

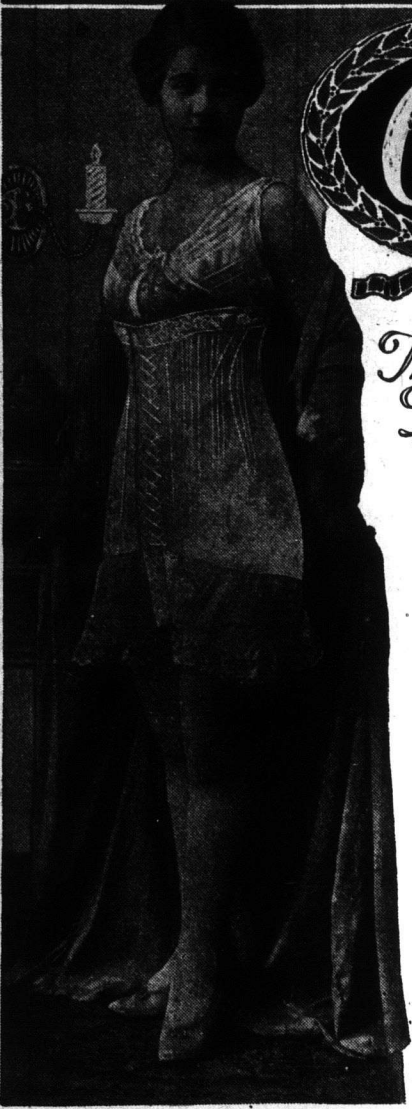
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joining. As for John's own grain, he had calculated that it would run thirty bushels to the acre, at the most conservative estimate.

But, somehow as he thought of his wheat now, he didn't seem to care how it threshed out.

Another week of dry, sultry weather passed. The sun went down each night like a ball of fire and the hot earth fairly begged for moisture. The wayside grass had turned to a dried yellow, and the farmers, from worrying about storms, began to pray for showers, and to dread a drought.

One night as John Ward was going over his acres on a tour of inspection, he came upon Carr's boarder. The scientist was trespassing, and John, generally the most hospitable of men, told him so. It was on the creek bank, and it was their first encounter.

"I merely stepped across the creek," explained the scientist, in a polite but cold voice, "to gather some fungi which I had been told grew here."

"I'll thank you to keep off my place just the same," was John's rejoinder. "There's plenty of that stuff on Carr's land."

Fitzherbert answered fully to Rosemary's description of him. He was slim and elegantly attired, but his face, while handsome after a way, was not an open one. It was a thin, ascetic face, and the mouth carried a perpetual smile which seemed to John Ward more like a sneer.

More words followed, and the quarrel was begun. It had started from nothing, but it was fanned by hatred and jealousy, and finally the young farmer, goaded to a fury, seized his adversary and flung him bodily into the creek. No sooner had he achieved this dramatic coup than he regretted it.

However, the water was scarcely three feet deep in its deepest part, and Fitzherbert soon scrambled out and up the opposite bank. Here he turned, and without a word, managed to convey in one look, a whole volume of meaning. Interpreted in one single clause, it seemed to say to John Ward: "I'll get even!"

Rosemary was picking wild raspberries the following afternoon, in the Carr's upper field—the one that ran down to the edge of the creek where John's finest wheat grew—when a pungent odor suddenly assailed her nostrils. She sat in the lee of a hedge, before a thickly-loaded berry bush, and not troubling to rise, at first, went on gathering the fruit, her thoughts busy.

But after a moment the odor again became noticeable. Smoke! And in this weather! With an inarticulate cry she sprang to her feet, upsetting her tin pail, which was nearly full of luscious red berries.

The prairie dweller well knows that fire in such dry weather is a rampant fiend! She clambered up a little rise and searched the landscape in all direction, sniffing the air like a young wolf.

There it was! Her eye caught a curling blue plume that rose stealthily from the farthest edge of Ward's wheat. It was probably a quarter of a mile distant. John's wheat!

Like a mad creature Rosemary sped across the stepping stones, and along the fringe of John's potato patch, then stumbled across the garden and into John's open door. John sat mending a piece of harness in his kitchen.

