



AIN'T IT TOO BAD ABOUT POOR OLD MIS' LANE?"

when she was visitin' here. She can't mention the place without cryin'."

A dull red came into Mrs. Bridges's face.

"She never visited here."

"Never visited here!" Mrs. Hanna laid her crochet and her hands in her lap, and stared. "Why, she visited everywhere. That's the way she managed to keep out o' the poor-house so long. Everybody was real consid'rate about invitin' her. But I expect she didn't like to come here, because she thought so much of the place."

Isaphene looked over her shoulder at her mother, but the look was not returned. The beans were sputtering nervously into the pan.

"Ain't you got about enough, maw?" she said. "That pan seems to be gettin' hefty."

"Yes, I guess." She got up, brushing the strings off her apron, and set the pan on the table. "I'll watch the cake now, Isaphene. You put the beans on in the pot to boil. Put a piece o' that salt pork in with 'em. Better get 'em on right away. It's pret' near eleven. Ain't this oven too hot with the door shet?"

Then the pleasant preparations for dinner went on. The beans soon began to boil, and an appetizing odor soon floated through the kitchen. Then the potatoes were pared—big, white fellows, smooth and long—with a sharp, thin knife, round and round and round, each without a break until the whole paring had curled itself about Isaphene's pretty arm to the elbow. The cabbage was chopped finely for the cold-slaw, and the vinegar and butter set on the stove in a saucepan to heat. Then Mrs. Bridges began to set the table, covering it first with a red cloth having a white border and fringe. In the middle of the table she placed an uncommonly large, six-bottled caster.

"I guess you'll excuse a red tablecloth, Mis' Hanna. The men-folks get their shirt-sleeves so dirty out 'n the fields that you can't keep a white one clean no time."

"I use red ones myself most the time," replied Mrs. Hanna, crocheting industriously. "It saves washin'. I guess poor old Mis' Lane 'll have to see the old place after all these years; they'll take her right past here to the poor-farm."

Mrs. Bridges set on the table a white plate holding a big square of yellow butter, and stood looking through the open door, down the path, with its tall hollyhocks and scarlet poppies on either side. Between the house and the barn some wild mustard had grown, thick and tall, and was now drifting, like a golden cloud, against the pale blue sky. Butterflies were

throbbing through the air, and grasshoppers were crackling everywhere. It was all very pleasant and peaceful; while the comfortable house and barns, the wide fields stretching away to the forest, and the cattle feeding on the hillside gave a look of prosperity. Mrs. Bridges wondered how she would feel—after having loved the place—riding by to the poor farm. Then she pulled herself together and said, sharply:

"I'm afraid you feel a draught, Mis' Hanna, settin' so close to the door."

"Oh, my, no; I like it. I like lots o' fresh air. If I didn't have six children an' my own mother to keep, I'd take her myself."

"Take who?" Mrs. Bridges voice rasped as she asked the question. Isaphene paused on her way to the pantry, and looked at Mrs. Hanna with deeply thoughtful eyes.

"Why, Mis' Lane—who else?—before I'd let her go to the poor-farm."

"Well, I think her children ought to be made to take care of her!" Mrs. Bridges went on setting the table with brisk, angry movements. "That's what I think about it. The law ought to take holt of it."

"Well, you see the law *has* taken holt of it," said Mrs. Hanna, with a grim smile. "It seems a shame that there ain't somebody 'n the neighborhood that 'u'd take her in. She ain't much expense, but a good deal o' trouble. She's sick, in and out o' bed, nigh onto all the time. My opinion is she's been soured by all her troubles; an' that if somebody 'u'd only take her an' be kind to her, her temperment 'u'd improve wonderful. She's always mighty grateful for every little chore you do her. It just makes my heart ache to think o' her goin' to the poor farm!"

Mrs. Bridges shut her lips tightly together; all the softness and irresolution went out of her face.

"Well, I'm sorry for her," she said, with an air of dismissing a disagreeable subject; "but the world's full of troubles, an' if you cried over all o' them you would be cryin' all the time. Isaphene, you go out and blow the dinner-horn. I see the men folks ev got the horses about foddered."

