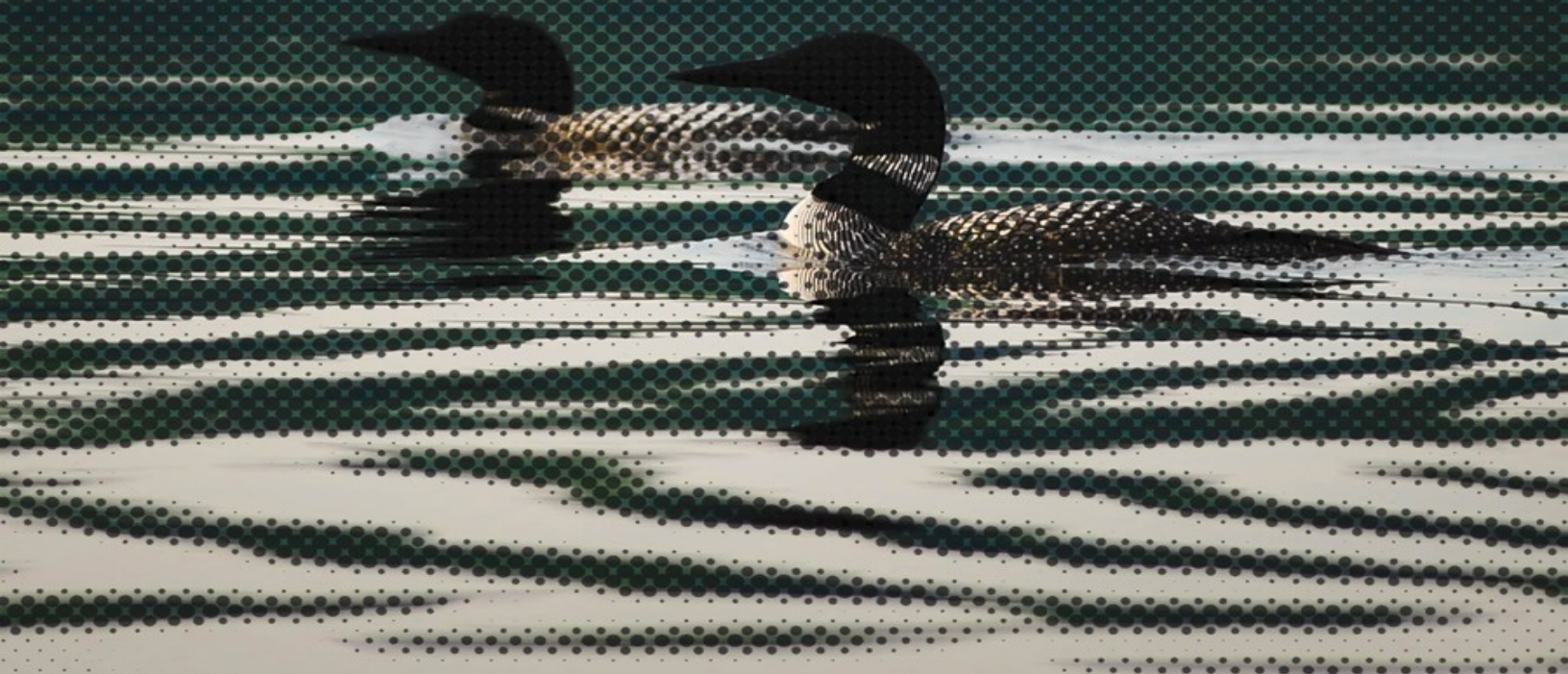


Egerton Ryerson Young



*Duck Lake; or Tales
of the Canadian
Backwoods*

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A HAUNCH OF VENISON

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CHAPTER ONE. A GIFT OF VENISON.

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The latest arrival in the Duck Lake district of Northern Ontario was the newly appointed game-warden, Mr John Holden Fitzgerald, and here by his vigorous application to business, eagerness in calling in the power of the law, and his haste in procuring evidence, he nearly made the innocent suffer with the guilty.

