

Grandmother's Bureau

Alice Brown

Illustrated by

E. F. Ward

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Grandmother's Bureau

By

ALICE BROWN

ILLUSTRATED BY E. F. WARD



Rilla Dayton, this early June morning, was on her way from Sudleigh to Tenterden. She had started before light, because, although she was coming from Sudleigh township, she had been staying two miles beyond the town limit, and this gave her an eight-mile walk. But she was swinging lightly along, as if she had not changed her stride since starting, and indeed she had rather warmed up to it, because, as she frankly told herself, she was growing more nerved up with every step. She was a young woman to whom emotion, in its outward manifestations, was becoming. It caused her to lift her finely set head even more proudly, and quickened the spark in her great dark eyes. She wore a blue calico, finely starched and ironed, and she had taken off her hat and swung it by her side. Judge Pemberton, meeting her as he was driving in his light wagon to Sudleigh, was caught by the gleam of the morning light on her bronze-red hair and felt like taking off his hat to such beauty. He did take it off, though Rilla could not know what inner tribute he was paying her, drew up and called to her:

“How are you, Rilla? Glad to see you ’round these parts again.”

Rilla came up to the wheel and took the hand he stretched down to her.

“Very well I thank you, Judge,” she said, in a frank pleasure at seeing him. “No, I haven’t been here lately, not since I ran away.”

The last she offered with a bright defiance which seemed to bring a deeper red into her velvet cheek, and the judge had great ado to keep from telling her what a cheek of rosy splendor it was and what a fool he had often thought her husband, Jeremy Dayton, for letting her go.

“How far are you walking?” he asked.

“Back home,” she answered, unthinking, and then corrected herself: “To Tenterden,” and continued with an unabated defiance, “I hear there’s goin’

to be an auction, an' I mean to get there early an' save my grammother's bureau."

"Step away from the wheel," said the judge, "so I sha'n't run over you." He backed, turned the wagon about and cramped the wheel for her. "Step in," he said. "I'll take you along a piece."

"Why, no, Judge," said Rilla. "I ain't tired, not a mite. It's no more to me to walk from Sudleigh over here than 'tis to do a forenoon's washin'—not so much."

"Step in," said the judge authoritatively, in a quiet way, and she obeyed him.

"I might ha' come by the woods," she said, as she settled herself and folded her brown hands in her lap. "But I wanted to start early, an' I thought the brakes would be wet as sop. I didn't want to get there lookin' like a drowned rat."

The judge thought he understood perfectly. Although she was going to fight out a property issue with a husband she refused to live with, none the less she elected to appear before her lost lord in all the becomingness of starched calico. He had pulled the horse in a little and they were going "step and step." After a ruminative moment of considering the wisdom of the challenge, he turned upon her suddenly.

"Rilla," he said, "what d'you run away for?"

She paused about an equal length of time and then cocked her head so that she met his eyes obliquely. Her face broke up into merriment.

"Well," said she, "nobody's dared to ask me that, not even Brother Samuel, when I went over to him an' asked to be took in to work for my board; but seein' it's you, Judge—"

Here she paused and laughed out in a spontaneous little burst he found strangely at odds with the tragedy of a woman who had deserted her home.

"Well," said he remindingly, after a moment, "seeing it's me—" The conventionality of his speech weakened in proportion to his sympathy.

Still she kept her perverse silence.

"Don't anybody know?" he pursued. "How about your husband. Does he know?"

"Yes," said Rilla provokingly. "I guess he knows all right."

“Well, what was it?”

“If I must speak,” said Rilla, “we quarreled.”

“Of course. Everybody knows that. But what about?”

She laughed outright.

“Well,” said she, unwillingly it seemed, for she knew when she was absurd, “it was about a winder.”

“A window? He wanted it open and you wanted it shut?”

“Oh, no,” said Rilla, “when we quarreled it hadn’t been put in.”

“I see,” said the judge gravely. “You quarreled about a window that didn’t exist.”

