

A THANKSGIVING WEDDING

BY BESSIE CHANDLER.

Mrs. Susan Danvers stood by the table, an open letter in her hand. She was blushing painfully. It was not a pretty blush, but a sort of brick-dust color that seemed to suffuse her whole anatomy.

"It's come sort of sudden at last," she gasped—"sort of sudden. Hiram says he's coming on 'bout the last of the month, and he wants to be married on Thanksgiving Day and take me back with him. It kind of gives me a turn."

"Well," said her sister, as she gave the last parting thump to a towel she was ironing, "You've had time enough to look forward to it."

This was true, for Miss Susan had been engaged twelve years. She was not a young woman at the beginning of her romance, and she looked older to-day than her thirty-nine years warranted, as she stood clutching her letter, while the uncompromising morning sun lighted her sorrow face.

Her wedding had always shone before her—a future possibility. Today it suddenly took shape as a present reality. She sighed a little heavily, and looked anxiously at her sister.

"I'm all ready," she said, falteringly. "There won't be much to do."

Her sister went to the stove and put down her iron without answering; then, without getting another, she came back to the table and looked at Miss Susan.

She was the older woman of the two, and she had been the prettier. Faint traces of attractiveness still lingered in her eyes and in the corners of her mouth.

She was a widow, and she had had a great deal of trouble. Poverty, a worthless husband, and the death of several children had been among her trials. They had left her with a shrill tone in her voice and a pessimistic way of looking at life generally.

"There'll be enough to do," she said to her sister, sharply. "There always is when weddings is going on. There's the raisins to seed, and the citron to cut, and the currants to wash, and the spices to grind, and the ham to boil, and the hull house to clean, and all to be got through with by Thanksgiving."

hardly possible to her that she should wear them now. She heard her niece in the next room singing to herself as she opened and shut her bureau drawers, putting away her things and changing her dress.

"Alice," she called, huskily, "come here."

The girl appeared at the door half dressed. Her white neck and arms were bare, and her pretty feet and ankles showed beneath her short skirt.

"I'll be here in a minute, Aunt Sue," she said, and she slipped on a dress over her shoulders. The rest of her person she did not notice, she was not unhappy, only in a dull sort of way she saw the girl's beauty, and realized that it was a fitter dowry for a happy bride than her own faded looks.

"I'll have to cut it pretty far back to make it thick enough," she said.

"I don't care," responded her aunt, meekly. "Of course you want to look as good as I can," she added, by way of apology.

"You've been engaged a long time, haven't you? Aunt Sue?" asked the girl, as she plied the brush and comb.

"Yes," said Miss Susan; "over twelve years. You see, I couldn't leave Hiram to go to the front, and before your father died, and sister Alviry and you came home to live, and I was the only one left. Then Hiram's father died, and he had to help his ma a spell, while the little children was young. Then when sister Alviry came home she was that sickly I didn't dare leave her. But she's got out of it now, and I'm this year. I don't see as any one needs me now. I guess I can go just as well as not. Land's sake, child! you ain't a-cutting all the hair off my head, are you?"

Some long locks had fallen in her lap. She looked up alarmed.

"It's all right," said Alice, reassuringly. "It isn't exactly like mine, but I hope you'll like it."

Miss Susan rose and looked in the glass. The stiff, straight, half gray bang which confronted her certainly was unlike the soft yellow curls that rested over her niece's white forehead.

way to answer the little girl, then had she said, "I don't care."

"The very same," she said, and she slipped on a dress over her shoulders. The rest of her person she did not notice, she was not unhappy, only in a dull sort of way she saw the girl's beauty, and realized that it was a fitter dowry for a happy bride than her own faded looks.

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he'll get here now 'bout as soon as his letter."

Alice was pinning up golden-rod on the curtain. "It's such an obliging flower," she said to Henry Morgan, who was helping her; "it stays just where you put it, and it doesn't fade."

Miss Susan opened her letter and read it eagerly. Then she turned very white. She sank down by the side of a little table, threw her arms across it, and buried her face in them. "Oh, my good Lord!" she cried—"my good Lord!"

There was a moment of startled silence. Then Mrs. Putnam ran to her. "Susan, Susan, whatever is the matter?" She put her hands on her sister's bowed shoulders and gave her a little shake.

