

*The Widow Peeble's Double*  
by Mary Kyle Dallas

“Snaggstown was a place where you had to consider popular opinion—folks was expected to—and popular opinion was dreadful strong on account of so many old ladies livin’ there that hadn’t nothin’ to do but to look out of the winders. I’d allers considered it, when I was a wife and when I was a widder, and that was why I wouldn’t go out a ridin’ with Mr. Jobkins, nor walk hum with him from church, nor take a hold of his book in prayer meetin’.

“Mr. Jobkins, ef I *was* to do that, popular opinion would be that I’d orter marry you.’

“Haven’t I asked you to do it about two dozen times?’ asked he.

“I know it,’ said I; ‘but my views don’t coincide with yourn. I do despise a widder to marry again, and I do admire to live single. So I beg and pray you won’t bother me no more.’

“But he did bother. Partheny kept a comin’ up with notes he’d left to the kitchen door, until I was nigh about wild; but I give you my word I never walked, nor rid, nor boated, nor sleigh-rided with him one single time. I regarded popular opinion.

“Jest jedge of my feelin’s, then, when old Aunt Tabby Snow came in one day with her knitting, and sot down and looked kinder knowin’ over her glasses and then kinder sniggered.

“Well,’ I said, ‘what is it, Aunt Tabby?’

“Well,’ said she, ‘I was just a wonderin’ when it was to be.’

“When what was to be?’ I asked.

“Why, when you and Mr. Jobkins was a goin’ to slip off?’

“Me and Jobkins?’ said I. ‘*Never!*’

“You speak as ef you meant it, Arethusy.’

“I *do*,’ says I. ‘I mean it as ef it was my catechism.’

“Well, then, Arethusy, you’d orter regard pop’lar opinion more, and not go a ridin’ with him so often.’

“A riding? Why, I never went a riding, nor a walking, with Jobkins.’

“Miss Jones says you do, and a lot more. They’ve seen you.’

“I was just as mad as I could be. I snapped and scolded so’t Aunt Tabby said that Jobkins might be thankful ef I didn’t hav’ him, seein’ the kind o’ treatment he might expect ef I did. Aunt

Tabby went home last night, laughing at me. But about an hour arter she'd gone who should come in but Mr. and Mrs. Deacon Trotters. She was a real quiet, lady-like critter, and he was awful solemn and serious. No joking in *them* two. But jest think what my feelins' must have been when Deacon Trotters turns his head kinder slow towards his wife, and said:

“Ma, Mrs. Peebles didn't see us as we was goin' to the station, I calkerlate.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Trotters, a turning her head, solemn like, jest a little towards the deacon, ‘I kinder thought Mrs. Peebles *did* see us, pa; I kinder thought so.’

“When was that, Mrs. Trotters?” I asked.

“About ten o'clock this mornin', Mrs. Peebles, when me and the deacon was goin' to take the York train, we see Mr. Jobkins's kerridge a drivin' along, and he and a lady was in it, and I says to the deacon, “Pa, aint that Mrs. Peebles?” and he says, “Why, yes, I calkerlate it is, ma;[”] but we couldn't make out whether you bowed to us, or whether you didn't bow.”

“I sartently *didn't* bow,” says I. ‘Good reason why, Mrs. Trotters—I wasn't there. I aint never been out ridin' with Mr. Jobkins. No, nor walkin' with him, nuther.’

“To be sure, her vail was down,” said Mrs. Trotters; ‘but she hed your identical suit on—the one you wore to church last Sunday—and that black hat with the feather with a gold tip to it, and them kinder mottled ribbons you fetched from York. That's the beatenest—them ribbons.’

“Well,” said I, feeling sort o' queer all over, ‘it was a mistake, Mrs. Trotters. I was setting out my geraniums that I've hed potted all winter into the garden beds, at that identical minute.’

“I want to know!” says Mrs. Trotters, turning her head toward the deacon. ‘Well, wonders will never cease. I couldn't hev believed no two ladies could hev jest the same identical clothes—bunnet, ribbons, and all—without they were sisters and did it a purpose.’

