



THE cynic is one who never sees a good quality in a man and never fails to see a bad one.—Henry Ward Beecher.

Winning the Wilderness

(Continued from last week.)

"THEN I won't listen to you. You are a flirt. Not satisfied with making one girl love you, you want to make all of us care for you."

"I know what you mean. I thought I loved Jo. Then I knew I didn't, and I felt in honor bound to keep her from finding it out. But that's a different kind of a business. You can't play that game and win. I've learned a good many things this summer, and one of them is that Todd Stewart is the only one who really and truly loves Jo, and she cares as much for him as she does for anybody."

"How do you know?" Leigh asked as she leaned back now and faced Thaine.

"Because she doesn't know herself yet. She's too spoiled by the indulgence of everybody and too pretty. She wants attention. But I found finally, maybe mother helped me a little, that if she has Todd's attention she's satisfied. More, she's comfortable. She was always on thorns with me. Isn't that enough about Jo?"

"Well?" Leigh queried.

"No, nothing is well yet. Leigh, let me go away to the University. Let me make a name for myself, a world-wide name, maybe, let me fight on my frontier line and then come back and lift the burden you carry now. I want to do big things somewhere away from Kansas prairies, away from the grind of the farm and country life. Oh, Leigh, you are the only girl I ever can really love."

He leaned forward and took her hands in his own, his dark eyes, beautiful with the light of love, looking into the ambition of undisciplined youth.

"Let me help you," he pleaded.

"It is only sympathy you offer, Thaine, and I don't want sympathy. You said that because you couldn't win with me. Neither would it with me. I am happy in my work. I'm not afraid of it. The harder part is to get enough money to buy seed and pay interest, and Uncle Jim and I will earn that. I let you the mortgage must be lifted by alfalfa roots just as Coburn's book says it will be."

There was a defiant little curve on her red lips and the brave hopefulness of her face was inspiring.

"Go and do your work, Thaine. Fight your battles push back your frontier line, win your wilderness, and make a world-wide name for yourself. But when all is done don't forget that the world of your father and mother made here, and are making to-day, is honorable, wonderful; and that the kind of a Kansas farm, bordered round by golden sunflowers, is a real kingdom. Its sinews of strength uphold the nation."

"Where, you eloquent little Jayhawk?" Thaine exclaimed. "You should have been an orator on the side, not

an artist. But all this only makes me care the more. I'm proud of you. I'd want you for my chum if you were a boy. I want you for my girl now, and afterwards, Leigh, I want you for my own, all mine. Don't you care for me?"

"Couldn't you learn to care, Leigh? Couldn't you go with me to the real big world? Couldn't we come some time to the Purple Notches and

"Leigh, will you do two things for me?" he asked at length. The sad, quiet tone was unlike Thaine Aylet.

"If I can," Leigh answered.

"First, will you promise me that if you want me you will stand for me. If you ever find—oh, Leigh, ever is such a long word. If you ever think you can care enough for me to let me come back to you, you will let me know."

"When I send you the little sunflower letter Prince Quipp never answered you may come back," Leigh said lightly, but the tears were so near for the promise to seem trivial.

"What is the other thing?"

"I want you just once to let me kiss you, Leigh. It's our good-by kiss for ever. Hereafter we are only friends, old chums, you know. Will you let me be your lover for one minute up here on the Purple Notches, where the whole world lies around us and nobody knows our secret? Please, Leigh. Then I'll go away and be a man somewhere in the big world that's always needing men."

Leigh leaned toward him, and he held her close as he kissed her red lips. In all the stormy days that followed the memory of that moment was with him. A moment when love, in all its purity and joy, knew its first realization.

The next day Leigh Shirley made



Fast Friends on the Farm of J. L. Stansell.

The little girl shown in the illustration is Neva Stansell, who is three years of age and the daughter of Mr. J. L. Stansell, Elm Co., Ont. The dog is a lover of Ayrshires, which is quite evident from the illustration.

build a home for just our summer days, because we have seen these headlines all our lives?"

Leigh's head was bowed, and the pink bloms left her cheeks.

"Thaine," she said in a low voice that thrilled him with its sweetness, "I do care. I have always cared so much that I have hoped this moment might never come."

Thaine caught her arm eagerly.

"Not! No! We can never, never be anything but friends, and if you care more than that for me now, if you really love me—" the voice was very soft—"don't ask me why. I cannot tell you, but I know we can never be anything more than friends, never never."

The sorrow on her white face, the pathos of the great violet eyes, the firm outline of the red lips told Thaine Aylet that words were powerless. He had known her every moment from childhood. She never dallied nor flinched against the word of answer hesitated. The great world was very too deep for her to argue down. And with Thaine Aylet was very proud and unaccustomed to being denied what he chose to want very much.

and sounds and odors of springtime made the April day entrancing on the Kansas prairies.

Leigh Shirley had risen at dawn and come up to the grove in the early morning. She tethered her pony to graze by the roadside, and with her drawing board on a slender easel she stood on the driveway across the lakelet, busy for awhile with her paints and pencil. Then the sweetness of the morning air, the gurgling waters at the lake's outlet, once the little draw choked with the plum bushes, and the trills of music from the shimmering boughs above her head, all combined to make dreaming pleasant. She dropped her brushes and stood looking at the lake and the way to the wide level fields beyond, with the river gleaming here and there under the touch of the morning light.

She recalled in contrast the silver and sable tones of the May night when she and Thaine sat on the driveway and saw the creamy water lilies open their hearts to the wailing moonlight and the caressing shadows. It was a fairytale that night. It was plain daylight now, beautiful but real. Life seemed a dream that night. It was very real this April morning. The young artist involuntarily drew a deep breath that was half a sigh and stooped to pick up her fallen brushes. But she dropped them again with a glad cry. Far across the lake, in the leaf-checked sunshine, Thaine Aylet stood smiling away.

"Shall I stay here and spoil your landscape or come around and shake hands?" he called across to her.

"Oh, come over here and tell me how you happened," Leigh cried eagerly.

Grass River people blamed the two years of the University life for breaking Thaine Aylet's interest in Jo Bennington. Not that Jo lacked admirers without him. Life had been made so pleasant for her that she had not gone away to any school, even after her father's election to office. And down at the University the pretty girls considered Thaine perfectly heartless, for now in his second year they were still baffled by his general admiration and undivided indifference toward all of them. His eager face as he came striding up the driveway to meet Leigh Shirley would have been a revelation to them.

"I happened last night, too late to wake up the dog," Thaine exclaimed.

"I happened to run against Dr. Carey, who had a hurry-up call down this way, and he happened to drop me at the Sunflower Inn. He's coming by for breakfast at my urgent demand. This country night practice is much to kill a doctor, but he's a white man over young as he is. He said he is going to take a trip out West and have a vacation right soon. I told him all my plans. You can tell him anything, you know. Besides, I'm hoping he will beat me to the house this morning and will tell the folks I'm here."

"Doesn't your mother know you are here?" Leigh asked.

"Yes, I wanted to come down early and tell the lake gourd. I have to leave again in a few hours."

The old impenetrable expression had dropped over his face with the words. And nobody knows why the sunshine grew dull and the birds' songs dropped to busy twittering about unimportant things.

"Do you always tell me good-by?" Leigh asked.

"No, not always. But she could think of nothing else to say."

"Not always, but this time it's different. I'm so glad I found you. I should have gone down to Cloverdale, of course, if you hadn't been here, but this saves time."

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