

was looked upon by most young men of the neighborhood as a very brilliant young fellow.

Fred felt how far beyond him was this glib tongued young man. His own overalls were dusty and torn. His straw hat was somewhat frayed.

Don's clothes were tailor made, soft and gray.

Fred hands were rough and large. Don's were soft and white. Don took kodak pictures and smoked cigarettes. He plowed, fed cattle and husked corn. Why couldn't he be like this curly haired young man, with his tales of college.

He could and would, thought Fred. He would go to the University. He would then have soft hands, wear nice clothes and take pictures and talk of gay times.

As Fred rode slowly home that evening, for he had stayed longer than he intended, held by Don's thrilling talk he felt somewhat aggrieved that his life had been so weary and common but it would change.

Three days had passed since Fred's visit to Don Sanders, three days spent in the orchard trimming and pruning small apple trees and mowing the tall grass. He had just come out after supper to cut a strip of rank weeds which grew close to the hedge bordering the road. It was an old hedge, for many years untrimmed, and formed a thick impassible barrier towering above the trees of the orchard. The shadows cast by the sun, now descending in a red blaze, enveloped in shade the rows of trees, some green, some white with blossoms, that sloped upward toward the little cottage, nestled among the bushes and poplars.

Here and there an old gnarled skeleton of a tree with scarecrow, made of a discarded blue trousers and jacket spread its empty arms in warning to birds and rabbits.

Fred had leveled all the tall weeds and leaned his scythe against an old dead limb, he stood hacking at the loose cracking bark with his pruning knife.

The startled cry of a crow at the lower end of the hedge and the scurrying of a rabbit past him drew his attention down the road.

What had frightened them?

A wagon—for he could now distinguish the rumble of wheels and the steady plod of horses feet. As they came nearer and the horses slowed to a walk he could distinguish the sound of voices.

That heavy sonorous tone belonged to Banker Woods, and the nasal, high-pitched voice, reminding one of nails and scraping tin, belonged to Crooks, the hardware man.

The voices ceased for a moment, and then broke out again, as they came close. It was the hardware man who spoke first.

"So I understand, that poor woman has slaved her life away for that boy. She has scraped together a home for both of them, and now he's an idea he's cut out for college. Sad thing to leave his mother at her time of life all alone."

"It does seem very foolish of the boy," replied Woods. "I offered him a position in my bank the other day. Thought he'd accept it."

"Oh, well, that young scapegoat of a Sanders has turned his head. College made a fool out of him with his foppish hand and cigarettes."

"Too bad the boy associates with Sanders. He's young and easily led. His mother ought to object. The boy has a good enough education."

"Oh, she doesn't object enough to hurt his feelings. Mrs. Dirk was up at his mother's a few days ago, and the poor old woman felt pretty badly his going away. But she is too kind

to tell him what he ought to know."

"It's certainly hard on Mrs. Curran. Her life has been a dreary one. The boy has good traits in him. John Curran was a noble man, and I felt his son was just the man for my bank. Never liked young Sanders. Too flake and unsteady."

Fred listened, mouth open, hands holding his hat tightly. When the men had passed he sat down on a stump and with his elbows on his knees, his head resting in his hands.

His temples were throbbing violently and his cheeks burned furiously. A sickening disgust moved him. Everything seemed changed. He thought of Don and his light nonsense, his ribbons and his cigarettes. "College made a fool of him," rang in his ears. "Too bad he associates with him," "easily led" fired his face with shame. "The boy has good traits in him," made him despise Don and his airy ways and blush that he had ever envied so worthless a young fellow. An honest farmer boy his father a "noble man," and he had thought of going to college to work—no to have a good time, to have soft hands, to—but Fred could stand no more. He rose violently, pushed his hat over his eyes and with hands in his pockets, walked savagely toward the house. His head was in a whirl—the orchard was in bloom and the odor was soft and fragrant, but he did not know it. His steps became slower. He reached the gate. His mother was standing in the yard, her back toward him, looking toward the setting sun.

Her head was almost white. Her form was somewhat stooped and heavy. "Sad thing to leave his mother," "slaved her life," "her life has been a dreary one," stung him to the very soul. Twenty years she had toiled for him. Twenty years her form had been slowly bending beneath the weight of care. Twenty years her hair had been growing white. Twenty years she had suffered and toiled—for him.

The little home was silent, the bushes and flowers seemed listening to the beating of his heart. The trees were tall, straight and hushed, standing like silent sentinels over the little cottage. Only a dull glow remained in the west and the faint glimmering of a star broke the broad expanse of the heavens. The dainty perfume of the lilacs spread like a cloud of unseen incense over the spot.

Fred's mother turned and slowly picked her halting steps between the lilacs and the flowers and passed under the vine covered porch into the house.

A boy stood at the gate with pale lips and heaving breast, his hands grasping the bars. Slowly and cautiously he opened it and went noiselessly into the house and to his bed.

When Mrs. Curran rose next morning she found on the table a piece of wrapping paper, with these hurriedly scrawled words:

"I've gone to see Banker Woods to take the position. Want to be there early to catch him at home. Be back in time for breakfast."

She folded the paper slowly, while her face lighted with a dim expression of peace. Her eyes filled, but she shed no tears.

The window was open and the curtains were gently waving in the fresh morning breeze. She looked out upon the lawn. The sun had awakened the sparrows from their silence, and they twittered merrily in the plum and gooseberry bushes. The short tufted blue grass was covered with the snow bloom of the plum bush, the fragrant odor of falling blossoms, the mild perfume of the clustered lilacs were wafted through the wide open window a harbinger of peace and rest.

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