

THE LURE

"I could forgive you some things, but not this."

Written for the Western Home Monthly by C. D. Pogson.

HUGE banks of snow lay around the old mountain cabin. The wind roared through the tops of the pine-trees. It shook the small four-light windows until the panes rattled. A loosened slate on the roof clattered incessantly, and a sliver somewhere about the eaves gave voice to intermittent shrieks. At short intervals the ghostly rat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat of a lone pack-rat sounded from the roof.

On a rudely-constructed bunk overlaid with cedar boughs, in one corner of the room, lay an aged man. He was fully dressed, and covered by a couple of blankets. Nearby stood a small sheet-iron camp-stove in which a few embers were smouldering.

Little Joe Dupres, though past the three-score period, had been tempted by the high price of furs to shoulder his pack of traps, and make his way up the steep mountain trail to an old cabin which he had built while on a former trapping expedition. Necessity had not compelled him to do so. He had ample means, but the wander-lust and the desire for a little more gain had finally overcome his better judgement.

It had been his intention to make fort-nightly visits to the nearest settlement for supplies, and to keep in touch with the war-news. He was favored by good weather while setting his line of traps, and had also cut sufficient wood to do for some time. His next care had been the securing of a supply of fresh meat. He spent several days stalking deer, and finally succeeded in shooting one about two hundred yards from his cabin, but separated from it by a deep ravine.

Nothing daunted, the old man dressed the carcass, quartered it, and proceeded to carry it piece-meal across the ravine to his cabin. He, however, found the task a very arduous one, and dangerous also, on account of the steepness and loose nature of the gravelly banks.

He reached the bottom of the ravine in safety, and made his way up the opposite side without mishap until within eight or ten feet of the top. There a small rock slipped from under his foot, thus throwing him off his balance. He quickly threw out one hand to grasp a sapling, missed it by an inch or two, and fell headlong down the embankment until he crashed, with terrific force into a thicket of underbrush, where further progress was arrested. Half stunned as he was, the old trapper at length succeeded in freeing himself, painfully hobbled to the cabin, and crawled into

the bunk. There he lay for the remainder of the day and all that night.

Though racked by pain, he had for several days thereafter been able to keep the fire replenished and to cook his food. But a day came when the last stick of wood was burned, and the last ounce of flour used. Then, and not until then, had fear gripped the heart of plucky Joe. He realized that his only hope lay in the vague possibility of a stray trapper's finding his way to the cabin, and who would care to breast the storm then raging? For hours the aged man lay contemplating his probable fate, then he fell into a troubled slumber.

A broken limb fell from one of the forest giants, and crashed upon a corner of the cabin. The sleeper awoke with a start.

"Ha, Grim Reaper, is that you? Say, ye think ye got me this time, don't ye? But I ain't quite ready yet. This may be your turn to win the game; it's hard t' say. Ye've had me cornered several times, but little Joe gave ye the losing hand."

"Dye mind the time that I walked over a snow-covered crevice in Crag Mountain, and broke through? I dropped fifteen feet, and the walls were like glass. 'Twas well for me that my rifle went with me. It had six shells in it, and the last shot in it was the one that brought Bill Smith to my rescue."

"Or the little fright ye gave me when I was driving the tunnel into Windfall slope? I had worked my way in, a hundred feet or so, when one day a piece of the granite roof dropped, not two inches from me. It puffed out my candle, an' filled the tunnel with black, chokin' dust. I was scared so I never went near the tunnel again for two days."

"I could mention a few more times when yer grin was too close fer comfort. Say, what 'er ye troublin' 'bout me fer? Can't this war satisfy yer hunger? Gred's yer best ally, Reaper. Think of the millions who are being sacrificed on her altars now. And why? Because Wilhelm and his henchmen want a little more territory. They're not satisfied with what they grabbed in 1870. But listen! listen! France isn't so easy to pluck; her sons will fight t' the last ditch. I tell ye this; before this little scrap is finished, Germany's iron heel will be on the other side of the Rhine. Vive la France! Vive la Allais! Here's luck fer dem!"

With a quick movement the excited man snatched up his rifle and sent half-a-dozen shots tearing through the roof.

