

Ray carried out his plans. There was no one to "say him nay," and he had become infatuated with the west. He found himself the possessor of \$10,000, besides the home place, which he did not care to sell. He bought the Murdock place and invested the rest of his money in cattle. Frank Edmonds was caring for a band of his own, and the two young men were constantly together, as Ray had arranged to board with his friends.

Pretty Nell Edmonds was the belle for many miles around, and received marked attention from all the prosperous young ranchmen, but she showed no favor to anyone until Ray Kingsley came, when it was observed she really enjoyed his society, and everybody predicted a speedy marriage and a happy couple. Ray was a general favorite, as he quickly "fell in" with all customs and was at home anywhere. Indeed, as Frank said, "Ray was made for a westerner."

Such being the case, it was not strange that he easily formed the habit of drinking when asked. He had never drunk at home, but his circle was temperance in sentiment and he had simply had no temptation to drink; but where it was the custom to treat and be treated in every saloon one came to, it was easier to drink than to refuse, especially as he had no scruples against drink.

To his surprise and pleasure he found that he could take a good deal without showing any visible effect. With poor Frank it was different. A very little liquor overcame him and he would become silly and daring, then stupid. It became quite the thing for Ray to lead Frank home from many a gathering.

Social life was necessarily restricted in such sparsely settled districts, but the young people rode out a great deal, and Nell was the best lady rider in that part of the country.

One lovely June day Ray asked Nell to ride, and they took the road to the Murdock ranch, which Ray had named "Willow Glen," on account of a beautiful glen with rippling water that ran through the place.

"No house, yet," commented Ray, "but who needs one without a mistress for it?"

"Let me show you the best building spot," said Nell, anxious to ward off a threatened proposal.

"All right," I shall be glad of your opinion," said Ray, and Nell knew she had not changed the aspect of affairs very much.

They rode to the spot Nell indicated, and viewed it from every point, talking over plans with great interest, he trying to think of the best way of telling her his love, and she using her utmost skill to prevent it. But Ray felt the time had come to speak, and he finally gave up all effort to be diplomatic, and said—

"But, after all, Nell, it will make no difference to me what sort of a house it is or where it stands, if

you are not in it as my wife! Nell, you know it is my one thought by day and dream by night to call you mine! You know I love you, dear! Do you—can you—love me well enough to marry me?"

Nell's merry face paled and she said, faintly—

"Oh, Ray, I ought not to have come to-day! I did not want you to ask me—to be your wife! I can not—marry you."

Ray was confounded. He had not hesitated about declaring his love because he never doubted Nell's, for he felt sure she loved him. What could it mean!

"What is it, Nell?" he managed to articulate. "Why can't you marry me? You do love me!"

He made this assertion with his pleading eyes full upon her agitated face.

"Oh, Ray, how can you!" she cried, a great wave of rose color stealing over her face. "Well, yes, Ray, I can't deny it; I do love you! But—" motioning him away, "I can't marry you because—because I will not marry any man who drinks!"

Ray looked his astonishment. "Why, Nell, every body drinks here—your father, Frank—"

"I know," she interrupted, "but my husband must not." She controlled her voice and went on—

"A man may be able to take considerable and show it very little, but if he drinks, he leads others to drink; he has the society of drinking men, and he is, in a sense, a slave to drink. Now, my husband must be free; he must not be guilty of leading others wrong, and he must prefer my society to that of the men hanging around saloons. True, my brother Frank drank before you came west, but he is not so strong as you and he—he—drinks more since you came. If you had been different, you might have led him."

Nell spoke eagerly—hastily. She made Ray feel, as he had never done before, that he was responsible for his influence.

"I had not thought," he began, "that I was responsible for any one but myself; but I see—try me, Nell. Promise to be mine and I will give up drink, and try to get Frank to do so."

Nell shook her head.

"I can't do that, either," she said. "The man I marry must be his best self—not to please me, but because his Maker requires it, and because he owes it to himself and to his country."

Ray stared in open astonishment at Nell's sentiments. She went on—

"The man I marry may not be the best man in the world, nor the best man I know, but he will be the man I love, and he will be his best self."

Ray attempted to interrupt, but Nell hurried on—

"How could I promise to be yours unless I have the assurance you will be all I expect? Your word will not be enough, for with the best intentions people