

# The Sixth Canvasser

By Inez Haynes Irwin

Mrs. Blaisdell sat in the shade of the elm-tree while her son Tom and his wife Ada wandered about the place, surveying present growths and making plans for future ones. She followed them with her eyes and she tried to concentrate on their movements, but her thoughts kept beating away from their activities.

The Blaisdell place included an acre of lawn, carefully cultivated, running to the street, and many acres of land, premeditatedly uncultivated, running to the sound. The ground sloped both ways from the big, pleasant colonial house. In front, the slope drew after it a train of lawn that was like emerald plush. That plush was broken by haphazard growths, the product of a century and a half of care, that offered privacy here, shade there, pleasing combinations of color and form everywhere. The tall wine-glass elm, the huge, bulbous smoke-bush, two powdered fir-trees, the trio of slim, closely furled cypresses, the group of white birches that shivered in their filmy spring draperies—all had disposed themselves at the right distances. Here and there were flower-plots, squares and circles of freshly spaded earth.

A robin, just a few feet away, utterly unawed by the still figure in the invalid's chair, seized the wriggling end of a fat worm, tugged at it so hard that, after stretching to an extraordinary exiguity, it broke, and he fell ignominiously backward. An automobile chugged along the road, dropping a mellow-horn gurgle as it went. The electric car, which came every quarter of an hour, jingled past, crowded with people. Mrs. Blaisdell made herself think of that motor and that car filled with people. They were all going to the beach; the heat had driven them there. Years ago she had dreaded almost equally the appearance in Wraymouth of the automobile and the electric car; they had come almost simultaneously. At first she had vowed to put a hedge between her and their clamor; but she never did that. She came to accept them as conveniences, then as comforts, as companions. With a car passing the door every fifteen minutes, she could call frequently on friends whom previously she had seen only at long intervals; and of course they called as frequently on her. Almost always somebody waved from the car as it ambled past. It was the same with many other things—the electric light, for instance. When they placed one near the left-hand corner of the place, it seemed to her that she could not endure its vulgar intrusion; and yet she had grown to look upon that as a kind of companion, too. She even admired the gush of purple-silver light that poured from it upon the fluttering white birches, giving in winter a veil to their slim nudity and in the summer an additional glitter to their gleaming draperies. She really thought the effect of the electric light more beautiful than moonlight, especially in these early days of spring; but she had never told anybody this.

Changes came all the time—she had lived long enough to expect that and not to care—but some things remained constant. Every spring, with the appearance of the spade, the robins came to pull worms from the steaming flower—beds; and every summer, as punctual as the honey-suckle itself, humming-birds appeared, little, vibrating films of iridescence stabbing with their slender, dart-like bills into the hearts of the blossoms.

Yes, changes came; and now the great change was coming to her. The great change! She must not think of that. She *must not* think of it; and yet she could not seem to prevent it.

This was the first day she had been able to sit out of doors, and she hoped that the beauty and freshness of the spring world would melt that weight that pressed so torturingly on her

consciousness. Every day in the last five days she had gone over again and again that snatch of overheard conversation. If she had only not listened! If she had only not happened to go into the grape-arbor that day! How had it happened, for ordinarily she did not sit there? She had wandered in, attracted by the lucent arch that the big grape—leaves made, with the sun shining through them. But once there, she had caught a whiff of Tom's conversation with Dr. Morris. Their talk came through the open window. Tom, of course, had taken the doctor into the dining-room to get away from her. Even when she caught her own name, she had no conscious intention of eavesdropping. Something inside held her clamped to the ground.

"It may happen in Mrs. Blaisdell's case at any time," Dr. Morris was saying as she stepped into the arbor. "I can't give her more than a month, but it may come tomorrow."

Tom did not speak for an interval. When his voice came, it was husky, a little choked.

"Will she suffer much, Doctor?"

"Not long," Dr. Morris answered, and paused.

Then in one word came the spurt of Tom's grief.

"God!" he said. "God!" Then after another interval, "I'd better write George and the girls at once."

