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**THE
YOUNG ALASKANS**

BY
EMERSON HOUGH

AUTHOR OF
"THE STORY OF THE COWBOY"
"THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE"
ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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See p [66](#)
**SUDDENLY DROPPING TO HIS
KNEE HE FIRED WITHOUT
LONGER HESITATION**

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I

AT HOME IN ALASKA

“Steamboat! Steamboat!”

Rob McIntyre had been angling for codfish at the top of Valdez dock for the past half-hour. Now, hearing the hoarse boom of the ocean vessel’s whistle out in the fog-bank which covered the mouth of the harbor, he pulled in his fishing-line, hurriedly threw together his heap of flapping fish, and, turning, sent shoreward the cry always welcome to dwellers in Alaska coast towns.

“Steamboat! Steamboat!” Some one at the freight office on Valdez dock heard him and repeated the cry. Again and again it was passed from one to another along the half-mile of high sidewalk which led from the dock to the town. Soon in every corner of the streets of Valdez there resounded the call: “Steamboat! Steamboat!”

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Now there came to the ears of all the low, hoarse boom of the steamer’s whistle. The great vessel was lying out somewhere in the fog, nosing her way in carefully, taking care not to touch any of the hidden rocks which line the Alaskan shores. The residents of the town poured out from dwelling and shop alike, and soon the streets were full, almost the entire population hurrying over the long trestle to the dock where the boat must land. The whistle said to them that there were now at hand cargoes of goods for the merchants, machinery for the new railroad building inland, necessities and luxuries for every-day life, and, best of all, letters, books and papers from the outside world. “Outside” in an Alaskan coast town means the United States. Across the range of mountains which fence off the coast from the vast interior “outside” means the coast itself; just as to any town dweller of the Alaska coast “inside” means somewhere in the icy interior, vast and unexplored.

Among the first to hasten down the long walk from the main street of the town were two friends of Rob McIntyre—Jesse Wilcox and John Hardy, the former ten and the latter twelve years of age, each therefore a little younger than Rob, who himself was now nearly fourteen. These boys might be called young Alaskans, for although the town of Valdez itself was not more than a few years old, their fathers had helped found the town and were prominent in its business affairs. Mr. Hardy was engaged in railway contracts on the new railroad, and Mr. Wilcox was chief of engineers on the same road. Rob’s father, Mr. McIntyre, owned the leading store, where all sorts of articles were sold, from shovels and picks to needles and pins. The three boys, it need not be said, were great cronies, and many was the hour of sport they had had here in far-away Alaska.

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“Hello, Rob!” called John, as he hurried up; “how many fish did you get? What boat’s that, do you think? Do you suppose my uncle Dick’s on board?”

“Hope so,” rejoined Rob, now rolling up his fishing-line, and again kicking his codfish out of the road of the gathering crowd. “He’s probably got something for us if he is.”

“How far is she out?” inquired Jesse. “She blows like the *Yucatan*, but maybe she’s the old *Portland* coming in.”

“If she’s the *Portland* my father might be aboard,” said John. “If it’s the *Yucatan*, and Uncle Dick’s coming, then we’ll get my new rifle, sure.”

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“One apiece, then,” said Rob. “If each of us had a gun we could all go hunting together.”

“Pack-train just came across the divide yesterday,” said Jesse, “and they had four bear-skins. They got ’em less than thirty miles inland. The fellow that killed them threw away two skins because they were so heavy he didn’t want to bother to pack ’em. But I don’t suppose they’d let us go bear-hunting yet,” said Jesse, hesitatingly.

“The biggest bear in this whole country,” began Rob, who was posted on such matters, “are over toward Kadiak Island. I heard a trader from Seldovia saying there were a few sea-otters over there, too.”

“Wouldn’t you like to go over to Kadiak—just once?” said John. “A big bear-skin or two, and maybe a sea-otter—we could cash in our fur for enough to buy a mining claim, like enough! My uncle Dick’s due to go over there, too, before long,” he ruminated. “You know he’s employed on the government survey, and they’re making soundings on that part of the coast.”

Rob drew a long breath. "Well, maybe *sometime* we could get over there," he said; and the others nodded, because they had come to look on him as something of a leader in their outdoor expeditions.

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"Priddy soon dat fog shall lift," remarked Ole Petersen, an old sailor who was lounging about the dock. He nodded toward the mouth of the harbor, where now all could see the heavy veil of mist growing thinner. Little by little, even as the steady boom of the steamer's whistle came echoing in, the front of the fog-bank thinned and lifted, showing the white-capped waves rolling beneath. Suddenly a strong shift of wind descended from the cañon between two of the many mountain-peaks which line the bay, and broke the fog into long ribbons of white vapor. The sun shone through, and its warmth sent the white mist up in twisting ropes, which faded away in the upper air. At last there came into view the red-topped smoke-stacks and the gaunt, dark hull of the great ocean steamer, whose funnels poured forth clouds of black smoke which drifted toward the farther shore of the bay.

"*Yucatan!*" sang out Rob—and Ole Petersen calmly seconded him with a nod—" *Yucatan!*"

The gathered population of Valdez—men, women, children, and dogs—greeted the vessel with a general outcry of welcome.

"In she comes," said Rob; and now, with two more long, hoarse roars from her giant whistle, the *Yucatan* slowly forged ahead, and within half an hour majestically swept up to her moorings at the front of Valdez dock.

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II

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AFLOAT ON THE PACIFIC

As the deck-hands cast ashore the light lines attached to the cable-loops, our young friends were among the first to lay hold and aid in dragging ashore the heavy cables which made fast the steamer to the dock-posts. Then they ran back amidships where the gang-plank was put out. The jingling of the ship's bells and general outcry from those on the dock or crowding along the rail of the vessel made everything a scene of confusion. Greetings were passed from ship to shore and back again. Friends now would meet, cargo would be discharged; touch with the outer world once more would be had.

"But I don't see Uncle Dick anywhere," said John, ruefully, as he examined the throng of figures packed along the rail waiting for the gangway to be made fast.

"Maybe he didn't come," suggested Jesse.

"There he is!" shouted John; "he's waving to us, over there 'midships."

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"He's got something under his arm," said Rob, judicially.

A tall, brown-faced man with a wide, white hat and loose gray clothing edged his way toward the head of the gangway. Catching sight of the boys, he called out a hearty greeting.

"Have you got it, Uncle Dick?" asked John, excitedly, as at last the latter reached the dock.

Uncle Dick's answer was to pass to his nephew a certain long package, which proved to be a fine rifle in a leather case. For the moment all three boys were so much engaged in examining this that they paid little attention to what was going on—hurry and confusion, shouting and laughing and excited talk, mingled with the creak of the hoists and the rattle of the donkey-engine as the ship's men now began the work of discharging the cargo of the *Yucatan*. It must be remembered that in Alaska few things are manufactured, and everything must be shipped in, fifteen hundred miles or more, from San Francisco, Seattle, and other points.

"Well, young gentlemen," said Uncle Dick, at last, "you seem gladder to see that gun than you are to see me."

"No, we're not, sir," rejoined Rob; "but we're pleased enough, even so, because now each of us has a rifle."

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"And no place to use one," answered Uncle Dick.

"Well, we may be able to go inside, hunting, before long," said Jesse, stoutly. "My father doesn't care if I go with him."

"How would you like to go over to Kadiak with me?" asked Uncle Dick, directly, looking at them keenly from his gray eyes.

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Rob. The three gathered round him.

"Are you going over there right away?" asked Jesse, staring up at him.

Uncle Dick nodded. "Same boat," he answered. "I'm going on with the *Yucatan* to Seward, and will take the *Nora* from there to Kadiak. Chance of your life to spend the summer, if your mothers will say the word. And not to hurry you any, you've got just about an hour and a quarter to get ready—that is to say, to get consent and get ready both."

The three boys hardly stopped to hear the last of his words. They were off, running at top speed across the long sidewalk toward the town. Uncle Dick followed them at his leisure, talking and telling the news to his acquaintances, of whom he had many in the town. He explained to these that the government work in soundings would be done by the revenue cutter *Bennington*, along the shores of Kadiak Island, for the next four months. Now, although to those unfamiliar with Alaska, Valdez may seem as far away as Kadiak, the latter really is some hundreds of miles farther to the northwest, and near the base of that long peninsula which tapers to a point in the Aleutian Islands. A dweller in a coast town in Alaska knows what goes on immediately about him. There were few in Valdez who knew more of Kadiak than they did of Kamchatka.

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"G'long there, ye young rascals!" called out a hearty voice at the fleeing boys. Captain John Ryan waved a cap toward them as he came down the gang-plank. But the boys, usually ready enough to visit with him on his stops at Valdez, were now too much excited to more than wave their hands as they disappeared.

"So ye're plannin' to take the rascals along with us, west, are ye?" asked Captain John Ryan of Uncle Dick. "A summer out there would be the makin' of the youngsters."

Uncle Dick's eyes wrinkled in a smile as he and the sturdy sea-captain started on down and walked to the town. At the farther end they were met by the three boys and by three nice-looking ladies, each prosperous-looking and well dressed, and each bearing a very anxious expression of countenance.

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"I tell you it's absolutely absurd, Richard," began one of these, as they approached—"your putting such notions into the heads of these boys."

"It's all utterly impossible, of course," said Rob's mother, in turn, her mouth closing tightly as she looked around at her son.

Mrs. Wilcox said less, but kept her hand on Jesse's shoulder. "What would you do at night with no one to see you safe in bed, my son?" said she, at length.

"Oh, mother!" began Jesse, shamefacedly.

"I'll take care of the boys," said Uncle Dick, at length. "I won't mollycoddle them, and they will have to shift for themselves, but I'll see that they get through all right. Think it over, good people. It will be the making of the kids."

"Oh, well now, Richard," began Mrs. Hardy, once more, "how do we know when you are coming back?"

"You don't know. I don't know myself."

"But these boys have to go to school."

"Oh, I'll get them back in time for the fall term. Boats are coming down from Kadiak every month or so."

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"But they say the storms out that way are perfectly frightful," began Mrs. McIntyre.

"We'll not be in any storms. The cutter *Bennington* anchors in the harbors, and, besides, the boys will be ashore in town at Kadiak. You don't suppose that Uncle Sam will let me have them around underfoot all the time, do you? I'll have something else to do."

"But what could the boys do, then?" inquired Mrs. McIntyre.

"Nothing much. Hunt seals and otters and whales and bears, and a few little things like that—catch more codfish and salmon than they ever thought of around here—go boat-riding with the Aleuts—"

"In those tippy bidarkas?"

"Tippy bidarkas," nodded Uncle Dick; "and go egg-hunting on the gull rocks, and all sorts of

things. Why, they'd have the time of their lives, that's all."

"But not one of the boys has a father at home now to advise in the matter," hesitated Jesse's mother. "They are all inside, and won't be back for a week."

"They'll all be back just a week too late," answered Uncle Dick. "In about three-quarters of an hour from now, as Captain Ryan here will advise you, we start; and these boys, I think, will be on board the *Yucatan* headed for Kadiak. You want to remember that this is Alaska, and that these are Alaskan boys. They've got to grow up knowing how to take care of themselves in this country. They're not sissies, with red morocco shoes and long yellow curls—they're the stuff we've got to make men out of up here. How'd Alaska ever have been found, in the first place, if there hadn't been real men raised from real boys?" [Pg 13]

"Oh, well!" began Mrs. McIntyre; and each of the other ladies echoed, "Oh, *well!*"

"Oh, *well!*" echoed Uncle Dick. "I'll tell you what: you had better hurry back home and get their blankets rolled, and an extra pair of shirts and some spare socks thrown together. And, boys, the best thing you can do is to go down to the store and get some ammunition. We can get all the grub we want from the ship's stores out at Kadiak. Now, excuse me, ladies, but don't take my time arguing this matter, because I've got several things to do; and the boat's going to start inside of an hour, and we're going to start with her!"

Sure enough, when at last the heavy boom of the *Yucatan's* warning whistle caused the window glass along the main street to tremble, a little party once more wended its way down the sidewalk toward the wharf. Uncle Dick led the way, earnestly talking with three very grave and anxious mothers. Behind him, perfectly happy, and shouting excitedly to one another, came Rob, Jesse, and John. Each carried a rifle in its case, and each looked excitedly now and then at the wagon which was carrying their bundles of luggage to the wharf. [Pg 14]

"All aboard!" called the mate at the head of the gang-plank, laying hold of the side lines and waiting to pull it in. Again came the heavy whistle of the ocean steamer. The little group now broke apart; and in a moment the boys, somewhat sobered now, were waving their farewells to the mothers, who stood, anxious and tearful, on the dock.

"Cast off, there!" came the hoarse order from the captain's bridge.

"Ay, ay, sir!" rejoined the mate, repeating the command to the dock hands. Slowly the great propeller began to churn the green water astern into white. The bow of the great vessel slowly swung, and majestically she headed on her way out to the mouth of the bay. Clouds of white gulls followed her, dipping and soaring. Once more her whistle saluted the town from which she departed, its note echoing deeply from the steep fronts of the adjacent mountains. The wheelsman laid the course straight for the mouth of the gap between the outer mountains which marked the mouth of the bay. In less than an hour the bold headlands were passed. Beyond rolled the white-topped swells of the sea, across which lay none might tell how much of adventure. [Pg 15]

"Now," said Rob, turning to his friends, "maybe we'll see something of the world."

III

[Pg 16]

THE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH

The good ship *Yucatan* steadily ploughed her way along the rock-bound Alaskan coast until, at noon of the second day, she nosed her way into the entrance of that great indentation of the coast known as Resurrection Bay, and finally concluded her own northbound journey at the docks of the town of Seward, which lies at the head of that harbor. Here the voyagers were to change to a smaller vessel, the sturdy little craft called the *Nora*, which was to carry them still farther northward and westward. The young travellers, although before this they had known Alaska to be a great country, now began to think that they had not dreamed how large it really was, for Uncle Dick advised them that they would need to steam almost a week yet farther before they could arrive at Kadiak harbor.

