

neck as he climbed East Hill, and Gifford turned, with one hand on the bay's broad flanks, to look down at Ashurst. The valley was still full of mist, that flushed and trembled into gold before it disappeared at the touch of the sun. There was a flutter of birds' wings in the bushes along the road, and the light wind made the birch leaves flicker and dance; but there was hardly another sound, for his horse walked deliberately in the grass beside the road, until suddenly a dog barked. Gifford drew his rein sharply. "That was Max," he said, and looked about for him, even rising a little in his stirrups. "How fond she is of the old fellow!" he thought.

In another moment the dog ran across the road, his red coat marked with dew; then the bushes were pushed aside, and his mistress followed him.

"Why, Gifford!" she said.

"Why, Lois!" he exclaimed with her, and then they looked at each other.

The young man threw away his cigarette, and, springing from his horse, slipped the reins over his arm, and walked beside her.

"Are you going away?" Lois asked. "But it is so early!"

She had her little basket in her hand, and she was holding her blue print gown up over a white petticoat, to keep it from the wet grass. Her broad hat was on the back of her head, and the wind had blown the curls around her face into a sunny tangle, and made her cheeks as fresh as a wild rose.

"You are the early one, it seems to me," he answered, smiling.

"I've come to get mushrooms for father," she explained. "It is best to get them early, while the dew is on them. There are a good many around that little old ruin further up the road, you know."

"Yes, I know," he said. (He felt himself suddenly in a tumult of uncertainty. "It would be no harm just to say a word," he thought. "Why shouldn't she know—no matter if she can never care herself—that I care? It would not trouble her. No, I am a fool to think of it,—I won't.") "But it is so early for you to be out alone," he said. "Do you take care of her, Max?"

"Max is a most constant friend," Lois replied; "he never leaves me." Then she blushed, lest Gifford should think that she had thought he was not constant.