

Rebel Revelations

GOOSENECK ISLAND . . . I shall attempt to send this by a passing boat if any should venture on the lake in the middle of this howling blizzard. If not, then I shall put it in a plastic bag and put the bag in a bottle and hope that it will reach shore.

In all my years in Maine I have never seen a season like this. Only by the calendar would you know that it has been summer. Each month the optimists have clung to the superstition that Maine weather is fickle, will change the next minute. If it has changed at all, it has been steadily for the worse.

The old timers say, well, the law of averages will certainly require that August will be dry if not warm. This is one year when the law of averages has been broken . . . broken by record rains, continual, unrelenting rain. The only break has been an occasional drizzle mixed with such a fog that even a Californian would admit that was measurable water.

There have been a few precious golden days when the sun did shine, the air was clear, the North wind dried the land on the surface. But before it was dry enough to work in the garden, another low pressure area moved in, and the rains came again.

Dispositions had become short. A kind of slimy green mold covers everything including your spirit. The plants are drooping from mere moisture than they can assimilate . . . and I was drooping, too. I need a change. I was tired, very tired. My mind was as rusty as the tools I had stupidly left outside near what I had hoped would be a garden. It might have been at that had I planted something that grows under water.

I needed a change. I needed a rest. Surely the island couldn't be any worse than Greentrees. All the bushes and trees would drip, but the cabin would be warm and dry. Surrounded by water, any additional moisture would not be too bad . . . I thought.

The barometer has been steady for two or three days. I could sit

out the miserable weather as well on the island as on the mainland . . . and I would be free from interruptions. So I fled to Gooseneck between showers on a Monday afternoon. Now it is Wednesday or maybe Thursday . . . and it is still raining.

The water is rising rapidly. I wonder if an island will float when the water covers it. Maybe I shall find that out these next few days. A fog has hidden the mainland and most of the other islands. The wind-whipped waves would swamp a boat before I had cleared the reef of Norman's Woe.

The stillness is broken only by the weird and unearthly cries of loons calling to each other from unseen bays and hidden coves, and by the rhythmic lap of the waves against the rocks. All I can see through the rivulets of water are the supple, swirling, evanescent Whispies. They are the strange fog maidens who seem to beckon to unwary travelers, luring them on silently with a macabre ballet to the shoals and reefs that smash boats to pieces.

The Whispies have been known since the days of the Indians . . . they are reputed to be land-locked mermaids who have been trapped in the inland waters by the series of dams and mill races that man built. They seek revenge forever until that day when the rising waters will sweep the dams away. Then they will find their mermaid sisters in whatever paradise they inhabit in the deep oceans.

The Whispies seem to dislike all fishermen, especially salmon and trout fanciers. They will frighten the fish away from the best pools whenever a fisherman approaches. Perhaps they are close kin to the lost Mulrish who Doc Higgins shot one day underneath a willow tree . . . shot her because she bothered him, scared the trout, and is alleged to have seduced his nephew. He couldn't decide whether she was fish or woman, fiend or human. Like too many people, he condemned anything he couldn't understand . . . and wanted to destroy it.

He shot the mermaid, so the ballad goes, but it didn't do him much good. The next day he went fishing, sure that no mermaid would be near that pool near the willow tree to frighten away the trout. The fog closed in. And with the fog came the sisters of the lost Mulrish, moaning, sighing in their bereavement. Their cold, clammy arms wrapped around old Doc Higgins. They drew him under the swirling waters.

When they found his body, they might have attributed his death to drowning. But on his throat were marks made by long, supple fingers, and around his arms were twisted strands of sea-green hair. And in his eyes which had remained open was such a look of horror that those who found him woke up screaming the rest of their lives.

All the Lake People know the legend of a renegade Revolutionary soldier named Zebe Parker . . . he had helped build the series of dams on this chain of lakes that flowed then unrestricted down to the Androscoggin River and thence to Merry-Meeting Bay to the Atlantic. There are some who claim he deserted from that rabble army which went with Arnold to Quebec.

However he got here, he was no credit to the community. He sired enough half-breed children to populate a county. Some of his worthless descendants still live and breed and die north of East Jalloppi beyond Slab City. They manufacture a potent liquor called orchard tea, a kind of apple brandy which they draw from a barrel of hard cider that has frozen almost solid leaving only firey 190 proof alcohol. They jack deer, fish in closed brooks, and are notorious poachers.

