

white sheet, covering it with the other. The next morning the stranger, who had slept soundly all night, leaving the desolate women to keep vigil with their own dead, dug a grave on a sunny slope, beside the five small graves already there; and Mildred, after tidying up the poor, bruised body as much as possible, and sewing it up in a sheet, brought boards, and together they constructed a rude box. This the loving sister hands lined with strips of a soft quilt, and in it they laid the mortal remains of "Ted"—her Ted, for whom she had sacrificed all. Kneeling beside the rude coffin, she shed the first tears that had come to her relief.

"Ted, Toddy! You are at rest and free from danger, and God grant that it will be well with you." Then looking up suddenly at her sister-in-law, who was lying back in her chair, she said triumphantly: "And he wasn't drunk, Jess; the men all said he refused to take a drop."

With almost superhuman strength the faithful sister assisted in the burial, and then sinking on the newly-made mound, she begged the man to leave her. All the day she lay there, until the sun was going down; then, rising, she groped rather than walked back to the house and mechanically resumed her duties there. The widow was really sick from fright and remorse by this time, and her pale, pinched face melted Mildred's heart, which had been hard toward her since her return.

"Poor, weak thing; but she's all that's left me," she thought.

The man, whose name was Bolton, went back to The Pass with the horse, taking Dick, at Jess's earnest entreaty, to ride back, for she said—

"You must come back for a few days, Mr. Bolton, or we shall die of fright."

Mildred suggested getting him to send help from a farm there was a few miles in another direction, but Jess would not hear to it. He came back and staid several days; then Mildred was gone nearly all one day on Dick, and when she came home she announced that she had engaged a half-breed, known as "Texas," to come and look after the stock and gather the crops.

Jess and Bolton were both angry, and the former fretted and whined. Texas came, however, and Bolton, after a private interview of some length with the widow, took his departure, but only to return every little while for a week's sojourn. Mildred did not like him. Jess seemed to be improving in health, and one day, when Ted had been dead three months, she announced to Mildred that the next time Bolton came she was going with him to The Pass. Of course, Mildred was surprised, but as she had always thought most of Jess's ailments imaginary, she was glad to see her getting out.

When the couple returned, however, and announced themselves married, she was almost furious. "And poor Ted in his grave only twelve short weeks!" she cried, choking with sobs and indignation; but the "turtle doves" did not seem to mind in the least.

Mildred went silently about the work now, seldom speaking to either of them, but thinking, thinking.

"I would go away from them only this is all the home I have; and after all these sixteen years I can not bury the skeleton in Ted's grave, and go back into the world from which I followed him. No, no; I want to die here, and surely they will bury me by Ted and the little ones," and so she took up the burden of life again in a per force, half-hearted way.

Jess had been Mrs. Bolton less than a month, when one evening, as Mildred sat on the little porch amid the ruins of the summer's beauty, veiled from sight by the tangle of dead vines, she heard Bolton's voice within saying—

"Say, Jess, s'pose ye hint ter the ole gal ter git out; we can't afford ter keep her nohow, 'nd she's so sort o' bossy, too. Everything here is our'n, 'nd she don't seem ter re'lize it."

"Well, I shan't hint any such thing, I kin tell ye. Why, d'ye s'pose I could do the work here? I see myself! Besides, we likely won't be here long. I guess that notice you stuck up of 'farm fer sale' will fetch a buyer pretty quick, 'nd I'm jist dyen ter live in town."

"So be I."

Waiting to hear no more, Mildred slipped off the porch, and fled through the darkness, stumbling, falling, rising, rushing on until she sank breathless and trembling upon her brother's grave. A grave beside him then was even to be denied her.

"Oh, God, this is terrible!" she groaned aloud.

Heeding neither cold nor dampness, she lay there for hours, trying to comprehend the terrible situation, trying to think ahead.

"What a failure my life has been," she sobbed. "I sacrificed life and love, and in the end it has all amounted to nothing."

In the morning she was too stiff and sick to rise, and when, at last, Jess came into her room to see what was the matter, she found her feverish and light-headed; but by noon she was better, and the next day she went out early to saddle Dick.

"I want that hoss to-day," cried Bolton, roughly.

"So do I," was the quiet reply.

"Where be ye goin' ter?"

"To The Pass."

"Not by a durned sight!" he swaggered, laying a hand on the bridle.

"Mr. Bolton," with a sneer, "I want you to understand that things here do not belong to you yet."