

HOME CIRCLE MAGAZINE SECTION

to laugh at my Seffy—except chust me—account I'm his daddy. It's a fight-word the next time you do it."

Mr. Busby straightened his countenance.

"He don't seem to notice—nor keer—'bout gals—do he?"

No one spoke.

"No, durn him, he ain't no good. Say—what'll you give for him, hah? Yere he goes to the highest bidder—for richer, for poorer, for better, for worsen, up and down, in and out, swing your partners—what's bid? He ken plow as crooked as a mule's hind leg, sleep hard as a 'possum in wintertime, eat like a snake, git left efery time—but he ken ketch fish. They wait on him. What's bid?"

No one would hazard a bid.

"Yit a minute," shouted the old fellow, pulling out his bull's-eye watch again, "what's bid? Going—going—all done—going—"

"A dollar!"

The bid came from behind him, and the voice was beautiful to hear. A gleam came into the old man's eyes as he heard it. He deliberately put the watch back in its pocket, put on his spectacles, and turned, as if she were a stranger.

"Gone!" he announced then. "Who's the purchaser? Come forwards and take away you' property. What's the name, please?" Then he pretended to recognize her. "Oach! Sally! Well, that's lucky! He goes in good hands. He's sound and kind but needs the whip." He held out his hand for the dollar.

It was the girl of whom he had spoken accurately as a prize. Her sleeves were turned up as far as they would go, revealing some soft lace-trimmed whiteness, and there was flour on her arms. Some patches of it on her face gave a petal-like effect to her otherwise aggressive color. The pretty dress was unlined far enough back to reveal the prettier petticoat—plus a pair of trimly-clad ankles.

Perhaps these were neither the garments nor the airs in which every farmer-maiden did her baking. But then, Sally was no ordinary farmer-maiden. She was all this, it is true, but she was, besides, grace and color and charm itself. And if she chose to bake in such attire—or, even, if she chose to pretend to do so, where was the churl to say her nay, even though the flour was part of a deliberate "make up"? Certainly he was not at the store that summer morning.

And Seffy was there. Her hair escaped redness by only a little. But that little was just the difference between ugliness and beauty. For, whether Sally were beautiful or not—about which we might contend a bit—her hair was, and perhaps that is the reason why it was nearly always uncovered—or, possibly, again, because it was so much uncovered was the reason it was beautiful. It seemed to catch some of the glory of the sun. Her face had a few freckles and her mouth was a trifle too large. But, in it were splendid teeth.

In short, by the magic of brilliant color and natural grace she narrowly escaped being extremely handsome—in the way of a sunburned peach, or a maiden's-blush apple. And even if you should think she were not handsome, you would admit that there was an indescribable rustic charm about her. She was like the aroma of the hay-fields, or the woods, or a field of daisies, or dandelions.

The girl, laughing, surrendered the money, and the old man, taking an arm of each, marched them peremptorily away.

"Come to the house and git his clothes. Eferything goes in—stovepipe hat, butterfly necktie, diamond pin, tooth-brush, hair-oil, razor and soap."

They had got far enough around the corner to be out of sight of the store, during this gait, and the old man now shoved Seffy and the girl out in front of him, linked their arms, and retreated to the rear.

"What Sephenijah P. Baumgartner, Senior, hath jined together, let nobody

put athunder, begoshens!" he announced.

The proceeding appeared to be painful to Seffy, but not to Sally. She frankly accepted the situation and promptly put into action its opportunities for coquetry. She begged him, first, with consummate aplomb, to aid her in adjusting her parcels more securely, insisting upon carrying them herself, and it would be impossible to describe adequately her allures. The electrical touches, half-caress, half-defiance; the confidential whisperings, so that the wily old man in the rear might not hear the surges up against him; the recoveries—only to surge again—these would require a mechanical contrivance which reports not only speech but action—and even this might easily fail, so subtle was it all!

"Sef—Seffy, I thought it was his old watch he was auctioning off. I wanted it for—for—a nest-egg! aha-ha-ha! You must excuse me."

"You wouldn't 'a' bid at all if you'd knowed it was me, I reckon," said Seffy.

"Yes, I would," declared the coquette. "I'd rather have you than any nest-egg in the whole world—any two of 'em!"—and when he did not take his chance—"if they were made of gold!"

