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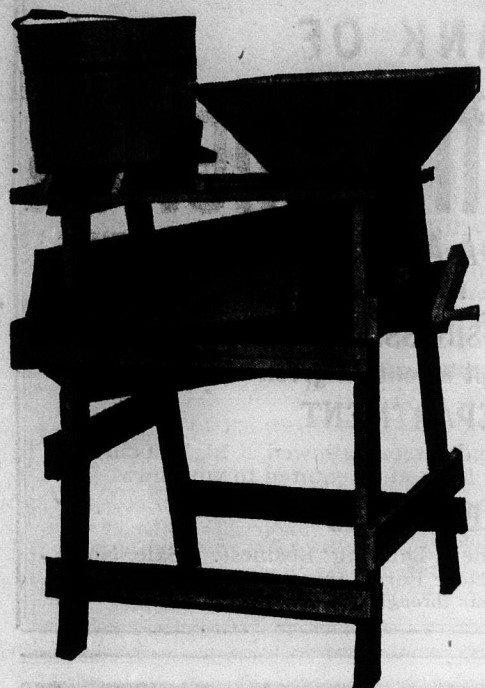
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Brandon, Man., Nov. 28, 1907.
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VALUABLE PATENT BOOK SENT FREE.

The Courting of Mirandy

By James F. B. Belford.

There was no doubt in any one's mind that Mirandy was the belle of Broncoville. There were other girls—French, breed and Canadian—not counting Sleepy Star, the pride of old Prairie Dog's teepee; but Mirandy was easily first. And she deserved to be. Big, bright and bouncing, with glorious eyes, sparkling with life, which looked at you fully and frankly. Long, lustrous hair, which swept behind her like a cloud as she urged her wiry little cayuse over the grass. Light as a fawn in the dance, merry and cheerful in company, she was at once the delight and despair of us all—excepting Old Sam, who had wooed and won a two hundred and fifty pound French half-breed, and young Tibbets, who was fresh from the East, and had been caught smiling and crying before a photograph. But though we all loved Mirandy, and were, individually and collectively, ready to fall at her feet, it was still painfully apparent that some of us were bound to be disappointed. And as time went by, one by one, most of us gradually dropped out of the running. Not that we loved Mirandy less, but that we realized the hopelessness of our case. At last only two were left,

their friendship. Bill was determined to win her, Jack was just as resolute, but that was no reason why the friendship of years should be broken up. They had a perfect understanding on the matter. Each had his own particular night on which he "set up" with Mirandy, and the other never intruded. Bill took her to the service in the schoolhouse one Sunday, and sat beside her in the narrow seat, holding one corner of her prayer-book, or singing the same hymn, looking as happy as a clam, while Jack was back in the corner with the boys. And the next Sunday they would exchange places, Jack getting the prayer-book and Bill the corner. If Bill drove her to the Temperance Lodge, Jack escorted her to the spelling match. Even at a dance they broke even, and divided round dances and breakdowns impartially. Since they had to oppose one another, they, at least, would fight fair.

And Mirandy, you couldn't see any difference in the way she treated them. It must have been trying for her—we always felt it must have been. Either of these chaps was just about all a fellow ought to be, and, take it all



"In his arms he held Jack, pale and speechless, his foot nearly sliced off by his axe."

and, try as we would, we could not discover which was to be the lucky man.

Bill Simmons owned a good claim, with a decent shack, a good string of ponies, and a nice bunch of cattle. He was a tall, good-looking fellow, rode well, danced well, and was always ready for anything that came along.

Jack Fraser was shorter by three inches, but fine-looking and well set up. He was equally well endowed with land, ponies and cattle, and was reputed the toughest man in a scrap in the country.

Both of them were madly in love with Mirandy, which was only natural, but what did seem strange was that, in spite of their rivalry, they were the best of friends. Generally, when two fellows are after the same girl, each of them just yearning to lie down and let her trample on him, there isn't much love lost between them. But Bill and Jack were different. They had struck the country together, had lived on the same claim, in the same shack, for three years, eating each other's bannock and pork, and were known far and wide as the "two chums."

When you saw Bill anywhere you could safely reckon Jack was not far away. And if Jack got into a row, as he sometimes did, Bill's tall figure was sure to shoot into sight presently.

