

Nothing happened to us; nothing save the birth, and the short, short life of a little child of ours—our only child—who died when he was seven years old, and could just read to his father at the loom. It was that year the sky began to grow greyer, and the wind to blow more chilly about the house. Transome was ten years older than me, and he began in some way to feel his age now the boy was gone. And as time went on things became duller and duller; and his rheumatism grew worse and worse, till he had to give up his loom, and at last he could do little more than work out the rent by being odd man for our landlord, who knew he could trust him with untold gold.

But all this while the country side was changing even faster than Transome and me. The railroads had been made, and machinery invented, and all the little villages were turning into towns as if by magic. There had always been a few mills along the course of our little river, but every year more and more sprang up, with their tall smoky chimneys, and streets were made, and houses built, until the dingle itself became a row of straggling cottages, creeping up towards our pretty homestead. Perhaps it was because I belonged to another county, and spoke in a different fashion, but none of the country folks about there ever took heartily to me, and I always felt shy with them and their rough ways. Transome himself was a quiet man, and never cared to make many friends; so we dwelt like strangers among our neighbors, up in our thatched cottage, which was as different from the new red brick houses about it as we were to the factory people living in them. But I never felt strange with children, nor they with me. So when Transome was laid up from his work, I opened a little dame school for the lads and lasses living in the houses down the dingle. They soon flocked to me like chickens at the cluck-clucking of an old mother hen, till I might have filled my kitchen twice over. But my outside number was thirty; and as they paid me threepence a week each, Transome and I managed to get along—what with him working out the rent, and me taking in fine sewing from the ladies of the town.

Transome was always proud of my learning, and now he was glad for me to earn money in that way instead of by washing, as many a woman has to do when her man is ailing. But he did not like little ones as I did: they potttered him, he said, and he never knew how to manage them. So after a while, whenever he could not go to work, he liked better to lie a-bed upstairs, till the evening school was over, than sit in the chimney nook listening to the hum of their lessons, which always sounded in his ears like a score of hives swarming. I used to be afraid he would be dreary and sad in those long days, whilst I was as busy as could be downstairs. But he said he had thoughts come into his head that he could not put into words; for he had always been a man of few words, fewer than any I ever met with, and as he got older they became fewer still. Maybe he'll know how to tell those thoughts of his when we meet in heaven.