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Many, but not all. For the evenings did how and then come when the pump ceased from troubling and the "critters" were at rest. Evenings when we sat under the lamp and read, when we walked and walked along moonlit roads or lay on the slopes of moon-washed meadows. It was on such an evening that we deliberately faced the vagaries of farm life.

"I'm beginning to see that it will never be any better," I said.

"Probably not," said Jonathan, talking around his pipe.

"You seem contented enough about it."

"I am."

"I don't know that I'm contented, but perhaps I'm resigned. I believe it is necessary."

"Of course it's necessary."

Jonathan often has the air of having known since infancy the great truths about life that I have just discovered. I overlooked this, and went on, "You see, we're right down close to the earth, that is the ultimate basis of everything, and all the caprices of things touch us immediately."

"And that knocks the bottom out of our evenings."

"Now, if we're in the city, playing bridge, somebody else is making those adjustments for us. We're like the princess with seventeen mattresses between her and the pea."

"She felt it, though," said Jonathan.

"It kept her awake."

"I know. She had a poor night. But even she would hardly have maintained that she felt it as she would have done if the mattresses hadn't been there."

"True," said Jonathan.

"Farm life is the pea without the mattresses," I went on.

"Sounds a little cheerless," said Jonathan.

"Well, of course, it isn't really cheerless at all. But neither is it easy. It's full of remorseless demands for immediate adjustment."

"That was the way the princess felt about her pea."

"The princess was a snippy little thing. But, after all, probably her life was full of adjustments of other sorts. She couldn't call her soul her own a minute, I suppose."

"Perhaps that was why she ran away," suggested Jonathan.

"Of course it was. She ran away to find the simple life and didn't find it."

"No. She found the pea—even with all those mattresses. And we've run away, and found several peas and fewer mattresses," said Jonathan.

"Let's not get confused."

"I'm not confused," said Jonathan.

"Well, I shall be in a minute if I don't look out. You can't follow a parallel too far. What I mean is, that if you run away from one kind of complexity you run into another."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to like it all," I answered, "and make believe I meant to do it."

After that we were silent a while. Then I tried again. "You know your trick of waiting with a glass of water on your head?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wonder if we couldn't do that with our souls."

"That suggests to me a rather curious picture," said Jonathan.

"Well, you know what I mean. When you do that your body takes up all the jolts and jiggles before they get to the top of your head, so the glass stays quiet."

"Well—"

"Well, I don't see why—only, of course, our souls aren't really anything like glasses of water, and it would be perfectly detestable to think of carrying them around carefully like that."

"Perhaps you'd better back out of that figure of speech," suggested Jonathan.

"Go back to your princess. Say, 'every man his own mattress.'"

"Well, where are we, anyway?" he asked after a pause.

"I don't know at all. Only, I feel sure that leading the simple life doesn't depend on the things you do it with. Feeding your own cows and pigs and using pumps and candles brings you no nearer to it than marketing by telephone and using city water supply and electric lighting. I don't know what does bring you nearer, but I'm sure it must be something inside you."

"That sounds rather reasonable," said Jonathan; "almost Scriptural."

"Yes, I know," I said. —Elizabeth Woodbridge in "The Outlook."



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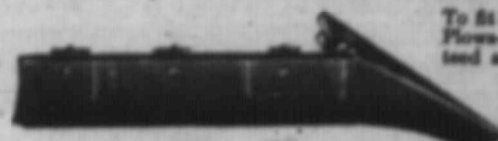
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