

GOLDEN DAYS

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

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THE LONE RANCH.

BY LOUIS PENDLETON.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTURE OF THE MOOSE.

It was quite extraordinary, indeed almost incredible, and yet Dick Redwood had heard of a similar capture. It was, in fact, the recollection of the story heard one day in the village of Dorset across the bay that suggested the idea and encouraged him to make the effort.

Dick had quarreled with his stepfather that morning, through no fault of his own, too, smarting under the consciousness of wrong and hot with anger, he rushed out of his room, ran down the hill, jumped into his little hrebark canoe, and paddled out of sight far down the lake (the Lake of Rays in a slight, thirty-actid district of Ontario), wishing alternately that his own dear father had not died and that he himself were a man, so that, in either case, there could be a proper reckoning with this interloping stranger, "Ab" Griffiths, who had come to the place within a year after the father's death and developed into the son's persecutor shortly afterward.

Dick was fair-haired and fair-faced, in spite of exposure to wind and sun, and there was still a soft, innocent look in his blue eyes suggesting a gambler's child. But he was well grown, and unusually strong and active for a boy of nearly sixteen.

He did not hesitate for a moment, therefore, when, on his return homeward, skirting the winding shore, he saw a moose step out of the brush and plunge into the water little more than fifty yards in advance of him.

The animal was not full grown, a heifer some two years old or thereabouts, but even at this age it was almost as large as an average horse, and, indeed, but for its horns and the buffalo-like hump above its forequarters it might have at the first glance been mistaken for one.

Its intention was undoubtedly to swim across "the narrows"—the lake at this point being less than half a mile wide—and having begun its task, it looked neither to right nor left, entirely unconscious of the boy's existence.

At sight of it, Dick had lifted his paddle from the water and drifted forward silently. He had no gun, and after one moment of the hunter's keen desire to slay, felt that he was unarmed—for to shoot a moose was in these days to break the law and be subject to a heavy fine.

During some minutes the boy gazed in longing wonder at the rare and unexpected game, but as his eye fell on a coil of rope in his canoe, an unpropitious, almost absurd, plan began to dawn upon him, and when presently he found himself directly in the wake of the swimming moose, still unobserved, he suddenly dipped his paddle again, began to make long, stealthy strokes and glide forward.

The swift and silent canoe was probably within fifteen feet of the moose before the

latter took alarm and plunged forward at redoubled speed.

After a few more vigorous and more noisy strokes, Dick dropped the paddle, stood up in the canoe, and, snatching the rope, flung it far before him, lass-o-like.

As rare good luck would have it, there was a slip-knot in the end of it—for there would have been no time to tie one. The boy was wildly delighted and half terrified, too, to see the moose settle over the great, branching horns, tighten, and the rope held in his hands come taut as he dropped on his knees again in the canoe.

Then away sped the frightened moose with the canoe and the excited boy in tow, the water splashing and foaming about them, a merry sight to see.

Dick rather expected his prize to turn round and fight, in which case he could only let go and get out of the way, for one blow from those great horns would be sufficient to demolish his frail bark boat; but the moose swam straight for the opposite bank of the narrows.

"As soon as she lands, I'll have to let go—I can't hold her," was the boy's anxious thought.

Then, after a few moments:

"No, I shan't let go. I'll jump out, run the rope round a tree, tie it, and go for help."

About three-quarters of the distance had been covered, when, just as Dick conceived this plan, a canoe shot out from the opposite shore and headed the moose off, rousing it

to change its course almost at right angles up the narrows.

"Have you got a rope, Mr. Halsey?" shouted Dick, recognizing the occupant of the other canoe—a wrinkled, stubby, gray-bearded man of middle age, who gripped a clay pipe upside down between his teeth.

For answer the newcomer reached behind him, bringing to view a handful of small rope, and proceeding to tie a slip-knot in the end of it, his canoe, meanwhile, swaying out of its course before the wind. Soon it shot rapidly forward again, and a few minutes later two canoes instead of one were being towed up the narrows in the wake of the frightened and weakening moose.

