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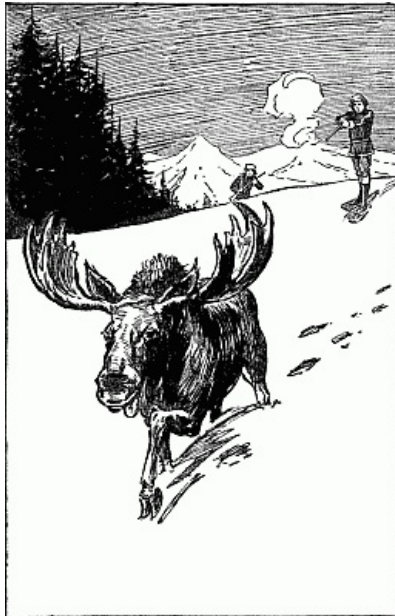
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER; OR, FRED STANLEY'S TRIP TO ALASKA ***



"The moose plunged on"
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The Young Treasure Hunter

Or

Fred Stanley's Trip to Alaska

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A FARM BOY," "THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS,"
"THE BOY FROM THE RANCH," "BOB THE CASTAWAY," ETC.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS

By *FRANK V. WEBSTER*

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ONLY A FARM BOY, Or Dan Hardy's Rise in Life
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THE BOY PILOT OF THE LAKES, Or Nat Morton's

Perils
TWO BOY GOLD MINERS, Or Lost in the Mountains
JACK THE RUNAWAY, Or On the Road with a Circus

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THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER

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[1]

The Young Treasure Hunter

CHAPTER I

IN NEEDY CIRCUMSTANCES

"How are you feeling this morning, father?" asked Fred Stanley as his parent came slowly into the dining-room, leaning heavily on a crutch.

"Not so well, Fred. My leg pained me considerable last night, and I did not sleep much. You are up early, aren't you?"

"Yes. I am going over to the new diggings and see if I can't get a job, so I want to start soon."

"Where are the new diggings, Fred? I hadn't heard of any. But that is not surprising, as I don't hear news as I used to before the accident, when I could get around among the miners."

"Why, there is a rumor that several prospectors have struck it rich near Cartersville. They've formed a settlement and called it New Strike. I heard they wanted boys to drive the ore carts, and I thought I'd go over and try for a place."

[2]

"It's too bad you have had to stop school, Fred, and go to work. If I wasn't crippled I could make lots of money at mining."

"Never mind, father. When you get well again you'll make more than ever. And I don't mind giving up school—very much."

The last words Fred added in a lower tone of voice, for the truth was, he greatly liked his studies, and it had been quite a sacrifice for him to stop going to school. But when his services were needed at home he did not complain.

Norman Stanley, Fred's father, had been injured in a mining accident about six months before this story opens, and, though he was now somewhat improved, he could not walk without the aid of a crutch. The physician said he would eventually get entirely well, but the process seemed very slow, and at times Mr. Stanley was almost discouraged.

The Stanley family, of which Fred was the only child, lived in the town of Piddock, California. It was not far from a mining region, and within a short distance of the coast. Mr. Stanley had been in good circumstances when he was able to work, but since his accident, having a large doctor bill to pay, his savings had been used up. As he could not earn any more, the family was in needy circumstances, though, occasionally, Fred was able to make small sums by doing odd jobs here and there. Mrs. Stanley took in sewing, and they just managed to get along, paying a small rent, and eating only the most common food, though the doctor had said Mr. Stanley would recover more quickly if he could have a special diet.

[3]

"Well, Fred," went on Mr. Stanley, "I hope some day I can send you back to school, and perhaps to college. If only my leg would get better," and he uttered a sigh.

"Don't worry, father. We'll get along somehow. But where is mother? I would like to get my breakfast and hurry over to New Strike. All the best jobs may be taken, and I'll only get a chance to be superintendent, or something like that," and he laughed at his joke, for Fred was not a gloomy-spirited boy.

"Your mother is not up yet, Fred," said Mr. Stanley. "She was sewing quite late last night, and I told her to take a rest this morning. She needed it. I thought maybe you and I could get our own breakfast."

"Of course we can, dad. It won't be the first time I have done it, for when I went camping with the fellows I used to be cook part of the time."

"And I haven't forgotten the time when I was prospecting in the mountains and used to have to get my own flapjacks and coffee," added the former miner. "I guess we can make out all right, and then you can go see if you can strike a job. If they insist on making you part owner, or manager of a good mine, I suppose you will have to take it."

[4]

He smiled at his son in spite of his rather gloomy feelings. But he was sad at the thought of how hard his wife had to work to earn a little money, while he, a strong man, save for his injured leg, could do next to nothing.

"Oh, I guess I can stand it to take half shares in a new lead," replied Fred. "Now if you'll set the table, dad, I'll put the kettle on, make coffee and fry some eggs."

Mr. Stanley could manage to move slowly about the room with the aid of his crutch, and by degrees he had the table set. Meanwhile Fred had made a fire in the kitchen stove, and the kettle was soon humming, while he ground the coffee, cut some slices of bacon, and got the fresh eggs from the cupboard.

In the midst of these operations Mrs. Stanley, a little woman with slightly gray hair, but a sweet face and kindly, laughing blue eyes, came downstairs.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "You're ahead of me this morning, aren't you?"

"I thought you would like to rest a bit," said her husband. "That is why I did not call you."

[5]

"Oh, I'm not so tired. I slept well, and I wanted to be up early and get Fred's breakfast, for he has quite a journey ahead of him."

"I wish he didn't have to take it," murmured Mr. Stanley to his wife when Fred was out of the room. "If I only could get back to work myself."

"Now, Norman, I thought you promised me you wouldn't worry."

"I'm not, but—"

"Yes, you are. Now please don't do it any more. We are getting on very nicely, and I think Mrs. Robinson will pay me well for the sewing I did for her last night. She is very much pleased with my work."

"I wish you didn't have to work."

"Oh, my! I don't! What a queer world it would be if no one had to work. I just love to be busy," and she laughed joyously, though, to tell the truth, she was still weary from her toil of the night before. Fred heard his mother's voice and looked in from the kitchen.

"Breakfast will soon be ready, Mrs. Stanley," he said in imitation of a servant girl they had had when they were in better circumstances. "The water is jest comin' on to a bile, ma'am, an' the eggs am almost done, ma'am."

"That's just what Sarah used to say," remarked Mrs. Stanley. "It sounds quite natural. Now, Fred, you come in and sit down and I'll finish getting the meal."

[6]

"No, indeed, mother, let me do it. Pretend you are a visitor, and I'll bring the eggs and toast in, piping hot for you."

"No, Fred. I'll do it."

The boy was so much in earnest that his mother gave in, and with a laugh seated herself by her husband's side, while Fred rattled away among the dishes out in the kitchen as if he was a regular Chinese cook, which many families in California keep in preference to a woman.

"Do you feel any better this morning, Norman?" asked Mrs. Stanley.

"Not much. Perhaps a little. It is very slow."

In spite of herself tears came into the eyes of Mrs. Stanley at her husband's misfortune, but she turned her head away so he would not see them.

"Here we are!" cried Fred suddenly, as he came in with a platter of bacon and eggs in one hand, and some nicely browned toast, on a plate, in the other.

"Grub call!" he added, in imitation of the camp cry.

"Well, you did get up a nice breakfast," complimented his mother.

"I'll bring the coffee in a minute," added the boy as he went back to the kitchen. "You dish out, mother."

[7]

The little family gathered around the table, and soon Mr. Stanley had temporarily forgotten about the pain in his leg, while he told Fred something of how to drive an ore cart.

"Perhaps I'll not get a chance at one, dad."

"Oh, yes, you will. If you see any old miners there, at the new diggings, just mention my name, and they'll help you. They all know me, for I've prospected with a number of them, and grub-staked lots of 'em. Yes, and some of them have grub-staked me."

Grub-staked, it may be explained, means that a man with money provides a poor miner with food or "grub" and an outfit to hunt and dig for gold. If the miner finds a good lead, or mine, a large share of it goes to the man who grub-staked him.

Mrs. Stanley placed two eggs and some toast on her husband's plate, and was about to help Fred to the same quantity, when she noticed that her son was engaged on a big dish of oatmeal.

"Don't you want some eggs?" she asked.

"Don't care for 'em," replied Fred quickly. "I'd rather have oatmeal. It will stick by me longer, if I get a job to-day."

The truth was there were only four eggs in the house, and no money to send out and buy more. And Fred wanted his mother to have the remaining two. So he took oatmeal, though he did not like it.

[8]

"Why, Fred!" exclaimed his mother. "You always used to like eggs. Why don't you take them? I don't feel very hungry."

"Those eggs were cooked especially for you, mother," said the boy. "If you don't eat them I'll think you don't like my way, and I'll leave."

His mother laughed, but, once more, there came a mist of tears to her eyes. Slyly she tried to put one of the eggs on Fred's plate, but he would not let her.

"This toast is fine, if I did make it myself," said Fred, "and the bacon isn't half bad," he added as he took several slices, for there was plenty of that. "Guess I'll take some along for my dinner, as I'll not come back until night—if I get a job."

"That's so, Fred, I must see if there is anything in the house for your lunch. I—I don't believe I'll have any money until Mrs. Robinson pays me. I'll take her work home right after breakfast."

"A light lunch will do for me, mother. I can get some grub from one of the miners, if I run short."

This was true enough, for the gold-diggers would share their last crust with a hungry traveler.

The meal was soon over, and, with a small package of bread and bacon, and a piece of pie, saved from the day before, Fred Stanley started off to look for work.

[9]

CHAPTER II

SEEKING A JOB

From Piddock, where Fred lived, to New Strike was about eight miles, over the mountains. It was a hard journey, but the boy set off on it with a light heart, whistling merrily, for he was hopeful of getting a job, and he knew that if he did, there would be more happiness at home, since there was a dire shortage of money.

"I ought to get at least five dollars a week and my board," thought Fred. "If I do, I can save nearly four and send it home, and that will help out a lot. Poor dad, it's hard for him to be crippled the way he is. And I wish mother didn't have to work so hard. She is getting more gray than she ought to. I wish there was some work in Piddock. If I get a job over here I'll have to stay all the week, and can only go home Saturday night. But there's not much doing in Piddock."

This was true. The town had once been quite an important one, but the diggings near it had been exhausted, and the mining population had, in a large part, moved away. There were some mines in the vicinity, that were still worked, but they did not pay very well.

[10]

Shortly after Mr. Stanley's accident Fred had secured a place in the general store in Piddock, but, when the population diminished there was hardly enough work for the proprietor himself, and he had to discharge Fred, though he regretted it, for the boy was bright and quick, and a great help to him.

After that Fred tried in vain to get a steady position. He worked for a few days driving a team for a man, and occasionally did odd jobs for one of the merchants in town, or for some of the residents, but the pay was poor, and he seldom had three full days' work a week.

He had heard of the unexpected prosperity that had come to New Strike, and, knowing that there is usually plenty of work in a new mining camp, he determined to go there and see what he could find.

As Fred reached the mountain trail, leading to New Strike, he saw that it had been well traveled. On both sides of the narrow road were evidences that many teams had passed that way recently, for the refuse of camp stuff, broken boxes and barrels, and things that the miners had thrown away as useless, littered the ground.

As Fred made a turn in the road, he saw, just ahead of him, an old man, mounted on a small donkey. The man's legs were so long, and the donkey so little, that the rider's shoes nearly touched the ground.

[11]

Either the animal was lazy, or it was unable to carry the load on its back,—for the man had a big bundle on the saddle before him,—and the donkey went at a very slow pace. So slow, in fact, that Fred soon caught up to the rider.

"Good-morning," the boy said.

"Ah, stranger, good-morning," was the man's answer. "I see you are headed for the same place I am."

"I don't know whether it's the same place or not, but I'm going to New Strike," said Fred.

"So am I, if this donkey lasts the trip out. He's awful slow, stranger. What might your name be?"

"Fred Stanley."

"Where you from?"

"Piddock."

"Hum. Well I'm Bill Gardner. Old Bill Gardner, they mostly calls me."

"And where are you from?" asked Fred, thinking it only polite to manifest some interest in the rider.

"Me? Oh, I ain't from nowhere in particular. I make my home wherever I happen to drop my pick and shovel. I'm a prospector," and Fred noticed that, in addition to his bundle, the old man had a set of mining tools.

[12]

"Are you going to locate at New Strike?" asked Fred.

"That's what I am. I heard there was some rich pockets there, and I want to get my share. G'lang there, you jack rabbit!" and the man jerked the donkey's reins.

"That's a queer name for a donkey," commented Fred.

"Well, this is a queer donkey. I call him a jack rabbit because he's so different. He wouldn't jump if you fired a cannon off right under him."

"Did you ever try it?"

"No, but he stood right near a blast one day, when it went off before I was ready for it, and all he done was to wiggle one ear a bit, as though a fly had bit him. Oh, he's the slowest donkey I ever saw, and I've seen some pretty lazy ones. But do you expect to do any prospecting in New Strike? Where's your outfit?"

"I haven't any."

"Guess you'll find it pretty hard to pick up one in the camps. Every man'll want his own."

"Oh, I don't expect to look for gold."

"What are you going to look for then?"

"A job. I heard they wanted drivers for the ore carts at the stamp mills, and I thought I might fill the bill."

[13]

"I guess you could, if the places aren't all taken. But, why don't you try mining?"

"I don't believe I'm old enough."

"Oh, yes, you are. I came to California, 'way back in '49, when I was only a boy, and I've been mining ever since."

"My father was a miner," said Fred.

"Was he? What's his name?"

"Norman Stanley."

"What! Norman Stanley, who used to work in the Eagle's Claw mine?"

"Yes," replied the boy, who had often heard his father speak of the mine mentioned.

"Well, well! I know him like a brother. Just tell him you met old Bill Gardner, and he'll remember me all right."

"I will."

"And I'll speak a good word for you when we get to the new diggings," went on the old man. "I know every miner in these parts worth knowing. G'lang there, Kangaroo."

"I thought you said the donkey's name was Jack Rabbit."

"No, that's not his name. You see I call him something different every time."

"Why?" inquired Fred.

"Well, I think one name gets sort of tiresome for an animal. And then I think, if I call him a different name every time, he'll think maybe I'm somebody else, and he'll go faster. He knows me so well he won't pay any attention to me, and he knows I won't hit him. But if I call him a different name, he may think there's a different man on his back, and he may run a bit."

[14]

"He doesn't seem to be going to."

"No, I guess not. G'lang there, Hippopotamus!"

That name seemed to have no effect, either, and, with an exclamation of disgust, the old miner settled back in the saddle and let the donkey take its own time.

Fred found he could easily keep up with the small animal, and the miner chatted pleasantly until they came to New Strike. Then, at the suggestion of Mr. Gardner, the boy went to the superintendent of the stamp mills, to apply for a job.

"Let me know how you make out," said the miner, as he was about to part from the boy.

"Where will I find you?"

"Oh, I'm going to put up at the hotel. There's only one, so you won't have much trouble finding me. Just ask for Old Bill Gardner, and anybody'll point me out. Well, good luck."

"Thank you," answered Fred, as he started toward the stamping mills, the thundering noise of which could be heard for a long distance.

[15]

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the superintendent sharply, as Fred entered the office.

"Do you want any boys to drive ore carts? I heard you did."

"We did, but we filled the last place about an hour ago."

Fred's heart sank. If he had been a little earlier, or if he had started sooner, he might now have had a good job.

"Is there anything else to do around here?" he asked. "I would be glad to get work of any kind."

"I'm afraid I haven't anything for any one as young as you."

"I am quite strong, though I am only seventeen years old."

"Yes, I must admit you seem a sturdy lad, but, I am sorry to say, I can't give you any work. If you leave your name and address I'll send for you, when there is anything."

"Thank you," replied Fred, and he wrote them on a piece of paper the manager gave him.

"If you were a man now, I could give you work in the mine. But I can't put boys in there. Have you had any experience in mining?"

"No, but I know something about it from hearing my father tell about it. He is a miner."

"What is his name?"

Fred told him, and found that, while the manager did not know Mr. Stanley, he had heard of him. [16]

"I wish, for your father's sake, I could give you work," he said. "I'll keep you in mind, and you shall have the first job that is open."

"Thank you. I shall try some other places here."

"I would, if I were you, and you can refer to me."

"That is very kind of you."

Fred bade the manager good-morning, and started off to see if there was not work elsewhere for him. But he found that either all the places were filled, or that, when there was work, it was of such a nature that he could not do it.

Somewhat discouraged, he sat down in a shady place to eat his simple lunch, and, after a drink from a spring, he felt refreshed.

Early that afternoon he had exhausted the possibilities of work in New Strike.

"I think I'll start back home," he said. "There's no use bothering to look up Mr. Gardner."

The truth was he disliked to tell the old miner he had not succeeded in getting work. So Fred started off on his long tramp back to Piddock.

But, as he was passing along the main, and, in truth, the only street of the town, a voice hailed him.

"Hold on there, Fred," was the cry, and he turned to see the old miner beckoning to him, from in front of the "Imperial Hotel," as a sign in front of the one-storied building indicated it to be. [17]

"Wait a minute. I want to speak to you!" [18]

CHAPTER III

THE BURIED TREASURE STORY

Fred turned and walked toward the hotel, the old miner advancing to meet him.

"Well," asked Mr. Gardner, "how'd you make out?"

"I didn't make out at all."

"Pshaw! That's too bad. What are you going to do now?"

"Go back home."

"I wish I could help you. Do you need work very much?"

"Well, I have to help support the house since my father met with that accident."

"That's so. Shucks! Why ain't I rich? Then I could help my old friend."

"I don't think my father would take money that he or I did not earn."

"No, that's right, he wouldn't. But if I was rich I could give you a job. As it is I can't do any more than offer to grub-stake you, or let you come prospecting with me." [19]

"Thank you very much for the offer, but I don't believe I could do it. We need money right away, and I must earn it—somehow."

"But how are you going to?"

"That's what I don't know," and Fred spoke a little discouragedly. "I must try some other camp, I suppose."

"Yes, I guess that's the only way. But say, won't you come in and have some lunch with me? I'm just going to sit down."

"No, thank you. I must be getting home. I have quite a long walk."

"Oh, come on. It won't take long, and you'll feel all the better for having eaten something. They don't set a very good table here. Everyone is too busy thinking about gold mines, to care much about grub. I'd lend you my elephant to get home on, only you can walk faster than he'll carry you."

"Your elephant?"

"Yes, that's my latest name for the donkey."

"Oh, I understand."

"Come on in and have lunch," insisted the old miner again.

Fred did not need much urging. The truth was he was quite hungry, for he had not eaten a hearty breakfast, and his lunch was not very substantial. So he followed Mr. Gardner into the hotel, or what answered for one, and soon they were seated at a rough table, where the food, if not very dainty, was good, and there was enough of it. [20]

"So your folks need money, do they?" asked Mr. Gardner when they were drinking their coffee.

"Well, I fancy it would come in handy in 'most any family," answered Fred with a smile.

"That's what it would. I could use a bit more myself. But I may strike it rich here. If I don't, I may have a try for the Stults treasure. I sure would, without stopping here, if I wasn't so old and stiff, and wasn't afraid of the cold."

"The Stults treasure?" asked Fred. "What's that, and where is it? Is there any chance of me getting a share?"

"I don't know. There might be," replied the miner, more seriously than Fred thought he would answer, for, at first, the boy thought his companion was joking.

"Is there really a treasure hidden around here, Mr. Gardner."

"Around here? No, only the gold in the mines, and that is hard to get out. The Stults treasure, that I referred to, is many miles away."

"Where is it?"

"In Alaska."

"Alaska?"

"Yes, and the coldest part, too. I'll tell you what I know of it, but don't hold me responsible."

"I'll not." [21]

"Very well then. The story is more or less known, but I can't say as much for the location of the treasure. Several have tried their hand at locating it, but had to give it up.

"It appears that an old miner, named Max Stults, went to Alaska, in the early days of the gold discoveries there, with a few companions. They made their way up the Yukon river as far as where Circle City now is. Then they went off into the mountains, for, it seems, the old man had a curious dream that he would find gold in a certain place.

"His companions laughed at him, for it was outside the gold-bearing region, and, finally, they all deserted him. Nothing more was heard of Stults for a long time. One day, so the story goes, a man, half dead from exposure, staggered into the camp, which was the beginning of what is now Circle City.

"This man, who turned out to be Stults, told a strange story. He said he had discovered a wonderful treasure of gold, in the bed of a river that had changed its course. There were many big nuggets of the pure metal he had picked up, he said."

"Why didn't he bring it with him?" asked Fred.

"He tried to, but he was attacked by a band of savage Alaskan Indians, who tried to get the gold away from him. He had it in the mountains, and managed to escape, coming to the camp for help." [22]

"Did they give it to him?"

"They would have, but, unfortunately, just as they were setting out to find the buried treasure, Stults died."

"And they never found the gold?"

"They never found it. Stults had a sort of map, showing the location of it, but no one could make head or tail of that map after he was dead. Several parties made the attempt, but they all failed. Some were frozen to death, and others were driven from the country by the savage

Indians. So, up to the present time, no one has found the Stults treasure, as far as I know."

"What became of the map?"

"Oh, that, and a few personal belongings of the old German gold hunter, were sent to his widow. I heard that she raised money and sent out an expedition after the gold, for she was familiar with her husband's handwriting and understood what certain words on the map meant, which was more than those who first saw it knew. But it fared no better than the others. So the treasure must be there still. Now if you only had a share of that, you and your folks wouldn't have to worry."

"No, indeed, but I guess the chances are very small for me finding that gold, even if I could go to Alaska, which is impossible."

"Yes, I am afraid so. Still, when you grow up you may want to have a try for it. I think Mrs. Stults is living yet, and, I understand, she has a standing offer of half the treasure to whoever will find it."

[23]

"Is that so? Where does Mrs. Stults live?"

"The last I heard she was in Denville, California."

"Denville? Why that is not more than twenty-five miles from Piddock!" exclaimed Fred, a sudden idea coming into his mind.

"So near as that? Well, why don't you go and see her, get a copy of the map, and hunt for the gold?" and the old miner laughed as if it was a joke.

"Maybe I will," replied Fred, in a curiously quiet voice, as he rose to leave the dining-room of the hotel.

[24]

CHAPTER IV

FRED HAS HOPES

"How long will it take you to get home?" asked Mr. Gardner of Fred, as he accompanied him toward the street.

"Oh, about three hours. I'm a pretty fast walker, and it's mostly down hill."

"Then you'd better take my tame snake."

"Your snake? Oh, you mean the donkey."

"Yes, I think he would go pretty well down hill. He could slide most of the way. Better let me get him for you. You can send him back whenever you get ready. I shan't want him for a week or so."

"Thank you very much, but I think I'll walk."

"Well, maybe you'll get home a little sooner, even if it is down hill. Stop and see me whenever you're in this direction. I don't expect to go to prospecting right away, and I'm going to make this hotel my headquarters."

"Thank you, Mr. Gardner, I will."

"And give my regards to your father. I'd like to see him."

[25]

"I will do so, but I'm afraid you can't see him unless you call. He is not able to get very far from the house."

"Then I'll try to call. Don't forget to say that Old Bill Gardner was asking for him. And if he wants to have a try at the Stults treasure, why, I'll give him a letter of introduction to the widow. I know her."

"Do you?" asked Fred eagerly. "Then perhaps you would give me a letter?"

"Give you one? Why, you don't expect to have a try for it; do you?"

