A WILFUL MAIDEN

Baltimore News: "Why, Freya, I was just coming in to look for you! " I am caught! Rollo steps in at the window with an air of satisfaction-a tall, straight, blue-eyed fellow in a brown shooting suit-unceremoniously dethrones poor Cato, and sits down upon

the cushion at my side. "Why do you disturb the cat?" I say crossly. "Wouldn't the arm-chair have done as well, or better?"

"No-it wasn't so near you!" He is looking at me sentimentally; I know it without glancing up. I used to lke Rolle very much before he took to being sentimental, though he was always spoiled by his mother. I used to do everything for him, and he always looked to me for help out of all his scrapes, and that, I suppose, made me fond of him. I never thought he would behave like

I pick up my neglected knitting and click my needles industriously. He sits

"I say," he begins presently, "has my mother been saying anything to you?"
"A great many things," I reply. "She was telling me not an hour ago that the preserves wanted looking at. 'You know I don't mean anything of

that kind! Why are you so obstinate, I think that cap would fit another

head!" I retorted. "You know what I mean. Has she been saying anything to you about meanything to make you so provokingly wrong-minded and—yes, I'll say it again if you do sneer at me—obstinate?"

"Do you suppose my mind would be different if your mother chanced to be agreeable to—to your wishes?"
"Well, I thought it might be, if she did not worry you into going against

"I have done all I can to make you understand that I am acting of my own free will and as I wish," I exclaim

"As you wish?" be queries, in eager lover-like fashion. "Your own free will, I know, for you would do anything you believed to be for the good of any one of us; you have always placed our welfare, our pleasures, before your own. But is it really your wish-the true wish of your heart-that, after our years companionship and-and love, we should never be anything more to each other-anything closer-dearer?"

He has sank down upon his knees by my side and is looking up into my face with appealing blue eyes. Rolle has very nice eyes when he does not use them in this foolish way; he makes a good pleader, too-I am aware of that, though I remain unmoved. "That's just it, Rolle! After all the

years of companionship you speak of, you ought not to think of being anything but a brother to me.

"Ought not! Why not? You can't have any idea, Freya, what a sweet, pretty, lovable girl you are—even when you look as cross as you are looking now! Nobody could help falling in love "Then I pity mankind in general,"]

observe grimly.
"So do I," he retorts, "if you're never. going to have any more mercy on any of them than you show towards me!" "Oh, I did not say that!" I return wil-

fully.
Then there is some one "What! Then there is some one is some one in the state of the stat sise?" Rolle springs to his feet; all his humility gone in a moment. "I can't stand that-I won't! If I catch him

"Do not be so foolish!" I interpose, coldly, with a disdainful upward glance. I suppose it is because Rolle is the handsome one of the family that his mother has spoiled him so. Godard and Lumley are quite plain—Aunt Ellen says they favor their father, while Rolle belongs to her family. "Am I not as free as you to choose where I will?" I continue, for Rolle's wrath at the possibility of my having any lover beside himself has inspired me with an idea obliged to fancy myself in love with you because you fancy yourself in love with me. And I don't fancy it-I know I'm

"Because you know you are in love with some one else?" he demands jeal-'I shan't tell you anything about it," I retort. "Very well; let me meet him, that's

all! He'll rue the day." "And that's the way you show your love for me, is it?" I cry in hot scorn. 'It's a poor love that would injure the

being I loved to further its own selfish He looks rather ashamed at this. "Nobody could love you better than I do," he says sulkily. "Nobody could take

better care of you than I would. No-body"-boldly-"has a better right to you than I have,"
"Well, I like that!" I exclaim, facing him indignantly: "What right do half a dozen years of childish friendship give you over me, pray? Any one that I love

better than you has a better right to mo, let me tell you!" "And is there any one you love better than me?" he questions, in a doubtful tone that enrages me.

"Yes," I answer, coolly and deliberately. I am thinking only of dear old Uncle Sam and Cherry Meldon, but Rolle supposes immediately that there is a favored lover in the background, as I meant he should. It is the only way of convincing him that he is not first with me as he is with every one else; and I shall leave him in his error, for the

present, at any rate. He turns upon his heel and is out by the window and across the lawn before I realize what has happened.

I feel rather guilty when I think over what I have said. I have said nothing but the simple truth, but I have spoken it in a way calculated to mislead him. Well, I will not undeceive him, for his own sake, for as long as he thought he had no rival he would never have given up the point.

Now it will be a case of sour grapes. He has another fortnight of leave yet; I wish it were only another day. Absence will cure him sooner than anything.

