

The Channel at Boulder Point

By SPENCER C. GUNN

KATCHEQUA Lake had thrown aside its overcoat of ice, which now lay in huge blocks upon its shores. It had dressed itself once more in the deep blue of a clear May sky, and its breast was bright with the jewels of sparkling waves.

A little crowd had gathered on the dock at Karinae to see the steam-launch Nymph begin the first trip of her second season on the lake. The people waved hats and handkerchiefs as the boat moved away, and waited to see her disappear around Boulder Point, a half-mile distant. A narrow and dangerous channel, with rocks on either side, there offered a short cut which the Nymph was accustomed to use.

On the top of Boulder Point, just within the fringe of scraggly cedars, which half covered the rock, a man stood and watched the boat leave the dock. He was dressed in flannel and corduroy, and leaned upon a long, old-fashioned rifle. He was Pierre Chevenaux, the half-breed guide.

Pierre smiled as he noticed the docks salute the departing boat, and the smile was not pleasant. He sat down upon the rock, looking now at the approaching launch and now at the channel down in front of him. At times that sinister smile would for a moment reappear only to vanish as quickly, leaving his face more sullen than before. He was thinking, and his thoughts were as dark as the little piece of black wood in the channel to which his eyes often turned.

The Nymph was Pierre's enemy and the enemy of his comrades. Before the launch came they were the masters of Katchequa. In their skiffs, stanch, swift, and sure, the tourists had ridden about the lake, leaving much silver in the hands of the boatmen. Now all was changed. Their boats usually waited for passengers in vain, for the Nymph

could take them all, and more quickly and cheaply.

Most of the guides had gone elsewhere; but Pierre, having invested his savings in a little home, and having his wife, Rosie, and little Tommy, their son, to care for, could not leave. He had been obliged to do odd jobs around the village to make a scanty living, and he despised that kind of work. During the winter just passed Rosie and Tommy had to live with her father, for Pierre could not earn enough money in the cold months to keep three mouths supplied with food. They were to return soon. Would he be able to keep them?

He glanced at the boat, now half-way to the point. He smiled and looked at the channel and at the little black stick which he had placed there. He stretched himself out upon the ground, his chin resting upon his hands, his eyes fixed upon the white boat with its new flags. There was a curse on his lips. What right had the Nymph on the waters of Katchequa? What right had one man, himself once a guide, to deprive all the other guides of their means of livelihood in that neighborhood? What right had this boat and this man to make him carry wood for the women of the village—he who had been the leader of the guides and the favorite of the tourists—who had shown them the trails of deer, the haunts of trout, the nests of loons; he who had shot with his rifle the flying ducks their shells had missed, and had brought the timid but curious deer to the shores with his wild cries?

The whistle of the Nymph roused him. She was very near. He looked again at the little black stick and drew a line from it to the bow of the launch. The line was perfectly straight and only a few hundred yards long.