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GLENGARRY SCHOOL DAYS

A STORY OF EARLY DAYS IN GLENGARRY

By RALPH CONNOR—REV. C. W. GORDON

CHAPTER IX

HUGHIE'S EMANCIPATION

Hughie rose late next morning, and the hurry and rush of getting off to school in time left him no opportunity to get rid of the little packages in his pocket, that seemed to burn and sting him through his clothes. He determined to keep them safe in his pocket all day and put them back in the drawer at night. His mother's face, white with her long watching, and sad and anxious in spite of its brave smile, filled him with such an agony of remorse that, hurrying through his breakfast, he snatched a farewell kiss, and then tore away down the lane lest he should be forced to confess all his terrible secret.

The first person who met him in the school-yard was Foxy.

"Have you got that?" was his salutation.

A sudden fury possessed Hughie.

"Yes, you red-headed, sneaking fox," he answered, "and I hope it will bring you the curse of luck, anyway."

Foxy hurried him cautiously behind the school, with difficulty concealing his delight while Hughie unrolled his little bundles and counted out the quarters and dimes and half dimes into his hand.

"There's a dollar, and there's a quarter, and—there's another," he added, desperately, "and God may kill me on the spot if I give you any more!"

"All right, Hughie," said Foxy, soothingly, putting the money into his pocket. "You needn't be so mad about it. You bought the pistol and the rest right enough, didn't you?"

"I know I did, but—but—you made me, you big, sneaking thief—and then you—" Hughie's voice broke in his rage. His face was pale, and his black eyes were glittering with fierce fury, and in his heart he was conscious of a wild longing to fall upon Foxy and tear him to pieces. And Foxy, big and tall as he was, glanced at Hughie's face, and saying not a word, turned and fled to the front of the school where the other boys were.

Hughie followed slowly, his heart still swelling with furious rage, and full of an eager desire to be at Foxy's smiling, fat face.

At the school door stood Miss Morrison, the teacher, smiling down upon Foxy, who was looking up at her with an expression of such sweet innocence that Hughie groaned out between his clenched teeth, "Oh, you red-headed devil, you! Some day I'll make you smile out of the other side of your big, fat mouth."

"Who are you swearing at?" It was Fusie.

"Oh, Fusie," cried Hughie, "let's get Davie and get into the woods. I'm not going in to-day. I hate the beastly place, and the whole gang of them."

Fusie, the little, harum-scarum French waif was ready for anything in the way of adventure. To him anything was better than even the monotony of the school routine. True, it might mean a whipping both from the teacher and from Mrs. McLeod; but as to the teacher's whipping, Fusie was prepared to stand that for a free day in the woods, and as to the other, Fusie declared that Mrs. McLeod's whipping "wouldn't hurt a skeeter."

To Davie Scotch, however, playing truant was a serious matter. He had been reared in an atmosphere of reverence for established law and order, but when Hughie gave command, to Davie there seemed nothing for it but to obey.

The three boys watched till the school was called, and then crawling along on their stomachs behind the heavy cedar-log fence, they slipped into the balsam thicket at the edge of the woods and were safe. Here they flung down their school-bags, and lying prone upon the fragrant bed of pine-needles strewn thickly upon the moss, they peered out through the balsam boughs at the house of their bondage with an exultant sense of freedom, and a feeling of pity

if not of contempt, for the unhappy and spiritless creatures who were content to be penned inside any house on such a day as this, and with such a world outside.

For some minutes they rolled about upon the soft moss and balsam-needles and the brown leaves of last year, till their hearts were running over with a deep and satisfying delight. It is hard to resist the ministry of the woods. The sympathetic silence of the trees, the aromatic airs that breathe through the shady spaces, the soft mingling of broken lights—these all combine to lay upon the spirit a soothing balm, and bring to the heart peace. And Hughie, sensitive at every pore to that soothing ministry, before long forgot for a time even Foxy, with his fat, white face and smiling mouth, and lying on the broad of his back, and looking up at the far-away blue sky through the interlacing branches and leaves, he began to feel again that it was good to be alive, and that with all his misery there were compensations.

But any lengthened period of peaceful calm is not for boys of the age and spirit of Hughie and his companions.

"What are you going to do?" asked Fusie, the man of adventure.

"Do nothing," said Hughie from his supine position. "This is good enough for me."

"Not me," said Fusie, starting to climb a tall, lithe birch, while Hughie lazily watched him. Soon Fusie was at the top of the birch, which began to sway dangerously.

"Try to fly into that balsam," cried Hughie.

"No, sir!"

"Yes, go on."

"Can't do it."

"Oh, pshaw! you can."

"No, nor you either. That's a mighty big jump."

"Come on down, then, and let me try," said Hughie, in scorn. His laziness was gone in the presence of a possible achievement.

In a few minutes he had taken Fusie's place at the top of the swaying birch. It did not look so easy from the top of the birch as from the ground to swing into the balsam-tree. However, he could not go back now.

"Dinna try it, Hughie!" cried Davie to him.

"Ye'll no mak it, and ye'll, come an awfu' cropper, as sure as deith." But Hughie, swaying gently back and forth, was measuring the distance of his drop. It was not a feat so very difficult, but it called for good judgment and steady nerve. A moment too soon or a moment too late in letting go, would mean a nasty fall of twenty feet or more upon the solid ground, and one never knew just how one would light.

"I wudna dae it, Hughie," urged Davie, anxiously.

But Hughie, swaying high in the birch heeded not the warning, and suddenly swinging out from the slender trunk and holding by his hands, he described a parabola, and releasing the birch dropped on to the balsam top. But balsam-trees are of uncertain fibre, and not to be relied upon, and this particular balsam, breaking off short in Hughie's hands, allowed him to go crashing through the branches to the earth.

"Man! man!" cried Davie Scotch, bending over Hughie as he lay white and still upon the ground. "Are ye deid? Maircy me! he's deid," sobbed Davie, wringing his hands. "Fusie, Fusie, ye gowk! where are ye gone?"

In a moment or two Fusie reappeared through the branches with a capful of water, and dashed it into Hughie's face, with the result that the lad opened his eyes, and after a gasp or two, sat up and looked about him.

"Och, laddie, laddie, are ye no deid?" said Davie Scotch.

"What's the matter with you, Scotch?" asked Hughie, with a bewildered look about him. "And who's been throwin' water all over me?" he added,