

After the Storm

Written for The Western Home Monthly By T. L. Neish

THE street in the little country town was deserted and the north wind in triumphant sport was whirling the flying snow along the clear space, and driving it eddying around the corners of buildings to rise in sudden swirls to the eaves and to be sent flying away to mingle again in the wild blizzard. The shadows of one side of the street were thrown across the roadway to the sunlit opposite walls, far out across the country beyond the town the late afternoon sun was making brilliant miles of moving drift speeding southward across the polished surface of the snow.

Somewhere away out there stood a low-roofed farm house from whose two chimneys the smoke was blowing in a sudden, drooping, waving line, as if the escaping comfort of the house were stricken with instant panic at the low line of broken storm clouds from which the wind seemed to come. The glowing sun was nearly setting when the door on the sheltered side of the house opened, and shut as a man came out followed by a cloud of steam, into the frosty air. His fur hat was pulled close down over his ears and his wind-resisting double suit of hard cloth overalls was buttoned tight up under his chin. He stood for a moment looking out across at the desolate sunset scene, and then, as if the frosty air and the sight of nature's wonderful supremacy and beauty struck sudden inspiration into his comfort-stored, well-nourished body, he brought his leather-mitted hands together with a forceful bang, and laughed a deep-seated, joyous laugh. A hairy collie dog lying close to the wall showed a red eye, bright with appreciation of his fun, but made no further movement to disturb its warmth-enclosing fur. The man went round to the back of the house and with a shovel broke the hard drift around the wood pile, and knocking each piece of wood against another to clear it of snow, he piled full his extended arm to the top of the shoulder with fuel for the stove inside.

The cheery, sharp click of the stricken wood brought a little face to the thick-frosted window, and he could see the child's eye watching him through the narrow strip of clear glass at the edge of the pane. As he rose with his arm load and passed the window he tapped the wood work with a stick in recognition of the interest of the child, and then a sudden gust of blizzard made him lean back to preserve his balance as it almost pushed him round the corner of the house. With his free hand he opened the door and, entering, closed it behind him with a backward movement of his foot. The wood tumbled with a rattle into the box at the stove, and he was outside again.

This time the joy at his heart caused him to precipitate himself upon the dog and hold him fast to his snow bed as he began to struggle under the friendly grasp.

Both man and dog rose together, the dog sneezing and shaking his hair in enjoyment at the sudden frolic.

Two or three such carryings of wood and the box inside was filled high and was being supplemented by an overflow pile on the floor, until the tidy woman who was his wife, exclaimed with a smile, that he must be reckoning on being warm to-night. He told her of some horses he had seen at the straw pile out over on the unfenced field, and only half agreeing with her that they must be having a bad time, he got into his sheepskin coat and went out to the stable to water the stock, a business he had put off all day while the storm was at its height. Now, however, it had to be done, and he decided to haul the water from the well to the stable in the barrels instead of turning the animals out. He was afraid that if he turned loose his horses they would be half mad with frolic and end by running away to the straw pile to join the other horses there.

The stable felt warm and comfortable and his team stretched themselves lazily as he buckled on the collars, but in the gustiness outside the stable door they would hardly stand while he fastened them together. The stone-boat and barrels stood out on a wind-swept place and the team shied round to avoid the blast as he fastened the tugs to the whiffletrees, so that with their impatience he had just time to catch hold of the wind-disordered lines and step on board as they suddenly wheeled and started off at a smart trot. As they plunged over the new snow-drifts, it was all he could do to keep control and to balance himself and the barrels on the tilting sleigh, and at the well it was risky to leave the team while he pumped the water. Some shovelling was necessary at the pump and he had to leave the team out of his reach in order to do it, and with nothing to hold them but the lines fastened together around a barrel. Handicapped as he was by resisting the wind and by being half stupefied by the snow which whirled up into his face, he was just too late, when the horses moved, to seize the lines again. The barrel blew over and away the horses went, hastened, rather than recalled by his loud-shouted, half-affrighted "Whoa."

Away they went right across the wind to the straw pile, the lines blown trailing out to one side. The spirited horses, fretted past endurance with discomfort, had no plan but just to run. The horse on the sheltered side was the faster and kept a little ahead so that as a team they could not wheel off down-wind, but kept straight for the straw pile, where the horses there, loath to rouse themselves from their statue-like immobility, were awakened to amazed movement by the unnatural approach. They had only just time to scatter out as the team came up to them, and, winded as the team was, by the

strain of plunging at speed over the drifts, it paused in the shelter of the pile, and they all came up together to examine one another. The man lost no time in following, but when he came near the strange horses moved out to avoid him, and the excited team following their movements, started off again; this time to the stable.

