

A Woman Has Troubles

Timotheus Carson

SHE was listening for the sputter of her husband's old Ford truck coming up the bumpy lane. She waited and waited, occasionally putting a stick of wood in the old cook stove to keep his peas, hamhock, and blackberry pie warm. She sat by the window to watch for headlights, and after an hour she felt fear around her heart.

She tried thoughts. "He's probably stopping over at Brother Albert's house. No. Not Lonzo. You never catch Lonzo puttin' up with the kind of life that rascal Albert lives. Not Reverend Lonzo Johnson. Could be he had a wreck on that old haunted highway runnin' through the mire banks? Is he layin' somewhere near them ugly mounds, bleedin' and dyin'? God, control! God, *please* control! Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

The clock ticked away long and solemnly into the night. Stillness irritated her. God, control. *God*, control. "Could be some harlot draped in the sheep clothes of righteousness makin' love to my man? My Lonzo a-trottin' round in secrecy doin' things I don't know about? Them friendly church-folks, this decent home, that raise in salary last Sunday—all them blessings and Lonzo would do a thing like that?"

Adah waited, stretched and yawned. Something bad was slithering about in the pit of her stomach. Her head felt light and her eyelids felt weighted. She got up and slumped into the huge bed. She assumed for a second she was saying her prayers, and finally she passed into sleep.

Some hours later when she changed sides she touched a warm body and angered into wakefulness.

"Lonzo!"

"Yes, Adah," the burly form answered.

"Where you been all this night? You worried me crazy stayin' out like that."

"Why, Adah," Lonzo pleaded in his solemn but gentle voice. "Don't you remember me askin' you to take the truck to Mayberry's yesterday for a tank of gas?"

Adah remembered. Lonzo had gone with Deacon Clint yesterday morning to arrange the pall-bearing service for Old Man Grant, and when he came back he was in a rush to get his tomatoes and strawberries ready for the market.

"The gas-dial is broken off complete. You know how that is, Adah. I thought you had the tank filled. I didn't ask you this mornin' because I was hurryin' to get those strawberries off my hands."

Adah remembered. She had meant to send one of the boys to get the tank filled, but it had slipped her mind.

"Well, I run out of gas twelve miles out from the McConnell's and I walked the rest of the way here. Lord, I'm tired." He sighed heavily and fell asleep.

Adah felt the bottom of her heart give way. Her ears burned with shame as she went over the thoughts that had come to her while she was watching for headlights at the window. She felt that she stood before a solemn judge who looked coldly at her nakedness and waited for her to speak.

"A woman's got troubles all her own," she said. "Men-folks don't know." She settled herself comfortably for the night.

The Guiding Hand

Patricia Anne Moriarity

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"Do you know any nice Jewish boys for my Deborah?" whined Miriam Klein into the phone. "I swear, Mrs. Chahevsky, it's enough to give a mother grey hair, worrying about an only daughter. She's twenty-two now, you know, and hasn't given a thought to getting married some day. I'm telling you it's like pulling teeth to get her to go out even. I tell her, 'Debbie, why don't you go out with that nice Epstein boy?' and she says to me, 'Oh Mom, I don't like him,' and I say to her, 'You might like him if you'd give him a chance.' But she just sits home every night and watches television. You'd think nice Jewish boys grew on trees the way she talks.

"I was telling Jake just the other day, 'Jake,' I said to him, 'Jake, are there any nice Jewish boys down at the store for Deborah?' But Jake, he won't do anything. Anything to be done around this house, I do, like always. Jake always says, 'Let Deborah be. She'll find a nice boy when she's ready.' Just like she had all the time in the world, or something.

"You say Mrs. Shapiro's nephew is coming soon? Good! Maybe Deborah would like him. I'll call up Mrs. Shapiro this afternoon and have them all come over to dinner when he comes. Deborah will appreciate what a thoughtful mother she has one of these days."

Later that afternoon, Deborah came home from her job as assistant in the downtown library. She walked into the kitchen and began setting the table for dinner. As she arranged the three plates on the checkered tablecloth, her mother bustled in and hurried to the stove to put the finishing touches on dinner.

"Debbie, Mrs. Shapiro's sister's son is coming to visit her next month, and I invited them to dinner so you two can get acquainted."

Deborah breathed a weary sigh. "Mom, why don't you give up. I'll get married when I'm ready. Your continual matchmaking doesn't do anything but embarrass me and the poor sucker that gets roped into coming."