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## WEIGA OF TEMAGAMI

BY CY WARMAN

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Seventy miles or more north of Nipissing, beyond the "Highlands of Ontario," where the moose and the reindeer roam, where the summers are short and the twilights long, Lake Temagami lies imbedded beneath the northern sky. Upon the silent shore of this translucent lake, where the mirrored pictures of the forest-folk, walking upside down, can be seen from your canoe, dwelt Meniseno and his wife, Weiga, their daughter, and an only son.

In the unwritten law of the forest the northern Indians have and hold certain dimly defined rights to hunt and fish in favored sections and "silent places," and these rights they guard jealously.

One matchless morning in the berry-moon, in a sheltered nook where the summer sun slipped in under the shore-trees and gilded the ripples of a rivulet that romped in from the wilderness, spilling its laughter on the limpid lake, Weiga, daughter of Meniseno, was drying her hair. The crack of a twig caused her to turn her sharply head and glance over her shoulder along the lake. She was surprised to see a great moose coming towards her, walking slowly near the water-edge; and still more surprised to observe, two oar-lengths from the shore, a bark canoe occupied by a solitary Indian, also moving in her direction. Upon the back of the moose there was a small pack, which told her that he had been tamed. It was equally evident from his slow movements and backward glances that he was conveying the canoe.

When the little barque touched land near where Weiga sat she saw that its occupant was ill. In answer to his signal she stepped quickly down and drew the nose of the little craft upon the shore. The big moose stood by stamping his foot threateningly, but the man in the canoe called to him,



She Drew Near and Held Out a Hand.

and then he seemed assured that the woman would do him no harm.

For a time they talked, the man in the canoe and the maiden on the mossy bank where the brook came down. He asked whose hunting-ground lay along this entrancing shore, and she said it was claimed by her father, Meniseno, an Ojibway.

"I am an Algonquin," said he. "Let us be friends. I want to make my lodge here by this beautiful stream, that I may drink and drink and drink, for my spirit is on fire and my throat a flame."

"Alas," sighed Weiga, "my father is very old and very jealous of his claim; I fear he will not let you live here."

"I do not ask to be allowed to live here," said he. "I only desire to die here, hearing the song of that cool stream—and," he added, devouring the maiden with his hungry eyes, "the music of your voice."

The Algonquin, without awaiting an invitation, signalled to Weiga. She drew near and held out a hand, which he grasped as he stepped ashore. With simple confidence he asked her to take him up on the bank and help him to find a camping-place near the stream. Again she held out her hand, and again he grasped it. But when he had gotten to his feet he did not release her hand, as he had done before, but held it and looked earnestly into the face of the Ojibway, owing a vague feeling of peace and happiness altogether new to him.

On the following day when Meniseno stumbled unexpectedly upon the Algonquin's lodge he was obviously offended. Knowing this would be so, Weiga had not apprised her father of the coming of the stranger, for if he was jealous of his hunting-ground, he was over-jealous of his handsome, industrious, and well-behaved daughter.

Meniseno coldly asked the Algonquin why he had come to disturb the peace of an old man, and told him plainly he would not be allowed to live where he had made his camp.

The Algonquin's answer was the same as he had given Weiga—he had come not to live, but to die. He had pitched his poor tent there so that when death, who was now very near, should come to him, he might not die utterly alone.

At first the old Indian seemed to accept this simple statement, but when, a few days later, he found his daughter caring for the young man, he flew into a great passion and ordered the Algonquin out of the country. By this time, however, the Indian was too ill to travel, and so he heeded not the

angry old man, but lay back upon his bed of boughs.

Unto the sick man the maiden ministered mercifully, and as they grew to love each other her father's hatred grew.

When the lone lodger had held out longer than a man may last, lying helpless without food or drink, the old Indian, whose malady was madness, now, lay in wait until he saw Weiga enter the lodge, bearing food and water for the sick man.

From that day the Ojibway spoke not a word to Weiga—He was now gone mad with a sullen, murderous madness, born of jealousy.

One moonless night when his son was away, when his watchful wife and Weiga were sound asleep, the old Indian stole out to where the Algonquin had pitched his tent. Meniseno's awful malady had robbed him of none of the inherent caution for which the bush-tribes are famous. Without the crack of a twig, scarcely with the rustle of a leaf, he had approached to within ten yards of the tent, when suddenly from the rear a great moose appeared and stood at the door. The old Indian, mad as he was, was terror-stricken at this unexpected apparition. The thing served in a way to sober him, and he demanded of the moose what God it stood for.—Gitche, the good, or Mitche, the bad,—but there was no answer. Then it occurred to him that it was only a moose which could be easily frightened away. Unfastening his blanket, the Indian opened it and shook it in the face of the mute monarch of the woods. The moose's answer was the stamp of one great foot and a loud "whoof," that froze the Indian's blood, causing him to hurry back to his hogan.