"I don't know," replied the boy seriously. "I would like to talk to my father about it. But I have another scheme in mind. If I had a letter to Mrs. Stults, she might be able to tell me where I could get work. I believe you said she had an interest in some mines."

"She has, and she might be able to get you a place. I did not think of that. But Denville is quite a way off."

"Well, I may have to go quite a distance before I can get a job."

"All right. Wait a few minutes and I'll write you a letter of introduction to Mrs. Stults. She is rather a peculiar German woman, slow-going, and she doesn't make her mind up in a hurry."

"Then I will give her plenty of time to consider matters, Mr. Gardner."

[26]

In a little while, charged with messages of remembrance to his father, and bearing the letter of introduction to the widow, Fred was on his way home. He stepped out at a quick pace, for in spite of his long walk that morning he did not feel tired, as he was busy thinking of a certain matter.

You have probably guessed that it was the buried treasure, though Fred had only the most hazy notion where it was, and he knew that it was almost entirely out of the question for him to go in search of it. Nevertheless, as do all lads, he had hopes, and it was these hopes which made the way seem short to him, so that he did not mind the long mountain trail.

"Well, Fred, any luck?" asked his father, when he got home, about dusk.

"No, dad," yet the answer was not given in a despondent tone.

"I was afraid you wouldn't have. A new digging is usually quickly overrun with miners, and there are two applicants for every place."

Fred described the incidents of the day, and gave his father the message from Mr. Gardner.

"Yes, I remember him very well," said the miner. "He was a peculiar man."

"He is yet," and Fred told of the various names applied to the little donkey.

"That's just like Old Bill Gardner," commented Mr. Stanley.

[27]

"You'll not have to go without your supper, Fred," said his mother, coming in at that moment. "I have a nice meal for you."

"That's good. I have a fine appetite."

"I'm glad of it. Mrs. Robinson paid me more for the sewing than I expected, and I got a little treat for you. I made some tapioca pudding. We haven't had any in a long time."

"That's so, mother, but I can get along without it."

"You'll not have to, to-night."

Mr. Stanley's face flushed. He keenly felt the position he was in—that of a man unable to support himself, much less his family. If only his lameness would leave him! For there was no work for a lame man in Piddock.

During the meal Fred was so busy thinking that several times his mother had to ask him the same question twice. When this occurred, after she had asked him if he was ready for the pudding, a dish of which he was very fond, she exclaimed:

"Well, Fred! Something must be the matter. You are not ill; are you?"

"No, mother."

"Then of what are you thinking?"

"I'll tell you," said Fred, with sudden determination. "I am thinking of a curious story I heard to-day."

"A story? What about?"

[28]

"About treasure, buried in the mountains of Alaska."

Then Fred told what Mr. Gardner had related to him about the gold left by Stults.

"I have heard that story several times," said Mr. Stanley, when Fred had finished the account, "but it was always from men in whom I could place no confidence."

"Do you think Mr. Gardner is telling the truth, father?"

"I place more reliance on the story now than I ever did before," replied the old miner. "You can generally depend on what Old Bill tells you."

"Then you think there might be treasure there?"

"I believe there might have been. Whether it is there still is another question. Why, Fred, you weren't thinking of going after it; were you?"

"I was, father."

Though the boy spoke quietly the words startled his parents.

"You were!" exclaimed Mr. Stanley.

"What, Fred! Go away off to Alaska, and freeze to death on an iceberg?" asked his mother.

"Oh, I guess I could stand the cold, mother. I could wear a fur suit, like the Eskimos. But whether I could find the gold is, as father says, another question. How much do you think would be there, dad?"

"It is utterly impossible to say. I have heard various amounts mentioned, from as high as a

[29]

million to as low as a thousand dollars. But I think, from the stories current at the time of the death of Stults, that it must be many thousands of dollars."

"So do I, father, and I would like to go after it."

"You don't appreciate what that means, Fred," said Mr. Stanley. "In the first place the treasure, if there is any, is in a desolate place, hard to get at, once you are in Alaska. Then Alaska is no easy place to reach, and it takes more money to get there than we shall ever have, I'm afraid. Another thing: you would have no right to go after the treasure. It belongs to the widow of Stults."

"I would have a right to search for it, if she gave me permission, as she has others."

"Yes, but you do not know her, and I doubt if any one knows where she is. No, Fred, it is out of the question."

Fred drew something from his pocket.

"I admit it may be impossible for me to go after the treasure," he said, "but part of the objections can be overcome. I know where Mrs. Stults is now, and I have a letter of introduction to her," and he showed the epistle given him by Mr. Gardner.

[30]

CHAPTER V

MRS. STULTS CONSENTS

Fred's announcement took his parents completely by surprise. Mr. Stanley extended his hand for the letter, and read it over slowly.

"That ought to get you a hearing, at any rate," he said at length. "I understand that Old Bill Gardner is quite well acquainted with the widow of the man who buried the fortune to save it from the Alaskan Indians. But, Fred, don't build your hopes too high. I don't see how you are going to get to Denville, and, even if Mrs. Stults should consent to allow you to hunt for the treasure, how are you going to do it?"

"I thought I might get some of your friends interested, father, and we could form an expedition to go to Alaska."

"But that will take considerable money."

"So it does to start a mine, and this is just as sure as a mine is."

"I admit that. But whom could you get?"

"I thought you might be able to propose some one. You see, father, there is no use of me staying around here. There is no work to be had in Piddock, and if I have to go off some distance to look for a job, I might as well go a little farther, and hunt for the treasure."

[31]

"But Alaska is a good way off."

"Not so very far."

"You'd think so, if you had to walk," added his mother. "Besides, Fred, I hate to think of you going off to that terrible place."

"But think of it, mother! I might come home with a fortune in gold! Then you wouldn't have to work any more, and dad could have better treatment, so he would get well."

Fred spoke earnestly, and there were tears in the eyes of his father and mother at his words. He wanted so much to help them, yet he could do so little.

"It might be done," said Mr. Stanley, musingly, after a pause. "I suppose I could talk to some old miners I know, and get them interested. They place a good deal of confidence in me, and they would believe anything Old Bill Gardner said. But I don't see, at present, Fred, how you are going to get to see Mrs. Stults. The railroad fare costs more than we can afford."

"I can walk it, father."

"What? Walk twenty-five miles—yes, fifty, for it would mean that."

[32]

"Oh, I could do it. But I may be able to get some work, and earn my car-fare."

"Well," said Mr. Stanley, after thinking it over, "the matter will have to be discussed considerably more at length, before I can consent to let you do anything."

"May I go see Mrs. Stults, dad?"

"Yes, if you can arrange it. I have been promised a little job as watchman at the old Owl mine. There is a lawsuit over it, and the court has ordered that it be guarded, pending a settlement. The wages are not much, but it is about all I can do. The offer only came to me this afternoon."

With what I can earn there, and with what your mother takes in, I think we can spare you for a few days, if you want to try and see Mrs. Stults. But, if you walk, you must take at least two days at it. I don't want you to get sick."

"I don't either, dad. I'll go slow, so I'll be in good shape to start for Alaska with the expedition."

"I'm afraid it will be a good while before the expedition starts, my son."

But Fred had no doubts to worry him. He felt confident that he would succeed, and he did not consider the many obstacles in the way. He only looked ahead, and saw himself, in fancy, bringing home a great treasure, to delight his father and mother. [33]

Fred mapped out a plan for himself. Now that his father had a little work, the boy did not worry so much about matters at home. He decided he would try, harder than ever, to get odd jobs to do, so that he might earn money enough for his railroad fare to Denville. In this he was more successful than he hoped. In about a week he had the necessary cash, and then, on second thoughts, as there was no great hurry, he decided to walk after all.

So, taking only part of the money he had earned, and giving the rest to his mother, he set out, one fine morning, on his long walk.

He had cash enough to buy his meals, and he knew he could find sleeping places in the mining camps, where he would have to pay nothing. In this way, should his mission prove a failure, as far as the widow was concerned, he would not be out much.

Fortunately for Fred the weather continued good, and, in less time than he had calculated, he arrived at Denville. Everyone knew where Mrs. Max Stults lived, and, after having had his breakfast, on the third day after leaving home, Fred called at the house.

"Vell, vot it is?" asked Mrs. Stults, when he introduced himself.

"I have a letter of introduction from Mr. William Gardner," said Fred, extending the missive. [34]

"I don't know such a man as dot."

"Don't know Mr. Gardner—Old Bill Gardner?" and Fred began to feel disappointed, thinking he had made a mistake.

"Oh, so! You means dot Old Bill! Ach! Yah! I know him vell. Vot you say, he has wrotten me a letters?"

"It's about that Alaska treasure."

"Oh, dot treasure! I wish I never hear of him! He kill mine poor husband, und he is more boddors to me as everyding; dot treasures! Vait; I reads der letter."

Slowly adjusting a large pair of glasses, she carefully spelled out the missive. Her face took on a more kindly look, and, when she had finished it, she said:

"Vell, Fred, I do 'most anyding for you, after I read dot letter from Old Bill. My husbands vos very fond of Bill. Vot it is you vants?"

"I would like to get a map of where the treasure is buried, and have you tell me all you can about it."

"So? Vell, I don't know vere it is, only vot der map says. But listen, how is a boy like you going to hunt for dot treasure? Maybe it don't be dere no more. Maybe dose Indians vos took it. Ach! My poor husband! Dot treasure vos der death of him, und I don't want to see it kills any more beples." [35]

"Well, I shall have to take that chance, I suppose," said Fred. "But are you willing I should hunt for it?"

"How can a boy like you vos, all alone, find somedings vot lots of mens has failed to find?"

"I expect to have some men help me. My father is an old miner, and he will advise me. Probably he would go, only he is lame."

"So? Dot's different alretty yet, if your fader vos a miner. Den you knows somedings about der trouble. Und maybe you could get a party to hunt it, only der last party vot vent for it vos frozen prutty bad, und dey comes back midout der gold."

"Have you the map?" asked Fred, anxious to see the document.

"Yah, but if I consents to let you search, I vill only give you a copy. If you don't come back, my map would be lost. Maybe it would be better if it vos lost, den noboddies would try for dot treasure, any more."

"If it's there it ought to be found, Mrs. Stults. The gold is no good buried out of sight."

"Dot's so. Vell, maybe I gives you a copy of der map. I have to dink it ofer. You comes back in an hour, und I lets you know."

Fred was anxious to know right away, but he could not very well urge the widow to hasten her decision. So he went out and wandered about the streets, occasionally looking at a clock in a [36]

jeweler's window, to see if the hour was not up. He was back probably a minute or so ahead of the time.

"Vell," said Mrs. Stults slowly, after she had admitted him, "I haf considered it, und I am villing dot you should haf a try for der treasure."

"And can I have a copy of the map?"

"Yah. Widout it you could do noddings. I vill haf my lawyers draw up a copy for you, und you also has to sign a papers."

"What kind of a paper?"

"You must promise to bear all of der expenses of der expedition, you und your friends, und I must have half der treasure, if you finds him. Vill you do dot?"

"That I will, Mrs. Stults."

"Den come here dis afternoon, und I vill haf der map copy und der papers ready for you. You vos a smart boy. Maybe you vos succeed vere der oders fail. Anyhow I trust you, because of der letter from Old Bill. Now come back dis afternoon. Good-by, Willy. Vos dot your name?"

"No, my name is Fred—Fred Stanley."

"Vell, Fred, den. Vos you any relations to dot man vot discovered many t'ings in Africa?"

[37]

"You mean Henry M. Stanley?"

"Yah."

"No. I think not."

"Vell, anyhow, maybe you vos be as better a discoverer as him. Come dis afternoon."

[38]

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD GOLD HUNTER

Fred thought the hour would never arrive when he might again call on Mrs. Stults. But, of course, it came around in due course, and he was there on time. He found the widow seated in her parlor, with a bundle of papers on a table near her, and a man sitting in a chair by a window.

"Here is dot Fred boy, vot I tell you about," said Mrs. Stults to the man.

"Ah, yes. He seems quite young to undertake such work as hunting for the lost treasure."

"Dot's vot I tells him."

"I'll grow older," remarked Fred, with a smile, "and I am used to hard work and exposure. I have done considerable camping out."

"Yes, but not in such a cold country as Alaska, young man."

"No, sir, but I expect to prepare for it."

"Dis is mine lawyer," explained Mrs. Stults, "Mr. Ackerman. He vill make out der papers."

"Mrs. Stults has told me what you want to do," went on Mr. Ackerman. "I see no objection to it, provided you can get your father or some other men interested. I have drawn up an agreement by which you are required to give Mrs. Stults half the gold you discover."

[39]

"I am willing to do that."

"Then if you will sign it, I will give you a copy of the map, and such directions as the late Mr. Stults left. I must warn you that they are not very clear, and, even with the aid of the map, many men have tried to find the gold, but have failed."

"I may fail also," admitted Fred, "but I am going to try."

"That is the right spirit. I wish you all success."

The papers were signed, a duplicate being given Fred. Mrs. Stults affixed her name, the lawyer put his down as a witness, and Fred received a copy of the map, and some directions how to find the gold. He glanced over the latter, and had to admit that they were rather vague. He hoped, however, when he was on the scene, to make them available.

"I'll let you know when we start, Mrs. Stults," he said. "I can't tell how soon I can get some men interested."

"Oh, dot's all right," replied the German widow. "It don't make so much difference ven you vos start, as it does ven you comes back. Dot's vot I vant to know—ven you comes back, mit der gold."

[40]

"Yes, that is the main part," added the lawyer. "Mrs. Stults has allowed several persons to hunt for the gold, but, so far, not one has come anywhere near finding it."

"Maybe I'll have better luck," said Fred, as he bade the lawyer and the widow good-by, and took his departure for home.

He had been more successful than he dared to hope, in getting the map, and his first thought was that he would use what little remaining money he had, and ride as far on the railroad as it would take him. He wanted to get home quickly with the news.

Then he reflected that there was no special hurry; that it would take some little time to organize an expedition, and he would need all the money he had. So he decided to walk back, taking his time, so as to arrive in good condition.

But, unconsciously, perhaps, the thought of the treasure and the fact that he was now in a position to start after it, quickened his steps, and he made the return trip in much less time than he had spent on the first half of his journey.

"Well, Fred!" exclaimed his father, as his son entered the house, "we didn't expect you until tomorrow. I suppose you couldn't reach any agreement with the widow, and had to come back." [41]

"No, dad, I was successful."

"You don't mean to say she gave you the map?"

"Not exactly the map, but a copy of it, which is just as good."

"And permission to hunt for the treasure?"

"Yes, dad."

"Oh, Fred! Are you going off to that terrible cold country?" asked his mother, who came into the room just then, and heard the closing part of the conversation.

"Well, mother, don't you think it's worth trying for? Think of getting thousands of dollars in gold!"

"Yes, but it wouldn't make up for being frozen to death."

"No, mother—but I don't expect to freeze to death. We will take fur-lined clothes along."

"Where are you going to get them? I used to have a fur-lined cloak once, but the moths ate it up."

"I'm afraid it would hardly have answered, if you had it now, mother. But of course that's a part I've got to talk over with father—about fitting out the expedition."

"And I'm afraid you'll have trouble," remarked Mr. Stanley. "Oh, if I was only well and strong I'd ask nothing better than to go along!"

His words caused a little feeling of sadness, but it soon passed away, and Fred's father and mother listened with interest to his account of the trip to Denville. [42]

"Now, father, what would you advise me to do?" asked Fred, when he had concluded. "We need to get some man, who has money, interested in this venture, for it will cost something to fit out the expedition. Do you know of any one among your acquaintances, who would take the risk?"

Mr. Stanley was silent for several seconds. He was in deep thought. Then he suddenly exclaimed:

"Fred! I believe I know the very man."

"Who, dad?"

"Simon Baxter. He is an old gold hunter, as well as a miner. He has gone on several expeditions of this kind, and he has traveled in the far north. He would be the very man."

"Is he well off?"

"Yes, he is quite rich."

"Do you think he would go; and provide the money?"

"Ah, that is another question. But it would do no harm to see him, and find out. He lives about five miles from here, with his son Jerry, who is about your age, Fred."

"Perhaps Jerry would go along. Then he and I could have a good time together."

"He might. He is a strong, hearty lad, about your build. I will write a letter to Mr. Baxter, and you can take it to him. You were so successful with the widow Stults, where I did not think you would be, that, perhaps, you can prevail on this old gold hunter to finance the expedition. He and I are old friends, though I have not seen him in some time." [43]

"Write the letter at once, dad, and I'll take it to him."

"Aren't you tired, after your long tramp?"

"No. Besides, I am so anxious that I can't rest."

"Very well. I'll write the letter at once."

After dinner Fred started out, this time on a shorter journey, bearing a letter to Mr. Baxter, explaining matters.

Fred found the old gold hunter in his garden, pulling weeds from an onion patch.

"Well?" he asked, as Fred came up the walk.

"Here is a letter for you, Mr. Baxter."

The old miner read it through slowly. Then he started on it a second time. Finally, when he had again gotten to the end, he asked:

"Are you Fred Stanley?"

"I am, sir."

"And you want me to leave my quiet life here, let my garden all grow up to weeds, and go chasing off to Alaska after a lot of gold that we'll probably never find."

"We might find it; and, as for the garden, isn't there some one you can leave in charge?"

[44]

"Nobody knows how to take care of my garden but myself," said the man. "Especially my onion bed. I'm very fond of onions. Are you?"

"No, sir, I don't like them."

"Great mistake! Great mistake! Everyone ought to eat onions. They're the healthiest vegetable that grows. Guess I'll have one now," and he pulled a green one from the ground, wiped the earth from it, and chewed it with every indication of satisfaction.

"But—about the gold expedition," said Fred, thinking the old man had forgotten all about it.

"The gold? Oh, yes. I was thinking whether I hadn't better plant more onions. It hardly seems enough to tide me over the winter, but I'll have to make 'em do. The gold, hum—let me see."

He got up from his knees, read Mr. Stanley's letter over again, folded it carefully, placed it in the envelope, placed the envelope in his pocket, and then said:

"Come into the house, young man."

[45]

CHAPTER VII

OFF FOR ALASKA

Striding on ahead, Mr. Baxter led the way to the porch of a fine country house. Fred followed, hardly knowing what to think. Certainly the man's manner was not very encouraging, but the boy had not yet lost hope.

"Sit down," said the old gold hunter, indicating a big chair on the porch. Fred took it, and Mr. Baxter seated himself near the boy. Then he read the letter over again.

"How's your father?" he asked suddenly, as though that was the chief matter in his mind.

"Not very well."

"I'm sorry to hear that. He's a fine man."

Then Mr. Baxter seemed lost in thought.

"How much gold did Stults bury?" he asked at length.

"I don't know, sir."

"Hum. I'm glad you said that. I was afraid you might have an idea that it was a million or more. I've heard all sorts of stories about the Stults treasure, but I never took any stock in 'em. Now it begins to look as if there was something in it. Tell me all you know about it."

[46]

Fred did so to the best of his ability, taking in from the time Mr. Gardner first related the story to him to his interview with Mrs. Stults.

"And you want me to finance the expedition, eh?" asked the old gold hunter.

"My father hoped you might be willing to."

"What was your idea of how much my share should be in case we found the gold, young man?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Of course Mrs. Stults will get her half."

"Yes. And how much would you get?"

"I'd be willing to leave that to you."

"You wouldn't want all the other half then?" asked Mr. Baxter, but, by the smile on his face, Fred knew the old man was only joking.

"I'll leave it to you," he repeated.

"Hum. Well, I've been thinking this thing over in the last few minutes, and I don't know but what I'll go in with you."

At these words Fred's heart gave a bound. He already saw himself possessed of several thousand dollars, and his father and mother placed beyond the necessity of worrying over money matters.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed.

"Wait a bit," advised Mr. Baxter. "I haven't finished. I am willing to finance the expedition and go after the gold. I think I'll take my son Jerry along, and we'll need another man, or maybe two." [47]

"Can't I go?" asked Fred, fearing he was to be left behind.

"Yes, I am coming to that. You can go along, and your share will be one-third of half the treasure."

"I'm satisfied with that."

"It may seem that I am taking the larger part," went on Mr. Baxter, "but that is not so. It will cost quite a sum to fit out the expedition, and then there is the risk of failure. If we find the gold we will set aside one-half for the widow of the man who hid it. The remainder we will divide into three parts, and you shall have one. I calculate another third will pay for the expedition, and cover my expenses and the hire of whatever men I may have to engage. That will leave one-third clear for me, so, you see, I am really going shares with you. Is that satisfactory?"

"Indeed it is, Mr. Baxter."

"I am glad you think so. Of course, there is a big risk involved. We may fit out an expensive expedition and end up in failure. But I am willing to take that chance. I have hunted for buried treasure before. Sometimes I have been successful, and more often I have failed. I am getting along in years, but I don't want to retire just yet. So we will go to Alaska for the gold." [48]

"Hurrah!" cried Fred, unable to restrain his feelings.

"Hello, dad! What's up? Fourth of July celebration?" asked a lad, coming around the corner of the porch. Fred looked at the newcomer. The youth was about his own age, perhaps a bit bigger and stronger.

"No, Jerry, it isn't Fourth of July," replied Mr. Baxter. "This is Fred Stanley, son of an old friend of mine. I have just made a contract with him to go treasure hunting up in Alaska."

"Treasure hunting! In Alaska! Oh, dad! Can I go?"

"I expected that," said Mr. Baxter dryly. "Do you think you can stand the pace, Jerry?"

"Of course, dad. Wasn't I with you in Hudson Bay last year?"

"That's so; you were. Well, I reckon you can go. Now let's get down to business."

Mr. Baxter introduced his son to Fred, and the three were soon deeply interested in arranging for the prospective expedition. As an old miner and hunter, Mr. Baxter knew just how to set about fitting out the party and about what it would cost.

"Are we three the only ones going?" asked Jerry.

"No, I think we'll need another man," said his father. "We'll have hard work, and those Alaskan Indians are not the most pleasant customers in the world. With another man I'll feel safer. But leave that to me." [49]

"Now, Fred, I think the best thing for you to do would be to go home and get your outfit ready. I'll tell you what you'll need in the way of clothing. That is, the ordinary garments. Of course, those for use in the cold—the fur garments—I'll supply with the rest of the things. I'll get the guns, ammunition, picks, shovels and all that. We'll have to take a warm tent along, for I think we'll have to do some camping out."

"When can we start?" asked Fred.

"It will take about two weeks to get everything in shape. In the meanwhile don't talk too much about the trip. The fewer that know about it the better it will be."

"I'll be careful."

"Now I'll write a list of what you can take from home and then you can go. I'd ask you to stay and spend a few days with us, only I'm going to be so busy that you wouldn't enjoy yourself. Give my regards to your father."

Fred promised to do this, and then, with a list of the things he would need (none of which

would have to be bought, he was glad to note, for he had them all at home) he took his departure.

"Take good care of that map," cautioned Mr. Baxter. "If that's lost the whole expedition will be up the flume, as we miners used to say." [50]

"I'll be careful of it," replied Fred.

Mr. Stanley was delighted with the success of Fred's visit to the old gold hunter. Then, for the first time, he really began to look on the trip to Alaska as a settled thing. Mrs. Stanley, also, who had been hoping that nothing would come of it, began to be alarmed. She spoke seriously to her husband when Fred was out of the house.

"Do you really think, Norman," she said, "that it will be safe to let Fred make this trip?"

"Well, my dear, why not?"

"Oh, there are so many dangers. Think of the icebergs, the polar bears, the great sea lions, the terrible cold, and all that."

