

thought. She was a stern woman who had lost her husband and all her children but my man—Edward—and she was that wrapped up in him that she thought no one was good enough for him, much less a little harum-scarum Irish girl from beyond the seas, with a smile that had a hint of unhappy reminiscence in it. She hesitated suddenly. 'But it was the vine you wanted to know about, and here I'm gossiping away like the foolish old woman that I am——'

'Oh, please go on!' I begged. 'I am very much interested. Tell me how it came out; that is, if you don't mind,' I added hastily.

'Well, then, I don't,' she answered, with an apologetic glance. 'I do be thinking of the old times as I sit here by myself, and I do get a load on my heart with the lonesomeness; and it's a relief to talk to some one, for it isn't many in these days who care to hear the old people talk. Our day is past, ma'am,' with a resigned sigh.

I was about to ask if she lived there alone, when she went on with her reminiscence:

'It's queer, ma'am, isn't it, how things work out in this life? I took my man away from his mother in her old age, and here I am, alone and lonely, with neither chick nor child to comfort or care for me. Ah, well, sure it's good that we can't see what's before us. I mind as if it was but yesterday the day he brought me over here to plant this vine. It was but a wee bit of a slip that the lady I worked for gave me. It was within a week of our marriage, and we walked out from the town—this was quite a way in the country then, and people walked more, too, planning that his mother and I would plant the bit of vine together that we might become better acquainted. She would ask me to stay to supper, and he would walk back with me in the evening. It turned out that he hadn't told his mother yet that we were to be married so soon, intending to break the news to her in my presence. But some one else had told her, and she was angry and cross when we got there, sore hearted, as I can see now; and she wouldn't have a word to say to me. He angered himself, who was very fond of me, and they had hot words. It ended in the two of us planting the bit of vine himself and myself, right there at the corner of the house, and going on, mightily discouraged, back to town together. She came out and glowered at us as she saw her son digging. "What are you doing?" she asked, suspiciously. "Planting a little vine," he answered surly enough. "A vine," sneeringly. "You needn't think it will ever shade you or yours! I'll dig it up!" And he answered her in quick anger, not meaning it at all. "If you do, I'll never speak to you as long as I live!" I saw her face turn white, even to her lips, and she went in the house without a word and closed the door. That day a week later we were married, but he didn't take me home to his mother, as he had intended, but to a cosy enough log cabin, a mile away. He still turned the ground here and supported his mother, but they were both black in their tempers, and they never made up. As mothers do, she blamed me, and said hard things about me, and hearing them from meddling neighbors didn't make my heart any softer toward her. Sure, as I look back now I see how sad and foolish it all was, and I might have had more sense and understanding; but it's life that brings us that, isn't it, dear?'

'Yes,' I assented, soberly; 'and sometimes brings it too late.'

'True for you, ma'am. I was young and thoughtless, and himself was good to me and the children, and it never came to me how much his mother was missing him until my eldest child—a fine boy of nine—died. Edward went after her then, but found her sick in bed, down with a fever that took her off in a week. She told him how bitter the sorrow was on her for quarrelling with her only child; how lonely she had been, and how she had often longed to see him and his children, and even me. But she was that proud not to see us when we took the little one by there on purpose. It broke Edward's heart, the poor man! It was himself reproached himself many a time for all the lonesome hours that we never could make up to her.

It's a terrible thing, isn't it, that we never can make up for some things? But I tell you, ma'am, I often think, as I sit here by myself in the long summer days, and inside, in the long, lonesome winter evenings, that I am makin' up for it some way. I do be that lonesome sometimes that I think my heart would break within me—here in the same house where she spent her bitter, lonesome days.'

'Are you all alone in the world?'

A faint look of pain passed quickly over the patient old face, but her lips smiled bravely, as she said with a show of cheerfulness:

'Oh, no, ma'am; I have two daughters living, but they are far away from here. They are married and live in Colorado. They have growing sons and daughters, but I have never seen any of my grandchildren. They never came back since they left, though they often talk about it. Oh, they're good to me, she hastened to add. They're always sending me presents. You know I have this little house and enough to keep me; himself saw to that—but I do get the lonesome feeling over me to have none of my own about me. I had eight children, and now all are gone but my two youngest girls, and they are far and far away enough. Ah, well, sure it's the way of the world.'

'Wouldn't you?' I put the question diffidently—'wouldn't you go to them?'

The soft old eyes regarded me gently. 'Ah, ma'am, sure there's no place like your own small corner. Many's the happy day I spent in this little house after we came back here. Four of my children were born here, and here I raised them all. Himself went to his rest twenty-one years ago, and it's out of the same door I want to go when my time comes. Here under the vine we planted fifty years ago I do sit many an hour thinkin' of the old days when I had my children about my feet, the happiest days of a woman's life, ma'am, and a word to the wind, my heart to leave it. Sure I know it, not much to look at—barrin' the vine maybe, but it's home, and it's my own. Sometimes, ma'am, I wish they were here, but they would be coming back to see me. But sure they don't know how much I love to have them. It's no use sayin' that, for when all my grand-children couldn't come, for any reason, I'd be comforted, and it takes a deal to be a grandchild, ma'am.'

'You sure they'd surprise you one of these days,' I put in with a certainty I did not by any means feel. 'How fine it will be to see your grandchildren!'

'Yes,' with a far-away look in her eyes. 'But she never saw her grandchildren to talk to. I mean—and sometimes I do be thinkin' that maybe I--' she hesitated, and a slow tear fell on the withered cheek.

'Nonsense,' I interrupted, briskly. 'It wasn't your fault and if it was, surely you have atoned for it in all these years of loneliness! O wonderful heart, I was thinking, that had kept the memory of that early mistake so fresh in mind, and was willing to suffer now as she had, innocently enough, made another suffer so many years ago. Husband and mother stubborn both, their hearts had crumbled into dust this many a year; yet the reproach and wrong of those old days still found a resting place in this tender, sad old heart.'

At this instant a brilliant idea popped into my head, and before I could conjure up a plan to carry it out, my little woman unconsciously placed the means right in my hand. She said:

'Here's a letter I got from one of my daughters to day. And she drew a thick misive from her apron pocket. 'Would you mind reading it to me again? My eyesight is poor and the girls write so small I can't always make it out.'

To my surprise it was a most delightful letter, full of affection and tender inquiry. There was solicitude in every line and many a fond desire expressed to see the mother soon. The letter confirmed me in my intention, which was carried out that very night. I bade the old lady farewell soon after I finished the