The Crippled Lady Of Peribonka

By James Oliver Curwood

W.N.U. Service

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Introducing some of the people of the pretty little French-Canadian village of Peribonka, particularly the Crippled Lady, chief of the simple inhabitants, and herself of an epic destined to live long in the village annals.

CHAPTER II.—How the romance of Molly Brant, sister of the great Indian chief, Joseph Brant, and Sir William Johnson, in pre-Revolutionary days, comes down to today with the birth of a son, Paul, to Molly Kirke, wife of a powerful New York financier, and her death when Paul is thirteen years old. Molly Kirke was a descendant of Molly Brant, and her boy has many of the Indian characteristics. At thirty-two Paul marries Claire Durand, daughter of his father's business partner. He is in charge of an immense engineering work on the Mistassini river, near Peribonka, which his millionaire father has undertaken, but his Indian blood deplores the destruction of the wilderness, and his thoughts are more of Carla Haldan—not then the Crippled Lady—than of his work.

CHAPTER III.—Paul's wife is in Europe, she having no inclination to live in "those horrible woods." He comes to see in Carla, daughter of a central European immigrant, with her devotion to her invalid mother and her work of educating the village children, his ideal of womanhood.

CHAPTER IV.—Paul writes to his wife, urging her to join him, though Carla is the inspiration of the letter. Later that evening, passing the Haldan home, he hears Carla crying. He enters the cottage. Mrs. Haldan, long a hopeless invalid, is dead. Paul's efforts to comfort Carla, he feels, bring them closer together.

CHAPTER V.—Claire announces her intention of joining Paul on the Mistassini in a short time. She also writes to Carla, of whom she has heard from Paul, a letter of kindly sympathy, on the death of her mother.

CHAPTER VI.—Paul goes to Quebec to meet Claire, and brings her to his temporary home. Though she is apparently glad to be with him, and evinces a warm friendship for Carla and Paul's other friends, he feels she is only there because she feels it her duty. She is not really happy. He becomes aware of a gulf between him and his wife.

CHAPTER VII.—Paul, Claire, Carla, and two friends make a luncheon party to visit the "Big Gorge" of the Mistassini, an appallingly swift current which disappears in a mountain side. Current belief is that anything dropped into it is never seen again. In sport they cast into the stream pieces of wood, and other objects, watching them disappear. Finally they carry a large log to the edge of the rushing water. As they toss it over it upends, striking Paul and throwing him into the stream. The two women with whom Paul's life is entwined see him go to what they are sure is certain death. One asks the other if she is going with him. Receiving no answer, she announces, "Then—I am!" and springs into the water.

CHAPTER VIII

Paul saw the swift, deliberate plunge through space of the slim body, which, in the uncertainty of his vision, an instinctive and positive impulse told him was Claire's. A woman's piercing cry came from the cliff, but no responsive echo of horror escaped his own lips, no sound, but an articulate gasp as the figure struck the water and disappeared. An appalling and devastating weakness seized upon him, a deadly sickness of shock, a thing that loosened the grip of his fingers from the clinging belt of weeds and made him limply impotent against the dragging force of the undertow. For an instant his brain reeled in darkness. He began to go down, easily and slowly, as if the cruel and murderous hands below were fearful of arousing the inertness to which he had momentarily succumbed. Then water struck into his face and startled him. Heart and brain leaped in response to its warning, and he thrust up wildly and caught the weeds again. They hung closely to the rock, allowing him to drag his body up until his shoulders were out of water once more. He heard Derwent shout, as if from a mile away, but he paid no attention to the cry, nor did he look toward the cliff. The thought in his mind was that Claire would be with him in another moment or two. She would come to the surface near the rock, and he must be ready to seize and hold her with him until the weeds gave way—or a miracle happened.

