

The Gift of the Storm

By E. C. Cuming
Contd. from page 12

upon their patient. "He must have had a pretty tough time with it out there, don't you know, Miss."

"Oh, if we can only get him through now," she said in reply, forgetting that she too was on the verge of breaking under the strain.

"Well, it's no use giving up until it's over, so we'll just peg away until he comes through," said Coleman with determination.

So they worked far into the night over the man without knowing either each other or each other's name, but with a bond that seemed to hold them above the conventions of names and labels, the bond of a common work. At last the patient seemed to give some signs of life and the pair worked on more furiously.

"Where am I?" he questioned later as he opened his eyes. "Why, Nelly, you are here, so it's all right. Oh, let me sleep," he demanded, and quickly fell once again into unconsciousness.

"Say, he's coming too, if we can just keep on," encouraged the man, and the girl seemed to catch something of his spirit. For another hour they continued their ministrations, when the man once more came back to life and seemed to recognize them.

"Well, old top, you have had a terrible time of it, but it's all over now. Say, you just take this and get some sleep again, and we'll get a doctor here to see what can be done for you," said Coleman, offering him some stimulant with a view to keeping the patient up against the pain of the thawing out.

"Oh, father, just try and help us by keeping up now, we have had such a fight to get you back again and everything is all right. Mr.—"

"Coleman," supplied the man, realizing that he had not yet introduced himself to the girl.

"Coleman," she continued, "went out and found us lost in the snow and I am afraid you have become frozen pretty badly."

"Oh, by the way, what's your name?" he asked. "Awfully awkward, don't you know, not to know a person's name isn't it," he explained.

"Our name is McKenzie and my name is Nelly McKenzie," she replied with a blush and a look of gratitude that suffused her face. "I need hardly say how grateful we are to you for what you have done for us, Mr. Coleman. I hate to think just what would have happened if you had not come after us when we were lost."

"Now, you need not think about those things now, but I am afraid that your horse is about dead and stiff by this time. 'How came you to be out in such a night?' he asked as they once more turned their attention to the patient.

"Why, we were trying to get home from Clarence's, away up in the valley; we had no idea that the storm was as bad as it was, when we lost our way and somehow the horse found its way to your buildings and stumbled over something in the snow," she explained.

"That must have been the line I put out to guide me to my barn should I have to go out again. You see, that's what some of the people do here and it's a first rate idea, I think," he answered.

The McKenzies had lately come to the country and this was their first winter out from Old Ontario, so that it was to some degree excusable that they should have taken the risk that the prairie dweller dreaded, and should have been lost on the trail. Like Coleman, they had taken up a homestead and intended to farm some five or six miles distant from their newly found friend. They had decided to spend the holiday with some friends from the old home town, and had started out, despite the entreaties of their hosts, to find the storm much worse than they had at first supposed.

The doctor arrived the next day with Coleman, who had driven in to the nearest town for supplies and to fetch him, confirmed their fears that it would

"He's still breathing and his heart is in action," said Coleman at the end of an hour in which they had said nothing beside the ordinary comments

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be a long time before the patient would be able to get around well enough to make their home, with the result that a "committee of ways and means" was decided upon.

"Now, Miss McKenzie," said Coleman after the arrangements had been made for the doctor's return, "the bally old shack is not very large, but you are welcome to everything that I have here, and since Briggs says that we must not attempt to move your father for some weeks, I think that it will be necessary for you to stay here. We will make some arrangements about your stuff you know and I will go out from time to time to have a sort of look around. It will be a good arrangement for I was tired of this old life, don't you know, and I decided that I would get out as quickly as I could."

"It's really too bad," the girl answered, "to impose upon you in this way, but then we did not altogether come here of our own will. Suppose we amalgamate our forces, and I'll be nurse and housekeeper, while you will look after things outside."

The arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to all concerned and in the weeks that followed there was a jolly party in the very close quarters of Coleman's domain. Several alterations had to be made, and, while the quarters were made even smaller as a result, the owner felt that he had reaped the best of the bargain.

Some six weeks later the patient was sufficiently recovered to be moved to their own home, and the question of breaking up the happy arrangements that had existed during the last weeks, came to the fore. There were a great many things to be attended to against the coming of the spring that promised that year to be early, and, after several attempts at postponement by Coleman it was agreed that during the next few days he would go out to their farm and put things into order against their coming. One evening, however, towards the close of their visit the two younger people sat discussing the situation and, with a look of sadness upon their faces that at last the good times must be ended, they began to take stock between themselves of the situation. Through the weeks that had just passed there had ripened a friendship between these two that had entirely changed their view of life and Coleman, at least, found himself re-adjusting his decision as to the mistake of several well-meaning gentlemen with regard to the prairies. Thrown together they had come to learn the best in each other's lives and, while there were several things that Nelly could not understand about the man who had sheltered them, of one thing she was convinced, and that he was a brave and fine man. Coleman, on the other hand, began to have visions of the loneliness that was in store for him after they had made their exit from his life, and he found himself wishing again and again that the relation between them could be settled into a permanency.