But then she spoiled it.

"It's worse fellows than you, Seffy."

The touch of coquetry was but too apparent.

"And better," said Seffy, with a lump in his throat. "I know I ain't no good with girls—and I don't care!"

"Yes!" she assented wickedly.

"There are better ones."

"Sam Pritz—"

Sally looked away, smiled, and was silent.

"Sulky Seffy!" she finally said.

"If he does stink of salt mackerel, and 'most always drunk!" Seffy went on bitterly. "He's nothing but a molasses-tapper!"

Sally began to drift further away and to sing. Calling Pritz names was of no consequence—except that it kept Seffy from making love to her while he was doing it—which seemed foolish to Sally. The old man came up and brought them together again.

"Oach! go 'long and make lofe some more. I like to see it. I expect I am an old fool, but I like to see it—it's like ol' times—yas, and if you don't look out there, Seffy, I'll take a hand myself—yassir! go 'long!"

He drew them very close together, each looking the other way. Indeed he held them there for a moment, roughly.

Seffy stole a glance at Sally. He wanted to see how she was taking his father's odiously intimate suggestion. But it happened that Sally wanted to see how he was taking it. She laughed with the frankest of joy as their eyes met.

"Seffy—I do—like you," said the coquette. "And you ought to know it. You impl!"

Now this was immensely stimulating to the bashful Seffy.

"I like you," he said—"ever since we was babies."

"Sef—I don't believe you. Or you wouldn't waste your time so—about Sam Pritz!"

"Er—Sally—where you going to tonight?" Seffy meant to prove himself.

And Sally answered, with a little fright at the sudden aggressiveness she had procured.

"Nowhere that I know of."

"Well—may I set up with you?"

The pea-green sunboonet could not conceal the amazement and then the rancidance which shot into Sally's face.

"Set—up—with—me!"

"Yes!" said Seffy, almost savagely.

"That's what I said."

"Oh, I—I guess so! Yess! of course!" she answered variously, and rushed off home.

"You know I own you," she laughed back, as if she had not been sufficiently explicit. "I paid for you! Your pappy's got the money! I'll expect my property tonight."

"Yas!" shouted the happy old man, "and begoshens! it's a reg'ler bargain! Ain't it, Seffy? You her property—"

real estate, hereditaments and tenements." And even Seffy was drawn into the joyous laughing conceit of it! Had he not just done the bravest thing of his small life?

"Yes!" he cried after the fascinating Sally. "For sure and certain, to-night!"

"It's a bargain!" cried she.

"For better or worsen, richer or poorer, up an' down, in an' out, chasses right and left! Aha-ha-ha! Aha-ha-ha! But, Seffy,"—and the happy father turned to the happy son and hugged him, "don't you efer forgit that she's a feather-head and got a bright red temper like her daddy! And they both work mighty bad together sometimes. When you get her at the right place out—well, nail her down—hand and feet—so's she can't git away. When she gits mad her little brain evaporates, and if she had a nife she'd go round stabbing her best friends—that's the only sing that safes her—yas, and us!—no knife. If she had a knife it would be funerals following her all the time."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAVE FEELINGS GOT TO DO WITH COW-PASTURE?

They advanced together now, Seffy's father whistling some tune that was never heard before on earth, and, with his arm in that of his son, they watched Sally bounding away. Once more, as she leaped a fence, she looked laughingly back. The old man whistled wildly out of tune. Seffy waved a hand!

"Now you shouting, Seffy! Shout ag'in!"

"I didn't say a word!"

"Well—it ain't too late! Go on!"

Now Seffy understood and laughed with his father.

"Nice gal, Sef—Seffy!"

"Yes!" admitted Seffy with reserve.

"Healthy."

Seffy agreed to this, also.

"No doctor-bills!" his father amplified.

Seffy said nothing.

"Entire orphan."

"She's got a granny!"

"Yas," chuckled the old man at the way his son was drifting into the situation—thinking about granny!

"but Sally owns the farm!"

"Uhu!" said Seffy, whatever that might mean.

"And Sally's the boss!"

Silence.

"And granny won't object to any one Sally marries, anyhow—she dasent! She'd git licked!"

"Who said anything about marrying?"

Seffy was speechlessly savage now—as any successful wooer might be.

