

The Free Press Short Story

The Guardian of the Double M

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At four o'clock, as the sun began to dip toward the western Rockies, Roger Melton pulled his horse to a stop before descending the bluff to the Double M ranch.

"This has been a good birthday, Keno, old boy," he remarked.

He had been spending his nineteenth birthday in tallying the Double M range horses, and had found them in good shape, all fat and ready to rustle through another blizzardy Montana winter.

Roger took a distinctly personal interest in those range horses. At breakfast Claude had said, "When you're twenty-one, Brother, I'll take you into full partnership."

Claude was twenty-eight, with a teasing grin and a nonchalant manner. He was, however, a hustler. He had started with just a small legacy seven years before and had established the Double M stock ranch in one of the least populated regions of Montana.

He was successful, and he was far-sighted, working for quality rather than quantity in both cattle and horses. Roger was proud of the prospect of being his partner. He and Claude were alone in the world.

The latter had sent for him when their father had died five years before.

Just now, however, Claude was in a quandary. By means of a clever irrigating stunt he had raised a great crop of feed during a locally dry year, and now he had practically no stock. He had been offered such a good price for his cattle that he had sold most of them; and when he had started to look around for a cheap bunch of beef to winter, he had found the country pretty well cleaned up of any young stuff he could afford to buy.

He had started off that morning on a half-broken horse to pick up any cattle news he could, and Roger had not seen him since.

When Roger stabled his horse, he found Claude's beloved Plume in a stall near by. Little Plume was a slim, fast bay. His own Keno was a big, rangy, blaze-faced sorrel.

"Claude's weak in his head, Keno," Roger informed his horse as he washed the sweat from the sorrel's back with a soft rag and cool water. "He thinks Plume is a faster stepper than you are. We'll show him yet!"

Plume nickered impudently as though he understood. The bay was fast, and he had beaten the sorrel twice in quick half-mile rushes. After each trial, Roger had argued indignantly: "But Keno can beat him! A half isn't long enough, Claude."

Claude had laughed indulgently, scoffingly, and retorted: "Well, he hasn't yet."

At the finish of the last sprint, he had added teasingly: "Tell you, Buddy, if your Keno ever does lick Plume, I'll give you my gr-r-and black Angora chaps!"

If Claude had a weakness, it was his fondness for gay trappings. His purchase of the famous leg coverings had been his one and only personal extravagance in years. He was justified, for they were really a necessity; but his proposal showed just how low he held the sorrel's chances.

Roger still believed in Keno, however, and he coveted those Angora chaps as he had never coveted anything else.

Loading the mangers with hay, Roger went to the house. It was early yet, not five o'clock.

Roger wondered idly where his elder brother was. Full of energy, he needed the vegetable patch for a bit; then, observing indications of an unusually gorgeous sunset, he threw his saddle on the refreshed Keno and rode to the top of a small hill, about an eighth of a mile from the ranch.

The vivid glow in the sky was blotted out by muttering thunderclouds. Twisting in his saddle, Roger gazed back at the ranch. The soft, bright twilight was being routed by premature darkness, but it was not too dark for Roger to see something that astonished him.

A rider on a white horse had dashed into the barn corral, a man in shimmering, cream-colored chaps and screaming black and white checked shirt.

"What in the world!" exclaimed Roger.

Almost at once, however, he was electrified into action, for the man had dashed into the stable and then reappeared in a twinkling leading the prancing Plume. The next second he was mounted and racing up the rough road that led toward Old Man Dunlap's ranch.

"Why the crazy horse thief!" snorted Roger, whirling Keno about and starting in pursuit.

Plume and the horse thief were far in advance. Presently they topped the grade and disappeared. Roger checked his wild pace. He would save Keno, for on the other side of the grade was a long series of undulating slopes. There, if ever, they must catch the thief!

The interval until they gained the top was torture. Suppose he should find that Plume and his rider had melted into the concealing welter of pines and brush-covered draws and coulees?

They had not. Roger saw them flying on ahead a mile down the road. A spear of lightning lit up earth and sky,

outlining clearly the man on Plume's back. Queer he was riding so fast. He had not been pursued when he hit the ranch. Why should he be in such a lather?

Roger, however, had scant time for speculation. His job was to recover Plume. He leaned over on Keno's back. "Go to it, old boy!" he yelled.

