Third Tuesday

Larry Edson*

*Iowa State University

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by Larry Edson

THE LARGE white house stands silent. A quiet of death and mourning had settled around it, like dust on a shaft of ethereal light, the day Marvin went away.

People pass it with due respect. Old women in two's and three's shuffle by, trying hard not to look.

"Poor Julia, all alone now in that big house, it's a shame, really a shame. You know she hardly leaves, even to go to market."

"Poor thing."

"... has everything delivered, and they say she just walks from room to room. She really oughtn't stay there. 'Get a place of your own,' I said, but she'd have none of it; said she wanted to be near his things."

"Poor soul," and they move on, clicking tongues to the rhythm of their wagging tails.

Every third Tuesday, Julia has tea. ("Brave dear, insists on't, though she shouldn't, in her state.") She greets them at the worn door, the long lines of her face set in perpetual sadness. And with much nodding and cooing they settle themselves for the afternoon in the musty parlor.

The talk is warm and quiet, like the sea steaming in the tiny china cups. Their voices hum on, hardly disturbing the heaviness of the room. The dust of grayed draperies lies in crocheted niches as before, and the velvety purple violets in the window emit their drowsy scent.

Amid the mantel's clutter is a large clock. Muted colors of marble and brass surround the yellowing face, and from somewhere within it slowly marks the time—bong, bong, bong. Their afternoon is nearly over, and at last Julia is ready to make her announcement.
“It’s just six weeks today that Marvin’s gone, the third Tuesday in April. I remember it was such a lovely morning. I picked some early daffodils and put them in a vase, there on the mantel. He’d been poorly for so long—you just never know when it’ll finally come.”

A lace hanky emerges from her black bosom and darts at the watery blue eyes behind her gold-framed glasses.

“Just before he went he said, ‘Don’t mourn more than’s fittin’ my dear Sweet, there’s nothin’ to cry about, I’m goin’ to my rest’—and now it’s six weeks.”

The women huddle together in organized sympathy for a moment then, gathering their wraps around them, bustle to the door. Consoling and sympathetic, they offer the goodness of their collective heart.

“Dinner? Oh, no,” Julia says, “I couldn’t think of going out so soon.” She watches them leave the big silent house. Turning from the door, her face exercises the trained misery, and her heart is warm and happy.

Lullaby

by Tessie Pappas

Now through the night the cradle rocks,
And swings
The sleeping child against the rail;
Still at the door the Bailiff never knocks,
But once—
And mother makes a cradle of the jail:
And nurses on,
And nurses through the night.
Not knowing love,
Not knowing love in spite.

Je suis née,
Tu es né;
Vive, je te commande.