"Well, this beats me—lassing a moose in the lake!" exclaimed the newcomer. "A young one," he added. "An old one would turn to and fight us, and whip us, too, maybe."

"If we can get her around our point, perhaps we can land her on our meadow," suggested Dick.

"Not yet awhile. If we keep her swimming in the lake we'll land her out all right."

Half an hour or more later a little twenty-haired girl of eleven, bare-headed and in a torn, soiled frock, stood fishing on a wharf made of floating drift logs at the foot of a cleared hillside, conspicuous objects of which were a small farmhouse and a large barn.

"Jane! Jane Redwood!" called an exasperated female voice from the neighborhood of the farmhouse.

But the little girl did not heed, her eyes

being now fixed on three curious objects rounding the "Point," and which were apparently a large swimming animal and two canoes in pursuit.

Suddenly the child sprang into a punt lying at hand, seized the oars and rowed out into the lake. Her shifty eyes had recognized her brother, the situation had become clear, and she pluckily determined to give assistance. And, indeed, it was the coming up of the punt that caused the moose to again change its course and presently land upon the meadow in the clearing, as was desired.

The foundering animal having plunged up the bank, the man and the boy jumped into water knee deep, and followed, swinging on the ropes.

The little girl landed almost as promptly with her punt, saw that the canoes were made fast, then, snatching up a stick, she too, followed up the slope.

Thus they crossed the meadow with their prize. Dick on the right, Halsey on the left and Jane urging the moose on from behind with her stick.

If the animal plunged to the right or the left, making for one of its enemies with lowered horns, the man or the boy would throw his whole weight upon the rope on the opposite side, thus checking it.

The maddened beast made more than one frantic break for the woods, carrying them far out of their course; but the poor thing had nearly exhausted its powers in the water, and could not struggle much longer.



"AWAY SPED THE FRIGHTENED MOOSE WITH THE CANOE AND THE EXCITED BOY IN TOW."

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A Missing Pony

L. M. Montgomery

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I never see a sorrel-colored pony, with a faded mane and tail, without remembering a night adventure that Sam Richards and I once had on account of just such an animal.

It happened long ago, when I was teaching school in a well-to-do country district called Maberly.

I boarded at old Ezra Burke's, and I chummed a good deal with his hired boy, Sam Richards.

I was a mere boy myself at the time, being barely eighteen, and Sam was a few months my junior. He was by no means an ordinary hired boy, as the status of hired boys went in Maberly, but was several grades higher in the social scale.

Sam was an orphan, and had been well brought up with an uncle's family. Upon the death of his uncle, a few years previous to the date of my story, Sam was thrown upon his own resources.

But he had any amount of pluck. The only thing he knew anything about was farming, and he stuck to it.

"I don't believe in trying to fit a square peg into a round hole," he once said to me. "I like farming, and I didn't know how to do anything else, so I didn't try. Of course, I don't mean to be a hired boy all my life. But so long as I am one, I intend to be the very best it is possible to be."

I liked and respected Sam. He was an active, intelligent lad, with a cheerful way of looking at things and unlimited good nature. All the Maberly people were his friends, and never dreamed of looking down on him because of his occupation.

Sam needed all of his good nature to get along with Ezra Burke. I never knew a more disagreeable, exacting, fault-finding old curmudgeon. It was always a wonder to me how Sam could put up with him at all.

It was nothing unusual for old Ezra Burke to have three or four different hired boys in one season. Few of them could endure his unreasonableness, and the few who could generally found themselves peremptorily discharged for some trifling reason. This was Sam's second summer with him—a phenomenal record in Maberly chronicles.

He looked with sour disapproval on my intimacy with Sam. I was never a favorite with old Ezra, and I fancy he imagined I did not exert any favorable influence over Sam.