A mile at that mad speed! Still Keno did not waver in his stride, and the gap was closing. Only three-quarters of a mile separated the flying riders. The distance between them shortened. A half mile, a quarter, and Roger gave a long raucous, blood-curdling yell.

An opportune flash of lightning turned him that the horse thief had shored in his saddle, was aware of his pursuit. He was calling on the last burst of speed Plume possessed. "You'll pay for that," muttered Roger. "Keep it up, Keno."

Suddenly another thought struck him. "Hi, Keno!" he yelled. "Wait till I tell Claude about your running down Plume! I'm due to get one pair of fancy riding pants!"

Keno was drawing closer, closer to Plume. A hundred yards—a hundred feet! Desperately, Roger planned. He did not believe the horse thief was armed. He felt certain his own strength would be equal to a hand to hand struggle. He could not barely see the blur of the horse as it sped across the prairie ahead of him.

Suddenly the darkness ahead of him began splitting flame. Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Four shots in all! Roger instinctively dodged, this way and that.

For an instant the youth checked his horse. No more bullets, however, whistled above his head. Keno, sobbing now, but maddened, again closed in.

Roger was a length behind. "Stop!" he shrieked, hoarsely. "I'll shoot!"

Abruptly the man slid Plume to a halt, dived from his back, and scuttled into the brush. Roger flung himself off Keno and dashed after him. For a moment he traced the man by the crackling, swishing noise of the bushes; then these guiding sounds ended.

Roger plunged ahead for a moment recklessly. He would catch the thief if it was the last thing he did. He stopped to listen intently. Suddenly some one sprang out from the bushes, came plunging upon him, and seized him in a smothering embrace. The next instant he was neatly tripped and thrown upon his back. "Now then!" snarled a voice. "What do you want?"

Roger could not see any use in telling. Silently, violently, he heaved himself to and fro in the darkness.

In the end, exhausted, Roger did cease struggling, wondering what the thief was going to do with him. At that moment the lightning flashed. In the blue-white splendor, outlining every twig and shrub, Roger saw his captor as plainly as his captor saw him. He was glaring up into the face of Claude, and Claude was glaring down on him!

Darkness wrapped itself around them again. Roger felt Claude relax his hold. Awkwardly, without a word, both rose to their feet.

Claude finally broke into speech. "Of all the crazy stunts!" he burst forth.

"Crazy stunts yourself!" retorted Roger. "Suppose you start in explaining."

In the end, Claude did. He pointed out somewhat violently that, as Roger knew, he had ridden off that morning to pick up news of purchasable cattle. At noon, after doing various errands, he had met young William Dunlap, who had told him that a big fire had burned up half of old Man Dunlap's hay. With winter approaching and feed high, Dunlap would be glad to sell off part of his young stock at bargain prices. His son had advised Claude to get some cash, hurry out to the old rancher, wave it under his nose, and bargain.

Claude had visited his bank, swapped horses with William, whose white horse was fresher than his broncho, and headed for Dunlap's. The shortest route back was through his own ranch, and there Claude had paused to change his borrowed mount for Plume.

"But," growled Roger, ruffled from his mauling. "Why didn't you slow up when you heard me shout?"

Claude snorted. "How'd I know who you were? Do you suppose, there in the dark when I couldn't see who it was, I was going to slow up—when I've got thirty-five hundred dollars in cash on me?"

"Boy!" whispered Roger. "No wonder you shot at me!"

"Lucky I didn't have any more shells to drill at you!" Claude reflected.

The danger was past. Near tragedy was becoming sheer comedy. Roger broke into jeering chuckles.

"Whose horse is fastest?" he demanded.

Claude swallowed hard, then he admitted, "Yours!"

Roger openly gloated. "Remember your promise? Well, you skin out of those giddy chaps right now. I aim to look pretty when we prance in at Dunlap's. If you hadn't got reckless and bought yourself those white chaps and that howling shirt, I might have known

who you were instead of thinking you a common horse thief."

His gloating and chortling went unrebuked. Claude was busy with the connotations that go with taking off elaborate riding breeches. Soon Roger was putting them on.

"You look pretty impressive," Claude admitted; then he grinned broadly. "Will I spoil those chaps for you, Roger, if I tell you that you were going to get them anyway?"

"Why?" demanded Roger. "And what for? You can't spoof me with that."