It is two months since I first came to stay at old Mrs. Scarr's. I made Woodlands too hot to hold me, and was packed off here in disgrace by Aunt Ellen. Uncle Sam has written to me twice-

once when Aunt Ellen was at the vicarage for the sewing meeting, and again when Miss Meliuish came to lunch. Cherry Meldon writes twice a week-

Cherry is Godard's intended and they are to be married soon-but I am very lonely, for all that,

Mrs. Scarr reads Hervey's "Meditation Among the Tombs" most of the time when she is not lecturing me. She will not let me do my hair on the top of my head; she says it is nothing but vanity, and that she hopes to teach me the folly of such things during my stay with As long as I am neat and what else have I to trouble about in my appearance? she asks me. Well, certainly there is no one to see how I look for it is the dreariest place in the world, and I am never allowed to step

outside the door without Mrs. Scarr. It is all through Rolle. When he found I really would not listen to him, he exchanged into a marching regiment, and started for Egypt with the troops five weeks ago. There was such a commopraying and entreating was of no avail;

the thing was done before any one in the use was allowed to hear of it. was always so proud of Relie in his uniform; but when it came to actual fighting she would have liked to strip it off and put him in his baby frocks again. Rolle was very quiet through all the excitoment, but very firm.

Aunt Ellen was too miserable about losing him to be very angry with him; but all her fury was expended upon my luckless head. I was packed off here in disgrace, without having the chance of wishing him good-by, for which, however, I was hardly sorry, as a parting between us would have been somewhat awkward.

"We are all so glad to have you back!" exclaimed Lumley. "The house has not been the same without you!"

Lumley is a quiet and rather awkward boy of twenty, the dull one of the family, for whom trade is considered good enough. He is to look for his start in life to his uncle, George Stewart, who long ago offered to take one of his brother's boys into his London business. Lumley is to leave us for his new life in a few more months. I shall miss him very much; he has never teased me like Godard and Rolle have, but has always been quietly affectionate, the kindest of

"Mother missed you as much as any of as," he adds. "She was more glad to see me than I

expected she would be," I allow hesi-

"O, she has got over her vexation now!" Lumley speaks rather hastily and his face flushes a little. "She has made some fresh friends-the people who have taken Oak Hall-and she has got news of Rolle, and so I dare say it will all blow over now."

"What news is there of Rolle? No one has mentioned his name to me."
"They haven't? Well, I suppose

They didn't mean to keep it a secret,' he falters. I look at him in some surprise, because of his nervous, hesitating nanner; it is so unlike his usual sedate-"Rolle has got his promotion aiready," he goes on. "Yes, he's Lieuten-ant Steward"—smiling at my surprise. "He has been wounded, too—only a scratch on the temple in the skirmish. but mother was terribly upset about it, until a letter came in his own handwriting, saying that the wound had laid him up for only twenty-four hours; and that ne had been in action ever since. That juite cheered her up.

"So she sent for me home in the ful-ness of her heart," I suggest. "Not exactly because of that," he answers awkwardly. "Of course she knew

you could not-could not love to orderand-and-"And it would have been a good deal worse if I had," I interpose briskly.

"Well, perhaps it would," he agrees.
"But let us forget it all now, and be appy again as we used to be. Rolle writes bravely; the stirring life out there seems to have cured him." "I hope it has," I declare heartfly, but

nevertheless I am slightly piqued at Lumley's calm assurance. He is too simple-minded to imagine that such an announcement could be received with anything but unmixed gratification by the author of all the mischief. "And he really wasn't much hurt?' I inquire. "No-the merest scratch; but the newspapers exaggerated it."

"Cherry never told me anything about it in his letters," I say half resentfully. "Perhaps she thought it was of no use to alarm you for nothing, or perhaps she considered it best to leave the subject done altogether," he observes.

I feel scared and dazed after Lumley

has gone away and left me alone with aunt's housekeeping accounts to cast up, as if I had passed through some great danger with a hair-breadth escape. Certainly, if Rolle had been killed, they would have laid his death at my door. That would have been dreadful; and yet all this time it has never occurred to me that he is in daily danger, and that help her, but she was never o That would have been dreadful; and yet any newspaper I take up may con- any tidings of his death! How thoughtless I have been! Oh, I should not like to have that burden to bear! From this time I watch the newspapers feverishly, dreading that day I may be pronounced Rolle's destroyer. Every night, too, I offer up a prayer for his safety—a selfish prayer, having more to do with my own case of mind than with his welfare—but still in my sternest moods of self-accusation I cannot find it in my heart to leave that prayer unsaid. Nobody knows of it, so no false conclusions can be drawn.

