

There was nothing contented about the cow
—and nothing backward about the girl

YOU could say that it was a combination of circumstances that made the day a memorable one for Jeff Bentley. The fact that all the circumstances were female contributed no little to the specific nature of the memories. It is important to know the circumstances.

A bright Westchester sun was streaming into the breakfast room when the housekeeper brought Jeff's orange juice to him.

"Wonderful morning, Mrs. Blodgett," Jeff said.

"What's so wonderful?" Mrs. Blodgett said.

"Could you do better?"

"Ha, ha," Mrs. Blodgett said. She could not properly be considered a female circumstance. Mrs. Blodgett was a circumstance apart—ruddy, neutral and belligerent. "That cow is here," she said.

"Now, now," Jeff said, "I know this is only an excess of loyalty, but that is no way to speak of the lady next door."

"What lady next door?" Mrs. Blodgett said. "I says the cow is here. The female bull."

"The cow!" Jeff turned to his daughter, who was deep in the morning paper. She was tenish, a sedate child with blond hair and freckles. "Did you hear that, Jan? The cow is here."

"A cow, yet," Jan said, and turned over the paper.

"Please," Jeff said, "don't exchange knowing looks with Mrs. Blodgett. I know what I am doing."

A large rheumatic farmer had just finished unloading a young cow from his truck when Jeff and Jan appeared in the back yard. He led the cow into a new, rustic enclosure beside the double garage, and sighed heavily.

"There's our cow, big as life," Jeff said.

"Bigger," Jan said unhappily.

The farmer approached them, wiping his hands on his dungarees. His face was round and melancholy.

"It's none of my business, son," he said, "but what in the name of parity do you want with a cow in Stardale?"

"I'll be glad to explain," Jeff said. "The cow is for my daughter. She is bookish."

"Bookish?"

"Reads books. The idea is to give her a healthy outdoor interest. This is Jan's cow."

"Mine, he says," Jan muttered.

The farmer looked down at his feet and sighed. "What's her mother think about it?"

"Unfortunately, I am both father and mother to Jan."

"Well," the farmer said, "it's none of my business."

"I don't think you understand," Jeff said patiently. "Having a cow will give my girl a sense of communion with the good earth. Some of our



THE FEMALE CIRCUMSTANCE

The cow was the first circumstance. The lady next door was the second. Jan was the third. While only the cow could be considered a new circumstance, it was the combination that did the trick. It is important to know the combination.

A cow in suburban Stardale was roughly the equivalent of a blacksmith shop in Times Square. Stardale had once been farming country, but an expanding city had sent ahead its commuters to exterminate ruthlessly all vestiges of livestock, while carefully preserving the externals of the past.

"Come see the cow, Jan," Jeff said. "You're going to love her."

"Love her, he says," Jan murmured. "Sit down, Zeke," Mrs. Blodgett said.

"Huh?" Jeff said.

"I says sit down. You can play like you're a farmer after you finish your breakfast."

"Oh, all right," Jeff said.

"A cow, yet," Jan said softly, and exchanged a knowing look with Mrs. Blodgett.

greatest citizens came from farm backgrounds."

"So did I," the farmer said. He sighed again, accepted twice what the cow was worth and climbed moodily into his truck.

"Of course," Jeff said, "we're counting on getting good fresh milk from her."

"Easier to get blood from a turnip," the farmer said. "She ain't due to freshen for four months yet." He drove off. Jeff and his daughter turned to contemplate the cow.

"Big, isn't she?" Jan said.

"Just right," Jeff said. "Cow-size."

THE large beast was black and white, with a peculiarly malevolent gleam in her big brown eyes.

"She looks mad," Jan said.

"Yes, doesn't she?" Jeff said, and laughed nervously.

"They all look that way," a voice behind them said. "Sullen and not at all contented."

It was the lady from next door. Jeff looked around quickly and was

annoyed to find that his face was warm and flushed. Constance Pryor was a full-blown young lady, delightfully curved and black-eyed.

"Sneaking up behind people is a nasty habit, Constance," Jeff said stiffly.

"I made it on tiptoe," she said. "It seemed like a sacred moment of communion between father and daughter."

"We were both scared," Jan said.

"Nothing of the kind," Jeff said.

"Daddy suffers from gynophobia," Constance said. "It is an over-all fear of the feminine. It apparently includes cows."

