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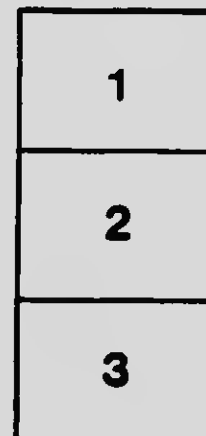

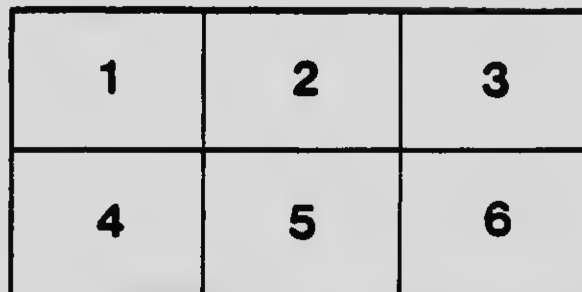

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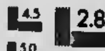

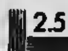

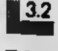

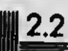

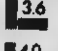

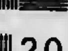

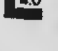

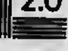

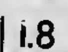

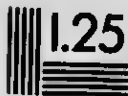

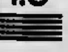

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I

Two old labourers came out of the lane leading to Great End Farm. Both carried bags slung on sticks over their shoulders. One, the eldest and tallest, was a handsome fellow, with regular features and a delicately humorous mouth. His stoop and his slouching gait, the gray locks also, which straggled from under his broad hat, showed him an old man—probably very near his old-age pension. But he carried still with him a look of youth, and he had been a splendid creature in his time. The other was short of stature and of neck, bent besides by field work. A broadly-built, clumsy man, with something gnome-like about him, and the cheerful look of one whose country nerves had never known the touch of worry or long sickness. The name of the taller man was Peter Halscy, and Joseph Batts was his companion.

It was a fine July evening, with a cold north wind blowing from the plain which lay stretched to their right. Under the unclouded sun, which by its own 'sun-time' had only reached half-past four in the afternoon, though the clock in the village church had already struck half-past five, the air was dry and

parching, and the fields all round, the road itself, and the dusty hedges showed signs of long drought.

'It du want rain,' said Peter Halsey, looking at a crop of oats through an open gate, 'it du want rain—*bad.*'

'Aye!' said the other, 'that it du. Muster Shenstone had better 'a read the prayer for rain lasst Sunday, I'm thinkin', than all them long ones as ee *did* read.'

Halsey was silent a moment, his half-smiling eyes glancing from side to side. At last he said slowly,—

'We du be prayin' a lot about ower sins, and Muster Shenstone is allus preachin' about 'em. But it's the sins o' the *Garmins* I be thinkin' of. If it hadn't a bin for the sins o' the Garmins my Tom wouldn't ha' lost 'is right hand.'

'An' ower Jim wouldn't be goin' into them trenches next November as ever is,' put in Batts. 'It's the sins o' the Garmins as ha' done *that*, an' nothin' as you or I ha' done, Peter.'

Halsey shook his head assentingly.

'Noa—for all that pratin', pacifist chap was sayin' lasst week. I didn't believe a word ee said. "Yis," I says, "if you want this war to stop, I'm o' your mind," I says, "but when you tells me as *England* done it—you'm——"'

The short man burst into a cackling laugh.

'"You'm a liar!" Did you say that, Peter?'

Peter fenced a little.

'There be more ways nor one o' speakin' your mind,' he said at last. 'But I stood up to un. Did you hear, Batts, as Great End Farm is let?'

The old man turned an animated look on his companion.

'Well, for sure!' said Batts, astonished. 'An' who's the man?'

'It's not a man. It's a woman.'

'A woman!' repeated Batts, wondering. 'Well, these be funny times to live in, when the women go ridin' astride, an' hay-balin', an' steam-ploughin', an' the Lord knows what. And now they must be takin' the farms, and turnin' out the men. Well, for sure.'

A mild and puzzled laughter crossed the speaker's face.

Halsey nodded.

'An' now they've got the vote. That's the top on't! My old missis, she talks poltiks now to me of a night. I don't mind her, now the childer be all gone. But I'd ha' bid her mind her own business when they was yoong an' wanted seein' to.

'Now, what can a woman knoa about poltiks?' said Batts, still in the same tone of pleasant rumination. 'It isn't in natur. *We* warn't given the producin' o' the babies—we'd ha' cried out if we 'ad been!'

A chuckle passed from one old man to the other.

'Well, onyways the women is all in a flutter about the votin', said Halsey, lighting his pipe with old hands that shook. 'An' there's chaps already coomin' round lookin' out for it.'

'You bet there is!' was Batts's amused reply. 'But they'll take their toime, will the women. "Don't you try to hustle-bustle me like you're doin'," says my missus

sharp-like to a Labour chap as coom round lasst week, "cos yo' won't get nothin' by it." And she worn't no more forthcomin' to the Consarvative man when ee called.'

'Will she do what *you* tell her, Batts?' asked Halsey, with an evident interest in the question.

'Oh, Lord, no!' said Batts placidly, 'shan't try. But now about this yoong woman an' Great End?——'

'Well, I ain't heared much about her—not yet awhile. But they say as she's nice-lookin', an' Muster Shenstone ee said as she'd been to college somewhere, where they'd larn't her farmin'.

Batts made a sound of contempt.

'College!' he said, with a twitching of the broad nostrils which seemed to spread over half his face. '*They* can't larn yer farmin'!'

'She's been on a farm too somewhere near Brighton, Muster Shenstone says, since she was at college; and ee told me she do seem to be terr'ble full o' new notions.'

'She'd better be full o' money,' said the other, cuttingly. 'Notions is no good without the money to 'em.'

'Aye, they're wunnerfull costly things is notions. Yo'd better by a long way go by the folk as know. But they do say she'll be payin' good wages.'

'I dessay she will! She'll be obleeged. It's Hobson's choice, as you might say!' said Batts, chuckling again.

Halsey was silent, and the two old men trudged on with cheerful countenances. Through the minds of both there ran pleasant thoughts of the contrast between the days before the war and the days now prevailing.

Both of them could remember a wage of fifteen and sixteen shillings a week. Then, just before the war, it had risen to eighteen shillings and a pound. And now—why the Wages Board for Brookshire had fixed thirty-three shillings as a weekly minimum, and a nine-hours' day! Prices were high, but they would go down some day; and wages would not go down. The old men could not have told exactly why this confidence lay so deep in them; but there it was, and it seemed to give a strange new stability and even dignity to life. Their sons were fighting; and they had the normal human affection for their sons. They wished the war to end. But, after all, there was something to be said for the war. They—old Peter Halsey and old Joe Batts—were more considered and more comfortable than they would have been before the war. And it was the consideration more even than the comfort that warmed their hearts.

The evening grew hotter, and the way to the village seemed long. The old men were now too tired to talk; till, just as they came in sight of the first houses, they perceived the village wagonette coming towards them.

'There she be! I did hear as Webb wor to meet her at the station. He's took her over once before,' said old Halsey, raising his eyes for a moment and then dropping them again. Batts did the same. The glance was momentary. But both men had the same impression of a pleasant-faced young woman sitting erect behind Jonathan Webb, the decrepit driver of

the wagonette, and looking straight at them as they passed her. There was a general effect of youth and bright colour; of pale brown hair, too, over very dark eyes.

'Aye, she be quite nice-lookin',' said Batts, with unction, 'rayther uncommon. She minds me summat o' my missis when she wor a young 'un.' Halsey's mouth twitched a little, but though his thoughts were ironical, he said nothing. It was generally admitted by the older people that Mrs Batts had been through many years the village beauty, but her fall from that high place was now of such ancient date that it seemed foolish of Batts to be so fond of referring to it.

The wagonette passed on. The woman sitting in it carefully took note of the scene around her, in a mood of mingled hope and curiosity. She was to live in this valley without a stream, under these high chalk downs with their hanging woods, and within a mile or so of the straggling village she had just been driven through. At last, after much wandering, she was to find a home—a real home of her own. The word 'home' had not meant much—or much at least that was agreeable—to her, till now. Her large but handsome mouth took a bitter fold as she thought over various past events.

Now they had left the village behind, and were passing through fields that were soon to be her fields. Her keen eyes appraised the crops standing in them. She had paid the family of her predecessor a good price

for them, but they were worth it. And just ahead, on her left, was a wide stretch of newly-ploughed land rising towards a bluff of grassy down-land on the horizon. The ploughed land itself had been down up to a few months before this date; thin pasture for a few sheep, through many generations. She thought with eagerness of the crops she was going to make it bear, in the coming year. Wheat, of course. The wheat crops all round the village were really magnificent. This was going to be the resurrection year for English farming, after fifty years of 'death and damnation'—comparatively. And there would be many good years to come after.

Yes, Mr Thomas Wellin, whose death had thrown the farm which she had now taken on the market, had done well for the land. And it was not his fault but the landlord's that the farm house and buildings had been allowed to fall into such a state. Mr Wellin had not wanted the house, since he was only working the land temporarily in addition to his own farm half a mile away. But the owner, Colonel Shepherd, ought to have looked after the farm house and buildings better. Still, they were making her a fair allowance for repairs.

She was longing to know how the workmen from Millsboro' had been getting on. Hastings, the Wellins' former bailiff, now temporarily hers, had promised to stay behind that evening to meet her at the farm. She only meant to insist on what was absolutely necessary. Even if she had wished for anything more, the lack of labour would have prevented it.

The old horse jogged on, and presently, from a row of limes beside the road, a wave of fragrance, evanescent and delicious, passed over the carriage. Miss Henderson sniffed it with delight. 'But one has never *enough* of it!' she thought discontentedly. And then she remembered how as a child—in far-away Sussex—she used to press her face into the lime-blossom in her uncle's garden—passionately, greedily, trying to get from it a greater pleasure than it would ever yield. For the more she tried to compel it, by a kind of violence, the more it escaped her. She used to envy the bees lying drunk among the blooms. They at least were surfeited and satisfied.

It struck her that there was a kind of parable in it of her whole life—so far.

But now there was a new world opening. The past was behind her. She drew herself stiffly erect, conscious through every limb of youth and strength, and filled with a multitude of vague hopes. Conscious, too, of the three thousand pounds that Uncle Robert had so opportunely left her. She had never realised that money could make so much difference; and she thought gratefully of the elderly bachelor, her mother's brother, who had unexpectedly remembered her. It had enabled her to get her year's training, and to take this farm with a proper margin of capital. She wished she had been able to tell Uncle Robert before he died what it meant to her.

They passed one or two pairs of labourers going home, then a group of girls in overalls, then a spring

cart containing four workmen behind a ragged pony, no doubt the builder's men who had been at work on the Great End repairs. They all looked at her curiously, and Rachel Henderson looked back at them—steadily, without shyness. They were evidently aware of who she was and where she was going. Some of them perhaps would soon be in her employ. She would be settling all that in a week or two.

Ah, there was the house. She leant forward and saw it lying under the hill, the woods on the slope coming down to the back of it. Yes, it was certainly a lonely situation. That was why the house, the farm lands, too, had been so long unlet, till old Wellin, the farm's nearest neighbour, having made a good deal of money, had rented the land from Colonel Shepherd, to add to his own. The farm buildings, too, he had made some use of, keeping carts and machines, and certain stores there. But the house he had refused to have any concern with. It had remained empty and locked up for a good many years.

The wagonette turned into the rough road leading through the middle of a fine field of oats to the house. The field was gaily splashed with poppies, which ran, too, along the edges of the crop, swayed by the evening breeze, and flaming in the level sun. Though lonesome and neglected, the farm in July was a pleasant and picturesque object. It stood high and the air about it blew keen and fresh. The chalk hill curved picturesquely round it, and the friendly woods ran down behind to keep it company. Rachel Henderson,

in pursuit of that campaign she was always now waging against a natural optimism, tried to make herself imagine it in winter—the leafless trees, the solitary road, the treeless pasture or arable fields, that stretched westward in front of the farm, covered perhaps with snow; and the distant stretches of the plain. There was not another house, not even a cottage, anywhere in sight. The village had disappeared. She herself, in the old wagonette, seemed the only living thing.

No, there was a man emerging from the farm-gate, and coming to meet her—the bailiff, George Hastings. She had only seen him once before, on her first hurried visit, when, after getting a rough estimate from him of the repairs necessary to the house and buildings, she had made up her mind to take the farm, if the landlord would agree to do them.

'Yon's Muster Hastings,' said Jonathan Webb, turning on her a benevolent and wrinkled countenance, with two bright red spots in the midst of each weather-beaten cheek. Miss Henderson again noticed the observant curiosity in the old man's eyes. Everybody, indeed, seemed to look at her with the same expression. As a woman farmer she was no doubt just a freak, a sport, in the eyes of the village. Well, she prophesied they would take her seriously before long.

'I'm afraid I haven't as much to show you, miss, as I'd like,' said Hastings, as he helped her to alight. 'It's cruel work nowadays trying to do anything of this kind. Two of the men that began work last week have been called up, and there's another been just

'ticed away from me this week. The wages that some people about will give are just mad!' He threw up his hands. 'Colonel Shepherd says he can't compete.'

Miss Henderson replied civilly but decidedly that somehow or other the work would have to be done. If Colonel Shepherd couldn't find the wages, she must pay the difference. Get in some time, during August, she must.

The bailiff looked at her with a little sluggish surprise. He was not used to being hustled, still less to persons who were ready to pay rather than be kept waiting. He murmured that he dared say it would be all right, and she must come and look.

They turned to the right up a stony pitch, through a dilapidated gate, and so into the quadrangle of the farm. To the left was a long row of open cow-sheds, then cow-houses and barns, the stables, a large shed in which stood an old and broken farm cart, and finally the house, fronting the barns.

The house was little more than a large cottage built in the shabbiest way forty years ago, and of far less dignity than the fine old barn on which it looked. It abutted at one end on the cart-shed, and between it and the line of cow-sheds was the gate into the farm-yard.

Miss Henderson stepped up to the house and looked at it.

'It is a poor place!' she said discontentedly; 'and those men don't seem to have done much to it yet.'

Hastings admitted it. But they had done a little,

he said, shamefacedly, and he unlocked the door. Miss Henderson lingered outside a moment.

'I never noticed,' she said, 'that the living room goes right through. What draughts there'll be in the winter!'

For as she stood looking into the curtainless window that fronted the farm-yard, she saw through it a further window at the back of the room, and beyond that a tree. Both windows were large and seemed to take up most of the wall on either side of the small room, The effect was peculiarly comfortless, as though no one living in the room could possibly enjoy any shred of privacy. There were no cosy corners in it anywhere and Miss Henderson's fancy imagined rows of faces looking in.

Inside a little papering and whitewashing had been done, but certainly the place looked remarkably uninviting. A narrow passage ran from front to back, on one side of which was the living room with the two windows, while on the other were the kitchen and scullery. Upstairs there were two good-sized bedrooms with a small third room in a lean-to at the back, the lower part of which was occupied by a wash-house. Through the windows could be seen a neglected bit of garden, and an untidy orchard.

But when she had wandered about the rooms a little, Rachel Henderson's naturally buoyant temperament reasserted itself. She had brought some bright patterns of distemper with her which she gave to Hastings with precise instructions. She had visions

of casement curtains to hide the nakedness of the big windows, with warm serge curtains to draw over them in the winter. The floors must be stained. There should be a deep Indian-red drugget in the sitting-room, with pigeon-blue walls, and she thought complacently of the bits of old furniture she had been collecting, which were stored in a friend's flat in town. An old dresser, a grandfather's clock, some bits of brass, two arm-chairs, an old oak table—it would all look very nice when it was done, and would cost little. Then the bedrooms. She had brought with her some rolls of flowery paper. She ran to fetch them from the wagonette, and pinned some pieces against the wall. The larger room with the south aspect should be Janet's. She would take the north room for herself. She saw them both in her mind's eye already comfortably furnished; above all fresh and bright. There should be no dirt or dinginess in the house, if she could help it. In the country whitewash and distemper are cheap.

Then Hastings followed her about through the farm buildings, where her quick eye, trained in modern ways, perceived a number of small improvements to be made that he would never have noticed. She was always ready, he saw, to spend money on things that would save labour or lessen dirt. But she was not extravagant, and looking through the list of her directions and commissions, as he hastily jotted them down, he admitted to himself that she seemed to know what she was about. And being an honest man himself,

and good-tempered, though rather shy and dull, he presently recognised the same qualities of honesty and good temper in her; and took to her. Insensibly their tone to each other grew friendly. Though he was temporarily in the landlord's employ, he had been for some years in the service of the Wellin family. Half-consciously he contrasted Miss Henderson's manner to him with theirs. In his own view he had been worse treated than an ordinary farm labourer throughout his farming life, though he had more education, and was expected naturally to have more brains and foresight than the labourer. He was a little better paid; but his work and that of his wife was never done. He had got little credit for success and all the blame for failure. And the Wellin women-folk had looked down on his wife and himself. A little patronage sometimes, and worthless gifts, that burnt in the taking; but no common feeling, no real respect. But Miss Henderson was different. His rather downtrodden personality felt a stimulus. He began to hope that when she came into possession she would take him on. A woman could not possibly make anything of Great End without a bailiff!

Her 'nice' looks, no doubt, counted for something. Her face was, perhaps, a little too full for beauty—the delicately coloured cheeks and the large smiling mouth. But her brown eyes were very fine, with very dark pupils, and marked eyebrows; and her nose and chin, with their soft, blunted lines, seemed to promise laughter and easy ways. She was very lightly and

roundly made; and everything about her, her step, her sunburn, her freckles, her evident muscular strength, spoke of open-air life and physical exercise. Yet, for all this general aspect of a comely country-woman, there was much that was sharply sensitive and individual in the face. Even a stranger might well feel that its tragic, as well as its humorous or tender possibilities, would have to be reckoned with.

'All right!' said Miss Henderson at last, closing her little notebook with a snap, 'now I think we've been through everything. I'll take over one cart, and Mrs Wellin must remove the other. I'll buy the chaff-cutter and the dairy things, but not the reaping machine——'

'I'm afraid that'll put Mrs Wellin out considerably!' threw in Hastings.

'Can't help it. I can't have the place cluttered up with old iron like that. It's worth nothing. I'm sure *you* wouldn't advise me to buy it!'

She looked with bright decision at her companion, who smiled a little awkwardly, and said nothing. The old long habit of considering the Wellin interest first, before any other in the world, held him still, though he was no longer their servant.

Miss Henderson moved back towards the house.

'And you'll hurry these men up?—as much as you can? They *are* slow-coaches! I must get in the week after next. Miss Leighton and I intend to come, whatever happens.'

Hastings understood that 'Miss Leighton' was to

be Miss Henderson's partner in the farm, specially to look after the dairy work. Miss Henderson seemed to think a lot of her.

'And you must please engage those two men you spoke of. Neither of them, you say, under sixty! Well, there's no picking and choosing now. If they were eighty I should have to take them ! till the harvest's got in. There are two girls coming from the Land Army, and you've clinched that other girl from the village?'

Hastings nodded.

'Well, I dare say we shall get the harvest in somehow,' she said, standing at the gate, and looking over the fields. 'Miss Leighton and I mean to put our backs into it. But Miss Leighton isn't as strong as I am.'

Her eyes wandered thoughtfully over the wheatfield, ablaze under the level gold of the sun. Then she suddenly smiled.

'I expect you think it a queer business, Mr Hastings, women taking to farming?'

'Well, it's new, you see, Miss Henderson.'

'I believe it's going to be very common. Why shouldn't the women do it!' She frowned a little.

'Oh, no reason at all,' said Hastings hurriedly, thinking he had offended her. 'I've nothing against it myself. And there won't be men enough to go round, after the war.'

She looked at him sharply.

'You've got a son in the war?'

'Two, and one's been killed.'

'Last year?'

'No, last month.'

Miss Henderson said nothing, but her look was full of softness. 'He was to have been allowed home directly,' Hastings went on, 'for two or three months. He was head woodman before the war on Lord Radley's property.' He pointed to the wooded slopes of the hill. 'And they were to have given him leave to see to the cutting of these woods.'

'These woods!' Miss Henderson turned a startled face upon him. 'You don't mean to say they're coming down!'

'Half of them commandeered,' said Hastings, with a shrug. 'The Government valuers have been all over them these last weeks. They're splendid timber, you know. There's been a timber camp the other side of the hills a long while. They've got Canadians, and no doubt they'll move on here.'

Miss Henderson made another quick movement. She said nothing, however. She was staring at the woods, which shone in the glow now steadily creeping up the hill, and Hastings thought she was protesting from the scenery point of view.

'Well, the Government must have the wood,' he said, with resignation. 'We've got to win the war. But it does seem a pity.'

'I don't know that I should have taken the farm,' she said, under her breath——

'If you had known? I wish I'd thought to tell you. But it was really only settled a few days ago.'

'I don't like having a lot of strange men about the farm,' she said abruptly, 'especially when I have girls to look after.'

'Oh, the camp's a long way from the farm,' he said consolingly. 'And these woods will come last.'

Still Miss Henderson's face did not quite recover its cheerfulness. She looked at her watch.

'Don't let me keep you, Mr Hastings. I'll lock up the house, if you'll tell me where to leave the key.'

He showed her where to put it, in a corner of the stable, for him to find on the morrow. Then, in her rapid way, Miss Henderson offered him the post of bailiff on the farm, from the date of her entry. He agreed at once; his salary was settled, and he departed with a more cheerful aspect than when he arrived. The hopefulness and spring of youth had long since left him, and he had dreaded the new experience of this first meeting with a woman-farmer, from whom he desired employment simply because he was very badly off, he was getting old, and Mr Wellin's widow had treated him shabbily. He had lost his nerve for new ventures. But Miss Henderson had made things easy. She had struck him as considerate and sensible—a 'good sort.' He would do his best for her.

Rachel Henderson, left to herself, did not immediately re-enter the house. She went with a face on which

the cloud still rested to look at the well which was to be found under the cart-shed, at the eastern end of the house.

It was covered with a wooden lid which she removed. Under the shed roof there was but little light left. A faint gleam showed the level of the water, which, owing to the long drought, was very low. Hastings had told her that the well was extremely deep—150 feet at least, and inexhaustible. The water was chalky but good. It would have to be pumped up every morning for the supply of the house and stables.

The well had a brick margin. Rachel sat down upon it, her eyes upon that distant gleam below. The dusk was fast possessing itself of all the farm, and an evening wind was gustily blowing through the cart-shed, playing with some old guano sacks that had been left there, and whistling round the corners of the house. Outside, Rachel could hear the horse fidgeting, and old Jonathan coughing — no doubt as a signal to her that she had kept him long enough.

Still, she sat bent together on the margin of the well. Then she drew off her glove, and felt for something in the leather bag she carried on her wrist. She took it out, and the small object sparkled a little as she held it poised for a moment—as though considering. Then with a rapid movement she bent over the well, and dropped it into the water. There was a slight splash.

Rachel Henderson raised herself and stood up.

'That's done with!' she said to herself, with a straightening of all her young frame.

Yet all the way back to London she was tormented by thoughts of what she had declared was 'done with'; of scenes and persons, that is, which she was determined to forget, and had just formally renounced for ever by her symbolic action at the well.

II

'You do seem to have hit on a rather nice spot, Rachel, though lonesome,' said Miss Henderson's friend and partner, Janet Leighton, as they stood on the front steps of Great End Farm, surveying the scene outside, on an August evening, about a week after she and Rachel had arrived with their furniture and personal belongings to take possession of the farm.

During that week they had both worked hard—from dawn till dark, both outside and in. The harvest was in full swing, and as the dusk was falling, Janet Leighton, who had just returned herself from the fields, could watch the scene going on in the wheat-field beyond the farm-yard, where, as the reaping machine steadily pared away the remaining square of wheat, two or three men and boys with guns lay in wait outside the square for the rabbits as they bolted from their fast lessening shelter. The gold and glow of harvest was on the fields and in the air. At last the sun had come back to a sodden land, after weeks of cold and drenching showers which, welcomed in June, had by the middle of August made all England tremble for the final fate of the gorgeous crops then

filling the largest area ever tilled on British soil with their fat promise. Wheat, oats, and barley stood once more erect, roots were saved, and the young vicar of Ipscombe was reflecting as he walked towards Great End Farm that his harvest festival sermon might now after all be rather easier to write than had seemed probable during the foregoing anxious weeks of chill and storm.

Rachel Henderson, who had thrown herself—tired out—into a chair in the sitting-room window, which was wide open, nodded as she caught her friend's remark and smiled. But she did not want to talk. She was in that state of physical fatigue when mere rest is a positive delight. The sun, the warm air, the busy harvest scene, and all the long hours of hard but pleasant work seemed to be still somehow in her pulses, thrilling through her blood. It was long since she had known the acute physical pleasure of such a day; but her sense of it had conjured up involuntary recollections of many similar days in a distant scene—great golden spaces, blinding sun, and huge reaping machines, twice the size of that at work in the field yonder. The recollections were unwelcome. Thought was unwelcome. She wanted only food and sleep—deep sleep—renewing her tired muscles, till the delicious early morning came round again, and she was once more in the fields directing her team of workers.

'Why, there's the vicar!' said Janet Leighton, perceiving the tall and willowy figure of Mr Shenstone,

as its owner stopped to speak to one of the boys with the guns who were watching the game.

Rachel looked round with a look of annoyance.

'Oh, dear, what a bore,' she said wearily. 'I suppose I must go and tidy up. Nobody ought to be allowed to pay visits after five o'clock.'

'You asked him something about a village woman to help, didn't you?'

'I did, worse luck!' sighed Rachel, gathering up her sunbonnet and disappearing from the window. Janet heard her go upstairs, and a hasty opening of cupboards overhead. She herself had come back an hour earlier from the fields than Rachel in order to get supper ready, and had slipped a skirt over the khaki tunic and knickerbockers which were her dress—and her partner's—when at work on the farm. She wondered mischievously what Rachel would put on. That her character included an average dose of vanity, the natural vanity of a handsome woman, Rachel's new friend was well aware. But Janet, Rachel's elder by five years, was only tenderly amused by it. All Rachel's foibles, as far as she knew them, were pleasant to her. They were in that early stage of a new friendship when all is glamour.

Yet Janet did sometimes reflect, 'How little I really know about her. She is a darling—but a mystery!'

They had met at college, taken their farm training together, and fallen in love with each other. Janet had scarcely a relation in the world. Rachel possessed, it seemed, a brother in Canada, another in South Africa,

and some cousins whom she scarcely knew, children of the uncle who had left her three thousand pounds. Each had been attracted by the loneliness of the other, and on leaving college nothing was more natural than they should agree to set up together. Rachel, as the capitalist, was to choose the farm and take command. Janet went to a Cheshire dairy farm for a time to get some further training in practical work; and she was now responsible for the dairy at Great End, with the house-keeping and the poultry thrown in. She was a thin, tall woman with spectacles, and had just seen her thirty-second birthday. Her eyes were honest and clear, her mouth humorous. She never grudged other women their beauty or their success. It always seemed to her she had what she deserved.

Meanwhile the vicar approached, and Miss Leighton descended the steps and went to meet him at the gate. His aspect showed him apologetic.

'I have come at an unearthly hour, Miss Leighton. But I thought I should have no chance of finding Miss Henderson free till the evening, and I came to tell you that I think I have found a woman to do your work.'

Janet bade him come in, and assured him that Rachel would soon be visible. She ushered him into the sitting-room, which he entered on a note of wonderment.

'How nice you have made it all,' he said, looking round him. 'When I think what a deserted hole this has been for years. You know, the village people firmly believe it is haunted? Old Wellin never could

get anybody to sleep here. But tramps often used it, I'm certain. They got in through the windows. Hastings told me he had several times found a smouldering fire in the kitchen.'

'What sort is the ghost?' Janet inquired, as she pointed him to a chair, devoutly hoping that Rachel would hurry herself.

'Well, there's a story—but I wonder whether I ought to tell you——'

'I assure you as to ghosts—I have no nerves!' said Janet with a confident laugh, 'and I don't think Rachel has either. We are more frightened of rats. This farm-yard contains the biggest I've ever seen. I dream of them at night.'

'It's not exactly the ghost——' said the vicar, hesitating.

'But the story that produced the ghost? What—a murder?'

'Half a century ago,' said the vicar reassuringly; 'you won't mind that?'

'Not the least. A century ago would be romantic. If it was just the other day, we should feel we ought to have got the farm cheaper. But half a century doesn't matter. It's a mid-Victorian, just a plain, old-fashioned murder. Who did it?'

The vicar opened his eyes a little. Miss Leighton was, he saw, a lady, and perhaps clever. Her spectacles looked like it. No doubt she had been at Oxford or Cambridge before going to Swanley? These educated women in new professions were becoming a very

pressing and common fact! As to the murder, he explained that it had been just an ordinary poaching affair. An old gamekeeper on the Shepherd estate had been attacked by a gang of poachers in the winter of 1866. He had been shot in one of the woods, and though mortally wounded had been able to drag himself to the outskirts of the farm, where his strength had failed him. He was found dead under the cart-shed which backed on the stables, and the traces of blood on the hill marked the stages of his struggle for life. Two men were suspected, one of them a labourer on the Great End Farm; but there was no evidence. The suspected labourer had gone to Canada the year after the murder, and no one knew what had happened to him.

But having told the tale the vicar was again seized with compunction.

'I oughtn't to have told you—I really oughtn't; just on your settling in—I hope you won't tell Miss Henderson?'

Janet's amused reply was interrupted by Rachel's entrance. The vicar arose with eagerness to receive her. He was evidently attracted by his new parishioners and anxious to make a good impression on them. Miss Henderson's reception of the vicar, however, was far more guarded. The easy friendliness of manner which had attracted the bailiff Hastings was, at first at any rate, entirely absent. Her attitude was almost that of a woman defending herself against possible intrusion, and Janet Leighton, looking on, and occasionally

sharing in the conversation, was surprised by it, as indeed she was by so many things concerning Rachel now that their acquaintance was deepening; surprised also, as though it were a new thing, by her friend's good looks as she sat languidly chatting with the vicar. Rachel had merely put on a blue overall above her land-worker's dress. But her beautiful head, with its wealth of brown hair, and her face, with its sensuous fullness of cheek and lip, its rounded lines, and lovely colour—like a slightly overblown rose—were greatly set off by the simple folds of blue linen; and her feet and legs, shapely but not small, in their khaki stockings and shoes, completed the general effect of lissom youth. The flush and heat of hard bodily work had passed away. She had had time to plunge her face into cold water and smooth her hair. But the atmosphere of the harvest field, its ripeness and glow, seemed to be still about her. A classically-minded man might have thought of some nymph in the train of Demeter, might have fancied a horn of plenty, or a bow, slung from the sunburnt neck.

But the vicar had forgotten his classics. *En revanche,* however, he was doing his best to show himself sympathetic and up-to-date with regard to women and their new spheres of work—especially on the land. He had noticed three girls, he said, working in the harvest field. Two of them he recognised as from the village; the third he supposed was a stranger?

'She comes from Ralstone,' said Rachel.

'Ah, that's the village where the new timber camp is. You really must see that camp, Miss Henderson.'

'I hate to think of the woods coming down,' she said, frowning a little.

'We all do. But that's the war. It can't be helped, alack! But it's wonderful to see the women at work, measuring and checking, doing the brain work, in fact, while the men do the felling and loading. It makes one envious.'

The vicar sighed. A flush appeared on his young but slightly cadaverous face.

'Of the men—or the women?'

'Oh, their work, I mean. They're doing something for the war. I've done my best. But the Bishop won't hear of it.'

And he rather emphatically explained how he had applied in vain for an army chaplaincy. Health and the shortage of clergy had been against him. 'I suppose there must be some left at home,' he said with a shrug, 'and the doctors seem to have a down on me.'

Janet was quite sorry for the young man—he was so eagerly apologetic, so anxious to propitiate what he imagined ought to be their feelings about him. And Rachel all the time sat so silent and unresponsive.

Miss Leighton drew the conversation back to the timber camp; she would like to go and see it, she said. Every one knew the Canadians were wonderful lumbermen.

The Vicar's eyes had travelled back to Rachel.

'Were you ever in Canada, Miss Henderson?' The question was evidently thrown out nervously at a venture, just to evoke a word or a smile from the new mistress of the farm.

Rachel Henderson frowned slightly before replying. 'Yes, I have been in Canada.'

'You have? Oh, then, you know all about it.'

'I know nothing about Canadian lumbering.'

'You were on the prairies?'

'I lived some time on a prairie farm.'

'Everything here must seem very small to you,' said the vicar sympathetically. But this amiable tone fell flat. Miss Henderson still sat silent. The vicar began to feel matters awkward and took his hat from the floor.

'I trust you will call upon me for any help I can possibly be to you,' he said, turning to Janet Leighton. 'I should be delighted to help in the harvest if you want it. I have a pair of hands anyway, as you see!' He held them out.

He expatiated a little more on his disappointment as to the front. Janet threw in a few civil words. Rachel Henderson had moved to the window, and was apparently looking at the farm-girls carrying straw across the yard.

'Good-night, Miss Henderson,' said the young man at last, conscious of rebuff, but irrepressibly effusive and friendly all the same. 'I hope you will let your Ralstone girl come sometimes to the club-room my sister and I have in the village? We feel young people

ought to be amused, especially when they work hard.'

'Thank you, but it's so far away. We don't like them to be out late.'

'Certainly not. But in the long evenings—don't you know?' The vicar smiled persuasively. 'However, there it is—whenever she comes she will be welcome. And then, as to your seat in church. There is a pew that has always belonged to the farm. It i about half-way up.'

'We don't go to church,' said Rachel, facing him. 'At least, I don't,' She looked at her companion.

'And I can't be counted on,' said Janet smiling.

The vicar flushed a little.

'Then you're not Church of England?'

'I am,' said Rachel indifferently; 'at least I'm not anything else. Miss Leighton is a Unitarian.' Then her eyes lit up with a touch of fun, and for the first time she smiled. 'I'm afraid you'll think us dreadful heathens, Mr Shenstone!'

What the vicar did think was that he had never seen a smile transform a face so agreeably. And having begun to smile, Rachel perversely continued it. She walked to the gate with her visitor, talking with irrelevant animation, inviting him to come the following day to help in the 'carrying,' asking questions about the village and its people, and graciously consenting to fix a day when she and her friend would go to tea with Miss Shenstone at the vicarage. The young man fairly beamed under the unexpected change, and lingered

at the gate as though unable to tear himself away; till with a little peremptory nod, though still smiling, Rachel dismissed him.

Janet Leighton meanwhile watched it all. She had seen Rachel treat a new male acquaintance before as she had just treated the vicar. To begin with, the manners of an icicle; then a sudden thaw, just in time to save the situation. She had come with amusement to the conclusion that, however really indifferent or capricious, her new friend could not in the long run resign herself to be disliked, even by a woman, and much more in the case of a man. Was it vanity, or sex, or both? Temperament perhaps; the modern word which covers so much. Janet remembered a little niece of her own who in her mother's absence entertained a gentleman visitor with great success. When asked for his name, she shook her pretty head. 'Just a man, mummy,' she said bridling. Janet Leighton suspected that similar tales might have been told of Miss Henderson in her babyhood.

And yet impressions recurred to her of another kind—of a sensitive, almost fierce delicacy—a shrinking from the ugly or merely physical facts of life, as of one who had suffered some torment in connection with them.

Janet's eyes followed the curly brown head as its possessor came slowly back from the gate. She was thinking of a moment when, one evening, while they were both still at college, they had realised their liking for each other, and had agreed to set up in partnership.

Then Rachel, springing to her feet, with her hands behind her, and head thrown back, had said suddenly: 'I warn you, I have a story. I don't want to tell you, to tell anybody. I shan't tell you. It's done with. I give you my word that I'm not a bad woman. But if you don't want to be my partner on these terms, say so!'

And Janet had felt no difficulty whatever in becoming Rachel Henderson's partner on these terms. Nor had she ever yet regretted it.

. . . . . .

The light farm cart which had been sent to the station for stores drove up to the yard gate as Rachel left it. She turned back to receive some parcels handed out by the 'exempted' man who drove it, together with some letters which had been found lying at the village post office. Two of the letters were for Janet. She sent them up tc the house, and went herself towards the harvest field.

There they stood—the rows of golden 'shocks' or stooks. The 'shockers' had just finished their day's work. She could hear the footsteps of the last batch, a cheerful chatter, while talk and laughter came softened through the evening air. The man who had been driving the reaping-machine was doing some rough repairs to it in a far corner of the field, with a view to the morrow, and she caught sight of her new bailiff, Hastings, who had waited to see everybody off, disappearing towards his own cottage, which stood on a lonely spur of the down. The light was fast going, but the deep glow of the western sky answered the

paler gold of the new-made stubble and the ranged stooks, while between rose the dark and splendid masses of the woods.

Rachel stood looking at the scene, possessed by a pleasure which in her was always an ardour. She felt nothing by halves. The pulse of life beat in her still with an energy, a passion, that astonished herself. She was full of eagerness for her new work and for success in it, full of desires, too, for vague, half-seen things, things she had missed so far—her own fault. But somewhere in the long, hidden years, they must, they should be waiting for her.

The harvest was magnificent. She had paid the Wellins a high price for the standing crops, but there was going to be a profit on her bargain. Her mind was full of schemes, if only she could get the labour to carry them out. Farming was now on the up-grade. She had come into it at the very best moment, and England would never let farming go down again, after the war, for her own safety's sake.

The War! She felt towards it as to some distant force, which, so far as she personally was concerned, was a force for good. Owing to the war, farming was booming all over England, and she was in the boom, taking advantage of it. Yet she was ashamed to think of the war only in that way. She tried to tame the strange ferment in her blood, and could only do it by reminding herself of Hastings's wounded son, whose letter he had showed her. And then—in imagination —she began to see thousands of others like him, in

hospital beds, or lying dead in trampled fields. Her mood softened, the tears came into her eyes.

Suddenly—a slight whimper—a child's whimper—close beside her. She paused in amazement, looking round her, till the whimper was renewed; and there, almost at her feet, cradled in the fragrant hollow of a wheat stook, she saw a tiny child—a baby about a year old, a fair, plump thing, just waking from sleep.

At sight of the face bending over her, the child set up a louder cry, which was not angry, however, only forlorn. The tears welled fast into her blue eyes. She looked piteously at Rachel.

'Mummy, mummy!'

'You poor little thing!' said Rachel. 'Whose are you?'

One of the village women who had been helping in the 'shocking,' she supposed, had brought the child. She had noticed a little girl playing about the reapers in the afternoon—no doubt an elder sister brought to look after the baby. Between the mother and the sister there must have been some confusion, and one or other would come running back directly.

But meanwhile she took up the child, who at first resisted passionately, fighting with all its chubby strength against the strange arms. But Rachel seemed to have a way with her—a spell, which worked. She bent over the little thing, soothing and cooing to her, and then finding a few crumbs of cake in the pocket of her overall, the remains of her own lunch in the

field, she daintily fed the rosy mouth, till the sobs ceased and the child stared upwards in a sleep wonder, her blue eyes held by the brown ones above her.

'Mummy!' she repeated, still whimpering slightly.

'Mummy's coming,' said Rachel tenderly. 'What a duck it is!'

And bending, she kissed the soft, downy cheek greedily, with the same ardour she had just been throwing into her own dreams of success.

She carried the child, now quiet and comforted, towards the house. The warm weight upon her arms was delicious to her. Only as she neared the gate in the now moonlit dusk, her lips quivered suddenly, and two tears rolled down her cheeks.

'I haven't carried a child,' she thought, 'since——'

Suddenly there was a shout from the farther gate of the harvest field, and a girl came running at top speed. It was the little one's elder sister, and, with a proper scolding, Rachel gave up her prize.

. . . . . .

The two land-girls had finished giving food and water to the cattle and a special mush to new-born calves. Everything was now in order for the night, and Janet, standing on the steps of the farm-house, rang a bell, which meant that supper would be ready in a few minutes. The two partners and their employees were soon gathered round the table in the kitchen, which was also the dining-room. It was a cold meal of bacon, with lettuce, bread and jam, some tea made on a 'Tommy's cooker,' and potatoes which Janet, who was

for the present housekeeper and cook, produced hot and steaming from the hay-box to which she had consigned them after the midday dinner. A small oil-lamp had been lit, and through the open windows afterglow and moonrise streamed in to mingle with its light. There was a pot of flowers on the table—purple scabious and tall cow-parsley, gathered from the orchard, where no one had yet had time to cut the ragged hay beneath the trees.

