

## The Inglenook.

### Days and Dollars.

CARROLL WATSON RANKIN.

Tekla, who was seventeen years old, felt very important indeed, for a surprising thing had happened. It was only five days since she had graduated from the High School, and here she was with a working knowledge of the real estate business at her finger-tips—literally because her business was principally concerned with the type-writing machine in the office of Armstrong & Wolfe. The knowledge, perhaps did not extend far beyond her finger-tips, because most of the letters she wrote at the dictation of her employer conveyed absolutely no meaning to her mind; but this did not trouble Tekla or anybody else.

Her copy was neat as well as accurate, and there was nothing about the completed letters to indicate that the typewriting young person was as innocent as the typewriter itself of the difference between the east half of lot fifty seven and the northwest forty in Skardna township.

"You're wonderfully fortunate," said Geraldine Pease, who was four years older than Tekla. "I've always wished I could work for Armstrong & Wolfe—it's such a good place. How did you ever happen to get it?"

"Oh" said Tekla, overlooking Geraldine's somewhat uncomplimentary emphasis, "Mr. Wolfe and father used to be friends. He knew I'd have to do something to help mother out, and when Miss Dodd's sick father telegraphed for her to go East, Mr. Wolfe came to me, I'm to have thirty dollars a month."

Mr. Wolfe who was almost sixty, but looked younger, was a large man, so well proportioned in every way that his great height did not impress one until he stood looking down upon some ordinary "six footer." His shoulders were broad, his hands and feet large, his goodnatured mouth wide, his mild eyes stood wide apart.

Everybody loved and respected him, and because of his kindly ways he had very few enemies. No unfortunate person ever appealed to him in vain, yet in spite of his amiability, he was seldom imposed upon.

Tekla was conscious of no desire to impose upon him; but she was young, it was summertime, often there were no letters to be answered, and she found idleness irksome.

The baseball match between the teams of her own town and of Ironside was the beginning of her fall from grace. The office closed at four on Saturday afternoons, and at half past five on other days, and work was supposed to start at half past eight each morning. It seemed to the restless girl that two hours' playtime ought not to make make much difference to the firm and she asked if she might be excused.

It is probable that she would not have enjoyed the game half so well if she had suspected that Mr. Wolfe, whose large blunt fingers did not tend themselves gracefully to typewriting had been compelled to answer, at considerable length, and with much discomfort, two important letters that had arrived in the three o'clock mail.

Mr. Armstrong, the other partner, had not learned to use a typewriter, and always had enough to do besides, in his own special department.

The ball game, however, was only the opening wedge. Tekla was popular, and her friends and classmates were having a glorious time that summer.

At first, indeed the girl stood out bravely, refusing all daytime amusements; but, after the first baseball match, Tekla found it easy to ask and to obtain leave of absence for part of Monday morning, all of Tuesday afternoon, or every bit of Wednesday, that Mr. Armstrong, an irascible wiry man with nervous dyspepsia, feared that Mr. Wolfe was in danger of being compelled to do all the typewriting.

One forenoon Mr. Armstrong observed Tekla, who had arrived three quarters of an hour late, looking at her watch with more than her usual irritating frequency. When she was not employed with this futile employment, she was casting impatient glances at a visitor who had, in her opinion already stayed far too long. Mr. Armstrong knew what her impatience portended. The door had barely closed behind the visitor before Tekla had taken the intruders place beside Mr. Wolfe's big desk.

"O, Mr. Wolfe," she said, in her pretty pleading way, "should you mind very much if I were to go home a little earlier? It's almost eleven, you know. I'm going to a party tonight, and I want to try on the new gown mother's making for me. It's just the prettiest dress—"

Mr. Wolfe glanced from the papers in his big hand to the office clock.

"This letter—" he began.

"Couldn't I do it the first thing this afternoon?" pleaded Tekla eagerly. "You see mother can't do a thing more to that wait until I've tried it on."

"Well if that's the case, I suppose—"

"O thank you!" said Tekla hurriedly darting away.

Mr. Armstrong who had suffered in silence for six weeks, rose and slammed the door.