"We are good friends, Constance," Jeff said uncomfortably.

"You and the cow, perhaps," Constance said. "For you and me, Jeff, there is more than friendship."

"Now, now, Constance," Jeff said, weakly.

The lady next door was more than the second circumstance. She was the living embodiment, beautifully done, of a fact of Stardale life.

There were unwritten laws in suburban Stardale, as surely put through by the feminine community as the institution of marriage itself. When a Stardale man reached his maturity, it was understood that he would marry promptly and settle into a comfortable white suburban home, to be met at the railway station by his pretty wife, preferably in a station wagon. Failing marriage, he left Stardale just as promptly for a bachelor life in New York. An unmarried man in a comfortable white suburban home outraged tradition and the female community as thoroughly as might a member of the Democratic party.

"That cow, now," Constance said. "It is as sorry an excuse for a mother substitute as I have ever seen." Constance was a writer of psychological novels.

"It is not a mother substitute," Jeff said, "it is a cow. Jan and I have no need for a mother substitute. Have we, Jan?"

The little girl was busily writing in a small notebook she carried.

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL OLIVER HURST



Jeff and Jan studied the cow. "She looks mad," Jan said. "They all look that way," a voice behind them said

"How do you spell substitute?" she said.

"Now, darling," Jeff said distractedly. "No notes, please. Daddy has spoken to you about this before."

"But how will I ever remember, Daddy?" she said.

"I've often wondered how they do," Constance said.

THERE was no doubt the child was bookish. It was a piece of bad luck, though, that had led her to a succession of books like *Life with Father*, *I Remember Mama*, and *I Remember Life with Father and Mama*. Her decision to do a book about Jeff had flattered him at first. It was only when she began to take notes that the tribute seemed hollow.

"It's the only way I can remember all the funny things you do, Dad," she said. "I'm going to call the book *So's My Old Man*."

"That's wonderful, dear," Constance said.

"Don't encourage her," Jeff said.

"She ought to be encouraged," Con-

stance said firmly. "If there's anything I can do to help, dear, you just ask me."

"Would you really help?" Jan said.

"I was wondering what I ought to do about the love interest. You have to have a love interest, don't you?"

"Not at all!" Jeff said.

"Definitely," Constance said. "I'll speak to your father about it, dear. We'll see what we can work out." She smiled warmly at Jeff.

"Thank you, Miss Pryor," Jan said happily.

"Thank you, she says," Jeff murmured. "Come, Jan, we must be getting back to the house."

He took her hand and walked quickly away.

"But, Daddy," Jan said, "we didn't even say goodby to Miss Pryor or the cow."

"Did Rommel say goodby to Montgomery?" Jeff said. "This is retreat, darling."

"You'll have to talk slower, Daddy," Jan said, notebook at the ready. "How do you spell Rommel?"

Those were the circumstances. Each in itself might have been handled. It was the combination that was decisive.

The cow wandered off about an hour after her arrival. Jeff had retreated to his study for a regrouping of his forces when the phone rang. It was Constance.

"She went that-a-way," she said.

"Who?" Jeff said.

"The cow. I last saw her heading over my lower forty toward the brook."

"You mean your back yard," Jeff said, "and I'll be right over."

"Tallyho," Constance said.

JEFF grabbed his hat and told Mrs. Blodgett where he was going. "She's out to hook you," Mrs. Blodgett said darkly.

"The cow? I'll be careful."

"Miss Pryor," said Mrs. Blodgett, "and you can't be careful enough."

Jeff shuddered and walked through the hedge to Constance Pryor's back yard. She was waiting for him, her

light auburn hair blowing in the wind, the color high in her apple cheeks. Despite his sternest efforts, Jeff felt a warmth stirring within him.

"Come on," Constance said; "she can't be far away."

"All right," Jeff said.

"We'll be alone in the woods," Constance said. "I hope you won't try to turn an innocent situation to your advantage."

"Good grief!" Jeff said.

The black and white cow was grazing peacefully by the bank of Larkin's Brook. As Jeff and Constance approached through a clump of woods, she raised her heavy head and gazed at them with sullen menace.

"We'd better circle," Jeff said. "Take her from the flank."

"It's only a cow," Constance said.

Jeff worked his way to within a few feet of the cow, moving cautiously through the underbrush. He was about to grab her when his foot caught on an exposed root. He fell flat on his face.

