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surprising in one whose physical bulk moved with such extreme deliberation.

"Well, now, 'twouldn't be the strongest thing in the world," she declared. "Everybody knew that Elkah Sutton wanted Lyddy badly enough, but she wouldn't leave her mother. And now his wife has been dead two years—or is it three?"

"'Twill be two and a half years come the eighteenth of January," Mrs. Warren replied accurately. The two women glanced significantly at each other; there was a feeling that it was hardly decorous to talk of love under the shadow of that fluttering ribbon across the road, but the subject would not quite be suppressed. Little Jessie from her corner looked up with a sudden light in her blue eyes. In a girl's hero-worshipping world she had for years admired Lydia Duroe.

Mrs. Bale struggled heavily to her feet. "Well, I must be getting along," she said; "I've set longer now than I had any idea of doing. I s'pose I'll see you at the funeral to-morrow?"

"I'm going over early to help Lyddy," Mrs. Warren returned. "There ain't much to do, but it didn't seem right for her to be all alone, and I'm her nearest neighbor. I wish you didn't have to hurry, Mrs. Bale."

"There was just my shawl and nubia, Jessie," Mrs. Bale called after the girl, who was going for her wraps. "Well, I'm sure I don't think I've been in any hurry, Mrs. Warren. Somehow when I get over here I allus do have a piece of work getting started again. That's so—'tis forlorn for Lyddy. Hasn't she any kin at all?"

"I've heard there are some of her father's folks still living, but there isn't anybody on her mother's side nearer than second cousins; and when you want folks, second cousins ain't apt to be satisfying, Mrs. Bale."

"No more they ain't," Mrs. Bale agreed, backing clumsily around as she stood on the doorstep. "Well, Providence has a way of surprising folks sometimes. Ef nothing else turns up for Lyddy, she'll discover a new relation. Don't you be standing at the door in this wind, Mrs. Warren. Come over when you can."

The wind whipped the last words out of her mouth almost before they were spoken. For a moment Mrs. Bale stood struggling to catch her breath against it; then she plodded heavily down the road, her broad bulk looming impressively against the bare road.

Over in the other house Lydia Duroe watched her pass. She was a tall woman, with clear gray eyes still full of the spirit of youth. There was unquenchable youth too in the splendid ease and vigor of all her movements. Sitting behind the closed blinds, she looked down at her idle hands with a curious expression, as if they had suddenly become unfamiliar to her; as a matter of fact, she could not remember when before she had sat for an afternoon so. The gloom of the room depressed her; she was almost pagan in her worship of light; when her mother and father had died, she had refused to have the blinds closed.

"I dunno when I'll ever need to let in all the heaven I can more'n now," she had said. But the very fact that the little, still figure down below had claimed pity rather than love made her, in an odd fashion that she did not try to explain, carefully scrupulous.

"I want to do everything the way she'd like it," she had told Mrs. Warren. "She didn't have much in her life when you think about it. I like to think that she's proud about this, if she knows."

So through the long afternoon she sat in the shadowed silence. It seemed to her as if the world had stopped. Vaguely she realized that it was going to be strange to have no one needing her any more; she had not yet caught the flavor of liberty in the cup that had come to her; she tasted only its loneliness.

Just at dusk a man pushed open her gate. He was tall and delicate-looking, and stepped with a certain nervous eagerness. Lydia rose quickly and met him at the door.

"I don't s'pose there's anything I can do, Lyddy," he said, "but I wanted you to know that I was ready. There ain't anything you could ask me that I wouldn't be glad to do."

"I know that, Elkah," she answered, quietly. "No, there ain't anything, but 'tain't because I wouldn't ask you if there was."

He looked hesitatingly beyond here into the house.

"I thought mebbe I'd come over a little while to-morrow evening," he suggested. But she answered, with something almost like alarm in her voice, "Not to-morrow, Elkah."

He stared at her blankly. She recovered herself instantly.

"It's just some more of my queer-ness," she said, laughing a little uncertainly. "You know you always said that I was queer. And to-morrow night—such a few hours after poor Betsy has been laid away—I'd rather not see people for a little while."

An expression of relief lightened the dejection of his face.

"Just as you say, of course, Lyddy," he responded, stiffly.

Lydia's grave face flashed into a smile full of all good-will and fellowship.

"I know 'tis, Elkah," she returned. "Folks have to fix things for themselves the best way they know how. There's no shirking that—we've both found that out, as I guess everybody does sooner or later."

From the dark room she watched him down to the road. He shuffled a little as he walked, she noticed. There was a gentle inefficiency about the whole man that pleaded eloquently for a woman's care. Lydia's lips were compressed with sudden pain.

"I guess everything's too late for me," she said, bitterly. "There's been flowers and birds and sunshine, weeks and weeks of it, and I'd have loved it just as well as anybody, but I couldn't stop to look at them. And now it's November and there ain't nothing left."

It was a mood of bitterness rare for her, but the sudden knowledge that her life had carried her irrevocably beyond this man found her all unprepared.

The next day came and passed. There was a large funeral; everybody came for Lydia's sake. Lydia caught herself once counting the carriages, thinking how pleased Betsy would be. Then she went back to the empty house and waited for morning. She did not know exactly what she was going to do except that she was going to walk and walk. She was starving for light and the wide liberty of open fields. Once she stopped aghast in her thinking—if it should rain to-morrow! It seemed to her thought a calamity outweighing any power of words.

But it did not rain. Lydia, up early for first tidings of her day, stood awestruck before the glory of the sunrise—gold that flooded the whole sky and burned for breathless moments of ecstasy, vanishing finally in long, shimmering silver reaches and trailing clouds of rose like the memory of all the beauty of summer-time. She accepted the omen with the passion of one to whom life and death rest in the decision of a day. "I ain't never seen a finer sunrise than that in June," she thought, exultantly. So much, at least, had blessed her November forever.

She had not thought herself hungry, but she ate a good breakfast, and then set her house in order. No loose ends anywhere should spoil the fair order of her day. Besides, each moment the sun was climbing higher, and the world, numb and stiff from the November night, was relaxing in its warmth. As she went about her work she was conscious of en-tering colors without. She would not turn her eyes to them, but she smiled as one who has heard a secret word of joy.

It was half-past nine when she locked her door and dropped the key in her pocket. She stood upon the door-stone a moment, her face lifted to the sky. It was a wonderful day, with the tenderness and color of Indian summer, yet with a crisp edge that enticed one to deeds, not dreams. She turned happily up the road, her eyes a-holidaying like happy children.

The road stretched away in idle, solitary fashion, with no house for quite a distance. Sometimes there were trees, sometimes only open fields; but there were hedgerows always. Lydia noticed wonderingly how the few, thin leaves left fluttering there glowed like gems. "I'd most think they was flowers," she said to herself.

Little troops of dry leaves started up under her feet and drifted along before her; they seemed wood-spirits instinct with life and motion. Lydia walked faster and faster to keep them company—so fast that she did not hear her

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