And Mirandy made no difference in

round, it was a living example of "the embarrassment of riches."

Broncoville is known all through the country for its races at the fall fair. The Agricultural Society had laid out as pretty a half-mile track as any horse could wish to run over, and we had some mighty good horses, too. About a week before the fair came on, we heard that Jack and Bill had settled to run their ponies in the mile race, and that the losing man was to give up all claim on Mirandy. Jack had a little black pony and Bill a buckskin. Both of them were known to be fast, but their owners, being such chums, had never raced them against each other. But now on the speed of the black and buckskin hung the fates of the boys and Mirandy.

There was a crowd at that fair. The news got pretty generally around the county, and every man, woman and child just naturally left everything and turned out. They came in democrats and in wagons, in buggies and in Red River carts, on sulkies and on horseback, on driving horses, mules and oxen, and old Pen Tripp had hitched his muley cow into the hay-rake and driven her in. There must have been a thousand people in Broncoville that day.

And the betting! Not so much on the horses as on the men. Some knew

Jack better than Bill, and vice versa, and each backed the man he knew best. There were other horses running, but no one gave them the second thought. So when old Bob Clark, the hotel keeper and leading sport of the town, rang the bell for the mile race, the whole track was lined—men, women, children and Indians, just bracing themselves and yelling.

Mirandy was there. She was sitting in the parson's buggy, where she could see the whole course, and the people looked first at the horses and then at her. But it might have been a slow race for a bag of chop for all the difference you could see in Mirandy. The parson was a young man the bishop had just got out from the East, a bit of a tenderfoot, of course, but great on football, and a fair good sport in his way. He liked a good horse, and a day after elk or chicken, and was not a bad fellow for all his surplise.

But I've got away from the race. The ponies started well together. You could see by their looks that the boys were dead in earnest. Crouched low over their horses' necks, their faces white and set, they meant to ride for all that was in it.

Round went the horses, and when they reached the judges' stand for the first half-mile Bill and Jack were neck and neck, with the rest of the field nowhere. Everybody cheered again, that is, everybody but Mirandy. She sat there quiet as an oyster.

At three-quarters of a mile both were going strong and still even, when a measly yellow Injun dog ran out right in front of Bill's pony. Down went the bronco, and Bill went twenty feet up the track on his face, almost in front of the parson's buggy, where Mirandy was sitting. Quick as a flash the parson jumped from the buggy and grabbed Bill, pulling him off the track. The rest of the horses came on with a rush, and I don't know to this day who won that race, for I was watching Jack. Just as soon as he saw Bill's pony fall, he set himself back in the saddle and pulled in his horse. He had that horse stopped and was by Bill's side almost as soon as the parson pulled him on to the grass. And you never saw a man look worse than Jack did. Bill was scratched and bloody, covered with dust, and the wind pretty well knocked out of him, but Jack was ghastly. I thought sure he would tumble over when he knelt by Bill. The doctor ran up and felt Bill all over, said there were no bones broken and that he would be all right in a day or two; and then Jack got right up and whooped. And the cheerful manner in which he kicked Howling Coyote across the track when that smoke-scented warrior wanted pay for his dog was an exhilarating treat.

When the crowd got over its scare, we began to wonder how this would affect the Mirandy question. The general consensus of opinion arrived at was that this game was a draw.

Jack took Bill home with him, and looked after his stock till he got over his shaking up. The parson drove Mirandy home. Things ran on much the same as before that race, all that fall.

We were all still wondering which of the boys would get Mirandy finally, when we heard they were going to have another try for it. Each of them had a good smart team, and they were regarded as the two best axemen in the county. And so, when we heard the new plan of campaign, we were not much surprised. This was the idea: They were to start from the parsonage, each with his team, sleigh and axe, at ten o'clock Wednesday morning, drive to the woods from there, cut a measured cord of green poplar, bring it back to the parsonage and pile it, the first man done to be the winner, the stakes the same as before.

Well, of course, we all wanted to see the result, so we arranged a social that night at the school-house, which was just across from the parsonage. That was the most popular social ever held in Broncoville. The Ladies' Aid made a big thing that night. The schoolhouse would not begin to hold the crowd. Not that the crowd wanted to stay in. They'd rush in, pay their money, grab a paper bag full of sandwiches and doughnuts, and rush out