The scene was typical of a new England. Women governing—and women serving—they were all alike making their way through new paths to new ends. It was no household in the ordinary sense. The man was wanting. The two elder women were bound to the two younger by a purely business tie, which might or might not develop into something more personal. The two land-lasses had come to supper in their tunics and breeches, while Rachel Henderson and Janet had now both put on the coloured overalls which disguised the masculine garb beneath, and gave them something of the usual feminine air. Rachel's overall, indeed, was both pretty and artistic, embroidered a little here and there, and showing a sunburnt throat beneath the rounded chin.

The talk turned on the day's work, the weather prospects, the vagaries of the cows at milking time, and those horrid little pests the 'harvesters,' which haunt the chalk soils. The two 'hands' were clear by now that they liked Miss Leighton the best of the two ladies, they hardly knew why. Betty Rolfe,

the younger of them, who came from Ralstone, was a taking creature, with deep black, or rather violet, eyes, small features framed in curly hair, and the bloom of ripe fruit. She was naturally full of laughter and talk, and only spoilt by her discoloured and uneven teeth, which showed the usual English neglect of such things in childhood.

Her companion, Jenny Harberton, was a much more ordinary type, with broad cheeks, sandy hair, and a perpetual friendly grin, which generally served her instead of speech, at least in her employer's presence. She was a capital milker, and a good honest child. Her people lived in the village, and her forebears had always lived there. They were absolutely indigenous and autochthonous—a far older Brookshire family than any of the dwellers in the big houses about.

Then in the midst of a loving report by Betty on the virtues and docility of a beautiful Jersey cow who was the pride of Miss Henderson's new herd, Janet Leighton remembered one of her letters of the evening and drew it out of her pocket.

'Who do you think is going to be—is already—the commandant of the timber girls in the new camp?'

Rachel couldn't guess.

'You remember Mrs Fergusson—at College?'

Rachel raised her eyebrows.

'The Irish lady? Perfectly.'

'Well, it's she. She writes to me to say she is quite settled, with thirty girls, that the work is fascinating,

and they all love it, and you and I *must* go over to see her.'

Rachel looked irresponsive.

'It's a long way.'

'Oh, miss,' said Jenny Harberton timidly, 'it's not so very far. An' it's lovely when you get there. Father was there last week, drivin' some officers. He says it *is* interestin'!'

Jenny's father, a plumber in the village, owned a humble open car which was in perpetual request.

'There are a hundred Canadians apparently,' said Janet Leighton, looking at her letter, 'and German prisoners, quite a good few, and these thirty girls. Mrs Fergusson begs us to come. Sunday's no good because we couldn't see the work, but—after the harvest? We could get there with the pony quite well.'

Rachel said nothing.

Janet Leighton dropped the subject for the moment, but after supper, with her writing-desk on her knee, she returned to it.

'Can't you go without me?' said Rachel, who was standing with her back to the room, looking out of the window.

'Well, I could,' said Janet, feeling rather puzzled, 'but I thought you were curious to see these new kinds of work for women?'

'So I am. It isn't the women.'

'The German prisoners, then?' laughed Janet.

'Heavens, no!'

'The Canadians?' asked Janet—in wonder—after a moment. Rachel turned abruptly towards her.

'Well, I didn't have exactly a good time in Canada,' she said, as though the admission was dragged out of her; adding immediately, 'but of course I'll go—sometime—after the harvest.'

On which she left the room, and presently Janet saw her wandering among the stooks in the gloaming, her hands behind her back. She seemed in her ripe and comely youth to be somehow the very spirit of the harvest.

A little later, just before ten o'clock, while the sunset glow was still brooding on the harvest fields, the two farm-girls, after a last visit to the cows, slipped into the little sitting-room. Janet, who was mending her Sunday dress, greeted them with a smile and a kind word. Then she moved to the table and took up a New Testament that was lying there. She was an ardent and mystically-minded Unitarian, and her mind was much set towards religion.

'Shall we have prayers at night?' she had said quite simply to the farm-girls on their arrival. 'Don't if you don't want to.' And they had shyly said 'yes'—not particularly attracted by the proposal, but willing to please Miss Leighton, who was always nice to them.

So Janet read some verses from the sixth chapter of St John: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life. . . . I am the Bread of Life. . . . I am the living Bread which came

down from Heaven. . . . The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.'

Closing the book, while her quiet eyes shone in the gleaming dusk, she said a few simple things about the Words of Christ, and how the human soul may feed on them—the Word of Love—the Word of Purity—the Word of Service. While she was still speaking, the door opened and Rachel came in. It had been agreed between her and Janet that although she had no objection to the prayers, she was not to be asked to take part in them. So that Janet's pulses fluttered a little when she appeared. But there was no outward sign of it. The speaker finished what she had to say, while the eyes of her three hearers were sometimes on her face and sometimes on the wide cornfield beyond the open window, where the harvest moon, as yet only a brilliant sickle, was rising. The Earth Bread without—the 'Bread of Life' within; even in Jenny's primitive mind, there was a mingling of the two ideas, which brought a quiet joy. She sat with parted lips, feeling that she liked Miss Leighton very much, and would try to please her with the cows.

Betty, meanwhile, beside her, passed into a waking dream. She was thinking of a soldier in the village: the blacksmith's son, a tall, handsome fellow, who had just arrived on leave for ten days. She had spent Sunday evening wandering in the lanes with him. She felt passionately that she must see him again—soon.

The little reading passed into the Lord's Prayer. Then it was over and the two girls disappeared to bed.

Janet felt a little awkward when she was left alone with Rachel, but she went back to her sewing, and began to talk of the day's news of the war. Rachel answered at random, and very soon said good-night.

But long after everybody else in the solitary farm-house was asleep, Rachel Henderson was sitting up in bed, broad awake, her hands round her knees. The window beside her was open. She saw the side of the hill and the bare down in which it ended, with the moonlight bright upon it, and the dark woods crowning it. There were owls calling from the hill, and every now and then a light wind rustled through the branches of an oak that stood in the farm-yard.

She was thinking of what Janet had said about the 'Words' of Christ—the Word of Purity—and the Word of Love. How often she had heard her father read and expound that chapter! very differently as far as phraseology—perhaps even as far as meaning—went, yet with all his heart, like Janet. He was an Anglican clergyman who had done missionary service in the Canadian West. He had been dead now three years, and her mother five. She had bitterly missed them both when she was in her worst need; yet now she was thankful they had died—before——

What would her father think of her now? Would he grant that she was free, or would he still hold to those rigid, those cruel views of his? Oh, he must grant it! She *was* free! Her breast shook with the fervour of her protest. She had been through passion and wrong, through things that seared and defiled.

She knew well that she had been no mere innocent sufferer. Yet now she had her life before her again; and both heart and senses were hungry for the happiness she had so abominably missed. And her starved conscience—that, too, was eagerly awake. She had her self-respect to recover—the past to forget.

Work! that was the receipt—hard work! And this dear woman, Janet Leighton, to help her; Janet, with her pure, modest life and her high aims. So, at last, clinging to the thought of her new friend like a wearied child, Rachel Henderson fell asleep.

III

'A JOLLY view!'

Janet assented. She was sitting behind the pony, while Rachel had walked up the hill beside the carriage, to the high point where both she and the pony—a lethargic specimen of the race—had paused to take breath.

They were on a ridge whence there was a broad bit of the world to see. To the north, a plain rich in all the diversities of English land—field and wood, hamlet and church, the rising grounds and shallow depressions, the small enclosures and the hedgerow timber, that make all the difference between the English Midlands and, say, the plain of Champagne, or a Russian steppe. Across the wide, many-coloured scene, great clouds from the west were sweeping, with fringes of rain and sudden bursts of light or shadow, which in their perpetual movement—suggesting attack from the sky and response from the earth—gave drama and symbol to the landscape.

On the south—things very different! First, an interlocked range of hills, forest-clothed, stretching east and west, and, at the very feet of the two women,

a forest valley offering much that was strange to English eyes. Two years before it had been known only to the gamekeeper and the shooting guests of a neighbouring landowner. Now a great timber camp filled it. The gully ran far and deep into the heart of the forest country, with a light railway winding along the bottom, towards an unseen road. The steep sides of the valley—Rachel and Janet stood on the edge of one of them—were covered with felled trees, cut the preceding winter, and left as they fell. The dead branch and leaf of the trees had turned to a rich purple, and dyed all the inside of the long deep cup. But along its edges stretched the forest, still untouched, and everywhere, in the bare spaces left here and there by the felling among the 'rubble and woody wreck,' green and gold mosses and delicate grasses had sprung up, a brilliant enamel, inlaid with a multitude of wild flowers.

'Look!' cried Rachel.

For suddenly, down below them, a huge trunk began to move as though of its own accord. Hissing and crashing like some gray serpent, it glided down the hill-side, till it approached a group of figures and horses congregated at the head of the valley, near an engine puffing smoke. Then something invisible happened, and presently a trolley piled high with logs detached itself from the group, and set out on a solitary journey down the railway, watched here and there by men in queer uniforms with patches on their backs.

'German prisoners!' said Janet, and strained her

eyes to see, thinking all the time of a letter she had received that morning from her soldier brother fighting with the English troops to the west of Rheims:—

'The beggars are on the run! Foch has got them this time. But, oh, Lord, the sight they've made of all this beautiful country! Trampled, and ruined, and smashed! all of it. Deliberate loot and malice everywhere, and tales of things done in the villages that make one see red. We captured a letter to his wife on a dead German this morning: "Well, the offensive is a failure, but we've done one thing—we've smashed up another bit of France!" How are we ever going to live with this people in the same world after the war?'

And there below, in the heart of this remote English woodland, now being sacrificed to the war, moved the sons of this very people, cast up here by the tide of battle. Janet had heard that nobody spoke to them during the work, except to give directions; after work they had their own wired camp, and all intercourse between them and the Canadian woodmen, or the English timber girls, was forbidder [illegible] were they saying among themselves—wha[illegible] hinking—these peasants, some perhaps from the Rhineland, or the beautiful Bavarian country, or the Prussian plains? Janet had travelled a good deal in Germany before the war, using her holidays as a mistress in a secondary school, and her small savings, in a kind of wandering which had been a passion with her. She had known Bavarians and Prussians at home. But

here, in this corner of rural England, with this veil of silence drawn between them and the nation which at last, in this summer of 1918, was grimly certain, after four years of vengeance and victory, what ferments were, perhaps, working in the German mind?

Yes, there was the German camp, and beyond it under the hill the Canadian forestry camp; whilst just beneath them could be seen the roof of the large women's hostel.

Another exclamation from Rachel, as, on their left, another great tree started for the bottom of the hollow.

'But haven't you seen all this before?' asked Janet.

'No, I never saw anything of lumbering.'

The tone showed the sudden cooling and reserve that were always apparent in Rachel's manner when any subject connected with Canada came into conversation. Yet Janet had noticed with surprise that it was Rachel herself who, when the harvest was nearly over, had revived the subject of the camp, and planned the drive for this Saturday afternoon. It had seemed to Janet once or twice that she was forcing herself to do it, as though braving some nervousness of which she was ashamed.

The rough road on which they were driving wound gradually downward through the felled timber. Soon they could hear the clatter of the engine, and the hissing of the saws which seized the trees on their landing, and cut and stripped them in a trice, ready for loading. Round the engine and at the starting-place of the trolleys was a busy crowd: lean and bronzed Canadians;

women in leather breeches and coats, busily measuring and marking; a team of horses showing silvery white against the purple of the hill; and everywhere the German prisoner lads, mostly quite young and of short stature. The pony carriage passed a group of them, and they stared with cheerful, furtive looks at the two women.

Then the group of timber girls below perceived the approaching visitors, and a figure, detaching itself from the rest, came to meet the carriage. A stately woman, black-haired, in coat and breeches like the rest, with a felt hat, and a badge of authority, touches of green besides on the khaki uniform. Janet recognised her at once as Mrs Fergusson, their comrade for a time at college, and much liked both by her and Rachel.

She came laughing, with hands outstretched.

'Well, here we meet again! Jolly to see you! A new scene, isn't it? Life doesn't stand still nowadays! One of my girls will take the carriage for you.'

A stalwart maiden unharnessed the pony and let him graze.

Mrs Fergusson took possession of her visitors, and walked on beside them, describing the different stages of the work, and sections of the workers.

'You see those tall fellows farthest off? Those work the saws and cut up the trees as they come down. Then the horses bring them to the rollers, and the Canadians guide them with those hooks till the crane seizes hold of them and lifts them on to the trolley.

But before the hooks get them—you see the girls there?—they do all the measuring; they note everything in their books and they mark every log. All the payments of the camp, the wages paid, the sums earned by the trolley contractor who takes them to the station, the whole finance, in fact, depends on the *women*. I've trained scores besides and sent them out to other camps! But now come, I must introduce you to the commandant of the camp.'

'A Canadian?' asked Janet.

'No, an American! He comes from Maine, but he had been lumbering in Canada, with several mills and camps under him. So he volunteered a year ago to bring over a large Forestry battalion—mostly the men he had been working with in Quebec. Splendid fellows! But he's the king!'

Then she raised her voice,—

'Captain Ellesborough!'

A young man in uniform, with a slouch hat, came forward, leaping over the logs in his path. He gave a military salute to the two visitors, and a swift, scrutinising look to each of them. Rachel was aware of a thin, handsome face bronzed by exposure, a pair of blue eyes, rather pale in colour, to which the sunburn of brow and cheek gave a singular brilliance, and a well-cut, determined mouth. The shoulders were those of an athlete, but on the whole the figure was lightly and slenderly built, making an impression rather of grace and elasticity than of exceptional strength.

'You would like to see the camp?' he said, looking at Rachel.

'Aren't you too busy to show it?'

'Not at all. I am not wanted just now. Let me help you over those logs.' He held out his hand.

'Oh, thank you, I don't want any help,' said Rachel a little scornfully. He smiled in approving silence, and she followed his lead, leaping and scrambling over the piles of wood, with a deer's sureness of foot, till he invited her to stop and watch the timber girls at their measuring. As the two visitors approached, land-women and forest-women eyed each other with friendly looks, but without speech. For talk, indeed, the business in hand was far too strenuous. The logs were coming in fast; there must be no slip in measurement or note. The work was hard, and the women doing it had been at it all day. But on the whole, what a comely and energetic group,' with the bright eyes, the clear skins, the animation born of open air and exercise.

'They can't talk to you now!' said Mrs Fergusson in Janet's ear, amid the din of the engines, 'but they'll talk at tea. And there's a dance to-night.'

Janet looked round the wild glen in wonder.

'Who come?'

'Oh, there's an Air Force camp half a mile away—an Army Service camp on the other side. The officers come—some of them—every Saturday. We take down the partitions in our huts. You can't think what pretty frocks the girls put on! And we dance till midnight.'

'And you've no difficulty with the men working in the camp?'

'You mean—how do they treat the girls?' laughed Mrs Fergusson. 'They're *charming* to the girls! Chivalrous, kind, everything they should be. But then,' she added proudly, 'my girls are the pick—educated women all of them. I could trust them anywhere. And Captain Ellesborough—you won't get any mischief going on where he is.'

Meanwhile the captain, well out of earshot of Mrs Fergusson's praise, was explaining the organisation of the camp to Rachel as they slowly climbed the hill, on the opposite side from that by which she and Janet had descended.

'Which works hardest, I wonder?' she said at last, as they paused to look down on the scene below. 'We on our farm, or you here? I've never had more than five hours' sleep through the harvest! But now things are slacker.'

He threw his head back with a laugh.

'Why, this seems to me like playing at lumbering! It's all so tiny—so babyish. Oh, yes, there's plenty of work—for the moment. But it'll be all done, in one more season; not a stick left. England can't grow a real forest.'

'Compared to America?'

'Well, I was thinking of Canada. Do you know Canada?'

'A little.' Then she added hastily: 'But I never saw any lumbering.'

'What a pity! It's a gorgeous life. Oh, not for women. These women here—awfully nice girls, and awfully clever too—couldn't make anything of it in Canada. I had a couple of square miles of forest to look after—magnificent stuff!—Douglas fir most of it—and two pulping mills, and about two hundred men—a rough lot.'

'But you're not Canadian?'

'Oh, Lord, no! My people live in Maine. I was at Yale. I got trained at the forest school there, and after a bit went over the Canadian frontier with my brother to work a big concession in Quebec. We did very well—made a lot of money. Then came the war. My brother joined up with the Canadian army. I stayed behind to try and settle up the business, till the States went in, too. Then they set me and some other fellows to raise a Forestry battalion—picked men. We went to France first, and last winter I was sent here—to boss this little show! But I shan't stay here long! It isn't good enough. Besides, I want to fight! They've promised me a commission in our own army.'

He looked at her with sparkling eyes, and her face involuntarily answered the challenge of his; so much so that his look prolonged itself. She was wonderfully pleasant to look upon, this friend of Mrs Fergusson's. And she was farming on her own? A jolly plucky thing to do! He decided that he liked her; and his talk flowed on. He was frank about himself, and full of self-confidence; but there was a winning human note

in it, and Rachel listened eagerly, talking readily, too, whenever there was an opening. They climbed to the top of the hill, where they stood on the northern edge of the forest, looking across the basin and the busy throng below. He pointed out to her a timber-slide to their right, and they watched the trees rushing down it, dragged, as she now saw plainly, by the wire cable which was worked by the engine in the hollow. A group of German prisoners, half-way down, were on the edge of the slide, guiding the logs.

'We don't have any trouble with them,' said the captain carelessly. 'They're only too thankful to be here. They've two corporals of their own who keep order. Oh, of course we have our eyes open. There are some sly beggars among them. Our men have no truck with them. I shouldn't advise you to employ them. It wouldn't do for women alone.'

His smile was friendly, and Rachel found it pleasant to be advised by him. As to employing prisoners, she said, even were it allowed, nothing would induce her to risk it. There were a good many on Colonel Shepherd's estate, and she sometimes met them, bicycling to and from their billets in the village, in the evening after work. 'Once or twice they've jeered at me,' she said flushing.

'Jeered at you!' he repeated in surprise.

'At my dress, I mean. It seems to amuse them.'

'I see. You wear the land army dress like these girls?'

'When I'm at work.'

'Well, I'm glad you don't wear it always,' he said candidly. 'These girls here look awfully nice of an evening. They always change.'

He glanced at her curiously. Her dress of dark blue linen, her pretty hat to match, with its bunch of flowers, not to speak of the slender ankles and feet in their blue stockings and khaki shoes, seemed to him extraordinarily becoming. But she puzzled him. There was something about her quite different from the girls of the hostel. She appeared to be older and riper than they; yet he did not believe she was a day more than five-and-twenty, and some of them were older than that. Unmarried, he supposed. 'Miss Henderson?' Yes, he was sure that was the name Mrs Fergusson had mentioned. His eyes travelled discreetly to her bare, left hand. That settled it.

'Well, if I came across these fellows jeering at an Englishwoman, I'd know the reason why!' he resumed hotly. 'You should have complained.'

She shook her head smiling. 'One doesn't want to be a nuisance in war time. One can always protect oneself.'

He smiled.

'That's what women always say, and—excuse me—they can't!'

She laughed.

'Oh, yes, we can—the modern woman.'

'I don't see much difference between the modern woman and the old-fashioned woman,' he said obstinately. 'It isn't dress or working at munitions that makes the difference.'

'No, but—what they signify.'

'What?—a freer life, getting your own way, seeing more of the world?' The tone was a trifle antagonistic.

'*Knowing* more of the world,' she said quietly. 'We're not the ignorant babes our grandmothers were at our age. That's why we can protect ourselves.'

And again he was aware of something sharp or bitter in her—some note of disillusionment—that jarred with the soft, rather broad face and dreamy eyes. It stirred him, and they presently found themselves plunged in a free and exciting discussion of the new place and opportunities of women in the world, the man from the more conservative, the woman from the more revolutionary point of view. Secretly, he was a good deal repelled by some of his companion's opinions, and her expression of them. She quoted Wells and Shaw, and he hated both. He was an idealist and a romantic, with a volume of poems in his pocket. She, it seemed, was still on a rising wave of rebellion, moral and social, like so many women; while his wave had passed, and he was drifting in the trough of it. He supposed she had dropped religion, like everything else. Well, the type didn't attract him. He believed the world was coming back to the old things. The war had done it—made people think. No doubt this girl had rushed through a lot of things already, and thought she knew everything. But she didn't.

Then, as their talk went on, this first opinion dropped in confusion. For instead of presenting him with a

consistent revolutionist, his companion was, it appeared, full of the most unexpected veins and pockets of something much softer and more appealing. She had astonishing returns upon herself; and after some sentiment that had seemed to him silly or even outrageous, a hurried 'Oh, I dare say that's all nonsense!' would suddenly bewilder or appease a marked trenchancy of judgment in himself which was not accustomed to be so tripped up.

The upshot of it was that both Rachel and her new acquaintance enjoyed an agreeable, an adventurous half hour. They got rapidly beyond conventionalities. One moment she thought him rude, the next delightful; just as she alternately appeared to him feminist and feminine. Above them the doomed beech trees, still green in the late August afternoon, spread their canopy of leaf, and through their close stems ran dark aisles of shadow. Below them was the tree-strewn hill-side. In the hollow Rachel could see Janet Leighton and Mrs Fergusson among the measuring girls; the horses moving to and fro; the Canadian lumber-men catching at and guiding the logs; the trolleys descending the valley; while just opposite to them trunk after trunk was crashing down the hill, the line of the steel cable gleaming now and then in a fitful sunshine which had begun to slip out below a roof of purple cloud. Only one prisoner was left to look after the slide. The others had just gone down the hill, at a summons from below. Suddenly Ellesborough sprang to his feet.

'Good Heavens! what's that?' For a loud cry

had rung out, accompanied by what sounded like a report. The man who had been standing among the dead brushwood on the other side of the descending timber, about a hundred yards away, had disappeared; and the huge beech just launched from above had ceased to move.

Another cry for help.

'The cable's broken!' said Ellesborough, starting at full speed for the slide. Rachel rushed after him, and presently caught him up where he knelt beside a man lying on the ground, and writhing in great pain. The prisoner's cap had fallen off, and revealed a young German lad of nineteen or twenty, hardly conscious, and groaning pitifully at intervals. As he lay crouched on his face, the red patches on his back, intended to guide the aim of an armed guard in case of any attempt to escape, showed with a sinister plainness.

'The cable snapped, and has caught him round the body,' Ellesborough explained. 'Give him this brandy, please, while I try and make out——'

With skilled and gentle fingers he began to explore the injury.

'A rib broken, I think.' He looked with anxiety at some blood that had begun to appear on the lips. 'I must go down and get some men and a stretcher. They won't know what to do without me. My second in command is off duty for the day. Can you look after him while I go? Awfully sorry to——'

He gave her a swift, investigating glance.

She interrupted him.

'Tell me what to do, and I'll do it.'

He loosened the boy's collar and very gently tried to ease his position.

'Mamma!' murmured the boy, with the accent of a miserable child in a bad dream. Ellesborough's face softened. He bent over him and said something in German. Rachel did not understand it—only the compassionate look in the man's blue eyes.

'Give him more brandy if you can, and try to keep him still,' said Ellesborough as he rose to his feet. 'I shall be back directly.'

Her glance answered. By this time there was commotion below, the engine had stopped working and men were running up the hill. Ellesborough went bounding down the steep slope to meet them. They turned back with him, and Rachel supposed they had gone to fetch a stretcher, and if possible a doctor, from the small camp hospital which Mrs Fergusson had pointed out to her near the gate. Meanwhile, for a few minutes, she was alone with this suffering lad. Was he fatally hurt—dying? She managed to get some brandy down, and then he lay groaning and unconscious, murmuring incoherent words. She caught 'Mamma' again, then 'Lisa,' 'Hans,' and broken phrases that meant nothing to her. Was his mind back in some German home, which, perhaps, he would never see again?

All sorts of thoughts passed through her: vague memories gathered from the newspapers, of what the Germans had done in Belgium and France—horrible,

indescribable things! Oh, not this boy, surely! He could not be more than nineteen. He must have been captured in the fighting of July, perhaps in his first action. Captain Ellesborough had said to her that there was no fighting spirit among any of the prisoners. They were thankful to find themselves out of it, 'safely captured,' as one of them had had the bravado to say, and with enough to eat. No doubt this boy had dreamt day and night of peace, and getting back to Germany, to 'Mamma' and 'Lisa' and 'Hans.' To die, if he was to die, by this clumsy accident, in an enemy country, was hard!

Pity, passionate pity sprang up in her, and it warmed her heart to remember the pity in the face of Captain Ellesborough. She would have hated him if he had shown any touch of a callous or cruel spirit towards this helpless creature. But there had been none.

In a few more minutes she was aware of Mrs Fergusson and Janet climbing rapidly towards her. And behind them came stretcher-bearers, the captain, and possibly a doctor.

The accident broke up the working afternoon. The injured lad was carried to hospital, where the surgeon shook his head, and refused to prophesy till twenty-four hours were over.

Captain Ellesborough disappeared, while Rachel and Janet were given tea at the woman's hostel and shown the camp. Rachel took an absorbed interest

in it all. This world of the new woman, with its widening horizons, its atmosphere of change and discovery, its independence of men, soothed some deep smart in her that Janet was only now beginning to realise. And yet, Janet remembered the vicar, and had watched the talk with Ellesborough. Clearly to be the professed enemy of man did not altogether disincline you for his company!

At any rate it seemed quite natural to Janet Leighton that, when it was time to go, and a charming girl in khaki with green facings caught the pony, and harnessed it for Mrs Fergusson's parting guests, Ellesborough should turn up, as soon as the farewells were over; and that she should find herself driving the pony-carriage up the hill, while Ellesborough and Rachel walked behind, and at a lengthening distance. Once or twice she looked back, and saw that the captain was gathering some of the abounding wild flowers which had sprung up on the heels of the retreating forest, and that Rachel had fastened a bunch of them into her hat. She smiled to herself, and drove steadily on. Rachel was young and pretty. Marriage with some man—some day—was certainly her fate. The kind, unselfish Janet intended to 'play up.'

Then, with a jerk, she remembered there was a story. Nonsense! An unhappy love affair, no doubt, which had happened in her first youth, and in Canada. Well, such things, in the case of a girl with the temperament of Rachel, are only meant to be absorbed in another love affair. They are the leaf mould that feeds the

final growth. Janet cheerfully said to herself that, probably, her partnership with Rachel would only be a short one.

The pair behind were, indeed, much occupied with each other. The tragic incident of the afternoon seemed to have carried them rapidly through the preliminary stages of acquaintance. At least, it led naturally to talk about things and feelings more real and intimate than generally haunt the first steps. And in this talk each found the other more and more congenial. Ellesborough was now half amused, half touched, by the mixture of childishness and maturity in Rachel. One moment her ignorance surprised him, and the next, some shrewd or cynical note in what she was saying scattered the *ingénue* impression, and piqued his curiosity afresh. She was indeed crassly ignorant about many current affairs in which he himself was keenly interested, and of which he supposed all educated women must by now have learnt the A B C. She could not have given him the simplest historical outline of the great war; he saw that she was quite uncertain whether Lloyd George or Asquith were Prime Minister; and as to politics and public persons in Canada, where she had clearly lived some time, her mind seemed to be a complete blank. None the less she had read a good deal—novels and poetry at least —and she took a queerly pessimistic view of life. She liked her farm work; she said so frankly. But on a sympathetic reply from him to the effect that he knew several other women who had taken to it, and they

all seemed to be 'happy' in it, she made a scornful mouth.

'Oh, well—"happy"?—that's a different thing. But it does as well as anything else.'

The last thing she wanted, apparently, was to talk about Canada. He, himself, as a temporary settler in the great Dominion, cherished an enthusiasm for Canada and a belief in the Canadian future, not, perhaps, very general among Americans; but although her knowledge of the country gave them inevitably some common ground, she continually held back from it, she entered on it as little as she could. She had been in the Dominion, he presently calculated, about seven or eight years; but she avoided names and dates, how adroitly he did not perceive till they had parted, and he was thinking over their walk. She must have gone out to Canada immediately after leaving school. He gathered that her father had been a clergyman, and was dead; that she knew the prairie life, but had never been in British Columbia, and only a few days in Montreal and Toronto. That was all that, at the end of their walk, he knew; and all apparently she meant him to know. Whereas she on her side showed a beguiling power of listening to all he had to say about the mysterious infinity of the Canadian forest-lands and the wild life that, winter or spring, a man may live among them, which flattered the very human conceit of a strong and sensitive nature.

But, at last, they had climbed the tree-strewn slope, and were on the open ridge with the northern plain

in view. The sun was now triumphantly out, just before his setting; the clouds had been flung aside, and he shone full upon the harvest world—such a harvest world as England had not seen for a century. There they lay, the new and golden fields, where, to north and south, to east and west, the soil of England, so long unturned, had joyously answered once more to its old comrade the plough.

'"An enemy hath done this,"' quoted Ellesborough, with an approving smile, as he pointed towards the plain. 'But there was a God behind him!'

Rachel laughed. 'Well, I've got three fields still to get in,' she said. 'And they're the best. Good-night.'

She gave him her hand, standing transfigured in the light, the wind blowing her beautiful hair about her.

'May I come and see you?' he asked, rather formally.

She smiled assent.

'Next week *everything* will be in, and some of it threshed. I shall be freer then. You'll like our place.'

He pressed her hand, and she was off, running like a fawn after the retreating pony carriage.

He turned away, a little dazzled and shaken. The image of her on the ridge remained; but what perhaps had struck deepest had been the sweetness of her as she hung above the injured boy. He went slowly towards the camp, conscious that the day now departing had opened a new door in the House of Life.

IV

ELLESBOROUGH allowed a week to pass before making the call at Great End he had arranged with Rachel. But at last, when he thought that her harvesting would be really over, he set out on his motor bicycle, one fine evening, as soon as work at the camp was over. According to summer time it was about seven o'clock, and the sun was still sailing clear above the western woods.

Part of his way lay over a broad common chequered with fine trees and groups of trees, some of them of great age; for the rest he ran through a world where harvest in its latest stages was still the governing fact. In some fields the corn was being threshed on the spot, without waiting for the stacks; in others, the last loads were being led; and everywhere in the cleared fields there were scattered figures of gleaners, casting long shadows on the gold and purple carpet of the stubble. For Ellesborough the novelty of this garden England, so elaborately combed and finished in comparison with his own country, was by no means exhausted. There were times when the cottage gardens, the endless hedgerows, and miniature plantations pleased him like the detail in those early Florentine pictures in the Metropolitan Museum, for which,

business man as he was, and accustomed to the wilds, he had once or twice, on visits to New York, discovered in himself a considerable taste. He was a man, indeed, of many aptitudes, and of a loyal and affectionate temper. His father, a country doctor, now growing old, his mother, still pretty at sixty, and his two unmarried sisters were all very dear to him. He wrote to them constantly, and received many letters from them. They belonged to one of the old Unitarian stocks still common in New England; and such stocks are generally conspicuous for high standards and clean living. 'Discipline' was among the chief marks of the older generation. A father or mother dreaded an 'undisciplined' child, and the word was often on their lips, though in no Pharisaical way; while the fact was evident in their lives, and in those private diaries which they were apt to keep, wherein, up to old age, they jealously watched their own daily thoughts and actions from the same point of view.

And though the younger generation, like the younger generation of Quakers, shows change and some disintegration, the old Puritan traditions and standards are still, as we all know, of great effect among them. Especially with regard to women, and all that concerns them. Among the Ellesborough clan, which was a large one, there prevailed, along with the traditional American consideration for women, and especially among the women of the family themselves—a strict and even severe standard of sexual morals. There was no hypocrisy in it; they talked of it but little,

but they lived by it; and their men were brought up in the atmosphere created by it. And as affection and tenderness and self-sacrifice were freely mixed with the asceticism, there was no rebellion—at any rate no open rebellion—among their men folk. The atmosphere created led, no doubt, to certain evasions of the hard problems of life; and to some quiet re-valuations of things and persons when the sons of the family came to men's estate. But in general the 'ape and tiger,' still surviving in the normal human being, had been really and effectively tamed in the Ellesborough race. There was also a sensitive delicacy both of thought and speech among them; answering to more important and tested realities. Their marriages were a success; their children were well brought up, under light but effective control; and, if it be true, as Americans are ready to say, that the old conception of marriage is being slowly but profoundly modified over large sections of their great Commonwealth, towards a laxity undreamt of half a century ago, the Ellesboroughs could neither be taxed nor applauded in the matter. They stood by the old ways, and they stood by them whole-heartedly.

Ellesborough himself, no doubt, had knocked about the world more than most of his kindred, and had learnt to look at many things differently. But essentially, he was the son of his race. His attitude towards women was at once reverential and protective. He believed women were better than men, because practically he had found it so in his own circle; but he

held also very strong beliefs, seldom expressed, as to their social disadvantages and their physical weakness. The record of the Germans towards women in France and Flanders, a record he had verified for himself, had perhaps done more than anything else to feed the stern flame of war in his own soul. At thirty-two, he would probably have already been a married man, but for the war. He rather fiercely held that it was a man's duty to marry and have children. But beyond a few passing fancies he had never been in love; and since the American declaration of war, he had been, like his President, out to 'make the world safe for democracy'; and the ardour of the struggle had swept his private interests out of sight.

All the same here he was, walking his motor cycle up the field road leading to Great End Farm, and looking eagerly about him. A lonely position, but beautiful! On the woods behind the house he turned a professional eye. Fine timber! The man who was to succeed him at Ralstone would no doubt have the cutting of it. The farm quadrangle, with its sixteenth century barn, out of which the corn seemed to be actually bursting from various open doors and windows, appeared to him through that glamour which, for the intelligent American, belongs to everything that mediæval and Elizabethan England has bequeathed to the England of the present. He will back himself, he thinks, to plan and build a modern town better than the Britisher—in any case quicker. But the mosses and tiles of an old Brookshire barn beat him.

Ellesborough paused at the gate to watch two land lassies carrying pails of milk across the yard towards a prolongation of the farm-house, which he supposed was the dairy. Just beyond the farm-yard, two great wheat-stacks were visible; while in the hay-fields running up to the woods, large hay-stacks, already nearly thatched, showed dimly in the evening light. And all this was run by women, worked by women! Well, American women, so he heard from home, were doing the same in the fields and farms of the States. It was all part, he supposed, of a world movement, by which, no less than by the war itself, these great years would be for ever remembered.

The farm-house itself, however, seemed to him from the outside a poor, flimsy thing, unworthy of the old farm buildings. He could see that the walls of it were only a brick thick, and in spite of the pretty curtains, he was struck by the odd feature of the two large windows exactly opposite each other, so that a spectator on either side of the house might look right through it.

'Seems like being in the street. However, if there's nobody to look at you, I suppose it don't matter.'

Then he laughed, for just as he led his motor cycle into the yard, and passed the sitting-room window, he was struck by the appearance of two large sheep, who seemed to be actually in the sitting-room, at its farther end. They were standing, he presently perceived, upon the steep down beyond the house, on the slope of which the farm was built; which on the southern

side of the farm quadrangle came right up to the house wall. At the same moment he saw a woman inside get up and shoo them from the open window, so that they ran away.

But when Jenny Harberton had admitted him, and he was waiting in the sitting-room, from which the woman he had seen had disappeared, he was in the mood to admire everything. How nice the two women had made it! His own rough life, both before and since the war, had only increased a natural instinct for order and seemliness. The pretty blue paper, the fresh drugget, the photographs on the wall, the flowers, and the delicate neatness of everything delighted him. He went round looking at the pictures and the few books, perfectly conscious that everything which he saw had a more than common interest for him. The room seemed to be telling a story—opening points of view.

'Ah!'

He paused, a broad smile overspreading his bronzed face.

For he had perceived a popular History of the War lying open and face downwards on the table, one that he had recommended to the mistress of the farm. So she had followed his advice. It pleased him particularly! He had gathered that she was never a great reader; still, she was an educated woman, she ought to know something of what her country had done.

And there was actually a piano! He wondered whether she played, or her friend.

Meanwhile Rachel was changing her dress upstairs—rather deliberately. She did not want to look too glad to see her visitor, to flatter him by too much hurry. When he arrived she had just come in from the fields where she had been at the threshing machine all day. It had covered her with dirt and chaff; and the process of changing was only half through when she heard the rattle of Ellesborough's cycle outside. She stood now before the glass, a radiant daughter of air and earth; her veins, as it were, still full of the sheer pleasure of her long day among the stubbles and the young stock. She was tired, of course; and she knew very well that the winter, when it came, would make a great difference, and that much of the work before her would be hard and disagreeable. But, for the moment, her deep satisfaction with the life she had chosen, the congruity between it and her, gave her a peculiar charm. She breathed content, and there is no more beautifying thing.

She had thought a good deal about Ellesborough since their meeting; yet not absorbingly, for she had her work to do. She was rather inclined to quarrel with him for having been so long in making his call; and this feeling, perhaps, induced her to dawdle a little over the last touches of her toilet. She had put on a thin, black dress, which tamed the exuberance of her face and hair, and set off the brilliance and fineness of her skin where the open blouse displayed it. The beautiful throat was sunburnt, indeed, but not unbecomingly so; and she was about to fasten round it

a slender gold chain, when she suddenly dropped the chain. Some association had passed through her mind which made her shrink from it.

She chose instead a necklace of bluish-green beads, long, and curiously interwoven, which gave a touch of dignity to the plain dress. Then she paused to consider the whole effect, in a spirit of meditation rather than mere vanity. '*I wish he knew!*' she thought, and the glass reflected a frown of perplexity. Had she been wise, after all, to make such a complete mystery of the past? People in and about Ipscombe would probably know some time—what all her Canadian friends knew. And then, the thought of the endless explanations and gossip, of the horrid humiliation involved in any renewed contact whatever with the ugly things she had put behind her, roused a sudden, surging disgust.

'Yes, I was quite right,' she thought vehemently. 'I was quite right!'

Voices in the room downstairs! That meant that Janet had gone in to greet the visitor. Should they ask him to stay for supper? The vicar was coming, and his pious little sister. There would be quite enough to eat. Cold ham, potatoes and salad, with their own butter and bread—Janet made beautiful bread—was enough for anybody in war time. Rachel was in the mood to feel a certain childish exultation in the plenty of the farm, amid the general rationing. The possession of her seven milch cows, the daily pleasure of the milk, morning and evening, the sight of the rich separated cream, and of the butter as it came fresh from the

churn, the growing weight and sleekness of the calves: all these things gave her a warm sense of protection against the difficulties and restrictions of the war. She and Janet were 'self-suppliers.' No need to bother about ounces of butter, or spoonfuls of cream. Of course they sold all they could, but they could still feed their few guests well—better, perhaps, than any of the folk in the villa houses round Millesborough.

'Yes! and no one's leave to ask!'

She threw out her arms in a vehement gesture as she turned away from the glass. It was the gesture of a wild bird taking flight.

By which, however, she was not hurling defiance at the gentle but most efficient little lady who represented the Food Control of the neighbourhood, and the mere sight of whom was enough to jog uneasy consciences in the matter of rations. Rachel was long since on the best of terms with her.

Captain Ellesborough was asked to stay to supper, and gladly accepted. The vicar and his young sister arrived and were introduced to the American. Betty and Jenny, alarmed at so much company and the quality of it, hurriedly asked to be allowed to take their meal in the tiny scullery behind the living room. But the democratic and dissenting Janet would not hear of it. There was room for everybody, she said, and while she lived in it there should only be one table for all who worked on the farm. If the vicar and Miss

Shenstone objected, she was sorry for them. But tney wouldn't object.

So the small living room of the farm was soon full of a merry company: the two mistresses, in their Sunday frocks, the land girls in their uniforms, the young vicar in a short coat and round collar, his little sister of nineteen, who was training to be a missionary, and carried about with her already the sweet and dedicated look of her calling; and Ellesborough, a striking and manly figure in full khaki. Ellesborough was on Rachel's right, the vicar on Janet's; Miss Shenstone sat between the two girls, and was so far from objecting to their company that she no sooner found she was to sit next the daughter of her brother's handy-man than her childish face flushed with pleasure. She had seen Jenny already at her brother's Bible-class, and she had been drawn to her. Something in the character of the labourer's daughter seemed to make a special appeal to the delicate and mystical temper of the vicar's sister, in whom the ardour of the 'watcher for souls' was a natural gift. Jenny seemed to be aware of it. She was flushed and a little excited, alternately shy and communicative—like the bird under fascination, already alive to the signal of its captor. At any rate, Margaret Shenstone kept both her companions happy through the meal.