The noble game, the moose deer, were in danger of extinction in the beautiful lake and forest regions of the province of Ontario, such was the persistency and success of the hunters in these parts. To prevent such a calamity, the Provincial Government passed stringent laws that for a number of years no moose deer were to be shot under any consideration, and any person found killing one would be subject to a fine ranging from \$20 for the first offence to \$50 or imprisonment for others. The game and guns of the poacher were to be confiscated. To enforce their law the Government appointed a number of game-wardens, and sent them to different points where killing had been reported.

The beautiful country around Duck Lake was one of these regions which had fallen into ill-repute, and to it Game-Warden Fitzgerald was sent. He entered upon his duties with the zeal of a new appointee, but his pleasure in his

appointment was increased by the presence of his cousin, Mr Horace Fitzgerald, with his wife and little children, who had taken a cottage on Duck Lake, and were extending their stay into the autumn.

When the Game-Warden reached Duck Lake, he made his way over to his cousin's home, but was disappointed in finding him away. He, however, accepted the cordial invitation of Mrs Fitzgerald to step in and rest, as Mr Horace might return home at any moment.

"You are extending your stay considerably. Don't you find it lonely?" asked the Game-warden.

"Oh, a little, sometimes," replied Mrs Fitzgerald; "but the autumn scenery is so beautiful. I believe it is the best part of the year in this charming lake region. Horace is perfectly delighted with it."

"Where has Horace gone to?"

"I don't know exactly. He has a few friends whom he is fond of visiting. One is an Indian, Jonas Bear, who is the best canoeist and fisherman around here. There are two or three settlers he likes to visit, to hear their tales of early struggles when they first came into this country. There is also an interesting school- teacher not far away; but his latest discovery or acquisition is a young preacher who came in here a few months ago."

"That is indeed a new turn for Horace. It sounds like conversion to hear of him fraternising with a preacher," laughed the Warden.

"Well, he is a decidedly interesting fellow," replied Mrs Fitzgerald. "He is not like the ordinary ministers, full of preach and little else. Mr Hewitt, for that is his name,

believes in doing something for his people. He is very independent, however, and some of his women parishioners think he is a little too independent and not a little conceited, especially over his own cooking and laundrying;" and Mrs Fitzgerald laughed a merry laugh.

"A jolly `Vicar of Bray' in the woods," suggested the Warden, with an attempt to be merry also.

"Oh no! Not that. He's too shy, too single-minded, too earnest for that. When he came, he could not find a suitable home, as the few settlers who have houses of any size have their extra rooms filled with tourists or hunters, and Mr Hewitt would not live in the common room of the smaller householders. Failing in his attempt to get himself a home, Mr Hewitt searched around and found a discarded log cabin at the other end of the lake. For this he negotiated, and secured it for the consideration of \$15 a year. He patched up the logs, filled in the chinks, and sent to his distant home for a few things to make it habitable. Some hemp matting acts as a carpet, and an ancient stove serves for heating and cooking purposes. He says he can make the best johnny-cake around here;" and Mrs Fitzgerald went off into another merry laugh.

"And this the women deny?" put in the Warden.

"Of course they do," said Mrs Fitzgerald. "They say, `Such conceit!' But Mrs Miller pities his laundrying attempts the most. She says, `Why, it's yellow as my Leghorn rooster's legs!'" And as she pictured the contemptuous look of the sturdy backwoodsman's wife, the happy little woman went into peals of laughter.

“Is it the preacher's johnny-cake that takes Horace over there?” asked the Warden.

“Oh, don't you get sarcastic about our preacher. We won't stand that around here. He may be independent and all that, but he is good and nice and kind. He is happily innocent of the ways of the world you know only too well, but he has read a good deal; he is fond of music, and is jolly good company. Horace likes to visit him, and he is always welcome here.”

Mr Horace Fitzgerald had gone that day to the “Parsonage,” as they had humorously styled Mr Hewitt's cabin-home; but when he reached the place he found it empty. The night before a farmer by the name of Farley had come on horseback and told Mr Hewitt that his hired man had been taken suddenly ill, and they thought that he was dying. The missionary quickly ran out, saddled his horse, and told his informant to lead the way over the rocky road as fast as he dare.

