



SWEET WORLD OF BLOSSOMS.

Sweet world of blossoms
And melody divine,
Dark time and light time—
How long shall you be mine?

The Hermit
A Story of the Wilderness

By CHARLES CLARK MUNN
Author of "Pocket Island," "Uncle Terry"
and "Rockhaven."

CHAPTER XXIX.—CONTINUED.

"Oh, middlin' so," answered old Cy,
his face glowing with excitement;
"it's Amzi fast enough, 'n' he owns it up,
but he can't make out how or why I'm
here, an' he don't 'low he's got a
brother Dave 'n' a grown up gal, Angie.
He's sane enough so fur's livin' here,
'n' how he does it, 'n' all about the garden
'n' squirrels, but jist the mimit I
shift back to old times, he either gets
wary or don't reclect. He thinks I
come here 'lone, too, 'n' when I come
'way, he acted worried for fear I
wouldn't come back, 'n' kept beggin' I
would. It's a curus case, 'n' I can't
make it out. He acts like a man woke
up out of a sleep."

CHAPTER XXX.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

For a moment Martin stood looking
at these men in speechless astonishment.
He had fancied them far away
on their murderer-hunting cruise,
and now they were back—and for what
purpose.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said
Martin, with the best grace he could;
and advancing to meet them, "have
you found your man yet?"

"We haven't," answered the leader
in a curious tone, "but we think we
shall if we stay around here long
enough." Then, glancing at his
companion, he added, "Do you do most
of your canoeing by night?"

"I do," responded Martin, laughing
slightly, and not at all abashed, "if I
want to make time and protect 'an
innocent man."

"I presume you know," returned the
officer, almost insolently, "that warnin'
a suspected criminal or aiding him
to escape exposes you to arrest?"

"I do," answered Martin, firmly, "and
also that arrestin' a man without a
specific warrant and proof that he is
the criminal wanted, lays even an officer
open to arrest and prosecution. Now
you have with you, no doubt, a
warrant for the arrest of one McGuire,
a criminal in hiding. I gave you, some
three weeks ago, what I believed to be
directions where you could find him.
You doubted my word of honor as a
gentleman, and came here. You found
a cabin that had been vacated for many
weeks; you remained in it over night,
committing two crimes, trespass and
stealing, and then went your way. The
owner of this cabin is an old friend of
mine whom I know well, and he is back
again now. You can arrest him, of
course, but at your own peril. If you
do, I assure you, I am worth and will
spend \$10,000 to land you in jail for
so doing. Now, gentlemen, we won't
waste words over this matter. Please
consider yourselves my guests, pitch
your tent here, and let us be sociable."

For a moment the two newcomers
looked at one another, hardly knowing
whether to be civil or not. The better
impulse won finally, and when Martin,
as is customary, proffered a flask, they
drank to his good health.

"We do not wish to annoy any one,"
the leader asserted, when peace was
restored; "my name's Scott, and this
man is my chum, John Smart. We
did come here, and of course made free
with an open shack. We don't doubt
your word as a gentleman, but we have
been up the Mooshorn and don't find
signs of any patch or hut you described,
and that's the story and why we are
here."

Old Cy, with his homely speech,
kind heart, and "horse sense," was
right, and Martin knew it. It was none
the less pitiful, however, and that
night as he, left alone with the two
guides, sat by the camp-fire watching
its glow and listening to the low wave
wash of the lake, his thoughts flew
far away to a vine-hid porch, the
rustling of falling leaves, and a fair
face with bewitching eyes. All that
last evening with Angie, her willing
efforts to entertain, how he stole the
picture while she sang, and her cool
parting words came back. He had
lived over the old boyish illusion
months ago beside this same lakelet;
it had led him back to Greenvale and
to a new ambition and unrest that
spoiled his peace of mind. And now
back again in this vast wilderness,
with the stars twinkling in the placid
lake, it pursued him still and would
not be put away. It had been almost
four weeks now since he left Green-
vale, the leaves were turning, and he
was anxious to get back for many rea-
sons of his own—the new church move-
ment which he had in a thoughtless
moment offered to assist, the coming of
his friend as its pastor, and his own
hobby of trout raising. They were all
ties of more or less strength, but chief
of all was Angie.

The fire had burned low and both
guides were asleep in their bark shel-
ter when old Cy returned.
"I think ye best stay 'round a few
days," he said, "'n' then go 'way a
spell. Amzi is kinder gettin' fond o'
havin' me 'round helpin', 'n' arter a
few days things 'll come back to him,
mebbe. I doubt we'll git him back to
Greenvale, though, 'thout we fetch him
back; he's that wanted here."

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signs of any patch or hut you described,
and that's the story and why we are
here."

"You will be satisfied in two min-
utes that this old hermit is not your
man," responded Martin, pleasantly.
"He is a poor fellow, almost a child
now, and my old friend you saw with
me was his intimate friend years ago."