The vicar employed himself in vigorously making friends with Janet Leighton, keenly alive all the time to that vivid and flower-like vision of Miss Henderson at the farther end of the table. But some instinct

warned him that beside the splendid fellow in khaki his own claim on her could be but a modest one. He must watch his opportunity. It was natural that certain misgivings had already begun to rise in the mind of his elder sister, Eleanor, who was his permanent companion and housekeeper at the vicarage. For why should her brother be so specially assiduous in the harvest operations at Great End? She was well aware that it was the right and popular thing for the young clergy who were refused service at the front to be seen in their shirt sleeves as agricultural volunteers, or in some form of war work. A neighbouring curate in whom she was greatly interested spent the greater part of his week, for instance, on munition work at a national factory. She thought him a hero. But if it was to be harvesting, then it seemed to her that her brother should have divided his help more evenly among the farms of the village. She was afraid of 'talk.' And it troubled her greatly that neither Miss Henderson nor Miss Leighton came to church.

Meanwhile, the vicar, like a wise man, was securing the position with Janet. What he wished, what he was really driving at, he would not let himself inquire. What he *knew* was that no woman had ever fluttered his quiet mind as Miss Henderson had fluttered it during these summer weeks. To watch her, erect and graceful, 'pitching' the sheaves on to the harvest cart, where he and a labourer received and packed them; to be privileged to lead the full cart home, with her smile and thanks at the barn door for reward; or to

stand with her while she proudly watched her new reaping machine, with the three fine horses abreast, sweeping round her biggest field, while the ripe sheaves fell beside it, as of old they fell beside the reapers that Hephæstus wrought in gleaming gold on the shield of Achilles; and then perhaps to pay a last visit with her to the farm buildings in the warm dusk and watch the cattle coming in from the fields and the evening feed, and all the shutting up for the night after the long, hot, busy day: these things had lately made a veritable idyll of the vicar's life. He felt as though a hundred primitive sensations and emotions, that he had only talked of or read about before, had at last become real to him. Oxford memories revived. He actually felt a wish to look at his Virgil or Theocritus again, such had never stirred in him since he had packed his Oxford books to send home, after the sobering announcement of his third class. After all, it seemed these old fellows knew something about the earth and its joys!

So that a golden light lay over these past weeks. And in the midst of it stood the figure of a silent and —as far as he was concerned—rather difficult woman, without which there would have been no transfiguring light at all. He confessed to himself that she had never had much to say to him. But wherever she was she drew the male creature after her. There was no doubt as to that. She was a good employer—fair, considerate, intelligent; but it was the *woman*—so the vicar believed—who got her way.

From which it will be seen that Miss Eleanor Shenstone had some reason for misgiving, and that the vicar's own peace of mind was in danger. His standards also were no longer what they were. He had really ceased to care that Miss Leighton was a Unitarian!

'I suppose you have been horribly busy?' said Rachel to Ellesborougb, when, thanks to the exertions of Janet and the two girls, everybody had been provided with a first course.

'Not more than usual. Do you mean——' He looked at her, smiling, and Rachel's eyebrows went up slightly. 'Ah, I see—you thought I had forgotten?'

'Oh, no,' she said indifferently. 'It is a long way to come.'

He flushed a little.

'That never occurred to me for a moment!' he said with emphasis. 'But you said you would have finished with the harvest in a week. So I waited. I didn't want to be a nuisance.'

At which she smiled, a smile that overflowed eyes and lips, and stirred the senses of the man beside her.

'How is the prisoner?'

'Poor boy! He died the day before yesterday. We did everything we could, but he had no chance from the first. Hard lines!'

'Why, he might have been home next year!'

'He might, indeed. Yes, Miss Henderson, it'll be peace next year—perhaps this year! Who knows! But I hope I'll have a look in first. I've got my

orders. As soon as they've appointed my successor here, I'm off. About a month, I suppose. They've accepted me for the Air Force.'

His eyes glowed. Rachel said nothing. She felt hurt that he expressed no regret at going. Then the vicar struck into the conversation with some enthusiastic remarks about the steady flowing in of the American army. That, indeed, was the great, the overpowering fact of these August days. Ellesborough responded eagerly, describing the huge convoy with which he himself had come over; and that amazing, that incredible march across three thousand miles of sea and land, which every day was pouring into the British Isles, and so into France, some 15,000 men—the flower of American manhood, come to the rescue of the world. He told the great story well, with the graphic phrases of a quick mind, well fed on facts, yet not choked by them. The table hung on him. Even little Jenny, with parted lips, would not have missed a word.

He meanwhile was led on—for he was not a man of facile or boastful speech—by the eyes of Rachel Henderson, and those slight gestures or movements by which, from time to time when the talk flagged she would set it going again.

Margaret Shenstone was particularly stirred.

'What friends we shall be!' she said presently, with a long, quivering breath—'I mean America and England. Friends for ever! And we quarrelled once. That's so wonderful. That shows good does come out of evil!'

'I should jolly well think so,' said Ellesborough, looking kindly at the young girl. 'Why, if it hadn't been for this war, millions of these boys who are coming over now would never have seen England or Europe at all. It'll change the face of everything!'

'Only we must play up,' said the vicar anxiously. 'We must get rid of our abominable shyness, and let your people really see how we really welcome them.'

Rachel gave a little defiant shake of the head.

'America's got to thank us, too!' she said, with a challenging look at Ellesborough. 'We've borne it for four years. Now it's your turn!'

'Well, here we are,' said Ellesborough quietly, 'up to the neck. But—of course—don't thank us. It's our business just as much as yours.'

The talk dropped a moment, and Janet took advantage of it to bring in coffee as a finish to the meal. Under cover of the slight bustle, Ellesborough said to Rachel, in a voice no longer meant for the table,—

'Could you spare me a letter sometimes, Miss Henderson—at the front?'

He had both elbows on the table, and was playing with a cigarette. There was nothing the least patronising or arrogant in his manner. But there was a male note in it—perhaps a touch of self-confidence—which ruffled her.

'Oh, I am a bad letter-writer,' she said, as she got up from the table. 'Shall we go and look at the cows?'

They all went out into the warm September night. Ellesborough followed Rachel, cigarette in hand, his

strong mouth twisting a little. The night was almost cloudless. The pale encircling down, patched at intervals with dark hanging woods, lay quiet under a sky full of faint stars. The scent of the stubble-fields, of the great corn-stack just beyond the farm-yard, of the big barn so full that the wide wooden doors could not be closed, was mingled with the strong ammonia smells of the farm-yard, and here and there with the sweetness left in the evening air by the chewing cows on their passage to the cow-house on the farther side of the yard.

Rachel led the way to the cow-house—a vast fifteenth-century barn, with an interlacing forest of timber in its roof, where the six cows stood ranged, while Janet and the two land lassies, with Hastings the bailiff to help them, were changing the litter and filling up the racks with hay. Rachel went along the line pointing out the beauties of each separate beast to Ellesborough, and caressing two little calves whom Jenny was feeding by hand. Ellesborough was amused by her technical talk and her proprietor's airs. It seemed to him a kind of play-acting, but it fascinated him. Janet had brought in a lantern, and the light and shade of it seemed to have been specially devised to bring into relief Rachel's round and tempting beauty, the bright brown of her hair where it curled on the temples, and the lovely oval of the cheeks. Ellesborough watched her, now passing into deep shadow, and now brilliantly lit up, as the light of the lantern caught her; overhead, the criss-cross of the arching beams as of some primitive

cathedral, centuries old;' and on either side the dim forms of the munching cattle, and the pretty movements of the girls busy with their work.

'Take care,' laughed Rachel as she passed him. 'There are horrid holes in this floor. I haven't had time to mend them.'

As she spoke, she slipped and almost fell. Ellesborough threw out a quick hand and caught her by the arm. She smiled into his face.

'Neatly done!' she said composedly, submitting to be led by him over a very broken bit of pavement near the door. His hand held her firmly. Nor did she make any effort to release herself till they were outside. Here were the vicar and his sister waiting to say good-night—the vicar much chagrined that he had seen so little of his chief hostess, and inclined to feel that his self-sacrificing attention to Miss Leighton at supper had been but poorly rewarded. Rachel, however, saw that he was out of humour, and at once set herself to appease him. And in the few minutes which elapsed before she parted with him at the gate she had quite succeeded.

Then she turned to Ellesborough.

'Shall we go up the hill a little?'

They slipped through a side gate of the farm-yard, crossed a field, and found themselves on an old grass road leading gently upward along the side of the down into the shadow of the woods. The still, warm night held them enwrapped. Rachel had thrown a white scarf over her head and throat, which gave a mysterious

charm to the face within it. As she strolled beside her new friend she played him with all the arts of a woman resolved to please. And he allowed himself to be handled at her will. He told her about his people, and his friends, about the ideas and ambitions, also, with which he had come to Europe, which were now in abeyance, but were to spring to active life after the war. Forestry on a great scale; a part to be played in the preservation and development of the vast forest areas of America which had been so wilfully wasted; business and patriotism combined; fortune possible; but in any case the public interest served. He talked shrewdly, but also with ardour and imagination; she was stirred, excited even; and all the time she liked the foreignness of his voice, the outline of his profile against the sky, and all the other elements of his physical presence.

But in the midst of his castle-building he broke off.

'However, I'm a silly fool to talk like this. I'm going out to the front directly. Perhaps my bullet's waiting for me.'

'Oh, no!' she said involuntarily—'no!'

'I hope not. I don't want to die just yet. I want to get married, for one thing.'

He spoke lightly, and she laughed.

'Well, that's easy enough.'

He shook his head, but said nothing. They walked on till they reached the edge of the hill, when Rachel, out of breath, sat down on a fallen log to rest a little. Below them stretched the hollow upland, with its

encircling woods and its white stubble fields. Far below lay the dark square of the farm, with a light in one of its windows.

Rachel pointed to the grass road by which they had come.

'We haven't seen the ghost!'

He asked her for the story, and she told it. By now she had pieced it all together; and it seemed to Ellesborough that it had a morbid fascination for her.

'He dragged himself down this very path,' she said. 'They tracked him by the blood stains; his wounds dripped all along it. And then he fell, just under my cart-shed. It was a horrible, bitter night. Of course, the silly people here say they hear groans and dragging steps. That's all nonsense, but I sometimes wish it hadn't happened at my farm.'

He couldn't help laughing gently at her foolishness. 'Why, it's a great distinction to have a ghost!'

She disagreed—decidedly.

'Any one can have my ghost that wants. I'm awfully easily scared.'

'Are you?' There was a deep note in his voice. 'No, I don't believe that. I'm sure you're a plucky woman. I know you are!'

She laughed out.

'How do you know?'

'Why, no one but a plucky woman could have taken this farm and be working it as you're doing.'

'That's not pluck,' she said, half scornfully. 'But if it is—well, I've got plenty of pluck of that kind.

But I am often scared, downright scared, about nothing. It's just fear, that's what it is.'

'Fear of what?'

'I don't know.'

She spoke in a sombre, shrinking tone, which struck him uncomfortably. But when he tried further to discover what she meant, she would say nothing more. He noticed, indeed, that she would often seem to turn the talk upon herself, only to cut it short again immediately. She offered him openings, and then he could make nothing of them; so that when they reached the outskirts of the farm on their return, he had given her all the main outlines of his own history, and she had said almost nothing of hers.

But all the same the walk had drawn them much nearer.

He stopped her at the little gate to say,—

'I'm going to ask you again—I want you to write to me when I'm in France.'

And this time she said almost eagerly,—

'Yes, I'll write; indeed I'll write! But you'll come over again before you go?'

'Rather,' he said joyously; 'rather! Why, there's a month. You'll be tired of me before you've done.'

A few minutes later she was standing in her own little room, listening to the retreating rush of his motor-cycle down the road. There was a great tumult in her mind.

'Am I falling in love with him? Am I—am I?'

But in the dark, when she had put out her light, the cry that shaped itself in her mind was identical with that sudden misgiving of the afternoon, when on Ellesborough's arrival she had first heard his voice downstairs talking to Janet.

'*I wish he knew!*' But this time it was no mere passing qualm. It had grown into something intense and haunting.

On this same September afternoon, a dark-eyed, shabby woman, with a little girl, alighted at Millesborough Station. They were met by a man who had been lounging about the station for some time and whose appearance had attracted some attention.

'See him at a distance, and you might take him for a lord; but get him close, my word!——' said the station-master to the booking-clerk, with a shrug, implying many things.

'Wouldn't give a bob for his whole blessed turn-out,' said the booking-clerk. 'But right you are, when you sort of get the hang of him, far enough away on the other platform, might be a dook!'

Meanwhile, the man had shouldered some of the bags and parcels brought by the woman and the child, though hardly his fair share of them; and they finally reached the exit from the station.

'If you're going into the town, the bus will be here in a few minutes,' said a porter civilly to the woman. 'It'll help you with all those things.'

The man gruffly answered for her that they preferred

to walk, and they started, the woman and the child dragging wearily beside him.

'Now, you've got to be content with what I've found for you,' he said to her roughly as they reached the first houses of the town. 'There isn't scarcely a lodging or a cottage to be had. Partly it's the holidays still, and partly it's silly folk like you—scared of raids.'

'I couldn't go through another winter like last, for Nina's sake,' said the woman plaintively.

'Why, you silly goose, there won't be any raids this winter. I've told you so scores of times. We've got the upper hand now, and the Boche will keep his planes at home. But as you won't listen to me, you've got to have your way, I suppose. Well, I've got you rooms of a sort. They'll have to do. I haven't got money enough for anything decent.'

The woman made no reply, and to the porter idly looking after them they were soon lost from sight in the gathering dusk of the road.

V

THE little town of Millesborough was *en fête*. There was a harvest festival going on, and the County Agricultural Committee had taken the opportunity to celebrate the successful gathering of the crops, and the part taken in it by the woman land-workers under their care. They had summoned the land lasses from far and wide; in a field on the outskirts of the town competitions had been in full swing all the morning, and now there were to be speeches in the market-place, and a final march of land girls, boy scouts, and decorated wagons to the old Parish Church, where a service was to be held.

All Millesborough, indeed, was in the streets to look at the procession, and the crowd was swelled by scores of cadets from a neighbouring camp, who were good-heartedly keeping the route, and giving a military air to the show. But the flower-decked wagons were the centre of interest. The first in the line was really a brilliant performance. It was an old wagon of Napoleonic days, lent by a farmer, whose forebears had rented the same farm since William and Mary. Every spoke of the wheels blazed with red geraniums;

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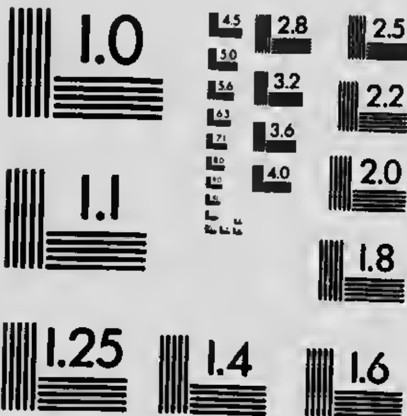

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there was a fringe of heather along the edge of the cart, while vegetables, huge marrows, turnips, carrots, and onions dangled from its sides, and the people inside sat under a nodding canopy of tall and splendid wheat, mixed with feathery barley. But the passengers were perhaps the most attractive thing about it. They were four old women in lilac sunbonnets. They were all over seventy, and they had all worked bravely in the harvest. The crowd cheered them vociferously, and they sat, looking timidly out on the scene with smiling eyes and tremulous lips, their gray hair blowing about their wrinkled, wholesome faces.

Beside the wagon walked a detachment of land girls. One of them was the granddaughter of one of the old women, and occasionally a word would pass between them.

'Eh, Bessie, but I'd like to git down! They mun think us old fools, dizened up this way.'

'No, gran; you must bide. You're the very best bit of the show. Why, just listen how the folk cheer you!'

The old woman sighed.

'I'd like to look at it mysel',' she said with a childish plaintiveness. But her tall granddaughter, in full uniform, with a rake over her shoulder, thought this a foolish remark, and made no reply.

In the second wagon, Rachel Henderson in full land-dress—tunic, knee-breeches, and leggings—stood in the front of the cart, guiding two white horses, their manes and tails gaily plaited with ribbons, and scarlet badges on their snowy heads.

'Eh, but yon's a fine woman!' said an old farmer of the humbler sort to his neighbour. 'Yo'll not tell me she's a land lassie?'

'Noa, noa; she's the new farmer at Great End—a proud body, they say, an' a great hustler! The men say she's allus at 'em. But they don't mind her neither. She treats 'em well. Them's her two land girls walking beside.'

For Betty and Jenny mounted guard, their harvest rakes on their shoulders, beside their mistress, who attracted all eyes as she passed, and knew it. Behind her in the cart sat Janet Leighton; and the two remaining seats were filled by the Vicar of Ipscombe and Lady Alicia Shepherd, the wife of the owner of Great End Farm and of the middle-sized estate to which the farm belonged.

Lady Alicia was a thin woman, with an excitable temperament, to judge from her restless mouth and eyes, which were never still for a moment. She was very fashionably dressed and held a lace parasol. The crowd scarcely recognised her, which annoyed her, for in her own estimation she was an important member of the Women's Committee which looked after the land girls. The war had done a great deal for Lady Alicia. It had dragged her from a sofa, where she was rapidly becoming a neurasthenic invalid, and had gradually drilled her into something like a working day. She lived in a flurry of committees; but as committees must exist, and Lady Alicias must apparently be on them, she had found a sort of vocation, and

with the help of other persons of more weight she had not done badly.

She did not quite understand how it was that she found herself in Miss Henderson's wagon. The committee had refused to have a wagon of its own, and the good-natured vicar had arranged it for her. She did not herself much like Miss Henderson. Her husband had sent her to call upon the new tenants, and she had been much puzzled. They were ladies, she supposed. They spoke quite nicely, and Miss Henderson seemed to be the daughter of a clergyman. But she was afraid they were dreadful Socialists! She had talked to Miss Henderson about the awful—the *wicked*—wages that the Brookshire board had just fixed for the labourer.

'My husband says they'll simply crush the life out of farming. We shall all be ruined, and where will the labourer be then?'

And Miss Henderson had looked quite unpleasant. It was high time, she said, that the labourer should have enough to live on—*decently*; really thrown the word at you. And Colonel Shepherd had told his wife that he understood from Hastings Miss Henderson had raised her wages before the award of the Wages Board. Well, he only hoped the young woman had got some money behind her, otherwise she would be finding herself in Queer Street and he would be whistling for his rent.

The wagons drew up in the centre of the market-place, and the band which the cadets had brought

with them struck up 'God Save the King.' Lady Alicia rose at once and nudged her little boy, whom she had brought with her, to take off his cap. She looked approvingly over the crowd, which was growing denser and denser every moment. It was so that she really enjoyed the populace—at a safe distance—and ready to lend itself to the blandishments of its natural leaders. Where was her husband, Colonel Shepherd? Of course they would want him to speak at some time in the proceedings. But she looked for him in vain.

Meanwhile, the speaking was beginning from the first cart. A land girl who had played a rousing part in the recruiting campaign of the early summer was speaking in a high voice, clearly heard by the crowd. She was tall and pretty, and spoke without a sign of hesitation or self-consciousness. She gloried in the harvest, in the splendid news from the war, in the growth of the Woman's Land Army. 'We've just been proud to do our bit at home while our boys have been fighting over there. They'll be home soon, perhaps, and won't we give them a welcome! And we'll show them the harvest that we've helped to sow, and harrow, and roll; the harvest we've helped to reap—the biggest harvest that England's ever known!—the harvest that's going to beat the Boche.' The young simple voice flowed on, with its simple story and its note of enthusiasm, and sometimes of humour. 'It's hard work, but we love it! It's cold work often, but we love it! The horses and the cows and the pigs—they're naughty often, but they're nice!—yes, the

pigs, too. It's the beasts and the fields and the open air we love!'

Betty looked at Jenny with a grin.

'Jenny!—them pigsties yesterday; d'ye think she's ever cleaned one out?'

'I know she has,' said Jenny confidentially. 'She's Farmer Green's girl, out Ralstone way. Ee says there ain't nothing she can't do. Ee don't want no men while he's got 'er. They offered him soldiers, and ee wouldn't have 'em.'

'Silly, sentimental young woman,' said a tall man, with a pipe in his mouth, who had just lounged up to the outskirts of the crowd, from a side street. 'Who's she going to take in here? What's the good of talking poetry about farming to a lot of country people? A London shop-girl, I guess. What does she know about it?'

'You bets she knows a lot,' said a young man beside him, who, to judge from his uniform, was one of the Canadians employed at Ralstone camp. He had been taken with the 'sentimental young woman,' and was annoyed by the uncivil remarks of his neighbour. 'Wonder what farm she's on?'

'Oh, you know these parts?' said the other, removing his pipe a moment and looking down on his companion.

'Well, not exactly.' The reply was hesitating. 'My grandfather went out to Canada from a place near here sixty years ago. I used to hear him and my mother talk about Millesborough.'

'Beastly hole!' said the other, replacing his pipe.

'I don't agree with you at all,' said the other angrily. 'It's as nice a little town of its size as you'd find anywhere.'

The other shrugged his shoulders. A man a few yards off in the crowd happened at that moment to be looking in the direction of the two speakers. It was the ticket-collector at the station, enjoying an afternoon off. He recognised the taller of the two men as the 'dook' he had seen at Millesborough station about a week ago. The man's splendid carriage and iron-gray head were not to be mistaken—also his cadaverous and sickly look, and his shabby clothes. The ticket-collector saw that the man was holding the dark-eyed, 'furrin-looking' child by the hand, which the woman he met had brought down with her. 'Furriners,' he supposed, all of them; part of that stream of fugitives from air raids that had been flowing out of London during the preceding winter, and was now flowing out again, as the next winter approached, though in less volume. Every house and lodging in Millesborough was full, prices had gone up badly, and life in Millesborough was becoming extremely uncomfortable for its normal inhabitants—'all along o' these panicky aliens!' thought the ticket-collector, resentfully, as he looked at the tall man.

The tall man, however, was behaving as though the market-place belonged to him, talking to his neighbours, who mostly looked at him askance, and every now and then breaking into a contemptuous laugh,

provoked apparently by the eloquence of the young woman in the wagon. Meanwhile the little girl whose hand he held was trying to pull him into a better place for seeing the rest of the procession. For from the place where they stood on the outskirts of the crowd, the foremost wagon with its nodding wheat and sheaves, its speaker, its old women, and its bodyguard of girls entirely hid the cart behind it.

'Dis way, pappa, dis way,' said the child, dragging him. He let her draw him, and suddenly from behind the speaker's cart there emerged the second wagon with its white horses; Rachel Henderson, the observed of all beholders, standing flushed and smiling, with the reins in her hands, the vicar just behind her, and Lady Alicia's lace parasol.

'My God!' said the man.

His sudden start, and clutch at the child's hand made the child cry out. He checked her with a savage word, and while she whimpered unheeded, he stood motionless, sheltering himself behind a girl with a large hat who stood in front of him, his eyes fixed on the Great End wagon. A ghastly white had replaced the patchy red on his cheeks, and had any careful observer chanced to notice him at the moment, he or she would have been struck by the expression of his face—as of some evil, startled beast aware of its enemy, and making ready to spring.

But the expression passed. With a long breath, Roger Delane pulled himself together.

'Hold your noise, Nina,' he said roughly to the child.

'If you'll be a good girl, I'll put you on my shoulder.'

The child stopped crying at once, and Delane, raising her on to his shoulder, pulling his own soft hat over his eyes, and placing the child so that her dress concealed his own features. Then he resumed an excited scrutiny of the Great End wagon. At the same moment he saw a man in uniform making his way through the crowd towards Miss Henderson who was waving to him. An officer—an American officer. Delane recognised at once the high collar and the leathern peak to the cap.

The crowd had already begun to cheer him. He reached the Great End wagon, and its mistress, all smiles, bent over to speak to him. She and the vicar seemed to be giving directions, to which the American with a laughing shrug assented, going off to the front wagon, evidently in obedience to orders. There the girl speaker had just sat down amid a hearty cheer from the crowd; and the chairman of the meeting, a burly farmer, eagerly came to the side of the wagon, and helped the American officer into the cart. Then with a stentorian voice the chairman announced that Captain Ellesborough from Ralstone camp had come 'to tell us what America is doing!' A roar from the crowd. Ellesborough saluted gaily, and then with his hands in his pockets began to talk to them. His speech, which was a racy summary of all that America was doing to help the Allies, was delivered to a ringing accompaniment of cheers from the thronged market-place, rising to

special thunder when the captain dwelt on the wheat and bacon that America was pouring across the Atlantic to feed a hungry Europe.

'We've tightened our own belts already; we can tighten them, I dare say, a few holes more. Everybody in America's growing something, and making something. When a man thinks he's done enough, and wants to rest a bit, the man next him gets behind him with a bradawl. There's no rest for anybody. We've just registered *thirteen million* men. That sounds like business, doesn't it? No slacking there! Well, we mean business. And you mean business. And the women mean business.'

Then a passage about the women, which set the land girls grinning at each other, and at the men in the crowd, ending in three cheers for Marshal Foch and Sir Douglas Haig, which came echoing back from the fourteenth church and the old houses which ringed the market-place.

All eyes were on the speaker, no one noticed the tall man with the olive-skinned child on his shoulder. He himself, with thumping pulses, never ceased to watch the figures and movements in the second wagon. He saw Miss Henderson sit down and another woman also in tunic and knickers take her place. He watched her applauding the speaker, or talking with the clergyman behind her, or the lady with the lace parasol. And when the speech was over, amid a hurricane of enthusiasm, when the resolution had been put and carried, and the bells in the old church-tower began

to ring out a deafening joy-peal above the dispersing crowd, he saw the American officer jump down from the speaker's wagon and return to Miss Henderson. Steps were brought, and Captain Ellesborough handed out the ladies. Then he and Rachel Henderson went away side by side, laughing and talking, towards the porch of the church, where Delane lost them from sight.

The market-place emptied rapidly. The decorated wagons moved off to the field where the competitions had been held in the morning, and some of the crowd with them. Another portion streamed into the church, and soon only a few scattered groups were left.

The tall man put down the child, and was seized with a fit of coughing, which left him more pallid and sunken-eyed than before. When it was over, he noticed a group of elderly labourers. They had come late into the meeting, and were making for the bar of the Cow-roast Inn, but before they entered it Delane went up to one of them.

'I'm a stranger here,' he said carelessly. 'Can you tell me who all these people were in the wagons?'

The man addressed—who was old Halsey—gave the speaker a reconnoitring look.

'Well, I dunno neither,' he said cautiously, 'leastways, many of 'em. There was my old missus, I know, in the first one. She didn't want to go, dressed up in them sunbonnets. But they made such a fuss of her, she had to. There was Farmer Broughton I seed, an' I don't know nobody else.'

'Well, but the second wagon?' said Delane impatiently.

'Oh, the second wagon. Why, that was Miss Henderson. Don't ye know er? I works for 'er.'

'Is she on the land?'

The old man laughed.

'That she be! She's a farmer, is Miss Henderson, an' she frames pretty fair. She don't know much yet, but what she don't know Hastings tells her.'

'Who's Hastings?'

'Why, her bailiff, to be sure. You do be a stranger, not knowin' Muster Hastings?'

'I'm just here for a few weeks. It's a rum business, isn't it, this of women taking farms?'

Halsey nodded reflectively.

'Aye, it's a queer business. But they do be cleverer at it than ye'd think. Miss Henderson's a good headpiece of her own.'

'And some money, I suppose?'

'Well, that's not my look out, is it, so long as I gits my wages? I dessay Colonel Shepherd, ee sees to that. Well, good-day to you. I'm goin' in to get summat to drink. It's a dryin' wind to-day, and a good bit walk from Ipscombe.'

'Is that where you live?'

'Aye—an' Miss Henderson's place is just t'other side. A good mile to Ipscombe, and near a mile beyont. I didn't want to come, but my old woman she nagged me to come an' see her 'ome.'

And with another nod, the old man turned into

the public, where his mates were already enjoying the small beer of the moment.

For a few minutes Delane strolled down the main road in silence, the child playing at his heels. Then he turned abruptly, called the child, and went up the side street from which he had appeared when the meeting began.

A quarter of an hour later he returned to the market-place alone. The service in the church was still going on. He could hear them singing the harvest hymn: 'We plough the fields and scatter—The good seed on the land.' But he did not stop to listen. He walked on rapidly in the direction of Ipscombe.

Delane found the main line from Millesborough to Ipscombe dotted at intervals with groups of persons returning from the harvest festival—elderly women with children, a few old labourers, a few soldiers on leave, with a lively fringe of noisy boys and girls skirmishing round and about their elders, like so many young animals on the loose. The evening light was failing. The pools left by a passing shower, gleamed along the road, and the black elms and oaks, scarcely touched as yet by autumn gold, stood straight and sharp against a rainy sky.

The tall, slouching man scrutinised the various groups as he passed them, as though making up his mind whether to address them or not. He wore a shabby great-coat, warmer than the day demanded, and closely buttoned across his chest. The rest of his dress, felt hat, dark trousers, and tan boots, had all of it come

originally from expensive shops, but was now only just presentable. The one thing in good condition about him was the Malacca cane he carried, which had a carved jade handle, and was altogether out of keeping with his general appearance.

All the same there was something striking in that appearance. Face, figure, and dress represented the wreck of more than one kind of distinction. The face must once have been exceptionally handsome, before an underlying commonness and coarseness had been brought out or emphasised by developments of character and circumstance. The mouth was now loose and heavy. The hazel eyes had lost their youth, and were disfigured by the premature wrinkles of either ill-health or dissipation. None the less, a certain carriage of the head and shoulders, a certain magnificence in the whole general outline of the man, especially in the defiant eyes and brow, marked him out from the crowd, and drew attention of strangers.

Many persons looked at him, as he at them, while he swung slowly along the road. At last he crossed over towards an elderly man in company with a young soldier, who was walking lamely with a stick.

'Excuse me,' he said formally, addressing the elder man, 'but am I right for Ipscombe?'

'That you are, muster. The next turnin' to the right'll bring yer to it.' Peter Betts looked the stranger over as he spoke, with an inquisitive eye.

'You've come from the meeting, I suppose?'

'Ay. We didn't go to the service. That worn't

in our line. But we heerd the speeches out o' doors.'

'The carts were fine!—especially the second one.'

'Ay—that's our missis. She and the two girls done the dressin' o' the cart.'

'What's her name?'

'Well, her name's Henderson,' said the old man, speaking with an amiable, half careless detachment, the manner rather of a philosopher than a gossip.

'She's the farmer's wife?'

'Noa, she ain't. She's the farmer herself—'at's what she is. She's took the farm from Colonel Shepherd—she did—all on her own. To be sure there's Miss Leighton as lives with her. But it do seem to me as Miss Henderson's—as you might say—the top 'un. And me an' James Halsey works for her.'

'*Miss* Henderson? She's not married?'

'Not she!' said old Betts emphatically. She's like a lot o' the women nowadays, I guess. They doan't want to be married.'

'Perhaps nobody 'as wanted to marry 'em, dad!' said his elder son, grinning at his own stale jest.

Betts shook a meditative head.

'Noa—yo'll not explain it that way,' he said mildly. 'Some of 'em's good-looking—Miss Henderson 'ersel', by token. A very 'andsome upstandin' young woman is Miss Henderson.'

Delane followed all these remarks with close attention, and continued a rather skilful examination. He learnt that Great End was a farm of about two hundred

and fifty acres, that Miss Henderson seemed to have 'lots o' money,' and had sold her autumn crops very well, that Miss Leighton managed the stock and the dairy with the help of two land-girls, and it was thought by the village that the two ladies 'was doin' fine.'

Arrived at the village, Betts turned into his cottage, with a nod to his companion, and Delane went on his way.

The lane on the farther side of the village was dark under branching trees. Delane stumbled along it, coughing at intervals, and gripped by the rising chill of the September evening. A little beyond the trees he caught sight of the farm against the hill. Yes, it was lonesome, as the old man said, but a big, substantial-looking place. Rachel's place! And Rachel had 'lots o' money'—and as to her health and well-being, why the sight of her on that cart was enough. That vision of her indeed—of the flushed, smiling face under the khaki hat, of the young form in the trim tunic and leggings, and, not least, of the admiring crowd about her, kept returning upon the man's furious sense as something not to be borne, a recurrent blow from which he could not escape.

And that American chap—that Yankee officer who had walked off with her to the church—what was the meaning of that? They were not strangers, that was plain. She had beckoned to him from the cart. The manner of their short conversation, indeed, showed them well acquainted. She told him to go and speak

—and he had gone—with alacrity—smiling back at her. Courting, no doubt! Rachel could never let a man alone—or live, without a man after her. A brutal phrase shaped itself—a vile epithet or two—flung into the solitude of the lane.

When he emerged from the trees into a space of greater light between two stubble fields, Delane suddenly drew a letter from his pocket. While Rachel was flaunting with 'lots of money'—this was how his affairs were going.

'Dear Roger,—I can do nothing for you. Your demands are simply insatiable. If you write me any more begging letters, or if you attempt again to force your way into my house as you did last week, I shall tell the bank to cancel your allowance, and wash my hands of you altogether. My husband's determined to stop this kind of thing. Don't imagine you can either threaten us, or come round us. We have tried again and again to help to reform you. It is no good—and now we give you up. You have worn us out. If you are wise, you will not answer this—and if you keep quiet the allowance shall be continued.

Marianne Tilney.'

That was a nice letter to get from a man's only sister! Allowance! What was £100 a year to a woman as rich as Marianne? And what was the use of £100 a year to him, with living at the price it was now? His wretched pittance besides, doled out to him by his

father's trustees under his father's will, brought his whole income up to £300 a year. How was a man to live on that, and support a woman and child?

And here was Rachel—free—bursting with health—and possessed of 'lots of money.' She thought, no doubt, that she had done with him—thrust him out of her life altogether. He'd let her see! Whose fault was it that he had taken up with Anita? Nagging, impossible creature!—with her fine ladyisms and her tempers, and her insolent superior ways!

He walked on, consumed with a bitterness which held him like a physical anguish. By now he had reached the farm gate. The sunset had cleared and deepened. Great rosy thunder-clouds topped the down, and strong lights were climbing up the bronzed masses of wood behind the house. No one to be seen. At Millesborough they could hardly be out of church yet. He had time before him. He walked cautiously up the farm-lane, diverging to the left as he reached the buildings so as to escape the notice of any one who might be left in charge. As he slipped under the large cart-shed which backed on the cow-house, he heard somebody whistling inside. It was old Halsey, who had done the afternoon milking in the absence of the girls. Delane could hear the movements of the labourer, and the munching of the cows. A little farther on was the stable, and two horses' heads, looking pensively out from the open half of the door. Delane peered into the stable with the eye of one to whom all farming matters were familiar. Three fine horses—

d——d fine horses!—must have cost £100 apiece at least. No doubt the cows were equally good stuff. And he had noticed under the outer cart-shed a brand-new reaper and binder, and other farm implements and machines of the best quality. Rachel was doing the thing in style.

But where was the farm-house? Then as he crept round the third side of the rough quadrangle, he became aware of a large window with white curtains. Looking through it with his face against the glass, he was startled to find that he was looking straight into the farm-yard through another window of equal size on the other side of the room. And at the moment Halsey came out of the cow-shed carrying a pail of milk in either hand. Delane drew hastily back into the shelter of an old holly that grew against the wall, till the old man had disappeared. Then he eagerly examined the room, which was still suffused by the sunset. Its prettiness and comfort were so many fresh exasperations. He contrasted it inwardly with the wretched lodging from which he had just come. Why, he knew the photographs on the walls—her father, the old parson, and her Puritanical mother, whom Rachel had always thrown in his teeth. Her eldest brother, too, who had been drowned at sea. And that engraving—that sentimental thing by Watts, 'Love and Death,' that Rachel had bought once on a visit to Toronto, and he had scolded her for buying. There it was, as large as life. How did it come there? Was it her property or his? He believed he could claim it, if he chose.

Gad!—what would she say if she knew where he was at that moment, and what he was doing!

For eighteen months she had hidden herself so cleverly that he had entirely lost sight of her. When her lawyers communicated with him in the spring they had been careful to give no address. On the whole he had believed her to be still in Canada. She, on the other hand, unless she were a greater fool than he thought her, *must* have guessed that he would get back to England somehow. Why, the farm had ended in bankruptcy, and what else was there to do but to come home and dun his relations! Yet she had not been afraid to come home herself, and to set up in this conspicuous way. She supposed, of course, that she had done with him for good—kicked him off like an old shoe! The rage in his blood set his heart beating to suffocation. Then his cough seized him again. He stifled it as best he could, flattened against the wall, in the shadow of a yew-tree.

The sound, however, was apparently heard, for there were rapid steps across the farm-yard, and a gate opened. 'Hallo—who's there?' The voice was, no doubt, that of the labourer he had seen. Delane slipped noiselessly along the wall, and to the back of the stables, till all was quiet again within the farm.

But outside in the road there were persons approaching. He mounted the hill a little way into the shelter of the trees which covered the steep face of the down, and ran up into the great woods along the crest. Through the gathering dusk he saw the large farm-

cart clattering up the lane with several figures in it. The cart carried lamps, which sent shafts of light over the stubbles. There was a sound of talk and laughter, and alongside the cart he saw a man leading a motor-bicycle, and apparently talking to the woman in the cart. A man in uniform. The American, no doubt!

The cart drew up at the farm-yard gates, and the old labourer came to open them. Everybody dismounted, except one of the girls, who, standing in the wagon, drove the horses. Then, for a time, Delane could see nothing more. The farm quadrangle had absorbed the party. Occasionally a light flashed, or a voice could be heard calling, or laughter came floating up the hill through an open door or window. But in a little while all was silence.

Delane sat down on a fallen trunk, and watched. All kinds of images were rushing through his brain—wide wheat fields with a blazing sun on the stooks—a small frame-house set nakedly on the flat prairie with a bit of untidy garden round it—its living room in winter, with a huge fire, and a woman moving about—the creek behind it, and himself taking horses down to water. They were images of something that had once meant happiness and hope—a temporary break or interlude in a dismal tale which had closed upon it before and after.

Darkness came down. The man on the hill said to himself, 'Now they are having supper,' and he crept down again to the farm, and crouching and wriggling along he made his way again to the big window, over

which the curtains had been drawn. There was no one in the sitting-room, however, to judge from the silence, but from the kitchen across the passage came a rush of voices, together with a clatter of plates. The kitchen looked out on the front of the farm, and a wooden shutter had been fastened across the window. But the wood of the shutter was old and full of chinks, and Delane, pressing his face to the window, was able to get just a glimpse of the scene within—Rachel at the head of the table, the man in uniform beside her —three other women. A paraffin lamp threw the shadow of the persons at the table sharply on the white distempered wall. There were flowers on the table, and the meal wore a home-like and tempting air to the crouching spy outside. Rachel smiled incessantly, and it seemed to Delane that the handsome man beside her could not take his eyes from her. Nor could Delane. Her brown head and white throat, her soft, rose-tinted face emerging from the black dress, were youth itself—a vision of youth and lustyhood brilliantly painted on the white wall.

Delane looked his fill. Then he dropped down the bank on which the farm stood, and avoiding the open track through the fields, he skirted a hedge which led down to the road, and was lost in the shadows of advancing night.

VI

RAIN!—how it pelted the September fields day after day and week after week, as though to remind a world still steeped in, still drunk with the most wonderful of harvests, that the gods had not yet forgotten their old jealousy of men, and men's prosperity. Whenever a fine day came the early ploughing and seeding was in full swing, and Rachel on one side of the largest field could watch the drill at work, and on the other the harrow which covered in the seed. In the next field, perhaps, she would find Betty and Jenny lifting potatoes, and would go to help with them, digging and sorting, till every limb ached, and she seemed to be a part herself of the damp brown earth that she was robbing of its treasure. For a time when the harvest was done, when the ricks were thatched ready for threshing, there had been a moment of ease. But with the coming of October, the pressure began again. The thought of the coming frost and of all those greedy mouths of cattle, sheep, and horses to be filled through the winter, drove and hunted the workers on Great End Farm, as they have driven and hunted the children of earth since tilling and stock-keeping began. Under

the hedges near the house, the long potato caves had been filled and covered in; the sheep were in the turnips, and every two or three days, often under torrents of rain, Rachel and the two girls must change the hurdles, and put the hungry, pushing creatures on to fresh ground. On the top of the down, there was fern to be cut and carted for the winter fodder, and fallen wood to be gathered for fuel, under the daily threats of the coal-controller.