One evening Sam was ordered to take back to Isaac Gardner a cart which Ezra Burke had borrowed. I intended to go up to Gardner's along with him and borrow Isaac's two-wheeled gig, in order to make a short trip to the nearest town on the following day.

At dusk we went out and hitched Major into the cart. Major was a sorrel pony, which Mr. Burke had bought a week before from Stephen Pollock, a farmer over at Maple Ridge, the next district to Maberly.

We did not know much about him, but he seemed a quiet, inoffensive little animal, with not enough spunk to get into mischief.

Old Ezra came out just as we were ready to start, and, finding we had taken Major, he flew into a furious temper and abused us roundly in most unmeasured terms. Had we taken any other horse it would have amounted to the same thing.

He had been in an unbearable humor all day, and was just in the mood for a tantrum. He ended up with a peremptory command to unhook the pony instantly and take another horse.

Sam, who had listened to it all with praiseworthy calmness, respectfully replied that the black mare's leg was so lame it was impossible to take her—she had sprained it, if I remember aright—and that the gray horse and the bay colts were away in the back clearings, where it would take a good hour to go and get them. Consequently, either Major must be taken or the cart must be left where it was.

Old Ezra grimly succumbed to these unanswerable arguments, but he seemed to cherish a grudge against Sam for the stress of circumstances, and evidently blamed him for it all.

“You look out what you do with that pony,” he growled, as he shuffled off. “I darsn't trust you. If anything happens to him, I'll send you packing before morning.”

Sam and I smothered a laugh over the old fellow's crustiness, and rattled off down the lane in Isaac Gardner's road-cart.

We were in high spirits, and it was a delightful evening, somewhere along between haying and harvest, with an exhilarating sparkle in the air and a cool breeze.

It was about a mile to Isaac Gardner's, where the post office was kept, and which was a general rendezvous in the evening. Several of the boys from adjacent farms were in the habit of dropping in to discuss news or play games with the jolly crowd of Gardner boys and girls.

Sam and I frequently went over in the evenings to play checkers with Belle and Gertie Gardner, and eat platefuls of their August apples and homemade taffy.

This evening, after we had unharnessed Major from the cart, and put it away in the shed, we went in as usual, leaving our pony securely tied—as we fancied—to the orchard fence.

There were a number of our friends there, and, as we were all very merry, it was not until eleven o'clock that we dispersed.

We all went out in a jolly mood, playing boyish pranks on each other, and calling

back joking messages to the Gardners; but Sam and I sobered down when we reached the spot where our pony should have been, but was not. The bridle was hanging to the fence, but Major was gone.

At first we accused some of the others of having loosened him for a trick; but, as they all solemnly protested their innocence, we concluded that the pony had somehow contrived to free himself, and had taken French leave.

Isaac Gardner came out with a lantern, and we searched the yard and outbuildings thoroughly, but Major was not forthcoming.

“It’s too bad!” said Sam, in a vexed tone.

“Nonsense!” replied Isaac Gardner, banteringly. “Surely, two strong young fellows like you don’t mind a mile’s walk on a night like this? Your pony wanted to teach you a lesson on keeping early hours, and has gone home before you. You’ll find him there when you get back.”

“I hope we will,” rejoined Sam, seriously. “I wouldn’t care if I were sure that he *had* gone home. But you know Mr. Burke bought him only last week, and he belonged to Stephen Pollock. He hasn’t seemed contented since we bought him, and I’m afraid he’s gone back to Maple Ridge, instead of home.”

However, there was nothing to do but go home and see. We bade the rest goodnight, and tramped moodily off.

Sam said little, but he was visibly anxious. Old Ezra’s threats were never empty ones, and, if Major did not turn up safe and sound, Sam would undoubtedly suffer for it.

“Cheer up, Sam,” I said. “We’ll find the pony home when we get there all right. Anyhow, he can’t have done anything worse than gone back to Maple Ridge, and he’ll be safe there. Old Ezra won’t discharge you for that.”

