

who put the wrinkles in the bull's horn," and for the first time since Billy went away May indulged in a good hearty laugh.

CHAPTER III

When they drove over and "took a whirl out of Dad," the following morning the old man laughingly washed his hands of the whole matter, telling them they might do as they pleased. Thus left to themselves they quickly gathered up Kate's belongings and on the way back home, in high good humor with themselves, they planned the outset of their campaign.

Kate was a product of the range, wholesome and free as air, with a thorough knowledge of stock raising and all that goes with it, and as soon as they arrived at home she threw a saddle onto one of the bronks, rode out and run in the cattle. They cut out the steers that were fit for beef, run them back into the fenced field and turned the old cows and young cattle out on to the open range to rustle until snow came. Next they turned their attention to the horses, sorting them as they had done the cattle, corralling those that were fit for work and running out the mares and colts. When they came to the pig pasture Kate stood a long time gazing over the woven fence at the herd of porkers—nibbling the tender grain with which the field was sowed—and when May finally asked her what she was mooning about she answered absently: "It's mighty funny that nobody ever made a bunch of fool pigs pay, for I believe it can be done."

"All right," May laughed. "There are the fool pigs. Go to it and make them pay," and they went on down the field, joking, until they came to the much talked of field of wheat.

"Don't it seem too bad to have to turn all that grain under?" May asked sadly. Kate made her way out into the waist high grain before she answered, pulling off her head after head, examining them carefully. Then she burst out:

"Turn your grandmother's duck house under. That stuff will make the very best of feed."

"No?" May cried, excitedly, "are you sure?" "Am I sure? I froze my fingers many a day hauling poorer feed than that to a band of doggies."

"Then if that is so we may be able to make something out of it yet."

"How much hay did Billy get put up down on the bottoms?" Kate asked. "About a hundred and fifty tons."

"Well, just multiply that by five dollars a ton in the stack and you'll know what that field is worth to us, for we'll cut the wheat for our own feed and sell the hay to the feed barn man in town."

"But will he buy it, and pay us for it?" May wanted to know, remembering her experience with the stock.

"Well, if he won't buy it from us this fall he will next spring, and he'll pay us ten dollars for it then instead of five," and time told that the girl was right. That very afternoon they hitched the horses to the binder and started in to put the grain in shock.

Kate rigged up the team and made the first couple of rounds, instructing May in the operation of the big machine and soon she turned it over to her altogether and started in herself to do the shocking. Which of the girls worked the hardest neither ever knew. May's arms ached within an hour, from the weight of the heavy lines. Kate's back soon stiffened from handling the bulky bundles, and long before quitting time both were aching with fatigue. But they stuck to it, day after day, and, just when they were commencing to become hardened to their work, relief came. Kate's Dad secured a wandering half-wit to help them with the shocking.

After that things went swimmingly. May ran the binder—the lightest of the work. Billy, the half-wit followed the machine while Kate hitched up the bronks and started hauling in the bundles, piling them in a tangled heap around the corral, making no pretense at stacking, for, as she said, "it never rains in Alberta in the fall, anyway."

So the days passed and the work went on apace. The crop was harvested and the big field plowed. The hay was sold to

the barn man, the steers to the fat beef buyer and when finally the hogs were culled out and sold May found herself in possession of ample funds to carry her through another year, and one of her first provisions was to see that Kate had an opportunity to make those "fool pigs" pay, for, after the system was explained to her she came to the conclusion that they could raise a herd of hogs with very little outlay of either time or money. They spent the last few days before freeze-up getting the posts set for a larger pasture for the spring and bought a dozen brood sows to add to the fine ones they had kept. Then, when the cold nights came and the glory of an Alberta autumn was upon them they roamed the prairie on their saddle horses, shooting ducks and prairie chickens, making excursions to points of interest on the prairie and fishing in the innumerable lakes and creeks.

