

there was something terrible in having this silent, strange man respond:

"Yes."

He spoke very gently and put out his hand to her.

She laid her own in his strong grasp, and then instantly felt as if she had done something wrong. But he would not let it go again. Drawing her a little toward him, he turned so that they could walk together back to the mills.

"Did John send you this way? Have you seen him?" she asked, falteringly.

"No," said Vibbard. "From where I happened to be, I thought I could get here sooner by walking over through Bartlett. Besides, it was pleasanter to come my own way instead of by railroad."

"But how did you know me?"

"I have never forgotten how you looked. And besides, that lilac."

With a troubled impulse, Ida drew her hand away from his and snatched the blossoms out of her hair, meaning to throw them away. Then she hesitated, seeing her rudeness. Vibbard, who had not understood the movement, said with a tone of delight:

"Won't you give them to me? Do you remember how you wore them in your hair one day, years ago?"

"I have reasons for not forgetting it," she answered with a laugh, feeling more at her ease. "Well, I have spoiled this bunch now, but of course you may have them."

He took the flowers, and they walked on, talking more like old friends. At the moment when this happened, Silverthorn, who, while waiting for another train to arrive, had come back to the house in search of Ida, passed on into a little orchard on a slope just beyond, which overlooked a bend in the road: from there he saw Ida give Vibbard the lilac spray. At first he scarcely knew his old friend, and the sight struck him with a jealous pang he had never felt before. Then suddenly

he saw that it was Vibbard, and would have rushed down the slope to welcome him. But like a detaining hand upon him, the remembrance of his foolish quarrel with Ida held him back. He slunk away secretly through the orchard, into the woods, and hurried to meet Vibbard at a point below the house, where Ida would have left him.

He was not disappointed. He gained the spot in time, and appeared to be walking up from the mill, when he encountered his old comrade going sturdily toward it. Nevertheless, he felt uncomfortable at the deception he was using. They greeted each other cordially, yet each felt a restraint that surprised him.

Vibbard explained how he had come.

"And I have seen Ida," he exclaimed impetuously, with a glow of pleasure. Then he stopped in embarrassment. "Are you going back that way?" he asked.

"No," said the other, gloomily. "We'll go over the river to where I live."

They took the path in that direction, and on the way Vibbard began explaining how he had arranged his property.

"It's just as well not to go up to the Winwoods' until we have finished this," he said, parenthetically. "And to tell you the truth, Thorny, it's a queer business for me to be about, after I've been hard at work for so long, scraping together what I've got. I shouldn't like people to know about it, I can tell you; and I never would do it for any man but you."

Formerly, Silverthorn had been used to this sort of bluntness, but now it irritated him.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you would break your bargain if it had been made with any one besides me?"

Vibbard drew himself up proudly.

"No, sir!" he declared, in a cold tone. "I keep my word whenever I have given it."

Silverthorn uttered an oath under his breath.