

Susie

KATHLEEN BLACKBURN, IN GODEY'S

There is this peculiarity about cakes and pastries: it is to enjoy the cakes, the whole contents of the molasses jug should not be poured upon them at once.—Critic.

SHE was the only daughter of a rich English merchant, a fact which was pleasing in outline, but had its detrimental side as well; for only daughters, like only pet dogs, often suffer from an overweening amount of family interest, which is bad for both parties.

Of course, some girls are naturally fitted with the disposition to carry them through all quiet admirably; but Susie Harmon, sometimes pronounced "Armon" had the eccentric, strong-minded, not-to-be-guided temperament which cannot accommodate itself to circumstances, and refuses to fit into conventional niches.

Susie unfortunately was the possessor of none of these qualities. She was dark and freckled, and her straight hair, which had the help of curling-tongs she endeavored to conform to a fashionable fluffiness, had a surprising habit of "coming out" and standing on end in a distressingly unbecoming manner. She walked atrociously too, in a hip-pety-hop sort of a fashion, and her laugh had more to do about it which would raise her in the social spheres. In fact she was a type of that femininity which dresses badly, giggles, inopportunely, and flirts unnecessarily. For, in accordance with the prevailing fashion which is especially pronounced among English mammae, she had been brought up with the idea that to remain unmarried was distinctly a social crime, and nature and heredity fostered the sentiment.

She was moderately anxious to marry. Did not her father, mother, aunts, uncles and brothers expect it of her? And was it fair to disappoint them? She was conscientious to a degree in that respect, in that she would willingly sacrifice herself to anyone, be he rich or poor, young or old, fair or dark, mattering not; she would throw herself into his arms, crying out, "Take all I have, only marry me."

But now she was thirty, and looked it, and still the possible husband remained sternly hidden behind futurity's veil. Her family began to feel distinctly nervous. Could it be possible that Susie was never going to marry? The only daughter of a rich father! Impossible! Somebody must turn up some time.

"I cannot understand it at all, Mary," Susie's Aunt Emma remarked indignantly, to Susie's mamma one day. "We have done all we can for Susie. We have entertained; we have given dances and dinner-parties, and theatrical entertainments; she has had every opportunity, and it all seem wasted, a very much afraid that the poor girl will live and die an old maid."

"I'm afraid so," Susie's mamma answered sadly, shaking her head as she spoke. She was a stout, sweet-faced, middle-aged lady with mild, meekly looking eyes and a placid manner, as unlike her only daughter as the proverbial hen with the ugly duckling. "But I don't think I am to blame, Emma; am I?" she asked, pathetically. "I am sure, as you say, that we did everything that lay in our power, and now I do not feel like exerting myself any more; besides, I am tired of entertaining."

"Well, I think, Mary, I think I should keep it up just for this winter and then if nothing happens, I really would give it up. Susie tells me that there was a young man named Henderson, George Underwood I think she said whose name he marked attention at the Crystal Palace Ball the other night; and who knows?—perhaps he may really be taken with her."

"What is he like, Emma, and what does he do?" Mrs. Harmon asked.

"Oh, Susie says he is tall and fair and quite gentlemanly, and she fancies he is a bank clerk, but she isn't sure. However, he is going to call on Sunday afternoon, and then we can judge for ourselves. I hope we shall like him, though."

"I hope so, indeed!" Susie's mamma ejaculated, fervently.

About a fortnight after the foregoing conversation Susie's mamma and aunt were sitting together in the parlor placidly drinking their cup of afternoon tea, when their quiet was unceremoniously broken in upon by the sudden entrance of Susie, who burst wildly into the room in a visible state of agitation. "Susie!" they both ejaculated, in mildly reproachful tones.

"Do not your hat on straight, dear. It always worries me to see it so crooked," her mother remarked.

"Oh, don't bother me!" the young girl exclaimed, impatiently, as she slipped excitedly up and down the room. "I have got something else to think about now besides hats."

"Oh, what is it, Susie?" Aunt Emma inquired, anxiously. "Has—"

"Yes, Auntie, George has proposed, and I think I am just the happiest girl in the world!"

"When did it happen?" Mrs. Harmon asked, with a tremble of excitement in her voice.