"I'm thinkin' about buyin' a horse an' buggy," she announced, with sternly repressed triumph, when the girl had gone out. "An' an organ. Isaphene's been wantin' one, an' I don't believe her paw'll ever get worked up to the pitch o' gettin' it for her. But I've got some money laid by. I'd like to see his eyes when he comes home an' finds a bran new buggy with a top

an' all, an' a horse that he can't hetch to a plough, no matter how bad he wants to! I ain't sure but I'll get a phaeton."

"They ain't as strong, but they're handy to get in an' out of—specially for old, trembly knees."

"I ain't so old that I'm trembly."

"Oh, my—no," said Mrs. Hanna, with a little start. "I was just thinkin' mebbe sometimes you'd go out to the poor farm an' take poor old Mis' Lane for a little ride. It ain't more'n five miles, is it? She ust to have a horse an' buggy o' her own. Somehow, I can't get her off o' my mind at all to-day. I just heard about her's I was startin' for your house."

The men came to the house, pausing on the back porch to clean their boots on the scraper, and wash their hands and faces with water dipped from the rain barrel. Their faces shone like brown marble when they came in.

It was five o'clock when Mrs. Hanna, with a sigh, began rolling the lace she had crocheted around the spool, preparatory to taking her departure.

"Well," she said, "I must go. I had no idy it was so late. How the time does go, talkin'! Just see how well I've done—crocheted full a yard since dinner-time! My! how pretty that hop-vine looks. 'T makes an awful nice shade, too. I guess when Mis' Lane planted 't she thought she'd be settin' under it herself to-day—she took such pleasure in it."

The ladies were sitting in the front porch. It was cool and fragrant out there. The shadow of the house reached almost to the gate now. The bees had been drinking too many sweets—greedy fellows! and were lying in the red poppies, droning stupidly. A soft wind was blowing from Puget Sound and turning over the clover leaves, making here a billow of dark green and there one of light green; it was setting loose the perfume of the blossoms, too, and sifting silken thistle-needles through the air. Along the fence was a hedge, eight feet high, of the beautiful ferns that grow luxuriantly in western Washington. The pasture across the lane was a tangle of royal color, being massed in with golden-rod, pink-weed, yarrow, purple thistles, and field daisies; the cottonwoods that lined the creek at the side of the house were snowing. There was a wild syringa near the gate, throwing out spray upon spray of white, delicately scented, golden-hearted flowers.

Mrs. Bridges arose and followed her guest into the spare bedroom.

"When they goin' to take her to the poor-farm?" she asked, abruptly.

"Day after to-morrow. Ain't it awful? It just makes me sick to think about it. I couldn't 'a' eat a bite o' dinner 'f I'd stayed at home, just for thinkin' about it. They say the poor old creature ain't done nothin' but cry an' moan sence she know'd she'd got to go."

"Here's your bag," said Mrs. Bridges. "Do you want I should tie your veil?"

"No, thanks; I guess I won't put it on. If I didn't have such a big fam'ly, an' my own mother to keep, I'd take her myself b'fore I'd see her go to the poor-house. If I had a small fam'ly an' plenty o' room, I declare my conscience would'n't let me rest no way."

A dull red glow spread slowly over Mrs. Bridge's face.

"Well, I guess you need'nt keep hintin' for me to take her," she said, sharply.

"You!" Mrs. Hanna uttered the word in a tone that was an unintentional insult; in fact, Mrs. Bridges affirmed afterward that her look of astonishment, and, for that matter, her whole air of dazed incredulity, were insulting. "I never once thought o' *you*," she said, with an earnestness that could not be doubted.

"Why not o' me?" demanded Mrs. Bridges, showing something of her resentment. "What you been talkin' about her all day for, 'f you wasn't hintin' for me to take her in?"

"I never thought o' such a thing," repeated her visitor, still looking rather helplessly dazed. "I talked about it because it was on my mind, heavy, too; an', I guess, because I wanted to talk my conscience down."

Mrs. Bridges cooled off a little, and began to