The time seems to pass but slowly, for all in the nouse are in anxious suspense, though we affect much gayety, and Aunt Ellen talks with apparent certainty of the time when our soldier shall return covered with glory. Miss Venna, the only child of the wealthy barrister's widow, who has lately come to live at Oak Hall, about a mile from Woodlands, is a constant visitor. Aunt Ellen treats her like a daughter, and fills her ears with stories and praises of her absent darling till I should think the girl is tired of the sound of his name; but, if so, she does not show it, for she asks artless questions about him and listens unwear-iedly to the most trifling details.

It is very easy to see aunt's drift; Alice Venna will have a considerable fortune, and it is wise policy to interest her in Rolle beforehand, until he is on the spot to speak for himself. We do not like Alice-Cherry and I. It may be only prejudice—very likely it is on Cherry's part, for I know she is rather nervous about Godard and Miss Venna-but there can be no feeling on my side beyond a growing certainty that the pretty vain girl who is placed over my head in everything now is utterly unworthy of a good, brave, earnest man, such as Rolle is turning out to be. We read of his doings in the newspapers, though he says little about himself in the letters he writes home.

We have got Rolle home-that is our one comfort- and, when the time comes, he will pass away with the faces he knows and loves around about him. There is no hope—the doctors have never given us any—but he may be with us longer than was thought at first. Our soldier-Captain Stewart now-has indeed come home covered with glory, but what are honors and wealth compared with the precious life of the one we love? And yet all my afterdays-if indeed they can be many when Rolle is gone—I shall glorify the memory of our hero and dwell on his noble deeds with a heart filled with pride and grief! When I looked upon the terrible scar on his temple, when I see the empty sleeve, and think of the havec that the cruel bullet in the left side has worked in that vigorous young frame, I see also the true bravery, the manly endurance, which I would not believe in before, because nothing had happened then to bring out his heroic qualities, and be-cause, forsooth, Rolle was his mother's darling! I called Aunt Ellen hard and unfeeling in those days; but what was I myself that the honest passion of this noble heart could leave me untouched? Well, it is all over now, and I know my

own mind just too late. "Freya, have you got the jelly?" It is Aunt Ellen who breaks in upon my sad and bitter train of thought-no longer in the sharp accusing tone of old; the imperious woman has quite broken down under the blow which her love and

pride have received. tion! But all Aunt Elien's crying and it," I tell her, putting my arm around

comfort. I should not have dared to do it a year ago; but Aunt Ellen and I have ot on better since our troubles began. she kisses me and pulls out her handkerchief -poor nunt is often crying out-and I go and take the jelly to Rolle. He is lying on a couch in a room ad-

oining his bed room which has been nastly fixed up as a sitting room for him, the doctor having advised us to get him up every day as long as his strength will allow of it. He is so quiet and pale and wasted that it is somewhat difficult to believe that he was the vigorous, laughing stripling who kept the house amused but a few months ago. His eyes are as blue as ever, but so sunken and they have a mournful expression in them that Aunt Ellen and old Barbara say is the sign of approaching death. I almots wish that he loved me still, that I might comfort him while yet there is time; I would force grief away and give every moment to cheering him, if he cared to have it so. But he has quite forgotten his boyish passion; he is exactly the same to me as he is to every other person. Those sad yes never light up at my approach, and what little he says in his low weak voice shows by the manner in which it is said now completely indifferent he is. Well, was not worth remembering.

"You will like a little jelly now, won't you, Rolle?" I say, going up to his side. Barbara is in the room, busy with some needlework

"No, thank you," he answered list-

"Try to take a little-it is freshly made," I urge, speaking awkwardly, for feel so very ill at ease with Rolle now his altered condition. I know I should be of much more use if I could overcome the wretched feeling, and I have strug-gled against it, but hitherto with no

"It is so much trouble," he objects; and I don't want anything."
Then I bring forward the most powerul plea I can think of.

"Aunt Ellen is coming in a few min-ates. It was she who asked me to bring you this, and she will be so disappointed f she finds you haven't had any! He yields, and I administer some haif-dozen spoonfuls, when he stops my hand, declaring that he can take no

"I think you are a little better today," observe, experimentally. "For my poor mother's sake, I could almost wish I were," he replies.
At this moment Aunt Ellen comes in

with a great assumption of cheerfulness. You have had some jelly, darling? she begins, and stoops down to kiss him. I look on, thinking wistfully how easy it is to act the nurse when one may soothe and coax the patient with endearing words and caresses. My service must seem so cold and awkward after aunt's fond attentiveness. Even old Barbara addresses him as "Master Roley, dear." I am the only one who may not show the warmest love and tenderness to the invalid; I forfeited my right to do that

seven months ago.

