode away.

Then began a woeful life. Ned threw himself doggedly into work. Most of the time he did not speak to her at all; but occasionally an excess of anger would possess him, making him almost like a maniac. He never laid his hands on her, but once he cruelly flogged Jump because he would not go back to the house at his command. Another time he flung boiling water on the dog for coming into the kitchen with muddy feet. He had said, the last time, that he didn't mean to hit the dog. The first time his only remark was, "That'll teach him to mind next time."

Yet he was not always unkind, though never pleasant and gentle any more. One day she found a great box on the table, and ranged beside it a dozen cups of the exact pattern and size of those that had been broken. A note was open on one of the cups. It read:

"These are as good as those that fellow gave. I would have sent them sooner, but they had to send away for them."

Aggie had experienced a movement of forgiveness, almost of attraction toward him. But at supper he bore the same lowering brow and rigid mouth that she had grown to fear, and her carefully-studied words of kindness ebbed away from her lips, as birds fly at the sight of a hunter's gun. Her hand held the new teacup toward him, trembling.

"I'm obliged for the cups," she said. Fear made her voice cold.

"That's all right," he said. In a minute he added, "Did you count them?"

"No," faltered she.

"There's two extra for those there, holding flowers," said he, "and I want them."

"Why, Ned," she asked, "what's the harm of keeping them?"

"No harm, maybe; it's jest my little notion." So saying, he made two strides to the window where pansies bloomed in a teacup lacking only a handle and a saucer with but a slight nick; cup and saucer he took up in his hand. First he dropped the cup on the newspaper which she saw had been spread on the floor, and ground his heel into plant and china until they were a shapeless mass; next, he flung down the saucer to splinter it, in the same fashion. Something in his face, in his cold fury, frightened his wife. She was silent.

"I don't want any of that fool's truck around!" said he, sitting down at the table. He ate in morose dumbness; but she noticed—what she might have noticed before, had she been older—that he showed her a certain deference and observance. Her plate was never empty that he did not proffer something to refill it. He lifted the heavy teakettle and poured the water into the dishpan after supper. He carried the pans of milk into the icehouse where they were kept. He always filled the icebox in the pantry and the woodbox in the kitchen. And until to-day she had at least kept her domestic misery to herself. In one respect, too, her husband had not disappointed her; his kindness to her people was all she had hoped it would be, and more. There had gone over to the farm, where her father lived rent free, a continual overflow from Bruce's plenty. Jonas had a colt of his own. Her mother had Brahmas and Plymouth Rock fowls among the barnyard plebians of the leaner days. She never wore but she continually gloried in a black silk

bought her by her son-in-law. Every time Aggie saw her mother's face, with its new look of placid satisfaction, she resolved afresh not to complain. And Bruce had helped her. Did Mrs. Robbins come, he would always detain her for the next meal. During the meal he might be grave, but he was neither cross nor sullen, and sometimes he spoke to Aggie almost in his old manner.

"There ain't no need of pestering the old lady with our bickerings," he said.

Afterward she wished she had thanked him for showing her that much consideration, but at the time her misery choked her.

She got up, restless in her agony, and began to walk the floor. As she passed the window, the pictures outside froze her into a state of chill fright. A peaceful picture a stranger might have called it—the old-fashioned garden flooded with tranquil, evening light, and darkly shaped against the glow, his figure rimmed by the setting sun, a man leaning on a axe handle. Over the fence clambered a dog with a weight dangling at his heels. The weight—which was such as is used to hold gentle horses—caught on the fence and kept the dog captive, writhing and howling. Aggie understood it all in a flash. Adam had let the dog out of the wagon while he was waiting for the train, and Jump had dragged his weight all the way home. Her heart was in her mouth, pounding her breath away, as she looked at the faithful, meek creature struggling to crawl up to the feet of the man with the axe.

"He'll kill him! He said he would kill him!" she said. Useless as she knew her intercession to be, she tottered to the door—and stopped.

