

BOYS AND GIRLS

A Piece of Leslie's Mind.

(Carroll Watson Rankin, in the 'Wellspring.')

'It's a beautiful cake,' said Leslie holding it as far away as her strong young arms would permit, to admire its frosted surface.

'Really,' said Mrs. Perrin, when the girl had left the room, 'I'm proud of Leslie. Everything she is taking to the fair this year is so good. Her water-color head is beautifully done, and her embroidery is excellent. There is no reason why she shouldn't take half a dozen prizes.'

Leslie was of very much the same opinion as she boarded the electric cars with her big basket and two bundles. All the way to the fair, she made calculations with her pencil on the margin of her premium list, and she was much pleased by the result.

'Thirteen dollars and a half if they all take first prizes,' said Leslie, with a sigh of satisfaction. 'Such an easy way to earn one's Christmas money! I'll be able to buy all my presents, for once.'

Behind the counter in the administration building, she found Wilbert Lane and Virginia Macey, in charge of the entry books.

'Why, Virginia,' she exclaimed, 'I didn't expect to find you here.'

'Neither did I, half an hour ago,' laughed Wilbert, 'but she deserves a medal for saving my life. I was so rattled before she rescued me that I found myself entering rabbits as 'domestic handiwork' and spelling 'pig' with two g's. My! What a splendid cake! Do I get some of that?'

'Perhaps, when the fair's over, we'll have a picnic and eat our exhibits, as we did last year. Katherine Parks has some beautiful fudges and chocolate creams—we'll invite her too.'

'Them, you mean,' said Virginia, handing Leslie her entry cards.

Leslie carried her pictures to the art department, her needlework to the women's building, and her cake to its proper destination. In each place she found that her handiwork compared very favorably with that already entered. In the art department, Mrs. Frost and Edward Parks were busily engaged in hanging pictures and other things; for art, as interpreted in Knox County, was a broad term; like charity, it covered a multitude of sins—crimes, Mrs. Frost called them. She was holding one aloft, as Leslie proffered her exhibits.

'What in the world is that?' asked Leslie.

'Sh!' whispered Mrs. Frost. 'The man at your left brought it. It seems to be a wreath of cotton-batting water lilies encrusted with salt. There's a bouquet of hair flowers in the show case, and a statue of Washington made of raisins with pop corn for eyes, on the shelf behind you. Here's a bas-relief of Roosevelt, in chewing gum, and a bust of Patrick Henry carved from one of soap. My! This head of yours is fine! You did that landscape from life, didn't you? I recognize that place.'

Because of the miscellaneous character of its contents, the building over which Mrs. Dollar presided had no name. It was usually spoken of without formality as 'the cake-and-pie building,' or 'the jelly-and-jam department.' In addition to sheltering baker's goods and preserves, one side of the building was devoted to the fruit exhibit. This belonged properly to the agricultural hall, but one year the judges found only empty plates when they went to award the prizes, small boys

having annexed the exhibits. Mrs. Dollar, whose cherished plums had vanished, thereupon announced her intention of taking all future displays under her own wing.

'I guess,' Mrs. Dollar had said, 'if I'm capable of keeping my plums on the trees until fair time, I'm capable of keeping them on their plates for five days longer.'

There was no doubt of Mrs. Dollar's capability, and she became guardian of the fruit as well as of the pies and cakes.

'Why, this is the nicest place of all,' said Leslie, relinquishing her cake. 'How good it smells in here!'

'Makes you hungry, doesn't it?' said Mrs. Dollar. 'Here, have one of my doughnuts. I guess this is the hungriest spot in the country. I always keep something on hand for hungry visitors. My girl makes a big batch of doughnuts or cookies every day. I guess that's one reason I don't have much trouble keepin' the boys out of the fruit. My! that's a nice-lookin' layer cake. Hope you'll get the prize. I never saw smoother frosting.'

The following day Leslie visited all the departments where she had exhibits. Their chances seemed good, but in each place her confidence was a little shaken. There was more competition than she had expected.

'That water-color head,' she said, noticing one that Virginia Macey had entered, 'looks a great deal more like a poster. If the judges go by size, I'm simply lost, that's all. Then there's my cake. It seems to me that half the cooks in town have made layer cakes—but I know mine's the best.'