Once out of Resurrection Bay on their journey to the farther north, they began to see sights strange even to them, long as they had been used to Alaska. Hundreds of sea-lions crowded some lofty rocks not far beyond the entrance to the bay, roaring and barking at the ship as she steamed close in to the rocks, and plunging off in scores as the whistles of the boat [Pg 17]

aroused and frightened them from their basking in the sun.

Rob's eyes proved keener than those of his friend, and he was always looking out across the sea in search of some strange object.

"What's that, Mr. Dick?" he exclaimed, after he had been gazing steadily at the far horizon for some moments.

Uncle Dick hastened to his state-room and returned with a pair of field-glasses.

"That," said he, "is a whale—in fact, more than one; indeed, I think there is a big school of whales on ahead. We'll run almost square into them at this rate."

Sure enough, within the hour they came within plain sight of a number of great black objects which at first seemed like giant logs rolling on the water. All at once there appeared splashes of white water among the whales, and the latter seemed to be much agitated, hastening hither and thither as though in fear. Captain Zim Jones, of the *Nora*, leaned down from his place on the bridge. [Pg 18]

"School of killers in there!" he sang out.

"That's right," exclaimed Uncle Dick, handing the glasses to Rob. "Watch close now! Don't you see those smaller black things swimming along, with tall, upright fins? Those are killers, and they are fighting the whales right now!"

Eagerly the boys took turns with the glasses, watching the strange combat of the sea now going on. Evidently some of the whales were much distressed; one large one seemed to be the especial mark of the enemy, which pursued him in a body.

"Look, look!" cried John. "He jumped almost out of the water. He is as big as a house!"

"I didn't know anything could hurt a whale, he's so big!" commented Jesse. "How do they fight a whale?"

"Maybe they poke 'em with that big fin," said Uncle Dick. "But they do the damage with their jaws. One of them will bite a chunk out of a whale, and as quick as he lets go another will take his place. They come pretty near to eating the whale alive sometimes, although I don't know that they really kill them very often."

"Well, I don't know," said Rob, who was looking steadily ahead. "There is one right ahead of us who just came up, and he's acting mighty stupid. See, he's coming right across the bows. If we don't look out we'll hit him. There!" [Pg 19]

Even as he spoke there came a heavy jar which almost stopped the ocean vessel. Her steel-shod bow had struck the whale full in the middle of the body.

"Caught him square amidships," sung out Captain Zim from his station. "I guess we finished what the killers began!"

The great creature lay for an instant stunned on the surface of the water, its vast body bent as though its back were broken. Then as the ship passed on it slowly sank from sight, even as the school of whales, diving and breaching, also fell astern, still pursued by their savage enemies.

"Well," said Captain Zim, "I've sailed these waters thirty years, but that's the first time I ever struck a whale."

"I've promised these boys plenty of exciting things," commented Uncle Dick. "But if you don't mind, I'd rather you wouldn't run over any more whales. You'll be taking the keel out of this ship the first thing you know."

"I see something else!" called Jesse, who was examining the rolling sea studiously with the field-glasses. "See it—right over there about two hundred yards! It looks like a man standing up in the water." [Pg 20]

"Oh, *that*," said Uncle Dick, "it's only a seal."

"Couldn't I shoot it?" asked Rob. "I'd like to get its fur."

Uncle Dick laughed. "You wouldn't find its hide worth more than a dollar or so, if you got it," said he. "That's only a little hair seal. You won't find any fur seals until you get a good many hundred miles beyond Kadiak. And that's a good many hundred miles yet from here. Let the little fellow go, and turn the glasses on that big bunch of whale-birds over there. See them flying—there's a string nearly a mile long."

"I see them! I see them!" called out Rob. "There are thousands and thousands of them. I've

seen them before, and one of the sailors told me that there is always most of them where there are whales around. They seem to feed on the same sort of things in the water, someway."

"There are plenty of things you see up in this country," said Uncle Dick, as he turned away. "You may have thought Valdez was pretty much all of Alaska, but I'll show you it is just the beginning."

"Do they have shipwrecks up here, Uncle Dick?" asked John. "It looks to me pretty rocky along these shores." [Pg 21]

"Don't talk about shipwrecks!" replied his uncle. "This coast is full of them. I can show you the skeletons of four ships within two hours' sail of Kadiak, and how many small boats go ashore, never to be heard of, no man can tell. There are big ships lost, too, up and down this coast. Last year the natives below Kadiak brought in casks and boxes and all kinds of things bearing the name of the steamer *Oregon*. She was wrecked far to the south of Valdez, but the Japan Current carried her wreckage a thousand miles to the north and west, and threw it on the coast of Kadiak and the smaller islands west of there. It made the natives rich, they found so much in the way of supplies."

"Are there any bears out there?" asked Jesse, wonderingly.

"Biggest in the world!" replied Uncle Dick. "You'd better keep away from them. We're sailing now just south of the great Kenai Peninsula of Alaska. There's bears over there, but mostly black ones. Plenty of moose and caribou in these mountains, and once in a while a grizzly, but the biggest grizzlies are the brown bears of Kadiak and the peninsula on beyond."

Rob was silent for a time, but at last remarked: "From what I hear of this Kadiak country, I believe we're going to like it. When'll we get there?" [Pg 22]

Uncle Dick smiled. "Oh, sometime within a week," he answered. "Distances are long up here, and wind and tide have something to do with even a steamer's speed."

IV

[Pg 23]

LOST IN THE FOG

Sure enough, it took five days more of steady steaming before the *Nora* approached the shores of far-off Kadiak Island. In the nighttime the boys heard the steamer's whistle going, and knew that Captain Zim was sounding the echoes to get his bearings in the thick weather then prevailing. Sea-captains on those shores, when the fog is thick, keep the whistle going, and when they hear the echoes from the rocks too plainly they make outward to the open sea.

The *Nora* crawled down the coast of Afognak Island in the fog and the dark, but finally cast her anchor as near as could be told off the entrance to the narrow channel of Kadiak Harbor. Here she sounded her whistle for more than an hour at short intervals, waiting for a pilot to come out. At last, soon after those on board had finished breakfast, they heard the sound of oars out in the fog and a rough voice calling through a megaphone: "Steamer ahoy! What boat is that?" [Pg 24]

"*Nora*, from Valdez," answered Captain Zim. "Are you the pilot?"

"Ay, ay!" came the voice through the fog.

"Come on board—this way!" called Captain Zim; and once more the hoarse whistle of the steamer boomed out into the fog.

Needless to say, the three boys now were on deck, and they leaned over the rail as there appeared at the foot of the rope-ladder a big dory with two native oarsmen, and a stout, grizzled man, whom the ship's company announced to be Pete Piamon, the pilot for that coast.

"How are you, Pete?" said Captain Zim. "Can we take her in? I'm late and in an awful hurry."

Pete grinned. "All the time you ban in awful hurry, Captain Zim. Dis fog awful tick. Yas, we shall take her in if you say so—and maybe so pile her up on de rock. You don' min' dat, eh?"

"Where's the revenue-cutter *Bennington* lying, Pete?" asked Uncle Dick.

"Inside, beyond de town." Pete jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, captain," said Uncle Dick. "I'm in a big hurry to report to my commanding officer on the *Bennington*, for he's no doubt been lying here two or three days waiting for us. You keep Pete here, and let me and the boys take his dory and pull in—they'll take us through the tide-rips all right, if it gets bad. I won't ask you to put down one of the ship's boats." [Pg 25]

Pete looked at Captain Zim, who answered: "Oh, all right, if you're in such a hurry; though you might wait and let us all go in together. How are you going to get all of your hand luggage and all four of you into that dory, though?"

"You couldn't spare us a ship's boat?"

"Sure I can," answered obliging Captain Zim. "I'll tell you—put the boys in the dory, and I'll send you and the luggage over in the long-boat."

"Get down there, boys," commented Uncle Dick, briefly, pointing to the rope-ladder. "Are you afraid to go down the ladder?"

Rob's answer was to make a spring for the top of the ladder, and down he went hand over hand, followed by the others, each of whom could climb like a squirrel. The two natives, grinning, reached up and steadied them as they reached the jumping dory. The boys insisted on having their blankets and rifles in the boat with them—a part of Alaska education which had been taught them by old prospectors.

Pete shouted something over the rail in the Aleut tongue. At once the two natives bent to their oars, and the dory slipped away into the fog. Uncle Dick, busy with hunting out his luggage for the long-boat, did not at first miss it from the foot of the ladder. [Pg 26]

"Hello! Where did that dory go?" he asked, finally. In the confusion no one answered him. So at last he concluded his own work in loading the long-boat and went overside, ordering the boat's crew to give way together, strongly, in order to overtake the dory.

But when the long-boat, after feeling its way down the narrow channel, emerged from the fog and pulled up at Kadiak dock there was no dory there.

"Hello, there, Jimmy!" cried Uncle Dick to the manager of the warehouse at the dock. "Where's that boat?"

"What boat do you mean, sir?" answered the other.

"Why, Pete's dory. We just sent it in by two natives, with three boys I've got along—friends and relatives of mine."

"You're joking, sir. You can't have brought boys away up here. Besides, they haven't showed up here at the dock, nor any dory, either."

"They must have got into the other channel mouth in the fog and gone down Wood Island way," said Uncle Dick, at last, beginning to be troubled. [Pg 27]

"Well, if an Aleut can do anything wrong, that's what he's going to do," answered the dock-master. "We'll have to send a boat over there after those people yet. By-the-way, Captain Barker, of the *Bennington*, is waiting for you. And he told me to tell you to come aboard in Pete's dory as soon as you struck the town."

"But the dory's gone," commented Uncle Dick. "I don't like the look of this."

Both men, with lips compressed, stood staring out into the heavy blanket of fog.

V

[Pg 28]

THE MISSING DORY

What happened was this: The two natives in the dory were unable to understand English, and of course the three boys knew nothing of the native language. Yet from the hasty instruction of the pilot, Pete, the natives had gathered that "the boss gentleman"—that is to say, Uncle Dick—wanted to go to the revenue-cutter *Bennington*. Accordingly they concluded that the boys also were bound directly for the cutter, and so instead of heading

to the channel which led to the town, they proposed to take a cut-off behind Wood Island, best known to themselves. Thus they rowed on for more than half an hour before any of the boys suspected anything wrong. Rob made signs to them to stop rowing. All the boys looked about them in the fog. They were still in the roll of the open sea, and the dory pitched wildly on the long swell, but, listen intently as they might, they could hear no sound from any quarter.

"We ought to have stayed with Uncle Dick," suggested Jesse.

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"That's right!" admitted Rob. "But the question is, what ought we to do now? They pointed out town that way from the *Nora*, and I know we're not going the right direction."

To all inquiries and commands the natives did nothing but shake their heads and smile pleasantly. At last they resumed their oars and began to row steadily on their course. The sea now came tumbling in astern in long black rolls, broken now and again by whitecaps. Like a cork the dory swung up and down on the long swells, and all the boys now grew serious, for they had never been in so wild a water as this in all their lives.

They progressed this way a little while, until Rob bethought himself of the plan employed by the captains when skirting the shore in fog. He put his hands to his mouth and gave a loud, drawn-out shout, and then listened for an echo. Sure enough it came, faint and far off, but unmistakable.

"We're running down the coast, or else the channel is wide here," said Rob, "because the echo is only on one side."

From time to time they renewed these tactics, and for mile after mile kept in touch of the shore, on which now and then they could hear the waves breaking wildly. At last Rob set his jaw tight in decision.

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"I tell you what," said he; "we're going the wrong way. We ought to have been at the town long before this. I'm for going ashore and waiting till the fog lifts."

Both Jesse and John agreed to this, for now they were thoroughly alarmed. Rob made motions to the two native oarsmen that they should head the dory inshore. They, always disposed to be obedient to the white race, agreed and swung the dory shoreward. "*Karosha*," said the older of the two men; by which they later learned he meant to say, "All right."

The two natives were well used to making a landing through the surf. Arrived off shore, they waited till a big wave came directly at the stern, then with a shout gave way and rode in on its crest, jumping out into the water and pulling the dory high up on what proved to be a shingle beach backed by a high rock wall a hundred yards or so inland.

All the boys now scrambled out, glad enough to set foot on shore. But they found their surroundings cheerless rather. The soft blanket of the fog shut in, white and fleecy, all about them. Now and again they heard a wandering sea-bird call, but they could see neither the sea nor any part of the shore beyond the rock wall near at hand. They no longer heard the whistle of the *Nora* lying at anchor at the mouth of the channel.

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Both the natives now pulled out pipes and began to smoke silently. One produced from his pocket an object deeply wrapped in a bundle of rags and hide, which finally proved to be an old brass watch, which he consulted anxiously.

"Him sleep," he remarked, shaking the watch and putting it to his ear. By this Rob knew that he meant that the watch had stopped.

"I knew he could talk," said John. "Ask him where we can get something to eat. I'm getting awful hungry."

"You're always hungry, John," said Rob. "The most important thing for us is to find where we are. Here, you!" He addressed the natives. "You can talk English. Which way is town? How far? Why don't we get there at once?"

The wrinkled native smiled amiably again, and remarked "By-'n-by"; but that seemed to be the extent of his English, for after that he only shook his head and smiled.

"This is a fine thing, isn't it?" said Rob. "I wonder what your uncle Dick will think of us. Anyway, we've got our guns and blankets, and there's a box of crackers and some canned tomatoes under the boat seat."

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At last the two natives began to jabber together excitedly. They turned and said something to the boys which the latter could not understand, and then, without further ado, made off inland and disappeared in the fog. Some moments elapsed before the boys understood what

had happened, and indeed they had no means of knowing the truth, which was that the two natives, who were perfectly friendly, had started across to the Mission House of Wood Island, some two miles or more, in search of something to eat, and possibly in the wish of getting further instructions about these young men they found in their charge.

"Why don't they come back?" asked Jesse, in the course of half an hour or so, during which all were growing more anxious than they cared to admit.

"Who knows how long 'by-'n-by' may mean? I'd like to get out of here," added John.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Rob, after they had waited for perhaps another half-hour. "These men have left us, and now we'll leave them in turn. The sea is pretty rough, but this is a good boat and we can run her. We can go back that way, and get to the mouth of the channel, because I noticed which way the wind was blowing. Town must be off to the left, and we can keep track of the shore by the echo. I'm for pulling out right away."

