

you Susie—my boyhood's first chosen sweetheart. Why, years ago, at that donation party, 'twas I who egged those lads on, daring them to offer their escort to the girls, simply as a cloak to my own desire to walk with you! Dear soul, pure heart, I will not claim that I have waited intentionally for you all these years; but I thank God I have waited, and I do claim that you were my first choice as you shall be my last—Susie!"

Incapable of uttering a word, the woman turned her face with all its racing blushes, and lifting dilated blue eyes gave him one look of such devoted, grateful love that tears sprang into the bold, dark eyes of McDonald as he cried: "Susie, you do love me?" and catching at her hand: "You will marry me, dear—as soon as—" and got no further; for he felt Susannah tear her hand from his; saw her face pale as she sank into a chair, where falling forward at the table she folded her arms about her head, and from that shelter sobbed: "No, it cannot be! I cannot marry you!"

McDonald stood staring at the weeping woman. He realized that this was not coquetry. She was not one to raise pretended obstacles to enhance the value of her final yielding. He thought hard. He knew that he had seen love in her gentle eyes. Then what was her reason for refusing him? Suddenly his face lightened. Women, he thought, were so bound and fettered by conventionalities, by social proprieties and rules of etiquette!

Now, recalling her brief widowhood, he felt that he understood, and said gently: "What is it, Susie? Have I wounded you by speaking too soon—before the end of the regular period set by the world for mourning has arrived? Have I? But you see, dear, a man's strong passion cannot well be stayed by merely pointing to a certain date. Try to forgive me; for indeed, dear, it is hard to think of you as either wife or widow. Your marriage always seemed strangely vague and unreal to me. My dear, don't writh and groan like that! We will wait any reasonable time out of respect for the late Mr. Brown's memory, only let me have your promise to sustain me!"

"It is impossible—impossible!" The words all broken into bits by heavy, racking sobs—that was all her answer.

McDonald stood with knitted brows; his eyes never leaving that poor, bowed head. Suddenly a quick, vindictive spark flew from him, and he asked sternly: "Did you—er, did that man Brown—er, was he so jealous—did he exact, Susannah, a promise from you not to marry again?"

The bowed head was shaken violently, and then an appalling thought came to McDonald's mind. Had the late Brown been an utterly impossible person, and had he perhaps abandoned this beloved woman, and in a dismayed voice, he cried: "Susie! Susie! Answer me! Isn't that man Brown really dead?"

Lifting her head she flung back in distracted answer: "Good Lord! forgive me! No, he couldn't die, because, poor man, he never even lived! I just invented him!"

"You invented him?" repeated McDonald, and sank limply into a chair and stared stupidly at her.

"Oh, I never meant it should come to this!" poor Susannah sobbed. "It was just a joke on Bess and Margy, to punish them for their unkindness and their mockery of me!"

"Why should they mock you?" sharply demanded the listening man. "Because I was an—old maid!" meekly answered Susannah. "They were my only friends, and I loved them so! I would not acknowledge that they were neglecting me and were greatly changed since they were married; until—until one day I received, by mistake, you understand, this." She took from her pocket-book a worn-looking letter and handed it to McDonald. "The whole crazy undertaking was caused by that." As McDonald read the mocking words of the self-

seeking Bess and the coarse jest of James Bullock, at Susannah's expense, his face darkened with anger. Still he listened quietly while she poured forth the entire story of her wrong-doing; but as he saw how thoroughly both women had been taken in by this most guileless creature on earth, laughter overtook him and he shook from head to foot. Only once he spoke, when Susannah was saying intensely: "I know I should have stopped right there; but I was so lonely that Mr. Brown seemed real companionable."

And then in a burst of pity he caught her trembling hands, and murmured protectingly: "Oh, my dear! my dear!" he pressed them to his bearded lips, and when the recital was ended he laughed again, this time in almost boyish triumph.

"Then you are no man's widow, but just my sweetheart, Susie? Now, when shall we be married?"

But Susannah, with reproachful eyes, said gravely: "You would not care to marry a woman who stole your spoons, or tucked your best napkins up her sleeves?"

"No," he answered with dancing eyes. "I think not."

"And I," she cried dejectedly, "have stolen a husband!"

"Prove it!" he laughed. "Produce the goods! Oh, Susie, why don't you name the day?"

But she argued distractedly: "You can't marry me; for I'm Mrs. Brown here, and our marriage would not be legal."