"Just now, Mamma, I met him when I was coming out of the Crystal Palace, and that what passes between George and myself is sacred even from my mother. I would never reveal it, never!" Susie answered, romantically, with a rapt expression in her brown eyes.

"Oh, very well, then, Susie," answered Aunt Emma, airily. "I shall ask George himself, then. When is he coming?"

"To-night," Susie replied, stiffly. "I have invited him to dinner, and I will be of you, Aunt Emma, not to say anything of the kind."

That evening there was great excitement in the Harmon household. Susie's father beamed upon her in a paternally paternal way, her mother and aunt looked the picture of satisfied matronhood, her uncle kissed her affectionately, while her three younger, teasing brothers exclaimed simultaneously with a whoop and a shout, "Well done, old Susie!" Susie was the heroine of the hour, but just then she was quite impervious to all external elements; she wore her very best pink silk dress with the chiffon sleeves; she was expecting her lover in a few minutes, and she positively could not care.

Mr. George Underwood was a pale, nervous, gentlemanly young man, of twenty-five or thereabouts, to whom the conjugation of the verb "am" had hitherto been a lesson still unlearned; but his Bret Hart's Chinaman, "be warm, be warm, be warm," he was full of warmth of manner, her appealing brown eyes, her extreme volubility, and a certain appropriating air she had, fairly carried him away, thaved out his bushy hair, and converted him into that state of mind which, rightly or wrongly, seemed to him to be the personal application of the verb which up to this time he had so grotesquely neglected. Stimulated by this deep-seated conviction, and also by the active coercion on the part of his inamorata, he proposed, and was instantly accepted.

Events are merely the blunt, outward manifestations of that delicate and subtle mechanism which link by link forges outward events in to the finished chain of circumstances. This world is a world of wheels within wheels, so it was a combination of forces which had converted George Underwood into an engaged young man, and had brought him to the Harmon do-vest at half past six punctually. It was rather an ordeal for such a very bashful young man, and his knees trembled slightly with emotion as he pulled the bell; but the family soon restored him as to his welcome, and with the best intentions in the world, endeavored to set him at his ease. Susie sat him in the hall with a joyful smile, crushed her pink fingers against his arm, and held up her face for an expected kiss. Mrs. Harmon and Aunt Emma greeted him graciously and sweetly, Uncle Henry and the boys were cordially polite, while Mr. Harmon, whose long-forgotten, subtle, and almost to be gratified, beamed upon him, ratted him on the back, gave him fatherly advice, and finally, as a great mark of his esteem, took him all round the rooms to show him the oil-stainings and family portraits.

The dinner was announced, it was one of those long, tedious English dinners, which carry the participant by

gradual stages through the crescendo of the solid meaty courses down to the diminuendo of the delicate jellies, fruits, and confections.

The Harmon as a family were fond of the good things of life; they were also fond of domestication, of lengthy speeches, toasts, etc., etc. And upon such an occasion as this, what could be more befitting than that the health of the young engaged couple should be duly placated in a glass of sparkling champagne? So Mr. Harmon, in a friendly, bright-eyed, beaming, rose at the head of his table and addressed his daughter and future son-in-law in flowery and eloquent language. He spoke of the charms of his dear daughter, of the many years of her lover, of the happiness which the engagement had opened to them, and he hoped that the future might hold for them both an ever-widening increase of blessings and joy.

But young Underwood who was unaccustomed to such effusion, failed to appreciate it. He returned to his seat, nudged feebly, pulled his hair, downy mustache, and felt vaguely uncomfortable.

"You must make a speech now, George," Susie exclaimed, archly, as soon as her father was seated.

"Yes, Mr. Underwood, you must make a speech," said Aunt Emma, and all the family looked at George and waited. But the young man, blushing to the roots of his sleek, brown hair, stammered out a hasty apology. He had never made a speech in his life, he did not know how, he really must beg to be excused, etc., etc.; but his apology was only accepted upon the promise that next time his speech would be forthcoming. And then to his great relief, Mrs. Harmon saved the situation to him, and the family repaired to the drawing room where cups of coffee were handed round and music proposed.

George did not sing? No? Did he like music? Then Susie must sing for him.

Susie's voice was a high soprano with a quaver running through it, and her songs were all of the very sentimental, die-for-love order, and intensified by the fact that she sang them directly to George.

