

THE SOILED ROSE By D. H. LAWRENCE

IT was a mile nearer through the wood. Mechanically, Syson turned up by the forge and lifted the field-gate. The blacksmith and his mate stood still, watching this self-assured trespasser. But Syson, dressed in stylish tweeds, looked too much a gentleman to be accosted. They let him go on in silence across the small field to the wood.

There was not the least difference between this morning and those of the bright springs, six or eight years back. White and sandy-gold fowls still scratched round the gate, littering the earth and the field with feathers and scratched-up rubbish. Between the two thick holly bushes in the wood-hedge was the hidden gap, whose fence one climbed to get into the wood ; the bars were scored just the same by the keeper's boots.

Syson was extraordinarily delighted. It is a wonderful thing, at twenty-nine, to have a Past. Like an emigrant he had returned, on a visit to the country of his past, to make comparison. The hazel still spread glad little hands downwards, the bluebells here were still wan and few, among the lush grass and in shade of the bushes.

The path through the wood, on the very brow of a slope, ran easily for a time. All around were twiggy oaks, just issuing their gold, and floor spaces diapered with woodruff, with patches of dog-mercury and tufts of hyacinth. The two fallen trees still lay across the track. Syson jolted down a steep, rough slope, and was again upon the open land, this time looking north as through a great window in the wood. He stayed to gaze over the level fields of the hill-top, at the village which strewed the bare upland plain as if it had tumbled off the passing waggons of civilisation, and been forsaken. There was a forlorn modern little grey church, and blocks and rows of red dwellings lying at random ; at the back, the twinkling headstocks of the pit, and the looming pit-hill. All was naked and out-of-doors, not a tree ! It was quite unaltered since his childhood.

Syson turned, satisfied, to follow the path that sheered downhill

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into the wood. He started. A keeper was standing a few yards in front, barring the way.

“Where might you be going this road, sir?” asked the keeper. The man was inclined to be offensive. Syson looked at him with an artist’s impersonal, observant gaze. The keeper was a young man of four or five and twenty, ruddy and comely. He had large, dark blue eyes, which now stared aggressively. His black moustache, very thick, was cropped short over a small, rather self-conscious, almost feminine mouth. In every other respect the man was unusually virile. He was just above middle height; the strong forward thrust of his chest, and the perfect ease of his erect, proud carriage gave one the feeling that he was taut with life, like the thick jet of a fountain balanced at ease. He stood with the butt of his gun on the ground, staring insolently and questioningly at Syson. The dark, restless eyes of the trespasser, examining the man as if he were a tree or a flower, troubled the keeper and made him angry.

“Where’s Naylor, and his velveteen skirts? He can’t be dead——?” Syson implored.

“You’re not from the House, are you?” inquired the keeper. It could not be, since everyone was away.

Syson’s mobile mouth broke into a laugh.

“No, I’m not from the House,” he said. It seemed to amuse him.

“Then are you going to answer my question?” said the keeper disagreeably.

“Which? Oh, certainly—I beg your pardon!” Syson was laughing all the time. “I am going to Willey Water Farm.”

“This isn’t the road.” The man was certainly a bully.

“I think so. Down this path, paddle through the water from the well, and out by the white gate. I could go blindfold.”

“Happen so, but you’d be trespassing all the same, did you know that?”

“Did I? I say, how strange! I am sorry. No, I used to come so often, in Naylor’s time, I had forgotten. Where is he, by the way?”

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“ Crippled with rheumatism,” the keeper answered reluctantly.

“ I say ! ” Syson exclaimed in pain.

“ You’d happen tell me what your name is ? ” asked the keeper, with a new intonation.

“ John Adderley Syson, late of Cordy Lane.”

“ As used to court Hilda Millership ? ”

Syson’s eyes opened with a curious smile. He nodded. There was a very awkward silence.

“ And you will introduce yourself ? ” asked Syson.

“ Arthur Pilbeam—Naylor’s my uncle,” said the other.

“ You live here in Nuttall ? ”

“ I’m lodgin’ at my uncle’s—at Naylor’s.”

“ I see ! ”

“ Did you say you was goin’ down to Willey Water ? ” asked the keeper.

“ Yes.”

“ Well, at that rate I should like you to know—as *I’m* courtin’ Hilda Millership.”