Rachel worked hard and long. How she loved the life that once under other skies and other conditions she had loathed! Ownership and command had given her a new dignity, in a sense a new beauty. Her labourers and her land girls admired and obeyed her, while—perhaps!—Janet Leighton had their hearts. Rachel's real self seemed to be something that no one knew; her companions were never quite at ease with her; and yet her gay, careless ways, the humanity and natural fairness of her mind, carried a spell that made her rule sit light upon them.

Yes!—after all these weeks together, not even Janet knew her much better. The sense of mystery remained; although the progress of the relation between her and Ellesborough was becoming very evident, not only indeed to Janet, but to everybody at the farm. His departure for France had been delayed owing to the death in action of the officer who was to have been sent home to replace him. It might be a month now before he left. Meanwhile, every Sunday he spent some hours at the farm, and generally on a couple of

evenings in the week he would arrive just after supper, help to put the animals to bed, and then stay talking with Rachel in the sitting-room, while Janet tidied up in the kitchen.

Janet, the warm-hearted, had become much attached to him. He had been at no pains to hide the state of his feelings from her. Indeed, though he had said nothing explicit, his whole attitude to Rachel's friend and partner was now one of tacit appeal for sympathy. And she was more than ready to give it. Her uprightness, and the touch of austerity in her, reached out to similar qualities in him; and the intellectual dissent which she derived from her East Anglian forbears, from the circles which in eighteenth-century Norwich gathered round Mrs Opie, the Martineaus, and the Aldersons, took kindly to the same forces in him; forces descended from that New England Puritanism which produced half the great men—and women—of an earlier America. Rachel laughed at them for 'talking theology,' not suspecting that as the weeks went on they talked—whenever they got a chance—less and less of theology, and more and more of herself, through the many ingenious approaches that a lover invents and the amused and sympathetic friend abets.

For clearly Ellesborough was in love. Janet read the signs of it in the ease with which he had accepted the postponement of his release from the camp, eager as he was to get to the fighting line. She heard it in his voice, she saw it in his eyes; and she was well aware that Rachel saw it. What Rachel thought and felt

was more obscure. She watched for Ellesborough; she put on her best frocks for him; she was delighted to laugh and talk with him. But she watched for Mr Shenstone, too, and would say something caustic or impatient if he were two or three days without calling. And when he called, Rachel very seldom snubbed him as at first. She was all smiles; the best frocks came out for him, too; and Janet, seeing the growing beatitude of the poor vicar, and the growing nervousness of his sister, was often inclined to be really angry with Rachel. But they were not yet on such terms as would allow her to remonstrate with what seemed to her a rather unkind bit of flirtation; seeing that she did not believe that Rachel had, or ever would have, a serious thought to give the shallow, kindly little man.

But though she held her tongue, Janet showed her feeling sometimes by a tone, or a lifted eyebrow, and then Rachel would look at her askance, turning the vicar's head none the less on the next occasion. Was it that she was deceiving herself, as well as trying, very unsuccessfully, to deceive the lookers-on? The progress of the affair with Ellesborough made on Janet a curious and rather sinister impression, which she could hardly explain to herself. She seemed to see that Ellesborough's suit steadily advanced; that Rachel made no real attempt to resist his power over her. But all the same there was no happy, spontaneous growth in it. Rachel seemed to take her increasing subjection hardly, to be fighting obscurely against it all the time, as though she were hampered by thoughts and motives unknown

to the other two. Ellesborough, Janet thought, was often puzzled by the cynical or bitter talk with which Rachel would sometimes deliberately provoke him. And yet it was clear that he possessed the self-confidence of a strong man, and did not really doubt his ultimate power to win and hold the woman he was courting.

One bitterly cold evening at the very end of September, Ellesborough, arriving at the farm, was welcomed by Janet, and told that all hands were in the fields 'clamping' potatoes. She herself left a vegetable stew ready for supper, safely simmering in a hay-box, and walked towards the potato field with Ellesborough. On the way they fell in with Hastings, the bailiff, who was walking fast, and seemed to be in some excitement.

'Miss Leighton—that old fool Halsey has given notice!'

Janet stopped in dismay. Halsey was a valuable man, an old-fashioned labourer of many aptitudes, equally good as a woodman, as an expert in 'fagging' or sickling beaten-down corn, as a thatcher of roofs or ricks, as a setter of traps for moles, or snares for rabbits. Halsey was the key-stone of the farm labour. Betts was well enough. But without Halsey's intelligence to keep him straight—Janet groaned.

'What on earth's the matter, Hastings? We raised his wages last week—and we did it before the county award was out!'

Hastings shook his head.

'It's not wages. He says he's seen the ghost!'

Janet exclaimed, and Ellesborough laughed.

'What, the defunct gamekeeper?'

Hastings nodded.

'Vows he's seen him twice—once on the hill—on the green path—and once disappearing round the corner of the farm. He declares that he called to the man—who was like nobody he had ever seen before—and the man took no notice, but went along, all hunched up—as they say the ghost is—and talking to himself—till all of a sudden he vanished. I've argued with him. But nothing'll hold him—old idiot! He vows he'll go—and if he talks to the others they'll all go.'

'Has he gone home?' asked Janet.

'Long ago. He left the houses to Jenny, and just marched off. In the lane he met me, and gave notice. Such a cock-and-bull story as you never heard! But I couldn't do anything with him.'

'I'll go and tackle him,' said Janet at once. 'We can't lose him. The work will go to smash.'

She waved a farewell to Ellesborough, and ran back to the house. The others, watching, saw her emerge on her bicycle and disappear towards the village.

'Well, if anybody can move the old fellow, I suppose it's Miss Leighton,' said Hastings disconsolately. 'She's always managed to get the right side of him so far. But I'm nearly beat, captain! Things are getting too hard for me. You can't say a word to these men—they're off in a moment. And the wages!—it's sinful!'

'We're supposed only to be fighting a war, Hastings,' said Ellesborough with a smile as they walked on

together. 'But all the time there's revolution going on beside it—all over the world!'

Hastings made a face.

'Right you are, captain. And how's it going to work out?'

'Don't ask me!' laughed Ellesborough—'we've all got to sit tight and hope for the best. All I know is that the people who work with their hands are going to get a bit of their own back from the people who work with their heads—or their cheque-books. And I'm glad of it! But ghosts are a silly nuisance. However, I dare say Miss Leighton will get round the old man.'

Hastings looked doubtful.

'I don't know. All the talk about the murder has come up again. They say there's a grandson come home of the man that was suspected sixty years ago—John Dempsey. And some people tell me that this lad had the whole story of the murder from his grandfather—who confessed it—only last year, when the man died.'

'Well, if he's dead all right, and has owned up to it, why on earth does the ghost make a fuss?'

Hastings shook his head.

'People get talking,' he said gloomily. 'And when they get talking, they'll believe anything—and see anything. It'll be the girls next.'

Ellesborough tried to cheer him, but without much success. The 'poor spirit' of the bailiff was a perpetual astonishment to the American, in the prime of his own life and vigour. Existence for Hastings was always

either drab or a black business. If the weather was warm, 'a bit of cold would ha' been better': if a man recovered from an illness, he'd still got the 'bother o' dyin' before him.' He was certain we should lose the war, and the rush of the September victories did not affect him. And if we didn't lose it, no matter—prices and wages would still be enough to ruin us. Rachel grew impatient under the constant drench of pessimism. Janet remembered that the man was a delicate man, nearing the sixties, with, as she suspected, but small provision laid up for old age; childless—with an ailing wife; and bearing the marks in body and spirit of years of overwork. She never missed an opportunity of doing him a kindness; and the consequence was that Hastings, always faithful, even to his worst employers, was passionately faithful to his new mistresses, defending them and fighting for their interests, as they were sometimes hardly inclined to fight for themselves.

After showing Ellesborough the way to the 'clamps,' Hastings left him. In succession to the long days of rain there had been a sudden clearing in the skies. The day had been fine, and now, towards sunset, there was a grand massing of rosy cloud along the edge of the down, and windy lights over the valley. Rachel, busy with the covering of the potato 'clamps,' laid down the bundle of bracken she had been handing to Peter Betts, and came quickly to meet her visitor. Her working dress was splashed with mire from neck to foot, and coils of brown hair had escaped from her

waterproof cap, and hung about her brilliant cheeks. She looked happy, but tired.

'Such a day!' she said, panting, as they met. 'The girls and I began at six this morning—lifting and sorting. It was so important to get them in. Now they're safe if the frost does come. It's a jolly crop!'

Ellesborough looked at her, and her eyes wavered before the ardour in his.

'I say! You work too hard! Haven't you done enough? Come and rest.'

She nodded. 'I'll come!'

She ran to say a word to the others and rejoined him.

They went back to the farm, not talking much, but conscious through every nerve of the other's nearness. Rachel ran upstairs to change her dress, and Ellesborough put the fire together, and shut the windows. For the sun had sunk behind the hill, and a bitter wind was rising. When Rachel came down again, the wood-fire glowed and crackled, the curtains drawn, and she stared in astonishment at a small tea-tray beside the fire.

Ellesborough hurriedly apologised.

'I found some boiling water in the kettle, and I know by now where Miss Janet keeps her tea.'

'Janet brought us tea to the field.'

'I dare say she did. That was four—this is six. You felt cold just now. You looked cold. Be good, and take it easy!' He pointed to the only comfortable chair, which he had drawn up to the fire.

'Are you sure it boiled?' she said sceptically, as she sank into her chair, her eyes dancing. 'No man knows when a kettle boils.'

'Try it! For five winters, on the Sangucnay I made my own tea—and baked my own bread. Men are better cooks than women when they give their minds to it!' He brought her the cup, hot and fragrant, and she sipped it in pure content while he stood smiling above her, leaning against the mantelpiece.

'I wanted to see you,' he said presently. 'I've just got my marching orders. Let's see. This is October. I shall have just a month. They've found another man to take over this job, but he can't come till November.'

'And—peace?' said Rachel, looking up.

For Prince Max of Baden had just made his famous peace offer of October 5th, and even in rural Brookshire there was a thrilling sense of opening skies, of some loosening of those iron bonds in which the world had lain for four years.

'There will be no peace!' said Ellesborough with sudden energy, 'so long as there is a single German soldier left in Belgium or France!'

She saw him stiffen from head to foot—and thrilled to the flame of avenging will that suddenly possessed him. The male looked out upon her, kindling—by the old, old law—the woman in her.

'And if they don't accept that?'

'Then the war will go on,' he said briefly, 'and I shall be in for the last lap!'

His colour changed a little. She put down her cup and bent over the fire, warming her hands.

'If it does go on, it will be fiercer than ever.'

'Very likely. If our fellows set the pace there'll be no dawdling. America's white hot.'

'And you'll be in it?'

'I hope so,' he said quietly.

There was a pause. Then he, looking down upon her, felt a sudden and passionate joy invade him—joy which was also longing—longing irresistible. His mind had been wrestling with many scruples and difficulties during the preceding days. Ought he to speak—on the eve of departure—or not? Would she accept him? Or was all her manner and attitude towards him merely the result of the new freedom of women? Gradually but surely his mounting passion had idealised her. Not only her personal ways and looks had become delightful to him, but the honourable, independent self in him had come to feel a deep admiration for and sympathy with her honourable independence, for these new powers in women that made them so strong in spite of their weakness. She had become to him not only a woman but a heroine. His whole heart approved and admired her when he saw her so active, so competent, so human. And none the less the man's natural instinct hungered to take her in his arms, to work for her, to put her back in the shelter of love and home—with her children at her knee. . . .

And how domestic was this little scene in which

they stood—the firelight, the curtained room, the tea-things, her soft, bending form, with the signs of labour put away! . . .

The tears rushed to his eyes. He bent over her, and spoke her name, almost unconsciously.

'Rachel!'

His soul was in the name!

She started, and looked up. While he had been thinking only of her, her thoughts had gone wandering—far away. And they seemed to have brought back—not the happy yielding of a woman to her lover—but distress and fear. A shock ran through him.

'Rachel!——' He held out his hands to her. He could not find words, but his eyes spoke, and the agitation in every feature.

But she drew back.

'Don't—don't say anything—till——'

His look held her—the surprise in it—the tender appeal. She could not take hers from it. But the disturbance in him deepened. For in the face she raised to him there was no flood of maidenly joy. Suddenly—her eyes were those of a culprit examining her judge. A cry sprang to his lips.

'Wait!—wait!' she said piteously.

She fell back in her chair, covering her face, her breast heaving. He saw that she was trying to command herself, to steady her voice. One of those forebodings which are the children of our half-conscious observation shot through him. But he would not admit it.

He stooped over her and tried again to take her

hand. But she drew it away, and sat up in her chair. She was very white, and there were tears in her eyes.

'I've got something to say to you,' she said, with evident difficulty, 'which—I'm afraid—will surprise you very much. Of course I ought to have told you —long ago. But I'm a coward, and—and—it was all so horrible. I am not what you suppose me. I'm—a married woman—at least I was. I divorced my husband—eighteen months ago. I'm quite free now. I thought if you really cared about me—I should of course have to tell you some time—but I've been letting it go on. It was very wrong of me—I know it was very wrong!'

And bowing her face on her knees, she burst into a passion of weeping, the weeping of a child who was yet a woman. The mingled immaturity and intensity of her nature found its expression in the very abandonment of her tears.

Ellesborough, too, had turned pale. He was astounded by what she said. His thoughts rushed back over the six weeks of their friendship—recalling his first impressions of something mysterious and unexplained.

But of late he had entirely forgotten them. She had talked so frankly and simply of her father and mother—of her father's missionary work in Canada, and her early journeys with him; and of her brother in Ontario, his children and his letters. Once she had handed him a letter from this brother to read, and he had been struck by the refined and affectionate tone of it. Here were the same family relations as his own.

His heart, his taste were satisfied. If Rachel Henderson accepted him he would be bringing his mother a daughter she would find it easy to love.

And all the time—instead of an unmarried girl, with the experiences of love and marriage before her —she had been already married—and divorced! Another man had loved and possessed her—and even if she were innocent—but of course she was innocent! —there must be some ugly story involved.

He tried to collect his thoughts—but all his consciousness seemed to be bruised and in pain. He could only put his hand on her hair, and say incoherent things,—

'Don't cry so, dear—don't cry!'

And even as he spoke he felt with bewilderment how—in a moment—their respective attitudes had changed. She checked her sobs.

'Sit there!' she said, pointing peremptorily to a seat opposite. Then she looked round her.

'Where is Janet?'

'She went to the village.'

Rachel dried her eyes, and with trembling hands smoothed her hair back from her face.

'I'll try and tell it shortly. It's a horrible tale.'

'Do you feel able to tell it?'

For he was aghast at her pallor—the alteration in her whole aspect.

'I must,' she wailed. 'Weren't you—weren't you just going to ask me to marry you?'

Strange question!—strange frowning eyes!'

'I was,' he said gravely. 'Didn't you know I should?'

'No, no, I didn't know!' she said piteously. 'I was never *sure*—till you looked at me then. I wouldn't be sure!'

He said nothing. Speech was ice-bound till he had heard what she had to say.

'It all began to happen three years ago,' she said hurriedly, hiding her face from him with her hand while she hung over the fire. 'I was living with my brother, who was then near Winnipeg. He offered me a home after my father died. But he was married, and I didn't get on with his wife. I dare say it was my fault, but I wasn't happy, and I wanted to get away. Then a man—an Englishman—bought the next section to us, and we began to know him. He was a gentleman—he'd been to Cambridge—his father had some land and a house in Lincolnshire. But he was the third son, and he'd been taught land agency, he said, as a training for the colonies. That was all we knew. He was very good-looking, and he began courting me. I suppose I was proud of his being a University man—a public school boy, and all that. He told me a lot of stories about his people, and his money—most of which were lies. But I was a fool—and I believed them. My brother tried to stop it. Well, you know from his letters what sort of man he is,' and again she brushed the sudden tears away. 'But his wife made mischief, and I was set on having a place of my own. So I stuck to it—and married him.'

She rose abruptly from her seat and began to move restlessly about the room, taking up a book or her

knitting from the table, and putting them down again, evidently unconscious of what she was doing. Ellesborough waited. His lean, sharply-cut face revealed a miserable, perhaps an agonised suspense. This crisis into which she had plunged him so suddenly was bringing home to him all that he had at stake. That she mattered to him so vitally he had never known till this moment.

'What's the good of going into it all!' she said at last desperately. 'You can guess—what it means'—a sudden crimson rushed to her cheeks—'to be tied to a man—without honour—or principle—or refinement—who presently seemed to me vile all through—in what he said—or what he did. And I was at his mercy. I had married him in such a hurry he had a right to despise me, and he used it! And when I resisted and turned against him, then I found out what his temper meant.' She raised her shoulders with a gesture which needed no words. 'Well—we got on somehow till my little girl was born——'

Ellesborough started. Rachel turned on him her sad, swimming eyes. But the mere mention of her child had given her back her dignity and strength to go on. She became visibly more composed, as she stood opposite to him, her beautiful dark head against the sunset clouds outside.

'She only lived a few weeks. Her death was largely owing to him. But that's a long story. And after her death I couldn't stand it any more. I ran away. And soon I heard that he had taken up with an Italian girl.

There was a large camp of Italians on the C.P.R., quite close to us. She was the daughter of one of the foremen. So then my brother made me go to his lawyers in Winnipeg. We collected evidence very easily. I got my divorce eighteen months ago. The decree was made absolute last February. So, of course, I'm quite free—quite—*quite* free!'

She spoke the last words almost savagely, and after them she moved away to the window looking on the down, and stood gazing through it, as though she had forgotten Ellesborough's presence.

'The action was not defended?' he asked, in a low voice.

She shook her head without speaking. But after a minute she added,—

'I can show you the report.'

There was silence. Ellesborough turned round, put his hands on the mantelpiece, and buried his face on them. Presently she approached him, looked at him with a quivering lip, and said in broken sentences,—

'It has all come so suddenly—hasn't it? I had been in such good spirits to-day, not thinking of those horrible things at all. I don't know what I meant to do, if you did ask me—for of course I knew you *might*. I suppose I intended to put off telling you—so as to be sure first —*certain*—that you loved me. And then—somehow —when you looked down on me like that, I felt—that *I* cared—much more than I had thought I cared—too much to let you speak—before you knew—before I'd told you. It's always been my way—to—put off

disagreeable things. And so I thought I could put this off. But every night I have been awake thinking—" if only he knew! "—and I was wretched—for a while—because you didn't know. But then it went away again—and I forgot it. One does forget things—everything—when one is hard at work. But I'm awfully sorry. And now—I think—we'd better say good-bye.'

Her voice faltered against her will. He raised himself quickly.

'No—no,' he said passionately, 'we won't say good-bye. But you must let me think—for you, as well as for myself.'

'It would be better to say good-bye,' she persisted. 'I'm afraid—you expect in me—what I haven't got. I see that now. Because I'm keen about this work, and I can run this farm, you think—perhaps—I'm a strong character. But I'm not. I've no judgment—not in moral things. I give in—I'm weak—and then —I could kill myself!'

She had grown very white again—and her eyes were strangely fixed on him. The words seemed to him incoherent, out of touch somehow even with their tragic conversation. But his first passing bewilderment was lost in pity and passion. He stooped, took her hand, and kissed it. He came nearer.

But again she drew back.

'There's Janet!' she said, 'we can't talk any more.'

For she had caught sight of Janet in the farm-yard, leading her bicycle.

'Can you meet me to-morrow evening—on the Common?' he said. 'I could be there about six.'

She frowned a little.

'Is it worth while?'

'I beg you!' he said huskily.

'Very well—I'll come. We shall be just friends, please. But, of course, I'll tell you more—if you wish.'

Janet's voice and step were heard in the passage. How Ellesborough got through the next ten minutes he never remembered. When they were over, he found himself rushing through the cool and silence of the autumn night, thankful for this sheltering nature in which to hide his trouble, his deep, deep distress

VII

THE October night rang stormily round Great End Farm. The north-west wind rushing over the miniature pass just beyond the farm, where the road dropped from the level of the upland in which Ipscombe lay, to the level of the plain, was blowing fiercely on the square of buildings which stood naked and undefended against weather from that quarter of the heaven, while protected by the hills and the woods from the north-east. And mingled with the noisy or wailing gusts came the shrieking from time to time of one of the little brown owls that are now multiplying so fast in the English midlands.

The noise of the storm and the clamour of the owl were not the cause of Rachel's wakefulness; but they tended to make it more feverish and irritable. Every now and then she would throw off the bed-clothes, and sit up with her hands round her knees, a white and rigid figure lit by the solitary candle beside her. Then again she would feel the chill of the autumn night, and crouch down shivering among the bed-clothes, pining for a sleep that would not come. Instead of sleep, she could do nothing but rehearse the scene with Ellesborough

again and again. She watched the alterations in his face—she heard the changes in his voice—as she told her story. She was now as sorry for him as for herself! The tears came flooding into her eyes as she thought of him. In her selfish fears of his anger she had forgotten his suffering. But the first true love of her life was bringing understanding. She realised the shock to him, and wept over it. She saw, too, that she had been unjust and cowardly in letting the situation go so far without speaking; and that there was no real excuse for her.

Would he give her up? She had told him that all was at an end between them; but that was only pride—making a virtue of a necessity. Oh, no, no, he must not give her up! It was only six weeks since their first meeting, and though it would be untrue to say that since the meeting he had wholly possessed her thoughts, she had been capable all through them of that sort of dallying with the vicar which Janet thought unkind. She had been able to find plenty of mind for her work, and for the ambitions of her new profession, and had spent many a careless hour steeped in the sheer physical pleasure of the harvest. Yet, from the beginning, his personality had laid its grip on hers. She had never been able to forget him for long. One visit from him was no sooner over than she was calculating on and dreaming of the next. And as the consciousness of some new birth in her had grown, and sudden glimpses had come to her of some supreme joy, possibly within her grasp, so fear had grown, and

anxiety. She looked back upon her past, and knew it stained—knew that it must at some point rise as an obstacle between her and him.

But how great an obstacle? She was going to tell him, faithfully, frankly, all the story of her marriage—accuse her own rash self-will in marrying Delane, confess her own failings as a wife; she would tell no hypocritical tale. She would make it plain that Roger had found in her no mere suffering saint, and that probably her intolerance and impatience had contributed to send him to damnation. But, after all, when it was told, what could Ellesborough do but pity her?—take her in his arms—and comfort her—for those awful years—and her lost child?

The tears rained down her cheeks. He loved her! She was certain of that. When he had once heard the story, he could not forsake her! She already saw the pity in his deep gray eyes; she already felt his honest, protecting arms about her.

Ah—*but then*? Beyond that imagined scene, which rose, as though it were staged, before her, Rachel's shrinking eyes, in the windy darkness, seemed to be penetrating to another—a phantom scene in a dim distance—drawn not from the future, but the past. Two figures moved in it. One was herself. The other was not Roger Delane.

The brown owl seemed to be shrieking just outside her window. Her nerves quivered under the sound as though it were her own voice. Why was life so cruel, so miserable? Why cannot even the gods themselves

make undone what is done? She was none the worse—permanently—for what had happened in that distant scene—that play within a play? How was she the worse? She was 'not a bad woman!'—as she had said so passionately to Janet, when they joined hands. There was no lasting taint left in mind and soul—nothing to prevent her being a pure and faithful wife to George Ellesborough, and a good mother to his children. It was another Rachel to whom all that had happened, a Rachel she had a right to forget! She was weak in will—she had confessed it. But George Ellesborough was strong. Leaning on him, and on kind Janet, she could be all, she would be all, that he still dreamed. The past—*that* past—was dead. It had no existence. Nothing—neither honour nor love—obliged her to disclose it. Except in her own mind it was dead and buried—as though it had never been. No human being shared her knowledge of it, or ever would.

And yet the Accuser came closer and closer, wrestling with her shrinking heart. 'You can't live a lie beside him all your life!' It won't be a lie. All that matters to him is what I am now—not what I was. And it wasn't I!—it was another woman—a miserable, battered creature who couldn't help herself.' 'It will rise up between you, and perhaps—after all—in some way—he will discover it.' 'How can he? Dick and I—who in all the world knew, but us two?—and Dick is dead.' 'Are you sure that no one knew—that no one saw you? Think!'

A pale face grew paler in the dim light, as thought hesitated :—

'There was that wagon—and the boy—in the storm.' 'Yes—what then?' 'Well—what then? The boy scarcely saw me.' 'He did see you.' 'And if he did—it is the commonest thing in a Canadian winter to be caught by a storm, to ask shelter from a neighbour.' 'Still—even if he drew no malicious conclusion, he saw you—alone in that farm with Dick Tanner, and he probably knew your name.' 'How should he know my name?' 'He had seen you before—you had seen him before.' 'I didn't know his name—I don't know it now.' 'No—but in passing your farm once, he had dropped a parcel for a neighbour—and you had seen him once—at a railway station.' 'Is it the least likely that I shall ever see him again—or that he remembers seeing me at Dick Tanner's door?' 'Not likely, perhaps—but possible—quite possible.'

And while this question and answer passed through the brain, the woman sitting up in bed seemed to be transported to a howling wintry scene of whirling snow—a November twilight—and against that background, the hood of a covered wagon, a boy holding the reins, the heavy cape on his shoulders white with snow, the lamps of the wagon shining dimly on him, and making a kind of luminous mist round the cart. She heard a parley, saw a tall and slender man with fair hair go out to the boy with hot milk and bread, caught directions as to the road, and saw herself as a half-hidden figure in the partially open door.

And then afterwards—the warm farm kitchen shutting out the storm—a man at her knees—his arms round her—his kisses on her cheek.

And again the irrevocableness of it closed down upon her. It could *never* be undone: that was the terrible commonplace which held her in its grasp. It could never be wiped out from one human mind, which must bear the burden of it as best it could, till gradually—steadily—the life had been killed out of the ugly, haunting thing, and it had been buried—drowned, out of sight and memory.

But the piteous dialogue began again.

'How *could* I have resisted? I was so miserable—so lonely—so weak! 'You didn't love him!' 'No—but I was alone in the world.' 'Well, then, tell George Ellesborough—he is a reasonable man—he would understand.' 'I can't—I *can't*! I have deceived him up till now by passing as unmarried. If I confess this, too, there will be no chance for me. He'll never trust me in anything!—he'll suspect everything I do or say—even if he goes on loving me. And I couldn't bear it!—nor could he.'

And so at last the inward debate wore itself out, and sleep, sudden and deep, came down upon Rachel Henderson. When she woke in the morning it was to cleared skies both in her own mind and in the physical world. The nightmare through which she had passed seemed to her now unreal, even a little absurd. Her nerves were quieted by sleep, and she saw plainly what she had to do. That 'old, unhappy, far-off thing'

lurking in the innermost depth of memory had nothing more to do with her. She would look it calmly in the face, and put it finally—for ever—away. But of her marriage she would tell everything—everything!—to George Ellesborough, and he should deal with her as he pleased.

The day was misty and still. October, the marvellous October of this year, was marching on. Every day, Foch on the battlefield of France and Belgium was bringing down the old Europe, and clearing the ground for the new. In English villages and English farms, no less than in the big towns, there was ferment and excitement, though it showed but little. Would the boys be home by Christmas—the sons, the brothers, the husbands? What would the change be like—the life after the war? If there were those who yearned and prayed for it—there were those who feared it. The war had done well for some, and hideously for others. And all through the play of individual interests and desires, and even in the dullest minds there ran the intoxicating sense of Victory, of an England greater and more powerful than even her own sons and daughters had dared to dream—an England which knew herself now, by the stern test of the four years' struggle, to be possessed of powers and resources, spiritual, mental, physical, which amazed herself. In all conscious minds, brooding on the approaching time, there rose the question: 'What are we going to do with it?' and even in the

unconscious, the same thought was present, as a vague disturbing impulse.

Janet had just read the war telegrams to Rachel, who had come down late, complaining of a headache; but when Janet—the reserved and equable Janet—after going through the news of the recapture of Ostend, Zeebrugge, and Bruges, broke into the passionate, low-spoken comment: 'The Lord is King—be the people never so unquiet!' or could not, for tears, finish the account of the entry into recaptured Lille, and the joy of its inhabitants, Rachel sat irresponsive—or apparently so.

How would it affect Ellesborough—this astounding news? Would it take him from her the sooner, or delay his going? That was all she seemed capable of feeling.

Janet was troubled by her look and attitude, and being well aware that the two had had a long *tête-à-tête* the day before, wondered how things were going. But she said nothing; and after breakfast Rachel joined the two girls in the potato-field, and worked as hard as they, hour after hour. But her usual gaiety was gone, and the girls noticed at once the dark rims under her eyes. They wondered secretly what Miss Henderson's 'friend' had been doing. For that the 'Cap'n' was courting their employer had long been plain to them. Betty, of course, had a 'friend,' the young soldier whose sick leave was nearly up, and the child's deep velvety eyes were looking nearly as tired as Miss Henderson's. While Jenny, too, the timid, undeveloped Jenny had lately begun to take an interest in a 'friend,'

a young fellow belonging to Ellesborough's forestry camp whom she had met in Millsborough the day of the Harvest Festival. They had hardly exchanged half an hour's real conversation. But he had bought her some sweets at Millsborough, and walked a bit of the way home with her. Then she had seen him in the village once or twice. He had some relations there—there was some talk of him, and that old murder at the farm—she didn't know rightly what it was. But she felt somehow that Miss Henderson wouldn't want to have him about—Miss Henderson didn't like talk of the murder—so Jenny had never asked him to look her up. But her raw, childish mind was full of him, and the ferments of sex were stirring. In the secret opinion of both girls, 'friends' were quite as much pain as pleasure. No girl could do without them; but they were pretty certain to cause heart-aches, to make a girl wish at some time or other that she had never been born. A London factory-girl would have expressed it in the Cockney way: 'Blokes are no good—but you must have a bloke!'

The two girls then concluded that Captain Ellesborough had been causing trouble, as all men did, at some point; and being sympathetic little souls, they worked especially hard in the potato-field, and would not allow Rachel to carry the heavier baskets to the 'clamp.'

Meanwhile Janet had been wrestling with old Halsey, till he had very reluctantly yielded to her persuasion, and returned to work.

'I'm not the man I wor,' he confided to Peter Betts, as they were eating their dinner under a hedge in the damp October sunshine. 'When I wor a young man, I wouldn't ha' minded them things, not if it was iver so. But now they do give me the shivers in my inside.'

'What do?' said Peter Betts, with a mouthful of cold bacon. He was still greatly in the dark as to why Halsey had left work so early in the afternoon the day before, and why he was now in such a gruff and gloomy mood. There was indeed a rumour in the village that old Halsey had seen 'summat,' but as Halsey had gone to bed immediately after Miss Leighton had had her say with him, and had refused to be 'interviewed' even by his wife, there was a good deal of uncertainty even in the mind of his oldest pal, Peter Betts.

'Why—ghostisses!' said Halsey, with a frown, removing his pipe for a moment to give emphasis to the word. 'I don't see as a man can be expected to deal with ghostisses. Anythin' else yer like in a small way—mad dogs, or bulls, or snakes, where they keep 'em, which, thank the Lord, they don't in these parts —but not *them*.'

'What did yer see?' said Betts, after a few ruminating pulls.

'Well, I saw old Watson, the keeper, as was murdered sixty years since, ''at's what I saw,' said Halsey with slow decisiveness.

'An' what might be like?' asked Betts, with equal

deliberation. The day was mild and sunny; the half-ploughed field on which they had been working lay alternatively yellow in the stubbles and a rich brown purple in the new-turned furrows under the autumn noon. A sense of well-being had been diffused in the two old men by food and rest. Halsey's tongue grew looser.

'Well, I saw a man come creepin' an' crouchin' down yon grass road—(it was visible from where they sat, as a green streak on the side of the hill)—'same as several people afore me 'as seen 'um—same as they allus say old Watson must ha' come after Dempsey shot 'im. He wor shot in the body. The doctors as come to look at 'im fust foun' that out. An' if ye're shot in the body, I understan', yo naterally double up a bit if yo try to walk. Well—that's jes' how I saw 'im—crouchin' along. Yo remember it wor a dull evenin' yesterday—an' it wor gettin' dark, though it worn't dark. It wor not much after fower, by my old watch—but I couldn't see 'im at all plain. I wor in Top-End field—you know?—as leads up to that road. An' I watched 'im come along making for that outside cart-shed—that 'un that's back to back wi' the shippen, where they foun' Watson lyin'. An' I wor much puzzled by the look on 'im. I didn't think nothink about old Watson, fust of all—I didn't know what to think. I was right under the hedge wi' the horses; 'ee couldna' ha' seen me—an' I watched 'im. He stopped, onst or twice, as though he wor restin' hisself—pullin' 'isself together—and onst I 'eered 'im cough——'

Halsey looked round suddenly on his companion as though daring him to mock.

Betts, however, could not help himself. He gave an interrupting and sceptical chuckle.

'Ghostisses don't cough, as ever I 'eered on.'

'And why shouldn't they?' said Halsey testily. 'If they can do them other things they'd used to do when livin'--walkin' an' seein' an' such-like—why not coughin'?'

Betts shook his head.

'Never 'eered on it,' he said, with conviction.

'Well, anyways I seed him come down to that shed, an' then I lost 'im. But I 'ad the creeps somehow, and I called to Jenny to come an' take the 'orses. An' then I went after 'im. But there was all the field an' the lane to cross, and when I come to the shed, there wasn't no one and nothink to be seen—excep'——'

The old man paused, and again looked doubtfully at his companion.

'Well?' said Betts eagerly, his philosophic attitude giving way a little.

'Excep'—a large patch o' blood—*fresh blood*—I touched it—on one of them ole sacks lyin' near the cart,' said Halsey slowly. 'An' it worn't there in the afternoon, for I moved the sacks mysel'.'

Betts whistled softly. Halsey resumed,—

'There was nothin' moved—or taken away—nothin' at all!—only that patch. So then I went all round the farm, and there was nobory. I thought 'ee might ha' turned back by the grass road, p'raps, without my

seein' 'im, so I went that way, and there was nothin' —until—a little way up the road—there was blood again'—the old man's voice dropped—'every couple o' yards or so—a drop or two here—an' a drop or two there—just as they tracked old Watson by it, up the hill, and into yon wood—where Dempsey set on him.'

The two old men looked at each other. Betts was evidently impressed.

'Are you sure it was blood?'

'Sure. Last night, Hastings said it was sheep-dip! After I tole 'im, when 'ee went to look under the shed, it wor so dark 'ee couldn't see nothin'. Well, 'ee knew better this mornin'. 'Ee fetched me, an' asst me if I'd said anythin' to Miss Janet. And I said, no. So then he tole me I wasn't to say nothin' to the ladies, nor the girls, nor anybody. An' 'ee'd done summat wi' the sack—I dunno what. But 'ee might ha' held 'is tongue last night about sheep-dip! Who's been dippin' sheep about here? 'As Miss Henderson got any ruddle anywhere about the farm? I know she ain't!—an' Muster Hastings knows she ain't.'

'Why didn't yer tell Miss Janet?—about the bleedin'?'

'Well, I was a bit skeered. I thought I'd sleep on't, before I got talkin' any more. But on the way 'ome, as I tellt yer, I met Hastings, an' tole *'im*, an' then give 'im notice.'

'That wor a bit hasty, worn't it?' said Betts after a moment, in a judicial tone. But he had been clearly much exercised by his companion's account, and his

pipe hanging idly from his hands showed that his thoughts were active.

'Well, it might ha' bin,' Halsey admitted, 'bit as I said afore, I'm gettin' an old man, and I don't want no truck wi' things as I don't unnerstan'. It give me the wust night as I've had since I had that bad turn wi' the influenza ten year ago.'

'You didn't see his face?'

'No.'

'An' 'ee didn't mind you of anybody?'

Halsey hesitated.

'Well, onst I did think I'd seen some one o' the same build—soomwhere. But I can't recolleck where.'

'As for the blood,' said Betts reflectively, 'it's as curous as the coughin'. Did you iver hear tell as ghosts could bleed?'

Hasting shook his head. Steeped in meditation, the two old men smoked silently for a while. Then Betts said, with the explosiveness of one who catches an idea,—

'Have yer thought o' tellin' John Dempsey?'

'I hain't thought o' tellin' nobody. An' I shouldn't ha' told Miss Leighton what I did tell her, if she 'adn't come naggin' about my givin' notice.'

'You might as well tell John Dempsey. Why, it's his business, is old Watson! Haven't yer seen 'im at all?'

Halsey said No, holding his handsome old head rather high. Had he belonged to a higher station in life, his natural reticence, and a fastidious personal dignity would have carried him far. To a modern

statesman they are at least as valuable as brains. In the small world of Ipscombe they only meant that Halsey himself held rather scornfully aloof from the current village gossip, and got mocked at for his pains. The ordinary human instinct revenged itself, however, when he was *tête-à-tête* with his old chum Peter Betts. Betts divined at any rate from the expression in the old man's eyes that *he* might talk, and welcome.

So he poured out what he knew about John Dempsey, a Canadian lad working in the Forestry Corps at Ralstone, who turned out to be the grandson of the Dempsey who had always been suspected of the murder of Richard Watson in the year 1859. This young Dempsey, he said, had meant to come to Ipscombe after the war, and put what he knew before the police. But finding himself sent to Ralstone, which was only five miles from Ipscombe, he saw no reason to wait, and he had already given all the information he could to the superintendent of police at Millsborough. His grandfather had signed a written confession before his death, and John Dempsey had handed it over. The old man, it appeared, had 'turned pious' during a long illness before his death, and had wished to square matters with his conscience and the Almighty. When his grandson had volunteered for the war, and was about to sail for Europe, old Dempsey had sent for him, had told him the story, and charged him, when he was able, to place his confession in the proper hands. And having done that, he died 'very quiet and comfortable'—so John Dempsey reported.

'Which is more than poor Jem Watson did,' growled Halsey. He felt neither respect nor sympathy for a man who, having set up a secret, couldn't keep it; and the confession itself, rather than the crime confessed, confirmed the poor opinion he had always held of the elder Dempsey when they were young men in the village together. But he agreed to let Betts bring 'young John' to see him. And thereupon they went back to the sowing of one of Miss Henderson's big fields with winter wheat.

When the milking was done, and work was nearly over for the day, a note, brought by messenger, arrived at the farm for Miss Henderson. It was from Ellesborough—a few scribbled words. 'I am prevented from coming this evening. The Chief Forestry Officer of my district has just arrived, and stays the night. I hope to come over to-morrow between six and seven. Shall I find you?'

Rachel scribbled an answer, which a small boy on a bicycle carried off. Then she went slowly back to the sitting-room, so disappointed and unnerved that she was on the brink of tears. Janet who had just come in from milking, was standing by the table, mending a rent in her waterproof. She looked up as Rachel entered, and the needle paused in her hand.

'I say, Rachel!—you do look overdone! You've been going at it too hard.'

For all day long Rachel had been lifting, and sorting, and carrying, in the potato field, finding in the severe

physical exertion the only relief from restlessness. She shook her head irritably and came to stand by the wood fire which Janet had just lit, a welcome brightness in the twilight room.

'Suppose you knock up——' began Janet in a tone of remonstrance. Rachel cut her short.

'I want to speak to you—please, Janet.'

Janet looked round in astonishment and put down her work. Rachel was standing by the fire, with her hands behind her back, her eyes fixed on Janet. She was still in the graceful tunic and knee-breeches, in which her young and splendid youth seemed always most at home. But she had taken off her cap, and her brown hair was falling round a pale face.

'Janet—you know Captain Ellesborough and I had a long talk last night?'

Janet smiled.

'Of course I do. And of course I have my own thoughts about it!'

'I don't know what they are,' said Rachel slowly. 'But—I'd better tell you—Captain Ellesborough asked me to marry him.'

She paused.

