The Girl from Tim's Place

BY CHARLES CLARK MUNN

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SYNOPSIS.

Chip McGuire, a 16-year-old girl living at Tim's place in the Maine woods is sold by her father to Pete Bolduc, a half-breed. She runs away and reaches the camp of Martin Frisbie, occupied by Martin, his wife, nephew, Raymond Stetson, and guides. She tells her story and is cared for by Mrs. Frisbie. Journey of Frisbie's party into woods to visit father of Mrs. Frisbie, an old hermit, who has resided in the wilderness for many years. When camp is broken Chip and Ray occupy same canoe. The party reach camp of Mrs. Frisbie's father and are welcomed by him and Cy Walker, an old friend and former townsman of the hermit. They settle down for summer's stay. Chip and Ray are in love, but no one realizes this but Cy Walker. Strange canoe marks found on lake shore in front of their cabin. Strange smoke is seen across the lake. Martin and Levi leave for settlement to get officers to arrest McGuire, who is known as outlaw and escaped murderer. Chip's one woods friend, Tomah, an Indian, visits camp. Ray believes he sees a bear on the ridge. Chip is stolen by Pete Bolduc and escapes with her in a canoe.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

One, two, five minutes elapsed, and then a sudden suspicion of something wrong came to Old Cy, and, followed by Ray, he hurried to the landing.

One pail of water stood on the float, both their canoes were adrift on the lake, and as Old Cy looked out, there, heading for the outlet, was a canoe!

One swift glance and, "My God, he's got Chip!" told the story, and with face fierce in anger, he darted back, grasped his rifle, and returned.

The canoe, its paddler bending low as he forced it into almost leaps, was scarce two lengths from the outlet.

Old Cy raised his rifle, then lowered it.

Chip was in that canoe!

His avenging shot was stayed.

And now Old Tomah leaped down the path, rifle in hand.

One look at the vanishing canoe, and his own, floating out upon the lake, told him the tale, and without a word he turned and, plunging into the undergrowth, leaping like a deer over rock and chasm, vanished at the top of the ridge.

CHAPTER IX.

While Chip, bound, gagged and helpless in the half-breed's canoe, was just entering the alder-choked outlet of this lake, 20 miles below and close to where the stream entered another lake, four men were launching their canoes.

"It was here," Martin was saying to Officer Hersey, "one moonlight night a year ago, that a friend of mine and myself saw a spectral man astride a log, just entering that bed of reeds, as I told you. Who or what it was, we could not guess; but as that spook canoeman went up this stream, we followed and discovered our hermit's home."

"Night-time and moonshine play queer pranks with our imagination," Hersey responded. "I'm not a whit superstitious, and yet I've many a time seen what I thought to be a hunter creeping along the lake shore at night, and I once came near plugging a fat man in a shadowy glen. I was up on a cliff watching down into it, the day was cloudy, and 'way below I saw what I was sure was a bear crawling along the bank of the stream. I had my rifle raised and was only waiting for a better sight, when up rose the bear and I saw a human face. For a moment it made me faint, and since then I make doubly sure before shooting at any object in the woods."

And now these four men, Levi wielding the stern paddle of Martin's canoe, and Hersey's deputy that of his, entered the broad, winding stream. The tall spruce-tops meeting darkened its currentless course, long filaments of white moss depended from every limb and as they twisted and turned up this somber highway, the air grew stifling. Not a breeze, not a sound, disturbed the solemn silence, and except for the swish of paddles and faint thud as they touched gunwales, the fall of a leaf might have been heard. So dense was this dark, silent forest, and so forbidding its effect, that for an hour no one scarce spoke, and even when the two canoes finally drew together, converse came in whispers. Another hour of steady progress, and then the banks began to outline themselves ahead, the trees opened more, a sign of current was met, and the sun lit up their pathway.

By now the spectral beard had vanished from the trees, white clouds were reflected from the still waters, and the gleam of sandy bottom was seen below. The birds, inspired perhaps by the absence of gloom, also added their cheering notes. Nature was smiling once more, and not a hint or even intuition of the fast-nearing tragedy met those men.

And then, as a broad, eddying bend in the stream held their canoes, by tacit consent a halt was made.

Martin, his paddle crossed on the thwarts in front, dipped a cup of the cool, sweet water and drank. Levi wiped the sweat from his face, and Hersey also quenched his thirst. The day was hot. They had paddled ten miles. There was no hurry, and as pipes were drawn forth and filled, conversation began. But just at this moment Levi's ears, ever alert, caught the faint sound of a paddle striking a canoe gunwale. Not as usual, in an intermittent fashion, as would be the case with a skilled canoeist, but a steady, rhythmic thud.

"Hist," he said, and silence fell upon the group.

And now, from far ahead, came the steady tap, tap, tap. It soon increased, and then it assured those waiting, listening men that some canoe was being urged down stream.

Without a word they glanced at one another, and then, as if an intuition came to both at the same time, Martin and Hersey reached for their rifles.

On and on came the steady thump, thump.

