

## THE LOST CHILD.

A TRUE TALE OF PIONEER LIFE SEVENTY YEARS AGO.

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"There was a sound of revelry by night," and many hardy pioneers were gathered at the log cabin of Mr. Standish to witness the marriage of his daughter, Elizabeth, with George Leslie, a young man highly esteemed by all who knew him.

The solemn words which bound the young couple together for life were spoken, hearty congratulations offered and the merry company were gathered around the festive board, which fairly groaned beneath its load of pastry, wild fowl, and huge haunches of venison. Although the table appointments were of the rudest description, content spread its charm over all, for none of the company were accustomed to anything better.

Everything wore a festive appearance. Branches of evergreens intermixed with bright scarlet berries relieved the bareness of the unplastered walls. Numerous bear and deer skins rendered the otherwise uncarpeted floor more comfortable, and the logs in the huge fireplace blazed and crackled, sending their forked tongues of flame high up the chimney, as if determined to do all in their power to make the wedding feast a merry one. And a merry one it was; for, although the pine torches, fastened firmly along the walls, alternately blazing and spattering, cast their flickering light upon faces marked by that look of habitual anxiety inseparable from a life of toil and privation, dull care was for the time laid aside, and "what the conversation lacked in wit was made up in laughter." The older people talked of the homes and friends they had left behind when they came to this far-off land. The younger ones spoke of homes and friends to be made in the future, while soft eyes looked love to eyes that spoke again. All went merry, but scenes of woe and pleasure are ever close commixed. Suddenly there was a hush. The laugh ceases. The joke is left untold. A man with a white, frightened face and bearing a torch is seen to go hurriedly past the window. The door is quickly opened and he enters. At his first words, "Is Mr. Frazer here?" a man in the prime of life steps forward, saying, "What is it? is anything the matter with my children?"

"Your little girl Agnes got lost this afternoon. We hunted for her until after dark, but couldn't find her, so I came here."

"Lost! my Agnes lost!" screamed a woman's voice. "How could she get lost! I left her with her aunt."

"Yes; but she shut the door and left the little girl sitting alone on the step eating some bread and butter, while she went down to the foot of the hill to gossip with Mrs. Bedford. She says she wasn't gone more than half an hour, but likely it was longer than that; anyway, when she came back the child was gone."

Loud murmurs of indignation broke from the company as the man ceased speaking. What! leave a little three-year-old child alone for so long in a forest full of wild beasts, how could any woman do such a thing. But the poor mother could only cry "Why did I leave her! oh, why did I leave her!"

"Ah, then there was hurrying to and fro,  
And gathering tears and tremblings of distress,  
And cheeks all pale that but an hour ago  
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness."

Hurried farewells were spoken, many offers of help tendered and accepted. Mrs. Frazer was placed upon the only horse belonging to the party and the sorrowful pair started for their home, which was seven miles distant.

Seven miles to be traversed by two parents whose child is lost in the pathless forest, perhaps even now being devoured by some wild beast; the very thought is torture. How bitterly they upbraid themselves for having left their home and their little ones. On and on they go, every minute seeming an hour and every mile a furlong. There is no path, a small mark called a "blaze" on the different trees being their only guide. The night is intensely dark and, although it is the fifth of April, bitterly cold. The light of the torch casts weird shadows over the little party. Occasional patches of snow lying in hollows seem to render the scene more ghost-like. No word is spoken, and the stillness of the night is broken only by the rustling of the dead leaves under their feet, and the melancholy sighing of the wind among the leafless branches of the trees. Occasionally, a wolf ventures near, its ghastly fangs and gleaming eyeballs filling the hearts of all with unspoken terror as they think of the lost child; but cowardly, like all its race, it retreats before the glare of the torch. But the longest journey must have an end, and at last the almost distracted parents reach their home. Tear-stained childish faces are pressed against the window panes. Childish voices, choked with tears, cry "Agnes is lost! Agnes is lost! aunt left her alone, and they can't find her!" The house is full of anxious, friendly neighbours, who have been searching the woods since night-fall, but without finding any trace of the child. Fresh torches are soon procured, another party organized, signals agreed upon, and the father sets forth, inwardly vowing never to return without the child, dead or alive.

