

to you and say you stole my oil, but they'd go on saying it behind your back. So, Cap, I thought I'd come right up here and tell everyone that you acted fair and square and that I knew the oil was there in the swamp."

Captain McPhee's eyes bulged with astonishment while all over the hall people jumped up on to chairs and craned their necks to get a glimpse of this extraordinary old man who stated so quietly that he knew oil was in his swamp and yet sold his farm for a mere pittance.

Captain McPhee's astonishment was so great that he could not help the words falling out of his open mouth. "You knew the oil was there?" he exclaimed.

"Of course I did. It fell in off me sleigh as I was crossing the swamp last April. Four cans there were, Cap, and my old moke dumped the lot into the swamp off the sled. It was too dark that night to get them and when I came along early the next morning and tried to rake them up I couldn't bring them to the surface, although I could feel them down in the swamp when I jabbed a long pole after them. I know I busted three and maybe the fourth, but I wouldn't be sure on that. Anyway, Cap, that's all I have to say. The oil is yours and welcome," and without apparently looking to the right hand or the left old Thorne turned and walked slowly down the centre aisle of the opera house and out of the door.

A great silence filled the hall while the old man went out, and for a few seconds afterwards. Carmagan felt his heart stop and a cold chill strike him at the pit of his stomach. He looked at the Captain. He was still standing at the edge of the platform. Twice Carmagan saw his lips move but he heard no sound.

Then the clergyman rose from his seat and walked solidly down the centre aisle. Captain McPhee remained on the platform as still as a graven image. Another and another of the great audience rose and went quickly from the hall. No one spoke, or if they did, only in whispers, that immovable figure chilled their mouths to silence. It was tragedy.

Carmagan sat as one in a dream. At last he awoke to the fact that only he and Captain McPhee remained. The hall was empty before them, the platform deserted, save for the still statuesque captain and himself.

Carmagan rose and he felt old and decrepit as he did so and touched McPhee on the right arm.

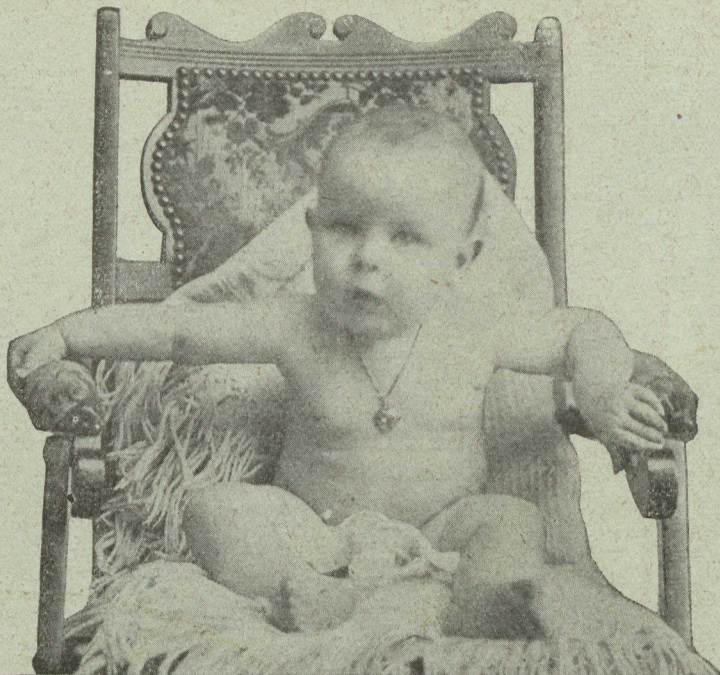
"Come on, Cap," he said, "it was sure a near thing, but there's nothing doing now."

McPhee did not move and Carmagan took hold of his arm and began to gently pull him towards the door at the back of the platform.

Suddenly Captain McPhee shook him off and flinging out his right hand before him pointed down the centre aisle towards the back of the empty hall.

"The jinx," he cried, "the jinx, I see it coming!" and turning quickly he ran across the platform and out into the gathering gloom.

They found him later that same evening, all covered with mud, dropping lighted matches into a little rain puddle five miles out on the prairie and cursing horribly because the water did not flare up into flame. And he would not listen to argument, so they put him under restraint.



Actual reproduction of one of the photos referred to in the letter.

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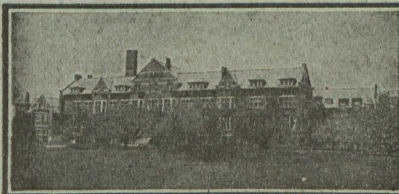
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