

ONLY A FARMER.

Quite an interested and anxious group had gathered in Mrs. Wilson's dressing room, one pleasant morning in June. It consisted of Mrs. Wilson and her three unmarried daughters, and the subject under their animated discussion was how and where they should open their usual summer campaign.

It had always been an interesting subject, and to the maternal element, attended with considerable anxiety, but never such a matter of perplexity, almost amounting to a despair, as now.

The contents of the various wardrobe had been laid out and examined; silks and muslins, cambrics and lawns, sufficient it would seem, for a dozen, and the two elder Misses Wilson, declared with tears in their eyes, "that they had nothing, absolutely nothing, fit to wear."

It is noteworthy with what surprising unanimity the two sisters agreed on the point, who seldom agreed on any point.

Mrs. Wilson looked with dismay upon the finery spread before her, after listening to the above assertion.

"I'm sure, my dear," she ventured to say, "some of them are hardly worn, and with a little alteration—"

"Now, mamma!" interrupted Belle, "Why, will you talk so ridiculously, when you know that there is not a thing here but what is wretchedly out of style! And as to altering anything, it always gives me a pain in the side to sew, and I'm not going to Saratoga all fagged out, if I never go!"

Of course this settled that. It is a little curious that a small amount of work will "fag" a girl "all out" who can dance until the break of day without the slightest inconvenience.

"There's one thing certain," said Lucy, the second daughter, "we've got to have at least one new dress."

"I don't know where it's to come from then," responded Mrs. Wilson, sinking down wearily into a chair. "It was as much as I could do to get pa's consent to going at all. It was 2 o'clock at night before he gave in, and I verily believe it was from pure weariness, and inability to keep awake any longer."

Mrs. Wilson said this with an air of a woman determined to perform her duty at all hazards, and anxious to obtain credit for the same.

But it seemed to have quite the contrary effect upon Josie, the youngest daughter, who had not before spoken, but who now burst forth:

"I declare if it isn't a sin and a shame for you to worry pa so!"

Mrs. Wilson cast a reproachful look at the speaker.

"I will say Josie, that you are the most ungrateful child I ever saw. I'd like to know how much money I'd get out of you if I didn't worry it out. But that's all the thanks I get for laying awake nights, scheming and planning how to give you a chance to get settled in life."

"I'd thank you for not doing so; I am not going to Saratoga or Long Branch. In the first place I know that pa can't afford it. And then I promised Mary Crofton that I would visit her this summer."

Though Mrs. Wilson affected to be displeased at this announcement she was secretly relieved.

Belle and Lucy were all suited with this arrangement too. Josie was very handy at furnishing and making over, and if she was determined to bury herself in a country farm house, she would not need so much of that for herself, and could, therefore, devote more time to them. And so busy did they keep her during the two weeks that followed, that Josie was glad enough to see the big trunks all packed and waiting in the hall.

To save expenses, Mrs. Wilson had arranged to dismiss the servants and shut up the house, with the exception of one room for her husband who was to take his meals at his sister's.

"Of course, she won't charge him anything, so that will be one item saved," remarked Mrs. Wilson, as she regarded complacently the effect of Belle's new dress which her management had secured.

"As though pa would board there for nothing," was Josie's indignant rejoinder. "When Uncle William has such a hard time to get along."

"Well, if your pa chooses to pay when he needn't and it isn't expected of him, it's his own loss. For my part I don't see what's the good of having relations if you can't make use of them."

Mrs. Wilson certainly believed in making her relatives useful, carrying out that belief to its fullest extent, whenever it was practicable as some of them knew to their cost. Even her love for her daughters partook of the selfishness of her intensely selfish nature, her chief anxiety being to get them "off her hands," and in a manner that would be advantageous and reflect as much credit on herself as possible.

But they were gone, at last, and Josie was at liberty to make her own simple preparations, which did not take her long to complete.

The father and daughter had a nice quiet tea together. Josie was going on the morrow, and as sitting opposite him and pouring out his tea, she saw the hard lines softening in his careworn face and how happy he was in her society, her heart reproached her for leaving him.

"I have half a mind not to go, papa; it seems too bad to leave you here all by yourself."

But Mr. Wilson would not hear to this.

"I insist upon your going; you have been working hard, and you need a change. My life would be much the same anyhow."

"You can expect me in three weeks, papa," smiled Josie from the car window, the next morning. You will want your little housekeeper by that time I know."

And Mr. Wilson went back to the corroding anxieties which had made him an old man before his time, thanking God for this bit of sunshine, and which left its glow in the heart long after it had vanished.

There were only a few passengers for Baybridge, a small town in the interior of the State, though there were the usual loungers upon the platform of the station as Josie stepped out. But they blankly around for the carriage that she

supposed would be waiting for her. She walked clear around the station looking in every direction, but not a vehicle was in sight except a rough board wagon, with a board across it, drawn by a pair of spirited black horses, that stamped their feet and tossed their heads as if impatient to be off.

A man stood beside the restive creature that yet seemed to be under perfect control.

"There Jenny! Be easy Kate!" he said, patting the satin-smooth skin, and speaking very much as a mother would to a child.

The baggage-master was standing near a pile of trunks and parcels.

"Is this your trunk, Miss?" he said, as Josie approached him.

"Yes, I was expecting friends to meet me, but they are not here. There must be some mistake."

"I know most of the people around here. What might their name be?"

"Crofton."

"Why, bless me, you've got off at the wrong station. They live at North Baybridge, five miles beyond."

"When does the next train leave?"

"To-morrow morning."

Josie looked the dismay that she certainly felt at this announcement.

"It's too bad, I declare," said the good-natured officer, pitying Josie's evident distress.

Then as his eyes fell upon the owner of the team, who was looking towards them he added:

"If this ain't a streak of luck! Here's John Manning, their next neighbor. He can take you along as well as not."

