

### Too Late.

Gather the links that scattered lie,  
Bury them somewhere—a life is broken.  
Stir not the air with an idle sign,  
Lay on the grave no blossomed token.

None need remember and none regret  
With reproachful looks that a life is  
wasted;  
It is enough that a sun has set,  
That the wine was spilled ere a drop  
be tasted.

Bury them somewhere, nor stay to part  
The gold from the dross in the silent  
grave;  
Inscribe on the tombstone "This fragile  
heart  
Was afraid—and none was at hand to  
save."

—L. C. M. L.

## THE SIMPLE LIFE

BY MARGERY WILLIAMS

It seemed the last house on the road, which had stretched, flat and dusty and featureless, for the five miles since he left Birchville, edged by barren pasture and overgrown with brambles, and with here and there a stunted tree to break the monotony.

He slowed his bicycle down as he drew near, looking at the small square dwelling, with its whitewashed fence and green shutters and tiny unpainted barn at the back, and a little patch of cultivated ground in which, between rows of bean-poles and cabbages, he could see the moving flutter of a woman's skirt.

She had her back towards him stooping to gather something. She turned as he stopped at the gate, and he could see her hands full of green leaves and earthy roots.

"Can you tell me," he began, dismounting, and then paused as he saw her coming towards him.

When she moved, something about her struck him instantly as incongruous; he could not have told what it was. She was young, and might have been pretty, but that her hair was strained back too tightly from her thin face, giving her a look of plainness. She wore a pink cotton blouse, washed many times and faded, and a short cloth skirt, that sagged ungracefully at the back.

"I'm going to ask you," he said as she came near, "to let me have a drink at your pump and then put me on the right road to Allentown."

When she spoke the incongruity resolved itself instantly. She had the voice of his own native city, clear-cut, educated.

"This is the Allentown road," she said. "And won't you come in, please? The pump is just round at the side."

She held open the gate, and he leaned his bicycle against the fence



"This is the Allentown road," and followed her in. There was a tin dipper on the pump; he filled it and drank. The water tasted good after seven miles of dusty riding.

While he was drinking he observed her again. There was a curious restlessness in her face, a look at once eager and disappointed. It was the expression that comes to those who have watched empty roads for a long time.

He glanced at her hands. They were earthstained and squared at the finger tips by outdoor toil, and they, too, had the same nervous lines, the same tired wistfulness.

"I suppose it is very hot, riding," she said as he set the dipper down.

"Scorching!" He looked about him at the tidy garden patch with its lines of beans and tomatoes unobtrusively among the sober green and brown; a garden essentially utilitarian.

"You have a nice place here," he said.

"Yes. It's very quiet." She dropped the lettuce she was holding into a half-filled bucket that stood near. Her eyes met his, and there was something childish in their look, almost an appeal.

She hesitated a moment, then said: "Allentown is six miles from here. Won't you come into the house and have some tea before you go on? I was just going to make it."

He looked at his dusty boots.

"I am alone just now," she said, "and it's so quiet here—no one ever comes. One is glad to see anybody."

He murmured some vague thanks as she turned abruptly, averting her head, and followed her up a little trodden path to the open door. It was a two-roomed cottage with a tiny lean-to shed at the back, built for a kitchen. She slipped past to it, and he could hear her dragging the kettle across the stove, clinking cups and saucers.

Left to himself a moment he looked about him with swift, observant eyes. Every thing in the room was very plain, very simple, spotlessly clean; whitewashed walls and bare floor and the scantiest of plain-made furniture. There were one or two good pictures, oil sketches; some marigolds in a bowl on the mantel-shelf, near an old pewter jug; a row of books on a long shelf against the wall.

A man's straw hat lay on a chair, frayed and shabby and burnt by the sun, and he seemed to see intuitively the man who wore it. The room seemed to speak to him, its ascetic bareness, its uncompromising utility.

He moved to the book shelf, knowing in advance what books he would find there. The whole house laid bare its story to him frankly on entry, and the story of the wistful, restless-faced woman with the city voice.

His gaze traveled along the titles, some familiar, some unfamiliar, and as he turned away again he caught sight of a small framed portrait, an engraving, hung on the wall. His mouth curved curiously as he looked at it.

The girl came in from the kitchen, carrying a teapot and some cups.

"There isn't any cake," she said. "I'm so sorry, but we don't have company often. And you can eat bread and butter, can't you? And there's fruit."

She was making little journeys to and from the kitchen while she talked.

"I know it's queer, asking you in like this, but you don't mind, do you? And we're quite strangers, so it doesn't matter. One so seldom sees guests here, one likes to make the most of them!" She laughed, but he could read the nervous restlessness in her voice, the hunger born of monotony.

"Won't you pull the chair up?—that's right. Do you take sugar? It's an age since I poured out tea for anyone!"

There was almost a defiance in her friendliness, her frankness, a reckless eagerness to make the most of this chance hour's companionship.

She ate scarcely anything herself; all the time she was watching him, listening to him, chatting in a quick detached way about one thing and another.

Gradually there grew up for him in her face, her manner, something quaintly childish, infinitely pitiful. All the loneliness of her life spoke to him wistfully, tentatively, in this room with its unhomelike furnishing, its air of emptiness.

When he had finished she still kept pressing him to take more. His hand moved unthinkingly to his coat pocket,

and she said at once: "Yes, do smoke! I do wish you would."

