

## My First Prairie Fire

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night came and went. The cold, fierce wind blew in our faces. Far away in the east a dull glare told us of distant trouble. Weariness took hold of us, and dropping like dead men, we rested in the thick grass, motionless, inanimate, exhausted.

Silence encircled us. The quick, high pitched shriek of the wind and the crash of a stable falling into ashes. These were the only sounds.

"I guess we are through," said the philosopher.

"Yep!"

A weary, grateful chorus. Once more we stretched on the sod, conscious of good work well done.

"By the holy smoke!"

"By —!"

Stirred by the flow of oaths we half raised ourselves on our elbows.

One man sprang up.

"Come on, boys," he shouted, "it has started up again." A tiny patch, half-extinguished, had done the business. The leaping, jumping, crackling devil rushed towards us once more, laughing, exulting, rejoicing as it came. Once more the attack, once more the rhythmic beat, once more the dull, dead, destroying sound. Foot by foot, yard by yard, we conquered the fire. Grudgingly, reluctantly, the flames changed to embers, the embers became ashes. The moon appeared. Faint, sickly, cold, ashen, but for us full of hope. No longer we fought in the darkness, and as the dawn came, we realised the fruition of our work, we reaped the harvest of our labours. And—the wind went down. And as the first glimpse of the dawn broke into the half-light, we plodded home to fall into our beds, black, hungry, scorched, filthy beyond conception, infinitely tired.

As the last head touched the pillow, a few flakes of snow tapped at the window.

The philosopher spoke.

"That will fix it," he said.

"Y-e-p."

And seven men snored as one.

## A Passing Confidence

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on loving and believing in him," repeated themselves over and over in her memory. She had not done that . . . ah, no. She had cast belief and trust to the winds long ago. She had thought the worst of him. She had even been ashamed of loving him.

Just as she reached the main road a dog-cart came whirling around the curve under the maples. The driver pulled quickly at sight of her and asked her if she would get in, asked it doubtfully, for he had flung himself out of her presence that morning with an oath, and he did not know how she might receive this shame-faced advance. Persis smiled and came over to him. He helped her in. As they drove along under the maples she slipped her hand into his. "Jack," she said gently, "do you remember what day this is?"

He looked surprised at her tone.

"Yes. I went in this morning to speak of it to you, and I had a present for you . . . that big opal you fancied so much. But you were so hard on a fellow you didn't leave much room for sentiment."

"I was too hard. I'm sorry, Jack. I thought you had forgotten all about it. I'm so glad you didn't."

"A fellow doesn't forget his happy days," he said, with a rather constrained smile. Persis put her arm

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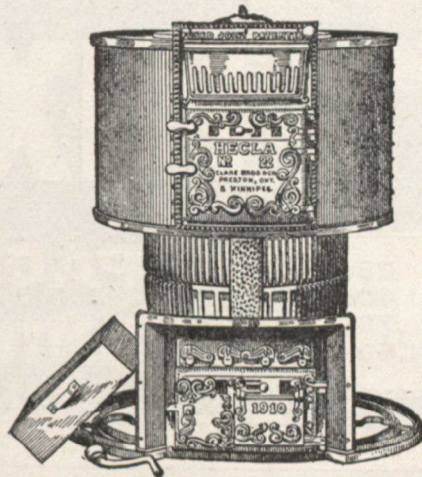
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