

The Education of Sally

(Continued from page 10.)



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in the seventh heaven of delight. Was not Sally at last a belle? As for the proposals—well, Sally was not the girl to count her scalps in public, but every once in so long a visiting youth dropped out and was seen no more at Glenellyn. One could guess what that meant.

Sally apparently enjoyed all this. I grieve to say that she was a bit of a coquette. I tried to cure her of this serious defect, but I found that for once I had undertaken something I could not accomplish. In vain I lectured; Sally only laughed; in vain I gravely rebuked; Sally only flirted more vivaciously than before. Men might come and men might go, but Sally went on forever. I endured this sort of thing for a year, and then I decided that it was time to interfere. I must find a husband for Sally—my fatherly duty would not be fulfilled until I had—nor, indeed, my duty to society. She was not a safe person to have running at large.

None of the men who haunted Glenellyn was good enough for her. I decided that my nephew, Frank, would do very well. He was a capital young fellow, handsome, clean-souled, whole-hearted. From a worldly point of view he was what Sara would have termed an excellent match; he had money, social standing, and a rising reputation as a clever young lawyer. Yes, he should have Sally.

They had never met. I set the wheels going at once. The sooner all the fuss was over the better. I hated fuss, and there was bound to be a good deal of it. But I went about the business like an accomplished match-maker. I invited Frank to visit Owlwood and before he came I talked much—but not too much—of him to Sally, mingling judicious praise and still more judicious blame together. Women never like a paragon. Sally heard me with more gravity than she usually accorded to my dissertations on young men. She even condescended to ask several questions about him. This I thought a good sign.

TO Frank I said not a word about Sally; when he came to Owlwood I took him to Glenellyn, and, coming upon Sally wandering about among the beeches in a ruby atmosphere of sunset, I introduced him without any warning. He would have been more than mortal if he had not fallen in love with her upon the spot. It was not in the heart of man to resist her—that dainty, alluring bit of womanhood. She was all in white, with flowers in her hair, and for a moment I could have murdered Frank or any other man who dared to commit the sacrilege of falling in love with her.

Then I pulled myself together and left them alone. I might have gone in and talked to Sara—two old folks gently reviewing their youth while the young folks courted outside—but I did not. I prowled about the pine wood and tried to forget how blithe and handsome that curly-headed boy Frank was, and what a flash had sprung into his eyes when he had seen Sally. Well, what of it? Was not that what I had brought him there for? And was I not pleased at the success of my scheme? Certainly I was! Delighted!

Next day Frank went to Glenellyn off his own bat, not even making the poor pretence of asking me to accompany him. I spent the time of his absence overseeing the construction of a new greenhouse I was having built. I was conscientious in my supervision; but I felt no interest in it. The place was intended for roses, and roses made me think of the pale yellow ones Sally had worn at her breast one evening the week before, when, all lovers being for the time absent, we had walked together under the pines and talked as in the old days before her young womanhood and my grey hairs had risen up to divide us. She had dropped a rose on the brown floor and I had sneaked back after I had left her in the house to get it before I went home. I had it now in my pocket-book.

Frank's wooing seemed to prosper. The other young sparks who had haunted Glenellyn faded away after his advent. Sally treated him with the most encouraging sweetness. Sara smiled on him; I stood in the background, like a benevo-

lent god of the machine, and flattered myself that I pulled the strings.

At the end of a month something went wrong. Frank came home from Glenellyn one day in the dumps and moped for two whole days. I rode down myself on the third. I had not gone much to Glenellyn that month; but if there were trouble Sallyward it was my duty to make the rough places smooth.

As usual, I found Sally in the pine wood. I thought she looked rather pale and dull—fretting about Frank, no doubt. She brightened up when she saw me, evidently expecting that I had come to straighten matters out; but she pretended to be haughty and indifferent.

"I am glad you haven't forgotten us altogether, Stephen," she said coolly. "You haven't been down for a week."

"I'm flattered that you noticed it," I said, sitting down on a fallen tree and looking up at her as she stood, tall and lithe, against an old pine, with her eyes averted and the sunlight falling in a fine rain over her dark hair. "I shouldn't have supposed you'd want an old foggy like myself poking about and spoiling the idyllic moments of love's young dream."

"Why do you always speak of yourself as old?" said Sally crossly, ignoring my reference to Frank.

"Because I am old, my dear. Witness these grey hairs."

I pushed up my hat to show them the more recklessly.

Sally barely glanced at them.

"You have just enough to give you a distinguished look," she said, "and you are only forty. A man is in his prime at forty. He never has any sense until he is forty—and sometimes he doesn't seem to have much then," she concluded impertinently.

My heart beat. Did Sally suspect? Was that last sentence meant to inform me that she was aware of my secret folly and laughed at it?

"I came over to see what has gone wrong between you and Frank," I said gravely.

Sally bit her lips.

"Nothing," she said.

"Sally," I said reproachfully, "I brought you up—or endeavored to bring you up—to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Don't tell me I have failed. I'll give you another chance. Have you quarrelled with Frank?"

"No," said that maddening Sally, "he quarrelled with me. He went away in a temper and I do not care if he never comes back."

I shook my head.

"This won't do, Sally. As your old family friend I still claim the right to scold you until you have a husband to do the scolding. You mustn't torment Frank. He is too fine a fellow. You must marry him, Sally."

"Must I?" said Sally, a dusky red flaming out on her cheek. She turned her eyes on me in a most disconcerting fashion. "Do you wish me to marry Frank, Stephen?"

Sally had a wretched habit of emphasizing pronouns in a fashion calculated to rattle anybody.

"Yes, I do wish it, because I think it will be best for you," I said, without looking at her. "You must marry sometime, Sally, and Frank is the only man I know to whom I could trust you. As your guardian I have an interest in seeing you well and wisely settled for life. You have always taken my advice and obeyed my wishes; and you have always found my ways the best in the long run, haven't you, Sally? You won't prove rebellious now, I am sure. You know quite well that I am advising you for your own good. Frank is a splendid young fellow who loves you with all his heart. Marry him, Sally. Mind, I don't command. I have no right to do that, and you are too old to be ordered about if I had. But I wish and advise. Isn't that enough, Sally?"

I had been looking away from her all the time I was talking, gazing determinedly down a sunlit vista of pines. Every word I said seemed to tear my heart and come from my lips stained with my lifeblood. Yes, Sally should marry Frank, but heavens, what would become of me?



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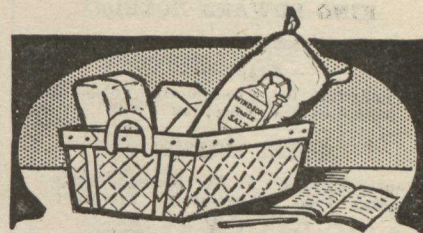
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