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WILDA'S CHOICE.

By MRS. EDWARDS PAINE.

WILDA was a country schoolmarm, teaching her first school ten miles from home. She taught five days one week and six the next, and at the end of every fortnight it was her father's custom either to come for her himself or send some one to bring her home for over Sunday.

On one particular Friday night the uncle whom her father had delegated to go for her failed to put in an appearance, and Wilda, after vainly watching until after 10 o'clock for some one to come, decided to get up early in the morning and start for home on foot, with a possible hope that she might either meet her father, or catch a ride with some one else, at least for part of the way home.

The reason why she was so determined to reach home before Saturday night was to keep an engagement with a certain young man by the name of Walter Mather, whom she had promised to marry. In point of fact, there had been considerable difficulty connected with her engagement to this young man. In the first place she was an independent little woman, and wanted to test her own powers at earning a living. In the second, she wasn't just sure whether she cared enough for Walter to marry him, and in the third he had met with an unconscious rival in the person of one Theodore Graham, Wilda's father's hired man, who, by the way, could not be called such, according to the common acceptation of the term. On the contrary he claimed to be a broken-down athlete from a neighboring university who had begged the privilege of working for her father for the purpose of recuperating his wasted strength.

Wilda had felt no little trepidation in regard to her engagement with Walter Mather. Her father had cautioned her repeatedly about the consequences of making an unwise choice, and some of her numerous friends had felt it their duty to tell her in plain English that he wasn't half good enough for her; that he possessed some traits of character that would surely bring her to grief.

However, Walter's father was a very wealthy farmer, which counted for considerable in those days, but that didn't amount to much in Wilda's estimation, for her own father had enough and to spare, and there was no need of her teaching school had she not wanted to. The main proposition with her was whether in her uncertain state of mind she was justified in marrying him at all.

Theodore Graham had on several occasions tried to make advances to Wilda, which, under the circumstances, she was wise enough not to encourage, and wise enough to keep to herself. His menial position would not warrant him in advancing very far, albeit, Wilda did not doubt his being a college-bred man, judging from his habits and knowledge of books. But she knew nothing of his life and character, excepting what she observed for herself, and as far as he was concerned he had his own reasons for not letting her or anybody else know that he was a city-bred man, too, and that at his mother's death he would come into the possession of at least half a million.

Wilda's father, with an eye simply to the best interests of his motherless and only child, had never delegated his hired man to go and bring his daughter home from her school, but somehow Theodore always managed to be at the gate to assist her to alight. Wilda understood his maneuvers, but her father took it as an act of courtesy which was simply her due.

At the first peep of day Wilda was up and dressed and ready to start for home. Mrs. Thompson, the lady with whom she was boarding that week, said to her:

"You shall not go one step until you have had a good hearty breakfast."

"It is too early for a good hearty breakfast, Mrs. Thompson," said Wilda. "I can't eat if you get it."

"Now you just go out and walk around the house and down to the spring and back, and drink in some of this morning air, and then see if you won't eat some of it."

So Wilda did as she was bidden, and to her surprise she did eat her breakfast with a relish.

Mrs. Thompson smiled with approval all the time she was eating, then, when she had finished, she saw her through the gate which opened into the lane, and watched her until she entered the public highway.

Wilda waved her hand good-by, then she said to herself—

"I hope I shan't meet any one coming for me, for at least a mile any way, for I do love to take long walks in the cool of the morning and hear the birds sing."

Along the road she trudged, her young heart as light and happy as the birds she watched and listened to, thinking of Walter, how happy and pleased he would be to know of the effort she was making to keep her fortnightly appointment with him.

"If he only knew," she said to herself, "he would gladly have come for me himself; but then he doesn't, so there's no use in my bothering my head about that. Besides, father wouldn't be pleased if Walter came for me, as he considers that a particular privilege of his own, from which he derives much pleasure. Poor father! He'll miss me when I'm gone. But this walk! It's going to be a long one; and I don't believe I'd run the risk of walking the whole way for another man living."

Wilda, in her reflections, was trying to reconcile herself to her act, and acquire the proper respect for and confidence in her lover, but after that last assertion the honest, sunburned face of Theodore Graham rose before her and refused to be put down.

