

The Greater Duty

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Francis J. Dickie

DUCK!" a man's voice shouted. Another's breath doused the big oil light. In the quick following blackness a revolver spat, its momentary flame lighting fitfully the cabin's single room.

Darkness again—the dead hush of tense, horror freighted air—then, after a breathless second, the soft slithering of unsteady moccasined feet on rough plank floor, and quick in the wake of this the sound of striking, inert human body, a hollow, heavy thud, gruesome in the silent blackness of the room. Almost in unison came the padding of another pair of moccasins, barely audible, yet clearly conveying the direction of their owner's steps. Only a moment this continued, dying in the faint creak and jarring slam of swiftly opening and closing door.

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Corporal Morton snapped closed the fast metal clasp on his hip-length bearskin coat, pulled on a bit tighter the matching fur cap, drew on his mitts and, thus full prepared against the cold of northern winter night, pause, eyeing regretfully the comfort of his quarters.

The big tin Arctic-heater, now tight dampered, hummed softly, from its rounded black sides and low conical top, wave on wave of heat atoms shimmered upwards in an endless succession of tenuous, rippling lines, no longer colorless, but tinged faintly golden under the play of yellow rays from the kerosene lamp. The room was somnolently warm; the air still strong with the fragrant incense of fresh pipe smoke from a tobacco redolent of much perique. A rough table occupied the centre of the floor; on it, face down and open, a magazine lay close to the zincware lamp. Beside this stood the Corporal's just vacated plain arm chair, its harsh outlines however, almost completely hidden by covering coyote pelts and a big cushion of goose feathers, covered by coarse brown twill. Despite the roughness of this furniture, the log walls and board bunk in the corner farthest from the stove, there was something attractive about the living room, a certain indefinable air portraying more surely than words that its solitary occupant was a home loving body.

"Gee, I wish the regulations would let me have him here with me," he voiced aloud, his eyes passing swiftly from object to object till finally they settled upon the magazine he had reluctantly put down the minute before, right in the middle of a most interesting story. "Now, I wanted to finish that story," he went on still aloud, after the fashion one much alone falls into, "but I guess I'd better slip down to the settlement and see the kid's all right. Now, if I could only keep him here with me, I'd be able to keep cases on him a little better." He shrugged his shoulders; tried to smile impatiently at his fears, and growled: "Getting to be a regular old woman, I am—a regular old woman."

But his face did not clear. Leaning over the table he blew out the light, crossed the room, and stepped out into the early born night, where the Northern Lights had just begun their dancing. Across all the expanse of sky they were, and wide; a shimmering sheen, disporting upon the vast blue bowl of heaven in multi and vari-colored brightness, softly brilliant, radiant though subdued. Moving in wonderful array, this driving host of hyperborean space ran in an undulating ribbon on the breast of night, then retired, to rush forth and back again in ceaseless play, while below the grey wilderness, crouching there under the frost and snow, listened grim and silent to the sounding of their dancing, at first but faint and weird rustling like gently crushed and bruised silk, then louder, till all the sleeping winter world became alive with tiny crackings, as the simultaneous snappings of the lashes on a million million toyish whips.

Yet the esthetic soul of Corporal Tenner Morton—usually responsive to all things beautiful—refused now to thrill at the sight, one often seen, and, until now, never fully without charm. To-night, however, his eyes travelled straight to where, two hundred yards away, the dozen cabins and three stores of Pelican Settlement lay dark against the snow.

Morton's cabin—known officially as Pelican Patrol Headquarters, one of the many lesser Mounted Police Posts in Division "N"—lay on the side of a hog's back ridge perhaps a hundred feet higher than the settlement snuggling in the valley below, giving him a bird's-eye view of the entire place.

From several of the cabin windows pinpoints of light glowed through the soft dark, and out of every chimney the smoke, in slow, thick columns, climbed straight up, strangely like solemn, snow shrouded conifers painted by some fantastic artistry of the frost—and seeing this last, Morton knew how bitter was the cold, without needing to glance at the thermometer hanging beside the door.

A moment his gaze took in the whole scene, then his eyes came to rest upon the cabin nearest him, one lying back and a little apart from the rest. He eyed it frowningly.

For three years he had covered the four hundred odd square miles of his patrol, till now he knew every watercourse and trail, and the white and halfbreed trappers and small farming "squatters," in ahead of the survey, that dwelt within the land. Yet it was only lately that worry had come with its wearing strain and rust to rasp his nerves.

This was not caused by trouble within his district—for Pelican Patrol was fairly quiet, no different from most of these northern ones—but through the coming, in the late Fall some three months previously, of his brother Charley, aged twenty-two.

