

ANNE.

A little figure stood behind a western farm-house, looking out over fields of dark green corn, veiled with the blue mists of early morning—a light figure, listlessly poised, with small brown hands clasped at the back over a picturesque skirt, and a nervous head thrown slightly to one side. Anne absently regarded the delicate sunrise, spreading its webs of color beneath the eastern clouds. Her long brows were contracted.

"I'm goin'," she said softly to herself, as she turned away, "I'm goin'."

When she entered the kitchen, where the family were eating their early breakfast, she repeated it. The mother had heard the declaration before, but that did not prevent her always receiving it with the same surprised reproach. She had big eyes, with which she was wont to subdue her enemies and her children. She let them fall on Anne, who affected not to know it. Then she sighed heavily and spoke.

"No you ain't neither," she said. "I've told you you can't and that's the end of 't. I couldn't spare you, and you know you'd starve. I want you to hurry up and get to them chickens," she continued in a different voice. But Anne eyed her with amazing composure.

"I may starve," she replied, speaking gently. "Any way you've got to spare me. I'm goin' th' day after t'morrow."

At night, in the kitchen again they talked it over together. The six boys and the farmer formed a kind of impromptu jury. The farmer's wife was altogether the loudest voiced, but Anne was the most important. That night she surprised them all by rising to eloquence. She stood under the smoky lamp asserting herself with valor. It was her mother that she answered, but it was to the jury that she appealed. This was her argument.

"You say I can't go. I expect you speak from the courage of your convictions. I've heard you say you a'ways did. Well, I act from mine. What kind of convictions do you think are best, those you speak from or those you act upon?"

"You say I'd starve. I've starved all my life. There are two kinds o' starvin'. One comes from not gettin' enough t' eat, an' th' other from livin' on a Nebraska farm. I guess its mostly a matter o' taste, which you prefer."

"You say I'm too young. I'm only seventeen, but its work that makes people old. So—I'm not too young."

"No, I'm goin'. You must let Jennie help you now. It's I've been the drudge, while Jennie had good times—her good times, and they're not like mine. It's I've washed while Jennie danced. It's I've got dinner f'r all hands while Jennie went on picnics. It's always been Jennie, but it's going to be Anne at last. Someday I'll come back—"

"A fine lady!" put in her mother, as yet unvanquished.

"No. I'm not goin' f'r that," she replied. "I'm goin' to live."

And Anne, with a quivering breath, was silent.

Two days later a lady occupying part of a vacant section on the east-bound train saw a little figure enter the car and stand for a moment uncertain, looking up and down the aisle. Presently Anne approached and took the seat opposite her. Crossing her ill-shod feet with a satisfied air, spreading smooth her picturesque skirt, she proceeded to make friends in most charming good faith.

"I'm goin' t' seek my fortune," she concluded, as she related some of her circumstances. "I'm goin' t' leave th' country an' seek my fortune. I'm so happy!"

Miss Selina North, for that was her name, regarded Anne with eyes almost passionately protesting. The car had rounded a curve just in time for Anne to take leave of a Nebraska sunset. The

beautiful, free sky above the illimitable ranks of corn, burned far along the western horizon like fire. The flood of light and color, leaping high, softened, and a few, vague clouds took the last wave lightly. Miss Selina North grasped Anne's arm.

"Don't," she cried. "Go back. If you could appreciate what you are leaving! If you could know how little you'll gain! See—that's what you're leaving."

Anne looked. But so curiously listless, so suddenly apathetic was her gaze that Selina wondered if she were less intelligent than she had seemed. Then she spoke.

"I'm not losin' it," she said. "I never had it. That's not my West. It's the West you rich people, you educated people h'v found. My West has been ignorance and misery. I'm only leaving it until our West c'n be th' same. Then I'll come back."

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