

# Very Long Lived

By LOUISE B. CUMMINGS

"Mirandy," said her aunt, Miss Quackenbos, "I don't see any reason why you and Dan Perkins shouldn't be married at once instead o' waitin' for me to git out o' the way and—leave you what I got. I tell you what I'll do. I'm an old woman and not likely to live the year out. Dr. Baldwin says there isn't a sound organ in my shriveled old body. If you and Dan are certain you're goin' to get my property you'll feel more like gettin' married than if you're not. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"I'll leave you property worth \$10,000 on condition that you take care o' me for the few months I have to live. You bind yourselves to give me \$500 a year. The money is invested at that, so you'll not be out a cent, and when I'm buried you'll have the whole thing."

Dan had a salary of \$1,200 a year, but with nothing laid up he had declined to marry Miranda, who had nothing, until he should make some accumulation. This offer of the aunt gave him courage, and the pair, having taken over the property and signed a bond to pay Mrs. Quackenbos \$500 a year so long as she lived, were married. A part of the estate was the dwelling in which the old woman lived. Being too large for her, she moved out to spend the rest of her days with a sister, and the bridal couple moved in.

Now, this was an excellent arrangement. It gave the young couple a confidence they would not otherwise have felt. But they were prevented from making any use of the property until it was unencumbered by the annuity. Dan was disposed to refrain from encroaching upon the estate, but Miranda needed this and needed that, and when her husband objected she would say that her aunt was getting worse every day and surely couldn't live the month out. Then Dan would yield, and the desired articles would be bought.

But the old lady didn't die. After lying supposedly at the point of death for a long while she suddenly got out of bed and seemed more chipper than ever. Indeed, she announced that she was disinclined to mope and was going to start a chicken farm. This she did in a small way, and the interest she took in it improved her health amazingly.

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Perkins were having a hard time to get on. The Quackenbos property gave them no income and had been an inducement to spend money that did not come in, as had been expected. Children came to them, and it seemed the more children and the older and more experienced they grew the more vigorous the old lady became. Of course they could not object to her remaining alive, but she spoke to them on the subject thus:

"Reckon you two think I'm goin' to live forever. It ain't my fault. I don't want to hang on any longer. I'm ready to go any time. After all, it won't do you any harm. You're economizin' at a time when you ought to economize, and you'll reap the benefit of it all after I'm gone."

Then the couple would look at each other and sigh, knowing that their debts had already nearly eaten up the whole expected property.

The old lady hung on till the Perkins' debt exactly balanced the \$10,000 they had taken in exchange for the annuity. Then she died. They paid the funeral expenses—\$300—which left them in debt by that amount.

Considering how unfortunate they had been in the old lady's living so long, they behaved very well. Indeed, they did not blame her. They blamed themselves for having drawn upon the property before they possessed it. They not only refrained from accusing Miss Quackenbos from designedly drawing them into a trap, but spoke kindly of her both in the domestic circle and to others.

Having buried the old lady, they put the property they had taken from her in the market to sell to pay their debts. Then one day they went to her quarters to remove to their house the few belongings she had left. Among these articles they brought away a tin box. It was locked, and they did not find the key, but since there seemed to be something in it Dan pried it open. Within they found a bundle of papers and pass books. Miranda opened one of the books and found that it showed a credit at a savings bank of \$937.56. Then she opened another, and it showed a credit of \$2,742.18. A third more than doubled these two together.

Dan unfolded a document, which proved to be a deed to a dwelling and another to a business block. All this property was in Miss Quackenbos' name. The Perkins couple began to open their eyes. The old lady had evidently possessed more property than she had conveyed to them. But who had inherited what these vouchers stood for?

They began to empty the box in a search for a will. Pass books, deeds, certificates of stock and bonds were picked out and strewed the floor. Then Miranda, running over the indorsements on a bundle of papers, exclaimed: "Here it is. Last will and testament!"

Unfolding the paper with trembling hands, she cried: "To my beloved niece, Miranda Quackenbos Perkins."

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