

She had made their long ride down the valley very pleasant that morning; and at dinner — well, Esther had been so silent and old for years that he had forgotten that a woman could be, at one and the same time, so gay and so sensible, so tantalizingly kind and yet so distant as this one had been. He wished they were out on the road again. He believed he could talk better with the familiar lines in his hands. But the colt was tired, and the widow wanted to hear the band.

"Mrs. Wren," he began, at length; "as I told you before, I'm a very plain-spoken man; but I'll be jiggered if I know where to begin on what I want to say. I guess you know, though, what it is, don't you?" he asked appealingly.

"I don't know *how* I should know," she retorted coldly, averting her head.

"You don't know what I drove twenty miles before sunup for?" he burst out. "You don't know what I got that rubber-tired straddle-bug and the silver-plated harness for? And look at these clothes!" he went on excitedly, springing up and turning around for her inspection. "Look at that Panama with the checked band around it! Don't that mean anything? And look at these infernal shoes! I'll bet a dollar I have to cut 'em off to-night! And this collar! And this suit! Jerusalem! What I've suffered in 'em today; and then she don't know what they mean!" He slumped down beside her again, and fanned himself violently with his hat.

Mrs. Wren smiled in spite of herself. "There's other things to think of besides clothes," she told him soberly. "But, did you really get 'em, and the buggy for me?" she asked wistfully.

"You bet I did!" he affirmed; "and a lot more. You just would n't know the old place — that is, if you'd ever seen it. Trees all trimmed; new picket fences all painted; all round the house grubbed and seeded till it's as handsome —" He cast a speculative eye over the well-kept lawn about him. "Handsome than this," he continued with emphasis; "for it's got flowers all round the edges."

"You don't say?" she cried delightedly, clasping her hands.

"Yes, sir-ee!" And with water pipes coming from the windmill sticking up here and there all over it; and we've got a hose," he told her with boyish delight, "and I've laid more cement walks about the place than there is in the whole town of Yarrow. And the house —"

"And the house?" she prompted breathlessly, her face alight.

"Well, now, I don't just know about the house," he returned in pretended uncertainty. "You see, I ain't much up on such matters, so I got a feller from town to — to renovate, he called it; and by the Jumpin' John Rogers, he did it!"

"Did what?" she demanded anxiously.

"Why, renovate, to be sure," he told her gravely, though his gray eyes were twinkling. "He tore out partitions here, and slapped in fire-places there; he yanked off stoops and put on verandies; and he stuck windows in and bays out till I'll be blest if I don't get lost sometimes going up to bed."

"Oh!" Mrs. Wren breathed ecstatically.

"And then he turned in and slapped on paint and paper wherever they'd stick, and fixed the floors so blamed fancy that sometimes I find myself setting flat to admire 'em when I'd 'lowed to go on up stairs."

"Oh! Oh!" whispered Mrs. Wren tremulously. "And you did all this for me?"



QUT ON the street today the air throbs with many prayers and petitions; prayers of thought and word and deed and being; piteously tender prayers; fierce, tempestuous prayers; hard-wrung prayers of anguish and humility; mad, energetic prayers of buoyant joy. There are prayers of babes, if we will hear them; prayers of lovers, and prayers of those about to die. Let us listen and look, and a few of them will be made known to us.

There, between two policemen, goes a young man who is a murderer. In a few months he will be hanged; and we shall feel no remorse. Yet, there is some good stuff in him. His strong body is a broken contract to supply human wealth, and his mind a promise unfulfilled. He grew up unprotected in sloth and anger and bitterness, untutored in control. And now Society wreaks vengeance on the ugly passions it has engendered. Justice? No, for more than that is needed. Although he never prays, he is a prayer for scientific mercy.

Do you see that pale, bent woman in yonder doorway? She has hard, work-stained hands, and eyes dimmed by tears. She is not pretty and attractive. By working all day she has lost her power to please; and her husband has ill treated her. Her lips are dumb; for she will not speak of her misery, lest a prayer be overheard. Yet, she herself is a mighty prayer for tenderness and love.

