



The Widow's War

By Sally Gunning
ISBN: 9780060791582

Introduction

When was it that the sense of trouble grew to fear, the fear to certainty? When she sat down to another solitary supper of bread and beer and pickled cucumber? When she heard the second sounding of the geese? Or had she known that morning when she stepped outside and felt the wind? Might as well say she knew it when Edward took his first whaling trip to the Canada River . . .

When Lyddie Berry's husband is lost in a whaling disaster she finds that her status as a widow is vastly changed from that of respectable married woman. She is now classified as the dependent of her nearest male relative—a ruthless son-in-law—who sets out to strip her of everything she and her husband worked for. Refusing to bow to societal and legal pressures brought to bear on her, Lyddie finds that defying one rule emboldens her to defy another . . . and another. Ultimately outcast from family, friends, and neighbors, Lyddie discovers a deeper sense of self and, unexpectedly, one

compassionate, enlightened man who will stand beside her.

Evocative and assured, *The Widow's War* is a stunning work of literary magic, a spellbinding tale from a gifted writer.

Questions for Discussion

1. Lyddie Berry, a woman very much of her time, ends up making a series of choices that put her at odds with the social, legal, and religious strictures of her time. What external and internal events cause this transformation? Do you think other women of this time, facing the same series of events, would have evolved in this same way? If not, what characteristics make Lyddie unique to her situation?
2. Are there other options that Lyddie ignores which might have peacefully achieved her goal of controlling her own destiny? If so, why do you think Lyddie ignores them?
3. What factors draw Lyddie Berry and Sam Cowett into their relationship? What factors cause them to back away? What parallels or contrasts do you see in the relationship between Lyddie and Eben Freeman?
4. Considering the time in which she lives, do you believe a long term relationship with Sam Cowett is a viable option for Lyddie? Does the relationship serve only as a source of physical comfort as Lyddie initially implies?
5. At one point Lyddie Berry blames Sam Cowett for alienating her from her religion. How fair is this a statement?
6. Considering the time in which he lives, do you believe Eben Freeman is forward thinking in regard to women?
7. What factors shape Lyddie's relationship with her daughter? How might they have acted to better protect the mother/daughter bond? Why don't they?
8. Sam Cowett claims that of the two Clarke brothers, Silas is the greater menace. Do you agree? Do you find any redeeming features in either brother?
9. Considering the methods of travel and communication in 1761, how do limited access and long delays affect the characters and events in this novel?
10. What is the actual significance of the Berry house in Lyddie's life? If the house had burned to the ground in the fire, do you think Lyddie would have been better able to accept living in her son-in-law's home?
11. If you were Lyddie Berry, what options would you have considered and which would you have rejected in order to make your way? Has Lyddie fully explored all her options? If not, why not?
12. Compare the political philosophies of Eben Freeman and James Otis. Who is the greater idealist? Is Lyddie an idealist or a realist?
13. If you were alive in 1761 America, how would you have responded to the ideas of James Otis? How do you imagine today's politicians would have responded to them?
14. How would you explain Lyddie's attitude toward Mercy Otis Warren and her accomplishments? How does her attitude define her times?

About the Author

A history buff specializing in the eighteenth century, Sally Gunning spends much of her time digging in local archives, searching out the next new-old story, or painting and enjoying the natural world around her. Gunning lives with her husband of thirty years in Brewster in an old cottage not far from Cape Cod Bay.