The keeper looked at the intruder with a blaze of defiance, almost pitiful. Syson opened new eyes of astonishment.

“ No-o ? ” he cried, with incredulous irony. The keeper went scarlet to the ears. But :

“ And she,” he said, huffed, “ is keeping company with me.”

“ Good God ! ” exclaimed Syson. The other man waited uncomfortably.

“ And is it a fixed thing between you ? ” asked the intruder.

“ What do you mean by that ? ” retorted the other, sulkily.

“ Well—does she—do you think of getting married before long ? ”

It was evidently a sore point. The keeper kicked at a sod.

“ We sh’d ha’ been married afore now, if——” Pilbeam was full of resentment.

“ Ah ! ” Syson expressed his understanding in the monosyllable.

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“ I’m married myself,” he added, after a time.

“ You are ! ” said the other, incredulously, with a touch of contempt.

Syson laughed in his brilliant, quick way.

“ This last fifteen months,” he said.

The keeper gazed at him with heavy, sulky, inscrutable gaze, apparently thinking back, and making connection.

“ Why, what of it ? ” asked Syson.

“ Nothing,” said the other sulkily, turning away.

There was silence for a moment.

“ Ah well ! ” said Syson, “ I will leave you. I suppose you don’t intend to turn me back.” The keeper paid no attention. The two men stood high in an open space, grassy, set round with small sheaves of sturdy bluebells ; a little open platform on the brow of the hill. Syson took a few indecisive steps forward, then stopped.

“ I say, how lovely ! ” he cried.

He had come in full view of the downslope. The wide path ran from his feet like a river, and it was full of bluebells, save for a green winding thread down the centre, where the keeper walked. Like a stream the path opened into azure shallows at the levels, and there were pools of bluebells, with still the green thread winding through, like a thin current of ice-water through blue lakes. And from under the twig-purple of the bushes swam the shadowed blue, as if the flowers lay in flood water over the woodland.

“ Ah, isn’t it lovely ! ” Syson exclaimed, a world of regret in his tones ; for this was his past, the country he had abandoned, in which he was now only a visitor. Wood pigeons cooed overhead, and the air was full of the brightness of myriad birds singing.

“ If you’re married, as you reckon you are, what do you keep writing to her for, and sending her all them poetry books and things ? ” asked the keeper. Syson stared at him in astonishment for a time, then he began to smile :

“ You see,” he said, “ I was not aware that she—that you . . . ”

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Again the keeper flushed scarlet.

“ But if you reckon to be married——” he charged.

“ Well—— ? ” queried the other mockingly.

But, looking down the blue, beautiful path, Syson felt he had been wrong. “ I have been keeping her—a sort of dog-in-the-manger,” he said to himself. Aloud :

“ She knows I’m married and all that,” he said.

“ What do you keep on with *her* for, then ? ” urged the keeper.

“ But why shouldn’t I ? ” Syson returned. He knew quite well. There was silence. Syson suddenly struck his thigh with his gloves, and drew himself up.

“ Good-day,” he said, bowing, very polite and distant. He strode off downhill. Now, everything seemed to him ironic : the two sallows, one all gold and perfume and murmur, one silver green and bristly, reminded him that here he had taught her about pollination. And now, in the paths sacred to their youth, he was walking under a smart of condemnation from a game-keeper, for interfering with the latter’s girl.

“ Ah well,” he said to himself ; “ the poor chap seems to have a grudge against me because she won’t marry him. I’ll do my best on his behalf.” He grinned to himself, being in a very bad temper.

The farm was less than a hundred yards from the wood’s edge. Almost, the wall of trees seemed to form the fourth side to the open quadrangle. The house faced the wood. With many pangs, Syson noted the plum-blossom falling on the daffodils and on the profuse, coloured primroses, which he himself had brought here and set. How they had increased ! There were thick tufts of scarlet, and pink, and pale purple primroses, under the plum-trees. He saw somebody glance at him through the kitchen window, heard men’s voices.

The door opened suddenly : } very womanly she had grown !
He felt himself going pale.

“ You ?—Addy ! ” she exclaimed, and stood motionless.