"There are no icebergs to be met with on land, and I don't believe they'll meet with any wild animals worse than wolves or wild dogs. They're not to be feared as long as one has a gun. Of course it's bound to be cold, but Fred is hardy, and, with plenty of fur garments, he can be almost as comfortable as here at home. Then, my dear, you must think of the chance for making a large sum of money, and we need it very badly. It grieves me very much to see you sewing so often."

"I shouldn't mind that in the least, Norman, if only we could keep Fred home."

"Aside from the chance of finding the treasure, I am not sure but what it will be a good thing for the boy to go. It will teach him to rely on himself, and he will gain many new and valuable experiences. I know I can trust Mr. Baxter, who will take as good care of Fred as if he was his own son." [51]

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive. Besides, Fred and Jerry will be together, and they can help each other."

"Well, I suppose he'll have to go then, but I wish he was safe back."

"So do I, and with the treasure in gold. But don't worry."

"I'll try not to, but I can't help it."

Fred got his clothes together, and was waiting word from Mr. Baxter. The latter, as he informed Mr. Stanley in a letter, had not been idle. He had arranged for the passage of himself, his son, Fred, and a big colored man, named George Johnson, on a steamer sailing from San Francisco to an Alaskan port, and they were to start soon. Such supplies as they would have to take on the steamer were purchased, the remainder it was planned to buy in Alaska.

Fred had told none of his acquaintances about the trip, merely stating that he was going on a journey. Mr. Baxter, on his part, was equally reticent, so, aside from the immediate families, and Mrs. Stults and her lawyer, no one was aware of the gold-hunting expedition. [52]

On the appointed day Mr. Baxter and his son Jerry called for Fred at the latter's home. George Johnson had gone on ahead to San Francisco in charge of the baggage.

"Well, are you all ready?" asked the old gold hunter of Fred after greeting Mr. Stanley.

"All ready, sir."

"So are we. Our passage is booked in the steamer *Sea Lion*, a good name, I think. So, if you have everything packed, we'll start for San Francisco."

Good-bys were said, Mrs. Stanley clasped her son in her arms and shed a few tears, though she tried to bear up, and then, with a waving of hands, the little party of adventurers was off for Alaska. [53]

CHAPTER VIII

AMID FROST AND ICE

The railroad journey to San Francisco did not occupy a great while, and that same day Fred and his friends went aboard the *Sea Lion* as she lay at her dock, waiting the stowing of the cargo before putting off for the frozen north.

There was a big crowd aboard, for the stories of gold being found in that wonderful northern land were wilder than ever, and many thought they had but to take a trip there, walk along the coast, stuff their pockets with yellow nuggets and return wealthy forever. How different it was from this they soon found to their sorrow.

But our young treasure hunter and his friends had no such delusions. Mr. Baxter was an old

hand at the game, and, though he had been in Alaska but once before, he knew that any gold that was to be obtained by miners would be found only after hard work and much suffering. Hunting a treasure was different, and probably more hazardous and uncertain.

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George Johnson proved to be a big jolly colored man, used to hardships of all sorts, though he had never been very far north. He was of immense strength, which was the principal reason why Mr. Baxter had selected him.

The ship was almost overcrowded, so great was the rush to the gold fields. On all sides was heard only talk of great "strikes," of finds of fabulous wealth, and of how men who barely had enough to buy an outfit and pay their way to Alaska had become millionaires in a night.

"Don't believe all you hear," cautioned Mr. Baxter to his son and Fred. "If you do you'll go half crazy dreaming of gold."

"Johnson is taking it all in," remarked Jerry.

"Yes! If his eyes get much bigger they'll fall out of his head," added Fred. "One miner told him the streets in Nome were paved with gold, and he thinks all he has to do is to take up a few of the yellow blocks to make him rich."

"That's the trouble with a new gold field," said Mr. Baxter. "They circulate wild stories about it. Of course there's lots of gold in Alaska. The thing is to find it. Fred, I hope you have that map safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Better let me have it. I think I can take better care of it than you can. If some one should steal it and get ahead of us we'd be in a queer pickle."

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"That's so, dad," spoke up Jerry. "I wonder how soon this steamer sails?"

"Early to-morrow morning. That's why we came on board to-day. I don't like to get up early to catch a boat and run the chances of getting left."

The four treasure hunters occupied one stateroom with four berths, as they wanted to be together.

Fred was awakened in his berth the next morning by an uneasy motion. At first he could not understand what it was, but he soon knew that it was caused by the action of the waves on the ship.

"Are we off?" he cried.

"That's what we are," replied Mr. Baxter.

Fred and Jerry dressed and hurried out on deck. They were out of sight of land, for the steamer had sailed before daybreak, and it was now about eight o'clock.

"We're headed for Alaska!" cried Fred enthusiastically.

"Aye, aye!" answered Jerry, sailor-fashion. "And there's no telling when we'll be coming back."

"I don't want to until we get that treasure," went on Fred.

"Hush! Don't speak about it," cautioned Jerry.

At that moment a man, who, from a peculiarity in his look, was seen to have one glass eye, passed the two lads. He glanced sharply at Fred, and the boy regretted he had mentioned the treasure.

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"Do you think he heard me?" he asked Jerry in a low tone.

"I'm afraid so. But I guess it doesn't matter. He can't know what you meant, and there is any amount of treasure in Alaska. Still, it's better not to speak of it on the ship."

"I'll not after this. Say, this air makes me hungry."

"Same here. Let's go to breakfast."

Little happened on the days that followed. The *Sea Lion* steamed steadily north, and the boys were not the only ones counting the days until they should arrive on the Alaskan coast, for there were many who were taking the voyage in the hope of bettering their fortunes.

The man with the glass eye was frequently seen on deck, but, as Fred and Jerry were careful not to mention the treasure again, they paid little attention to him. Once the man, whose name Fred learned was Jacob Callack, tried to get into conversation with the lad.

"You and your friends going to prospect or buy up some claims?" asked Callack.

"Prospecting," replied Fred, for surely hunting for a buried treasure was "prospecting" for gold if anything was.

"Whereabouts?"

"We haven't quite decided," said Fred, truthfully enough, and

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then, seeing Mr. Baxter coming, he went to join him.

"Oh, you think you'll throw me off the track," murmured the man with the glass eye as Fred left him. "But I'll find out yet. Jake Callack can see more with his one eye than some folks can with two. You can't lose me so easily as all that."

As the days passed there was a noticeable change in temperature. The winter was just setting in, and winter in the northern regions means something very different from what it does in the United States.

When Fred and Jerry came on deck one morning there was a sharper tang than usual in the air.

"We'll sight ice to-day," remarked one of the sailors.

"Do you mean an iceberg?" asked Fred.

"That's what. I can tell by the smell. We'll sight a big one before night."

The sailor proved a good prophet, and that afternoon the steamer passed an immense berg, the glittering pinnacles of which towered high into the air. The presence of it added to the cold, which was becoming sharper every hour.



"The glittering pinnacles towered high in the air"

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"Time to get out our fur garments, I guess," said Mr. Baxter that night, and from the baggage he had Johnson take out thick fur coats, caps and mittens, while heavy fur-lined boots were gotten in readiness for the journey on land, which would soon begin.

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If there had been confusion on the dock in San Francisco over the sailing of the ship, there was more when she arrived at her destination and proceeded to land the passengers and stores. The *Sea Lion* went up the Yukon River as far as it was navigable for her and there docked.

There was a settlement on shore, but even in the wildest mining region of California there was nothing to equal it.

A fierce snowstorm the day before the ship arrived had covered everything with a coat of white. The cold was bitter, and even in their fur garments the little party of adventurers felt it keenly.

On every side there was a rush and confusion. Almost as many as had come on the ship wanted to take passage back in her. Some had made their fortunes and were returning happy. Others had failed to find any gold, or had lost it by theft or gambling. Some had barely enough to pay their way home.

There were only the rudest kind of shacks, which served for houses, stores and hotels.

With the help of Johnson, whose great strength stood the travelers in good stead, the baggage of the four gold hunters was landed. It was piled up on the wharf, together with that of scores of other adventurers, for so great was the gold rush that there were no facilities for caring for freight as it should be.

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"What are we going to do, dad?" asked Jerry as he and Fred gazed in wonder at the scene of confusion about them.

"Well, we'll see if we can't find quarters in some hotel, or what passes for one here. Then I'll have to see about getting guides and dog teams."

"Are we going to travel with dogs and sledges like the Eskimos?" asked Fred.

"That's about the only way we can travel where we're going," replied Mr. Baxter.

"Let's discover the north pole while we're at it," suggested Jerry jokingly.

"I'd rather discover a warm place where I could get something to eat," remarked Fred.

"Come along," invited Mr. Baxter. "If we don't hurry all the places in the hotels will be taken, and we'll have to camp out our first night here."

Fred was scarcely able to realize that he was really in Alaska; that wonderful land of gold, of which he had heard so much, and which might hold for him a great treasure. Would they find it? Would they get it safely home?

These were questions that came to the young treasure hunter, and he tried to find a hopeful answer to them as he followed Mr. Baxter and Jerry. As they turned away from the wharf, leaving Johnson in charge of their goods, the man with the glass eye arose from behind a pile of boxes.

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"I must keep my one good optic on you," he muttered. "I think you're up to something besides prospecting."

[61]

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE INTERIOR

With all the assurance of an old campaigner Mr. Baxter made his way through the throng of miners and others, down the single street of the settlement which ran along the river until he saw a hotel he thought would answer. On making inquiries he found that there was only one room left.

"We'll take it," he said promptly.

"But, dad, can we four sleep in one room?" objected Jerry.

"We'll have to, son, and we ought to be glad to get it. Many persons will have to sleep in tents while this rush is on. How much is the room?" he asked the clerk.

"Thirty dollars a day."

"Thirty dollars a day!" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes, and if you don't want it say so," snapped the clerk. "There are plenty that do."

"Oh, we'll take it," said Mr. Baxter quickly. "That's cheap, according to some prices they're asking," he added. "When ordinary meals are five dollars each, the cost of living soon runs up." [62]

"But if our expenses are going to be so high, how can we stand it until we discover the——" began Jerry.

"Hush!" interrupted Mr. Baxter. "Don't say a word about what we're after. There are too many rascals in this locality. I'll manage about the expenses."

"But meals at five dollars each!"

"Don't worry. We'll not pay that long. The prices are high because there is a big crowd just in off the steamer, and the dealers want to make hay while the sun shines. Things will go down in a day or so, when the miners begin to travel into the interior."

"But won't it cost a lot to buy our provisions at that rate?"

"It would if we had to buy them, but I brought them along with me. We will have to buy very little. The principal things we will need are dogs, sledges and guides for a certain distance. We will stay here a day or so until I can arrange about them, and then we will start for the interior."

Mr. Baxter had signed his own name and those of the two boys on the hotel register, and had taken them into a comparatively quiet corner to impart this information.

"Now, Jerry," he said, "if you and Fred will go help Johnson get our stuff up here to our room, I'll go see if I can hire some guides and sledges. Pile the stuff right in our room. That's the only place it will be safe. We'll have to rough it for a night or so, but we can stand it, I guess. My, but it's getting cold out," he added as he glanced from the window at a thermometer hanging on the side of the hotel. [63]

"How much?" asked Fred.

"Twenty-two degrees below zero."

"Twenty-two below!"

"That's nothing. Wait until it goes to forty and fifty below. Then the mercury in the ordinary thermometer freezes solid, and only spirit gauges are of any use. Then you'll feel the cold. There is no wind, fortunately, or you'd notice it even in here, with the big stove going."

They had taken off their fur garments while in the warm hotel, but, as Fred and Jerry had to go out to see about their goods, they donned them again.

It was getting dark, for, though it was early, the winter season had begun, when the sun would shine but for a little time each day, and farther north not at all for six long months.

"I should say it was cold!" exclaimed Fred when he and Jerry were outside. The keen air cut his face like a knife, and he was thankful for the thick fur garments, the heavy fleece-lined boots, and the big mittens he wore. Burying his face down below the collar of his coat, an example which Jerry followed, Fred started back to the steamer dock, while Mr. Baxter went off to see about getting guides and sledges. [64]

The boys found Johnson still on guard, but the colored man was racing up and down to get warm, and whipping his long arms about his body to keep up the circulation.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry with a laugh.

"Matter, Massa Jerry? Why, it feel laik somebody done gone an' stick a icicle down mah back, that's what it do, fo' suah! It suttin' am terrible cold."

"Well, you'll soon be warm," spoke Fred. "We're going to take the things to a hotel."

"A real hotel, where dey has real things t' eat, Massa Fred?"

"Yes, real things to eat. They charge five dollars a meal."

"Five dollars a meal! Den I reckon dis coon'll git a small po'tion ob dessert fo' his share," and the colored man laughed so heartily that he felt no necessity of whipping his arms about.

"Well, come on, let's see if we can't hire a small truck and wheel our stuff up," suggested Jerry. They were able to, but they had to pay a good price for the little vehicle, which they got from one of the men on the dock. Indeed, it seemed that you had almost to pay the weight of anything in gold in Alaska, as there were so many who wanted the same article. [65]

It took several trips by the boys and Johnson to get all the things to the hotel. There was quite a quantity of canned stuff, plenty of bacon, sugar and tea, for those are staple articles of diet in cold countries, arms and ammunition for all four, an extra supply of fur garments and sleeping bags, a heavy tent, a portable alcohol stove, cans of alcohol for fuel, and other needful supplies.

It was quite dark when they had everything in their room, and there was little space left to lie down. There were four cots in the apartment, and no bedclothes of any kind, but they expected to sleep in most of their clothes because of the cold. Mr. Baxter came back in time for supper, and it must be said, in spite of the high prices for meals, they were not very good. There was no use of finding fault, however, as there were others only too anxious to get the accommodations our travelers had secured at the hotel.

"Did you get the dogs, sleds and guides, dad?" asked Jerry when they had gathered to look over their supplies that night in their room.

"Yes, but I had to pay higher than I calculated on. It seems there has been a new strike made, and there is a great rush of miners to it. Guides can get whatever pay they ask, and as for dogs and sleds, you might almost as well buy them as hire them, only no one will sell. But I guess we'll get along." [66]

"When do we start for the for—" began Fred.

"Fred, you must be more careful," cautioned Mr. Baxter in a whisper. "Don't mention the word treasure," he added in a low voice. "These hotels are constructed in a very flimsy manner, and what is said in one room can be heard in another. If any one gets an idea we are after a store of hidden gold we may be followed by some rascals who would try to steal it from us. There is practically no law in this country yet. We'll have to wage our own battles, and I don't want to get into a fight with any desperadoes, of whom there are many here, only too anxious to take advantage of any one who has gold."

"I'll be more careful," Fred promised. "When are we to start for the interior?"

"To-morrow afternoon. It will take us until then to get the dogs and sleds here and have our stuff packed for the trip. I have also to buy a few more supplies. Now I advise you three to stay in the room until I return. I have to go out to transact a little business, and this settlement is not a nice place for boys after dark. I'll leave you in Johnson's care."

"An' if anybody tries t' do any funny work, I'll squeeze 'em laik a grizzly bear!" threatened the colored man, stretching out his long, powerful arms. [67]

The cold to which they had been exposed made the boys sleepy, and they soon dozed off. Johnson likewise fell into a slumber, from which he was awakened by a pounding on the door.

"Who's dat?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's me. Mr. Baxter," answered the old gold hunter. "I guess I'll turn in now. Everything is all ready for to-morrow."

They all slept soundly, though there was much noise and excitement all night, for a lawless element was abroad, and there were several shooting affrays among the gamblers and miners, but fortunately no one was seriously hurt.

Soon after breakfast, which was not much of an improvement on the supper, a sled arrived with some supplies which Mr. Baxter had purchased at one of the stores. The things were piled up outside the hotel, together with the goods they had brought from San Francisco, and a little later several Alaskan Indians, driving four dog teams, attached to long, low wooden sleds, came down the snow-covered street.

"That's our outfit," announced Mr. Baxter. "I see Holfax is on time."

"Who's Holfax?" asked Fred. [68]

"He's the chief guide, and seems a fairly decent chap. I can't say as much for the others."

Certainly none of them would have taken a prize in a beauty contest. They were typical Alaskan Indians, short and stout, not too clean, but of that one could not judge very well, for they were so wrapped up in furs that only their noses and eyes were visible.

There were eight Indians, two in charge of each sled, to each of which was fastened eight dogs by thongs of reindeer hide. The animals were snarling and snapping in an ugly manner, and the Indian drivers called harsh words to them, or struck them with the long lash of the whip, which

they used with great skill, being able to touch a particular dog on any available spot from the farthest end of the sled.

"Load up, Holfax," ordered Mr. Baxter, indicating the goods.

"We load. Pretty soon go quick," replied the head Indian. Then he called something to his companions in the native tongue, and they began to lash the supplies on the sleds.

"Are we going to ride or walk?" asked Fred.

"Ride," answered Mr. Baxter. "There are only four Indians going with us. The rest came merely to help load, as that is a matter which must be carefully attended to. The dogs will be able to pull two persons on each sled, in addition to the load. I am afraid we are going to be in for some cold weather. The thermometer is still going down. It's thirty below zero now. Be careful not to expose your fingers, boys, or they'll be frozen inside of five minutes. And look out for the end of your nose."

[69]

The loading was rapidly proceeded with, quite a crowd of men gathering to see the expedition leave. It was no great novelty, but one so well equipped and so large did not often start from that settlement. When the last package had been lashed on the sleds, and when Mr. Baxter, Johnson and the boys, with their rifles under their arms, were ready to get on, a man came strolling up the street. He was the man with a glass eye, though his face was so deep down in his fur collar that this defect could hardly be seen.

"Off for the gold region?" he asked Mr. Baxter, and at the sound of the voice Fred knew the man was the same one who had questioned him on the ship—Jake Callack.

"Yes, we're off prospecting, stranger."

"Well, good luck."

"Thank you."

"Get on, boys," said Mr. Baxter, taking his place.

Fred, Jerry and Johnson sat on the big sleds in little hollows left at the rear when the goods were packed on. Mr. Baxter did likewise. The Indian drivers sitting in front yelled to the dogs and cracked their long whips. At that moment the man with the glass eye leaned over and said something in a whisper to Zank, one of the guides, the one on the leading sled, on which rode Johnson.

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The Indian looked up, nodded, and then, with a louder yell to his dogs, set them off at a fast pace. The treasure hunters were on their way to the interior after the store of buried gold.

[71]

CHAPTER X

ATTACKED BY WOLVES

After a careful examination of the map, which he had studied while aboard the ship, Mr. Baxter decided that the treasure had been hidden by Stults in a certain mountain range about three hundred miles away from the settlement where they had outfitted. These mountains lay in a northwesterly direction from the town, and were in a desolate region, where, now that winter had set in, there was much snow and ice.

It was Mr. Baxter's plan to proceed to this mountain range by the most direct way and then to make a camp. From this camp, after a more careful study of the map, while actually in the region it referred to, he could start out after the treasure. Just where it was located of course he did not know. The map showed a small stream flowing down the side of the mountain, and there was a waterfall about midway of the course. It was near this fall that Stults said he had hidden the gold in a natural cave.

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But, as he had buried it during the summer, and as a winter scene is very different from a summer one, and as the stream would be frozen and probably covered from sight with snow, finding the gold was not going to be a very easy task, Mr. Baxter feared.

The dogs drew the party swiftly onward, for, though the sleds were heavily laden, the runners slipped easily over the frozen surface. It was becoming colder, and the wind created by their speed cut into the faces of the travelers.

The Indians did not seem to mind the wind, but kept yelling and shouting to their dogs, urging them to still faster speed. Perhaps this shouting and the swinging of the long whips kept the Alaskans warm. But Mr. Baxter, the boys and the colored man felt the cold very much in spite of their thick garments as they sat on the sleds.

"I should think those Indians would freeze down inside, they keep their mouths open so much, shouting," remarked Fred.

"It is a wonder they don't," agreed Jerry. "Whenever I open my mouth it feels as if some one

had stuffed an icicle in."

"By the way, boys," said Mr. Baxter as his sled came opposite Fred's and Jerry's, "did it strike you that there was anything familiar about that man who wished us good luck as we were coming away?"

[73]

"Yes, he's the man with the glass eye who tried to get some information from me while we were on the ship," answered Fred.

"I thought so."

"And I think he said something to the driver of Johnson's sled," went on Fred.

"That's what I thought, too," said Jerry's father. "I wonder what it meant? I don't like that man's actions. I hope we can trust our guides."

"Why, are they liable to do us any harm?" asked Fred.

"Well, there are good Alaskan Indians and bad ones. I tried to hire good ones, but there are many thieves among them, and, now that they know the value of gold, they are as wild after it as any white men."

"Do you think you can trust our men?"

"I hope so. I am sure Holfax is all right, for he was recommended to me by an old miner whom I know. As for the others, I'll have to be on the lookout."

"Johnson's driver seems to be hanging back, as if he wanted to find out what we are talking about," said Fred suddenly.

"So he does. Holfax," said Mr. Baxter quickly, "make go fast—run dogs," and he motioned to Zank, whose team of snarling animals was going very slowly.

[74]

Holfax, who was in charge of the other Indians, called out something. Zank answered in what seemed to be angry tones, but he shouted to his dogs, and once more they took the lead.

"We'll have to watch that fellow," murmured Mr. Baxter.

Their way now lay over a small range of hills, and as they got on top the cruel cold smote them more and more. The day was a cloudy one, and the wind sprang up, sending the dry snow in stinging particles into their faces.

"My feet haven't any more feeling in them," said Fred at length, "and my hands are like wooden ones."

"Is that so?" asked Mr. Baxter quickly. "Then you must get off and run a bit. Your circulation is going back on you, and you'll be frost-bitten if you don't look out. We'll all get off and run beside the sleds. That will warm us up. In about an hour we will stop and have tea."

"I should think coffee would be better," suggested Fred.

"Tea is the best drink in all cold countries," replied the old gold hunter. "Coffee is too stimulating, but tea warms you up without doing any harm. In Russia, when a man gets chilled through, he will often drink seventeen or eighteen glasses of hot tea, one right after the other. They use glasses instead of cups there."

[75]

"I guess one or two will be all I can stand," replied Jerry. "I'm no great hand for tea."

"You'll like it up here," said his father, and he was right.

Mr. Baxter called to Holfax to stop the dog teams, and the four travelers got off. They were all so cold and stiff they could hardly stand, but a little motion soon started the blood to circulating, and they felt better. The dogs were driven at a slower pace, and the gold hunters ran alongside of the sleds.

When thoroughly warmed through Mr. Baxter called a halt and got out the alcohol stove to make tea. For water they used melted snow, and then Mr. Baxter cautioned the boys and Johnson against ever eating snow or ice when thirsty. It would cause sore mouths, he said, and they would suffer great pain.

It seemed rather strange to sit down out of doors in that icy region and drink hot tea, but every one admitted that it was an excellent drink. Then the journey was resumed until a sudden increase in the gloom warned the travelers that night was coming on.

"We'll make camp now," said Mr. Baxter, and he gave the orders to Holfax.

The Indians drew the sleds up in the form of a square, and when robes were spread over them, this would form their shelter. As for the others, the tent was erected, snow being piled around the bottom to keep out the wind. Then, when the alcohol stove was set up inside and a simple meal started, the place was more warm and cozy than one would at first suppose was possible.

[76]

"Why, I believe it's warm enough to take off our fur coats," said Fred.

"Yes, you can do that," spoke the old miner. "We'll get into our sleeping bags soon."

