

## THE OVERSEER AT THE SMITHSON RANCH.

It was Easter morning.

Breakfast over at the Smithson ranch, each man occupied himself as duty or inclination dictated.

Dart Wylie, the overseer, saw a half dozen of the men ride off in as many different directions, and then turned in secret disgust from the gang gathered about the table in the sleeping cabin for a day at cards.

Restlessly he paced about the premises for half an hour or more, then, repairing to the sheds, saddled his favorite broncho and galloped off across the frozen prairie.

It was likely to be a hard day for him, and he wondered if Easter could ever bring peace and joy to him again.

He had been a ranchman a little more than a year and half, and thus far had utterly failed to affiliate with his companions, though to a man they respected him. He could not get used to their ways and manner of looking at things. To him Sunday was Sunday as well on the plains, where no church bell had ever chimed, as in the eastern university, from which (to use his own expression) he had "graduated to become a cowboy." He did not profess to be a Christian, but he scorned the lives these men lived with their drinking and paltry betting on cards and horses. Yet he never reproved them, and they simply called him a "tenderfoot" and held no grudge so long as he was a civil overseer. "Poor fellows," he thought, "they have known nothing better, stood on no higher plane." Then he would add bitterly: "Better I had been born to my surroundings."

It was late and the rest had dined when he walked his jaded pony into the "settlement," as the boys called the half dozen ranch buildings grouped together in the lee of a rocky hillside.

The cook had saved his share of the carefully hoarded eggs, and at once began to spread his dinner. These eggs were the legitimate fruit of a few hens bought, at an enormous price, of a "squatter" some fifty miles distant, by Wylie the summer before.

The meal hastily dispatched, the young overseer retired to the tiny cabin built for his especial accommodation. Dropping into a chair, he buried his face in his hands and gave himself up to retrospection.

Some six years before he had graduated from the village school of his native place and entered the state university for a four years' course. His father was not a wealthy man, but he meant to do his duty by his boy—all that remained to him of the wife of his youth. Another wife and other children were his but Dart—Eleanor's child—must have the first and best chance, and the gentle stepmother found no fault.

Dart was a wide-awake youth, a good student, fine looking and winning. Among his classmates was one, a dainty, little, "brown" girl, who completely won the young man's honest, ardent affection. For him the world contained no other maiden so lovely and charming, and, best of all, she seemed to be equally pleased with him.

Dora Hastings was a *petite* creature, with brown, curling hair, brown, curling lashes, brown, liquid eyes and pink and white skin. She had pretty, bird-like ways and a wonderfully innocent, child-like expression.

It was on an Easter morn, as they stood a few minutes alone in the chapel waiting for the rest of the quartette, that he blundered unexpectedly into a declaration of love, and was shyly, but readily, accepted.

"From this time forth Easter shall be to me doubly blessed and sacred," he had whispered as voices sounded outside.

Before the next Sabbath a new student arrived at the university—a man who only wanted a few weeks in special branches, a man with a dark face, half-veiled eyes, color unknown, and sinister expression. No one took much notice of him until he was seen walking with Dora Hastings.

"Do you know him, Dora?" her lover questioned at the first opportunity.

She colored violently, but merely answered—

"Professor Day introduced us."

Dart was not naturally jealous or suspicious, so he soon forgot the matter, until a repetition of the—in his eyes—offence ruffled him decidedly.

"Why, Dora, you must be pleased with that Cresswell, you are with him so often in public places," he said again.

Drawing up her small figure, she answered haughtily—

"Really, Mr. Wylie, if you are going to watch my every movement and call me to account, I think we better separate."

"Oh, Dora, you don't mean it—you can't."

"I can and I do. I hate a man who is jealous and meddling."

"Dora—Miss Hastings, do I understand that you apply those terms to me?"

"Understand what you please," she returned testily, and then began to cry.

Instantly his anger was forgotten, and kneeling beside her he clasped her in his arms.

A reconciliation followed, as a matter of course, he calling himself all manner of hard names.

But the next day she met the dark man at the very same crossing, and they walked for half a mile or more together.

Dart heard of it, but held his peace. The next time that he called at her boarding house she refused