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"So am I," assented John. And Jesse, although he looked rather sober at the sight of the white-topped waves, agreed.

By great good-luck they were able to push the dory out with the receding crest of a big wave, and the first thing they knew they were pitching up and down in the white water. By hard pulling they got the boat offshore, and being there outside the more broken water made fairly good headway, although they found the boat heavy and hard to pull.

"We can't make it," said Rob, at last. "She's too big for us to pull against the wind, and that's the way we must go if we go toward town. I'm afraid we'll have to go ashore again."

"Look, look there!" cried John, suddenly.

They all stopped rowing for a moment and gazed ahead.

A towering ridge of white, foamy waves arose directly in front of them, higher than their heads had they stood upright in the boat. Swirling and breaking, it seemed to advance and march down upon them. The surface of the water was agitated as though some great creature were lashing it into foam. But soon they saw that this was something worse than any creature of the deep.

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"It's the tide-rips!" cried Rob, anxiously. "The tide-bore is going out the channel—I've heard them tell of that before. Look out, now! Give way, and put her into it quartering, or it'll swamp us, sure!"

VI

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ADRIFT ON THE OCEAN

A thousand angry, choppy waves pitched alongside the dory, as though reaching up and trying to come aboard. Time and again the boys thought all was lost. Instead of passing through the tide-rips, the dory seemed to be carried on with them as they shifted.

The tide, indeed, had now turned, and with its turn the fog began to lift. Getting some idea of what now was happening, Rob undertook to make back toward the shore, where they could hear the surf roaring heavily. Perhaps it was lucky they did not succeed in this attempt, for the boat would no doubt have been crushed like an eggshell on the rocks. Instead, they began to float down parallel with the coast, carried on the crest of the big tide-bore which every day passes down the east coast of Kadiak between the long, parallel islands which make an inland channel many miles in extent. As the boys called now they could hear an echo on each side of them, and indeed could see the loom of the rock-bound shore; but all about them hissed and danced these fighting waves, tossing the dory a dozen ways at once, and all the time there came astern the long roll of the mighty Pacific in its power, the Japan current and the coast tide in unison forcing a boiling current down the rocky channel. Escape was hopeless.

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"Boys," said Rob, his face perhaps a trifle pale, "we can't get out of this. All we can do is to run."

The others looked at him silently.

"She's a splendid boat," went on Rob, trying to be cheerful. "She rides like a chip. I believe if we keep low down she'll be safe, for it doesn't seem to be getting any worse."

A powerful steamboat, if it were caught under precisely these conditions, could have done little more than drift down the channel. The boys resigned themselves to their fate. Now and again the fog shut down. Wild cries of sea-birds were about them. Now and then the leap of a great dolphin feeding in the tide splashed alongside, to startle them yet more. Each moment, as they knew, carried them farther and farther from their friends, and deeper and deeper into dangers whose nature they could only guess.

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"I wish we'd never left Valdez," said Jesse, at last, his lip beginning to quiver.

"That's no way to talk," said Rob, sternly. "The right thing to do when you're in a scrape is to try to get out of it. This tide can't run clear round the world, because your uncle Dick said this island wasn't over one hundred and fifty miles long, and there must be any number of bays and coves. Pull some crackers out of that box and let's eat a bite."

"That's the talk," said John, more cheerfully. "We'll get ashore somewhere. It's no use to worry."

John was always disposed to be philosophical; but the great peculiarity about him was that he was continually hungry. He found the crackers now rather dry and hard to eat, so worried open a can of tomatoes with his hunting-knife, complaining all the time that they had no water to drink.

Their hasty meal seemed to do them good. Finding that their dory was still afloat, they began to lose their fears. Indeed, little by little, the height of the waves lessened. The tide was beginning to spread in the wider parts of the channel.

"Let's try the oars again," said Rob, at last.

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To their delight they found that they could give the dory some headway. But in which direction should they row? Small wonder that in these crooked channels, with the wind shifting continually from the shore and the veil of fog alternately lifting and falling again, they took the wrong course.

They had now been afloat for some hours, although at that season of the year there is daylight for almost the entire twenty-four hours, so that they had no means of guessing at the time. They had passed entirely across the mouths of two or three of the great inland bays, which make into the east shore of Kadiak Island. At the time when they flattered themselves they were making their best headway back toward town, they were really going in the opposite direction, caught by the stiff tide which was running between Ugak Island and the east coast of Kadiak. In all, they remained in the dory perhaps ten or twelve hours, and in that time they perhaps skirted more than one hundred miles of shore-line, counting the indentations of the bays, although in direct distance they did not reach a total of more than fifty or sixty miles. At the head of one of these bays, had they but known it, there were salmon rivers where fishing-boats occasionally stopped; but all that they could do was to use the best of their wisdom and their strength, and they kept on, steadily pulling, believing that the tide had turned, whereas in truth they were going down the coast still with the tide and approaching the mouth of the vast crooked bay known as Kaludiak, half-way down the east coast of the great island. Thus they were leaving behind a possible place of rescue. Although their first fright had in time somewhat worn away, they were now tired, hungry, thirsty, and, in fact, almost upon the point of exhaustion.

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All at once, at an hour which in the United States would probably have been taken to be just before sundown, but which really was nearly eleven o'clock at night, a change in the contour of the coast caused the wind to whip around once more. The fog, broken into thousands of white, ropy wreaths, was swept away upward. There stretched off to the right the entrance of a vast bay, with many arms, whose blue waters, far less turbulent than these of the open sea, led back deep into the heart of a noble mountain panorama of snow-covered peaks and flattened valleys.

"It's almost like Resurrection Bay, or Valdez Harbor," said Rob. "At any rate, I'm for going in here. There will be streams coming down out of the mountains, and we can stop somewhere and make camp."

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VII

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THE HUT ON THE BEACH

Rob pointed to a valley which made down to the bay some distance ahead.

"There must be a stream somewhere in there," said he. "Besides, it looks flat, as though there were a beach. We'd better pull over there."

So, weary as they were, they tugged on the oars until finally they drew opposite this narrow beach. A long roll from the sea came down the bay, but the surf did not break here so angrily, so that they made a landing with nothing more serious than a good wetting. They pulled the dory as far up the beach as they could, and made it fast by the painter to a big rock.

They now found themselves in a somewhat singular country. The beach, of rough shingle, rose at an angle of thirty degrees for perhaps a hundred feet, where it terminated in a long, low ridge which, like a wall, paralleled the salt water as far as they could see on either hand. Inside of this wall, which was not very many yards across the top, they beheld a flat valley lying between the ocean and the foot of the mountains, perhaps a quarter of a mile across. A part of this valley was occupied by a long lake or lagoon, into which the water from the mountains seemed to come, and which found its outlet through a creek, which made off to the sea, far to the right.

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All this country is covered with the heavy moss, or tundra, peculiar to Alaska, which, when covered with a heavy growth of grass, as was the case here, affords rather difficult walking. But as the boys left the edge of the sea-wall Rob uttered an exclamation.

"Here's a path!" he cried. "It must go somewhere. There have been people here!"

"Look yonder!" said Jesse, pointing ahead. "There is the reason. There's a house over there!"

The three now stopped and looked ahead anxiously. There was, indeed, a low hut built of drift-wood and earth—such a dwelling as is used by the Aleuts in their native condition and is called by them a "barabbara."

"There's no smoke," said Rob. "Maybe it's deserted. We'd better be careful, though."

They had been told by Uncle Dick that there lived on the east coast of Kadiak Island a part of the Aleut tribes who still remained savage, and who never visited a white settlement unless obliged to do so. Many tales of theft and bloodshed came from these natives, who had always refused to come under the influence of the missions or schools, one or two of which are established near Kadiak. In short, as Rob especially very well knew, there was no wilder or more dangerous portion of Alaska than that in which they now found themselves. It was very well to be cautious when approaching the dwelling-place of any of these wild natives, who had reasons of their own for putting out of the way any stray white man who might come into the country.

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Thirst, however, drove them on. They watched the low house for several minutes, and then cautiously advanced along the path. They found the place to be a typical native camp. Pieces of drift-wood lay about, mingled with skeletons of foxes, bones of salmon and codfish—all the uncleanness of an Aleut dwelling. The only opening of the low, round hut itself was fastened by a square door about three feet across. No sound came from it.

"Who's afraid?" said Rob, at last, and boldly pushed open the door. He stooped and entered, and the others followed him.

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They found themselves now in the interior of a low hovel, perhaps fifteen feet across, and rudely circular in form. A wall of roughly laid timbers extended all around, perhaps three feet from the ground, and from these eaves to a conical point there rose the rough beams of the roof, which was covered heavily with dirt, grass, and moss. A hole was left in the middle of the roof for the smoke to escape. In the centre lay the white ashes of many fires, on opposite sides of which stood two half-burned sticks which had supported kettles. The plan of the barabbara, in fact, is precisely similar to that of the tepee of the Plains Indians, except that it is not movable and is lower and even less roomy than a good tepee.

"Nobody home!" said Jesse, looking about the dark interior, where the smoke had blackened all the wood, and where only a little light came through the door and the smoke-hole, there being no window at all.

"Nor has there been for a long time," said Rob. "These bits of fish are all dried up. The ashes have been wet with rain for a long time. See, back there under the eaves there are a lot of *klipsies*. That's what they call their fox traps. Yes, this no doubt is the camp of a trapper or two who live here in the winter-time."

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"But where do they go in the summer?" asked John.

“Probably to some of their own villages. It’s almost too late now to trap foxes for their furs, so the chances are there will be no one here until next winter.”

“Why, then,” said Jesse, his eyes brightening, “we could use this for our house, couldn’t we?”

“Precisely,” said Rob. “That’s just what we will do.”

“That’ll be fine,” said John, his eyes brighter than they had been for many an hour. “Now if we only had something for a good meal.”

“Here’s an old tin lard-pail they no doubt used for a water-pail,” said Rob, kicking about in the heavy covering of grass which lay on the floor. “Now, I tell you, I’ll go get some water; you clean the hut, Jess; and, John, you go to the boat and bring over the box of crackers and tomatoes.”

With light hearts the others complied, each glad that now at least they were free from the dangers of the sea.

“I believe we’re going to be all right here, John,” said Jesse, as the latter started toward the boat. [Pg 46]

“Surely we will,” said John. “Only I know I want a drink pretty badly.”

When they met at the door of the hut a few moments later Rob offered them his kettle of water, from which he had not yet drunk. John took a deep draught and spat it out with a wry face.

“Salt!” he exclaimed. “That’s awful!”

Rob looked at him in surprise.

“That’s strange,” said he. “I saw the creek tumbling right down through the alders into this little lake, and it must be fresh water.” He scratched his head. “Oh, I know,” said he. “The tide backs up in here to the foot of the little falls. Give me the kettle. It’s shallow out there in front, and there’s rocks. We’ll cross the lake to get a drink!”

Suiting the action to the words, he went off on a run, and this time when he returned he had the pail full of excellent fresh water, cold as ice.

“I got my feet wet,” said he; “but never mind that. I’ve learned something else—or, at least, I think I have.”

“What’s that?” asked Jesse.

“Why, it’s this. Our crackers and tomatoes won’t last very long, and we can’t eat moss or dried grass. We’ve got our fishing-lines done up in the bedrolls in the boat, and if we can’t catch any codfish in the bay, there’ll be a time before long, unless I’m mistaken, when there’ll be salmon in this creek. They say they run in every river on the Alaska coast, and I suppose it’s the same here.” [Pg 47]

“We’d better not eat up all our crackers right away,” suggested Jesse, hesitating.

“No,” said Rob, who seemed to drop into the place of leader. “We’ll have to do the way people do when they’re shipwrecked and cast away. We’ll go on short rations for a while.”

“Well,” said John, “let’s have a cracker, anyway, and the rest of that last can of tomatoes we opened. I’d like a cup of tea pretty well; but it may be some time before we see tea again.”

“Worry enough for the day,” said Rob. “And what we ought to be is mighty thankful we got off as well as we have. Anyhow, we’re alive; and, anyhow, we’ll camp here to-night. Now you boys go over to the boat and get the bedrolls, while I pick up some wood and get some fresh grass for the beds. It’ll be dark now before long. We’ll make a fire and cook the tomatoes in the can.”

Following Rob’s advice, each now busied himself at these different tasks. In the course of an hour they had a fire glowing at the centre of the barabbara, which now would otherwise have been quite dark. The smoke did not seriously trouble them after they had learned to keep down low on the floor. Each unrolled his blankets on the deep, sweet-scented grass near-by the fire. Thus, alone and far from home, in a situation stranger than any of them had ever fancied himself about to see, they lay about the fire at midnight of the short Alaskan darkness. Each without instruction took his rifle from its case and put it on the blankets beside him, taking care that it was loaded. Outside they could hear the calls of flying birds; otherwise deep silence reigned. They felt, although they could not see, the presence of the surrounding walls of the great white mountains. Now and then they could [Pg 48]

hear the faint boom of the sea on the opposite side of the inner wall. It was a wild and new experience for them as at last, one by one, each nodded and dropped back upon his blankets for such sleep as he could find in his first night in camp on the unknown Kadiak coast.

VIII

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THE SALMON RUN

Worn out as they were by the adventures of the preceding day, the boys slept long and soundly. When at length Rob awoke he saw that the sun was shining brightly down through the smoke-vent in the roof. He called the others, who rolled over sleepily in their blankets.

"Time for breakfast, John," said he, laughing.

"Yes, and no breakfast," grumbled John—"at least, nothing but more crackers and tomatoes, and not very much of that."

"I'll have a look outside first," said Rob, crawling over to the door and pushing it open. "I say, it's a fine day! You can see the mountains all around as clear as you please. Wherever we are, it's a big country at least."

"What was that I heard just now?" exclaimed John, joining him at the door; "it sounded like a splash."

They both crawled out of the door and stood up where they could see the surface of the lagoon, which lay but a few yards distant from the front of the hut. Sure enough, a series of spreading wrinkles marked the water.

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"Must have been a fish," said John. "There he goes again!"

