

the marryin' any more now than he ever was—and I was kind of took unawares, so I said, 'Well, Tom, I must think about this,' and I decided to come down here and talk it all over with you, bein' my own sister, and Tom's aunt, and the only one left belonging to us."

Mrs. Watkins listened with surprise; it was not like Belinda to take things so quietly; and still less her way to offer to consult or ask anyone's advice. Belinda had always been high-handed, and run things on her own judgment only. Mrs. Watkins had expected that when it came to Tom's marriage her sister would put her foot down and refuse to consider it until Tom had openly declined to submit to her authority any longer, had done some threatening, or had declared war to the knife.

"Well, sister," began Mrs. Watkins, slowly, "there's no use denyin' that Tom has reached the years of manhood. He has always been a most obedient boy; he has worked and been a help to you from time he was a lad of twelve; and he has always listened to you and been guided by you, and never stopped to question anything you told him to do. Now he is a man—thirty years of age—and folleyin' the nature the Lord has put in him, he is lonesome, and wants to take a wife, and what are you goin' to do about it?"

MRS. BURNS drew a deep breath, and expelled it in a long sigh. "Mealy, I am goin' to talk to you now as I never thought to talk to any livin' bein'. Some folks like to talk about what's goin' on in their heads—you're like that, Mealy, and I suppose you take comfort in it; others keep their thoughts to themselves, and although they pass remarks, and seemingly mix in with people, they have a life to themselves, in their own heads, that no one suspects them of; now, I'm that kind. Tom's father and me never did much talkin' except about the work of the place. Now, do you suppose I could live on that? No; but I liked to think and plan and do, and so never missed the talkin'."

She paused a moment, and Mrs. Watkins said: "Yes, you've always kept your thinkin' pretty well to yourself. Even me, your own sister, has often been kept in the dark on things I'd ought to know."

"Well, Mealy, it is my nature, and I do not mean any slight by it. It's the same way with Tom. I have often thought that the day 'ud come when Tom 'ud want to marry, but I have put it away, for I did not want to think of it. Tom is my only child, and in my own way I love him as well as any mother could love her son. I've worked for Tom and I've planned for him—but not for Tom's wife. I'd do anything in this world for Tom, but I've always hated the notion of a daughter-in-law. A strange woman steps in and I step down."

"Oh, Mealy, it is that steppin' down that's goin' to break my heart. God Almighty has made us women suffer ever since Eve listened to that serpent in the garden of Eden. For thirty years I've worked and toiled and planned for that boy of mine. When I married and went home with Tom's father he took me into a log cabin on a little clearin' of fifty odd acres, and there my life's work began. What have I accomplished? From the boundary line to beyond the church, from the main road to beyond the railway, in all two hundred acres, cleared, in fine grain and pasture land, with wood enough to last many generations; a fine new brick house with a sink, and water piped into the kitchen, besides all the outside buildin's, barns, stables of the best; not a cent in debt, and money in the bank. Who has done it all? I have. For the Burns before my Tom were the pitiablest managers as far back as anyone could remember."

"And now, what? Tom asks me to step down and let a young woman come in and manage things her way. The Lord forgive me, Mealy, for questionin' His way, but, oh, it is a hard one. First she takes my boy, and he's hers, for 'a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife,' then she steps into the home I've worked for and loved, the gardens I've planted and the buildin's I've planned, and they're hers; and I have to step down and out. My boy's gone, my home's gone, and I am left desolate." Her voice sank into a whisper, then ceased.

She sat staring in front of her with unseeing eyes for a few moments, and then went on: "I wonder now, how a man 'ud feel who has spent his life buildin' up some business, and when he gets to fifty years of age he has to step down and let his daughter's husband step in and manage; perhaps some whippersnapper of a chap who knows nothing about it, but because he married the daughter he's entitled to it? But the Lord has made it easier for the men, what they have earned and built up is theirs as long as the breath of life is in them, and what becomes of it after need not concern them."

"I suppose it's nature," said Mrs. Watkins after a pause, "Eve likely had to step down to Cain's wife, although I don't remember ever hearing about him havin' one; but if he had you may be sure that was the way of it. Men is men, and women is women, and there is no use for a woman to be settin' herself up like a man, for down she'll come as sure as she's born. God made Adam first, and, accordin' to Scripture, was very well satisfied with him, too; He didn't lay out to create any women, but it seemed to come to Him as an afterthought, just like when you were buildin' your house; you took a notion that a verandah along the front 'ud be an improvement; you didn't build the house to show off the verandah, but built the verandah to kind of chime in with the good appearance of the house. Now, it's just the same with women. We were created to kind of chime in with the men, and not to be thought anything of by ourselves, and the sooner in life that we make up our minds to this the better for us; it'll save us lots of worriment all through. Now, I'm goin' to get us a bite of dinner, and after we get something in our insides we'll feel more like facin' things."

Mrs. Watkins bustled around, and soon had an appetising meal on the table, which Mrs. Burns ate in silence, while her sister talked of other things not bearing on the subject so vital to them both.

"NOW," said Mrs. Watkins, after all had been cleared away, "let us go back to Tom again. I suppose you know who he has in mind?"

"Of course, Tom has never looked at but the one girl in his life. He used to carry Ann Evans' lunch basket to school, and help her over fences when he was only a young lad."

"Ann is a good girl," put in Mrs. Watkins, "and comes of decent stock, and there is no better housekeeper in all the township. If a woman has to step down, I'm sure it had ought to be easier to do it for a girl like Ann Evans than for some good-lookin' drab who'd soon have the place at sixes and sevens."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Burns wearily, "It had ought to be easier, I'll allow."

"Perhaps," cautiously, "you and Ann might come to some arrangement that you would not have to leave the place."

"Mealy," sternly from her sister, "you ought to know me well enough not to talk about 'arrangements.' What arrangements could be made, I'd like to know, for me to be playin' second fiddle in a place I've lived in for