Alas! their search seemed doomed to be in vain; for, although they hunted valley and hill, they found no trace whatever. One by one the men, wearied and hopeless, returned to their homes to wait for daylight, until at last the father was left alone. After some hours a light breeze sprang up, and the clouds that had so long hung over the forest like a pall began to clear away, and

"Then, the moon rising in clouded majesty,  
At length apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,  
And o'er the dark her silvery mantle threw."

Regarding this as a good omen, the father hurried on with renewed vigour, occasionally calling, "Agnes! Agnes!"

"But there came no other answer than the echo of his crying,  
Than the echo of the woodlands."

Sometimes he fancied he caught a glimpse of his child's light dress and darted quickly forward, only to find the white moonlight gleaming on some tree-trunk. Again he thought he heard a light footstep, but was again deceived. 'Twas the night wind in the pine trees.

So the dreadful night wore on, until the fading glory of the moon showed that her reign was over. Slowly the east flushed into beauty, the sun rode forth in his golden chariot to rule the day with his brightness, and the April morning broke in all its splendour.

Nature, awakened from her long sleep, seems determined to break the icy chains which bind her, but grim old winter is not going to give up without a struggle. He has fringed the leafy mantle of the trees with a beard of hoar frost, which, glittering and sparkling in the sunlight, forms a scene incomparably beautiful. Twittering birds, rejoicing in the loveliness around them, fly about from place to place, tasting the pure air, and making the forest vocal with their glad songs.

The beauty around him would the day before have gladdened the father's heart, but now it seems only to mock his misery, for she who had so often during the long winter asked if the flowers would soon wake up, is now, he feels sure, sleeping the sleep that knows no waking.

Daylight brought more neighbours to aid in the search, but all in vain. The rosy mist of the morning gave place to the dazzling brightness of noon, then the sun began his downward march, and still the dreary, hopeless search went on, until

"Swiftly the evening came, the sun from the western horizon  
Like a magician extended his golden wand o'er the landscape."

Weary and sick at heart, the men were retracing their steps, and were within about a mile from home, when suddenly the father gave a glad cry and sprang forward. There, where a small patch of snow lay in a hollow, was the print of little feet. Eagerly they pressed forward, but their joy was quickly turned to horror. Just in front of them, by a hollow tree, where they had evidently slept during the winter, were two fierce-looking bears. To fire at the foremost was the work of an instant. The ball entered its head, but seemed at first to be ineffectual, and the infuriated beast made a desperate bound forward, striking Mr. Frazer as it did so and inflicting a slight flesh wound on his shoulder, then, with a growl of mortal agony, it rolled lifeless on the ground. The other, maddened at the loss of its mate, seemed determined to sell its life as dearly as possible. But the odds were four to one. Shots were fired in rapid succession, and soon it, too, lay dead.

Could they have devoured the child? But no! The thought was too horrible. Breathlessly the men hurried forward a few steps further. Then there was a glad shout, "We've found her, we've found her"; for in the distance they caught sight of a child's dress. As they drew nearer, the sight which met their eyes made even their stout hearts quake. There, lying beside a little hillock, was the child, the setting sun making a halo of glory about the bare golden head which lay on some ice.

The little figure lay white and motionless, but whether it was icy Death, or only her gentle twin sister Sleep, which held her in its grasp at first they could not tell. The sweet blue eyes were closed, traces of tears were on the marble cheeks which only the day before had glowed with health and happiness. The poor little hands were clenched and in one of them was a crust of bread. Her dress was dragged and torn, one little shoe was gone and her whole attitude spoke of terror and exhaustion.

"The father stooped to lift her, but the spark of life had fled,  
And the poor little child in the wild, wild wood lay dead."

For a moment not a word was spoken. Then the father repeated slowly and reverently: "The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Their next thought was one of wonder and thankfulness that she had been preserved from the savage beasts which that she had been so dangerously near her. Surely she must have been watched over by some of these "millions of spiritual creatures which walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep." The heat of her head had at first melted the ice slightly, and her head had sunk a little, but the frost king had resumed his sway again, and it was only by severing some of the golden curls with their knives that they could free it from his grasp. A robin sitting in a tree overhead ceased his evening song, and his bright eyes looked down pitifully upon the scene, as the father gave up his precious burden to another because his poor trembling arms were not able to bear it.