“I might as well tell you the whole an’ tell it as ’twas,” said she. “I guess I’ve got to. You see, I wanted a dormer window put into the shed chamber, so’s ’twould make us another sleepin’ room. We’re always bein’ overrun with company, his folks an’ all. An’ if you’ll believe me, he wouldn’t do it.”

“Perhaps he couldn’t,” said the judge. “Maybe he hadn’t the money.”

“Yes, he had, too.” She sat straighter, if that could be, and a thrill came into her voice. He saw she was living that past revolt all over again. “He’d got it right there in the desk. It was what we took in from boardin’ them lumbermen you had down here to thin out your woods, an’ I earnt it as much as he did.”

“Well,” said the judge, temporizing, “maybe he thought it was wise to lay it aside for a rainy day.”

“Rainy day!” Her sense of the incredible nature of her wrong mounted higher and higher. “No, he’d got it all planned out what he meant to do with it. He was goin’ to put in three winders in the barn, one side o’ the other, there at the north corner, an’ put him in a carpenter’s bench.”

“Well,” said the judge, plucking up hope because it seemed to him he had something more of a case than he feared, “your husband’s a carpenter besides being a farmer. Every carpenter needs a bench, and unless he’s a fool he plans to have it where he can see.”

“Oh, it wa’n’t that,” said Rilla impatiently. “It wa’n’t really the winder. It was only the winder begun it. An’ then we went on from bad to worse. First, I told him he’d got one carpenter’s bench in the carriage-house, an’ he said

'twas a dark hole an' wuss'n none at all. Then I told him he didn't care no more about me than the wind that blows. An' at that, he said—"

She stopped, and the judge, glancing 'round at her, saw that at last her full lip trembled.

"Go on," he said quietly. "What was it he said."

"Oh!" moaned Rilla, with a prolonged breath, "I thought I wa'n't goin' to shed no more tears over that. I'll tell you, an' mebbe then I sha'n't. He said 'twas true, he didn't." Again she put her head up and gave a little shake as if she shook away the dust of trouble. "But that," she continued, "ain't no reason why anybody ought to expect me to let my grammother's bureau be sold at auction. You draw up here, Judge. We're gettin' pretty nigh, an' I'd better 'pear there afoot an' alone. Mebbe when I get to the gate I sha'n't have the courage to go in at all."

The judge drew up, and she stepped out.

"I guess you'll go," he said. "But before you come away again, I'd take a look at that corner of the barn, if I were you, and I'd take another look at the shed chamber. Then you can make up your mind all over again whether you've made a mistake and, if you haven't, just how you'd like things to be."

"I dunno," said Rilla dispiritedly. Her charming gayety had sunk, with the end of her journey. "I dunno what I shall say nor what I can do. But anyways, I'm goin' to put up a fight for Grammother's bureau."

The judge, on his way to Sudleigh, turned about to wave his hand at her, and she stood in the road looking after him until the wagon had gone spinning round the first turn. She was loath to lose the only friend she could be sure of in her forsaken home. The neighbors, she knew, must have talked over her going with the individual frankness she remembered in each one of them. Her husband had let her go in silence, and he might receive her with an outspoken repudiation only a shade worse.

She went along droopingly, stopping only for a minute more to put on her hat, as offering the support of a more conventional approach, and when she reached the narrow path leading up to the great square yellow house she took it almost at a run, lest courage fail her. The path, she noted, as she went, was very narrow, a mere line in the unmown grass. It had not been trodden much this spring, and she felt a momentary throb of indignation at the neighbors, for not coming to enliven what must have been Jeremy's solitary hours. At least, though he had been so willing to abet her in her

