



KISSING HANNAH.

BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER.

MR. OTIS BRUPP did not mingle with the other boarders at Jabez Lawkins's farmhouse. He clung to the far end of the porch in a sort of bland melancholy, for the other boarders were women, and Mr. Brupp was a woman-hater, which only means he was afraid of women. He was afraid of maids, old maids, and wives, and his intense bashfulness had—as is often the case—led him to fear the female sex, and fear easily becomes hatred.

As the twilight failed Jabez gave his final instructions to Jake, his hired hand, and seated himself beside Mr. Brupp on the edge of the porch. He was tired. He had been trying to milk Hannah, the red and white cow, and Hannah had taken one of her fits of dislike for him, and had chased him out of the cow-yard. She was a handsome cow, but she had the temper of a wolf, and she particularly disliked Jabez. It was a mere womanly whim, perhaps, but when a whim is backed by a pair of sharp horns some notice has to be taken of it.

"By crickey!" said Mr. Lawkins, with a twitch of his beard; "some female critters do beat all creation."

"All of 'em beat it," said Mr. Brupp.

"You pet 'em," said Mr. Lawkins, "an' you do all you kin to please 'em, an' they treat you worse'n if you beat 'em."

"All females in general is that way," said Mr. Brupp out of the fulness of his wisdom.

"I dare say," said Jabez, "but I wasn't speakin' of females in general. I was speakin' of Hannah. I can't seem to get along with Hannah."

He was right. He could not get along with her. She had all the marks of a quiet, home-loving cow, but underneath it all she hid a dare-devil charac-

ter. In her contrary moments she could jump the pasture fence with the agility of a springbok. At such times she did everything a cow should not, except climb trees; but, above all else, she loved to chase Mr. Lawkins around the pasture—or elsewhere. She had hunting instincts at such times, and the thing she loved to hunt was Jabez. It annoyed Mr. Lawkins. He was always kind and considerate to Hannah, and he did not deserve such a return.

"No, sir," said Mr. Lawkins, "I can't seem to understand Hannah."

"Nobody can understand none of 'em," said Mr. Brupp.

"With me," said Jabez, "she's as contrary and cantankerous as a mad hen, but she's as sweet as pie to any other man. Jake, for instance. I believe she would foller Jake around like Mary's little lamb. When Jake comes around she just follers him with her eyes. An' Jake ain't han'some, an' he don't treat her nowise unordinary, neither. It beats me!"

"It don't beat me," said Mr. Brupp. "I've studied females from A to Z, and my experience with them like her is——"

"I thought you was from the city," said Mr. Lawkins.

"So I be," said Mr. Brupp, "but nobody ever give this subject more thought than what I have. First off, I take it you are too easy with her."

"That's a fact," said Jabez. "I couldn't treat her better if I tried. Nothin' ain't been too good for Hannah."

"Spoiled her, I reckon," said Mr. Brupp judicially. "She ever run away?"

"Run away!" said Jabez. "I should say so! Why, she's always runnin' away!"

Mr. Brupp looked at Mr. Lawkins

curiously. He had spoken to many men about wives, and often his advice had been ungratefully received, but never had he met a man who took flagrant behaviour so philosophically. But here was a man who seemed to enjoy talking about his wife's misdemeanours. Here was a man after his own heart.

"You say she's special fond of this here Jake?" asked Mr. Brupp.

"She thinks the world an' all of Jake," said Mr. Lawkins frankly. "I get right down jealous of him sometimes."

"Ever run away with him?" asked Mr. Brupp.

"Nope!" said Mr. Lawkins. "She don't ever run away *with* anybody. She just gits her dander up at me, and runs away. Say," he said suddenly, as an idea came to him, "you ain't thinkin' Hannah is a horse, are you?"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Brupp positively. "Not at all! I understood perfect. But you mark my word, some day she is goin' to run away with this Jake. She'll run away with him, and she won't come back."

"Oh, I guess Jake would bring her back," said Mr. Lawkins easily. "Jake's honest. He ain't no common hired man. My wife knowed him before we was married. Her and Jake's sort of far-off cousins. I ain't afraid but Jake would bring Hannah back. Fact is, I send Jake after her when she runs away."