"Nobody but me, sank you!" said the old man with equally specious meekness. "Look how she ken jump a six-rail fence. Like a three-year filly! She's a nice gal, Seffy—and the farms jine together—her pasture-field and our corn-field. And she's kissing her hand backwards! At me or you, Seffy?"

Seffy said he didn't know. And he did not return the kiss—though he yearned to.

"Well, I bet a dollar that the first initial of his last name is Sephanijah P. Baumgartner, Junior."

"Well!" said Seffy with a great flourish, "I'm going to set up with her tonight."

"Oach—git out, Sef!"—though he knew it.

"You'll see."

"No, I won't," said his father. "I wouldn't be so durn mean. Nossir!"

Seffy grinned at this subtle foolery, and his courage continued to grow.

"I'm going to wear my high hat!" he announced, with his nose quite in the air.

"No, Sef!" said the old man with a wonderful inflection, facing him about that he might look into his determined face. For it must be explained that the stovepipe hat, in that day and that country, was dedicated only to the most momentous social occasions and that, consequently, gentlemen wore it to go courting.

"Yes!" declared Seffy again.

"Bring forth the stovepipe, the stovepipe, the stovepipe—"

chanted Seffy's frivolous father in the way of the Anvil Chorus.

"And my butterfly necktie with—"

"Wiss the di'mond on?" whispered his father.

They laughed in confidence of their secret. Seffy, the successful wooer, was thawing out again. The diamond was not a diamond at all—the Hebrew who sold it to Seffy had confessed as much. But he also swore that if it were kept in perfect polish no one but a diamond merchant could tell the difference. Therefore, there being no diamond merchant anywhere near, and the jewel being always immaculate, Seffy presented it as a diamond and had risen perceptibly in the opinion of the vicinage.

"And — and — and — Sef — Seffy, what you goin' to do?"

"Do?"

Seffy had been absorbed in what he was going to wear.

"Yas—yas—that's the most important," He encircled Seffy's waist and gently squeezed it. "Oh, of course! Hah? But what yit?"

I regret to say that Seffy did not understand.

"Seffy," he said impressively, "you haf tol' me what you goin' to wear. It ain't much. The weather's yit pooty col' nights. But I ken stand it if you ken—God knows about Sally! Now, what you goin' to do—that's the conuntrum I ast you!"

Still it was not clear to Seffy.

"Why—what I'm a-going to do, hah? Why—whatever occurs."

"Gosh—a-mighty! And nefer say a word or do a sing or help the occurrences along? Goshens! What a setting-up! Why—say—Seffy, what you set up for?"

Seffy did not exactly know. He had never hoped to practise the thing—in that sublimely militant phase.

"What do you think?"

"Well, Sef—plow straight to her heart. I wish I had your chance. I'd show you a other-guess kind of a setting-up—yassir! Make your mouth warter and your head swim, begoshens! Why, that Sally's just like a young stubble-field; got to be worked constant, and plowed deep, and manured heavy, and mebbly drained wiss blind ditches, an crops changed constant, and kep' a-going thataway—constant—constant—so's the weeds can't git in her. Then you ken put her in wheat after a while and git your money back."

This drastic metaphor had its effect. Seffy began to understand. He said so.

"Now look here, Seffy," his father went on more softly, "when you git to this—and this—and this"—he went through his pantomime again, and it included a progressive caressing to the kissing point—"well, chust when you bese comfortable—hah?—mebbly on one cheer, what I know—it's so long sence I done it myself—when you bese comfortable, ast her—chust ast her—aham!—what she'll take for the pasture-field! She owns you bese and she can't use bese you and the pasture. A bird in the hand is worth seferal in another feller's—not so?"

But Seffy only stopped and stared at his father. This, again, he did not understand.

"You know well enough I got no money to buy no pasture-field," said he.

"Gosh-a-mighty!" said the old man joyfully, making as if he would strike Seffy with his huge fist—a thing he often did. "And ain't got nossing to trade?"

"Nothing except the mare!" said the boy.

"Say—ain't you got no feelings, you idjit?"

"Oh—" said Seffy. And then: "But what's feelings got to do with cow-pasture?"

"Oach! No wonder he wants to be an anchel, and wiss the anchels stand—holding sings in his hands on his head! He's too good for this wile world. He'd linger shiffening on the

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