

over thirty years; for me to be bargainin' for this and askin' for that, where I've been mistress and beholden to no one all these years. No; when Tom brings the wife in I go out; it 'ud be folly for Tom to build another house on the place, and what 'ud I do with that big one and Tom gone? No; Tom's father never made but the one will, and that was when Tom was a little lad. He left it all to me, knowin' in his heart that it was me that had made all there was to leave. He knew, too, that I'd do the right thing by the boy; and so I will. Tom and Ann can have the place with the new house, buildin's and stock, and one hundred acres; that's as much as any young pair should have to begin life. The rent of the other hundred 'ull be mine along with the bank money. If Tom wants to keep it I'll rent it to him, if not, there'll be plenty glad to get it."

"And where 'ull you go?" asked Mrs. Watkins eagerly.

"I was just comin' to that. I'll come and buy myself a house here in town. It 'ull be be a different life to me, and not so much to my likin', but it's all there is to do, for I believe in young married folks bein' left to themselves without outside interference. I'll try to take comfort in Tom's bein' happy, and bye-and-bye, perhaps, there'll be children, and that 'ull be very satisfyin' to me. Dear knows, I may even cultivate a likin' for talkin', Mealy, I feel so turned upside down that I hardly know what's what any more. Mebby I have been too set in my ways and myself; mebby the Lord has thought so, and is takin' this way of humblin' me; mebby I'll be happier when it's all over, and I feel I've done the right thing by Tom. Now, Mealy, I've been over it all with you; I had to talk about it or go mad. I'm feeling better now, and Ann Evans never was the upsettin' kind, and perhaps we'll get on well; I hope so for Tom's sake."

AS Mrs. Burns drove up to her gate that afternoon Tom hastened out to meet her. Tom had been in an anxious frame of mind all day, and was glad to see his mother back, and eager to hear what she had to say. He helped her out of the buggy, and was about to unharness the horse, when Mrs. Burns laid her hand on his arm, saying: "Don't put the horse in, Tom, for I want you to drive over to Evans' and bring Ann home with you, I want to have a talk with her."

Tom looked at his mother in surprise; "Want to have a talk with Ann?" he repeated slowly; "Mother, has this anything to do with what I spoke of yesterday? For if it has it's only right that I should know why you want to see Ann. Mother, I love Ann Evans, I have loved her for many years; I am like you; I don't talk much of what is nearest my heart, and loving Ann as I do I am bound to shield her from all unpleasantness. I've waited and said nothing, for I wanted to do what was right by both her and you. Lately it has come to me that I have not been doing right by Ann; that I have been a sort of dog-in-the-manger. I have not asked her myself, and I have helped to keep her from settling in life with some other man all these years. It is this that made me say what I did yesterday; and now, mother, before I bring Ann here I want to know what you are going to say to her. For if it is to be family quarrels Ann is not to be brought into it."

He stood facing his mother, looking at her with her own determined eyes and firm mouth. The mother's eyes softened, and her firm mouth became tremulous as she said: "Tom, can't you trust your mother? Have I ever deceived you yet? Go and bring Ann to me."

"Mother," said Tom, putting his arms around her neck boyishly, "Mother, I do trust you, I'll show you

how much; I'll go and bring Ann, and I'll say nothing to her until you've had your say first; I'll leave it all to you and abide by it." He kissed her, bounded into the buggy and drove off.

MRS. BURNS went into the house and set about getting tea. She opened up her best dining-room, got out her finest linen, her best cutlery and china, and set the table. She brought forth the best she possessed—the daintiest of provisions, and the costliest of tea—tea such as people only drink at weddings or funerals. Even tea can assume the dignity of the occasion; so thought Mrs. Burns, as she measured out the requisite quantity, and its fine bouquet pierced her nostrils. When she had finished all, and stood surveying the splendor, she murmured: "In the course of nature it had to be, and I'd have been one of the first to object to Tom's developin' into one of them dry, pinched lookin' old bachelors; and havin' to be, where could he have found one more after my own heart than Ann Evans?" She paused and gazed at the bright knives, the shining china, glistening glassware, and the snowy, well polished linen.

"Ann Evans 'ull appreciate all this," she went on exultingly to herself, "Ann knows what things are and how to care for them. Ann 'ull see everything on this table, and know the management necessary to keep them lookin' like this." Her eyes were quite soft now. "Dear knows, it isn't goin' to be half as hard as I thought."

She heard the sound of wheels coming up the drive, and deftly felt her lace cap and smoothed down her black silk apron, then walked slowly towards the front door, and opened it just as Tom had helped Ann out. Ann came up the steps with cheeks aglow and shining eyes; she hardly understood it all, and could only surmise, half in fear, and half in doubt, as to what it could all mean.

"How are you, Ann? It is real kind of you to come to tea on such short notice. Come into the bedroom and lay off your hat, and Tom 'ull be into tea presently."

Ann sat on one side of the table, Tom across from her, and Mrs. Burns at the head behind the rare, fragrant tea. Ann took in the display and wondered what it all meant. She had often taken tea with Mrs. Burns, but had never known her to bring out all her best things just for a neighborly cup of tea. By common consent of the housekeepers around, such dignity of state was only brought forth for the preacher, for the school inspector or travelling delegate, provided he were accompanied by his wife, who could understand these things—or for a bride and groom. The best in everyone's house was always for the happy pair who made their tour with a horse and buggy, visiting their respective relations and friends. Ann mentally ran over these questions in her mind, and when she came to the last she blushed. Tom saw her, and asked if her tea was too hot; Mrs. Burns proffered more cream, but Ann said: "The tea is just to my liking; it is the finest tea I ever tasted, what kind is it, Mrs. Burns?"

Mrs. Burns was pleased, for she had felt that Ann would appreciate that tea, so she told her all about it, and became very chatty for her, while the meal was in progress. When they got up from the table Ann began to gather up the plates, when she was stopped by Mrs. Burns with: "We'll leave these for the present, come into the parlor."

Ann marvelled still more, for it was not Mrs. Burns' way to leave her table and best dishes lying, especially as it was still in fly season. The women walked into the parlor, followed by Tom.

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