

## [Up until last year]

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Topic Study of Folklore in the Berkshires Colrain

Up until last year there was in the section of the town, known as East Colrain, a man of fine lineage living on one of the old family estates. Calvin S. Coombs - a farmer known every where as just "Cal" Coombs was this man. Last year he died at the age of eighty-eight and people conjectured even more than they had while he was alive. For a few days after his death a person would be almost certain to hear some story about "Cal" or his life. He was odd and even those who did try to understand him (as the local minister of Mr. Coombs' church did) did not even pierce the shell which he had placed between himself and the world. Mr. Coombs never went to church but contributed dutifully and regularly and upon his death he left a large sum of money to the very church he had refused to attend.

[Mass. 1938-9?]

Strangely enough however the subject is not to be "Cal" Coombs but his housekeeper who worked for him for thirty years and more. Eliza Dole - more familiarly, 'Liza Dole, came to work for "Cal" when she was a fairly young woman. Mr. Coombs was then probably in his early fifties, well known, respected and with a moderate amount of money. 'Liza was slim and dark and had married into an excellent family herself. In Shelburne Falls the Dole name has much significance and of the present day Doles one man is a state representative and others hold high positions. Somehow 'Liza didn't stay intimate with the Dole family for long and "Cal" Coombs acquired a housekeeper. "I dassen't say for sure" (and you know he's told the story for fact for years and thoroughly believes it himself) I dassen't say, but it's common talk 'round town, that Liza Dole hed a boy - wall

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I know she had one - and he goes by the name of Dole [but?] "Cal" Coombs is the boy's father alright. He don't look no diffunt from old "Cal" than peas in a pod. They's another man in taown that belongs to Coombs too. I'll tell ya his name. It's Jay - Ernest Jay. He aint no more a Jay than I be. I heerd he was peekin around about Old "Cals" estate too. It's wirth lookin' inta, reckon." Thus out comes some "choice morsels" from a lonesome farmer, expanding in the sun of his house vegetable garden. "Liza come of a good family. They never had no great amount of money but the folks was alright. Seems like 'Liza could of made mor'n she did of herself but then it's ev'y one ta his own likin's." 'Liza Dole was always unusual looking. She was one of those persons who are both light and dark. Her hair and eyebrows and her eyes are extremely black and her skin had that peculiar almost transparent whiteness. Today her hair is still amazingly black and Liza is in her fifties. Her skin however is now drawn tight over her face [bones?] and it is very sallow. The first impression one has of her however is that her eyebrows are startlingly dark and compact. From a distance they seem to be heavily penciled but closer inspection reveals that Liza does not emyloy such methods of allure. Liza's face reveals little of the craftiness of her nature. One might call it frankly a blank face for it rarely registers more than a mild (evidently) curiosity. The word "evidently" is used because Liza is acquainted with more facts than those who are active around town and see more 3 people than she does. To watch her on one of her rare visits to town, it seems she does not notice anything of importance. In reality, little escapes her dark, roving eyes. 'Liza enhances her unusual looks by wearing clothes of very many years ago. She is very untidy. One hired man or rather former hired man on the Coombs farm worked there for only a short time before his fastidiousness caused him to leave. He was supposed to have his meals in the house with Mr. Coombs and 'Liza but after one day he boarded out. He had lost his appetite with the first meal 'Liza served and soon he gave up the farm work entirely and left. Few of the hired men remained long. 'Liza was a good cook too.

The hired man mentioned said that 'Liza had a dress that he didn't believe it had been washed since she bought it years ago. She wore her clothes an [absurdly?] long time and

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rarely took them off. There was a brown light plush coat which she wore when she came to town in the early Spring or the Fall. It was tremendously long and sizes too large for her but instead of hiding her spare frame it only seemed to emphasize' it. On the very top of her head, covering the knob of her tightly drawn up black hair, is set an amazing affair. It is a hat but it might be a plant empirical experimental garden or an aviary for there are both riotous flowers and fruits and large birds in profusion.on it. The color of it is an indefinite brown - perhaps the sun has faded it. Liza pulls the hat straight down, as near to her ears as possible and if her face is vague looking without a hat, it is doubly unexpressive with one. Liza's shoes too 4 were made for wear not comfort or beauty and they served her winter and summer for they were large enough to permit her to wear extra stockings and wool socks in the winter time.