resolve to go, he must have had minutes of hunger for companionship, for voices echoing through his silent rooms. As she reached the front door and set her foot on the stone step, a great wave of feeling rushed at her and stopped her progress. For she heard him coming, and wondered for one wild moment if he were coming to meet her. The steps drew nearer and he appeared from the sitting-room and was about to cross the hall, when he saw her and stopped short and stared at her as she was staring at him. Her first thought was that he had changed in the three months, not as she had, to grow, on the stimulus of anger, more robust and, her looking-glass told her, handsomer by far, but to gain an acquiescent, questioning look, as if something vital had happened to him and he had failed to understand it. He was a tall man, with thin brown hair and a bright spark in the eyes. She had once told him he never lighted up unless he was looking at a piece of machinery or turning a screw. She had wished, when strangers saw him, that they could find him over his tools. Then they wouldn't go away saying Jeremy Dayton was a kind of a washed-out man that didn't look as if he had force enough to go in when it rained. But now, as he stood without sound or motion, staring at her, she found something almost terrifyingly solemn in his fixed gaze. It seemed to have got so used to asking the mysterious question to which it found no answer that it had gained a permanent appeal and wonder. How the silence would have broken she could not have told. Perhaps, in the abashment of her wonder she would have had to go away without breaking it at all. But suddenly her eyes, falling upon a rent in his blouse, traveled down to his hands, and noted that, as he stood there, he held the old japanned tray, heavy with a pile of china, the best china from the sitting-room closet. And the hands were trembling. Then at once she forgot herself and him and found her voice.

“For goodness sake,” said she, “don’t you drop that china! What you doin’ with it, anyway?”

To her relief she sounded cross. At least, however much his blouse needed mending or his eyes an invitation to a more confident look, she was not going to cry. Something broke and shivered in him also, and he looked down at the tray as if its presence there surprised him.

“I thought I’d carry it into the best bedroom,” he said absently, beginning again to watch her face. “I’m pickin’ up, little by little. If folks are comin’ ’round to buy, first thing they do they’ll poke into the house. The settin’-room cluzzet don’t lock, an’ it jest come over me you set by that chiny.”

“Here,” said Rilla briskly, “you let me take it. I’ll put it in on the best-room bed till we can find a better place, an’ shet the door.”

She stepped in, took the tray from him and carried it through the parlor to the bedroom at the back. She carried it with a perfect steadiness, but when she had set it on the orange and blue quilt Grandmother had pieced together when she made them her first visit and slept in this very room, she found her hands were trembling, quite as Jeremy’s had trembled, and she wrung them together once, angrily, to warn them such betraying weakness could not be. She gave one enveloping glance about the room and another round the parlor, as she crossed it on her way out, and the dust thick on her beloved possessions hurt her like an accusation. Jeremy was standing precisely where she had left him, “in his tracks,” she told herself. He did not seem to have moved an inch. Not even his eyes had moved. They were still solemnly seeking and, as she stepped into their focus, it began to seem to her, with a great conviction, that they were seeking her. She had to speak sharply, to cover her knowledge of it.

“Look here,” said she, “if you’re goin’ to have folks in an’ out here you’d ought to dusted off the things. They don’t look as if they’d been dusted once for a month o’ Sundays.”

“They ain’t,” said Jeremy. “Not sence—”

Here he stopped, and she briskly took up the tale. She felt as if she were heading him off, heading them both off from remembrances they must not entertain.

“Well,” she said, “if the duster ain’t been used, it’ll be in the same old place. I’ll just run over this room an’ give it a lick an’ a promise. Nobody’d ought to be expected to bid on things they can write their names on.”

She had darted through to the kitchen and came back with her clean duster, unused, she sagely assumed, since the day she had washed it last. Her hands flew over the parlor furniture like a rhythmic wind, and as she freed the polished surfaces from their desolate gray bloom, Jeremy watched her, still, as she noted, with an odd disturbance at her heart, not stirring from his tracks.

“There,” she said, when she had finished the room and given one frowning glance at its renewed perfection, “now I’m goin’ to sweep up the kitchen floor. You’ve got a regular hurrah’s nest there. You blaze up a fire, an’ ’fore the stove’s het up I’ll give it a mite o’ blackin’. I shouldn’t think it had been blacked sence—”

“No,” said Jeremy, in the same low voice. “It ain’t, not sence—”

Here again he stopped, and when she brought forth from some hiding-place of her own in the shed a rag of low degree, devoted to the stove, and washed off the traces of his most flagrant derelictions of spilling and burning, he laid the fire, and lighted it, and as it blazed she blacked and polished with a vigor which seemed only the haste of getting ahead of a too fervent heat. Jeremy stood and watched, until at length she could bear it no longer.

