

"Yes, Mary, it is," answered John in a deep voice. "The boy must work—like his father—he must help you—he must help us all. God must help us all."

He got up and paced the little room, shook off her hand; then, returning, lifted her work-worn fingers, with the courtliness of love, close to his set, strong lips.

The woman had dropped her sewing now. Sissy's red dress-waist fell to the floor. Her mother, after a moment's silence, picked it up, folded it methodically and laid it away for the night.

"I think I'll go and see if the children are covered up," she said lightly. "It has changed to the east."

The rocker of her little sewing-chair creaked as she moved; Tommy half waked and called her; and, from the inner room, she could be heard hushing the stirring baby in inarticulate, beautiful, maternal polysyllables. The east wind drove in at the open front door, and sounds from the distant village, broken, stirring and solemn, came in.

Mary came back soon enough, and they sat together and talked of many things. Her thoughts ran wild with the future that night: what trades the boys would like; how old Sissy would be when she married; whether he, John, would grow tired of her, Mary, when she grew old. They talked about a new oil-cloth in the entry and the prevention of profanity in a boy like Tom. They discussed the lining to the kitchen stove and the last lie that Sissy told. They considered the price of rump-steaks and whether, if John were a church-member, he would have family prayers. They talked of when he must have new shirts and how long they had been married. They criticised the old rooster and the new minister. They spoke of the pudding they would have to-morrow and the good they would have done if they had been rich people. They spoke of the last time they were cross to

each other and of how they would love each other forty years to come.

John got himself through it all in a stern, soldierly fashion. He kept his hands clasped behind his head at first, and gave her his sad, straightforward eyes, regarding her with the pathetic reticence characteristic of certain men; his look seemed to lift her up as if she had been one of the children like Sissy or Tom, and to hold her to the heart of thoughts as unspoken as his pure and perfect love. It was as if this awful individuality of the purpose of a man, stepped out like another being between the husband and the wife, and made three of them. She apprehended it before she spoke. She was not wise enough to put it into words, but she knew, from the bottom of her heart, and felt, from the limits of her understanding, that she had for the first time come up against that in the man's nature with which she, Mary, his wife, whom he had sworn to cherish till death did part them, could not, by might or right or love or longing, hope to intermeddle.

As they talked her face blanched sadly; but she was not a crying woman; she looked steadily on straight before her. She had been sitting in the low rocker all this while without her work, her hands, in the rare and awkward idleness of working-people's, crossed clumsily in her lap. She had not touched him.

But now, at last, she put out her fingers and slid them timidly into his. She rose then, and, still timidly, she gave him the other hand. For a moment so she looked down at him.

"John," she said, "do you want to take me in your lap a minute?"

In the silence he held up his shaking arms. The distant drum-beat from the village sounded out as she crept to him.

"John, do you—Oh, hush! hush! Oh, I know you love me! Oh, I won't ask! I'll never be so cruel. I'll save you, dear