"I don't know why," she said to herself, "he always persists in coming up just at the time when he is least expected."

On and on she walked. The sun climbed higher and higher, and finally, somewhat heated and weary, she came to the village of Haven, where she sat down on one of the rustic seats in the park. She sat there for some time, with a feeling in her feet that she would like to take off her shoes and stockings, and paddle around on the cool, green grass. But she could not remain long, so she soon resumed her journey, and when she turned the street corner towards home, the eastern sun blazed full into her face. For the first time she realized the day was going to be excessively warm. She had not covered more than a quarter of the way, and her shoes, which were new, were already beginning to pinch, and her satchel increase in weight.

"If I only had my parasol," she thought; "but I was thoughtless enough to leave that at home."

She saw a team coming rapidly toward her, and thought possibly it might be her father, but it proved to be a stranger with a man and a trunk, hastening toward Haven, probably to catch the morning train.

Disappointed and discouraged, she sat down by the roadside to rest. Under the shadow of a great elm she watched and waited for some one to come by and ask her to ride; but, as no one came, she plucked up courage, in spite of the burning sensation in her feet, and started on.

She judged she had walked about five miles, and then she began to reflect again.

"I wonder," she asked herself, "if I'm not folish for undertaking such a walk as this? Supposing I didn't keep my engagement with Walter, what difference would it make? I'm not sure that he'd care, and I don t believe he'd go to all this trouble for me. Besides, what view will he take of it? Will he think I'm crazy to be with him, or see the principle involved in it? Well!" she exclaimed, after a few moments more of reflections, "I've never broken my word to anybody yet, and I'm not going to begin with him. I told him I would surely be home to-night, and I'm going to keep my word. Oh," she continued, "these feet will be the death of me," when she heard a rumble of wheels approaching her from behind. She looked around, and to her delight she recognized Mr. Cline, an old friend of her father's.

"Why, Wilda Wright!" he exclaimed, reining in his horse. "What in the name of sense are you doing here this hot day?"

"Father didn't come after me last night, so I thought I'd walk."

"Walk, child! Why, you must be crazy. Why, it's twelve miles, if it's an inch."

"Ten, father calls it," replied Wilda.

"Yes, by taking some cross-cuts. But what's the stress 'bout your getting home? Homesick, eh?" he asked, peering under her straw hat.

"No, not exactly that," said Wilda, prevaricating a little. "But it's been two weeks since I've been there."

"Well, you're a plucky girl, to say the least; and if I wasn't in such a confounded hurry to get back with this cutter-bar, I'd take you clear home. But you see," he added apologetically, "the men can't go on with the haying until I get there."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Cline. I don't mind it. I can just as well walk as not," said Wilda, bravely, at the same time secretly wincing at the pain that was getting more intense in her feet.

"But you won't get home for dinner," he said solicitously.

"Oh, yes I shall," replied Wilda. "I'll be home long before that."

"It will be a little out of your way, but get in and ride as far as my house," he said, reflectively, and then drove rapidly into the south fork of the road. "From there you can go cross lots and in the end you will save time."

"Yes," said Wilda, thinking the while that their way led right by Walter Mather's house.

"Perhaps I'll see Walter," she thought, "and he'll recognize the effort it is costing me to keep my promise."

Long before they came in sight of the house, she plainly discerned the maple grove which sheltered the white farm house. When they neared the place her eyes searched eagerly under the low-hanging branches for a familiar form. At last she discerned two people swinging leisurely in a hammock, one a girl of her acquaintance, the other, Walter Mather, with his arm around her waist.

For a moment Wilda's heart beat wildly, then it seemed to stand still. He teeth closed like a vise, and could she have opened them to speak her tongue would have hissed out "traitor."

Suddenly Walter caught the sound of wheels, and looking up recognized her, withdrew his arm, and bowed.

Mr. Cline had caught the drift of things, too, and, giving his horses a clip with the whip, in the midst of a cloud of dust they ascended the hill.

"Who was that young woman with Walter Mather?" he asked, as soon as they were well over.

"Miss Wood," said Wilda, savagely.

"The bold minx!" he ejaculated, to which Wilda dare not trust herself to reply.