The Indians were expert in making camp, and soon the dogs were tethered off to one side, and were snarling and snapping over their supper of frozen seal blubber. After that they burrowed down under the snow to keep warm.

"I guess we're in for a cold spell," remarked Mr. Baxter as he looked at the thermometer he had hung outside the tent. "It's forty-one below now, but the wind doesn't blow, and that makes it better. With a stiff gale now we'd be in a bad way."

"Is it liable to get any colder?" asked Fred.

"It's liable to, but I hope it doesn't. This is all I want."

There was nothing to do but to go to bed, which they were glad enough to do, as they would be warm in the sleeping bags. Seeing that the tent was securely fastened, and that their rifles were ready at hand, Mr. Baxter turned in. The boys were already asleep, for cold has the effect of making one drowsy. [77]

It was long after midnight when Fred was awakened by a series of loud howls outside the tent. At the same time Mr. Baxter and Jerry sat up.

"What's that?" asked Fred.

"The dogs must have gotten loose and want something to eat," said Jerry.

"Those are not dogs," replied Mr. Baxter. "I know those howls only too well."

"What are they?" asked Fred.

"A pack of wolves. Boys, get your rifles ready. Unless I'm mistaken we're going to have trouble. The animals are probably wild with hunger, and have gotten scent of our camp." [78]

CHAPTER XI

SHOOTING A MOOSE

It was the work of but an instant for the travelers to slip on their big fur coats, and they were ready to go outside, for going to bed in the arctic regions is more a process of dressing than undressing, and they had lain down with even more clothes on than they wore during the day.

Mr. Baxter, kicking his sleeping bag to one side, loosed the fastenings of the tent and stepped out. He was followed by Fred and Jerry, Johnson coming last.

Fred was not prepared for the wonderful sight that met his gaze. At first he thought he had been transported back to his own home, and that a Fourth of July celebration was in progress. The sky was streaked with long streamers of colored fire that waved and undulated to and fro, beginning at the horizon and extending to the zenith.

"The Northern Lights!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter.

Then Fred understood that he had looked for the first time on the wondrous and beautiful Aurora Borealis. [79]

Suddenly the peacefulness of the night was once more broken by the fierce howls, and this time they were answered by the sled dogs, who, raising their sharp muzzles in the air, sent their answering challenge to the wolves.

"There they are!" cried Fred, pointing to a dark mass on the white, snowy expanse. "They're headed this way."

"Are your rifles ready?" asked Mr. Baxter. "We'll probably have to fight them off."

"Will they attack us?" asked Jerry.

"Wolves have to be in large numbers or desperate with hunger before they will tackle a man," said his father. "Especially where there is such a large number as there are of us. But they may fight with our dogs and injure them, and that would be the worst thing that could happen to us, as we have to depend entirely on the dogs for traveling here."

"They are coming closer," remarked Fred.

"Yes. It's curious the Indians don't awaken. I think I'll call them."

Mr. Baxter stepped toward the enclosure of sleds, tipped on their sides, which formed the Indians' camp. There was a small fire burning in the center, and grouped around it, with their feet toward the embers, were the dog-drivers. They were huddled up in their fur blankets, sound asleep. Holfax said afterward that it takes more than the howling of wolves to awaken an Alaskan Indian tired out with a day's work. [80]

But at a call from Mr. Baxter the four guides sat up suddenly. They did not need to be told what the matter was, for the wolves were now quite close, and were howling fiercely, while the

dogs were trying to break the thongs that held them, so that they might seek a place of safety.

For, though an Alaskan or Eskimo dog is really a species of wolf, it is no match in a fight for the wilder creature.

In a few minutes the Indians had the dogs safely inside the square of sleds, and not a moment too soon, for the foremost of the pack of wolves snapped at the heels of Holfax as he led the last dog in.

"Now, boys, let them have it!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter as he fired his repeating rifle several times into the midst of the ravenous pack. There were howls of pain, and several forms stretched out on the snow told how effective had been his aim.

Jerry and Fred fired together, and Johnson coming to their help, they had four rifles to turn against the savage creatures.

It was a wild scene, encamped there as they were on that dreary expanse of snow, with the mysterious Northern Lights flashing overhead, giving a weird illumination, the snarling wolves fairly surrounding the tent, and the frightened Indians guarding the whimpering dogs.

[81]

It did not need an expert marksman to find a target in that pack. There must have been at least fifty wolves in it, and their hunger had made them exceedingly daring. They leaped against the sleds, and tried with their keen teeth to bite through the lashings to get at the frozen fish and seal blubber which formed the rations for the dogs.

"Give 'em some more!" cried Mr. Baxter. "They are coming closer!"

Indeed some of the wolves had actually invaded the tent, hoping to find something to eat there. The rifles cracked, the wolves howled and the dogs yelped, while the Indians called to one another in their harsh tongue, asking if their white masters would be able to drive off the foe.

Fred and Jerry were firing as fast as they could work the ejection levers and triggers of their guns. At first they did not notice the cold, but after a few shots the piercing frost began to numb their fingers, for they had taken off their big, heavy mittens, which made it impossible to work their guns, and had on only light gloves.

"My fingers are too stiff to pull the trigger!" exclaimed Fred as he vainly tried to fire another shot. "They feel like pieces of ice."

"So do mine," added Jerry.

[82]

"Give 'em one more volley and I think we'll scatter 'em," called Mr. Baxter as he and Johnson fired again.

The boys managed to do it, though the cold, which was intense, was making itself felt more and more. But the tide had turned. More than half the wolves had been killed and a number wounded, for it was impossible to miss, firing into the midst of the pack as they did. With snarls of baffled rage the remainder of the fierce creatures withdrew to some distance, and, sitting down on their haunches, howled dismally, with their muzzles lifted in the air toward the flickering Aurora Borealis. The dogs howled back in answer, and then, after a few shots at long distance, the battle was ended. The wolves turned tail and trotted off across the snow-covered waste.

"It's lucky we heard them in time," commented Mr. Baxter, "or they might have been the means of depriving us of all our dogs. Then we would have had to give up the expedition for the time being."

As it lacked several hours to morning, and as every one was cold, Mr. Baxter had Johnson make a big pot of tea, some of which was served to the Indians. The beverage warmed every one up, and then the treasure hunters once more crawled into the sleeping bags, where they remained until the sun, coming just a little way up, told them another day had begun. The sun did not rise very high, and the day was of short duration, but the Aurora Borealis at night partly made up for the short visits of Old Sol.

[83]

Breakfast was a short meal, as indeed were all the ones that they had in that cold clime, for it is not pleasant to linger sitting down with the thermometer hovering around thirty below zero. The dogs, who always seemed ravenous, were tossed some frozen whitefish, which they bolted almost whole. Then the harness was adjusted, the sleds looked to and the start made.

Though the dogs were capable of great speed and endurance, even while pulling the heavy sleds, which each contained a load of over four hundred pounds, Mr. Baxter had given orders that the animals were not to be driven to their utmost. He wanted to be sure of reaching his destination and getting back.

It was about noon when, having passed through a gloomy stretch of woodland, they came out on a vast, level snow-plain which seemed to stretch away for many miles. At the farther end was a low range of mountains.

"Those are the mountains we are headed for," said Mr. Baxter in a low voice to the two boys. "There is where we will begin to search."

They knew by that he meant that was where the treasure might be hidden.

[84]

Suddenly Fred, whose sled was in advance, uttered a cry, and pointed to what seemed like a black rock on the snow.

"What is it?" called Mr. Baxter.

"A moose! A big moose! I'm going to have a shot at it!"

As he spoke Holfax gave a cry, and the dogs of all the sleds stopped. Fred was busy loosening the fur robe that covered him in order to get up.

"Take the snowshoes!" advised Mr. Baxter.

The driver of Fred's sled must have understood, for he handed the boy a pair of the contrivances which enable one to walk on top of soft snow. Fred, with the Indian's aid, quickly adjusted them. By this time the moose, which had been nosing under the snow to get the mosses which grow there, and on which it feeds, lifted its immense head with the sweeping horns.

"Oh! He's a beauty!" cried Fred. "I wonder if I can get him?"

"I'll help!" cried Jerry.

"No, let Fred see if he can't get it alone," advised Mr. Baxter.

With a snort the big animal was off, but the snow was deep, and it sank down at every step. Holding his rifle in readiness, Fred glided forward on the snowshoes. They gave him a great advantage over the beast, for otherwise he would not have been able to get anywhere near it. [85]

As it was, even with sinking to its shoulders at every plunge, the big brute was slowly distancing the boy. Fred determined on a long shot, for he was a fair marksman. Taking as good aim as he could in the excitement of the moment, he fired.

The moose plunged on.

"You've missed!" cried Jerry.

Fred fired once more. But there was no need. By great good luck his one bullet had reached a vital spot, and a moment later the big moose sank down in the snow. [86]

CHAPTER XII

LOST IN THE SNOW

With shouts of joy at the prospect of plenty of fresh meat, the Indians leaped from the sleds, donned showshoes, and were soon at the side of the dead moose. Mr. Baxter, Jerry and the colored man followed.

"Yo' suah am a good shot, Massa Fred," complimented Johnson. "I once shot a wild turkey, an' goodness, I was so puffed up I hardly knowed mahself."

"I guess it was more due to good luck than anything else that I hit him," said Fred modestly.

"Well, it's just in time for dinner," remarked Mr. Baxter. "It will be a welcome relief from the canned stuff."

"I'se gwine t' look out fo' suthin' t' shoot after dis," announced Johnson. Absent-mindedly he had taken off his heavy mittens to feel of the antlers of the moose, and without thinking what he was doing, he took hold of his rifle barrel in his bare hand. The next instant he uttered a howl of anguish. [87]

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Baxter quickly.

"Mah hand! It's froze fast t' mah gun! Ah cain't git it off!"

This was true. So intense was the cold that the moment the colored man placed his warm and somewhat moist hand on the steel the flesh had frozen fast. This is a common occurrence in the far north, and travelers, knowing it, are careful never to grasp anything of metal in their bare hands. But the colored man, though he had been warned against this, had forgotten it.

"Quick! Put some snow on and then wrap his hand up in a blanket!" called Mr. Baxter. "He'll lose a finger or two if we don't."

It was the work of but an instant for Fred to scoop up some snow in his big mitten, place it over the negro's hand and part of the rifle barrel and then throw a fur robe over his whole arm, thus shutting out the terrible cold for a moment. The treatment was effective, the snow melted the ice between Johnson's hand and the metal, and in a few seconds the hand had thawed loose.

"It done feel jest laik a burn," remarked Johnson as he drew on his mitten again.

"Yes, intense cold such as we are now in does feel for a moment almost like heat to the naked flesh," said Mr. Baxter. "Let this be a lesson to all of us. We must exercise the greatest care, or [88]

some of us will have frost-bitten hands or feet, to say nothing of our noses."

By this time the Indians were skinning and cutting up the moose. It would have been hard work in a region where everything froze solid almost the minute life left it, but Holfax and his men built a big fire, and in the warmth of that they worked. Every one had a good dinner, even the dogs, who feasted to their hearts' content on moose meat. Some was left to freeze, to be packed on the sleds for future use.

Once more they started the dogs northward, the day soon coming to a close, as the short-lived sun went down, and the Northern Lights began to play.

Their camp that night was not disturbed by any wolves, and they made an early start the next day, coming a few miles nearer to the mountains which they hoped held the store of buried gold.

As they approached a region where the going would be hard, for it was mostly up hill, Mr. Baxter decided to make a camp where they could remain a day or so to give the dogs a chance to rest. Some of the animals had sore feet, where they had been cut by the sharp ice, and, as the dogs were their only means of transportation, it was necessary to take good care of them.

Accordingly they stopped that afternoon on the edge of a big wood which, Holfax said, would take them two days to get through. It was a gloomy forest, stretching for miles and miles throughout the heart of Alaska, and beyond it lay the mountain range where Stults, the German hunter, had been pursued by the fierce Indians, to escape from whom he had hidden his gold. [89]

The tent was put up for the adventurers, and the Indians made themselves a shelter of the sleds, heaping snow up around them and spreading blankets across the top. Then, with a good fire, there was more comfort than at first would seem possible to get in a country where, at that season, it was seldom warmer than ten or fifteen degrees below zero.

They slept better that night than they had any previous one since starting on their land journey, for the terrible cold had somewhat abated. The next day the sun shone brightly, and the two boys decided to take a little trip for exercise, since sitting on a sled, weighted down by fur robes, had made their muscles stiff.

They put on their snowshoes, and with their rifles started off. They hoped they might see another moose, or a musk ox, or, at least, an Arctic fox, at which to take a shot.

"Don't go too far," cautioned Mr. Baxter. "There's no telling when a snowstorm may come up, and you can lose your way very easily up here." [90]

They started off, and, as Holfax had said it was rather dangerous to go into the forest because of the numbers of fierce wolves that might be there, they moved southward across the plain over which they had just come.

The sun shone brightly on the snow, which was unrelieved by a single dark object. It was one vast extent of dazzling white.

At first it was beautiful, so still and quiet, and with the sun up there was some relief from the piercing cold, that even seemed to strike through their thick garments. But there was a danger they did not know about.

"See tracks of anything?" asked Fred when they had gone some distance and were out of sight of the camp, which was down in a sort of hollow.

"No. Do you?"

"Not a thing. Let's keep on a little farther."

They walked on for perhaps another mile, their snowshoes making travel easy. But there was no sight of game. Not even a wolf showed itself.

"Guess we'd better go back," remarked Fred at length. "There doesn't seem to be anything here. Say, my eyes smart something fierce. How about yours?"

"Mine do, too. I wonder what it is?"

"I don't know. Say, the sun must be going down. It's getting dark. We must have been out longer than we thought." [91]

"That's so. Come on back. My, but it's getting dark suddenly."

"It certainly is. Why, Jerry, I can't seem to see anything! Where are you?"

"Right here, but I can't see you. I wonder what the trouble is? Do you think there's going to be a blizzard?"

Fred was waving his hand in front of his face. To his horror he could not see it. Before his eyes was nothing but blackness. Then he uttered a cry of fear.

"What is it?" asked Jerry. "What's the matter? I can't see you, Fred."

"Jerry!" cried the young treasure hunter. "We're blind!"

"Blind?"

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE WILDERNESS

Blindly groping about, the two boys located each other by the sounds of their voices.

"We mustn't get separated," said Fred. "That would be terrible. Oh, how my eyes hurt!"

"So do mine. It's just like once when some pepper blew in them. What shall we do?"

"I don't know. We must think. Wait a minute. I'll take my belt and fasten it to yours. Then we can't lose each other, and we'll have our hands free," for in their despair the two lads were holding each other's hands.

Fred held his gun between his knees that it might not sink down in the snow. Then he fastened his belt to Jerry's. Neither of the boys could see a foot in advance. It was just as if there was a black veil in front of their faces, and, though the sun shone brilliantly on the white snow, they could not distinguish it.

"Now what shall we do?" asked Jerry. "Have you any idea which way the camp is?"

[93]

"I remember that as we came away from it the wind was at our backs."

"Then if we walk with the wind in our faces we ought to get somewhere near it."

"That's so. Let's try it."

Stepping out cautiously, for they could not see where they set their feet, the boys advanced. It was like walking in the darkest night.

"Do you think they'll come to look for us?" asked Jerry.

"Perhaps; but they won't think we're in this plight until quite late, if it ever does occur to them. Then it will be dark, and they can't see our tracks in the dark."

"Maybe the Indians can."

"Perhaps; but I doubt it."

"Then what shall we do? If we have to stay out in the open all night we'll freeze to death. It's getting colder. I guess the sun must be going down."

"I'm afraid so," replied Fred. He felt that, in a measure, he was responsible for Jerry's plight, as he had been instrumental in organizing the expedition. It was getting much colder, and the wind was almost as cutting as a knife blade. It whipped stinging particles of snow into their faces, but they dared not turn their heads aside, as, if they did, they feared they would never get anywhere near camp.

[94]

"I have it!" cried Fred suddenly when they had proceeded cautiously some distance. "Why didn't we think of it before?"

"What?"

"Firing our guns! They may hear them in camp and come after us."

"That's so. Here goes!"

Jerry pointed his rifle in the air and pulled the trigger. The report, coming in that great stillness, sounded like a clap of thunder.

"We'll take turns at it, firing every five minutes, as near as we can judge," said Fred. "That ought to tell them something is wrong with us."

They put this plan into operation, walking slowly on in the intervals of firing as nearly in the direction of the camp as they could judge. They could see absolutely nothing save a sort of haze in front of their eyes, and, as the cold continued to increase, they knew the sun must have gone down.

"Can you see the Northern Lights?" asked Jerry.

"No. Can you?"

"Not a thing. Go on, it's your turn to shoot."

Following the report of Fred's gun they listened intently for an answering shot. None came. For an hour longer they walked on, firing by turns.

"I have only three more cartridges left," announced Jerry at length.

"And I have only two. This is getting serious. Maybe we're wandering away from the camp instead of toward it."

[95]

"If we are, and have to stay out in the open all night, we'll have to burrow down under the snow, the way the dogs do. I guess——"

"Hark! What's that?" asked Fred quickly.

"It's a shot!"

Fred quickly fired his rifle in answer.

"There it goes again!"

It was unmistakably a shot. Then Jerry fired, and again there came a response.

"Let's yell," suggested Fred, and they united their voices in a shout.

To their great relief they heard persons calling. The voices came nearer, and then they could distinguish Mr. Baxter's cry.

"Boys! Boys! Are you all right?" he asked anxiously.

"All right except that we're snow-blind!" replied Jerry.

"Oh, I feared you had been attacked by a pack of wolves, Jerry," said his father. "And, Fred, are you all right?"

"We're both blind!"

"Well, that will pass away. I should have warned you to wear snow goggles. I did not think you were going so far from camp, and I did not realize that the sun was so strong on the snow. We began to get worried about you a while ago, so Holfax and I started out after you. We heard your shots, and traced you by them. It's a good thing you had your guns. But come on, I'll lead you back to camp."

[96]

It did not take long to reach it, for the boys had been advancing in the right direction. They were warmed with many cups of hot tea, and after bathing their eyes in warm water their sight gradually came back, but they could not see well until the next morning.

"After this you must wear goggles; we all will," said Mr. Baxter. "Holfax has some, made from wood."

The goggles were queer affairs. They were merely pieces of wood, long enough to extend across the eyes, and wide enough to completely cover the optics. There was a narrow slit through which to look, an opening so narrow that only a little light penetrated through it. The goggles were fastened on with a piece of deer thong. Regular glasses, with metal rims, could not have been worn, as the great cold would have frozen them fast to the nose and face.

"We start through the great wilderness to-morrow," said Mr. Baxter to the boys in the tent that night. "I have been studying the map," he added, after listening to see that none of the Indians were walking too close outside the shelter. "I think we are on the right trail, though, of course, we are too far off to tell exactly. I have a plan, of which I have not told you yet."

[97]

"What is it?" asked Fred.

"I am going to get rid of all the Indian guides, save one, and he is Holfax. I know I can trust him. The others, especially Zank, I believe are thieves, and very dishonest."

"But can we get along with one?" asked Fred.

"Yes. Holfax says he can take the leading dog team, and, attaching the other dogs to the head sled, he can pilot them all. In this way, when we reach the treasure, only one Indian, and, I believe, an honest one, will know about it. Thus we will not run such a chance of being robbed."

"But what will you do with the three Indians you are going to discharge?" asked Jerry.

"They will go off to join a branch of their tribe, that is encamped not far from here. I have spoken to Holfax about it, and he says they will only be too glad to go, as the remainder of the journey is very difficult. I am going to pay them off when we camp to-morrow night, and then we will shift for ourselves."

"I hope we don't get lost again," remarked Fred.

"No; after this no one must leave camp," said Mr. Baxter. "We will make that a rule."

They started through the big wilderness the next day. The dogs, well rested, pulled the sleds at a good speed, though it was, most of the way, up a hard slope.

[98]

It was still very cold, and the travelers burrowed down in the piles of robes on the rear parts of the sleds. The Indians did not seem to mind it, though they did not have on as many garments as did the adventurers. Johnson suffered more than did any of the gold-seekers, for he was of a race that loves warmth. But he did not complain, and, when he felt too cold he got off, put on his snowshoes, and ran alongside. At times he would help pull the sleds up some steep hill.

When they made camp that night Mr. Baxter, through Holfax, as an interpreter, told the other three Indians he would no longer need their services. They seemed to take it as a matter of course, and their eyes shone greedily as they saw the bag of gold coins, from which Mr. Baxter took their pay. Only gold was used as money for the Indians.

"I hope they will have no trouble finding their tribe," said the leader of the expedition to Holfax.

"They know way," was the response. "They be in dis country many year."

"Well, give them plenty to eat, some tea, meat, and some matches to build a fire," added Mr. Baxter, for each Indian carried with him a simple camping outfit, consisting, for the most part, of a pot in which to make tea, and a frying pan to warm meat in over an open fire. [99]

"Well, good-by," said Mr. Baxter, to the three who were leaving, though they did not understand very much English.

"Goo'-by," responded Zank, with a leer that struck Fred as being rather ugly. "Me see you 'gin, maybe."

"I don't believe so," said Mr. Baxter with a smile, but Fred thought of the whispered words between the man with the glass eye and the Indian. A vague feeling of uneasiness possessed the boy. [100]

CHAPTER XIV

THE LOST MAP

Slinging over their backs the packages of food which had been given them, the three Indians started away along the ridge of the first low range of mountains, to join their tribe. The gold-seekers thought they had seen the last of them, but they did not know what the future had in store for them, nor under what circumstances they were again to see the treacherous Alaskans.

"Now we've got to rely a good bit on ourselves," said Mr. Baxter, when Zank and his two companions were out of sight. "Each one of us will have to do more work, but I think we will be better off. We are getting near to where Stults is supposed to have hidden the gold, and the fewer natives who know about it the better it will be."

He had spoken before Holfax, and Fred's face must have shown the wonder he felt, for Jerry's father remarked:

"Oh, Holfax knows what we are after. In fact we shall have to depend on him, in a measure, for he knows this country and the locality where we are going better than I do. I have told him about the map and about the treasure." [101]

"Me help to find it," replied the Indian with a grin. "But not good too many know. Some Indians bad. Me try be good."

"Yes, you do try, and I think we can trust you," added Mr. Baxter. "Now then, we must make camp. I think we had all better sleep in the tent," for it was not uncommon for white men and their negro, or Indian, helpers to occupy the same shelter in that cold country. The more persons in a tent the warmer it would be.

But the Indian had his own ideas about this. He did not like to change his way of life, and he had been so long used to burrowing under the snow, in a warm fur robe, that he preferred that method still. So he declined the shelter of the tent.

It was not as easy work as Mr. Baxter had thought it would be, to resume the journey the next day. The three dog teams, that were without drivers, seemed to know it, and got all tangled up in the harness, fighting among themselves, so it was some time before they could be separated, and fastened by long thongs to the sled in charge of Holfax. On this Mr. Baxter rode, in order to converse with the guide as to the best road to take.

The two boys, and Johnson, were entrusted with the long whips the Indians had formerly used. They tried to handle them as had the natives, in guiding the teams, but they did not have much success. [102]

However, Holfax kept a watchful eye over the wolfish canines, and whenever one of the brutes was inclined to turn tail, and attempted to haul the sled backwards, the angry voice of the Alaskan would, with a sharp reminder from the whip, send the rebel back in line with its fellows.

On and on they went, making slow progress because the trail was very poor. The second day after dismissing the three Indians they were enveloped in a blinding snowstorm, and they had to halt and make camp. It was terribly cold, so cold that a hot cup of tea would have a skim of ice over it in a minute after it was poured out. It seemed as if their very bones were frozen.