Pantingly she told him. Then, as if moved by a single impulse, they both ran to the cement well where some gunny sacks lay drying. Rosemary seized one and plunged it into the horse-trough. John followed suit with another, and the hired man, sensing the trouble rushed from an out-house and snatched up a length of old carpet. On the wings of the wind the three made for the burning area.

After three hours of unremitting labor the creeping fiend was beaten and stamped out, and John Ward, his brawny arms bare to the elbows, his hair a mass of wet black curls, stood panting on the outermost edge of the burnt grain. The girl, flushed and exhausted, had dropped down on the ground and was holding her throbbing temples.

"Thank God!" breathed John at last, as he drew his sodden red neck-handkerchief off.

"How much is lost?" asked Rosemary. "Just a dozen bushels or so, I should say, thanks to you it wasn't more! How did you happen to see it?"

But Rosemary did not reply. Her eye had caught the glint of something bright that lay at her feet. She reached for it, where it shone amongst the charred wheat.

They stared at the object a long, long minute. It was a nickel-mounted magnifying glass!

Old Carr sat smoking on the cool verandah of his home when the pair approached that vine-covered retreat. John Ward addressed the doughty old man with a degree of hardihood and assurance quite new to his usual halting bashful tongue. Carr's rocking-chair came to a full stop, and the old fellow peered over his spectacles in amazement.

"Where's my boarder, you say? Why—lemme see. I ain't seen the feller round fer quite a spell. Guess mebbe he's off gittin' some more weeds er somethin'. Set down, John."

"He laid a plan and tried to burn up my wheat," said Ward, ignoring the invitation to be seated.

"Tried to burn—"
"Yes, but we caught the fire just in time. That's quite a well-known trick—placing a lens in the crotch of a stick where the sun's rays will catch it. Here's the lens. (The stick of course was burnt.) Now where is this chap? I must find him."

Mrs. Carr was sent for. She remembered that Mr. Fitzherbert had taken a horse and buggy and gone to the village. That was about three o'clock. It was now five-thirty, but he had not yet returned.

"Did he take his suit-case with him?" demanded John.

No, all he had taken was the little wooden box.

"Has he paid his board?" was John's next question.

Carr stared.

"John, you got a sunstroke—er what? He paid me this very morning—a full month's board."

"I'll see,"
"Well, no—the fact is he paid me in silver. But he apologized fer it. Said he had a lot on hand, and—"

"Let me see that money."

There was no denying this determined young man. Carr swung open the screen door and the four entered the big living room. The old man went to his desk and unlocked a drawer.

"Thar," he said, flinging a handful of bright half-dollars down on the blotting-pad.

John Ward picked one up. He tried his teeth upon it and when he drew it from his mouth there were two faint indentations along the milled edge. Then he flung it on the floor. It gave back a suspiciously hollow sound. He tested half a dozen of the other coins. All were alike.

"Mr. Carr, you have been—buncoed," he said, at last.

"What!" shrieked the old man. "You mean t'say that feller's buncoed me? Are them false coins?"

John nodded grimly.

"And I very strongly suspect that the box your wife spoke of was full of more of them. Moreover, that trunk of his, you will find, is empty. He carried it out here for a blind. Now I want you to loan me the fastest horse you've got, Mr. Carr. (Mine are all too slow.) I want to make the village in an hour or less."

"But—what you going to do, John?"

"I'm going to get Billy Wiggett—who warned me about this coiner some time ago—and the two of us will gallop cross-country to the Utah border and catch him before he can get out of the country. He has taken the 5:03 train south, but we'll get him!"

Rosemary flew to the barn, and in less than five minutes had a saddle and bridle on the chestnut mare. John followed her and sprang into the saddle.

"John—oh John, be careful of yourself!" said Rosemary. "If he should fire on you! Oh, I never suspected he was a criminal!"

"He's a pretty slick one! He's been in hiding in Canada ever since it got too hot for him on the other side. Billy had been notified weeks ago that 'Silver Sam' was out here somewhere, but of course he wasn't sure that it was your friend—"

"Friend?"

"They say—"

"They say what?" she demanded, as he broke off.

"That you're engaged to him."

"Well, I'm not, so there! I never had

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