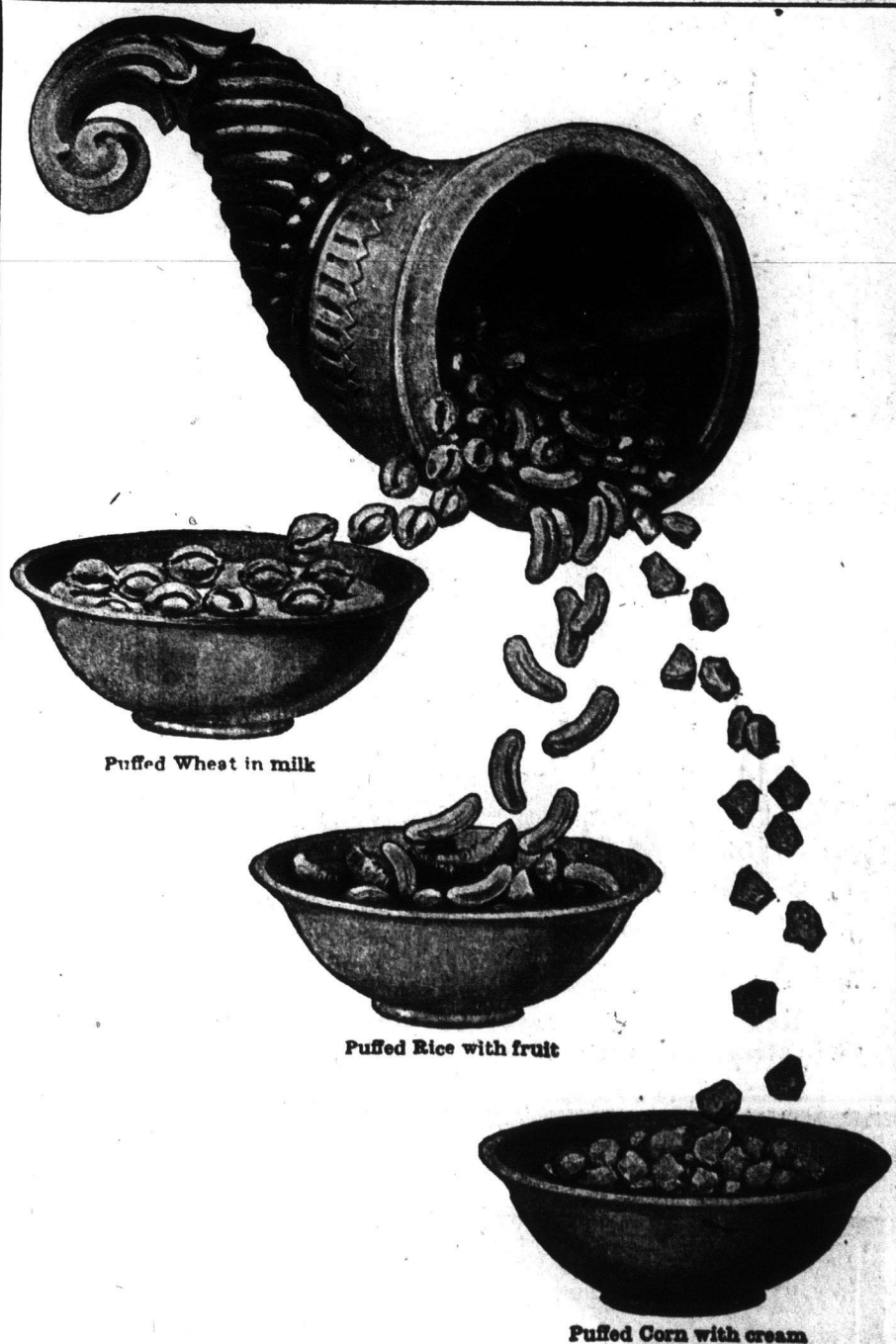
"Nelly," he said, after a silence that had lasted several minutes in which they had been thinking their own thoughts of the future, "I wish that it were possible for you to settle somewhere nearer, so that I could do things and look after you better. Your father will not be able to tackle the work of the farm this spring by himself, you know."

"Well, Dick, there are such things on these prairies and we are, of course, going to make provision along that line, so that Dad does not have to do very much of the work," she said as though she were trying to dodge the issue.

"Say, I wish that I could get that job, don't you know? Why, it would be worth working for nothing to be able to tackle it for you," he replied.

"Yes, I know all about that, but then you have your own work here and it's absolutely out of the question to let you work against your own interests like that."

"I have come to think that my interests are as much your interests after all, Nelly, for I feel that in a way the storm has brought you here and that this is your place. Won't you come here and be the mistress of this little shack and I will make things as comfortable as I can." (Continued on page 14)



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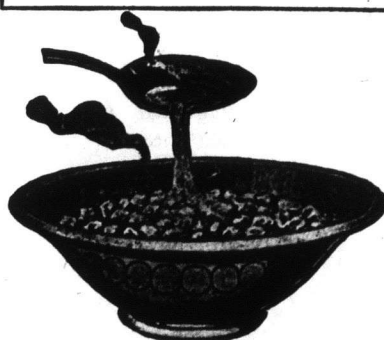
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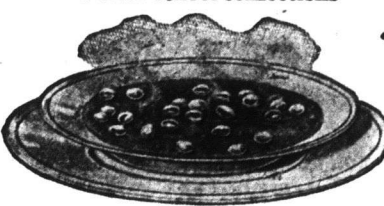
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