Even as he spoke Rob had left him and was running to the edge of the water. "Salmon!" he cried. "Salmon! I thought so. Now we're all right!"

These were Alaska boys, and a run of salmon was nothing new to them, although it is something never failing of interest no matter how often one sees it. The three now gathered at the shallow water a short distance below the hut. All along the creek crows and ravens were flying in great flocks. From the heavy grove of cotton-wood beyond the creek there arose several great birds, soaring majestically across—eagles—also interested in the coming of the fish. Suddenly one of these made a swift dart from its poise high in the air, straight as an arrow, and flinging the water in every direction as it struck. Struggling, it rose again with a great fish in its talons.

"He's got *his* breakfast, anyhow," said John, ruefully. "But now how are we going to get ours?"

"Run to the boat, John," said Rob. "I remember seeing some cod-lines with big hooks under the back seat. Must have belonged to those natives. You bring me those hooks while I hunt for a pole."

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Excitedly they all now began to see what might be done toward making a salmon-gaff such as Indians use; for all these boys knew very well that the Alaska salmon will not take any sort of a bait or lure when they are ascending a stream; and these were the red salmon, fish of about eight or ten pounds in weight, which in that part of the world are never known to take any kind of lure.

In a few minutes Rob, having found a longish pole in the grass near by, had hurriedly bound with a piece of cod-line the three large hooks at the end so that they made a gang or gaff. Taking this, and rolling up his trousers high as he could, he waded into the shallow, ice-cold water.

"Where are they now?" he asked of the others, who remained on the bank.

"There they come—there's a school coming now!" cried Jesse.

All at once Rob could see the surface of the water below him just barely moving in low, silvery ripples as though a faint wind touched it. A sort of metallic lustre seemed to hang above the water—the reflection from the bright scales of the many fish swimming close to the surface. Presently, as he looked into the water directly at his feet, he could see scores

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of large, ghostly looking creatures, pale green or silvery, passing slowly by him, some of them so close as almost to touch his legs as he stood motionless. Once or twice he struck with his gaff, but the quick motions of the fish foiled him; and it looked as though the boys would wait some time for their breakfast, after all. At last, however, he waded closer to the shore and half hid behind a bush, extending his gaff in front of him with the hooks resting on the bottom.

"Now, drive them over this way—throw in some stones," he directed.

The others did as he said, and all at once Rob saw the water directly in front of him full of a mass of confused fish. A quick jerk, and he had a fine, fat fish fast, and the next instant it was flopping on the bank, while all three of them fell upon it with eager cries.

"Now another!" said Rob. "They may not be running all day."

He returned to his hiding-place near the bush, and thus in a few minutes he had secured a half-dozen splendid fish. [Pg 53]

"That will do for now," said he. "What do you think of the chance for breakfast now, Mister John?"

John grinned happily. He already had a couple of the fish nicely cleaned.

"I'll tell you what," said Jesse, "after we've had breakfast we'll catch a lot of these fat ones and split them open the way the Indians do. I think we could make a smoking-rack for them without much trouble."

"Capital," said Rob. "We ought to dry some fish when we have the chance, because no one can tell how long we may have to live here."

"But we won't do anything till after breakfast," said John, looking up.

"No," laughed Rob, "I'm just as hungry as you are. So now let's build a little fire and, since we have no frying-pan as yet, do what we can at broiling some salmon steaks on sticks."

It was not the first time they had cooked fish in this way, and although they sadly missed the salt to which they were accustomed, they made a good breakfast from salmon and a cracker or so apiece, which Rob doled out to them from their scanty supply.

"We ought to keep what we have as long as we can," said Rob. "For instance, we've only a couple of boxes of matches, and we must not waste one if we can help it. We'll look around after awhile and see if we can scare up a frying-pan. But now I move that the first thing we do be to explore our country just a little bit." [Pg 54]

"Agreed," said John, who was now well fed and contented. "Suppose we walk down to the mouth of the creek over there."

Following along the winding shores of the small stream, which here at high tide was not above the level of the sea, they found themselves finally at the angle between the creek and the open bay, beyond the end of the low sea-wall which has earlier been mentioned. The creek here turned in sharply toward the foot of the mountain, and across from where the boys stood a sheer rock wall rose several hundred feet. This shut off the view of a part of the bay on that side, but in other directions they could see the white-topped waves rolling, eight or ten miles across to the farther side, where there were many other bays making back among the mountains.

Out in the bay where the stream emptied, schools of salmon, apparently thousands in number, were flinging themselves into the air as they started toward the mouth of the creek. At the last angle of the stream, where it turned against the rock wall, there was a pool perhaps fifty feet across and twenty feet in depth, and as the boys looked down into this it seemed literally packed with hundreds and thousands of great salmon, which swam around and around before picking out the current of the stream up which they were to swim. [Pg 54]

"Here's fish enough for us whenever we want any," said Rob. "We can catch them here without much trouble, I think."

"I don't know, we may not be so badly off here for a while, after all," admitted John.

"Just look at the gulls," said Jesse, idly shying a pebble at one great bird as it came screaming along close above them, to join its kind in the great flocks that circled around above the salmon, which they were helpless to feed upon, not being equipped with beak and talons like the eagles.

"Yes," said Rob, "thousands of them. And every pair of them with a nest somewhere, and

every nest with two eggs, and a good many of them good to eat. Do you see those tall, ragged rocks out there? That looks to me like their nesting-ground."

"But we can't get there," said John, pointing to the creek.

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"Oh yes, we can, in two ways. We could wade the creek up above and climb across the shoulder of the mountain there, and maybe cross the next creek beyond, and so get out to those rocks on the point below. Or we can launch the dory up above and come down the coast to the mouth of the creek, and then skirt the shore over there."

"Why don't we bring our boat over here and take it up the creek?" asked Jesse. "We wouldn't have to row more than a mile or so, and then we'd always know our boat was safe."

"That's a good idea," said Rob. "We'll do that this very day. Suppose we go back now to the house."

They now turned and began slowly to walk up the creek again. Suddenly Rob stooped down and parted the grass, looking closely at something on the ground.

"What is it, Rob?" asked John, joining him.

The two now pushed the grass apart and looked down eagerly. Rob rose to his knees and pushed the cap back on his forehead.

"If I didn't know better," said he, "I'd call that the track of an elephant or a mastodon or something. See, there it goes, all along the shore."

"But it can't be an elephant," said Jesse.

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"No, it can't be anything but just what it is—the track of a bear! What Uncle Dick said is true. Look, this track is more than half as long as my arm."

"We'd better get back to the house as quick as we can," said Jesse, anxiously. "That bear may come back any minute!"

IX

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THE BIG BEAR OF KADIAK

The three now started up the creek toward the barabbara, their steps perhaps a little quicker than when they came down-stream. Rob was scanning the mountain-side carefully, and looking as well at the sign along the creek bank.

"That's where he lives, up in that cañon across the creek, very likely," he said, at length. "Here's where he crossed in the shallow water, and last night he fished all along this bank. My! I'll bet he's full of bones to-day. It's the first run of fish, and he was so hungry he ate pretty near everything except the backbone." He pointed to a dozen skeletons of salmon that lay half hidden in the grass. The latter was trampled down as though cows had been in pasture there.

"I don't know," said Jesse, soberly. "I always wanted to kill a bear, and there's three of us now and we've got guns; but I don't believe I ever wanted to kill a bear quite as big as this one. Why, he could smash in the door of our house in the night and eat us up if he wanted to."

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"We'll eat *him*, that's what we'll do," said John, decisively. "I only wish we had a kettle or a frying-pan or something."

"Seems to me you'd better get the bear first," said Jesse. "But we might look in among the traps in the back of the hut and see what we can find. These hunters nearly always leave some kind of cooking things at their camps."

Sure enough, when the boys entered the barabbara to look after their rifles, and began to rummage among the piles of *klipsies* which they found thrown back under the eaves, they unearthed a broken cast-iron frying-pan and, what caused them even greater delight, a little, dirty sack, which contained perhaps three or four pounds of salt. They sat on the grass of the floor and looked at one another with broad smiles. "If everything keeps up as lucky as this," said Jesse, "we'll be ready to keep house all right pretty soon. But ought we to use these things that don't belong to us?"

"Surely we may," answered Rob. "It is always the custom in a wild country for any one who is lost and in need to take food when he finds it, and to use a camp as though it were his own. Of course we mustn't waste anything or carry anything off, but while we're here we'll act as though this place were ours, and if any one finds us here we'll pay for what we use. That's the Alaska way, as you know."

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"You're not going out after that big bear, are you?" asked Jesse, anxiously, of Rob.

"Of course; we're all going! What are these new rifles for—just look, brand-new high-power Winchesters, every one—and any one of these guns will shoot as hard for us as for a grown man."

They sat for some time in the hut discussing various matters. At last John crawled to the door and looked out. He was rather a matter-of-fact boy in his way, and there seemed no special excitement in his voice as he remarked: "Well, Rob, there comes your bear."

The others hurried to the door. Sure enough, upon the bare mountain slope beyond the lagoon, nearly half a mile away, there showed plainly enough the body of an enormous bear, large as a horse. It was one of the great Kadiak bears, which are the biggest of all the world.

"Cracky!" said Jesse; "he looks pretty big to me. Do you suppose he'll find us here in the house?"

Rob, the oldest of the three, who had been on one or two hunts with his father, looked serious as he watched this giant animal advancing down the hill-side with its long, reaching stride. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. "Look!" said he; "there's two more just come out of the brush. It's an old she bear and her cubs coming down to fish!"

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All could now see the three bears, the great, yellow-gray mother, huge and shaggy, and the two cubs, darker in color and, of course, much smaller, although each was as large as the ordinary black bear of the United States. Certainly it was an exciting moment as the boys looked at these great creatures now so close at hand.

Presently the old bear seemed to suspect something, for she stopped and sat up on her haunches, swinging from side to side a head which was fully as long as the arm of any one of the boys.

"She probably smells the smoke," whispered Rob. "Oh, I hope she won't get scared and run away! No, there she comes; it's the first salmon run, and they're all hungry for fish."

They watched the bears until at last they disappeared in the brush which lined the creek on the farther side. Rob kept his eye intently fixed on the place where they had disappeared, but made no motion to leave the hut until finally all three of the bears once more appeared, this time splashing across the creek.

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"She knows the tide as well as we do," muttered he. "It won't be long now before the fish begin to move up the creek again. Now, come on, fellows, if you're not afraid!"

Rob looked around at John, who had his new rifle in his hand, but looked none too eager, now that the opportunity had come to use it. Jesse's lip, it must be confessed, trembled a little bit, and he was pale. The first sight of a large bear has been known to unsettle the nerves of many a grown man, and it was not to be wondered at that it should disturb one of Jesse's years. There was, perhaps, in the wild and remote situation in which they found themselves something which gave them courage. They had escaped such dangers of the sea that now the danger of the land seemed less by comparison. Moreover, they all had the hunting instinct, and were accustomed to seeing big game brought in by their relatives and friends. Had an older person been with them, no doubt they would all have been frightened; but there is something strange in the truth that when one is thrown on one's own resources courage comes when needed—as it did now to these three castaways.

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Without any further speech Rob passed out at the door and stood waiting for the others to follow. Each was silent as he held his way down the creek.

For some distance they did not need to conceal themselves; then their leader took them along the edge of the creek, where their heads would not show above the grass. Thus following down the stream, and carefully peering over the banks at each bend, they worked along until they were perhaps three or four hundred yards above the big salmon pool and near to a flat piece of water which extended above it. Rob raised a warning finger.

"Listen!" he hissed.

They could hear it now distinctly—heavy splashing in the water, broken with low, grumbling whines in a deep, throaty voice, something like what one may hear in a circus at

feeding-time. Once in a while a squeak or a bawl came from one of the cubs. Rob laughed. From his position near the top of the bank he could now see the picture before him.

The old mother was sitting on her haunches out in the middle of the stream, with a cub on either side of her. She was trying to teach them to fish. Once in a while she would make a sudden, cat-like stroke with her long forearm, and almost always would throw out a fine salmon on the bank. Toward this the cubs would start in their hunger, but the old lady, reproving them for their eagerness, would then cuff them soundly on the head, knocking them sprawling over in the water, to their very great disgust. Once in a while one of them, his ears tight to his head, would sit down in the water, lift up his nose and complain bitterly at this hard treatment. Then again he would make a half-hearted stroke at some of the fish which he could see swimming about him; but his short claws would not hold like the long, curved ones of his mother, and no fish rewarded the efforts of either of the cubs. The boys lost all sense of fear in watching this amusing scene, which they studied for some minutes. They really lost their best opportunity for stalking their game, because presently the old grizzly changed her mind and led the way out to the bank where several fish were lying flapping. Upon these they all fell eagerly, grunting and grumbling, and now and again fighting among themselves.

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Rob turned toward his friends. "Quick now!" he whispered, sternly, and led the way, crawling into the high grass which would afford them cover for a closer approach to their game. The hearts of all of them now were throbbing wildly, and probably each one doubted his ability to do good shooting. Something, however, led them on, and although Rob saw two pale faces following him when he looked back, there was a glitter in the eyes of each which told him that at least each of his friends would do his best.

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Passing now out of the grass to the cover of the bank again, Rob ran along crouching, until he pulled up under cover of the bank at a point not more than seventy-five yards from where they could now distinctly hear the bears at their feeding.

"Get ready now!" he whispered.

Slowly the three crawled to the top of the bank. Rob laid a hand on Jesse's rifle barrel, which he saw was unsteady. He made motions to both of the others not to be excited. A strange sort of calm seemed to have come upon him. Yet, plucky as he was, he was not prepared for the sight which met him as he gazed through the parted grass at the top of the bank.

The old grizzly, once more suspicious, had again sat up on her haunches, and turning her head from side to side began to sniff as though she scented danger. Her shaggy hair shone silvery now in the sun, and she seemed enormously large. Rob's heart leaped to his mouth, but suddenly dropping to his knee, and calling out to the others "Now!" he fired without longer hesitation.

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The sound of the other two rifles followed at once. The great bear gave a hoarse roar which seemed to make the hair prickle on the boys' heads; but even as she roared she dropped and floundered in the mud of the bank, up which she strove to climb. Again and again the rifles spoke.