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“ Who ? ” called the farmer’s voice. Men’s low voices answered. Those low voices, curious, and almost sneering, roused the ironic spirit in the visitor. Smiling brilliantly at her he bowed low :

“ Myself—in all humility,” he said.

The flush burned very deep on her cheek and throat.

“ We are just finishing dinner,” she said.

“ Then I will stay outside.” He made a motion to show that he would sit on the red earthenware pipkin that stood near the door among the daffodils, and contained the drinking water.

“ Oh no, come in,” she said hurriedly. He entered with reluctance. In the doorway, he glanced swiftly over the family, and bowed. Everyone was confused. The farmer, his wife, and the four sons sat at the coarsely laid dinner-table, the men with arms bare to the elbows.

“ I am sorry I interrupt your lunch,” said Syson.

“ Don’t mention it. Sit down and have a bit,” said the farmer, trying to be free and easy.

“ It’s early for me,” said Syson.

He noticed the women were uncomfortable, and would rather he did not accept.

“ Why, what time *do* you reckon to have your dinner ? ” asked Frank, the second son, insolently.

“ Dinner ?—usually at half-past seven.”

“ Oh—ah—— ! ” sneered the sons altogether.

They had once been intimate friends with this young man.

“ We’ll give Addy something when we’ve finished,” said the mother, an invalid.

“ Do not let me be any trouble. Lunch does not matter to me.”

“ He allus could live on fresh air an’ scenery,” laughed the youngest son, a lad of nineteen.

Syson went round the buildings, and into the orchard at the back of the house, where daffodils all along the hedgerow swung like yellow, ruffled birds on their perches. He loved the place extraordinarily, the hills ranging round, with bear-skin woods

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covering their giant shoulders, and small red farms like brooches clasping their garments ; the blue streak of water in the valley, the bareness of the pasture on the home-hills, the sound of myriad-threaded bird-song, which went mostly unheard. To his last day, he would dream of this place, when he felt the sun on his face, or saw the small handfuls of snow between the winter twigs.

Hilda was very womanly. In her presence, he felt boyish. She was twenty-nine, as he was, but she seemed to him much older. As he was fingering some shed plum-blossom on a low bough, she came to the back door to shake the tablecloth. Fowls raced from the stackyard, birds rustled from the trees. Her dark auburn hair was gathered up in a coil like a crown on her head. She was very straight, imperious in her bearing. As she folded the cloth, she looked away over the hills.

Presently Syson returned indoors. She had prepared eggs and curd cheese, stewed gooseberries and cream.

“ Since you will dine to-night,” she said, “ I have only given you a light lunch.”

“ It is perfectly arcadian and delightful,” he said. “ I almost look for your belt of straw and ivy buds.”

Still they mocked each other with irony. He knew it hurt her. But—she was courting the game-keeper and she should marry him.

In his private heart he was thinking, “ What a woman she is—what a lot older she is ! ” He was afraid of her now, seeing her so much altered. Her curt, sure speech, her proud, hard bearing, her reserve, were unfamiliar to him. He admired again her grey-black eyebrows, and her lashes ; he quarrelled with her set mouth, with the expressionless composure of her face. Their eyes met. He saw, in the beautiful grey and black of her glance, tears and bitterness, and at the back of all, calm acceptance of sorrow.

“ She’s much older than I,” he said to himself. With an effort he kept up the ironic manner.

She sent him into the parlour while she washed the dishes. The long low room was refurnished from the Abbey sale, with

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chairs upholstered in claret-coloured rep, many years old, and an oval table of polished walnut, and a fresh piano, handsome, though still antique. In spite of the strangeness, he was pleased. Opening a high cupboard let into the thickness of the wall, he found it full of his books, his old lesson-books, and volumes of verse he had sent her, English and German. The daffodils in the white window-bottoms, shone across the room, he could almost feel their rays. The old glamour caught him again. His youthful watercolours on the walls no longer made him grin ; he remembered how fervently he had tried to paint for her, twelve years before.

She entered, wiping a dish, and he saw again the bright, kernel-white beauty of her arms.

“ You are quite aristocratic here,” he said, and their eyes met.

“ Do you like it ? ” she asked. It was the old, low, husky tone of intimacy. He felt a quick change beginning in his blood.

“ Ay,” he nodded, smiling at her like a boy again. She bowed her head.

