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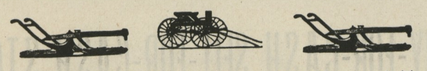

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A NIGHT OF SOBBING.

MRS. GALLUP LAMENTS THAT HER TIME ON EARTH IS SHORT.

She Heard the Summons to Get Ready to Be an Angel and Had a Little Talk With Mr. Gallup About Whom He Should Select For His Second Wife.

[Copyright, 1900, by C. B. Lewis.]

After supper Mr. Gallup had gone over to the store for a whetstone and a paper of carpet tacks, and as he went Mrs. Gallup was washing up the dishes and singing "The Home Over There" with great feeling. He returned in half an hour, and as he reached the kitchen door the sound of sobbing met his ears. He looked in to find Mrs. Gallup weaving back and forth on a chair with her check apron at her eyes. Something had happened. He didn't inquire what it was, but turned about and sat on the doorstep and in an absent way began sharpening a sickle with the stone he had bought. It was five minutes before Mrs. Gallup volunteered an explanation. When she saw that he had neither anxiety nor sympathy, she hitched her chair into the doorway, used a fresh spot on the apron to wipe her eyes and finally said:

"Samuel, when you've got that sickle sharpened you might go over to Mrs. Bebee's and tell her that I shall be a dead woman before tomorrer. You

"GIT READY TO BE AN ANGEL!"

needn't beat around the bush at all, but tell her right out. She'll rather be expectin the news. She was over here this afternoon, and she said I was liable to git my summons at any time. I've got it all arranged with her about the funeral."

Mr. Gallup did not look around. With calm deliberation he spat on the whetstone, and with calm deliberation he drew it back and forth across the blade.

"Yes, Samuel, my time has come!" sobbed Mrs. Gallup after waiting a reasonable time for him to speak. "A few hours hence and you will be a widower, and a few days hence you will be wearing a red necktie and canterin around after a second wife. When you started over town, I was as happy as a lark and hadn't the slightest idea of dyin. Ten minutes later when I went to carry the butter down cellar there came seven knocks on that empty cider bar'l, and as I stood there shakin I heard a whispered voice a-sayin, 'Hanner Gallup, git ready to be an angel!' It was my summons, and I've got to go. Nobody kin hold back ag'in a summons. What kind of a second wife shall you marry, Samuel?"

Mr. Gallup had paused in his labors and was looking absently at a robin in a cherry tree.

"You needn't feel at all delikit about talkin it over with me," said Mrs. Gallup as she dabbed at her eyes with the apron. "I've allus s'pected you'd git married ag'in if I should die, and I shan't howl and squeal about it. Mrs. Bebee says if her husband marries ag'in she'll haunt him, but you needn't be afraid of me. I'd ruther you married ag'in. If you didn't, you'd be goin to circuses and dogfights and candy pulls and become as wicked as Silas Johnson. S'pose you've kinder had your eye out, hev'n't you, Samuel—that is, you've kinder made up your mind about what sort of a woman you'd marry?"

Mr. Gallup withdrew his gaze from the robin and returned to his work of sharpening the sickle, and Mrs. Gallup's nose had grown very red with the pulling when she continued:

"There's the Widder Lapham, Samuel, and everybody says she's wuth $2,000, but I wouldn't want you to marry her. She's too hity tity for a man of your age. While she was swingin in a hammock she'd let the bread burn up in the oven. She'd want you to go off to a picnic every day in the year, and if you had any soft soap in the house you'd hev to buy it. And there's the Widder Davis. She's a good housekeeper, Samuel, as I'll admit, but they say she gits streaks on. One day she'll be laughin and gigglin all day long, and the next day she'll be as sulky as a mule. She kin make a pound of tea go as fur as I kin, but she told me with her own mouth that she had four pairs of stockin's last year. Could you put up with sich extravagance as that, Samuel? Wouldn't you be thinkin of how I allus got along on two pairs a year?"

Mr. Gallup whistled softly to himself as he felt of the edge of the sickle with his thumb. The whistle conveyed no direct information, but was a whistle in the abstract. Mrs. Gallup looked at the back of his neck for a moment and worked up and choked back a sob and then said:

"There's Phœbe Cousins, whom everybody likes, but she's an old maid and sot in her ways. She never backbites nor gits mad, but she wants everything jest so. If you come into the house and throwed your hat down on the floor or pulled your boots off in the parlor in the evenin, she'd raise the awfulest kind of a row. I guess you'll hev to marry a gal, Samuel. You are old 'nuff to be the father of any gal around here, but I don't see no other way. Hev you got any perticklar gal in mind? I was thinkin of Sue Sabins the other day. She's 20 years old and a great hand to work, and mebbe you'd be happy with her. Her mother says Sue likes to be petted. You've never petted me, but mebbe you'll change when I am gone. No, Samuel, I can't remember a time in 27 years when you've pulled my ear or patted me on the shoulder or poked me in the ribs. I—I"—

The remembrance that there had been no shoulder patting or ear pulling during all those long years brought a fresh outburst of emotion, and for two minutes Mrs. Gallup sobbed bitterly. Mr. Gallup laid down the whetstone and the sickle and picked up the paper of tacks and balanced it on the point of his finger, but he was oblivious of his surroundings.

"I—I don't complain, Samuel," said Mrs. Gallup when she could control her voice again. "When I saw that you was no hand to pet, I let it go. I'm old and wrinkled and scrawny, and I can't look fur pettin. It will be different with a gal, however. If you don't pull her ear at least once a week and call her angel, she'll git sulky and finally run away with a tin peddler. Mrs. Bebee was sayin that Bertha Williams would make a good gal wife fur you, and Mrs. Williams says that you could not do better than to marry Mary Hawkins, but I ain't goin to pick out nobody fur you nor find fault with your choice. All I'm goin to do is to die and become an angel and let you do jest as you want to. I've got jest one leetle favor to ask."

The lump in her throat and the tears in her eyes checked her speech for half a minute, and during that time Mr. Gallup put the tacks down and lifted up the sickle again.

"It's only this, Samuel. You needn't do no weepin fur me when I'm gone, and you needn't hang over the gate and try to look 'all broke up over my loss. You kin go right to playin checkers as soon as the funeral is over, but some night, later on, when you are all alone in the house and the crickets are singin, I want you to remember that I had my good p'ints as well as my bad. I want you to remember that I used a clothes biler with seven holes in the bottom fur nine years without mendin and that I hain't had a new corset fur 'leven years. Our teakettle is over 9 years old, and I've made one set of cups and sassers last us since we was married. That's all, Samuel, and now I'll go in and die, and you kin be lookin around fur your second wife!"

She rose up with a sob and retreated into the house, but Mr. Gallup knew nothing of it. He hung the sickle on a nail near the door, put the whetstone and tacks on a shelf in the wood shed, and then walked down the path and closed the henhouse door and cast a look into the pig pen. When he returned to the house, Mrs. Gallup was looking at her bowl of emptyings under the stove and humming the air of "I Want to Be an Angel." She had had her lamentation and got over it, and it would be three or four days before she would break out again. M. QUAD.

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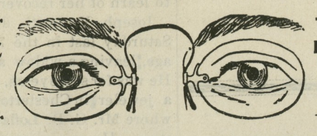

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