"Now the little ones—quick!" cried Rob, half springing to his feet, and continuing to fire steadily. Some one's shot struck the first cub square through the spine and killed it instantly. The second cub stood but a moment longer. These boys had used rifles many times before, and although not every shot went true, perhaps half of them struck their mark; and it was as Rob had said—the rifles shot as hard for them as for a grown man.

The great she bear, possessed of enormous vitality, was not easily disposed of. The magazines of all the rifles were emptied the second time before Rob would allow them to go a foot closer, and even so, the great gray body retained life enough to roll half down the bank as they approached. This time Rob finished the old bear with a shot through the head, at a distance of not more than thirty yards.

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The game was down and dead—three great bears, one of them huge beyond the wildest dreams of any of them, and unbelievably large even for the most widely experienced sportsman. Indeed, any sportsman might have been proud of this record. Rob turned to look at his friends.

Suddenly he himself sat down, and to his surprise found that he was trembling violently all over. Jesse and John were both doing the same. He saw that their faces were deathly pale.

"I'm—I'm—I'm sort of—sort of sick at my stomach!" said Jesse.

THE SAVAGE REFUGEE

"Well," said Rob, finally, looking around at his friends and grinning, "I don't know which of us is the worst scared; but, anyhow, we've got our game, and a lot of it. Do you suppose we can skin these big fellows?"

"We'll have to," said John. "There's meat enough to last us a year. That old bear is bigger than any horse in Valdez."

"And tough as any horse, too," said Rob. "The cubs may be better to eat. I have heard my father say that bear liver isn't bad; and certainly we can get all the fat we want to fry our fish. Lucky we've all got our hunting-knives along; so here goes!"

They now arose and began the difficult task of skinning out the great bear—slow work for even an experienced hunter. They kept at it, however, and had made a good beginning when all at once a slight sound at the edge of the creek bank attracted Rob's attention.

As he turned the others noticed him, and all three of them stood staring an instant later at the same object: a round, dark face gazing at them motionless through the grass—a face with cunning little eyes set slantwise, like those of a Japanese, and long, stringy locks of dark hair hanging down about the cheeks. Instinctively each boy reached for his rifle, which he had left leaning against the carcass of the great bear. Apparently not alarmed, the face kept its place, staring steadily at them. Rob now guessed the truth, which was that this Aleut savage had heard the shots and had entered the mouth of the creek in his boat. Not knowing whether he was friend or foe, Rob motioned the others to follow him, and approached him with his rifle at a ready. [Pg 69]

Seeing that they were not afraid, nor disposed to be driven from their place, the Aleut savage—for such it proved to be—arose, and with what he meant to be a smile stretched out his hand as though in friendship. His gun, a rusty old affair, he left lying on the ground at his side. Rob kicked it away as he approached.

They now saw how the Aleut had reached them. His boat, a long, native bidarka, lay in the creek, up which the native had paddled silently on his own errand of discovery. This boat interested the boys very much. It was nearly twenty feet long and not more than two feet wide, covered entirely with tightly stretched skin. In the deck were two round holes, around each of which there was a mantle, or hood, of oiled hide or membrane, which could be drawn up about the waist of a man sitting in the hatch. On the narrow and sloping deck there was lashed a long spear and an extra paddle. The boys also noticed sticking to the deck a stringy-looking mass of grayish white, which at first they could not identify, though later they found it to be a collection of devil-fish, or octopi, which the native had gathered among the rocks for later use as food. Peering into the hatches they saw a copper kettle partly filled with a whitish-looking meat, which later they found to be whale flesh. There was a ragged blanket of fur thrust under the deck between the hatches. [Pg 70]

"He's been cruising along the coast," said Rob; "but this is a two-hatch bidarka, so probably he's got a partner somewhere around."

"Maybe he's up at our house now stealing everything we left there," suggested Jesse.

"Yes, and maybe it's his house that we've moved into," added John.

Rob, the older of the boys, and the one on whose judgment they had come to rely, remained silent a moment. [Pg 71]

"Boys," said he, at last, "this fellow looks like mischief to me. We can't let him go away, to come back after awhile and rob us. We can't leave his gun here with him and go on with our work. The only thing we can do is to take him in charge for a while."

"Let me get his gun away from him," began John.

Possibly the Aleut understood some of this, for all at once he made a sudden spring and caught at his gun.

Quick as a flash Rob covered him with his own rifle. "No, you don't," he said; "drop it! That settles it for you!"

Again the Aleut seemed to understand, for he stood up, tried to smile again, and once more held out his hand.

"Take his gun and chuck it in the boat, Jess," commanded Rob. "Now you mush on!" he

ordered the Aleut, pointing to the carcass of the bear. ("Mush on," in Alaska dog-train vernacular, means "march on," being a corruption from the French word *marchons*.)

The native sullenly walked on ahead, and finally sat down by the side of the bear.

"You watch him, John," said Rob. "I've got to go on skinning this bear." So saying, he resumed his work, presently rejoined by Jesse. [Pg 72]

The native watched them, but finally began to smile at their clumsiness.

"I'll tell you what," said Jesse; "if he's so smart about this, let's make him help skin."

"A good idea!" added Rob. He began to make signs to the Aleut. "Here, you," said he, "get up and go to work—and keep on your own side of the bear."

He pointed to the crooked knife which he saw in the native's belt. The latter, none too well pleased, sulkily arose and began to aid in skinning the bear. It was easy to see that it was not the first work of the kind he had done. He laid the hide off in folds, with long, easy strokes, doing twice as much work as all the other three. After a time the boys stopped their work entirely and stood watching him with admiration. The Aleut paid no attention to this, but went on with his work, once in awhile helping himself to a piece of raw fat. In the course of half an hour or so he had the great robe spread out on the grass, with the difficult work of skinning out the feet all done, and the ears, nose, and all parts of the head skinned out without leaving a slashed spot on the hide. [Pg 73]

"This beats doing it ourselves!" said John, who was not especially fond of work.

"We ought to thank him some way," said Rob. "You know a little Chinook, John; why don't you talk to him?"

John grinned.

"*Kla-how-yah, tillicum!*" he began. "*Klosh-tum-tum, eh? Skookum! Skookum!*"

Again the Aleut smiled in his distorted way, but whether or not he understood no one could tell.

"What did you say to him, John?" asked Jesse.

"Asked him how he was; told him that we were all pretty good friends, and that he had done mighty good work," interpreted John, proudly.

"Well, it didn't seem to do much good, anyhow," said Rob. "But what shall we call him?"

"Call him Jimmy," said Jesse. "He looks as though his name might be Jimmy as much as anything else."

"All right!" agreed their leader. "Here, you, Jimmy, catch hold here! I'll show you a better way of getting this hide up to camp than carrying it there." [Pg 74]

He motioned that they should put the hide on the deck of the bidarka, and in time this was done, although the great weight of the green hide, a load for two strong men, sunk the bidarka so deeply that half its deck was covered.

"Now get in, Jimmy," ordered Rob, pointing to the rear hatch. The native stepped in lightly, paddle in hand, and showed his ability to handle the little craft, even heavily loaded as it now was. Rob pointed up the creek, but with a sudden sweep of his paddle the Aleut turned the other way and started for the sea.

"Quick, get the guns!" cried Rob. "Head him off across the bend!"

Quick as were their movements, they were none too soon, for as they rushed across the narrow part of the creek bend they saw the Aleut almost upon them. He made no attempt to get at his gun, which was buried under the hides in the front hatch, but was paddling with all his might. Without hesitation Rob fired two shots into the water ahead of his boat, and held up his hand in command to him to stop. These things were language that even an Aleut could understand. Scowling and sullen, he slowly paddled up to the bank. He understood the fierce menace of the three rifles now pointing at him. This time he obeyed the gestures made to him, and, turning about, proceeded to paddle slowly up the creek, followed by the boys along the bank. [Pg 75]

A TROUBLESOME PRISONER

When they reached the lagoon in front of the barabara they stood for a time closely watching the latter. No sign of any visitor appeared, however. At last Rob boldly went on, kicked open the door, and called to the others to follow. Evidently, if the Aleut had any companion, he was not in that part of the island.

"You watch me make this fellow work," said John. "I know a few words of Aleut as well as some Chinook. Here, you, Jimmy," he went on, "*sashgee augone! Skora!*"

To the surprise of all the Aleut actually smiled, as though in pleasure at hearing his own tongue.

"Got him that time!" said John, importantly. "Why, I can talk to these people all right. *Skora, Jimmy!*" he added, sternly, pointing to the fireplace.

"*Da! Da! Skora!*" said the Aleut, and began to hunt about for wood.

"What did you tell him that time?" asked Jesse.

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"Told him to make a fire, and be jolly quick about it," said John. "If you want to get anything done, come to me, fellows. Look at Jimmy build that fire!"

In truth the Aleut seemed to accept the place assigned him. He not only built the fire in the middle of the hut, but picked up the skillet as a matter of course, wiped it out with some dried grass, put into it some of the bear fat, and added a part of the liver which they had brought along. He handed out the empty pail to John, grunting something which no one understood; but John, passing the pail in turn to Jesse, said he thought that what the Aleut wanted was some water to boil.

"*Chi?*" asked the Aleut, suddenly, of John.

"*Natu chi,*" said John ("Haven't got any tea").

In reply to this the Aleut stooped down, went out of the door, and walked over to the bidarka, where it lay at the bank. Rob followed him to see that he attempted no treachery, but the Aleut seemed to have no intention of that. He pulled out from his boat a dried seal-skin or two, his old blanket, and his gun, which latter Rob took from him.

"He's been hunting and fishing," said Rob. "Looks like he had a bear-hide of his own underneath there. He's got two or three fresh codfish, and here's his cod-line of rawhide—with bone sinkers. And here's a bow and some bone-tipped arrows, besides his spear there on the deck. If we kept his rifle and turned him loose he could make a living all right."

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"But we don't want to turn him loose," said John; "he's too useful. Look at that."

The Aleut finally produced from under the deck a dirty little bag tightly tied.

"*Chi!*" he exclaimed, holding it up in triumph.

"You see," said John, "we've got tea all right. Now it looks to me that we could get a pretty good meal."

By the time the Aleut had prepared their supper for them, and had made each a tin can of hot tea, all the boys began to feel tired and sleepy, for now the hour of night was well advanced, although the Alaskan sun stood well above the horizon.

"I'm mighty sleepy," said John, yawning.

"I should think you would be," said Jesse, "after all you ate. But if we're sleepy, why can't we go to sleep?"

"That would never do," spoke up Rob. "We don't know what this native might do while we were all asleep. I've been thinking that over. It seems to me the only way we can do is to tie his hands together, so he can't do any harm, and then take turns in standing watch."

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"Have we got to do that always?" asked John, sleepily.

"We've got to do it to-night, at least," said Rob, emphatically. "Take that piece of hide rope, John, tie his wrists together, and pass it down to his ankles behind his back. He can sleep a little in that way, at least; and I'll stand the first watch."

The Aleut, not doubting at the first of these motions that they intended to kill him, fell upon his knees and began to jabber, apparently begging for mercy. At last he grinned as he looked down at his manacled hands, and presently, without much more ado, rolled himself over on his blankets and seemed to fall asleep. On the opposite side of the hut Jesse and

John followed his example, and soon were fast in real sleep. Rob sat by the failing fire, his rifle across his knees. He, too, was tired with the work of the day. At times, in spite of himself, his head would drop forward and he would awake with a start.

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WAYS OF THE WILDERNESS

Rob awoke with a sudden jerk. A slight sound had disturbed him. He gazed steadily at the figure of the Aleut in the faint light of the embers. The latter was lying quite motionless, but something caused Rob to feel suspicious. He put out a hand and awakened his two companions, who sat up, rubbing their eyes sleepily.

"What's the matter?" asked Jesse. "Where are we, and what sort of a place is this? My! I was dreaming, and I thought I was back home in bed."

"John," said Rob, "crawl over and look at that fellow's fastenings. I thought I heard him move. Don't be afraid. I'll keep him covered with the rifle. Build up the fire a little."

John complied, presently stooping down to examine the cord with which the Aleut had been confined. He gave an exclamation. "Why, he's loose! He's gnawed the hide clean in two with his teeth. He could have got away any time he liked."

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Rob admitted his fault. "The truth is," said he, "I was very sleepy, and I must have dozed off. But now, what shall we do? Here we've got this man, and he evidently doesn't intend to stay a minute longer than he can help. Whether he would hurt us or not is something we can't tell; but we don't dare take the chance."

"It'll be a great deal of trouble to watch him this way all the time," suggested John.

"True, but we must watch him. On the other hand, what right have we to take him prisoner, since we don't know that he ever meant any wrong? We're not officers of the law, and this man has not committed any crime, so far as we know. The question is, what would he do to us if he got us before a law-court and accused us with making him a prisoner for no cause?"

The three sat in the dim light of the hut for a time and pondered over these matters. At length Rob spoke again with decision.

"It's the greatest good for the greatest number," said he. "It seems to me that the best thing we can do is to treat this man well, but not let him get away. He ought to do his share of the work, and he's stronger than any of us. Then, if we should ever be rescued—"

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Jesse's lips began to twitch. Evidently he was getting rather homesick. Rob noticed his face, and went on: "Of course we will get out of here before long, someday," he said. "Meanwhile, we will have to make the best living here we can. If we ever get this man to a white settlement, where we can find out who and what he is, why, then, we can pay him for his time, if it should prove that he is only an innocent native hunting away from his village. On the other hand, if he turns out to be a criminal of any kind, then we've had a right to arrest him, and can't get into any trouble over it."

"It's a pretty rough joke on him," said John, "if he hasn't done anything wrong. He acts as though he had been here before. For all we can tell, he may own this house that we've taken over for ourselves. The only thing sure is that he's a better hand in camp than we are, the way things stand now. I'm for keeping him and letting him work. My folks'll pay him whatever is right, if it comes to that; and you never saw an Aleut who wasn't glad to get hold of a little money, I'll warrant that."