Mr. Brupp marvelled. Never had he known a man so complacent. Here, as he understood it, was Mr. Lawkins's wife running away from time to time, and especially fond of this Jake fellow, and Mr. Lawkins sent Jake to bring her home when she ran away! And Mr. Lawkins was able to sit there and say, calmly, that if she ran away with Jake it would be all right; Jake would bring her home again! It was an interesting case of infatuation. He would probe deeper. Perhaps he could save this good-hearted, simple man much trouble.

"Now," said Mr. Brupp, "now, have you ever caught Jake kissin' her?"

"Kissin'——" cried Mr. Lawkins. "Did I ever catch Jake kissin'——

Do you mean, did I ever catch Jake kissin' Hannah?"

"That's what I mean," said Mr. Brupp firmly.

It was Mr. Lawkins's turn to look at Mr. Brupp curiously, but Mr. Brupp was entirely serious. Jabez tried to picture Jake kissing Hannah, but he simply could not imagine it. He simply could not imagine Jake pressing an affectionate kiss on the lips of that red and white cow.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" he exclaimed. "Jake wouldn't kiss her! No, indeed!"

Mr. Brupp laid one hand on Mr. Lawkins's knee.

"Now, don't git mad at me," he said; "but I've studied this business a long time, and I ain't easy fooled. I know what goes with this here infatuation business. You bet he kisses her!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Lawkins again.

"Now, don't you be so sure!" said Mr. Brupp, shaking his head. "I've studied lots of cases just like this. 'Soul mates' is what they call it. And whilst things look innocent enough right along, come to find out there's always a lot of kissin' goin' on. On the sly. Of course, it don't mean nothin' if he just goes up to her and steals a kiss when she ain't expectin' it. She can't help that sort of kissin', and it don't prove nothin' but that, maybe, he's fond of kissin'. What I call infatuation is when she kisses him back."

"Hey?" said Mr. Lawkins. "Hey?" He might, by stretching his imagination to the breaking point, believe that Jake would kiss the cow, but that the cow would return the kiss was too much!

"That's right!" said Mr. Brupp. "That's 'soul mates.' He kisses her, and she kisses him back, and the first thing you know—gone! He's gone off with her. I tell you, this infatuation 'soul mates' business is awful. It's terrible, it is! Now, you don't think he would kiss her, do you?"

"No, by heck!" said Mr. Lawkins.

"All right!" said Mr. Brupp. "All

right! And you might think he might kiss her, but you wouldn't believe she would kiss him back, would you?"

"Say," said Mr. Lawkins, "if I was to see Hannah kiss Jake—if I was to see that, with my own eyes—you could make me believe the earth was shaped like a doughnut!"

"And I tell you," said Mr. Brupp, "that hundreds, and maybe thousands, of men have felt just like you do about it, until they found out the truth. And then they had to own up. A man like you can't grasp this here 'soul mates' idea right quick at first. No, sir. You can't understand it. You say to yourself, 'Now, why should Hannah kiss Jake when she can kiss me?'"

"Kiss me?" exclaimed Mr. Lawkins.

"Yes, you. Of course!" said Mr. Brupp. "Who else should she kiss?"

"Hannah kiss me?" asked Mr. Brupp again.

"Certainly," said Mr. Brupp. "And that's all right. That's proper."

"What's proper? For Hannah to kiss me?" asked Mr. Lawkins, bewildered.

"Certainly," Mr. Brupp reassured him. "Just as it is for you to kiss her."

"Say," said Mr. Lawkins feelingly, "I swear to goodness I never kissed her in my life! I never thought of no such foolishness. No, indeed! Why—why, that would be plumb nonsense!"

Mr. Brupp now looked at Mr. Lawkins with surprise.

"You ain't ever kissed her?" he asked. "Well, that accounts for it! No wonder she wants a 'soul mate.' You take my advice. You kiss her, and you kiss her right often. She'll like it. They all do. They are just that foolish, the whole lot of them. You try kissin' her."