Five or six feet from him, where the water was like a pool of oil that had no motion, a little disturbance suddenly flecked its surface—a change of light, a drifting up of something intangible and shadowy, a nebulous blotch which changed under his eyes to substance, a floating mass of hair. The sun was shining, the water was almost black, but there was no glint of gold in what he saw. The hair was dark. Carla's. He grasped a part of it in a moment. It seemed to him that the monsters who lived about the rock held her up for him, with a smile on her lips and in her eyes, her face toward him and her arms reaching out. He was half in a daze, and might have fancied some of the things he saw. But Carla was there. She, not his wife, had come to join him in death. The quiet, terrible drama of it held him from calling her name as he waited for her to come within his reach. But the undertow brought her no nearer. For a second, two of them, three or four, it held her away from him, and each of these seconds was a lifetime in passing. Then he saw the distance between them widening, and as it widened the things below began to drag Carla down. She made no struggle, did not cry out to him, but only raised her hands so that he might see they were waiting for him, and wanting him, as she went to her kingdom of Miconicen, her land of dreams.

He swung himself out, thrusting against the rock, and when the ogres of the water pit dragged at their victims Carla was in his arms. His brain was keenly alive again, and he knew that teams of oxen could have pulled but futilely against the undercurrents, which, one after another, were transporting them irresistibly and yet without great haste through watery space. Thought of physical salvation scarcely filtered in a ray of hope through his mind, and his senses were unterrified by the suffocating presence of death. In Carla were his strength and courage. He locked his arms about her closely. He could feel her clinging to him with the same desire to remain inseparable when the end came. Strange. A kingdom of Micomicon—a land of Almaschar—a place of fairies—a world of dreams— They were going to it all. Between the walls where no man had ever looked. Death! A magnificent adventure, with Carla in his arms! A roaring filled his ears. They were traveling swiftly now. His senses grew less distinct, like colors merging one into another in a sunset sky. Queer, why it should end like this, after years of life—he—and Carla—together—as it must have been intended from the beginning. A glorious graciousness of Fate, an immortal symphony of fulfilment—to pass on like this with Carla, no matter how many hundred centuries had gone before! And some one—his wife—had said—that seconds meant more than years—when—like this—

The roaring was an enormity of sound. Its wailing was like the wind in the cave of Aeolus, its thunder like Stentor's blasts rumbling through the empty bowels of the earth. They numbed and anesthetized, yet left him with a shred of living, thinking cells which told him they were tearing through the gullet of the gorge, and which, at the same time, held his arms unyielding as bands of steel about Carla's body.

Although close to the edge of an abyss of utter darkness, consciousness did not quite leave him. Vaguely he experienced the thrill of being transported out of a hell of tumultuous sound into a soft and gently drifting sea which was without noise or violence. For an interval he fancied his arms were wings and that he was trying to fly, making rather a bad mess of it because one side of him refused to co-ordinate with the other. This was the arm, only one arm now, which held Carla. With the other, after a little, he found himself clawing and digging into something. A man may live a hundred years, but when he is ready to die and looks back over the path he has traveled, it seems very short, and the hundred years no more than a few hours. Paul had reflected upon the illusory and baseless fabric of time, its inadequacy and the hollowness of its human measurement. "One who is happy has but a fleeting vision of life," Carla had said to him once. "To live long and terribly, one must be unhappy—in prison." It was odd why he should be thinking of this as he continued to claw and dig. But time had fastened itself upon him like a leech, and if each second of his wide-awake life had been as long as these few seconds he would have lived a thousand years. During this cycle of his existence he slowly and tediously progressed, until, with air filling his lungs again, and the smothering folds of near-insensibility breaking away from him, he knew that he was no longer in water, that his fingers were clutching at soft sand, and that the burden which he had dragged with him was Carla.

There was scarcely a breath between this knowledge and the full and poignant possession of every faculty with which his brain was capable of being inspired. But darkness, mystery, the defeat of death, and the fact of his own physical salvation were submerged all at once in an agonized appeal to the limp, dead form which he clasped in his arms. The spirits of the sable blackness about him listened to his voice calling Carla's name as he struggled to bring life back into her body. Once he had worked over a little girl who had been taken from the water, and now memory came to him vividly of the first gentle beating of the heart again, the slow returning of the soul into the tender body, until the child lived and breathed once more. But Carla's soft breast gave no response. Her lips were cold and lifeless, and, at last, believing her surely dead, he held her face close to him, and kissed her mouth and eyes, as the father of the little girl had kissed his child when she was returning to him. When the first whisper of breath came from Carla's lips he was holding her like this, staring into the blackness. Her heart, beating faintly, responded to the call of life close against his own. Her lips grew warm. Her eyes opened. Paul kissed her again in the blackness that shut them in and found that she was alive.