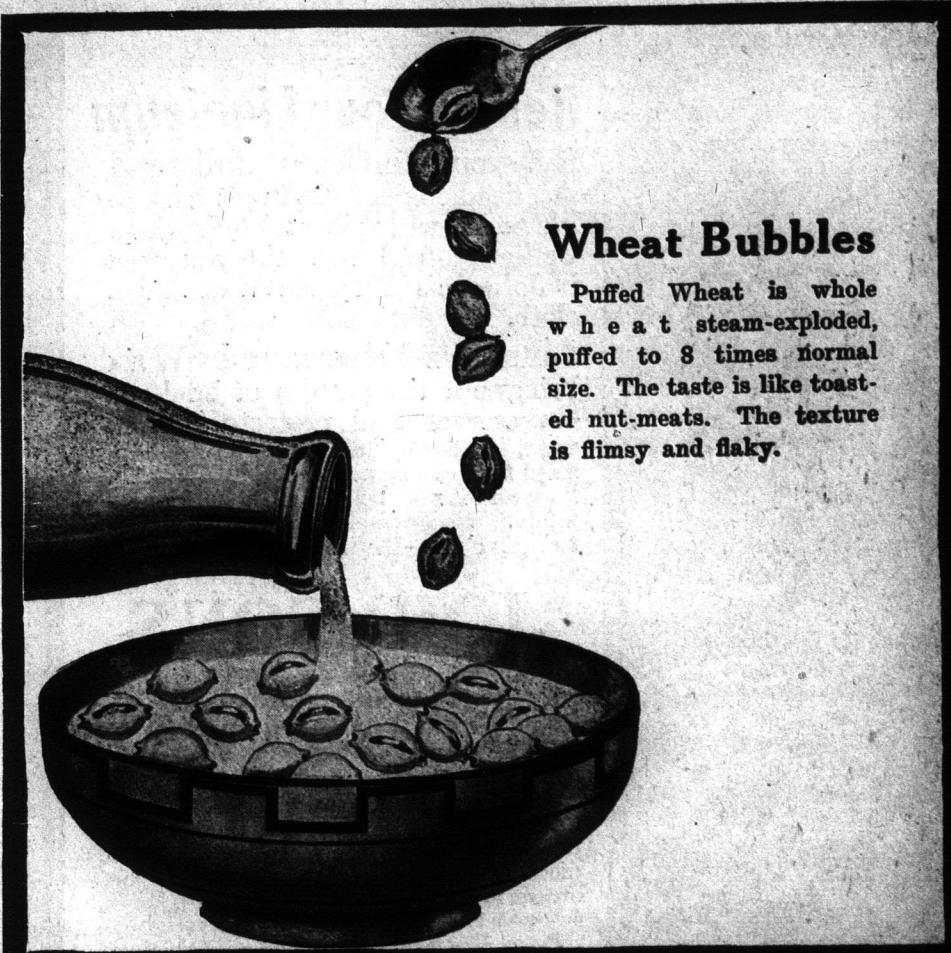
Charlie, ten years his junior, had been shipped post haste from the effete and distant East by frantic parents, after the boy, as assistant teller in the Merchants Bank, had gambled two thousand dollars that should have remained reposing in the strong boxes of that institution. To make this good, Morton here had hastily placed a mortgage upon his corner grocery, thus saving Charlie from jail and the family name from public disgrace. Then, with that fanatic faith and hope common to all parents, they had shipped Charley to his brother in the north, in the fond belief that few years spent where no temptations could harass would bring him to the age of riper judgment when he might once more safely return to the places of crowded things.

Corporal Tenner Morton, being a good son and, too, fonder of Charley than brothers generally are, had accepted the burden almost happily. And, being a general favorite with all the community, it had required little importuning upon his part to place Charley as bookkeeper and general store assistant to "Ginger" Smith, a veteran trader of the northland. Smith ran a string of small trading posts throughout the surrounding territory, with a headquarters one at Pelican. Finding his new assistant competent he had, for the past two months, left everything in Charley's hands at Pelican, while he spent his time between the other points of his string where business was always brisk with the deepening of winter.

This, while highly gratifying to Corporal Morton, had only increased his worry, for once again Charley was placed in control of a large sum of money; and Pelican Settlement, wilderness though it was, was yet perhaps a more dangerous spot than even a great city to one possessed of the gambling mania, for in the silent places time often hangs heavy on men's hands, and, unafforded the many sane and natural pastimes of civilized centres, they fall the more easily into reckless drinking and high play, the better to break the monotony of their days.

In Pelican lived "Piano" Jack Munro, an "ex-parlor house professor," and at the moment proprietor of the big cabin which Corporal Morton's eyes now rested upon. Within the cabin a card game went continually on. Here, too, Piano Jack sold whiskey, the same being forbidden north of fifty-three. But, though Corporal Morton had thrice raided the place in the past year, he had either come at the wrong time, or Piano's cache was too cunningly hidden, for never once had he found incriminating liquor upon the premises.

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Both are whole grains with whole-grain nutrition.

Both are steam-exploded. Every food cell is blasted by Prof. Anderson's process. So every atom feeds. No other process so fits these grains for food.



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Some mothers say that Puffed Grains are too good. Children eat too many, displacing other foods.

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In the morning serve with cream and sugar. At night in bowls of milk. For variety's sake serve both Puffed Grains. But the greatest is Puffed Wheat.

Puffed Wheat

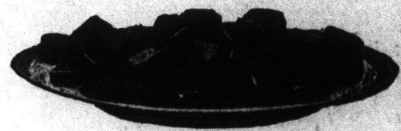
Puffed Rice

Both Steam-Exploded—8 Times Normal Size



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Use Like Nuts

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