

"My brother is back from sea," she said, "and mother wants me home for a few days, and Aunt Janet will spare me if you will."

"I shall be glad," began Eli, he meant to say he understood how sad and dull she had been, and that he was glad she should have a change, but a stronger feeling stopped his words. He could not change his nature suddenly, and nature had not gifted him with a ready tongue. Ruth drew back and shivered.

"You will be glad enough to go," muttered Eli.

"Oh, I shall!" cried Ruth and looked piteously at Eli.

Eli scraped his throat, looked at Ruth and said in a gruff voice:

"Don't trouble yourself to hurry back."

She looked up at him with flashing eyes. She wanted to tell him that but for Aunt Janet she would never come back at all, but Eli hurriedly walked off. Ruth did not see Eli again before she started.

Ah! what the house became without Ruth. Idle Sukey did what work she liked, and soon fell back into her slatternly ways. Aunt Janet dozed and knitted, and grew weaker and feebler in body and mind. Eli bore all discomfort with uncommon placidity.

"It is of no use crying," he said to Aunt Janet one day when no dinner was forthcoming, "Ruth will be back soon." That phrase was always in his mind. A slow man Eli, who, when once he had embraced an idea, held it closely even unto death. He wandered about the house, so vacant without Ruth, wondered at the dim light in the dairy; had he not a picture of it radiant with the brightness of her presence deep down in his heart? How long in the quiet evenings did he now linger at the gate, and lean upon it, and think and think. Maybe Ruth had returned; if so, would she run out to meet him? Ah! if she would! Could he but recall

that one moment of his life! Could he but find an opportunity to explain that he had never meant to be hard or unkind! A bright-haired girl running to meet him, laughing and shaking the rain-drops from her hair! Was it a vision? Alas! yes. Two weeks passed by, but Ruth did not return.

A month dragged slowly away, and then a letter came from Ruth. Aunt Janet clung to it with her withered hands, but her eyes were so dim with glad tears she could not read it.

"Give it to me," demanded Eli in a hungry voice. He took it and rapidly read its contents. He did not speak then: the old house seemed very quiet. In the stillness, the kitchen clock loudly vibrated, then struck the hour; it seemed to Eli that it took a year to strike. Then Sukey was heard calling, as she scattered cornseed to the fowls, "Chick, chick!"

"Speak to me, Eli; what does she say?" cried Aunt Janet.

He made an inarticulate sound; the letter fell from his hand; he turned slowly away and went out—out of doors, where the lazy animals basked in the sun, where the birds were singing, and the sun-flower turned its yellow face to the brightness. Eli strode rapidly on. Sukey came running after him. "Master, here is your hat," she said.

Eli worked amongst the men in the field; he told himself that work was the cure he needed; but, in the busiest part of the day, he was sent for to the house. Aunt Janet was taken very ill. Eli sat by her side, waiting for the doctor to come, and feeling a strong desire to say something kind and comforting to her, but he was a man of few words and failed power of expression at this moment.

"It has been too much for you," he said at length.

Her eyes turned to the letter on the bed.

"Read it," she said feebly.