"At once," Dr. Morris assented. "It's useless for George to attempt to get here, but the girls may."

There came a brief interval of dull silence; then Dr. Morris rose, murmuring sympathy. Mrs. Blaisdell pulled herself up from the spot where she had taken root, retreated back of the house. Five minutes later Tom, very white and shaky, found her seated on the rustic seat that overlooked the sound. "Lord, Mother,"—he accounted for his panic—"you frightened me almost to death, disappearing like this! I couldn't think where you'd gone.

That night Tom wrote three letters. Mrs. Blaisdell, apparently much engrossed with a magazine, knew exactly how long those letters were and guessed their exact destination. She conjectured that telegrams also went. The next day came a telegram from Ruth, whose marriage had borne her to Pennsylvania, saying that she was coming to Wraymouth for the summer; that she would start as soon as little Tisdale had recovered from an operation for adenoids. She would arrive Tuesday.

Later came a telegram from Molly, in California, saying that she was starting east immediately, also for the summer, and that she was bringing little Anna. It would be a long time before they would hear from George, whose peripatetic address was somewhere in the Philippines. Mrs. Blaisdell's heart yearned unspeakably for her two absent daughters, her one absent son, her three absent grandchildren; and yet with all the comfort that their presence would bring, there was one terror that it could not allay, one horror that it could not mitigate—the moment of death!

The moment of death! She dreaded that moment with an almost uncontrollable sense of fright. The thought of it waked her up half a dozen times, gasping, choking, sticky-wet. She was afraid it would come in the darkness of the night, when she was alone and too weak to cry out. She dreaded everything about it—the gasp of mortal agony, the tearing, searing pain, the choking as the breath left, the faintness lapsing to ultimate unconsciousness. True, under the pretext of wanting cooler sleeping-quarters, Tom had moved into the little bedroom opposite hers; he insisted on keeping her door and his door open. But she knew how impenetrable was Tom's sound sleep. Would he hear her? In all her vigorous young womanhood, in all her vigorous middle age, in all her vigorous old age, she had never known a terror like this.

It was ponderable, like an actual weight. It stayed with her day and night. She had stopped reading the papers; for the world, in the grip of conflict, titanic, bloody, riddled with cruelty, and

saturated with hate, was filled with death and talk about death. And yet because the habit of sparing her young unnecessary pain still persisted, she could not speak of this horror to her children. It was the final gift of her mother's self-sacrifice. They must never know that she had suffered. She must go alone. She must face the going alone. The moment of death! The moment of death!

Nobody looking at her would have guessed this struggle. Her sickness had made her white, her sleeplessness had turned her wan; but the impression she gave, as always, was of a sweet-faced old lady whose features, a little long and pointed, had never lost their good lines, and whose silvery hair, parted and waved over the temples, still showed a youthful abundance. She wore a black skirt and a short dressing-sack of challis, cream-colored, with a little lilac figure, and pinned with a big cameo-pin. Over her head and about her shoulders lay a light, fleecy, white-worsted shawl. From under her skirt protruded her unworn shoes, square-toed and flat-heeled. On her right hand, old, crinkle-skinned, and freckled, her thin, tight wedding-ring puffed the flesh in mounds.

"The dahlias are up, Mother," Tom called cheerily.

"And the four-o'clocks," Ada added.

Mrs. Blaisdell waved her hand feebly in answer. She did not speak. It seemed to take too much effort to project her voice through the little space between them.

