

PRIZE STORY.

A Brave Wife.

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(Based on Illustration in the August Number.)

A Manitoba prairie, bright in the rays of an October sun, green with rich pasturage, stretched smoothly off to the distant horizon. Not even a knoll to break the monotony, only where the land was slightly depressed, a tiny river, motionless, looking much like a beautiful ribbon, wound about till it also blended with the sky, a few clumps of bushes along its banks with here and there some trees, and in the midst of this a small white house with lean-to attached, from the roof of which a stove-pipe stuck up. Cattle could be seen dotting the plains, grazing in droves here and there. A man on horse back trotted quickly towards these from the house, and proceeded to bunch them together to keep them from straying. He was one of the new emigrants from Maine, who had arrived the year before. Tired of poor farming in the States he and his wife had listened to the agents of the North-west, and finally had sold out and come to Manitoba. They had built a small house and invested their money in cattle, though both often became weary of the loneliness and wished for home. Oscar Willard, having driven his cattle a mile or two to fresh grounds, rode off towards some scrub bushes hoping to get some prairie chickens which were plentiful there. The horse was turned loose and Oscar tramped around with his gun. In a few minutes there was a loud and sudden whirr, and a brace of the birds flew up. The rifle cracked and one of them fell. Others soon were seen scuttling about, and it was not long when he had as many as he wanted. The horse meanwhile had wandered about half a mile away. As Oscar walked towards it sudden rumblings as of thunder sounded on his ear; cattle bellowed, and rising above the din he heard shouts of men. Astonished he beheld his whole herd rushing madly towards him.

Four hundred frightened cattle already within a mile; a solid breastwork of tossing horns, roaring and bellowing, the earth already seeming to shake with their approach. Frightened and urged on by something, they would soon be upon him. A fearful death seemed inevitable. Behind them, completely enveloping some, rose clouds of dust which rolled like smoke over the plain. Directly between the herd and himself his horse gazed frightened, then broke and ran. Its course led towards Oscar, who, as it passed him, made an effort to reach the bridle, but a sudden swerve on its part and it swept past, and in a moment was rods beyond. With a groan he threw aside the chickens and his rifle and dashed after it hoping to get to one side of the mass ere he was overtaken. With head down, panting for breath, he ran, but the tumult grew louder and closer; already they were not fifty yards from him, and his chances of hope seemed gone. He could not hear his own footsteps, when suddenly a horse galloped close in front of him, a voice called to him to keep up and he saw his wife mounted on her mare riding directly towards the rolling herd. His own danger forgotten, he turned to gaze after her. The herd was formed in the shape of a gigantic crescent, the two points nearly up to him, though perhaps some yards apart. Mrs. Willard, holding in one hand the reins, at once recognized as

one in which they carried salt, with the other guided the horse around in a half circle, scattering the salt as she turned; the cattle instantly scenting it, stopped in their fearful career. Those nearest it at once covered the spot while others crowded in and fought for a place. The two great horns of the crescent swept around and closed with a crash, fifty feet behind Oscar and his wife. The entire herd came to a standstill, excepting for the fighting in the centre, and those on the outside which pawed savagely at the ground. Mrs. Willard was a perfect rider, and a better shot than her husband. She now carried her rifle across her saddle as she rode. She had seen men coming upon the herd and commenced to drive them away as she was riding out with the salt, and had run her horse to warn her husband, arriving only on time to save his life. But now a new danger threatened.

A dozen mounted men galloped out of the clouds of dust cursing and swearing at her misfortune. They were an organized band of cattle thieves who made sudden descents on cattle and drove them into Dakota, where they got rid of them without trouble.

The Willards took in the situation at a glance, and Oscar shouted, "Molly, go for the police, they are down at Denton's—these thieves will shoot us both."

Molly as she galloped off shouted, "I will try and save you." Her horse carried her away like a flash, and a couple of the men at once urged their horses after her. One of them, however, was suddenly thrown to the ground by his horse, which stumbled and fell; the other mounted on a splendid horse would have soon overtaken her had she not turned and fired, wounding him in the arm. He at once stopped and returned to the others, while Mrs. Willard in a short time was out of sight. In the meanwhile the others had galloped up to Oscar, one of them firing his rifle as he approached.

"Hold your hands up," shouted two or three voices. "What do you mean by stopping those cattle?" said one. "What do you mean by running them in this fashion?" said Oscar. "Well," said another, "I suppose we can run our own cattle, can't we, they're not yours any longer, anyway." "Here stop this shooting, we will want that man yet," shouted the man whom Mrs. Willard had shot. "That woman has broken my arm, tie it up some of you, and you others get around those cattle and try and move them on. Now then," he said, turning to Oscar, "tell us where the mounted police are."

