

THIRTEENTH IN A SERIES OF REMINISCENCES BY VENOSTA'S TOM MCLAUGHLIN IN HIS DAYS IN A LOGGING CAMP BACK IN THE 1930'S

(Tom came home to a hero's welcome from his younger siblings. But, back at the logging camp, there things were happening that needed his attention.)

Amid all the glory, I still couldn't get Topsy out of my mind. Her feeble condition on the last day was worrying me. I had become very close to Topsy and the sow during our long stay in the bush together. They had helped me through the lonely times, and made me feel a necessary part of the overall scheme.

I arose early the next morning, and left the farm before daybreak, heading for the camp. I couldn't rid myself of a feeling of forboding, and the low gray clouds didn't help any. I could hear the wolves howling on a distant mountain. They honed by concerns to a sharper edge. There was the possibility that the wolves had visited the camp during the night. God knows what I'd find.

I felt sure that the wolves wouldn't try to get at the sow, if Topsy was in good shape. But when I left her, she looked as if she was ready to lie down and die. I hurried on my way.

The clouds were low, dense and restless, and seemed ready at any moment to release their mischief. The wind was building velocity. A severe winter storm was in the making.

When I came over the hill to the little valley within a valley, the cabin eyed me sulkily. I felt as if I could almost reach out and touch the boiling



Tom McLaughlin

clouds, which, with the swirling winds in the trees overhead, created an eerie setting. I watched in awe, expecting that the clouds would make clinking noises as they came together. The trees above seemed to be embracing in an act of mourning.

I made my way hurriedly to the stable. I opened the door to enter, and tripped over Topsy's colt. She had miscarried during the night. I was glad that no one was around to see me cry.

I didn't have time to hang around mourning, I wanted to get the animals out before the storm broke. Topsy looked as if she wouldn't make it. She didn't want to leave the stable, but I managed to get her headed toward home. The sow seemed raring to go.

The trip was uneventful until we reached the first meadow, I was leading Topsy, and the sow was following close behind. We were a few hundred feet into the field when I realized that the sow was nowhere in sight. I slapped Topsy on the rump to keep her going, and I turned back to look for the sow. I could see that she had turned back at the entrance to the field. But she was nowhere to be seen. I ran

to catch up with her, to try to head her off. She was waiting at the stable door.

I couldn't budge her, no matter what I did. It was obvious that she didn't want anything to do with civilization. I prodded her with the stick I carried. She just stood there, grunting in protest. I decided to coax her with a pail of grain. It worked. We were just getting started when I saw Topsy coming over the hill. As sick as she was, she knocked the pail of oats from my hand, scattering the grains in the snow. I sat on a stump in despair.

While Topsy and the sow were eating the oats, I was reshaping my plans. I dragged the colt out into the snow and put Topsy in the stable. Then I took some provender from the sack. It worked like a charm. The sow trotted after me, trying to get her snout into the pail, until we reached the edge of the forest again. Then she turned and made a bee-line for the camp. There was no way that she was going to leave the security of the forest.

There was only one thing left to do. I left the sow in the stable with the mare, and returned to the farm to get another horse, plus the single sleigh and the pig crate. When I returned, the sow nervously followed the provender onto the crate, and I quickly latched the door. I let Topsy out of the stable, and she followed us meek and wobbly, back to the farm. And none too soon. The storm proved to be the worst blizzard of the winter. The experience, with the aid of the storm, awakened me to the knowledge that I was a small and largely insignificant, part of the world. But I felt secure that everything was unfolding according to the master plan.