"Hold on! Hold on, now!" said Jabez. "I'm willin' to feed her, and house her properly, and all that, but I swear I won't kiss Hannah. No, sir! That ain't in my nature. Jake can kiss her if he wants to, but I draw the line at that. I'd sooner she took and follered him to the end of nowhere,

'soul mates' and infatuation and all. I ain't buiit that way!"

"Well, don't kiss her, if you feel like that about it," said Mr. Brupp, a little hurt by this reception of his advice. "But let her kiss you. I bet she's offered to often enough, hasn't she?"

"Not one single once!" said Mr. Lawkins positively. "And I wouldn't expect it. I'd think she had gone crazy, and me, too."

He studied Mr. Brupp's serious face.

"Oh, pshaw!" he said at length. "You are foolin', ain't you?"

"Me? I should say not!" said Mr. Brupp.

"Well," said Mr. Lawkins. "I don't believe a word of it. I don't believe Hannah ever kissed Jake, and I don't believe Jake ever kissed Hannah. No, sir, I can't imagine why they should. I can't imagine how they would go about it."

"They go about it in different ways," said Mr. Brupp, "that's how! Sometimes she'll walk right up to him and kiss him, mouth to mouth; and sometimes she'll sort of lay her head on his shoulder like, and kiss him on the cheek. There's dozens of ways. I've read about lots of ways, right in the papers. And sworn to by witnesses."

"All right!" said Jabez, arising. "All I say is I don't believe it of Jake, or of Hannah. I just wish you would show me Jake kissin' Hannah once; just once!"

"You wouldn't kill him, or her?" asked Mr. Brupp cautiously.

"I'd fire Jake off the place, and I'd take a club to her," said Mr. Lawkins. "But no killin'."

"All right, sir!" said Mr. Brupp. "I'm on my vacation, and I ain't got anything else to do, and, if you don't mind, I'll just show you!"

"Do so," said Mr. Lawkins. "I'd just like to know if Jake is that big a fool."

The next day Mr. Brupp spent near the house. He tried to keep one eye on Mrs. Lawkins and one on Jake, but he had little to report when Mr. Lawkins sought him on the edge of the porch that evening.

"Any kissin' goin' on to-day?" asked Mr. Lawkins, sarcastically.

"Well, no," said Mr. Brupp, apologetically. "No, I can't say so."

"Jake didn't go nigh her at all, hey?" said Mr. Lawkins.

"Well, only but once," said Mr. Brupp. "He only went nigh her once, and that was to take her a basket o' turnips."

"What's that?" cried Mr. Lawkins with sudden and seemingly unaccountable wrath. "Jake took her a basket o' turnips? An' I told him, positive, not to take her any turnips! I told him, time and again——"

"Seems to me," said Mr. Brupp, "I shouldn't call that much. Just takin' her a basket of turnips."

"But I call it much!" said Mr. Lawkins. "She's crazy over turnips, Hannah is! She'd rather have turnips brought her than a young girl would care for candy. She eats 'em by the ton, if I allow her to, and then what? Colic!"

Mr. Lawkins jumped up. He saw Jake slowly coming from the barn toward the house, and he hurried to meet him. Mr. Brupp watched the interview from his place on the edge of the porch, but he could not hear a word.

"Look here, Jake!" said Jabez. "I don't want Hannah to have no more turnips? I told you once, didn't I? And she's bound to have colic to-night. You got to set up with her. You see that the lantern is full of oil, and you put Hannah in the box stall, an' watch her. If she gets too bad, call me. Feedin' that cow raw turnips! I won't stand it, I tell you! Go ahead an' be 'soul mates' with her, if you want to, but don't you give her no raw turnips. Understand?"

Jake's mouth fell open, and he stared at Mr. Lawkins. He was too surprised to speak.

"You remember I'm boss here!" said Mr. Lawkins. "You can go ahead an' kiss the cow, an' you can let the cow kiss you, if you're that foolish, but no raw turnips!"

Mr. Lawkins turned away angrily, and Jake stared after him wonderingly. Then he picked up the milk-pail he had set down, and shook his head sadly.

"I'll be dinged!" he said. "Crazy as a loon!"

All that night he sat on the milking-stool by Hannah's side, but there never was a more healthy cow.

