

The Marriage of William Ashe

talk which amazed him; flashes of insight, of profound and passionate experience, which seemed to fashion her anew before his eyes. The hard peasant life, in contact with the soil and natural forces; the elemental facts of birth and motherhood, of daily toil and suffering; what it means to fight oppressors for freedom, and see your dearest—son, lover, wife, betrothed—die horribly amid the clash of arms; into this caldron of human fate had Kitty plunged her light soul; and in some ways Ashe scarcely knew her again.

She recurred often to the story of a youth, handsome and beardless, who had been wounded by a stray Turkish shot in the course of the long climb to the village where she nursed. He had managed to gain the height, and then, killed by the march as much as by the shot, he had sunk down to die on the ground-floor of the where Kitty lived.

"He was a stranger—no one knew him in the village—no one cared. They had their own griefs. I dressed his wound—and gave him water. He thought I was his mother, and asked me to kiss him. I kissed him, William—and he smiled once—before the last hemorrhage. If you had seen the cold, dismal room—and his poor face!"

Ashe gathered her to his breast. And after a while she said, with closed eyes:

"Oh, what pain there is in the world, William!—what *pain!* That's what—I never knew."

The evening wore on. All the noises ceased downstairs. One by one the guests came up the stone stairs and along the creaking corridor. Boots were thrown