“Ain’t you got anything to do?” she inquired, as she brushed. “You make me as nervous as a witch. Seems if anybody was out o’ their heads advertisin’ an auction an’ not takin’ one step toward gettin’ ready for it. An’ here ’tis nine o’clock, an’ by ’leven they’ll begin together. You got anything to give ’em for luncheon?”

“Why, no,” said Jeremy, “I dunno’s I have.”

“No crackers an’ cheese, an’ no salt fish?” she inquired, as if the auction were indubitably the end and aim of her return. “I never heard o’ such a thing. An’ here’s the furniture all scattered over the house, an’ no lists made out for the auctioneer to go by—that is, fur as I can see. But mebbe you’ve been over it with him an’ he’s made out his own lists. If you ain’t, it’s the most shif’less piece o’ business I ever knew in all my born days.”

“Where’d you see the auction bill?” he inquired now, quickly, as if he dreaded beginning even any common-place intercourse with her and yet must venture in.

“’Twas up in the post office,” said she. “I went in there ’long about dusk last night, an’ there was much as a dozen lookin’ at it an’ readin’ down the list to be sold.”

“D’you read it?” inquired Jeremy.

“Read it? No, I guess I didn’t. I was glad enough to get out ’fore they turned an’ set eyes on me. But I see ’twas Thursday, an’ I says to myself, ‘My soul! that’s to-morrer, an’ if I’m goin’ to save anything I’ve got to start out bright an’ early.’ ”

“Well, I guess,” said Jeremy, “ ’f you had read it you wouldn’t ha’ found anything to be upset about.”

“No,” said she, “mebbe I shouldn’t. Most o’ the things was yourn. I never brought you anything.”

“Yes, you did, Rilla,” said he, in so low a voice that she caught only the murmur of it, “you brought all there was.”

“What d’you say?” asked Rilla, and he answered:

“Nothin’ of any consequence. ’Tain’t wuth sayin’ over again.”

She had finished the stove and now stood, brush in hand, looking with approval at its black perfection. Her gaze fell to the floor and she shook her head with deep dissatisfaction.

“I guess I’ll run over that oilcloth underneath the stove,” she said. “There won’t be time to do the whole floor. I’ve got to give all the rooms a brushin’ up. You can’t be sure where they’ll go nor where they won’t. An’ like’s not they’ll begin together by ten.”

“I dunno’s I would,” said Jeremy. “Seems a pity to spend every minute you’ve got clearin’ up a house you’ve give up int’reast in.”

She had caught a pail from under the sink and now was pumping into it with quick, forcible strokes. She wondered how he could hurt her by saying a thing like that, he who had never hurt even her quick spirit until that last day when he had told her he did not care for her.

“Anybody needn’t have no ownership nor int’reast in a house,” she said, “to want to see it look decent enough for folks to come into.” She knelt, with her pail and cloth, and began washing the oilcloth vigorously. “But there’s one thing I do take an int’reast in,” she said, whipping up in herself what she hoped was going to feel like the impelling force of anger, “an’ that’s Grammother’s bureau. That ain’t goin’ to be bid off an’ carried out o’ this house, nobody knows where, not if I can help it.”

He was silent, and she intermitted her scrubbing to look up at him.

“Jeremy Dayton,” said she, “don’t you tell me you’ve made way with Grammother’s bureau.”

“No,” said Jeremy quietly, “I ain’t made way with it.”

“Then what have you done with it? I see the minute I come in ’twa’n’t there in the back hall where it’s always set an’ was goin’ to set till I got me another spare room.” Then, as he did not answer, she rose and confronted him. “Jeremy Dayton,” said she, “what you done with my grammother’s bureau?”

He did not answer. His eyes avoided her, and she told herself she had never, not even in the days when he used to say soft things to her, seen him

look more sheepish.

