

The Free Press Short Story

THE WHISTLING HOLE

FAYE N. MERRIMAN

TELEPHONE for you, Miss Duncan. Elizabeth glanced up in surprise. It was rarely that anyone called her at the office. Only when she heard Harvey's voice, sharp with excitement, was her interest aroused.

"Listen to me carefully," her brother began without any preliminaries. "Get that option upon the West place if you can find it, and put it in a safe deposit box. If anything should happen that I could not get home before the first, raise the money in some way to pay the initial amount mentioned. Don't forget."

"But Harvey—"

"I haven't time for another word; the train leaves in two minutes. He's a good soldier, Bess, and so what I say."

The girl sat for a moment, staring dazedly ahead of her, the receiver still in her hand. The West Place—Harvey—option—the words seemed to swirl through her consciousness senselessly. It was not until she rubbed her forehead energetically for a moment with tense fingers that she could remember.

"Yes, Harvey had secured an option on West Place just before their father died. The strip of land along the river bottom and running up and crossing the low rocky hills beyond had originally been a part of their own place, but had been sold in a time of stress. The boy had planned to repurchase it, with the money that came from the sale of timber on land where he was cutting the trees on shares, but a dishonest partner had cheated him out of the greater portion of his part, and the father's death had followed, making it necessary for the two young people to abandon the sadly unproductive ranch and go into town to work. Harvey had secured an excellent position traveling, while Bess found a place in Mr. Gregory's office. She had completely forgotten the option.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mr. Gregory, watching her keenly as she resumed her seat.

"I think not," answered the girl, deliberately putting the puzzle from her mind and taking up her pen to resume the interrupted dictation. Her pencil moved smoothly and rapidly over the paper.

The apartment in which the two young people lived was but a few blocks from the office, and Elizabeth always returned there for her lunch. To-day, as she felt in her bag for her key, she was surprised to see the door open slowly before her. "Why—how strange!" she cried. "I didn't know I ever left it unlocked!"

As she stepped inside, a swift breeze met her, carrying a bit of paper into her face. Automatically her fingers grasped it. "Why, that is a receipt out of the cash box," she said. She glanced around. The room was the scene of utmost confusion. The rugs were pulled aside, chairs were overturned, the cushions of the sofa had been tumbled upon the floor, and one or two had their covers torn, while the contents of the cash box were scattered far and wide.

"The place has been robbed!" cried Elizabeth, peering out of the window leading to the rear escape. No one was to be seen. Methodically she commenced to pick up the litter, and set the room to rights. A little packet of bills of small denominations that had been in the tin box, lay among the scattered papers. Elizabeth picked them up in astonishment. "Strange they didn't take these," she thought.

The girl hurried into the bedroom, and as she expected, found the scene repeated here. An inspection of the upper drawer where she kept her few pieces of really good jewelry, however, revealed to her that nothing had been taken.

Elizabeth sat down upon the edge of the bed breathlessly. "The option!" she thought in a flash. "Some one is looking for that option! But why? Her forehead knotted into lines of perplexity. Where was the option? Why she had not even thought of it for months, in fact, she had forgotten its very existence until Harvey had called up about it. She was quite sure she had never seen it since she and her brother came in to town. Then it must still be out at the ranch!

Hastily swallowing a glass of milk and a sandwich, the girl hurried back to the office. "Mr. Gregory," she said, "I should like to have the afternoon off if possible."

Her employer raised his brows. "Isn't this rather short notice?" he asked.

"Briefly," Elizabeth explained while the man tapped softly upon the desk blotter with his glasses. "Let's see, what you call West Place, just where is it located?"

When Elizabeth explained the location, she was rewarded by the stifling of Mr. Gregory's figure and the sudden light of interest dawning in his eyes. "Let's see," he observed, "that is out toward those queer, low hills. I believe there's a natural curiosity of some kind there that I have heard of that attracts tourists during the summer."

"The whistling hole!" interrupted Elizabeth suddenly. "That is between our place and the car line. We played there as children, but it was not until the coming of the automobile tourist that it won fame as a curiosity. But that—"

"Has nothing to do with the present matter," Mr. Gregory finished for her. "Perhaps it has more than you think. A famous geologist was among the automobile tourists to visit the cur-

deak to pieces with an ax, once their suspicions were aroused.