"Well," said Rob, "we'll let it stand that way. And now, as the night seems to be about half done, suppose you and Jess keep watch together and let me take a little nap. If one of you gets sleepy the other can waken him. I suppose there's no use tying that man again, for he's got teeth like a beaver."

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The Aleut made no further disturbance during the long hours of waiting, which seemed endless to the two young watchers. At last, however, the light grew stronger in the dark interior of the barabara. John announced his entire willingness to eat breakfast, and, pushing open the door, motioned for the Aleut to go and get some wood. Without any resistance the man did as he was bid, shaking the remaining thong off his wrist with a grin. They finished their breakfast of bear meat and tea, the prisoner seeming immensely to enjoy the biscuits which the boys offered him as pay in return for his contribution of tea.

"Now, what's on the programme for to-day?" asked John, finally. "It certainly looks as though we ought to take care of all that meat."

"Yes," assented Rob. "We'll see if we can't dry some of it, at least. Suppose you go on down the creek, John, and keep the crows and eagles away from the meat, while the rest of us bring the boat down the beach and into the mouth of the creek. That'll give us plenty of boat room to bring up quite a cargo of meat to the camp here."

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"There's another thing we ought to do," said John, "and that is to put up some kind of a signal in case a boat should come down into the bay here. Of course Uncle Dick will be looking for us, and there might be a boat in here almost any day."

"That's a capital idea!" exclaimed Rob. "Now, Jesse, if you'll get a long pole and tie this handkerchief to it, I'll meet you over at the dory with the other things which we'll need on our trip this morning."

Rob left the Aleut's gun on the deck of the bidarka, but carried along his hide fishing-line and both the bidarka paddles. His own rifle and that of Jesse he put in one end of the dory, opposite the seat where he intended the Aleut to sit. Telling Jesse to watch the latter, he once more ascended to the top of the sea-wall, and here erected his signal-flag, piling up a heap of stones at the foot of the staff. Long and anxiously he gazed out toward the mouth of the bay, but only the long green billows of the sea came rolling in, unbroken by any sail or cloud of smoke. Across the bay, a half-dozen miles or so, the great mountains stood grim and silent, the tops of many of them wreathed in fog. It was a wild and desolate scene, and one to try the courage of any young adventurer. But Rob, seeing how homesick Jesse was becoming, did his best to cheer him as he joined him at the dory.

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"Plenty to do to-day!" he said. "And now for a good boat ride. It's lucky we've so good a sea-boat along as this dory—it's far safer than Jimmy's bidarka over there."

Rob seated himself at the stern and put Jesse in the bow. He motioned to the Aleut to take up the oars and row, and the latter, without objection, skilfully got the dory out through the surf, and at once proved himself master of the white man's oars as well as the native paddle. The wind was coming astern, and their run of something like a mile down to the mouth of the creek was made rapidly. Just around the point from the mouth of the stream Rob motioned to the Aleut to stop rowing.

"It looks deep here," said he to Jesse. "Maybe we could get a codfish. Here, Jimmy, take a try with your own fishing-line."

The Aleut grinned as Rob tossed him his rough-looking line of hide, and at once set to work. Nor did he prove inefficient, even with this rough tackle of hide and bone. He baited the crude hook with a piece of meat which he took from his pocket, and dropped it overboard in twenty fathoms of water. Motioning to Rob to keep the boat steady, he began to pull the line up and down in long, steady jerks. Before long he gave a short grunt and began to pull it in rapidly hand over hand. Rob and Jesse, gazing over the side, at length saw the gleam of a large fish deep down in the water. The Aleut, with another grunt, pulled the fish in, swung it over the sides, and threw it flopping at the bottom of the dory. It was a fine codfish weighing perhaps a dozen pounds.

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"Well, I'll say one thing," said Jesse, finally, smiling: "since we have to make a living for ourselves, this is about as easy as any country we could have gotten into. Try it again, Jimmy."

Whether or not Jimmy understood any English they never knew, but at least he cast over his bone hook once more, and, continuing his operations as the dory slowly drifted, in less than half an hour he had eight fine fish aboard.

"That'll do, old man!" said Rob to him, and motioned to him now to row into the mouth the creek which was nearly opposite. They now could see John waiting for them on the shore. He had seen them fishing, and congratulated them on their fine catch, agreeing with Jesse that certainly they at least would not lack abundance to eat.

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"I've heard you can make salt by boiling sea-water," said John, who, although a hearty eater, was sometimes rather particular about his food. "That is almost the only thing we need that we haven't got now. Our little sack won't last forever."

"Yes," said Rob, "it would be all the better for our bear meat in this moist climate. But we'll have to do the best we can by drying it with smoke."

They now pulled the dory into the mouth of the little creek, turning it at the face of the high rock wall, and noticing the thousands of salmon that swam round and round the deep pool just above the entrance of the stream. From this point up the crooked bends to the place

where the dead bears lay was perhaps a quarter of a mile. But presently they all met there.

"There is pretty near a ton of meat," said Rob, looking down at the dead bears. "We ought to have skinned those young bears yesterday, but will do that now before they spoil. Then maybe we can make Jimmy understand what we want to do about saving the meat." [Pg 88]

They all fell to work now, the boys at one of the cubs and the Aleut at the other. The latter, with a grin of triumph, held up his fresh hide entirely skinned out before the three boys together had finished theirs. In some way he seemed to understand what they wished to have done about the meat, perhaps himself being inclined to see that plenty of food was on hand, since his captors were not disposed to let him go away. The Aleuts, who never see any fresh beef, and who live in a country where not even caribou are often found, are very fond of bear meat, which the more civilized ones call "beef." The captive seemed to understand perfectly well how to take care of this "beef," and he took out the long tenderloins from the back of each cub and separated the hams. For the big bear he did not seem to care so much, and made signs to show that it was tough and hard to eat. Rob insisted, however, that he should take some of the choicer parts of the bear also, since it seemed a shame to let it waste. They loaded their dory down as heavily as they dared, and so, dragging on the painter and poling with the oars, at last they got their cargo up to camp, mooring the dory alongside the bidarka. [Pg 89]

Without much more ado Jimmy began to search around in the grass and found some long poles, one end of which he rested on the roof of the barabara, supporting the other on some crotches which he set up. Across these poles he laid smaller sticks and made a rough drying-rack. He showed the boys how to cut the meat into long, thin strips, and under this, after it was stretched on the rack, he built a small fire, so that the smoke would aid the sun in curing the meat—none too sure a process in a country where rain was apt to come at any hour. After this the Aleut turned toward the dory, and hauled out something which the boys had not noticed before. He busied himself at the edge of the lagoon.

"What's he doing, John?" asked Rob.

They all stepped up and watched him.

"Why, that's the intestines of the old bear," said Rob, at last. "I didn't see him throw them into the boat."

"I know what he's doing," said John. "He's going to clean 'em out. They make all sorts of things. For instance, that hood around the bidarka is made out of this sort of thing, I believe. And then they make other outfits—"

"*Kamelinka!*" said Jimmy, suddenly, holding up a part of the intestines and smiling. He motioned to his own sleeves. [Pg 90]

"*Da! Da!*" exclaimed John, in Aleut language. "Yes, that's so! Sure!"

"He means he is going to make one of their rain-coats out of it," he explained to the others. "A *kamelinka* is made out of these membranes, and they put it on like a coat, and no water can get through it. Didn't you ever see one? They tear if they're dry, but if you wet them they're tough, and no water will go through them. Mr. Jimmy puts on his *kamelinka*, and gets in the bidarka and ties the hood around his waist, and there he is, no matter how high the sea runs. No water gets into the boat, and when he comes home he is dry as when he started. Pretty good scheme, isn't it?"

They watched Jimmy for a time at his work before they finished stretching all the meat. Then they cleaned the codfish and put them inside the hut, so that the crows could not get them. Over the fresh meat on the scaffold they now spread some damp grass, because it was their intention to leave the place for a little while.

"We'll make a hunt this afternoon," said Rob, "and see whether we can find any gull eggs. First we want to see what our resources are, and after that we can help ourselves as need be." [Pg 91]

Accordingly, after they had taken the cargo out of the dory, and thus completed their labors for the time, they all four embarked in the dory, pushed rapidly down the creek, and out into the open waters of the bay. Here, a half-mile ahead of them, below the mouth of the creek, they saw some rough pinnacles of rock, over which soared thousands of sea-birds. As they approached these rocks they found a narrow beach wide enough to hold the dory. It took them but a few moments' climb to gather all the eggs they wanted. These they were obliged to carry in their pockets or in the folds of their jackets. They trusted Jimmy to tell them which were fresh. Jimmy seemed always to know what ought to be done, and now without any advice he left the boys and proceeded to climb up to the steeper part of the

rocks, where the nests of the gulls and sea-murres were so thick that he could scarcely avoid crushing the eggs as he walked. Evidently it was not eggs he sought. Agile as a cat, he climbed to the top of a sheer face of rock, and leaning over put his hand into a hole. A moment later the boys saw a dark body hurtle through the air and fall on the beach. It proved to be a stout, heavy, dark-colored bird with a strong, parrot-like beak and a crest of long yellow feathers on each side of the head.

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"That's a sea-parrot," said Rob, picking it up. "Look out, Jesse, there comes another!"

Sure enough, one after another of the dead bodies of the sea-parrots fell on the narrow beach, until two or three dozen were lying there.

Jimmy ceased his labors, climbed down the rocks, and calmly began to skin off the breast plumage of the birds.

"What's he doing that for?" asked Jesse of Rob.

"They're not good to eat," said Rob, "that's one thing sure. I'll tell you what—I've seen some dark-colored feather coats and blankets at the trader's store down below Valdez. I'll warrant they were made out of the breasts of these very sea-parrots here."

Whatever were Jimmy's plans he could not or did not disclose them. After a time he threw his heap of parrot-skins into the front of the dory, and stood waiting at the side of the boat, as though ready to go home if the others wished it. They therefore embarked for return to their camp.

XIII

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MAKING A LIVING

"If any of our people were along," said John, as they headed the dory back toward the mouth of the creek, "I would say we could have a pretty good time here."

"I don't doubt," answered Rob, "that we can get along all summer without trouble. I believe, too, that the natives come here so often we may be able to send out word even if we can't get out ourselves. We can't possibly be a hundred miles from Kadiak town, and although we might get there in our dory, the chances are so much against it that I think we would do better to stay right where we are for a time at least. As we were saying not long ago, this country furnishes a living without much trouble."

"And without much work," added John, "as long as we have Jimmy."

"He's stronger than we are," admitted Rob; "still, each of us must do his share of the work around camp, because that's the only right way to do. He's a good teacher, for we're in his country and will have to live in his way—What's on his mind now, do you suppose?" Rob continued, as Jimmy suddenly stopped rowing and began to look keenly off toward shore.

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"I see him!" exclaimed Jesse, eagerly. "It's a seal! Look at him!"

About sixty yards away there was a round object with two shining spots on it standing just above the water—the head of a seal which was closely examining the strange object which approached it. All at once, as they looked at it, the seal suddenly sank out of sight. Without instruction the Aleut now bent to his oars as hard as he could, and hurried to the beach which lay not far beyond. Hurriedly pulling the dory up, he motioned to Rob to get out with his rifle.

"There he is again!" called John, pointing. "He's closer in now. Look, he isn't a hundred yards away! You try him, Rob; you're the best shot."

Crouching down, Rob hurried toward a big rock which lay at the water's edge. Here he rested his rifle and, taking quick aim, fired. The splash of the ball on top of the intervening wave showed that he had missed. Once more the seal sank, but in the course of a few minutes it appeared yet again, this time still closer in. Carefully Rob fired a second time, and this time they all heard distinctly the thud of the bullet, which proved that the shot had struck true. With a splash the seal disappeared, but giving a shout the Aleut pushed off the dory and called to them all to get in. In a few moments he brought them alongside the still struggling body of the seal, which appeared now above and now beneath the surface of the water. Hurriedly catching up his long spear, the native made a thrust at the seal and fastened it with the barb, and with many grunting chuckles drew it alongside. Soon, with a

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heave, he got it inboard—a small hair seal not much more than three feet in length.

“*Karosha!*” exclaimed the Aleut, with a grin.

“He means that it’s good—that it’s all right,” explained John, who seemed to be the official interpreter.

“Well, I don’t believe that I care to eat seal meat,” said Rob; “but maybe Jimmy knows what he can do with the hide, or something else. We’ll skin Mr. Seal and peg his hide out up at the camp. It’s time now we got the bear hides stretched so that they can begin to dry.”

Much elated with their successful day’s work, the boys now assisted the native in stretching all the green hides, flesh side upward. The native showed them how to flesh and scrape the hides, and they spent an hour or so at this until each complained that his back was aching.

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“Suppose we cross the creek and take a little climb up the mountain-side,” suggested Rob. “We can get a good look out from there.”

“All right,” said John. “Of course we’ll have to take our *tillicum* along. Mush on, Jimmy!”

The Aleut, although apparently a native of the country where the language of the dog-train was little known, nevertheless seemed to understand the Alaskan command to “March!” He stood ready, only looking to see which way they wished him to go. Rob set off in advance, and they all splashed through the waters of the shallows at the lower end of the lagoon.

“Here’s where Jimmy has a good deal the best of us,” said Rob, pointing to their wet feet. “Our shoes will be gone in a little while; but look at his seal boots with high tops. They keep his feet dry.”

“They call them *tabosas*,” said John. “The Eskimos use boots like that, but they call them *mukluks*. You see, I used to know a native from up-coast who was a waiter in a restaurant at Valdez. That’s how I picked up my knowledge of the Aleut language—which, you see, is quite considerable,” he concluded, swelling out his chest a trifle.

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“I see now why he wanted that seal,” commented Rob. “Every country has its own way of getting along, hasn’t it? Now, I suppose Jimmy here is about as comfortable when he is at home as we are in our houses down in Valdez; and he certainly does know how to make his living off the country.”

They now continued their slow climb up the steep mountain-side, which lay beyond the little creek. Here the deep moss or tundra extended quite to the top of the smallest peak, but although heavy snow-fields lay at the top, the spring sunshine had now melted the snow at the lower levels, so that continually they were walking in little pools of ice-water, none too pleasant to persons shod as they were.

