

afternoon," he remarked contentedly. "A fellow needs company bad enough any time, but when one of these big blizzards comes scally-hootin' across the prairie, its enough to drive a man crazy to sit here alone and listen to it screamin' at him like a pack of cut throat Sioux."

Alex held the bowl of his pipe in his big, red fist, and looked reflective.

"Right you are!" he said emphatically, adding with a half shame faced laugh: "I remember mighty well, the first one I put through all by my lonesome over there in my little soddy. I wouldn't own it to every one, but I don't mind tellin' you. I was so cussed home-sick, shut in there with that storm howlin' round me and no one to say a word to, that I sat there one whole blest ed afternoon and cried like a baby. That was the big whizzer we had the year before you struck this country. Lasted three days—I swear I never was so gawd glad to get out doors in my life, as I was the day the sun came out after that storm. I dug out and waded waist deep two miles and a half, over to Johnny Jenkins' place. He was that crazy to see some body that he actually hugged me. Yes sir! he hugged me till I thought I'd—"

"Alex! what the dickens is that?" and Bradley suddenly brought his feet down from the stove and the legs of his chair to the floor with a crash. "I've heard it twice."

"I didn't hear a thing except the wind."

"I did! I'd swear I heard some body calling my name; sounded like a woman's voice."

Alex threw back his head with a big jolly roar that would have shaken any thing less a part of the earth than a sod house

"Any body'd think this was your first blizzard Bradley. Haven't you been on the prairie long enough yet to know that when a blizzard takes the trouble to shut you up it brings along with it all the voices you ever heard in your life or dreamed of hearin'. Ain't I listened to 'em till I thought I'd lose my mind? Voices? Well I guess so! Women's voices? Yes, and men's too and children's. Voices of angels and devils! Howlin' coyotes and the bawlin' of the calves they're runnin' down. And when you've sized up all the sounds you've ever heard there ain't any much worse than that," he added thoughtfully. "Many's the time I've wakened in the night and listened to the pitiful bawlin' of some little calf out on the range and the horrid hair raisin' howl o' them damned coyotes, till I was scared stiff. Voices? Well I should say. I've heard a few myself. If the blizzard wasn't so cussed fond of lettin' loose these voices on a fellow, I could stand it pretty well. But I don't mind tellin' you they get me down."

Bradley got up and walked restlessly about, stopping at last at the window. He picked a withered leaf from the geranium and crumpled it in his hand.

"I'm glad I wrote to my wife not to come till later," he said. "You know she intended to come yesterday and I was goin' over to Lone Tree to meet her. But I was afraid of this. March came in too much on the lamb order. Besides, I've got to thinkin' it over and I concluded I'd rather she'd get her introduction to the country in the summer, when it doesn't look quite so gawd-forsaken."

"Right enough!" said Alex. "This country's all right when you get used to it, but winter is a bad time to begin. It's apt to be rather monotonous at first, do the best you can. But if you've known the prairies in summer you can forgive them for being so beastly dull and ugly in winter. However with nothing to remember, a man would cuss the thing and chuck it. I don't know

what a woman would do," he added reflectively. "Cry, I suppose, and want to go home to her ma."

"Ruth wouldn't!" said Bradley, shortly. "She'd set her teeth and stand it, same as the rest of us. Ruth is grit clean through. But I didn't see any use in her havin' to show it this year. And that twenty-nine mile drive from the railroad, with only two places where a person can stop to get warm's no fool of an item in winter weather. So I wrote her to wait until the first of May. I can wait a little longer I guess! Ruth is worth waiting for."

"Go on, old man. I'm listenin'. The twenty-ninth time I've listened to the praises of Ruth, this week. I've not been your chum for nothing since you went back east last summer and married that woman. Fire away Jim, I know how it goes. Been there myself. Been in love off and on ever since I was big enough to wear knee pants. And when you've found the only perfect woman in the world, and got a dead cinch on her, you've got to tell somebody, huh? Fire away! Don't be bashful."

He got up, stretched his brawny arms over his head, with a prodigious yawn, and came over to the window. Bradley laughed and clapped his arm about his friend's broad shoulders.

The afternoon had darkened toward evening, and the storm lulled a trifle.

"Seems as though the wind's gone down a little," said Alex. "But the storm ain't over, not much Mary Ann! We'll get some more before dark I guess."

He hummed lightly and airily with syllables of his own manufacture, a tune which sounded a little like, "The Girl I Left Behind me:"

Te de de de Te de de de
Te de de de de de de de
Te de de de —

He broke off suddenly. "I swear I heard something that time!" he said with a serious face.

