

bear being left alone with her." And so it happened that the last kiss, the last backward look, had been for the helpless father, when Susannah A. had left the chill purity of her own home, and wrapped in her mantle of silence had gone among strangers to earn her right to live.

In the mechanical use of the pen Miss Blacklock was an adept. Neatness, precision, perfect legibility and surprising speed kept her work as an amanuensis near perfection; yet from the moment she had first seen a type-writing machine she had been taken in the snare. Before that she had wondered at the haste that seemed to possess everyone; at the frantic, headlong determination with which everything was done here in the States. But at that moment she too felt a touch of that furious fever that is the desire for immediate possession, and as extra work she did much copying, and even addressed envelopes; went insufficiently clothed, insufficiently fed; worked nights as well as through noon hours; risking everything to earn quickly the type-writer that might so materially improve her position—and she came to date things afterward as happening "before or after I bought my type-writer," just as Bess and Margy dated from their marriages or from baby's birthday.

The girls—women now—were widely separated. Bess, who lived away in the West, in a thriving and aspiring city, had married a coarse-grained, but shrewd, hard-driving man, who knew the value of his wife's education; but somehow as their material welfare advanced Susannah felt a coarsening of mental fiber in Bess. She always had been gay; but now her fun was too broad to be pleasant at times. She made such cynical speeches, and talked of money, money, and yet of money; and when an event had been expected in the Bullock family, Susannah by the aid of a book of printed instruction behind her locked door had worked on the mysterious little pink and white silk and woolen foot-gear, whose size suggested that some adventurous fairy was contemplating a dash for the North Pole.

And when in blind, hopeless obedience Susannah had followed to the letter the directions that sounded so like utter gibberish, and had "knit" so many, and then "purled" so many more stitches, and "thrown her thread across," "knit two together," and "made one," and "knit three plain," etc., etc., there slowly developed before her delighted eyes the waviest, laciest open-worked little sock-leg conceivable; and the lonely woman pressed her cheek to the dainty morsel, and with closed, moist eyes gave herself up to sweet imaginings, to tender longings and to mute farewells. And after thus learning her lesson she had made many pairs of little socks as gifts to her married chum Bess.

For it was only now that she was winding her Saxony wool with an eye to the Patton household; for while Bess and her lord had been changing their hundreds to thousands, fickle little Margy had been prancing through the hearts of all the men she knew; and poor Susannah, who received full particulars and minutest details of each and every affair from start to finish, was for four good years kept in a state of quivering anxiety, lest little Margy should lose her head and pick at last some crooked stick after rejecting so many straight ones.

And then, at last, when young Patton, the fashionable photographer, had appeared and begged leave to make some studies, for "art photography," from her lovely throat and arms—one of the said studies nearly having given Susannah apoplexy—Margy had said so little about his being so perfectly lovely, and wearing the smartest clothes, and being so generous about bonbons and theater tickets, that poor Susannah, to use her own words, "was dropped all in a heap," when she received a bit of Mrs. Walter Patton's wedding-cake, for her to dream over, and flushing a little wondered if that was meant to be ironical, but concluded that Margy was too gentle to wish to wound even a woman so nearly an old maid as she already was. Now, with a heart full of relief that pretty Margaret was safely married at last, she hurried forth to find her morsel of silver for a wedding gift, and because the bride loved her own fair face, Susannah gave something for the toilet rather than the dining-table.

And all these long years that had bloomed and blossomed for her friends had been so arid, so dust-dry for her. Unending work, unbroken loneliness—that was all. She had lived for years in this same third floor front, and she felt more intimate with the

leprous old tree outside than with anyone inside the house. "Poor old thing!" she thought, as she looked at it; for, alas! each summer it bore a large crop of offensively fat worms, who spun long threads to swing from, while watching for a coming stranger to fall upon. "It's so alone!" thought the woman. "It has no one to care for it. A little attention, a little spraying from a friendly hand, would prevent this summer horror. In the spring I'm sure it thrills as keenly to the joy of rising sap, through all its limbs, as can the clean, well-cared-for maples across the way, and its buds swell with as proud promise."