“Well,” she pursued, “why don’t you answer me? You’ve carried it off. Where’ve you carried it to?”

Now he did answer, in a halting, shamefaced way.

“I guess it ain’t gone fur.”

“I know where ’tis,” she cried, in a sudden access of hot certainty. “You’ve sold it to that old-furniture man that’s set up shop in Sudleigh. He see it once, when he come to the door spyin’ ’round after old castaway things. I dunno’s ever I thought to tell you. You was down the lot, hoein’. He left his team at the gate an’ come there to the front door, an’ while I was tellin’ him we’d nothin’ to sell, he was peekin’ ’round behind me to see what he could spy out. ‘What’s that,’ says he, ‘back there under the stairs?’ ‘It’s my grammother’s bureau,’ says I, ‘an’ there ain’t money enough in this township to buy that, not if Judge Pemberton himself wanted it an’ turned in all he’s got.’” She was silent, and her eyes pierced him. “An’ I know,” said she, “how it happened. I know to a dot. Somebody told him Jeremy Dayton’s wife over to Tenterden had left him, an’ he hitched up and drove over, and you hadn’t got over your mad, an’ when he asked for Grammother’s bureau you up an’ let it go. I dunno’s you’d done it if you’d had more time to think it over, or if he hadn’t come so quick,” she added, moved, in spite of her, by the look of reproach unmistakable in his eyes. “But anybody’ll do anything when they’re mad. I would myself.”

Then she remembered her task, snatched the pail from the floor and went out through the shed to empty the water near the lilac she had been trying to encourage. It had not thriven very well in the dryness of the bank about the house, but now it had taken a start. As she poured the water, she noticed the bush had been dug around and fertilised. The ground was wet about it. Jeremy, she thought with wonder, must, for some unknown reason, be taking an interest in the lilac. But when she came back to the kitchen, her mind was made up.

“I’m goin’ to sweep them other rooms,” she said, “but I can’t put my mind on anything till I know what’s become o’ Grammother’s bureau. You goin’ to tell me or not?”

“No,” said Jeremy quietly. “I ain’t goin’ into that.”

“Why ain’t you?” Rilla pursued him peremptorily, and he answered with the same immovable mildness:

“I dunno’s I can say.”

She looked at him a moment, perusing his expression, weighing his words. She thought she knew Jeremy Dayton root and branch, egg and bird, but now at last he was baffling her.

“Well,” she said, after her cogitation, “there’s nothin’ for me to do but go over the house an’ see. I s’pose, as long as the whole township an’ half o’ Sudleigh’s liable to be here in course of an hour an’ run over things,” she added bitterly, “you wouldn’t feel as if you needed to forbid me to do the same.”

“Rilla,” said Jeremy suddenly and with vigor, “don’t be a fool. You know—”

“What is it I know?” she prompted him.

“Nothin’,” said he, again out of his immovable calm. “You can go where you’re a mind to an’ say what you’re a mind to, for all o’ me.”

It was, she saw, all a part of the change that had come over him when he had cast her off, and with a dull, renewed acceptance of it, she turned about and went up the kitchen stairs. In spite of her high head so humble did she feel that it seemed presuming to go into the front hall and up those wider stairs. The whole county might do that when they came to the auction to buy what she once called her things. There was nothing for her but to make the house decent for them and then slip away into exile. But first, blow high, blow low, she would assure herself about Grammother’s bureau. In the back hall she did pause one moment to wonder whether she could bear a glimpse at the front rooms, they must have fallen into such a dusty melancholy. No one, she was sure, had set a foot in them since she left them without a good-by glance. But though the bureau was not likely to be in a room already fully furnished, she meant her quest to be a thorough one. Besides, curiosity and a love of the whole house, now passionately renewed, beckoned her, and she hurried, lightly as if she must not be heard, into the great west chamber, and there she stopped, constrained by wonder. The room was the same, yet not the same. The furniture was there, in the old places, but the top of the bureau was uncovered, the bedspread was gone, and the floor was bare. All her handsomest rugs had been here, the drawn-in ones and the homespun she had made on Grammother’s old loom. She looked at the mantel and that, too, affronted her. The Little Praying Samuel was gone and the vases with the peacock and the deer, delightful pieces, the peacocks larger than the deer.