“ This was the countess’s chair,” she said in low tones. “ I found her scissors down here between the padding.”

“ Ay— ! Show me.”

Quickly, with a lilt in her movement, she fetched her work-basket, and together they examined the long-shanked old scissors.

“ What a ballad of dead ladies ! ” he said, laughing, as he fitted his fingers into the round loops of the countess’s scissors.

“ You are the only man who could use them,” she said, with a little thrill. He looked at his fingers, and at the scissors :

“ The only one of *your* men, perhaps,” he said, putting the scissors aside with a sudden darkening in his soul. She turned to the window. He noticed the fine, fair down on her cheek and her upper lip, and her soft, white neck, like the throat of a nettle flower, and her fore-arms, bright as newly blanched kernels. She was being discovered afresh to him, who thought he knew her so thoroughly.

“ Shall we go out awhile ? ” she asked softly.

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“ Ay!” he answered. But the predominant emotion, that flooded over the daring and the ecstasy in his heart, was fear. Something big was going to happen to him and to her, unless he took care, his soul warned him.

She put no covering on her head, merely took off her apron, saying : “ We will go by the larches.” As they passed the old orchard, she called him in to show him a blue-tit’s nest in one of the apple-trees, and a sycock’s in the hedge. He rather wondered at her surety, for she had been one to go dreamily unobservant.

“ Look at the apple buds,” she said, and he then perceived myriads of little scarlet balls among the drooping boughs. Watching his face, she laughed. He was dumb and stupid, and at the bottom, afraid. If he were going to fall in love with this old lover, whose youth had marched with his as stately, religious nights march beside reckless days, then it would be a love that would invade many lives and lay them waste. His soul realised this, not his reason. His mind was almost paralysed.

For her part, she was brilliant as he had not known her. She showed him nests : a jenny wren’s in a low bush.

“ See this jinty’s !” she exclaimed.

He was surprised to hear her use the local name. She reached carefully through the thorns, and put her finger in the nest’s round door.

“ Five !” she said. “ Teenty little things.”

She showed him nests of robins, and chaffinches, and linnets, and buntings ; of a wagtail beside the water :

“ And if we go down, nearer the lake, I will show you a king-fisher’s”

“ Among the young fir-trees,” she said, “ there’s a throstle’s or a blackie’s on nearly every shelf—hundreds. The first day, when I had seen them all, I felt as if I mustn’t go in the wood. It seemed a city of birds : and in the morning, hearing them all, I thought of the clamour of early markets. I was afraid to go in my own wood.”

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The wasted poet in him did honour to her. He felt weak as water in her hands. She did not mind his silence, but was always a brilliant hostess entertaining him in her wood. As they came along a marshy path where forget-me-nots were opening in a rich blue drift :

“ We know all the birds, but there are many flowers we can’t find out,”—“ I can’t find out,” she quickly corrected herself.

“ We ? ” he questioned.

She looked dreamily across to the open fields that slept in the sun :

“ I have a lover as well, you know,” she gently reprimanded him, dropping again into the intimate tone.

This woke in him the spirit of combat.

“ I think I met him. He is very bonny—also in Arcady.”

Without answering, she turned into a dark path that led up hill, where the trees and undergrowth were very thick.

“ They did well,” she said at length, “ to have various altars to various gods, in old days.”

“ Ah yes ! ” he agreed. “ And which have you turned to now ? ”

“ Do you think I have left the old one ? ” she asked, pathetically.

“ No, not really. It was your highest, the one you kneeled at with me——”

“ But *you* have left it,” she said. He caught his breath, with a quick, painful frown.

“ Ay—but the man doesn’t matter so much,” he said. There was a pause.

“ And you are mistaken. I *have* turned away,” she admitted, in a low, husky tone, averting her face from him.

There was silence, during which he pondered. The path was almost flowerless, gloomy. At the side, his heels sank into soft clay.

“ No,” she said, very slowly, “ I was married the same night as you.”

He looked at her a quick question.

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“ Not legally, of course,” she replied, in the same grave, deliberate manner. “ But—actually.”

“ ‘ Tandaradei,’ ” he mocked.

She turned to him brightly.

“ You thought I could not ? ” she said. But the flush was deep in her cheek and throat, for all her seeming assurance.

