

missed anything," Mrs. Dorgan sniffed her superiority to such excuses.

Walter did not press the point. He enquired, "How did you come to hear that I was killed?"

"Oh, your name was in a list the Saturday Sun copied off'n a daily paper from the city."

"I suppose all the red tape often led to such errors."

"Funny you never got hurt a bit an' poor Larris was all shot up the first month he was in," remarked Mr. Dorgan, in an unpleasant tone.

"Looks like you didn't fight so hard," said Mrs. Dorgan, putting bald words to her husband's insinuation, and failing to cover the sting of them with a forced laugh.

Walter, acutely conscious that Marjorie was washing dishes within easy hearing, contrived to say quietly, "Oh you met lots of those queer chances in the course of the war."

"Mebbe so," was the laconic response from the master of the house, then, "how'd ye like to help me break up some noo ground today. -I want somebody spry to touch off the blasts under a few ole roots."

III.

Walter rapidly settled down at the Dorgan homestead. It seemed to have been tacitly agreed that he should be the guest of the ranch, in return doing all the most arduous and distasteful tasks for the owner. He worked cheerfully, enjoying every moment of the healthy, strenuous life that during his previous sojourn there had seemed so hateful to him. "I have undoubtedly learned a lot, somehow," he thought to himself, realizing his keen delight in his labors.

The atmosphere in the household, however, was anything but conducive to gaiety. The suspicion that had been aroused by that one ill-natured remark of Dorgan's not only survived but flourished and expanded. It passed beyond the walls of the house, borne on the industrious tongue of Mrs. Dorgan, who received loyal co-operation in the village from several kindred spirits. Soon one might meet those inevitable best-informed people who knew the name of the non-combatant unit to which Walter had belonged; and the base well behind the line which had been the scene of his service. Tom Larris said that he had passed through that base on his way to the front.

Whenever this cheerful veteran arrived on his crutches for one of his frequent visits to the Dorgans, and set them all laughing by his irresistible horseplay, or holding their breath to hear him recount an experience at the war, it was an opportunity for the family to emphasize their contempt for Walter Marbury.

Marjorie was certainly no longer cold to the advances of her maimed suitor. It was obvious to everyone how "well they got on together," and it was generally felt that the maiden's sympathy and capability were just what was needed to help Larris through life. The village soon accepted the intelligence of his successful courtship. "He's a lucky fellow," was the consensus of opinion, "that Marbury turned up again the way he did. If he'd stayed away the girl might have been pining over his grave yet. Them fillies is hard to understand."

Walter knew well what was being said, and the pangs of disappointment could not efface a deeper-seated exultation that the whim which had led him back was resulting in Marjorie's happiness.

He understood clearly that she was not in love with Larris. No tyro in the moods of the sex, he comprehended something of the intricate influences which moulded her conduct. There was admiration for Larris, of course, and a sort of glamor his personality produced; there was annoyance at being made feel ridiculous by her groundless mourning for Walter; and the increased irritation caused by his presence drove her on, in a futile effort to pierce his air of placid indifference.

Under circumstances more quixotic—or perhaps less?—men might have tried to influence the course of affairs, but

Walter had a sort of cynicism which he considered common sense, and which advised him that Marjorie was acting for the best. Larris was fond of her, seemed a good fellow, and had excellent prospects. It was common knowledge that he would soon succeed his father as postmaster and he was beginning to influence the public affairs of Slanter. "Marjorie would waste all her chances if she married for love," was Walter's conclusion.

So now that her affairs seemed to tend prosperously he began to feel the other aspects of the situation becoming intolerable, even to his irresponsible disposition. He began to lay his own plans, and one evening announced: "I've arranged to take up some land under the settlement board."

"Hereabouts?" queried Dorgan.

"No—up North."

This was the ordinary form of their conversation of late, and Walter smiled inwardly during the remainder of the evening to see a new expansiveness bred of relief in the family's manner. He thought "I expect they feel that Slanter is well rid of a worthless character like me."

IV.

It was the day before his departure and Marjorie's engagement, while not officially announced, was tangible enough to permit of private discussion as to the wedding, when Slanter turned out en fete for one of her pet heroes, Major James Conaghy, who had made a famous record at the front and had later filled an executive post in England, so that this was his first return to his home town.

Joe Dorgan, who had once been on the municipal council with Conaghy, was one of the first to greet him. The latter, who was noted for a keen eye and memory where the fair sex was concerned, soon contrived to remark to his old friend, "that pretty little girl of yours must be getting on for a woman, Joe; lots of sweethearts, eh?"

"Aye, she's got a young feller runnin' after her pretty strong."

"Oh, who's that?"

"Tom Larris, know him?"

A peculiar expression crossed the Major's face. "He was wounded, wasn't he?"

Dorgan, anything but obtuse, realized that his friend knew something that bore significantly on the subject. He replied, "At the battle of Cambrae, he says; what's your side of the story?"

The Major hesitated: "Well, I don't know; I think on the whole I ought to warn you. I had quite a fancy for that little kiddie, and I don't like the idea of any nasty tricks being played on her. I'll tell you straight. It was well-known over there that Larris went half off his head with funk—wounded himself purposely so that he wouldn't be any more use. It was generally expected that he would be court-martialled, but by some fluke he got off."

Dorgan, long schooled in taciturnity, did not betray how serious had been the affair between Larris and his niece. He merely expressed his feelings in a short whistle, saying: "That wasn't a nice thing to do. You're a good fellow to let me know, Jimmie. That's even a worse record than Marbury's eh?"

Conaghy was at a loss. "Remember, I'm used to your sarcasm, Joe," he said.

"Sarcasm, how d'ye mean?"

"Well, you don't seriously compare Larris with Walter Marbury? Surely you know that he got his commission for valor on the field, and later was awarded the D.S.O."

V.

It became known the next day that Tom Larris had accepted a civil service position in the Maritime provinces, for which married men were ineligible. And in about a week Walter Marbury had arranged with the authorities to exchange his holding in the North for a comfortable little farm in the Slanter district.