'Did you think that would be news to any of us?' said Janet laughing, and then stopped. The sudden contraction of pain in Rachel's face, and something like a sob startled her.

'Don't, Janet, please. I told him something—which made him wonder—whether he did want to marry me after all.'

Janet's heart gave an uncomfortable jump. A score of past conjectures and misgivings rushed back upon her.

'What did you tell him?'

'What I see now I ought to have told you—as well as him—long ago. Henderson is my maiden name. I was a married woman for three years. I had a child which died. I divorced my husband, and he's still alive.'

The colour had flamed back into her cheeks. Janet sat silent, her eyes fixed on Rachel's.

'I did tell you I had a story, didn't I?' said Rachel insistently.

'You did. I took my chance. It was you who—who brought the action?'

'I brought the action. There was no defence. And the judge said—I'd been awfully badly treated—it was no wonder I wanted—to get free. Well, there it is. I'm sorry I deceived you. I'm sorry I deceived him.'

'You didn't deceive me,' said Janet. 'I had practically guessed it.' She rose slowly, and going up to Rachel, she put her hands on her shoulders,—

'Why didn't you tell me, you poor thing!' Her voice and eyes were full of emotion—full of pity. But Rachel shrank away a little from her touch, murmuring under her breath, 'Because I wanted never to hear of it—or think of it again.' Then, after a pause, she added, 'But if you want to know more, I'll tell you. It's your right. My married name was Delane.'

'Don't tell me any more!' said Janet peremptorily. 'I don't want to hear it. But you ought to be—quite frank—with *him*.'

'I know that. Naturally—it was a great shock to him.'

There was something very touching in her attitude. She stood there like a shame-faced boy, in her quasi-male dress; and the contrast between her strong young beauty, and the humility and depression of her manner, appealed with singular force to Janet's mind so constantly and secretly preoccupied with spiritual things. Rachel seemed to her so much cleverer and more vigorous than herself in all matters of ordinary life. Only in the region of religious experience did Janet know herself the superior. But Rachel had never made any outward sign that she cared in the least to know more of that region whether in Janet or other people. She had held entirely aloof from it. But self-reproach—moral suffering—are two of the keys that lead to it. And both were evident here. Janet's heart went out to her friend.

'When is he coming?'

'To-morrow evening. I dare say he'll give me up.'

Janet marvelled at the absence of self-assertion—the touch of despair—in words and tone. So it had gone as deep as this! She blamed herself for lack of perception. An ordinary love-affair, about to end in an ordinary way—that was how it had appeared to her. And suddenly it seemed to her she had stumbled upon what might be tragedy.

No, no—there should be no tragedy! She put her arms round Rachel.

'My dear, he won't give you up! As if I hadn't seen! He worships the ground you tread upon!'

Rachel said nothing. She let her face rest on Janet's shoulder. When she raised it, it was wet. But she kissed Janet quietly, and went away without another word.

VIII

Four grown-ups and a child were gathered in the living-room of Halsey's cottage. The cottage was old like its tenant and had all the inconveniences of age; but it was more spacious than the modern cottage often is, since it and its neighbours represented a surviving fragment from an old Jacobean house—a house of gentlefolks—which had once stood on the site. Most of the house had been pulled down, but Colonel Shepherd's grandfather had retained part of it, and turned it into two cottages—known as 1 and 2 Ipscombe Place—which for all their drawbacks were much in demand in the village, and conferred a certain distinction on their occupants. Mrs Halsey's living-room possessed a Tudor mantelpiece in moulded brick, into which a small modern kitchener had been barbarously fitted; and three fine beams with a little incised ornament ran across the ceiling.

Mrs Halsey had not long cleared away the tea, and brought in a paraffin lamp, small but cheerful. She was a middle-aged woman, much younger than her husband—with an ironic half-dreamy eye, and a native intelligence much superior to her surroundings. She

was suffering from a chronic abscess in the neck, which had strange periodic swellings and subsidences, all of which were endlessly interesting to its possessor. Mrs Halsey, indeed, called the abscess 'she,' wrapped it lovingly in red flannel, describing the evening dressing of it as 'putting her to bed,' and talked of 'her' qualities and oddities as though, in the phrase of her next-door neighbour, 'it'd a been a christened child.' She had decided views on politics, and was a match for any political agent who might approach her with an eye to her vote, a commodity which she kept, so to speak, like a new shilling in her pocket, turning it from time to time to make sure it was there.

But independent as she was, she rarely interfered with the talk of Halsey and his male friends. And on this occasion when the three men—Halsey, Peter Betts, and young Dempsey—had gathered smoking round the fire, she settled herself with her knitting by the table and the lamp, throwing in every now and then a muttered and generally sarcastic comment, of which her husband took no notice—especially as he knew very well that the sarcasms were never aimed at him, and that she was as proud of him as she was generally contemptuous of the rest of the world.

Halsey had just finished a rather grudging description of his experiences two days before for John Dempsey's benefit. He was conscious that each time he repeated them, they sounded more incredible. He didn't want to repeat them; he didn't mean to repeat them; after this, nobody should get any more out of him at all.

Young Dempsey's attitude was certainly not encouraging. Attentive at first, he allowed himself, as Halsey's talk developed, a mild, progressive grin, which spread gradually over his ugly but honest face, and remained there. In face of it, Halsey's speech became more and more laconic, till at last he shut his mouth with a snap, and drawing himself up in his chair, re-lit his pipe with the expression that meant, 'All right—I've done—you may take it or leave it!'

'Well, I don't see that what you saw, Mr Halsey, was so very uncommon!' Dempsey began, still smiling, in spite of a warning look from Betts. 'You saw a man come down that road? Well, in the first place, why shouldn't a man come down that road—it's a reg'lar right of way——'

'It's the way, mind ye, as the ghost of ole Watson has allus come!' put in Peter Betts, chivalrously anxious to support his friend Halsey, as far as he could, against a sceptical stranger. 'An' it's been seen twice on that road already, as I can remember: once when I was a little boy, by old Dan Holt, the postmaster, and once about ten years ago.'

Dempsey looked at the speaker indulgently. To his sharpened transatlantic sense, these old men, in their funny old village, seemed to him a curiously dim and feeble folk. He could hardly prevent himself from talking to them as though they were children. He supposed his grandfather would have been like that if he'd stayed on at Ipscombe. He thanked the stars he hadn't!

But since he had been summoned to consult, as a person who had a vested interest, of a rather blood-curdling sort, in the Great End ghost, he had to give his opinion; and he gave it, while Halsey listened and smoked in a rather sulky silence. For it was soon evident that the murderer's grandson had no use at all for the supposed ghost-story. He tore it ruthlessly to pieces. In the first place, Halsey described the man seen on the grass-road as tall and lanky. But according to his grandfather's account, the murdered game-keeper, on the contrary, was a broadly-built, stumpy man. In the next place—the coughing and the bleeding l —he laughed so long and loudly at these points in the story that Halsey's still black and bushy eyebrows met frowningly over a pair of angry eyes, and Betts tried hurriedly to tame the young man's mirth.

'Well, if yer don't think that man as Halsey saw *was* the ghost, what do you s'pose 'ee was doin' there?' asked Betts, 'and where did he go to? Halsey went right round the farm. The hill just there is as bare as my hand. He must ha' seen the man—if it *wor* a man —an' he saw nothin'. There isn't a tree or a bush where that man could ha' hid hisself—if he *wor* a man.'

Dempsey declared he should have to go and examine the ground himself before he could answer the question. But of course there was an answer to it—there must be. As to the man—why Millsborough, and Ipscombe too, had been full of outlandish East Enders, flying from the raids, Poles and Russians, and such like—

thievin' fellows by all accounts. Why couldn't it be one of them—prowling round the farm for anything he could pick up—and frightened off, when he saw Halsey?'

Betts, smoking with prodigious energy, inquired what he made of the *blood*. Didn't he know the old story of how Watson was tracked down to the cart-shed? Dempsey laughed again.

'Well, it's curious, I grant ye. It's real funny! But where are you going to get blood without a body? And if a thing's a body, it isn't a ghost!'

The two old men were silent. Halsey was lost in a hopeless confusion of ideas, and Betts was determined not to give his pal away.

But here—say what you like!—was a strange man, seen on the road, which had been used, according to village tradition, on several previous occasions, by the authentic ghost of Watson; his course was marked by traces of blood, just as Watson's path of pain had been marked on the night of the murder; and on reaching the spot where Watson had breathed his last, the apparition, whatever it was, had vanished. Perplexity, superstition, and common sense fought each other. Halsey, who knew much of his Bible by heart, was inwardly comparing texts. 'A spirit hath not flesh and blood'—True—but on the other hand what about the 'bodies of the saints'—that 'arose'? While, perhaps, the strongest motive of all in the old man's mind was the obstinate desire to prove himself right, and so to confound young scoffers like Dempsey.

Dempsey, however, having as he thought disposed of Halsey's foolish tale was determined to tell his own, which had already made a great impression in certain quarters of the village, and ranked indeed as the chief sensation of the day. To be able to listen to the story of a murder told by the grandson of the murderer, to whom the criminal himself had confessed it, and that without any fear of unpleasant consequences to any one, was a treat that Ipscombe had seldom enjoyed, especially as the village was still rich in kinsfolk of both murdered and murderer.

Dempsey had already repeated the story so often that it was by now perfect in every detail, and it produced the same effect in this lamplit kitchen as in other. Halsey, forgetting his secret ill-humour, was presently listening open-mouthed. Mrs Halsey laid down her knitting, and stared at the speaker over the top of her spectacles; while across Betts's gnome-like countenance smiles went out and in, especially at the more gruesome points of the tale. The light sparkled on the young Canadian's belt, the Maple Leaf in the khaki hat which lay across his knees, on the badge of the Forestry Corps on his shoulder. The old English cottage, with its Tudor brick-work, and its overhanging beams, the old English labourers with the stains of English soil upon them, made the setting; and in the midst sat the 'new man,' from the New World, holding the stage, just as Ellesborough the New Englander was accustomed to hold it, at Great End Farm. All over England, all over unravaged France and northern Italy similar

scenes at that moment were being thrown on the magic sheet of life; and at any drop in the talk the observer could almost hear, in the stillness, the weaving of the Great Loom on which the Ages come and go.

There was a pause when Dempsey came to a dramatic end with the last breath of his grandfather; till Mrs Halsey said dryly, fixing the young man with her small beady eyes,—

'And you don't mind telling on your own grandfather?'

'Why shouldn't I?' laughed Dempsey, 'when it's sixty years ago. They've lost their chance of hanging him anyhow.'

Mrs Halsey shook her head in inarticulate protest. Betts said reflectively,—

'I wouldn't advise you to be tellin' that tale to Miss Henderson.'

Dempsey's expression changed at the name. He bent forward eagerly.

'By the way, who is Miss Henderson? Do you know where she comes from?'

The others stared.

'Last winter,' said Betts at last, 'she wor on a farm down Devonshire way. And before that she wor at college—with Miss Janet.'

'Was she ever in Canada?'

'Yes!' said Halsey with sudden decision, 'she wor —for she told me one day when I wor mendin' the new reaper and binder, that we in this country didn't know what harvest meant. "Why, I've helped to

reap a field—in Canada," she ses, " fower miles square," she ses, " six teams o' horses—an' six horses to the team," she ses—" that's somethin' like." So I know she's been in Canada.'

'Ah!' said Dempsey, staring at the carpet. 'And she's not married? You're sure she's not married?'

'Married?' said all the others, looking at him in disapproving astonishment.

'Well, if she ain't, I saw her sister—or her double—twice—about two-and-a-half year ago—at a place thirty miles from Winnipeg. I could ha' sworn I'd seen her before!'

'Well, you can't ha' seen her before,' said Betts positively; 'cause she's Miss, not Missis.'

'Ah!' said Dempsey again in a non-committal voice, looking hard this time into the fire.

'Where have you seen her—in these parts?' asked Mrs Halsey.

'At the Harvest Festival, t'other day. But I must have been mistaken—that's all. I think I'm going to call upon her some day.'

'Whatever for?'

'Why—to tell her about my grandfather!' said Dempsey, looking round at Mrs Halsey, with an air of astonishment that any one should ask him the question.

'You won't be welcome.'

'Why not?'

'Because she don't want to hear nothin' about Watson's murder. And whatever's the good on it,

anyhow?' said Mrs Halsey with sudden emphasis. 'You've told us a good tale, I'll grant ye. But yer might as well be pullin' the old feller 'isself out of his grave, as goin' round killin' 'im every night fresh, as you be doin'. Let 'im be. Skelintons is skelintons.'

Dempsey, feeling rather indignantly that his pains had been wasted, and his audience was not worthy of him, rose to take his departure. Halsey's face cleared. He turned to look at his wife, and she winked in return. And when the young forester had taken his departure, Mrs Halsey stroked the red flannel round her swollen neck complacently.

'I 'ad to pike 'im out soomhow. It's 'igh time she wor put to bed!'

That same evening, Ellesborough left the Ralstone camp behind him about six o'clock, and hurried through the late October evening towards Great End Farm. During the forty-eight hours which had elapsed since his interview with Rachel he had passed through much suffering, and agonies of indecision. He had had to reconstruct all his ideas of the woman he loved. Instead of the proud and virginal creature he had imagined himself to be wooing, amid the beautiful setting of her harvest fields, he had to think of her as a woman dimmed and besmirched by an unhappy marriage with a bad man. For himself, he certainly resented the concealment which had been practised on him. Yet at the same time he thought he understood the state of exasperation, of invincible revolt which had

led to it. And he kept reminding himself that, after all, her confession had anticipated his proposal.

Nevertheless, such men as he have ideas of marriage, both romantic and austere. They are inclined to claim what they give—a clean sheet, and the first-fruits of body and soul. In Rachel's case the first-fruits had been wasted on a marriage, of which the ugly and inevitable incidents haunted Ellesborough's imagination. One moment he shrank from the thought of them; the next he could not restrain the protesting rush of passion—the vow that his love should put her back on that pinnacle of honour and respect from which fate should never have allowed her to fall.

Well, she had promised to tell him her story in full. He awaited it. As to his own people, they were dear, good women, his mother and sisters—saints, but not Pharisees.

It was a dark and lowering evening, with tempest gusts of wind. But from far away, after he had passed Ipscombe, a light from one of the windows of the farm shone out, as though beckoning him to her. Suddenly, from the mouth of the farm lane, he saw a bicycle approaching. The rider was Janet Leighton. She passed him with a wave and a smile.

'Going to a Food meeting! But Rachel's at home.'

What a nice woman! Looking back over the couple of months since he had known the inmates of the farm, he realised how much he had come to like Janet Leighton. So unselfish, so full of thought for others, so modest for herself! There couldn't be a better friend for

Rachel; her friendship itself was a testimonial; he reassured himself by the mere thought of her.

When he drew up at the farm, Hastings with a lantern in his hand was just disappearing towards the hill, and the two girls, Betty and Jenny, passed him each with a young man, two members, in fact, of his own Corps, John Dempsey and another. They explained that they were off to a Red Cross Concert in the village hall. Ellesborough's pulse beat quicker as he parted from them, for he realised that he would find Rachel alone in the farm.

Yes, there she was at the open door, greeting him with a quiet face—a smile even. She led the way into the sitting-room, where she had just drawn down the blinds and closed the curtains of the window looking on the farm-yard. But his arrival had interrupted her before she could do the same for the window looking on the Down. Neither of them thought of it. Each was absorbed in the mere presence of the other.

Rachel was in her black Sunday dress of some silky stuff. Her throat was uncovered, and her shapely arms showed through the thin sleeves. The black and white softened and refined something overblown and sensuous in her beauty. Her manner, too, had lost its confident, provocative note. Ellesborough had never seen her so adorable, so desirable. But her self-command dictated his. He took the seat to which she pointed him; while she herself brought a chair to the other side of the fire, putting on another log with a steady hand, and a remark about the wind that

was whistling outside. Then, one foot crossed over the other, her cheek reddened by the fire, propped on her hand, and her eyes on the fresh flame that was beginning to dance out of the wood, she asked him,—

'You'd like to hear it all?'

He made a sign of assent.

So in a quiet, even voice, she began with an account of her family and early surroundings, more detailed than anything she had yet given him. She described her father (the striking apostolic head of the old man hung on the wall behind her) and his missionary journeys through the prairie settlements in the early days of Alberta; how, when he was old and weary, he would sometimes take her, his latest child, a small girl of ten or twelve, on his pastoral rounds, for company, perched up beside him in his buggy; and how her mother was killed by the mere hardships of the prairie life, sinking into fretful invalidism for two years before her death.

'I nursed her for years. I never did anything else—I couldn't. I never had any amusements like other girls. There was no money and no time. She died when I was twenty-four. And three months after, my father died. He didn't leave a penny. Then my brother asked me to go and live with him and his wife. I was to have my board and a dress allowance, if I would help her in the house. My brother's an awfully good sort—but I couldn't get on with his wife. I just couldn't! I expect it was my fault, just as much as hers. It was something we couldn't help. Very soon

I hated the sight of her, and she never missed a chance of making me feel a worm—a useless, greedy creature, living on other people's work. If only there had been some children, I dare say I could have borne it. But she and I could never get away from each other. There were no distractions. Our nerves got simply raw—at least mine did.'

There was a pause. She lifted her brown eyes, and looked at Ellesborough intently.

'I suppose my mother would have borne it. But girls nowadays can't. Not girls like me, anyway. Mother was a Christian. I don't suppose I am. I don't know what I am. I just *had* to live my own life. I couldn't exist without a bit of pleasure—and being admired—and seeing men—and all that!'

Her cheeks had flushed. Her eyes were very bright and defiant.

Ellesborough came nearer to her, put out a strong hand and enclosed hers in it.

'Well then—this man Delane—came to live near you?'

He spoke with the utmost gentleness, trying to help her out.

She nodded, drawing her hand away.

'I met him at a dance in Winnipeg first—the day after I'd had a horrid row with my sister-in-law. He'd just taken a large farm, with a decent house on it—not a shack—and everybody said his people were rich and were backing him. And he was very good-looking—and a Cambridge man—and all that. We danced

together almost all the evening. Then he found out where I lived, and used to be always coming to see me. My brother never liked him. He said to me often, "Why do you encourage that unprincipled cad? I'm certain there's a screw loose about him!" And I wasn't in love with Roger—not really—for one moment. But I *think* he was in love with me—yes, I'm sure he was—at first. And he excited and interested me. I was proud, too, of taking him away from other girls, who were always running after him. And my sister-in-law was just mad to get rid of me! Don't you understand?'

'Of course I do!'

Her eyelids wavered a little under the emotion of his tone.

'Well, then, we got married. My brother tried to get out of him what his money-affairs were. But he always evaded everything. He talked a great deal about his rich sister, and she did send him a wedding present. But he never showed me her letter, and that was the last we ever heard of her while I knew him. . . .'

Her voice dropped. She sat looking at the fire—a gray, pale woman, from whom light and youth had momentarily gone out.

'Well, it's a hateful story—and as common!—as common as dirt. We began to quarrel almost immediately. He was jealous and tyrannical, and I always had a quick temper. I found that he drank, that he told me all sorts of lies about his past life, that he presently only cared about me as—well, as his mistress!'—

and again she faced Ellesborough with hard, insistent eyes—'that he was hopelessly in debt—a gambler—and everything else. When the baby came, I could only get the wife of a neighbouring settler to come and look after me. And Roger behaved so abominably to her that she went home when the baby was a week old—and I was left to manage for myself. Then when baby was three months old, she caught whooping-cough, and had bronchitis on the top. I had a few pounds of my own, and I gave them to Roger to go into Winnipeg, and bring out a doctor and medicines. He drank all the money on the way—that I found out afterwards—he was a week away instead of two days—and the baby died. When he came back he told me a lie about having been ill. But I never lived with him—as a wife—after that. Then, of course, he hated me, and one night he nearly killed me. Next morning he apologised—said that he loved me passionately—and that kind of stuff—that I was cruel to him—and what could he do to make up? So then I suggested that he should go away for a month—and we should both think things over. He was rather frightened, because—well—he'd knocked me about a good deal in the horrible scene between us—and he thought I should bring my brother down on him. So he agreed to go, and I said I would have a girl friend to stay with me. But, of course, as soon as he was gone, I just left the house and departed. I had got evidence enough by then to set me free—about the Italian girl. I met my brother in Winnipeg. We

went to his lawyers together, and I began proceedings——

She stopped abruptly. 'The rest I told you.—*No!* —I've told you the horrible things—now I'll say something of the things which—have made life worth living again. Till the divorce was settled I went back to my brother in Ontario. I dropped my married name then and called myself Henderson. And then I came home —because my mother's brother, who was a manufacturer in Bradford, wrote to ask me. But when I arrived, he was dead, and he had left me three thousand pounds. Then I went to Swanley and got trained for farm-work. And I found Janet Leighton, and we made friends. And I love the farm-work—and I love Janet—and the whole world looks so different to me! Why, of course, I didn't want to be reminded of that old horrible life! I didn't want people to say, "Mrs Delane? Who and where is her husband? Is he dead?" "No—she's divorced." "Why?" There!—Don't you see?—all the old vile business over again! So I cut it all!'

She paused—resuming in another voice—hesitating and uncertain,—

'And yet—it seems—you can't do a simple thing like that without—hurting somebody—injuring somebody. I can't help it! I didn't mean to deceive *you*. But I had a right to get free from the old life if I could!'

She threw back her head proudly. Her eyes were full of tears. Then she rose impetuously.

'There!—I've told you. I suppose you don't want to be friends with me any more. It was rotten of me

I know, for, of course—I saw—you seemed to be getting to care for me. I told Janet when we set up work together that I wasn't a bad woman. And I'm not. But I'm weak. You'd better not trust me. And besides—I fell into the mud—and I expect it sticks to me still!'

She spoke with passionate animation—almost fierceness. While through her inner mind there ran the thought, 'I've told him!—I've told him! If he doesn't understand, it's not my fault. I can always say, "I *did* tell you—about Roger—*and the rest*!—as much as I was bound to tell you." Why should I make him miserable—and destroy my own chances with him for *nothing*?'

They stood fronting each other. Over the fine bronzed face of the forester there ran a ripple of profound emotion—nostril and lip, and eye. Then she found herself in his arms—with no power to resist or free herself. Two or three deep, involuntary sobs—sobs of excitement—shook her, as she felt his kisses on her cheek.

'Darling!—I'll try and make up to you—for all you've suffered. Poor child!—poor little Rachel!'

She clung to him, a great wave of passion sweeping through her also. She thought, 'Now I shall be happy!—and I shall make him happy, too. Of course I shall!—I'm doing quite, quite right.'

Presently he put her back in her chair, and sat beside her on the low fender stool, in front of the fire. His aspect was completely transformed. The triumphant

joy which filled him had swept away the slightly stiff and reserved manner which was on the whole natural to him. And it had swept away at the same time all the doubts and hesitations of his inner mind. She had told her story, it seemed to him, with complete frankness, and a humility which appealed to all that was chivalrous and generous in a strong man. He was ready now to make more excuses for her, in the matter of his own misleading, than she seemed to wish to make for herself. How natural that she should act as she had acted! The thought of her suffering, of her ill-treatment, was intolerable to him—and of the brute who had inflicted it.

'Do you know where that man is now?' he said to her presently. She had fallen back in her chair—pale and shaken, but dressed for his eyes, in a loveliness, a pathos, that was every moment strengthening her hold upon him.

'Roger? No, I have no idea. I always suppose he's in Canada still. He never appeared when the case was tried. But the summons had to be served on him, and my lawyers succeeded in tracking him to a lodging in Calgary, where he was living—with the Italian girl. But after that we never heard any more of him—except that I had a little pencil note—unsigned, undated, delivered by hand—just before the trial came on. It said I should repent casting him off—that I had treated him shamefully—that I was a vile woman—and though I had got the better of him for the time, he would have his revenge before long.'

Ellesborough shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

'Threats are cheap! I hope you soon put that out of your mind?'

She made a little restless movement.

'Yes, I—I suppose so. But I did tell you once, didn't I, that—I often had fears—about nothing?'

'Yes, you did tell me,' he said, smiling. 'Don't have any more fears, darling! I'll see to that.'

He took her hands again, and raised them to his lips and kissed them. It astonished him to feel them so cold, and see her again so excited and pale. Was she really afraid of the villain she had escaped from? The dear, foolish woman! The man in his self-confident strength loved her the more for the vague terrors he felt himself so well able to soothe.

For half an hour more they sat together, in that first intimacy of love, which transfigures men and women, so that when they pass back from it into ordinary life, they scarcely recognise life or themselves again. They talked much less of the past than of the future—and that in the light of the glorious war news coming in day by day. Austria was on the point of surrender—the German landslide might come at any moment—then *peace!*—incredible word. Ellesborough would hardly now get to France. They might be able to marry soon—within a few weeks. As to the farm, he asked her, laughing, whether she would take him in as a junior partner for a time, till they could settle their plans. 'I've got a bit of money of my own. But first you must let me go

back, as soon as there are ships to go in—to see after my own humble business. We could launch out—get some fine stock—try experiments. It's a going concern, and I've got a good share in it. Why shouldn't you go, too?'

He saw her shrink.

'To Canada? Oh, no!'

He scourged himself mentally for having taken her thoughts back to the old unhappy times. But she soon recovered herself. Then it was time for him to go, and he stood up.

'I should like to have seen Janet!' he said joyously. 'She'll have to get used to Christian names. How soon will you tell her? Directly she comes in?'

'Certainly not. I shall wait—till to-morrow morning.'

He laughed, whispering into her ear, as her soft, curly head lay against his breast.

'You won't wait ten minutes—you couldn't! Well, I must be going, or they'll shut me out of the camp.'

'Why do you hurry so?'

'Hurry? Why, I shall be an hour late, anyway. I shall have to give myself C.B. to-morrow.'

She laughed—a sound of pure content. Then she suddenly drew herself away, frowning at him.

'You do love me—you do—you will always!—whatever people may say?'

He was surprised at the note almost of violence in her voice. He answered it by a passionate caress, which she bore with trembling. Then she resolutely moved away.

'Do go!' she said to him, imploringly. 'I'd like to be a few minutes—alone—before they come back.'

He saw her settle herself by the fire, her hands stretched out to the blaze. Seeing that the fire was low, and remembering the chill of her hands in his, he looked around for the wood-basket which was generally kept in a corner behind the piano.

His movement was suddenly arrested. He was looking towards the uncurtained window. The night had grown pitch dark outside, and there were splashes of rain against the glass. But he distinctly saw as he turned a man's face pressed against the glass—a strained, sallow face, framed in straggling black hair, a face with regular features, and eyes deeply set in blackened orbits. It was a face of hatred; the lips, tightly drawn over the teeth, seemed to have a curse on them.

The vision lasted only a moment. Ellesborough's trained instinct, the wary instinct of the man who had passed days and nights with nature in her wilder and lonelier places, checked the exclamation on his lips. And before he could move again, the face had disappeared. The old holly bush growing against the farm wall, from which the apparition seemed to have sprung, was still there, some of its glossy leaves visible in the bright light of the paraffin lamp which stood on the table near the window. And there was nothing else.

Ellesborough quietly walked to the window, drew

down the blind, and pulled the curtains together. Rachel looked round at the sound.

'Didn't I do that?' she said, half dreamily.

'We forgot!' He smiled at her. 'Now it's all cosy. Ah, there they are! Perhaps I'll get Janet to come as far as the road with me.' For voices were approaching—Janet talking to the girls. Rachel looked up, assenting. The colour had rushed back to her face. Ellesborough took in the picture of her, sitting unconscious by the fire, while his own pulse was thumping under the excitement of what he had seen.

With a last word to her he closed the sitting-room door behind him, and went out to meet Janet Leighton in the dark.

IX

It was a foggy October evening, and Berkeley Square, from which the daylight had not yet wholly departed, made a peculiarly dismal impression on the passers-by, under the mingled illumination of its half-blinded lamps, and of a sunset which in the country was clear and golden, and here in west London could only give a lurid coppery tinge to the fog, to the eastern house-fronts, and to the great plane-trees holding the Square garden, like giants encamped. Lansdowne House, in its lordly seclusion from the rest of the Square, seemed specially to have gathered the fog to itself, and was almost lost from sight. Not a ray of light escaped the closely-shuttered windows. The events of the *mensis mirabilis* were rushing on. Bulgaria, Austria, Turkey had laid down their arms—the German cry for an armistice had rung through Europe. But still London lay dark and muffled. Her peril was not yet over.

In the drawing-room of one of the houses on the eastern side, belonging to a Warwickshire baronet and M.P.—Sir Richard Winton by name—a lady was standing in front of a thrifty fire, which in view of the

coal restrictions of the moment, she had been very unwilling to light at all. The restrictions irritated her; so did the inevitable cold of the room; and most of all was she annoyed and harassed by the thought of a visitor who might appear at any moment. She was tall, well-made, and plain. One might have guessed her age at about thirty-five. She had been out in the earlier afternoon, attending a war meeting on behalf of some charities in which she was interested, and she had not yet removed a high and stately hat, with two outstanding wings and much jet ornament, which she had worn at the meeting, to the huge indignation of her neighbours. The black of her silk dress was lightened by a rope of pearls, and various diamond trinkets. Her dress fitted her to perfection. Competence and will were written in her small, shrewd eyes and in the play of a decided mouth.

There was a knock at the door. At Lady Winton's 'Come in!' a stout, elderly maid appeared. She came up to her mistress, and said in a lowered voice,—

'You'll see Mr Roger here?'

'Why, I told you so, Nannie!' was the impatient answer. 'Is everybody out of the way?'

The maid explained that all was ready. Jones the butler had been sent with a note to the City, and the housemaid was sitting with the kitchen-maid, who was recovering from the flu.

'I told them I'd answer the bell. And I'll keep an eye that no one comes down before he's gone. There he is!'

For the bell had rung, and the maid hastened to the hall door to answer it.

A tall man entered—coughing.

'Beastly night, Nannie!' he said, as soon as the cough would let him. 'Don't suit my style. Well?—how are you? Had the flu., like everybody else?'

'Not yet, Mr Roger—though it's been going through the house. Shall I take your coat?'

'You'd better not. I'm too shabby underneath. Sir Richard at home?'

'Sir Richard's in the country, Mr Roger.'

'Oh, so her ladyship's alone? Well, that's how I generally find her, isn't it?'

But Nannie—with her eye on the stairs—was not going to allow him any lingering in the hall. She led him quickly to the drawing-room door, opened it, and closed it behind him. Then she herself retreated into a small smoking-den at the farther end of the hall, and sat there, without a light, with the door open—watching.

Roger Delane instinctively straightened himself to his full height as he entered his sister's drawing-room. His overcoat, though much worn, was of an expensive make and cut; he carried the Malacca cane which had been his companion in the Brookshire roads; and the eyeglass that he adjusted as he caught sight of his sister completed the general effect of shabby fashion. His manner was jaunty and defiant.

'Well, Marianne,' he said, pausing some yards from her. 'You don't seem particularly glad to see me. Hallo!—has Dick been buying some more china?'

And before his sister could say anything, he had walked over to a table covered with various bric-a-brac, where, taking up a fine Nankin vase, he looked closely at the marks on its base.

Lady Winton flushed with anger.

'I think you had better leave the china alone, Roger. I have only got a very few minutes. What do you want? Money, I suppose—as usual! And yet I warned you in my last letter that you would do this kind of thing once too often, and that we were *not* going to put up with it!' She struck the table beside her with her glove.

Delane put down the china and surveyed her.

'The vase is Ming all right—better stuff than Dick generally buys. I congratulate him. Well, I'm sorry for you, my dear Marianne—but you *are* my sister—and you can't help yourself!'

He looked at her, half-smiling, with a quiet bravado which enraged her.

'Don't talk like that, Roger! Tell me directly what it is you want. You seem to think you can force me to see you at any time, whatever I may be doing. But——'

'Your last letter was "a bit thick"—you see—it provoked me,' said Delane calmly. 'Of course you can get the police to chuck me out if you like. You would be quite in your rights. But I imagine the effect on the aristocratic nerves of Berkeley Square would be amusing. However——'

He looked round him—

'As Carlyle said to the old Queen, "I'm getting old, madam, and with your leave I'll take a chair——"'

He pushed an arm-chair forward.

'And let me make up the fire. It's beginning to freeze outside.'

Lady Winton moved quickly to the fireplace, holding out a prohibiting hand.

'There is quite enough fire, thank you. I am going out presently.'

Delane sat down, and extended a pair of still shapely feet to the slender flame in the grate.

'Dick's boots!' he said, tapping them with his cane, and looking round at his sister. 'What a lot of wear I've got out of them since he threw them away! His overcoat, too. And now that it's the thing to be shabby, Dick's clothes are really a godsend. I defraud Jones. But I have no doubt that Jones gets a good deal more than is good for him.'

'Look here, Roger!—suppose you stop talking this nonsense and come to business,' said Marianne Winton, in pale exasperation. 'I've sent Jones out with a note—but he'll be back directly. And I've got an appointment. What are you doing? Have you got any work to do?'

She took a seat not far from her brother, who perceived from her tone that he had perhaps gone as far as was prudent.

'Oh, dear, no, I've got no work to do,' he said, smiling. 'That's not a commodity that comes my way. But I must somehow manage to keep a roof over Anita and

the child. So what can I do but count on your assistance, my dear? My father left you a great deal of money which in equity belonged to me—and I am bound to remind you of it.'

'You know very well why he left you so little!' said Lady Winton. 'We needn't go into that old story. I ask you again, what do you want?' She took out her watch. 'I have just ten minutes.'

'What do I want?' He looked at her with a slow, whimsical laugh. 'Money, my dear, money! Money means everything that I must have—food, coals, clothes, doctor, chemist, buses—decent house-room for Anita and myself——'

A shiver of revulsion ran through his sister.

'Have you married that woman?'

He laughed.

'As you seemed to think it desirable, Anita and I did take a trip to a Registry Office about a month ago. It's all lawful now—except for our abominable English law that doesn't legitimise the children. But'—he sprang to his feet with a movement which startled her—'whom do you think I've seen lately?'

His sister stared at him, amazed at the change in him—the animation, the rush of colour in the hollow, emaciated face.

'*Rachel!*—my wife—my former—precious—wife. I thought she was in Canada. No doubt she thought the same of me. But I've stumbled upon her quite by chance—living close to the place where I had taken lodgings for Anita and the babe, in September, in case

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there were more raids this winter. What do you think of that?'

'It doesn't interest me at all,' said Lady Winton coldly.

'Then you have no dramatic sense, my dear. Just think! I stroll out, for want of anything better to do, with Anita, into the market-place of a beastly little country town, to see a silly sort of show—a mixture of a Harvest Festival and a Land Girls' beano—when without a moment's warning—standing up in a decorated wagon—I behold—*Rachel!*—handsomer than ever!—in a kind of khaki dress—tunic, breeches, and leggings—enormously becoming!—and, of course, the observed of all observers. More than that!—I perceive a young man, in an American uniform, dancing attendance upon her—taking her orders—walking her off to church—Oh, a perfectly clear case!—no doubt about it all. And there I stood—within a few yards of her—and she never saw me!'

He broke off, staring at his sister—a wild, exultant look—which struck her uncomfortably. Her face showed her arrested, against her will.

'Are you sure she didn't see you?'

'Sure. I put the child on my shoulder, and hid behind her. Besides—my dear—even Rachel might find it difficult to recognise her discarded husband—in this individual!'

He tapped his chest lightly. Lady Winton could not withdraw her own eyes from him. Yes, it was quite true. The change in him was shocking—ghastly.

He had brought it entirely on himself. But she could not help saying, in a somewhat milder tone,—

'Have you seen that doctor again?'

'To whom you so obligingly sent me? Yes, I saw him yesterday. One lung seems to have finally struck work—*caput!* as the Germans say. The other will last a bit longer yet.'

A fit of coughing seized him. His sister instinctively moved farther away from him, looking at him with frightened and hostile eyes.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said, as soon as he had found his voice again, 'I'm drenched in disinfectant. I take all proper precautions—for the child's sake. Now then'—he rose with an effort to his feet—'what are you going to do for me?'

His aspect had altered, had assumed a sinister and passionate intensity. His sister was conscious of the menace in it, and hastily taking up a small hand-bag lying near her, she produced a purse from it.

'I have saved twenty pounds for you—out of my own money—with *great* difficulty,' she said, with indignant emphasis. 'If I were to tell Richard, he would be furious. And I cannot—do—*anything*—more for you, beyond the allowance I give you. Everything you suffer from, you have brought upon yourself. It is hopeless to try and help you.

He laughed.

'Well, then, I must try Rachel!' he said carelessly, as he looked for his hat.

'That I think would be the lowest depth!' said

Lady Winton, breathing quick, 'to beg money from the wife who divorced you!'

'I am ready to beg for money—requisition is the better word—from anybody in the world who has more of it than I. I am a Bolshevist. You needn't talk to me about property, or rights. I don't acknowledge them. I want something that you've got, and I haven't. I shall take it if I find the opportunity—civilly if I can, uncivilly, if I must.'

Lady Winton made no reply. She stood, a statue of angry patience waiting for him to go. He slowly buttoned up his coat, and then stepped coolly across the room to look at an enlarged photograph of a young soldier standing on the piano.

'Handsome chap! You're in luck, Marianne. I suppose you managed to get him into a staff job of some sort, out of harm's way?'

He turned to her with a sneer on his lips. His sister was still silent.

The man moving about the room was perhaps the thing she feared and hated most in the world. Every scene of this kind—and he forced them on her, in spite of her futile resistance, at fairly frequent intervals—represented to her an hour of torture and humiliation. How to hide the scenes and the being who caused them, from her husband, her servants, her friends, was becoming almost her chief preoccupation. She was beginning to be afraid of her brother. For some time she had regarded him as incipiently insane, and as she watched him this evening he seemed to her

more than ever charged with sinister possibilities. It appeared to be impossible to influence or frighten him; and she realised that as he seemed not to care a fig whether he caused a scandal or not, and she cared with every pulse of her being, she was really in his power, and it was no good struggling.

'Well, good-night, Edith,' he said at last, taking up his hat. 'This'll last for a bit—but not very long, I warn you—prices being what they are. Oh, by the way, my name just now is Wilson—make a note of it!'

'What's that for?' she said disdainfully.

'Some Canadian creditors of mine got wind of me—worse luck. I had to change my quarters, and drop the old name—for a bit. However—what's in a name?' He laughed, and held out his hand.

'Going to shake hands, Edie? You used to be awfully fond of me, when you were small.'

She stood, apparently unmoved, her hands hanging. The pathetic note had been tried on her too often.

'Good-night, Roger. Nannie will show you out.'

The door closed on him, and Lady Winton dropped on a sofa by the fire, her face showing white and middle-aged in the firelight. She was just an ordinary woman, only with a stronger will than most; and as an ordinary woman, amid all her anger and fear, she was not wholly proof against such a spectacle as that now presented by her once favourite brother. It was not his words that affected her—but a hundred little personal facts which every time she saw him burnt a little more deeply into her consciousness the irreparableness of his personal

ruin—physical and moral. Idleness, drink, disease—the loss of shame, of self-respect, of manners—the sense of something vital gone for ever—all these fatal things stared out upon her, from his slippery emaciated face, his borrowed clothes, his bullying voice—the scent on him of the mews in which he lived!

She covered her face with her hands and cried a little. She could remember when he was the darling and pride of the family—especially of his father. How had it happened? He had said to her once, 'There must have been a black drop somewhere in our forbears, Edie. It has reappeared in me. We are none of us responsible, my dear, for our precious selves. I may be a sinner and a loafer—but that benevolent Almighty of yours made me.'

That was wicked stuff, of course; but there had been a twist in him from the beginning. Had *she* done her best for him? There were times when her conscience pricked her.