“The Trotters didn't stay long arter that, and I was so upsot I was glad to hev 'em go. But that evening was prayer meeting; so arter the work was done up, I put on my bunnet and shawl and went across the medder to church. Talking to Partheny hed sort o' kept me, and I was late, and the seats was pretty full; but old Mrs. Barber beckoned me, and pinted out that there was room 'long side of her. So I sot down and listened to the brother that was at the moment a prayin' until he was done, and then, in a kinder carm that followed, Mrs. Barber, she whispered, sorter sly:

“Hope you enjoyed your ride a Monday afternoon, Mrs. Peebles.’

“What ride?”

“The one you took with Mr. Jobkins.’

“I didn't take any.’

“Don’t fib in church,” said she. “I saw him sot you down at your own gate. You had on your suit that Treeny Jones made you, and your black bunnet with the gold tipped feather.”

“I begun to feel cold all over, and arter that I couldn’t pay no attention to the prayer and praise. Mrs. Barber meant what she said. I saw that, and the only hope I had was that some other woman had clothes jest like mine. Before next day noon I’d been to York, and I’d bought me a gray poplin suit, trimmed with satin, and a hat to match, with blue flowers into it, all ready made, and I came down with bundle and box, and when I got home Partheny opened the door for me.

“My,” says she, “you’re quite loaded down with packages, Mrs. Peebles.”

“Yes, I be, Partheny,” says I; “and I feel to be thankful that my bother is over. There’s some woman another, Partheny, with my clothes exact, ridin’ around with old Jobkins, and folks is sayin’ it’s me. That’s at an eend now.”

“Yes, ’m, I hope so,” said Partheny.

“Why, what do you mean, Partheny?”

“Well, I don’t want to skeer you, Mrs. Peebles, but once I lived with a Dutch family, and there was an old gentleman in the family that there was two of.”

“Partheny, I don’t know what you mean!”

“No, ’m, I don’t s’pose you ken swaller it at oncet,” says Partheny; “but this was the way of it, Mrs. Peebles. I’ve seen that old gentleman a sittin’ in his cheer by the fireplace fast asleep—and at the same time another jest like him was watering his tulips in the garden. He was in two places at once, and to be seen in both at the same time. It was awful skeery—that’s why I left the place. I couldn’t stand the old gentleman’s t’other one. He called it his *dopple-ganger*, or something like that, and I don’t want to skeer *you*, Mrs. Peebles, but mebbe you’ve got one.”

“At that I screeched out and tumbled into a cheer.

“Partheny,” said I, “if I have, what’s the use of my being keerful of popular opinion, when my t’other one, my “dopple-ganger,” if that’s what you call it, may be goin’ out with Mr. Jobkins and letting him court her all the time.”

“However, I didn’t believe it, and I packed the black and yellow away and took my new spring suit into wear, though it was too early. Sunday I wore it to church, so that everybody would know it, but I caught cold, and Monday I was laid up in bed with such an influenzy as I hev’n’t hed for years. A Wednesday the minister’s wife, Mrs. Smilax, came in, and Partheny showed her up stairs.

“Why, *what* a cold you hev, Mrs. Peebles,” says Mrs. Smilax, after we’d shook hands. “What a cold you hev, to be sure; but it was rather onprudent for you to go a ridin’ in such a gale of wind in that new spring suit a Tuesday.”

“I wasn’t out of my bed a Tuesday, Mrs. Smilax,’ said I.

“If you hadn’t lighted down at your own gate, out of Mr. Jobkins’s buggy, I could believe you.’

“I’ve *never* been out riding with Mr. Jobkins. The whole village is saying it, but it’s a fib.’

“Then I told her all I had to tell, but she went away unconvinced. Arter she had gone, Partheny asked me if she might run over and see how her grandmother was. Partheny was always going over to see her grandmother, in those days, and I gave her leave, for she said she didn’t know what day the poor soul would slip off; and I told her to lock up and take the kitchen door key in her pocket, for I was too sick to get up.

