

WE UNDERSTAND—

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the little town—until summer heat began to start the yearly, worried-conversation about the crop prospect. Corn was yellowing dangerously. Cotton looked bad. John Kemper confided to "Doc" Weaver, over a heaving cow, that he wasn't going to make any feed that fall.

Storekeepers began to pull their chairs out on the sidewalks. There they sat every afternoon, with little knots of harried farmers, rubbing the stubble on their chins, and fanning flies attracted by the tobacco juice on the pavement.

The air grew hot and sticky. At night people ran their fans, and fought mosquitoes.

The girdleless Mrs. Bixby, nearly every day, panted and sweated her ponderous way between the houses of the Garden Club members—and most everyone else's house. She took flowers to old "Dad" Miller—told him about the out-of-town pastor at the Union Revival Meeting—kept her copy of the Americanized Bible circulating, and made assignments among the young people for B. Y. P. U. meetings.

One afternoon she told Mrs. Weir that dear Brother Orrison looked so badly lately. She hadn't seen his car in front of Marcia's for over two weeks either. She had seen it last night at Penelope's though. Their, dear, sweet Marcia didn't, after all, appreciate Brother Orrison like she ought. Mrs. Weir agreed. Mrs. Bixby sorrowfully shook her head.

Summer droned on monotonous.

The first cool breeze of October stirred faintly in the dusty, yellow curtains behind the choir-box, and barely brushed Marcia's tired numbed body. The air in the church was humid, sticky—hot and stifling from a torrid sun the day before. In the middle of the building, people poured sweat and felt their clothes sticking to the backs of the pews. Marcia coughed at the dust rising from the seams of the old splintering floor.

She stood up with the rest of the choir, and began to sing: "Just As I Am."

How sweetly the old hymn rang this morning! Marcia felt its soft timbre pulsing in her heart. She was glad, and gloriously happy over it—yet somehow she knew she should be surprised.

Why didn't she rage inward at Mrs. Bixby this morning? Loathe that fat, coruplent back? Every Sunday, for as long as she could remember, the turtle-shaped woman had been in front of her in the soprano section. She had, always, recoiled at the stringy hair, plastered repulsively against the dumpy fat neck at the dirty-white collar, greasy with perspiration around the edges at the tight dress stretched forbiddingly over huge mounds of quaking jelly. Mrs. Bixby had always been her "Exhibit A" when disparaging the small town.

The woman's presence had always sickened her goaded her nerves.

But dear Mrs. Bixby! wasn't that way this morning. How sweet she looked! The little felt hat so winning. Poor old soul how shameful to think of her so meanly all these years. Why! she asks nothing of anyone goes her way tirelessly, helping everybody!

She had seemed a trifle gossipy when she asked why Vinny had stopped coming by talked about him looking so troubled. But, after all, that was just her way of trying to help trying to show how foolish

Oh, this new feeling! How nice to be here in church. Hot maybe, but pleasant, peaceful.

Part of Jack's letter! It had kept running through her mind all morning. How it had opened her eyes!

"Darling, you won't have to come after me after all. I'm coming back to you—to live in our little town. Oh, you've Life there, Marcia that I'll never take you from that I want to share myself.

"I'm so tired of this city muck, dear. It's cheap

bawdy sometimes. People shellack themselves with a sorry veneer and call it polish. They literally purr with affected "culture." I'm glad I've found them out! Culture? Intellectuality? I'm going to breathe both at home with you, my dear."

How clearly she had seen things after that letter! She had suddenly known—realized—that Jack was right. Known too—she could not marry Jack since he was coming home. Jack was her lover in the city—not here. Here it could only be Vinny. Vinny! Why it always was how could she love anybody else? Oh fool fool

How ashamed she had felt when she awakened from her dream last night. She had seen Vinny and herself out on the lake again—last spring. Heard herself saying, " how quietly wonderful it is with you here—like this. How delightfully placid, Vinny!" Saw herself look up at him this time, quick enough to gasp at his face, grown hard and cold. He had broken out, "Marcia! can't you understand that that hurts—tortures me? Peace! Ha, so that's how I affect you. (How his eyes had burned her). I'm a man! I offer Love. What devil's right have you to find that placid to warm your hands at my fire. Great God! I want to see you happy—but I want you, Oh, to He! with your peace!"

She had bolted upright in bed. Shaking. It was true! True! No right to call that placid devil warm hands at fire went you

"Oh Vinny," she had cried into the darkness. "I'm so sorry." Quivering, crying. "I love you Vinny—want you. You can have me—you can have me!"

"Dear God" she breathed now.

The hymn was over. Vinny was getting up to preach. A little more now, and it would be over the people would leave the church, and she could throw her arms around him, and cry out her love beg him not to think her a devil anymore. Oh, if she could only sob it out now! If she could only be in his arms feel his lips kissing away the tears she knew would come.

How strong his voice sounded! It folded on itself in every corner. Marcia imagined it wrapping around the great shafts of light, flooding from the peaked-arch windows. Hanging there, vibrant for the little congregation that listened so intently.

I'm not going to use a text this morning.

He always begins so quietly!

I want us to awaken to the honesty of our lives this morning, my friends—to realize that we are chosen. We should rejoice in the good fortune of sound, firmly-grounded happiness.

Is he still pleading? He needn't. Oh, Vinny!

The worth of a life is the worth of its loyalties. Our loyalties, thank Dear Heaven, bear not toward ornament, tinsel, or sham. We need no affections, no sentimentalities, to command respect from others. Here is no charlatantry, no pedantry, no shallow profundity. Rejoice in your honest life, my friends. Honest!

Yes darling yes, yes I know, I know.

(Tears forcing their way out. Lips quivering. Soul breaking.)

Here is the hearth and fireside. Staunch friends. We are the only class of people in America left with the chance at Life as it should be. Here are our babies, children. Sunday dinners. Call it "rural" if you will, pity yourselves if you will, but these incorporate the solid foundation on which the whole mess of the world's "culture" rests its crumbling structure.

Oh, hurry Vinny darling

The little church was quiet now all the people nearly gone. The subdued murmur of voices on the outside grew less and less audible. The curtains rustled faintly. A wasp hummed overhead. The breeze—freshened now—laid its cool

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