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 Friable, occupied by Martin, his wife, nephew, Raymond Stetson, and guides. She tells her story and is cared for by Mrs. Friable. Journey of Friable's party into woods to visit father of Mrs. Friable, 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. Friable'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 an 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. Chip is rescued by Martin and Levi as they are returning from the settlement. Bolduc escapes. Old Cy proposes to Ray that he remain in the woods with himself and Amzi and trap during the winter, and he concludes to do so. Others of the party return to Greenvale, taking Chip with them. Chip starts to school in Greenvale, and finds life unpleasant at Aunt Comfort's, made so especially by Hannah. Old Cy and Ray discover strange tracks in the wilderness. They penetrate further into the wilderness and discover the hiding place of the man who had been sneaking about their cabin. They investigate the cave home of McGuire during his absence. Bolduc finds McGuire and the two fight to the death, finding a watery grave together.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

How welcome he was, and how all, even Amzi, of those winter-bound prisoners vied with each other in making him the guest of honor, need not be asserted. He had been a part of their life here the previous summer, with all its joys and dangers, and now seemed one of them.

When mutual experiences and their winter's history had been exchanged, of course Chip's rescue, the half-breed's escape, and the whereabouts of her father came up for discussion that evening.

"I've heard from Tim's Place two or three times this winter," said Levi, "an' neither Pete nor old McGuire has been seen or heard on since early last fall. Pete got thar all safe, but vowed revenge on McGuire, as Martin and I found, when we went out. He stayed round a week or so, I heard later, and then started for his cabin on the Fox Hole, 'n' since then hain't never been seen or heard of by nobody. Tim an' Mike went over to his cabin 'long in the winter, but no signs of him was found, or even of his bein' thar since snow came. McGuire also seems to hev dropped out o' business and ain't been heard on since in the summer. We've expected him all winter at the lumber camp, but he didn't show up."

"We've seen him," put in Old Cy, flashing a smile at Ray, "leastwise I callated 'twas him, though I never let on to that effect. He was trappin' over beyond a big swamp last fall, 'n' he paid us a visit, stole a half-dozen o' our catches 'n' left his trade-mark on our canoe." And then Old Cy told the story of their adventure, omitting, however, any reference to the supposed cave.

"It's curis what has become o' him," Levi said, when the tale was told, "and our camp crowd all believe that thar's been foul play, with Pete at the bottom on't. Nobody's shed any tears, though, an' I'm thinkin' the woods is well rid o' him. He's been a terror to everybody long enough."

Much more of this backwoods gossip and change of experience filled in the evening, and next morning Old Cy gave Ray a word of caution.

"I kept whist 'bout our findin' what we callated was a cave," he said, "an' I want you to. This matter o' McGuire and the half-breed ain't blowed over yit, an' we don't want to git mixed up in it. Ez fer the cave, if we 'lowed we found one, the folks at Tim's Place 'ud go huntin' fer it, sure, 'n' I've my reasons for not wantin' they should go. So mum's the word to Levi 'bout it."

Levi's arrival, however, changed their plans, for he at once offered to convoy Ray out of the woods, thus relieving Old Cy, and three days later these two, with well-laden canoes, started on the out-going journey.

It was not without incident, for when the main stream was reached, it was dotted with floating logs and the red-shirted drivers with the bateaux and spike shoes were in evidence. A monster jam was met at the first rapid, the bags of gum nuts, bundles of firs, and canoes had to be carried around it, and when Tim's Place was reached, a score of the good-natured woodsmen were in possession.

Levi discreetly avoided all questions as to what Tim knew of Chip, her father, or the half-breed. Ray's lips were also sealed, and so both escaped much questioning. Here, also, they learned what both had guessed—that McGuire and Pete had either left the wilderness or had perished that winter. Where and how, if such was the case, no one seemed to know or care, and a close observer would have said that every one a Tim's Place hoped that these two outlaws had met their fate.

Old Tomah was also found at Tim's Place, and he was undeniably glad to see both Ray and Levi, and to learn that Chip was likely to be well cared for.

When these two voyagers were ready to start, he joined and kept with them until the settlement was reached. Knowing full well the value of gum and furs, he soon found a purchaser for Ray's store and stock at its full value; and when that youth, now elated as never before, was ready to start for Greenvale, the fine old Indian showed almost a white man's emotion.

"Take this to little girl," he said, handing Ray a package, "and tell her Old Tomah not forget. He hope she come back to see him soon."

"Tell Mr. Friable I shall be here, waitin' to meet him, when he sends word," Levi said; and shaking hands with both of his good friends, Ray now bade them good-by with many thanks for all they had done.

