

HE WOULDN'T BE A HERO

By M. QUAD

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Joe Harper was a sturdy young farmer, and Ellen Taylor was the daughter of another, and they were engaged to be married. All their friends said it would be a sensible match. Joe was given the credit of lots of "horse sense," and no one could say that the young woman was a bit frivolous. That is, they couldn't until after a certain girl friend of hers from town had made her a three weeks' visit and left four or five novels behind her when she departed.

Those novels were about heroes, cowboys, cavaliers and knights. They told of perils, combats and rescues. Mrs. Taylor would have checked them to see the cover had she found them and boxed her daughter's ears besides, but she didn't find them. They were read at night after the rest of the family was asleep. By the time she had finished the second one the girl was looking askance at Joe. He was sunburned and freckled; his ears were rather large; instead of saying "prithoo," he said by gosh. In all the novels the cavaliers had plumes in their hats; Joe didn't even wear a hen's feather in his old straw. He had a hoe on his shoulder instead of a lance, and he plowed corn with an old scabblion mare instead of riding around on an Arabian steed.

No, Joe didn't size up for shucks, compared to the cavaliers.

In the meadow, near the field where Joe was plowing corn, a colony of bumble bees had taken up their quarters in a tuft of grass. This fact was known to the Taylor family, and the farmer intended to root them out some evening. Bumble bees are not chevaliers, but they are the next thing to it. At 2 o'clock one afternoon, when it was seen that Joe and the old mare were hard at work, Miss Ellen put on her bonnet and walked out to that bumblebee caucus. At five feet from it she halted and screamed and danced around.

The scream reached Joe Harper's ears, and he let go of the plow handles and made for the fence. In an instant he realized the situation, but he didn't dash forward and fall over several stumps. Instead of so doing he sat on the fence and called out:

"Ellen, why in thunder don't you run away?"

"Oh, the bumble bees!" she shouted.

"Yes, but don't stand there like an idiot! Make for the house!"

A week had passed and the stings had been cured, when Joe got another chance. At 2 o'clock one afternoon Miss Ellen sat on the veranda sewing and wondering how Joe would look in armor and on horseback, when she caught sight of a big dog coming along the highway on the gallop. She screamed for Joe again. He dropped his hoe and came running, but passed as he reached the fence to ask what was the matter.

"Mad dog! Mad dog!" she shouted.

"Then climb up that ladder on to the roof of the kitchen!"

No rushing to the rescue, no hearing the dog's brains out, no remarks worth leaving to posterity. Miss Ellen was furious with him. That was the reason a ring of the ladder broke as she was descending and precipitated her on an ashheap. Within an hour the cavalier of the hoe received word that he need never show up at the Taylor house again. The engagement was off.

"Now look at that!" he exclaimed when he had been made to understand. "There was that ladder handy to climb! I saw the dog coming and knew it belonged to Perkins. Was there any need for me to break my other suspender? And if it had been a real mad dog would it have helped the case any for both of us to have been bitten?"

Joe stayed away. He had been told to and he obeyed. At the end of two weeks he took a day off to go fishing. Miss Ellen heard through her brother that he was going, and she made a little plan. She had got over being mad at the man who wouldn't be heroic. In fact, she wanted to "make up." She would go a-fishing too. She wouldn't fish for fish, but for Joe Harper. The lover of other and happier days was fishing from a shady bank when she came into view, but he was on the other side of the stream. He watched her walk out on a stranded log and said to himself:

"If she gets a bite and jerks up her pole she'll sure go off that log."

Two minutes later the thing happened. There was a sizzle, a jerk and a wobble, and after the wobble a yell for Joe. He had been seen. The water was only about three feet deep, and as the girl pulled her feet after the wobble she was called to:

"Don't get skart, Ellen!"

"Oh, Joe—Joe!"

"You can wade ashore easy enough."

"Joe, I shall—shall!"

"No, you won't."

In the six weeks following the bet were ten to one that Joe and Ellen would never marry, but those who gave the odds lamented it. The two met on the highway, and after pretending not to see each other they halted, and the girl said:

"Joe, I wanted to marry a hero."

"Well, I ain't one."

"I wanted to marry a hero, but I guess I'll have to take up with a great, big, good natured, stabled farmer."

"Looks that way to me, Ellen," smiled Joe, and that evening the marriage day was set.

Making It Clear.

Counsel—What did you and the defendant talk about?

Witness—I think we talked about twenty minutes, sir.

"No, no! I mean what did you talk over?"

"We talked over the telephone, sir."

Condensed.

"Do you buy condensed milk, madam?"

"I presume that we must, but I never thought of it before. I always order two quarts and pay for two quarts, but it never measures more than three pints."

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