(Continued on page 52)

CUPID UP THE BAYOU

BY ROARK BRADFORD

"Little Bee womens don't want no man dat no yuther ladies don't want too," the Widow Duck told Wee Willie

THE Widow Duck was engaged in her favorite pastime. She was helping Cupid shoot arrows into the hearts of a couple of young people on Little Bee Bend plantation. Seated in her split-hickory chair and pausing occasionally to drown a bumblebee with a mouthful of snuff juice, she was explaining to Wee Willie Gaillard some of the inner secrets of social life on the plantation.

Wee Willie was a grown man and knew a lot of things. He had been born and reared on the plantation, but just at the time he became a man, he went away for five years with Uncle Sam's Seabees down on the island of Trinidad. There was a definite gap in his education so far as the Red River bottom plantation was concerned.

"Little Bee womens," the Widow Duck was explaining, "is bawn wid certain things no yuther womens is got."

"Like which?" asked Wee Willie.

"Well, like de time when I was a young gal." She smiled fondly with the memory. The hot afternoon was heavy with the bittersweet scent of growing cotton. The water in Willow Chute Bayou, fifty yards away, looked cool and peaceful under the overhanging branches of the weeping willows. Even when an old gar swam to the surface, flapped lazily and dived back to the bottom, it served only to emphasize the relaxed restfulness of the day. It was a pleasant afternoon, a good one for happy memories. "I wa'n't so big and fat in dem days," the Widow Duck went on. "And I was a sinner, right on down to de ground!"

"Mis' Duck! You was a sinner?"

The old woman worked her jaws rapidly, and pursing her lips sent an amber stream of snuff juice far out into her front yard. A well-drenched bumblebee stopped buzzing and flew off crazily toward the bayou.

"Might' nigh splattered a rose dat time!" the Widow Duck grumbled.

"Maybe," suggested Wee Willie, "yo' eyes ain't as sharp as dey used to be."

The Widow Duck snorted. "Humph! My eyes is all right. Hit's dis no-good snuff. Since us had dat war, ain't nothin' been no good. Bad meat, bad clothes, bad plows, bad crops, bad weather, bad ev'rything. All on account er dat war! When snuff git so bad I can't set on my front porch and knock a bumblebee offen my crimson creeper vine widout splatterin' a flower, well, hit's about time to back up and start plowin' a new row."

"But you didn't."

"Naw, but I come close."

Wee Willie was smart enough to sit

silent while the Widow Duck's temper cooled. Then, "You was speakin' 'bout de time when you was a sinner?"

The Widow Duck smiled again. "Nawp, I was speakin' 'bout Little Bee womens. Like when I was young and skinny, and a sinner, too, yas. But de main p'int is, I was a Little Bee Bend gal, so I jest up and took Big Jim Haley away f'm a frail brown over on Duke's Bend."

Wee Willie frowned earnestly. "But Sugarlee ain't got to take me away f'm nobody," he protested. "She de gal I wants. I swear, Mis' Duck, I love dat gal so good I gits de high trembles ev'y time she comes to my mind. But she pass me by like de evenin' breeze."

"Sho, she pass you by," the Widow Duck said lightly. "Dat's on account she's Little Bee, bawn and bred."

"I'm Little Bee, bawn and bred, too," Wee Willie argued. "Sometimes Giles say I'm de best tractor driver he got. I works hard and goes to church and don't waste my money buyin' wine at de Hi-Way Club and I don't run around wid—"

"You ought to," the Widow Duck interrupted.

"Ought to which?"

"Run around wid de womens. Git a pint er wine and chunk yo' hat on de ground. Pull yo' elbows way back and step high on one foot. Ack like you's de tush hog and don't keer how many gals knows hit."

"But I don't want no yuther gal," Wee Willie said miserably. "I jest wants Sugarlee."

"I didn't say to git you no yuther gal," the Widow Duck corrected. "I said to git you lots of gals." She stopped long enough to drench a bumblebee in flight and, pleased with her marksmanship, resumed. "Big Jim Haley used to sing a song which said:

I ain't never had no one woman at a time.

I always had six, seven, eight or nine.

He sung dat song at me one time and de next thing he knowed, he was walkin' slow behind a mule and a double shovel in my cotton patch!"

WEE WILLIE looked thoughtful. "You mean I ought to make Sugarlee jealous?"

