

"Come in to dinner."

Frank arose laboriously. He looked at me with a trace of embarrassment.

"Ben to dinner?"

"No," I answered.

"Come on in then. You won't get much to eat, but what there is you're welcome to." He shoved open the old warped door that hung loosely upon its leather hinges, and went before me into the house. I looked around me curiously. The floor was nothing but the bare earth. In one corner a great hole had been scraped, and there lay the wooly dog glaring at me malignantly. The walls were covered with yellowing newspapers, the ceiling with coarse, cracked building paper. At the one open window sat a crooked old woman with a brown face like a shrivelled potato. She was puffing away at a grimy, crooked-stemmed pipe, which she laid upon the window sill as I entered, and stared suspiciously at me, with her long brown fingers pulling at the one yellow tooth in her shrivelled gums.

"Set down," said my host, pushing a chair to the bare table.

The kitchen door opened and a pale, light haired young woman, walking with a crutch entered the room, carrying in one hand three plates with a handful of knives and forks upon them. As she saw me she let the plates fall, making a great clatter.

"Wilina!" screamed the old woman.

"Cussed awkwardness" growled Frank.

The woman leaned her crutch against the wall, stooped down and picked up the dishes and then retreated to the kitchen. Soon she returned with the dishes and placed them on the table. Then she brought a plate heaped high with fragrant Johnny-cake, and a bowl of gravy. Last she brought a dish with some warmed-over prairie chicken which she placed by the plate of her lord.

Frank looked at the table with evident discontent. "Haint you got nothing else? We've got company."

"Dere wasn't any more" said the woman in a low, humble voice.

"Them Swedes, they can't cook nothin'!" snarled the old woman.

"Help yourse'lf, mister," said Frank, pushing the Johnny-cake nearer me. He broke

open a piece and eyed it critically.

"What kind of meal is that cake made of, anyhow?" he demanded. "Taint half ground."

"De barrel vas empty, so I had to make it vid de coffee mill."

The old woman glared at her furiously and Frank swore a little in a low voice. I glanced at the young woman and saw a big tear running down her pale cheek.

The meal went on in silence. Frank ate like a famished Hercules. He kept the prairie-chicken by his own plate and ate it all himself, muttering that his health required some meat. Everybody was through, even Frank, who was sucking the bits of chicken gravy from his fingers, when the dog sprang up and began to bark furiously. I heard the sound of horses galloping through the weeds. Frank leaned back in his chair and looked out of the window. "Why didn't you tie them horses?" he asked sharply.

"I fell ven I vater dem, and de horses, dey run away," she answered beginning to cry.

"Well, them horses hev got to be tied."

She hobbled away as fast as she could. Frank went to the door and looked after her.

The old woman came closer to me. "That's always the way with her. Them Swedes don't amount to a hill of beans."

"Indeed?" I said.

"Hey?"

"Is that so?" I said correcting my impression.

"Yes; she aint worth anything. It does provoke me so. It's a shame, I say. Now Frank is a good boy and deserves a good wife. And then that he should throw himself away on a Swede."

"What made him marry her?" I asked overcome by curiosity.

"Well her father was kind of rich. But then he was fool enough to sign somebodys bond and lost his farm. And last spring when the hosses run away she was throwed out and crippled for life. It would have ben a good thing if she had ben killed; she wouldn't have ben a dead weight on poor Frank. Yes sir, it would have ben good if she'd ben killed, and I don't make no bones about telling her so nuther."

I could endure that old woman no longer, so I left the room. I said good day to Frank