

## Wild Love

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Roy North.

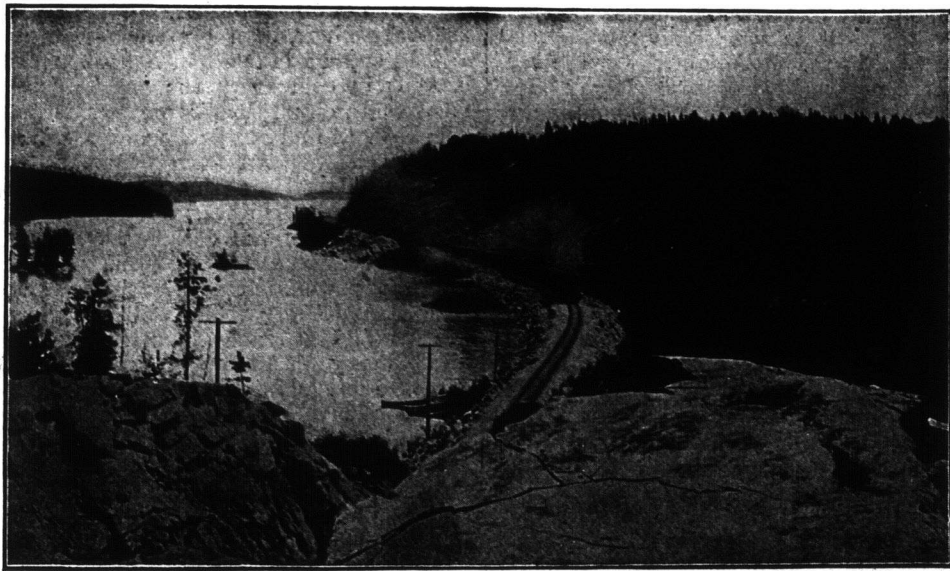
THE mother moose slid quietly down the bank and stood knee deep in the cool water. The calves, only a week old, lingered timidly on the brink, afraid to take the plunge. The mother's great nose stretched up to them, breathing encouragement, and presently they stepped forward, planting their unsteady feet gingerly in the soft black mud of the slope. At last the descent was accomplished and they stood by her side.

It was their first acquaintance with cold water, and they shivered as it flowed around their tender bodies, for the ice had only just gone from the lakes.

Suddenly the mother was galvanized into alertness by an unusual sound. With ears erect and nose sniffing she gazed at the bend in the river. Once before she had heard that steady tapping—the sound of paddles on the side of a canoe. It was long ago, but she had cause to remember, for a rifle bullet had torn through the fleshy part of her neck and harsh cries had pursued her as she sought the shelter of the woods. Now her first thought was for her young. With desperate haste she urged them

cook and generally frolicked with everyone. In the evenings of the hot summer they roamed the lake shore together, and sported in reedy bays, returning to the camp at dark. A stall was provided for them, and at night they were brought inside, tied up with the team of horses and fed with oats from the manger.

One man alone did not take kindly to them. This was "Lightning Jim," the teamster, a surly fellow who had earned his nick-name because he had never been known on any occasion to bestir himself with alacrity. Many a curse did Jim bestow on the camp pets, thereby bringing upon himself the disfavor of the men and the defiant resentment of the bull moose. Instinct told the animal that Jim disliked him, and one day when the teamster had falsely tempted him with an empty bucket, and then dealt him a blow with the same, in wrathful disappointment the young bull sent the can high in the air and with lowered head charged the offender. For once in his life "Lightning" fled with a speed which fully justified his name, and the watching miners, roaring with laughter, chaffed him accordingly. In future, both the moose were treated



Canyon Lake, Alta.

ashore and plunged past them up the bank. Hardly was she hidden in the thick willows when the bow of a canoe rounded the bend.

The keen eyes of Reddy Patterson, the bowman, were quick to notice the tell-tale signs of freshly churned mud and the stray moose hairs floating on the water. It was the work of only a few seconds to tie the craft to the willows and Winchester in hand start in pursuit. The branches crashed in front of him as the huge animal broke through them in its flight, and there, right in his path, stood the two calves, their retreat barred by a huge fallen log. Reddy dropped his rifle, flung himself upon them and shouted lustily for his companion.