Zebe was a scoundrel, no doubt about it. He stole furs from the traps of the Indians, and then stole their women. Poor gals may have had a rough life with their braves but it was nothing compared to what they had to endure in the harem of old Zebe Parker. He beat them regularly, made them cut the wood, haul the water, and even made them steal food and grain from the settlers.

Had he been content with the women he had, Zebe might have died a natural death. But one night in the Haunted Cove, his lecherous eyes lit upon the lovely Wa-na-neesh bathing in the pool by the Cleft Rock. Wa-na-neesh was too beautiful to be human, but Zebe didn't know that. She was all gold and silver. Her body was as slender as a birch tree, her silvery blonde hair floated around her like a path in the moonlight. Zebe sat motionless in his canoe watching what no mortal eyes were supposed to see anyway . . . and certainly no evil eyes like those of Zebe. Wa-na-neesh swam to the shore and shook herself dry. The moon shining on the drops of water that ran down her enchanting form made her glow like many opals. In a kind of ecstasy she began her moon dance . . . as though the moon were some Indian brave she was wooing with exquisite movement.

No one knows exactly what happened after that. Perhaps Wa-na-neesh discovered the intruder. Or her Heavenly lover took revenge for the sacrifice. Old Zebe drowned there in the Haunted Cove . . . and when they found his body, his eyes had been burned out of their sockets . . . a fitting punishment for that peeping Tom, the Lake People agree.

Wa-na-neesh was a Whispie maiden. She and her sisters still keep the curious away from the Haunted Cove. They manage to hide the passages to the best fishing grounds, too. They will punish a trespasser swiftly and silently. But they are a gentle, a friendly people. If you respect them and their element, water, they will not harm you. They like their domain to be quiet and peaceful . . . a raucous noise is offensive to their sensitive ears.

Their soft, minor-key lullaby will soothe away any sleeplessness. They sing of Wa-na-neesh and her immortal beauty. They murmur the legends of the lake, and the old Lake People. They sing a plaintive lament for their home, the sea, from which they have been exiled. Late in their song there has been a new note, a kind of exultation. It may be the Whispies know that all this water will wash out the dams, and restore the waters to their natural level. And then all the land-locked things will be free to return to their home.

HELEN CALDWELL CUSHMAN



By ROBERT SCHMIDT

During the past month several gardeners have asked me for information about peonies. Should they be divided? When should they be moved? When should new plantings be made?

The time for making new plantings or moving or dividing old plants would be October and November in eastern North Carolina and September and October for the western or mountain section of the state. But don't move them unless there is some good reason to do so. Peonies do not like to be disturbed.

If you have a large clump that is doing very well and producing good blooms don't disturb it. Any loss of roots will have a harmful effect. It is not necessary to divide and move peonies every two or three years as we do iris and daffodils. If a plant is not blooming satisfactorily, then it may be advisable to move it to a better location, or perhaps it has been planted too deep and should be taken up and replanted. In such cases cut off as few roots as possible. Peonies should be planted shallow—the buds should not be more than one to two inches below the surface of the soil.

Have you seen the newspaper ads of the "Miracle Plant" which will bloom for you without soil or water? It was really do that. The plant is the colchicum which resembles a large crocus and will send out blooms without leaves during August or early September, no matter if you put it in soil water, or on the kitchen shelf.

You can buy these bulbs at any of the large seed stores. Plant them in the yard about two to three inches deep. Leaves are produced in the spring which die down in summer and flowers come out during August

ville was elected chairman and Mrs. Della Matlocks of Ross Hill, vice-chairman. Other officers are Emily Rivenbark of Wallace, secretary and treasurer; Mrs. Cornelia Williams of Burgaw, Future Homemakers of America Advisor; Charlotte Murphy of Atkinson and Mrs. Frances Searight of Garland, reporters. Mrs. Clara Reade of Richlands and Emily Rivenbark were appointed as a courtesy committee. Monthly meetings for the coming school year were discussed and topics for programs for these meetings were selected. Plans were made for the annual meeting of Future Homemakers of America, presidents and advisors at Carolina Beach in September.

Home Ec Teachers Plan New Program

Vocational home economics teachers of the county group representing Pender, Duplin, Sampson, Onslow, and Jones counties met recently at the Kenansville school to make plans for the coming year. Mrs. Ruth Buelow of Jackson-

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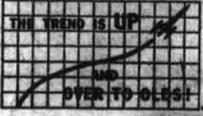
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