He did not cry out or speak, but brushed her thick, wet hair back and pressed his face close to hers, and waited. In her first consciousness Carla's arms crept about his neck. Her lips breathed his name. Words were futile for a little while. Only in silence could they claim each other, a silence of voice, where other sound was moaning and throbbing about them. Both knew what it meant as the seconds counted themselves off. They had come through the mouth of the gorge, and were caught in a subterranean hole of the earth. Chance. A miracle. God. That they might have each other at last, with the barrier between them torn away. This was Carla's thought, and her arms drew closer about Paul. He belonged to her now, for there was no other world than this—a pit of gloom with death for its walls, an abysmal grave, where love, for a space, would build for them "the great world's altar stairs that slope through darkness up to God."

She almost spoke the words. Instead she whispered:

"It was right for me to come, Paul? You are—glad?"

"I know—now—that I expected you," said Paul.

CHAPTER IX

After a time they were standing in the blackness.

More distinctly the hollow, rumbling sound about them began to impinge itself upon their ears as Paul supported Carla against his breast. They listened, as if for a voice, his lips pressing against her hair, where they had so long wanted to rest. What they heard was unlike anything out in the world of sun and sky. The roaring and wailing were gone, and in their place was a phantom-like cadence that moved and stirred about them, but which seemed to come mostly from a vast dome over their heads. It was like something trying to escape, throbbing until it seemed to be beating with little clubs at the drums of their ears when it was nearest, then leaving them to intone and hum like a huge tuning fork through the shut-in sea of gloom. There was no break in the sonorous sameness of it. It was eternity of sound without change. In a little while it could drive a living thing mad.

"I am not afraid," Carla said. "Are you?"

Her voice was no different than if the sun had been shining, and there was something in it for him which had never been there before. A kind of exultation came with it, a gladness which troubled in the darkness, and which sent shame and triumph sweeping over him in a submerging emotion.

"Afraid? Good G—d, no!"

She drew herself out of his arms and stood beside him, with her hand in his. Their voices had broken down a tenseness about them, and life drew closer, more sure. He wanted to see her, and fumbled in his sodden pocket for his metal box of matches.

"I'm going to strike a light, Carla. I want to look at you!"

A flare of yellow flame made a hole in the blackness. Until it died out their eyes devoured each other. Carla was like an angel. Love, transforming death into a happy incident, was an uncovered glory in her eyes at last, clearly revealed for him to see.

He knew that only the positiveness of their fate could make her look at him like this, with Claire living and waiting in another world outside. Claire seemed infinitely removed from him, a century away, a glow of memory—like star dust, yet he thought of her as the match went out. His wife would go on living. He and Carla were about to die. He had seen understanding and sureness in the shining depths of Carla's eyes when the tiny flame had illumined their faces. She had let him know, without words, that earth bonds were stricken from her, because there was no longer an earth for either of them. For a few hours they were to be in a world all their own. Then—their couch of everlasting sleep—together. He felt a spiritual reaction from the oppression of horror and fear which had come upon him. To feel sure that Carla knew, and that she had given herself to him because of her knowledge—that she was not afraid, but was happy in the freedom which an approaching termination of life made possible for them, filled him with an emotion which took from their brief future its stark and ugly grimness and gave to it an almost joyous aspect.

As if she had been a partner in the few seconds of his thoughts, Carla spoke softly, giving him her hand again in the night which shut them in.

"I want to hear you say it, Paul! I have dreamed, and even prayed in my wickedness, and have fancied your voice telling me the story. For that I have many times asked God to forgive me. But now it is right and just. I want to hear you say—you love me."

"I do," said Paul. "I know—now—that I have loved you from the beginning of time, before I came to the Mistassini, before I was born in this life—a thousand or a million years I have worshiped the soul that is you. Sometime, it may have been ages ago. I know that you belonged to me."