"It's a fact," Claude insisted. "I traded my blacks for 'em. Gave a punched ten berries to boot. They're your birthday present. I reckoned you'd like white better than black. And I've got a blue and white shirt like mine for you."

As he spoke, the lover of gay horse gear was cheerfully crawling into the old shabby chaps his younger brother had tossed to him. "Hurry up," he added. "I want to see Old Man Dunlap before he starts his nightly chores."

Roger was not listening. He was regarding his white Angoras with suddenly blurred eyes. "Claude," he announced, "you're a flop as a horse thief, but you're a prince as a birthday present picker!"

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.

THE FROST IS ON THE PUMPKIN

To many, the pumpkin is but a symbol of Halloween. To others it means only Mother's pumpkin pie. There are many other excellent ways in which pumpkin may be served. Try these:

- HONEY PUMPKIN PIE
1 cup cooked pumpkin
1/4 cup honey
1/2 teaspoon ginger
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2-teaspoon salt
-1 egg
1 1/4 cups milk

Press pumpkin through a fine sieve, add salt, spices and honey, beat well. All well-beaten eggs, then milk. Pour into a deep pie plate lined with pastry and bake at 450 degrees F. for ten minutes, then reduce to 325 degrees F. Bake until custard is firm.

Pumpkin Custard is excellent for children and may be served when pie is served to adults. Use the above recipe, omitting the spices. Bake in custard cups.

- PUMPKIN CHIPS
6 lbs. pumpkin
4 lbs. sugar
1/2 oz. root ginger
2 lemons

Cut the pumpkin up, rejecting the centre seeds and hard outside rind. Cut the pulp into small thin chips, use only the juice and rind of lemon. Put all together into a granite pot, bring to a boil and boil slowly for two hours, taking great care to prevent burning. Remove ginger root. Put away in sterilized jars.

- CANDIED PUMPKIN
Peel pumpkin, remove seeds and cut in pieces 1 inch square. Weigh and add an equal weight of sugar. Let stand overnight. Drain. To each cup of syrup allow 1 teaspoon of vinegar and a small piece of root ginger. Cook until it coats the spoon, add pumpkin and boil until the pumpkin has absorbed almost all the syrup. Drain thoroughly, then spread on plates to dry. When dry roll in sugar, and pack between layers of waxed paper.

To can pumpkin for winter use, the following method has proved satisfactory:

Peel, remove seeds and pulp and cut pumpkin in small pieces. Steam until tender. Mash or press through a sieve, pack in sterilized jars, partially seal and sterilize 180 minutes in a water bath or 60 minutes in a pressure cooker. Seal, cool and store in a cool place.

FUN TO THEM—DEATH TO HIM

Last fall a student in a mid-western university killed himself and left a letter to explain the reason. He was a plain youth with an unusually long nose, and while he was still a little lad, his playmates had made fun of him. His self-confidence was destroyed. He brooded over his ugliness, and finally, after completing several years of his college course, he killed himself. In his letter he admitted that, while he was not afraid to die, he was afraid to face the world. He wrote: "God forgive everyone for this."

Of course that does not excuse those who drove him to take his own life. The playmates of his childhood who made fun of him, and then perceiving his selflessness, joyously kept up their teasing, had no idea that what was fun to them would be death to him. Again we are reminded of the harm that can be wrought by thoughtless cruelty. Of all forms of amusement, teasing is the most unkind.

NEVER CLIMBED THAT ONE

Mrs. Newrich was describing her travels to an audience.

"And have you been in South America?" somebody inquired.

"Many times," said Mrs. Newrich, rather bored. "I know it from end to end."

"Then, of course, you went up the Amazon?"

"Not as a matter of fact, I didn't," said Mrs. Newrich. "But my husband went to the top. You know I never did care for climbing."

ADVANTAGES OF CHEESE AS A FOOD

One pre-eminent characteristic of Canadian cheese is that its manufacture does not impair the nutrients in the milk from which it is made. Almost all the protein of the milk, the body building element, is present in the cheese, and, if the cheese is made from whole-milk, almost all the butter-fat, with the associated fat soluble vitamins which is indispensable to growth and mental development. Cheese also contains some of the water soluble vitamins and most of the water soluble calcium necessary for building bones and teeth. One pound of cheese contains nearly all the protein and fat in one gallon of milk. By weight, its composition is approximately one-third protein, one-third fat and one-third water.