"I mean, Little Bee womens don't want no man dat no yuther ladies don't want too. Us Little Bee ladies is got game chicken blood in we's veins. When we flies off de roost, we hits de ground fightin'. And we can't fight good onless hit's some yuther lady got what we wants."

Wee Willie didn't wish to be fought over. All he wanted was Sugarlee and

some peace and quiet. He wanted a crop of his own, where Giles would not forever be saying, "Wee Willie, do this" or "Wee Willie, do that." The five long years in the Seabees had been troublesome. Of course, Giles hadn't been in Trinidad but there had always been a chief petty officer who acted like Giles. Instead of "Wee Willie," the chief used to call him "Mech. Two Gaillard." He called him frequently, too. And while Wee Willie had helped to build air bases and stayed away from the native women, he dreamed of the time he would come back home, marry him a fine wife who could talk regular talk instead of "Broadtone," and make his own crop with no one everlastingly telling him what to do.

The war had brought changes to Little Bee Bend, too. Instead of a man being allowed to take a pair of mules and a cultivator and make his own crop, the tractors had come in. The three biggest fields, New London, the Windmill Cut and Cucklebur Lake had been merged into one cotton patch with rows two miles long that ran from the bayou to the dredged drainage ditch. Giles got about in a jeep instead of on Prince's back. A man was paid wages instead of a share in the crop, a fact which kept the bossman constantly at the bank. Only irregularly shaped plots in the bayou bends which did not lend themselves to the assembly-line technique of mechanized farming were worked with mule and plow. Giles parceled out these patches for sharecropping to people who couldn't adjust themselves quickly to mechanized farming. Hands who had wandered off to high-wage war jobs returned to find their fields being cultivated by tractors that plowed three rows at a time.

When Wee Willie got home from the war, Giles gave him no opportunity to discuss a crop of his own. "Hit's four diffrent kinds of tractors yonder under de shed," Giles had told Wee Willie, "and ain't none of 'em any good. But on account er you was fightin' in de war, you kin go take yo' pick." And before Wee Willie realized what was happening to his dream, he was driving a tractor every day in the big field where the rows were two miles long and the women were so far away you could hardly see them swinging their hoes.

However, Wee Willie saw Sugarlee. He had known her since she was a baby, but he had never paid any attention to her. Then one day when it was too wet to plow, he was walking down a turnrow and had come upon her bending over a "volunteer" vine, picking tomatoes.

"What you say, Sugarlee?" he greeted. He was not really interested; he'd asked only for the sake of good manners.

Sugarlee straightened. She was at the moment taking a bite from a big ripe tomato. That red against the velvety brown of her skin was just about the prettiest sight Wee Willie had ever seen. And while she stood there looking at him, she took the tomato from her mouth, flashed a wide smile and said, "Same thing! And you?"

That gave Wee Willie the high trembles and it tied his tongue. Before he could think of anything else to say, Sugarlee bent over the vine once more.

Wee Willie passed Sugarlee several times after that. She always looked as if she were going to smile and say something. Instead, she turned her head away and passed him by. It was more than tantalizing; it was maddening.

"Jest like my heart was a clod er dirt in de road," Wee Willie told the Widow Duck, "and Sugarlee tromped on hit like hit wasn't there."

"Well, keep yo' heart high, so she got to reach to git hit!"

AFTER Wee Willie left, the Widow Duck continued to sit on her porch. She had certain things to do, but she would wait until the sun was lower and the air a little cooler before she took to the bayou patch. Meanwhile, she let her mind pleasure itself on the happy memories of the good things that had overtaken her. She had good friends, good religion and good memories. Her kitchen larder was well stocked, her vegetable garden was growing fine and just up the bayou was her eight acres of cotton already lopping in the middles.

As the afternoon wore on, women and children began to come by with bait cans and fishing poles. The Widow Duck greeted them all pleasantly. They knew as well as she did that the perch would not bite until the shade from the willows swept across the bayou; and they knew that all the pleasure in fishing was not merely in catching fish.

Presently, the Widow Duck saw the shadow from a big cottonwood tree near the bayou touch her front-yard fence. She looked heavenward, expectantly. A cooling breeze stirred and fanned her broad brown face.

(Continued on page 36)

The Widow Duck knew exactly what to do. She stepped high with her left foot, took a swig and fired a shot

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM MEADE PRINCE