

*The Latimer Chapter
of*

*Eyes of Silver
Eyes of Gold
by*

Ellen O'Connell

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Author's Note

The chapter that follows was edited out of the published version of my historical romance novel, *Eyes of Silver, Eyes of Gold*. It is not a short story and cannot stand on its own independent of the rest of the book. My purpose in making it available is to give people who have read the book and who were sorry when it ended a chance for one more peek into the lives of Cord and Anne Bennett.

One thing I should explain is that in early drafts of the book, when Anne and Cord go to town together for the first time, a nasty woman named Wilkinson insults Anne, and Cord refers to her as a lemon. That dialog is what led to the lemon reference in this chapter. In the book as published, when saying what his Cheyenne grandfather would have done with such a woman, Cord does not refer to lemons.

This chapter came after Anne and Cord did the haying and before she realized she was pregnant.

Latimer Chapter

Cord had no more than poured himself a cup of coffee and taken his seat at the poker table at the back of Bob Windon's livery barn, than Bob asked him a surprising question.

"Would you be willing to sell Lady to the Latimers for their Frannie? It's her birthday next week, and all she wants is a horse of her own."

Without answering, Cord picked up his cards and began to sort the hand. Bob had long been the closest thing to a friend he had in Mason. The asking and granting of a favor would take things between them where they had never gone before, and Bob was asking for a considerable favor.

On the other side of the table, his nephews were staring at their cards with such intensity they might as well have hung signs around their necks saying they understood exactly what Bob was asking. In some ways life had been easier before those two started to grow up.

Sighing inwardly, he finally met Bob's eyes. "Maybe. Anne would have to agree. That mare is hers."

"I thought she'd outgrown the mare. All she's riding these days is the red stallion. You got anything else that might do? Gentle, not too big, and broke to death, of course."

"Why don't *you* sell them something?"

"I've been looking for months and haven't been able to get my hands on anything like that, and of course...."

"They can't pay."

"They've got a hundred dollars set aside."

This time Cord didn't bother hiding the sigh. Lady was worth twice that, and since Anne had come into his life, he'd been selling horses for what they were worth. Mostly.

"I'll talk to her."

He waited until that night after chores to tell Anne about Bob's request. She reacted exactly the way he expected.

"They're haters. You know they're haters. Why on earth would we let them have Lady?"

"The girl's too young to hate that much. She needs something like Lady, and even if they could find one like her for sale, they couldn't afford it."

"Then let them buy something they can afford from somebody they approve of."

“It’s Bob that’s asking. I’d like to help him out.”

His words gave Anne pause. She understood why he would want to help Bob out, but that didn’t mean she had to like it, and she didn’t.

“I suppose they want her delivered too, don’t they? The whole family will want to try her out so they can make sure you’re not cheating them. If they welch on the deal, can we charge them livery fees?”

Cord just looked at her.

“Oh, all right. If I can have a kiss, you can give her away if you want to.”

“How about more than a kiss, and you can give me change back?”

She didn’t waste more words, just walked into his arms.

On the day of the promised delivery, Anne ignored Cord’s attempt to talk her into staying home. She wasn’t having any of that. They rode to the Latimers’ farm without conversation.

Anne knew her face was not wreathed with smiles, but Cord’s words as they tied Keeper and Red to some trees in the yard drove the point home in an uncomfortable way.

“You know, Ti-gress, the look on your face right now would do credit to Mrs. Wilkinson.”

She gave him the glare that remark deserved but said nothing.

The Latimers were sturdily built, square-faced farmers whose sour expressions matched Anne's mood. Bob had surely been required to talk a lot harder to convince them to make the purchase than he did to get Cord to do the selling.

Amy Latimer was one of those who had been a casual friend of Anne's for years who now swept her skirts aside if they passed in the street. The menfolk in the family might be less obvious, but not by much.

Still, looking at Frannie Latimer, Anne could feel her attitude softening in spite of herself. No one who didn't know would guess that today was Frannie's tenth birthday. An almost fatal illness as an infant had left her small for her age with translucent skin and fragile, bird-like bones—and a weak and atrophied left leg. Like many chronically ill youngsters, the child had an unusually sweet and uncomplaining disposition, and the whole town loved her.

Frannie's stubborn determination to learn to ride was understandable. On horseback she would be able to move with the speed and ease denied her on the ground. Bob had been helping the little girl for some time now in exchange for work her brothers did around his stable, and he had confessed to Cord he was stymied.