The clock struck seven. The sound brought her to her feet. She must go and dress. Richard would be home directly, and they were dining out, to meet a distinguished General, in London for a few days' leave from the front. Dick must, of course, know nothing of Roger's visit; and she must hurriedly go and look up the distinguished General's career in case she had to sit next him. Vehemently she put the preceding hour out of her mind. The dinner-party to which she was going flattered her vanity. It turned her cold to think that Roger might some day do something which

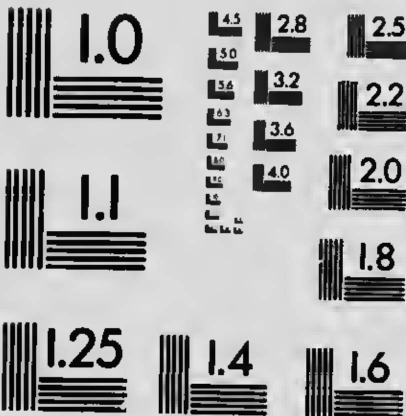
would damage that 'position' which she had built up for herself and her husband, by ten years' careful piloting of their joint lives. She knew she was called a 'climber.' She knew also that she had 'climbed' successfully, and that it was Roger's knowledge of the fact, combined with a horrid recklessness which seemed to be growing in him, that made the danger of the situation.

Meanwhile Delane stepped out into the fog, which, however, was lifting a little. He made his way down into Piccadilly, which was crowded with folk, men and women hurrying home from their offices, and besieging the omnibuses—with hundreds of soldiers too, most of them with a girl beside them, and smart young officers of every rank and service—while the whole scene breathed an animation and excitement, which meant a common consciousness, in the crowd, of great happenings. All along the street were men with newspapers, showing the headlines to passers-by. 'President Wilson's answer to the German appeal expected to-morrow.' 'The British entry into Lille.'

Delane bought an *Evening News*, glanced at the headlines, and threw it away. What did the war matter to him?—or the new world that fools supposed to be coming after it? Consumptives had a way, no doubt, of living longer than people expected—or hoped. Still, he believed that a couple of year or so would see him out. And that being so, he felt a kind of malignant indifference towards this pushing, chattering world,

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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aimlessly going about its silly business, as though there were any real interest or importance in it.

Then, as he drifted with the crowd, he found himself caught in a specially dense bit of it, which had gathered round some fallen horses. A thin slip of a girl beside him, who was attempting to get through the crush, was roughly elbowed by a burly artilleryman determined to see the show. She protested angrily, and Delane suddenly felt angry, too. 'You brute, you,—let the lady pass!' he called to the soldier, who turned with a grin, and was instantly out of reach and sight. 'Take my arm,' said Delane to the girl—'Where are you going?' The little thing looked up—hesitated—and took his arm. 'I'm going to get a bus at the Circus.' 'All right. I'll see you there.' She laughed and flushed, and they walked on together. Delane looked at her with curiosity. High cheek-bones—a red spot of colour on them—a sharp chin—small, emaciated features, and beautiful deep eyes. Phthisical! —like himself—poor little wretch! He found out that she was a waitress in a cheap eating-house, and had very long hours. 'Jolly good pay, though, compared to what it used to be! Why, with tips, on a good day I can make seven and eight shillings. That's good, ain't it? And now the war's goin' to stop. Do you think I want it to stop? I don't think! Me and my sister'll be starvin' again, I suppose?'

He found out she was an orphan, living with her sister, who was a typist, in Kentish town. But she refused to tell him her address, which he idly asked

her. 'What did you want with it?' she said, with a sudden frown. 'I'm straight, I am. There's my bus! Night! night!—go long!' And with a half-sarcastic wave of her tiny hand, she left him, and was soon engulfed in the swirl round a north-bound bus.

He wandered on along Regent Street, and Waterloo Place, down the Duke of York's steps into the Mall, where some captured guns were already in position, with children swarming about them; and so through St James's Park to the Abbey. The fog was now all but clear, and there were frosty stars overhead. The Abbey towers rose out of a purple haze, etherially pale and moon-touched. The House of Commons was sitting, but there was still no light on the Clock Tower, and no unmuffling of the lamps. London was waiting, as the world was waiting, for the next step in the vast drama which had three continents for its setting; and meanwhile, save for the added movement in the streets, and a new something in the faces of the crowds hurrying along the pavements, there was nothing to show that all was in fact over, and the war won.

Delane followed a stream of people entering the Abbey through the north transept. He was carried on by them, till a verger showed him into a seat near the choir, and he mechanically obeyed, and dropped on his knees.

When he rose from them, the choir was filing in, and the vergers with their pokers were escorting the officiating Canon to his seat. Delane had not been inside a church for two or three years, and it was a good deal

more since he had stood last in Westminster Abbey. But as he watched the once familiar spectacle there flowed back upon him, with startling force, old impressions and traditions. He was in Cambridge again, a King's man, attending King's Chapel. He was thinking of his approaching Schools, and there rose in his mind a number of figures, moving or at rest, Cambridge men like himself, long since dismissed from recollection. Suddenly memory seemed to open out—to become full, and urgent, and emphatic. He appeared to be living at a great rate, to be thinking and feeling with peculiar force. Perhaps it was fever. His hands burnt.

'*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*'

As the chant rose, and he recognised the words, he felt extraordinarily exalted, released, purified. Why not think away the past? It has no existence, except in thought.

'I am what I conceive myself to be—who can prove me to be anything else? What am I then? An educated man, with a mind—an intelligence. I have damaged it, but there it is—still mine.'

His eyes wandered, during the Lesson, to the line of sculptured Statesmen in the north transept. He had taken History honours, and his thoughts began to play with matter still stored in them: an essay on 'Dizzy' and Cobden he had written for a Cambridge club—or Gladstone's funeral, which he had seen as a boy of seventeen. He had sat almost in this very

place, with his mother, who had taken pains to bring him to see it as an historic spectacle which he might wish to remember. A quiet, dull woman, his mother —taciturn, and something of a bookworm. She had never understood him, nor he her. But she had occasionally shown moments of expansion and emotion, when the soul within glowed a little through its coverings; and he remembered the look in her eyes as the coffin disappeared into the earth, amid the black-coated throng of Lords and Commons. She had been for years a great though silent worshipper of Mr Gladstone, to the constant amusement of her Tory husband and sons.

Then, suddenly, a face, a woman's pretty face, in the benches of the north transept, caught his eye, and with a leap, as of something unchained, the beast within him awoke. It had reminded him of Rachel; and therewith the decent memories of the distant past disappeared, engulfed by the seething, ugly, mud-stained present. He was again crouching on the hill-side, in the shelter of the holly, watching the scene within: Rachel in that man's arms! Had the American seen him? He remembered his own backward start of alarm, as Ellesborough suddenly turned and walked towards the window. He had allowed himself, in his eagerness to see, to press too near. Had he exposed himself? He did not really believe that he had been discovered —unless the American was an uncommonly cool hand! Any way, his retreat to the wooded cover of the hill had been prompt. Once arrived in the thick plantation

on the crest, he had thrown himself down exhausted. But as he sat panting there, on the fringe of the wood, he had fancied voices and the flash of a light in the hollow beneath him. These slight signs of movement, however, had quickly disappeared. Darkness and silence resumed possession of the farm, and he had had no difficulty in finding his way unmolested through the trees to the main road, and to the little town, five miles nearer to London than Millsborough, at which he had taken a room, under his present name of Wilson.

The wooded common, indeed, with its high, withered bracken, together with the hills encircling the farm, had been the cover from which he had carried out his spying campaign upon his former wife. As he sat or knelt, mechanically, under the high and shadowy spaces of the Abbey, his mind filled with excited recollections of that other evening when, after tearing his hand badly on some barbed wire surrounding one of Colonel Shepherd's game preserves, so that it bled profusely, and he had nothing to bandage it with, he had suddenly become aware of voices behind him, and of a large party of men in khaki—Canadian foresters, by the look of them, from the Ralstone timber camp, advancing, at some distance, in a long extended line through the trees; so that they were bound to come upon him if he remained in the wood. He turned back at once, faced the barbed wire again, with renewed damage both to clothes and hands, and ran, crouching, down the green road leading to the farm, his wound bleeding as he ran. Then he had perceived an old labourer making

for him with shouts. But under the shelter of the cart-shed, he had first succeeded in tying his handkerchief so tightly round his wrist, with his teeth and one hand, as to check the bleeding, which was beginning to make him feel faint. Then, creeping round the back of the farm, he saw that the upper half of the stable door was open, and leaping over it, he had hidden among the horses, just as Halsey came past in pursuit. The old man—confound him!—had made the circuit of the farm, and had then gone up the grass road to the hill. Delane, looking out from the dark stable, had been able to watch him through the dusk, keeping an eye the while to the opposite door opening on the farm-yard. But the labourer disappeared, and in the dark roomy stable, with its beamed roof, nothing could be heard but the champing and slow trampling movements of the splendid cart-horses. Rachel's horses! Delane passed his free hand over two of them, and they turned their stately heads and nosed him in a quiet way. Then he vaulted again over the half door, and hurried up the hill, in the gathering darkness.

He was aware of the ghost-story. He had heard it and the story of the murder from a man cutting bracken on the common; and he had already formed some vague notions of making use of it for the blackmailing of Rachel. It amused him to think that perhaps his sudden disappearance would lead to a new chapter of the old tale.

Then at the recollection of Rachel's prosperity and peace, of her sleek horses and cows, her huge hay and

corn-stacks, her comfortable home, and her new lover, a fresh shudder of rage and hatred gripped him. She had once been his thing—his chattel: he seemed to see her white neck and breast, her unbound hair on the pillow beside him—and she had escaped him, and danced on him.

Of course she had betrayed him—of course she had had a lover! What other explanation was there of her turning against him?—of her flight from his house? But she had been clever enough to hide all the traces of it. He recalled his own lame and baffled attempts to get hold of some evidence against her, with gnashing of teeth. . . .

'For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal!'

He caught the words staring at him from the page of the open prayer book beside him, and automatically the Greek equivalent suggested itself. He had always done well in 'divinners'! Then he became aware that the blessing had been given, that the organ was playing, and the congregation was breaking up.

Twenty-four hours later, Delane found himself on a road leading up from the town where he was lodging to the summit of the wide stretch of common land on the western side of which lay Great End Farm. Half-way up a long hill, he came upon a young man in uniform, disconsolately kneeling beside a bicycle which he seemed to be vainly trying to mend. As Delane

came up with him, he looked up and asked for a light. Delane produced a match, and the young man, by the help of it, inspected his broken machine.

'No go!' he said with a shrug, 'I shall have to walk.'

He rose from the ground, put up the tool he had been using, and buttoned up his coat. Then he asked Delane where he was going. Delane named a little village on the farther edge of the common.

'Oh, well, that's straight ahead. I turn off to the right,' said the young soldier, 'at the cross road.'

They walked on together, Delane rather unwillingly submitting to the companionship thus sprung upon him. He saw from the badge on the man's shoulder that he belonged to one of the Canadian Forestry Corps in the district, and was at once on his guard. They started in silence, till Delane, pulling his mind back with a jerk, asked his companion if be was going to Ipscombe.

'No—only to Great End Farm.'

Darkness hid tbe sudden change in Delane's countenance.

'You know some one there?'

'No, but I want to see one of the ladies about something. There's two of them running the farm. But Miss Henderson's the boss.'

Cautiously, with assumed indifference, Delane began to ask questions.

He discovered that his companion's name was Dempsey; and before many minutes had passed the murderer's grandson was in the full swing of his story.

Delane, despising the young man for a chattering fool, listened nevertheless, with absorbed attention to every item of his tale. Presently Dempsey said with a laugh,—

'There's been people in Ipscombe all these years as always would have it old Watson walked. I know the names of three people at least as have sworn to seein' 'im. And there's an old fellow in Ipscombe now that declares he's seen him, only t'other day.'

Delane lit his pipe, and nonchalantly inquired particulars.

Dempsey gave a mocking account of Halsey's story.

'He's an old fool! Did you ever hear of a ghost bleedin' before!' The speaker threw back his head and laughed. 'That's all rot! Besides, I don't believe in ghosts—never did. But as Miss Henderson's farmin' the very land where my father did in old Watson, I thought she'd like to have the true story and first hand. And there's no one but me knows it--not first hand. So I wrote to her, and said as I would call at six o'clock this evening.'

'You know her?'

'No—o,' said the young man, hesitating. 'But I somehow fancy as I may have seen her before.'

'Where?'

'Why, in Canada. I was living on a farm, not far from Winnipeg'—he named the place. Delane suddenly dropped his pipe, and stooped to pick it up.

'All right,' he said, 'go on.'

'And there was a man—a sort of gentleman—his name was Delane—on another farm about ten miles from

where I was working. People talked of him no end—he was a precious bad lot! I never saw him that I know of—but I saw his wife twice. They say he was a brute to her. And she was awfully handsome. You couldn't forget her when you'd once come across her. And when I saw Miss Henderson drivin' one of the wagons in the Millsborough Harvest Festival, a fortnight ago, I could have sworn it was Mrs Delane. But, of course, it was my mistake.'

'Where did you see Mrs Delane?'

'Once at her own place. I was delivering some poultry food that Delane had bought of my employer—and once at a place belongin' to a man called Tanner.'

'Tanner?'

'Tanner. He was somethin' the same sort as Delane. We've a lot of them in Canada—remittance men, we call them—men as can't get on in the old country—and their relations pay 'em to go—and pay 'em to keep away. But Tanner was a nice sort of fellow—quite different from Delane. He painted pictures. I remember his showin' some o' them in Winnipeg. But he was always down on his luck. He couldn't make any money, and he couldn't keep it.'

'You saw Miss Henderson there?'

Dempsey gave a guffaw.

'Oh, Lor, no! I don't say that. Why, I'd get into trouble—shouldn't I? But I saw Mrs Delane. I was driving past Tanner's place, with two horses, and a heavy load, November two years ago—just before we passed our Military Service Act, and I joined up.

N

And an awful storm came on—a regular blizzard. Before I got to Tanner's I was nearly wore out, an' the horses, too. So I stopped to ask for a hot drink or somethin'. You couldn't see the horses' heads for the snow. And Tanner brought me out some hot coffee—I'm a teetotaller, you see—an' a woman stood at the door, and handed it to him. She was holdin' a lamp, so I saw her quite plain. And I knew her at once, though she was only there a minute. It was Mrs Roger Delane.'

He stopped to light a cigarette. No sound came from his companion. All round them spread the great common, with its old thorns, its clumps of fir, its hollows and girdling woods, faintly lit by a ghostly moonlight that was just beginning to penetrate the misty November dusk. The cheerful light of Dempsey's cigarette shone a moment in the gloom. Delane was conscious of an excitement, which it took all his will to master. But he spoke carelessly.

'And what was Mrs Delane doing there?'

Dempsey chuckled.

'How should I know? Tanner used to have a sister staying with him sometimes. Perhaps she and Mrs Delane were friends. But I saw that woman quite plain. It was Mrs Delane—that I'll swear. And Miss Henderson is as like her as two peas. It might have been her sister. Miss Henderson's very uncommon-looking. You don't often see that complexion and that hair. And she has lived in Canada.'

'How do you know?'

'She told old Halsey. Well, there's my road, just ahead. And if you're going to Moor End, you keep straight on. The moon's coming up. It won't be very dark.' And with a careless good-night, the Canadian turned a corner, and disappeared along a road which diverged at a right angle from the main road, and led, as Delane knew, direct to Ipscombe.

He himself walked on, till he found a lane tunnelled through one of the deep woods that on their western side ran down to Great End Farm. In the heart of that wood there was a keeper's hut, disused entirely since the war. Delane had discovered it, and was quite prepared to spend a night there at a pinch. There was a rude fireplace in it, and some old sacks. With some of the fallen wood lying about, a man could make a fire, and pass a winter night in very tolerable comfort.

He made his way in, managed to prop a sack against the small cobwebbed window, fastened the door with a rusty bolt, and brought out an electric torch he always carried in his pocket.

There was not a house within a long distance. There were no keepers now on Colonel Shepherd's estate. Darkness—the woods—and the wild creatures in them—were his only companions. Half a mile away, no doubt, Rachel in her smart new parlour was talking to the Canadian fellow.

Tanner! Ye gods! At last he had the clue to it all.

X

Dempsey did not find Rachel Henderson at home when he called at Great End Farm, after his meeting with his unknown companion on the common.

Ellesborough and Rachel had gone to London for the day. Ellesborough's duties at the Ralstone camp were in a state of suspended animation, since, in these expectant days before the signing of the armistice, there had been a general slackening, as though by silent and general consent, in the timber felling due to the war throughout the beautiful district in which Millsborough lay. Enough damage had been done already to the great wood-sanctuaries. On one pretext or another men held their hands.

Ellesborough then was free to take time off when he would, and to spend it in love-making. The engagement had been announced, and Ellesborough believed himself a very happy man—with the slight drawbacks that may be imagined.

In the first place—although, as he became better acquainted with Rachel's varying moods and aspects, he fell more and more deeply under the charm of her temperament—a temperament at once passionate and

childish, crude, and subtle, with many signs, fugitive and surprising, of a deep and tragic reflectiveness; he became also more and more conscious of what seemed to him the lasting effects upon her of her miserable marriage. The nervous effects above all; shown by the vague 'fears' of which she had spoken to him, on one of their early walks together; and by the gulfs of depression and silence into which she would often fall, after periods of high, even wild spirits.

It was this constant perception of a state of nervous suffering and irritability in this splendid physical creature—a state explained, as he thought, by her story, which had put him instantly on his guard, when that sinister vision at the window had sprung for a moment out of the darkness. Before almost he could move towards it, it had gone. And with a farewell smile at the woman he had just been holding in his arms, a smile which betrayed nothing, he had hurried away from her to investigate the mystery. A hasty word to Janet Leighton in the kitchen, and he was making a rapid circuit of the farm, and searching the farm-yard; with no results whatever.

Then he, Janet, and Hastings had held a hurried and secret colloquy in a corner of the great cowshed, as far from Rachel's sight and hearing as possible. Clearly some one was haunting the farm for some malicious purpose. Hastings, for the first time, told the story of the blood-marks, and of two or three other supposed visions of a man, tall and stooping, with a dark sallow face, which persons working on the farm, or walking

near it on the hill, had either seen or imagined. Ellesborough finally had jumped on his motor-bicycle and ridden off to the police depot at Millsborough. Some wind of the happenings at Great End Farm had already reached the police, but they could throw no light on them. They arranged, however, with Ellesborough to patrol the farm and the neighbourhood after dark as often as their diminished force would allow.

They were inclined to believe that some half-witted person was concerned, drawn, perhaps, from the alien population which had been floating through the district, and bent on mischief or robbery—or a mixture of both.

Rachel meanwhile knew nothing of these consultations. After her engagement was made public, she began to look so white, so tired and tremulous, that both Ellesborough and Janet were alarmed. Over-work, according to Janet, with the threshing, and in the potato fields. Never had Rachel worked with such a feverish energy as in these autumn weeks. Add the excitement of an engagement, said Janet, and you see the result.

She would have prescribed bed and rest; but Rachel scouted the advice. The alternative was amusement —change of scene—in Ellesborough's company. Here she was more docile, feverishly submissive and happy, indeed, so long as Ellesborough made the plans, and Ellesborough watched over her. Janet wondered at certain profound changes in her. It was, she saw, the first real passion of Rachel's life.

So Dempsey called in vain. Miss Henderson was

in town for a theatre and shopping. But he saw Janet Leighton, to whom with all the dramatic additions and flourishes he had now bestowed upon it, he told his story. Janet, who, on a hint from Hastings, had expected the visitation, was at any rate glad that Rachel was out of the way, seeing what a strong and curious dislike she had to the ghost-story, and also to any talk of the murder from which it originated.

Janet, however, listened, and with a growing and fascinated attention, to the old tale. Was there some real connection, she wondered, between it and the creature who had been prowling round the farm? Was some one personating the ghost, and for what reason? The same queries were ardently in the mind of Dempsey. He reported Halsey's adventure, commenting on it indignantly.

'It's some one as knows the story, and is playin' the fool with it. It's a very impudent thing to do! It's not playing fair, that's what it isn't; and I'd like to get hold of him.'

Janet's mouth twitched. The young man's proprietorial interest in his grandfather's crime, and annoyance that any one should interfere with it, turned the whole thing to comedy. Moreover, his fatuous absorption in that side of the matter made him useless for any other purpose; so that she soon ceased from cross-examining him, and he rose to go.'

'Well, I'm sorry not to have seen Miss Henderson,' he said awkwardly, twisting his cap. 'I'd like to have

had a talk with her about Canada. It was old Halsey told me she'd lived in Canada.'

'Yes,' said Janet irresponsively.

Dempsey smiled broadly and seemed embarrassed. At last he said with a jerk.

'I wonder if Miss Henderson ever knew a man called Tanner—who lived near Winnipeg?'

'I never heard her speak of him.'

'Because'—he still twirled—'when I saw Miss Henderson at Millsborough that day of the rally, I thought as I'd seen her before.'

'Oh?' said Janet ardently. But some instinct put her on her guard.

'Dick Tanner, they called him, was a man—an artist chap—who lived not far from the man I was with—and I once saw a lady there just like Miss Henderson.'

'Did you?'

Dempsey grew bolder.

'Only it couldn't have been Miss Henderson, you see—because this lady I saw was a Mrs Delane. But was Mrs Delane perhaps a relation of Miss Henderson? She was just like Miss Henderson.'

'I'll ask Miss Henderson,' said Janet, moving towards the door, as a signal to him to take his leave. 'But I expect you're confusing her with some one else.'

Dempsey, however, began rather eagerly to dot the i's. The picture of the snow storm, of the woman at the door, various points in his description of her, and of the solitary—apparently bachelor—owner of the farm, began to affect Janet uncomfortably. She got

rid of the chatter-box as soon as possible, and went slowly to the kitchen, to get supper ready. As she fried the bacon, and took some vegetables out of the hay-box, she was thinking fast.

Tanner? No—she had never heard Rachel mention the name. But it happened that Dempsey had given a precise date. It was in the 'November before they passed Conscription' in Canada, *i.e.* before he himself was called up—that he saw Mrs Delane, at night, in Dick Tanner's house. And Janet remembered that, according to the story which as they two sat by the fire alone at night, when the girls were gone to bed Rachel had gradually built up before her. It was in that same month that Rachel had been deserted by Delane; who had gone off to British Columbia with the Italian girl, as his wife afterwards knew, leaving Rachel alone on the farm—with one Japanese servant.

'Why shouldn't she have been staying on Mr Tanner's farm? There was no doubt some one else there—whom the boy didn't see. Perhaps she had herself taken refuge there during the storm. But all the same Janet felt vaguely troubled.

It was nearly seven o'clock, and the moon, now at the full, was rising over the eastern hill, and blanching the stubbles and the new turned plough-lands in the upland cup to a pearly whiteness as they lay under the dark woods and a fleecy sky. There was a sound of a motor in the lane—the village taxi bringing the travellers home.

In a few more minutes they were in the sitting-room. Rachel throwing off her thick coat with Ellesborough's help, and declaring that she was not the least tired.

'Don't believe her!' said Ellesborough, smiling at Janet. 'She is not a truthful woman!'

And his proud eyes returned to Rachel as though now that there was light to see her by he had no other use for them.

Rachel, indeed, was in a radiant mood. Pallor and depression had vanished; she was full of chatter about the streets, the crowds, the shops.

'But it's hopeless to go shopping with a man! He can't make up his mind one bit!'

'He hadn't a mind to make up!' murmured Ellesborough, looking up at her as she perched above him on a corner of the table.

She laughed.

'That, I suppose, was what made him want to buy the whole place! If I'd taken his advice, Janet, I should have been just cleared out!'

'What's the good of being economical when one's going to be married!' said Ellesborough joyously. 'Why——'

Rachel interrupted him—with a hand on his shoulder.

'And we've settled our plans, Janet—that is if you're agreeable. Will you mind looking after the farm for six months?'

'You see, if the armistice is signed—and we shall know to-morrow,' said Ellesborough, 'I shall be free

in a month or so, and then we propose to marry and get a passage before Christmas. I must go home, and she says she'll come with me!'

A shadow had fallen suddenly, it seemed to Janet, over Rachel's aspect, but she at once endorsed what Ellesborough had said.

'We can't settle things—can we?—till we've seen his people. We've got to decide whether I'll go to America, or he'll come here.'

'But we want to say'—Ellesborough turned gravely to Janet—'that first and foremost, we wish to do the best for you.'

The sudden tears came into Janet's eyes. But they did not show.

'Oh, that'll be all right. Don't bother about me.'

'We shall bother!' said Rachel with energy, 'but I'll tell you all about it presently. He won't stay to supper.'

She descended from the table, and Ellesborough rose. After a little more chat about the day and its doings, he said good-night to Janet.

'How do you get back?'

'Oh, I left my bike in the village. I shall walk and pick it up there.'

Rachel took up her thick coat and slipped it on again. She would walk with him to the road, she said—there were some more things to say.

Janet watched them go out into the wide frosty night, where the sky was shedding its clouds, and the temperature was falling rapidly. She realised that they were

in that stage of passion when everything is unreal outside the one supreme thing, and all other life passes like a show half-seen. And all the while the name Tanner—Dick Tanner—echoed in her mind. Such a simple thing to put a careless question to Rachel! Yet perhaps—after all—not so simple.

Meanwhile the two lovers were together on the path through the stubbles, walking hand-in-hand through the magic of the moonlight.

'Will you write a little line to my mother to-morrow?'

'Yes, of course. But——'

He caught her long breath.

'I have prepared the way, darling. I promise you—it will be all right.'

'But why—why—didn't I see you first?' It was a stifled cry, which seemed somehow to speak for them both. And she added, bitterly, it's no good talking—it can't ever be the same—to you, or to your people.'

'It shall be the same! Or rather, we shall owe you a double share of love to make up to you—for that horrible time. Forget it, dear—make yourself forget it. My mother would tell you so at once.'

'Isn't she—very strict about divorce?'

Ellesborough hesitated—just a moment.

'She couldn't have any doubts about your case—dearest—who could? You fell among thieves, and——'

'And you're picking me up, and taking me to the inn?'

He pressed her hand passionately. They walked in silence till the gate appeared.

'Go back, dearest. I shall be over on Sunday.'

'Not till then?'

'I'm afraid not. If the peace news comes to-morrow, the camp'll go mad, and I shall have to look after them.'

They paused at the gate, and he kissed her. She lay passive in his arms, the moonlight touched her brown hair, and the beautiful curves of her cheek and throat.

'Wasn't it heavenly to-day?' she whispered.

'Heavenly! Go home!'

She turned back towards the farm, drawing her cloak and its fur collar close round her, against the cold. And indeed Ellesborough was no sooner gone, the rush of the motor-cycle along the distant road had no sooner died away, than a shiver ran through her which was more than physical. So long as he was there, she was happy, excited, hopeful. And when he was not there, the protecting screen had fallen, and he was exposed to all the stress and terror of the storm raging in her own mind.

'Why can't I forget it all—*everything*! It's dead—*it's dead*!' she said to herself again and again in an anguish, as she walked back through the broad open field where the winter-sown corn was just springing in the furrows—the moon was so bright that she could see the tiny green spears of it.

And yet in reality she perfectly understood why it was that, instead of forgetting, memory was becoming more and more poignant, more and more persecuting. It was because the searching processes of love were

going deeper and deeper into her inmost soul. This good man who loved her, who was going to take her injured life into his keeping, to devote to her all his future, and all the harvest of his upright and hard-working past—she was going to marry him with a lie between them, so that she could never look him straight in the face, never be certain that, some time or other, something would not emerge like a drowned face from the dark, and ruin all their happiness. It had seemed, at the beginning, so easy to keep silence, to tell everything but the one miserable fact that she couldn't tell! And now it was getting intolerably hard, just because she knew for the first time what love really meant, with its ardour for self-revelation, for an absolute union with the beloved. By marrying him without confession, she would not only be wronging him, she would be laying up probable misery for herself—and him—through the mere action of her own temperament.

For she knew herself. Among the girls and women she had been thrown with during the preceding year and a half, there were some moral anarchists, with whose views she had become strikingly familiar. Why, they said, make so much of these physical facts? Accept them, and the incidents that spring from them. Why all this weeping and wailing over supposed shames and disgraces? The sex-life of the present is making its own new codes. Who knows what they will ultimately be? And as for the indelible traces and effects of an act of weakness or passion that the sentimental and goody-goody people talk of, in the majority of cases

they don't exist. After it, the human being concerned may be just the same as before.

Rachel was quite aware of this modern gospel. Only she was shut out from adopting it in her own case by an invincible heredity, by the spirit of her father in her, the saintly old preacher, whose uncompromising faith she had witnessed and shared through all her young years. She might and did protest that the faith was no longer hers. But it had stamped her. She could never be wholly rid of its prejudices and repulsions. What would her father have said to her divorce?—he with his mystical conception of marriage? She dreaded to think. And as to that other fact which weighed on her conscience, she seemed to hear herself pleading--with tears!—'Father!—it wasn't my will--it was my *weakness*!—Don't look at me so!'

And now, in addition, there was the pressure upon her of Ellesborough's own high ideals and religious temper; of the ideals, also, of his family, as he was tenderly and unconsciously revealing them. And, finally, there was the daily influence of Janet's neighbourhood—Janet, so austere for herself, so pitiful for others: Janet, so like Ellesborough in the unconscious sternness of her moral outlook, so full, besides, of an infinite sorrow for the sinner.

And between these two stood this variable, sensuous, woman's nature, so capable both of good and evil. Rachel felt the burden of their virtues too much for her, together with the sting of her own secret knowledge.

In some moments, even, she rebelled against her

own passion. She had such a moment of revolt, in this moonlit dark, as her eyes took in the farm, the dim outlines of the farm buildings, the stacks, the new-ploughed furrows. Two months earlier her life had been absorbed in simple, clear, practical ambitions: how to improve her stock—how to grow another bushel to the acre—how and when to build a silo—whether to try elect[illegible]cation: a score of pleasant riddles that made the hours fly. And now this old fever had crept again into her blood, and everything had lost its savour. There were times when she bitterly, childishly, regretted it. She could almost have hated Ellesborough, because she loved him so well; and because of the terror, the ceaseless preoccupation that her love had begun to impose upon her.

Janet, watching her come in, saw that the radiance had departed, and that she crept about again like a tired woman. When, after nine o'clock, they were alone by the fire, again and again it was on the tip of Janet's tongue to say, 'Tell me, who was Dick Tanner?' Then, in a sudden panic fear, lest the words should slip out, and bring something irreparable, she would get up, and make a restless pretence of some household work or other, only to sit down and begin the same inward debate once more. But she said nothing, and Rachel, too, was silent. She sat over the fire, apparently half asleep. Neither of them moved to go to bed till nearly midnight.

Then they kissed each other, and Janet raked out the fire.

'To-morrow!' she said, her eyes on the red glow of the embers, '*to-morrow!*—Will it be peace?'

And then Rachel remembered that all the civilised world was waiting for the words that would end the war. Somewhere in a French château there was a group of men conferring, and on the issue of this night depended the lives of thousands, and the peace of Europe.

Janet raised her clasped hands, and her plain, quiet face shone in the candle-light. She murmured something. Rachel guessed it was a prayer. But her own heart seemed dead and dumb. She could not free it from its load of personal care; she could not feel the patriotic emotion which had suddenly seized on Janet.

The morning broke gray and misty. The two labourers and the girls went about their work—raising their heads now and then to listen. And at eleven came the signal. Out rang the bells from Ipscombe Church tower. Labourers and girls threw down what they were doing, and gathered in the farm-yard round Janet and Rachel, who were waving flags on the steps of the farm-house. Then Rachel gave them all a holiday for the rest of the day, and very soon there was no one left on the farm premises but the two women and the bailiff.

'Don't stay, Hastings,' said Rachel. 'I'll get the horse and cart myself.'

For it was market day at Millsborough, and peace or no peace, she had some business that must be done there.

'Oh, I've no call to go, Miss,' said Hastings. 'I'd rather stay and look after things.'

His eyes met Janet's, and she nodded imperceptibly. She was relieved to think of Hastings—good, faithful unassuming creature!—remaining on guard. The very desertion of the farm-houses on this great day might tempt marauders—especially that thief or madman who had been haunting their own premises. She hoped the police would not forget them either. But Hastings' offer to stay till the girls came back from the Millsborough crowds and bands at about nine o'clock quite eased her mind. And meanwhile she and Hastings, as had been agreed, kept their anxieties from Rachel.

Rachel went off at twelve o'clock in her khaki suit, driving a spirited young horse in a high cart, which was filled with farm produce. She was to take early dinner with some new friends, and then to go and look at a Jersey cow which Janet coveted, in a farm on the other side of Millsborough.

'Don't wait tea for me,' she said to Janet, 'I shall get some somewhere.' And then with a smile to them both she was off. Janet stood looking after her, lost in a painful uncertainty. 'Can't you let it alone?' Lord Melbourne was accustomed to say suavely to those members of the Cabinet who brought him grievances or scandals that wanted seeing to. One half of Janet's mind was saying, 'Can't you let it alone,' to the other half.

XI

THE daylight had all gone when Rachel at last got into her cart in the yard of the Rose and Thistle at Millsborough and took the reins. But there was a faint moonrise struggling through the mist in which the little town and countryside were shrouded. And in the town, with its laughing and singing crowds, its bright shop windows, its moist, straggling flags, the mist, lying gently over the old houses, the moving people, the flashes and streamers of light, was extraordinarily romantic and beautifying.

Rachel drove slowly through the streets, delighting in the noise and excitement, in the sheer new pleasure of everything, the world—human beings—living—the end of the war. And out among the fields, and in the country road, the November sun was still beautiful; what with the pearly mist, and the purple shapes of the forest-covered hills. She had been much made of in Millsborough. People were anxious to talk to her, to invite her, to do business with her. Her engagement, she perceived, had made her doubly interesting. She was going to be prosperous, to succeed—and all the world smiled upon her.

So that her pulses were running fast as she reached Ipscombe, where in the mild fog, a few groups were standing about, and a few doors were open. And now —there was home!—in front of her. And—Heavens! what had Janet done? Rachel pulled up the horse, and sat enchanted, looking at the farm. For there it lay, pricked out in light, its old Georgian lines against the background of the hill. Every window had a light in it—every blind was drawn up—it was Janet's illumination for the peace. She had made of the old house 'an insubstantial faery place,' and Rachel laughed for pleasure.

Then she drove eagerly on into the dark tunnel of trees that lay between her and the house.

Suddenly a shape rushed out of the hedge into the light of the lamps, and a man laid a violent hand upon the horse's reins. The horse reared, and Rachel cried out,—

'What are you doing? Let go!'

But the man held the struggling horse, at once coercing and taming it, with an expert hand. A voice!—that sent a sudden horror through Rachel,—

'Sit where you are—hold tight!—don't be a fool! —he'll quiet down.'

She sat paralysed; and, still holding the reins, though the trembling horse was now quiet, a man advanced into the light of the left-hand lamp.

'Well—do you know me?' he said quietly.

She struggled for breath and self-control.

'Let those reins alone!—what are you doing here?'

And, snatching up her whip, she bent forward. But he made a spring at it, snatched it easily with a laugh, and broke it.

'You know you never were strong enough to get the better of me. Why do you try? Don't be an idiot. I want to make an appointment with you. You can't escape me. I've watched you for weeks. And see you alone, too. Without that fellow you're engaged to.'

Her passion rose, in spite of her deadly fear.

'He'll take care of that,' she said, 'and the police. I'm not helpless now—as I used to be.'

'Ah, but you'd better see me. I've got a great deal to say that concerns you. I suppose you've told that American chap a very pretty story about our divorce? Well, it took me a long time to get to the bottom of it myself. But now I'm—well, disillusioned!'

He came closer, close to the rail of the cart and the lamp, so that she saw clearly the haggard wreck of what once had been Roger Delane, and the evil triumph in his eyes.

'Who stayed the night alone with Dick Tanner, on his place, when I was safely got rid of?' he said, in a low but clear voice. 'And then who played the innocent —who did?'

'Liar!'

'Not at all. I've got some new evidence now—some quite fresh light on the scene—which may be useful to me. I want money. You seem to have a lot. And I want to be paid back a little of what I'm owed. Oh, I can hold my tongue, if it's made worth my while. I

don't suppose you've told your American young man anything about Dick Tanner—eh?'

'Let go the horse!' she said fiercely, trying to recapture the reins. 'You've nothing to do with me any more.'

'Haven't I? Oh, by all means tell your Yankee that I've waylaid you. I shouldn't at all object to an interview with him. In fact, I rather think of asking for it. But if you want to prevent it, you've got to do what you're told.'

He came closer, and spoke with slow emphasis. 'You've got to arrange a time—when I can see you—*alone*? When shall it be?'

Silence. But far ahead there were sounds as of some one approaching. Delane leapt on the step of the cart.

'This is Monday. Wednesday night—get rid of everybody! You can do it if you like. I shall come at nine. You've got to let me in.'

Her white, quivering face was all his answer.

'Don't forget,' he said, jumping down. 'Good-night!'

And in a second he was gone, where, she could not tell.

The reins fell from her grasp. She leant back in the cart, half fainting. The horse, finding the reins on his neck, strayed to the grassy side of the road, and began grazing. A short time passed. In another minute or two the left wheel would have gone down into a deep ditch.

'Hallo!' cried a man's voice. 'What's the matter?'

Rachel tried to rouse herself, but could only murmur inarticulately. The man jumped off his bicycle, propped it against a tree, and came running to her.

He saw a woman, in a khaki felt hat and khaki dress, sitting hunched up in a fainting state on the seat of a light cart. He was just in time to catch the horse and turn it back to the road. Then in his astonishment John Dempsey altogether forgot himself.

'Don't be frightened, Mrs Delane! Why, you've had a faint. But never mind. Cheer up! I'll get you home safe.'

And Rachel, reviving, opened her heavy eyes to see stooping over her the face of the lad in the hooded cart whom she had last seen on the night of that November snow-storm, two years before.

'What did you say?' she asked stupidly. Then, raising herself, with an instinctive gesture she smoothed back her hair from her face, and straightened her hat. 'Thank you, I'm all right.'

Dempsey's mouth as he retreated from her shaped itself to an involuntary grin.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am—but I think I've seen you in Canada. Didn't I once come to your place, with a parcel from Mr Grimes—that was my employer —of Redminster? I remember you had a Jap servant. And there was another time, I think'—the lad's eyes fixed her, contracted a little, and sharp with curiosity —'when you and Mr Dick Tanner gave me that fizzling hot coffee—don't you remember?—in that awful blizzard two years ago? And Mr Tanner gave the

horses a feed, too. Awfully good chap, Mr Tanner. I don't know what I should have done without that coffee.'

Rachel was still deathly white, but she had recovered possession of herself, and her mind was working madly through a score of possibilities.

'You're quite mistaken,' she said coldly, 'I never saw you before that I am aware of. Please let go the reins. I can manage now quite well. I don't know what made me feel ill. I'm all right now.'

'You've got the reins twisted round the shaft, miss,' said Dempsey officiously. 'You'd better let me put 'em right.'

And without waiting for a reply, he began to disentangle them, not without a good deal of fidgeting from the horse, which delayed him. His mouth twitched with laughter as he bent over the shaft. Deny that she was Mrs Delane! That was a good one. Why, now that he had seen her close, he could swear to her anywhere.

Rachel watched him, her senses sharpening rapidly. Only a few minutes since Roger had been there—and now, this man. Had they met? Was there collusion between them? There must be. How else could Roger know? No one else in the world but this youth could have given him the information. She recalled the utter solitude of the snow-bound farm—the heavy drifts—no human being but Dick and herself—till that evening when the new snow was all hard frozen, and they two had sleighed back under the moon to her own door.

What to do? She seemed to see her course.

'What is your name?' she asked him, endeavouring to speak in her ordinary voice, and, bending over the front of the cart, she spoke to the horse, 'Quiet, Jack, quiet!'

'My name's John Dempsey, ma'am.' He looked up, and then quickly withdrew his eyes. She saw the twitching smile that he now could hardly restrain. By this time he had straightened the reins, which she gathered up.

'It's curious,' she said, 'but you're not the first person who's mistaken me for that Mrs Delane. I knew something about her. I don't want to be mistaken for her.'

'I see,' said Dempsey.

'I would rather you didn't speak about it in the village—or anywhere. You see, one doesn't like to be confused with some people. I didn't like Mrs Delane.'

The lad looked up grinning.

'She got divorced, didn't she?'

'I dare say. I knew very little about her. But, as I said, I don't want to be mistaken for her.'

Then, tying the reins to the cart, she jumped down and stood beside him.

His hand went instinctively to the horse's mouth, holding the restive animal still.

