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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# Together

By IDA M. KIER

*'A brief little story with a real human appeal*

**D**IMLY lighted windows were all that was visible of the old house behind the maples. The autumn night wind, whistling a dirge, stirred half-bare branches, and dead leaves dropped softly, like tears of sorrow, on the roof. Inside the dwelling the solemn stillness was broken occasionally by hushed voices and careful footfalls.

The clock was striking twelve when a woman crossed the narrow hallway, noiselessly opened a door, and paused on the threshold of what was evidently the best room. A shaded lamp illuminated the plainly furnished interior, its rays seeming to focus on the most striking object—a cream-colored casket, uncovered, and disclosing the white-shrouded form of a girl whose head, crowned with wavy, brown hair, lay serenely against the satin pillow. Close by, in an old-fashioned rocking-chair, a white-haired woman was sitting. There was no sound within the room; no motion save the gentle swaying of white curtains at an open window behind the bier.

The woman in the doorway coughed to announce her presence, then softly crossed the floor and stood beside the rocker.

"Come, Gran'ma Bowen," she coaxed, "it's after midnight, and you'll need strength for tomorrow. Do come——" She ceased and involuntarily shrank back as the aged face with its drawn, grief-stricken features and sorrowful eyes was raised to hers.

The old woman spoke in a decisive tone. "I've told you before that I won't leave this room."

"But you can do no good staying here, Gran'ma," was argued kindly, "and you need rest——"

"Rest!" bitterly. "As if I could rest away from Nelly! No! I won't leave her. I sat with her the first night she was on earth—and I'll stay by her the last. All my family gone," she began to moan pitifully, her body swaying back and forth, frail hands twisting each other. "Nelly the only one left, and now——" She choked back sobs, and after a moment added, "I could bear it better if—she looked right——"

"Looked right?" The listener turned startled eyes on the casket, and saw a lovely face, with no hint of death showing on the tranquil features. The mortician had skilfully applied life-like tints. Long lashes lay quiet on the delicately pinked cheeks; the curved lips were faintly carmined. "Why, she looks beautiful, Gran'ma."

"But not natural," the old lady declared. "Nelly's hair never laid smooth like that. It tumbled over her forehead. And her mouth wasn't sad. Go away!" harshly, pointing to the door. "Leave me alone with my dead."

**T**HE woman retreated hastily to the room across the hall where another waited. "She won't come, Emmaline. She wants to be alone."

"Thought you could do nothing with her." Emmaline shook her head. "Last time I went in, she ordered me to keep out. Well, it's her house and we neighbors'll have to do as she says, I reckon."

Poor soul! She's not budged out of that room since Nelly was brought home. What you shaking for, Jennie?"

"Gran'ma Bowen looks awful. She's taking it too hard."

"It was a terrible shock," Emmaline returned solemnly. "That girl—full of life—going for a ride; and in a little while brought back a corpse! No wonder her grandmother's distracted."

"She—scared me!" Jennie shuddered again. "I'll be glad when this night is over. Will anyone else be here—do you suppose?"

"I guess not. But Lorene promised to come back in the morning. You see," continued Emmaline, "Lorene was Nelly's closest friend. The two were like sisters, and expected to *be* sisters, once; for Nelly was engaged to Lorene's brother, Tim McCree. He's an aviator. Lorene was heartbroken when Tim and Nelly quarreled and Tim went away. And she was furious when he wrote that he was engaged to a Brooklyn girl. Nelly laughed, they say! But, of course, she would. I've been wondering—seems kind of queer—about that accident. Maybe——"

"What?" eagerly.

"Oh—nothing." Then, after a pause, "Lorene sent her brother a wire. Wonder if he'll come?"

Jennie could not say; and silence fell. The minutes ticked away, and the watchers nodded in their chairs. Emmaline, rousing suddenly, exclaimed in dismay, "My goodness! It's after two! And listen at the wind—a reg'lar gale! Take a look in yonder, Jennie, while I make some strong coffee."