"So did I," said Alex. "Well, what ever's doin' that howlin', we're goin' after it. It can't be far or we couldn't hear it in this row. I shan't stay indoors, and let this blizzard get even a dog if I can help it. Besides, if it is a dog, it's likely he's got some folks, though I hope to gwad nobody in this part of the country was fool enough to start to go any place this afternoon. I'm fool enough, the Lord knows, but I ain't fool enough for that."

Alex was struggling into his coat, as he talked, pulling on his fur cap and as he finished his speech he tied a handkerchief over his mouth and picked up his big fur mittens.

Bradley fixed the fire, shut off the draughts, with the remark, "We'll most likely be pretty cold when we come in." This done he hurried into his furs, dropped a compass into his pocket and they plunged outside into the snow.

Once outside in the swirl and stress of the storm they stopped and stood with their backs to the wind, listening. The plain was wrapped in a whirling maze of zigzagging white, and the roar of the wind in their ears was like the roar of the sea. They shouted to each other, and the gale bore their voices away, so that the voice of each to each, came faintly as from afar.

Suddenly, faint, scarcely to be heard through the tumult of the storm, yet unmistakable came the long drawn howl of a dog.

It sounded a little to the westward. Plunging in that direction across the wind, which buffeted them with merciless blows, they walled through the drifts, for what was really a short way though it seemed an interminable distance.

"Give it up?" yelled Alex in Bradley's

ear as he stopped to take breath.

Bradley shook his head.

Then suddenly, so near that both men started, sounded a loud, joyous barking, and a big, shaggy St. Bernard hung himself upon them.

Alex stooped over him, and put a hand on the big, tawny head. The dog whined and looked back over his shoulder, then up into Alex's face.

"He's got folks some where here," Bradley shouted. "Come on!"

The dog waited whining, until they struggled forward, then uttering a succession of short barks he plunged on through the drifts, running back now and then to make sure of his new-found friends. Stumbling on fifty yards further, they came suddenly upon that which they sought.

Half buried in the snow, a man stood at the head of a big team which stood tails to the wind with discouraged heads hung low. The slack traces led back to a low home-made sled, in which was a bundle of robes and shawls.

The dog scratched and tore at them as Bradley and Alex rushed forward shouting. The bundle moved, and something within the innumerable wrappings sat up and peered out.

"Thank the Lord!" shouted the driver as they came up. "I thought we was done for. Hope the woman ain't froze!" "Get in the sled!" yelled Bradley. "I'll lead the team."

He turned the horses carefully, and calling to Alex to take the compass and "break a way," he tramped stubbornly back toward home, guiding them partly by the compass, but mostly by his own sure instinct trained by long years on the prairie. Alex held a straight course and they came after a numbing struggle of a half hour, back to the low, storm encompassed house.

"You go on in with them," said Alex. "I'll take the team to the barn."

The driver lifted the woman from the sled as Bradley threw open the door, and they stepped into the warm, cozy room where the stove glowed with the fire Bradley had made before they left. It was like a haven of peace. Breathless as they were from the long struggle with the wind and numb with cold, no one spoke.

The driver began to unwind his long crocheted scarf from his neck. The dog shook himself free of snow sending a million little drops over the bare floor. The woman unwound the shawl from her head. Bradley was struggling against the wind to shut the door. When he turned he saw a tall woman standing with her back toward him and the door. A big coil of yellow hair glowed like gold under her soft Alpine hat. He gave a great start, flung the snow from his eyes, and stood motionless, scarcely breathing.

The other man was talking in a low, monotonous voice as he took off his over coat and wiped the snow from his long, black whiskers with his big, red cotton handkerchief.

"I told ye we'd get lost," he was saying. "'Nd I was a blame fool to let you come it over me that-a-way and set out with ye in the teeth of a blizzard. However, all's well that ends well, as the sayin' is!"

"Ruth!" It was a great, hoarse cry, from the depths of Bradley's soul.

The woman had turned her face toward him.

When Alex came in a few minutes later, Ruth was comfortably ensconced in Bradley's one wooden rocker, before the fire with the dog at her feet. Bradley stood beside her with one hand on her fair head. The driver with his feet in the oven, and satisfaction in his soul, beamed upon them a smile both comprehensive and comprehending.

Alex stared at Bradley's face as it was turned toward him. It was as the

face of a stranger. Then the truth burst upon him.

"Well I'll be blowed," he said.

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