Miss Susan roused herself with a start, and sat up very straight. Her face was red, and her unfortunate bang stuck out in a fierce, defiant sort of way. There were no tears in her eyes. "Hiram—ain't—coming," she said. "He's a-going to marry some other woman. There ain't going to be any wedding here at all. Alice, you stop pinning up that golden-rod! Alviry, don't you bake all that bread we've got in sponge; we won't need no sandwiches. Then she went back. I think I'll just go, good-bye, plain, that Hiram jilted me. I couldn't stand it all if I was hurt inside and ashamed outside both; but, you see, I ain't. I'm just as glad in my heart—just as glad as anything. It's a pity 'bout the cake, though, it got such a good look on it, and I suppose I could sell it down at that new store—the Women's Extraneous, they call it—but I made that cake for myself, and it kind of makes me wreathe to think of strange jaws chewing it." She looked at them a minute in silence, then a sudden twinkle gleamed in her blue, faded eyes. "You mustn't let me see no more of that married-to-morrow could you, and use that cake?"

The color swept over Alice's face as if she had suddenly stood in the glare of a red light. "Oh, Aunt Sue!" she cried, "how could you! How could you?"

But Henry rose excitedly. "Aunt Sue," he exclaimed, "you're a brick! We will, Alice, we must we will! It's the very thing! What's the use of waiting! I would help Aunt Sue more than anything we could do. Don't you see? Say you will, Alice—say you will."

He had his arm around her, urging her with great earnestness, but Alice put both hands before her face and gasped: "Why, it's perfectly dreadful! I won't for anything! I don't—I can't!"

Miss Susan stretched them wearily. "Alice," she said simply, "put down your hands and look at poor Henry. He's blithely blind clear to the wick, he's so excited. Listen to what he says. 'Tain't best to sit too long. If you could make it convenient, why, there's the ham all boiled and everything ready. We needn't stify the minister, nor anything; just things go on as they were a-going. And Alice, if there's anything of my own want, you're welcome to it, though judging by my bang, I don't think four things become me, and 'tain't likely things would you didn't rip up my black silk, and I'd like real well to wear it at your wedding."

She paused a moment, and then left them, Alice and Henry, and returned, Henry eager and determined. Alice declared again and again that she never could think of it, but to Henry it seemed a rare and unique chance to obtain possession of a girl whom he had loved for so long, and whom he had aptly called "slipped." Her coquetry had hurt him, and he was afraid of it in the future. It seemed as if now or never with her, and he pressed his suit with all the ardor that he possessed. He conquered, finally, and protesting to the last minute that she never would.

And so the Thanksgiving wedding came off expected in the little brown house, with a slight change in the dramatics.

gingerly or it would drop all to pieces. I ain't so breakly. I want to tell you that I'm glad of it. There! do you hear? I'm glad of it, and I ain't a-saying this either just to put on airs, and pretend I don't care. Of course I feel as if I'd been hit right in the face, and that ain't pleasant; but if there wasn't no other way out of it but just this, I would rather it had come so than not at all. I've felt awful 'bout getting married. No one knows how bad unless it's the old house and my room and the back yard and the chicken now; and West's cousin was so far to go!" She choked for a second, and sniffed a little. Then she recovered herself and went on: "Of course I'm just as ashamed as 'bout 'bout it all. I don't know what it says to folk, and there's those five o'clock and all my other presents to go back. I think I'll just go, good-bye, plain, that Hiram jilted me. I couldn't stand it all if I was hurt inside and ashamed outside both; but, you see, I ain't. I'm just as glad in my heart—just as glad as anything. It's a pity 'bout the cake, though, it got such a good look on it, and I suppose I could sell it down at that new store—the Women's Extraneous, they call it—but I made that cake for myself, and it kind of makes me wreathe to think of strange jaws chewing it." She looked at them a minute in silence, then a sudden twinkle gleamed in her blue, faded eyes. "You mustn't let me see no more of that married-to-morrow could you, and use that cake?"

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So they went to work, removing all traces of the wedding preparations. No sound came from that closed chamber overhead. At dinner time Alice went up softly and knocked on the door.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Aunt Sue?" she said gently. "I've brought you one, and a piece of pie."

"Oh, that's all right, Alice," answered Miss Susan, in a clear, composed voice. "I'm ripping up my stun-colored silk."

Alice went down and told her mother. She held up both hands in amazement.

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