Meanwhile, the poor mother, denied the consolation of searching, sat at home benumbed with grief. In vain her four other children clung around her, seeking in their childish way to comfort her, saying: "Father will find Agnes and way to comfort her, said all right!" In vain kindly neighbours bring her back all right! In vain kindly neighbour women laid her baby on her knee; mechanically she attended to its wants, but her thoughts were all with the lost one. Wearily, oh so wearily, the hours rolled by, the pen-dulum of the old clock had never before seemed to swing so slowly. One by one the children, worn out with crying, slept the dreamless sleep of childhood. One by one kindly

neighbour-women returned to their own homes and loved ones, until at last the mother and the conscience-stricken aunt were left alone together. No word of reproach was spoken, however, and none was needed, for

"Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,  
'That pierce the soul or wring the wind with anguish  
Beyond comparison, the worst are those  
'That to our folly or our guilt we owe."

At last the dreadful night wore away. Slowly the cold, gray dawn approached, then the sun sent his gladsome beams to brighten the interior of the little cabin, but still the mother sat there

"Speechless, motionless,  
Unconscious of the daylight or the darkness."

The children awoke asking pitifully if "father hadn't brought Agnes home yet"; and then the mother roused herself. Household duties were attended to, the children cared for the same as usual, the tall clock ticked away, and the sun shone as brightly as ever. Oh, what a mockery it all seemed!

Winged rumour had been busy, and people came from far and near, asking tidings of the lost child. Weary men returned from the search only to report non-success, but still the father came not. So the never-to-be-forgotten day wore on. Morning was gradually followed by noon, then the lengthening shadows told that the day was declining. At last the poor tired mother fell into a troubled sleep, soon to be awakened by the shout, "They've found her, they've found her!" She tried to rise, but her poor trembling limbs refused to support her. She could only stretch out her arms to receive the precious burden. One look told her that her child was dead, and with a piercing cry she fell back senseless.

Two days later the mother, with a lingering touch, arranged for the last time the clustering curls about the marble brow, and placed in the tiny hands a bunch of snow-drops which had forced their way through the frozen soil, as if to offer themselves as a sacrifice on this altar of childhood's innocence and purity. Then, with tender hands, they placed the little white-robed figure in the coffin which the father's hands had made. The children were called to take a last look at their little angel sister, and a solemn procession started on foot for the nearest grave-yard, which was eight miles distant.

In a beautiful spot, where the trees formed a verdant canopy overhead, and a thick carpet of moss stretched beneath the feet, was the little grave, and when the parents had seen the last shovelful of earth heaped upon their darling they returned sorrowfully to their home, where "They took up the burden of life again."

The silent wheels of Time have run their annual course for seventy years since then. The reaper whose name is Death has long since laid the parents beside their child. Strange to say, however, the couple whose marriage took place on that eventful night, still live, honoured and beloved by all who know them. Although their locks are silvery white, and their bodies bend beneath their weight of years, their mental faculties are unimpaired, and as their children's children gather around them they often tell the story of the little "Lost Child," whose moss-covered tombstone tells her sad story:

"Through fault of friend she went astray,  
And perished in the wilderness, wherein there was no way."

## Beware! She is Fooling Thee.

Were you ever on a river  
In the new Canadian West,  
Where the maples shade the waters  
And the flowers bloom the best,  
Where the sky is blue and cloudless  
And the birds in thousands sing  
Where the blossoms are the sweetest  
In the Manitoba spring.

I have wandered by such river,  
I have seen such flowers blow,  
I have seen such verdure growing—  
Only Manitobans know—  
And the song birds were the sweetest  
And the river fair to see,  
For I met beneath the maples  
The dearest one to me.

Now 'tis winter, and the mercury  
Is twenty-five below,  
And the river of the summer  
Wears a shroud of ice and snow.  
The leaves have left the maples,  
All the birds have gone away,  
And my love! She loves another.  
Or so, at least, they say.

## L'envoi.

Changing as the weather changes,  
From the cold to summer heat,  
Is a woman's fickle favours,  
And her constancy a cheat;  
Yet in spring beneath the maples—  
Knowing this you'll likely see—  
I'll be wandering by the river  
If she only beckons me.

LA TOUCHE TUPPER (Willie Seaton).