"You go, Emmaline. I'm—afraid."

"Good land!" Emmaline spoke in a hoarse whisper. "What you 'fraid of? Go on," she commanded. "Don't be silly!"

Jennie reluctantly crossed the hall and opened the best-room door. Mrs. Bowen

still sat with fragile hands clasped against the side of the coffin, her white head bowed upon them. How still!

Jennie's heart jumped to her throat as the white curtains suddenly billowed inward and the leaves of a magazine on a standtable fluttered noisily. Only the wind, of course. That window must be closed. But as she started forward, her steps were arrested by the sound of the old woman's voice, in gentle, coaxing tones:

"Tell Gran about it, honey. Gran wants to know how it happened. And she wants to know what makes you look so sad—like you used to when you were a little girl and had been naughty—and then were sorry. If you've done something you're sorry about, honey—I want to know the truth. Then I'll be satisfied."

The voice ceased as the pallid face raised and turned toward a door that opened on the side lawn. A look of surprise came over the pinched features. An exclamation fell from the parted lips.

"Why, Tim! That door's locked—but you're coming right in!"

Her gaze traveled from the door to the casket, as if following a moving form.

"I'm glad you've come, Tim," the quavering voice went on. "I suppose you got the telegram. Your sister hoped it would give you an awful jar. She was mad at you. I wasn't mad; just sorry for you and Nelly both. To think you would quarrel—after you'd been sweethearts so long! There, now—don't muss her hair all up, Tim! Better put your own hair out of your eyes. It's all ever' way. Nelly always said you had beautiful hair, but I never noticed it being so red before. And your face is red, too! It looks like—— What happened?"

Her voice trailed into silence; her dim eyes watched avidly.

"I wanted to be all alone in here," she

continued. "I ordered the women to keep out. But I don't mind you, Tim, because you and Nelly used to think so much of each other. I know that quarrel hurt her, but she wouldn't let on. She laughed and said she didn't care if you married another girl. Only her eyes didn't laugh. And they looked so sad when she started on the drive. They say the car shot right over the cliff! Strange—wasn't it?—when Nelly was such a good driver and knew the road so well. I don't understand—*you* do, you say? When you got the telegram, you knew what Nelly had done? And you couldn't stand it? You wanted to go with her? So you went up—There, Tim, you're rump!ing her hair again! The undertaker will be mad. He thought he had it fixed so nice. But I like it better, now. Looks like it used to when you and Nelly were courting. And you've kissed the smile back to her mouth. She looks happy now.—Nelly, honey! Tim's come! And Gran's come! Why, look—we're all—together——"

Another gust of wind sent the flapping magazine to the floor, and the curtains flared inward until their hems brushed the casket.

**J**ENNIE forced her trembling limbs across the room. She lowered the sash quickly and turned; her eyes darted here

and there, as if searching for someone. But there was only the old woman sitting motionless, forehead bowed on clasped hands; and the still figure in the coffin. Upon it Jennie gazed, fascinated. Finally she touched Mrs. Bowen's shoulder, then gave a cry.

Emmaline came running.

"Gran'ma's gone!" she whispered, after a glance. "Poor old soul! She just couldn't stand it—Jennie, what on earth are you saying?"

Jennie, shuddering and sobbing, talked on.

"Don't tell that to anyone else," Emmaline advised, when the tale was finished. "They'd think you're crazy. You *must've* dreamt it."

"I didn't," Jennie declared vehemently. "I saw and heard, I tell you. Look," pointing to the casket. "You can say the wind did that to her hair. But could the wind make her smile? And she wasn't smiling, before."

Emmaline shook her head. "Don't ask me. I'll be glad when it's morning and Lorene comes."

**M**ORNING came, but not Lorene. She had been called to Brooklyn by a telegram bearing the message that her brother, Tim McCree, had been killed during the night in a plane crash.

