

The Level of Hog Eye Forbush.

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"Say, you there!" cried Capt. Jack, vociferously, "come over here."

Hog Eye looked around dubiously; no other was in sight. It was indeed, himself that the Captain called. "Say—you want a job, frien'—what's-your-name?"

"Mr. Jasper I'm called," answered Hog Eye. "A job—well, that jes' depends."

Captain Jack grinned, and beckoned him inside. Hog Eye had often seen and envied this personage, but it was his first chance to meet him at short range. He shuffled after the Captain down the counter's length of the general store, and leaned up against a pork barrel, while the Captain swung his legs from a packing-case.

"Look a' here!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "can you saw wood?"

Hog Eye's bubble burst—and his heart, too—almost. The air of expectancy shining upon his face resolved itself into a sudden dejection, and he tugged weakly at his ragged beard. "No," he said, regretfully; "my strength is that poorly I've had to give up vilent labor—but ef there was a job 'a' sweepin', now?"

The other laughed. "Oh, hell, frien'—saw wood an' say nawthin', I mean."

Hog Eye nodded quickly, and drew up some more spunks of hope in his heart. Maybe Captain Jack had in mind to grubstake him with an outfit like his other and send him out to the Bannocks in the hills.

He openly suggested the hope.

No, said Captain Jack, he didn't want him to go liquor running among the bucks and squaws. What could it be, then?

"Horse-teeth!" answered the redoubtable merchant, with a knowing grin and a dig at Hog's ribs. "Hoss-teeth, an' it's easy!"

"Hoss-teeth—why—" stammered Hog Eye, weakly, thinking it a joke. But the other was in earnest—deadly earnest.

"Hoss-teeth," he repeated, craftily; "hoss-teeth as comes from hosses with horns—savey? Hosses in bands—round the Park, like."

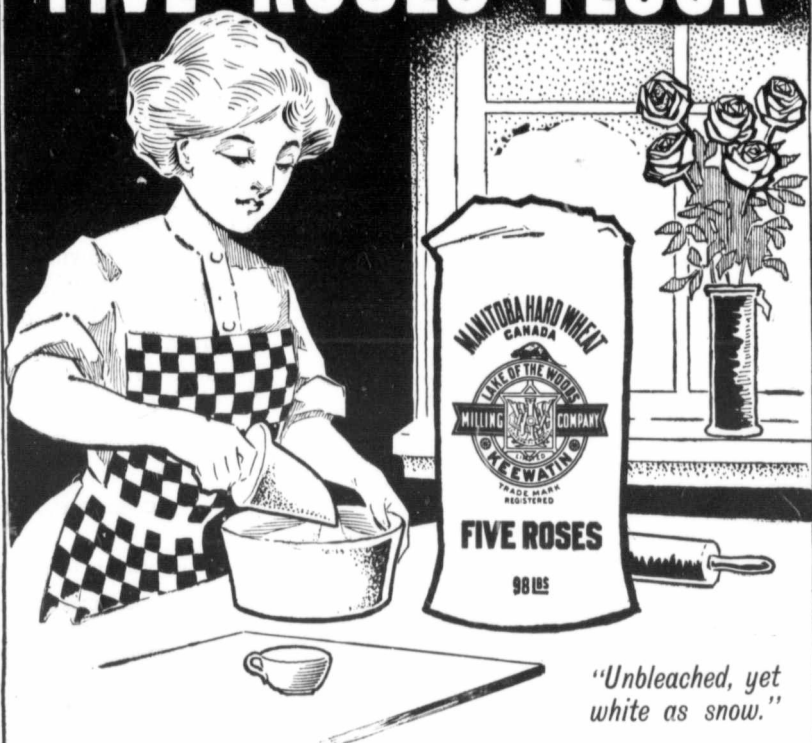
"Hosses with horns?" echoed Hog Eye; and then a gleam of intelligence struck into his heavy mind; "why, do you mean elks?"

"I ain't a-sayin' nawthin'," replied Captain Jack, but with a wink that conveyed a world of meaning. "But what I want is hoss-teeth like what I wants—savey?"

Hog Eye understood what he wanted, but not why he wanted; and so the Captain set forth to explain. He had a letter from the East, he said, asking for all he could get. They were popular back there for ornaments, watch-charms and the like. For each and every one of these produced, he would give Mr. Hog Eye Forbush twenty-five cents.

Hog Eye thought a moment.

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"But that's only fifty cents a' elk, Capting," he protested.

"Ain't they plenty o' elks," the Captain retorted, "an the skin an' meat's your own."

And so the bargain was struck. "Yer see," explained the Captain, as they sat over a bottle in the store, "I counn't trust none them others 'roun' here. Them folks at the Hole's kicked up a muss at killin' their damned elks, an' they're settin' the wardens on to hones' folks who was tryin' to make a livin'. No, I counn't trust none o' the reglars 'roun' here, so I just had to come to you."

"That's right," assented Hog Eye, flattered into a sense of equality; "they don't give a feller no chanet!"

At the first touch of cold the herds began moving. They slipped down from the heights of the summer feeding-ground, band by band, and sought the lower pastures of the foothills. Dawn and night-fall heard the bugling challenges of the herd-bulls ringing clear from every hillside, and band by band their numbers

grew. In every park, the cows and calves grazed on the lush herbage, or walked aside from the arena of their battling lords. A great multitude had come together there, but a multitude that, year by year, was growing less. Their ranges, once reaching into limitless distances, now were cramped and driven in by the coming of the destroyer, man. At first, they had met this peril strongly—for then man killed only for his needs. But destruction grew apace—there came the butchery of wantonness. At every stage of the trail was death waiting, and a brutal, blind and heartless beginning of the end.

But to the man, Forbush, there were no regrets. He had come up into the foot-hills, and pitched camp beside a stream. Outside, the bright stars gleamed in the depths of the frosty sky and a great silence and peace wrapped the wilderness about him. He heard the tinkling of the brook beside his cabin, and on a nearby hillside the stones came rolling down, stirred by the feet of a

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