

HIS MOTHER OR HIS SWEETHEART

By EVELENE A. SPENCER

IT was a hot Sunday in July. The church door and windows stood wide open, and the soft summer wind waved the green paper blinds to and fro with sleepy rhythm. The big flies and an occasional bee buzzed in, and finding all in semi-darkness, soon darted for the open door, and the piles of freshly cut clover and hay which lay in the meadows surrounding the little church.

The preacher waxed eloquent notwithstanding the heat, for he was a "local," and did not get a chance to preach very often.

Ann Evans sat in the choir and waved a big palm leaf fan to and fro, and smiled to herself as she noted the number of men and women who had first got beyond listening, then beyond appearances, and were now openly nodding their heads in drowsy unconsciousness. Ann stole a glance at the pew where Tom Burns and his mother sat, and the hot color mounted to her face, for Tom was looking right at her, and in a very unusual way, too.

Some others had been sharp enough to see it, too, and when the service was over one girl whispered to another: "Can they be engaged at last?"

"No," replied the other, "His mother will never consent to Tom's marrying any girl."

"More fool she to waste her time on him. Why, Ann Evans must be near thirty, and has never had any beau but Tom Burns. Pity he hadn't me to deal with, I'd bring him to time, mother or no mother," and with a laugh they passed outside the church door.

It was perfectly natural for Tom Burns to join Ann Evans and walk home with her. Tom had taken Sunday tea at Evans' for many years. He talked of crops with Mr. Evans, of horses with the boys, and the price of butter and eggs with Mrs. Evans, but his eyes followed Ann's every movement with interest, and she knew it.

ANN had known and liked Tom when she was a little girl; she had loved him with all the fervency of a woman's heart for nearly ten years; she had refused other men, and blindly waited for him to speak. She knew that he loved her, although he had never said anything which she could have construed as such, but words were not necessary, Ann and Tom fully understood each other; he knew that she would never marry him without his mother's full approval, and accordingly, to his code of honor, love-making was impossible without the proffer of marriage which should accompany it; and so he, too, waited on year by year, trusting, hoping, but always longing for the time to come when he could go and tell her all about it.

This Sunday evening he seemed different; Ann felt it from the time she met his eye in church, and Mr. and Mrs. Evans commented on it in the privacy of their bedroom that night.

"I would not be a bit surprised if Tom's at last had it out with his mother, and is thinking of marryin' Ann," began Mrs. Evans.

"Well, I was thinkin' the same thing," replied her husband, "and I suppose it's about time; although," with a sigh, "I don't see how you'll ever manage without Ann. I've always been glad she never married early like the other girls, she has been a help and comfort to us all her life."

"I'm afraid you're a selfish old man," amiably from his

wife, who knew and understood all, "but I look beyond all that, and will be a thankful woman when I see my daughter married to Tom Burns. There was no use proddin' her, she never would look at anyone else, nor ever say a word to urge Tom on either. I saw that years ago, and have waited for the Lord to adjust it all in good time. Belinda Burns was never the woman to listen to anything she did not want to hear. She was always set up and high-handed, and seein' that the place is all hers, Tom and her have to settle all that before he can bring in a wife. Judgin' from to-day, he seems to have put the first spoke in the wheel, and we'll soon see the finish."

EARLY Monday morning Mrs. Burns was on her way down to Centreville. She was a large, fine-looking woman of fifty years of age, with a very determined eye, and a firm mouth. She slapped the horse's back with the reins impatiently, and clicked vigorously with her mouth to try and accelerate his speed, then she fell to thinking again. Evidently her thoughts were not pleasant ones, for she frowned and compressed her lips, and suddenly became aware of the slow rate at which she was travelling, and seizing the whip, proceeded to tickle the horse's back, after the manner of a humane-minded woman. The horse pricked up his ears and broke into a steady trot, which he kept up until he drove up to Mrs. Amelia Watkins' door.

"How are you, sister," cried Mrs. Watkins, who had heard the wheels stop, and bounded out.

Mrs. Burns drove slowly through the gate and into the back yard, followed by her sister. The two women unharnessed the horse and started for the house. As Mrs. Burns removed her bonnet, she said, "I suppose you're wonderin' what has brought me to town so soon again."

"Well, yes, I was kind of wonderin', Belinda, knowin' that it is not much like you to do much visitin', or come to town any oftener than you can help."

"That's true, Mealy, I never was much of a gadder. No one could say that of me, anyway. Whatever my faults is, I stay at home and 'tend to my own business. Perhaps if I wasn't so fond of home it 'ud be better for me now," she added in an unsteady voice.

"Why, Belinda, has anything happened?—you don't seem quite yourself," asked Mrs. Watkins, anxiously and eagerly too, for Mrs. Watkins lived on news as well as her daily bread.

Mrs. Burns required no pumping to disgorge her news, as her sister well knew. "Ask Belinda a straight question and she'll give you a straight answer," she was proud of saying. "You don't have to beat around the bush with her."

"What would you think, Mealy, of Tom askin' me yesterday if I had any objection to him gettin' married?"

"Well, well," ejaculated Mrs. Watkins, secretly pleased to learn that her nephew had done what she had counselled him to do for the last three years.

"Yes he did," resumed Mrs. Burns; then she paused, as if lost in the memory of what had taken place. Mrs. Watkins waited a few moments, and then prompted: "And what did you say to him, Belinda?"

"I said very little. Such a question as that needed thinking over before I could answer it. It came on so sudden like—that is, I never suspected Tom was on for