"I hat girl's the limit!" he snapped. "If I had my way, I'd fire her so quick she would not know what had happened."

"In that case," said Mr. Wolfe, "she wouldn't realize why she had been fired, and the experience wouldn't do her any good."

"It would do me good!" declared Mr. Armstrong. "She's utterly impossible."

"No" said Mr. Wolfe, "there's good stuff in that girl. It means something in this business, where figures count for so much, to have a girl who is so absolutely accurate—"

"And absolutely ignorant!" sneered Mr. Armstrong, whose love for the older partner made him quick to resent anything that seemed like imposition.

"Well" returned Mr. Wolfe, mildly, "as long as typewriting is all I expect of her, I don't mind that. So far those quick little fingers of hers haven't made a mistake. Miss Dodd, as you know, got us into hot water about eighteen times last year by her inability to stick to straight copy. Yes, there's good stuff in that little girl, but she certainly lacks a realizing sense."

"Or any kind of sense! She isn't giving you three solid days work a week."

"She's giving me more," said Wolfe smiling whimsically, and casting a rueful glance at his outspread fingers as he sat down at Tekla's typewriter. "If they weren't

built so like sausages I wouldn't mind, but it seems to me that I hit everything within six inches every time I aim for a key. Look at that! Figure 2 for 'A' every time. But, bad as it is, it's more legible than my handwriting."

"Why don't you give that girl a good talking to, if you think she's worth taking pains with?"

"Well," confessed Mr. Wolfe, inserting a fresh sheet, and with one heavy forefinger laboriously ticking off the date, "to tell the truth, I have. I went round there once about three weeks ago, and talked to her like a grandfather. You know you can't be right down hard on a little, lighthearted thing like that. Her mother doesn't seem much older than she is, and they certainly need the money. I talked to them both. They—both seemed pleased."

"Humph!" exploded Mr. Armstrong, indignantly. "I'll talk to her."

"No, you won't," said Mr. Wolfe, resting his large, calm eyes for a moment on his partner's perturbed countenance. "Talk just rolls off that girl like salad dressing from an ice tomatoe. Some sort of kindergarten method might work better. I'm willing to take a little pains with her because of her father. Mighty nice chap was old Samuel Bliss. Now, don't you worry, Mr. Armstrong. She'll be trying to work thirteen hours a day, the way you do, before I'm done with her. I haven't quite figured on the way out yet, but I think I see light."

Nothing on paper had ever looked quite so beautiful to Tekla as the check she had received at the end of her first month's sadly neglected work. The envelope, addressed to Miss Tekla Bliss, and placed on her table, had greeted her the morning she was so disgracefully late from oversleeping after Mildred Hull's coming out party. For three days afterward Tekla had experienced at breakfast time, something surprisingly like a sense of duty. It hurried her to the office and kept her there until closing time. But the glamour of the check and the unprecedented sense of duty flickered out together by the afternoon of the fourth day, when Tekla succumbed, at half past two, to temptation in the form of a naphtha-launch picnic.

Mr. Armstrong noticed that his partner paused in his work frequently to lean back and regard Tekla with puzzled, almost remorseful eyes. Sometimes, when so engaged, he scribbled something in a little book that he carried in his waistcoat pocket. Toward the end of the month the puzzled expression departed, but the sorrow remained. Mr. Armstrong could see that although the kindhearted old man had made up his mind to deal with Tekla, he was far from happy over the prospect. She herself had no misgivings. She continued to arrive late, to go home early, and to absent herself whenever she happened to feel like it.

"You do have an easy time in that office, don't you?" Said Geraldine Pease, meeting Tekla one noon in holiday attire. "I don't dare ask for a day off once in six weeks."

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" returned Tekla, airily. "Mr. Wolfe isn't the scolding kind. He says I'm the neatest typewriter he's had—when I'm there. Mr. Armstrong looks like a thundercloud all the time, but Mr. Wolfe lets me go any time I ask."

"But," asked Geraldine, curiously, "haven't you any conscience in the matter?"

"Not a scrap," laughed Tekla.

"I should think," said Geraldine, "that you'd like to feel sure you were earning your salary."