After the two officers had pitched
their tent, cooked and eaten supper
beside Martin's fire, they all gathered
around it and he told the old hermit's
story. The wild man's night visit
months before was not omitted, and the
hidden cabin, with its bell signal,
was again described.

The two officers also proved to be
decent men on acquaintance.

"I should not have taken that all-
night paddle," asserted Martin, when
his story ended, "if you had not
doubted my word, and to-morrow, if I
find it wise to leave my old friend
alone here with the hermit, I'll go
with you up the Mooshorn and show
you that cabin. It may not be occu-
pied now, but it was then."

When morning came, Officer Scott
proved himself worthy of respect by

accepting Martin's word, and keeping
away from the hermit.

"It will only scare him," explained
Martin, "and we hope to get him out
of the woods and back to Greenvale
and his daughter. If we can't coax him
to go, I am nonplused, and we may
have to carry him out. How he has
contrived to live here winter after
winter is a mystery."

The new plan of Martin's going away
met old Cy's approval.

"Amzi and me is gittin' real chum-
my once more," he said; "we've dug
his pertatoes 'n' packed 'em in moss
under the cabin; we're cuttin' an'
splittin' wood, 'n' smokin' meat, 'n'
gatherin' nuts for the squirrels all
day long. I like it, and wouldn't mind
stayin' with him all winter. He's got
a couple o' bear traps set somewhar,
'n' to-morrer we're goin' ter tend 'em."

It was a pleasant picture of wood
life, but it failed to relieve Martin's
mind much, or show him a way to
secure Angie's inheritance. It set him
to thinking, however, on what would
be gained after all by the return of this
childish hermit to Greenvale, and
would Angie be made the happier by
it? It was a question, and one hard to
solve. So far as the law went, a deed,
and all necessary legal papers, could be
signed and witnessed here. It was too
soon to propose that now, but it must
be kept in mind.

"I am going to leave Jean here to
hunt for you and Amzi while I'm gone,"
Martin said to old Cy, when ready to
depart with the officers; "he can get
you one or two deer to cure for winter
use, and I may decide to let you stay
here, after all. When the right time
comes, show Amzi the two pictures of
Angie and take good care of him."
And with this parting injunction he
and "Old Faithful," as he had some-
times called Levi, pushed off.

A canoe trip through a wilderness is
at once romantic, laborious, and lazy.
The waterways, of course must be fol-
lowed, and when a "pitch of water,"
as a rapid or falls is called, is reached,
your craft and belongings must be
carried around if ascending the stream.
If descending and not too dangerous,
a thrilling, and often risky trip is made
down through the boiling, seething
waters; leaping perhaps over sheer
falls of two or three feet, dodging
rocks, tossed upon white-crested surges,
spun around in eddies, wet with spray,
breathless with excitement, until the
mad race is run, and you float calmly
at last in the foam-covered pool below.



SCOTT LIFTED HIS RIFLE.

This mysterious forest influence was
familiar to Martin, but now, as he
journeyed onward, down-stream, up-stream,
across carry with the two officers, and
camping where night overtook them,
it seemed to him that he had under-
taken a fool's errand. We all ought
to have an interest in the cause of
justice, but to go in pursuit of an in-
trenched murderer hiding in a vast
wilderness was, at least, not to his lik-
ing. He had, on the spur of impulse,
and to prove his own assertions, prom-
ised to do this; but when the broad,
slow-running Mooshorn was reached
and night found them at the camp-
site where he and Dr. Sol were visited
by a wild man, he wished himself
back with old Cy.

The spot had not changed in the
months that had elapsed except that
the North Branch was lower, and the
summer's growth had sprung up where
undergrowth had been cut away. The
old tent poles still remained in place,
the same endless procession of foam
flecks came down the Branch, and the
same low murmur of running water
issued from above.

When the tents were up, fires started,
supper cooked and eaten, a council of
war, so to speak, was held.

"It was here," Martin said to the of-
ficers, "that a friend and myself first
discovered that some mysterious hu-
man being or wild man was haunting
this wilderness, and, as I told you, he
gave us a good scare. Whether he was
this man, McGuire, whom you want,
I can't say. We found a peculiar se-
cluded cabin late the next day, and if
we make an early start to-morrow, we
can reach it before night. I will pilot
you to it, but more than that you must
not expect. If this escaped criminal is
there, you must act as you see fit.
His arrest is not my affair, and I don't
care to make it such. I've no doubt if
it is your man, that the first one of
us to approach his hut will be called
to a halt, and, failing to obey, will meet
a bullet. I've described the location
and situation, and would suggest that
you now decide upon a plan of action.
A desperate criminal like this McGuire,
who has kept in hiding for years,
won't hesitate to add one or even three
more murders to his list. Now know-
ing what you are likely to meet, what
do you propose to do?"

For a moment the two officers con-
sidered the matter.

"We are here to arrest this chap," the
leader, Scott, responded firmly at last,
"and shooting is a game two can play
at."