Jesse, the youngest of the party, now and then stopped for a moment to catch his breath; and, in fact, he seemed none too happy with some of these hardships of their experience.

“Come on,” said Rob; “we’ll stop when we get to the thicket just up above there. Jimmy acts as though he was looking for something up there—I don’t know what.”

They toiled on upward, now and again turning to look at the great expanse of country which lay below them—the wide bay shining in the sunlight, the magnificent panorama of the mountains beyond, and the line of the deep sea beyond the entrance to the bay. They turned as they heard a sudden exclamation from Jimmy, who was prowling at the edge of the alder thicket where they had stopped for the moment. As he pointed down they saw the surface of the ground among the alders ripped up as though by a giant plough.

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Jimmy held up three fingers and pointed below toward their camp, the smoke of whose fire they could dimly see. At first they could not understand him, until he made motions as if digging, and swung his head from side to side, grunting in such plain imitation of a bear that they could not mistake. Then they saw that this had probably been the feeding-ground of the three bears which they had killed. Apparently the bears had been living high up in the mountains for a long time, waiting for the salmon run to begin. The country was all torn up where they had dug for roots and bulbs.

“Well, now, what’s Jimmy going to do this time?” asked Jesse, interested.

The Aleut, talking to himself in some unknown words, was down on his hands and knees, himself digging in the holes among the alders.

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“*Karosha!*” said he, at length, holding up several long, white bulbs about as thick as his finger; and he made a motion as though to eat them.

“Ah, ha!” said Rob. “This is an Aleut potato-patch, it seems. All right, we’ll just gather some

of these and use them for vegetables. They'll help out the meat and fish, perhaps."

As Jimmy dug the bulbs they put them into the folds of their jackets and sweaters until they had a good supply. After this they made their way down the mountain, splashed through the creek again, and threw down their new discoveries beside the meat scaffold. Jimmy indulged in a broad smile.

"Plenty soup!" said he, suddenly.

"The beggar!" said Rob. "I shouldn't wonder if he understood English as well as we do!"

They could not, however, induce him to use any further words than this, which is common among the Aleuts as the meaning of "food" or "plenty to eat," they having got this word from their association with English-speaking persons. The Aleut language now is a mongrel, made up largely of Russian, with many native words and a few of English.

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Jimmy proceeded to show that he meant to use in his "soup" some of these bulbs which they had brought down, for now he began to strip them down to the clean white inner portion and half filled their water-can with them, presently setting it on the fire to stew. The boys never knew the name of this bulb, but they found it not unpleasant to eat—rather sweetish and insipid without salt, however.

They were all very tired that night; but they felt it necessary to keep some watch upon their Aleut prisoner, obliging as he had proved himself throughout the day. Again Rob stood the first watch, until he grew so sleepy that he was obliged to waken the others. Thus the long and uncomfortable night wore away, the prisoner being the only one who slept undisturbed.

XIV

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THE SURPRISE

As daylight began to shine more clearly in the interior of the barabara, John, who was standing the last watch, suddenly reached out an arm and wakened his companion. "Listen!" he whispered. "I hear something outside."

As they all sat up on the blankets they were surprised to see their prisoner also waken and lift himself half on his elbow. He, too, seemed to be listening eagerly and to feel some sort of alarm.

"Some one is coming!" said Rob. Now, indeed, there was no doubt. They heard shuffling foot-falls and many voices in some confused speech which they could not understand.

"I'm afraid!" said Jesse. "They're not white people."

Rob raised a warning hand that they should all be silent. At last a loud voice called out to them in broken English:

"White mans there! You come out! Me good mans! All good mans!"

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The faces of all inside the hut were now very serious, for they did not know what might be the nature of these visitors, and there was no window or crack through which they could peer. Jimmy made no motion to go out of the door, but, on the contrary, was trying to hide behind the pile of fox-traps under the low eaves.

"One thing is certain," said Rob, with determination: "we're trapped in here, and can't get out without their seeing us, whoever they are. So come on and let's go out and face them. Are you ready now?"

The others, silent and anxious, crawled close behind him as he pushed open the door and sprang out, rifle in hand.

They found themselves surrounded by nearly a score of natives—short, squat fellows with wild, black hair, most of them in half-civilized garments. They bore all sorts of weapons, some of them having rifles, others short harpoons, and bows and arrows. A large, dark-faced native seemed to be their leader, and seeing the boys now ready to defend themselves, he shifted his gun to his left hand and held out his right with a smile, continuing his broken English.



**HE SHIFTED HIS GUN TO HIS LEFT HAND AND
HELD OUT HIS RIGHT WITH A SMILE**

"Good mans me," he said. "You good mans. Plenty fliend, all light, all light, all light!"

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He continued to repeat these last words as though they would serve for the rest of the conversation. Rob, willing enough to accept his assurance of friendship, shook him by the hand, all the time, however, keeping his eyes open for the wild-looking group around him.

"Come dat ways, bidarka!" said the chief, pointing to the beach beyond the sea-wall. "Hunt bad mans. You see-um bad mans? Him steal."

John touched Rob quietly on the arm and whispered to him: "He means Jimmy," he said. "They are after him, and he knows it. That's why he wouldn't come out."

"You see-um bad mans?" asked the chief, eagerly. "Him there?" He pointed at the door of the barabbara, and would have stepped over to look in. Rob moved in front of him.

"No!" he said. "All good mans here. What you want?"

"No want-um white mans," answered the chief. "Village over dar." He pointed across the mountains.

Rob guessed that these natives had therefore followed around the coast-line from their town, although he was not yet clear as to their purpose in coming hither.

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"You got-um bad mans here," said the chief, sternly, at last. "See-um boat dar." He pointed to the bidarka at the edge of the lagoon.

"What you do with bad mans?" asked Rob.

"Plenty shoot-um!" answered the chief, sternly, slapping the stock of his gun. "Him steal! Him steal dis! Steal-um *nogock*! All time my peoples no get-um whale. Him steal-um *nogock*!"

Rob was puzzled.

"Now what in the world do you suppose he means?" asked he of John. "And what is that thing he's got?"

The chief was holding up a strange-looking object in his hand—a short, dark-colored, tapering stick, with hand-holes and finger-grips cut into the lower end, and with a long groove running toward the small end, which was finished with an ivory tip.

"I saw that thing in the boat," said John. "That must be what he means by *nogock*. I don't see how they would kill a whale with it, though, or anything else."

The chief evidently understood their ignorance. With a smile he fitted to the groove of the short stick the shaft of a short harpoon, whose head, about a foot and a half in length, they now discovered to be made of thin, dark slate, ground sharp on each edge and at the point. When the chief had fitted the butt of this dart against the ivory tip, he grasped the lower end of the *nogock* firmly in his hand, steadying the shaft in the groove with one finger. He then drew this back, with his arm at full length above his head, and made a motion as though to throw the harpoon. In short, the boys now had an excellent chance to see one of the oldest aboriginal inventions—the throwing-stick, used from Australia to Siberia by various tribes in one form or another. As they themselves had sometimes thrown a crab-apple from a stick in their younger days in the States, they could readily see that the

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greater length added to the arm gave greater leverage and power.

"I'll bet he could make that old thing whiz," muttered John. "Still, I don't see how he could hurt a whale with it."

None of them knew at that time anything about the native Aleut method of whale-killing. Neither did they know that the *nogock*, or whale-killing weapon, is a sacred object in the native villages, where it is always kept in the charge of the headman, or leader in the whale-hunts, who wraps it up carefully and hides it from view. The Aleuts never allow the women of their villages to look at the *nogock*, saying that it brings bad luck for any one to look at it or touch it except the chief himself. Therefore, had the boys known that their prisoner had stolen this sacred object, as well as the bidarka and much of its cargo, they would better have understood the nature of this pursuit and the intentness of the Aleut chief to punish the offender, who had been guilty of a crime held, in their eyes, to be as bad or worse than murder.

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Not, however, understanding all these things, and being very well disposed toward their captive, who had been of such service to them, the boys were not willing to turn him over at once to these people whom he so evidently feared, and who with so little ado announced their intention of killing him. For the time Rob could think of nothing better than continuing the parley.

"You got-um bad mans!" asserted the chief again.

"One mans," admitted Rob. "Maybe so good mans; we don't know."

"Where you comes?" asked the chief, presently, looking about him. "This my house here. White mans come here now?"

Rob did not think it best to admit that they were castaway and lost on these distant shores, so he determined to put on a bold front.

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"Heap hunt here," he said, pointing to the meat and the hides stretched on the ground. "Kill three bear. Catch-um plenty fish. By-and-by schooner come."

"When schooner come?" asked the chief, with a cunning gleam in his eye.

"Pretty soon, by-and-by," said Rob, sternly. "Plenty white mans come pretty soon."

The chief was not to be balked of his purpose, and kept edging toward the door of the barabbara. "Kill-um bad mans," he muttered. "Him steal."

Rob, seeing that he was bent on this, and unable to dissuade him from his certainty that the fugitive was inside the hut, for the moment scarcely knew what to do.

"No touch-um mans!" he finally commanded, sternly. "White mans come here by-and-by—Uncle Sam white mans. Suppose bad mans steal; Uncle Sam catch-um. You no touch-um bad mans!"

The chief hesitated, for he knew perfectly well that all the villages of this island were under control of United States law, and although the natives sometimes kept their own counsel and wreaked their own punishment on those whom they held to be offenders, they were, if detected, certain to be held to account by the United States government, which holds control over all this country to the uttermost point of the Aleutian Islands, although little enough law reaches enactment in these far-off regions. As he hesitated the chief turned away from the door, and the Aleuts now began to jabber among themselves. They pointed to the meat, and made signs that they were hungry.

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"*Da, karosha!*" assented Rob, who was beginning to learn Aleut from his friend John.

He motioned them to help themselves. Without much more ado the natives proceeded to take off pieces of the meat from the scaffold, and drawing a little apart they built a fire. Rob observed that they used matches, and so knew that they must be in touch with civilization at least once in a while.

"It's all right, Jess," said he. "We're going to get out of here sure before very long. These people can take us to the settlements any time they feel like it. I only wish we could talk more of their language or they more of ours."

The Aleuts for the time did not talk much of any language, for presently their mouths were too full for speech. Each would stuff his mouth full of meat, and then with his knife cut off a piece so close to his lips as would seem to endanger his nose.

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"We won't have much meat wasted if they stay around," remarked John, ruefully. "For my part, I wish they'd go. It's trouble enough to take care of one native, let alone more than a

dozen."

The chief seemed to be actuated with some sense of fair-play, or else wished to continue in the good graces of the whites. Some of the men began to boil a kettle and to make tea. The chief picked up the bag of tea and made a gesture of inquiry of Rob. "*Chi?*" he asked.

Rob shook his head, and made a motion signifying that they had but very little. The chief poured out in his hands what must have represented to him considerable value in tea.

"Now ask him for salt, John," said Rob.

This was too much for John's knowledge of the Aleut language. He got a little red in the face as he admitted this.

"Here, you mans," he said. "You got-ums salt?"

The chief shook his head.

"Salt! Salt-ums! Heap salt!" went on John, frowning. He made a motion as of sprinkling something on the meat, then touched his fingers to his mouth, smacking his lips. [Pg 110]

The chief grinned broadly. "*Da! Karosha!*" He jabbered something to one of his men, and the latter went down the path toward the beach. Evidently he had supplies there, for in a few moments he returned carrying a dirty sack in his hand. The chief took this in his hand and grinned, addressing John.

"Salt, salt-um, salt! All light, all light, all light!" he explained, and divided generously with the boys, giving them something which was of great value to them.

For a time attention seemed to be diverted from the purpose of these strange visitors, the chief making no reference to the man for whom they were searching, but seeming to be content to sit at the fire and eat. What might have been the result was not determined, for all at once something happened which set them all on a run for the beach.

A man appeared at the top of the sea-wall excitedly shouting, waving his arms, and pointing toward the sea. The others answered with loud cries, and in a moment the space immediately about the barabara was entirely deserted.

XV

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THE WHALE-HUNT

For a moment Rob, John, and Jesse stood looking after the natives as they hastened toward the beach. Their first thought was one of relief for the present at least; the prisoner in the hut remained unmolested. Then their curiosity as to the cause of all the excitement led them to forget everything else.

"Come on!" called Rob; and in an instant they were hurrying to join the scene of confusion which now was enacting on the beach.

As they reached the top of the sea-wall they saw for the first time the full party of natives, not more than half of whom had come over to the camp. More than thirty bidarkas lay pulled up along the beach, most of them two-hatch boats. To these boats the natives were now hastening; indeed, some of them had already launched their bidarkas and were paddling back and forth, as much at home on the water as on the land. With much shouting and gesticulation, one after another bidarka joined these, the hunter in each hurriedly casting off the lashings of his harpoon which lay along deck. [Pg 112]

At first the boys could see no reason for all this hurry, but as they gazed out across the bay all at once there arose in plain sight of all a vast black bulk which at once they knew to be a whale. The white spray of its spouting was blown forty feet into the air as it moved slowly and majestically onward deeper into the bay. It was plain that the natives meant to attack this monster in their fleet of bidarkas.

The old Aleut chief saw the boys as they came up. He motioned hurriedly to Rob as he ran to his own bidarka, grinning as though he hardly expected Rob to accept the invitation to come and join the hunt. Not so, however; for Rob was so much excited that he did not stop to think of danger. As the chief thrust the long, narrow craft into the water, steadying it with his paddle, Rob sprang in behind the rear hatch. In an instant they were off!

Rob looked around to see Jesse and John both crowded together in the rear hatch of yet another bidarka, where they did what they could to help a swarthy boatman to propel their craft. Rob noticed now that each hunter had his paddles, his harpoon, and his arrows marked in a certain way with red-and-black paint, so that they could not be mistaken for the property of any one else. All the hunters made ready their gear for the chase as they paddled on, perfectly assured and apparently not in the least anxious about the result of the hunt.

