

An' all this twenty years we've worked farms together, 's you might say—lookin' to the jinin' of 'em by-and-bye. We've been more'n common neighbors; line fences and ditches aint been strict. Ef he wanted a piece of my gully-field fer the water—why he got it. We've swapped, an' fixed an' mended, an' planned an' made 'provements an' laid bysavin's so 's to give you an' Jack a good start. Ye played together when ye was young ones an' ye used to be sweet-hearts, till after ye come from yer Aunt Laura's. If she's put any nonsense into ye—it's got to come out."

It was a long speech for Robert Martin. He was wrought into a tempest of nervousness. His square, leathery hands were planted into and plucked out of his pockets with the force of which he would have unburdened himself by beating a horse, kicking a dog or jerking a plough.

Debby came and sat down beside the fire. She had hung her coat and cap behind the kitchen door.

"Didn't ye get yer feet wet?" asked the mother.

"A little."

"Well, take them boots right off'n put on yer knitted slippers. It's enough to give ye yer death! Set there an' git warmed through—it'll take the chill out o' yer bones."

Debby acquiesced mechanically and sat facing her father without seeing him. She was shivering, partly from the raw wind and dampness, partly from nervous strain.

Mrs. Martin pattered in and out of the pantry and up and down the cellar stairs. She was a little woman, slender of wrist and waist and neck. Her sallow face, dark-rimmed eyes, yellow eyeballs and

teeth told of her stomach's unsuccessful battle with unwholesome food, bad air and over-work. Her hair was scanty, uncared-for and gray. She wore a cotton gown---gray ground with a black sprig. It was a standard pattern in that section of the country. When one old dress was worn past all redemption by patches, Mrs. Martin bought the same number of yards of the same kind, and made up another in exactly the same style.

"Our butter's most out—we'll hev to eat dry bread by the end of the week," she said. No one paid attention. She habitually looked upon the darkest side, which was partly temperment and partly indigestion.

"Git up an' help yer mother git supper," growled Robert Martin.

Debby started and muttered something about not knowing she was getting tea.

"Never mind father," said the mother. "I'd rather she'd git good an' warm. It's all done now anyway. Ain't your dress wet 'round the bottom," she said, as Debby came over beside her. "Why child," stooping to feel it, "it's soakin'—go right up an' put on dry things."

Debby went, still mechanically.

"You've said enough to her, pa," began Mrs. Martin. She came and stood beside the stove, clasped her hands and turned them palms down to the heat.

"O, you're jest as anxious as I am, but you're so 'fraid she'll die of consumption ef she don't git her own way."

"I thought she liked him," said Mrs. Martin reflectively. "She used to. There must be somebody else."

"Drat 'im, whoever he is—spoilin' my plans. But I'll see ef my girl is a-goin' to run me."