The calves, exhausted by their recent efforts and terrified by the suddenness of their capture, offered but feeble resistance as they were carried to the canoe, and, with legs firmly tied, deposited on the top of some sacks of flour. "I reckon the boys 'll be glad to have these youngsters as pets," said Reddy as he loosed the canoe and bent to the paddle.

Reddy's surmise proved correct; the men of Gold Rock mining camp extended a hearty welcome to the two young captives. Cans of condensed milk were opened with unwonted frequency by the cook, and their contents, suitably diluted, were lavished upon the calves. For their part, they took to their new diet in a manner which surprised everybody. A week later even the most pessimistic man in camp was fain to admit that they might live. Not only was this prophecy fulfilled, but the moose grew and even thrived in their new surroundings. All remembrance of their mother faded, and ere three months had passed they had quite adapted themselves to the life of a mining camp.

Every day they followed the men to work, rambling in and out of the stables, received tit-bits from the hands of the

by "Lightning Jim" with a deferential respect highly amusing to those who had witnessed his discomfiture. He was a prudent man, not given to courting danger unnecessarily.

A year later, when owing to financial difficulties, mining operations at Gold Rock were suspended and the camp closed down, there was not a man among the miners who did not feel sorry to abandon the two tame moose. Reddy Patterson in particular cursed the luck, and swore he would not part with both of them. Finally it was decided that the cow should accompany the party out to the railway, but the bull should be left to fend for himself.

At this decision even Lightning Jim opened his heart, and filled up the manger with a liberal feed of oats for the poor beast that must remain. When preparations for departure were complete, the door of the empty stable was thrown wide, and the young bull was left there feeding contentedly, all unconscious of the desertion. After a time he became restless at the unaccustomed silence, and walked out to ascertain the cause of it. The cabins were empty and silent, and not a soul was to be seen.

Smoke still issued from the stove pipe of the cook-shack, and the acrid odor of burning wood assailed his nostrils. On the full trot he made his way over to the cabin, clattering over the piles of empty cans which lay in his path. He was confronted by a door locked and barred against him. Turning, he swung up by the steep trail among the hills to the shaft mouth, but failed to find any trace of his human friends. All was silent at the pit mouth, and he returned disconsolately to the camp. Standing in the clearing there among the deserted shacks, which already seemed to have taken on an indescribably forlorn appearance, the bull moose threw up his head and called loudly for his mate. There was no answer.

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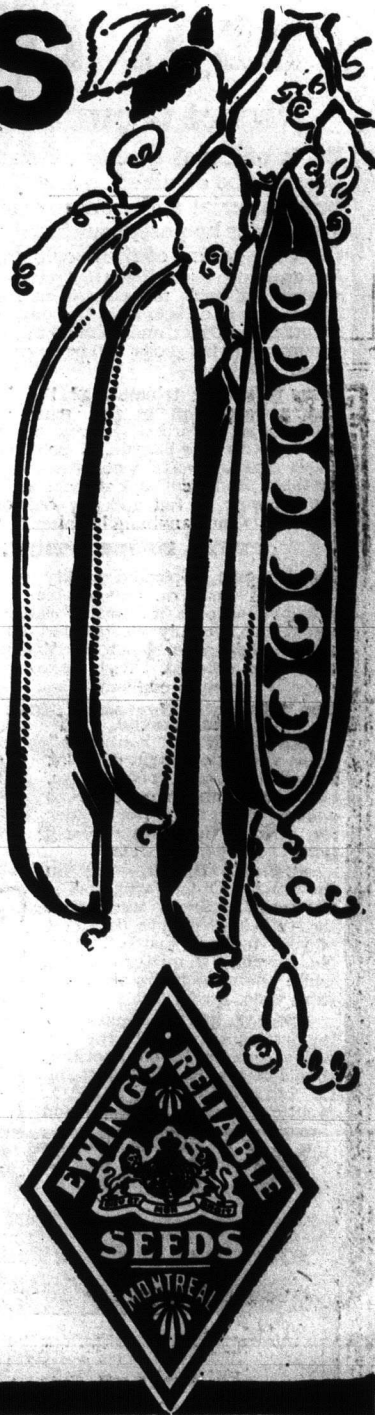
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