Suddenly Elizabeth felt the old house shudder. The stranger was trying to force the door. It was stout and would hold for a few moments the secret of the house, but it was also old, and eventually would yield. Under cover of the racket, the girl sped across the front room, unlocked the door, and was out through the front gate, keeping shrubs and trees between her and the man as long as possible. Then, with the bag grasped in her hand, she commenced the ascent of the path which would bring her out into clear sight.

A light breeze came welling back and turned her ankle at the top of the first hill. Instinctively she glanced over her shoulder, and her worst fears were realized. Her pursuer had discovered her presence, and was plunging up the hill in hot pursuit. Elizabeth limped along as rapidly as she could, but the result of a race so unequal was inevitable. The man gained upon her rapidly.

Just why she left the main path and ran toward the whistling hole, Elizabeth did not stop to analyze. Perhaps she cherished a wild hope of throwing the man off the trail, perhaps she sought, at the old, familiar spot unconsciously, at any rate, a few moments found her at the brink of the mysterious place. She glanced back.

Soon the man plunged into sight. He grinned triumphantly. "Just toss down that paper you took from the old house," he said when he stood directly below her. "It will save me going up after it, and you some trouble. I don't want to have to hurt you, but I have instructions to get hold of that paper, and I intend to do it."

Elizabeth glanced frantically around. No one was in sight. During the tourist season many persons made pilgrimages to the whistling hole, but to-day the vicinity was deserted. She searched for some weapon, something with which to defend herself, but there was nothing but the round edges of the hole. Suddenly the whistling and moaning began, and she had the satisfaction of seeing the man start. The girl drew back as a current of air shot upward, catching at her hat and tearing it from her head, hurling it into the air and keeping it there. The man laughed again, and commenced to climb the slope that separated them.

Elizabeth snatched the folded paper from her bag and held it. When the stranger's face appeared on a level with her feet, she suddenly tossed the document away from her into the spouting air current.

Her pursuer started in surprise as the paper lifted, the edges fluttering. He sprang up, made several ineffectual efforts to seize it, and then peered down into the hole as the current suddenly subsided, taking head-gear and paper along with it. "Well, that's gone, you rumbakill!" he said. "You haven't much sense. As long as the paper is destroyed, it is just the same as if I had it in my possession. Lather Miller will be just as pleased with it gone into the centre of the earth, as with it back in his possession. Of course, he would never have given it if he had known about the oil."

"It really belonged to us anyway," Elizabeth replied. "Mr. Miller took advantage of us in time of trouble, and urged my brother to pay for the option."

"Then that really was the option?" A look of crafty suspicion had been dawned on his face. Swiftly he snatched her bag, examined it, and then appar-

ently satisfied, disappeared down the trail while Elizabeth clung to the edge of the rock and held her breath, her eyes upon the wrist watch held before her. She heard the clanging of the car bell, and almost immediately the whistling hole commenced to moan and groan again. Suddenly out of the depths shot the air as before, bringing with it the rather rowdy looking hat, and the fluttering paper. The two objects fell at Elizabeth's feet.

The girl tore the lining of her coat and inserted the paper carefully within. Then she pulled the battered hat down over her head. "When I saw you going straight up, I knew what to do," she chuckled.

Recognized as a leading specific for the destruction of worms, Mother Graves' Worm Exterminator has proved a boon to suffering children everywhere. It seldom fails.

HOW TO TELL WHEN MUSKMELONS ARE RIPE

The production of muskmelons is a specialized business understood by the best experienced gardeners. This crop is as a rule a profitable one to grow, particularly if it can be marketed early, but in these days when melons are imported from the more southern regions the edge is as a rule off the market for the so-called early local crop despite the difference in quality in favor of the local product.

The difficulty of interpreting the signs of maturity in muskmelons that are essential to keeping quality where the melons are to be shipped long distances often results in melons of inferior quality being offered for sale by dealers. The proper stage of maturity may be determined to a fair degree by the appearance of the netting. Green melons have shallow, smooth netting, while mature melons have rough, corky netting.

Where melons are being grown for local market the degree of maturity may be judged by the peduncle or stem. For such a market the fruits may be removed at the half-slip stage or when a line or break between the melon and peduncle or stem is showing and leaves the melon in part only. When the fruits are harvested at this stage they are not fully mature but are developed to the points where they will keep well and have very fair quality, sweetness and flavor.

The full-slip stage is by far the best time to harvest the melons for local market, that is when the peduncle or stem comes away easily and free from the fruits leaving a large scar. At this stage the melons will possess the highest sugar content and have the best flavor and quality.

