

In desperation Musquash struck out into the marsh, heading toward his old refuge on the north shore. The mink followed closer and closer. Soon he was within a foot of the game, another moment and the chase would be over. Musquash bared his teeth. If he must sell his life he would fight his foe under water, where the rat's greater endurance would more nearly equalize the odds. With this desperate resolve Musquash dived, turned suddenly in the water, and rose at his pursuer. His one faint hope was to secure a firm hold on the savage head or throat, and drag his foe to the bottom. This done, his superior power of continuing without air would enable him to hold on long enough to drown his enemy. But as he rose he discovered to his amazement that the mink was no longer on his trail. Gazing cautiously in all direc-

tions, he could see no sign of the assailant. Then in the upper air, he heard the snarl of the mink as if battling with some unseen antagonist. From under a lily leaf Musquash watched the writhing, biting fury, struggling in the clutches of the horned owl. The owl had, after many moons of stalking, seen his chance for a muskrat. He had swooped to catch a Tartar.

The mink seized the owl's leg, working upward toward a deadlier grip beneath the wing. Fang and talon made furious work; neither dared relax his grip. The combat drifted shoreward, wavered over the willow flat, and dropped from view in the meadow beyond.

Silently, fearfully, Musquash made his homeward route. How the battle terminated, he never learned. Both his enemies vanished, and the marsh which they had terrorized knew them no more.

Willie and His Valentine

A Story of Man's Shallying. Written for The Western Home Monthly by Lionel Kingsley.

IT was out in Alberta. A long, low range of hills sloped gently to some fair-seeming meadowland, brown soil washed at its edges by a small, swift creek of pure water. But the creek was not running now. At the touch of the Maker it had locked its murmurings within an icy garment, and the occasional wayfarer could now cross it dryshod. In the summer the stream took some wading, boots and stockings had to come off and acquaintance made with the cool water, for bridge there was none. On the slope of one of the gentlest of the hills stood a shack, low, ugly, and put up, evidently, by someone strange to the ways of the country. For here and there, in the quickly disappearing darkness of night, could be seen a drift of light, which, picturesque as it might look from the outside, meant knot holes and draughts of icy air within.

The door of the shack was thrown open and there appeared in the dull glow reflected from a fire, the figure of a man, young, presentable even. He gave a long look, a sad look. His thoughts were, seemingly, far away. He stood there, defiant of all the winds that blew—an. they blew eerily in the Alberta hills; coming across the razor-backs of one or two of the sharpest defined of them; they cut like knives into the skin, hardened as it was by exposure. But he stood there regardless of discomfort. His eyes, clear grey eyes, wandered up to the skies. It was now early morn, and the stars were beginning to die out in the heavens. The light moon hovered on the edge of day, seemingly reluctant to go into its place over some other part of the globe. Nothing disturbed the silence; it was as if nature were nodding over its coming work in the spring, when the creek should rush its piling waters down to the big river, and the lowlands should bring the preparing for a harvest.

Suddenly the man wheeled around, and clicked his fingers loudly. A collie, a beautiful scion of a Scotch race of King-dogs, came nuzzling his head into his master's eager hands. Master and dog were evidently good companions. Out in the hills companionship is appreciated and the one good thin about a dog, good friend as he may be, is that he doesn't answer one back, even if one is spoiling for a quarrel. "Come on, Bruce," said the grey-eyed man, "let us run over to the post office and see if there be any letters for Willie Macquarrie." Willie, it would appear by the warm glint that came into his eyes, expected something by the mail, and, as the month of February was getting towards its middle, one might have suggested that the glint was not unconnected with the idea of valentines. For Willie had always been a great one for this convenient way of delicately advising a lady that he considered her worthy of having money spent upon her. His reputation far away in Ross-shire, in the dear old Scotch hills, had been admirable in this respect and in that lengthy course, over which a young man's love affairs often range before he finds his right mate,

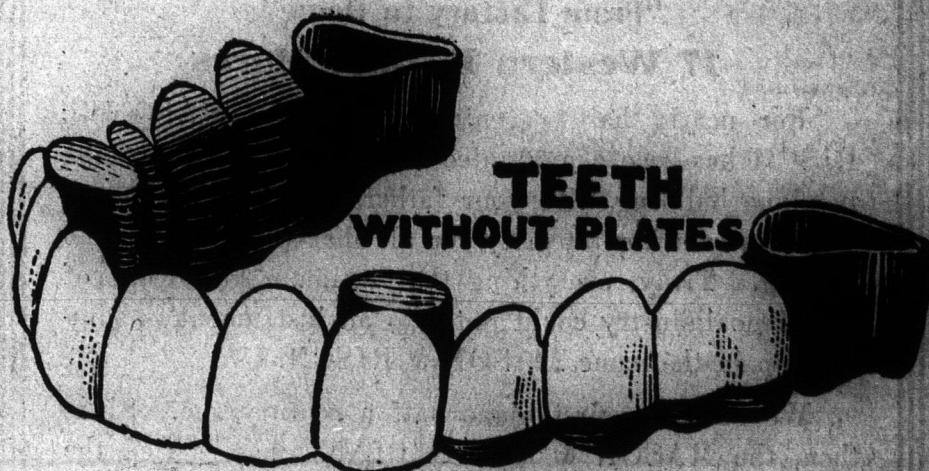
many a Highland girl had received some little token of a wasting passion in the shape of scent bottles, gloves, or ribbons, daintily ensconced in a lace covered box, shot with Cupid's arrows, and such like frivolities.

The "run" to the post office meant six miles, but this distance means nothing to a lover, especially when he is mounted on snow shoes. So a few minutes later the pair were sliding over the white expanse, down the slopes over the low lands, heading, in the crisp sharp air, for the resting place of love's message—perchance, if the gods were favorable to his suit—the mundane post office. The man's thoughts were occupied with the delight of receiving—just as a girl's is more often with the joy of giving. His imagination transported him away ahead of his snowshoes. Perhaps that was why one of them suddenly broke, and let him describe a parabola with extraordinary fluency of speed—as one might say—landing him head foremost in a drift. Up to his shoulders in the warm snowy blanket the lover's legs waved for a moment or two picturesquely in the air, the astonished collie sniffing hard at this abrupt up-ending of one of the great humans. A mighty heave and Willie came into his rightful position, his snowshoes in the process, rendering the dog half unconscious. With a long yelp Bruce subsided on a snow bank. There were the pair, with "hors de combat" for a time, midway between love's resting place and the fires of home, yeelped the shack on the hill. But everything passes, so off came the snowshoes. Bruce gradually became aware that he had worked the situation for all it was worth, and they struggled forward. A small collection of houses marked the township, the goal of the two adventurers. One of them had the temerity to dare the wintry air with the national flag. The air had, jealous of sundry wavings of the said flag, retorted by freezing it stiff, so that it now hung around the staff much like an umbrella which has seen better days.

No one was about as Willie and the dog stumbled into the one room which served as grocery store, post office, lounging place and all. To Willie the assortment of smells drifting about the heated place was sweet in his nostrils, and he sniffed long and luxuriously. He warmed himself at the stove, he melted the snow on his boots. He did everything but ask for his expected letters. He dallied with his sensations. He knew—or thought he knew—that he could, at any moment, receive what he expected across the counter. So, therefore, he considered, why not enjoy the pleasures of anticipation. For even Willie had lived long enough to know that the anticipation often far surpasses the reality. And, again, for the truth must be told, even about a Scotch laddie with clear grey eyes, Willie was a sad flirt. There might be one valentine waiting for him, there might be more. His feminine acquaintance in old Scotia



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