He lit his pipe.

"Do you live here all the year round?" he asked.

"Yes. Summer and winter."

"Not alone?"

She flushed very slightly. "My husband is away to-day. He is up in the city. Generally he is at home. I expect him back in a little while."

He looked round him again at the bare room at her, sitting there with her restless face, her work hardened hands, and risked all his psychological insight in one simple cast.

"Why, dear girl, why did you do it?"

She laughed.

"Why? O, it's simple, isn't it! So you know!" She leaned back, her fingers gripping the chair edge. "It's all written out for you; you can just come right in here and read it. I suppose I did it because I was a fool—a fool—a fool! There I guess you wonder at my sitting here saying it to you, but I've got to just that point I'd say it to anyone—just anyone at all that came along!"

The childishness went from her face. She rose, pushed her chair aside, and walked about the room.

"I guess I don't have to tell you anything, do I? I was young, and I didn't know anything, and it all sounded very nice and beautiful, and I wanted to try it. I thought it would work. A two-roomed cottage and some books and an acre of ground."

Well, I've found it out. Isn't it funny, isn't it humorous, the sort of thing you read about in books! My God! Do you know when you came along to-day I'd got to such a pitch—I was nearly crazy. I felt I had to have someone to speak to—someone to talk to—just anyone at all, so long as it was a stranger, I could tell it all to and then have them go away and forget every word. And if you hadn't come in I'd have made you, if I had to go down on my knees to you! Isn't that shameless! Don't you guess I'm crazy?"

She had spoken quickly, breathlessly, as though every moment were of value and she had to get it all out before he should go his traveler's way and leave her. Now, as she stopped short her fingers went to the chair-back and clung to it, working nervously.

"How old are you?" he said.

"How old do you think?"

"Thirty."

She laughed again.

"Yes, I know you'd guess that! I'm 25. That's what it's done for me. I used to be pretty. You wouldn't guess it, would you? Look at my hands, aren't they lovely? And I've had four years of it—four years!"

"It was all right at first; I liked it. I thought it would go always, but it didn't. I found it out. If anyone had told me that three years ago, I'd have laughed. I wouldn't have believed it."

"But I've found it out. He hasn't; he thinks it's all right still; and he'll never know—that's the funny part. I care just that much for him still—that I'd hate to have him find it out to know it was all a big, mad failure. So I've got to stick to it; only sometimes—sometimes—"

She moved nearer to him across the bare floor.

"I'm glad you came to-day," she said. "I'm so glad, because if you hadn't I'd have gone crazy. I would! I wanted someone to tell it all to. Do you know, I've gone out sometimes and talked to the cabbages? Isn't that a symptom of insanity? Well, I've done that before now! And you're a stranger, we've never met before and we never will again, and you can go right off and forget it. Don't think me mad. Only I had to tell someone. Now I'll be all right; I've had it all out and over, and can go on for another four years!"

"You poor little soul," he said. "You poor little soul!" He held out his hand, and for a moment she clung to it.

"Yes, that was it—to tell someone. It just got on my nerves. Because I never see a soul here—never, never!"

I get sick for a strange face. Just this half-hour—hasn't it changed me? O, I know it! Am I the same woman you met at the gate?"

It was true; he had seen it, even while she was talking. She led the way out to the garden.

"Look at my marigolds—aren't they dears? They grow better than anything else here. That's the Allentown road, but I'll walk a little way with you. I've got to fetch the cow in before supper time."

He walked beside her, leading his bicycle. It was near sundown, and the level surrounding pasture land was flooded with gold-green haze. Some poplars stood up flat against the sky-line, and the road stretched like a gray, empty scroll.

They walked very slowly and in silence. The cow was tethered near the roadside.

"I must leave you here," she said. "No, it's all right. I can manage. And you'll keep straight on; I don't think there are any turnings."

They shook hands again. And then



A lonely blur of pink.

it was that the real secret of the strange household, the one thing that she hadn't told him, rose pitifully and spoke.

"I shall never see you again," she said.

When he looked back, after riding a little distance, he could see her still, a lonely blur of pink among the green bushes. Behind her the cottage, small and square, caught the light on its shingled roof and whitewashed walls, like a monument set in the wilderness.—Black and White.

### Tea as Complexion Balm.

"You didn't know that tea was a complexion beautifier?" asked a young woman, noted among her friends for her brilliant coloring and fair skin, to a friend recently. "Well, it's a fact. I owe any good looks I may have to its use."

"I learned to drink it the winter I spent in Canada. Everyone drinks it there two or three times a day, and you know what beautiful complexions the Canadians have."

"It's just so with the English girls, the Russians, Norwegians and even the women of India—those of the better class—they all have nice coloring, and they all drink quantities of tea."

"None of your old-fashioned notions for me. I'm for tea all the time."

### New Floral Decorations.

A favorite arrangement much used in floral decorations for important houses is the huge bowls filled with masses of flowers, no set and regular design being permissible.

Superb porcelain jardinières, therefore, are placed on tables once devoted to a myriad of bibelots, but now severely bare, save for the bowl of flowers. Indeed, flowers play the most decorative part in the new house beautiful, and "the new art" so much talked about uses them as one of its most emphatic illustrations. Could anything in the world be more captivating.—Boston Herald.