The mounted police were men kept throughout the North-west in case of trouble.

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Oscar. "That is my business, not yours," said he threateningly, "but I'll tell you: we have quite a distance to go to-night; if the police are not near, we take the cattle, and if they are near, we leave them, with you dead beside them, now tell us where they are?" "I don't intend to tell you where they are, you have terrorized this country long enough, for I think you are William Black, the leader of the worst thieves in Dakota." The other drew a revolver from his belt. "Do you know," he said, pointing it at Oscar's head, "that your life is not worth a straw? You answer that question or die this minute." "Do your worst," Oscar answered, quietly.

The revolver was lowered, with an oath. "What will we do, boys," he said to the others. "I would not shoot him yet," said one; "take him along with us a ways and give him time to think it over, then if he won't tell us we will drop him."

This was finally agreed upon. One of his own horses was captured, a bridle secured at the house near which they were, and he was mounted upon it with his hands tied behind his back. Two men rode beside him, while the others started the cattle forward, for several hours hurrying them on. Darkness then began to fall, and Oscar heard the men talking about halting.

The leader then rode up to him. "Now," he said, "we expect to stop here to-night in this hollow. Unless you tell me what you know of the police, mark my words you will never leave it." Oscar looked about him. The desperadoes were drawn around him, their set faces express-

ing death in every movement. They were surrounded by tress and bushes on all sides; darkness had already hid the plain from sight. Not far off the cattle could be seen grazing quietly.

His captors' horses were fastened a short distance away, while they had left their rifles lying about in different places, except their leader, who now held his menacingly in his hands. He knew that he would be shot if he did not tell where the police were, and that the police themselves could not overtake them for two hours at least. "If I should tell you where they are, how am I to know whether you will set me free or not?" he said at last. "We will let you go at once," answered the leader. "Well, I will have to trust you," said Oscar, uneasily; "the police were at Denton's ranch yesterday when I was there." "Denton's!" shouted Black, "and that was where your wife was headed for to-day?" "Yes," was the reply, "I suppose she went to get them, and now untie my hands." "Wait a minute," said Black quickly; "at that rate they can overtake us in two hours, if she finds them. So we must try and hide these cattle to-night. What do you think about it, boys?" "It is time we were moving," answered one, "and if that is the case, we must not let this fellow go."

"No, you're just right," said the leader. "He's done for, I'll do the business myself—start the cattle quick then and I'll help you in a minute." "Do you mean to say you are going to shoot me like a dog," cried Oscar. "I didn't say nothing," was the reply; "but when I say ten you die," and he raised his rifle. "You're not going to help police to catch us," he added, as Oscar violently struggled to free his hands. "One, two, three," the rifle was pointing at his head, he could make no resistance, Black's eye was coolly glancing over the sights; he stopped struggling and looked frantically around, but hope was gone; the leader's voice sounded, "seven, eight, nine," there was a loud report, but the flash which accompanied it did not, however, come from Black's rifle. It swept forth from some of the bushes near by and was instantly followed by the appearance of men in the uniform of the mounted police, whose number was at once augmented till they numbered about twenty. Shot through the shoulder, Black, with a cry threw his arms up, his finger already pressing the trigger discharged the rifle towards the sky, and his body fell back lifeless on the sward.

His men not having their rifles, drew their revolvers and commenced a quick fire, which was almost at once silenced by the heavier fire of their assailants. "Do you surrender?" shouted the police; and received a surly answer in the affirmative. "Drop your guns then, and come here, one at a time," he ordered.

While the captives were being bound, Mrs. Willard rode through the trees towards her husband. "Oscar, are you hurt?" she cried, as she sprang to the ground. "No, I am all right, Molly," replied Oscar, "but you came just in time." "How did you get here so soon?" "I met the police less than half-way to Denton's," said his wife, as she untied his hands, "and we followed the trail of the cattle till we saw them here, and then the men left their horses and surrounded you." "Three seconds more and you would not have found me alive," said Oscar. "The fellow you shot to-day was their leader, but I see he is not dead yet." As he spoke he walked towards him. "Where are you hurt?" he asked, seeing that he was conscious. "My shoulder is hurt," gasped the fellow. "This is the most unlucky day I ever went through." "You will think it unlucky when we are done with you," said Oscar. "You have stolen your last cattle." He then proceeded to bind up his wounds; as he did so, one of the policemen came up, saying they would remain there for the night, and take the prisoners away in the morning.

Fires were at once lighted and preparations made to pass the night there, which was done very comfortably, except for the wounded men, who, however, were able in the morning to journey to the nearest jail with their comrades, where justice was dealt out to them in the way of several years, imprisonment all round. The Willards safely drove their cattle back to their ranch, excepting a few lost during their sudden trip.

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