And then, as those stern-faced, watching, listening men, rifles in hand, almost side by side, waited there, out from behind this bend shot a canoe.

"My God, it's Pete Bolduc! Look out!" almost yelled Levi, and "Halt! Surrender!" from Hersey, as two rifles were leveled at the oncomer. Then one instant's sight of a red and scarred face, a quick reach for a rifle, a splash of water, an overturned canoe and with a curse the astonished half-breed dived into the undergrowth.

Two rifles spoke almost at the same instant from the waiting canoes, one answered from out the thicket. A thrashing, struggling something in the filled canoe next caught all eyes, and Levi, leaping into the waist-deep stream, grasped and lifted a dripping form.

It was Chip!

And then came another surprise; for down a sloping, thick-grown hillside, something was heard thrashing, and soon Old Tomah, his clothing in shreds, his face bleeding, appeared to view.

"I Want a Good Square Talk with Ye, My Boy."

Calculating to a nicety where he could best intercept and head off the escaping half-breed, he had crossed four miles of pathless undergrowth in less than an hour, and reached the stream at the nearest point after it left the lake.

How Chip, still sobbing from the awful agony of mind, and dripping water as well, greeted Old Tomah; how Hersey, chagrined at the escape of the half-breed, gave vent to muttered curses; how Martin joined them in thought; and how they all gathered around Chip and listened to her tale of horror, are but minor features of the episode, and not worth the telling.

When all was said and done, Old Tomah, grim and silent as ever, although he had done what no white man could do or would try to do, washed his bloody face in the stream, drank his fill of the cool water, and lifting Pete's half-filled canoe as easily as if it were a shingle, tipped it, turned the water out, and set it on the sloping bank.

"Me take you back and watch you now," he said to Chip. "You no get caught again."

And thus convoyed, poor Chip, willing to clasp and caress the feet or legs of any or all of those men, and more grateful than any dog ever was for a caress, was escorted back to the lake.

All those waiting at the cabin were at the landing when the rescuers arrived. Angie, her eyes brimming, first embraced and then kissed the girl. Ray would have felt it a proud privilege to have carried her to the cabin, and Old Cy's wrinkled face showed more joy than ever gladdened it in all his life before.

Somehow this hapless waif had grown dearer to them all than she or they understood.

There was also feasting and rejoicing that night at Martin's wildwood home, and mingled with it all an oft-more. Shadowy forms and the mysticism of the wilderness were more to repeated tale.

Old Cy told one end of it in his droll way, Martin related the other, and Chip filled up the interim. Levi had his say, and Hersey supplied more or less—mostly more—of this half-breed's history.

Old Tomah, however, said nothing. To him, who lived in the past of a bygone race which looked upon lumbermen as devastating vandals ever eating into its kingdom, and whose thoughts were upon the happy hunting-grounds soon to be entered, this half-breed's lust and cunning were as the fall of the leaf. Were it left to he would, as he had, plunge through bramble and brier and leap over rock and chasm to rescue his big pappoose, but now that she was safe again, he lapsed into his stoical reserve once his taste than all the pathos of human life; and while his eyes kindled at Chip's smile, his thoughts were following some storm or tempest sweeping over a vast wilderness, or the rush and roar of the great white spectre.

"Chip is good girl," he said to Angie the next morning, "and white lady love her. Tomah's heart is like squaw heart, too; but he go away and forget. White lady must not forget," and with that mixture of tenderness and stoicism he strode away, and the last seen of him was when he entered the outlet without once looking back at the cabin where his "big pappoose" was kept.

More serious, however, were the facts Martin and Hersey now had to consider, and a council of war, as it were, was now held with Levi, Old Cy and the deputy as advisers.

What the half-breed would now do, and in what way they could now capture him were, of course, discussed, and as usual in such cases, it was of no avail, because they were dealing with absolutely unknown quantities.

He was now at large in this wilderness, knew where the girl and his enemies were, and as Hersey said, "He had the drop on them."

"I believe in standing by our guns," the officer continued, after all these conclusions had been admitted. "We are here to rid the woods of this scoundrel. We have five good rifles and know how to use them. The law is on our side, for he refused to surrender, and returned our shots; and if I catch sight of him, I shall shoot to cripple, anyway."

Old Cy's advice, however, was more pacific.

"My notion is this feller's a cowardly cuss," he said, "a sort o' human hyena. He'll never show himself in the open, but come prowlin' 'round nights, stealin' anything he can. He may take a pop at some on us from a-top o' the ridge; but I caliate he'll never venture within gunshot daytimes. His sort is allus more skeered o' us'n we need be o' him."

In spite of Old Cy's conclusions, however, the camp remained in a state of siege that day and many days following.

Angie and Chip seldom strayed far from the cabin. Ray assumed the water-bringing, night and morning. Old Cy and Levi patroled the premises, while Martin, Hersey, and his deputy hunted a little for game and a good deal for moccasined footprints or a sight or a sign of this half-breed.