It would have been hard to say whether it was a day in late spring or early summer, for it had all the freshness of the one and all the lusciousness of the other. The sky was a June blue, not a May blue, and the clouds that crowded it were of a midsummer thickness and whiteness. The air had in it a little—was it moisture, honey-green, or mere light dusty-gold? Whatever it was, it served to give the atmosphere body; it seemed actually to take color from the things in it. The Baker apple-orchard on the opposite side of the way was an enormous, cushiony plane of blossom; about it the air held a rose-colored glow. The lilac-hedges that separated the Blaisdell place from the rest of the world were spiky with bloom; about them the air turned to gauzes faintly purple. The perfume of the apple-blossoms and the lilacs came to Mrs. Blaisdell on little breezes that were warmer than the air itself. Warm earth smells came to her from the smoking, turned-over flower-beds. All kinds of sounds crowded the odors in the air. From back of the house came the hoarse caw of a crow. From one side, the Mallons's new-born calf gave vent to pessimistic impressions of a new world in long blarts of remonstrance. Through the lilac-hedge she could hear little Peggy May's stuttery chatter. Opposite, she could see Virginia Small's slim, virginal figure making its way from dresser to closet and back again in one of the big front chambers of the Small house. Through two thicknesses of curtain, Mrs. Blaisdell could translate all her motions; she was doing her hair different ways, trying on belts, brooches, rings, shoes, and hats. Now that she was "going with" Ed Howes, it took Virginia precisely two hours to dress. And next door Ed, who was obviously waiting for her, had begun, all dressed as he was, to tinker with his automobile. Mrs. Blaisdell tried to fix her thoughts on each of these things in turn; but despite her best effort, the horror seeped back, the weight grew heavier. The moment of death! The moment of death!

"There are the canvassers again, Mother," Ada called. "I guess they'll get to us today."

For three days a group of six young people had been canvassing Wraymouth for signatures to a petition for equal suffrage. Mrs. Blaisdell had watched them at work all yesterday afternoon. At moments they had actually made her forget.

Situated in a rumpled stretch of land that ran from the street to the sound, the Blaisdell place faced an inclined plane, cut by many streets, that ran up to Wraymouth Heights. That tilted plane

bared a big expanse of neighborhood to her inspection; for the lines of trees could not obscure the streets, nor the shrubbery and orchards the gardens. Mrs. Blaisdell, who had watched most of these houses grow, knew just the spaces that offered opportunities for inspection. Through these green alleys she followed the work of the suffrage canvassers.

There were six of them, three young girls, three young men. One reason why, despite her mental turmoil, Mrs. Blaisdell had been able to concentrate on their movements was that they were all comely and all gay. Not all gay, indeed. The sixth canvasser was very serious, and he might not, like the rest, have been comely; for Mrs. Blaisdell had not yet caught a glimpse of his face. It was apparent that he took his work very hard. The others walked straight up to the house that happened to be the point of attack with all the dazzling buoyancy and all the superb effrontery of youth. Up the walk—Mrs. Blaisdell could almost hear their quick footsteps—on to the piazza—she could almost hear their high, shrill ring—and then a long parley. Sometimes they would emerge gleeful with success, at other times a little defiant with failure. But the sixth canvasser was not like that at all. In the first place, he was a mere boy; also, it was quite obvious he was shy. He would walk up and down before a house for a long while, not even looking at it directly, but peering sidewise. Sometimes he would not go in at all; he would pass on to the next house. When he did enter, he never went to the front door; he would sidle slowly round to the back, peering up at the windows, reappearing, still sidling, on the other side. Sometimes when he had made half the circuit of the place, he would retreat, as though his courage had suddenly left him.

Today they were out again in force. Over there was the one Mrs. Blaisdell described to herself as the “tall, red-headed girl,” who advanced proudly on a house as though it were a citadel that she could take single-handed. Here was the “roly-poly, dark one,” who gathered a whole household about her on the piazza and made them laugh. Yonder was the “thin school-teacher one,” who was quick and efficient at her work. Beyond was the “big, strong-looking boy,” who was unmistakably in love with the “roly-poly, dark one,” talking with “the-one-who-wore-a-gray-shirt,” who was so unmistakably jealous of him. And, yes, there was the sixth canvasser staring up at the old Edgemore house. He stopped at the gate, as beautiful as a bit of carved ivory, and peered through its interstices. Suddenly he pushed the gate open and made a hesitating step up the path; but then inexplicably he turned back, his head bowed in dejection. Once outside on the sidewalk, he stopped abruptly, as though girding his courage to another effort. Then with a soft dash he entered again, flitted silently through the garden to the back. It would do him little good, Mrs. Blaisdell reflected, to ask Mattie and Laura Edgemore to sign the petition. How those women had changed! They had been so gay and open-hearted once! When Mrs. Blaisdell’s children were young, they used to go to children’s parties on the Edgemore place. As plainly as though it were yesterday, she could see Edgar’s dark little head flitting between the high stalks of fire-colored phlox and wine-colored hollyhocks.