By Thursday afternoon, premium ribbons were fluttering from the successful exhibits in every department, and there was a decided change in the atmosphere. During the earlier part of the week, the faces of the exhibitors had worn eager, hopeful expressions. Now, however, the persons pressing against the railings or rushing to and fro from building to building could easily be divided into two distinct classes. The prize-winners were jubilant and triumphant, and their faces showed it. Those whose exhibits had failed to take prizes were disappointed, often indignant, and their countenances, too, showed the state of their feelings. The persons in charge of the departments were sympathetic or apologetic, and were doing their best to explain the reasons for defeat. One superintendent, more timid than the rest, had taken refuge in flight; the judges kept their badges in their pockets. Some of the disappointed suffered in silence, but not all; for the suave gentleman in charge of the agricultural building was busy dodging unsuccessful potatoes, while trying to prove that the prize cauliflower was really better than the one that failed to capture a premium. The secretary was flying from building to building to straighten out unforeseen difficulties, and the president, entrenched behind the counter of his office, was soothing savage beasts, with tactful words. Long experience had made him an adept at pouring oil on troubled waters.

Leslie Perrin had not been able to attend the fair that afternoon, but rumors had soon reached her, and she was not pleased. Not being pleased always meant in Leslie's case being very much displeased, for she was an outspoken young person, and when things went wrong at home she usually mentioned it with some vigor. Her mother often remonstrated in this wise:—

'Leslie, you must control your temper. It isn't ladylike to burst out in that fashion when things go wrong. It's a bad habit to

get into. Some day you'll fly into a rage and say things that you'll be ashamed to think of afterwards. Don't be so hasty—wait until the next day.'

'But it's all gone the next day,' objected Leslie.

This was quite true. When Leslie had spoken her mind, the matter was settled, so far as she was concerned; but her victim—usually a relative—wished that Leslie were not so easily stirred to wrath, or so unpleasant when she was stirred. Mrs. Perrin was much worried over her daughter's quick temper, but seemingly there was no cure for it.

Friday noon found Leslie's young friends Katherine and Edward Parks and some other young people, making preparations for a picnic on the grass in the huge field used as an athletic field. Wilbert paid them flying visits, but was too busy to stay long, and Virginia was too occupied with a case of conscience to remember the picnic; but the party was a merry one, nevertheless. Before joining her friends, Leslie had made a tour of investigation among the buildings, where she had found things even worse than she had expected. Aside from a few second prizes, she had failed in every department, not because her exhibits were not meritorious, but because there was so much competition. Leaving the art department, she turned toward Mrs. Dollar's building. The band, however, had paused before it on its way to the grand stand, and was playing a lively march. Leslie, knowing that it would be impossible to get through the listening crowd, returned to her friends without learning the fate of her cake.

'It's the meanest thing I ever heard of,' said Leslie, with blazing eye. 'Somebody entered a picture that's nothing in the world but a poster, as a water-color head. Just because it was bigger than mine, it took the prize. I know my doilies were the best there, and I never saw a prettier sofa pillow than mine. The judges haven't any sense—they don't know pillows from—'

'Why don't you tell 'em so?' asked Edward, mischievously. 'They've been catching it all round for the last twenty-four hours. I tell you, folks don't know what they miss when they decline to act as judges at country fairs. The gratitude that pours in—'

'Now, you hush,' said Katherine, arranging sandwiches on a wooden plate. 'It's a mean shame, Leslie, and I think something ought to be done about it. Your things were just lovely. Why, there isn't a scrap of cake! Didn't anyone bring cake?'

'I've a perfectly delicious fig cake over in the cookery place,' said Leslie, springing to her feet. 'Now that the things have been judged, I'm sure Mrs. Dollar will let me have it!'

'Wait a minute,' said Edward, clutching her skirt. 'Did you say fig cake? Was it on a big blue plate?'

'Yes,' said Leslie; 'what of it?'

'Well, guess you'll not need to go after it, that's all. Your cake's not there.'

'Not there! Where is it, then?'

'It's eaten. Some of the boys stayed pretty late last night to work on the new band stand—the old one collapsed, you know—and they were just starved. Mrs. Dollar was sent for to go home early that night—a neighbor's baby had croup—so she handed her keys over to Wilbert Lane, and rushed off to save the baby. I guess Wilbert was hungry, too; but, anyway, they ate up two cakes, and one was yours. They said it was good.'

Leslie's eye blazed. It was the last straw. 'I'm just going to give those folks a piece of my mind,' said she, starting hastily to—