A most amazing thing had happened. The axe lay on the ground and Ned was patting Jump's head. His hand slipped down to the dog's neck—Jump all the time wagging his tail so violently Aggie could hear the thumps on the ground—and strap and collar fell together.

Bruce waved his hand, saying something at which the hound bounded away, to burst through the spring door and jump joyously on his mistress.

Bruce remained, his head sunk on his breast, in the attitude of one pondering deeply. At last he shook himself and walked briskly up to his own door. He entered, but did not come into the dining room, going directly upstairs. She could hear him moving about in the chamber which he now occupied.

What did it mean? What would he do next? Memories stirred in her heart of the days when he had been kind, when she had not shrunk from him, when even a timid affection and a pride, that was very sweet, in his manly strength and daring had begun to console her. She brushed away thoughts and visions; she cried out that she hated him, and always hated him, but his eyes would seem to shine again as they had once or twice; she felt a kiss timid as passionate on her hair, and, in a mixture of feelings she could not understand, found the tears rolling down her cheeks. His step aroused her. He was passing through the hall. Hastily she dried her eyes. He did not come in. She saw him going through the yard, wearing the good clothes he always wore to town. "He is going to town; I am glad, I am glad," said she. And as she rose and went again to the window she repeated, "I am glad. I wish he'd stay."

But in a minute she had left the window and gone out on the piazza to ring the bell. "He ought to have something to eat before he goes"—so she excused her action to herself.

He was half way to the barn, where a hail had stopped him. Behind the honeysuckle Aggie unseen herself, could see Adam Hull's horses trotting up to the gate. In the wagon beside Adam sat his wife, shielding her new blue outing suit with her husband's linen duster, and slipping her arms out of the duster as she drew in sight of the house.

"She will have to know!" thought the poor wife. She lingered and did not step out; though why she waited she hardly knew. Bruce stepped up to the wagon. He spoke with perfect calmness and civility.

"I was just going to hunt you up, Hull. Good evening, Mrs. Hull." He removed his hat. "Say, Hull, the dog you took came back, and I was glad enough to see him. I got in one of my fool tempers at him for chasing a little sick chicken that's a pet and follows me about; and I wanted to cut the heart out of him. My wife punished me just right by giving him away. But I guess she punished herself, too; and, anyhow, when the feller came back, and, you might say, begged my pardon, I felt all-fired cheap—"

"Did he get back?" cried Mrs. Hull. "I told Adam that was where he'd gone."

"Yes, ma'am. He came back with the weight on him—couldn't keep him, and the happiest dog you ever saw to get back! Now, that's what I'm coming to. I'd like to buy that dog of you, Hull, I've a Hereford calf—"

Adam interposed hastily, with the warmth of a much-relieved man. "Oh, take him, you're welcome—you see, we keep chickens, too."

"We wouldn't have him for a gift if you ain't going to hurt him," chimed in Mrs. Hull.

"I shall never lick him again," said Bruce very sternly, "but look here, you've got to take that Hereford calf. Your wife can take it if you won't. Say, Mrs. Hull, just come over to the barn and look at it once!"

She accepted the calf, which Adam had fain declined; but she would not stay to supper. Ned and his wife ate the meal alone and almost in total silence. Neither of them had any appetite. After supper Ned, as usual, filled Aggie's dish pans and then went out in the yard. He was gone so long that the dishes were washed and his wife's brown head was bent over her sewing in a white halo of lamplight when he stood on the threshold.

He looked at her thus for a few moments—his handsome, dark face working—before he entered. He did not notice, being strongly moved, that she thrust her work into the basket near her; but he did notice her frightened eyes and how she half rose at his entrance, as if for a stranger. His mouth quivered a little. But when he spoke his voice was gentle and sad. "Aggie," said he, "when I get mad I don't know what I'm doing; and I got mad at Jump. I was angry at other things, too. I ain't—I ain't so angry now. I'm sorry. I bought the dog back from Hull. He ain't Hull's dog any more, he's mine. Will you take him for a present from me? I'll never lick him again. Will you?"

Aggie did not look up yet. "Yes, Ned," she said, and she added a timid "thank you."