Of his homeward trip and all the charming anticipations now his, no mention need be made. They are but the flowers wisely strewn in the pathway of youth, and Ray—now more a man than when he entered the woods—full well deserved all that lay before him.

But Old Tomah's heart was sad, and far away beside a rippled lake was another who felt the same.

CHAPTER XVII.

Chip's success and popularity in Greenvale was practically nullified by Hannah, who from wounded vanity and petty jealousy became her enemy from the outset.

Aunt Comfort did not know it. Angie was not conscious of the facts, or, busy with her own social duties and home-making, gave them no thought. And yet, inspired by Hannah's malicious tongue, Greenvale looked upon poor Chip as one it was best to avoid.

With Angie as sponsor, she had been made one of the Christmas church decorators, and had been twice invited to parties, only to exasperate Hannah all the more and cause an increase of sneers.

"She's nobody an' an upstart," Hannah said at the first meeting of the village sewing circle after Chip's advent, "an' I've my doubts about her father an' mother ever bein' married. Then she's an infiddle an' believes in injun sperrits an' hobgoglin things she calls spites, an' is a reg'lar heathen. I don't trust her a minit, an' never leave the house 'thout I lock up my things."

There was also some color for this ill repute, for Angie had concealed nothing, and Chip, foolishly perhaps, had asserted her belief when it would have been better to conceal it.

The parson also, chagrined at his failure to make a convert of the girl, referred to her as "rebellious, obstinate in her ideas, and one who needed chastening."

Her teacher, however, was her stanch friend. Aunt Comfort beamed upon her morning and night, while Angie, having provided her with home, raiment, opportunity for schooling, escort to church, and much good advice, felt that she had fulfilled her duty. And in a way, she had.

But social recognition in a country village can be made or marred by such a person as Hannah, and quite unknown to those most interested. Chip's popularity was not decreed. Neither was she conscious of this undercurrent. Each day she went to and returned from school in a sturdy sort of way. A most devoted pupil, she never failed to thank her teacher for every word of help, and if—thanks to Hannah—she failed to make friends about the village, she won a place near to Aunt Comfort's heart.

But somehow Aunt Comfort, who loved everybody alike, good or bad, or at least spoke no ill of the bad ones, didn't count. That she must inevitably take Chip under her motherly wing, all recognized. She had taken Hannah, then Angie and Nezer, and now this waif who, as Hannah insisted, was all bad; and according to Greenvale's belief, Aunt Comfort would keep on "taking in" homeless waifs and outcast mortals as long as she lived, or house room held out. And it was true.

By midwinter Martin's new house was all furnished, and social obligations began to interest Angie, which made matters all the worse for Chip, for now Hannah could persecute her with less danger of exposure.

But Chip was hard to persecute. She had known adversity in its worst form. Her life at Tim's Place had been practical slavery, and the worst that Hannah could do was as pin pricks compared to it.

It is certain, also, if Chip had "spunked up," as Hannah would call it, now and then, it would have been better for her; but it wasn't Chip's way. To work and suffer in silence had been her lot at Tim's Place. Angie had said, "You must obey everybody and make friends," and impelled by experience, and this somewhat broad order, Chip was doing her best.

One hope cheered her all that long, hard winter of monotonous study—the return of Ray, and possibly Old Cy, when summer came. Somehow these two had knit themselves into her life as no one else had or could. Then she wondered how Ray would seem to and feel toward her when he came, and if the little bond—a wondrous strong one, as far as her feelings went—would still call him to her side.

It had all been a beacon of hope to her in the uphill road toward the temple of learning; and how hard she had studied, and how patiently she had tried to correct her own speech, not even her teacher guessed.

Sobbed in Utter Despair.

It is also possible, in fact almost certain, that that unfortunate waif's somewhat pitiful tale had won her teacher's interest and affection as naught else could. Only one reservation was made by Chip—her own feelings toward Ray. All else became an open book to Miss Phinney.

When school was out, the two walked homeward together as far as their ways permitted, and then Chip obtained the one hour of the day which she felt was quite her own. At first, during the autumn days, she had used it for a scamper through the unbrown woods. When winter came and it was not too cold, she occasionally visited the mill pond above the village, where, if the conditions were right, all else skating and sliding youth were gathered; and when blessed spring returned, it was away to the hills and fields once more.

On Saturdays she seldom left the house, unless sent on an errand, and Sunday became a day of penance.

And now, when the flowers and birds had once more returned to Greenvale, and Ray might return any day, a little plan that Chip had had in mind for many weeks took shape. She knew Ray must come on the stage, and eager for a sight of his face as only love can make one, she meant to be the first to meet and greet him.