CHAPTER IV

During the long, cold days of winter, to quote Kate, they just stuck around and got fat. In the morning they would tumble out of bed at daylight, scramble into their outdoor clothes and make a dash for the corrals. A half hour of forking bundles to the cattle and grain to the hogs would start the young blood to racing through their veins and by the time they would get back to the shack their appetites would be in shape for a real man's size breakfast—bacon and eggs and flapjacks. Then their day was divided something like this. Two hours housework to get everything in shape, then magazines until noon. A few big yawns, then back into the mackinaws and another turn at feeding and a run to the creek to open the water holes. Then dinner and magazines again, or, if the afternoon were fine, a run on skis, or in the saddle, or a couple of hours with the long toboggan on the steep side hill above the shack.

So the days wore on to spring, and the snow disappeared from the prairies. Then all was bustle about the homestead. The girls were up with the early dawn and their songs rang out with the lark's.

Their seed was fanned, their harness overhauled, the machinery greased and everything gone over for the twentieth time, and now they but waited the day to start the big drills for seeding. It seemed to May afterwards that those busy spring days were the happiest in all her life, for she felt that now, for the first time in all her years she was really living, and doing something and, as she stood upon the foot-board of her drill, sweeping up and down the field behind her prancing four-up, she gloried in the possibilities that lay before her. Illness, or fatigue she never felt now. Her slender muscles were as hard as whipcord. The days were never long enough for the things she had to do, and, when at night, dog-tired and self complacent over work well done she would "turn in," her head would scarcely touch the pillow till she would be asleep.

As soon as the days became warm they sowed the seed upon their pig's pasture—oats and wheat and rye—and soon a swarming brood of little pigs surrounded each grunting mother as she rustled among the tender grain. This was indeed a time of joy to the two girl farmers; little calves were jumping and blating everywhere, each wise old mare guarded an inquisitive colt and it seemed as though the spirit of life was rampant in everything about. The year turned out good for crops, gentle rains falling all summer long and as the fall drew near and the hay was put in stack the girls felt assured that, barring an early frost, their crop would be a bumper.

Towards the last Kate swore every night when the wind went down and May would whisper a prayer of thankfulness each morning when she arose and found that dew had fallen instead of frost. Every day they would visit the field of wheat and at last there could be no further doubt, the grain was ripe and ready to be cut—a field of waving gold. To provide against the harvest May had secured a sturdy farm hand whose duty it would be to follow the binder, shock up the grain and relieve the girls of all the heavier work, for, now that a crop was assured, the expense of harvesting had become a mere detail.

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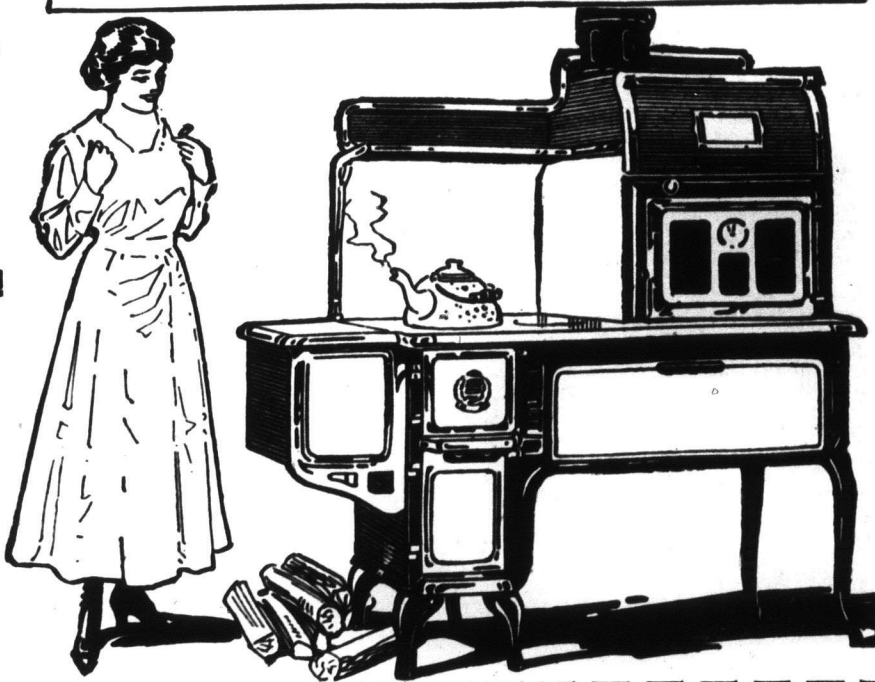
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