"Then I'll go to Cleveland, where you are Miss Blacklock, and where our marriage will be legal!" he promptly replied.

One last objection Susannah offered: with drooping

HEARTLESS

By Kate M. Cleary

SHE went upon her knees. He gave no single sign of heeding, although he saw and heard, he sat, and calmly kept on reading. She humbly knelt! Strange sounds arose, as if for pity pleading; but mailed in steel of self he sat, and calmly kept on reading reports, reviews, the foreign news, accounts of crimes appalling. She wiped her brow, the cloth she held she wrung till drops were falling. And still she stayed upon her knees, and he was all unheeding. When Dinah scrubbed his office floor, he calmly kept on reading.

HERO OF THE VALLEY



By Edwin L. Sabin

Some must bide in the valley
That some may scale the peak—
Ill could exist the mighty
Were't not for the faithful meek.

The nation o'ertops the hamlet,
And blazons the scholar's tomes;
But the life of this selfsame nation
Depends on these humble homes.

And list! in his life's gray twilight
An angel chorus sings:
"Here cometh a gentle hero—
Well-doer of little things!"

To some is given the scepter,
To some the lyric prize;
But some must sharpen the sickle
And croon the lullabies.

Who works in the quiet lowland
While others storm the crest,
He too will be crowned with laurel
If he but does his best.

head she said: "Harry, you are a proud man. Do you think when I have humbled myself and confessed and they have all—the husbands, too, have had their say and—" shivering nervously—"Bess can be dreadful when she is angry—do you think you will care to marry a woman so humiliated, so shamed?"

Then, with the sharp ring of authority in his voice, McDonald declared: "You will humble yourself to no one—you will accept humiliation from no one. Personally, I should enjoy seeing these two time-serving hypocrites made ridiculous in their own eyes. Oh, Susie! Susie! If you only had a sense of the ridiculous how you would enjoy the trick you have played! But since it all means grief and pain to you, we will be silent—that is all. In three months I will join you in Cleveland, where we shall be married. I myself will announce to Bess and Margy that on our honeymoon we shall pay each a visit of a day or two. No objections, please. Your first marriage defied most of the conventions, and that gives me a precedent. You have no relative to make announcements for you, so I shall do it. By waiting three months we will choke off the 'indecent haste' remarks of your victims, Margy and Bess. And now, beloved, will you name the day of the week for our marriage, or must I do that too? I certainly will say Monday."

"Oh, no!" broke in Susannah. "Monday is so suggestive of domestic discomfort. It—it always seems to smell of brown soap. I always have been fond of Tuesdays, though."

"Then," broke in McDonald, taking Susannah in his arms and kissing her brow, "on the first Tuesday in June next, by the grace of God, and your own dear word, you will become my wife."

Judging by a letter sent by Bess to Margy sometime later, McDonald's plan seemed to be working out all right; for along on the second page it said: "Yes, blue is Susannah's favorite color, as it is your own, so in freshly fitting up your spare room for Susannah in white and blue you kill two birds with one stone—complimenting the bride and pleasing yourself at the same time. It was a capital idea, and it will make a regular grand-stand play with Harry McDonald, for in his eyes nothing is too good for 'Susie.'"

"Did you ever hear anything like the changed luck of that dear girl? Oh, speaking of luck, reminds me. Margy, you remember when Susannah wrote asking us not to send wedding gifts this time, the two marriages coming so closely together as to seem like an imposition upon our generosity, etc. Well, I went and read my letter to James, feeling sure he would be glad to be let off from the expense of a second gift, when he had grumbled so over the first; and what on earth do you think the man said? Never talk to me about changeable women, after this speech by James Bullock, my own husband!

"Huh!" he said. "Well, if you want to practise cheese-paring on your friend's wedding fixin's, all right, keep your fist shut! But I send a present, and you bet your life it'll be a buster, too! No wedding present? Why, that woman's a wonder! Think what she's done! First, she waits around till she's a plum old maid, and then, by thunder, she waltzes in and marries two men inside of eighteen months! Why, she's a hustler, she is, and deserves encouragement! Wedding present? Well, I guess!"

"So there's James Bullock for you; and I don't even know whether he will let me come in with him on his gift—from Mr. and Mrs., you know—or whether I shall have to get an independent offering. I am making careful preparations for the entertainment of our expected guests; for it is quite plain to me that Harry McDonald expects everyone else to be as devoted as he is to the late Mr. Brown's widow."

[THE END.]