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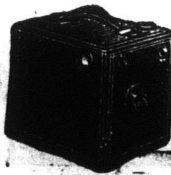
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A Strenuous Wooing

By E. L. Chicanot

WE had just finished supper and were consequently feeling in good humour as we sat in the bunk-house which was our only "Home Sweet Home," whilst out with the threshing outfit. Pipes and cigarettes were alight, and as the cold wind howled outside we instinctively drew closer to the little stove, and occasionally some particularly energetic one would so far bestir himself as to place another poplar log on the fire. Each head, lighted up by the fire of some smoking material, appeared above chair or box, whilst the particular pair of feet which belonged to each head it would have been difficult to pick out from amongst the conglomeration of boots resting on the stove.

Tom Baxter, the farmer whose crop we were threshing, was to be married the following week, the "second round," as Rob Mackay expressed it, for once before had he entered on the sea of matrimony, and this fact naturally brought round the conversation to a discussion of marriage and women in general. Old Nelson, who is never so happy as when filling his face, and who was plainly dis-

how Jack was beginnin' to leave behind all his little failin's, so to speak. He quit the booze, except on some special bust-up, an' took to chewin' gum an' usin' plain dictionary language, though it come pretty hard at first, him not bein' used to it. He was sure qualifyin' for the little Sunday-School-Willie class, an' one night he took a feller, who you might call a novice 'longside Jack, and threw him out the bunk-house fer makin' the air a little blue over a game of sevens-up. The feller was naturally a hot-headed cuss but he was so darned surprised that he just sat up on the ground gapin'. Believe me, there's only one thing that sets a feller on the goody line like that, an' we looks round fer the girl. She warn't hard to find neither, specially as Jack had took to goin' kind er frequent to the Horseshoe ranch, where Bessie Good kept house fer her old pa, when he was home, which warn't overly frequent, him havin' a double-distilled thirst fer stuff which Bessie wouldn't allow on the premises.

"We got to takin' an interest in Jack's courtin', none of us bein' in the runnin'



Everybody helps at the Harvest

gusted at the bachelor fare Baxter had put on the board, expressed the opinion that we were likely to get better grub when we came round next time, but we, most of us, asserted that there was more in marriage than that. I noticed that the married men were particularly strong on this point. Every man had his own views, which had all seen the light many a time before, and the female portion of the community was duly discussed and criticised. The subject seemed declining for lack of material when Rob Mackay, the separator man, pitched the stub of his cigarette in the stove, prepared to make another, and started out:

"I guess most of you fellers remember Jack Simmons that stopped at my place the summer 'fore last."

The waving of several pipes and cigarettes in their respective mouths gave assent, and Rob continued:

"Well, sir, Jack's got as fine a wife as ever a feller cud pick out of a fashion book, but he had the mightiest hard time 'courtin' I ever seen. He's a true sport though, an' he'll tell you right now that she was worth every bit of the trouble.

"Well, sir, you fellers know Jack was a cow-puncher, same as me, an' made of the same stuff as the rest of the species, only worse; just the sort of devil-may-care cuss you used to meet on the ranges them days. To hear him talkin' to the cows, when they'd break away, was a treat, an' fellers used ter come from the other ranches, an' take lessons, so to speak. He was sure a marvel at language work; just open his mouth an' let it say what it liked an' never say the same adjective twice in ten minutes. We was sure proud of Jack on the range an' he cud get a job anywhere.

"One summer Jack an' me was workin' on the BX ranch south of McLeod, an' me an' the other fellers began to notice

an' things not bein' so excitin' but that we'd jump at anything that might turn up an ace. We helped him out all we could an' shared up all our toggery. One feller lent his fancy saddle, an' another his silver spurs, an' while one curried down his pinto cayuse, another did the same job fer Jack.

"Well, sir, we seen pretty soon that things warn't goin' just right. Jack 'ud come back to the ranch at night, lookin' kinder worried like, an' throw all his joy-rags in the corner. We was kinder curious to know how things were goin', but it bein' a rather delicate subject we stood it off as long as we cud.

"Jack's partner was Roy Gates, a young feller just come that spring from the East. He warn't hardly the kinder feller we'd been used to, bein' really just a kid, with the face an' complexion of a girl, an' we ragged him considerable until Jack took him under his wing, an' they become great pals. Roy havin' best right, we primed him up to know how Cupid was gettin' along, an' one night when Jack turned up late, looking particularly vicious, he up an' asks how matters was goin'. For a minute or two Jack lapses back into his primitive state, so to speak, and strings out the adjectives, an' it began to look like the old times.

"It's that darned red-headed cuss, Smithers, from the Bar A," he says; 'the skunk seems to get there ahead o' me every blamed night, an' things is goin' bad.

"Speakin' dramatically, there was a rival on the scene, an' the next night when Jack goes out, we holds a pow-wow, an' there havin' bin always kinder bad feelin' with the Bar A ranch, we makes a motion, which everybody seconds, to get ahead of Smithers if it was only for the honour of the ranch. Lots of plans was talked over, but none was any good, so we just waited to see how things would turn out.

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