When they arrived, Mr Hewitt saw that the poor fellow was suffering from a severe attack of inflammation. To merely speak soothing words to the man, while he was in such agony, seemed to the practical minister sheer mockery and folly. It was time for action, and he had bags of salt heated and then applied to the suffering man. He also used hot water in abundance, and then he gave the man a gentle massage. This heroic treatment was repeated throughout the night. By morning the young man was much relieved, and hopes were entertained for his recovery. Mr Hewitt then read and prayed with the sufferer, and carefully nursed him all that day.

When Horace Fitzgerald found no one in the "Parsonage," he went in, sat down and rested awhile. He looked into some of Mr Hewitt's books, played a little on his guitar, and then picked up an old rifle which the young preacher had brought with him. This rifle had once belonged to Mr Hewitt's father, and thinking that he might have some use for it, he brought it with a box of cartridges to his backwoods home. But up to the present time he had not used it.

Horace Fitzgerald was quite a hunter, and so was much interested in the weapon. While handling it he determined to try it, and after picking a few cartridges out of the box he started off into the woods. He had not walked more than a quarter of a mile from the house, when, to his delight, he saw a large moose spring up from his resting-place, about two hundred yards away. He raised the rifle and fired. The startled brute gave one leap into the air, and dropped dead.

Horace hurried back to Mr Hewitt's cabin, replaced the gun, and secured his carving knife and axe. Returning to the deer, he cleaned it and skinned it. He cut off a good haunch and carried it back to the "Parsonage" with the knife and axe. He deposited the meat on the table, stuck the knife in a beam, and left the axe outside the door. Looking around, he found a large piece of canvas. Out of this he made a kind of a bag, and placed in it as much venison as he wanted to carry home. The rest he hung up in the trees, making what the Indians call a "cache."

When Horace Fitzgerald reached his home, highly delighted with his success, his wife told him that his cousin the Warden had arrived, that he had waited for him all the

morning, and that he had now gone on to the "Duck Lake Hotel." Then, suddenly recollecting the Warden's business, and the boasts he had made to her that he would put a stop to all moose-poaching in that part, she said, with some solicitude—

"But what will the Warden say about this moose you have shot? He doesn't approve of such things."

"Oh, he," replied the triumphant hunter, jocularly. "Give him a steak to eat. I'll guarantee he'll say that it is prime."

Although he had said this bravely, he was struck with a conviction that he had done wrong, and felt that even relationship with the Warden would not shield him from the law's demands when his act became known.

"But what will you tell the Warden?" persisted his wife.

"Tell him all, and also that his moose must not come and tempt people when they are out hunting for their humble fellows," said Mr Fitzgerald, rather more shortly than courtesy allows.

With provoking imitation of a monitor at school, Mrs Fitzgerald said, with a merry twinkle—

"Now you'll catch it. See if you don't."

* * * * *

It was late the next day when Mr Hewitt, after his pastoral visit, started on his long ride home. The day was very raw. A drizzly rain was falling. So when he reached his home he was tired, hungry, and cold.

The sight of the splendid haunch of meat on the table made his heart dance.

"Somebody has been very kind," said he.

The horse was quickly stabled and fed, and then the missionary returned to examine his treasure. He soon had a fire roaring in his stove, and a savoury steak sizzling in the flames.

After he had heartily enjoyed his simple meal, he threw himself on his lounge, and was soon lost in a much-needed refreshing slumber. But the young preacher had been asleep only a short time when he was awakened with a start, and found a stranger in his room.

It was the new Game-Warden.

"Ah, ha, young man," said the Warden, "I have caught you this time. Almost in the act, red-handed anyway. Before you sleep, after your successful chase, you should have covered your tracks better."

Mr Hewitt sprang up and rubbed his eyes in a most bewildered way. Things seemed so strange to him, he thought he must be dreaming. What could the Game-Warden mean? "Caught red-handed— cover up tracks?"

