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"Oh Daddy, what a mess!" exclaimed Lena suddenly opening the door at this moment.

Joe had been much too busy to take any notice of his surroundings, but now as he glanced around the result of his efforts came upon him with somewhat of a shock. "The room certainly did seem—well, a bit messed up." There was a good half-inch of water on the floor, while the rest of the place looked as if it had been struck by a snow-flurry. Upon the bed little Joe, looking like a ripe tomato rescued from the flour-barrel, was lying practically strait-waistcoated by a small pair of combinations put on wrong way before.

"Say Lena," he said, sharply, "if you haint got nothin' better to do than stare around, p'raps you'd better set to work and dress this kid."

Congratulating himself on having disposed so satisfactorily of what had threatened to become rather an awkward situation, he entered the opposite room and commenced to tackle the bed.

"Turn the mattress, indeed!" he snorted. "The women sure thinks they've done the last thing when they flop it over. I'll bet that mattress haint had a real good rattle since it was bought—that's what it's goin' to get now, anyway."

Going to the foot of the bed, and taking a firm hold, he pounded and shook it vigorously, and when he con-

everyone would have detected it, he debated in his mind whether to sweep or wash up next, and decided on the former.

The broom was new and 'swishy,' and by applying the vigorous methods he was wont to use on the granary floor, and prudently refraining from disturbing the positions of chairs, tables, and such-like obstacles, he progressed apace, and in a moderately short space of time succeeded in distributing mattress-stuffing to every room in the house, with the exception of the kitchen which he remembered his wife swept before breakfast, and little Joe's small apartment which he omitted for the present to allow the floor to 'dry off a bit.'

Going to the window he leisurely filled and lighted his pipe. He reckoned it must be between nine and half-past. A little early for Selina, perhaps. In front, upon the grass, little Joe, who seemed none the worse for his experiences, was playing at 'keeping-house' with his sisters. Joe watched them for some time and came to the conclusion that it was a remarkably silly game. Strolling into the kitchen, he glanced casually at the cheap alarm-clock that ticked loudly upon the dresser. "What's wrong with the blessed thing anyway?" he exclaimed, giving it a shake.

Quarter to eleven, indeed! Why Selina wasn't back.

Pulling his watch from his pocket he consulted it. It showed exactly thirteen minutes to —to ten, of course—

in the eighties and not a breath of wind stirring, but he gallantly achieved another smart clip back with the result. To scrape them was impossible, so after giving them a hurried look at the scrub-brush, he filled a pan with cold water, dumped them in, and with a mental prayer for the result, placed them on the fire to boil.

Out again hot-foot in the other direction for the steak. It was good two hundred yards to the well and when he arrived he was panting. Forty pounds of beef hung at the other end of the rope but he hauled it up as if it were four. Having come without a knife, he carried the lot to the house, where it was the work of a moment to hack off some pieces and throw them into the frying pan. Fourteen minutes to twelve! He would do it yet if only those confounded potatoes would boil!

The rest of the meat he temporarily bestowed in the 'lean to' shed, intending to see to it later. It escaped his memory, but not Fido's; and what she couldn't eat she took care nobody else could.

At ten minutes to twelve he caught sight of Selina and the horses returning over the hill. Botheration! So she was on time. Bringing bread, butter, milk and other necessary articles from the larder, he placed them haphazard upon the table. Now what else? Oh, yes, there were the biscuits—and pie!

Returning again with the biscuits in one hand and an open affair that appeared to be filled with a mixture of treacle and things, in the other, he nearly came a cropper over little Joe, who had come in with his sisters to announce 'mummy's' return.

Placing the child in his high chair, he sat him up to the table to be out of the way.

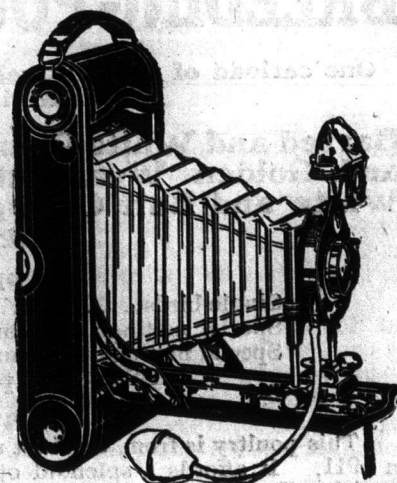
The stove next claimed his attention. Things were progressing none too rapidly and the potatoes showed no inclination to boil. More wood and more coal oil at the risk of firing the chimney.

A sudden scream from the girls, and an alarming clatter of crockery pulled him up short.

He turned quickly to find that little Joe had taken a header fairly and squarely into the middle of the treacle pie, and was in imminent danger of suffocation. "Holy smoke, but this beats Tanglefoot all to blazes!" exclaimed the frenzied parent, springing forward and pulling his offspring upright again.

