

For the first time a tear stood in her eye; but she pressed her finger into her eye and kept it closed for a moment. The expression on her face became tense, and tense the bearing of her figure. She looked a brave little figure standing up to the complications of life, some of them of her own making, some of them thrust upon her by fate and circumstance and the demands of her temperament and of her generation.

Then she set herself in the direction of her home, and in spite of the emotions struggling in her breast, could not but enjoy the freshness of the early morning, the flight of birds, the play of light in the heavens, the smell of the earth, the sound of Nature alert, awake.

Not a solitary soul did she meet; and she was thankful to think that no one in the village would ever know the history of her return. All that any one could learn, would be that she had returned, and then vanished, like a spirit.

But as she was rejoicing over this one propitious circumstance, Melton, the shepherd, driving his flock, approached from the left and met her almost face to face. He stopped short, as he had always stopped when he had encountered her in this same way, in the early morning, year in, year out. His face lit up with smiles.

"Why, this be a bit of sunshine, this be," he said. "Aye, but we've missed ye, Mrs. Holbrook. The moors have been right dull, and the sheep right daft, I can tell ye."

Joan laughed, and he laughed too. The meeting might be inopportune, but the greeting wasn't. And she was thankful for it, and grateful to him that he asked her no questions. It was enough for him to have this unexpected renewal of her comradeship which had always meant much to him. Thanks to Old Jacob's training in her childhood's days, she could talk and understand about sheep in a way that delighted Melton; and so now he