The next morning Mr. Brupp took up his detective duties with renewed vigour. If a basket of turnips could serve as a love token between the "soul mates" he was watching, he meant to let nothing escape him. Crouched behind the rain-water barrel near the kitchen window, he waited patiently, and about ten o'clock he was rewarded. He heard Jake's heavy tread in the kitchen.

"Jake," said Mrs. Lawkins, "I wisht, before you do any more chores, you would fetch me another half-peck o' them turnips."

"You git Jabez to fetch 'em," said Jake sullenly. "I ain't goin' nigh that turnip patch no more. No, I caught hallelujah about turnips yesterday, and I'm goin' to steer clear of turnips from now on."

"I got to have some turnips, Jake," said Mrs. Lawkins, "and you got to get 'em for me."

Jake sighed.

"Well," he said, "Jabez he is over in the ryefield. I guess I got to get 'em."

Mr. Brupp, from behind the barrel, watched Jake go, and then he, too, went. As hastily as he could travel he ran to the ryefield.

"Jake's gettin' Hannah some more turnips," he panted, and Mr. Lawkins started for the turnip-patch on a run. He caught Jake around the neck and threw him backward, sprawling.

"You're fired!" shouted Mr. Lawkins. "Didn't I tell you to keep away from these turnips? Get out from here, now! You hear? Get to the house and pack your duds and get out!"

Jake gathered himself up, cast one affrighted glance at Mr. Lawkins, and fled as fast as his legs could carry him.

"You finish up your chores first, ding ye!" Mr. Lawkins shouted after him. "I'll pay ye your wages when I git to the house."

Mr. Brupp shook his head. "You hadn't ought to have done that!" he said.

"Serves him right!" said Mr. Lawkins.

"But now, what chance have I got

to show you him kissin' his 'soul-mate'?" asked Mr. Brupp. "If you had just waited—— Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I'll show you yet!"

"How so?" asked Mr. Lawkins.

"Why, ain't he goin' to want to kiss her good-bye?" asked Mr. Brupp. "Pshaw! Of course! He'll be coaxin' her to go off with him now that he's got to go."

Mr. Lawkins's brow wrinkled, and his eyes followed Jake. He saw Jake dash into the kitchen, but, although he waited, Jake did not come out of the kitchen door again.

He advanced stealthily towards the kitchen, and from Mr. Brupp's observation place behind the barrel both men peered into the kitchen. Suddenly they heard Jake coming down the back stairs like a landslide. His feet merely touched the edges of the treads. In the kitchen he paused and looked about. He still bore on his face the look of fright that had come there when Mr. Lawkins threw him backward. He hesitated but a moment, and then, with his bundle of clothes in his hand, he did a thing he had never done before. He left the house by the front door, and he left it on a lope. The screen-door slammed behind him, his boots made but one thump on the front porch, and the next moment he was across the lawn and crossing the road towards the pasture in which Hannah was calmly eating grass.

Mr. Brupp straightened up.

"Well," he said, in a disappointed tone, "he didn't kiss her! Not that we could see."

"Kiss her!" cried Mr. Lawkins, starting for the road. "Of course he didn't kiss her. Do you s'pose she would be in the kitchen. She's over yonder in the pasture, that's where she is. And that's where he's makin' for!"

Dodging to the left, so that he might be hidden behind the clump of hazel-brush, Mr. Lawkins darted after Jake, and Mr. Brupp followed him. The summer boarders on the porch stood up and watched the three men with great interest.

"The hired man," said Miss Longley, calmly, "has evidently stolen something."

Jake, looking back, and seeing no furious madman on his trail, slackened his pace into a walk. Hannah, in the far end of the pasture, looked up as he approached, and Jake, bending down, picked up a piece of broken fence board and tested its balance by shaking it in his hand. Mr. Brupp peered eagerly about for some trace of Mrs. Lawkins. Jabez stared at Hannah. But Hannah did not run to meet Jake with a glad moo. She did not pucker up her lips for a kiss. She gave no signs of infatuation for her "soul-mate" whatever. She stood placidly chewing her cud, and every so often switched the flies from her flank.

But Jake walked straight up to Hannah, and as he neared her his eyes blazed.