But the pie came up with him, and when his father frantically tried to tear it off, the crust came away like a shell

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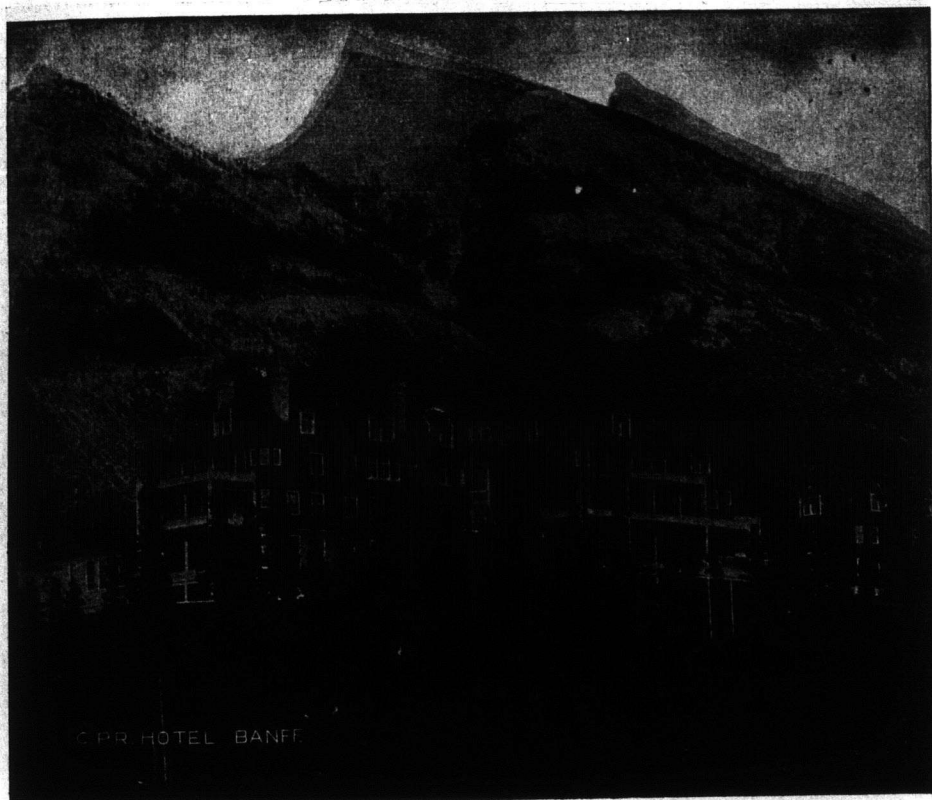
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sidered that end had had enough, he attacked the other. Phew! It was hot work. His forehead was dripping, and he paused to take breath for the final bout.

Seizing it with both hands near the middle, he raised it bodily, and gave a mighty shake.

Zzzrrp!—zzzrrrrpp!!—zzzz-r-r-ppp!!!

Joe broke away very suddenly, back-stepping with the celerity of a man who has inadvertently disturbed a wasp's nest. Down the centre of the mattress was a gaping rent nearly four feet long!

For a moment the extent of the calamity took all the starch out of him, and he collapsed limply upon a chair. But he was not easily daunted, and presently his face lightened.

Pulling a handful of wire nails from his pocket, he pushed back as much of the stuffing as he could into the mattress. It was by no means all, but he was not in the mood to stick at trifles. Then drawing the torn edges of the rent together he pinned them in place with half a dozen of the nails, and carefully turning it the other side up drew back in triumph.

"There!" he exclaimed, with a satisfied smile. "As good as ever it was. Give me a four-inch spike for fixin' things—or a length o' barbed wire!"

"Oh, I guess there's troubles in every department of life," he reflected more soberly. "And what did Selina want to tell me to monkey with it at all for?"

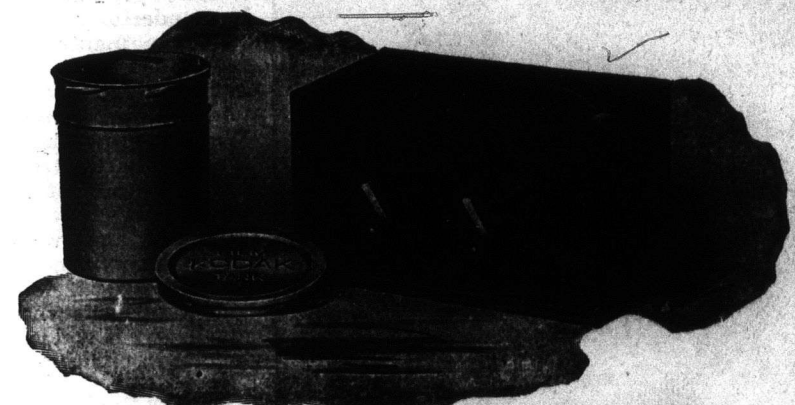
The bed being 'made,' though not

no, by Jove, it wasn't though—it was eleven!

Even now he refused to credit it, but thoroughly uneasy went hastily into the parlor, where upon a shelf of its own, a large black marble time-piece, a wedding present to Selina from her father, marked the hours in solitary grandeur. It's scrolled and gilded hands pointed accusingly to ten minutes to eleven.

In the face of this three-fold evidence it was impossible to doubt any longer. How nearly three solid hours had slipped away he could not imagine. Hurrying back to the kitchen he feverishly collected up the dirty plates and dishes, determined at all costs not to give Selina the satisfaction of finding dinner late. The fire was out and the kettle stone cold. Hastily throwing on some wood, he poured over it a liberal dose of coal oil. At the third match it ignited with a 'plop' that half blinded him with a shower of ashes. Glancing at the clock he realized that hot water was out of the question unless he meant to be late, so he used cold. By the time he had got the smeary lot of crockery back upon the table—some of the pieces strongly reminiscent of breakfast—it was twenty minutes past. And the potatoes were still growing, while the meat was thirty feet down the well! Already in a perspiration he caught up a pail and did a record sprint to the garden, only to find that he had forgotten the hoe. There as nothing for it but to scratch for the tubers with his fingers. It was hot work with the thermometer

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