

Mrs. Sands shook her head.
 'Has he give her anythin'?'
 'No—not as I know of. He's brought mack'ral an' perch in sev'ral times.'
 'Well,' said Mrs. Care's, 'you take my advice, Lucy Ann, an' don't you be too sure. You can't tell about these young fellers. They're more'n likely not to mean anythin', an' Emmy's a real good girl; but she ain't one of the kind that young fellers take to, I shouldn't think. Who's comin'?'
 'Emmy,' said Mrs. Sands, with an attempt at dignity.

The door opened then, and Emmy entered. She had a brown paper parcel, and she handed it at once to her mother.
 'Here's the pork, mother,' said she.
 'I'd like to know where you have been all this time.'

'I had to wait. I couldn't help it. The store was full of folks.'

Emmy was not as tall as her mother, she was very thin, and there was a little stoop in her slight shoulders. Her young face looked darkly and gravely from under her wind-beaten hat; a dragged plume trailed over the brim, two loops of ribbon stood up grotesquely.

'Do look at Emmy's hat!' said Mrs. Elkins, laughing.

'It's all blown to pieces in this wind,' remarked Mrs. Sands. She was slicing the pork.

Emmy removed her hat soberly, and straightened the plume and the ribbon. She had a complexion like her mother's, and the winds had beaten all the brightness out of it. Her blue eyes looked as strange in her sallow face as blue violets would have looked in sand. She had tried to curl her front hair, but the wind had taken out all the curls, and the straight locks hung over her temples. She wore a cheap, blue gingham dress; she and her mother had tried to fashion it after the style of some of the cottagers' costumes. There were platings and drapery, but it was poor and homely, and beginning to fade.

Emmy's aunts surveyed her sharply; finally Mrs. Elkins spoke with a titter: 'Well, Emmy, is he comin' up to-night?'

Emmy gave a great start. She looked scared and pitiful, but she answered rather shortly, 'I don't know of anybody that's comin'.' Then she went quickly into the sitting-room. Presently her mother followed, and found her smoothing her hair before the looking-glass.

Mrs. Sands walked around, and looked at her with a kind of sharp tenderness. 'What is it?' she asked; 'what's the matter with you?'

'Nothin'.'
 'Yes, there is, too. You needn't tell me. I saw the minute you come in some-thin' had come across you. What is it?'

'Nothin' has come across me. I wish you wouldn't act so silly, mother.'

'Did you see anything of him?' Mrs. Sands's voice dropped to a whisper. Emmy nodded as if she were forced to.

'Where—'

'In the road. Don't mother!'

'Walkin'!'

'No.'

'Ridin'!'

'Yes.'

'Anybody with him?'

'Flora Marsh.'

Mrs. Sands stood looking at Emmy. 'He'd ought to be ashamed of himself,' said she. 'Don't you mind nothin' about it, Emmy. He ain't worth it.'

Emmy strained back her struggling

front hair and pinned it tightly; her full forehead showed, and her face, no longer shaded by the straying locks, had a severe cast.

'I don't know why he ain't worth it,' said she. 'I don't know why he'd ought to be ashamed of himself goin' to ride with Flora Marsh. I can't hold a candle to her.'

'Well, I should think after the way he's been comin' here—'

'He ain't been here long. He ain't never asked me to have him. He ain't beholden to go with me if he don't want to.'

'Emmy Sands, ain't he set up with you?'

'That don't make it out he's got to marry me.'

'Well, you can stick up for him if you want to. I ruther guess—'

'Somebody's comin', said Emmy; and Mrs. Care's opened the door.

'The pork's burnin', said she, 'an' I guess you'll have to turn it over, Lucy Ann; I'm afraid of its spatterin' on my dress if I try it. What's the matter?'

'Nothin', answered Mrs. Sands; and she went out and turned the pork and fried the fish. Emmy set the table; her aunts questioned her about her 'beau,' but got little satisfaction.

'I ain't got any beau,' she said; and that was all she would say.

Pretty soon her father came, a large man lumbering wearily across the yard with a wheelbarrow load of potatoes. He was a small farmer. He had a nervous face although it was so fleshy, and he looked at his wife and Emmy with an anxious frown between his eyes. He did not say much to his sisters-in-law; he had been as cordial to them as he was able at noon; company disturbed him.

As soon as he could he beckoned his wife into the sitting-room. 'Come in here a minute, Lucy Ann,' said he. When he had shut the door he looked at her impressively. 'What do ye think I see?' he whispered mysteriously; 'young Parsons out ridin' with the Marsh girl.'