The days pass on, bringing no great change, either favorable or unfavorable. The patient lies in an apathetic state, from which it is difficult to rouse him for more than a minute or two at a time. He is considered to be slowly sinking. My heart is ready to break. Oh, if only might tell him I have long since repented my girlish cruelty and beseech his forgiveness. But he is passing beyond the woman's love that is his now, and not to spared a life-time of self-reproach would I risk disturbing that quiet spirit hovering thus between earth and heaven. All the household is subdued, as if Rolle were already dead. We have very few callers, the neighborhood being sparsely populated. Mrs. Meldon and herry come or send every day, besides

having Godard's frequent reports of his brother's condition. The Vennas have gone away, Alice having first condoled in sickness, being so use sensitive. Aunt Ellen looks years older, and the white hairs are coming thickly in poor uncle's brown locks. I do not know that I, too. am altered-I have not had time to think about myself for a long while now-until one day Rolle says to me, as I am bending over him, moving his pillows very

"How thin you have grown, Freya! And where is all your pretty color?" He speaks in the listless tone which has become usual with him now; but his remark shows that he has been more alive to people and things about him than we have supposed-sometimes, at

any rate.
"We can't always keep young and protty," I reply, with a great effort at He smiles very faintly.

"How old are you now, Freya? I forget how the time passes.' "I shall be nineteen in two months from today," I teil him.

om today," I tell nim.
"I shan't be here to help you to keep your birthday," he says gravely, must give you my good wishes now." I do not answer, because I cannot, for a lump seems to have risen in my throat

and to be nearly suffocating me. "Freya," he continues presently, "there is one thing you could do to please me before—before I go—that is, if you didn't mind; if you did, I would rather not."

"I will do anything for you, Rolle," I manage to say, all my strength being concentrated in one supreme effort not to break down and agitate him. "Kiss me, then, Freya. It will com-fort me till I die."

At this my tears burst forth, and, terrified at possible consequences and overcome by opposing feelings at this un-looked-for request, I sink upon my knees at the side of the couch and hide my face among the rugs and shawls that

"What's the matter?" he inquires quite calmly, to my great relief, "What are you crying for?"

"O. Rolle, do you care for me to kiss

"Care!" I feel his hand laid weakly upon my "lint-white locks," as he used to call them. "It would make me happy for the rest of my life!" "Dear Rolle, then why didn't you ask

me long ago?" "Oh, I thought you wouldn't like it, and I didn't mean to ask you at all! But today I felt as if—as if I should not be here much longer, and that perhaps he -your lover, I mean-wouldn't mind now. But I meant, before I asked that, to have begged your forgiveness forfor giving you so much trouble, you

He sinks back exhausted. It is the longest speech he has made since he came home. His voice is as weak and listless as ever, but a faint color has tinted his wasted cheeks while speaking. It dies away now, leaving him so deathly pale that I rise to my feet in sudden terror and despair. Can this be the end? Is he going without knowing that all my life and love are his-dedicated to his memory for evermore, since they may not be spent on himself? I stoop over and press the longed-for kiss upon his lips—the lips that I would gladly have kissed twenty times in an hour had I

known that he would care for it.
"Dearest Rollie" I say in wild agitation and fear, "I have longed to ask forgive-ness of you! I was false to myself as well as to you! There was no one else-

to explain to you, Oh, dear Rolle, think I must have love you then, darling, almost as well as I love you now, though I was so hard and wilful! Dearest—my love—can you hear?"

But he lies still and ashy pale, the lids closed over the summer.

closed over the sunken eyes, never, I fear to be opened again. I rush to the bell, and then administer what restoratives there are at hand until assistance

Rolle is not dead. Our efforts bring him back to life; and, when at last he opens his eyes and looks round on our anxious faces, aunt is unable to keep up any longer, and I assist her out of the room. I see her through the worst of her attack of hysterics, and then I leave her with the housemaid and steal back to Rolle, I meet uncle coming out of the room; he is going down stairs to see if the doctor is in sight. I find Lumley and Barbara with Rolle, silently watching him as he lies with his eyes closed, looking much the same as when I left him. Lumley gets up, and whispering to me that he is going to fetch the doctor, passes out, and I take his seat at the side of the

