

# A Woman Who Homesteaded

By Gertrude Major

How I came to be left, at the age of forty-seven, almost entirely without money and compelled to walk in crutches, would make a story of itself, but if I tried to write it it would make me too sad; so I shall just begin by saying that such was the fact. Not knowing what else to do, I began to figure on homesteading, as I found that no one wanted to employ a crippled woman who was already past her youth.

I was in Rossland, B. C., and people there were just beginning to talk of the Peace River country and other areas full of promise, and of the railroads that were going to criss-cross all through Canada. I felt that, if I could only get a few of those acres, I would have some weapon to throw at the wolf that I could almost hear barking at my door.

After a great deal of reading up on the country I finally filed on a claim of forty acres, about fifteen miles from Rossland. It was heavily timbered and well watered, but it took almost my last dollar to pay for the papers. I thought I could live my first few months in a tent, but found I could not do so on account of the wild animals abounding in the forests. I heard of a carpenter three miles from Rossland whose wife was ill. I went to see him and agreed to do all of the work and nurse his wife (I could do a good deal in the house in spite of my crutch) if he would build a cabin on my place. He agreed to do this, but said he had no way of getting material for building on the place. So when I got through working for him I went and cooked for a dozen "lumber jacks" and so made enough to pay for having the lumber taken to the claim. I made arrangements to have the provisions for six months charged at the nearest store. During this time I lived principally on bacon, cornmeal and coffee.

As soon as the lumber was on the place we went out. We camped the first night in the open by a big fire. The next night

the cabin was up. My furniture had gone out with the lumber. It consisted of a little rust-eaten stove and a cot, donated by the carpenter's family, two china plates, a tin cup, a frying-pan, some steel knives and forks, some comforters and a sofa cushion.

The man and boy who built the cabin left on the morning of the third day. That day, and the week following, was a time of terror. Never before did I dream what loneliness could be. It was so still that the silence made my ears ache. I could hear the worms gnawing in the new fence rails that the men had split and put up around the cabin. At night there were sounds that cut the silence with an indescribable effect of terror. There was the long cry of the coyotes, the whine of the bobcats and the snarl of the cougars. They came up to my very doorstep and looked with gleaming eyes into my window. I think I should have gone mad had I not known that I could leave my claim for a time after six months. I checked off the days, one less each night. I chopped wood, slowly and painfully, and little by little I got a little clearing made.

It was worse after the snow came. The loneliness became greater than I could bear, and one morning, risky as I knew it to be, I started out to walk to the nearest neighbor, a distance of three miles, through trackless snow. We had blazed the way when we came in. I had a terrible experience, but I would have borne anything for the sake of the sound of a human voice. The snow was deep, but it was not very cold and I kept warm walking, but the trip took me all day long.

Toward nightfall I saw a cougar that had been trailing me silently for I know not how long. He was probably thirty feet away when I saw him, I brandished my crutch and he retreated a little, but I didn't like the watchful gleam of his eye. I was completely exhausted when I reached