

A Paying Quarrel

Written for The Western Home Monthly By Marvin Leslie Hayward

THE brief New Brunswick summer had drawn to a glorious close, and it was "diggin' time" up and down the St. John valley. Potatoes were turning out one hundred barrels to the acre with half a ton of fertilizer; the dealers were paying "a dollar out of the field," and an air of genial peace, prosperity and contentment seemed to hover about the old-fashioned "homesteads."

The Denton "place" was, apparently, a generous partaker of the prevailing bounty; but on this particular forenoon Bert Denton walked in from the potato field with an agitated look on his round, boyish face, and headed for the verandah of the old farm house snuggled beneath the big elms, where his mother and sister were preparing for the usual midday meal.

"Something's gone wrong in the field again, I'm afraid," declared Mrs. Denton, anxiously.

"I suppose father's been finding fault with him again," said Eva. "I don't want to find fault, but really it's getting almost impossible to get along with him at all."

Mrs. Denton sighed uneasily, and glanced at the approaching Bert with motherly pride.

"Yes, but it's only his way, and he has a lot of things to worry him," she said gently, "and see what a fine wedding he's providing for you and Harry."

"I know that," agreed Eva, "but every time Harry comes I hardly dare breathe for fear father will make one of his usual scenes, and Harry's parents are so mild and get along so peaceably."

Bert hurried up the verandah steps, flung himself into a chair with a despondent thud, and smashed his battered "cows-breakfast" hat on the floor.

"What brought you home to dinner so early?" queried Mrs. Denton.

Bert leaned against the verandah with the deep despondency of youth.

"Father's in one of his bald-headed rages again," he declared, "and my presence in the field is not very welcome."

"What's wrong now?" asked his mother and Eva in unison.

"Oh, one of the men couldn't make the digger work just right," replied Bert, "so father flew into one of his usual tantrums. The other men took it up, and father discharged the whole crowd of them, and they're half way to town by this time."

The mother allowed her paring knife to clatter to the floor and raised her hands in the orthodox gesture of despair.

"Discharged them right in the digging season, and men worth their weight in gold," exclaimed Mrs. Denton. "What could your pa have been thinking about?"

"Oh, father never stops to think about anything like that," averred Bert bitterly. "He's getting to be the biggest crank in Lecarnot County."

"Yes, and the biggest potato farmer, too," defended the mild Mrs. Denton, "and he always thinks better of these things the next day."

"That may be," retorted Bert, "and then it's generally too late. Now, I don't suppose we can pick up a digging crew again in less than a week or ten days."

A tall young man sauntered up the path, and the manner in which Eva sprang to meet him showed plainly enough that he would be the other principal in the wedding to which the mother had referred, and that it was Eva's intention to lure him away from this scene of domestic infelicity.

"What are you doing at the house at this hour of the day?" bantered Harry Escott, the newcomer. "Potatoes won't hold up to a dollar for more than a week."

Before Bert had time to reply, his father hurried in from the field. He was a big bluff man, and his weather beaten face was flushed from his recent encounter with the digging crew.

"Put 'Bess' in the buggy," he ordered briskly. "I've got to drive to Hartville and hire a new crew, and there's no time to lose, either."

Bert braced stubbornly against the verandah post, and made no move to obey. Eva winced as she sensed the coming storm.

"There'll be some time lost before you get another crew that will do the work of the ones you just discharged," replied Bert sulkily, in spite of his mother's warning glance.

Denton whirled as if potato phosphate

had doubled in price, and his dark eyes snapped beneath his shaggy brows.

"I suppose you think I've got to take any amount of 'lip' from you," he roared, "but I want you to understand that I can fire you just as quick as them 'durgins' that were getting \$2 a day."

Bert clenched his fists fiercely; an angry flush mounted to his face, and with the pent up restraint of a lifetime, he flung discretion to the breeze.

"And I want you to understand that I am just as willing to go," he retorted hotly.

Denton took a furious step forward and then checked himself.

"Go then, quick," he shouted.

"Please, please," pleaded Mrs. Denton. "Neither of you ever went that far before."

Harry Escott broke from Eva's detaining hand, a conciliating smile on his honest face, and a deep desire to pour the traditional oil on the troubled waves. "Come, Mr. Denton," he remonstrated, "you don't really mean that, you know."

"Don't I," sneered Denton. "We'll see about that, buttin' into matters that don't concern you, so while I'm about it, I'll give you notice right now that it's all off between you and Eva, and if I catch you around here again I'll horsewhip you. The idea of my daughter marrying an Escott, anyway."

"But, papa, you can't mean that," Eva faltered, "and the wedding announced for July."

"Don't I?" declared Denton. "Well,

we'll see who's running this place." And he stamped off to the barn.

Bert had not waited to hear the conclusion of the discussion, but sought his little room over the kitchen, opened his grip and threw it on the bed.

"I won't stand for it, that's all," he fumed, as he began piling his clothes into the grip. "I'd rather work with the 'ragoes' on the C.P.R. for a dollar a day. Now, mother, it's no use to say anything," he declared as Mrs. Denton gently slid into the room. "I know what you're going to say, and I'm sorry to leave on your account; but father's been going from bad to worse lately, and I'm not going to put up with it a day longer."

"You're as determined as him, in a way," she replied sadly, as she stood watching him fling his personal belongings into the grip. But, as he turned to close

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