

The Battle of Plummer Township

By Ambrose Lewthwaite

The time was January, 1901. The place was a certain section on the Sault Ste. Marie branch of the C.P.R., along the north shore of Lake Huron. The section hands boarded at a farmhouse, about half a mile from the station. One of our gang, called George, was a man of nearly fifty, and reputed to be the owner of a farm down in Renfrew County, but was as yet unattached. Our boarding-boss employed a young man, Johnny by name, in the capacity of chore-boy, that winter. Another member of the household was a young lady named Nelly, whose position was that of a domestic help.

It came to pass that George took quite a fancy to Nelly. Maybe he was not to be blamed, for Nelly was rather a nice girl—not bad-looking, of a merry disposition, and a hard worker. But, anyway, she did not reciprocate, and George took it into his head that Johnny exerted too much of an influence over her. So, one night on the way home from town he issued an ultimatum to Johnny in some such terms as these: "Johnny, if you want that girl you've got to fight for her." Now, Johnny was not worrying himself about the girl, but he saw that George was spoiling for a fight, so he accepted the challenge. "And when will we have it?" asked George. "Any time you like," said Johnny. "All right," George replied; "we'll pull it off tomorrow morning after breakfast." Johnny agreed.

At breakfast next morning an ominous silence reigned. George got through first, and, rising from the table, said: "Well, Johnny, I'll be waiting for you outside." "Good," said Johnny; "I'll be with you in a minute." It has been the writer's lifelong practice to eat his meals in spite of all counter-attractions; so on this occasion he stayed with the breakfast, and was not an actual spectator of the fray. Reliable testimony, however, indicated that the contestants "went to it" literally without gloves, oblivious of the temperature, which was 18 below zero. Johnny had the advantage of nimbleness, but George outclassed him in weight and strength; and whenever Johnny landed him a specially skillful blow, George would thus encourage him: "That's a good one, Johnny, give us another." The progress of the conflict, though

vigorously prosecuted by both belligerents, was indecisive; and when one of the neutrals proposed to intervene, George bade him keep off, saying: "I'll attend to you, Jim, when I get through with this man!" But even the heat of battle was not sufficient to counteract the coldness of the atmosphere, and Johnny presently was obliged to intimate that his hands were half-frozen; so George suggested that they should suspend militant operations while they warmed their hands. This being mutually agreed upon, they returned into the house, and stood alongside one another at the kitchen stove, thawing out their hands, with the gore running down their faces, presenting one of the most ludicrous sights the writer has ever beheld.

Presently our foreman said: "Well, George, it's seven o'clock; are you going to work?" "What do you say, Johnny?" asked George. "Will we finish this job now, or have it out some other time?" "I guess we might let it stand over till another time," was Johnny's reply. So George washed the outward and visible effects of the fight from his hands and face, and went out with us for our daily ride on the hand-car in the cool morning air.

As far as the writer is aware, however, the combat was not renewed, and it may be that the issue remains to this day undecided. As for Nelly, though rather amused at George's foolishness, it distressed her to see him carry it to the extent of a declaration of hostilities. Her feeling toward him was one of dislike, and, even had he won the war, he had no sufficient reason to hope for the fruits of victory.

The moral of this little tale is, perhaps, sufficiently obvious to make a specific statement of it unnecessary; but here it is: Let no two men fight over a girl; for she may not want either of them.

"If we wish to live through this war we must use everything that is within us—and one of those things is our sense of humor."—Lloyd George.