But the next day the storm ceased, and they toiled on and on, the hope of the hidden gold luring them. Once a sled overturned, and the load was spilled off, necessitating an hour's halt.

Again, one of the sled runners broke, going around a dangerous curve, and only the quickness of Fred, who leaped off and held on to the load by the thongs binding it, prevented it from toppling over into a deep ravine.

It took some time to mend the sled runner, but Holfax was equal to the emergency, and, after a day's halt, they were able to proceed. But their troubles were not at an end. The dogs grew worse and worse, and were continually fighting among themselves. They did it so often that the party could only go a mile or two, before Holfax would have to stop, and run back to separate some of the savage animals, that seemed to become more and more like wolves the farther north they went.

[103]

At last the Indian solved the problem by changing all the dogs about. With new team-mates, the animals seemed to get along better.

One afternoon, just as they were about to go into camp, Johnson, who was riding on the sled containing most of the provisions, got off, intending to unharness his dogs, and tie them. No sooner was he off the sled than the beasts ran away with it.

"Stop them! Catch them!" cried Mr. Baxter. "If they run away with that load we'll starve."

Johnson needed no urging, but, as he had not put on his snowshoes, which were on the back of the sled, he plunged up to his thighs into a deep drift, and could make only slow progress, while the broad-runner sled skimmed over the frozen snow at top speed, pulled by the wild dogs.

It looked serious for a few moments, but Holfax leaped on his sled, and with a word to his trained beasts, sent them after the runaways, rounding them up before they had gone more than a mile.

"We're getting to the end of this wilderness," remarked Mr. Baxter, when the dogs had been driven back, and camp was in process of making. "By to-morrow night we ought to be through it."

[104]

"Then where will we be?" asked Fred.

"At the edge of a big plateau, according to Holfax. That plain leads to the second range of mountains, in which is located the waterfall, near the cave of which the gold is supposed to be buried."

"I hope we find it," remarked Fred.

"So do I," added Mr. Baxter. "If we don't we'll have had a lot of trouble and expense for nothing."

Fred felt the responsibility that rested on him, but he knew he was taking the same chances as the others, though he was not risking as much as was Mr. Baxter.

It was bitter cold that night. By the spirit thermometer it was nearly fifty degrees below zero, and, wrapped up as they were, in thick furs, with a great fire going outside the tent, and the alcohol stove lighted inside, the adventurers were nearly frozen. They had to get up every now and then, and stamp their feet and throw their arms about, in order to keep the blood in circulation.

"Look at that," said Fred, as, in the glow from the alcohol stove, he pointed to a mercury thermometer they had with them. The little silver column had vanished from the tube, and the quicksilver was in a little globule at the bottom.

[105]

"Yes, it's frozen solid," remarked Mr. Baxter. "You could use it for a bullet if you wanted to. Mercury freezes at forty degrees below zero."

"Does alcohol ever freeze?" asked Jerry.

"It has been frozen, with artificial cold, at two hundred and three degrees below zero, but we are not likely to reach that here. If it got much colder than this I'd want to turn back. But I guess we're about at the frostiest part of our trip."

Hot tea served to make the travelers more comfortable, but even the effects of that wore off after a while.

"I can understand now, how those Russians can drink seventeen or eighteen cups in succession," remarked Fred. "They have to do it almost constantly to keep from getting frozen stiff."

"That's about it," admitted Mr. Baxter.

They were all glad when morning came, and they had a glimpse of the sun, even if the golden ball was not so very heating. At any rate it was more cheerful than the long night, with the mysterious Aurora Borealis flashing in the sky.

To make sure of the route for that day's travel Mr. Baxter got out the map, and he and Holfax examined it, before the dogs were hitched to the sleds.

"I think we are really in the treasure district," said the old gold hunter, as he looked at the copy of the tracing made by the German. "Here is shown the end of the forest, and the great plain over which we have to go to get to the waterfall. Well, boys, we will be there in a day or two,

[106]

now."

"That's good," remarked Fred. "I'll be glad to get back to warm, sunny California again, where I can wear ordinary clothes."

Mr. Baxter was returning the map to the fur case in which he carried it. On account of the heavy mittens he and all the adventurers had to wear, his hands were not very certain in their movements. When he had replaced the map in the case, he endeavored to slip the latter inside his fur coat, where he had a pocket in which it was kept.

But his hand slipped, and the fur case, map and all fell to the snow-covered ground. An instant later, one of the big hungry dogs, doubtless thinking it was something to eat, rushed up and made a grab for it, carrying it away in its strong jaws, and snapping and snarling at its fellow brutes that tried to take away what they supposed was a choice morsel of seal blubber.

"Catch him!" cried Mr. Baxter. "If he tears that case, and spoils the map, we'll never find the treasure!"

"I'll git him!" cried Johnson, gliding on his snowshoes after the dog. But the brute saw him coming, and ran farther off. [107]

"Hold on, or I'll shoot you!" called the negro.

"No, don't shoot!" cried Mr. Baxter. "If we lose even one dog it will go hard with us."

"He's tearing the case!" yelled Fred.

"The map is lost!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter.

"Me get him!" spoke Holfax, running up. "Me show how make dog drop map."

It was a critical moment. In another instant the strong teeth of the dog would make the map undecipherable, and the trip would end disastrously. [108]

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CAVE

With a swift motion the Indian ran to the sled containing, among other things, the food for the dogs. He burrowed beneath the fur coverings, that were firmly lashed down, to prevent the animals eating all their supplies at one meal, and brought out several frozen fish. Now the Alaskan dog loves fish above everything else, and when Holfax had tossed several on the snow, there was a mad rush of the shaggy, wolf-like creatures to secure some.

Even those dogs crowded around the one that had the map-case, ceased worrying him, and bolted to get a share of the good things so unexpectedly cast before them. The rush, and the sight of the fish, was too much for the canine thief. He dropped the map, and made a bolt for the fish.

"Now git um," said Holfax, and Johnson, who was nearest, rushed forward and secured the precious document. [109]

"Is it injured?" asked Fred, as Mr. Baxter began to examine it.

"No, I think not. I'll have to be more careful in the future. That dog nearly ate a fortune."

Stowing the map securely away, Mr. Baxter helped the boys and Johnson strike the tent, and load the sleds for that day's trip. It was not as cold as it had been during the night, but there was a feeling of snow in the air.

"Git plenty bad storm quick soon," remarked Holfax, as he again fastened the coverings on the provision sled.

"Do you think we had better start then?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"Bad here—bad there," replied the Indian, with a sweep of his arm toward the distant mountain range. "Bad all over—plenty bad—bad go—bad stay."

"Then as long as we're going to be in for it one way or the other, we might as well start. Come, boys, are you ready?"

"All ready, dad," mumbled Jerry from the depths of his fur collar.

"How about you, Fred?"

"My sled is all ready."

"Then we'll start."

The long whips cracked, Holfax gave his Indian yell to the dogs, they settled into their harness, and once more the sleds were being pulled northward. The dogs seemed to be in better humor after their unexpected meal of frozen fish, and they hauled well together. [110]

It was a bleak and cheerless landscape that lay before the travelers. The vast snow-covered plain stretched out before them, and, at their backs, was the desolate, black wilderness. Only the hope of gold kept their hearts stout.

Over the hard crust scurried the dogs, their toe-nails scratching the hard ice. Occasionally they yelped or barked, probably in protest at being made to haul such heavy loads. But Holfax kept them at their tasks.

As they advanced the day became dreary in the extreme. The sun was hidden by misty clouds, and the wind was cold and cutting. Then a few fine flakes of snow sifted down.

"Storm come," remarked Holfax, tightening the robes about him.

"Guess you're right," admitted Mr. Baxter. The moisture in the air, which preceded the storm, had, with his breath, condensed on his beard, and about his mouth was a ball of snow, as large as his two fists. He actually had to crush it off his beard before he could speak.

Then with a sudden fury the snow came down in a blinding cloud. Only the fact that the four dog teams were fastened together by a long piece of deer hide prevented them from becoming separated in the fog of frozen crystals. [111]

"Can Holfax see to guide us?" shouted Fred, above the howl of the wind.

"I guess so," answered Mr. Baxter. "We'll have to trust to him, anyhow."

It was the worst weather they had yet met with, and it was all the Indian could do to induce the dogs to continue. It needed the spur of his long whip, and his angry voice, calling to them in strange words, to keep them on the trot.

At last even the hardened Indian had to give it up. It was almost certain death to face that blast from the north any longer.

"Got to camp!" shouted Holfax, above the roar of the gale, and he began to unharness the dogs.

It was desperate work to get the tent up, but they managed to do it, and also to build a roaring fire of logs which the Indian dug out from under the snow with one of the shovels that had been brought along. Then, in the combined shelter of the tent and the upturned sleds, with a big pot of hot tea and some sizzling bacon, the gold hunters tried to forget their hardships.

But it was not easy to do, and there were grave apprehensions that night whether they would not be frost-bitten before morning. The storm continued all the next day, and it was impossible to proceed. The dogs were buried from sight in big snowdrifts, and Holfax had one hand slightly frozen in digging them out to give them a feed of fish. [112]

But troubles cannot last so very long at a time, and on the morning of the third day the sun came out once more.

"Forward!" cried Mr. Baxter. "We are nearing the place, Fred. In a couple of days we ought to be able to tell whether we are on a wild-goose chase or not."

They crossed the big plain by the next night, and camped at the foot of the mountain range where the gold was supposed to be buried. Mr. Baxter consulted the map, and thought they had come very close to the trail down which Stults had made his way to the settlement, where he had related his strange story.

By daylight Mr. Baxter's views were confirmed by Holfax, who closely examined the map. There was to be seen a tracing of a vast ravine, near which the party had made camp, and this ravine was one of the landmarks by which the place was known. Several expeditions, seeking the gold, had gotten thus far, but when they penetrated the mountains they lost all traces. Either the map was wrong, or they did not properly follow the directions. Would these fortune hunters have any better luck?

Breakfast was hurriedly eaten, the dogs harnessed, and a start made. Travel had to be very slow now, and it was necessary for the adventurers to walk beside the sleds, as the dogs could not pull the passengers and the heavy loads up the steep, snow-covered mountain. [113]

They reached a shoulder of the incline, and stopped to rest. Here Mr. Baxter consulted the map again.

"I think we had better bear off more to the left," he said. "It looks as if there was a stream there, but it's frozen over."

Holfax agreed with him. It was now quite certain they were at least on part of the very ground mapped out by Stults. But whether they were near the hidden treasure was another question.

They followed the course of the stream as nearly as they could with the sleds, and, after a toilsome climb found themselves on a sort of level place.

"Doesn't look as though we were going to find a waterfall around here," remarked Mr. Baxter.

"It certainly does not," added Jerry.

Fred felt his heart sinking. They had come far enough, according to the map, to be at the fall, but there was no sign of it. Was the story all a myth? Was there no waterfall, no cave, no gold?

Fred went a little way ahead. As he turned a place where a big ledge of rock jutted out, hiding what was behind from view, he uttered a cry. [114]

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Baxter, hurrying up, thinking the lad had been hurt.

"The waterfall!" cried Fred. "There it is, frozen solid! See!"

And so it was. The great cold had solidified, into fantastic shapes, the falling water, until it looked like nothing but a vast ledge of ice, with great columns, like spears, hanging down here and there.

"Now for the cave!" cried Fred, hurrying forward. "It must be at one side of the fall."

Mr. Baxter, Fred, and Jerry hastened forward, while Holfax and Johnson remained behind to look after the dogs, that seemed to develop a sudden wild desire to run away.

It was hard climbing, over the piled-up masses of frozen water, and great icicles, but the gold-seekers managed it. Mr. Baxter was in the lead. He passed across a frozen pool, into which, during what summer there was in that cold region, the waters of the cataract fell, and then, with a loud shout, he pressed forward.

The boys, close at his heels, saw him headed toward a dark opening. They hurried to join him.

"The cave!" cried Fred. "It's the cave where Stults hid his treasure!"

Mr. Baxter was just at the entrance. As he was about to pass under the icy ledge, there was an ominous crackling overhead. Fred looked up. To his horror he saw a great icicle, that had become detached from the mass at the frozen waterfall, come toppling straight down toward where Mr. Baxter was standing, he having hesitated a moment to look into the black interior of the cavern. [115]

"Look out!" cried Fred. "Go into the cave!" Mr. Baxter comprehended his danger. He took a step forward, but, just then, his foot slipped, and he fell.

The great mass of ice, sharp as a spear, and weighing a ton or more, was falling straight down on the prostrate man, as if to transfix him. [116]

CHAPTER XVI

DIGGING FOR TREASURE

Fred never could distinctly recall, afterward, how he accomplished it, but he did. As he saw the mass of ice descending toward Mr. Baxter, the boy, with a swift, comprehensive look, took in the situation. A daring scheme came into his head.

From where he and Jerry stood, on a sort of little hill, the ice descended, in a slope, to the mouth of the cave. The frozen surface was almost as smooth as glass.

"My father will be killed!" cried Jerry.

Falling downward the great icicle struck with a tinkling sound against the masses of ice on either side. Down, down it came.

With a sudden motion Fred threw himself face forward on the icy slope, like a boy coasting down hill on a sled. Only Fred had no sled. But his thick fur garments protected him as much as a contrivance of wood and steel could have done.

Right down the steep, icy slope he slid, straight at the prostrate figure of Mr. Baxter. The man, hampered as he was in his heavy suit of furs, was struggling in vain to rise and get out of the way of the falling mass of ice. [117]

But there was no need. Coasting down the declivity, Fred struck Mr. Baxter on the shoulder with his outstretched hands, and the force of the blow shoved the man ahead. Straight ahead it forced him, the weight of Fred's body, with the speed it had attained, being sufficient to send Mr. Baxter within the cave. Fred followed also, being unable to stop.

An instant later, with a terrific crash, the great icicle came down where, but a moment before, Mr. Baxter had been prostrate on the ice. His life had been saved by Fred's brave and quick act.

Mr. Baxter slowly struggled to his feet, within the cave. Fred also got up. The youth was trembling from the excitement and exertion.

"Fred," spoke up Mr. Baxter, "you saved my life!"

"I am glad I thought of sliding down to you," replied the boy modestly. "It came to me in a flash that it was the only way."

"Yes, and you came against me like a flash, only a little more



**"The force of the blow
shoved the man ahead"**

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solidly, or it wouldn't have done any good," went on the man.

Jerry, who had watched the rescue with awe-struck eyes, hastened into the cavern, climbing over the broken masses of the great icicle. His emotion was such that, for a moment, he could not speak. He had thought to see his father crushed to death. Then he clasped the hand of his parent in one of his, and extended the other to Fred. [118]

"I shall never forget what you did," he said to Fred.

"Nor I," added Mr. Baxter. "If we don't get any of the hidden gold I shall feel that I owe Fred a debt I can never pay."

"Hello dar!" exclaimed a voice at this juncture. "Whar am everybody? Did anyt'ing happen?"

"It's Johnson," said Mr. Baxter. "Yes, something did happen."

"Whar am yo'?" asked the colored man. "I can hear yo', but I cain't see yo'."

The entrance to the cave, in which were the three, was partly hidden from view by the broken ice.

"We're in the cavern," replied Fred, stepping to the opening, where Johnson could see him.

"Do you think this is the place, father?" asked Jerry, gazing around curiously.

"I think so. It seems to correspond with the map. But we shall soon find out. Probably the gold is not buried very deep, as Stults did not have much time. The cave is small, and it ought not to take long to explore it thoroughly. George, tell Holfax where we are, have him make a sort of temporary camp just outside here, and bring up the tools. We'll stay in the cave, I think. It's warmer than outside." [119]

The colored man went back to join the Indian, while Mr. Baxter and the boys looked about the cave, as well as they were able to in the darkness. The cavern was about twenty feet square, and the roof seemed to be quite high up. It was formed of rock, and here and there water had leaked through and frozen, long, sharp icicles hanging from the sloping sides and roof.

"When we get a lantern lighted we can begin to dig for the treasure," said Mr. Baxter. "I'm afraid it will be difficult work, though, for the ground is frozen as hard as a stone."

The thought of being so near the store of precious metal took their minds off of the narrow escape from death that Mr. Baxter had just had. Fred recovered his nerve, and waited with impatience the return of Johnson and Holfax with the lanterns and tools.

The latter were soon at the cave, having brought the dogs and sleds as close as possible to the entrance. After bringing in the tools, and several lanterns, fitted to burn alcohol, and arranged to give a more brilliant light than the usual little blue flame from that fluid, the colored man and the Indian, in obedience to orders from Mr. Baxter, went outside.

"I don't want them to see us when we come upon the gold," said Mr. Baxter. "There is no telling how much there is, and it would not be right to put temptation in their way. Besides, they must get the camp in shape before night." [120]

The lanterns were lighted, and then the work of digging for the treasure was begun. It was warm enough in the cave to allow the three to lay aside their heavy outer coats, as the exercise of digging would keep their blood in circulation.

"Now we'll divide the cave floor into three parts," said Mr. Baxter, "and each one of us will take one. In this way we will be able to make sure that we have covered every foot. There is no need to go down very deep."

The work was soon under way. It certainly was difficult, for the frozen earth was like stone in hardness. But the picks were sharp, and they were wielded by sturdy arms, the owners of which were urged on by the desire to get at the buried wealth.

It was slower work than Mr. Baxter had calculated on, and when it came time to eat dinner, they had, altogether, turned up only a small part of the cave floor to a depth of about two feet.

"No sign of treasure yet," said Fred, about the middle of the afternoon. "I think I'll go outside far a breath of fresh air, and to rest myself."

"I'll go along," declared Jerry.

When the two boys reached the mouth of the cavern, they were surprised to find that it was quite dark outside. The short day was ended, and the sun, which never got far above the horizon, had set some time before. The Northern Lights were beginning to shoot across the sky. [121]

Close to the cave, Holfax and Johnson had arranged the sleds with their loads, and had

tethered the dogs, that were now howling for their supper of frozen fish.

"That reminds me I'm hungry too," said Jerry; "aren't you, Fred?"

"Not so very. I'm too anxious to find the gold. I'm going back and dig."

They used their picks on the flinty soil for an hour more, and then Mr. Baxter, with something like a sigh of disappointment, announced that they would have the night meal.

"I don't suppose any of you came across any stray gold nuggets, did you?" he asked the boys.

"No," replied Fred soberly. "Do you think the treasure is here, Mr. Baxter?"

"Well, I hope so. If it isn't we can at least prove that there is no Stults treasure, and that the story is all a myth, Fred."

"Oh, I hope such a thing as that doesn't happen."

"I hope so myself."

It got much colder after they had had their hot tea and meat, so, as they were very tired, Mr. Baxter decided they would do no more digging until the next morning. [122]

"We ought to finish up the cave to-morrow," he said.

"Suppose we don't find the gold, dad?"

Mr. Baxter said nothing. It was a thing he did not like to contemplate. They had dug over more than half the floor of the cavern, and had seen no signs of where Stults, years before, had made an excavation to hide his gold. The cave looked as if it had not been disturbed for centuries.

"This is the right place, according to the map," said Fred, as though to assure himself and the others that they must be on the track of the hidden wealth.

"It is," admitted Mr. Baxter, "but there are so many chances for error, that we can never be sure. There are probably more caves and waterfalls than this in Alaska, and Stults was not an expert map-maker. He may have thought he was setting down very explicit directions, when, as a matter of fact, he may be miles and miles off. But we can tell better in the morning."

None of the gold-seekers rested well. Though they were more sheltered than at any time since beginning their journey,—for the cave made a fine place to camp in,—their sleep was disturbed by a haunting vision of disappointment. Suppose there should be no gold after all? [123]

They resumed the digging soon after breakfast. By noon they had covered nearly the entire floor of the cavern. Fred was using his pick in one corner of the cave. Of the third assigned to him, not more than a square yard remained. The others had about the same still to explore, and, up to now, there had not been the slightest indication of the buried wealth. Fred's heart began to fail him.

He raised his pick high over his head, and brought it down with great force in the frozen dirt. Somehow it seemed to penetrate easier than it had before. It stuck in nearly up to the handle. The sharp point had entered something soft.

The boy's heart gave a convulsive throb. He pried up on the pick handle. Something was giving way. Had he discovered the hole in which the gold was hidden?

An instant later, as the light from one of the lanterns gleamed on the spot where he was digging, Fred uttered a joyful cry.

"What is it?" shouted Mr. Baxter, as he and Jerry threw down their picks and hastened to the lad's side.

The boy was down on his knees, scooping at something with his hands. The others looked.

Then they saw what they had come so far to seek. Fred's pick had pierced through a canvas bag, buried a short distance below the frozen surface. It was a bag of gold nuggets, and they lay scattered about in the dirt. [124]

"The treasure!" cried Fred. "Here it is! I have found it!"

And so he had. Almost on the verge of failure he had unearthed the gold buried so long before by the old German, Max Stults! [125]

CHAPTER XVII

THE SPYING INDIAN

The adventurers could hardly believe their good luck. Fred, still on his knees, scooped out handful after handful of the dull yellow nuggets, which meant so much to him and to them all. His thoughts went back to the humble home he had left, to his crippled father, and his toiling mother.

Now they could have peace, comfort and happiness. But, better than all, his father could now be assured of a cure. No wonder it seemed too good to be true.

But it was no dream. The gold was actually there. There were two score sacks of it, as they soon discovered, for it did not take the three of them long to get it from the hiding place. Only one had been broken by Fred's pick, and the nuggets were carefully gathered up.

"Good for you, Fred!" exclaimed Jerry, as he and his father helped pile the gold carefully to one side. "You won out, but I had begun to think we were going to fail."

[126]

"So did I," added Mr. Baxter.

"I was beginning to get discouraged myself," admitted Fred. "How much do you suppose is there, Mr. Baxter?"

"There must be half a million," said Jerry.

"Nonsense," answered his father. "No such good luck as that. Still, it is a tidy little fortune. Let me see if I can calculate it."

He weighed in his hands the different bags, counted them and began to figure in his head.

"There are forty bags," he said, "and I calculate that each one weighs about eight pounds. That would give us about three hundred pounds of gold."

"Three hundred pounds of gold!" repeated Fred, in an awe-struck voice. "How much is that worth?"

"Well, if it's pure gold, such as these nuggets are, it is worth in the neighborhood of twenty dollars an ounce."

"How many ounces have we?" asked Jerry.

"Well, of course gold is weighed by Troy measure, which goes twelve ounces to the pound, but I have calculated this gold by the standard of sixteen ounces to the pound, and, in three hundred pounds there are forty-eight hundred ounces."

"And if the gold is worth twenty dollars an ounce that would be—why it would be ninety-six thousand dollars!" exclaimed Fred, who was good at arithmetic.

[127]

"Ninety-six thousand dollars!" repeated Jerry, staggered by the amount of so much wealth.

"Of course that is only a rough estimate," Mr. Baxter hastened to add.

"Well, now we've got it, how are we going to get it home?" asked Fred, when they had stood about a while, contemplating the wealth.

"That's so," agreed Jerry. "Three hundred pounds of gold is no light weight to transport over three hundred miles on dog sleds."

"I think we will distribute it on the four sleds," said Mr. Baxter. "It will be safer that way, and not such a load for the dogs. We have used up considerable of our supplies, and we have that much less in weight. But the gold will more than make up for it."

They were so excited over their good fortune that they scarcely thought of eating, and they were startled when Johnson put his head in the opening of the cave, and announced that dinner was ready.