In passing, a partly matured melon when harvested and kept for several days will develop the usual flavor but will not develop the sugary high quality that the melon will that has been fully matured on the vines.

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP

Dorothy, attending the Episcopal Church for the first time, was surprised to see the people about her kneel suddenly. Turning to her mother she asked what they were going to do.

"Rush, darling," whispered mother, "they are going to say their prayers."

"What! With all their clothes on?" said Dorothy.

SLATS' DIARY
BY ROSS FARQUHAR

Friday—Pa is lookin for a new Raddio Set. He dussent like these here sets with you Ping in on the current, he likes the ole fashioned Battery set. Because you dont half to listen to it wile you are haveing them Recharged he says.

Saturday — Pa go into more trouble at the noose paper shop with he wicks at today, he printed a peace about the boss of the noose paper was a going to spend a few mons. In the open and he left off the letter o of the wifd OPEN.

Sunday—Ant Emmy was very very Kelted las nite she sed she cudent sleep on acct. of these was a duple cats kep houlting all nite but it was all rite. We found out it was oney a fello a playing the Saxafone wile he was calling on the girl wifd lives next dore to us.

Monday—pa went and bought his self a ole fashioned nite shirt tought he say he dissided to cut out Pajamas on acct. it was to Atemimaut he says.

Tuesday—well the forth of July was not very successfull here in town oney I kid got a finger shot off and 2 houses burnt down. But what can you expeck when they once allow the store keepers to sell far wicks 2 days before the forth of July. Ma wanted pa to go to ottomabeel races but he sed he went last yr. and set there all day and never saw even 1 man get kilt.

Wednesday—the new kid, witch moved in the house a crost the st. with his muther says his father is a very emportant man becuz the government wants him very very Bad and wood give a Reward of 5 thousand \$ if enny one can produce him to the government. He says his father has made a lot of munny and the government is jellus mubby.

Thursday—Jakes pa is out of wifd so Jakkies unkel sed for him to send him out there doing the Depreshun, but yesterday they got a Telegram and his unkel sed. I am sending Jake back you mite send the depreshun in sted of Jake.

WORD PERFECT

At a singing competition the local baritone sang "The Village Blacksmith," and was confident of being placed first. On the result being declared he was disappointed to find he was only second, and asked for an explanation.

"Well," said the adjudicator, "you made a bad blunder. Instead of singing 'Each evening sees it close, you sang, 'Each evening sees some task begun, 'each morning sees it close.'"

"That was right enough," protested the singer. "Don't you know he was on the night shift?"

CHEAPER

MacGregor had just arrived in America after a weary journey across the Atlantic. As he walked off the ship he saw a man in a diving outfit climbing up from the harbor to the deck of a nearby boat. "Mon! Mon!" he exclaimed. "I wish I'd known about that sooner; I'd have walked across myself."

THE MIBROE BETRAYS

Wife—Do you know, I have a very small mouth. In the glass it doesn't look large enough to hold my tongue.
Husband—It isn't.



"It's lovely honey—how much do you want?"

All her neighbors wonder how Ed Baker's wife gets such good prices for her honey. But Mrs. Baker's secret is simple. She sells by Long Distance telephone.

"It's lovely honey this summer," she telephones to the hotel in town. "Yes—I'll deliver by the end of the week."

Long Distance is quick, easy to use—and profitable.

DOUGLAS' EGYPTIAN LINIMENT, always quick, always certain. Stops bleeding instantly. Cauterizes wounds and prevents blood poisoning. Splendid for muscular rheumatism.

POINTS ON RAISING HOGS

The Superintendent of the Dominion Experimental Station at Windermere, B. C., presents a bit of homely logic in connection with the raising of hogs in a report recently issued, in which he says, "Expensive buildings are not necessary for the successful rearing of pigs. The main points to bear in mind are that the animals should be protected from the storms in winter and the sun in the summer time. The bedding quarters should be dry at all times, and well bedded with straw in winter. At the station a straw shed has given good results, and is preferred by the pigs to the up-to-date piggery. Single ply cabins if well bedded are quite satisfactory."

LOW EVENING RATES on Station-to-Station calls begin 7:00 p.m. Still lower night rates at 8:30 p.m.

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GOOD YEAR

BE SAFE—BUY TIRES WITH THE TREAD IN THE CENTRE WHERE THE TIRE MEETS THE ROAD.