After a moment of staggering silence, the young missionary said—

"Sir, I've no tracks to cover up."

"What impudence!" said the Warden, growing stern. He had hoped that the young man would have confessed, and that he would not have given him any more trouble than was absolutely necessary.

"Can't I see with my eyes what a fine piece of venison you have on the table? Within half a mile of this place a moose was killed; part of it is now hanging in the trees, and there are blood tracks all the way to your house. I'll

guarantee that your rifle is hardly cold, and your axe and knife are yet bloody.”

Mr Hewitt was, if possible, more stupefied than ever at these words. When the Warden referred to his gun, he replied—

“I have never fired my rifle since I came here.”

The Game-Warden walked over to the place where the rifle stood. He took it up in his hands, opened the barrel and held it up to the sunlight.

“Come here, and look at this,” he said.

The young man walked stupidly over. The universe seemed falling around him. He walked as one in a dream.

He looked. Sure enough, there were unmistakable signs of fresh powder and other marks of recent firing.

“I cannot account for this,” said he, meekly.

“Bring me your hunting-knife and axe,” demanded the Warden.

Mr Hewitt went outside and found his axe. Though he was a decidedly muscular young man, yet the sight of that axe made him as weak as a kitten.

“There, sir,” said the Warden, as he stood in the doorway, “there is the blood of the moose you have killed and cut up. Now, out with your hunting-knife, and be quick about it.”

“I have no hunting-knife,” was the reply.

“Well, get the knife you used to cut up the moose, whether it is a hunting-knife or not,” said the Warden. He had his eyes about him far more than had the poor missionary, and in his moving around he found the knife

where it had been left the day before, sticking in the beam, near the door.

“Oh, here it is. Ha! ha! All smeared with blood! Now, young man, I'll make you sweat for this. Lying as well as poaching. Pretty work for a young preacher looking for Orders in a ministry; I confiscate your gun and knife. I shall take this piece of meat with me; and when I summon you before a justice it will be well for you to appear and confess your guilt.”

With this he took the meat, rifle, and knife, and left the young preacher's home.

A more distracted young man could hardly have been found than Mr Hewitt at that moment. Bright, almost unusually buoyant, even when many serious things seemed to impede his way, he appeared to rejoice in things that tested physical endurance; but here was an altogether new condition of affairs, a testing of the spirit. What a tangle the whole world seemed to be in!

Perhaps, if Mr Hewitt had not been so worn out after his self-sacrificing endeavours for the sick man he would have been less distracted. But what a complication of evidence! Proved guilty to his face! What could he do?

CHAPTER TWO. JONAS THE INDIAN.

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“Mr Hewitt want any fish to-day?”

“Hello, Jonas, old boy, come in,” said the young missionary, recognising the voice of his Indian friend, and glad to be relieved from his distracting thoughts.

Jonas had quick ears, and he detected a false note in the usually merry voice, and he said—

“Is Mister Hewitt sick to-day?”

“No, not sick, Jonas, but ruined. All my work here is to be utterly ruined. I must have been dreaming, or something or other. I came home about an hour ago from tending to Farley's hired man, and found a piece of meat on the table, then lay down to get a nap, when in popped the new Game-Warden, and said that I had shot a moose. My rifle and axe, neither of which I had touched for days, showed signs of recent use. I am to be fined, or confined in jail, for poaching.”

Jonas' face grew solemn, and for a moment he was deep in thought; then he asked—

“Killed moose! Where?”

The Warden said it was killed within half a mile of this house, and that there are blood-marks all the way.

“We go see,” said Jonas, as he immediately turned, went out, and began examining the ground.

With unerring skill he found the marks that had attracted the attention of the Game-Warden. These the young men followed up, and at length came to the remains of the moose.

“Good fine moose that,” said Jonas, with evident pleasure. “But who kill him?”

“Ah, that's the question,” responded the missionary.

Jonas surveyed the ground carefully, and in a few minutes brightened, as he glanced at some marks in the ground, near the spot where the deer fell, and then looked at Mr Hewitt's feet.