

break Merah slept, but she awoke the pale ghost of her happy self.

All day she crouched by herself in the furthest corner of the kitchen. When forced to move, she passed the windows shrinkingly, and she gave a grateful look when her mother drew the thick green shades over them. Toward night she showed a strange restlessness. More than once she started toward the door, from which the path led downward to the rocks. At last she opened it. It had rained heavily all day long, but the child passed out with uncovered head.

Orpha would have held her back, but Ike raised his hand commandingly. "Let her go. Ef it's really done her good!" he said.

Orpha answered with a sort of gasp, and her face looked strained and old as she followed the little girl. Ike went after her. When they reached the rocks Merah was behind their shelter, a moment more and they saw her again.

Far out where the sharp black points rose up from the heavy sea she stood, but not as had been her wont, with light, firm poise. Her arms were helplessly outstretched, she swayed, her eyes were closed as if in sleep. Again she moved, but with leaden feet, with fluttering helpless hands. Even as they looked she tottered, fell.

Ike bounded forward, but Orpha was there before him. She hardly touched the rocks in her swift flight. Yet she

was but just in time to snatch the child from the hungry waves, and the red, red blood was flowing, dyeing the thick masses of yellow hair.

Orpha herself bore Merah home. No word escaped her lips, but she worked as only those can do who see death standing by.

"No use—no use!"

She heard the words as in a dream, but she silenced her husband fiercely.

It was a long, hard struggle. For days and nights Merah lay between life and death, Orpha watching her every breath.

In the silence of that room, watching his wife in her vigilance, her love-taught skill, Isaac Winkley's eyes were opened, and he knew that of us God demands not blind, insensate worship, but the willing service of mind and hand and heart.

When his child was well once more, Ike made a confession to his wife.

"God forgive me. I was blind, but now through you *I see*."

And a night came when Orpha and her husband, sitting hand in hand before the fire, saw the gray old ghost of Lupton Marsh disappear to the last vestige. When nothing remained but ashes, the light of a new hope dawned on Ike's worn face.

"Orpha," he said, "we'll call our child 'Relief.'"

And so the Winkley curse was lifted.

ROMANCE OF A DRY RANCH.

BY E. BARNARD FOOTE,

Author of "Early Morning in the Prairie."—OUTING, Vol. xix., p. 73.

"COMING—meet me on the tenth," was what the telegram said. Kittie capered about her parlor, snatched her husband's paper from his hand with the impunity of a young wife and cried "Hurrah! that settles the summer's campaign."

Walter Fay was a rising attorney of a flourishing town in Eastern Washington. He had gloried in single blessedness for thirty years. But the previous year, summoned to New York by an important lawsuit, he had fallen an easy victim to the charms of the proverbially dangerous Eastern girl, and with

true Western enterprise had refused to leave the Atlantic coast until both his suits were won. In doing this, however, he had been forced to neglect his title to a piece of government land which, though without water, was very valuable. His thrifty little helpmeet upon learning that his claim to the ranch was still undisputed, would not consent to the forfeiture, and at once made preparations for the "continuous residence," which the land laws demand of "heads of families."

There was a comfortable house upon the land, water was only two miles off, and the distance from town was not so

great but that Walter could drive to and from his business morning and evening.

There was but one drawback to his wife's anticipations, and that was the prospect of the long, lonely days, for neighbors were few and far between. This difficulty was now removed by the telegraphic promise of her schoolmate—her "first love"—Elsie Dayton, of Boston, to come for the summer. Another week saw the young couple and their guest installed in their rambling farmhouse, with books, music, flowers and pets, for a summer of playing at house-keeping.

Was ever a ranch so isolated or so inaccessible that the arrival of an eligible young woman was not the signal for an immediate call from every bachelor in the township? The very evening following their arrival was spent in a game of whist with their nearest neighbor, Harry Redmond, who proved to be a refined and scholarly man, pining for the society of something more congenial and human than live stock and current literature. Redmond called almost every evening thereafter for his mail, which Fay always brought from town. The finest saddle-horse in his band suddenly displayed a mysterious amiability under a side-saddle and skirt, and it happened that there were numerous long rides about the prairies and canyons—sometimes by the four, oftener by the younger couple chaperoned by the complaisant little matron, but oftenest by Elsie and Redmond alone, for Mrs. Fay was not fond of riding. Moreover, it suited her scheming soul to leave this evidently well-assorted pair to the solution of their own destiny.

That Redmond should not fall in love with this, the first cultured and congenial girl that had entered his life since his college days, was as impossible as that one should see a flower blooming in the midst of a tedious desert journey, and feel no impulse to stretch a hand to gather it.

"I believe I could win her," Redmond often said to himself, as he sat playing his violin to her accompaniment, or looking gravely into her appreciative eyes while he explained some sweet mystery which she had discovered among the flora or fauna of the prairies. But he held his peace. To a woman accustomed to life in an Eastern city the shocks of a social creative state

might involve lifelong desolation. The devotion of one heart, however good and worthy, might not reconcile her to the unpeopled prairie. Redmond struggled long against this conviction; but once he had succumbed he gave himself over with unflinching courage to the hard logic of his solitary, secluded life—the life that had nourished his naturally strong and romantic ideals at the same time that it precluded the realization of his dreams. He would worship her in silence while she stayed, and when she was gone—gone to be the light of some luxurious home—he would worship always a fond, ideal woman who should never suffer and never die.