"Now, you cantankerous old cow, you!" he muttered. "Now I'll teach you a lesson! I'll teach you to git me fired! I'll teach ye to set Jabez agin me! Blame ye!"

He wiggled the board in his hand, making ready to smite Hannah in his wrath, but she turned her calm feminine gaze upon him, and just looked at him. Slowly Jake allowed the board to fall from his hand.

"Plague you!" he said. "What for should I hit you, anyhow? You're the only livin' thing about the place that cares a hang for me, anyway!"

His hand slipped into his pocket, and he drew forth a turnip. Mr. Lawkins breathed deeply. Jake held the turnip before Hannah; she sniffed it, and, finding it good, opened her mouth and munched it contentedly.

"Cuss him!" said Mr. Lawkins. "Turnips, hey?"

"Good girl!" said Jake. "Good girl!" and then, looking cautiously around first, he patted Hannah gently on the shoulder, and in a sudden influx of emotion, leaned forward and kissed the white spot on her forehead.

"Y' gum!" exclaimed Mr. Lawkins, his eyes big with amazement. "He done it! He kissed her like you said! I wouldn't have believed he would do it, but he done it!"

Mr. Brupp stared at him.

"Done what?" he asked.

"He kissed the cow!" said Mr. Lawkins, still wonderingly.

"Say," said Mr. Brupp abruptly, "what's that cow's name?"

"Hannah," said Mr. Lawkins. "And to think of a hired man like Jake takin' a cow for his soul mate!"

"What's your wife's name?" asked Mr. Brupp, uneasily.

"Jane," said Mr. Lawkins.

Mr. Brupp did some very rapid thinking. Jake was already out of the pasture, and walking up the road.

"As I was sayin'," said Mr. Brupp, "this here infatuation that some humans has for animals is a queer thing, and as common as mud in springtime, but there ain't no real harm in it. Most generally, when it is found out, it stops right short."

"That so?" said Mr. Lawkins, looking after Jake. It was a bad time of the year to pick up a hired man. "But a man that would kiss a cow is—"

"He's foolish, but he ain't nothin' worse," said Mr. Brupp earnestly. "So long as the cow ain't got into the habit of kissin' him back, he's easy cured. Now, if the cow had kissed him back, I wouldn't say but it was a case of love that couldn't be cured. But a cow flike that—a pretty-lookin' cow like that—anybody that loves animals might want to kiss. I feel like I could kiss that cow myself."

Mr. Lawkins stared at him.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Brupp, bent on repairing the harm he had done Jake, "any man that has a love for live stock would be glad to kiss that cow. Just a plain, ordinary kiss, as man to man. No harm in it at all. By gracious," he said, as Mr. Lawkins still hesitated, "I believe I'll kiss that cow right now!"

He climbed over the fence and walked toward Hannah. She waited until he was half-way across the pasture, and then she charged. Mr. Brupp did not hesitate. He retreated as fast as he could run, and he just managed to clear the fence as Hannah touched him with the tips of her horns. He fell in a panting heap.

"Just testin' her!" he panted. "Just testin' her! Don't worry about her, Mister Lawkins. She ain't goin' to git into no sickly sentimental soul-mate business, that cow ain't. No, sir! She ain't—she ain't the kissin' kind."

"Hey?" said Mr. Lawkins.

"That there cow," said Mr. Brupp, "is a reg'lar suffragette, she is. A little bit of affection, like Jake has for her, won't do her nothin' but good."

For just one moment Mr. Lawkins hesitated.

"Well, I don't know nothin' about these here soul-mate things," he said. "I got to take your word for it. But I know Jake's a mighty good hand about the farm." He put his hands, trumpet-like, to his mouth. "Oh, Jake! O—h, Ja—ke!" he shouted, "Come back here an' git to work!"

Jake turned, hesitated, and approached slowly.

"I'll hire him over again," said Mr. Lawkins, "but I'm goin' to let him understand I ain't goin' to have none of this cow kissin' during work hours. No, sir!"

"Well," said Mr. Brupp, with a sigh of relief, "I guess he won't do much more kissin' from this on."

And Jake did not.