A mile down the village street and beyond the last house was a sharp hilltop. The stage usually reached here about an hour after the close of school, and to this vantage point, where she could hide behind a stone wall, Chip now betook herself each day.

Her plans for meeting her young hero were well considered. She was sure he would, like herself, prefer a seat with Uncle Joe. That important person, whose heart she had won by her admiration of his horses on her arrival, would surely invite her to ride into the village, if he saw her. If he was alone, she would remain hid; but if some one was with him, she would then disclose herself and the coveted invitation and meeting with Ray would follow.

It was mid-April when Chip began her daily watch, and missed no day unless a pelting rain prevented. It was June ere she won her reward, and then one balmy afternoon when she saw the stage afar, there, perched beside Uncle Joe, was—a companion!

How sure that weary, waiting waif was that her heart was not mistaken! How her pulses leaped and thrilled as the slow-moving stage crept up the hill; and how Ray, eager to catch the first glimpse of his native village, saw a winsome, smiling face shaded by a flower-decked hat, peeping at him over a wall, was but a minor episode in the lives of these two; yet one to be recalled many, many times afterward and always with a heartache.

None came to them now, for on the instant Ray saw who was waiting for him he halted the stage, and the next moment he was beside his sweetheart. And Uncle Joe, with the wisdom and sympathy of old age, discreetly averted his face, and said "Golang" to his horses, and drove on alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

During all the long weeks while Chip had awaited her lover's coming, one hope had been hers—that his return would end all her loneliness and begin a season of the happy, care-free days like those by the lake once more.

For the first few moments after he kissed her upraised lips, she could not speak for very joy; and then, as hand in hand they started toward the village, her speech came.

"I've been so lonesome," she said simply, "I've counted the days, and come down here to meet you daily, for over a month. I don't like it here, and nobody likes me, I guess. I'm so glad you've come, though. Now I shan't be lonesome no more. I've studied hard, too," she added, with an accent of pride. "I can read and spell words of six syllables. I've ciphered up to decimal fractions, an' begun grammar.

"I'm glad to get home, too," answered Ray, as simply. "It was lonesome in the woods all winter, when we couldn't tend the traps. But I've made a lot of money—'most five hundred dollars—all mine, too. How is everybody?" And so they dropped from sentiment into commonplace.

At the tavern he secured his belongings. At the corner where their ways parted, he bade Chip a light good-by, and with an "I'll see you soon," left her.

Her hero had arrived. They had met, kissed as lovers should, and the lonely waiting and watching days were at an end and a new life was to begin for Chip.

Little did she realize what it would mean for her, or how utterly her hopes were to fail.

"He will come to-night," her heart assured her, and that evening, without a word to Aunt Comfort or Hannah as to whom she expected, she arrayed herself in her one best dress and awaited his expected visit.

And what a propitious and all-favoring evening it was! The June night was balmy. Blooming lilacs and syringas half hid, as well as adorned, the porch of Aunt Comfort's home. Aunt Comfort had just departed to make a call, Hannah was away at prayer meeting, and "no one high to hinder."

But Chip waited in vain!

At school next day her mind and heart were at war. The parts of speech and rules of subtraction and division seemed complete chaos, and when homeward bound, she loitered slowly along, hoping Ray would make amends and meet her on the way. But again he failed to appear.

And that night, when alone with Hannah, a worse blow came.

"I heard young Stetson got back yesterday," she said, fixing her steely blue eyes on Chip, "an' you went down the road to meet him. I should think you'd be 'shamed o' yourself. If you're callatin' on settin' your cap for him, 'twon't do a mite o' good. His aunt wouldn't think o' havin' such an outcast ez you for him—that I can tell ye."

But not a word of reply came from poor Chip. Such speeches were not new to her, and she had long before ceased to answer them. But this one, from its very truth, hurt more than all others had, and, crushed by it, she stole away out of the house.

No thought that Ray might call came to her. She only wished to escape somewhere, that she might cry away her misery and shame in solitude.

The evening was but a repetition of the previous one. The same sweet influence and silvered light was all about, but no heed of its beauty came to Chip. Instead, she felt herself a shameful thing of no account. Her lover had failed her—now she knew why, and as she sped along the lonely way to the schoolhouse, scarce conscious of her steps, all hope and all joy left her. Why or for what purpose she was hurrying toward this deserted little building, she knew not. Hot tears filled her eyes. Shame surged in her heart. She was a nobody in the eyes of all her world, and once she had reached the worn sill, so often crossed by her, she threw herself upon it and sobbed in utter despair.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PERUNA EDITORIAL NO. I.

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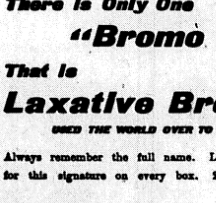

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