Unfortunately, years ago Liza became afflicted with an ailment which made her unable to control her urinating. She had ample money to have gone to a competent doctor and received treatment but she preferred or was overly modest and tried "doctoring" herself with old remedies and herbs. Of course she grew worse. When she came to town she had so to stop at a number of houses regularly and those meticulous housewives generally had a very disgusting job of cleaning up after Liza had been there. She was very careless and thotless and didn't always bother to thank the kindly woman of the house for allowing her to use their personal toilet. The woman finally had to refuse to let her in. When they saw her coming into town they would all pull down their window blinds, lock their doors and pretend to be away. One such time, in the middle of the day, Liza found all the women "away". The blinds were down in her accustomed s stopping places and so because her need was so imperative she wasted no time in hunting for a secluded spot out hurried over to the high wood steps leading into what was at that time a novelty store where there was always a congregation of men. Without further ado she satiefied her desire. One woman close [by?] said, "The dirty ol' devil cocked herself right up to the weather in front of all these men, too!" When Liza came to the grocery store in Colrain City (the center), the

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owners or one of the clerks would rush out and get some sawdust and sprinkle it around in front of the counters where Liza might walk.

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It seems pitiable that one's affliction should be held up for public gossip but the blame lies with Liza herself. She had money enough to been cured many times over but she was careless with this as with other personal matters. Consequently she has ruined her looks, disposition, character and self-respect.

Liza had many characteristics - some commendable and others not so excellent. One mannerism, probably born of her life in the country was an almost manish way of standing in a moving wagon or cart. She has been seen standing, feet wide apart, (and there was a seat on the wagon too) balancing casually with the movements of the vehicle which had been drawing a few minutes before, manure to fertilize some field on the Coombs farm. The wagon was being driven into town. The attitude of abliviousness to surroundings, however sordid, and a spirit of independence typified by her preference to stand up in the wagon, are characteristics rarely found together. Another characteristic was an apredictable unselfishness. She was very uncharitable in some manners and could still show an amazing kindness of spirit. Old Mr. Coombs was "stingy", according to a neighbor farmer. "Liza was foxy - quite foxy, tho", he said. "She ust ta send eggs out by the dozins to folks with large families. I don't know how many dozins she's give ta Ella over here." (The Ella to whom he referred was a poor woman with a rather shiftless husband and twelve youngsters to feed.) "She did it ta get back at Cal for being so clost and et was a good theng too long as Cal want wise." "She bought her boy and his family little thengs and helped him all along by getting little things here and there and chargin' em to Cal's grocery account. Did you know what 6 she did right after old Cal died?" It seemed to cause him a great deal humour and it proved contagious. "She switched herself right down to the grocery store and got twenty pound of cheese. She stahted out with it and then came back and ordered thu ty (thirty) pound more. Imagin' a woman stahtin' out with fifty pound of cheese all ta once! Well she was doin' the job up brown. She knew they want goin' ta

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be no more gettin' things an' chargin' 'em to old Cals account so she was makin' the most of the time she hed. Thompson's at the store cen tell ya that. Seems like her boy's family must of et cheese for quite a spell. Liza and Cal had a run in years back. Cal was quite a man fer the wimmin and I reckon Liza that ta get a better hol' on him. They was quite a flare up et the time. She had him pinched for some business, I don't rememba rightly - I dassent say fer sure waut twas, suthin' like an unatchal ac' (unnatural act) against her. It come out, when she got ol' Cal all cramped up so's he couldn't squeak, that she hadn't hed no pay fer thuty (thirty) years up to the time of the scrape. Well naow she hed ol' Cal good ta rights and he hed to settle all ta once. She got nineteen hundred dollars in back pay which was as et should be, but I cant [be?] sure but if I remember kerec'ly (correctly) she di'nt git much fer her trouble 'bout the [unatchal?] ac'. I guess those in charge of the affair didn't figger that would give much trouble seein's how she'd stayed putty clost fer the number of years she hed an' hedn't made no complaint."

Liza is living with her son and his family and the arrangement is very unsatisfactory. The family - not even with her son wants her with them and she has been used to doing almost anything she pleased or in not doing and it piques her to have to be ordered around now. If any one would accept her Liza would like to go back to housekeeping for someone. No one in this town or nearby communities has not heard of Liza Dole and her disqualifications however. The likely outcome will be that she will live with or they will tolerate her until all of her money is gone and then her son will probably have her sent to the poor farm if she is not ready for an insane asylum. Thus will end the days of an unfortunate peculiar woman of Colrain. She might have been more had she not given her youth to the low aim in life which she did. She was careless of her youth, her reputation and her future and as her carelessness grew, she as a personality died. That narrowing sense of vindictiveness, like her "getting back" at Mr. Coombs for mistreating her, gradually warped her life completely and her disinterest in things of the mind finished the deadening of her existence. The sharp thin lines of her face and the "almost sullen look

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of her black eyes are what the townspeople see now and few try to remember that she did some generous things in her life and asked no favor in return.