Frannie couldn't control her left leg well enough to use a sidesaddle at all, and he was making no progress with her riding astride either. A horse as well trained and gentle as Lady should be a big help.

Bob and Cord shook hands, but the Latimers stayed where they were. Only Frannie was too excited to hew the family line. She evaded her mother's restraining hand and limped over to pet Lady, smiling at Bob but not looking at Cord, reinforcing Anne's uncharitable opinion. Maybe she was a sweet child, but she was going to grow up as mean and narrow-minded as her parents, and that was that.

Bob saddled Lady and led the mare towards a corral near the barn. He lifted the girl into the saddle, and she began to ride around the corral.

Her problem was evident immediately. Anne could not see how the little girl would ever be able to do more than sit on a horse, for she had to compensate for the weakness of her crippled leg by throwing her weight heavily toward the good side.

If Bob had been unable to find a way past this, talking wasn't going to do it. Frannie didn't need Lady. A horse with hardly any training would do if it were gentle enough.

Anne watched Cord and Bob talking it over, expecting the whole thing to end any minute. What happened was Bob lifted Frannie down, and he and Cord started what looked like destruction of the saddle. Soon Karl Latimer and his oldest son, Mike, were leaning over the two, questioning.

Lord, thought Anne, we're not only not selling them the horse, even for half what she's worth, we'll end up buying the damn saddle.

Not too much later, however, Cord resaddled Lady, and Bob lifted Frannie back on. As Lady walked off, Anne saw a difference right away. Cord walked beside the horse, giving Frannie instructions that had her spine aligned with the mare's in minutes.

Bob left the corral and came to stand beside Anne. After an unhappy look around, Latimer and his son left too, then hung on the gate as if expecting Frannie to need rescuing any second.

Leaning his arms on the top rail, Bob watched the goings on but addressed Anne. "You sure don't look too happy about this. I know it's my fault, and I'm sorry."

"You're not the only one who doesn't like the way I look today. My husband told me I look like Mrs. Wilkinson."

"Ah, now, Anne, the only time I've ever heard him come close to sounding poetic is talking about

you. You know as well as I do he doesn't think you resemble Mrs. Lemon in the slightest way."

Amusement finally erased the last of Anne's irritation. "Mrs. Lemon! Does he know you call her that?"

"Half the town's been calling Emma that ever since that day at Miles' store. Behind her back, of course. Sure he knows. He doesn't miss much."

Anne shook her head, but she was smiling now. "What did he do that helped Frannie so much?"

"Ripped up the leather on the stirrup so it bends under her and gives her support above the knee. It won't do for permanent, but I'll talk the saddler into fixing something padded for her. It makes a big difference, doesn't it?"

Frannie was now jogging the horse around the corral, still sitting straight.

"This is why you wanted them to buy the horse isn't it?" she said. "It has nothing to do with needing a well trained horse. You wanted him to help her."

"Yup, that's what I wanted, and he knew it the minute I mentioned it. These people would never agree if I just said right out I wanted to ask him for help, but I never meant to cause trouble between the two of you."

"There's no trouble between us. You know he can charm me into going along with anything he

wants. It's these wretched people, and the way he just ignores them. He's giving Frannie help she needs, and they can't even be polite."

"Anne...." Bob gave her a troubled look, and then went on. "If he did what you think you want, he'd be what they think he is. Then you probably wouldn't like him so much, and neither would I. He's been doing a pretty good job of dealing with their kind all his life, you know, and here and there, now and then, he makes a few cracks. That's probably the biggest reason he's doing this today."

"What do you mean 'cracks?'"

"Well, Karl and Amy, they're probably too old to change, but the youngsters' minds aren't set yet. Sometimes, when people actually meet him, they find they're wrong, and it makes cracks—cracks in closed minds. You know I talked to John Stone a while back. He said he guessed he'd never like him much, but he 'never met a man who engendered more respect.'"

Bob's fairly accurate imitation of John Stone's affected tone made Anne laugh, and his words made her think. He was right, if Cord hated people like the Latimers back, he would be a different person, and she wouldn't love him so much. She vowed to try and curb her fiercely defensive reactions to the haters, but didn't expect to be tested immediately.

Frannie was now circling Lady away from the corral fence, learning to direct the horse without using the fence for a guide. Bob and Anne looked away as another horse came into the yard, and Andy Creighton, who was courting the Latimers' oldest daughter, dismounted and walked over to the corral.