"All right," answered Mr. Baxter. "We've found the gold, George."

"Has yo' really, Massa Baxter? Am it a million dollars?"

"Far from it, George."

The colored man seemed disappointed. Mr. Baxter did not think it wise to tell him just how much it was, nor did he want him or the Indian to catch sight of the yellow nuggets. They might not be able to stand the sight of so much wealth. So the sacks were covered with some fur robes, and, while Mr. Baxter remained on guard, Fred and Jerry went to eat. Then they relieved Mr. Baxter, and, with ready rifles, waited until he had finished his meal.

[128]

The short day was soon at an end, and Mr. Baxter, having sent the Indian away from camp, to bring in a supply of firewood, began, with the aid of the boys and Johnson, to pile the gold securely on the sleds.

"We'll start for the south in the morning," announced Mr. Baxter, "and glad I am to be able to do it, too. This cold seems to get through to my very bones."

As the last of the gold was being put on the sleds, Fred saw, peering over the edge of an ice-covered rock, the face of an Alaskan Indian.

"Hello, Holfax!" he cried. "What are you coming that way for?"

But, to his surprise, the figure vanished, and, a moment later, Holfax appeared, coming from a different direction.

"Why—why—that's funny," remarked Fred.

"What is?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"I thought I saw Holfax looking at me from up there, and here he comes down there."

[129]

No sooner had he spoken than there was a cry from the guide. The eyes of the four adventurers were drawn toward him, and, as they watched, they saw another Indian rush at Holfax, take quick aim with a rifle, and fire.

Holfax dropped the bundle of wood he was carrying, seized a long stick, and ran at the other. The latter turned and fled, easily distancing Holfax, who had no snowshoes, while his assailant had on a pair.

"Are you hurt?" asked Mr. Baxter anxiously, hurrying toward the guide, who turned back as the other passed out of sight in a hollow.

"No hurt. Him bad shot. Him miss."

"Who was it? Why did he fire at you? What did he want?"

"Him bad Indian. Him come spy on camp. Him Toldez, friend of Zank—no good. Me catch," and Holfax, who had donned his snowshoes, prepared to race after his assailant.

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter quickly. "Don't go, Holfax. There is something queer about this," he added. "That Indian tried to kill you, Holfax. Why did he do it?"

"Me no know. Him bad, guess. Maybe want gold."

"That's it!" cried Mr. Baxter. "He's a spy, sent on by some others. You say he is a friend of Zank? Zank knows that one-eyed man. Do you suppose there are more Indians around here, Holfax?"

[130]

"Mebby so. Plenty Indians live over there," and the guide pointed to the west. "Toldez live there. Him come spy on camp. Me like shoot Toldez, but him no shoot me. Too much bad aim," and he chuckled over his narrow escape, as though it was a thing of no consequence.

"Boys," said Mr. Baxter solemnly, "I'm afraid we're in for trouble. The thieving Alaskans know about our finding the gold. That one may have been hiding around here for some time, and probably watched us put the sacks on the sleds."

"What can we do?" asked Fred.

"We must be on our guard. Get your rifles, and keep them loaded. We must hasten to some settlement. Here we are at the mercy of these savage and thieving Indians. Our gold is not safe yet, even though we have found it."

[131]

CHAPTER XVIII

FOLLOWED BY THE ENEMY

An uneasy feeling filled the hearts of the treasure finders. If what Mr. Baxter surmised proved true, they might have to face more perils than any they had yet encountered.

"Do you think that man with the glass eye—Callack his name is—will try to get the gold?" asked Fred.

"It looks as if he had arranged some plot," replied Mr. Baxter. "You recall how he whispered something to Zank as we started off on this expedition. I did not like that at the time, for I feared he was up to some trick. Now, it appears, this other Indian, who is acquainted with Zank, has been spying on us. Probably Zank, and the other three Indians who we dismissed, made their way to where their tribe was encamped, and Callack was there. He may have paid Zank to give information about us."

"But how did he know where we were going?"

"He may have gotten it out of Holfax in some way," said Jerry's father in a low voice. "I don't believe Holfax would betray us knowingly, but he is simple-minded, and a scoundrel like Zank may have wormed it out of him."

[132]

"Then what shall we do?"

"We can only be on the lookout. We must stand guard to-night, and to-morrow we will proceed as fast as we can to the south. Come, we will eat now. Holfax has the fire ready."

The Indian had built a roaring blaze, and was preparing a meal, while the hungry dogs, smelling it, tried in vain to break loose and reach the food.

The travelers passed an uneasy night. They took turns standing guard, at the mouth of the cave, and, though they saw no signs of any hostile Indians, there was a nervous fear in every

heart. Soon after breakfast the next morning, having seen that the sleds were well loaded, with the gold and the remainder of their supplies, they started for the south.

All that day they traveled, making fairly good time, as the slopes of the hills were downward. The terrible cold did not let up, however, and Johnson's hands were slightly frost-bitten when they camped that night.

Once more they stood guard, but this time it was under trying circumstances. For they were now in the open, protected only by the tent, and the time they had spent in the cave, where it was comparatively warm, made them wish again for its shelter. [133]

Shortly after midnight, when Fred, in accordance with the arrangements, roused Mr. Baxter to take his turn at guard duty, there sounded, off to the rear, long-drawn-out howls. At the sound the sled-dogs raised their muzzles in the air, until they were pointing at the flickering and shifting Northern Lights, and sent back an answer.

"Wolves!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter. "I hope we're not going to be surrounded by a hungry pack of the brutes. We may need all our ammunition to fight off human enemies."

"Do you think the Indians will attack us?"

"I hope not, but it is hard to say what the rascals will do, especially if they have an unscrupulous white man to urge them on."

"That sounds as if there were a large number of wolves on our trail."

"It certainly does, Fred. I think I'll rouse Johnson and Holfax."

But there was no need to awaken the Indian. The disturbance among the dogs, of which he had charge, had roused him from his slumber on the snow under a pile of fur blankets. He called some commands to the animals, and they slunk down.

"Wolves coming, Holfax?" asked Mr. Baxter. "Shall we get our guns ready?"

"No wolves," replied the Indian. [134]

"No wolves? Why I can hear them howl."

"No wolves," repeated the Indian. "Them dogs what howl. Listen. Can tell different noise. Wolf howl long—shrill—dog he howl short an' quick."

Mr. Baxter and Fred listened intently. Now that their guide had called their attention to it, they could distinguish a difference in the howls, which did not sound at all like those of the brutes that had once attacked them.

"Then if those are dogs, there must be Indians close to us," went on Mr. Baxter.

Holfax nodded.

"What are they doing near here? Is that the camp where Zank and the others went?"

"No," replied Holfax. "Them Indians follow us."

"They are following us?"

"Bout three miles back," added Holfax. "Can hear plain on cold night."

"Do you mean they are coming after us to get the gold?" inquired Mr. Baxter.

Once more Holfax nodded.

"Them camp now," he said. "Follow us in mornin'."

Mr. Baxter, as Fred could see in the glare of the Aurora Borealis, looked grave. Their worst fears were realized. It would have been better to have a pack of wolves after them, than to have this band of savage Alaskan Indians, led on probably by a daring and unscrupulous white man. [135]

"Shall I stay up and keep watch with you?" asked Fred.

"No. I think, as Holfax says, that they will not attempt to creep up on us during the night. They will do nothing until morning. Then we must be on the lookout."

Holfax proved that he had guessed correctly. There was no disturbance that night, but, in the morning, after they had started, the Indian mounted a hill, near which they had encamped.

"There Zank and his men," he announced, pointing to the rear. "Can see smoke of fire."

Mr. Baxter looked. A thin thread of smoke could be observed ascending in the frigid morning air, but no camp was in sight.

They started off soon after they had made a hasty breakfast. It seemed colder than at any time yet, but a glance at the thermometer showed that it was only thirty degrees below zero. Still that was cold enough, though what made it seem more piercing was a stiff wind that sprang up.

"Hark!" exclaimed Holfax, when they had gone several miles.

He halted the dogs and listened. The others could hear nothing.

"What is it, Holfax?" asked Mr. Baxter.

[136]

"Them come," replied the Indian. "Can hear dogs howl, an' sound of sleds on ice."

This may have been so, but the hearing of the Indian was more acute than that of the travelers.

"So the enemy is after our gold?" remarked Mr. Baxter. "Well, they'll have to fight to get it."

"Suppose they outnumber us?" asked Fred.

"They probably do. Otherwise I do not believe they would dare think of attacking us. There is probably a large band of them."

"Then we can not fight them alone."

"I suppose not," admitted Mr. Baxter. "But I have a plan that may help us. Holfax, come here, I want to talk to you."

[137]

CHAPTER XIX

THE ATTACK

The Indian obeyed, having first fastened his leading team of dogs to a large ice boulder by means of a long thong, so they would not run off. As the other animals were attached to the team Holfax drove, they too, halted.

"Goin' make fight?" asked the Indian.

"That is what I want to talk to you about. Do you think we can fight them?" and he motioned back toward their pursuers.

"They plenty many," replied the Indian.

"I suppose so. What sort of weapons have they?"

"They got guns."

"What! Indians in this wild country having guns? Where did they get them?"

"White mans give, for to be showed gold," replied Holfax, "Indian not care much for gold—only for guns an' t'ings. If can find gold tell white mans an' git guns. Guns better than gold—guns shoot wolves, musk-ox, moose."

[138]

"That's so. Guns are worth more to the Indians than gold."

"Shoot mans too," added the Indian. "Zank an' his men got plenty much guns—also plenty much men. Make big fight."

"That is what I supposed," said Mr. Baxter. "Our only hope is to run away from them, and get help. We'll put the first into operation at once. Do you think our dogs are faster than theirs are, Holfax?"

"Our dogs much fastest. I pick out good dogs. No dogs so fast like dogs Holfax pick out."

"I believe you. These dogs are certainly excellent animals, and they are as strong and healthy as the day we started."

"Other dogs—no much good," went on Holfax, speaking slowly to make his imperfect English understood.

"Then we have a chance to escape them. But I am also going to try to get help. Holfax, do you think you could get some friendly natives to aid us? Can't you call on some friends of yours who will come and help us fight these scoundrels, who want to steal the gold?"

"Holfax's friends much ways off."

"I suppose so, but you can travel fast on snowshoes, and tell them to come back with you. We will pay them well."

"Pay gold?" asked the Indian.

[139]

"Some gold, yes. I'll give you and your friends a thousand dollars in gold if they succeed in protecting us."

"Gold buy plenty guns," observed the Alaskan, seeming to consider the matter.

"Will you go?"

"Me go," said the guide quickly. "Good far ways, but Holfax go quick. Tell friends come help white man, two boy-white mans an' black man like smoke," the last description referring to

Johnson, whose ebony skin was a source of considerable wonder to the Indian.

"That's right," said Mr. Baxter. "Now you had better hurry, Holfax. There's no telling when those thieving Alaskans will be close after us."

"But what are we going to do?" asked Fred. "Will we stay here and defend ourselves?"

"No, my plan is to push on south as fast as possible. Every mile we get nearer our destination the better off we are, for the miners will rally to our aid when they see our plight."

"But how can we go on without Holfax to guide the dogs?"

"I have thought of that. I know something of dog teams, though I am not an expert driver. I have often handled the animals, and I think, with the aid of you boys and Johnson, and if I leave the four teams hitched together, I can get along all right. Holfax and his friends can take a short cut and catch up with us perhaps. How long before you can get help, Holfax?" [140]

"Two sleeps," replied the Indian, meaning two nights.

"Well, we'll try to stand the enemy off until then. Now hurry, and don't waste any time."

Holfax was an experienced traveler. He fastened on his snowshoes, made himself up a package of food, tea and a pot, put some matches in a safe place, and was ready to start on his long trip to find his friends.

"Keep watch," was his parting injunction to the four treasure finders. "No let Indians come too close. Me come back soon as can."

With that he was off, setting himself a rapid pace, half walk, half trot, that enabled him to cover considerable ground in a day.

"Now to see what sort of progress we can make," remarked Mr. Baxter when Holfax was out of sight down a hollow between two ice hummocks. "Boys, help me with the dogs. Johnson, you sort of keep your eyes on the sleds so that none of them upset. We'll see if we can outdistance our pursuers."

The dogs made much trouble, leaping about here and there, and almost refusing to get properly in line with the traces so they could pull. Probably they knew that Holfax was not there to punish them. But by dint of hard work Mr. Baxter succeeded in getting them started. [141]

He rode in the foremost sled, with Fred next, then came Jerry, while Johnson brought up the rear. The colored man had strict instructions to give the alarm the instant he saw the enemy in pursuit.

Once the dogs found out they had to do their usual work, they seemed to give up their playful spirit, and settled into the collars for a long, steady pull. They were traversing the same track they had used in going to the cave, but of course all traces of it had been blotted out by storms. Still the dogs seemed able to find their way with very little guidance.

Though anxious watch was kept, there was no sign of the enemy seen that day, and night settled down, finding the travelers in a more hopeful mood.

"Perhaps they have given up," suggested Fred.

"I'm afraid not," returned Mr. Baxter. "More likely they are up to some trick. We must be careful about standing guard to-night. Fire at the least suspicious sight or sound, boys. I'm afraid it's going to be more trouble to keep this gold than it was to find it."

They were traveling over the plain now, having emerged from the forest some time previously, and, when Mr. Baxter gave the word to halt for the night, the boys looked about for a good place to pitch the tent. [142]

"That looks like a sheltered place over there," remarked Fred, pointing to where a big hummock of ice offered some protection from the north wind that was now sweeping over the plain with great force.

"We'll try it there," decided Mr. Baxter. "Fasten the dogs well, and give them plenty of fish. We must keep up their strength, and see that they are in good health, or we will fail, after all."

The animals were tethered, the tent put up, and supper was gotten ready. Then a big fire was built, as some protection against the bitter cold. In spite of the fact that they were getting closer to the Yukon River, where it is always warmer than inland, they felt the frost cruelly.

Jerry had the last watch that night, his hour extending to nearly sunrise, which, as winter was more and more advancing, was not of much account in the arctic regions. As the boy noted with satisfaction a reddening in the east, indicating that it would soon be time for breakfast, when he would not be so cold, he heard a noise off to his left. It was different from the crackle of the ice, and the dull boom that told of falling masses of frozen crystal, and Jerry turned quickly around.

As he did so he saw a sight that startled him. From behind great masses of ice there suddenly sprang into view the ugly faces of a score or more of Alaskans. They peered at the little camp of adventurers, and some of them uttered a cry of satisfaction. [143]

"The Indians! The Indians! They're all around us!" cried Jerry.

Mr. Baxter, Johnson and Fred hurriedly awoke, and it was instinct with them to grab the guns lying at their sides.

"What's the matter?" cried Jerry's father, running to the flap of the tent, near which his son stood.

"The Indians! They're here!"

There was no doubt of it. Seeing that there was no need of concealment, the Alaskans boldly advanced. It was seen that nearly every one had a gun.

But stranger than all was the figure that walked at the head of the hostile Indian procession. It was the figure of a white man. A man with a glass eye—the same man who had accosted Fred on the ship.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Mr. Baxter as he saw Callack advancing. "What right have you to follow us?"

"There's no 'right' up in this land," was the sneering answer. "There's no law, neither. We do as we please here."

"What are you going to do now?"

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"We're going to take that gold you unlawfully removed from the cave. Ah, you needn't deny you have it. I have proof of it. One of my men saw it."

"I suppose you mean that spy," replied Mr. Baxter. "We are not going to deny it. But let me tell you we'll never give up anything we have without a fight."

"A fight? Why, we outnumber you five to one!"

"I'm not afraid of that. We shall defend our property to the last."

"Bold words!" spoke Callack with a sneer, "but I'm going to have that gold," and he advanced toward Mr. Baxter.

The Indians, watching their white leader, began to close in on the treasure finders.

"Fred!" cried Mr. Baxter, "you look after the left side, Jerry, you the right, and I'll take the center. Stand with your backs to the tent. Johnson, get up on the ice hummock and fire at the first man who comes within a hundred feet, be he a white or an Indian."

In less time than it takes to tell it the little force had assumed a position of defense. From his elevated place the negro could command a wide range.

"Are you going to fight us?" demanded Callack.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Baxter.

"It will be useless. I have traveled too far after that gold to give it up now. You had better surrender. I'll guarantee to get you safe to the river."

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"Never! We are going to keep the gold."

At that moment, whether by accident or design, one of the Indians discharged his gun at Johnson, who had not done as Mr. Baxter had thought he would, and concealed himself behind some blocks of ice. Instead he stood bolt upright.

There was a cry of pain from the colored man. An instant later he raised his rifle quickly and fired into the midst of the advancing Alaskans. One Indian fell.

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CHAPTER XX

BURYING THE TREASURE

"Are you hurt?" cried Mr. Baxter anxiously.

"Jest a scratch on mah cheek," replied Johnson. "But it was so close, sah, dat it done made me mad. I hit one o' dem rascals."

"That's what you did. I hope you didn't kill him, for I don't want any bloodshed if we can avoid it. Still, they fired first."

The moment the Indian fell his companions were thrown into confusion. They had not expected such vigorous resistance. Several of them threw down their guns and rushed to their fallen comrade. A well-directed fire at that moment would probably have scattered the enemy, but Mr. Baxter did not want to shoot into the midst of the Indians, unarmed as most of them now were.

Callack was in a rage. He stormed at his allies, and made them take up their guns again. The

Indian Johnson had hit was only wounded, and he was carried to the rear. But the quick response of the colored man to the attack of the Indians had a good effect. It frightened the Alaskans, and, notwithstanding the demands of the rascally white man, they would not again advance. They wanted to consider matters first, and Callack was too big a coward to proceed alone.

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Sullenly he retreated with his band of Indians to a small hollow about half a mile from the Baxter camp.

"Don't think we're going to let you go," he called out angrily as he went away. "We're going to have that gold."

Mr. Baxter did not reply. He watched the withdrawal of the Indians.

"Keep a close watch," he cautioned Johnson. "Tell us as soon as you see any suspicious movement."

"Dat's what I will, an' I'll shoot, too."

"No, don't do that unless they attack us again. They may leave us alone after this."

The position of the treasure finders was perilous enough. They were in a desolate country, and, though they had plenty of provisions for the time they had calculated on, they would not have enough if they were detained by the enemy. Their only hope was that Callack's men would retreat.

"Well, they've given us a chance to get breakfast, at any rate," remarked Mr. Baxter. "Now you boys hustle around, make some tea, cook some meat, and get things ready, while I bring the dogs closer in and feed them. Then I'll lay out some more ammunition. If it comes to a fight we'll have our hands full."

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"Do you think they'll go away?" asked Fred.

"No; to be frank, I don't think they will. Callack is too greedy after the gold. He knows we have it."

"Then what are we going to do? We can't fight such a big crowd."

"I don't know. Perhaps I can think up some plan. But now get busy with the breakfast."

The meal was soon ready and eaten, Fred taking the place of the colored man on the ice hill while Johnson ate. Mr. Baxter had brought the sleds closer to the big hummock, had fastened the dogs more securely, and had opened several packages of cartridges.

"Why can't we build some sort of a fort?" suggested Fred.

"A fort?" inquired Mr. Baxter.

"Yes; to protect ourselves."

"What could we make it of?"

"Blocks of ice."

"So we could. I wonder I didn't think of that. It's a good idea, Fred. We'll do it. Get the picks and shovels. We can soon throw up a breastwork that will be proof against their bullets, and, as we occupy the highest ground, they can't fire down on us."

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There was plenty of material for the fort, and before night there was a good rampart of ice, built in a semicircle out from the big rock, and taking in the tent and sleds, to which the dogs were kept fastened. They were quiet now, Mr. Baxter having given them a good feeding of seal blubber.

"What are your plans?" asked Fred after an early supper. "Do you think they will attack us to-night?"

"I hope not, for I want to put into execution a scheme I have thought of."

"What is it, dad?" asked Jerry.

"I think we will bury the treasure and make a dash to escape."

"Bury the treasure? Where?"

"Right here. We can cut a deep hole down under the ice and snow, put the bags of gold in, cover them up, and then be in readiness to make a dash through their lines."

"Suppose they pursue us?"

"That is probably what they will do. But I think we can escape, as our dogs are much swifter than are theirs. Then we will proceed toward the river, get help, and return for the gold. Or, better than that, Holfax and his friends may come to our relief. They ought to be here soon."

"If he doesn't fail us," suggested Fred.

"I do not believe he will. Holfax is faithful."

Mr. Baxter's plan was soon put into operation. A great hole was dug in the ice, the enemy being unable to observe the operation because of the rampart. Then the gold, in bags, was put in, and the blocks of frozen crystal placed back again. To better cover up the place, Mr. Baxter melted some snow into water in a kettle over a fire and poured the water over the filled-up hole. It froze almost instantly, and no one would ever have suspected that beneath that ice there was a fortune in gold.

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"When are you going to try to escape?" asked Fred.

"To-night, about midnight. I think they will be sleeping soundly then, and if the dogs keep quiet we can slip through their lines."

"Can't we muzzle the dogs?"

"I'm afraid not. They would probably be so frightened that they would make more fuss than ever. We can only trust to luck."

Meanwhile Johnson or one of the adventurers kept a close watch from the hummock. Though only occasional glimpses of the Indians could be seen, the number of fires that were built showed that the enemy was in a circle about the place.

"They have us fairly hemmed in," said Fred. "They evidently mean to get that gold."

"I should think you'd be afraid to leave it buried here, dad, and go off," said Jerry. "Won't they dig and find it?"

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"I depend on our chance of fooling them," replied his father. "I don't believe they will suspect we would go off and leave the treasure. They will think we have it with us and will give chase."

"Then our only chance depends on keeping out of their clutches?"

"That's it."

Preparations for the escape were quietly made, so that if by chance any spying Indian looked into the little camp he would not understand what was going on. The sleds were securely loaded, rifles and ammunition placed where they could be quickly reached, and the tent struck shortly before midnight. The Northern Lights were not as brilliant as usual, for which they were thankful, as it favored their chances of not being discovered.

At last all was in readiness. For a wonder the dogs were quiet, and allowed themselves to be harnessed with little or no fuss. With a final look around the fort, which held the treasure they had braved so much for, the small party set out, each one taking his place on a sled.

Mr. Baxter called softly to the leading dogs, and swung the long whip over their furry backs. The animals straightened out, and set off at a rapid run. Mr. Baxter guided them toward the left, which seemed the more open place in the circle the enemy had drawn around the camp.

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They had made a good start, but could they get far enough through the line of the Indians to make good their escape? That was the question in the hearts of the four.

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CHAPTER XXI

CAPTURED

As the dogs drew the sleds down the little elevation on which the gold was buried, and where the fort was built, the treasure finders caught a glimpse of their enemies.

The Indians had established four camps, about equal distances apart, depending on members from each one to guard the spaces between. Four fires glowed on the snow, and little dark heaps here and there showed where either dogs or the Indians were huddled up in slumber.

Mr. Baxter directed the leading dog team as nearly as possible between two fires. He hoped none of the natives would awake, and certainly there seemed to be no danger of disturbing any guards, for there were none to be seen, at least none patrolling the open spaces.

But his hopes were doomed to disappointment. One of the Indian dogs set up a sudden howl. Perhaps it was a challenge in the Alaskan dog language. At any rate, it was answered from several throats of the beasts pulling the sleds of our friends.

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"That will bring them out!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter in dismay. "No need for silence now!"

He shouted to the dogs, calling loudly, and cracked the long whip. Barking and snarling, bidding defiance to their fellows in the camp of the enemy, the animals rushed on.