“Won’t he?” responded Sam, gloomily. “You don’t know old Ezra yet. He’s the biggest crank alive. Why, he sent his last man off with an hour’s notice, because he accidentally dropped a bucket down the well one day. It’s been nothing short of a miracle that he’s kept me so long. I wouldn’t stay with him, except that he pays better wages than most, if he *is* a crank.”

We kept a sharp lookout along the road for Major, but saw nothing of him. All was silent when we got home. The family had long since gone to bed.

Sam and I went straight to the barn-yard, and searched the premises thoroughly, even going through every building in the hope that Major had got home before old Ezra went to bed, and had been put in.

There was not a dark corner on the place which we did not explore; but we were not rewarded by finding the sorrel pony. Plainly he had not come home.

We met at the well and gazed at each other blankly, in the pale light of the late-rising moon.

“Major’s gone back to Maple Ridge,” said Sam at last, “and the only thing to do is to go straight there after him.”

“Sam,” I protested, “go to Maple Ridge at this hour of the night! You’re crazy! Why, it’s twelve o’clock now, and it’s six miles over there and back. What time would it be before we got home? If that miserable pony has gone there, let him stay till morning. It won’t hurt him. Let’s go to bed.”

“No!” replied Sam, decidedly. “I didn’t expect you to come, Fred, of course. You go in and go to bed. But go I must, and will! I know old Ezra better than you do. If Major isn’t in his stable by daylight, my place isn’t worth a continental.”

“If you’re bound to go, Sam, of course I’ll go with you. I wouldn’t think of doing otherwise if it’s necessary. Let’s start, then. We’ve no time to lose. It’ll be rather a lark, after all.”

We went, after I had overcome Sam’s objections to my troubling myself. Our walk, though long, was not unpleasant. The moon cast a mellow, hazy light over the fields and road, and the night breeze was cool and inspiring.

Most of our way lay through woods of young maple—a second growth, leafy and luxuriant, intersected by many woodland streams, whose liquid gurgle came musically to our ears in the silence of the night.

We walked along over a mosaic of light and fantastic shadow, occasionally cutting across a pasture field or an overgrown blueberry common, wet with dew.

In no very long time we found ourselves at the Pollock farm at Maple Ridge. All was dark and silent.

“I knew they’d be all in bed, Sam,” I said. “What are you going to do now?”

“You didn’t suppose I was going to rouse them up at this hour, did you?” returned Sam. “You forget that I was hired here two summers ago, and I know every nook about the place. If Major is here, he must be outside somewhere, or in an open shed, for he couldn’t get in anywhere. I know where to look. Don’t make a noise.”

Sam made a speedy and careful search about the place, with precisely the same result as before. We did not find Major.

Sam was getting decidedly worried, for he had been quite sure the sorrel pony would be there. We stopped in the open moonlit yard in front of the barn to discuss our next move.

“Go back home, I suppose,” said Sam, dejectedly. “It beats me where that pony has got himself to. This is getting serious. *What* will old—Good gracious!”

A series of angry, snarling barks burst out of the shadows at the end of the barn; the next second a huge, dark body, with cruelly-gleaming teeth, came bounding across the yard.

“Run!” exclaimed Sam, taking to his heels at the word.

And run we both did, with all our speed, to a big fir tree behind the barn, up which we scrambled in headlong haste.

Not a minute too soon, either, for the dog was close at our heels, and sprang with a vicious snarl at my boot as I drew myself up into a place of safety beside the breathless Sam.

“Gracious! what an escape!” he panted. “That brute would have torn us in pieces, I believe. I clean forgot all about him, like the addle-pated idiot I am! Mr. Pollock keeps him for the benefit of orchard-raiders, and he’s the most vicious beast in the dog line you ever saw. He must have broken his chain. We’re safe at present, anyhow.”

