

Mr. and Mrs. Sallie
—being the Confessions of a new wife—
Illustrated by Paul Robinson
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Gladys Baker

In silence the dinner hour passed. I felt that following the meal there would be a scene, far, from his former conversation, I was certain that Curtiss would demand that I give up the idea of buying the shop, and I was more determined than ever that I would not.

Later he took his pipe and sat in front of the living-room fire and as I passed him, going into my own room, I noticed that his gaze was fixed on the bright, sparkling flames and I knew that he was deep in thought. In my room I busied myself rearranging the closet shelves—a practical occupation which never failed in its soothing effect when I was emotionally overwrought.

In about an hour Curtiss called to me. His voice was gentle and there was no trace of the angry attitude he had shown when we had discussed the proposition in town.

"Won't you sit here?" He designated a place beside him on the divan, which he had drawn close to the cheerful blaze. I sat as far away from him as possible for I was afraid he was going to resort to gentle tactics in order to persuade me to relinquish my plans. He moved swiftly to my side and took my hand.

"Listen, sweetheart," he began, "I've been thinking about this scheme of yours and I've tried to look at it fairly from your viewpoint as well as mine, and I've come to the conclusion that I have no right to interfere. As you said this afternoon it is your life that you have to live and naturally I realize that you must get the most out of it in your own way. I'm old-fashioned, dearest, and that's why I blew up. Then, too, it was such a surprise. I guess I was peeved too because you had gone ahead without asking my advice and I've always felt that a man and wife were so closely bound that each should share the other's innermost thoughts. But, it's all right. I see the thing differently now and if you want the shop you certainly have my permission to go ahead."

He was making a terrible sacrifice and I could not help but marvel at the complete metamorphosis that had come over him in the short time he had been fighting the thing out alone.

"Well, you certainly have changed your mind?" I exclaimed, "how on earth did it happen?" I asked.

"Well, you see," he replied, with his charming half-smile, "it just so happens that I love you better than anything on earth and I want you to be happy above everything else. I admit that I can't see why you want to brave the many unpleasant situations that contact with the business world invariably brings, and, looking at it from a practical viewpoint, I don't see how, without any experience, you can possibly make a success in the commercial field, but," he drew a deep breath, "if you feel that this shop will bring pleasure into your life it is not up to me to object. I can not live your life for you, all I can do is try to shield and protect you at a distance and try to realize that I've married a modern wife."

"But why don't you think I'll make a success? Other people without experience have done so," I declared.

"Well, in the first place you're not the type. You're too feminine and fluffy and sweet. Whether you'll admit it or not, Sallie, you were meant to find happiness in your home."

"No one ever said I was domestic before," I announced.

"I know," he nodded with a serious look in his eyes, "but you are, just the same. You haven't quite found yourself, yet, Sallie dear, but some day you will. In the meantime you are young. Go ahead and enjoy your toy until the novelty wears off and then, come back to your poky old husband and," he looked around the living-room with a slight wave of his hand, "and our little nest."

"But Curtiss," I flashed back at him, "it isn't a toy, really I've never been more serious about a thing in my life."

"Yes, I understand all that," he replied, "so it is settled then," he spoke rapidly and without enthusiasm, but there was no hint of criticism in his voice, "good luck to you, my dear, and remember, while I shan't in any way interfere, I'll be glad to help you whenever I can."

I flung myself into his arms. "Oh, you are a dear!" I cried, and I was overwhelmingly happy because for the first time, he had given me the sympathetic understanding that I had always desired.

I told him about Captain T. Curtiss was so half-hearted sport. Having made up his mind to offer no further objections to my plan, he was evidently prepared to go the whole way. He said he was sorry for Vladimir Tchertkov and agreed with me that we should introduce him to some of our friends.

We talked late into the night and when I finally fell asleep my dreams were shot through with high ambition and firm resolve.

The book shop had been going on for almost half a year. I refused all invitations of a frivolous nature and set to work. The same energy and enthusiasm that I had used in my social life I gave to the new enterprise, but never before had I known the meaning of real work. Thankful and Captain T. both gave unstintingly of themselves but the minute details of managing the shop devolved upon me and as each day passed I realized the seriousness of the responsibility I had so gladly assumed. While I uttered no complaint, I know that no shop girl had ever worked harder to keep starvation from her door. I was determined to make a success of the shop, if only for the reason that Curtiss and my friends expected me to fail.

A year passed. . . Twelve months of faithful, determined effort, which was rewarded by seeing the shop established on a basis where it was operating without expense and some profits were being made; enough to pay the salaries of Thankful and Captain T. "The Studio" became the rendezvous for Birmingham's most fashionable set and the intelligentsia also gathered there, to exchange ideas, and to take home a beautifully bound book. Curtiss complimented me often on what he called my business career and my friends, who had laughed at what they thought was a new hobby, began to sing my praises where I could hear.

But what a trickster is Fate. Just when I should have been most pleased with myself, I was seized with the idea of wanting to give up the shop. Everything connected with the business world grew sordid and repellent to me. I guess, after all, Curtiss had been right. I was not the type.

Spring had come, trailing her garments of leaf-green chiffon. I wanted to take long walks in the woods, which were sweet with burgeoning trees. I longed to get out in my flower garden and plant row after row of neat seeds. As I poured over book catalogues, I could feel the heavy odor of earth newly-turned. I even thought it would be fun to cook a cake or to sew a fine seam. I yearned, with all the femininity of my being, for the housewifely duties that crown a woman in her home. Yet I kept my desires to myself for I realized that Thankful and Captain T. were depending on me to carry on. They were both interested in their work and if I sold the shop it would in all probability, drive Thankful back into her old life as a household drudge for two sisters who were selfish and vain and Captain T. would be out of a job.

Thankful was radiant these days. From the demure little creature of the church hand she had developed into a woman of subtle and elusive charm. On several occasions I thought that the young Cosack's thoughts were far from antiques and books and I could not help but wonder if he were not thinking of his wife, from whom he had secured his divorce, or if the shadow of the old days cast a burden on his heart. Time after time I had invited him to our home for which he thanked me graciously but always with an excuse.

What should I do? Everything in me rebelled at the idea of keeping on with the shop. Then suddenly a situation developed like clear sunshine after a storm and it became perfectly plain to me what course I should pursue.

(Continued Next Week.)

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