And when at last the poor, mangy, lopsided leaves were raked together to their burning, the silvery, purple, twisting spirals of their smoke rose to the third floor front, and through the still autumn air bore Susannah as the crow flies straight across land and lake, and she was back in the Canadian town, where handsome Harry McDonald had offered her, Susannah A., his escort, when the evening air was full of the smoke of burning leaves.

Yes, that was why her intimacy with the tree was closer than with boarder, roomer or landlady at No. 999 Oregon-st., was why when she received her wound she instinctively had turned to it in her silent pain.

She so loved and trusted those two friends of her youth, and though she could express only a little of what she really thought and felt, she was punctual in her laborious efforts in that direction, in spite of the growing impression that the girls were more interested in expatiating on their own moving affairs than in reading of hers. She winced a little, then put the thought aside as unworthy and unfriendly, until the morning when the overdue letter from Bess had come and she had opened it hastily—first to bewilderment, then to a flashing comprehension of what had happened. Careless Bess evidently had written to Margy and her at the same time; then addressing two envelopes had misplaced the letters within them, and so she had read, among other things:

"What nonsense to hold that duplicate silver for

Susannah is old and homely, though I've told him she is only two years older than I am, and would have been good enough looking had she not been so prim. Do you remember how she used to drag her hair back so tight she couldn't shut her eyes? Her mother said it was neat and modest. Doesn't it seem strange to think that Aunt Blacklock, who was so domineering and so strong, has been dead these four years, and poor old Uncle Blacklock lives on to pester Susannah?"

"There, your last letter just came; so I've paused to read it. Why, Margy Patton—what are you talking about! You don't suppose anyone would pay attention to such a thorough old maid as Susannah A. Blacklock must be by this time? And who is this Mr. Brown, who walked home with her? I've never heard of him; and I don't believe she will say a word about it all to me when she writes." And she closed by saying: "You should just give Susannah a little hint about those socks, because they are troublesome things to make yourself and cost outrageously at the fancy stores, and Susannah makes them so beautifully and might as well do that out of office hours as to read all the time." And she was "as ever," Margy's "sincere friend, ELIZABETH BULLOCK."

Wounded, shamed and angered, in all the pain and confusion of many rankling wounds, she realized that the deepest humiliation, the sharpest hurt, came from the readiness of Bess to repeat and send forward for another's amusement the coarsely unkind jest that James Bullock had made at her expense. She had woven so many loving thoughts, hopes and prayers into the soft, pink-and-white web of her knitting, and all the time she had been looked upon as a vulgarly ludicrous figure of fun and why? Simply because fate had set the seal of utter loneliness over against her name. And how old she must seem to others, since her friends called her an old maid!

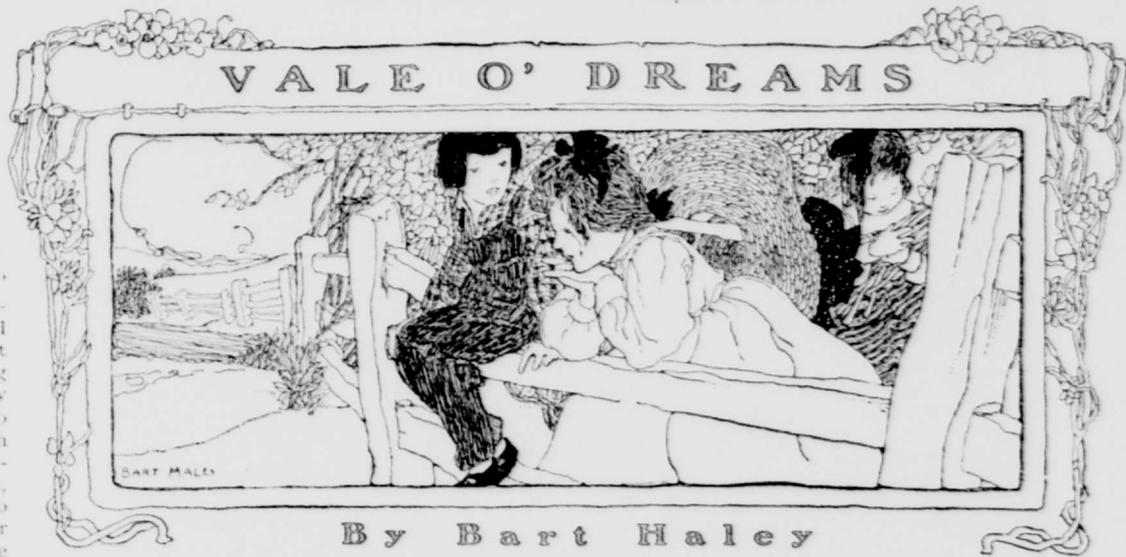
Tears smarted her eyes as she glanced again at the letter that had shown the insincerity and selfishness of Elizabeth Bullock; then suddenly she exclaimed: "Mr. Brown? Mr. Brown? What is the woman talking about? I know no Mr. Brown! Ah!" as light came to her. "I knew Margy did not half read my letters; and here's the proof. I wrote to her that after the birthday party, Mr. Bowen and I had walked home with little Alice, to whom he had been very attentive, and she reads that Mr. Brown walked home with me and had been very attentive. It would serve her right to leave her to her own blunder." Then her face flushed red, at the next words of Bess: "I don't believe she will say a word about it all to me."