Still he would not say anything.

“ You see,”—she was making an effort to explain—“ *I* had to understand also, to keep pace.”

To keep pace, she meant, with Syson, whom she loved with the deepest part of her nature.

“ And does it amount to much, this *understanding* ? ” he asked, cynically. She was shocked.

“ A very great deal—does it not to you ? ” she replied.

“ And you are not disappointed ? ”

“ Far from it ! ” Her tone was deep and sincere.

“ Then you love him ? ”

“ Yes, I love him.” She was tender, and gentle, in her thought of the keeper.

“ Good ! ” he said.

This silenced her for a while.

“ Here, among his things, I do love him truly,” she said.

His conceit would not let him be silent.

“ And me ? ” he asked, bitingly.

“ So different ! ” she cried.

He laughed shortly.

“ You turned Opportunist ? ” he said.

“ ’Tis your doing,” she replied.

For a moment the hearts of these two idealists stood still with despair.

They came to a place where the undergrowth shrank away, leaving a bare, brown space, pillared with the brick-red and purplish trunks of pine trees. On the fringe, was the sombre green of elder trees, with flat flowers in bud, and bright, unfurling

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pennons of fern. In the midst of the bare space stood a keeper's log hut. Pheasant-coops were lying about, some occupied by a clucking hen, some empty.

Hilda walked over the brown pine needles to the hut, took a key from among the eaves and opened the door. It was a bare wooden place with a carpenter's bench and form, carpenter's tools, an axe, snares, traps, some skins pegged down, everything in order. Hilda closed the door. Syson examined the weird flat coats of wild animals, that were pegged down to be cured. She pressed some knots of wood in the side wall, and an opening appeared in the bare logs, disclosing a second, small apartment.

"Is he a romantic, then?" asked Syson, ponderingly.

"Perhaps so! He is very curious—up to a certain point, cunning—in a nice sense—and inventive, and so thoughtful—but not beyond a certain point."

She pulled back a dark green curtain. The apartment was occupied almost entirely by a large couch of heather and bracken, on which was spread an ample rabbit-skin rug. On the floor were patchwork rugs of cat-skin, and a red calf-skin, while hanging from the wall were other furs. Hilda took down one, which she put on. It was a cloak of rabbit-skin edged with white fur, and with a hood, apparently of the skins of stoats. She laughed at Syson from out of this barbaric mantle, saying :

"What do you think of it?"

"Ah——! I congratulate you on your man," he replied.

"And look!" she said.

In a little jar on a shelf were some sprays, frail and white, of the first honeysuckle.

"They will scent the place at night," she said.

He looked round curiously.

"Then where does your keeper come short?" he asked. She gazed at him for a few moments. Then, turning aside—

"The stars aren't the same with him," she said, intensely, "nor the forget-me-nots. You could make them flash and quiver,

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and the forget-me-nots come up at me like phosphorescence. I have found it out—it is true.”

He laughed, saying :

“ After all, stars and forget-me-nots are only luxuries.”

“ Ay,” she assented sadly. “ It is a pity.”

Again he laughed quickly at her.

“ Why ? ” he asked, mockingly.

She turned swiftly. He was leaning against the small window of the tiny obscure room, and was watching her, who stood in the doorway, still cloaked in her mantle. His cap was removed, so she saw his face and head distinctly in the dim room. His black, straight, glossy hair was brushed clean back from his brow. His black eyes were playing a polite game with her, and his face, that was clear and cream, and perfectly smooth and healthy, was flickering with polite irony.

“ You are very different,” she said bitterly.

Again he laughed.

“ I see you disapprove of me,” he said.

“ I disapprove of what you are becoming,” she said.

“ But you have still hopes of me ! Then what must I do to be—— ”—he checked himself—“ to avoid this calamity ? ”

She saw that he was always laughing at her.

“ If your own soul doesn't tell you, I cannot.”

“ I say,” he cried, mock-serious, “ where have I heard that before ? Besides,” he continued politely, “ one cannot live in Rome without being Romanised—unless one is fanatically patriotic—and really, you know, I am of no country.”

“ No—— ? ” she said bitterly.

“ Unless I have been adopted unaware.” That, he felt, was insulting, and his spirit turned in shame.

