

isn't it humorous, the sort of things you read about in books. My God! Do you know when you came along to day I'd got to such a pitch I was nearly crazy. I felt I had to have someone to speak to—someone to talk to—just anyone at all, so long as it was a stranger I could tell it all and then have them go away and forget every word. And if you hadn't come in I'd have made you, if I had to go down on my knees to you! Isn't that shameless? Don't you guess I'm crazy?"

She had spoken, quickly, breathlessly, as though every moment were of value, and she had got it all out before he should go his traveller's way and leave her. Now, as she stopped short her fingers went out to the chairback and clung to it, working nervously.

"How old are you?" he said.

"How old do you think?"

"Thirty."

She laughed again.

"Yes, I knew you'd guess that! I'm twenty five. That's what it's done for me. I used to be pretty. You wouldn't guess it would you? Look at my hands, aren't they lovely? And I've had four years of it—four years! It was all right at first; I liked it. I thought it would go always, but it didn't. I found it out. He hasn't; he thinks it all right still, and he'll never know—that's the funny part. I care just that much for him still—that I'd hate to have him find it out, to know it was all a big mad failure. So I've got to stick to it; only sometimes—sometimes—"

She moved nearer to him across the bare floor.

"I'm so glad you came today," she said. "I'm so glad, because if you hadn't I'd have gone crazy. I would! I wanted someone to tell it all to. Do you know, I've gone out sometimes and talked to the cabbages? Isn't that a symptom of insanity? Well, I've done that before now! And you're a stranger; we've never met before

and we never will again, and you can go right off and forget it. Don't think me mad. Only I had to tell someone. Now I'll be all right. I've had it all out and over, and I can go on for another four years."

"You poor little soul!" he said. "You poor little soul!" He held out his hand, and for a moment she clung to it.

"Yes, that was it—to tell someone. It just got on my nerves. Because I never see a soul here—never, never! I get sick for a strange face. Just this half hour—hasn't it changed me? O, I know it! Am I the same woman you met at the gate?"

It was true; She had seen it, even while she was talking. She led the way out to the garden.

"Look at my marigolds—aren't they dears? They grow better than anything else here. That's the Allentown road, but I'll walk a little way with you. I've got to fetch the cow in before supper time."

He walked beside her, leading his bicycle. It was near sundown, and the level surrounding pasture land was flooded with gold green haze. Some poplars stood up flat against the sky line, and the road stretched like a grey, empty scroll.

They walked very slow and in silence. The cow was tethered to a bush near the roadside.

"I must leave you here," she said. "No, it's all right. I can manage. And you'll keep straight on; I don't think there are any turnings."

They shook hands again. And then it was that the real secret of the strange household, the one thing that she hadn't told him, rose pitifully and spoke.

"I shall never see you again," she said.

When he looked back, after riding a little distance, he could see her still, a lonely blur of pink among the green bushes. Behind her the cottage, small and square, caught the light on its slung roof and whitewashed walls, like a monument set in the wilderness.