

## How "Mokwuh" Came Home

Written for the Western Home Monthly by Geo. E. Clough.

"**B**EAR! Bear!" At the cry Ahmik stepped from his log house, gun in hand, and shading his eyes with his sleeve, gazed across the blue expanse of water. Far out in the lake two black dots could be seen travelling slowly from shore to shore. Ahmik's squaw, eager for the chase, launched the bark canoe and in a moment it was speeding forward with Ahmik in the bow to intercept the swimming animals. Meanwhile Ahmik's little daughter Asahtee hurriedly climbed the rocky hill behind the shack in order to obtain a better view of the hunt. The bears quickened their pace as the canoe approached them, the one which proved to be the mother far out-distancing her cub. As she swam she kept up a continual roaring, partly of fear and partly by way of encouraging her offspring to top speed. Ahmik, knowing that the animal was at his mercy, paddled leisurely beside it, waiting until it should be conveniently near shore before firing the fatal shot. Panting from her long swim the mother glanced up appealingly at the Indian as he laid down his paddle and cocked the hammer of his shot gun. Fired from such close quarters the heavy charge of duck-shot struck with the force of a bullet full in the ear of the poor creature. The smoke cleared to reveal the water churned into bloody foam, in the midst of which a maddened animal lashed, roared and struggled, at times submerged, at times re-appearing to cough up great mouthfuls of water stained with its life-blood. Again the gun spoke, and "Mokwuh" the bear floated still and lifeless in the lake.

Calmly the Indians waited the approach of the cub. Almost exhausted the little thing swam up and sniffed at the body of its mother. Leaning over,

Ahmik reached out a big arm and catching up the fluffy ball of fur deposited it dripping and shivering in the bow of the canoe.

"This will be a nice toy for Asahtee," he said.

Several hours later, while the Indians were busy dispatching juicy bear steaks, Asahtee, on her knees in a corner of the room, was trying by means of a lump of sugar to establish friendly relations between herself and her new pet. At first "Mokoons" was disinclined to be comforted, but perseverance carried the day and he soon consented to accept the tit bits which Asahtee tendered, for who could refuse what those little brown hands offered, and who could resist the appeal of such red lips and merry eyes?

Before many weeks passed Mokoons and Asahtee were fast friends. Ahmik made a leather collar for the cub and its days were spent in an out-house, chained to a stout staple which was driven firmly into the log wall. When the first snow came Asahtee went to the bush and gathered lots of moss and leaves. With these and the aid of some small sticks she constructed a warm den into which the young bear retired and spent the winter drowsily sucking his right paw. Asahtee often came to the outhouse, and by stooping down and peering through one of the chinks in the den could just make out the black form of her friend. "Surely he must be hungry" she would say, and with that she would poke a bit of frozen moose-meat through the chink. When at last Spring came and Mokoons pushed down his den and emerged blinking, looking fatter and sleeker than ever, Asahtee's delight knew no bounds, and every time the fish-nets were lifted she brought him fresh fish from the lake.

Mokoons, being now a year old and quite big enough to protect himself from the dogs, was allowed the run of the village and soon became a universal favorite. "He is now 'Mokoons' no longer but 'Mokwuh,'" said Ahmik, as he watched the animal with a well-directed blow of its paw knock over one of the mongrels which was snapping and barking round him.

Ahmik at Asahtee's request made the bear a new collar, for he had already far outgrown his old one, and the bigger he grew the more mischievous he became. He would enter the house, and standing on his hind legs, reach down a can of syrup from the shelf, and removing the lid, pour the sticky mixture into his mouth and down his glossy coat, and no one but Asahtee would dare to interfere with him. After a while the Indians began to tire of having so mischievous a pet about the place. Several dogs had been badly maimed and there was scarcely a man in the village who had not suffered some loss, however trifling; possibly the theft of a piece of moose-meat, a few pounds of sugar or some fish left drying in the sun. The climax was reached the following summer, when Ahmik discovered that the bear had been scratching for ants in the bottom of his upturned birch-bark canoe, and it was decided that Mokwuh must go.

No one ever dreamed of killing him. Every one agreed that it would be much better to take him a canoe trip down the lake and turn him loose in the bush to fend for himself. So one hot summer's day a little party consisting of Ahmik, his squaw and Asahtee set off, with Mokwuh lying quietly in the middle of the canoe, for the high burnt country whose dim purple hills bristling with the blackened stumps of trees could be just seen from the village. A couple of hours' steady paddling brought them to where a fine creek, babbling over rocky boulders, entered the lake, and here Ahmik suggested that Mokwuh be put ashore and left to his fate.

"How will he live?" asked Asahtee.

"He will catch fish," replied Ahmik.

"He will starve," said Asahtee with tears in her eyes.

"He will get fat on the blue berries," replied her father.

So Mokwuh was turned loose at the mouth of the creek, and after sitting on his haunches and regarding his retreating friends with a puzzled air, turned and quietly disappeared among the tangle of bushes which fringed the stream.

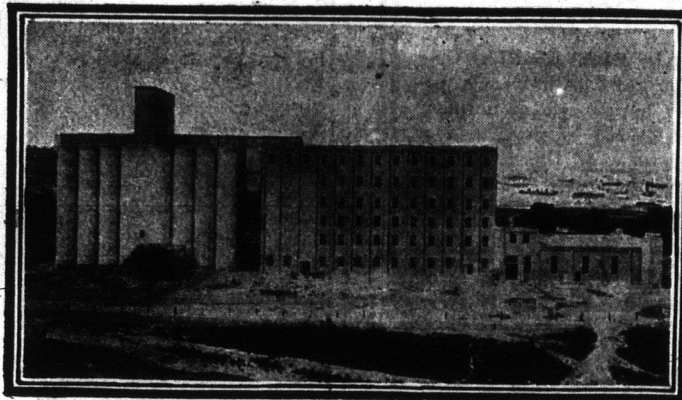
Everything seemed very quiet in the village without Mokwuh. Even the dogs were at a loss for something to do, being deprived of their customary sport of bear-baiting. Each Spring when Ahmik and his fellow-tribesmen set forth on the annual bear-hunting expeditions they always gave a wide berth to the district where the village pet was supposed to roam. No man thought of putting a trap or snare in the bear-trail which ran beside the creek, and Mokwuh was allowed the unmolested run of the country.

It was two years later in the fall of the year that the white men paddled down the lake in their wooden canoe. There were two of them, both hunters, and they passed the village, travelling in the direction of the rolling hills where Mokwuh had his home. Several of the Indians saw them pass and their advent caused much comment among the red men. Looking down the lake Ahmik saw the smoke of their camp-fire, and frowned. "These white men always bring trouble with them," he said.

In the meantime what of the pet bear? How fared he during the two years since he was cast adrift? At first he was rather at a loss as to how to procure sufficient to eat, but instinct soon asserted itself, and what with fish from the creek, and blue-berries from the burnt hills, helped out with ants, roots and bees' nests, he got along very comfortably.



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