“My soul!” she breathed to herself and then was silent, for another wonder was upon her. The looking-glass, too, the old Constitution mirror: that was gone from between the windows, and the dark green oblong behind

it, she noted absently, showed how green paper fades. And at that instant she heard Jeremy's step. He was coming up the front stairs. Rilla, in the instant of hearing him, felt she could not possibly see him again. She was at last afraid—afraid of being angry, if he had denuded the room out of some obscure resentment against her, afraid she might reproach him, and, above all, afraid of the pang ready to stab her if he told her the house was no longer hers and she had no right to “meddle nor make.” She turned with a wild inner certainty that one refuge at least was open to her, one dark unadorned spot where she might hide from him until she could get control of herself again, and ran cautiously along the back hall to the shed chamber. She opened the door softly, stepped in and closed it behind her. There she stood bewildered, struck so suddenly by the strangeness of the place that she held her hand across her eyes, to shut out the vision and recall her normal self. At that moment she wondered, with a sudden terror at the unexpected within the ordered certainties of her mind, if she had perhaps thought and dreamt of the shed chamber until reason itself was overthrown. Now she opened her eyes and looked about her timorously. It was no vision. The room was smiling at her, a room such as she had never seen. It was not even the room she had imagined in the dark chambers of her dull resentment where she dwelt upon his cruelty in refusing to make it even livable. Jeremy had not built the dormer she had asked for. He had lifted the entire roof at the back, and put in a line of windows with mullions between. Five windows there were, and through them was the outlook to the sunset and Ellen's Hill. It seemed to her a long time that she gazed at the view from those windows, one after another, and she kept gazing because, though strangely, they were helping her keep her hold on sanity. For there was Ellen's Hill, in all the glamour of its new green. Looking into the familiar softness of its beauty, she could believe the nearer strangenesses were real. The room she found not only altered but bloomed out in unimagined beauty. It had been a skeleton of a room with bare rafters and black shadows, and now it glowed in shining white paint and a delightful paper with a light background and little nosegays of rosebuds tied together with blue ribbon. The old four-post bedstead that had been stored away in the barn because Jeremy had never found time to tinker a fractured leg was standing there in polished pride, and over the plump feather bed was the quilt from the west chamber. Grammother's bureau stood opposite, where the Constitution mirror over it got the best light from the five windows, and on it lay the embroidered cover under the vases with the peacocks and deer. Rilla felt as if she had climbed a mountain, with stumblings and great weariness, to find a heaven of beauty at the top. She looked, as if she could never look her fill. Innocently she had no idea the room was hers. She had forfeited it by running away, but she felt all

the incredulous happiness of a dream come true. Life would be a different thing to her now she had seen the glorification of the shed chamber. All the time of her standing there she had been so still that Jeremy, looking for her in the main body of the house, suddenly thought, with a pang of actual terror, that she had slipped out of the house and taken herself away. He had turned to run down the stairs and out into the road to call to her, pursue her wherever she had gone, when he thought of the shed chamber as her one last refuge, hurried to it and flung open the door. Rilla turned to him with that look of delight and awe upon her face, and he cried out to her:

“Oh, my darlin’, is this where you be?”

Rilla forgot the shed chamber and the rosebud paper and the five windows toward Ellen’s Hill. She flew to him and clung about his neck.

“Oh, Jerry,” said she, “be I your darlin’? You ain’t called me that sence we begun to go together that winter you asked me first.”

“Ain’t I?” said Jeremy, drawing such breaths that it seemed to her he was crying, too, and she suddenly had a great compassion for him, such as she had felt for her little son who died, whenever he got a tiny hurt. “ ‘Course you’re my darlin’. What d’you s’pose you was?”

