

SHE INSISTED UPON AN ELOPEMENT

Because He Promised One

Thirty Years Ago



MRS. ROBERT SAYLOR

MISS VIRGINIA HEPPERT, aged 47 years, and Robert B. Saylor, aged 55, eloped in Brooklyn by the aid of the fire department, clambered aboard a street car, and fled romantically down to Flushing, were married, and returned home to the flat from which they fled to partake of a wedding supper which Miss Heppert had prepared before her elopement.

Saylor, the groom, is a stout, sedate, and settled down business man, with an established trade on Fulton street, and he is comfortably wealthy. Miss Heppert was romantic—and it was she who insisted upon the elopement and he who solved the problem of eloping with her from the fifth story window of her apartment house.

Despite her years Miss Heppert is an young looking and as unscarred by her 47 years of contact with the world—or rather by looking at the world—as she was thirty years ago up in Scituate, Mass., when she and "Bob" Saylor were in the high school together. They were in love with each other then, desperately in love, and Bob was the only boy in all Scituate who could carry Virgie Heppert's looks for her or take her to a taffy pulling.

And when Bob started out into the great big world twenty-nine years ago to make his living he gave Virgie a little ring set with red coral surrounded by a true lovers' knot, and she gave him a lock of her hair to wear in a little locket next to his heart all the time, forever and ever.

Promised to Elope with Her.

So Bob kissed her good-by and marched away, after they had made a secret arrangement that, just as soon as he made his fortune in New York, he was to come back to Scituate and elope with her. This plan was arranged because Mrs. Heppert, Virgie's mother, had expressed herself forcibly about "kids a-wantin' to get married."

So, for two years Virgie waited, and turned the little coral ring so the lovers' knot was inside where no one could see that she was engaged, and, back of her geography in school, she wrote long letters to Bob to encourage him and Bob wrote back "care general delivery" so Virgie's mother wouldn't suspect anything, and they plotted the elopement. Every time that Virgie wrote she told Bob just where he would find the ladder in the barn when he came for her, and Bob, lying away in his little, untidy bed room in a tenementlike boarding house, looked out on the big, hot, nervous city, reeking with noise and smells, and—well, he confesses that, if Virgie did cry a little bit, he cried just as much.

Bob found employment in a wholesale shoe store down towards the point in New York and lived in cheap lodgings over on the east side. He fought bravely, saving his money and denying himself almost everything—and, after two years he wrote to Virgie and asked if \$285 wasn't enough to start on. (They had planned to elope when he made \$50,000.)

And Virgie wrote that she thought \$285 was near enough, so they planned their elopement for June, 1887.

Fearful to Tell Her of Failure.

Early in that month, when Bob was getting ready a little furnished room that was to be their nest, the shoe makers failed and he was thrown out of employment. When he made his mistake. Instead of writing to Virgie and telling her the truth he sought desperately to find a new position and to recover his standing in the world so that he might not disappoint her and himself. He hunted from house to house for weeks—and not a job could he find that would enable him to support a wife.

The day before Virgie expected him to come to Scituate, place a ladder against her window sill, and carry her down in his strong arms, Bob was practically penniless in New York. She waited for him in vain, and at the hour that she was sitting beside her packed valise in the darkness of her pretty little white and pink bedroom at Scituate, trembling with ecstasies of fear and joy, waiting to hear the ladder scrape against the side of the house, Bob was dragging himself wearily along lower Broadway thinking of a leap from a pier into the river.

The following morning Virginia came downstairs red eyed, but concealing her heart's sorrow. Her mother and her brother inquired if she was sick, but she said she was not, except that she had not slept.

Lost for Years Through False Pride.

After that Bob and Virginia were lost to each other. He, realizing that in his false pride he had ruined his happiness and probably hers, never wrote. She sent him the little coral set ring with the true lovers' knot, but the package came back to her marked "Not found"—and then she was sorry, fearing that something had happened to Bob and that he was not to blame. She fed her heart on the hope that something had happened—not anything serious—but something that would relieve him of the charge that he had been false to her. Then, for a time, she feared he was dead, and she mourned until one day, over a year afterwards, a Scituate man met Bob on the



streets of New York and reported him well and prospering. That broke Virgie's heart—almost—but she was proud and never gave a sign.

Bob, indeed, was prospering. He had found work with another shoe company, in Brooklyn this time, and was advancing too rapidly. He was ashamed of his action and too full of false pride to write and tell Virginia everything. So, year by year, they drifted further and further apart until the people of Scituate almost forgot Bob, although Miss Heppert (she had become Miss Heppert, not Virgie) never did.

Bob Saylor prospered. He became a partner in the firm, then withdrew and started a big shoe store of his own in Brooklyn and began to grow wealthy, and also fat. He did not marry. In fact, the girls in his store who set their caps for him declared he was a hateful old bachelor. Neither did Miss Heppert marry. Men came and went, several proposed, but she refused them all. She became well known for philanthropic and church work, and, after the death of her mother, she inherited considerable property. She had entirely lost track of "Bob" Saylor for she moved to Worcester and lived there several years, and two years ago she moved to Brooklyn, taking apartments on Fifth avenue in Brooklyn, out in the Gowanus bay district, so as to be near her brother's business.

Isn't This Virgie? It Was.