“But arter Partheny had been gone an hour I felt better, and it struck me it would do me good to go down to the garden and walk about. So I wrapped up well and down I went, and the air made me feel so much stronger that I staid quite a spell, and walked way over to the east gate, that we hadn’t used for a good while, and was a looking over the currant bushes, when I saw a buggy drive up to the gate. I kinder hid away in the bushes and peeped out to see who it was; but when I did see my blood began to run cold and my teeth to chatter as if I had the fever n’ ager—for it was Mr. Jobkins’s buggy, and him in it, and beside him *me* in my new suit—me—and he kissed me as he handed me out. I felt my senses goin’, and keeled over in the bushes. When I came to myself I crept up to the house. Partheny had come in, and was setting the tea table. She jumped when she saw me, and said:

“My sakes! Mrs. Peebles, I thought you was in your bed up stairs. How white you be!”

“I’ve reason to be white, Partheny. I’ve seen my double at last. I saw her get out of Mr. Jobkins’s buggy, and him kiss her—and she was me. I shall die.’

“I thought I should for a spell, but arter tea I made up my mind it was time I was seen to by a minister. So I sent Partheny over for Mr. Smilax, and for Mrs. Smilax too; and when they came I told ’em all the story, and they looked at each other and shook their heads and sort o’ rithed.

“Now, Dominie, and Mrs. Smilax,’ said I, ‘you all know how long old Jobkins has been arter me, and how keerful I’ve been of popular opinion; but what am I to do ef I’ve got an onproper conducted double, that goes out a ridin’ with him, and lets him kiss her at the gate? Is it my duty to consider I’ve been lettin’ Jobkins court me and marry him, or aint it? And how am I to know which is me—me or the double?’

“Mr. Smilax shook his head and rithed, and so did Mrs. Smilax.

“It’s an awful state of things for a poor widder lady,’ said I, and I begins to cry.

“Mrs. Smilax she handed me the bottle of cologne, and then she and Mr. Smilax had a talk together in the corner behind the bookcase. After this she comes and sits by me, and says:

“‘We’ve a plan, my dear sister. If you really have a double, it must be the work of Satan himself. If you haven’t, you’re imposed upon. Now my advice to you is this: to-morrow you go to bed, as you’re sick, and kinder mention to Partheny that ef a few more friends were to see you a ridin’ along with Mr. Jobkins, you’d feel obliged to consider his proposal on account of popular opinion. That’s all you need to do. Leave the rest to me. You’ll hear from us before long, ef not, keep on being sick.’

“Then they went away, and somehow I felt as ef I was in good hands, and I did what they told me. Next day I staid in bed all day, and I had need to. And in the afternoon Partheny went to her grandmother’s, and took the kitchin door key, and I went off asleep. I dunno how long I’d slept when I heerd a kinder queer noise down stairs, partly shrieking, partly laughing, and then the door opened and Mrs. Smilax came in.

“‘Don’t be skeered, Mrs. Peebles,’ said she, ‘we’ve caught your double. We’re bringing her up stairs now.’ And the next minute in comes the minister and the doctor, and half a dozen of our neighbors—old Aunt Tabby, and Mrs. Barbar, and the deacon’s wife, and the rest—and *me*. Yes, *there* atween the dominie and the doctor, with her arms held tight, was me, in my new suit, with a vail on.

“‘Take it away!’ said I. ‘It’s worse than a ghost!’ But jest then Mrs. Smilax stept forward and put up the vail, and I screeched out again with joy. It was only Partheny in my clothes.

“‘You wretched critter,’ said I. ‘It’s you have been goin’ about with Mr. Jobkins dressed like me.’

“‘Oh, dear! dear!’ said Partheny. ‘It was all his doin’s. He wanted you so; and he wanted to rouse pop’lar opinion on his side. He said you’d never’ go agin that; and he gave me twenty-five dollars.’

“‘It was all for true love, Arethusa Peebles,’ said Jobkins’s voice, outside the door; but the women folks slammed it in his face.

“Well, I *was* relieved; my tribulations were over. I hadn’t a double-up, and popular opinion allowed me to stay a widder. But I was glad to know—arter I discharged Partheny—that popular opinion was for Jobkins to marry her. He was miserable enough about it, but he hed to do it. You can’t go agin popular opinion in Snaggsville; and they do say they lead a dreadful life.”

*New York Ledger*, December 27, 1879