Rilla opened her lips to ask him why, if she was his darling, he could have told her he didn’t care about her any more, and then wisdom descended on her, and she understood he had said it in the anger she had fanned up in him, and forgotten it when the red moment passed. She drew herself away and looked at him, a shy smiling in her wet eyes.

“I guess,” she said, “you knew what you was about when you wanted a winder cut in the barn an’ a new j’iner’s bench to do a piece o’ work like this.”

The sheepish look came back to his face, and she wondered what he was hiding.

“Jeremy Dayton,” said she, “you ain’t been an’ give up your barn winder an’ your j’iner’s bench so’s ’t you could make over this room? You tell me the truth.”

“I dunno’s I give it up,” said Jerry defiantly. “I may ha’ made up my mind not to launch out so fur, so to speak, but I dunno’s you could call it givin’ on’t up.”

The tears came again to her eyes. She looked at him in love and spoke softly.

“But you ain’t had it, now have you?”

“No,” said Jeremy with an airy decisiveness she found quite foreign to him and, on the whole, piquingly commendable. He was taking a brace, she saw, and meant to put what complexion he liked on the affair. The new chamber was not to be embittered to her by any loss of his. “I ain’t had it, an’, what’s more I ain’t goin’ to have it, not yet a while, not till we get a little ahead from where we be now.”

They were standing there together in the sweet chamber, his arm about her, and she was looking wistfully and with something like an adoring rapture, into his face. But suddenly she recalled herself from this dream of her new knowledge of him.

“Why,” she said, “after all, what good was’t goin’ to do?”

“What good’s what goin’ to do?” asked Jeremy.

“Why, makin’ this lovely place, when you’re goin’ to sell out an’ give it all up—for you wouldn’t have an auction unless you’re goin’ away.”

“I was goin’ away,” said Jeremy. “I was goin’ out to Grand Rapids to see if Cousin William Henry couldn’t give me a job with him.”

“An’ leave all this?” said Rilla wonderingly. “Fix up the shed chamber an’ go away an’ leave it behind you?”

“Rilla,” said Jeremy, “did you read that bill, tellin’ what there was for sale?”

“No,” said Rilla, “I told you I didn’t. Some folks come into the post office an’ I didn’t want to be ketched readin’ it, an’ I run.”

“ ’Twas the farm implements only,” said Jeremy, “an’ the hay an’ stock. The rest I was goin’ to leave behind for you.”

“For me?” asked Rilla breathlessly. “Go away an’ leave it all for me? What made you, Jeremy? What made you?”

“ ’Twas your house,” said Jeremy, with a solemn tenderness. “An’ ’tis now. I figgered it out you could git some o’ the neighbors to carry on the farm to the halves, an’ you’d have your home here, same ’s you allers had.” Then he began to laugh. “An’ as for the auction,” he said, “I guess you see as well as I do ’tain’t goin’ to be now, an’ ’twan’t goin’ to be to-day anyways. You went by the day o’ the week, Rilla, but if you’d ha’ stopped an’ read over the bill you’d ha’ seen ’twas Thursday o’ next week.”

But Rilla did not laugh with him. She stood looking at him for a moment in what seemed partly a desire to see how he would take it and part sheepishness like his own.

“Jeremy,” she said, and stopped.

“What is it, darlin’?” he asked her tenderly.

“Jeremy. I dunno what you’ll think o’ me, but I can’t seem to keep anything back now we’re together again an’ things look so different. I didn’t think ’twas to-day. I heard folks talkin’ about it, an’ they said it was next week. But I wanted—”

“Yes,” said Jeremy, soothing her. “I know all about it. You wanted to be sure-footed about your grammother’s bureau.”

“I didn’t care anything about Grammother’s bureau, no more’n the rest o’ the things,” said Rilla passionately. “If ’twas all goin’ to be scattered—our things we’d lived with till we set by ’em as if they were wuth their weight in gold—I wanted to see our house once more same’s it was, an’ I pitched upon Grammother’s bureau to save my face. An’ I had to come right off quick, or I knew I shouldn’t have courage to come at all.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Grandmother's Bureau* by Alice Brown]