

more hopelessly down on her shrinking shoulders.

"I'd like to steal Ned's pistol and shoot myself," she muttered; "I don't believe it would be wicked—the way things are!"

She had begun to set the supper table, wondering drearily how she could ever have been so pleased as she was over the pretty table linen and the new china. "That was before I was married," she thought. "Oh, if girls only knew!"

But in general her state of mind was too stunned for even silent words. She crawled about the room, and, half of instinct, repeated every tidy, usual motion in preparing the table. Once or twice her mind strayed dully after Adam; but his presence, that had once been the centre of a young girl's romance, failed to move her now. "He was afraid of Ned," she thought, "and he was afraid his wife wouldn't like Jump. He never really cared for me. I wish I never had seen him. Maybe then I wouldn't have married Ned!"

Dizzily her thoughts crawled backward through her husband's courtship. First, it was Adam came to see her, driving out from the village, where he kept a store, to her father's farm. Those handsome greys that he was driving to-day used to know the way to Alfred Robbins's gate well enough to traverse it in the dark. One day he brought her a hound with long ears and beamy, dark eyes, so swift and agile of limb that Aggie called him Jump. More than once he brought her candy of a choicer sort than he sold in the store, the boxes decked with paper lace and a flattened pair of tin tongs, to Aggie a truly sumptuous offering.

Aggie's mother went about among the neighbors, incidentally mentioning Hull's presence in the house and his gifts to Aggie. The girl never remembered seeing her mother so cheerful. Mrs. Robbins was a gaunt woman, with more wrinkles than her years needed, an anxious eye and a stoop of the shoulders. By unremitting energy she had kept a thriftless husband's head above water, and, unwelcome as every one save the eldest had been, she had loved and tended all her great family. But Aggie was her idol, and to have her marry well, marry a man who could "do for her," as she expressed it, was the one vivid hope in her colorless life.

Aggie was nineteen, teaching school, and flinging her meagre salary into the hole of the family expenses. To nineteen the first lover who has straight eyes and a good coat on his back is gilded by romance into a hero.

Aggie regarded Adam's narrow shoulders, untanned cheeks and white hands with admiration. She saw how kind was his nature, and she had no doubt that she loved him.

But one Sunday night Adam did not come. Instead, Ned Bruce, who was her father's landlord, followed him into the kitchen. His dark face flushed as he greeted Aggie.

"What's the matter with him?" thought Aggie, carelessly. But he was a lenient landlord and she bestirred herself to help entertain him, although her ears ached, straining after every sound outside which might be twisted into the rattle of wheels. Bruce laughed loudly at her girlish pleasantries. He seemed uncommonly interested in her scholars. After a while, to do honor to the guest, a plate of apples was brought up; and Aggie's mother praised a certain tree in Bruce's orchard.

"They do taste good," said Bruce. "Say, Mrs. Robbins, let me send you over a barrel tomorrow."

The children's eyes were all shining. Each had been provided with half an apple, which

Since she was ten years old she had been her mother's confidant. She knew every small economy that was practised in the household. It was she who declined the meat always at supper—meat made her have bad dreams.

"Well, I don't see what's become of Adam," Mrs. Robbins did say a few times during the next fortnight, "seems to me he acts awful queer!" But before a fortnight was over an interview with Bruce had changed her approbation of Adam into irritated dread. She only feared now that Aggie cared for him, and she heard with actual relief of his attentions to Ella Rhodes.

"They do say," she told Aggie, "as how he has been courting Ella for a year, but they had a tiff of some sort and they've jist made it up. Mrs. Martin told me, I'm 'bout sure she jist wanted to be hateful. But I matched her. 'He's been awful attentive to Aggie,' says I, 'but I guess it was only tryin' to keep his mind took up. I hope so,' says I, 'seeing how Aggie has another beau she likes better—'"

Aggie's delicate cheek grew hot. "But you know I ain't, ma—"

"I know you have, Aggie. Ned Bruce spoke to me 'bout you this week, and he's a man

Adam can't hold a candle to. Look at the way he's done that farm since his pa died. He owns two big farms and our little one, and there ain't a more respected man. He could go to the Legislature any day if he'd only turn Democrat."

Two months later, Aggie married Bruce. To-day the first months of her married life were passing before her, unformed and shapeless, here a mist, there a startling, vivid scene. "He was good to me, for a while," she said to herself, "but then, they always are, they say, at first."

He was "awful kind," he really was, until that day he came back from town full of the gossip he had heard about her and Adam. He asked her about it, and he asked her in such a tone that she grew angry. And then—she had heard Ned had a temper, but she did not know what the words meant.

On the table stood the pretty cups and saucers sent her by Adam for a wedding present. One by one her husband hurled them savagely at the empty stove. She started up to save them, but he held her at arm's length with one iron hand, while the other wrecked cup after cup.

It was just as he turned away, the last saucer gone, that Jump crept into the room. A snarl, like a wild beast's, escaped Bruce. "He gave him to you—that's why you're so everlasting fond of that dog," he yelled. Remembering, Aggie put her hands before her eyes as if thus she could shut out the vision of the rage-distorted face of her husband, the brutal motion of his foot and the hound's body flying through the window.

That was the first outburst. She was too angry to reason. She locked herself in her room. He did not come to it; maybe because he had read the note she left downstairs. Did



was rapidly disappearing. Mrs. Robbins said she wouldn't have children eat much just before they went to bed, there was nothing so unhealthy. The oldest boy sat near Bruce and furtively smoothed the fur cuffs of his overcoat. "I like you," he said, shyly.

The speech made Bruce redder again. "Well, that makes it even," said he, "for I like you." But he looked up and smiled at Aggie.

The next day the barrel of apples came. Casually, also, Bruce gave little Jonas a new pocket-knife with more blades in it than any Robbins boy had ever seen. Jonas was sure he was "an awful nice man," and frankly demanded of his sister why she wouldn't marry him instead of Adam.

"I'm not expecting to marry either of them," replied Aggie, tartly. Nevertheless, she experienced a certain gratitude toward Bruce because he had diverted her mother's thoughts from Adam's absence. She winced at the thought of her mother's disappointment. In fact she suffered more from the dread of that than from any wound in her own heart.