*Edgar!* Must she leave Edgar behind, or would she find him *there*? Oh, she must not think of *that*; she must not!

Mrs. Blaisdell meant to sign the petition. She had always believed in what she still called “woman suffrage.” When she was a girl, she had heard Susan B. Anthony speak. She had never had to hear anybody else.

Tom came strolling over to her chair, stood beside her, smoking. Mrs. Blaisdell noticed how graceful his hand was, lightly fingering the little pipe, which seemed to cling close to the bold, graceful curve of his chin. She had always taken pride in Tom’s beautiful hands because she

considered that her own were ugly. She was glad, too, that he had inherited his father's fine, strong, muscular figure. Tom was handsome, regular-featured, aristocratic-looking.

"The place is looking fine this year, Mother," Tom said.

"Yes," Mrs. Blaisdell said; "so much rain has been good for everything. This is a beautiful day. I think we're going to have settled weather now."

"I hope so," Tom said. "I think probably I'll be home more this summer than I've ever been since I went on the road. Instead of taking two weeks' vacation in October, I'm going to take a day here and there. There are some things I'd like to do myself on this place this summer."

"That'll be fine, Tom," Mrs. Blaisdell said.

"And with the girls coming on," Tom went on, "of course I want to be home as much as possible. Isn't it great they're both to be here? If only George could get back, we could have a complete family reunion."

"Except Edgar," his mother interpolated. "Don't forget Edgar, Tom. I never do."

Edgar was Mrs. Blaisdell's second son. He came between George and Molly. Over thirty years before, when he was seventeen, Edgar had gone to sea. His first voyage had been a short one, but filled with storms. Mrs. Blaisdell had hoped that he would come home cured of all desire to go again. But he had left, when he was still a slender lad, on a second trip. His ship, the *Eliza Shoreby*, stopped at Liverpool. Edgar went ashore at nine o'clock one morning; he had never been seen or heard from since. Everybody else had given him up for dead years ago, but Mrs. Blaisdell had never lost faith that he would come back to her. Whenever the gate clicked unexpectedly, whenever a strange man of middle-aged aspect appeared on the walk, Mrs. Blaisdell's heart always gave a thick flutter.

"You know, Tom," she said, a faint tone of reproach in her voice, "I have never given up expecting Edgar. I never will."

"It would be a wonderful thing if he did come back," Tom said. "Of course I was such a little shaver at the time that it didn't make much impression on me."

"You do remember him, though," Mrs. Blaisdell pleaded.

"Oh, sure!" Tom said in an offhand way. He went on to talk about his and Ada's plans for the place. They were going to throw out a piazza at the back of the dining-room, screen it in so that they could eat out of doors; they would cover it with rambler roses. They were going to get rid of the little flower-beds on the lawn. They were going to put wide flower-beds in front of the lilac-hedges, and stand phlox and hollyhocks up against them; Tom had always loved that combination. He remembered it from a boy, when he played in the Edgemore place. They were going to place wide borders of sweet alyssum about those beds.

Mrs. Blaisdell listened carefully, approved gently; but inside she was torn and bleeding again. It hurt her unspeakably that Tom did not remember Edgar as clearly as she did. She examined with a passionate fondness that picture that hung, virilely limned, vividly colored, in her mind's gallery. It was curious that, of them all, Edgar had been the throwback in the family. She would have expected it sooner of huge, powerful George or tall, muscular Tom. But perhaps George's activities as a teacher in the Philippines was one modern satisfaction of the ancient seafaring impulse in the blood, and Tom's as a traveling salesman another. Although he was strong, Edgar was pale and frail-looking. He was also soft-haired and soft-eyed. He was a "mother's boy."

