

A RIDDLE.

There's a queer little house That stands in the sun; When the good mother calls, The children all run.

This queer little house Has no windows nor doors; The roof has no shingles; The rooms have no floors;

The story of this Little house is quite true; I have seen it myself; And I'm sure you have, too.

—Author Unknown

THE DARK MOUNTAINS

There was one window where Rachel Nash could embroider without being "fussed at," and that was in her son's bedroom at the peak of the house.

Ira Nash never exerted himself to climb the dim stair unless Jole were at home and overslept. But Jole Nash wasn't at home now.

Mother had been afraid she wouldn't get Margaret Foss's tablecloth embroidered before Jole's birthday; maybe not before commencement.

It seemed she only felt her way through "riding up" after dinner. Putting away the plates, her hand touched her little, ragged Bible with its too-fine print.

When the light seemed to be closing in on Mother's aching eyes, she lived it all over, that almost tragedy.

When she went up hurriedly, she caught at the wall, at the shabby banisters. Maybe it was half past one—not late.

Rachel Nash worked cautiously—she didn't hurry. When a dozen or so stitches had been set, she closed her eyes to rest them.

It was a year, now, Rachel Nash had been laying fragile, yet firm, five-petaled blossoms in swirls around the scalloped edge of a long oval.

With the coming of Reddy Laughlin it had suddenly been different. Jole wasn't making good in the university.

Mother knew where her boy's ambition had come to rest. Sitting there on the edge of his bed, she visualized a prose poem in last year's Daily O' Collegian.

Nash had never lost the privilege of kissing his wife's young mouth, and she stooped to her now. But his voice was edgy.

Rachel changed the subject. She brought out Jole's birthday cake, a huge square of angel food.

Nash thought he might get some powdered sugar at the Corners. "But what makes you mess with it?" he grumbled crabbedly.

That was true. Joseph Culpepper, for whom Jole was named, had begun the study of law at eighteen.

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Now, a blue flax flower is a bit of June sky, and through its exquisite azure run threadlets of royal purple.

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Of course, Jole was crazy about Reddy Laughlin. One thing Mother noticed with hope—he hadn't learned to fetch and carry.

Before the web of crimson not much bigger than her two hands, and meant to stretch into a complete garment for a full grown girl, Rachel Nash had grown a little sick.

When Ira Nash was concerned, he was furious. Now he got up so violently as to upset his chair.

Rachel Nash met her husband's anger with steadiness, but she didn't say anything more.

It wasn't late; it only seemed late. She had brought up a pan of salt water with soft washcloth, and she made herself use them.

Jole's father had considered it a waste of time going to Stillwater just to see his boy graduate.

Living it over, she felt her breath coming faster. She was pushing through gates to the blast of silver trumpets in the hands of little plumed knights.

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Strange how thought unwinds itself, like thread; breaks off; knots itself together and reels on.

Smilingly now, though with fumbblings, Rachel Nash set the last stitch. When she sighed with relief and looked up, it seemed very late.

It was a prolonged spell of silver blindness; it was the real thing. Tremblingly she folded the tablecloth in its glossy paper.

A strange thing, sudden blindness. If this had been night-darkness, Rachel Nash would have stepped across the warped boards with confidence; have gone down the steps nimbly.

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