"John, here is a young woman that's got off at the wrong station. She wants to go to Crofton's. I tell her she can ride with you."

The young man removed his straw hat, revealing a forehead broad and full, and whose whiteness contrasted strongly with the healthy brown of the cheeks below.

"I shall be very happy, if the young lady has no objection to riding with a farmer, and in a farmer's wagon."

The admiration so clearly visible in the honest blue eyes that met her own, made her cheeks redder.

"If it will not be too much bother,"

As the young man listened to these low, softly spoken words, he felt nothing the speaker could ask would be any trouble at all. Springing to work, he soon improvised quite a comfortable seat for Josie by passing a rope from one stake to another, just back of the board in front, throwing a thick, soft blanket over the whole.

Glad to be released, Jenny and Kate bore them swiftly along the winding country road, dotted here and there by farmhouses, nestled down among trees and shrubbery. As soon as Josie got a little used to it she enjoyed her elevated and novel position and which gave her a fine view of the beautiful country through which they were passing.

Her companion smiled at the enthusiastic exclamations and comments, seeming to take pleasure, they being so frankly and innocently expressed.

"Do you think you would like to live in the country?" he said, stealing an admiring glance at the glad young face.

"Above all things," responded Josie—"that is," she added, after a moment's pause, "if papa could be here too. I wish he could be, just for a little while; he would enjoy it so. Papa was brought up on a farm, and it would seem like old times to him. I heard him say that he wished he had never left it."

"I had a strong desire, when a boy to go to the city, where I could get a chance to get rich, and not have to work so hard. But I am the only son—an only child since last winter—"

—he said, and Josie's eyes saddened. "I promised father just before he died, that I wouldn't leave the farm while mother lived, and I don't know that I care to do so now."

"I wouldn't if I were in your place," said Josie, with a wise shake of her pretty head. "It's dreadful hard times in the city. Everybody is struggling about them, which makes it dismal enough. As to working hard, I'd like to know who works harder than papa does. It's ever so much nicer here."

The honest young fellow, whose heart was in his eyes, inwardly hoped that she would always think so.

"There is where I live," he said aloud, pointing to a house with a wide piazza running round two sides, and which looked very pleasant amid the green verdure that surrounded it.

Young Manning drew the reins at the gate, inside of which a pleasant faced silver haired woman was standing.

"Here's the mail, mother," he said, tossing down to her some papers and pamphlets. "Been lonely any? I'm going to take this young lady to Mr. Crofton's. My mother, Miss Wilson."

The young man took leave of Josie with a feeling at his heart such as he had never experienced before.

"How pretty she is!" he thought, and as good as pretty, I am sure."

"What an honest and pleasant face! I wonder if I shall ever see him again!" This is what she thought.

Josie did see him again and quite often. The Mannings and Croftons were not only neighbors, but were intimate. Mary Crofton had always been strongly attached to Mrs. Manning's only daughter, who died the preceding winter. She spent a good deal of time at her house, and Josie frequently with her. Mary was never weary of praising John; he was such a good son, and so intelligent, steady and industrious.

John soon got over his shyness with Josie, who took so kindly to the country ways that it seemed as if he had always lived in the country. He used to walk home with her. Mary considerably lingered by the gate to talk with his mother, well pleased with the turn affairs were taking.

Then there was rides and walks, picnics and social gatherings, at all of which John and Josie had a fashion of getting off by themselves—a fashion that every one seemed to honor and understand.

And so the happy days went on each day binding those young, loving hearts more closely together.

When Josie returned to the city, which was two weeks later than she in-

tended, she had a pleasant story to whisper in her father's ear.

"If you love him and he is worthy of you," he said, in reply to the query with which it ended.

Josie's quick ear detected the sadness that under ran her father's words.

"You know you promised to live with me when I was married, papa," she whispered, laying her cheek closely to his. "And on a farm, too! Won't it be delightful!"

Belle and Lucy returned, with that conscious air of subdued triumph and importance peculiar to "engaged young ladies."

Having attained the end and aim of their existence, there was nothing further for them to hope or expect.

From henceforth they were to repose upon their laurels, floating down the stream of life with no thought or care for anything but the present enjoyment.

Belle's captive was a Wall street broker, owning a fabulous amount on paper. Lucy's was the son of a millionaire, whose ambition seemed to be to spend as quickly as possible the money that his father had labored to acquire.

They made no attempt to disguise their disdain when they heard Josie's modest comment.

"Only a farmer!" sniffed Mrs. Wilson. "Never did I dream that one of my daughters would stoop to that! But I suppose if you have your father's approval you don't care for mine."

"Of course you can't expect us to visit you," said Belle loftily. "The connections of Charles Augustus are all of the highest and most aristocratic character, and it couldn't be thought of."

"Certainly not," echoed Lucy. "A wife has to take the position of her husband, which is something you had better think of."

Josie had thought of it, and very happy thoughts they were, too.

The financial disasters of the three years that followed made quite a change in the surroundings of all the above, with the exception of Josie and her husband.

Out of the wreck of Mr. Wilson's business nothing was left but the honor and integrity, which shone all the more brightly from the temporary gloom that shrouded him. His wife took their altered fortune very hard, fairly fretting and worrying herself into the grave, where she was laid a few months after. Penniless and unfitted for anything higher the husbands of Belle and Lucy were glad to accept positions, one as a conductor on a city car, the other a third-rate clerkship.

Josie did not see much of her sisters, but many a barrel of apples and crock of butter found their way from the Manning farm.

Almost every pleasant afternoon a gray-haired, placid looking old man can be seen on the western piazza of the farm-house, with a grandchild on each knee. It is Mr. Wilson, who often thanks God that one of his daughters married "only a farmer."

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