"Lord! this is a beautiful day!" Tom exclaimed. "I'm glad I'm going to be home so much. I'll have this place in tiptop shape for Molly and Ruth."

He was making many references to his being at home, and many excuses for it; but, "Yes, it is a lovely day," was all Mrs. Blaisdell said.

The sky was putting on, though it was mid-morning, its noon blue. The hot-looking, white clouds—it was as though there were a little sun shining behind each of them—thinned and silvered, frayed at the edges, and melted into the dazzling atmosphere. Birds flew in and out of the Baker orchard, and constantly a pink-petaled shower shifted noiselessly to the green. The crow continued to caw, the calf to blart; robins came and went, burning a crimson hole through the air. Still Peggy May kept up her lispy chatter, and still Virginia Small fussed about her room, trying on things. An automobile glided with a nervous softness to the Baker gate, stopped noiselessly.

“Dr. Morris!” Mrs. Blaisdell and Tom said simultaneously.

“I forgot to tell you,” Tom explained, “Annie told Rose this morning that Mrs. Baker wasn’t feeling well. Morris came once in the night. Ada went over to ask if there was anything she could do. The nurse said she’d raise the curtain a little when the baby was born.”

“I’ll watch for it,” Mrs. Blaisdell promised. “Oh, I hope it won’t be bad this time!”

“Now, don’t let it excite or worry you, Mother!” Tom said, a nervous furrow playing in his forehead.

“No, Tom, I won’t,” Mrs. Blaisdell said. “Besides, when you get to my time of life, you realize that births are happy things. It’s only marriages and funerals that are unhappy. Why, to a mother that moment of birth—”

A sharp pang tore her. The moment of birth! The moment of death!

“How many are there of those suffrage-canvassers?” Tom changed the subject abruptly. “I make out five, three girls and two men.”

“No, six,” Mrs. Blaisdell corrected him. “Three young men, too. There’s one you probably haven’t noticed. He doesn’t seem to be very successful.”

“I don’t know what their system is,” Tom commented, “but it seems to be kind of hit or miss. They all seem to hang together about the same neighborhood instead of dividing the town up. Perhaps, though, they all take a hand at any house where there’s difficulty. They say they’re volunteers, college girls and boys. I suppose you’re going to sign their petition, Mother?”

“Oh, yes,” Mrs. Blaisdell answered; “I always have.”

“I will,” Tom promised, “and Ada, too.”

“That’ll be nice,” Mrs. Blaisdell approved.

“Well, I guess I’ll go over and help Ada tie up those vines.” Tom strolled over to his wife’s side. They stood before the clematis—trellis and talked.

Mrs. Blaisdell knew that they were talking about her, and she thought she also knew what they were saying; but she did not care. She had a sudden heart-sick yearning for George, who could not possibly get home from the Philippines in time. And she wondered with a sudden sharp sense of terror if Molly or Ruth would be too late. But again she told herself she must not think these thoughts. Resolutely she looked over to the Baker house. A little new baby, how wonderful it was! Nobody but a mother could possibly know. Dr. Morris had not come out; he was going to stay this time. About the house appeared signs of activity; windows opened, doors shut. A maid who had been sweeping off the back porch disappeared abruptly, as though in answer to a sudden call.

Mrs. Blaisdell’s eyes strayed again over the surrounding neighborhood. The “tall, red-headed girl” had gathered a group about her in front of the fire-house; Mrs. Blaisdell could see the firemen tilted back in their chairs, grinning as they craned to get her talk. The “one who wore a gray shirt” had gone into the garage. Mrs. Blaisdell could just make out the dusky-white spots in the gloom that were faces clustered about him. The sixth canvasser had emerged from the

