

# CARMICHAEL: by Anison North

A picture of farm home life in Canada faithfully reproduced by a writer who knows it. The disputed "line fence" has been the cause of many a bitter feud, and the settlement of this particular feud makes a most interesting story. Copyrighted. All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOREST

During the days which followed I did much thinking about Henry Carmichael. Almost my first thought, on awaking in the morning, was to wonder would he do anything that day by way of carrying out his threat to be even with my father; and for a good fortnight, while the wheat and oats were being cut and gathered into stooks, I stood out every day for hours watching that I might give warning on the approach of Henry Carmichael across the fields. Sometimes, indeed, I thought it rather curious that one who could be so kind to old Yorkie Dodd could be so harsh and bitter toward another; but then it was such a terrible calamity that had come upon Yorkie.

However, as the days went by and my father continued to come in regularly at meal-times and at nights, and was never found lying shot behind a fence or among the grain-ricks, I began to breathe more freely again, and, as Henry Carmichael seemed to have regained all his good humour, and my father never once mentioned the affair of the stolen timber in my hearing, could presently feel that a great crisis had been safely passed.

When next I met Carmichael it was at the turning of the summer, just before the first red banners of autumn began to hang out here and there from the vast green wilderness of the woodland. I think I have mentioned my dread of thunderstorms, and oh, what a summer of thunderstorms that was! First a few days of sunshine and intense heat, then a terrible hurricane of wind and rain, and clouds all shot with the lightning—that was the record of almost every week of July and August, until people began to talk of putting up lightning rods, and to wonder if the clearing away of so much of the woods were not the cause of the trouble.

Upon the occasion of which I speak, I had gone, late in the afternoon, to look for the cows. They were not in the pasture, and so, seldom afraid in the woods, I plunged boldly into the green wilderness, with Jap bounding ahead of me in delight, and making a thousand deviations after scurrying red squirrels and other such interesting game. The woods always filled me with keen pleasure, and this evening my steps became slower and slower as I looked up through the green-gold of the leaves, all flushed with the slant, evening sun light, and marked the red shafts of brightness that struck through, here and there, to the moist, brown earth below. It was delightful also to look at the solemn great trunks standing up like pillars, myriads of them, as far as eye could reach, and to note the soft, green patches of maiden hair and other dainty, woody things, scattered here and there below as though safe in the protection of the great canopy above.

At the little brook I paused for a moment to listen to the music of the water; then after plucking a few spikes of the scarlet lobelia, plunged again into the thick of the woods.

There was still no trace of the cows, but a part of the rough slash fence, which marked this portion of the boundary between our farm and the Carmichael's was broken down, and I judged that, possibly, the cattle had gone through, and were somewhere in the Carmichael woods. After a little hesitation I decided to follow them.

For a little while the cow-path, which I presently came upon, and which led upward from the watering place, was pressed closely on either hand by a dense mass of undergrowth, maple and beech saplings, pin-cherry trees and

raspberry bushes; but, as the older woods beyond were reached, these thickets gave way, and again I could see vast, dimly lighted spaces all interspersed with gray trunks and rooted in by the thick, green leafage above. Here, however, where the way was not so familiar to me, the vastness of the forest became a thing to be felt, and I began to be oppressed by a vague dread of I knew not what. Jap, too, seemingly less sure of his bearings, gave up his racing about, and trotted along nearer me, ever and anon thrusting his damp, friendly nose into the palm of my hand. But his presence reassured me, and so I did not once think of turning back. There was an old clearing just beyond where, possibly I might find the cows.

At a few paces farther, and as an index to this clearing, the undergrowth again began to press upon either hand, so closely that it formed here a mass impenetrable to the eye, with branches sometimes stretching across the path, so that it was necessary to raise them in forcing one's way. The path, too, still went upward in a succession of knolls, and glancing up from the foot of one of them I saw a sight that made my heart stand still.

It was only Henry Carmichael, looking down at me. He was standing quite still, with the thick, green leafage on either side, and behind him; and in his arms he held a lamb which began to bleat pitifully, as though in pain, a late lamb, already grown almost into a sheep, but, on his broad bosom looking quite young and helpless; yet, for the instant, while knowing that it was Carmichael, I did not realise that it was he.