'And I should be very much obliged to you if you would keep what you thought about me to yourself. I don't want you to talk about it in the village or

anywhere. Come up and see me—at the farm—and I'll tell you why I dislike being mixed up with that woman—why, in fact, I should mind it dreadfully. I can't explain now, but——'

The young man was fairly dazzled by the beauty of the sudden flush on her pale cheeks, of her large pleading eyes, her soft voice. And this—as old Betts had only that afternoon told him—was the lady engaged to his own superior officer, Captain Ellesborough, the Commandant of Ralstone Camp, whom he heartily admired, and stood in considerable awe of! His vanity, of which he possessed so large a share, was much tickled; but, also, his feelings were touched.

'Why, of course, ma'am, I won't say anything. I didn't mean any harm.'

'All right,' said Rachel, scrambling back to her seat, 'If you like to come up to-morrow morning, I shall be pleased to see you. It's a bargain, mind!'

He saluted, smiling. She nodded to him, and drove off.

'Well, that's the rummiest go!' said the bewildered Dempsey to himself, as he walked towards his bicycle. Mistake be damned! She *was* Mrs Delane, and what's she up to now with my captain? And what the deuce was she doing at Tanner's?'

Never did a person feel himself more vastly important than Dempsey as he bicycled back to the Ralstone camp, whence he had started in the morning, after the peace news, to go and see a cousin living some distance beyond Great End Farm. To be his grandfather's grandson was much—but *this!*

Rachel drove, with hands unconscious of the reins, along the road and up the farm lane leading through her own fields. The world swam around her in the mist, but there, still in front of her, lay the illuminated farm, a house of light standing in air. As she neared it, the front door opened and sounds of singing and laughter came out.

The *Marseillaise! Allons, enfants de la patrie!*—Janet was playing it, singing vigorously herself, and trying to teach the two girls the French words, a performance which broke down every other minute in helpless laughter from all three. Meanwhile, Hastings, who had been standing behind the singers, his hands in his pockets, a rare and shame-faced pleasure shining from his care-worn face, thought he heard the cart, and looked out. Yes, it was the Missis,' as he liked to call Miss Henderson, and he ran down to meet her.

'Well, I suppose there were fine doings in Millsborough, miss,' he said, as he held the horse for her to get down.

'Yes—there were a lot of people. It was very noisy.'

'We thought you'd hear our noise, miss, as far as the road! Miss Leighton, she's been keeping us all alive. She took the girls to church—to the Thanksgiving Service, while I looked after things.'

'All right, Hastings,' said Miss Henderson, in a voice that struck his ear strangely. 'Thank you. Will you take the cart?'

He thought as he led the horse away, 'She's been overdoin' it again. The Cap'n will tell her so.'

Rachel climbed the little slope to the front door. It seemed an Alp. Presently she stood on the threshold of the sitting-room, in her thick fur coat, looking at the group round the piano. Janet glanced round, laughing. 'Come and join in!' And they all struck up *God Save the King*—a comely group in the lamplight, Jenny and Betty lifting their voices lustily. But they seemed to Rachel to be playing some silly game which she did not understand. She closed the door and went upstairs to her own room. It was cold and dark. She lit a candle, and her own face, transformed, looked at her from the glass on the dressing-table. She gave a weary, half-reflective sigh. 'Shall I be like that when I'm old?'

She took off her things, and changed mechanically into an afternoon dress, her mind, like a hunted thing, running hither and thither all the time.

Presently she got up and locked the door. She must think—*think*—by herself.

It would be quite easy to defy Roger—quite easy to lie, and lie successfully, if only she was sure of herself, and her own will, to carry things through. Roger could prove nothing—or that vulgar boy—or anybody. She had only to say, 'I went to find Lucy Tanner, who was my friend—she wasn't there—I was overtaken by the storm—and Dick Tanner looked after me till I could get home.'

It was the most natural—the most plausible story. If Delane forced himself on George with any vile tale, Ellesborough would probably give him in charge for

molesting his former wife. There was absolutely nothing to fear, if she handled the thing in a bold, common-sense way, and told a consistent and clever lie.

And yet, she had weakly made appointments with both her tormentors!—made it plain to them that she was afraid! She called herself a coward, and a fool—and then as she leant her head against the side of her bed, the tears ran down her face, and her heart cried out for Ellesborough.

'How *can* I go on lying to him—now—and all my life? It was the same cry as before, but more intense, more passionate with every day's living. The need for lying had now doubled; yet her will could less and less steel itself to it, because of sheer love and remorse towards the man who loved her.

'He would forgive me. I know he would—I know he would!' she kept on murmuring to herself, while her eyes rained in the semi-darkness.

Yes, but it would change everything! Their love—his feeling towards her—could never be the same again. After Roger Delane—Dick Tanner. Why not another—and another? Would he not always be watching her, dreading some new discovery! suspecting her, even while he loved her?

No. She must choke off Delane—with money—the only way. And invent some story—some bribe, too—for that odious young man who had caught her unawares.

So again she hardened herself, despairingly. It

could not be allowed her—the balm and luxury of confession! It was too dangerous. Her all was in it.

Meanwhile, the singing continued below. Janet had struck up *Tipperary*, and the small flute-like voices of the girls, supported by her harsher one, mounted joyously through every crevice of the slightly-built house.

'It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
And my heart's right there.'

The beautiful tune, interwoven for our generation with all that is most poignant in its life, beat on Rachel's nerves. It was being sung all over England that Armistice Day, as it had been sung in the first days of the war, joyously, exultingly, yet with catching breath. There was in it more than thousands of men or women dared to probe, whether of joy or sorrow. They sang it, with a sob in the throat. To Rachel, also, sunk in her own terrors, it was almost unbearable. The pure unspoilt passion of it—the careless, confident joy—seemed to make an outcast of her, as she sat there in the dark, dragged back by the shock and horror of Delane's appearance into the slime and slough of old memories, and struggling with them in vain. Yes, she was 'damaged goods'—she was unfit to marry George Ellesborough. But she would marry him! She set her teeth—clinging to him with all the energy of a woman's deepening and maturing consciousness. She had been a weak and self-willed child when she married Delane—when she spent those half miserable, half wild days and nights

with Dick Tanner. Now she trusted a good man—n w she looked up and adored. Her weakness was safe in the care of George Ellesborough's strength. Well, then, let her fight for her love.

Presently Janet knocked at the door. The singing downstairs had ceased.

'Are you tired, Rachel? Can't I help you?'

'Just a bit tired. I'm resting. I'll be down directly.'

But the interruption had started fresh anxieties in her mind. She had paid the most perfunctory attention to the few words Janet had said about Dempsey's call at the farm, two nights before. She understood at the time that he had come to chatter about the murder, and was very glad that she had been out of the way.

But now—what was it that he had said to Janet—and why had Janet said so little about his visit?'

Instead of resting she walked incessantly up and down. This uncertainty about Janet teased her; but after all it was nothing to that other mystery—how did Roger know?—and to the strange and bewildering effect of the juxtaposition of the two men—their successive appearance in the darkness within—what?—ten minutes?—a quarter of an hour?—while the cloud was on her own brain—without apparently any connection between them—any relevance to each other. There must have been some connection! And yet there had been no sign of any personal knowledge of Roger Delane in Dempsey's talk; and no reference whatever to Dempsey in Delane's.

She went down to supper, very flushed and on edge. Little Jenny eyed her surreptitiously. For the first time the child's raw innocence was disturbed or jealous. What did John Dempsey want with calling on Miss Henderson—and why had he made a rather teasing mystery of it to her, Jenny? 'Wouldn't you like to know, Miss Inquisitive!' Yes, Jenny would like to know. Of course Miss Henderson was engaged to Captain Ellesborough, and all that. But that was no reason why she should carry off Jenny's 'friend,' as well as her own. Jenny's heart swelled within her as she watched Miss Henderson from the other end of the table. Yes, of course she was nice-looking, and her clothes were nice. Jenny thought that she would get a new best dress soon, now that peace was come; and a new hat with a high silk crown to match the dress. Dempsey had admired a hat like that on a girl in the village. He had said it was 'real smart.' And to be 'smart' Jenny thought was to be happy.

After supper, Janet and the girls washed up and put all tidy for the night. Rachel worked at accounts in the sitting-room. She had sold the last hay she had to spare wonderfully well, and potatoes showed a good profit. Threshing charges were very high, and wages —appalling! But, on the whole, they were doing very well. Janet's Jersey cow had been expensive, but they could afford her.

They had never yet drawn out so good an interim balance sheet without delight, and rosy dreams for the future. Now her mood was leaden, and she pushed

the papers aside impatiently. As she was sitting with her hands round her knees, staring into the fire, or at the chair where Ellesborough had sat while she told her story, Janet came into the room. She paused at the door, and Rachel did not see her look of sudden alarm as she perceived Rachel's attitude of depression. Then she came up to the fire. The two girls could be heard laughing overhead.

'So my cow's a good one?' she said, with her pleasant voice and smile.

'A beauty,' said Rachel, looking up, and recapitulating the points and yield of the Jersey.

Janet gave a shrug—implying a proper scepticism. 'It doesn't seem to be quite as easy to tell lies about cows as about horses,' she said, laughing; 'that's about all one can say. We'll hope for the best.' Then—after a moment,—

'I never told you much about that man Dempsey's visit. Of course, he came to see you. He thought when he saw you at Millsborough that you were a Mrs Delane he had seen in Canada. Were you perhaps a relation of hers? I said I would ask you. Then I inquired how often he had seen Mrs Delane. He said twice—perhaps three times—at her home—at a railway station—and at a farm belonging to a man called Tanner.'

'Yes,' said Rachel, indifferently, 'I knew Lucy Tanner, his sister. She was an artist like him. I liked them both.'

There was silence. In Rachel's breast there was

beating a painful tide of speech that longed to find its way to freedom—but it was gripped and thrust back by her will. There was something in Janet as in Ellesborough that wooed her heart, that seemed to promise help.

But nothing more passed, of importance. Janet possessed by vague, yet, as they seemed to herself, quite unreasonable anxieties, gave some further scornful account of Dempsey's murder talk, to which Rachel scarcely listened; then she said, as she turned to take up her knitting,—

'I'm going over to-morrow to a little service—a Thanksgiving service—at Millsborough. I took the girls to church to-day—but I love my own people!' Her face glowed a little.

'A Unitarian service, you mean?'

'Yes—we've got a little "cause" there, and a minister. The service will be about six, I think. The girls will manage. The minister and his wife want me to stay to supper—but I shall be back in good time.'

'About ten?'

'Oh, yes—quite by then. I shall bicycle.'

Through Rachel's mind there passed a thrill of relief. So Janet would be out of the way. One difficulty removed. Now, to get rid of the girls?

Rachel scarcely slept, and the November day broke gray and misty as before. After breakfast she went out into the fields. Old Halsey was mole-catching in one of them. But instead of going to inspect him and

his results, she slipped through a tall hedge, and paced the road under its shelter, looking for Dempsey.

On the stroke of eleven she saw him in the distance. He came up with the same look, half embarrassed, half inclining to laugh, that he had worn the day before. Rachel, on the other hand, was entirely at her ease, and the young man felt her at once his intellectual and social superior.

'You seem to have saved me and my horse from a tumble into that ditch last night,' she said, with a laugh, as she greeted him. 'Why I turned faint like that I can't imagine. I do sometimes when I'm tired. Well, now then—let us walk up the road a little.'

With her hands in her pockets she led the way. In her neat serge suit and cap, she was the woman-farmer—prosperous and competent—all over. Dempsey's thoughts threw back in bewilderment to the fainting figure of the night before. He walked on beside her in silence.

'I wanted to tell you,' said Miss Henderson calmly—'because I'm sure you're a nice fellow, and don't want to hurt anybody's feelings—why I asked you to hold your tongue about Mrs Delane. In the first place, you're quite mistaken about myself. I was never at Mr Tanner's farm—never in that part of Canada; and the person you saw there—Mrs Delane—was a very favourite cousin of mine, and extraordinarily like me. When we were children everybody talked of the likeness. She had a very sad story, and now—she's dead.' The speaker's voice dropped. 'I've been confused with

her before—and it's a great trouble to me. The confusion has done me harm, more than once, and I'm very sensitive about it. So, as I said last night, I should be greatly obliged if you would not only not spread the story, but deny it, whenever you can.'

She looked at him sharply, and he coloured crimson.

'Of course,' he stammered, 'I should like to do anything you wish.'

'I do wish it, and——'—she paused a moment, as though to think—'and Captain Ellesborough wishes it. I would not advise you, however, to say anything at all about it to him. But if you do what we ask you, you may be sure we shall find some way—some substantial way—of showing that we appreciate it.'

They walked on, she with her eyes on the ground as though she were thinking out some plan for his benefit—he puzzled and speechless.

'What do you want to do, now the war's over?' she said at last, with a smile, looking up.

'I suppose I want to settle down—somewhere—on land, if I had the money.'

'Here?—or in Canada?'

'Oh, at home.'

'I thought so. Well, Mr Dempsey, Captain Ellesborough and I shall be quite ready to help you in any scheme you take up. You understand?'

'That's awfully kind of you—but——'

'Quite ready,' she repeated. 'Let me know what your plans are when you've worked them out—and I'll see what can be done.' Then she stopped. There

was a gate near into one of her own fields. Their eyes met—hers absolutely cool and smiling—his wavering and excited.

'You understand?' she repeated.

'Oh, yes—I understand.'

'And you agree?' she added, emphasising the words.

'Oh, yes, I—I agree.'

'Well, then, that's all right—that's understood. A letter will always find me here. And now I must get back to my work. Good-morning.'

And with a nod, she slipped through the gate, and was half-way across the fallow on the other side of it before he had realised that their strange conversation was at an end.

XIII

It was again a very still and misty night—extraordinarily mild for the time of year. A singular brooding silence held all the woodlands above Great End Farm. There was not a breath of wind. Every dead branch that fell, every bird that moved, every mouse scratching among the fallen beech leaves, produced sounds disproportionately clear and startling, and for the moment there would be a rustle of disturbance, as though something or some one, in the forest heart, took alarm. Then the deep waters of quiet closed again, and everything—except that watching presence—slept.

The hut in Denman Wood, which had formerly played a hospitable part as the scene of many a Gargantuan luncheon at Colonel Shepherd's shooting parties, had long been an abandoned spot. All the colonel's keepers under fifty had gone to fight; and there was left only an old Head Keeper, with one decrepit helper, who shot the scanty game which still survived on strict business principles, to eke out the household rations of the big house. The Ipscombe woods were rarely visited. They were a long way from the keeper's cottage, and the old man, depressed by

the difference between war and pre-war conditions, found it quite enough to potter round the stubbles and turnips of the home-farm when game had to be shot.

The paths leading through the underwood to the hut were now in these four years largely overgrown. A place more hidden and forgotten it would have been difficult to find. And for this reason, combined with its neighbourhood to Rachel Henderson's farm, Roger Delane had chosen to inhabit it.

It was the third night after his interview with his former wife. He reached the hut after dark, by various bye-paths over the wide commons stretching between it and X——, the station at which he now generally alighted. He carried in his pocket some evening newspapers, a new Anthology, and a novel. Owing to an injection of morphia—a habit to which he had only lately taken—he felt unusually fit, and his brain was unusually alert. At the same time he had had a disagreeable interview with a doctor that morning who had been insisting on Sanatorium treatment if the remaining lung was to be preserved and his life prolonged. He did not want to prolong his life, but only to avoid the beastliness of pain. It seemed to him that morphia—good stuff!—was going to do that for him. Why hadn't he begun it before? But his brain was queer—he was conscious of that. He had asked the doctor about some curious mental symptoms. The reply was that phthisis was often accompanied by them.

Obsession—fixed ideas—in the medical sense: half

of him psychologically was quite conscious that the other half was under their influence. The sound self was observing the unsound self, but apparently with no power over it. Otherwise how was it that he was here again, hiding like a wild beast in a lair, less than a mile from Great End Farm, and Rachel Henderson?

He had found his way to London in the small hours of the day following his scene with Rachel, intending to keep his promise, and let his former wife alone. The cashing of Rachel's cheque had given him and Anita some agreeable moments; though Anita was jealously disturbed that he would not tell her where the money came from. They had found fresh lodgings in a really respectable Bloomsbury street; they had both bought clothes, and little Netta had been rigged out. Delane had magnificently compounded with his most pressing creditors, and had taken Anita to the theatre. But he had been discontented with her appearance there. She had really lost all her good looks. If it hadn't been for the kid——

And now, after this interval his obsession had swooped upon him again. It was an obsession of hate—which simply could not endure, when it came to the point, that Rachel Henderson should vanish unscathed into the future of a happy marriage, while he remained the doomed failure and outcast he knew himself to be. Rachel's implied confession rankled in him like a burn. *Tanner!*—that wretched weakling with his miserable daubs that nobody wanted to buy. So Rachel had gone to him, as soon as she had driven her husband

away no doubt to complain of her ill-treatment, to air her woes. The fellow had philandered round her some time, and had shown an insolent and interfering temper once or twice towards himself. Yes!—he could imagine it all!—her flight, and Tanner's maudlin sympathy—tears—caresses—the natural sequel. And then her pose of complete innocence at the divorce proceedings—the Judge's remarks. Revolting hypocrisy! If Tanner had been still alive, he would somehow have exposed him—somehow have made him pay. Lucky for him he was drowned in that boat accident on Lake Nipissing. And no doubt Rachel thought that the accident had made everything safe for her!

Every incident now, every phase of his conversation with her was assuming a monstrous and distorted significance in his mind. How easily she had yielded on the subject of the money! He might have asked a great deal more—and he would have got it. Very likely Ellesborough was well off—Yankees generally were—and she knew that what she gave Delane as hush money would make very little difference to her. Ellesborough no doubt would not look very closely into *her* shekels, having sufficient of his own. Otherwise it might occur to him to wonder how she had got rid of that £500. Would it pinch her? Probably, if all she had for capital was the old chap's legacy. Well—serve her right—serve her, damned, doubly right! Ellesborough's kisses would make up.

These thoughts, after a momentary respite, held him in their grip as he walked London streets.

Suspicion of the past—ugly and venomous—flapped its black wings about him. Had Rachel ever been faithful to him—even in the early days? She had made acquaintance with the Tanners very soon after their marriage. Looking back, a number of small incidents and scenes poked their heads out of the dead level of the past. Rachel and Tanner, discussing the Watts photograph when Rachel first acquired it—Tanner's eager denunciatory talk—he called himself an 'Impressionist'—the creature!—because he couldn't draw worth a cent. Rachel all smiles and deference. She had never given *him* that sort of attention. Or Rachel at a house-warming in the next farm to his. Rachel in a pale green dress, the handsomest woman there, dancing with Tanner—Rachel quarrelling with him in the buggy on the way home, because he called Tanner a milksop—'he cares for beautiful things, and you don't! —but that's no reason why you should abuse him.'

And what about those weeks not very long after that dance, when he had gone off to the land-sale at Edmonton (that was the journey, by the way, when he first saw Anita!), and Rachel had stayed at home, with a girl-friend, a girl they knew in Winnipeg. But that girl hadn't stayed all the time. To do her justice, Rachel had made no secret of that. He remembered her attacking him when he came home for having left her for three or four days quite alone. Why had he been so long away? Probably a mere bluff—though he had been taken in by it at the time, and being still in love with her, had done his best to appease her.

But what had she been doing all the time she was alone? In the light of what he knew now, she might have been doing anything. *Was the child his?*

So, piece by piece, with no auditor but his own brain, shut in upon himself by the isolation which his own life had forged for him, he built up a hideous indictment against the woman he had once loved. He wished he had put off his interview with her till he had had time to think things out more. As he came to realise how she had tricked and bested him, her offence became incredibly viler than it seemed at first. He had let her off far too cheaply that night at the farm. Scenes of past violence returned upon him, and the memory of them seemed to satisfy a rising thirst. Especially the recollection of the divorce proceedings maddened him. His morbid brain took hold on them with a grip that his will could not loosen. Her evidence—he had read it in the Winnipeg newspapers—the remarks of the prating old judge—and of her cad of a lawyer—good God! And all the time it was *she* who ought to have been in the dock, and he, the accuser—if he had known—if he hadn't been a trusting idiot, a bleating fool.

A brooding intensity of rage, as this inward process went on, gradually drowned in him every other feeling and desire. The relief and amusement of the money and its spending were soon over. He thought no more of it. Anita, and his child even—the child for whom he really cared—passed out of his mind. As he sat drinking whisky in the dull, respectable lodging, at

night after Anita had gone to bed, he felt the sinister call of those dark woods above Rachel's farm, and tasted the sweetness of his new power to hurt her, now that she had paid him this blackmail, and damned herself thereby—past help. She had threatened him. But what could she do—or the Yankee fellow either? She had given the show away. As for his promise to her, he had no right to make it—no right to allow such a woman to get off scot-free, with plenty of money and a new lover.

So on Thursday evening he took train for X—— It was still the Armistice week. The London streets were crowded with soldiers and young women of every sort and kind. He bought a newspaper and read it in the train. It gave him a queer satisfaction—for one half of him was still always watching the other—to discover that he could feel patriotic emotion like anybody else, and could be thrilled by the elation of Britain's victory—*his* victory. He read the telegrams, the positions on the Rhine assigned to the Second Army, and the Fourth—General Plumer—General Rawlinson—General F——. Gad! he used to know a son of that last old fellow at King's.

Then he fell to his old furtive watching of the people on the platform, the men getting in and out of the train. At any moment he might fall in with one of his old Cambridge acquaintances, in one of these smart officers, with their decorations and their red tabs. But in the first place they wouldn't travel in this third-class where he was sitting—not till the war was over.

And in the next he was so changed—had taken, indeed, such pains to be—that it was long odds against his being recognised. Eleven years, was it, since he left Cambridge? About.

At X—— he got out. The ticket collector noticed him, for that faint touch of a past magnificence still lingered in his carriage and gait; but there were so many strangers about that he was soon forgotten.

He passed under a railway arch and climbed a hill, the hill on which he had met Dempsey. At the top of the hill he left the high-road for a grass track across the common. There was just enough light from a declining moon to show him where he was. The common was full of dark shapes—old twisted thorns, and junipers, and masses of tall gorse-shapes which often seemed to him to be strangely alive, the silent but conscious witnesses of his passage.

The wood was very dark. He groped his way through it with difficulty and found the hut. Once inside it, he fastened the door with a wooden bar he had himself made, and turned on his electric torch. Bit by bit in the cor[illegible]ght visits he had accumulated a few necess[illegible]ome firewood, a few groceries hidden in a corner, a couple of brown blankets, and a small box of tools. A heap of dried bracken in a corner, raised on a substratum of old sacks, had often served him for a bed; and when he had kindled a wood fire in the rough grate of loose bricks where Colonel Shepherd's keepers had been accustomed to warm the hot meat stews sent up for the shooting luncheons, and

had set out his supper on the upturned fragment of an old box which had once held meat for pheasants, he had provided at least what was necessary for his night-sojourn. This food he had brought with him; a thermos bottle full of hot coffee, with slices of ham, cheese, and bread; and he ate it with appetite, sitting on a log beside the fire, and pleasantly conscious as he looked round him, like the Greek poet of long ago, of that 'cuteness' of men, which conjures up housing, food, and fire in earth's loneliest places. Outside that small fire-lit space lay the sheer silence of the wood, broken once or twice by the call and flight of an owl past the one carefully-darkened window of the hut, or by the mysterious sighing and shuddering which, from time to time, would run through the crowded stems and leafless branches.

A queer 'hotel' this for mid-November! He might, if he had chosen, have been amusing himself, *tant bien que mal*, in one or other of those shabby haunts—bars, night-clubs, dancing-rooms, to which his poverty and his *moeurs* condemned him, while his old comrades, the lads he had been brought up with at school and college, guardsmen, hussars, and the rest, were holding high revel for the Peace at the Ritz or the Carlton; he might even, as far as money was concerned, now that he had bagged his great haul from Rachel, have been supping himself at the Ritz, if he had only had time to exchange his brother-in-law's old dress suit, which Marianne had passed on to him, for a new one, and if he could have made up his mind to the possible

recognitions and rebuffs such a step would have entailed. As it was, he preferred his warm hiding-place in the heart of the woods, coupled with this exultant sense of an unseen and mysterious power which was running, like alcohol, through his nerves.

Real alcohol, however, was not wanting to his solitary meal. He drenched his coffee in the cognac he always carried about with him, and then, cigarette in hand, he fell back on the heap of bracken to read a while. The novel he sampled and threw away; the *anthology* soon bored him; and he spent the greater part of two hours lying on his back, smoking and thinking—till it was safe to assume that the coast was clear round Great End Farm. About ten o'clock, he slipped noiselessly out of the hut, after covering up the fire to wait for his return, and hiding as far as he could the other traces of his occupation. The damp mist outside held all the wood stifled, and the darkness was profound. Stepping as lightly as possible, and using his torch with the utmost precaution, he gradually made his way to the edge of the wood, and the lip of the basin beyond it. On the bare down there was enough faint moonlight to see by, and he extinguished his little lantern before leaving the wood. Below him were the dim outlines of the farm, a shadowy line of road beyond, and, as it were, a thicker fold of darkness, to mark the woods on the horizon. There was not a light anywhere; the village was invisible, and he listened for a long time without hearing anything but the rush of a distant train.

Ah!—Yes, there was a sound down there in the hollow—footsteps, reverberating in the silence. He bent his head, listening intently. The footsteps seemed to approach the farm, then the sounds ceased, till suddenly, on the down slope below him, he saw something moving. He threw back his head with a quiet laugh.

The Ipscombe policeman, no doubt, on his round. Would he come up the hill? Hardly, on such a misty night. If not, his retreating steps on the farm lane would soon tell his departure.

In a few minutes, indeed, the click of an opening gate could be clearly heard through the mist, and afterwards, steps. They grew fainter and fainter. All clear.

Choosing a circuitous route, Delane crept down the hill, and reached a spot on the down-side rather higher than the farm enclosure, from which the windows of the farm-house could be seen. There was a faint light in one of the upper two—which he had some reason to think was that of Rachel's bedroom. It seemed to him the window was open; he perceived something like the swaying of a blind inside it. The night was marvellously mild for November; and he remembered Rachel's old craving for air, winter and summer.

The light moved, there was a shadow behind the blind, and suddenly the window was thrown up widely, and a pale figure—a woman's figure—stood in the opening. Rachel, no doubt! Delane slipped behind a thorn growing on the bare hill-side. His heart

thumped. Instinctively his hand groped for something in his pocket. If she had guessed that he was there—within twenty yards of her!

Then, as he watched the faint apparition in the mist, it roused in him a fresh gust of rage. Rachel, the sentimental Rachel, unable to sleep—Rachel, happy and secure, thinking of her lover—the lies of her divorce all forgotten—and the abominable Roger cut finally out of her life!——

The figure disappeared; he heard the closing of the window, which was soon dark. Then he crept down to the farm wall, and round the corner of it to that outer cart-shed, where he had bound up his bleeding hand on the night when Halsey—silly ass!—had seen the ghost. He did not dare to smoke lest spark or smell might betray him. Sitting on a heap of sacks in a sheltered corner, his hands hanging over his knees, he spent some long time brooding and pondering—conscious all the while of the hidden and silent life of the house and farm at his back. By now he fancied he understood the evening ways of the farm place. The two girls went up to bed first, about nine; the two ladies, about an hour later; and the farm bailiff as a rule did not sleep on the premises, though there was a bed in the loft over the stable which could be used on occasion. That window, too, through which he had watched the pair of lovers, when the Yankee discovered him—that also seemed to fit into a scheme.

Yes!—the Yankee had discovered him. His start, his sudden movement as though to make a rush at

the window, had shown it. Meanwhile, Delane had not waited for developments. Quick as thought he had made for one of those sunken climbing lanes in which the chalk downs of the district abound, a lane which lay to the south of the farm, while the green terraced path connected with the ghost story lay to the north of it. No doubt there had been a hue and cry, a search of the farm and its immediate neighbourhood. But the night was dark and the woods wide. Once in their shelter, he had laughed at pursuit. What had the Yankee said to Rachel? And since he had stopped her in the lane, what had Rachel been saying to the Yankee? Had she yet explained that the face he had seen at the window—supposing always that he had told her what he had seen—and why shouldn't he?—was not the face of a casual tramp or lunatic, but the face of a discarded husband, to whom all the various hauntings and apparitions at the farm had been really due?

That was the question—the all important question. Clearly some one—Ellesborough probably—had given a warning to the police. On what theory?—ghost?—tramp?—or husband?

Or had Rachel just held her tongue, and had the Yankee been led to believe that the husband—for Rachel must have owned up about the husband though she did call herself Miss Henderson!—was still some thousands of miles away—in Canada—safely dead and buried, as far as Rachel was concerned?

On the whole he thought it most probable that

Rachel had held her tongue about his reappearance. If she had thought it worth while to bribe him so heavily, it was not very likely that she would now, herself, have set the American on the track of a secret which she so evidently did not want an expectant bridegroom to know.

The American—damn him! A furious and morbid jealousy rushed upon the man crouching under the cart-shed. The world was rapidly reducing itself for him to these two figures—figures of hate—figures against whom he felt himself driven by a kind of headlong force, a force of destruction.

How still the farm was, except for the movements of the cows inside the shippen at his back, or of the horses in the stable! Rachel, no doubt, was now asleep. In the old days he had often—enviously—watched her tumble asleep as soon as the bright head was on the pillow; while in his own case sleep had been for years a difficult business.

Somebody else would watch her sleeping now.

Yes, if he, the outcast, allowed it. And again the frenzied sense of power swept through him. *If he allowed it!* It rested with him.

The following day, Ellesborough set out in the early afternoon for Great End Farm, the bearer of much news.

The day was dark and rainy, with almost a gale blowing, but his spirits had never been higher. The exaltation of the great victory, the incredible victory,

seemed to breathe upon him from the gusty wind, to be driving the westerly clouds, and crying in all the noises of the woods. Was it really over?—over and done?—the agony of these four years—the hourly sacrifice of irreplaceable life—the racking doubt as to the end—the torturing question in every conscious mind—'Is there a God in heaven—a God who cares for men—or is there not?'

He could have shouted the answer aloud—'There is—there is a God! And He is just.'

Faith was natural to him, and nourished on his new happiness no less than on the marvellous issue of the war, it set his heart singing on this dull winter's day. How should he find her? Threshing, perhaps, in the big barn, and he would turn to, and work with her and the girls till work was done, and they could have the sitting-room to themselves, and he could tell her all his news. Janet—the ever-kind and thoughtful Janet—would see to that. The more he saw of the farm-life the more he admired Janet. She was a little slow. She was not clever; and she had plenty of small prejudices which amused him. But she was the salt of the earth. Trust her—lean upon her—she would never let you down. And now he was going to trust his beloved to her—for a while.

Yes—Rachel and the girls, they were all in the high barn feeding the greedy maw of the threshing machine; a business which strained muscles and backs, and choked noses and throats with infinitesimal particles of oil and the fine flying chaff. He watched Rachel a few

minutes as she lifted and pitched—a typical figure of a New Labour, which is also a New Beauty, on this old earth. Then he drew her away, flung off his tunic, and took her place, while she, smiling and panting, her hands on her sides, leant against the wall, and watched in her turn.

Then when the engine stopped, and the great hopper full of grain lay ready for the miller, they found themselves alone in the barn for a minute. The girls and Janet had gone to milk, and Hastings with them. There was a lantern in the barn, which showed Rachel in the swirl of the corn dust with which the barn was full, haloed and golden with it, like a Homeric goddess in a luminous cloud. Her soft brown head, her smile, showing the glint of her white teeth, her eyes, and all the beauty of her young form, in its semi-male dress—they set his blood on fire. Just as he was, in his khaki shirt sleeves, he came to her, and took her in his arms. She clung to him passionately.

'I thought you were never coming.'

It was one of the reproaches that have no sting.

'I came at the first moment. I left a score of things undone.'

'Have you been thinking of me?'

'Always—always. And you?'

'Nearly always,' she said teasingly. 'But I have been making up my accounts.'

'Avaricious woman!—thinking of nothing but money. Dear—I have several bits of news for you.

But let me wash!' He held out his hands—'I am not fit to touch you!'

She disengaged herself quietly.

'What news?'

'Some letters first,' he said smiling. 'A budget and a half—mostly for you, from all my home people. Can you face it?'

'In reply to your cable?'

'My most extravagant cable! On the top, of course, sacks of many letters!'

'Before we were engaged?'

He laughed as he thrust his arms into his tunic. 'My mother seems to have guessed from my very first mention of you.'

'But—she doesn't know yet?' said Rachel slowly.

They had passed out of the range of the lantern. He could not see her face, could only just hear her voice.

'No, not yet, dear. My last long letter should reach her next week.'

Her hand lay close in his as they groped their way to the door. When he unlatched it they came out into the light of a stormy sunset. The rain had momentarily ceased, and there were fiery lines of crimson burning their way through the black cloud masses in the western sky. The red light caught Rachel's face and hair. But even so, it seemed to him that she was pale.

'I say—you've done too much threshing!' he said with energy. 'Don't do any more—get an extra man.'

'Can't find one,' she said, laughing at him, but rather languidly. 'I'll go and get the tea ready.'

He went off to wash, and when he entered the sitting-room a little later, she, too, was fresh and neat again, in a new frock of some soft bluish-green stuff, which pleased his eye amazingly. Outside, the sunset was dying rapidly, and at a sign from her, he drew down the blinds over the two windows, and pulled the curtains close. He stood at the window, looking at the hill-side for a moment with the blind in his hand. He was recalling the face he had seen, of which neither he nor any one else had yet said a word to Rachel; recalling also his talk with one of the Millsborough police the day before. 'Nothing more heard of him, captain. Oh, we get queer people about these hills sometimes. It's a very lonely bit of country. Why, a year ago, we were hunting a couple of German prisoners about these commons for days.'

'Any more ghosts?' he said lightly, glancing round at Rachel, as he drew the curtains across.

'Not that I know of. Come and have your tea.'

He took a cup from her hand, and leaning against the chimney surveyed the room with a radiant face. Then he stooped over her and said,—

'I love this little room! Don't you?'

She made a restless movement.

'I don't know. Why do you love it?'

'As if you didn't know!' Their eyes met, his intense and passionate—hers, less easy to read. 'Darling, I have some other news for you. I think you'll like it—though it'll separate us for a little.'

And drawing a letter from his pocket, he handed it

to her. It was a letter from the American Headquarters, offering him immediate work in the American Intelligence Department at Coblentz.

'Some friends of mine there seem to have been getting busy about me. You see, I know German pretty well.'

And he explained to her that as a boy he had spent a year in Germany before going to Yale. She scarcely listened, so absorbed was she in the official letter.

'When must you go?' she said at last, looking up.

'At the end of next week, I'm afraid.'

'And how long will it be?'

'That I don't know. But three or four months certainly. It will put off our wedding, dearest, a bit. But you'd like me to go, wouldn't you? I should be at the hub of things.'

The colour rushed into her cheeks.

'*Must* you go?'

Her manner amazed him. He had expected that one so ambitious and energetic in her own way of life would have greeted his news with eagerness. The proposal was really a great compliment to him—and a great chance.

'I don't see how I could refuse it,' he said with an altered countenance. 'Indeed—I don't think I could.'

She dropped her face into her hands, and stared into the fire. In some trouble of mind, he knelt down beside her, and put his arm round her.

'I'll write every day. It won't be long, darling.'

She shook her head, and h felt a shudder run through her.

'It's silly of me—I don't know why—but—I'm just afraid——'

'Afraid of what?'

She smiled at him tremulously—but he saw the tears in her eyes.

'I told you—I can't always help it. I'm a fool, I suppose—but——'

Then she threw her arms round his neck—murmuring in his ear, 'You'll have time to think—when you're away from me—that it was a great pity—you ever asked me.'

He kissed and scolded her, till she smiled again. Afterwards she made a strong effort to discuss the thing reasonably. Of course he must go—it would be a great opening—a great experience. And they would have all the more time to consider their own affairs. But all the evening afterwards he felt in some strange way that he had struck her a blow from which she was trying in vain to rally. Was it all the effect of her suffering at that brute's hands—aided by the emotion and strain of the recent scene between herself and him?

As for her, when she turned back from the gate where she had bid him good-bye, she saw Janet in the doorway waiting for her almost with a sense of exasperation. She had not yet said one word to Janet. That plunge was all to take.

XIV

RACHEL woke the following morning in that dreary mood when all the colour and the glamour seem to have been washed out of life, and the hopes and dreams which keep up a perpetual chatter in every normal mind are suddenly dumb.

How was she going to face Ellesborough's long absence? It had been recently assumed between them that he would be very soon released from his forestry post, that the Infantry commission he had been promised would come to nothing, now the Armistice was signed, and that in a very few weeks they would be free to think only of themselves and their own future. This offer of Intelligence work at the American Headquarters had changed everything.

In ten days, if nothing happened, he would be gone, and she would be left behind to grapple alone with Roger—who might at any moment torment her again; with the presence of Dempsey, who was thinking of settling in the village, and for whom she would be called upon very soon to fulfil the hopes she had raised in him; and finally, with the struggle and misery in her own mind.

But something must happen. As she was dressing by candle-light in the winter dawn, her thoughts were rushing forward—leaping some unexplored obstacles lying in the foreground—to a possible marriage before Ellesborough went to France; just a quiet walk to a registry office without any fuss or any witness but Janet. If she could reach that haven, she would be safe; and this dumb fever of anxiety, this terrified conviction that in the end Fate would somehow take him from her, would be soothed away.

But how to reach it? For there was now between them, till they also were revealed and confessed, a whole new series of events: not only the Tanner episode, but Delane's reappearance, her interview with him, her rash attempt to silence Dempsey. By what she had done in her bewilderment and fear, in order to escape the penalty of frankness, she might only—as the man was now beginning to perceive—have stumbled into fresh dangers. It was as though she stood on the friable edge of some great crater, some gulf of destruction, on which her feet were perpetually slipping and sinking, and only Ellesborough's hold could ultimately save her.

And Janet's—Janet's first. Rachel's thought clung to her, as the shipwrecked Southern sailor turns to his local saint to intercede for him with the greater spiritual lights. Janet's council and help—she knew she *must* ask for them—that it was the next step. Yet she had been weakly putting it off day by day. And through this mist of doubt and dread, there kept striking

all the time, as though quite independent of it, the natural thoughts of a woman in love.

During the farm breakfast, hurried through by candle-light, with rain beating on the windows, Rachel was thinking—'Why didn't he propose it?'—this scheme of marrying before he went. Wasn't it a most natural thing to occur to him? She tormented herself all the morning with the problem of his silence.

Then—as though in rebuke of her folly—at midday came a messenger, a boy on a bicycle, with a letter. She took it up to her own room, and read it with fluttering breath—laughing, yet with tears in her eyes.

'My Darling,—What an idiot I was last night! This morning I have woke up to a brilliant idea—why I didn't propose it to you yesterday I can't imagine! Let us marry before I go. Meet me in London, a week to-day, and let us go into the country, or to the sea, for a blessed forty-eight hours, afterwards. Then you will see me off—and I shall know, wherever I go, that you are my very very own, and I am yours. I don't want to hurry you. Take time to think, and write to me to-night, or wire me to-morrow morning. But the very idea that you may say "yes" makes me the happiest of men. Take time to think—but—all the same—don't keep me too long waiting!

'Your own,

'E. E.'

All day she kept the letter hidden in the loose front

of her dress. 'I'll wire to-morrow morning,' she thought. But before that—something had got to happen. Every now and then she would pause in her own work to watch Janet—Janet butter-making, Janet feeding the calves, Janet cooking—for on that homely figure in white cap and apron everything seemed to depend.

The frost had come, and clear skies with it. The day passed in various miscellaneous business, under shelter, in the big barn.

And at night, after supper, Rachel stood on the front steps looking into a wide, starry heaven, moonless, cold, and still. Betty and Jenny had just gone up to bed. Janet was in the kitchen putting the porridge for the morrow's breakfast which she had just made into the hay-box, which would keep it steaming all night. But she would soon have done work. The moment seemed to have come.

Rachel walked into the kitchen and closed the door behind her. The supper had been cleared away, and the table on which they had eaten it shone spotlessly clean and bare. The fire would soon be raked out for the night, and Janet would lay the breakfast before she left the kitchen. Everything was in the neatest possible order, and the brilliant polish of a great stew-pan hanging on the wall particularly caught the eye. Janet was humming to herself—one of the war tunes—when Rachel entered.

'Janet—I want to speak to you.'

