

"Well, Ole Peterson come by last week an' tol' Luce, an' she was a tellin' me this mornin'. Hes Zach found out ef 'twas done a purpose er not?"

"Bill Mosby, he said they 'lowed 'twas done a purpose."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Rogers.

"Bob was a mighty good sheep dog, let me tell ye," said her husband. "Zach tol' me hisself he wouldn't take a hundred dollars fer him, an' I know of his bein' offered twenty-five."

"The sheep bizness is a mighty lonesome one ef a feller haint got a sheep dog that's some account," emphatically replied Mr. Lossen, and then the party began a series of dog stories, some reminiscent of various canines owned at different times by the narrators, and some apocryphal relating to dogs they had heard of, and this pleasant discourse was only checked when Billy, who seemed to devote his youthful existence to alternately tormenting the chickens and watching the road for passers by, burst into the house to announce a party of horseback riders coming down the grade. The grade was the point on the road where travelers were first discernable from the Rogers domicile, and was at least half a mile away, thus affording a delightful interval of uncertainty and guessing as to who might be approaching.

"That there's Nan's pony on this side, an' I reckon it's Nan a ridin' 'im," said Mr. Lossen, after a critical survey of the riders.

"An' there's Bud Smith, ridin' 'long side o' her."

"Yes, Bud, he's allers hangin' 'round Nan."

"An' them others is our Tom an' Moll Mosby, an' Hank an' our Liz," announced Mrs. Lossen, triumphantly.

"Look at Nan an' Bud racin'. Which d'ye 'low'll beat?"

The wiry ponies stretched to their work as their excited riders urged them on, reckless of possible stumbles that might befall them as they tore down the grade, and with much laughter and screaming drew up at the bars.

"W'y, Nan, w'at 'dye let Bud beat ye, fer?" asked Mr. Rogers, as soon as he could make himself heard above the general confusion of greetings, as the merry party streamed into the house.

"That's twic't Nan's got beat to-day!" cried Tom Lossen. "Bud, he beat 'er runnin' the race an' Hank, he beat 'er eatin' aigs."

"Law, Nan, ye'll haf to give 'im the han'kerchief now!" exclaimed her mother.

"Well, I wasn't a goin' to kill myself eatin' aigs jest fer a ol' han'kerchief," pouted the fair Nan. "He didn't eat fair, nobow; he et two at a time, an' I stopped."

Hank denied the accusation and was upheld in his

defense by the boys, while Nan and Mollie joined forces and disputed the number of eggs consumed and the manner of their consumption, with great fluency and zeal. Liz sat by, tossing her baby brother and blushing when Hank appealed to her for confirmation to some of his statements.

Then the egg subject was allowed to drop while the the material of the wagered handkerchief was discussed, Hank maintaining that it should be of silk, while Nan declared that cotton was good enough.

When this phase of the wager was exhausted, Mr. Rogers proposed some music, and, after some urging, Mrs. Lossen, who had been a singer in what she called her day, which must have been at some remote period in the history of her youth, favored the company with "Cruel Barb'ry Allen," in such shrill nasal tones that the very dogs howled in terror. Then Mr. Rogers, being duly urged, sang "Wait for the Wagon," with great effect, after which the girls, who wouldn't and couldn't sing alone, sang "The Sweet Bye and Bye," the boys coming in manfully on the chorus.

By the time this flow of soul was concluded the air was full of the sound of tinkling bells, as the sheep streamed down the hillsides, and Mrs. Lossen discovered that they must be going, and after prolonged parting injunctions to "come again when you can stay longer," and repeated invitations to be "neighborly," the creaking wagon was turned homeward, with the young folks riding on either side and indulging in much gay banter, as Hank and Liz gradually dropped to the rear and were lost to sight as the road wound around the hill.

"What ye thinkin' about?" asked Hank, tenderly, when they had ridden awhile in silence that was bliss itself.

Liz started and blushed under the bright blue eyes and frank face of the energetic Hank, who, being a "rus'ler to work," was not likely to prove a "laggard in love."

"Ye look awful purty to-day," he continued, admiringly. "I jest couldn't keep my eyes off'n ye."

Liz, blushing more and more, found it expedient to say something to check the flattery which was so dangerously sweet.

"Nan says I'm so still an' poky I'm jest like a ol' woman," she faltered.

"I wish't you'd be my ol' woman," murmured Hank, putting his hand on hers and riding so close that the sensible ponies stood still and rubbed noses in mild wonder.

The gathering twilight drew softly around the lovers as Liz gave him her bashful answer, and one early star came out and twinkled facetiously, as if in high glee that Cupid should be playing his pranks even in the "settlement."

SHE.