But the barking had roused the Indians and likewise their white leader. Callack's voice could be heard urging on his men. One or two rifles were fired, probably at random.

"Whip your dogs, boys," called Mr. Baxter, and Fred and Jerry let the long lashes fly.

The Indians were leaping to their feet and shouting. Several hurried to their sleds and began harnessing the animals.

Even then the fugitives might have escaped had it not been for their own dogs. A series of loud howls came from the beasts of the Indians. This was too much for the others. With wild yelps, utterly disregarding the voices and whips of Mr. Baxter, the boys and Johnson, who tried to urge them on, the brutes turned and made straight back for the camp of the Alaskans, probably intent on fighting with those who had challenged them.

"They're taking us right into the midst of the enemy!" cried Fred. "Let's jump off and run!"

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He tried to do so, but he was so encumbered with robes and fur coats that he could not.

Mr. Baxter was trying his best to guide the leading team to one side, but it was useless. Lash them as he did the dogs kept on, straight for the Indian camp, beyond which they had almost passed.

"We've got 'em!" yelled Callack. Then he cried some commands in the Alaskan tongue.

"Shall we fire?" cried Fred.

"No, don't!" replied Mr. Baxter. "You can't tell where you are aiming. You might kill one of us. I guess it's all up. But I'm glad I buried the gold," he added to himself.

A moment later the adventurers were fairly in the hostile camp, and Jacob Callack and his men had surrounded them.

"Surrender! We've got you!" yelled the rascally white man.

"Yes, you've got us," admitted Mr. Baxter coolly, "but you wouldn't have if our dogs hadn't turned back."

"They're fine dogs," answered Callack with a sneer. "I think I'll take 'em for myself. Now then, get off your sleds and we'll talk business. After I have the gold I may consent to let you have your dogs back, though you don't deserve it, for you've made me a lot of trouble."

He spoke as though he had a right to steal the treasure from those who had found it, and as if they had no right to resist. Callack called something to his men, and a moment later they were pulling the treasure finders from the sleds and binding them with thongs of deer skin, having first taken their guns away.

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Mr. Baxter and the two boys submitted with what grace they could to these indignities. But Johnson, the big colored man, fought with all his strength against the Indians. And, as he was very strong, and they were not very muscular, he tumbled several of them in a heap.

"There ain't no ugly ole Indian gwine t' tie up George Johnson without a fight, that's what they ain't!" he exclaimed.

"Rush at him all together!" called Callack to his men in the Alaskan tongue. Four or five of them did rush, but even they were no match for Johnson, who caught them in his long, powerful arms and tossed them over his shoulder, one by one, into a deep snow bank.

"I'll fix you!" yelled Callack, springing toward the fighting colored man, whose gun had been taken away.

The leader of the ugly Indians raised his rifle by the barrel and brought the stock down with terrific force on the head of Johnson.

Even protected as his skull was by a thick fur cap, the blow felled the negro like an ox. With a groan he sank down on the snow.

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"There," said Callack, addressing Mr. Baxter. "That's the way I serve them as don't do what I say."

"You're a coward, to strike a defenseless man," said Mr. Baxter contemptuously.

"What's that! You dare call me a coward!" and the infuriated man strode over to Jerry's father with upraised rifle. But Mr. Baxter did not flinch. Looking Callack straight in the face, he never moved away from under the poised weapon. The man's bravery was too much for the coward. Muttering something below his breath Callack moved away, calling to the Indians to bring along the captives and the sleds.

"Are you going to let Johnson lie there and freeze to death?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"Let him freeze! What do I care?" was the cruel answer.

"If you do I shall charge you with deliberate murder when I reach a settlement," threatened Mr. Baxter.

"Maybe you'll never reach one."

But the threat evidently had some effect, for, at a muttered word from Callack, some of the Indians carried the unconscious colored man to one of the tents of the enemy's camp.

It was quite light, for the Aurora Borealis was streaming across the sky, giving a radiance like

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that of a full moon, only more beautiful. The captives could see that they were in the hands of quite a large band of Indians. More of the Alaskans had evidently arrived since the first skirmish. Among them was Zank, on whose evil face was an ugly grin at his success in betraying those who had trusted him.

"It would have been better if you'd given up the gold at first," said Callack with a sneer. "Then I'd have let you go down to the river with your sleds and dogs. Now I don't know what I'll do with you. But first I'll get the gold."

"Will you?" thought Fred, as he recalled the cunning way in which they had buried it.

Callack gave some more orders, and the Indians began taking the things off the sleds of the captives. The dogs were removed and tied at a distance from the other animals, so the different teams would not fight.

So eager was the rascally white man to get possession of the treasure that he began to aid his allies in searching for the precious metal. The robes, tools, provisions and supplies of Mr. Baxter and the boys were rudely cast to one side in the hunt for the bags of yellow nuggets.

But the search was without avail. When at last the sleds had been stripped bare and no gold was found, Callack started up in a rage. [159]

"Where's that gold?" he cried. "You had it, I know you did!"

"Yes, we had it," admitted Mr. Baxter calmly. "One of your spies saw it."

"Then where is it now? You've got to give it up! I see! You have it concealed about you."

He strode over to Mr. Baxter and began to feel about his clothing. The impossibility of any one hiding a lot of bulky sacks about him without having them show did not occur to Callack until he had convinced himself that Mr. Baxter had no gold under his fur suit. Neither had the boys nor Johnson.

Callack was plainly puzzled. He had confidently expected to get the gold when he captured the fugitives. Now that it was neither among their baggage nor on their persons, he did not know what to do. But he was determined to have the bags of nuggets.

Approaching close to Mr. Baxter, and shaking his fist in the face of the bound man, he asked:

"Are you going to tell me where that treasure is?"

"No, I am not," was the bold reply.

"Then you'll suffer for it!"

He turned aside, called to some of the Indians, and the three captives were led into one of the tents, while a guard of several of the Alaskans was stationed outside. [160]

"Well, they've got us," said Fred softly when they were left alone.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Baxter, "but they haven't got the gold." [161]

CHAPTER XXII

ANXIOUS HOURS

The situation of the captives was desperate. They were in the power of a white man as savage, or more so, as any of the Indians. To add to this, he was enraged at his failure to discover the gold, to obtain which he had risked so much. What he might do to compel them to reveal the hiding place they could only guess.

For a while after being thrust into the tent there was silence among the three. They had been roughly handled, the exertion to escape had been hard, and they were utterly discouraged. It looked as though they had failed almost in the moment of success.

"Do you think Holfax will bring any aid?" asked Fred after a long pause.

"I think he will try," replied Mr. Baxter. "Whether he can bring enough of his friends to drive away this band of rascals is another matter. He ought to come along pretty soon, if he had good luck in reaching a camp and can persuade enough to come back with him." [162]

"I wish I could loosen some of these knots," remarked Jerry. "I'm tied so tightly that I can't move, and I'm getting cold."

It was very cold, even in the shelter of the tent, and wrapped as they were in thick fur garments, for they were tied so tightly that their blood could not circulate freely.

"Let's see if we can't loosen some of our bonds," suggested Fred. "The exertion will make us warmer even if we can't. And if we get loose we may be able to escape."

"No, don't try that part of it," advised Mr. Baxter.

"Why not?"

"Because, angry as he now is over not finding the gold, Callack would probably order us shot at once. If we wish to save our lives we will have to go slow. Try to loosen the thongs, by all means. That, as Fred says, will warm us up. But even if we get loose it will be advisable to stay in the tent. For, if we should manage to get out, we could not go far without dogs and sleds, and it would be impossible to harness the animals unobserved. No, boys, we'll have to stay here awhile and take our chances."

The Indians had been in such a hurry to tie their captives so that a search might be made for the gold that the knots were not very secure. It did not take a great deal of exertion to undo them, and the three were able to stand up and stamp about, thereby warming themselves. [163]

"I feel better," announced Fred. "Now if they'd bring us in something to eat we wouldn't be so badly off."

"I wonder how it goes with poor Johnson," said Mr. Baxter. "That was a cruel blow he received. Callack shall pay for that some day."

"He's a brute!" exclaimed Fred. "I wish I was big enough to fight him."

"I fancy if Johnson ever got at him in a fair fight Callack would wish he had never tried any of his tricks," observed Jerry.

Anxious hours passed. The captives, looking from the tent, saw Callack and several Indians grouped about the supplies they had taken from the sleds of the prisoners. They were appropriating to their own use such of the articles as they fancied, while Callack, unwilling to believe the gold was not there, was minutely examining every robe and garment, hoping to find part of the treasure concealed in the folds, or sewed up in them.

It was getting lighter with the approach of morning, though the days were successively getting shorter and shorter as the winter season advanced.

At last Callack became convinced that there was no trace of the gold to be found in the baggage of his prisoners. He gave up the search, and, calling to some of the Indians, ordered them to replenish the campfires, which had died down in the excitement over the attempted escape. [164]

"I hope he thinks to send us some breakfast," remarked Fred, as from the tent the captives saw the Indians preparing a repast.

"He's not very likely to, unless he thinks that by getting us in good humor we will tell him where the gold is," said Mr. Baxter.

"Will you tell him?"

"Never! And I hope you boys will remain firm, no matter what he does."

"I'll not," declared Fred. The search for the gold had been too hard, and the possession of it meant too much to him to make him willing, even under stress of dire threats, to tell where it was hidden.

"He'll have to threaten me good and hard before I'll tell him where it is," said Jerry.

"Perhaps he may find it himself," suggested Fred.

"I don't think so," observed Mr. Baxter. "We hid it very carefully, and it will take some digging, even if he thinks to try that method, before he'll come upon it. By that time Holfax and his men may arrive."

That it was not Callack's plan to starve his captives was shown a little later, when a couple of Indians came in with some hot tea and some meat. There was also some cold tallow, an article of diet much esteemed by the Alaskans in the winter, and the treasure finders had learned to eat it. For fats are very heating, and some such food as that is much needed in the Arctic region. [165]

"He's up to some move," said Fred, as, looking from the tent-flap, he saw a lot of the Indians beginning to break camp.

"Maybe they're going to leave us here and go back to the cave where we found the gold, thinking that we left it hidden there," suggested Jerry.

"No, they know we brought the gold away," said his father. "Their spy was there for that purpose."

"They certainly are moving the camp," went on Fred.

Moving it they were, but for no great distance. The tents and supplies, including those of the prisoners, their sleds and dogs, were taken toward the place where the ice fort had been built around the base of the great hummock.

"He's going back to our old camp!" exclaimed Fred.

"I thought he would," added Mr. Baxter. "He's going to have a try for the gold there. Well, I hope he doesn't find it."

A little later Callack approached the tent where the three captives were.

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"We're going to shift a bit," he said gruffly. "Going to where you had your camp. I'll dig up the gold there, and then I'll see what I'll do with you."

If he hoped to provoke a response by this he was disappointed, for neither Mr. Baxter nor the boys answered. Callack did not appear surprised to see that his prisoners were no longer bound. Perhaps he thought the Indians who had brought them the breakfast had loosed the thongs.

Closely guarded on all sides by the dusky Alaskans, Mr. Baxter and the two boys were made to march back to where the ice fort was. The tent was struck, and the old camp abandoned. Johnson, who had somewhat recovered from the cruel blow, staggered along, with an Indian on either side of him.

Callack lost no time in seeking the gold once he had reached the place where the first skirmish had taken place. He ordered his men to erect the tents, and then, taking several of the Indians, including Zank, with him, each one with a pick and shovel, he began to dig around the big hummock of ice.

"He'll hunt a good while before he finds anything there," remarked Fred.

As soon as the tents were up more Indians were set at digging. They demolished the fort, but this hindered rather than helped them, for the floor inside beneath which the treasure was buried was covered deeper than ever with a layer of ice. Callack excavated a little there, but the place seemed frozen so solidly because of the water Mr. Baxter had poured over it that it did not look as if it had been disturbed in a hundred years. So he did not go deep enough.

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All day long the Indians, urged on by the white man, dug and searched for the treasure, but without success. As night came on Callack seemed to give it up.

Throwing down his pick, he walked over to where Mr. Baxter and the boys were kept under guard in a tent.

"Come on out here!" he called to them. "I've got something to say to you."

He gave an order to the guards, and they stood aside. Wondering what the new move of the scoundrel might be, Mr. Baxter, followed by his son and Fred, went out. A bitter cold wind was blowing, and it looked as if there was going to be a big snowstorm.

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CHAPTER XXIII

CALLACK'S CRUEL THREAT

"Well," remarked Callack as he eyed his captives, "you hid the gold pretty far down, I guess. I haven't been able to find it."

He waited, seemingly for an answer, but Mr. Baxter did not reply, nor did the boys say anything.

"Now," went on the rascally white man, "I'm going to make you tell me where you've buried it, for I know you did bury it."

"Then why don't you find it?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"You were too sharp for me. I don't mind admitting that. You are ahead of me—so far—but I've got several tricks to play yet. But first I want to give you a fair chance."

"Then if you want to do that the best thing you can do is to give us back our sleds, dogs and other possessions and let us go on our way."

"Hu! I'd be very foolish to do that, wouldn't I? As soon as you got there you'd have mounted police after me, or you'd organize a vigilance committee."

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"That's what we would," admitted Mr. Baxter. "I'll pay you back for what you have done, if it takes the last dollar I have in the world."

"Well, you'll not use any of the gold," replied Callack with a sneer, "for I'm going to have that myself."

"You'll have to get it first."

"I intend to. That's why I called you out here. I have a proposition to make to you."

"You can save your breath," said Mr. Baxter quickly. "I'll never consent to compromise with you and give you part of the gold."

"And I'm not asking for a compromise. I want it all," cried Callack quickly. "What I mean is

this: You can tell me where the gold is buried and help me find it, in which case I'll provide you with safe transportation to the river."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you will be starved to death!"

At this cruel threat even Mr. Baxter, hardened as he was by privation in his early mining days, could not repress a start. For of all the deaths that could be devised, that of starving in the Arctic region is probably the worst. In that terribly cold climate much food is necessary to keep up bodily warmth, and once the temperature of the blood gets too low, the end comes by freezing. So, in reality, Callack was threatening to freeze and starve his captives to death unless they revealed the hiding place of the gold. [170]

But after his first exhibition of emotion Mr. Baxter recovered his composure. He did not believe Callack would dare do as he said he would.

"I thought I'd make you think twice," said the scoundrel, as he noted the slight change that came over Mr. Baxter's face. "Now will you tell me?"

"No!"

The word came as an exclamation.

"Then you'll starve."

"Will we?" asked Mr. Baxter. "You can't scare me, Callack. A man who is cowardly enough to strike an unarmed person isn't brave enough to do as you say you'll do. You'll be afraid to do it, for, though we're a good way from civilization, the law will get you some day. I'm not afraid. These boys are not afraid. You'll never get the gold if we have to tell you where it is, and you can make the most of that. Now don't ask me again, for if you do I'll not answer you. I don't like to talk to such a scoundrel as you are."

These words of defiance stung Jacob Callack to fury. He raged up and down in front of the captives, and at times it seemed as if he would attack them. But the fearless attitude of Mr. Baxter, and the calm bearing of the boys, who took a lesson from their older companion, was too much for the coward. [171]

"All right!" he exclaimed. "We'll see how you'll talk after you've been twenty-four hours without anything to eat. We'll see how you'll like it to feel the cold making you stiff. You need not think I'll ask you again where the gold is. I'll find it myself, and punish you at the same time. You might better have thought twice, Simon Baxter, before you defied me. You don't know me!"

"Yes, I do. I know you for a coward, and a man who would not stop at the worst of crimes to accomplish his ends. But I'm not afraid of you. Help is on the way to us, and before twenty-four hours have passed you may be begging me for mercy."

Callack laughed. Evidently he placed no faith in what his prisoner said.

"Very well," he sneered. "From now on, unless you change your mind and decide to tell me where the gold is, you shall have not a morsel to eat."

He turned and walked away, while the captives went back into the tent.

"Do you think he'll really do as he threatened?" inquired Fred.

"I have no doubt but that he'll try it," replied Mr. Baxter. [172]

"But can we stand it?" asked Jerry. "Wouldn't it be better to give him part of the gold and have him let us go?"

"He'd never be content with part of the treasure," was his father's answer. "He wants it all. But what do you say, Fred? You are an equal partner in this enterprise. Do you want to give Callack all the gold?"

Fred thought matters over for a moment. He had endured much to get his share of the treasure, and he was likely to endure more. To return without the gold meant that conditions would be the same at home as they had been. There would be pinching poverty, with his mother toiling over her sewing, and his father trying to get such light tasks as suited his strength. It meant that Mr. Stanley would get well very slowly, if at all.

On the other hand, if he stood out boldly with Mr. Baxter, there was a chance that Holfax and his men might come in time to save them. If he could stand the terrible pangs of hunger and cold for a time, all might yet be well. He made up his mind.

"We'll starve before we give up the secret of the gold," he said boldly.

"That's what I thought you'd say!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter. "I didn't think you'd give in, Fred. Now let them do their worst! We'll show them how brave boys and a strong man can go without eating. I don't believe he'll dare let us die. And Holfax may come at any time now. Yes, boys, we'll defy that scoundrel!" [173]

At that moment several Indians appeared at the flap of the tent.

"Come," said one who spoke a little English. "You go."

"I wonder what's up now?" said Fred. "Has he found the gold?"

There was no choice but to obey, and the captives went outside. It was snowing furiously.

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CHAPTER XXIV

DOUBLE HARDSHIP

Callack stood in front of the tent from which the captives were led by the Indians. He was so bundled up in furs that he was scarcely recognizable, and, as Mr. Baxter walked toward him, the man said:

"I'm going to give you one more chance to tell where the gold is. Will you?"

"I will not."

"Be careful! You don't know what you are going to suffer!"

"You have my answer. I'll not tell you where the gold is, and you had better be careful what you do. Friends are on the way to rescue us."

"They will arrive too late."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that unless you reveal the secret you will be left out in the open all night, with only such clothing as you now have on, and not a morsel of food, nor a drop of warm drink shall you have. Now do you still refuse to tell me?"

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Mr. Baxter hesitated. The double hardship might be more than the boys could stand. As for himself, he believed he could hold out until help came. But it was terribly cold, and the storm that was now howling about the camp gave promise of being a fierce one. Should he give in?

A moment's reflection decided him. He thought Holfax must be near at hand. Perhaps he would come by morning, and they could stand the cold and exposure until then.

"Well?" asked Callack impatiently.

"You can go ahead with your cruelty," replied Mr. Baxter. "I'll never tell you where the gold is."

With a muttered exclamation Callack turned aside. At an order from him a moment later the Indians led the captives to the top of the ice hummock. A more exposed place in a storm could not well be found. The wind swept over it with great velocity, making it colder than down in the more sheltered places. To be left there without food was almost certain death.

Yet there Callack was going to leave his prisoners. Johnson, who still suffered from the blow on the head so that he was dazed, was led out from a tent, and the four treasure finders were tied with strong thongs, part of the dog harness being used.

Under the direction of Callack three of the Indians were making the final fastenings of the bonds, when there suddenly arose a disturbance among the others, who were grouped about the sleds of the treasure seekers. There were loud voices, and then angry cries.

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"Those imps are fighting!" muttered Callack. "I'll soon put a stop to that!"

He caught up a heavy dog whip, and started down the side of the frozen mound. The disturbance among the Indians became more fierce. Blows were struck right and left, and several of the natives grappled with each other, rolling over and over on the frozen snow.

"They're fighting over the possession of our things," said Fred.

"Yes, there won't be much left for us," observed Jerry. "But I don't know as that makes much difference. We'll never get away from here to use our things."

"Oh, maybe we will," remarked Fred, hopefully.

Callack sprang into the midst of the fighting Indians. He raised his heavy whip, and the cruel lash fell left and right, but owing to the heavy clothing of the natives, it produced little effect. The cries of rage grew louder. The Indians were fairly tearing from each other's hands the choice articles of food, and the other supplies belonging to the captives.

The sight of their fellows in possession of what was to them unlimited wealth was too much for the three savages who were binding the captives. With one accord they dropped the thongs and leaped down the side of the ice hummock.

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For a moment, left thus comparatively alone and unguarded, the captives did not know what to do. They watched the three Indians leap into the midst of the fighting, yelling throng of their fellows, amid which Callack stood, vainly plying his whip, as he would among a pack of dogs, to

restore order.

"Boys!" cried Mr. Baxter suddenly. "Here's our chance. Can you loosen the thongs?"

As he spoke he exerted all his strength, and the partly-tied leather strips about his hands came loose. A moment later Fred's arms were also free. Jerry was more securely tied, but it did not take long for Fred and Mr. Baxter to release him.

"Now help Johnson," said the old miner, turning to where the colored man sat in the snow, just as he had been dropped when brought from the tent.

The thongs were quickly stripped from the negro.

"Stand up," cried Mr. Baxter, shaking the man, who seemed to be in a daze. "Stand up! We're going to escape! It's our only chance, when they're fighting among themselves!"

The Indians were paying no attention to their captives. They were in the thick of the fight now, the sound of blows echoing loudly in the still air. Clubs, dog whips, chunks of ice, shovels and picks, the implements being taken from the sleds, were used as weapons. Callack was unable to control his men. In fact he was in considerable danger.

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But the colored man never stirred. He looked up at Mr. Baxter, smiled stupidly and mumbled:

"It suah am a warm day. Landy, but dis coon has got t' take off some ob his clothes!"

"His mind is wandering," spoke Mr. Baxter sadly. "Come, Johnson," he said. "We will help you to escape. Get up and walk. You must, or we'll have to leave you. We haven't a minute to spare."

But the unfortunate negro could not understand.

"It's no use," murmured Mr. Baxter. "We'll have to leave him to save ourselves. We can't carry him, he's too heavy."

"But what will Callack do to him, when he finds us gone?" asked Fred, for it seemed that they could easily escape during the excitement, which had not ceased.

"I don't believe Callack will harm him," replied Jerry's father. "He knows Johnson can't tell where the treasure is in his present state, and he'll look after him carefully, in the hope that his mind will come back, so he can point out the hiding place of the gold. So he'll not harm him, and if we make good our escape, we can come back with a strong party, and free him. But we must hurry. Callack seems to be getting his men under some kind of submission."

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This was so. Though the Indians were still fighting, Callack's use of the heavy whip and his vigorous commands appeared to be having some effect. The captives waited no longer. Bidding Johnson farewell, though the negro probably did not understand what they said, Mr. Baxter and the boys fled down the side of the hummock, away from the camp.

Over the ice and snow they ran as fast as they could, but they welcomed the exertion, since, as they were not as warmly dressed as usual, the terrible cold was numbing them. The fierce fall of snow, which increased rather than diminished, served in a measure to conceal their movements.

"Come on, boys!" called Mr. Baxter cautiously, as he led the way. "We may escape that villain and his savages! Are you all right?"

"All right, but it's terrible cold," answered Jerry.

"Indeed it is, though it's not so bad as it was up on that hummock. Let's stop a minute, and see if they are after us."

They paused to listen. The only sound was the mournful howling of the wind, and the occasional boom, like that of a cannon, as some immense crack opened up in the ice about them.

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"They haven't discovered that we are gone, or else they don't know which way we took," said Mr. Baxter. "Come on, we must get farther away than this."

"Where are we going?" inquired Fred. "We can't stand much exposure, in this weather, and without food."

"I know it," replied Mr. Baxter. "I have hopes that we may chance upon some settlement of friendly Indians, where we can not only get food and shelter, but enlist their aid in capturing Callack."

