

As the man enters, the preacher is just closing the bible; and now he reads the hymn and the choir rises and sings the sweet simple melody. It is an old tune, one the man has heard many times, long ago. But is it so long ago? As he listens it does not seem so, and yet it is one—two—three—four—five—six—yes, six years ago that he sat in the little country church at home and listened to the preaching and the hymns.

His memory calls up a picture of the scene. He imagines the quiet gathering in the little church at the call of the familiar bell in the tower. The windows are all open to let in the warm, spring air, and through them he can see the green fields, the trees with their new, fresh leaves, and, far away, the blue slopes of the mountains, rising into the peaceful blue of the sky. Through them, also, come the sweet songs of the birds, singing in the giant elms before the door. He can see, just across the aisle, two seats in front of him, the pew where a young girl used to sit; and he remembers how often his eyes turned that way, and how, instead of listening to the sermon, his mind was filled with dreams of her—idle dreams. Yes, they were idle dreams, for she refused him. He remembers it all very distinctly and, although it was six years ago—six long years, in which he has striven to crush out all thought of the past, his heart is beating quickly, and somewhere inside is an ache that will not go away. His breath comes heavily, and he almost cries aloud, "My God! Why couldn't she have cared?" It is not an oath, but the cry of an aching, lonesome heart.

For the first time he realizes that the singing has ceased and that the preacher has nearly finished, and across his memory's pictures there comes a single, short sentence of the sermon, "Turn back." His heart seems to bound and then suddenly stop, for the words seem like a call to him. He would surely like to go back and see the familiar places again, but, then, what good would it do? She is no longer there—and without her—

The people rise to go out and he goes with them. He has not heard a word of the service except the first part of the hymn and that one, short sentence, but he cannot get away from those words. He takes a walk in the park, and the birds and the trees remind him of his country home; he sits down to the table, but he cannot eat; he buys a paper, but he cannot read. Ever