

## THE OLD WOMAN ON THE HILL 373

Raymond's voice was breaking, as he leaned forward toward her.

"He is with God, Mother Blondin. Jean—Jean has sent you a message. His last thoughts were of you—his mother."

The old eyes flamed with a dying fire.

"Jean—my son! My little Jean—his—his mother."

A smile lighted up her face, and hovered on her lips; and her hand, clinging to Raymond's, tightened. "Father—I——" And then her fingers slipped from their hold, and fell away.

The Bishop's arm was around Raymond's shoulders.

"Go now, my son—and you, my daughter," he said gently. "It is very near the end, and the time is short."

Raymond rose blindly from his knees. Mother Blondin was very still, and a pallor, gray and premonitory, had crept into her face. Her eyes were closed. He raised the thin hand, and touched it with his lips—and turned away.

And Valérie passed out of the room with him.

And by the open window of the room beyond, Valérie knelt down, and he knelt down beside her.

It was quiet without—and there was no sound, save now the murmur of the Bishop's voice from the inner room. He was to live—and not to die. To go free! To give himself up—but to be set free—and there were to be the years with Valérie. He could not understand it yet in all its fulness.

Valérie was crying softly. With a great tenderness he put his arm about her.

"It was the *Benedictus*—'into the way of peace'—that you said for her that night," she whispered. "Say it now again, my lover—for her—and for us."