Miss Dayton, however, was perhaps not entirely the ethereal divinity her lover imagined. At any rate she was a normal and capable young woman, and quite the mistress of circumstances anywhere. Moreover, her heart was quite as human as her head, and was very naturally and very swiftly going over, spite of all restraint, to this manly and self-contained lord of the prairies who, alas! did not seem to want the gift.

But if "Providence and one woman make a majority," then what, may we ask, is to become of a man's resolution when not only Providence but two women are tacitly arrayed against him?

The last day of August was Walter's birthday. As the fact did not occur to him, the ladies determined to give him a little surprise at dinner in the evening; so, after his departure, they addressed themselves to the concoction of various dainties. The great Cochin rooster which was to be slain for the occasion, had been imprisoned the night before, and Kittie purposed to have it killed by the butcher who would make his semi-weekly visit on that day.

Just as the cakes—beautifully iced—were set in the oven to dry, a messenger came with a led horse from a ranch two miles away, for Kittie, as the nearest woman, to go to the assistance of a young mother.

She fortified herself with that profound authority, "The Family Physician," and donning a sun-bonnet, mounted the saddled cayuse at the door and was off, calling back to Elsie that she would probably return in an hour or two.

Elsie put the finishing touches to the dainty preparations for dinner, practiced

some new music, arranged a bouquet of geraniums, and then, as noon came and passed without Kittie's return, she ate a lonely luncheon and nerved herself for a desperate deed. For the butcher had evidently forgotten to call, and the *pièce de résistance*, the chicken pie, would be totally lacking from the birthday feast unless she took the execution upon her own hands. It was no child's play to slay the big, courageous bird, and she postponed it as long as possible, but finally, securing a heavy hatchet, she set out for the barn and pluckily accomplished her purpose.

She had leisurely plucked the victim, sitting in the shady kitchen porch, and knife in hand was in the process of dismembering his corpulent white body, when she heard voices in front of the house. Peeping round the corner, she discovered four or five rough-looking men — evidently land-hunters — with teams and saddle-horses. They were clustered about the water-tank, and were plainly appropriating the water. This, on a dry ranch, was an act of the most flagrant robbery, as it would unquestionably leave the family destitute, not to mention the cow, chickens and other animals which would suffer before another supply could be brought.

Elsie remained in hiding a moment, frightened at the audacity of the men, but as she heard them chuckling over the luck that had saved them a two-mile drive to water, she began to grow righteously angry. She afterwards thought that she had never been so angry in her life. Certain it is that, forgetting fear and prudence, she deliberately walked around the corner of the house and started toward the men with the calm purpose to save the water, or die.

The men were just in the act of filling the trough for their horses when they discovered her. To her utter amazement they waited not for her approach, but after one startled look they inconspicuously climbed into the wagons and saddles and fled out of sight around the point of a hill. Elsie stood looking after them in sheer bewilderment until she heard the gallop of a horse from the same direction, and beheld Harry Redmond drawing rein at the gate.

The instant his eyes fell upon her he called her name in the wildest accents, and throwing his reins over the post

he leaped the gate and ran toward her, crying—with the unconscious addition of all the tender epithets he had so stoutly forsworn—"What is the matter? What were those devils doing?—There! there! don't cry, little one,"—he added, as Elsie, with symptoms of hysterics, avoided his contemplated embrace. Recovering as if from a trance she sank down upon the wood-pile and burst into a wild, uncontrollable fit of—laughter,

Was she crazed? Great heavens! this was desperate, thought poor Redmond. Then as the fugitives appeared in sight upon the brow of a hill opposite the house, he snatched Walter's rifle from the corner of the porch and was starting in pursuit, when Elsie, with tearful eyes, managed to point weakly toward the gory carcass of the Cochin lying on the table under the hop-vines. The mystery was explained, and the wild commingled shouts of laughter with which the canyon rang, reached the ears of the departing land-hunters and caused them to quicken the pace of their horses along the brow of the gulch.

The brave chanticleer had died hard, and when Elsie—masked in a sun-bonnet and conscious of nothing but her just indignation—had sallied out upon the marauders, her white rubber apron, her bare arms to the elbows, and the long dagger-bladed knife which she carried, had all been dripping with gore.

The consciousness of her appearance had not flashed upon her until Harry Redmond had sought, in his alarm, to take her in his arms, and she had sunk backward in hysterical laughter.

"No wonder they ran!"—she cried, bursting out afresh—"and what an Amazon you must think me."

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to relate that Raymond—despite certain shocks to his ideal of the woman he loved—told her then and there what he had suffered.

The chicken had just been put to cook when Kittie arrived, and it cannot be denied that some portions of the luckless bird gave evidence of this mysterious delay when served up in the pie for dinner. No one mentioned it, however, until, after the dessert, Harry announced something already known to the reader.

"Well, there!" Walter said, meditatively; "I'll venture to say now that that chicken was confoundedly tough, and I don't wonder."