Mrs. Sands held the knife with which she turned the fish. 'I know it,' said she impatiently. 'Emmy see 'em.'

'She didn't.'

'Yes; she met 'em when she was comin' home from the store. I've got to go an' turn the fish; I can smell 'em burnin' now.'

'Did she act as if she minded it much?'

'I couldn't see as she did. She acted kind of touchy. I can't stan' here, or them fish will be burnt to a cinder. You'd better get you out a clean pocket-handkerchief before you come to the table.'

Supper, with its company-fare of fried fish, hot biscuits, and a frosted cake, was quite late. The guests had to take their leave directly afterward, as they had a long drive. Mr. Sands brought the horse and buggy around, and Mrs. Sands got out her sisters' bonnets and wraps. She watched them as they put on their little flower-topped bonnets and adjusted their lace veils over their crimps. She had not had a bonnet so fine for years, but she felt no envy. She seldom looked in the glass, and never except to see if she were tidy. The sea had seemed to cultivate a certain objectiveness in her since she had lived near it. It was as if the relative smallness of her personality beside the infinite had come home to her.

When the sisters were in the buggy they walked the horse across the yard to the road, and Mrs. Sands walked at the side, talking. When she reached the road Mrs. Care's, who was driving, reined in the horse. A young man and woman were passing in a buggy.

'Who's that?' called Mrs. Elkins, after they had passed.

Mrs. Care's turned sharply on her sister: 'Ain't that Jim Parsons?'

'Yes, I ruther think 'twas him,'

'Who was that with him?'

'I guess 'twas the Marsh girl.'

Mrs. Care's tightened the reins. 'Well,' said she, 'I guess you'll find out there's somethin' in what I told you Lucy Ann. It ain't best to be too sure. Well, mebbe she'll find somebody else, now that the ice is broke. Good-by.'

Mrs. Sands stood beside a great wild rose bush and watched her sisters drive down the road. The twilight was coming fast, but the full moon was rising, and would be light in spite of the clouds, so there would be no difficulty about the two women driving home.

Mrs. Sands returned to the house, the sweep of the wind strong at her back. Emmy was washing the dishes. 'Ain't you goin' to change your dress?' asked her mother.

'No, I guess not.'

'Hain't you better? We might have somebody in, an' that don't look hardly fit.'

'I guess we shan't have anybody in.'

'Well, it ain't best to be too sure.'

Emmy said nothing more. She kept on washing and wiping the tea things. The corners of her mouth dropped, but nerve and resolution were in the motion of her elbows. After the dishes were put away she sat down with some sewing. Her mother sat opposite with her knitting-work. Mrs. Sands knitted fast, pursing her lips tightly and wrinkling her

forehead. She and Emmy scarcely spoke during the evening. At nine o'clock there was a step at the door, and a sudden red flamed over Emmy's face. Her mother started. 'There, I told you to change your dress,' she whispered. But the door opened and it was only Mrs. Sands. He stepped in cautiously, looked anxiously around the room, and then sat down.

'Well, how are you gettin' along?' he asked.

'Pretty well,' replied Emmy.

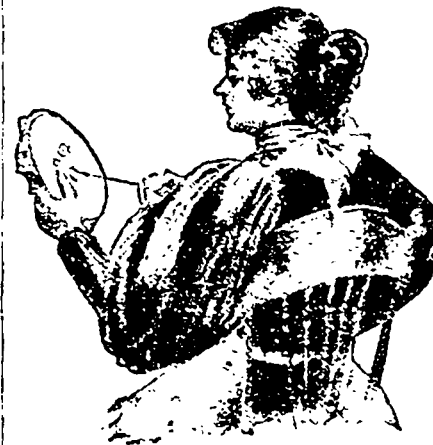
'Anybody been in?' he inquired in a casual voice.

Mrs. Sands shook her head. Pretty soon Emmy laid aside her work and went upstairs to bed in her plain little room. After she was in bed she lay listening to the murmur of her parent's voices in the room below. She knew they were talking about her. She felt intense shame that they should be discussing her love matters. It seemed sometimes to this little soul, setting forth for the first time out of her harbor of youth, as if the friendly watchers on the pier had caused her more discomfort than the roughness of the voyage. It seemed to Emmy that her parents talked all night; she was not conscious of any cessation.

When she went down in the morning her mother looked sharply at her. 'You don't look as if you'd slept a wink; great hollers under your eyes,' said she.

'I've slept enough,' replied Emmy.

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