Presently a cinder drops from the firegrate; the noise is very slight, but Rolle's eyes open directly. I am rather relieved, for I was dreading that he might pass from this sleep into death without even a warning. "And was that a real kiss you gave

"Yes," I say very softly, and under etense of reaching a pillow that has lipped down I bend over him and give him another. He smiles faintly and for a moment

there is so much color in his face that I am alarmed. "You must try to rest," I tell him.
"No; for then I shall think it was a

dream," he murmurs. He falls asleep almost immediately, however, waking about half an hour later, during the doctor's visit, as afterwards hear. I have a habit of keeping out of Dr. Allfair's way, because I believe he expects what has happened. This morning I hear him tell uncle that there is a change in the patient; but whether for better or worse he can hardly tell.

"I've been dreaming," he whispers looking vaguely before him; but I make a slight movement which at once attracts his attention. "It was about you," he adds.

I rise and bend over him, stroking back his curly hair from his forehead. I am no longer afraid to show affection for him, even though I know old Barbara is watching me keenly.
"It was a dream," he says, in a wist-

ful tone. "I thought that you said you loved me, and that you kissed me.' "It was no dream, dear," I reply; and how thankful I am that Barbara cannot see my face! "I was telling you that there was a mistake, and that I did love you—don't you remember now?"

Four days pass. Whenever I am left for a moment alone with Rolle, he looks at me imploringly, and I go to him and kiss him, murmuring some word of endearment in his ear. He never speaks in return, but his eyes grow eloquent. At the end of a week the physician from London comes down again at the request of Dr. Allfair. He sees the request of Dr. Allfair. He sees the change instantly. After a private conference they decide upon a different course of treatment. The case is not quite what they imagined it to be—that is all they will admit; but it is enough

to brighten every face in the house.

A fortnight later Dr. Alifair announces that Rolle has a chance of life now, providing that he has the greatest care and attention.
"He will have that, you may be sure,

doctor," says Aunt Ellen, amid her tears of joy and thankfulness, "between Bar-bara and Freya and me." The doctor looks at me as my name is mentioned. "O, Freya is the best of nurses!" my aunt adds, seeing the look. "There has been a curious change in

the patient's state of mind," he observes, with his sharp eyes still fixed upon my face. "It has much to do with this unlooked-for improvement." Aunt Eilen does not pay much heed; she is to joyfully absorbed in the pros-pect of her darling's living after all.

As Rolle gradually grows stronger I refrain from giving him the silent caresses to which we have both looked for ward day by day, and he ceases to ask for them. A cloud seems to have come between us, and I am not so happy. He is less bright too. "I shall never be of any more use in

the world," he says despondently one

"That you will," I assure him. "And, even if you had lost both arms instead of only one, you would still be of the greatest use in comforting your mother and all who care for you.

"All who care for me!" he echoes drearily. Then, after a pause, he adds. "I couldn't comfort you, Freya, could I? You-you're all right now; it was only while you thought I was dying" He stops. I see now what has been troubling him.

"You are all the comfort I have," I tell him. "If—if you had died, I should have longed to be put into the grave "O Freya! But I am a cripple-a bur

den that-" "You are a brave man," I interpose: 'a hero. All sorts of honors await you the first time you show your face in pub lie; you must not waste a thought upon your father's penniless orphan niece. But, though he is still confined to his sofa, he is strong enough now to stop my mouth with his hand and then to pul-

my face down to his.
"Freya, when I get well enough to marry you, will you—will you? Don't if yon think you will ever get tired of me!"
"If you won't get tired of me," I murmur, with my face held close down to

his with his one arm. It is in this position that Aunt Ellen finds us a few minutes later. I spring up with a crimson face; but Rolle only laughs and tells her to look at his future

"You might have told me before, "my aunt observes.

"May I have min ask somewhat shamefacedly. "He ought indeed to belong to you, Freya, seeing that you have saved his life.
"I saved his life!" But the thought

has occurred to me before this. "Dr. Allfair has told me—he had sharper eyes than I had—but no wonder just then! And Barbara said something to him as well." My happiness is great when Aunt Ellen clasps me in her arms and calls

me her daughter. And it is exactly six month later, when, just after Goddard and Cherry's marriage and Rolle and I are fixing our wedding day, a letter ar-rives from London with the news of Lumley's engagement to Uncle George Stewart's ward, who, according to my future brother-in-law, is the loveliest and sweetest girl in the three kingdoms. "Bar one!" observes Rolle.

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"I am just going to the kitchen to get it," I tell her, putting my arm around her with a few stammering words of took it, I—I was wicked enough imperial Champagne.

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