Cheese is a very concentrated form of food and, compared with other protein foods, is economical. Its small bulk makes it convenient to handle or to store. With proper care, cheese will keep a long time in good condition and the many ways in which it can be served give variety to the diet which includes a great deal of this food. From the standpoint of the housekeeper, one of the greatest advantages is that it can be served in its natural state without any destruction of vitamins or loss of heat-time, labor or expense required for heating, cooking or preparing it for the table.

In many European countries, cheese is one of the most important foods. A laborer at hard manual work finds a noonday meal of bread and cheese sufficient to maintain health and strength for his work and it provides a high percentage of body building substance needed by the growing girl or boy. In Canada, cheese is used more for its flavor than as a main dish of a meal, but it could very advantageously be given a more important place in Canadian diets. It can be procured almost anywhere and at all seasons of the year.

UNION PRINCIPLES

Relly: "Did you hear about Pat O'Rourke gettin' drowned yesterday?"

Flannigan: "Drowned, no! I thought he was a first-rate long-distance swimmer."

Relly: "So he was, but you know what strong union principles he had. Just as he was about to reach the shore he heard the whistle blow, and he quit work for the day."

Always Ready and Reliable.—Practically all pains arising from inflammation can be removed with Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil. Simply rub it on the sore spot and it is quickly absorbed by the skin. Its healing power is conveyed to the inflamed tissue which is quickly soothed. This fine old remedy is also a specific for all manner of cuts, scratches, bruises and sprains. Keep a bottle handy always.

1000 BABY CHICKS TO BE GIVEN AWAY FREE

Here is your chance, Ladies and Gentlemen, to get your 1935 chicks without a cent of cost. Enter the 1935 Bray Chick Contest—and you may be one of the lucky winners.

The contest commences next week, and is open to everyone who keeps poultry. 1,000 Bray chicks will be given away as prizes. First prize is a flock of 200 chicks (choice of breed), to be delivered any time during the 1935 season. Second prize is 150 chicks; third prize, 100 chicks; and there are five more prizes of 50 chicks each, and twelve prizes of 25 chicks each. Twenty prizes in all.

It doesn't cost you a cent to enter this contest, except the postage stamp to mail the coupon. And you don't have to buy anything or sell anything to win a prize. All you have to do is to furnish us with some information that will help us in making our plans for the 1935 hatching season. It shouldn't take you more than 15 to 30 minutes.

And the best part of it all is this: Everybody who enters this contest gets a worthwhile prize, whether he wins one of the bigger prizes or not. Every contestant receives a "credit note" that entitles him to 10 Bray chicks, free, with his 1935 order. Everybody is sure of a fair reward for his time, no matter who may get the big prizes.

Mail the coupon to-day, for complete information and our printed entry form. The earlier you get your entry in the better chance you have to win the 200 chicks.

COUPON

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Please send me full particulars about your 1935 Chick Contest, and your printed entry form.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

No. of hens kept \_\_\_\_\_

No. of brooder houses \_\_\_\_\_

No. of brooder stoves \_\_\_\_\_

A WARNING

Bored Husband: "Clair, I must go to an important conference, and shall probably not be home until two in the morning!"

