

ber, loved her better than she had ever loved her own mother. It was out—the terrible, guilty truth. She drew the covers over her face, held them tightly in her clenched, trembling fingers. Could even God forgive such wickedness? She tried to pray. The words would not come. Never in all her life had she been so desperately wicked. What if God should visit His wrath upon her? He had said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Would He—could He, that jealous God, understand her love for this woman who was no kin to her, whom she had never seen till eight weeks before?

Her tongue lay dry to the roof of her mouth, her shaking limbs grew heavy with fear. Yet—yet—yet—she was glad—glad this woman had come. The tense fingers relaxed, slowly; fearfully she peeped out over the covers at the daintily draped windows, the dressed-up furniture, the little pink roses that scrambled over each other on the creamy ground of the wall-paper.

And as quickly she closed her eyes against them. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," thundered in her ears.

The days that followed alternated with joy and fear. Tradition and the natural emotions of her heart battled fiercely. Even a new pale-blue lawn dress and a pretty girlish hat did not lighten her trouble. The girl's listless figure, the dull eyes, the pale, tightly drawn lips worried Mrs. Brennon considerably. She dosed her with blood medicine and blue mass pills, and insisted on Jonas taking the girl to market with him. At these times it was all Evelyn could do to keep from throwing her arms around her step-mother's neck and crying out how much she loved her.

But tradition is strong, and Evelyn was of the fibre that martyrs are made of. She went resolutely every day to her mother's grave over in the back orchard, and laid a bunch of flowers there. And this nearness to the stern, narrow woman who had borne her kept Evelyn in the shadow of the rigid, hard discipline she had been raised under. She had no way of knowing that the poor mother had been narrow, and cramped, and stern in her dull years of life because tradition had laid its bane on her, too. The cold, dead lips could not cry out to the flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone, that she had existed only because she did not know how to live, that her poor, cramped soul had shrivelled up because it had not known how to expand.

Warily the girl dragged her-elf away from the dull, shadowed spot back to the bright, cheerful farm-house with its neatly kept grounds and new air of homeliness, filled with emotions that she, poor child! could not understand. And there was no one to tell her, no

one to lift the burden of guilt from the young bleeding heart, no one to scatter the mists from the girlish mind, no one to whisper that joy needs no excuse for being.

Her step-mother, busy, complacent, had no experience of her own to help her understand what ailed the girl. That she was moping she saw at once, and tried in every way to brighten her up. She made Jonas let her use the new buggy, and coaxed and bullied him into getting her all sorts of girlish gewgaws: a string of beads, side-combs set with brilliants, a pair of open-work silk mits, a fan with spangles pasted on gauze, a white silk parasol!

Evelyn's delight over these things was unbounded. It made Mrs. Brennon feel good all over just to watch the dimpling face and the bubbling joy of her, as she opened the bundles and saw the precious things.

But still she moped. "Evie must have a beau." It was in determined voice that Mrs. Brennon made this announcement to Jonas as they sat one evening alone on the new porch.

Jonas took a fresh chew and crossed the other leg.

"George Black used to hang round here, but Liddy an' Jane Black didn't jest gee. Jane's a spankin' good cook, an' Liddy an' her had a fallin' out over some cakes they showed at the Fair. Evie held up for Liddy, an' George stuck by his ma, of course, an' him an' Evie ain't see each other to speak to sence, as I know on. I ain't never tasted seel pumpkin pies as Jane Black's. Liddy wouldn't ask her for the receipt. Liddy was awful sot in some things."

Next morning Mrs. Brennon hitched the horse to the new buggy and drove over to Jane Black's, three miles farther up the pike. She settled herself comfortably on Jane's side porch.

"There ain't much need of an introduction," she said with hearty pleasantness. "I've been trying to get over here before, but I've been so busy fixing things that I've not had time to return visits, let alone make 'em. And I ain't come visiting this time. I'm a fair cook myself, but Jonas has talked so much about your pumpkin pies. I've decided I've got a few things to learn yet. I'd like your receipt, if it ain't asking too much."

Mrs. Black's wrinkled, weather-beaten face relaxed into lines almost soft and youthful.

