



Joseph Lush saw Mrs. Hollis outside the garden gate beckoning wildly to him.

Illustrated by  
GEORGE  
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# The Reason Why

In Which Two Lonely Souls Thought Love Needed a Reason---and They Found One!

By RUBY M. AYRES

**T**HE ENGAGEMENT between Farmer Lush and Widow Hollis had been expected for so long that nobody was surprised when he appeared in the market-place of Little Helpton one morning with a gigantic carnation in his buttonhole.

The carnation was a prize bloom from the garden of Mrs. Hollis, and as she had never before been known to give one away, it was considered positive proof that she had also decided at length to give herself along with it, into the keeping of Farmer Lush.

Lush had been a widower and Mrs. Hollis a widow, exactly four years—the funerals of the two lamenteds having taken place at precisely the same hour on the same afternoon of the same dreary, rainy day in a certain September.

The proposal had been brief and to the point. "If you'll make me a good wife, Elizabeth," Lush said, solemnly, "I'll make you a good husband."

And Mrs. Hollis had said "Yes" rather ambiguously, but to their mutual understanding.

She had known for weeks past that Lush was going to propose, and she had pleasantly anticipated the

event; but now, somehow, she found herself comparing this commonplace wooing with that romantic night, twenty years ago, when George Hollis had whispered that she was the prettiest lass in the village; she sighed at the thought.

And Joseph Lush—sincerely as he liked and admired his old friend's widow, thought half-resentfully that she might have got up a blush, or a start of surprise, or one of the many bashful perturbations which the situation seemed to demand, and all of which his departed Ruth had displayed so effectually twenty years ago.

"But there'll never be another woman like my Ruth," he told himself sorrowfully, as he stooped awkwardly and bestowed something approaching a kiss on Mrs. Hollis' still smooth cheek.

But he cheered up on his way from the parlour to the gate, and half-way down the garden path had sufficiently recovered to ask boldly for one of the widow's choice carnations, and to stand with a smile on his face while she pinned the outward and visible sign of her conquest on his broad chest, for all the world to see.

Then he shook hands with his prospective bride and walked slowly off down the road, thinking of another parting, in similar, yet such different circumstances, twenty years ago, with the girl Ruth. How loth he had been to leave her; how many times he had looked wistfully back between the gate and the bend in the road, and how, just as he reached it, she had called him back, and—

"Mr. Lush! Mr. Lush!" called a voice.

Turning sharply, half-expecting to see the girlish figure in the pink cotton frock of his boyhood's romance, Joseph Lush saw Mrs. Hollis outside the garden gate beckoning wildly to him.

He walked slowly back to her.

"Yes, Elizabeth," he said, "what is it?"

There was a half-hope in his heart that perhaps she wanted to say something nice to him, perhaps even, she wanted . . .

But sentiment was far from the mind of Mrs. Hollis, just then.

"Just look at your coat," she said, severely. "All over whitewash where you've been leaning against the garden wall. You can't go to market like that. I do like to see a man neat and tidy."

She turned him round with business-like hands, and brushed his coat vigorously.

"There," she said, "that's better."

"Thank you, Elizabeth," said Joseph Lush—he looked at her half-hesitatingly—she certainly was a comely woman.

"I suppose you wouldn't care for me to come round after supper this evening and smoke a pipe in the parlour?" he suggested with diffidence.

Mrs. Hollis did not answer for a moment—it seemed almost as if she had not heard, then she pulled herself together with a little sigh that sounded somehow reminiscent.

"Yes," she said. "Come along at eight o'clock, Mr. Lush."

"I call you 'Elizabeth,'" said Joseph, meaningly. "Don't you think you could manage to use my Christian name now that we're—"

He paused. "Engaged" had been on the tip of his tongue, but, in the sunset glow of the memory of that other day when he had become engaged to a girl in a pink cotton frock, the word seemed somehow strangely inappropriate.

"Now we're going to be married," he added slowly.

"I'll try—Joe," said Mrs. Hollis.

Lush started. The little abbreviation of his name came to his ears with something of a shock. Nobody had ever called him "Joe" except the woman who lay in the churchyard; amongst his friends he was always "Joseph" or "Farmer Lush"—and, for a second, he looked at Mrs. Hollis almost resentfully.

"Thank you," he said at last, and turning, walked off down the road.

Mrs. Hollis went slowly back to the house.

**A**T THE carnation bed she stopped and stood looking down at the pink and red blossoms silently.

George Hollis had first planted that bed for her—and every Sunday when the flowers were in bloom, she had always gathered one and pinned it in his coat before they went to church together.

She had never given one of the blooms to anybody since he died—till to-day, and she felt almost guilty as she thought of the bloom adorning the manly chest of Farmer Lush.

"I hope he won't let it die," she said to herself. "I hope he'll put it in water."

But when, at eight o'clock precisely, Joseph Lush presented himself at Ivy Cottage, the carnation hung a weary and faded head against the rough tweed of his coat.

(Continued on page 38)



Mrs. Hollis set down the teapot firmly. "If I'd died," she said, "he would not have married again."