“But how are we to get out of this?” I asked.

“Wait till I get my breath, and we’ll discuss that,” said Sam, philosophically.

And I waited, perforce, wondering how on earth we were ever to free ourselves.

The dog had settled down on his haunches under the tree, and evidently meant to stay there. At our slightest movement he bounded and snapped. He was a huge brute of a mastiff, and could almost have chewed us up at a mouthful.

The boughs of the fir were very thick and close, so that our position was an extremely uncomfortable one.

“I suppose,” said Sam, “we had better try shouting first, and see if we can wake anybody up. Probably Mr. Pollock will shoot us for orchard-thieves; but that will be preferable to being eaten alive, or dying a lingering death here by cramp.”

We shouted accordingly. I venture to say that no two boys of our size ever made more or louder noise in a given time than we did. The dog helped us by howling furiously, and we whooped and shouted for about a quarter of an hour. Then I stopped in despair.

“Can’t keep it up any longer, Sam. My voice is all gone, and I am as hoarse as a crow. The people in that house have died or emigrated. We’ve raised a racket that would wake the seven sleepers.”

Sam, who was shouting with undiminished power and energy, stopped also.

“It’s no use,” he admitted, cheerfully. It was characteristic of Sam that the more desperate a situation got the more cheerful he became. “The house is too far away. Besides, old man Pollock and his wife are both deaf as door-nails, and the hired

man must be away. Well, Fred, what is our next move? Any suggestion will be thankfully received.”

“I’ve none to make, Sam. My brains won’t work in so cramped a position as this.”

Sam twisted himself around and looked up the tree. After a short scrutiny, he said:

“You see, those big branches up there hang right over the barn. Can’t we climb out on them and swing ourselves down to the roof?”

“What better off would we be? The roof is fourteen feet from the ground. And if we could get off, the dog’s here.”

“Hold on, Fred. I confess my landing you in this scrape doesn’t argue much for my common sense, but I’m not *quite* so idiotic as all that. You only see one side of the roof. There’s a pig-sty built against the barn on the other side, and one roof serves for both. It slopes down to within five feet of the ground. If we could get down off it, we’d be all right, for there’s a big pig-pen underneath with a high board fence all around it, and the dog can’t get at us. Then there’s a door opening from the pig-sty into the barn, and we could wait there till the dog got tired and went back to his kennel. Then we might get out on the other side of the barn and slip off.”

It sounded feasible if we could only get on the roof. I didn’t know anything about the intricacies of Stephen Pollock’s barns, but Sam appeared to be thoroughly at home.

“I’ll try it,” I assented, heartily. “Anything’s better than this. Who’ll go first?”

“I will. Watch how I do it. If I fall off and break my neck, or get chewed up by the dog, hang on where you are.”

He climbed up and out along the swinging bough. The dog jumped in a frenzy of rage, and howled furiously. Sam swung himself down on the end of the bough and dropped lightly to the roof.

He saved himself from slipping down its steep side by clutching one of the staging brackets that ran in rows across it. The barn had been recently shingled, and the staging brackets had been left on it—fortunately for us.

“All right,” said Sam. “It’s not so hard. Come on.”

I tore innumerable rents in my best black suit as I struggled up through the thick branches, and my hat fell off into the very jaws of the eager foe. I have never seen that hat since.

But at last I found myself on the roof beside Sam, and slowly and with a good deal of difficulty—for some of the brackets were rather rickety—we climbed up to the top and down the other side.

“I’ll drop first,” said Sam.

And he did, landing squarely among a group of fat porkers who were snoozing comfortably in the corner of their pen, and who careered blindly about with terrified squeals, while the dog rampaged around outside the pen, and added his voice to the general uproar.

Sam got up as I came sprawling down, narrowly escaping being carried off his feet by the frenzied dash of a big black porker, and we shook hands in silent congratulation.