"Isn't it bad enough you let him deliver the horse here without letting him near Frannie? And why'd he have to bring his whore?"

Cord was on the other side of the corral, too far to hear, but Bob's face showed anger as he turned and took a step towards the Latimer group. He got no further before Mike Latimer spoke. "You just shut up, Andy. Any more talk like that and that 'breed won't have to break both your legs. I will."

Bob stopped and turned back to Anne. "If it's all right with you, Anne, we'll just leave it there for now?"

"Yes, let's leave it. You were right in what you said—imitating them won't change them."

They watched in silence for another half hour as Frannie's ability improved steadily. Then Cord got Keeper and began to ride beside her. Soon after, Frannie was taking her first ride out of the corral, out to the road and back. Anne could see Cord's hands moving as he talked to the little girl, and

she knew perfectly well what kind of theories Frannie was hearing.

Bob asked then, "Why is it he's got you riding the fancy red horse, and he's still on that homely brown gelding?"

"Oh, he says Red is so sensitive he's more trouble to ride than it's worth, and since I don't mind babying him, I can have him."

"Uh huh." There was a world of disbelief in that sound.

"I don't believe it either. But the fact is that if we had to get rid of all the others and could only keep one horse, that homely brown gelding would be it. That's how he got his name, I guess. Cord says that's the most honest horse he's ever ridden, that he's never asked for anything Keeper didn't give. He just likes him."

Bob admitted he understood that. There had been a few animals he'd taken a shine to himself over the years.

Before long they were back. Frannie and the next two youngest children led Lady to the barn, and Cord and Karl Latimer exchanged bill of sale and cash without smile or handshake. The thanks came from Bob Windon.

Cord walked with Anne to where Red was tied. "Still mad?"

She said nothing but tilted her head at him and ran the very tip of her tongue over her upper lip.

“Witch. If you think you’re getting even by torturing me all the way home, you might find yourself upside down under a bush between here and there.”

“Devil.” She grinned at him, happy again now. One of the very best things was the knowing. There wouldn’t be any bushes on the way home. They would tease each other every mile, secure in the knowledge that when they got home they could spend as long as they liked wrapped in each other’s arms, until the flames subsided to embers once more.

Frannie Latimer’s high young voice interrupted this happy line of thought.

“Mr. Bennett, my mother made a cake for my birthday, and she says I can ask you and Mrs. Bennett to stay and have cake with us. Would you? Please?”

A grim-faced Karl Latimer was right behind his daughter, not pleased, but not gainsaying the invitation either.

Cord’s shrug told Anne it was her choice. She glanced past Karl to where his wife stood in the yard and met the other woman’s eyes. Amy’s expression never softened, but she gave a slight nod before turning away. A crack.

“Yes, thank you, Frannie, we’d be pleased to have some of your birthday cake.”

Boards had been laid over barrels out in the yard and covered with white cloths to make one long table. As they walked toward the rest of the Latimers, already seating themselves around the table, Anne was surprised to feel Cord’s arm around her waist. Except for helping her in and out of the wagon or buggy, he never touched her in front of anyone.

At first she thought that after their teasing exchange the urge to touch was so strong it was overcoming his reticence, but getting closer to the unwelcoming faces around the table, Anne realized it was more than that.

He was warning these people. Although he hadn’t heard Andy Creighton’s insult, he knew what haters were like, and he was serving notice—a remark like that would not be allowed to pass.

In spite of the reason for his possessive touch, Anne slipped her own arm around him in the same way, delighted to have the chance.

A short while later, Bob Windon watched Cord and Anne leave, trotting out the driveway knee to knee. The thing had gone better than he’d dared hope. Unexpectedly, Mike Latimer spoke from behind him. “He really helped Frannie, didn’t he?”

Bob nodded. "Yes, he did. I've been stuck for quite some time and couldn't think of anything to do. Now we can get someplace, I think."

"If Frannie was at your place when he was there, would he help her again?"

"That's no problem, Mike. He'll help. The problem is the way your family sees it."

"I can take care of that. I'll bring her. He's there Sunday afternoons a lot isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

"He's not like I thought, not at all like I thought. Maybe I'd like to know him better myself."

It wasn't a crack at all. It was a previously locked door thrown open wide enough for a man to walk through. Bob put an arm around Mike's shoulders, turning back towards the table and thinking of a second piece of cake. "I bet we can arrange that too. I just bet we can."

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