

The Queen Of Sheba

She Finally Became Part of a Betrothal Feast

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Susan Tipping peered from her window as Jonas Wilton turned into the path that led to the shipyard. Behind him walked a large gray goose.

"Fanny Lee hates that goose as bitter as I do and maybe worse, but she'll pretend she likes it just to get around him. Widdere is cunning critters! I shan't sacrifice my principles to please no man—not even Jonas Wilton. I'll always stand by what I've said—all a goose is fit for is to roost and serve with apple sauce!" Susan Tipping sat and brooded resentfully over a disturbed past in which Jonas Wilton had repeatedly asked her to become his wife, and she had as repeatedly refused as long as the objectionable goose waddled in the background.

When Jonas Wilton faced his housekeeper across the supper table that night excitement was written on his bronzed face and in his shining eyes. "I've got a surprise for you, Miss Tipping," he said mysteriously as he stirred his tea—"a surprise that'll lift you clean out of your shoes, ma'am!"

"Tell me, too," purred the Widow Lee's deep voice from the doorway.

Miss Tipping brought a napkin from the sideboard and resumed her seat with a flourish of lilac colored skirts.

"I've left the yard," announced Mr. Wilton dramatically.

The two women stared at him.

"What's the matter?" gasped Susan at last.

"I'm going away," explained Jonas carelessly. "I've shipped on the Blue Heron with Captain Rink. We are going to China; we won't be back for a year."

"You'll be dreadful seasick. You have never been to sea in your life," faltered Susan.

"Fiddle!" said Fanny Lee sharply. "He won't be sick. He's sailed a skiff on the bay ever since he was a boy. Ain't you, captain?"

Jonas blushed at the newly conferred title and turned a beaming eye on the widow. "There ain't but one thing worries me," he confided hesitantly.

"What's that?" she asked shyly.

"Queen o' Sheba—she's got to stay behind. Captain Rink, he says he can't accommodate no goose." Jonas admitted uneasily a gleam in Susan's blue eyes denoted that she understood the captain's objection.

It was a relief to turn to the Widow Lee's sympathetic face and meet her smile of perfect understanding. "That there goose has been like a—like a"—floundered Jonas pathetically.

"Like a dear friend. I know what it is to part with one's dearest and never set eyes on 'em again. When Robert passed away"—Fanny Lee choked down a rising sob and pressed the fringed napkin to her eyes.

Mr. Wilton looked uncomfortable. "I hope Queen o' Sheba will be all right when I get home," he said, with a furtive glance at Susan's clouded face.

"I shan't take care of the critter," said Miss Tipping decidedly as she prepared to clear the table. "It's bound to follow some one around town. I won't be dogged by no goose!"

It was a tragic moment for Susan Tipping, and her tone was bitter. If Fanny Lee assumed the care of Queen of Sheba it meant that the breach between Jonas and his housekeeper would be irreparable.

The Widow Lee arose to the occasion which had been made for her. "I'll take care of the poor critter, Jonas," she said softly. "She can run around my orchard, and sometimes I'll take her for a walk, same as you did."

"Birds of a feather," floated acidly from Susan's compressed lips as she disappeared in the kitchen and closed the door behind her.

Shortly afterward Susan heard the Widow Lee and Jonas Wilton leave the house by the side door and go around to the shed where Queen of Sheba lived in solitary splendor.

"Good night, Susan," called Fan-

ny sweetly. "We're going to take Queen o' Sheba home!"

"Good night," said Susan, quite amiably. "Wish you joy of her!"

When Queen of Sheba's noisy clamor had died away Susan finished her work and then went to the west wing of the house, where she lived with a bedridden aunt.

"Aunt M'Issy, Jonas has shipped on the Blue Heron with Captain Rink," she said in a matter of fact tone as she tucked the old lady under the covers and turned down the lamp.

"You're a fool, Susan Tipping," shrilled Miss Melissa angrily. "Is he going to take that goose along too?"

"No; Fanny Lee's going to take care of it."

Miss Melissa's dark eyes glared fiercely at her niece. "Go along, do! I ain't got no patience with you at all!" And she cowered beneath her coverlets with little grunts of displeasure.

Four days afterward Jonas sailed away on the Blue Heron. The Widow Lee flattered the gray goose as a betrothal gift, and Queen of Sheba was generally regarded as the tangible bond that united two loving, separated hearts. As the months wore on and no news came from Jonas there was a strained look in Fanny's eyes and occasionally in the woodshed the gray goose received the castigations she so richly deserved after her predatory descents upon the grass grown lawn.

It was a long year. Aunt Melissa died in the summer and left Susan richer by several thousand dollars, but poorer by one friend less. Susan planned when Jonas came back she would go away and leave the home to him and his waiting bride—and Queen of Sheba.

One cold winter night Fanny Lee brought the gray goose to Susan's door. Her eyes were red, and she wore a black dress and a black veil on her hat.

"I can't bear to see the critter around," she sobbed bitterly. "It reminds me so of Jonas and him drowned at sea!"

"Drowned?" asked Susan in a strange voice.

"I forgot you didn't know. Of course they told me first. It was off the coast of Brazil. He fell overboard and was drowned, and Captain Rink he sent word to the telly-graph station, and of course they told me. You'll keep Queen o' Sheba, won't you?"

Susan stared fiercely at the long neck and yellow bill wriggling out of the widow's black shawl.

"I'll take care of her," said Susan icily. "Put her in the shed."

"You'll be good to her—for his sake," sniffled Fanny Lee, turning to go.

"I'll be good to her," repeated Susan, with a strange smile as she closed the door.

One day a week later Susan was eating her dinner in lonely contemplation of the great goose that crowned the feast. Her face wore the look of one who has overcome an enemy, but her triumph was marred by lack of appetite and a fluttering pain at her heart.

The kitchen door opened noisily, and familiar feet tramped across the floor.

"Susan Tipping, I've wanted to see you for a hull year!" and to Susan's consternation a pair of arms encircled her and she was kissed by no other than Jonas Wilton himself. "I wasn't drowned. It was John Wilson, the cook!"

In her joy Susan nearly kissed Jonas in return, but a sudden recollection assailed her, and she pushed him away and arose to her feet. "What about Fanny Lee and Queen o' Sheba? She's took good care of the goose for you," she said quietly.

"I got a silk shawl for Fanny Lee," said Jonas, "that'll pay her for her trouble. As for the goose—there ain't nothing happened to her yet?" His voice almost quivered with suspense.

"There she is! Something has happened to her. I was so—so wrought up when I heard you was drowned I just took spite on her and killed her, but now somehow I can't eat her. I was awful mean to kill a pet goose!" Susan stood aloof, pale and dejected.

"Pet nothing!" comforted Jonas, with his arms about her once more. "I got dreadful tired of being tagged around by that goose. It made a sight of talk and it kept us apart, so I just made up my mind I'd run for a year and maybe some-

(Concluded on page 4)



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