

gave a concert. Perhaps you have heard me speak of that before. I appeared in a couple of numbers with my violin—the fiddle that I used to play the “SFE-SAW-HEE-HAW tunes” on when you and Carter were trying to study Analytics. Winnie was accompanist to almost every number, and the concert was a howling success. After it was over I rode home with the accompanist.

Music always has the effect of making me feel blue. Well, not exactly blue, but sad and melancholy. Visions of the past you know, and—what not? So on this occasion I was unusually silent and unsociable. Really, I was thinking of people and places in south-east Nebraska. Winnie was very quiet also, but I did not notice it then. Only when thinking it over afterwards, I was astonished that I hadn't remarked it at the time.

We went along slowly and silently, she busied with her own thoughts, I with mine; until we were more than half-way to the “Bar-Cross-U,” her father's ranche. We had left the main trail and were now following a path over trailing juniper vines, beneath thick cedars where the darkness was intense. Suddenly she reined her pony in very close to mine and said softly—so low that I had to lean over to hear:—“Jack,” (it is the custom here to speak to *everybody* with their christian names) “Jack, this is leap year, isn't it?”

“Yes,” I answered, absently, “I guess it must be.”

“Well Jack,” and her voice, though nearly in a whisper, trembled; “Do you—do you care anything for me?”

I reined my pony to his haunches with a jerk, and he commenced to dance. I felt as if I had fallen off my horse while asleep. I was dazed—scarcely knew where I was. Then in an instant there flashed through my mind—“a proposal, a refusal, tears, heart-aches, regrets, and a fearful jumble of other disagreeable things.” I knew then how a girl must feel who is proposed to by some fellow whom she hardly knows.

I wheeled my pony, dug the spurs into his flanks, and flew along under the cedars so fast that the lower branches cut and scraped my face like knives and whiplashes. I fled like a veritable coward, not knowing why—not knowing anything much—until I came to a cleared open in the cedars. I was half-way across it when I heard a whiz and felt a rope settle down and burn like a hot snake around my shoulders. As the noose tightened, and as I felt the sudden strain on the rope, I brought my poor little pony to a stand with a cruel jerk that nearly dragged him backward; and stopped in time to keep from being dragged from my saddle. The strain on the rope slackened, and I threw off the noose; but Winnie was alongside. Planting her pony across the trail, she said anxiously, “Oh Jack, are you hurt? I did it before I thought. But, Jack, wont you hear me, please? I'd do as much for you.”

What could I do? I got off the pony and sat down on a log. She sat beside me and told me that she loved me, Ted. Told me what it cost her to ask me what she did, told me that she had been waiting to love someone with her whole heart ever since she was a little girl, and that someone was *me*; and I had been blind and would have left her—not knowing of her love.

She told me of her prospects and of mine, told me that she would be happy with me—miserable and forlorn without me. She told me that sweet story I had so often read about, but never heard before; and as she spoke in low sweet tones, “surely,” I thought, “no sweeter story was ever told.”

And when she put her soft arm about my neck and pressed her warm cheek against my cheek—what could I do, Theodore? When we reached her father's ranche, there were two pink roses on her cheeks; and her eyes glowed, and I—I walked, no—floated on air.

'Tis a strange, strange world, Teddy. Ted, when this reaches you, I shall be a married man.

AUFWIEDERSEHEN, JACK.

J. M. R. (by permission).

(per TED.)