

## CHAPTER XLII

### A QUEER WEDDING

Grandfather's oldest teacher at DePore was Margaret Ramsey, probably approaching fifty. Margaret had a sister Gene - somewhat younger than herself - probably about forty. Gene was accounted the most capable woman in town. When the owner of the principal department store of the city found it necessary to go to California to live, he made Gene the manager. Gene bossed the clerks, some of whom were men older than herself, bought much of the merchandise and was entirely responsible for the financial success of the place, and all this, everyone granted, she did very well indeed. "If I had as good a business head as Gene Ramsey," said one of the business men, "I would make more money than I do."

To DePore there came a Scotchman, by the name of Walker, to work in the paper mill - the town's one large industry. The Scotchman was seen from time to time to take Miss Ramsey out for a row on the river and gossip soon whispered they were to be married. For once gossip was right. A house was rented, furniture was purchased and the pantry was stocked with a liberal supply of provisions.

Invitations were issued for a home wedding and a houseful of guests arrived for the ceremony. "Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?" asked the clergyman. "I do," stoutly responded the Scotchman. "Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband," droned the clergyman. "No! No! I can't," screamed the bride-to-be, and rushing upstairs, she went into a fit of hysterics from which she could

not be extricated until Walker and the guests had gone. Walker went to North Dakota to recover from an attack of nerves. The provisions were given to the neighbors; the furniture was sold; the lease was cancelled.

Gene went back next morning to Bingham's store and conducted it with the same masterful self-assurance which always had characterized her. The gossips nearly wore out their tongues trying to devise a plausible explanation. Not a word was forthcoming from the stolid Gene. In the course of time the gossips found something else to talk about and about six months later Walker, having recovered from his attack of nerves, returned to resume his duties in the paper mill. All was once more serene in the little city.

Then rumor began to get busy once more. It was said that the coldness between Gene and Walker appeared to be thawing out a bit. Again rumor was right, but this time the wedding was to be a very quiet home affair, with only a few relatives and a couple of witnesses present. Once more the minister asked: "Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?" "I do," again stoutly said Walker. "Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?" again inquired the clergyman, outwardly calm but possibly feeling a bit nervous on the inside. "No! No! I can't," again screamed the bride-to-be. Again she rushed upstairs and plunged into hysterics until Walker and the witnesses had departed.

Next morning with the same self-assured smile she was managing Bingham's store. Walker's nerves stood the second shock better. He went back to the paper mill the next morning. Gossip's tongues again had a grand convention, but again there was no light - and once more the town

settled down to forget what it could not understand.

Then one morning another rumor - "Gene Ramsey and Walker are really married." Impossible! Impossible! But again rumor was right. Still no explanation. Still the same self-confident smile. The house they first rented was rented again. Again furniture was bought, again provisions were purchased. Bingham's store had a new manager and the happy bride and groom were "at home" to all their friends. Again there was the same inscrutable Gene with her self-confident smile.

Gene and Walker lived happily to a ripe old age, but never did Gene say a word about any of her three weddings, and the town never was any the wiser as to why Gene did what she did.

Is not that a strange tale?