

WILD GEESSE

By MARTHA OSTENSO

Amelia, in the garden, worried about what he would say when she returned to the house. She knew that he had come in only to torment her with his knowledge that Mrs. Sandbo was there.

Lind hurried to her room and wondered just how far the news had gone that she had been seen with Mark Jordan. No one could have known that she had eaten with him at the Klovacs', so that any report of this kind must be nothing but malicious conjecture. But she must give them nothing to talk about while she was teaching at Oeland. It occurred to her that Amelia was justified in fearing Caleb if he held any damaging knowledge about her. Once the countryfolk got hold of it her name would be bandied about mercilessly.

"If I see her here again I'll put her off the place," Caleb added, after giving Amelia a dressing down for entertaining Mrs. Sandbo. "We'll have no mixing in with that lot. The Teacher's settin' her cap for Mark Jordan, eh? The Siding knows about it. She'll not want to find out the truth about that handsome young man, eh?" He chuckled under his breath and went out to the cattle yard. Amelia stood still and thought. The Teacher was so fine, so generous—it would not matter to her. But it would matter to him—yes, it would matter a great deal to Mark Jordan. A sudden impulse to her. Caleb was well out of hearing, and Ellen had gone to bring in water.

She called up stairs to the Teacher. Lind came and looked down at her.

"I'm going to bake two chickens—would you like to take one over to that young man at the Klovacs'?" Amelia asked. "Keep it a secret, of course."

Lind smiled at her, hiding her surprise. "What will the Icelanders say if they see me going there?"

"Well—do as you like. They will talk anyway, here."

It followed that Lind took the chicken, full of savory dressing, to the Klovacs' homestead. On the way she wondered at Amelia's sudden bold generosity, and wondered also what the woman's real self was.

Mark Jordan was repairing a binder when Lind rode up to him. His hair hung in damp little curls to his forehead, his bare arms were sunburnt and the muscles stood out on them. She laughed aloud with delight as she looked at him. He came and put his arms around her where she sat in the saddle.

"Do you know, I think you're an awful fraud. There isn't a thing wrong with you, and it's not necessary for you to be here at all," she told him.

"Well—it wasn't, but it is now," he smiled at her. "At least until the end of October."

He helped her down from the saddle and took the parcel she gave him.

"There's a scandal about us," she said. "The prairies have seen me riding with you."

"Well—then we'll have to be married right away. And Oeland will lose a first class school teacher," he declared.

"No—just for spite we'll wait," she laughed. "But that's delicious chicken. Mrs. Gare is a dear. I could kill the old man ten times a day. There must be something terrific keeping her there."

Mark caught her about the shoulders and kissed her repeatedly, taking off her hat so that he could bury his face in her hair.

"You are too lovely to be alive," he whispered. "I think sometimes that I've just dreamt you."

She kissed his hands, that were becoming tough in the palms with callouses. "Wonderful, isn't it?" she said, examining the callouses. "The doctor won't know his trembling patients."

They walked together to the house with their arms about each other, since from that point no one on the road could see them. When they were seated at the table for supper, Mark told her that he had had a letter from Anton Klovacs and that he was returning home in a few weeks. The letter had been dispirited, and Mark feared that the great doctor had not given him much hope. Anton had been spending the summer in a sanitarium, but his money was dwindling, and additional improvements would have to be made on the homestead before the government granted it to him.

"I'll stay on here until the winter work begins, Lind, to help the poor devil out. So that means that we shall be leaving together," Lind looked at him thoughtfully.

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of red and white and black and white. It was not until after Ellen and Martin had gone that it occurred to her that she should have looked for her steers. At Yellow Post the day before, Judith had disposed of the wool she had been hiding under the beam of the loft. She had scorned to ask Johannesson not to mention the sale of the wool to Caleb. He had decided it was time to sell a number of head of cattle. The roads to Nykerk Siding were dry and hard, it would be easy to herd them in. Martin and Ellen were summoned before Caleb in the sitting room and told to prepare to leave on the morrow. Then Martin went out with Caleb and selected fifteen steers and cows from the herd. Among them were the two steers that Judith had assumed were her own in place of the two that had been sold in the spring. "These are Judith's steers," Martin said this time. "Eh? Judith's—oh, yes, yes," Caleb agreed. "She'll get the money for 'em." He prided himself upon his fairness. "But she doesn't want to sell, until the fall." "Nonsense—nonsense. Beef is going down." Judith, who was at Yellow Post with Lind, did not see the steers turned into the pen. The next morning Ellen and Martin left before daybreak, while Judith was helping Amelia indoors with the morning work. So she did not see the herd of cattle mottling the early gray air with their swinging flanks

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It would be at the time of the wild goose flight. Suddenly she clasped her hands about his own and held them to her breast. "Dearest dear—I love you," she said. Mark drew her into his arms and they sat for a long time saying nothing. She left early, after they had arranged to meet again the following day at Yellow Post.

Caleb made daily tours of the fields now and took careful note of the weather. Every evening for a week he went out with his lantern while the others were milking, coming back with it unlit after dark. He spoke to no one except to give directions about the work on the farm, and at mealtime he was absolutely silent. He was absorbed with the process of growth on the land he owned, leading to it his own spirit like physical nourishment.

While he was raptly considering the tender field of flax—now in blue flower—Amelia did not exist to him. There was a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. It was more exacting, even, than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him, but the evil, and the indifference.

paid her for it and she had sent the money at once to the city for material for a dress that Lind had promised to make for her. Judith soon discovered that her steers were gone. She vowed to demand payment for them. Caleb had gone to Yellow Post, and she waited for his return to bring up the subject. At Yellow Post Johannesson spitefully asked Caleb if he had any more of the same wool that Judith had brought in. Caleb smiled blandly and said that he had not. When he returned home he came slowly upon Amelia in the kitchen. She stepped back. "So—she's showing the streak, eh? It'd come out somehow—somehow, yes! And you encouragin' her in it, too, like as not, eh?" His voice was a soft purr, his lower lip thrust forward. Amelia whitened. "What—what is it?" she stammered. "What is it? You know well enough what it is. You know she kept that wool—you know she sold it, you—"

to him, "I'll be wanting the money for those two steers you sent in." "Tch—you! Go in and talk to your mother. She'll show you it pays to be honest." (To Be Continued.) The Washington zoo has recently received two rare lizards from the zoological gardens at Wellington, New Zealand.