Then we stumbled through the pig-sty, falling over things in the dark, and alarming some more pigs—Stephen Pollock must have kept an immense number of pigs—and finally made our escape through a door into the barn.

“Tell you it’s lucky I was hired here and know all the ins and outs of it,” said Sam, complacently. “Now we’ll take our bearings. There’s a window over there looks out on the dog-kennel. We’ll watch cautiously till he goes and then we can get out of that door opposite. It opens from the inside fortunately.”

At this point he stumbled again and fell over something with a clatter. He picked himself up with a growl.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, stifling a burst of laughter. “You seem unsteady tonight, Sam. If you weren’t a member of the S. of T., in good and regular standing —”

“Shut up!” interrupted Sam, impatiently. “This is no joke. Here I’ve tumbled into old Stephen Pollock’s collection of paint cans. Oh, what a mess! Smell the turpentine, will you? I’ve got paint all over myself. Confound that Major! But if this isn’t just like old Pollock—setting paint cans around just where a person will fall into them!”

“Don’t be unreasonable, Sam. I suppose that, if Mr. Pollock had known we were going to favor his barn with a midnight visit, he’d have put his paint out of the way.”

Sam never could stay provoked long. He went off into a shout of laughter, and we perched ourselves upon the wheat-bin and watched the kennel for what seemed an age.

“What if that dog doesn’t go back?” I suggested. “What’ll we do then? Stay here till morning, and have Mr. Pollock coming out and demanding if we are burglars or oat stealers?”

“He won’t demand,” said Sam, with a grin, which the moonlight rendered absolutely ghastly. “He’ll knock us over the head first and inquire afterward. That’s old man Pollock’s way. But there goes that dog at last. Now for it!”

We stole across the barn carefully, unfastened the door and stepped out. The coast was clear.

“It would serve old Stephen right for keeping such a dog if I were to leave this door open,” said Sam, as he conscientiously put a stick against it; “but I won’t, since he built such a good pigpen fence.”

After we had crept cautiously out of earshot, we took to our heels and did not slack up until we reached the main road.

We were considerably worse off than when we left it, but sound in limb, which was more than we had expected.

Sam’s anxiety returned as we trudged home.

“I guess I can go home and pack up,” he said. “I *wish* I could find Major.”

“Don’t mention that wretched beast again,” I said, crossly. “Isn’t it all on his account we’ve got into this miserable scrape? Look at my clothes, will you? They’re ruined, and so are yours, all for that rat of a pony. I wouldn’t go through this again for a dozen Majors.”

By the time we got as far as Isaac Gardner’s the eastern sky was rimmed with silver. As we passed by the orchard fence, Sam stopped and said, with great earnestness:

“Well, I am blessed!”

And there, calmly gazing at us from the corner of Isaac Gardner’s orchard, where the faint light of early dawn and waning moon shone over his damp sorrel sides, stood Major.

I never saw anybody so disgusted as Sam Richards.

“I never once thought to look behind the copse of cherry trees, in the first place,” he said. “The next time Ezra Burke calls me a fool, I’ll believe him.”

We went in and captured the meek, unresisting Major, and borrowed Mrs. Gardner’s clothesline to lead him home.

When he was finally safe in his stable it was open daylight, and all the east was rosy and fire-streaked.

Old Ezra got up fifteen minutes later, and found Sam and me leaning meditatively over the barnyard fence. He did not address us, except by giving an inarticulate “huh!” as he passed by, and we did not feel called upon to relate our exploits to him; so we left him to suppose that we had merely been attacked with an acute spasm of early rising.

Major kept his own counsel, and the story never leaked out.

It is now several years since I saw Sam Richards last. He was then a well-to-do farmer, with a comfortable home, presided over by the Belle Gardner of other days,

and we had a hearty laugh over the recollection of the night we spent hunting for Major and frightened old Stephen Pollock's pigs over at Maple Ridge.



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *A Missing Pony* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]