"How is dat fer a serenade, eh? I

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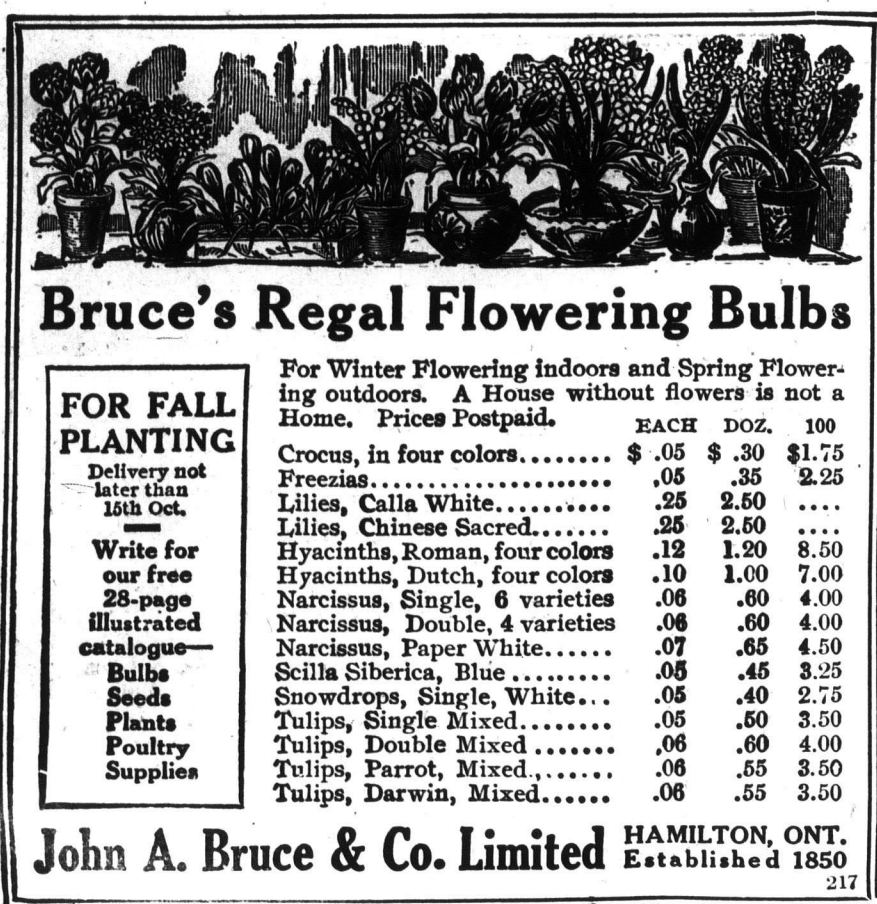
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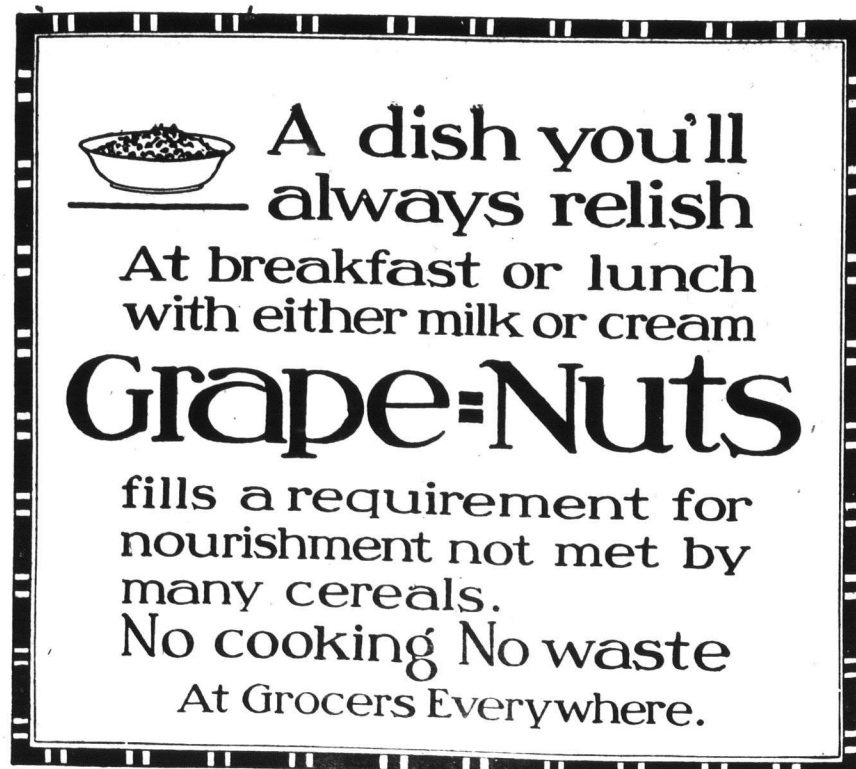
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