"I have always belonged to you," said Carla. "Yours is the love I thought was hopelessly gone from me—up there. But to die with you is my right. Can there be such a thing as doubt for us now?"

"I am sure there cannot," he said.

"You would like to live?"

"Without you, n .'

"And there is no chance—no hope of saving ourselves?"

"I can conceive of none. No force could contend with the maelstroms in the throat of the chasm. At the other end all physical matter is ground to pulp as the water comes out through the gorge. We are caught between the two."

He calmly and frankly spoke the truth to her. She made no reply in words, but he could feel her response creeping through her finger tips to him, could feel the tremble and thrill of it in her body. He had not frightened her, but had dispelled from her the beginning of a fear. She did not want to live. The truth seized upon and helped him with a kind of shock. Yet it was a simple thing, one he should have known without intuition or discovery. For Carla was—not only a woman, but a soul. Back there, in Claire's world, she would be lost to him—no matter what he might do in the way other men had solved such problems. Only here, in a beginning and an end all their own, could she belong to him.

Again she was in his heart, listening to his thoughts.

"It is strange, but I want to sing in this darkness," she said. "I did not know that blindness could be so beautiful!"

"Nor I!" he answered.

CHAPTER X

During the night following Paul's accident and Carla's leap, men were active below the gorge. Derwent lost no time in racing back to the Mistassini, and the presence of a hundred men below the chasm before midnight was the result. Every device of engineering science and unlimited resource which might be employed came with them. The big pool at the foot of the gorge was a glare of illumination, and men went down the river with their flaming torches, afoot along its banks and in canoes between them, questing for a shred of something which a few hours before might have been a part of Paul or Carla.

Lucy-Belle, shocked into sickness, was taken to her home. But Claire remained. Men who saw her in the weird glow of the lights will never be able to forget the image of her face as it was photographed upon their memories. Her blue eyes were so wide open and staring, so filled with an unwavering sapphire flame that at times Derwent thought of her as a spirit-goddess instead of a woman. Could Paul have seen her he would have known that at last she had conquered her fear and repugnance of the wilderness. She had come with the first men before a trail was cut. Her dress and shoes were torn, her soft skin bruised and bleeding. Where the water crashed and thundered loudest out from between the chasm walls she stood unafraid, until Derwent twice drew her back from the nearness and danger of it. She resented his appeal to leave the search to others, and Derwent made it only once. A white face, watching for its dead—that was what men would remember. Eyes flamingly blue, hungrily searching the black stream as it came from the mountain. A fragile form that seemed tireless, as steel. A woman, and yet more than woman—an unforgettable spirit, a vision that was like tragic music, always to be remembered.

She did not give up with the first hours of evening, but continued to watch through the night. She did not move from the foot of the gorge and the pool, as if she were sure that whatever came to her would be found there. Derwent was frequently with her, and tried to talk, but her lips framed few words. Not until day came again did something give way in her, and hopelessness take its place. Then he took her home to Lucy-Belle.

"I waited too long," she said to him, and afterward, back with the searching men, he wondered what she had meant.

These searchers, could they have looked through the rock, would have seen a fire. It was the second night for Paul and Carla in a place where night and day were the same. Paul had found drifts of wood along the edge of the sand, mixed with pitchy pine, and a little spot in their world was illumined by light.

In the fire glow sat Carla, combing her long, silky hair with her fingers. Paul watched her as she smoothed and braided the tresses, employing as great care as though she were in her bedroom at home. This was the third time she had given it such attention in their thirty-six hours of entombment. At other times he had held a light for her at the edge of the water while she bathed her face and hands, and once she had said to him: "It is wonderful water, almost as soft as

In the Fire Glow Sat Carla, Combing Her Long, Silky Hair With Her Fingers.

that which comes with rain." She spoke as if they might have been camping on one of the streams they loved, with the sky above and flowers about them. It was her utter acceptance of their fate as a thing of happiness which transformed what would have been a hell for him into a heaven. She had sat in the soft sand at his feet, a few moments before, with her head pillowed against his knees, and there she had unbraided her hair for him to caress, as she watched and pointed out for him the unusual and beautiful pictures that built themselves in the changing coals and crumbling embers of the fire.

