

frugal soul quailed at the total at the bottom of the list her daughter-in-law had furnished her. Why, it was a small fortune! Had she any right? No! she thought decidedly. She would live within her income from the rocky, worn-out old farm. And, too, if she got all those fine things, she would have no excuse to offer Grace for not appearing whenever Robbie's friends asked for her, which they often did. She knew her limitations even better than Grace did, and realised that fine raiment would only accentuate her lack of manners and education. No, she must efface herself as much as possible till—'Oh, Lord,' she whispered, 'not for long!'

It seemed that it was to be 'not for long' when, a few days later, they found her lying, cold and still, in front of her bed; but the wonderful vitality, engendered by years of plain living triumphed, and she reluctantly came back to life—though not to strength—and realised more strongly than before that she was a burden. They had been very tender—somewhat remorseful, she imagined—during those first days of her illness; but that had passed, and with a shrinking dread she saw the anxious frown reappear on her daughter-in-law's forehead as she ushered in a mildly interested or possibly curious guest. Even that haven of refuge, the attic, was denied her now, she thought with a whimsical smile, though there was some compensation in the thought that there could be no possibility of her sitting awkwardly on the edge of her chair and playing nervously with her apron; but all these were mere vexations compared with a very real trouble that began to obtrude itself.

It was bad enough in all conscience, she thought grimly, to be the cause of embarrassment to her loved ones; but to become an object of great expense as well was unendurable. Of late Robbie—the dear, patient boy—had looked worried and anxious, and by careful questioning she had learned from him that times were very hard. Then he had pinched her cheek and had asked her sternly what possible concern she could have with the money market. He told her she was a miserly old woman and that when she got round again, which would be very soon, he must watch her or she'd be dabbling in Wall Street.

His teasing did not fool her. Oh, why couldn't she be sick here in the good old-fashioned, economical way? But, no! she must have an elegant, white-capped lady to wait on her night and day that they paid—it made her sick to think what Robbie had to pay her each week! Poor Robbie! Poor Grace! If that snippy hired girl had only talked to Tompkins a little longer the morning she was taken sick, instead of coming nosing around and finding her unconscious on the floor, she would be safely at home with Silas to-day, instead of being a burden. Of course, if she had found things here at Robbie's as she had expected to, she wouldn't want to go-no-sir-ree! She liked life as well as the next one and had always got a sight of enjoyment out of everything; but this being a burden and having them ashamed of her—

'How long do you think I'll last?' she asked the doctor bluntly one day.

'Not very long, if you don't give me more help than you are doing,' he answered with equal candor.

'But, doctor, I'm such a care and expense!' she complained. 'I nursed Robbie's pa for a year, and buried him, and got mournin' for myself, on what it's costing him a month for me. I ain't worth it, doctor.'

'You'd be worth it to me, Mother Sinclair,' he said soberly; and stooping, kissed her on the forehead.

'You are a real nice boy to say so,' she returned, patting his arm affectionately. 'But, don't you see, the way things are goin' with them, they can't afford it.'

'They shouldn't have told you that!' he muttered angrily, a cork between his teeth. 'I've suspected all the time it was worry over their affairs that was keeping you down.'

She turned wide, startled eyes toward him, but he was busy counting drops into a glass, the cork still gripped between his teeth.

'You mean——' she began craftily.

'Bob's failure,' he answered promptly. 'Of course it's a serious thing to be wiped out slick and clean at his age; but he'll get on to his feet again, never fear. Now, take this—he raised the spoon to her lips—and then, at least, try to feel a little better. Why, what have you got all those stones on the bed for? To throw at us when we don't do things to suit you?' he demanded laughingly, as he laid her down.

'I wouldn't waste 'em on ye!' she retorted, in pretended disdain; then added eagerly, as she saw him examining one with great interest, 'they're our specimens. I took a notion I'd like to look at 'em this morning. Silas and I used to be mighty interested in specimens. That white one with the little black streaks on it come from Pike's Peak, and this spotted one——'

'And these?' he said, extending a handful. 'Where did these come from?'

'Those? Oh, Robbie picked those up back on the Ridge,' she answered indifferently. 'And this one Brother Simons brought from Jerusalem when——'

'You don't happen to own the Ridge, do you, Mrs. Sinclair?' he interrupted, in an odd voice.

'Why, yes. It ain't good for nothin' much except blackberries—and rattlers!' she returned, with a little chuckle. 'Silas bought it off'n old man Benson when his wife died, an'—Goin'?' she broke off to ask as he abruptly extended one hand, while dropping the 'specimens' into his pocket with the other.

'Yes,' he returned hurriedly; 'but I'll probably run in this evening.'

So Robbie had lost everything! She couldn't understand it at all just yet, though she supposed it would mean that they would have to get along without that polite Mr. Tompkins and all the rest, and leave this beautiful house. There was the farm left to them, if it came to a pinch. Robbie would love it, but Grace—She had to laugh, bad as she felt, when she thought of Grace sleeping in the little attic chamber and sitting on the old splint-bottomed hickories. And the children! Well, she'd like to see those pert little wax dolls making mud pies and splashing round in the duck pond. But Grace would never go to the farm—she knew that. She would never be satisfied with anything less than she had now; and likely, if she was beautiful and smart like Grace, instead of being an old-fashioned no-account, she'd feel the same way, she admitted loyally.

The doctor did not come back that night, as he had promised, but Robbie, strangely excited and unstrung, spent an hour with her, talking about the old place. He even spoke of the Ridge, and she told him how the doctor had run off with the specimens he had picked up when he was a little boy. Later Grace had come in, and, though she was very pale and silent, she had kissed her good night—something so unusual that it brought the tears to the older woman's eyes.

Neither Robbie nor Grace mentioned what had happened, however, and when she remembered how she had gotten the truth out of the doctor, she decided to say nothing herself. During the next few days she felt a subdued excitement among those about her, even the doctor acted more like a big happy boy than anything else, racing up and down stairs to see her half a dozen times a day, instead of his customary one visit. She wondered wearily if he charged Robbie for all of them. Surely not, when lots of times he didn't give her a speck of medicine, but just sat and visited and asked her questions about the farm. Dear, dear! She wished he wouldn't, for they brought back memories that nearly broke her old heart—her weary old heart, she told herself, that longed inexpressibly for rest.

Then Robbie went away on business, they told her; and though, to her surprise and joy, Grace spent hours with her where she had minutes heretofore, she missed her boy terribly.

One night, however, when she was feeling particularly blue, the three of them came trooping into her room. Robbie kissed her and gave her a bear hug, as he used to call it when he was a boy; but Grace, who had been crying, just sat down on the farther side of the bed and patted her hand. Then the big doctor boy, who had been standing looking down beside her