It was trying, George shuffled his feet, blushed a little, turned away his head, and tried to look unobservant; but the family gaze was fastened on him, and he could not get away from it. Would the song never come to an end? The perspiration was standing out on his forehead in large drops, and his hands had turned cold. Ah, there was the last verse! He breathed more freely, and served up his courage to glance at his fiancée. She had just given the final notes of her song, and was now gazing upon her lover with a rapturous warmth which seemed positively to envelop him.

"Bravo, Susie!" her father exclaimed, at the same time applauding her vigorously. "Now give us that little thing about the dying soldier."

"Do you mean 'The Warrior Boy'?" Susie asked, in her sweetest voice.

"Yes, give us that. We haven't had half enough yet, have we, George?"

George assented with a sickly smile, and the song proceeded.

With thoughts of making a precipitate rush for the door, he found his feet fastened to the floor. He felt that he was only by a desperate effort that he managed to control his emotion. He glanced at the clock. Oh, Lord! it was only half past nine, and in common decency would not rise till ten. How was he going to stand it? He gave a furtive glance at Susie, only to find out to his dismay that her "appealing brown eyes" were still seeking his.

Would that Warrior Boy never die? Would he go on protesting his undeviating devotion to the end of time? Ah! he has reached the battle field now, his demise cannot be very far off. "The plighted ring he wore was crushed and wet with gore," George felt distinctly grateful to the enemies who had slain him. Now that note of his dying speech had sounded, and with a fervent sigh young Underwood joined in the applause.

"Susie," her father remonstrated. "You must not leave the piano yet. We haven't had half enough."

"Oh, papa, my knees trembled slightly with emotion as he pulled the bell; but the family soon restored him as to his welcome, and with the best intentions in the world, endeavored to set him at his ease. Susie sat him in the hall with a joyful smile, crushed her pink fingers against his arm, and held up her face for an expected kiss. Mrs. Harmon and Aunt Emma greeted him graciously and sweetly, Uncle Henry and the boys were cordially polite, while Mr. Harmon, whose long-forgotten, subtle, and almost to be gratified, beamed upon him, ratted him on the back, gave him fatherly advice, and finally, as a great mark of his esteem, took him all round the rooms to show him the oil-stainings and family portraits.

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natural disposition, it is who shrank sensitively from showing a bird or a rabbit, or even from killing a house-fly or a gnat.

And then again, how in heaven's name was he to do the beastly thing? Go to the house and tell her? Curses on drops of perspiration stood out upon his forehead at the bare idea. Why, she would faint in his arms, or by into a passion, or scream, and in any case she would be sure to cry; for that was always woman's weapon, her peculiar method of self-defense.

Could he send a friend? No, that was cowardly, and besides would even his friends stand such a strain upon it? Then he must write. Yes, that was the best, the only way; for he could pick and choose his words, and try to do the thing as delicately as possible.

He walked slowly upstairs to his room, took some pale pink note-paper out of his blotter, and began:

Dear Miss Harmon—

"Dear Miss Harmon!" That sounded terribly formal; but he could not say dear Susie, perhaps. "My Dear Miss Harmon," would sound better. Yes, he tore up the sheet, and began again.

My Dear Miss Harmon: I have a confession to make to you which I feel must not be delayed.

That would do for a beginning.

I wonder how I, a penniless bank clerk, could have had the temerity to ask you to leave your own luxurious home just to share my humble lot.

"Humble lot!" That sounded terrible, so he knocked it out and wrote:

I feel it is too much to ask from you. I feel it would only be right, just, and many of me to release you from an engagement which is sadly one-sided.

"Heaven!" What a hypocrite I am developing into!" he exclaimed out loud. "But I can't tell her the whole truth, and I must finish it. There is no other way out of it." He picked up his pen and began again.

Besides, I am afraid that we are too unworldly ever to find happiness in one another's society. It is better to discover this now than afterward, when it is too late. I hope, I sincerely hope, that this letter will not hurt your feelings in any way, but believe me, it is for the best that we should part. Thanking you for all the kindness that I have received from you and yours, I remain yours sincerely, George Underwood.

World that do? He threw down the pen and picking up the letter read it through carefully.

"Furtive, hypocritical!" he ejaculated, "but it must go. Now for the envelope."

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