"That sounds too good to be likely to happen," observed Jerry. "Burr-r-r-r but it's cold."

"Don't think of it," advised his father. "Move a little faster, and get your blood in good circulation. Then you'll feel warmer."

"I don't believe I've got any blood left in me," replied his son. "It seems just like ice water."

They trudged on, not knowing and scarcely caring where they were going, as long as it was away from Callack's camp. In fact they could see but a short distance before them, and had to go it almost blind, for the snowflakes were like a pall of frozen fog.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Baxter, when they had been tramping along about half an hour. "Isn't that shouting behind us?"

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The boys listened. Faintly there sounded voices in pursuit.

"They're after us!" exclaimed Fred. "What shall we do? Shall we run, or give fight?"

"We haven't any weapons, or we might stand them off," remarked Jerry. "I'm almost willing to give up. We can't go on this way very far."

"I'd rather freeze to death out here than back in Callack's camp," observed Mr. Baxter grimly. "Let's go on, but we'll turn off to the left."

He swung around and began to run, the boys following. The three fugitives had not taken a dozen steps when suddenly Mr. Baxter, who was in the lead, disappeared.

"Why—why——" began Fred, when he found himself slipping down, and an instant later, Jerry also toppled into a big hole, that opened through the snow right at their feet. The two boys brought up with a jolt, and found themselves sprawled out beside Mr. Baxter. They had fallen down an opening toward a sort of cave, the black mouth of which was directly in front of them.

"Well, we came right down the chimney," observed Mr. Baxter. "This is a lucky fall. We'll have a place to stay, and we'll throw Callack and his Indians off the track."

He rose to his feet, and started into the cave, which seemed a large one. They had toppled down a shaft or hole in the roof. The boys followed him, and as they entered the cavern they saw a faint light at the farther end. [182]

"This cave has a back and a front door," observed Mr. Baxter. "Come on, boys, we'll conceal ourselves in here until they have given up the search."

As he spoke there sounded above their heads, and off to one side, the shouts and yells of Callack and his men, who were running at top speed after their captives. For the fight had been quelled, and the escape discovered.

The cave was found to be one hollowed out under the earth and rocks, and there was no ice or snow in it.

"Say, this is as warm as toast!" exclaimed Jerry.

"Toast! Don't mention such things," begged Fred. "I'm half starved. I wonder why who ever made this cave didn't leave something on the sideboard for visitors to eat?"

"I guess this is a natural cave," replied Mr. Baxter. "There doesn't appear to be any signs that any one was ever in it before. It will serve us well, though, as Fred says, it's hard to be without food."

There was nothing to do but wait until it was safe to emerge. The fugitives went close to the other opening of the cavern. In front of it stretched a big level field of ice and snow, as far as the treasure seekers could observe, which was not far, for the snow still came down in big flakes. [183]

The warmth, which was a welcome change from the terrible cold, made them drowsy, and before they knew it the escaped captives were dozing off. How long they slept they could not tell, as there was no way of measuring time, and with no change from daylight to darkness.

With their awakening came a renewal of the pangs of hunger. In that cold climate men need to eat often and heartily to combat the frost king, and the captives, weakened by the exposure, their exertions and lack of food, suffered very much.

But they grimly bore it all, and, though the boys felt it more than did Mr. Baxter, who was seasoned to hardships, they never complained.

"Maybe if one of us went out, we could find some edible mosses beneath the snow," suggested Fred. "That would be good for us, wouldn't it, Mr. Baxter?"

"Yes, if we can find the moss. There are some kinds that will keep a man from starving. I'll go out of the cave. I think it will be safe now. It must be several hours since Callack and his crowd passed."

Mr. Baxter went to the mouth of the cave and looked out. It had stopped snowing, and the northern lights were flickering in the sky. [184]

"I'll chance it," he said.

As he was about to step forth he heard a noise to one side. It was the movement of something over the frozen surface of the snow. He started, and was about to dart back into the cavern, thinking it was some of the Indians, when Fred, who had come to the entrance with Mr. Baxter, cried out:

"It's one of our sleds, with two dogs fast to it. Hurrah! It's a sled with food on it!"

"Well, if this isn't a marvel!" exclaimed Jerry. "How did that get here? Did Callack send it?"

"The dogs probably wandered away during the fight," said Mr. Baxter. "See, they are not properly harnessed; they are only tangled up in the thongs. I wonder if we can catch them?"

Hurrying out, the old miner called sharply to the animals in the Indian tongue, of which he had

learned a few words. The beasts halted. They were almost exhausted from pulling the heavy load from which, doubtless, they had probably tried to break loose.

"Food! food!" cried Fred, rushing from the cave, and beginning to tear away the robes over the load on the sled. "Now we're all right!"

With eager hands Mr. Baxter and Jerry aided Fred. The dogs lay down in the snow, panting and weary. [185]

"We'll feed them well, to pay them for having brought us this sled," said Mr. Baxter. "It has saved our lives. Fate sent the beasts this way. Now boys——"

But he did not finish the sentence, for, at that instant with wild shouts, there came rushing over a little hill of ice several fur-clad figures. And the foremost of them was Callack, while behind him came several Indians.

"Here they are! We've got them!" cried the ugly white man. "I'm glad I decided to trace those straying dogs. Don't run or I'll shoot!" he added, and the captives saw that he had a gun. They could not have run if they wanted to, they were so exhausted. Fate had apparently aided them only to cast them once more into the hands of their enemies.

"Ah! You thought you'd get away from me, did you?" asked Callack exultantly, as he and his men rushed upon the treasure seekers. "Well, you nearly got away, and if it hadn't been that I started off after the dogs that strayed away with the sled, you might have fooled me. But now I've got you, and I'll wager you won't get away again."

The captives said nothing. They were too miserable. They were roughly bound, though their legs were left free, and then they were led away. Callack sat in comfort on the dog sled, the animals managing to pull him and the load of food, as the trail back to camp led down hill. [186]

It was not far to the place where they had escaped from, for as the captives learned later, they had wandered about considerably in their flight. They were soon back at the camp, and this time Callack looked carefully to the tying of the thongs.

When the captives had been securely fastened, holes were made in the ice, and in them stakes were thrust. Then loose ice was tamped in around to make the stakes hold. To these stakes, which soon froze in, almost like part of the ice itself, the prisoners were fastened.

"Now," said Callack when the barbarous work was finished, "let's see how you like that. I think you'll soon wish you'd told me the secret."

No one made him an answer. All were too intent on trying to move about as much as the close bonds would permit to get positions where the cruel wind and the stinging particles of snow would not be in their faces. Poor Johnson, scarcely able to move, groaned in pain.

"Boys, can you stand it?" asked Mr. Baxter in a low voice, "or shall I give in to him?"

"I'll stand it," answered Fred decidedly.

"So will I," added Jerry.

They were left alone. The Indians and Callack retired to the tents where, sheltered from the fierce blasts, they ate of the food which they had taken from the sleds of their captives, for Callack's band was not well supplied with rations. [187]

Thicker and thicker came down the snow. It began to form in little mounds over the extended feet of the staked-out prisoners. Soon it would cover them completely. But that might be an advantage rather than otherwise, as it would produce a warmth which might save their lives. But would it happen in time? And would they not die in the meanwhile of faintness, because they were very hungry?

The terrible cold was making them stupid. With a refinement of cruelty Callack had hung a big thermometer on a stake in front of Mr. Baxter that he might look at the little column of colored spirits and see to what low point they fell. The glow of the Northern Lights made an illumination sufficient to see the figures.

The night advanced. More and more intense grew the cold. The snow froze as it fell, until the captives were fairly encased under a covering of ice. Higher and higher it grew, until it was up to their chests. They could not move.

"Fifty degrees below zero," murmured Mr. Baxter as he looked at the thermometer. "And it will get lower. I am afraid I must give in—for the sake of the boys."

He looked over at his son and Fred. They had not spoken nor moved in some time. The cold was making them numb. Even Mr. Baxter, hardened as he was, felt a deadly calm stealing



"The terrible cold was making them stupid"

An hour passed. The thermometer had gone down five degrees more. But the cold was now so intense that a few degrees more or less made no seeming difference. Burrowing their heads down as far as they could in their fur hoods, the captives tried not to think about it. This was easy for poor Johnson, as he was out of his mind from the cruel blow Callack had dealt him.

The snow came down thicker and faster. It was now almost over the heads of the captives. The thermometer could no longer be seen. It was getting darker as the Northern Lights died away.

More keen grew the pangs of hunger, made acute by the great cold. Fred thought he would have to give up, and ask Mr. Baxter to reveal the secret of the gold that they might escape their terrible fate.

But it was doubtful now if even a shout would have attracted Callack's attention. He was in his tent with some of the Indians. The others were also under shelter.

But now the snow, which had seemed to add to their discomforts, proved beneficial to them. As it drifted over their heads while they sat on the ground, bound to the stakes, it shut out some of the terrible cold. Soon there stole over the captives a feeling of delicious warmth. It was not the dangerous sensation that precedes death by freezing, but real warmth; the warmth from their bodies, retained beneath the covering of closely-packed snow. [189]

Though they were completely covered, it was porous enough for them to breathe through, or they might have been suffocated to death.

They could only hear each other now with difficulty, as the snow muffled their voices. Mr. Baxter called to the boys occasionally to learn if they were still alive.

"I'm feeling all right," answered Fred once. "Only I wish Holfax would hurry."

"Wait until morning," advised Mr. Baxter hopefully. "I think he will come then."

Somehow the long night passed. They could tell when the sun arose slightly above the horizon by the increased light that shone through the snow blanket that covered them. They could hear faintly movements in the camp about them—Indians calling to one another.

The captives knew that their enemies were preparing breakfast, and, oh, how they wished for some hot tea, and some warm meat, or even some cold tallow! A candle would have been welcome, provided it was made from suet.

Soon could be heard the blows of picks being driven into the ice. Then shovels tinkled on the frozen crystals. The Indians had resumed their hunt for the buried treasure. [190]

It had stopped snowing, and because of the warm breath of the prisoners little holes had been melted in the white mounds which covered them so that they could see out a bit. They observed a score of Indians digging all around the foot of the hummock, while Callack directed them, occasionally helping himself.

"How are you, boys?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"Still alive," replied Fred.

"Terribly cold and hungry," answered Jerry.

"Shall I give up?"

"No!" exclaimed both boys. They were not going to surrender yet.

The hours passed. Foot after foot the Indians searched. The captives, tortured by being obliged to sit in one position, suffering from cold and hunger, watched them. Callack seemed to become more and more enraged as the time went on and he did not find the gold. Yet he did not again appeal to Mr. Baxter.

The sun began to decline. Night was once more settling down. For over twenty-four hours they had had nothing to eat. They were faint and almost frozen, but they would not give in. As for Johnson, he realized little of what was going on around him. [191]

It began to get dark. Once more the Northern Lights appeared in the sky, wavering and shooting from the horizon to the zenith. The Indians had ceased their digging and returned to their tents.

"How are you, Fred?" asked Mr. Baxter.

"I'm—I'm pretty well—I—I guess I can stand it a little longer."

"Why doesn't Holfax come?" thought Mr. Baxter. "Jerry, do you want to give up?" he asked.

"I'll—I'll stick it out a little longer, dad."

"All right. But I'm almost determined to give in. I did not think Callack would dare carry out his threat. We must save our lives, even if we have to give up the gold. I will wait an hour longer—"

At that moment Mr. Baxter felt something working at the bonds in back of him which bound

him to the stake. He could not turn his head to see who it was because of the pile of snow that covered him.

"Who is there?" he asked.

There was no answer.

"Holfax; is that you?" he asked, a great hope coming into his heart.

Still there was no answer.

"Dad!" cried Jerry. "Some one is undoing the thongs about my arms."

"And mine also!" added Fred.

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A moment later Mr. Baxter felt himself free from the stake at his back. He struggled to his knees, thrust out his arms to make a space in the snow about him, and tried to see who it was who had released him. There was no one in sight.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE RESCUE—CONCLUSION

For a moment Mr. Baxter did not know what to think. That he had been released was certain; but how? That the same agency was also at work for the boys was evident, for a moment later they, too, were able to get up on their knees. Their hands were free, but their feet were still tied. However, it was an easy matter to slash with knives which they all carried the thongs that were wound around their ankles.

"Who did it? Who aided us?" asked Fred.

"I don't know," replied Jerry.

"Quiet!" cautioned his father. "We have a chance to escape."

At that moment there was a movement in the snow at his feet, and a black, pointed muzzle was thrust up.

"The dogs!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter. "It was the dogs that gnawed through the bonds and released us. I see how it happened. The thongs were freshly cut from some hide, and the half-starved dogs smelled them. They burrowed under the snow until they could gnaw them, and thus they released us. I thought at first it was Holfax and his men."

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"So did I," spoke Fred. "But what had we better do now?"

"We must first get something to eat," said Mr. Baxter. "Wait until our blood is in a little better circulation, and we will steal down to the camp and see if we can't get something without attracting attention."

By stamping around on the hummock and whipping their arms about them the prisoners succeeded in getting some warmth into their benumbed bodies. To their surprise the noise they made did not attract any notice from the Indians or Callack. As it happened, the Alaskans were all so wearied with their day's labor that they slept sounder than usual.

Cautiously the captives stole down from the hummock toward one of the tents near which their own sleds had been placed. They hoped to find some food, for they were nearly famished.

As they advanced they detected a movement among the dogs, only a few of which had burrowed under the snow to get at the fresh thongs, for an Alaskan dog will, in stress of hunger, devour its own harness.

Suddenly there was an uproar among the animals, they probably thinking the approach of the captives meant that food was going to be distributed. There were barks, snarls and yelps. Some of the half-savage beasts jumped up on Fred and Jerry, and the boys had to beat them off.

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"They're as bad as wolves!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter.

Then from one of the tents appeared Callack. He had been aroused by the noise, and saw the prisoners free, rushing down on his camp.

"Here!" he cried. "What's up?"

With a bound Mr. Baxter sprang for the man. He had determined to overpower him if he could and get food. But in his weakened condition he was no match for his enemy. Callack dealt Mr. Baxter a blow that felled him. Then the leader of the Indians called for help to recapture the prisoners.

It looked as if they would again be taken back to the stakes and kept there until they died. A hopeless fear was in the hearts of the three. Johnson was still back on the hummock.

"Hold 'em!" cried Callack. "Shoot 'em if they resist!"

But none of the three was in a position to resist. Mr. Baxter was grasped by half a dozen hands, and several of the Indians surrounded Fred and Jerry. Mr. Baxter was willing to give up now. Fate was against them. He was about to call to Callack that he would tell where the gold was when a shot was heard at the edge of the camp. [196]

It came so suddenly, and was so evidently fired by some one not connected with the thieving band, that it produced an instant cessation of activities.

Then a voice was heard calling.

"Where be Mr. Baxter? Where be? Where boys? Got plenty help now! Plenty much fight!"

Another shot was heard. Callack looked around wonderingly. Some of his Indians released their hold of the captives.

Just then there rushed into the center of the camp the figure of a man completely enveloped in furs. In his hand he held a rifle, and he rushed up to Callack and pointed the weapon in his face.

"Let Mr. Baxter go!" he shouted. "Me know you. You Callack. Zank tell me. I tie Zank up. He tell all. But he get away. Me see him here."

"Holfax! It's Holfax!" cried Fred in delight.

"Thank God for that!" murmured Mr. Baxter. "He came just in time!"

Following their brave leader came two score of friendly Indians, uttering shouts of defiance at the enemies of Holfax's friends.

Several shots were fired. The thieves, taken by surprise, were unable to make any defense. Several of them were hit by bullets and slightly injured. [197]

With a cry of defeat they began to run away. Those having hold of the boys had left them, and Fred and Jerry were free. Callack suddenly drew a revolver from his pocket and aimed it at Mr. Baxter. But before he could pull the trigger Holfax, swinging his rifle as a club, knocked the rascal down.

"Don't kill him!" begged Mr. Baxter, merciful even to his enemy.

But Holfax had no chance. Callack scrambled to his feet and ran away. He must have been bewildered by the sudden rescue, for he ran straight toward a deep ravine near the camp, and before any one could call out to warn him he had fallen over the steep cliff. The bad man was seen no more.

By this time the friendly Indians were in possession of the camp. The wounded ones, including Zank, limped off, leaving all their possessions with the rescuers.

"How be?" asked Holfax of his friends, grinning in a friendly fashion.

"Almost starved," replied Mr. Baxter. "Boys, we must get some food at once and see to poor Johnson."

"Me do it," spoke Holfax, and he was as good as his word. Soon pots of hot tea were ready, and, with their own supplies to draw on, the half-starved and nearly frozen captives feasted to their hearts' content. [198]

Then Holfax told his story. He had been longer in getting to the camp of the friendly Indians than he had thought he would be, and on the journey of rescue the storm had delayed him and his friends. They came on dog sleds, which had been left just outside of the camp. He had met Zank, who had tried to persuade some friendly Indians to attack the white adventurers, and had forced from the Alaskan scoundrel part of Callack's plan. Then Zank escaped and joined his evil master.

"Now we must dig up the gold, and hurry to the south. Callack may get together a larger band, and follow us," said Mr. Baxter, when explanations had been made.

But they need have had no further fear of Callack, for he was beyond the power of harming anyone. The gold was dug up, the dog teams were harnessed, and when the supplies had been packed on the sleds, all was in readiness for the start.

Mr. Baxter paid well the Indians whom Holfax had brought to the rescue, and, as a further reward, they were given the dog teams, tents and other things belonging to the thieving tribe. Thus they were abundantly satisfied.

Holfax and a few of the Indians agreed to accompany Mr. Baxter, the boys and Johnson to the nearest settlement. The colored man improved very much after a good breakfast, and, though he was not completely himself for a long time after the blow, he eventually got well. [199]

"Homeward bound!" exclaimed Mr. Baxter, as, with Holfax and some of his acquaintances to drive the dog teams, they were carried on the well-filled sleds over the frozen snow.

"And with all the gold safe!" added Fred. "Now I can help my father and mother."

They made good time to the settlement on the Yukon River, whence they had made the start for the interior.

The adventurers were lucky in finding a ship about to sail for Seattle, whence they could take a train for San Francisco. Holfax was well rewarded for his part in the treasure search, and three months after he had left his home Fred Stanley, richer by fifteen thousand dollars (for that was his share after Mrs. Stults's half and the expenses had been taken out), started from the Piddock railroad station toward the little cottage which, at one time, he feared he would never see again.

But something about it seemed strange. The shutters were closed, and there did not appear to be any one in it. For a moment the boy felt a deadly fear clutching at his heart. Suppose his father and mother had died while he was away? He had heard nothing from them, and had merely sent them a telegram from Seattle, telling them of his safe arrival, but saying nothing of his success, for he wanted to surprise them. [200]

As he started up the front walk he heard a noise. Around the corner of the house came his father, limping along with a crutch, while his mother was walking at his side. She was weeping.

"Mother! Father!" cried Fred. "What is it? What has happened?"

"I'll tell you what's happened!" exclaimed a gruff voice, and a roughly-dressed man appeared. "They ain't paid their rent for two months, and they're being dispossessed—put out—that's what it is."

"Mother, is this so?" asked Fred.

"Yes, dear. Your father lost his place as watchman, and our money gave out. But never mind. Now you are safe back I shan't worry. We can easily find another place. I can go back to sewing, and you will help us. Perhaps some of the neighbors will care for us until you can get work."

"You don't need work, mother!" cried Fred, throwing his arms about her neck. "We've got lots of money. The treasure hunt was a success! I've got fifteen thousand dollars in gold as my share!"

"Fifteen thousand dollars in gold!" repeated Mr. Stanley as if in a dream. "Then we needn't be dispossessed, mother." [201]

"Oh, Fred! Fred!" cried Mrs. Stanley. "Can it be true? How did it come about? Did you really find the treasure? You're not sick, are you?"

"Sick? Why no, mother. What made you think that?"

"Because I can hardly believe what you say. I thought perhaps you might have been frozen, and been very ill and—and that it had turned your mind. I have read of persons in the far north going insane because of the dreadful whiteness and the cold."

"No, mother; I'm all right. It was terrible cold, and we had a hard time, with plenty of danger thrown in, but I'm all right, and I'm not out of my head. In fact my health is better than ever."

"And you really have all that gold?" repeated Fred's father again.

"Sure. Here are some samples," and Fred pulled out a few gold nuggets that he had taken from his share of the treasure, which had been left in a safe place while he came on ahead.

At the sight of the gold the eyes of the mean landlord sparkled. He looked greedily at the yellow particles.

"Yes, that's the genuine stuff," remarked Mr. Stanley. "Oh, Fred, my son, how glad I am that you succeeded, for I feared you would not!" [202]

"Ahem! I—er—I guess you'd better go back into the house, Mr. Stanley," said the landlord, a sudden change coming into his manner. "I'll have your goods brought right back. I'll send in something for you to eat, too. You need nourishing food, that's what you need. I'll attend to it for you. And if your son wants to invest some of his money I will be glad to offer my advice. Come back into the house and we'll talk it over."

"Talk what over?" asked Fred sharply.

"Why—er—about investing your money. Of course you'll want to invest it."

"Probably," replied the young treasure hunter coolly, "but I think I know where to go for advice, too. I don't believe I'd trust any one who would act as you have done to my relatives when they were in temporary distress."

"Oh—er—I—I didn't mean anything by that," said the man, somewhat confused. "You see I have so much property, and my agents attend to it for me. One of them must have ordered Mr. Stanley dispossessed on his own responsibility. I did not understand the case. I am always disposed to be lenient to my tenants, especially—"

"Yes, especially when you discover they have money," finished Fred.

"You, personally, began this dispossess action," said Mr. Stanley. "It was not the work of one of your agents." [203]

"Oh—er—well, perhaps I made a mistake," went on the man. "You may stay in this house as

long as you like."

"No, but we'll not stay in this house," said Fred. "We will have a better one. Come, mother, we'll go to a hotel until we can find a place that suits us. And then father can go to a good hospital until he gets cured."

"I—er—I hope you won't take offense—I—er—I had to have my rent money—if you'd like it, I'll let you have this place a little cheaper," said the mean landlord.

"No, thank you," answered Fred decidedly. "We want a better place than this."

And some days later he bought a fine house for his parents with part of the proceeds of the buried gold. Mr. Stanley was sent to a hospital, where, with good care and nourishing food, he soon recovered the use of his leg, and was able to resume his work. As for Fred, he went back to school to complete his education, since the family was now beyond the fear of want. Part of the money his father insisted on investing for his son, and later some shares in a good mine were bought with it. If you were to visit Piddock to-day, you would find it a much larger city than when Fred left it to hunt for gold in far off Alaska, and if you were to ask who was the best known citizen there, you would be told he was Fred Stanley.

[204]

For Fred prospered very much after he started in the mining business for himself, and he showed the same determined characteristics that he exhibited when on that perilous trip.

Among his best friends he numbers Mr. Baxter and his son Jerry. As for Mrs. Stults, she never can say enough in praise of what Fred did for her, as her share of her husband's fortune was large enough to make her independent for life.

"Dot Stanley boy, he is der greatest boy vot effer vos," she used to say. "Dere vos a man Stanley vot discovered t'ings in der hot Africa, but Fred Stanley, he discovered gold in der cold country, und dot's better as neffer vos, eh?"

So now we will bid farewell to Fred, though, if you should ever meet him and ask him about his trip to Alaska, I have no doubt that he would be glad to tell you many details I have not had space to set down here.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER; OR, FRED STANLEY'S TRIP TO ALASKA ***

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