But the Ojibway was not to be denied. Lifting the heavy hatchet he carried in his hand, he let drive at the forest of horns that frowned at the front of the moose. The wily bull lowered his head and the charges of the moose, whose advances the old Indian was now dodging with a strength and agility peculiar to madness, brought the Algonquin to the door of the hut.

At sight of the sick man the Ojibway threw caution to the wind and ran towards the door; but the monarch nosed him vigorously, sending him to his back ten feet away.

The sound of the battle that had called the sick man from his couch had also awakened Weiga, who was running through the forest with the speed of the wind.

By the time the Ojibway, still clinging to his hatchet, had gotten to his feet and faced the four-footed god on guard over the Algonquin, Weiga was immediately behind her enraged father. The young Indian, watching from the threshold, saw Weiga fling herself upon Meniseno, and saw the latter throw her off as easily as the great moose might toss a dog.

She staggered to her feet and started for the insane old man, who with lifted hatchet, made another desperate effort to reach the object of his wrath.

Forgetting his illness, and all unmindful of the menacing weapon that was glittering in the starlight, the Algonquin darted beneath the nose of the moose, caught Weiga, and dragged her into his tent before the old man could realize it.

Outside the battle went on. The merciless hail of iron upon the antlers of the moose maddened him until he was fairly blind with rage. With a quick turn of his great head the moose caught the aged Indian, lifted him, and tossed him high up in the trees.

When the body crashed back to earth the old moose snorted new defiance, but the old Indian lay quite still. The splendid animal shook his aching head, stamped a front foot furiously, but his adversary had quit.

Softly the Algonquin called his champion, and the big beast turned slowly and approached the door, as a faithful dog might come to be petted and patted for good work.

They made a light—the man and the woman—and went out to gather up the broken thing she had called father. To their surprise he was still alive, and they bore him in and laid him upon the bed wherein he would have murdered the Algonquin. Soon he slumbered heavily.

When day arrived, and the old man awoke, his reason had returned. He had been mad, he said. He had attempted to take the life of a stranger, but Gitche Manitou had come in the form of a moose and fought with him.

He tried to move his limbs, but they were broken. All the bitterness was gone; all the hatred of the Algonquin had passed away.

As the aged Indian grew weaker, the Algonquin grew strong.

Finally, one twilight, when the September sun was sinking, when the summer bloom was blighted, and the autumn leaves were drifting over the placid bosom of the limpid lake, the light of the aged Indian's life went out, leaving a lone woman rocking to and fro, his head in her lap.

By the banks of Lake Temagami, where the winds whisper in the moss-hung trees and the waters lap on the silent shore, they laid the old man to rest.

For him the aged woman did not weep openly, nor cry aloud, but to his silent sleepin-place she stole when the moon was low, and o'er his cold clay she shed bitter tears. And there she may be seen to this day, watching by the little rock-walled resting-place of the old Ojibway, and, browsing about, is a big bull moose, and across the Temagami comes a little bark canoe, barely big enough for two, and it touches the shore where a crystal rill, romping out of the wilderness, spills its laughter on the limpid lake.

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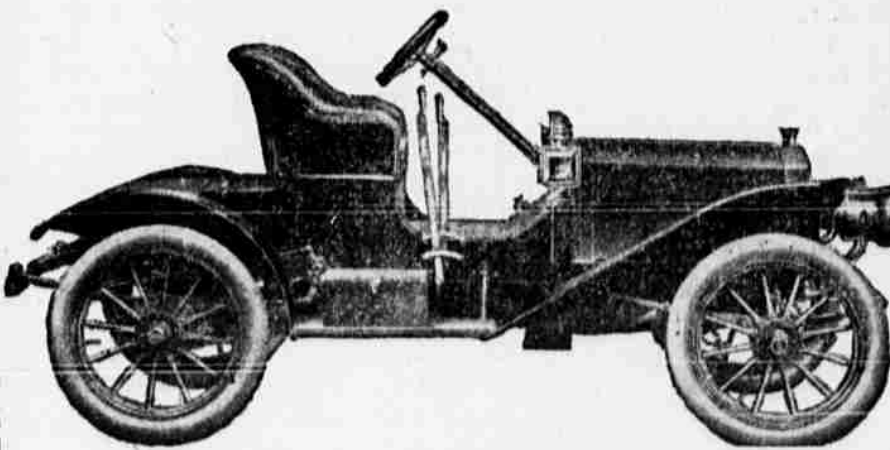
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