

The Mothers' Wooing

By ALICE LOUISE LEE

There ain't a better manager in the county than Betsey Agnew...



SEE THREW A BIG CAKE ON HER SON'S PLATE.

I hain't reached my time of life to set down in peace and have folks say...

It was one morning in the late winter that Mrs. Agnew said her 'little say' to her son...

Zed still sat at the table, bolting griddlecakes and listening without appearing to hear...

The only response he made to his mother's ultimatum was, 'Fork me over a few of them cakes, will ye?'

Mrs. Agnew, paying no attention, bent over the griddle. 'It ain't every day that a young man can git a farm of medder land...

'Twenty one, come next September.' 'Yes,' remarked Betsey meditatively...

'And what's more,' continued Betsey, 'she knows her aunt is dreadful dressy, and she'd cut a pretty figure in Boston without a decent dud to her back.'

Mrs. Willet sat bolt upright. 'Why, Betts, you don't mean?' 'Yes, I do,' interrupted Betsey. 'It'll fetch her if anything will.'

The farsighted Betsey gave Zed a full month in which to think over his prospects concerning the meadow lands.

'That man Skinner was here yesterday,' she remarked casually, 'to see about buyin' the medder lots. I told him I'd let him know in ten days what would be done with them medders.'

'Just as soon as the frost is out of the ground,' replied Betsey swiftly, 'fer it's got to be used by the last of September.'

'Ain't my plan with Atulky work in?' asked Betsey anxiously. Mrs. Willet groaned. 'Workin'?' she ejaculated.

'Yes, yes, Elzy, I know it's hard,' responded Betsey, with the light of victory in her eyes, 'but it's worth all that to have our own way where people think we can't.'

'I'm goin' to send Zed over Sunday night to set up with Atulky.' Eliza groaned afresh. 'Of course it's got to be done, but it'll mean another silk dress out of me, as likely as not, before she'll set up.'

Zed 'set up' Sunday night with his prospective bride—that is, he sat in one corner of the large parlor and blinked at the lamp.

By means of his toes hooked around the hind legs of the straight backed chair on which he sat...

Zed sat patiently until the hands of the clock designated the hour specified by Betsey and then took his silent departure.

There was no word for her to report, nor was there until September, until the house was finished and the wedding day set...

'They talked?' Mrs. Willet exclaimed. 'Now the Lord be praised!' cried Betsey, pliously sinking into a rocking chair.

'I should like to know,' said Betsey, regretfully, 'sein' it's only two weeks to the weddin'.'

'My, ain't I glad it's only two weeks more!' murmured Eliza pathetically. 'The clothes that Atulky has got out of me! They make folks open their eyes, though, I tell you!'

'I know it, Betts,' fretfully, 'but I'll be all-fired glad when it's over.' 'I can't help wonderin',' was Betsey's ambiguous response.

Unexpectedly Zed enlightened her that very afternoon. Zed had been doing an unprecedented amount of thinking for weeks and a little plan...

ning. He was proving himself the worthy son of his mother, but had his mother known it she would have been far from pleased.

gether pen, ink and paper, hooked his feet around the legs of his chair and with perspiring face tollsomedly indited a letter.

'Ma,' said Zed, coming into the pantry—'ma, me and Atulky want to go to the circus Wednesday at Auburn.

Betsey was delighted. Mrs. Willet was delighted. They beamed on the world generally and on each particularly for two days.

The dusk of the shortening September day was fast approaching when they heard the sound of horses at the front gate.

'Ladies,' he began, with some hesitation, 'I—ahem—feel it my duty to inform you—that your children will not be home—tonight, at least.'

Mr. Skinner bowed in Eliza's direction. 'She has just—let me see.' He drew out his watch.

Betsey suddenly advanced one step nearer Mr. Skinner. She spoke with heavy emphasis. 'My son got it, did he? Just wait till I git a hot of Zed.'

'California!' Betsey's voice was shrill. 'It can't be true! Zed left this house with just \$7 in his pocket.'

Betsey's head reeled. She caught the edge of the table and spoke hoarsely. 'The farm ain't his until the weddin' day. I've got the deed!'

'Ten minutes later two very pale and angry women were looking at each other silently. Betsey was the first to speak.

'To think,' she moaned, 'that I was fool enough to get that deed recorded! Eliza wring her hands. And there's Atulky run away without Zed after posterin' me high to death!'

She ended her sentence with a suppressed scream and sprang to her feet with the agility of youth.



'LADIES,' HE BEGAN, WITH SOME HESITATION. door, closely followed by the breathless and astonished Betsey.

The room was empty. Silk, chiffon, skirts, veils, gloves, hats, scarfs and all the toilet accessories, which for weeks had been draining Mrs. Willet's purse, had all disappeared.

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