Edgemore place. He had undoubtedly again been unsuccessful, for he drooped with dejection. He passed the Sawyer place, the Seaman place, the Mittinger place, three handsome modern mansions, with scarcely a look. Next came the fine old Murray place, built at the same time as the Blaisdell house and almost its twin, except that the former was painted yellow and white, and the latter slate—gray and green. Also, Mrs. Blaisdell often reflected proudly, her house had kept its big airy lookout, relic of those seafaring days when the women of Wraymouth watched the returning whalers from the house-tops. As the sixth canvasser caught sight of the Murray place, he stopped—stopped short as though something electric had caught him. The dejection seemed to pour out of him; obviously new hope flowed in. That new hope raised his head and cocked his shoulders. He studied the house again with his strange, furtive, peering glance, as though he was trying to remember something. He approached it once or twice with his hesitant, sidling step. Then suddenly he slipped, eel-quick and shadow-soft, through the entrance. The gate swung to, concealed him temporarily.

“Mrs. Blaisdell! Mrs. Blaisdell!”

It was a child’s voice that called, and a child’s slender body, wriggling through a crevice in the lilac-hedge, followed the call. “I b’inged you somesing.”

“Good morning, Peggy,” Mrs. Blaisdell answered. “Now, what are you ‘b’inging’ me?” “B’inging,” as Mrs. Blaisdell very well knew, was Peggy patois for “bringing.”

Peggy did not answer. She ran to Mrs. Blaisdell’s chair, threw herself against Mrs. Blaisdell’s knees, and dropped her basket into Mrs. Blaisdell’s lap. In the basket were three new-born kittens.

Peggy was exactly Mrs. Blaisdell’s idea of what a little girl should be, much as Molly had looked, although not half so pretty: floss-fine golden hair worn in long curls, sky-blue eyes starred by long lashes; pretty, tiny features; slender, dimpled body.

“What beautiful kittens!” Mrs. Blaisdell said. She reached into the basket with her trembling hands and smoothed the little creatures, which were peeping like young birds. “Their eyes aren’t open yet, are they? See what funny little tails they’ve got. When did Fuzzy bring them to you?”

“Mother finded them in the closet. Fuzzy b’inged them in the night. Mother said I could b’ing them to you. They can’t stay long.” Peggy I shook her head violently. “No, Fuzzy kies if I take them. Fuzzy dudn’t like her kitties to go. I b’inged you some tortors.” “Tortors” was Peggy’s patois for flowers.

The “tortors” were some gone-to-seed dandelions, very short-stemmed, and much the worse for the close clutching of a moist little hand. Peggy handed them to Mrs. Blaisdell. “Kitties go ’way now, Peggy said decisively. She seized the basket and scampered back through I the hedge.

Mrs. Blaisdell was sorry that Peggy had gone. Between her and the little girl had sprung up one of those sympathetic understandings possible only between old age and infancy. Peggy came to see her every day. It was true that she thought little of that overheard conversation when Peggy was with her. The moment of death!

“Are you keeping the shawl tight about you, Mother?” Ada called. She left Tom’s side and came strolling over to Mrs. Blaisdell’s chair. Ada was not a pretty woman, but she would have been much prettier she had not had to wear glasses. She had a wholesome matronly figure, with a round, firm bust and strong-looking arms and a wholesome matronly face with big, clear eyes and big, strong-looking teeth. She leaned over Mrs. Blaisdell and pulled the shawl closer. “These spring days are so treacherous sometimes. Isn’t it nice that Tom is going to be with us so much this summer?”

“Oh, yes,” Mrs. Blaisdeil answered; “I’m taking a lot of comfort out of that.”

“And the girls,” Ada went on. “It will be lovely to have them both I here. I hope they won’t think I’ve made too many changes.”

“I know they’ll be delighted with everything. You haven’t done anything that hasn’t improved the place, Ada,” Mrs. Blaisdell approved warmly.

This was true. Just as the interior workings of the house had become at Ada’s touch a perfect machine, so the outside growths had taken under her care a new impetus.

Ada still fingered Mrs. Blaisdell’s shawl, drawing it closer here, pulling it into soft folds there.

“You look sweet, Mother,” she said. “Are you feeling all right this morning?”

