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1912

WESTERN HOME MONTHLY, Winnipeg.

Find enclosed \$1.00 for which send the Weekly Free Press and Prairie Farmer, Winnipeg, and the Western Home Monthly, to the following address for one year.

Joe Hebblethwaite's Day Off.

By H. W. Hemmingsstone. Written for the Western Home Monthly.



WHEN I say 'work,' I mean WORK!" said Joe Hebblethwaite in aggressive tones; and balancing a piece of bacon in mid-air upon the end of his fork, he turned a scowling countenance upon his better-half, who faced him at the other end of the breakfast table.

"And not just messin' around the house," he added, gaining assurance as she remained silent. "The woman sure has a snap these days!"

Joe and his pretty young wife were on the verge of a serious quarrel. One of those domestic storms had been quietly brewing for some days, and the atmosphere was in consequence heavily charged with electricity, which needed only the most trivial excuse to burst forth into a regular pyrotechnic display. Whether it would spend its strength in harmless noise, making the dull and jaded air fresh and sparkling again, or in its random rage remorselessly shatter some ill-spared 'turret'—perchance the very 'keep' itself—of Love's Castle, leaving but a few tottering walls behind, depended solely upon how well that same Castle had been 'rodded' and coiled round with Dan Cupid's extra special protective bands.

From the tell-tale signs plainly visible in both faces it was evident that the time for even eleventh-hour precautions was already passed, and their Castle must weather it out on its merits. Joe's face was pale and bloodless; his dark brows hung heavy and lowering above two sullen brown eyes, like thunder-clouds poised threateningly over a hushed countryside, while a nervous twitching of the thin lips betrayed the angry forces straining to break loose.

In Selina's fair cheeks burned two ominous red spots, twin signals of battle. The tilt of her dimpled chin was obstinate and decided, and a dangerous gleam in her blue eyes said clearly that if Joe was rash enough to provide the thunder she was only too ready to oblige with the lightning.

Deep down in both hearts was the uncomfortable consciousness that each was partly to blame and neither could have given in cold blood a good and sufficient reason for this belligerent display; but, such is the contrariness of human nature this very knowledge only made them the more relentlessly determined not to yield their ground by an inch.

When more than 8 years ago, Joe Hebblethwaite, then a young man of 22, won Selina Maitland for his bride in the face of determined competition, he considered himself the luckiest fellow in Canada. The acknowledged belle of the countryside, she had been widely and assiduously sought after. That it was a love match was patent to all, for amongst those rejected in Joe's favour were a rising young lawyer and the editor of the local paper, either of them excellent matches from a worldly point of view. 'What Selina could see in poor homely Joe!' was a nine-day's wonder to her girl friends, two of whom thankfully consented to console the lawyer and the editor for their blighted hopes, and occasionally now flashed past in clouds of dust and large red motor cars.

A half-section of moderate farming land, free from debt nevertheless, was the extent of Joe's possessions. Not a very alluring prospect for the beauty of the settlement, nor one likely to provide much in the way of luxuries. So when Joe nervously asked Mr. Maitland for his paternal blessing upon the engagement, the old man, who was nothing if not candid, did not hesitate to say that "he reckoned his gal cud do better 'n that anyway," and affected to treat the matter as a good joke, but none the less one that must not be repeated.

But though Joe was neither a rich nor a brilliant suitor he was a persevering one, and at length that very grit and

manliness in his nature, which had won its way to the daughter's heart, found the soft spot in the mother's also. With two such powerful allies on his side it was merely a question of time ere Mr. Maitland capitulated. And at length virtue met with its reward. For one day at the close of a particularly lengthy and hard-fought discussion, during which the young lover's ardent feelings suffered tortures from the older man's cold and business-like way of putting things, the inevitable happened. Drawing his left hand suspiciously across his face, the hale and hearty veteran extended a huge and horny right to his future son-in-law:—

"Waal, lad," he said whimsically, "I guess we might as well quit talkin', for ef th' ole lady sez its a 'go,' it'll hev ter be one anyway. She's wonnerful at git'n her way when she's sot her mind on a thing. And S'leny's a reg'lar chip of th' ole block, too," he added with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Be good ter her, lad, and God be good ter yez both!"

To Joe, who worshipped the very ground she trod so lightly upon, to be otherwise than good to Selina was as impossible as it was unthinkable. At the bottom of his honest heart there always lurked a feeling of wonder at his good fortune, and it had been his firm resolve that come what might his wife should never regret her choice. To this end he had spared neither time nor labor, and their home though humble was quite the neatest and nattiest in the district; while Selina, though she did not yet ride in a motor, possessed the dearest little pair of grey ponies, and a husband who was also a lover.

And in her Joe had found a true helpmeet. Both willing workers, and pulling together like a well-mated team, they made light of life's burden, and bade fair to go far. Another half-section had been added to the first, and a nice herd of dairy cows got together; for Selina was a clever butter-maker, and the weekly shipments to Winnipeg more than sufficed to pay their account at the General Store.

Three bright and healthy children blessed—their union. The two eldest, Lena and Jane, were big enough to get up to breakfast, and regular little chatter-boxes they were usually. This morning, however, they sat in unwonted silence, their blue eyes wide open, and their young minds wondering why 'mummy and daddy were so naughty!' Little Joe, the 'baby' still, though nearly four years old, was asleep upstairs. His eyes were brown, and he was the image of his father, though Selina, when she wished to tease her husband, used to pretend she could not see the likeness, until he in his turn pretended to be angry, when they compromised with a hug, in which Joe the younger sometimes came near being fairly smothered.

But neither was in 'hugging' mood this morning. The truth was that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," and what they needed was a holiday. Joe had been without help all summer partly owing to the scarcity of farm labourers, but chiefly with a view to economising. The work was beginning to be too much for him single handed, and he became cross and irritable as a result. The never-ending chores absorbed all his spare time and thoughts, until it seemed that he only entered the house at eating and sleeping time. Upon Selina too the burden of milking and buttermaking, as well as the care of the house and three young children, especially during the last long spell of hot weather, had left its mark, making her pale and listless, and quick to take offence at trifles.

This morning when Joe came hurrying in from the stable—he was always in a hurry now, thought Selina resentfully—eager to get out to his work on the summer-fallow, breakfast was not ready. In answer to his complaint at the delay, Selina referred contemp-