

really dead, and the priest wouldn't allow a divorce; so she left her Church, and our minister married them, after the courts gave her permission.'

'The funny part of that was, you know,' Mrs. Brownell put in, 'two months after they were married his uncle died and left him plenty of money, so he needn't to have married a rich woman at all. They say he was so mad he wouldn't speak to her for a month. But he brings her to church and the ladies say she is very nice.'

'Mrs. Dunn has a better education. If she had any good clothes to go out in she would look real refined and genteel, even now.'

'I guess the little that her husband left won't much more than keep the roof over head, particularly now when she isn't able to make anything by sewing.'

Mrs. Dunn, the subject of their discourse, went into the house and the two watching women settled back in their chairs and placidly observed the twilight settle over the village. Very little happened in Brakely. Days slipped into weeks and weeks into months and years with hardly a visible change. Time furrows the city with its rasp; buildings rise or disappear in a twelve-month; a skyline may change in a decade. But time smooths a little town with a silken sleeve; a returning spring shows a few cracks in the ceiling of the town hall; a familiar figure or two is no longer seen in the streets; a few chairs are vacant where young men have left to go to a bigger town—nothing that an outsider would notice.

In the city a man may escape his mistakes. In the village he must live up to them. Thrown in upon themselves, their world confined almost within the limit of their vision, townspeople never forget.

When Anna Dunn, on that bitter morning, years before, had threatened never to 'darken the doors' of a church, the town soon knew about it. That she and the parish priest had quarrelled, and that Mrs. Dunn had told him 'to his face' she would not go to his church again, formed the topic of interest at sewing-circle and reading-club meetings for a fortnight.

For a time Mrs. Dunn filled in the void by private devotions, but little by little these shortened and finally ceased altogether. They failed to satisfy. Her religious life slipped from her like a handful of sand. More than once she was ready to start for the priest's house; but what would the neighbors say? Human respect was again too strong and the visit was put off until a more convenient season. Hers was but one of the tens of thousands of human barques that float into the Sargasso Sea, to drift there becalmed and tangled in the seaweed. Nothing changed with her. The flowers to which she devoted all her spare time blossomed and faded, while with each winter her step was less elastic, her eye duller.

'Mrs. Dunn, are you real well?'

Mrs. Brownell had watched for an hour next day until her neighbor should leave the house and take her morning walk to the village post office.

'As well as usual, thank you.'

'I'm so glad to hear that. My daughter and I were saying yesterday that we thought you looked tired.'

On her way down town two others stopped to inquire about her health. Mrs. Dunn looked in the glass on her return. The mirror returned the colorless image she had grown to expect, a little paler, perhaps, more lines about the eyes, but no great difference.

'What if I should be sick here, alone!' The thought went through her mind many times during the day. Back of it was another thought, only half-formed. 'If I should die alone—what then?' Mrs. Dunn would not entertain the suggestion. Was she not through with religion forever?

Whether it was a physical reaction from Mrs. Brownell's tireless efforts in spreading the report that Mrs. Dunn had been 'looking real peaked of late,' and the constant queries of the villagers that followed it, or the result of years of constant strain, Mrs. Dunn found herself steadily losing strength. Mrs. Brownell heard the outcome one morning when word got about that Mrs. Dunn had collapsed in the street and had

been carried home. The village doctor's automobile was standing in front of the door an hour later. Mrs. Brownell decided she would ask the physician himself just how his patient was.

'I'm afraid her condition is very serious,' the doctor replied in response to Mrs. Brownell's questions. 'Mrs. Dunn does not appear to have any recuperative power. Of course, her age has something to do with it, but she does not respond to treatment as a woman ought to in her general state of health.'

'Is it as bad as that? Can we help in any way?'

'She will not need constant care—at present, at least—but one of the neighbors ought to drop in every afternoon and see that things are going right. I am sending her a nurse.'

The nurse arrived, secured from a hospital in a nearby city, but Mrs. Dunn did not improve. Neighbors who paid visits returned with sober faces, bringing the news that the patient seemed very ill indeed. She appeared to take no interest in life, to care nothing as to whether she lived or not.

'Would you mind sitting with Mrs. Dunn for a couple of hours this afternoon?' The nurse asked this of Mrs. Brownell a few days later. 'I have an errand I must attend to and she is resting quietly.'

'I would be glad to.'

Mrs. Brownell would be delighted. Worrying the sick with well-meant but lugubrious talks on death and the uncertainty of any being saved, and harrowing the feelings of survivors by lengthy and dismal calls of condolence, were dear to her. A whole afternoon with a gravely sick woman! Such an opportunity did not come often. Mrs. Brownell had no intention of being cruel.

A big elm tree spread its branches just outside the windows of Mrs. Dunn's bedroom and the sunshine streaming through the foliage fell in mottled splotches on the floor. Her bed was near a window, and beside it a big bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, hardly more white than the face of the patient. Mrs. Brownell was shocked at the lack of lustre in her eyes and the absence of all interest in her countenance. Had Mrs. Brownell known it, hers was the expression that physicians dread, because it means the absence of the doctor's greatest ally, the desire to recover.

'No one can tell these times what a day may bring forth,' Mrs. Brownell began, seating herself in a chair near the bed. 'I was saying to my daughter the other day, "There was Mrs. Dunn, who looked so well and spry out there taking care of the flowers, and now she's so sick." Truly, in the midst of life we are in death.'

Mrs. Dunn turned her passive gaze on her visitor.

Mrs. Brownell talked on, telling the gossip and small news of the village, dwelling particularly on every unpleasant or disastrous occurrence, not from any actual intention to be depressing, but because her mind was full of the tragedy before her. If Mrs. Dunn listened or followed the line of conversation, she gave no intimation of it.

'Can't I read to you?' Mrs. Brownell concluded. 'Something from the Bible?'

'I'd like to have you,' Mrs. Dunn spoke for the first time during the visit. 'My Bible is on the table. Please read where the mark is.'

Mrs. Brownell picked up the book. She held it a little gingerly. It was probably the Catholic Bible, she thought, 'Douay Version' was marked on the cover. She had always supposed that Catholics were forbidden to read the Bible, or at least discouraged from reading it, and that when they did it was a Bible quite their own—doubtless a strange and unholy book. But one must not draw too close distinctions when it was a matter of gratifying the wish of a gravely ill woman. She opened it at the mark and read that wonderful passage from the Apocalypse:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth was gone, and the sea is now no more. And I, John, saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

"And I heard a great voice from the throne say-