

"AND STILL THE SUN IS SHINING."

And still the sun is shining. The birds are singing. The grass grows green and the clouds sail on in an ocean of blue, but over it all the dark angel of death broods and watches. Is he always so terrible—this angel of death? Does he not sometimes come in as angel of mercy, clothed in fair garments of white, with healing in his wings? Oh, he is often kind to men; and he watches silently and patiently till life has become too hard to bear and the struggle too great to endure. Then he steals in softly when we do not hear him come, and lays a kind hand on eyes that are tired of earth, and breathes his gentle message, and is gone. And men say "Hush!" and hold their breath. But still the birds sing, the grass shows green and the white clouds sail on in an ocean of blue, and over it all the angel of death, bearing God's sunshine on his wings, broods and watches tenderly.

The church bell in the village has just tolled forty-six. The tradesmen and farmers, and the tall, rough boys who do not work have been standing out in the street listening. They count the strokes silently. They ask each other who is dead, and none knows. They wonder if it is old Grandma Mason, who has been sick for so long. But no one can tell them. When the bell stops tolling they say, "forty-six," and lounge back into the stores to talk it over, and to say, "Well, things must be so, in this world," and then to drift back again to plain farmers' talk of hogs and cattle, and crops.

It was a May day, beautiful, with the bright, warm sunshine, and the gentle breeze that seemed to tread the earth soft'y. The trees were all in leaf, and the long winding curves of the little creek trailed like a green serpent through the newly plowed corn fields.

It was a May day, fair and lovely, as only May days can be. And yet sunshine, and singing birds, and soft, seductive breezes do

not always speak of life. There is a whisper in them that lures one on to rest, in some fair, bright place that weary ones dream of.

It was such a day as would have roused all the old longing for freedom in the heart of poor Mrs. Gates; it would have made her grow cross and snappish to the boys because there was so much work for her to do; she would have cried perhaps because she was so tired and sick of the old struggle—only now she was lying all calm and untroubled and at rest in the little darkened sitting room she had swept and dusted with her own hands early that bright May morning.

It came so suddenly, just as she was getting dinner for the boys. They found her lying on the floor by the stove.

"If she had not worked so hard," the doctor and the neighbor women said. But now it was of no use.

And John Gates sat alone in the little darkened room, alone with the Presence thinking.

How happy they had been at first down in the little old house by the creek. If they had just stayed there and not tried to build the new house, she might have been with him yet. And now he had almost paid the mortgage—and yet she had worked so hard, maybe he might have made it easier for her. He was going to get those parlor chairs she wanted when he sold the colts—but now—it was pretty hard on her, to lose everything comfortable and just get the work. It was just hard for her and for him.

He gazed long on her white, still face and wondered at its calm and peacefulness. She looked as if she were happy. It came to him dimly that death must be kinder to her than he had been, and he turned away and whispered, "No, it ain't hard fur her; she's better off."

The village people heard that Janet Gates was dead almost with apathy. She was a farmer's wife, they said, and like them all she worked too hard. It was a pity, just when the boys needed her most, and when they were all settled in their new house on the hill.