I think, however, that it must have been, most of all, the expression on his face which fascinated me, and brought up from the past, as a sort of vision, that memory from my baby years. In later life, thinking of it, I knew that pity for the lamb with its broken leg, and wonder at the wild little apparition I must have been, with my black hair streaming over my shoulders, my startled eyes, and my scarlet lobelia held to my breast, had combined to form that tender, pitying, wondering expression—for, when I knew him better I knew that, unless when under leash, Henry Carmichael's heart lay on his countenance as the print on an open book—but, however that may be, at the time it was not only Carmichael with his bleating lamb and the greenery pressing all about him that I saw.

Years before, when but a very little child, I had seen when with my mother in some city church somewhere, a picture which had fascinated me, and which I had watched and watched all the time of the service, with the drone of the white-gowned clergyman growing fainter and fainter in my ears. It was in a window of stained glass, and the morning sun, shining through it, had touched into what seemed a strange glory to my childish eyes the figure of the good Shepherd, with a little lamb in His arms, and the sheep following Him down a path that ran, with green bushes pressing on either hand, through a green, green meadow. Above all was the glory centred in the face, with the golden halo shining above it, and I had gazed and gazed until the sweet lips seemed to smile, and the gentle eyes to look down in pitying tenderness just on me.

So to-day the sudden appearance of Henry Carmichael startled me, as though the glowing apparition of my early childhood had projected itself, by some miracle, into the path in Carmichael's wood.

The next instant a sort of horror seized me, child though I was, that I should have confused Henry Carmichael that man of wicked words, with such a memory; and with the sudden reaction all my old terrors of him came back. Before he could move or speak, for with such lightning-like rapidity occur the transitions of the mind, I had darted like a startled fawn into the

underbrush, and was flying on and on through the woods.

"Peggie! Peg Mallory!" I heard him calling, but instead of answering I threw myself down in a dense copse where the green light could scarce suffice to reveal my slight little shivering form or the scarlet blossoms heaving up and down as I pressed them to my bosom. Jap, who had followed me in great glee, and had been nosing around in the copse, evidently under the impression that nothing less exciting than the finding of a fox's or ground-hog's hole could be at the bottom of such precipitancy, came up to me, disappointed, but with ears raised in expectancy. I was afraid he would yelp and divulge my whereabouts, for, having run away, I now felt all the trepidation of a fugitive; but when I raised my hand he came close to me to be petted, licking my face at every opportunity. Afterward he snuggled close to me, and so we lay, looking out into the woods which now seemed to be darkening strangely. Rapidly, in the distance, the myriad tree-trunks seemed to be dissolving, or rather moving nearer to one another and merging in an indistinguishable mass. At the same time the noise of waving tree-tops, which had kept up all the way like the murmur of a distant rapid, suddenly ceased, and all the forest seemed to be waiting in expectancy, while the darkness settled down like some vast pall falling silently from the heavens.

More terrified than ever, I darted out of the copse, and at the same time a low mutter of thunder and a sudden suffusion of red light through all the leaves heralded the beginning of a storm.

Glad, now, of the proximity of a human being, I lost my fear of Henry Carmichael in my greater fear of the storm, and darted with unerring step, like any wild thing of the woods, after him.

I came upon him in the open, just beyond the brook, when the flashes were beginning to come fast, and the thunder to roll louder and louder like roar of approaching artillery. He heard the patter of my feet behind him, and half turned.

"Come on, come on!" he said, "Scared o' the storm? Here, hang on to my coat-tail. This great sheep takes up both o' my hands."

I did not like to take hold of his coat, but was glad to run along beside him through the fields, even though he did not speak, nor even look at me again all the way.

The rain did not begin to patter until we had reached the lower barn where Dick was fastening in a flock of turkeys.

"Run across to Mallory's, Dick," said Mr. Carmichael, "'n' tell them Peggie's here, 'n' 'll be home all safe when the storm's over."

Immediately Dick set off on a run, while I followed his father into the sheep-house, and watched him while he set the lamb's leg between two bits of wood and bound it about with strips torn from his handkerchief. I thought he must be hurting the poor thing dreadfully, for it struggled a little, and bleated pitifully; but I knew he did not mean to, for all the while he kept talking to it, calling it "poor lambie!" and "poor little chap!" and assuring it it would be all right soon.

While watching the operation I was too much interested to pay much attention to the storm; but once it was over, and the lambie laid down on a bundle of clean straw, I felt very nervous and wretched indeed, and cowered back as far as I could from the open door.

When I looked at him again, Carmichael was sitting on the straw watching me with that twinkle in his eyes which, I was beginning to notice, appeared there whenever he spoke to a child.

"Ye may come over here beside me if ye like," he said, and glad enough

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