“ You are a Roman of the Romans,” she said sarcastically.

“ Of the emasculated period,” he laughed. “ But 'twas you would have it so.”

“ I ! ” she exclaimed.

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“ You *would* have me take the Grammar School scholarship—and you would have me foster poor little Botell’s fervent attachment to me, till he couldn’t live without me—and because Botell was rich and influential. You insisted on my accepting the wine-merchant’s offer to send me to Cambridge, there to chaperon his only child. Then you bade me go into the business until I had money—and then—and then—— ; well, ‘ Now ’ is the realisation. I have done exceedingly well, for an orphan son of a village school-master.”

“ And I am responsible ? ” she asked, with sarcasm.

“ I was a most plastic youth,” he laughed.

“ Ah,” she cried, “ I sent you away too young.”

“ But I am a *great* success—and really, I enjoy it. You keep preaching me the ‘ Tongues in trees ’ business, and ‘ good in everything ’ that is not London. But I assure you, there’s quite a lot to be said for my side. ‘ I would not change it.’ ”

“ You are too glib,” she said, in very cutting tones.

“ I always had that defect,” he said, bowing.

There was a rattling at the outer latch, and the keeper entered. The woman glanced round, but remained standing, fur-cloaked, in the inner doorway. Syson, quite indifferent, did not move.

The keeper entered, saw, and turned away without speaking. The others also were silent.

Pilbeam attended to his skins.

“ Have we finished our duel ? ” asked Syson.

“ I have nothing more to say,” she replied.

“ Then I give you ‘ To our vast and varying fortunes.’ ” He lifted his hand in pledge.

“ ‘ To our vast and varying fortunes,’ ” she answered, bowing gravely, and speaking in cold tones.

“ Arthur ! ” she said.

The keeper pretended not to hear. Syson, watching keenly, began to smile. The woman drew herself up.

“ Arthur ! ” she said again, with a curious upward inflection,

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which warned the two men that her soul was trembling on one of those sudden changes that are so striking in women ; as when a drop of acid suddenly throws out a black, turbid precipitate in a clear liquid.

The keeper slowly put down his tool and came to her.

“ Yes,” he said.

“ I wanted to introduce you,” she said, cold and deliberate.

“ I know him—I’ve met him before,” growled the keeper.

“ Never mind—I want to introduce you formally. Addy, Mr. Pilbeam, to whom I am engaged to be married. Arthur—Mr. Syson, who was an old friend of ours.” Syson bowed, but the other mechanically held out his hand. The two men shook hands.

“ Allow me to congratulate you heartily,” said Syson. In his heart he was saying bitterly, “ Mrs. Pilbeam—Good God ! ”

He bade the woman good-bye.

“ Which way will you go ? ” she asked.

“ Over Foster’s,” he replied.

“ Arthur, you will go with Mr. Syson to the gate,” she said. They went all three together down the gloomy path.

“ Ah les beaux jours de bonheur indicible

Où nous joignons nos bouches . . . ”

quoted Syson, half-sincere, half-mocking.

“ C’est possible ! ” she replied, in the same spirit.

“ Good ! ” he cried. “ We might have rehearsed it. I never could help being sentimental. How does it go on ? ”

‘ Qu’il était bleu, le ciel, et grand l’espoir.’ ”

“ I never liked farce,” she replied, cuttingly. “ Besides, *we* cannot walk in *our* wild oats. You were too modest and good to sow any at that time.”

Syson looked at her. He was shocked that she could sneer at their young love, which had been the greatest thing he had known. Certainly he had killed her love at last, as he had often wished he could. Now he felt a great sense of desolation.

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At the bottom of the path she left him. As he went along with the keeper, towards the open, he said :

“ You will let me know when you are going to be married, will you ? ”

“ Why ? ” asked the keeper.

“ Because she will not write to me—at least till after—I know.”

“ Well—— ! ” said the keeper, disagreeably, but hesitating.

“ I shan't be in Nuttall again for years—perhaps never. I shall want to know your news, for all that. So if you'll write to me, I will write to you. All the correspondence shall be between us two.”

He handed the young keeper his card.

“ All right then—we'll let it stand at that.”