"True enough," answered Martin, la-
conically, "but with one shooter se-

cure in a log cabin, the play part will
be all on one side. I shall not mix up
in it, as I said, but if you two feel that
your duty calls for suicide—well, I'm
sorry for you. I should hate to be
called upon to bury you under a
flag of truce in that clearing, and as
for conveying you out of the wilderness
if wounded—well, frankly, I can't spare
the time."

It was such a matter of fact state-
ment of the possible outcome that both
officers laughed.

"I don't believe in tolling a bell un-
til a corpse is ready," said Scott, "and
I've found that desperate men some-
times wilt easy. We will wait and see
how the land lays around this fellow's
lair."

And that night Martin felt worse
than the man who bought a white ele-
phant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAIR OF AN OUTCAST.

It was mid-afternoon, and an im-
pending storm hid the sun and made
the forest unduly sombre when Levi
caught the first sound of the stream
where, months before, he and Martin
had landed to follow a mysterious path.
Its beginning, beside the bush-grown
brook, was easily found, where twigs
had been broken off and grass recently
trodden.

"Here's tracks," exclaimed Levi, who
had landed first, with paddle in hand;
and, stooping, he added, "They're the
wild man's sure's a gun."

"It is he, fast enough," asserted
Marth, who had followed, rifle in hand,
and now also stooped over them.

They were plainly visible, and a
group of them at that. Some faint on
the patches of moss, and those close to
the stream more distinct and showing
the well-remembered claw marks. For
full five minutes the little party of
four stood looking at them with thrice
the interest Martin and the doctor felt
once before. They had journeyed 100
miles to find a desperado, and the first
signs of him filled them with forebod-
ings.

"Well, gentlemen," almost whis-
pered Martin, when the tracks had
been well examined, "here we are, and
your game isn't far off," and he led the
way into the shadowy forest, up the
narrow path only a few rods, and then
he halted, for there, beside it, and near-
ly hid under freshly cut fir boughs, lay
a canvas canoe, bottom up.

It was the one inseparable compan-
ion of man and his existence in this
wilderness; and yet, had it been a
crouching panther instead, it would not
have awakened much more interest.
It held all eyes one instant only, and
then the row of four stalwart men
glanced furtively around as if expect-
ing a savage to step out from behind
each tree. Only a moment they halted,
and then with rifles at ready, and Mar-
tin ahead, they filed cautiously up the
narrow path, step by step, twisting
around the dense thicket, along the
frowning ledge, and up the defile to
where the moose skull still grinned,
and here they paused. Martin made
no comment, but glanced at the offi-
cers, anxious to see how this ghastly
warning was received by them. They
looked at it in grim silence, then at
one another, and then up the narrow,
rock-walled path.

Once more Martin, as leader, moved
on, and the rest followed.

Not a whisper from any, not a loud
breath even, each step a slow one and
catlike, and, parting the bushes with
caution until the open glade came in
sight, and just where the swinging
stick crossed the path, they halted.

From here the log hut was visible,
and out of its low chimney a thin filar
of smoke was ascending.

Martin looked at it a moment and
then at his companions.

"There's your man, I guess," he
whispered, "cooking supper. Do you
want to call on him without notice, or
shall I ring?"

It was the critical moment, and one
Officer Scott was not ready to meet
He and his companion had for weeks
been searching this pathless wilderness
for a man whose crimes they knew
well enough, but of his temper, dispo-
sition, looks even, they knew but lit-
tle. If the occupant of this cabin was
McGuire, he was in a position to defy
arrest, or at least make it costly.

"Well," whispered Martin again,
realizing their dilemma, "shall I ring?"

Scott nodded.

On the instant, almost, and as the
faint, tinkling answers reached the
watching men, a shaggy-haired human
face appeared at the one small win-
dow, then a slide was moved across it,
leaving a narrow crack open.

The cabin's owner was evidently at
home.

But it needed a brave man, indeed,
to now enter this open glade, bristling
with blackened stumps like so many
fangs, and advance to the hut. Scott
was evidently not that man, for he
merely watched and waited, and Mar-
tin felt no cause to expose himself.
One, two, three minutes passed, and the
four still eyed the cabin.

And now Scott advanced to the sig-
nal lever and moved it again and
again.

Only the faint bell sounds issued.

It was seemingly a case of either ad-
vance or retreat, but Scott did neither.
Only a moment more he waited, then
then gave a loud "hallo."

It echoed through that silent wilder-
ness and back from the cliff that
frowned down upon the hut, but no
one appeared. Again and again was it
repeated, but the cabin door remained
shut, the window slide in place, and
the smoke still ascending.

"I've a notion to try a shot," whis-
pered Scott, and, as no one answered,
he raised his rifle, aimed at the cliff,
and fired.

The ping of the bullet against the
rock came back mingling into the re-
port, but no one emerged from the
hut.

Once again Scott lifted his rifle and
fired.

(To Be Continued.)

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