One afternoon in March Bob Saylor was in his Fulton street store when two women came in. All the clerks were busy, so Saylor went forward himself and spoke to the women. One of them had a strangely familiar look—and she, in her turn, glanced at Saylor with a half light of recognition in her eyes.

"Isn't this—Virgie?" asked Saylor.

"Aren't you Mr. Saylor?" she asked. They clasped hands, while Miss Heppert's sister-in-law looked on wonderingly. And they stood chatting casually while Miss Heppert's sister-in-law tried on some shoes.

Then, with a sudden rush, a bursting forth of confession, Bob told her the whole story; how he had starved and struggled; how he had come near ending it all in the river; how he had fought to the last minute and surrendered; and how he had lived during all those years, miserable because he feared he had caused her unhappiness. And, when he had finished, Miss Heppert, with tears in her eyes, looked at him and said:

"Poor boy. You should have told me."

The outcome of it was that Bob began to go to the flat out in the Gowanus district and, after the second call he proposed again and urged that they should forget the past and try to make it up in the happiness of the present.

Insists Upon the Elopement.

"I'd like to, Bob," she said. "But you promised to come and elope with me."

"A fellow can't elope with a woman who lives alone and can do as she pleases," protested Bob.

"I simply can't give up eloping," she said. "I'll never marry any man who doesn't come and carry me down a ladder and run away with me."

"That's foolishness, Virgie," he protested. "I can't carry you down a ladder from the fifth floor of a flat building. Besides, we can elope just as well down the stairs. Let's do it tomorrow, elope down to Flushing and get married."

"I wouldn't feel married unless I came down a ladder in the arms of the man I loved," said Miss Heppert. "I have thought of it every hour almost for the last 50 years, how you would come and carry me away, for I never thought of any one but you, Bob, and you promised to come."

"We're too old for that sort of foolishness, Virgie," argued Bob.

"I'm never too old for it," she said. "I have lived all my life on the idea that you would elope with me and I can't give it up."

"You'll have to move into the first floor flat then," said Bob, and they had a regular lovers' quarrel.

Of Course Woman Won Argument.

Night after night they argued it out, but Miss Heppert was firm. Bob lived in hope that her lease on the flat would expire on the first of May and that she would move into a first floor apartment, or at worst a second floor one, and give him a chance, but he learned on May 1 that the lease was for three years.

That evening there was a long argument and when Bob left he vowed that he would come and elope with her as she wished, and that, failing to carry her down a ladder, he would seize her by force, carry her down the stairs, and elope with her. Still, he knew and felt that, if he won

her by any such means, she would suffer from the blighting of her hopes and the destruction of the romance she had cherished all her life.

On the way home on the elevated that evening Bob Saylor vowed a vow that he would elope with her as she planned.

Now it happened that, during the time he was winning his way to success in the shoe business, Bob had achieved a little prominence in politics and he had something of a "pull" in his assembly district that extended through democratic circles all over Kings county, and on his way back to Flushing avenue, where he lived in bachelor apartments, he stopped in to see the district leader. They were closeted for over an hour, and when they parted the leader said:

"Easy—easy—and I'll be there to see it—and the boys will give you a grand sendoff," and he laughed until his jaws shook.

The following Thursday morning, shortly after 11 o'clock, Miss Virginia Heppert received an urgent message saying:

"Be ready to elope with me in half an hour. Bob."

Waiting for the Elopement.

Fuzzled, but willing, she attired herself in her best gown, fixed her hair, that is still black and plentiful, and stepped to the window to gaze down. Elevated trains were whirling by towards the beaches and towards the bridge, street cars were clanging along underneath them, and at either side of the street streams of humanity were flowing unceasingly.

She turned the latch in the door, stepped back into her little bedroom to put the finishing touches on her toilet, and at that instant her attention was attracted by a terrific uproar, a jangling, jarring, screaming uproar in the street below. She rushed to the window, gave one glance downward, and saw in the street below a fire engine, a great crowd, and the hook and ladder truck of a nearby fire company.

In one glance she realized what was coming and, with lips pressed determinedly together and a quaver of fear and joy fighting for mastery in her bosom, she stepped to the mirror and began to fix her hat.

The crowd below, excited and jostling, saw the big ladder slowly unjoint itself and rise upward alongside the building, then away inward until the end rested just below the fifth story window, but, even before it had swung inward the crowd yelled as Bob Saylor, plump and excited until his face was pink, started to clamber upward.

Slid from Window Into His Arms.

Behind Bob were Mike Corcoran, Capt. O'Brien, Bill Burke, and three others. The company, scaling after him to prevent accidents, in three minutes a breathless Bob stopped at the top of the ladder and Virginia, casting one fearful glance below, slid from the window sill into his arms.

The journey downward was one long march of triumph. The firemen, steadying and aiding Bob, cheered and cheered, while their comrades in the street yelled themselves hoarse, and the crowd, thinking that some gallant rescue was in progress, took up the cheer until the waters of Gowanus bay were rippled.

Puffing, red faced, almost exhausted, Bob, still holding Virginia close in his arms, reached the sidewalk and deposited her on her feet. She opened her eyes and gazed happily upon him, and whispered:

"O, Bob, I was so foolish, so cruel, but it was sweet. Then, while the firemen, lowering the ladder, cheered and swung their helmets, Bob and Virgie caught a Fifth avenue car, and rode away to get married, followed by the yells of the firemen and the crowd.