

"I will sometime," said David, absently.

She went over to his bed and beat up the bolster and made everything ready for him.

"You ought to have clean sheets and pillow-cases," she remarked confidently; "the negroes are worthless. Good night," she said, with her hand on the door, looking back at him timidly.

He sprang up and went over to her.

"Oh, mother! mother! mother!" he cried, and then he checked the useless words that came rushing in a flood.

"Good night! and thank you for coming. Good night! Be careful, I'll bring the candle, the stairway is dark. Good night!

"Oh, Gabriella! Gabriella!" he murmured as he went back to his table. He buried his head on his arms a moment, then, starting up, threw off his clothes, drank the mixture, and got into bed.

XX

AT dead of night out in a lonely country, what sound freezes the blood like the quick cry of an animal seized and being killed? The fright, the pain, the despair: whosoever has heard these notes has listened to the wild death-music of Nature, ages old.

On the still frozen air near two or three o'clock of next morning, such a cry rang out from inside the barn. There were the short rushes to and fro, round and round; then violent leapings against the door, the troughs, and sides of the stable; then mad plunging, struggling, panting; then a long, terrified, weakened wail, which told everything beyond the clearness of words.

Up in his room, perfectly dark, for the coals in the grate were now sparkless, David was lying on his back, sleeping heavily and bathed in perspiration. Overheated, he had pushed the bed covers off

from his throat; he had hollowed the pillow away from his face. So deep was the stillness of the house and of the night air outside, that almost the first sounds had reached his ear and sunk down into his brain: he stirred slightly. As the tumult grew louder, he tossed his head from side to side uneasily, and muttered a question in his broken dreams. And now the barn was in an uproar; and the dog, chained at his kennel behind the house, was howling, roaring to get loose.

Would he never waken? Would the tragedy which he himself had unwittingly planned and staged be played to its end without his hearing a word? (So often it is that way in life.) At last, as one who has long tugged at his own sleep, striving to rend it as a smothering blanket and burst through into free air, he sat up in bed, confused, listening.

"Dogs!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth.

He was out of bed in an instant, groping for his clothes. It seemed he would

never find them. As he dressed, he muttered remorsefully to himself:—

"I simply put them into a trap."

When he had drawn on socks, boots, and trousers, he slipped into his overcoat, felt for his hat, and hurried down. He released the dog, which instantly was off in a noiseless run, and followed, buttoning the coat about him as he went: the air was like ice against his bare, hot throat. Another moment and he could hear the dogs fighting. When he reached the door of the shed and threw it open, the flock of sheep bounded out past him in a wild rush for the open. He stepped inside, searching around with his foot as he groped. Presently it struck against something large and soft close to the wall in a corner. He reached down and taking it by the legs, pulled the sheep out into the moonlight, several yards across the snow: a red track followed, as though made with a broad dripping brush.

David stood looking down at it and kicked it two or three times.

"Did it make any difference to you whether your life were taken by dog or man? The dog killing you from instinct and famine; a man killing you as a luxury and with a fine calculation? And who is to blame now for your death, if blame there be? I who went to college instead of building a stable? Or the storm which deprived these prowlers of nearer food and started them on a far hunt, desperate with hunger? Or man who took you from wild Nature and made you more defenceless under his keeping? Or Nature herself who edged the tooth and the mind of the dog-wolf in the beginning that he might lengthen his life by shortening yours? Where and with what purpose began on this planet the taking of life that there might be life? Poor questions that never troubled you, poor sheep! But that follow, as his shadow, pondering Man, who no more knows the reason of it all than you did."

The fighting of the dogs had for the first few moments sounded farther and

farther away, retreating through the barn and thence into the lot; and by and by the shepherd ran around and stood before David, awaiting orders. David seized the sheep by the feet and dragged it into the saddle-house; sent the dog to watch the rest of the flock; and ran back to the house, drawing his overcoat more tightly about him. As quickly as possible he got into bed and covered up warmly. Something caused him to recollect just then the case of one of the Bible students.

"Now I am in for it," he said.

And this made him think of his great masters and of Gabriella; and he lay there very anxious in the night.

XXI

TWILIGHT had three times descended on the drear land. Three times Gabriella, standing at her windows and looking out upon the snow and ice, had seen everything disappear. How softly white were the snow-covered trees; how soft the black