

Out of The Fire

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Edwin C. Cuming

THE winter sun was setting across the old prairie and the moon that was still in its infancy was rising in the east, promising that the evening was to be one of great success for the social which had been planned in the little school-house several miles away from the shack of Richard Tempest. Like all prairie dwellers, Dick took his amusement with a zest and enthusiasm, and whenever an event such as was scheduled for that evening was upon the bill, he was one of the first to be present. It was not often that such events came round, and it had seemed to the lad that had come out from the east some eighteen months before, that they came all too seldom. The social was to be one of those ordinary events that help to break the long monotony of the winter in which otherwise there was little to do except the weekly visit to the post office, and the weekly visit of the preacher, who drove several miles to supply these people with a service. Very often even these visits were made impossible because of the severity of the weather.

The homestead that Tempest had taken was situated away from the trail that was called in those parts frequented, although the business that passed over it was limited to about three teams a day. Indeed the only break in the loneliness was the occasional visitor who called to see him when the work he had to do necessitated the borrowing of some piece of machinery that Tempest happened to own. Dick was a bachelor, and indeed seemed to be hopelessly so, although his neighbor Clemens, whose wife did his baking in the busy season, had often chaffed him with the fact and held out to him the comforts of marital happiness.

"Do you think I would ask a girl to come out here and live in this wilderness," he had said, very seriously on the last occasion of his visit; "No, sir, I have more respect for the girl who will honor me enough to be my wife. I think I'll wait until I can have things fixed up a little better and then, well Mrs. Clemens satisfies me with her splendid baking, although I suppose it is hardly fair to you to expect to depend upon her always. Still I'm going to surprise you one of these days old fellow and bring home a girl to that, to the old shanty on the hill."

An event had happened in the district during the past few days that had captured the attention of the whole neighborhood, and had formed the topic of conversation at the post office for nearly three weeks. Consternation had been caused in the hearts of these said bachelors by the advent of the new teacher from the east who had come to teach the small crowd of children of every nationality in the schoolhouse that had been recently erected. It was a little event in the life of a great city, for many new teachers are appointed every year, but out here several miles from the railroad, it was an event that had to be talked over and discussed. Then those who had seen her had testified that she

was a lady of unusual charm, and while several of them had laughed about the idea of a really good teacher coming out so far away from the railroad, they had admired the pluck, and when later they had heard the pupils talk about her, they had confessed themselves non-plussed.

Laura Owen was one of those girls who are constantly graduating from our colleges, who have come to see that there is in the great profession they have chosen the road to a great service, to the new nation that is being built out on these western plains, and who are ready to risk everything in life that the growing generation should have at least a chance to make it all that they dream it should be. Miss Owen had dreamed of this nation, and while her parents and friends had tried to dissuade her, she had stood by her decision and had come out west to do her part in the great work she had at heart. Thus when she had come to the little settlement the farmers had become especially interested in her because of the views she held, and the ideals she had brought with her. It was not long before she had the whole settlement by the ears, and the men were overwhelmed by the spirit with which she went about her work. To them life was to be measured in the dollars they received from their wheat, and when they found that crops for one reason or another were falling off, they were ready to move on to more suitable lands where they thought there was possibility of greater wealth. They failed to understand anyone who could have anything like the ideals about the great big stretches before them, and yet they felt that somehow Laura Owen had seen a vision that was bigger than theirs.

"Say, Bill, that school-marm has some great ideas about these prairies. She seems to think that it is heaven itself, and at least that it can be made something like the golden streets. You ought to have heard her talking down at Harvey's the other night, say, it certainly made me feel as though I would sell out for about thirty cents, after what I had said during the day. She says that the prairies are to be the great country of the future, and she wants the women to go in for a sort of better home movement. She certainly did roast the fellows that sell out as soon as they have 'proved up,' and she says they are as bad as an extra crop of gophers."

"Well, Lee, I think she's about right, you know. After all most of us are here for what we can make out of the country, and after all the improvements we put on are pretty poor after all. Most of us wait just as long as we can settle upon our farms, and then we clear out to some place where we can get more cheap land, and we are not ready to work here for what we get. Harvey was telling me about what she said, and it sort of hit me between the eyes. I think, boys, I'll have another year on my place at least, and not go to town this next fall as I figured. After all a fellow can make money out here

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