Hersey, more especially, made him his object of pursuit. He had come here for that purpose, his pride and reputation were at stake, and the thousand dollars Martin had agreed to pay was a minor factor. He and his mate passed hours in the mornings and late in the afternoon watching from wide apart outlooks on the ridge. They made long jaunts up the brook valley where the smoke sign had been seen, they found where this half-breed had built a fire here, and later another lair, a mile from the cabins and in this ridge. Long detours they made in other directions. Old Tomah's trail in the forest was crossed; but neither in forest nor on lake shore were any recent footprints of the half-breed found. Old ones were discovered in plenty. An almost beaten trail led from his lair in the ridge to a crevasse back of the cabins, but to one well versed in wood tracks, it was easy to tell how old these tracks were.

A freshly made trail in the forest bears unmistakable evidence of its date, and no woodwise man ever confounds a two or three days' old one with it. One footprint may not determine this occult fact; but followed to where the moss is spongy or the earth moist, a matter of hours, even, can be decided.

A week of this watchfulness, with no sign of their enemy's return, not even to within the circuit patroled time and again, began to relieve suspense and awaken curiosity. They had been so sure, especially Martin, that he would come back for revenge, that now it was hard to account for his not doing so.

"My idee is he got so skeered at them two shots," Old Cy asserted, "he hain't stopped runnin' yit." And then the old man chuckled at the ludicrous picture of this pernicious "varmint" scampering through a wilderness from fright.

But Old Cy was wrong. It was not fear that saved them from a prompt visitation from this half-breed, but lack of means of defense. The one shot remaining in his rifle at the moment of meeting had been sent on its vengeful errand, all the rest of his ammunition was in his canoe, and now on the bottom of the stream. Being thus crippled for means to act, the only course left to him was a return to his cabin 75 miles away, with only a hunting-knife to sustain life with.

He lived to reach his hut on the Fox Hole, and from that moment on, this wilderness held an implacable enemy of McGuire's, sworn to kill him, first of all.

CHAPTER X.

For two weeks the little party at Birch Camp first watched and then began to enjoy themselves once more. September had come, the first tint of autumn colored every patch of hardwood, a mellow haze softened the outline of each green-clad hill and mountain, the sun rose red and sailed an unclouded course each day, and gentle breezes rippled the lake. The forest, the sky, the air and earth, all seemed in harmonious mood, and the one discordant note, fear of this half-breed, slowly vanished.

Chip resumed her hour of study each day; a little fishing and hunting was indulged in by Martin and the two officers; wild ducks, partridges, deer and trout supplied their table; each evening all gathered about the open fire in Martin's new cabin, and while the older people chatted, Ray took his banjo or whispered with Chip.

These two, quite unguessed by Angie, had become almost lovers, and as it was understood Chip was to be taken to Greenvale, all that wonder-world to her, had been described by Ray many times. He also outlined many little plans for sleigh rides, skating on the mill pond, and dances which he and she were to enjoy together.

His own future and livelihood were a little hazy to him. These matters do not impress a youth of 18; but of one thing he felt sure,—that Chip with her rosy face and black eyes, always tender to him, was to be his future companion in all pleasures. It was love among the spruce trees, a summer idyl made tender by the dangers interrupting it, and hidden from all eyes except Old Cy's, who was these young friends' favorite.

But these days of mingled romance and tragic happenings, of shooting, fishing, story-telling and wildwood life were nearing their end, and one evening Martin announced that on the morrow they would pack their belongings and, escorted by the officers, leave the wilderness.

The next morning Old Cy took Ray aside.

"I want a good square talk with ye, my boy," he said, "an' I'm goin' to do ye a good turn if I kin. Now to begin, I s'pose ye know yer aunt's goin' to take Chip to Greenvale 'n' gin her a chanee at the schoolin' she sartinly needs. Now you're callatin' to go 'long 'n' have a heap o' fun this winter. I'm goin' to stay here 'n' keer for Amzi. This is the situation 'bout as it is. Now you hev got yer eddication, 'n' the next move is to make yer way in the world 'n' arn suthin', an' as a starter, I want ye to stay here this winter with me 'n' trap. The woods round here is jist bristlin' with spruce gum that is worth a dollar-fifty a pound, easy. We've got two months now, 'fore snow gits deep. We kin live on the top shelf in the way o' fish 'n' game. We'll ketch a b'ar and pickle his meat 'n' smoke his hams, and when spring comes, I'll take ye out with mebbe five hundred dollars' worth o' furs 'n' gum ez a beginnin'.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Carefully preserved at Stairs castle, the Aberdeenshire seat of the earl of Erroll, is a single playing card which recalls a never to be forgotten tragedy. It is the nine of diamonds (hence called to this day "the curse of Scotland"), on which the duke of Cumberland wrote his order for the butchery of the brave Highlanders who were taken prisoners at the fateful battle of Culloden.

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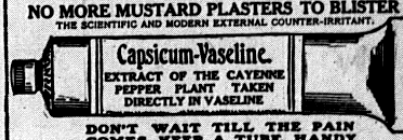

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