There the man, angry and exhausted, found them, and fortunately he was wise enough to check the latent spirit of tyranny which was roused within him, so that instead of bullying the harmless dependent animals, he took them for another short run and gathering up the tumbled barrels, succeeded in hauling the water without further mishap.

The team, as he unharnessed them, were awkward, and as if quite aware of the angry, volcanic impulse within him, seemed to push against him and resist him through their own suppressed half-fear of what he would do. He watered the cattle and the colts with a half-savage but silent impatience which made the colts check unnaturally the hurried gratification of their thirst, and lift their heads repeatedly from the pail he held, to eye with distrust the mood in him, which made his sudden and unusual movements, and when, after watering, he was giving the team their grain, he could not resist an impulse which made him give one of them a blow with the back of his mitted hand on the side of its sensitive, suspicion-feeling nostril.

The horse stepped back so suddenly as to break its worn, old halter, and turned into the passage and pressed up between two cows, who turned affrighted, kindly faces, and nosed at the shoulders of the unaccustomed invader. Then the man, sobered now, climbed over the stall into the cows' manger, and the horse doubly affrighted, backed suddenly up and wheeled round into its stall.

Freed of his anger, the man spoke to him, and fastening the tie-rope to the old, broken halter, made a repair with a piece of twine, while the horse, no longer suspicious, proceeded to enjoy its feed.

Outside the wind was still tearing and the darkness coming on as the man crossed from the stable to the house. He passed the dog, which was still curled up under the sheltering wall, and entering the warm, comfortable glow of the room inside, he took off his coat and jacket, observant of the neat figure of his wife, and, as she lifted two bubbling fried eggs from the pan, he took her in his arms and gave her a pure, self-humbled, love-inviting kiss.

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The wind had fallen, the moon shone upon the glistening plain, the horses from the straw pile were following their leader with plunging steps across the drifts to paw for grass beyond the cultivated field, and all around the house was still, when presently the collie dog went lightly o'er the hard-packed snow down to a neighbor's on the creek below.

Dollar Dinners

Recently a young man who is making plans to leave the farm because life there is too slow and money-making harder than it is in a city position was called by business to a city for a day and he dropped into a dollar-a-day hotel for his dinner. The regular dinner was served to him and he went out hungry. He might have called for extra helpings, of course, but when he saw the dots of vegetables and the thin slivers of meat on the little plates he concluded that a second helping would do him no good. So the next meal he entered a restaurant and proceeded to "eat his fill," as he told his mother on his return home. He selected a plain, satisfying meal and when he got his slip it was marked one dollar. And all he had was a man's portion of roast beef, potatoes, beans and pie with milk to drink.

"I tell you, Mother, I found something out today," he said when he got home. "You've been serving dollar meals to us right along and didn't know it. Here's six of us in the family and to fill us up as you've been doing would cost exactly six dollars each meal—particularly dinner—in the city." The good lady was skeptical, but her son soon convinced her with pencil and paper that the good meals she served would cost that amount in the city. "I tell you what," he added in conclusion, "the farm looks better to me than it did before I went to the city. I couldn't afford to pay even fifty cents a meal if I went to town to work and at twenty-five cents, which is the regular price for cheap boarding, I know I'd starve to death. I think I'll stay here a while longer."

It seems very strange that young, healthy, hungry farm boys and girls never consider the question of food when they want to leave the farm, and yet it is one of the most vital things as they find out later. They soon learn that high rents, expenses for light and fuel, breakages, unpaid bills and the swift decay of foods in hot weather force the restaurant keeper and the manager of the cheap boarding-house to serve the plainest and cheapest fare. And this fare is almost uneatable to the young farm boy or girl. These young workers are amazed to know that left-overs are carefully worked into the next meal and that "come-backs," as the re-served dishes are called, are matters of necessity to the cheap boarding-house keeper. From the "dollar dinners" of the farm prepared in a clean light kitchen to the scanty meals of a city eating-house is a swift transition to the healthy young people, and it requires real heroism to force down the unpalatable foods at first.

Of course there are hotels and restaurants where the choicest food that earth and sky and sea can produce is served, but the young person at the foot of the ladder sees the outside of these palaces.



Troop of Kurd Cavalry which the Turks are hurling against the Russians in the Passes of the Caucasus Mountains