Soon now they were at Mr. Cline's gate, when Wilda, unassisted, clambered out of the wagon, and after thanking him for her ride, started down the road toward home.

"Take it cross lots, Wilda," Mr. Cline called after her.

"All right, Mr. Cline. Excuse me, I forgot," she called back.

Then she turned in toward the high rail fence, climbed over it, and when she was well into the field beyond, in sheer desperation she sat down on the ground with her back against an old stump and began to cry.

"Only to think," she burst out indignantly, "of my going to all this trouble for him. The mean, deceitful wretch!" and the heavy heads of grass bent low and answered "Yes." "Now I know why I could never tell whether I loved him or not. He don't deserve it," and the waving grass bent its heads still lower and whispered, "No, he's deceiving you." "I'll never, never speak to him again," she cried.

"I wouldn't if I were you," croaked a blackbird as it lighted on the stump above her head.

"I don't believe Theodore Graham would be guilty of treating a girl like that."

"Indeed he wouldn't," again croaked the blackbird, flying away.

"And I've been as mean to him as I could be, and snubbed him every chance I could get. Oh, I wish I wasn't such a fool!" And covering her face with her hands she broke into an angry flod of tears.

After she had cried to her heart's content, she rose with difficulty to her feet, and hobbled away through the tall grass. Every step she took she almost cried out with pain. She knew her feet were swollen to bursting, but she dare not take off her shoes for fear she could not get them on again. So she traveled on as best she could, crossing fields and climbing fences until she came out at the north fork of the road and was in sight of home.

How cool the tall pines looked, silhoutted against the blue sky, and how she longed to be in the shadow of their thick branches; but between her and them was a great field of waving rye. To attempt to cross it she knew would be like blazing a way through an unbroken forest, but to accept the other alternative and add another mile to her journey by going around was simply out of the question.

The opposite side of this field lay parallel to her father's orchard, where, leaning on a gate-post, stood a tall, athletic appearing young man, intently watching a peculiar wave which semeed to be slowly approaching him through the rye.

Suddenly the tall spears of grain parted, and, catching sight of a scarlet face beneath a white straw hat, he exclaimed:

"Why, Wilda — Miss Wright — what in the world does this mean?"

At the tone of eager sympathy in his voice, Wilda's lips quivered and she began to cry.

Impulsively Theodore grasped her by the hand and led her through the open gate into the orchard and sat her down in the shade of an apple tree.

With a feeling of disgust at herself for exposing her weakness, Wilda snatched off her hat and threw it on the ground. Theodore quickly took it up and began to fan her with it and after she became more composed, he asked:

"How far have you walked?"

"Most of the way," was her curt reply.

"Where did you miss your father?"

"Has he gone?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes. He started early this morning. He didn't know your uncle had not gone until it was too late to go last night."

"I rode part way with Mr. Cline."

"That's how you came to miss him. You took the south fork?"

"Yes, of course," snapped Wilda, thinking of what she had seen under the maple trees.

"But you should have either met him, or he overtaken you, before that," persisted Theodore.

"Perhaps I should, and he didn't," retorted Wilda, thinking of the time she loitered away in the park at Haven.

Theodore ventured no reply. He saw plainly that in her state of mind further questioning was not only useless but cruel.

A big, ripe apple fell at Wilda's feet. She took it and began to eat ravenously. After she had finished and thrown the core away, Theorode ventured to ask:

"Why were you so bent on getting home to-night, Wilda?"

"To keep my appointment with Walter Mather," she responded unhesitatingly.

"Do you think it will pay?"

"It has paid already," she replied spitefully, at the same time wincing at the sharp pain that darted through her foot.

Theodore was startled at the look of agony that came into her face, and was just going to speak when she interrupted him by saying:

"Theodore, I am almost dead with pain in my feet, but I want to tell you one thing, I'm through with Walter Mather for all time. I tried to make myself believe I loved him; but I don't. When he comes to-night I shall not even see him, and he will not need to be told why. Now, take me to the house, for my feet are murdering me, and I am afraid I am going to faint."