Now she was a little distance from him, and no sense of dread or fear oppressed him as he followed the rhythmic movements of her slim white fingers braiding her hair again.

If it were madness which possessed him it was a beautiful madness, a sense of joyous living where there should have been despair. At first the fighting part of him had instinctively struggled against it, but now he accepted it fully, until, seeing Carla as she was, death seemed vague and far away and the glory of life very near. They had made no effort to hide from themselves the coming of the end, and Carla thought of it as a beautiful thing, a little journey, which they were making gladly together. Never had Paul believed so surely in a God. He had found himself fond of telling her how he loved her hair more than any other physical thing about her, and she had said: "I am going to spread it out so you may put your face in it when we lie down to sleep." This was the way she spoke of what was to come—as sleep. To drift off like this, his arms about her, seemed to Paul the fruition of a great privilege and joy, and not a triumph of fleshly dissolution. He had told her little stories about his mother and of the time they had spent sun-filled hours in the Indian burial place at Brantford, where the proudest of her forest ancestors were buried.

"I could not understand her then, when she told me how gladly she would give her life, were it not for me, to live for a single year the glorious freedom of Molly Brant," said Paul. "But I do—now. In that one year she knew she would find some thing which would more than make up for all the other years she might live, just as every hour here with you is more to me than ten thousand back there."

As he said these things, and believed and felt them, there was in him a will to live which would not utterly extinguish itself. It was scarcely more than a spark, a smoldering ember that was bound to die, for his eyes, his brain, and every faculty of reason which he possessed told him there was no hope of finding a way beyond the walls which shut them in. A few minutes before, when Carla had sat at his knees, with his fingers feeling the warmth and sweetness of her hair, this spark had leaped into flame. It still remained as Carla yielded at last to his demand, and gave herself to the bed he had made for her, with his coat for her pillow.

"It seems almost a sin to sleep," she said; and if slumber were near, or even the necessity for it, he could find no shadow of it in her face. She might have risen from her bed an hour ago, so freshly clear and lovely were her eyes, so deep their lustrous content and happiness when she looked at him. Yet, after a little, her lashes drooped as if to veil the love behind them, and lay in velvet darkness against the whiteness of her cheeks. For a while Paul sat close and watched her, and with each breath the flame in him grew stronger, the demand that something happen through force of God or man, to break down the walls of death which envroned her.

Alone, with Carla's unconscious form lending faith and inspiration to his thought, he fixed his attention, as a dozen times before, on the smoke which rose from the burning wood.

Where did it go?

Hours ago he had asked himself this question, and until he had discovered a thin fog of smoke settling over the water, and drifting away with the rush of it, his blood had run swiftly with a thrill of hope. And now, in spite of the fact that he knew where it went, the question remained, as if a voice inside his head had been trained to ask it, parrot-like, and could not be made to stop.

He and Carla had collected a pile of pitchwood. As they had found each stick they had acclaimed it a treasure discovered, until the thrill of a game had become part of their endeavor. He chose a stick heavily weighted with pitch and lighted the end of it in the fire. Then he walked off into the gloom where he and Carla had gone many times before. It was like following the inside of a great rock drum which was flat on one side—flat where the water thundered and raced through the mountain.

When his torch burned short he returned for another. Carla had not moved in her sleep, and he buried himself in blackness again, following the rock so closely that his body touched it, trying at every step to pierce with his vision a little farther into the stygian pit over his head. It was into this pit that the smoke went, mounting in drifting spirals, like smoke in an Indian tepee. Up there, he thought, it was taken by a slowly dragging current of air made by the suction of the stream, and descended to exit from the mountain with it. There was only one break in the circular wall of gruesomely black and water-worn rock, against which, in ages past, a subterranean flood had washed and roared. This was where a small section of it had given way from overhead and had piled up a mass of broken stone which he had climbed, with Carla watching from below. Here the smoke from his torch did not go upward but settled about his head and disappeared toward the vent in the mountain through which the river rushed with great force. He went to this outlet. It was a hole which his eyes were unable to measure, choked to within a foot of its upper jaw by a seething flood of water, and out of which—though the space for sound was small—came such a sullen rumbling that his blood was chilled as he listened to it. Alone, he would have plunged into this. To die fighting, pitting his small strength against all the forces which might oppose him, was the urge which was refusing to subdue itself within him. He flung out his flaming torch and saw it swallowed in an instant. Like that he would have gone if Carla had not been there to go with him.