"Why, why, she implies that I have told a falsehood, and that I will not dare to repeat it to her! It is too much! I—I have the greatest mind to—but wait!" She turned and took up a slender, green-bound book and looked at it thoughtfully. For that was not long after Thomas Bailey Aldrich had criminally wiped out of existence that lovely Marjorie Daw, and wrung such rueful laughter from his deceived readers. Yet after a little thought, Susannah contemptuously decided: "They will know nothing about Marjorie Daw, nothing! So, I'll do it! They have found me this Mr. Brown—now I'll keep him, and give them something to 'Oh!' and 'Ah!' about."

"Surely it will be very funny for an old maid to receive a gentleman's attentions! I—I wonder what Mr. Brown's first name is? Er—er Robert? John? Oh, no, John Brown's dead already. It should be rather a grave name, like Paul—yes, that's it, Mr. Paul Brown. Let me see, Mr. Brown's business is—er—er, what? Shopkeeper? No, I hate shopkeepers. I'd like him to be a lawyer; but how would a lawyer come to meet poor me? A literary man?" Her eyes brightened at the thought. "Yes—he came to this boarding-house—old friend of the family. Has traveled a good deal—no settled home. Mr. Brown has to be a bit unsettled and uncertain just at first. So now, Mistresses Margy and Bess, I'll introduce you to my friend, Mr. Paul Brown, a literary man."

She seated herself before her speckless, spotless desk, and for the first time in her life wrote rapidly, recklessly, two letters, which without re-reading she thrust into envelopes, and half angry, half-laughing, pushed them into the letter-box.

["An Old Maid's Husband" will be continued in the story of "Her Courtship and Marriage" August 28, and concluded in "Widowhood and Wedding Bells" on September 4.]



By Bart Haley

I know the way

Beyond the meadow where the river flows,
And where the great road to the wide world goes—
I'll travel when I'm big and have new clothes
For every day.

I know the way

Behind the far gray hills where cities lie
And reach their castles almost to the sky—
I'll laugh and sing and never have to cry
The livelong day.

I know the way—

How very happy through the world I'll be
With none to mind or scold or ever bother me
Or cry, when in a wond'rous ship upon the sea
I sail away.



the possible marriage of an old maid like Susannah A! Why, she will never get a husband in the world! Wasn't she always the old-maides creature you ever saw? I don't believe any man on earth ever has cast a glance at her. You'd better quietly sell those pieces of silver. You needn't tell your husband if he is so sentimental about them. I wonder if Susannah will send you some baby socks now? Margaret, you should have heard James, when I first told him about them! He nearly split his sides with laughter, crying all the time: "Good Lord! Good Lord! I'd give fifty dollars to see an old maid making baby socks!" James is so fond of his joke, and he will cling to his idea that