Then she attempted to rise, but staggered and fell fainting into Theodore Graham's arms. When she came to he was fanning her with all his might and calling her by all the endearing names of a lover's calendar. Wilda opened her eyes and smiled, then he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the house and laid her on the bed.

That evening, just about sun-down, Walter Mather came driving up with a spanking bay team, and a new piano-box buggy; but Wilda was too indisposed to see him, and apparently crestfallen he drove away without even asking why.

The next night by common consent of Wilda and her father, Theodore took her back to her school; her swollen and blistered feet bandaged and encased in her father's slippers; but it was her last as well as her first term of school, for that night she made her choice, and a wise one it was, too.—Waverley Magazine.

London took about twenty-nine per cent. of the whole number of letters delivered in the United Kingdom in the last fiscal year.

EARLIEST USE OF FORKS.

They Were Not Common in England Before the Year 1815.

It seems strange that the use of forks began only with our easily remembered forefathers; that the Greeks and Romans did not know anything of them, and that in the Far Eastern countries their use is still unknown. Up to the fifteenth century they were known only in Italy. Elizabeth had three "forks" "garnished with gold sleightly," and with "lyttie perles pendant," but they were considered as curiosities and never used. Indeed, in that era, says the Cooking Club, it was considered bad form, and ministers contended that to use them was an insult to God. What were our fingers for? In Thomas Coryates' "Crudities," published originally in 1608, is this:

"I observed a custom in all those Italian cities and towns through which I passed that is not used in any other country that I saw on my travels; neither do I think that any other nation in Christendom doth use it, but only in Italy. The Italian, and also most strangers, do always at their meals use a little forke when they cut their meats. For while with their knife, which they hold in one hand, they cut the meats out of the dish, they fasten the forke, which they hold in the other hand, upon the same dish; so whatsoever he be that, sitting in the company of others at meals, should inadvisedly touch the dish of meats with his fingers, from which all the table do cut, he will give occasion of offense to all the company, as having transgressed the laws of good manners, in so much that for his error he shall be at least browbeaten, if not reprehended in wordes. This form of feeding, I understand, is generally used in all places of Italy, their forkes being in the most part of iron, steele and some of silver; but these are used only by gentlemen. The reason for this curiosity is because the Italian cannot by any means endure to have his meat touched with fingers, seeing that all men's fingers are not alike cleane."

Not until the middle of the seventeenth century did England's nobility begin the use of the fork, but they came into use slowly, and even in the early part of the eighteenth century gentlemen who traveled carried a knife and fork, because the inns were not likely to have them. About 1815 forks became quite common in England, and in Europe soon became to be considered generally as a necessity.

The Spectral Clock.

That clock haunted me. As I was going out from that lonely room I saw that the clock was going too; but I stopped it!

"Not so fast!" I hissed, thrusting back both its hands.

Then I set it—under the mattress.

Heavens! I could hear the clock ticking in the bed-ticking.

The clock had often alarmed me, but never like that.

I seized it in my trembling hands and gazed at its white face. "Your hours are numbered!" I muttered. That was plain—on the face of it.

I wound it up tight—with a rope.

Then I ran wildly down the hall.

The clock ran down too!

I sprang from the cliff, and watched to see the clock spring. It did! and struck twice—heavily — against the rocks, and lay still with hands over its white face.

"Your time has come!" I shrieked—"and gone," I added sorrowfully, shaking it and holding it to my ear.

Then I woke up!—Lippincott's.

Where What We Eat Grows.

The onion is a vegetable of great antiquity, being found among the earliest of cultivated species. A kind of onion grown in Egypt 2000 years and more ago was considered so excellent that it received divine honors, being worshiped as a god. This was considered a good joke by the Romans of those days, who, as well as the Greeks, were acquainted with several varieties of onions. It is likely that the plant first grew in Persia or Afghanistan. Garlic has been raised in China for thousands of years, and the ancient Egyptians made great use of it. No picture of it has ever been found on the monuments, but this may be because the plant was considered unclean by the priests.—New York World.

Big Loaves of Bread.

The largest loaves of bread baked in the world are those of France and Italy. The "pipe" bread of Italy is baked in loaves two feet or three feet long, while in France the loaves are made in the shape of very long rolls, four feet or five feet in length, and in many cases six feet.