"Askin' too much! Why, Mrs. Brennon, you're welcome to it, an' anything I have. I know, though, it ain't any better'n yourn. Men jest get notions 'bout things. Jonas always did talk a heap about my pumpkin pies. Too much," she added, significantly. Mrs. Brennon nodded her understanding. She had no intention of discussing the first Mrs. Brennon. She had not come for that. Just then George came in from the field; per-

haps he thought the dinner-gong had sounded, perhaps he saw the Brennon rig drive in the gateway, perhaps he expected to find someone else besides the pleasant-faced matron on the porch. The latter was the reason Mrs. Brennon gave as she saw him look slyly about and his face suddenly fall.

A big, fine-looking young fellow, with good, alert face and merry eyes, he won Mrs. Brennon's heart at once. She greeted him heartily. They talked about the crops and the weather and the pests that plague a farmer almost to death, but both were thinking as hard as could be about "Evie," and somehow each divined what was in the other's mind. By the time Mrs. Black came out with the receipt George knew the second Mrs. Brennon better than he had ever known the first one.

He gave her a waggish twinkle over his mother's head as she renewed the discussion of the merits of Jane's pies, and a grateful smile as she insisted on their coming over to supper the very next evening.

Jonas smiled, too, then gave a low chuckle as Mrs. Brennon, at dinner, told about her visit and the arrangements made for the following day. Evelyn's face went red, then white, and all that day and the next she was very quiet; quiet but not moping, her step-mother noted with keen satisfaction. She herself helped her into the new blue lawn dress, tied the long ribbon sash, and arranged the soft hair so as best to show off the new side combs. And very sweet and winsome she looked as she stood slyly behind her stepmother and greeted their visitors.

The supper of fried chicken, hot biscuits, crisp cucumbers and tomatoes, plump peas and flaky mashed potatoes, golden-brown coffee and pumpkin pies made from the famous receipt, was one that, to use Jane Black's own words, "couldn't be beat." Jonas sat at the end of the table, twinkling and bristling with good humour, and George Black laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks at Jonas' jokes and yarns. The women laughed, too, and got in occasional jokes of their own that, like Jonas', had stood them in good stead many a time before. Evelyn was the only quiet one; like a shy, trembling little bird she sat, content with the wonderful life that came from her joyous, fast-beating heart.

But after supper she was strangely afraid, and hovered near her step-mother all the while. Mrs. Brennon looked un-

seemingly at the man's rueful face, and not till nearly time for their visitors to go did she lead him a hand. They were sitting on the new porch, looking off down the road that showed clear and white in the moonlight, Evelyn sitting silent between her step-mother and Jane, and George listening dumbly to Jonas' calculations on the winter price of hay.

"I declare if I ain't left my Paisley shawl down on the corn-bin in the barn!" exclaimed Mrs. Brennon, in a sharp, annoyed voice. "I am that careless! Evie, dear, just run down and get it this very minute—I set a heap by that shawl. It was mother's," and she plunged into a recital of the numerous accidents that had befallen the priceless heirloom.

Evelyn went almost on a run, and they were nearly to the barn before George had said a word; then he caught her in his big, strong arms and kissed determinedly the soft, flushed face and childishly quivering lips.

"Next to you, Evie, she's the best woman in the world," was what he said. "Wasn't it funny how she knew?" she breathed, rapturously.

"Knew what, Evie?" he whispered in teasing, happy voice.

"That I love you," she answered, blushing so softly and innocently. Her lover bowed his head humbly against the sweet upturned face.

"I'll be good to you, Evie," he said huskily. "I swear it, sweetheart."

She smiled joyously, and understood not at all the humility of the man before her purity and childish trust.

Mrs. Black had her bonnet on ready to start long before they came back, and, for all the thought they had given it, the precious Paisley shawl might still have been on the corn-bin, had it not lain safely all the while on its own shelf in Mrs. Brennon's clothes-closet.

Side by side, step-mother and daughter watched their company drive away, watched till the buggy was lost to view in the shadows in the distance. Then the older woman turned slowly.

"He's a fine young man," she said, more to herself than to the girl.

With a tempestuous, breathless little cry, Evelyn threw her arms around her step-mother's neck, kissed her, clung to her.

"I—I hated you at first," she cried, in a sharp, sobbing voice.

The woman patted the soft cheek, her eyes moist and very, very loving.

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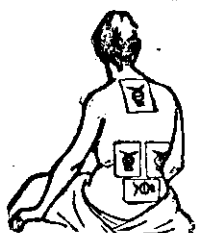
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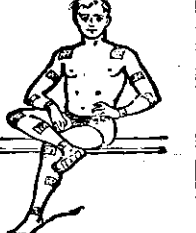
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