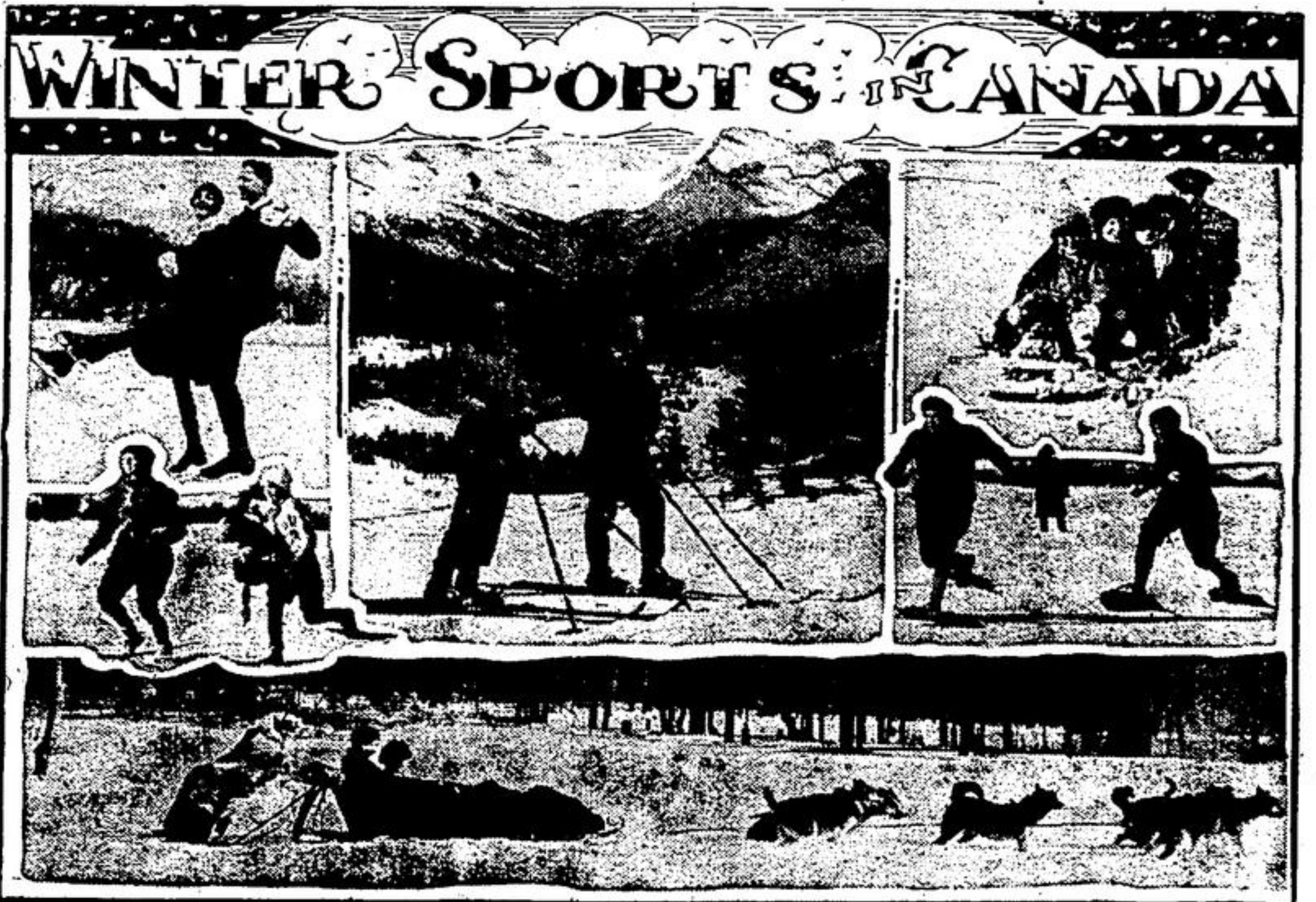
Experienced Wife: "All right — but don't call no trumps unless you have at least three aces in your hand!"

NO TROUBLE HUNTER

Citizen—"Wouldn't you like to travel and see the world?"

Bohunkus—"No, I believe in the brotherhood of man. It would be no satisfaction to me to make a personal inspection of the same old family troubles all over the map."

Rheumatism RUMACAP



ANTLES of purest crystal snow spreading over glen and vale, the smooth sparkling ice surface of rivers and lakes and the joyous tinkling of sleigh-bells remind one that the season for beneficial and enjoyable winter sports is again at hand.

Other forms of recreational activities are, for the time being, quite forgotten. The toboggan, ski, skate and sled are taken from their summer store-house and properly conditioned for the season's festivities. Children whose years scarcely

exceed the finger numerals of a hand, youths of teen age, adults of middle life and frequently those whose years are well extended toward the allotted span of life, all join in the merriment of typical Canadian winter sports.

During the winter season every settled area in Canada is as easily accessible by railroad as in the summer and autumn months. Many miles of provincial highways are kept free of snow enabling the motorist to reach cities, towns and villages of international repute as winter sport centres. Nearly everywhere are natural sites for skiing,

snowshoeing and tobogganing. Covered rinks for hockey, skating and curling are found in cities, towns and many smaller centres, while open-air rinks are legion. Carnival fairs, including bonspiels, toboggan racing, hockey matches, figure skating competitions, ski-jumping contests, snowshoe processions, and firework displays, add greatly to the enjoyment of a Canadian winter vacation.

The National Parks of Canada, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, will gladly supply information pertaining to Canada's winter sports attractions.

Did You Ever Stop to Think?

By Edsor. R. Waite, Shawnee, Oklahoma

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