Janet looked up—startled. And yet something in

her was not startled! She had been strangely expectant all these days. It seemed to her she had already seen Rachel come in like that—had already heard her say those words.

She shut up the hay-box, and came gently forward.

'Here, Rachel?'

'You've nearly done?'

'In a few minutes. If you'll go into the sitting-room I'll join you directly.'

And while she hurried through the rest of her work, her mind was really running forward in prophecy. She more or less knew what she was going to hear. And as she closed the kitchen door behind her there was in her a tremulous sense as though of some sacred responsibility.

Rachel was crouching over the fire as usual, and Janet drew up a stool beside her, and laid a hand on her knee.

'What is it?'

Rachel turned.

'I told you one secret, Janet, the other day. Now this is another. And it's——' she flushed, and broke off, beginning again after a moment, 'I didn't mean to tell you, or any one. I can't make up my mind whether I'm bound to or not. But I want you to advise me, Janet. I'm awfully troubled.'

And suddenly she slipped to the floor, and laid her head against Janet's knees, hiding her face.

Janet bent over her, instinctively caressing the brown hair. She was only three or four years older

than Rachel, but she looked much older, and the close linen cap which she wore on butter-making afternoons, and had not yet removed, gave her a gently austere look, like that of a religious.

'Tell me—I'll do my best.'

'In the first place,' said Rachel, in a low voice, 'who do you think was the ghost?'

'What do you mean?'

'The ghost was Roger Delane.'

Janet uttered an exclamation of surprise and horror —while fact after fact rushed together in her mind, fitting into one explanatory whole. Why had she never thought of that possibility, among all the others?

'Oh, Rachel, have you ever seen him?'

'Twice. He stopped me on the road, when I was coming back from Millsborough on Armistice Day. And he came to see me the day after. You remember you were astonished to find I had sent the girls to the Shepherds' dance? I did it to get them out of the way—and if you hadn't said you were going to that service I should have had to invent something to send you away.'

'I always thought he was in Canada?' said Janet, in bewilderment. 'What did he want? Have you told Captain Ellesborough?'

'No, I haven't told George. I don't know whether I shall. Roger wanted money—as usual. I gave him some.'

'*You gave him some!* Rachel!'

'I had to—I had to buy him off. And I've seen

John Dempsey also without your knowing. And I've had to bribe him, too.'

Rachel was now sitting up, very hard and erect, her hands round her knees. Her first object seemed to be to avoid emotion, and to prevent Janet from showing any. Janet had gone very pale. The name 'Dick Tanner' was drumming in her ear.

'I know you can't understand me, Janet,' said Rachel, after a pause, 'you could never do what I've done. I dare say when you've let me tell you the story you'll not be able to forgive me. You'll think I ought never to have let you settle with me—that I told a lie when I said I wasn't a bad woman—that I've disgraced you. I hope you won't. That—that would about finish it. Her voice shook at last.

Janet was speechless. But instinctively she laid a hand on Rachel's shoulder. And at the touch, in a moment, the story came out.

Confused and hardly intelligible! For Rachel herself could scarcely now disentangle all the threads and motives of it. But certain things stood out—the figure of a young artist, sensitive, pure-minded, sincere, with certain fatal weaknesses of judgment and will, which had made him a rolling stone, and the despair of his best friends, but as compared with Roger Delane after six months of marriage—Hyperion to a satyr; then the attraction of such a man for his neighbour, a young wife brought up in a refined home, the child of a saint and dreamer, outraged since her marriage in every fibre by the conduct and ways of her husband, and

smarting under the sense of her own folly; their friendship, so blameless till its last moment, with nothing to hide, and little to regret, a woman's only refuge, indeed, from hours of degradation and misery; and finally the triumph of something which was not passion, at least on Rachel's side, but of mere opportunity, strengthened, made irresistible by the woman's pain and despair: so the tale, the common tale, ran.

'I didn't love him,' said Rachel at last, her hands over her eyes, 'I don't pretend I did. I liked him—I was awfully sorry for him—as he was for me. But—well, there it is! I went over to his house. I honestly thought his sister was there; but, above all, I wanted him to sympathise with me—and pity me—because he knew everything. And she wasn't there—and I stayed three days and nights with him. *Voilà!*'

There was silence a little. Janet's thoughts were in a tumult. Rachel began again,—

'Now, why am I telling you all this? I need never have told anybody—at least up to a few days ago. Poor Dick was drowned just before I got my divorce, in a boat accident on Lake Nipissing. He had gone there to paint, and was camping out. If he hadn't been drowned, perhaps, he would have made me marry him. So there was no one in the world who knew I was ever with him, except——'

She turned sharply upon Janet—

'Except this man who turned up here in George's own camp—and in the village, two months ago, but whom I never saw till this week—*this week*—Armistice

Day!—John Dempsey. That was a queer chance, wasn't it? The sort of thing nobody could have expected. I was coming back from Millsborough. I was—well, just that evening, I was awfully happy. I expected nothing. And then—within twenty minutes——'

She told the story to Janet's astounded ears, of the two apparitions in the road—of her two interviews, first with Dempsey, and the following evening with Delane—and of her own attempts to bribe them both.

And at that her composure broke down.

'Why did I do it?' she said wildly, springing to her feet. 'It was idiotic! Why didn't I just accept the boy's story, and say quietly, "Yes, I was staying with the Tanners?" And why didn't I defy Roger—go straight to George, and hand him over to the police? Don't you see why? Because it is true!—*it's true*—and I'm terrified. If I lost George, I should kill myself. I never thought I should be—I could be—in love with anybody like this. But yet I suppose it was in me all the time. I was always seeking—reaching out—to somebody I could love with every bit of me, soul and body—somebody I could follow—— For I can't manage for myself—I'm not like you, Janet. And now I've found him—and—— Do you know what that is?'

She pulled a letter out of her pocket, and looked at Janet through a mist of despairing tears.

'It's a letter from George. It came this morning. He wants me to marry him at once—next week. He's got some new work in France, and he saw I was

miserable because he was going away. And why shouldn't I? *Why shouldn't I?* I love him—there's nothing wrong with me except that wretched story. Well, there are two reasons. First'—she spoke with slow and bitter emphasis—'I don't believe for a moment—Roger will keep his word. I know him. He is frightfully ill. He says he's dying. He may die—before he's got through this money. That would be the best thing that could happen to me—wouldn't it? But probably he won't die—and certainly he'll get through the money! Then he'll come back—and I shall begin bribing him again—and telling lies to hide it from George—and in the end it'll be no use—for Roger's quite reckless—you can't appeal to him through anything but money. He'll see George, whatever I do, and try it on with him. And then—George will know how to deal with *him*, I dare say—but when we are alone—and he asks *me*——'

She sank down again on the floor, kneeling, and put her hands on Janet's knees.

'You see, Janet, don't you? You see?'

It was the cry of a soul in anguish.

'You poor, poor thing!'

Janet, trembling from head to foot, bowed her head on Rachel's, and the two clung together, in silence, broken only by two deep sobs from Rachel. Then Janet disengaged herself. She was pale, but no longer agitated, and her blue eyes, which were her only beauty, were clear and shining.

'You'll let me say just what I feel, Rachel?'

'Of course.'

'You can't marry him without telling him. No, no—you couldn't do that!'

Rachel said nothing. She was sitting on the floor, her eyes turned away from Janet.

'You couldn't do that, Rachel,' Janet resumed, as though she were urgently thinking her way, 'you'd never have a happy moment.'

'Oh, yes, of course,' said Rachel, throwing up her head with a half-scornful gesture. 'One says that—but how do you *know*? I might never think of it again—if Roger and that man Dempsey were out of the way. It's dead—it's *dead*. Why do we trouble about such things?'

'It would be dead,' said Janet in a low voice, 'if you'd told him—and he'd forgiven!'

'What has he to do with it?' cried Rachel stubbornly, 'it was before he knew me. I was a different being.'

'No—it is always the same self, which we are making, all the time. Don't you see—dear, dear Rachel!—it's your chance now to put it all behind you—just by being—true. Oh, I don't want to preach to you—but I see it so clearly!'

'But it isn't as a man would see it—a man like George,' said Rachel, shaking her head. Look there'—she pointed to a little bundle of letters lying on the table—'there are letters from his people which he brought me this morning. It's awful!—how they take me at his valuation—just because he loves me. I must be everything that's good, because he says so. And you can

see what kind of people they are—what they think of him—and what they imagine about me—what they think I *must* be—for him to love me. I don't mean they're prigs—they aren't a bit. It's just their life coming out quite naturally. You see what they are—quite simply—what they can't help being, and what they expect from him and the woman he marries. And he's got to take me home to them—some time—to present me to them. The divorce is difficult enough—even if they think of me as quite innocent, it will be hard for them—that George should marry a divorced woman——'

'What have they to do with it?' interrupted Janet, 'it's only George that matters—no other person has any right whatever to know! You needn't consider anybody else.

'Yes—but think of *him*. It's bad enough that I should know something he doesn't know—but at least *he's* spared. He can take me home to his mother—whom he adores—and if *I* know that I'm a cheat and a sham—he doesn't—it will be all easy for him.

Janet was silenced for the moment by the sheer passion of the voice. She sat, groping a little, under the stress of her own thought—and praying inwardly without words—for light and guidance.

'And think of *me*, please!' Rachel went on. 'If I tell him, it's done—for ever. He'll forgive me, I think. He may be everything that's dear and good and kind'—her voice broke—'but it'd hit him dreadfully hard. A man like that can't forget such a thing. When I've

once said it, I shall have changed everything between us. He must think—some time—when he's alone—when I'm not there—" It was Dick Tanner once—it will be some one else another time!" I shall have been pulled down from the place where he puts me now—even after he knows all about Roger and the divorce—pulled down for good and all—however much he may pity me—however good he may be to me. It will be love, perhaps—but another kind of love. He can't trust me again. No one could. And it's that I can't bear—I can't *bear!*——'

She looked defiantly at Janet, and the little room with its simple furnishings seemed too small a stage for such an energy of fear and distress.

'Yes—that you could bear,' said Janet quietly, 'with him to help you—and God. It would all straighten out in the end—because the first step would be right.'

Rachel turned upon her.

'Now that I've told you,' she cried, 'can *you* ever think the same of me again? You know you can't!'

Janet caught her cold hands, and held them close, looking up to her.

'Not the same—no, not the same. But if I cared for you before, Rachel—I care for you ten thousand times more now. Don't you see?—it will be the same with him?'

Rachel shook her head.

'No—a man's different,' she repeated, 'a man's different!'

'Any way, you *must*,' said Janet resolutely, 'you know you must. You don't need me to tell you.'

Rachel wrenched herself away with a little moan and hid her face in her hands as she leant against the mantelpiece. Janet, looking up, and transfigured by that spiritual energy, that ultimate instinctive faith which was the root force in her, went on pleading.

'Dear Rachel, one goes on living side by side—doing one's daily work—and thinking just one's ordinary thoughts—and all the time one never speaks of the biggest things of all—the only things that matter—really. Isn't it God that matters—and the law in our hearts? If we break it—if we aren't true—if we wrong those that love us—if we injure and deceive—how will it be when we grow old—when we come to die? Whatever our gain—we shall have lost our souls!'

'You think I should injure him by marrying him?' cried Rachel.

'No—no! A thousand times, no! But by deceiving him—by not trusting him—with all your heart, and all your life—that would be the worst injury.'

'How do you know all there may have been in his life?' said Rachel vehemently. I don't ask.'

'I think you do know.'

Rachel considered the words, finally dropping her face again out of sight.

'Well, I dare say I do!' she said wearily. 'Of course, he's a hundred times too good for me.'

'Don't turn it off like that! It's for *oneself* one has to think—one's own fulfilling of the law. Love—is

the fulfilling of the law. And love means trust—and truth.'

Janet's voice sank. She had said her say. Rachel was silent for some time, and Janet sat motionless. The clock and the fire were the only sounds. At last Rachel moved. With a long sigh, she pressed back the ruffled hair from her temples, and standing tiptoe before a small mirror that hung over the mantelpiece, she began to pin up some coils that had broken loose. When that was done, she turned slowly towards Janet.

'Very well. That's settled. How shall it be done? Shall I write it or say it?'

Janet gasped a little between laughing and crying. Then she caught Rachel's cold, unresisting hand, and laid it tenderly against her own cheek.

'Write it.'

'All right.' The voice was that of an automaton. 'How shall I send it?'

'Would you—would you trust me to take it?'

'You mean—you'd talk to him?'

'If you gave me leave.'

Rachel thought a little, and then made a scarcely perceptible sign of assent. A few more words passed as to the best time at which to find Ellesborough at leisure. It was decided that Janet should aim at catching him in the midday dinner hour. 'I should bicycle, and get home before dark.'

'And now let's talk of something else,' said Rachel imperiously.

She found some business letters that had to be

answered, and set to work on them. Janet wrote up her milk records and dairy accounts. The fire sank gently to its end. Janet's cat came with tail outstretched, and rubbed itself sociably, first against Janet's skirts, and then against Rachel. No trace remained in the little room, where the two women sat at their daily work, of the scene which had passed between them, except in Rachel's pallor, and the occasional shaking of her hand as it passed over the paper.

Then, when Janet put up her papers with a look at the clock, which was just going to strike ten o'clock, Rachel, too, cleared away, and with that instinct for air and the open which was a relic of her Canadian life, and made any closed room after a time an oppression to her, she threw a cloak over her shoulders, and went out again to breathe the night. There was a young horse who, on the previous day, had needed the vet. She went across the yard to the stable to look at him.

All was well with the horse, whose swollen hock had been comfortably bandaged by Hastings before he left. But as she stood beside him, close to the divided door, opening on the hill, of which both the horizontal halves were now shut, she was aware of certain movements on the other side of the door—some one passing it—footsteps. Her nerves gave a jump. Could it be?—*again!* Impetuously she went to the door, threw open the upper half, and looked out. Nothing—but the faint starlight on the hill, and the woods crowning it.

She called.

'Who's there?' But no one answered.

Fancy, of course. But with the knowledge she now had, she could not bring herself to go round the farm. Instead she carefully closed the stable shutter, and ran back across the yard into the shelter of the house, locking the front door behind her, and going into the sitting-room and the kitchen to see that the windows were fastened.

Janet was waiting for her at the top of the stairs. They kissed each other gravely, in silence, like those who feel that the time for speech is done. Then Rachel went into her room, and Janet heard her turn the key. Janet herself slept intermittently. But whenever she woke, it seemed to her that there was some slight sound in the next room—a movement or a rustle, which showed that Rachel was still awake—and up.

It was a night, indeed, which left Rachel with that sense of strange illuminations, of life painfully enlarged and deepened, which love and suffering may always bring to the woman who is capable of love and suffering. She had spent the hours in writing to Ellesborough, and in that letter she had unpacked her heart to its depths, Janet guessed. When she received the letter from Rachel on the morrow, she handled it as a sacred thing.

XV

THE frost held. A sun of pearl and fire rose over the hill, as the stars finally faded out in the winter morning, and a brilliant rime lay sparkling on all the pastures and on the slopes of the down. The brilliance had partly vanished from the lower grounds when Janet started on her way; but on the high commons, winter was at its gayest and loveliest. The distant woods were a mist of brown and azure, encircling the broad frost-whitened spaces; the great single beeches and oaks under which Spenser or Sidney—the great Will himself—might have walked, shot up, magnificent, into a clear sky, proudly sheltering the gnarled thorns and furze-bushes which marched beside and round them, like dwarfs in a pageant.

Half-way up the hill, Janet came across old Betts bringing down a small cart-full of furze for fodder, and she stopped to speak to him. A little later on, nearer to the camp, she overtook Dempsey, who rather officiously joined her, and assuming at once that she was in quest of the Camp Commandant, directed her to a short cut leading straight to Ellesborough's quarters. There was a slight something in the manner of both

men that jarred on Janet—as though their lips said one thing and their eyes another—furtive in the case of Betts, a trifle insolent in that of Dempsey. She, with her tragic knowledge, guessed uncomfortably at what it meant. Dempsey—as she had made up her mind after ten minutes' talk with him—was a vain gossip. It had been madness on Rachel's part to give him the smallest hold on her. Very likely he had not yet actually betrayed her—his hope of favours to come might have been sufficient to prevent that. But his self-importance would certainly show itself somehow —in a hint or a laugh. He had probably already roused in the village mind a prying curiosity, a suspicion of something underhand, which might alter Rachel's whole relation to her neighbours. For once give an English country-side reason to suspect a scandal, and it will pluck it bare in time, with a slow and secret persistence.

Well, after all, if the situation became disagreeable, Rachel would only have to choose Ellesborough's country as her own, and begin her new life there.

Supposing that all went well! Janet's mind went through some painful alternations of confidence and fear, as she walked her bicycle along the rough forest-track leading to Ellesborough's hut. She believed him to be deeply in love with Rachel, and the spiritual passion in her seemed to realise—in the man's inmost nature, behind all his practical ability, and his short business manner, powers of pity and tenderness like her own. But if she were wrong? If this second

revelation put too great a strain upon one brought up in an exceptionally strict school where certain standards of conduct were simply taken for granted?

Mystic and Puritan as she was, there were moments when Janet felt her responsibility almost unbearable. Rachel deserted—Rachel in despair—Rachel turning on the woman who had advised her to her undoing—all these images were beating on Janet's tremulous sense, as the small military hut where Ellesborough and two of his junior officers lived came into view, together with that wide hollow of the forestry camp where he and Rachel had first met. The letter in her pocket seemed a living and sinister thing. She had still power to retain it—to keep it imprisoned.

A lady in the dress of the Women's Forestry Corps appeared on another path leading to Ellesborough's hut. Janet recognised Mrs Ferguson, and was soon greeted by a shout of welcome.

'Well, so Miss Henderson's engaged to our captain!' said Mrs Ferguson, with a smiling countenance, as they shook hands. 'The girls here, and I, are awfully interested. The camp began it! But do you want the captain? I'm afraid he isn't here.'

Janet's countenance fell.

'I thought I should be sure to find him in the dinner hour.'

'No, he went up to town by the first train this morning on some business with the Ministry. We expect him back about three.'

It was now one o'clock. Janet pondered what to do.

'You wanted to see him?' said Mrs Ferguson, full of sympathy.

'I brought a letter for him. If I leave it, will he be sure to get it directly he returns?'

'His servant's in the hut. Let's talk to him.'

Mrs Ferguson rapped at the door of the hut, and walked in. An elderly batman appeared.

'I have a letter for Captain Ellesborough—an important letter—on business,' said Janet. 'I was to wait for an answer. But as he isn't here, where shall I leave it, so that he will be certain to get it?'

'On his table, if you please, ma'am,' said the soldier, opening the door of the Captain's small sitting-room—'I'll see that he gets it.'

'It'll be quite safe?' said Janet anxiously, placing it herself in a prominent place on the writing-table.

'Lor', yes, ma'am. Nobody comes in here but me, when the captain's away. I'll tell him of it directly he comes home.'

'May I just write a little note myself? I expected to find Captain Ellesborough in.'

The servant handed her a sheet of paper. She wrote: 'I brought Rachel's letter, and am very disappointed not to see you. Come at once. Don't delay.—Janet Leighton.'

She slipped it into an envelope, which she addressed, and left beside the other. Then she reluctantly left the hut with Mrs Ferguson.

'I am so sorry you didn't find him,' said that lady. 'Was it something about the wedding?' she added

smiling, her feminine curiosity getting the better of her.

'Oh, no—not yet,' said Janet, startled.

'Well, I suppose it won't be long,' laughed Mrs Ferguson. 'He's desperately in love, you know.'

Janet smiled in return, and Mrs Ferguson, delighted to have the chance, broke out into praises of her Commandant.

'You see, we women who are doing all this new work with men, we know a jolly deal more about them than we ever did before. I can tell you, it searches us out, this joint life—both women and men. In this camp you can't hide what you are—the sort of man—or the sort of woman. And there isn't a woman in this camp, if she's been here any time, who wouldn't trust the captain for all she's worth—who wouldn't tell him her love affairs, or her debts—or march up to a machine-gun, if he told her. In a sense, they're in love with him, because—as you've no doubt found out, he has a way with him! But they all know that he's never been anything to them but the best of Commandants and a good friend. Oh, I could never have run this camp but for him. He and I'll go together! Of course, we're shutting up very soon.'

So the pleasant Irishwoman ran on, as she walked beside Janet and her bicycle to the top of the hill. Janet listened and smiled. Her own mind said ditto to it all. But, nevertheless, the more Ellesborough was set on a pinnacle by this enthusiastic friend and spectator of his daily life, the more Rachel's friend

trembled for Rachel. A lover 'not too bright and good' to understand—and forgive—that was what was wanted.

She reached the farm-gate about two o'clock, and Rachel was there, waiting for her. But before they met, Rachel, watching her approach, saw that there was no news for her.

'He wasn't there?' she said drearily, as Janet reached her.

Janet explained, and they walked up the farm lane together.

'I would have waited if I could,' she said in distress. 'But it would have looked strange. Mrs Ferguson would have suspected something wrong.'

'Oh, no, you couldn't have waited,' said Rachel, decidedly. 'Well!'—she threw her arms out in a great stretch—'It's done. In half an hour he'll be reading the letter. It's like waiting for one's execution, isn't it? Nothing can stop it; I may be dead before tea!' She gave a wild laugh.

'Rachel!'

'Well, that's how I feel. If he gives me up, it will be death—though I dare say I shall still go on fussing round the farm, and people will still talk to me as if I were alive. But!'—— she shrugged her shoulders.

'He won't give you up,' said Janet, much troubled, 'because—because he's a good man!'

'All the more reason. If I were he, I should give me up. Shall I tell you a queer thing, Janet? I hate Roger, as much as I can hate anybody. It would be

a great relief to me if I heard he were dead. And yet at the same time I see—oh, yes, I see quite plainly—that I treated him badly. He told me so the other night—and it is so—it's *true*. I never had the least patience with him. And now he's dying—at least he says so—and though I hate him—though I pray I may never, never, see him again, yet I'm sorry for him. Isn't that strange?'

She looked at Janet with a queer flickering defiance, which was also a kind of remorse, in her eyes.

'No, it isn't strange.'

'Why not?—when I hate him?'

'One can be sorry even for those one hates. I suppose God is,' Janet added, after a pause.

Rachel made a little face of scorn.

'Why should God hate any one? He made us. He's responsible. He must have known what He was doing. If He really pitied us, would He have made us at all?'

Janet made a little protesting sound—a sound of pain.

'Does it give you the shivers, old woman, when I talk like that?' Rachel slipped her hand affectionately through Janet's arm. 'Well, I won't, then. But if—' —she caught her breath a little—'if George casts me off, don't expect me to sing psalms and take it piously. I don't know myself just lately—I seem quite strange to myself.'

And Janet, glancing at her sideways, wondered, indeed, where all that rosy-cheeked, ripe bloom had

gone, which so far had made the constant charm of Rachel Henderson. Instead, a bloodless face, with pinched lines, and heavy-lidded eyes! What a formidable thing was this 'love,' that she herself had never known, though she had had her quiet dreams of husband and children, like her fellows.

Rachel, however, would not let herself be talked with or pitied. She walked resolutely to the house, and went off to the fields to watch Halsey cutting and trimming a hedge.

'If he doesn't come before dark,' she said under her breath, to Janet, before setting off—'it will be finished. If he does——'

She hurried away without finishing the sentence, and was presently taking a lesson from old Halsey, in what is fast becoming one of the rarest of the rural arts. But in little more than half an hour, Janet, bringing in the cows, saw her return and go into the house. The afternoon was still lovely—the sky a pale gold with thin bars of gray cloud lying across it, and the woods all delicate shades of brown and purple, with their topmost branches clear against the gold. The old red walls and tiled roofs of the farm, the fields, the great hay and straw stacks, were all drenched in the soft winter light.

Rachel went up to her room, and sat down before the bare deal dressing-table which held her looking-glass, and the very few articles of personal luxury she possessed: a pair of silver-backed brushes and a hand-glass that had belonged to an aunt, a small leather

case in which she kept some modest trinkets—a pearl brooch, a bracelet or two, and a locket that had been her mother's—and standing on either side of the glass, two photographs of her father and mother.

There was a clock on the mantelpiece. 'Nearly four o'clock,' she thought; 'I'll give it an hour. He'd send—if he couldn't come, and he wanted to come. But if nothing happens—I shall know what to think.'

As this passed through her mind, she opened one of the drawers of the dressing-table, in which she kept her gloves and handkerchiefs. Suddenly she perceived at the back of the drawer, a small leathern case. The colour rushed into her face. She took it out and ran quickly down the stairs to the kitchen. Janet and the girls were busy milking. The coast was clear.

A bright fire, which Janet had just made up, was burning in the kitchen. Rachel went up to it and thrust the leathern case into the red core of it. Some crackling—a disagreeable smell—and the little thing had soon vanished. Rachel went slowly upstairs again, and locked the door of her room behind her. The drawer of the dressing-table was still open, and there was visible in it the object she was really in search of, when the little leathern case caught her eye—a small cloth-bound book marked 'Diary.'

She took it out, and sat with it in her hand, thinking. How was it she had never yet destroyed that case? The Greek cameo brooch it held—Dick Tanner's gift to her—how vividly she recalled her first evening alone at the farm, when she had dropped it into the

old well, and had listened to the splash of it in the summer silence. She remembered thinking vaguely, and no doubt foolishly, that the cameo would drop more heavily and more certainly without the case, which was wood, though covered with leather, and she had therefore taken the brooch out, and had probably put back the case absently into her pocket. And thence it had found its way back among her things, how she did not know.

The little adventure had excited and unnerved her. It seemed somehow of evil omen that she should have come across that particular thing at this moment. Opening the diary with a rather trembling hand, she looked through it. She was not orderly or systematic enough to keep a diary regularly, and it only contained a few entries, at long intervals, relating mostly to her married life—and to the death of her child. She glanced through them with that strange sense of unreality—of standing already outside her life, of which she had spoken to Janet. There were some blank pages at the end of the book; and, in her restlessness, just to pass the time and to find some outlet for the storm of feeling within, she began to write, at first slowly, and then very rapidly.

'He must have got my letter by now. I sent it by Janet this morning. He wasn't there—but by now he must have got home—he is probably reading it at this moment. Whatever happens to me—I want just to say this—to write it down now, while I can—I shall never blame George, and I shall always love him—with all my heart, with all my soul. He has the right

to say he can't trust me—I told him so in my letter this morning—that I am not fit to be his wife. He has the right—and very likely he will say it. The terrible thing is that I don't trust myself. If I look forward and ask myself: Shall I always feel as I do now?—I can't honestly be sure. There is something in me that wants change—always something new—some fresh experience. I can't even imagine the time when I shouldn't love George. The mere thought of losing him is awful—unspeakable. But yet—I will write it down frankly!—nothing has ever lasted with me very long. It is like the farm. I used to love every minute of the day, every bit of the work, however dull and dirty it was, and now—I love it still—but I seem already—sometimes—to be looking forward to the day when I shall be tired of it.

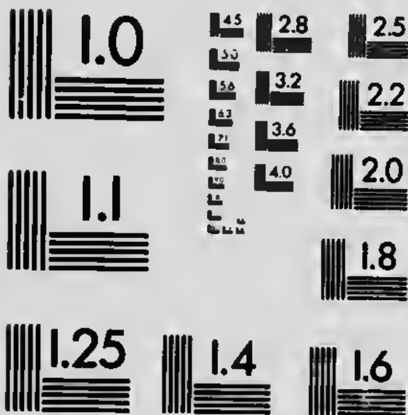
'Why am I made like that? I don't know. But I can't feel that I am responsible.

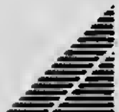
'Perhaps if George forgives me I shall be so happy that everything will change—my own character first of all. That is my hope. For though I suppose I am vain—though I like people to admire me and make much of me—I am not really in love with myself at all. If I were, I couldn't be in love with George—we are so different.

'I don't feel yet that I know him. Perhaps now I never shall. I often find myself wishing that he had something to confess to me. I would hardly let him—he should never humble himself to me. But to feel that I *could* forgive him something, and that he would

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)





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owe me something—would be very sweet, very heavenly. I would make it so easy for him. Is he feeling like that towards me? "Poor child—she was very young—and so miserable!"

'I mustn't write like this—it makes me cry. There is a beautiful yellow sunset outside, and the world seems very still. He must be here soon—or a messenger. Janet asked him not to wait.

'After all, I don't think I am so changeable. I have just been running myself down—but I don't really believe I could ever change—towards him. Oh, George!—George!—my George!—come to me!—don't give me up. George, darling, you could do anything with me you liked—don't despair of me! In the Gospel, it was the bad women who were forgiven because they loved " much." Now I understand why. Because love makes new. It is so terribly *strong*. It is either a poison—or life—immortal life. I have never been able to believe in the things Janet believes in. But I think I do now believe in immortality—in something within you that can't die—when once it has begun to live.'

And then she laid her pencil down, and sat with the book on her knee, looking towards the gold and gray of the sky—the tears running quietly down her cheeks.

Meanwhile, Hastings had come hurriedly into the shippen, where Janet and the two girls were milking. He came to stand beside her, silent, but fidgeting so that she presently looked up in astonishment.

'Did you want me?'

'I wanted to tell you something,' he said in a low voice, stooping over her. 'Don't let the girls hear. But that man's been seen again. The tramp.'

Janet started. She jumped up, asked Betty, who had finished, to take her place, and went with Hastings out of the barn.

'There are two or three people think they've seen him lately,' he said hurriedly. 'A man from Dobson's farm'—(the farm which lay between Great End and the village)—'who was on the hill yesterday evening, just before dark, was certain he saw somebody hanging about the back of the farm in a queer way——'

'Last night?' echoed Janet.

'Yes. And there are two people who remember meeting a man on the X—— road, who said he was going to Walton-End. And the police have been inquiring, but nobody at Walton-End knows anything about such a man. However, they have a description of him at last. A tall, dark fellow—gentlemanly manners—seems delicate. I don't like the look of it, Miss Janet. Seems to me as though it weren't just a tramp, hanging about for what he can steal. Do you know of anybody who has a down on Miss Hender on—who'd like to frighten her, or put blackmail on her?'

Janet considered. She was tempted to take the faithful fellow to some extent into her confidence, but she rapidly decided against it. She suggested that he should himself sleep for a few nights at the farm, and carefully examine the neighbourhood of it, last thing;

and that she should bicycle over to Millsborough at once, and have some further talk with the superintendent of police there.

'Besides—I'd like to be out of the way,' she thought. 'They won't want anybody hanging around!'

For there was growing steadily up in her a blissful confidence that all would be once more settled, and settled for good, before the night fell. Spectators were entirely out of place! Nor would she disturb Rachel's mind by any talk just then of what seemed to be a fresh attempt at terrorism on the part of her wretched husband. Hastings would be in charge for the moment, and Ellesborough would be on the spot for consultation before darkness had really set in.

So, as before, she told Hastings not to alarm Miss Henderson. But he was not to leave the farm-buildings, and possibly the superintendent of police would return with her. 'And then—either Rachel or the captain will have to tell the police the truth!'

Just as she was starting, Rachel came downstairs in some surprise.

'Where are you off to?'

'I have forgotten something I wanted from Millsborough. I shall be back in an hour or so.'

Rachel abstractedly nodded assent. The golden light from the west transfigured her, as she stood in the doorway. She was pale, but it seemed to Janet that she was no longer excited—that there was in her, too, something of the confidence which had sprung up in the heart of her friend. She had the look of one

for whom the Valley of the Shadow is past, and her beauty had never struck Janet as it struck her at that moment. Its grosser elements seemed all refined away. The girlish look was quite gone; she seemed older and graver; but there breathed about her 'a div'ner air.'

Janet, who was much the shorter, mounted on the step to kiss her. Caresses were not at all common between them, but Rachel returned it, and their eyes met in a quiet look which said what the lips forbore. Then Janet departed, and Rachel waved to her as she passed through the gate.

Hastings crossed the yard, and Rachel called to him,—

'Are you off soon?'

'No, miss. I shall sleep over the stable. That horse wants looking after.'

Rachel acquiesced, with a vague feeling of satisfaction, and Hastings disappeared within the stable opposite.

She went back into the sitting-room, which was still flooded with the last reflections from the western sky beyond the fields, though the light was fading rapidly, and the stars were coming out. What a strange effect it was—she suddenly noticed it afresh—that of the two large windows exactly facing each other in so small a room! One had an odd sense of being indoors and out at the same time; the Down on one side, the farm-yard on the other, and in the midst, the fire, the table and chairs, the pictures, and the red carpet, seemed all part of the same scene.

She made up the fire. She brought in a few Christmas

roses from a border under the kitchen window, and arranged them on a glass on the table. It was then time to draw the blinds. But she could not make up her mind to shut out the saffron sky, or the view of the road.

Something in the distance !—an approaching figure, and the noise of a motor-bicycle. She caught at a chair a moment, as though to steady herself; and then she went to the window, and stood there watching. He saw her quite plainly in the level light, and leaving his bicycle at the gate, he came towards her. There was no one in the yard, and before he entered he stood a moment, bare-headed, gazing at her, as she stood framed in the broad window. Everything that she wished to know was written in his face. The strong, sharply cut lips moved a little; the eyes fixed on her conveyed a message of ardent, protecting love, interfused with something of sorrow, of subsiding storm, which pierced her heart; so that a little sob broke the silence of the sitting-room. Behind the man's figure rose the red roofs of the farm buildings suffused with sunset, and the further spaces of golden sky that filled the hollow of the valley.

Meanwhile, to her lover outside she stood illumined within the familiar room. In that brief instant what his soul gave, hers implored; yet with a certain yearning and exquisite dignity, as though conscious that the love which breathed between them had indeed, as she had just written, 'made all things new.' And beyond her, seen through the further window, spread the darkening slopes of the down.

Then he opened the doors and closed them behind him. Without a word she seemed to glide over the room towards him; and now she was on his breast, gathered close against the man's passionately beating heart. Neither spoke—neither was able to speak.

Then—suddenly—a crash of breaking glass—a shot. The woman he was holding fell from Ellesborough's arms; he only just caught her. Another shot—which grazed his own coat.

'Rachel!'

It was a cry of horror. Her eyes were closing. But she still smiled at him, as he laid her on the floor, imploring her to speak. There was a stain of blood on the lips, and through them came a few shuddering gasps.

Hastings rushed into the room.

'Good God, sir!'

'A doctor!—Go for a doctor!' said Ellesborough hoarsely. 'No—she's gone!'

He sank down beside her, putting his ear to her lips. In vain. No sound was there. The smiling mouth had settled and shut. Without a murmur or a sigh, Rachel had passed for ever from this warm world and the arms of her lover, at the bidding of the 'fierce workman—Death.'

When Janet, a doctor, and the Superintendent of Police arrived, it was to find Ellesborough sitting motionless beside the body, while the two girls, a blanched and shivering pair, watched for Janet at the door.

'Can you throw any light upon it, sir?' said the Superintendent, respectfully, at last, when the doctor had finished his examination, and still Ellesborough did not speak.

The captain looked up.

'Her husband did it,' he said quietly; 'the man who was her husband.'

A shudder of surprise ran through the room.

'Did I hear you right, sir?' said the Superintendent. 'Miss Henderson passed for unmarried.'

'She married a man called Roger Delane in Canada,' said Ellesborough, in the same monotonous voice. 'She divorced him—for cruelty and adultery—two years ago. A few days since he waylaid her in the dark, and threatened her. I didn't know this till she wrote to me to-day. She said that she was afraid of him—that she thought he was mad—and I came over at once to see how I could protect her. We were engaged to be married.'

The Superintendent drew a furtive hand across his eyes. Then he produced his notebook, and took the evidence in order. Hastings came in from a lantern search of the farm-buildings, the hill-side, and the nearest fringes of wood, to report that he had found no traces of the murderer. The news, however, had by this time spread through the village, and the kitchen was full of persons who had hurried to the farm—Old Halsey and John Dempsey among them—to tell what they knew, and had seen. Ellesborough roused himself from his stupor, and came to assist the police in the

preliminary examination of witnesses and inspection of the farm. Once he and Janet passed each other, but they did not attempt to speak. Each indeed shrank from the other. A word of pity would have been merely a deepened agony.

But the farm emptied at last. A body of police had been sent out to scout the woods, to watch the roads and the railways stations. Ellesborough and Hastings had lifted the dead woman upon a temporary bier which had been raised in the sitting-room. Then Hastings had drawn Ellesborough away, and Janet, with a village mother, had rendered the last offices.

When Ellesborough re-entered, he found a white vision, lying in a bare room, from which all traces of ordinary living had been as far as possible cleared away. Only the Christmas roses which Rachel had gathered that afternoon were now on her breast. Her hands were folded over them. Her beautiful hair lay unbound on the pillow—Janet's trembling hands had refused to cut it.

At sight of Ellesborough, Janet rose from her kneeling posture beside the dead, as white and frozen almost as Rachel herself—with something in her hand—a small book. She held it out to Ellesborough.

'The Superintendent asked my leave to go into her room—in case there was anything which could help them. He brought me this. She had been writing in it. He asked me to look at it. I did—just enough to see—that no one had any right to it—but you. She

wrote it, I think, about an hour before you came. It was her last word.'

'I have her letter also,' said Ellesborough, almost inaudibly, as he took the book. 'You brought it—you kind woman! You were her good angel! God reward you!'

Then, at last, a convulsion of weeping showed in Janet's face. She laid her hand in his, and went noiselessly away.

Ellesborough sat beside his dead love all night. The farm was peaceful again after that rush of the Furies through it, which had left this wreck behind. Rachel's diary and letter lay before him. They were as her still living voice in his ears, and as the words sank into memory they pierced through all the rigidities of a noble nature, rending and kneading as they went. He recalled his own solitary hour of bitterness after her letter reached him. The story it contained had gone very hard with him, though never for one moment had he even in thought forsaken her. There was some comfort in that. But the memory which upheld him, which alone kept him from despair, was the memory of her face at the window, the sense still lingering in his own physical pulses of her young clinging life in his arms, of the fluttering of her poor heart against his breast, the exquisite happiness of her kiss—the kiss which death cut short.

No—he had not failed her. That was all he had to live by. And without it, it seemed to him, he could not have endured to live.

The two girls had sobbed themselves to sleep at last. But Janet did not sleep. Tears came naturally as the hours went by—tears and the agonised relief of prayer to one for whom prayer was a daily need of the soul. And in the early morning there flooded in upon her a strange consciousness of Rachel's spirit in hers—a strange suspicion that after all the gods had not wrought so hardly with Rachel. A few days before she had attended the funeral, in the village church, of a young wife just happily married, who had died in three days, of virulent influenza. Never had the words of the Anglican service pleased her so little. What mockery—what fulsome mockery—to thank God because 'it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this troublesome world!' But the words recurred to her now—mysteriously—with healing power. Had it been, after all, 'deliverance' for Rachel, from this 'troublesome world,' and the temptations that surround those who are not strong enough for the wrestle that Fate sets them—that a God appoints them? She had met her lover—after fear and anguish; and had known him hers, utterly and wholly hers, for one supreme moment. And from that height—that perfection—God had called her. No lesser thing could ever touch her now.

Such are the moments of religious exaltation which cheat even the sharpest griefs of men and women. Janet would decline from her Pisgah height only too soon; but for the time thoughts like these gave her the strength to bear.

When the house began to move again, she went down to Ellesborough. She drew him into the kitchen, made a fire, and brought him food. Presently she found calm enough to tell him many details of the previous days. And the man's sound nature responded. Once he grasped her hand, and kissed it—as though he thanked her dumbly again, for himself and Rachel. It seemed to Janet, indeed, as she sat by him, that Rachel had left her a trust. She took it up instinctively—from this first desolate morning. For there are women set apart for friendship—Janet was one of them—as others are set apart for love.

And with the first break of light on the new November day, the search parties in the hills came upon what they sought. Some one remembered the deserted hut—and from that moment the hunt was easy. Finally, in the dripping heart of the wood the pursuers found the murderer lying face downwards in front of the dead fire, with the revolver beside him with which he had taken first Rachel's life, and then his own. Some sheets of paper were scattered near him, on which he had written an incoherent and grandiloquent confession. But of such acts there is no explanation. They are the product of that black seed in human nature which is born with a man, and flowers in due time, and through devious stages, into such a deed as that which destroyed Rachel Henderson.

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