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## "Little Willie"

Specially written for The Western Home Monthly by Bertha C. Foster. Author of "The Fates of Three," "Rose Celeste," etc.

THRESHING was in full swing. Life on the farm was one big "hum" of work from four o'clock in the morning till after sunset. The tired men came in to supper at seven o'clock, and, after seeing that their still more tired teams were comfortable for the night, retired to bed, to sleep like logs till the voice of Mrs. McBain, shouting from the bottom of the stairs, awakened them in the morning. Then they rose to haul more grain to the station, help with the machine, and do all the usual work connected with threshing.

There was no doubt about it, Mrs. McBain was a hustler. She was of Scotch extraction, as her name betokened, though she was born down East, in Ontario. Her husband had come "fra Scotland" when quite a lad, and had settled in that same village, where he met and wooed the comely Mary. He was a straight, hard-working man, kind and good to his wife and family, but he had not the business capacity that his wife possessed. When they went out West, and settled on a homestead, they prospered, and soon their farm increased in size and value, till it grew to be one of the best in the district. In spite of some bad crops, poor seasons, and all the other drawbacks a western farmer has to contend with, the McBains flourished. Mrs. McBain was wise enough to urge her husband not to put all his eggs in one basket, and they did not depend entirely on the wheat. Their butter won prizes at all the dairy shows, their horses were celebrated, and they owned the biggest herds in the neighborhood. But in the midst of success Mr. McBain died, and Mrs. McBain was left to carry on the farm as best she could. Her friends urged her to sell out, for the money she would realize would enable her to retire in comfort. But Mrs. McBain refused. She loved farm life; her home was comfortable, and hard work suited her. She decided to keep it on till her son—a lad of sixteen, at college in Winnipeg—should be old enough to carry it on. Things went well enough, though she had some trouble with the hired men—but Edna was the real difficulty.

Edna was pretty, undeniably pretty and attractive, and Edna's admirers were plentiful. Moreover, Edna did not share in her mother's love of work. Farm life was distasteful to her. She pined for the town, for all the delights of theatres, picture shows, large stores, and everything else she had enjoyed when attending school at Regina.

Mrs. McBain spoilt her only daughter. She worked and toiled that her girl might be a "lady," and do nothing but amuse herself, and the consequence was Edna grew a very discontented, spoilt young person indeed.

But during the threshing season even Edna had to set to and help, for, though her mother kept a hired girl, with seven or eight extra men to cook for and lunches to send out to the field, there was more than two women could possibly do.

Among the men hired that year, for the threshing, was a tall young Englishman. He was fresh out from the Old Country, and his grip, clothes, manners, all earned for him the rather scornful title of "Dude." The other men promptly christened him "Little Willie." He accepted the name with his calm, good-tempered smile, as he did the constant "roastings" of his companions; and after a while they left him alone. Mrs. McBain, who at first regarded him rather scornfully, soon realized that there was good stuff in "Little Willie." Edna never has anything to do with the hired men—her mother wisely kept her in the parlor when the men came into the kitchen for their meals; but even the superior Miss Edna noticed "Little Willie." At first she laughed at him with the rest, but in the end his unfailing good manners won her respect.

There were several little ways in which he managed to make himself useful to her. When she was churning, somehow it was "Little Willie" who was

at hand to draw her a bucket of fresh, cold water. It was "Little Willie" who always had time to hitch up her horse when she wanted to drive, though Edna was well able to harness him herself. On Sunday the girl was not a little surprised to see the young man, dressed in exceedingly well-cut English clothes, march into church.

"I guess we'll have to give him a ride home," Mrs. McBain whispered, as they went out, "there is plenty of room in the rig and it seems sort of mean to let him have that long walk."

Edna shrugged her shoulders indifferently, but though "Little Willie" went at once to help the two ladies into the rig, he politely refused their offer of a lift.

"Who's your new beau, Edna?" enquired a sunburnt young farmer, with a covert smile in "Little Willie's" direction.

Edna tossed her pretty head. "Do you mean our new hired man?" she answered scornfully.

The words and tone were perfectly audible to "Little Willie," and the color flamed in his cheeks. He touched the brim of his straw hat and moved away, while Edna's companion laughed.

"Say, I've got a dandy new auto; come for a drive this afternoon, Edna?" Edna agreed readily, though Jim Parks was a man she did not care much about.

Mrs. McBain said nothing, but she was unusually kind to "Little Willie" when he came in to dinner.

It was a warm September afternoon, and Edna, dressed in her best clothes, sailed gaily off in the car.

Harvest had been unusually early in the West that season, and threshing was well advanced. Already the wheat fields were looking bare, with the stooks disappearing, and only the stacks of straw to show where the grain had lately been.

It was growing dusk when the motor car returned, and Jim Parks dropped the girl at the gate leading up the lane to the farm house. To her surprise it was closed, for usually it was open, summer and winter. She fastened it back, and went slowly on towards the house, thinking of all Jim had said during their drive. Jim was well off and had a nice house and good farm, and the auto added largely to his attractions in her girlish reckonings. But she was not at all sure that she wanted to marry yet awhile, and she hated the idea of living on a farm.

Suddenly a shout startled her. She looked round, and close behind her came a huge red bull.

"Run, run, Miss Edna," and she recognized "Little Willie's" voice, "run while I try to attract his attention!"

The girl needed no second bidding, she flew towards the building, terror adding wings to her feet.

"Little Willie" had taken off his coat, which he waved at the enraged animal, which turned upon him with an angry bellow.

Edna burst into the kitchen, where the men were assembled for supper.

"The bull," she panted, "the Dawson's bull has escaped, and he has got 'Little Willie'—down in the lane."

Seizing broomsticks, pitchforks, anything they could lay hands on, the men hurried out, while Edna burst into wild sobs.

A sickening sight met them in the lane, for the bull had soon got rid of the coat with which "Little Willie" tried to blind him, and had the young man down on the ground. Mrs. McBain, who had followed the men out, gave a shrill scream just as the beast lowered his head to gore his prostrate foe. The animal paused, lashing his tail fiercely, and Mrs. McBain screamed again. Two of the men had run for ropes, and while the rest tried to keep the animal at bay, they succeeded in roping him. Very soon he was helplessly entangled in the long whirling ropes, and left to come to his senses. But "Little Willie" did not move. Mrs. McBain bent over him and