And look! In that dark room there lies a cripple, bereft of healthy, useful days, bereft of a man's work in a busy world. He was hurt by a ruthless machine, belonging to employers who did not keep the law.

And look again! There is the young girl who sells you ribbons. She lives on four dollars a week, so we are frequently told. Perhaps her youth is garish and unlovely, because she has sold herself to buy the things her utmost toil can not purchase. What think you, are they not prayers — these two — for a purging of our industrial life, for a new culture and new conventions?

There are many more. Insanity prays daily for poise; disease and squalor, for health; ugliness, for beauty; sin, for religion; houses, for homes; yards, for gardens; suicide, for faith in life; crime, for the control that means strength; and little gray, gutter children, for a new birth in cleanliness and loving kindness, for a childhood guarded and guided, and for a youth wholesomely advised. All these are the prayers repeated from generation to generation with emphasis terrible and sublime. We can not be so deaf that we do not hear them. We dare not be so callous of heart that we do not answer them; for they are made to us.

It is our divine right to join hands with God; and by thought expressed and words spoken, by deeds faithfully wrought out, and by our being — made perfect, though with pain — to give back an ample answer.



"Yes; and one thing more," he told her soberly. "I've got a man and his wife working for me and living down in the old house; and if you come home with me, you shan't never do another hand's turn as long as you live; except tendin' the flowers, may be, and makin' pretty things like these," he amended, touching reverently the lace bordered handkerchief in her lap; but she snatched it from his hand and put it to her eyes.

"I don't deserve it," she moaned; "I don't deserve it."

"Drop that!" he commanded fiercely, dragging her hands from her face, "and listen to me. I ain't only half done. I've got to tell you something that I'd give my right hand if it never had happened."

"What?" she demanded anxiously, clutching his arm. "What has happened?"

"Oh! it ain't anything new," he explained bitterly. "It's about my wife, Esther."

"Don't!" she whispered; but he went on, unheeding:

"And, by Crickety! I'm going back right to the very beginning; and just you listen, Mrs. Wren, and keep me from butting my fool brains out against the stone wall when I come to the worst parts. Well, then, my folks was awful poor and always up to their ears in debt; so, when I married Esther I made up my mind that things with us was going to be different. I worked like a horse; so did she. We scrimped and saved, and soon got comfortable; that is, I did, but I was so all-fired busy and taken up with the fine stock and the new machinery I was getting that I didn't pay much attention to the house. And when she'd talk about new things for it or for herself, or about shuttin' up the chickens so's she could have flowers and things, I just brushed her aside as I would a gnat that was pestering me.

"She was a proud woman, Mrs. Wren, and a peace-loving one; and she did n't say much; just got silenter and worked along with what she had, putting three good meals a day on the table for me and the hands and keeping my ragged old clothes washed and patched the best she could. She got out of the way of ever going any place — ashamed of her clothes and the lumber wagon, I guess — and, in time, no one came to see us. She used to have the butter and egg money; but when she stopped going to town, I used that for the groceries.

"And so it went on for years. I put up big barns and had the best machinery and stock that money could buy — and I had plenty of it by this time — while she would n't have had anything but the old log house to live in, if her Pa had n't stayed with us a year before he died, and built a new one for her.

"Oh! I don't know why I was so blind!" he groaned remorsefully. "I always had a feeling way down somewhere under my hide-bound selfishness that, some time, we'd have things like other folks, and that Esther would have nice clothes like other women."

"You did? You really thought that?" Mrs. Wren asked tremulously.

He nodded. "But I waited too long. One night last winter I come home from town after dark and hollered for the lantern, as usual. I hollered again, pretty sharp, when she did n't come; and then I noticed that there was n't any light. I — I don't exactly like to think of that night, Mrs. Wren," he ended abruptly, his broad shoulders beginning to heave and his face to work grotesquely.

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