“Splendid,” Mrs. Blaisdell replied. “Anybody’d ought to feel good this morning weather.”

“Well, I guess I’ll run back to Tom,” Ada said. “We’re making plans for those two flower-beds.” Mrs. Blaisdell’s preoccupied gaze followed Ada’s figure as she sped to her husband’s side. Together Tom and Ada moved over to the corner where the birches dropped their shimmering green fountain. In their shade grew lilies of the valley. They knelt to examine them. The moment of death! The moment of death!

The Baker house was very quiet. Once Mrs. Blaisdell saw the nurse pass the window. Outside among the apple-blossoms the birds still whirled the air with a miniature rose-tinted snow-storm. The robins still made swift, fire-hot journeys from tree to tree. The sun rose higher and higher. The clouds had thinned now until they were faint silver strays filming the deep zenith blue. The little hot breezes that came from the lilacs were even more densely packed with perfume; the little hot breezes that touched the flower-beds were more heavily weighted with damp earth smells. From Peggy’s direction came a sudden series of squawks as the kittens protested against Peggy’s treatment. From the Mallon barn came a prolonged blart from the still-unreconciled calf. Virginia Small, arrayed at last as dewy as a rose in her pink smock and her pink, flower-covered hat, emerged from the Small house. Simultaneously Ed Howes shot from the Howes garage. They met at the front gate, and talking busily, their eyes glued to each other, they moved down the street. Mrs. Blaisdell smiled at this picture of young love. They were expecting to get the news of that engagement any day. Then suddenly her smile caught, crystallized, changed to violent contraction. The moment of death!

Nobody could help her now, not Tom or George or Molly or Ruth or Edgar—Edgar, for whom all the others had no memory and for whom her mother’s heart would always yearn. The suffrage-canvassers were still busy. The “dark, roly-poly girl” had stopped the postman. The “tall, strong-looking blond lad” was talking to the iceman. The sixth canvasser had emerged from the Murray place. Again every line of him drooped. He hadn’t succeeded anywhere, Mrs. Blaisdell concluded. He shouldn’t have tried to do this sort of thing. He wasn’t the type for it. Now, Tom, for instance, would have been a great success at getting signatures; he was a very successful salesman. Mrs. Blaisdell watched the slim figure, still peering into front yards, turn down Mason Street. Only the empty school was there. That would bring him to their corner. She hoped that he would come to them because then he would get three signatures.

The electric car jingled past the house. Mrs. Blaisdell sat quiet, her hand to her forehead. The moment of death!

The gate clicked, opened. Mrs. Blaisdell glanced up. It was the sixth canvasser. He entered and stood, quiet and still, looking at her. For the length of an eye-wink Mrs. Blaisdell, too, sat quiet and still, looking at him. And in that time the torturing weight on her consciousness melted, drifted away. She grew well—yes, *well*.

“O Edgar, my son!” she said at last. “You’ve come back!”

“Yes, Mother,” Edgar answered. He smiled. Mrs. Blaisdell smiled, too. “I’ve come back. I’ve been a long time finding you. I couldn’t remember. I must go away soon. I’ll take you with me this time, though.”

Mrs. Blaisdell clasped her hands.

“Oh, take me, Edgar!” she breathed.

“I think we’d better go now,” Edgar suggested. He still smiled.

Mrs. Blaisdell arose, took a step. Not even in her youth had she known such lightness as this; her foot did not even turn the grass-blades.

“Edgar, take me away from the moment of—”

Then suddenly she understood.

“O Edgar,” she said, “I didn’t think it was ever like this!”

“It’s always like this, Mother,” Edgar answered. He moved toward her, she moved toward him; they took each other’s hands, they gazed into each other’s eyes, they passed through the gateway, they floated down the street.

Something attracted Mrs. Blaisdell’s eyes over at the Baker house: the nurse was raising the curtain.

Something attracted her gaze back to her own place: under the elm Tom and Ada were bending over a very old lady whose white face had sagged sidewise upon her shoulder.