

We held a council of war. The end of it was that we drove our stock into the town next day, thirty miles, and sold it. It didn't make us rich, but at least we got the price of the hides. Then three of us went to work in the coal-shippings, and Jim Clayton went back to stay with the women. He had smashed his shoulder that summer and was of no mortal use with shovel and pick. We were to keep them in supplies, and it looked as if, after all, things might have been worse.

And they got worse before a great while. The coal company petered out just as the real cold weather set in. We took back a big load of coal; it was the only pay we ever got for our last fortnight's work, and we called another council.

Along in November late—about the time when they were keeping Thanksgiving on the side where they know what Thanksgiving means—we started out on a buffalo hunt. There was enough to eat, such as it was, for a month in the cabins, and fuel enough to keep them warm; and by that time we thought work might begin again. Anyway, we'd have our meat for the rest of the winter.

Well, it's no use to go over that. It wasn't a pleasure trip. We weren't out for the fun of killing. We camped out at night and rode and shot and dressed game by day, and did not starve nor quite freeze to death; and we got back again onto the plains along in December.

I wanted to push through and get home, but the horses were played out; and all the next day, after we struck the level we just crawled along. We had not heard a word since we started, and I was pretty anxious—Molly was not well when I left her; but there was no choice about it. I had to go; the women were with her, and there was a doctor in the town, and Clayton had a good horse, and we had to do about that as we had done about everything else—take our chances.

I shan't forget that day. Along in the middle of the morning a norther began to blow. It did not snow, although the sky thickened up with gray, woolly-looking clouds, low down and threatening. You never felt a norther? A wind that goes through your bones, that clutches your heart and stops your brain, that breaks you up, body and soul. You don't know anything about cold till you've felt

one. If there is such a thing as a frozen hell that's where these winds come from. It isn't pure cold, it's ghost cold, and all the infernal regions let loose, yelling and thundering up in the awful emptiness over your head and around you.

Love the prairies? Well, you can love them a good deal better on paper than anywhere else. But there's a fascination about them, somehow. It's like the sea. A man that's got his living on them for ten years is fit for nothing else in God's world. He can't get away. He's spoiled for everything else under heaven. He's got to have the sky and a chance to breathe. It's about all there is to get, better than he can have anywhere else; but it's a sure fact that so much he's got to have, whatever else gets left. It's like a poem, maybe—"I ain't much on rhyme" myself—driving across them in warm weather, horses fresh and well fed, with a big tent and spring cots for camping and a supply wagon with everything you can think of but ice, and maybe that, all the world a-ripple with summer green; the south wind surging like a warm ocean, and the sky blue and soft and arching away up to the great wide throne. That's one thing. To go trailing along, horses dead beat and half-starved, pulling a big wagon through sloughs up to the axles or over frozen ruts that wring every bolt in the concern and every bone in your body; with mile after mile of dead grass stretching out to the edge of the world; with buzzards swinging up out of nowhere, more like something infernal than any decent live thing; with coyotes yelping and crying all night—that's another thing, and the kind that doesn't get talked about much. Perhaps you remember that item in last winter's newspapers, a half-dozen lines or so—two families frozen in a Texas norther, horse, dogs, and all, just as they stood.

That night we went into camp ten miles from home. There was a ravine and plenty of brush, and the horses were ready to drop in their tracks, and that last ten miles was one of the things that couldn't be done. So we got our fires made and our horses fed and sheltered as well as we could, and put some heart into ourselves with buffalo, steak and hot coffee; and the rest of them packed themselves into the wagon. Some one had to stand guard