

"Mournful Mullin."

(Continued from page 2.)

leaving him without a word.

Therefore the Cap'n trudged one way, consumed by pique and rage that a woman should so slight him: "Mournful" Mullen trudged the other way, equally smarting under her contempt.

And as the days went past that feeling increased in each of those rugged breasts, until it became a desire to show the contemptuous woman that they were no such persons as she had imagined.

Now all that Smyrna understood about the matter was that both Cap'n Jotham Sprague and "Mournful" Mullen were showing attentions to widow Briggs, running all her errands, helping her at her farm-work, and in general acting out like two rivals who were dead in love.

The Cap'n remained saturnine. Mullen remained mournful.

So it came along into August when the days were hot and muggy, and the flies pestered the bald-heads, and the careful housewives and the cows in the pasture.

For her Jersey cow that she had named Maybelle, the widow had developed in almost sisterly affection. When she saw Maybelle frantically lashing herself in the pasture with her tail, or stamping in the yard to dislodge flies, her heart swelled with sympathy. She wondered why it was that farmers had never invented anything to keep flies away from cows. She laid the negligence to their hard hearts. It was the same callousness, she reflected, that took away the little calves and gave them to the butchers for a few paltry dollars. She didn't care what other people thought, she made up her mind to do something to allay poor Maybelle's tortures. So she planned and stitched, and at last her invention was ready.

It happened that the Cap'n was the faithful servitor to present himself first that day.

The two men had arrived at that point in their relationships that they glared at each other when they met and clenched fists behind their backs. But as far as they could see, the widow inclined neither to one or the other. If she praised the Cap'n for his good nature and funny stories, she gave him fits the next moment for his awkwardness.

A commendation of "Mournful" Mullen's handiness was always followed by some such sentiment as this: "But, oh, that face of yours would sour cream! How a man can go through this world and not laugh is more than I can understand. No wonder your first wife couldn't stand it!"

When the Cap'n presented himself on that day, which will forever remain memorable in Smyrna the widow was in the barn crying "So, boss!" in agitated tones. So the Cap'n hastened in. He caught at the side of the door to hold himself up and stammered wordlessly in his amazement.

There stood Maybelle arrayed as to her hind legs in neat gingham pantaloons, the waist of which was voluminous enough to cover her body to the neck. The widow was even then panting and perspiring trying to make the cow hoist her fore feet so that another set of pantaloons could be fitted there. But Maybelle was snoring madly and trying to kick loose.

"It's for the flies!" exclaimed the widow almost in tears. "But she don't seem to appreciate it a mite, Cap'n Sprague. Won't you lend a hand to help them on? I know she's goin' to appreciate 'em after she gets wanted."

It was the supreme test of the old skipper's self-control, but he mastered his indignant resentment at being asked to play lady's maid to a Jersey cow. First he knotted the end of the long halter about his wrist and with both hands free sought to force the cow into her new gingham rainment. She stepped on his feet, she tucked one of her brass tipped horns up under his chin and made him bite his tongue. She crowded him and bunted him. And at last, while he was trying to tie the straps of the trousers over her back she stepped on both his feet at once and gave him an uppercut with her blunt horn that nearly lifted off his head.

"There don't nobody hit me

more'n four times without gittin' it back!" he bellowed, and then he began on Maybelle with tongue and fists. They tore a half dozen times around the barn floor, the widow getting in a few peeks at the Cap'n with a fork handle and hitting the maddened Maybelle as many times. Then they burst out into the yard.

"Mournful" Mullen was just coming in at the gate. Five times the parade passed him, racing around the yard, Maybelle in those indescribable "panties" the Cap'n firmly attached to her by the rope knotted about his wrist running as he had never run before, in an effort to catch up and wreak more vengeance.

When the widow rushed in front of her and threw up her arms with an appealing "So, boss!" she dodged, quavered a long moan and leaped the picket fence, the Cap'n hurdling after her with a leap that, even in his rage and fear, he had to mentally pride himself on. Maybelle, with head down, took to the middle of the main street of the village, and the skipper followed, his arm stretched ahead of him to its limit, his body pulled sidewise and taking straddles like a whiskered "Puss in Boots." Thus the two went out of sight under the wayside elms, the villagers running to doors and windows to behold.

Now, the first expression on "Mournful" Mullen's face as he leaned on the gate and beheld the barn gave up this amazing cow in toggery and her satellite had been mild wonder, mingled with reproof for a man who would swear so horribly. When the parade swept by him on its second round of the yard his eyes, for the first time in the memory of Smyrna lost there elongated look of solemnity.

When Maybelle went past the third time, tail over her back and her new suit snapping in the breeze, wrinkles and ridges appeared on his face where there were never wrinkles before. The parchment-like hide seemed to crackle, and then his whole face softened mellowly. A moment later he began to laugh with shrill exclamations like hiccup, and then the roars came. He staggered against the fence and at last fell on the turf holding to his sides. He rolled about with imminent risk of being trodden under foot by Maybelle.

The Cap'n shouted to him for assistance but "Mournful" Mullen was helpless. He only rolled and kicked and bellowed. And when at last the cow and her tow went away down the street Mullen crawled on his hands and knees through the gate and watched them out of sight, palpitating with laughter and too weak to stand upright.

The widow pummeled him back into consciousness as he lay gasping like a fish. "Go get my poor Maybelle away from that thief, that pirate, that renegade!" she shrieked.

"He wanted me to get him away from her!" guffawed Mullen, sinking back again on the turf and "whickering" feebly.

But after a time her indignant reproaches stung him and he staggered to his feet. "I'll git her for you, Miss Briggs," he gulped. "He shan't hurt a hair on her. But she—she—she—" He stumbled to the fence and held on and hiccupped more laughter.

He went stumbling down the road. He came back half an hour later Maybelle following docilely behind him. He carried her rainment on his arm.

When he came around the corner she was sitting on the door-step scripping the gingham into breaths. He leaned against a piazza post and eyed her bashfully. "As I was sayin'," he ventured, "it don't seem to fit the sect to wear—"

"You just shut your big mouth about that now and forever," she cried, snapping her eyes at him.

But as she looked at him she realized that he was not "Mournful" Mullen any longer. It was as though he had broken out of a chrysalis. He boomed on her genially.

"I ain't no hand to heat about the bush," he said. "I've got kind of used to helpin' you out around this place and I'm ready to continue at it. I've got—well, say \$15.00 if I sell out my farm, and I reckon I will, cause I don't want to be solemn any more. You know what kind of a farmer I be. Now what say?" He boomed on her some more, this time with anxiety.

"I mean—"

"You'll sell your place the minute we're married?"

"Before."

"Well, then, go tend to it."

"And if you make any more of—of them you'll wear 'em."

Then she went into the house, poked the gingham breaths into the rag bag in the ell, and began to get dinner, singing cheerily.

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