They were at the gate. Syson held out his hand. When he was a dozen yards across the field, the other called :

“ I say, I s'll only write when there's something definite.”

“ Quite so ! ” said Syson, and each turned his several way.

Instead of going straight to the high road gate, Syson went along the wood's edge, where the brook spread out in a little bog, and under the alder trees, among the reeds, great yellow stools and bosses of marigolds shone. Threads of brown water trickled by, touched with gold from the flowers. Suddenly, there was a blue flash in the air, as a kingfisher passed.

Syson was extraordinarily wretched. He climbed the bank to the gorse bushes, whose sparks of blossom had not yet gathered into a flame. Lying on the dry brown turf, he discovered sprigs of tiny purple milkwort and pink spots of lousewort. He began to count his losses. In spite of himself, he was unutterably miserable, though not regretful. He would not alter what he had done. Yet he was drearily, hopelessly wretched. After a while he had got it clear.

“ She always knew the best of me, and believed in the best I might be. Whilst she kept her ideal ' Me ' living, I was sort of responsible to her : I must live somewhere up to standard. Now

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I have destroyed Myself in her, and I am alone, my star is gone out. I have destroyed the beautiful ' Me ' who was always ahead of me, nearer the realities. And I have struck the topmost flower from off her faith. And yet it was the only thing to do, considering all the other folk . . . ”

He lay quite still, feeling a kind of death.

Presently he heard voices : the keeper was coming down the path, with his wife.

“ Say what ails thee ? ” Syson heard the keeper ask gently, but with a touch of resentment.

“ I am a bit upset—don't bother me, ” pleaded the woman.

Syson turned over. The air was full of the sound of larks, as if the sunshine above were condensing and falling in a shower. Amid this bright sound, the voices sounded like horn-music.

“ Yes, but what upsets thee, ” persisted the man.

“ Go home now, Arthur. I will talk to you to-night. ”

Syson looked through the bushes. Hilda was leaning on the gate, tears running down her face. The man was in the field, loitering by the hedge, and, Syson at last made out, was catching the bees as they settled on the white bramble flowers, crushing them in his palm, and letting them fall, not aware what he was doing.

There was silence for a while, in which Syson imagined her tears among the brightness of the larks. Suddenly the keeper exclaimed “ Ah ! ” and swore loudly. He was gripping at the sleeve of his coat, near the shoulder. Then he pulled off his jacket, threw it on the ground, and absorbedly rolled up his shirt sleeve right to the shoulder.

“ Ah ! ” he said vindictively, as he picked out the bee and flung it away. He twisted his fine, bright arm, peering awkwardly over his shoulder.

“ What is it ? ” asked Hilda quietly.

“ A bee—crawled up my sleeve and stung me, ” he answered.

“ Come here to me, ” she said.

The Soiled Rose

The keeper went to her, like a sulky boy. She took his handsome arm in her hands.

“ Here it is—and the sting left in—poor bee ! ”

She picked out the sting, put her mouth to his arm, and sucked away the drop of poison. As she looked at the red mark her mouth had made, and at his arm, she said, laughing winsomely out of her tears :

“ That is the reddest kiss you will ever have.”

He put his arms round her, and was kissing her. When Syson next looked up, at the sound of voices, he saw the keeper with his mouth on the throat of his beloved, whose head was thrown back, and whose hair had fallen, so that one rough rope of dark brown hair hung across his bare arm.

“ No,” the woman answered. “ I am not upset because he’s gone. You won’t understand. . . . ”

Syson could not distinguish what the man said. Hilda replied, clear and distinct :

“ You know I love you. He has gone quite out of my life—I don’t know what I should do without you ” She ended plaintively. He kissed her warmly, murmuring. She laughed quickly.

“ Yes,” she said indulgent, but slightly bitter. “ We will be married, we will be married. You can tell people, and make arrangements.” He embraced her again. Syson heard nothing for a time. Then she said :

“ You must go home, now, dear—you will get no sleep.”

“ Shall we be married at church, or chapel or what—— ? ”

“ We will be married at church.”

It was the first time she had used the plural pronoun in that way, which moved the keeper to embrace her fervently. At last he pulled on his coat and departed. She stood at the gate, not watching him, but looking south over the sunny counties towards London, far away.

When at last she had gone, Syson also departed, going south.