He turned back to the fire and put on a fresh stick of resinous wood before he sat in the sand near enough to Carla to touch her with his hand. He wondered if fear had begun to seize upon him as he looked at her unconscious form, foreseeing the torment of impending hours when madness would be for him alone. Unless they died together, he must outlive Carla—to save her from a realization of that which he, in his greater strength, should bear.

(Continued Next Week.)

Not every stenographer who knows how to typewrite knws how to make a typewriter typewrite type right.

We really regret to say so, but we fear that it will take more than "public opinion" to keep the nations straight.

OREGON NEWS ITEMS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Brief Resume of Happenings of the Week Collected for Our Readers.

A blaze which swept the dry timber land on the Siskiyous, nine miles south of Ashland, destroyed the historic Dollarhide Tollgate property.

The third annual potato, corn and onion show sponsored by the Sherwood chamber of commerce was held recently, with a large showing of commercial and seed potato exhibits.

Plans which it is hoped will bring the United States department of agriculture walnut experiment station to Yamhill county were formulated at a meeting of county nut growers.

Clackamas county's budget for 1930 shows a decrease of $16,199 from the 1928 budget. The 1930 budget calls for a total expenditure of $888,005.25, as compared with $904,204.20 in 1929.

The state land department turned over to the state treasurer during November a total of $154,442.47, according to a report prepared by G. G. Brown, clerk of the state land board.

Three persons were seriously injured, one of them probably fatally, at Bend, when dynamite being tied into bundles preparatory to blasting operations exploded in a worker's hands.

THE MARKETS

Portland

Wheat—Big Bend bluestem, $1.40½; soft white, western white, $1.27; hard winter, northern spring, western red, $1.25½.

Hay—Alfalfa, $23@23.50 per ton; valley timothy, $20.50@21; eastern Oregon timothy, $22@22.50; clover, $20; oat hay, $19; oats and vetch, $20@20.50.

Butterfat—47c.

Eggs—Ranch, 30@44c.

Cattle—Steers, good, $10.25@11.

Hogs—Good to choice, $8.75@10.25.

Lambs—Good to choice, $10.50@11.

Seattle

Wheat—Soft white, western white, $1.27; hard winter, western red, northern spring, $1.26; bluestem, $1.40.

Eggs—Ranch, 32@45c.

Butterfat—47c.

Cattle—Choice steers, $9.50@10.25.

Hogs—Prime light, $10.40@10.50.

Lambs—Choice, $10.50@11.

Spokane

Cattle—Steers, good, $9.25@10.25.

Hogs—Good and choice, $10.

Lambs—Medium to good, $8.50@9.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION—Department of the Interior, U. S. Land Office at The Dalles, Oregon, Oct. 22, 1929.

Notice is hereby given that Peter Dohm of The Dalles, Oregon, who, on Sept. 24, 1924 made H. E. 023268 and also H. E. 023339, both under Act Dec. 29, 1916, for Lot 1, Sec.12, T. 1 S., R. 15 E., NE¼SW¼, Sec. 5, SE¼NE¼, Sec. 6, N½NE¼, NE¼NW¼, Lots 1, 2, Section 7, Township 1-South, Range 16-East, Willamette Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final three year proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before Register, United States Land Office, at The Dalles, Oregon, on the 14th day of December, 1929.

Claimant names as witnesses: James A. Claussen of Dufur, Oregon. Glenn O. Allen of The Dalles Oregon, Elliott P. Roberts of The Dalles, Oregon, George Petroff of The Dalles, Oregon.

J. W. Donnelly, Register.

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Physician and Surgeon
Grass Valley, Oregon
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