

children, I thought it was more than I could bear: but it wasn't bad as this—"

The stranger waited until she recovered her voice to go on.

"I had only the cottage and my willing hands. I toiled early and late all the years till John could help me. Then we kept the girls at school, John and me. They were married not long ago. Married rich, as the world goes. John sold the cottage, sent me to the city to live with them, and he went West to begin for himself. He said we had provided for the girls, and they would provide for me now—"

Her voice choked with emotion. The stranger waited in silence.

"I went to them in the city. I went to Mary's first. She lived in a great house many times larger than the little cottage, but I soon found there wasn't room enough for me—"

The tears stood in the lines on her cheeks. The agent came out softly, stirred the fire and went back. After a pause she continued:

"I went to Martha's—went with a pain in my heart I never felt before. I was willing to do anything so as not to be a burden. But that wasn't it. I found that they were ashamed of my bent old body and withered face—ashamed of my rough, wrinkled hands, made so toiling for them—"

The tears came thick and fast now. The stranger's hand rested caressingly on the gray head.

"At last they told me I must live in a boarding-house, and they'd keep me there. I couldn't say anything back: my heart was too full of pain. I wrote to John what they were going to do. He wrote right back, a long, kind letter, for me to come right to him. I always had a home while he had a roof, he said; to come right there and stay as long as I lived; that his mother should never go out to strangers. So I'm going to John. He's got only his rough hands and his great, warm heart, but there's room for his old mother, God bless him—"

The stranger brushed a tear from her fair cheeks, and