

to send him back to Larioch, or whatever is the name of the place he say she comes from.'

'Maybe he'll be mending in a day or two,' suggested Mrs. Huckerby, who was not altogether pleased with this advice. 'I could hold on wi' him for a week, or, on a pinch, for a fortnight. He's always dealt honestly wi' me, and I know he'll pay me back when he's at work again.'

'A week or a fortnight is nothing here or there,' said the doctor, pulling on his warm gloves, impatient to be gone; 'he'll never leave that room alive.'

'You don't say so, sir!' cried she, with lifted hands; 'why, what's amiss? He was out the hinder end of last week.'

'A man with heart disease and lung disease as advanced as his, *can't* live,' replied the doctor, beckoning to the groom to bring the smart dog-cart to the door of the little shop. 'All the same, Mrs. Huckerby, I don't say he will die at once; it may be weeks, or even months, or it may be to-morrow. So your best plan is to get rid of him at once, before it is too late to move him.'

Mrs. Huckerby returned to the kitchen, where the baby, awakened by the doctor's sonorous tones, was whimpering in the dilapidated cradle.

She took the little one up, and sat down in the rocking-chair before the fire. She wanted to make up her mind about Fergus, and with the baby in her lap, stretching out its bare toes to the warmth, and cooing and smiling into its mother's face, she applied such powers as she had to the puzzling question.

One detail after another came up. She had broken into Fergus's last half-crown, and, except his tools and few garments, he owned nothing worth selling. She herself had nothing in hand; though, it was true, business was improving. She remembered she had only just succeeded in getting one burden off her shoulders—that terrible bread-bill—and it was hard if she must at once bind another upon them. The children never had enough food to satisfy them, with all her efforts, and no one knew how hungry she often went herself.

Beyond and above all these very serious considerations, and more to be feared than all these, was the heavy additional labour of nursing to a woman who was already worked to the last extremity, and the shrinking dislike to a death in the house. And then people would laugh at her, and tell her she was a fool to go spending her time and very scarce money over a stranger who was nothing to her.

'Nay, it can't be done. He'll just have to go to the House,' said she at last, looking down at the tender creature who might have to suffer if Fergus were kept. 'Nobody can't say it's my duty, *I'm* sure. It's more nor I could do—sitting up at nights, and the lifting, and the wear and tear o' nerves. He'll have to go, and the sooner the better. Though I'm sorry for the poor chap, and I'd keep him if I could.'

She settled in her own mind to go to the proper authorities respecting the matter the following morning. And, setting the baby down on the strip of worn carpet before the fire, she applied herself again to the wash-tub, whence the doctor's visit had called her.

Although Mrs. Huckerby had come to this very reasonable decision, yet the matter was running in her mind all day—whilst pounding away at the clothes; whilst hanging them up on the rope across the room, to the sad revelation of their worn condition; as she weighed potatoes in the shop, or sold halfpenny-worths of cress and spring onions; talking to the children, smoothing Fergus's bed for him, or making his porridge. Somehow she could not forget it.

It happened that Fergus was rather low to-day. He had more than one bad fit of coughing. One time, when she had done what could be done to ease him, he said weakly, 'God bless you, missis, for your kindness to a poor fellow who hasn't a friend'; then, with the grace that comes naturally to a Highlander, he added, 'You and yours shan't suffer for me. I'll try to make up for it all when I'm out again.'

'There's no call to speak of it,' she said, quite ungracefully, even crossly. She could