

Out of The Fire

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if he likes to work for it. By jingo, if a girl can come out here and work for the kids in this district for what we are paying her in the school taxes, I say that she has something behind her more than high-brow talk."

The men had come by this time to the school house, which they found had been transformed by the decorations that the object of their talk had put up, and while they felt the natural bashfulness which is characteristic of the men who live out in the great deserts of the world, they felt a sense of admiration for the stranger who had brought about the social they were attending.

The evening programme was one of great success, and different to any they had ever attended, and all those who came felt they were meeting each other in a way which helped them to know the best in the other lives. The dainty supper that was served brought forth the praise of every bachelor, while the dance at the end of the evening seemed to cement the friendships that had been made earlier in the evening.

Richard Tempest stayed behind after most of the others had left, for he wanted to have a talk with this strange new girl about the things she had said around the settlement, and to widen the acquaintance that had begun during the evening. Very soon the last of the lights had been extinguished, and he saw his chance to speak with her and walk with her on her way home.

"Do you know, Miss Owen, I have been very interested in some of the things you have been saying around the settlement since you have been here, and I want to tell you that as far as I am concerned you have made a convert to your creed. I thought to move out this year when I had completed my homestead duties, but I have decided to stay and do what I can to make this country what you say it can be made," he said, in introducing the topic.

The teacher was interested and attracted by what this young man had to tell her, more especially because she recognised that he had been trained above the average of the settlers, and because she realized that her new convert would have an immense influence upon the others. She had mapped out a plan of campaign for the making of these settlers' homes better and more like home, but she realized that to attempt it without the help of some others, who had seen the same vision, was to invite failure. In Tempest she saw, not simply the educated farmer, but a propagandist who would carry weight among the men and women who were his neighbors.

"I am awfully glad to hear what you say, for Mr. Tempest, I think that you men who have been trained in college can do so much more in the way of leadership in this western country. These people think that because they have come out here to master these primitive conditions it is necessary to leave behind them all those things which have made for culture, and yet you know as well as I do, that, with the cheap books and the departmental stores, it is possible to make this prairie country the greatest in the world in the training of better and finer citizens," she had said, and if Tempest could have seen her face he would have seen that it was lit up with a wonderful light, the light which comes to one who has seen a great and wonderful vision.

The enthusiasm of the girl gripped Tempest until he found himself admiring the spirit which she had shown. He, too, had passed through one of the eastern colleges and had come west in order to make for himself a home, and to build a fortune apart from those in the east who had given him his start in life.

"Well, I want you to count on my help whenever you need it, and when you start your campaign just reckon me among your supporters," he had said.

The winter and early spring that year were filled with evenings such as the one that has been described, and the district showed signs of a great interest in the new movement. In these entertainments much was done for the amusement and the education of these people, and much of the loneliness of the long evenings

passed as they gathered from time to time under the direction of the teacher and those whom she had gathered around her. The school house that in so many places was simply the place where the children spent their time for several hours of the day, became the social centre of the community, and its effect was to be seen in the many little improvements which had come into the homes unannounced. Very many of the women felt a thrill of gratitude as they realised that these improvements had come as the result of the bigger vision that had been given to them and their husbands of what even the prairie home could be, and they looked out into the busy days of the spring and summer realising that life would be somewhat easier for them. Another and bigger change, however, had taken place in the life of Tempest at least. These two young people, the teacher and the farmer, had found themselves thrown together a great deal during the arrangements that were necessary, and Miss Owen found in Tempest a ready and willing helper at all times. The spring at length gave place to the long days behind the plow, and the hot days of the summer made all such activities impossible. The acquaintance had grown, however, into a friendship that was deep and strong, and in the heart of Tempest had taken a much more serious turn. Somehow, whenever he thought of the home he was to build some day, he found it impossible to think of it apart from Laura Owen, and indeed all his plans had a place in them for her. With the shyness, however, of the man who had spent a great deal of his time in the great silences he took care that she should not guess the depth of these thoughts until such time as he was ready to reveal them and to carry his plans to culmination. The next fall he thought would bring him the crop with its good return, and then he would find himself in the position when he could ask her to share his home with him. Thus he watched the crop mature with feverish interest, and every ounce of effort of which he was capable went into its production. Gradually he saw the fruits of his labors coming to perfection, and with it there came the determination that was in his heart to bring his dreams to fruition. If the crop was good he said he would ask her to become mistress of the house he was to build.

As the fall, however, was nearing an incident occurred which seemed at the time to place the possibility farther away than ever. Coming out of the field one evening after a long day's work he noticed that away to the west there appeared a great cloud of smoke, and while for the time he took little notice of it, he looked with some anxiety as he saw it grow in size after he had finished his chores. About ten o'clock he went out to have a last look round before retiring for the night, and looking around toward the place where he had previously seen the cloud of smoke, was alarmed to see that the sky had not only grown furiously red, but that he could easily distinguish large flames spreading themselves along the whole horizon. With the alertness that was natural to him he saw that the matter had grown serious and that unless something was done immediately the whole countryside would be in the grip of the dreaded prairie fires. Without waiting for any better covering than he had at the time, he rushed into the barn, unlocked his horses, and as quickly as it takes to tell was on his way towards the west from which he could see the flames making rapid progress. All his thoughts about his own crop and property seemed to have left his mind as he raced along to get near to the scene of the disaster. At every homestead he called the men who were available to join him, and wherever they were not engaged plowing out their own firebreaks they joined him.

"Looks like it was a bad 'un, Dick. I suppose that because we have a decent crop this year a fire has to come and take it, seeing that everything else has been in our favor. I never saw such a country in my life. Then there's that school-marm tellin' us to keep on and help out; believe me when I see her next time I'll tell her what I think about her views," grumbled Clemens who had been aroused to the danger of the oncoming fire.

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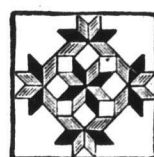
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