

able to attend to things after, to-day, David. I guess I'll go home to-day, Zillah is able to sit up and I'm not needed any longer."

David's face clouded over.

"Well, I s'pose we oughtn't to keep you any longer, Josephine. I'm sure it's been good of you to stay this long. I don't know what we'd have done without you."

"You're welcome," said Josephine, shortly.

"Don't go for to walk home," said David. "The snow in the field is too deep. I'll drive you over when you want to go."

"I'll not go before the evening," said Josephine, slowly.

David went out to his work gloomily. For three weeks he had been living in comfort. His wants had been carefully attended to; his meals had been well cooked and well served; everything had been bright and clean. And, more than all, Josephine had been there, with her cheerful smiles and companionable ways. Well, it was ended now.

Josephine sat at the breakfast table long after David had gone out. She scowled at the sugar bowl and shook her head savagely at the tea-pot.

"I'll have to do it, I suppose," she said at last. "I'm so sorry for him I can't do anything else."

She got up and went to the window, looking across the snowy field to her own home, nestled between the grove of firs and the orchard.

"It's awful snug and comfortable," she said, regretfully, "and I've always felt set on being free and independent. But it's no use. I'd never have a minute's peace of mind again for thinking of David living here in this dirt and disorder, and him so tidy and particular by nature. No, it's my duty plain and clear, to come here and make things decent for him—the pointing of Providence, as you might say. The worst of it is, I'll have to tell him so on my own hook. He'll never dare to mention the subject again after what I said that night he proposed last. I wish I hadn't been so dreadful emphatic. Now I've got to say it myself if it's ever to be said. But I'll not begin by quoting poetry, that's one thing sure."

Josephine threw back her head, crowned by its shining braids of jet black hair, and laughed heartily. She bustled back to the stove and poked up the fire.

"I'll have a bit of corned beef and cabbage for dinner," she said, "and I'll make David that pudding he's so fond of. After all, it's kind of nice to have some one else to think of and plan for. It always did seem like a waste of energy to fuss over cooking things when there was nobody but my self to eat them."

Josephine sang over her work all day, and David went about his work with the face of a man who is going to the gallows without benefit of clergy. When he came into supper at sunset his expression was so woe-begone that Josephine had to dodge in into the pantry to keep from laughing outright. She relieved her feelings by pounding on the dresser with the potato masher and then went primly out and took her place at the table. The meal was not a success from a social point of view. Josephine was nervous and David was glum. At the close, David said reluctantly.

"If you want to go home now, Josephine, I'll hitch up Red Rob and drive you over."

Josephine began to pleat the table cloth. She wished she had not been so emphatic on the occasion of his last proposal. Without replying to David's question she said crossly—Josephine always spoke crossly when she was specially in earnest:—

"I want to tell you what I think about Zillah. She's getting better, but she's had a terrible shaking up, and it's my opinion she won't be good for much all winter. She won't be able to do any hard work, that's certain. If you want my advice, I tell you fair and square that I think she'd better go off for a little visit as soon as she's fit. Clementine wants her to go and stay a spell with her in town. 'Twould be just the thing for her."

"She can go, if she wants to, of course," said David, dully, "I can get along by myself for a spell."

"There's no need of your getting along by yourself," said Josephine more crossly than ever. "I'll—I'll come and keep house for you if you like."

David looked at her uncomprehendingly.

"Wouldn't people kind of gossip?" he asked hesitatingly. "Not—but—what—"

"I don't see what they'd have to gossip about," broke in Josephine, "if we were married."

David sprang to his feet with such haste that he almost upset the table.

"Josephine, do you mean that?" he exclaimed.

Josephine rose, too.

"Of course I mean it," she said, in a perfectly savage tone. "Now, for pity's sake, don't say another word about it just now. I can't discuss it for a spell. Go out to your work. I want to be alone for awhile."

For the first and last time David disobeyed her. Instead of going out, he strode around the table, caught Josephine masterfully in his arms, and kissed her. And Josephine, after a second's hesitation, kissed him in return.



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17