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The other boats held back until the chief had taken his place at the head of the procession. It now became plain that his was the task of using the mysterious *nogock*, over whose loss he had seemed so concerned. Even as his bidarka shot forward with its own momentum, he drew out from the forward hatch this sacred instrument and fitted to it the short harpoon. He made over the weapon some mysterious passes with one hand, and as he fitted the harpoon or heavy dart to the throwing-stick he blew three times on the point of it, passing his fingers along the edge. Finally he held the weapon up toward the sky and uttered some loud words in his strange tongue. Having completed these ceremonies, he placed the *nogock* and harpoon crosswise on the deck in front of him and bent again to his paddle. Rob himself, no bad canoeman, had meantime been paddling as though he quite understood what was expected of him.

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The head bidarka now passed steadily and swiftly on toward the great bulk of the whale, which lay plainly visible not more than a quarter of a mile away. As the other boats came on in squadron close behind, Rob could hear a sort of low, rhythmic humming, as though all the natives were joining in an incantation. It was his privilege to see one of the native hunts for the whale in all its original features—something which few white men have ever seen. The strange excitement of the scene, so many savage hunters all bent upon one purpose, and evidently using every means to screw their courage to the sticking-point, did not lack its effect upon the young adventurers who found themselves, with so little preparation or intent, swept on in this wild scene.

Once in a while Rob cast his eye about to see how his friends were prospering. Jesse looked a little pale, yet both he and John were eager. Crowded as they were both in one hatch, they could not paddle to much effect, but the native in the bow managed to keep his place in the procession. The first thought of Rob was that it was absolute folly to think of killing so great a creature with the insignificant weapons which he now saw ready for use.

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As the chief began to approach the great whale more closely, he slowed down the speed, creeping cautiously onward at times when his instinct told him his boat was least apt to be discovered by the whale. The latter seemed ignorant or careless of the approach. Now and again it blew a vast spout of water into the air, and sometimes it rolled and half lifted its vast bulk free of the water, until it seemed larger than a house. The humming chorus of the Aleuts continued, but fell to a lower note as the boats drew near.

For what seemed an interminable time the bidarka of the headman lay silent, trembling and heaving on the swell of the choppy sea, while the huntsman sat steadily and studied the giant quarry in front of him. Once or twice he gently turned the prow of the bidarka, using the least possible motion. Again, a few feet at a time, he would edge it on in, pausing and crawling forward, his hand motioning back to Rob to be quiet and steady.

Now the Aleut showed at his best. There was no fear or agitation in his conduct. Without hesitation he gazed intently at the dark, glistening bulk in front of him, apparently hunting for the exact spot which he wished to strike—a point about a third of the way back from the angle of the jaw. The whale itself seemed to be stupid, as though sleepy, although now and again it rolled slowly from side to side as though uneasy.

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Like a cat the huntsman crept in and in toward his prey, scarce more than an inch at a time, till at last Rob saw the boat reach a point where the body of the whale seemed to tower above their heads.

Finally the hand of the chief was raised to signal Rob to stop paddling.

With his own paddle in his left hand clinched against the rim of the bidarka hatch, the chief with his right hand slowly and deliberately raised the *nogock* and its slate-tipped harpoon. His arm, extended at full length and quite rigid, passed now in a straight line above his head and slightly back of his shoulder. Rob, intent on all these matters, saw the native's thumb and fingers whiten in the intensity of their grip on the butt of the *nogock*; yet the middle finger lay light and gentle, just holding in place the slender shaft of the harpoon, whose slate head, blue and cold, extended down and in front of the throwing hand.

Still the chief poised and waited until the exact spot he wished to strike was exposed as the whale rolled slowly toward the right. Then suddenly, with a sighing hiss of his breath, the

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dark huntsman leaned swiftly forward. The motion of his hand was so swift the eye could scarcely follow it.

After that all that Rob could tell was that he was in the bidarka speeding swiftly away from a churning mass of white water, in the middle of which a vast black form was rolling. He heard a sort of hoarse roar or expiration of the breath of the stricken monster. Once he thought he caught sight of the slender shaft of the harpoon, which in truth was buried, head and all, eighteen inches or more deep in the side of the whale, the point passing entirely through the blubber and into the red meat of the body. Although Rob did not know it, the shaft did not long remain attached. The struggles of the whale broke off the slate-head at a point near to the shaft, where it was cunningly made thinner in order that it might break. A foot or fifteen inches of the slate-head remained buried deep in the body of the whale. The *nogock* had done its work!

A loud chant now broke from all the boatmen, who joined the head bidarka, all backing away from the struggling whale. To the surprise of Rob, no further effort was made to launch a harpoon, and he saw that the presence of these other boats was rather intended as a part of the ceremony than as an actual assistance in the hunt, the savage mind here, as elsewhere, taking delight in surrounding itself with certain mummeries.

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As Rob gazed back of him to watch the struggle of the whale, he saw the sea gradually becoming quiet. The giant black form was gone, the whale having sounded, or dived far below the surface.

"Plenty sick now," said the chief, sententiously, motioning toward the spot where the whale had disappeared. Then all at once he gave a loud whoop and started paddling toward the shore, followed by the entire fleet of bidarkas, all the occupants of which were singing joyously. Rob could not in the least understand all this, for it seemed to him the hunt had met with failure; but there seemed to be some system about it, for nothing but satisfaction marked the faces of the hunters as they finally drew up their bidarkas again upon the beach.

"Maybe so two—tree day, him die now," said the chief, at last. Rob did not even then understand what he later found to be the truth: that what the Aleut really does with his slate harpoon-head is not to kill the whale with the wound, but to poison it. If the stone harpoon-head passes through the blubber and into the red meat the wound is sure to fester, and in the course of a few days to kill the whale, which then floats ashore somewhere and is discovered by the waiting hunters.

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There continued some sort of system in this hunt, even though it was now arrested for the time. Men kept an eye out on the bay, where in a few moments the whale arose, spouting madly, and once more stirring the water into foam. Swimming on the surface, it then took a long, straight run apparently for the mouth of the bay. The chief gave some hurried command, and a dozen boats shot out, whether to head it or to watch it Rob could not tell, for presently the whale once more sounded, and when it next arose it was deeper into the bay. The situation now seemed to please the old hunter.

"Maybe so him stay here now," he said, briefly, though why he thought so Rob could not tell.

No one made any attempt to pursue the whale after that. The chief, carefully wiping off the sacred *nogock*, again wrapped it up in its coverings, made some mysterious passes over it, and restored it to its place in his bidarka, whence, as Rob now began to understand, the guilty Jimmy had some time since stolen it.

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As the boys met on the beach it must be confessed they were not thinking of their prisoner or his fate. In their excitement they were chattering to one another about the hunt, which they all agreed was the wildest and most peculiar one they had ever seen or heard of.

"You had the best of it all, Rob," said John, enviously. "Our man wouldn't row up any closer. My, that old whale must have looked big from where you were!"

"Well, he did, a little bit," admitted Rob, who had lost his cap somewhere and was now bare-headed.

"That beats bear-hunting," said Jesse, "even although we haven't got our game yet."

"They say he'll come ashore maybe in two or three days," said Rob. "Meanwhile, I suppose these natives will hang around here and wait. If they do get him, it's very likely they'll squat down here to eat him up, and that would take all summer! I must confess I don't like the look of it very much."

"And there's Jimmy—" began John.

"That's so! We must go and see about him."

Quietly they edged their way out of the excited throng of natives and hurried across the sea-wall to the barabbara. Opening the door they peered cautiously in. No motion met their gaze, and although they called several times in a low tone there was no response. Passing into the barabbara they searched every corner of it. No doubt remained—their late prisoner was gone!

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XVI

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THE MISSING PRISONER

For a time the boys sat silent and moody in the barabbara. The situation, as it appeared to them, was not a pleasant one. On the one side were half a hundred natives, whose intentions they could only guess; upon the other, as they now suspected, there might be an active enemy whose whereabouts they could only surmise. At last Rob spoke.

"It looks this way to me," said he: "we three could not make any kind of defence against that band of natives, but perhaps they will not attack us. From what has happened, I do not think they will. Now, here is tea and salt which we got from them. That proves that they trade with the whites, which means that help may not be more than a hundred miles away at farthest. In the second place, these people think that we are here alone for only a short time and that our friends will soon be here. The thing for us to do is to keep them thinking that."

"They'll be over before long," said John, "to see what has become of Jimmy, here, the man they were after."

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"I'm not so sure of that," rejoined Rob. "These natives forget any purpose very easily; and now, as we know, they are busy watching the whale. But suppose they do come. The barabbara is empty."

"They have not seen Jimmy at all as yet," said John. "But suppose the bidarka is gone—he very probably took that with him."

"Let's go see," suggested Jesse, and accordingly they hurried to the side of the lagoon. Sure enough, only the dory remained. The bidarka had disappeared from its resting-place.

"Now," reasoned Rob, "he would be afraid to go out of the creek into the open bay, for then they would see him sure. There is every chance that he left the bidarka somewhere in the creek. We'll hunt for it, then. I'll go across in the shallow water, and we'll search both sides of the bank. One thing sure is that Jimmy went in a hurry, because he left his gun behind. He can't have had anything along more than his bow and arrows. We'll know when we find the bidarka."

So saying, they separated, and began to scour both sides of the creek, without success, however, until they nearly reached the mouth. Here, hidden in the tall grass on the farther side of the creek and close to the high rock wall near the mouth of the stream, Rob stumbled across the missing boat. With a shout he called to the others to halt, and presently, pushing the bidarka out into the creek, he paddled across to them. They all joined now in examining the contents of the boat.

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"It's just as I said," commented Rob. "He left in a hurry, and badly scared. He could just as well have taken one of our guns as not, but we know he did not do that, and even left his own. Here's his spear and his paddles. His blankets are back at the hut. So far as I can see, he took only his fishing-line and his bow and arrows."

"Yes, but he may come back again," suggested Jesse.

"I hardly think so," reasoned Rob. "At any rate, he'll not come back so long as these people hang around, because he knows they're after him. Besides, the fact that he didn't steal anything from us shows that he is getting scared about stealing. I'm not so uneasy about him as I am about these other fellows over on the beach."

None too happy, the boys now proceeded to paddle the bidarka up the creek to its old resting-place in the lagoon, after which they busied themselves rather half-heartedly about camp work, a part of which was further fleshing of the bear hides. As they were engaged at this they heard a faint rustling in the dry grass near at hand. Startled, they looked around, and saw something staring at them from the cover. John reached for his rifle.

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XVII

THE ALEUT BOY

They advanced toward the intruder, who stood up, grinning and showing a set of very white teeth. He was an Aleut boy about twelve years of age, short and squat, with stringy, dark hair. He was clad in a smock, or jacket, of sea-parrot feathers, which came down to his seal-skin boots. In one hand he held a short spear, in the other several thongs to which were attached bits of ivory. He seemed not in the least alarmed, but, on the contrary, much disposed to be friendly.

"*Karosha!*" called out John to him. "All right, all right, all right!"

John seemed to pick up easily the expressions which the Aleuts used and understood.

Hesitatingly, but still smiling, the boy joined them, and walked with them over toward the bear hides, where he stood looking down. At last, as they resumed their work at the hides, he himself squatted down, and taking out his own knife—a mere bit of steel bound around at the end with rags and hide for a handle—he also began to scrape away. So much greater was his skill than theirs that at last he smiled at their awkwardness. For the time he made no attempt at any kind of speech, and answered no questions in regard to his people. At last, as Jesse departed to the top of the sea-wall to learn what was going on along the beach, he began to jabber and attempt to make some signs. John guessed that he meant to say that in a couple of days the whale would come ashore; that then his people would build fires and eat.

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"Maybe he'd like to eat a little himself," concluded John. "Suppose we try him on some bear meat."

Their offer seemed very acceptable to the Aleut boy, who in a very matter-of-fact way began to hunt around in the grass for fuel and to prepare to make a fire, which latter he did with skilful use of one of the few matches which he kept dry in a membrane pouch in an inner pocket.

"He's camped out before," said Rob. "It looks as though he had adopted us. Maybe he likes the look of our meat-rack better than he does the prospect of waiting over there for the whale to come ashore."

The young Aleut put his pieces of bear meat on sticks, which he stuck up near the fire; and while they were broiling he himself ran over toward the beach, presently reappearing with some dark-looking stuff in his hands, which he offered his friends, making signs that it was good to eat.

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"Smoked breast of wild goose," commented John, smacking his lips. "It's good, too. I wouldn't mind having some more of that."

Whether or not the boy understood it was impossible to say; but all at once he began to flop his arms up and down, quacking and honking in imitation of wild fowl. He pointed to a spot far up at the head of the lagoon, and then, picking up his bunch of thongs and ivory balls, whirled them around his head.

Rob's eyes kindled.

"We can't afford to use rifle ammunition to shoot birds, but if we can get this boy to go along on a goose-hunt we may have a new sort of fun, and maybe get some game."

The young Aleut showed no disposition to return to his own people, and when at length, after they had all eaten heartily, the three friends turned toward the door of the barabbara, he followed them as though he had been invited.

"What are we going to do with this boy?" asked Jesse. "He acts as if he belonged here."

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"Maybe he does," said John. "I saw him talking to the old chief, and maybe he's his son. I have more than half a guess that the old man does own this house, anyhow."

As the sun began to sink toward the horizon a wind arose and dark clouds overspread the sky.

"I don't blame the boy for wanting to stay here where he will be dry. If I'm not mistaken, we are going to have rain and plenty of it. Meantime, we might as well turn in and go to sleep," added Rob.

He motioned the young Aleut to the blankets which Jimmy had abandoned, and the latter, without ado, curled himself up on them. The others, tired enough, followed his example, and for that night at least they did not trouble themselves to keep any watch. Perhaps they had never had greater cause for vigilance, but their anxiety was lost in the bodily weariness which came over them after so many stirring incidents.

XVIII

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UNWELCOME VISITORS

After the edge of their weariness had worn off with their first heavy slumbers, the mental anxiety of the young adventurers began to return, and they slept so uneasily that when morning came they all awoke with a start at the sounds they heard outside the barabbara.

Rain and heavy wind had begun some time in the night; but now they heard something else—the swishing of feet in the wet grass and the sound of low voices.

The young Aleut was awake also, but he smiled as he sat up on the blankets.

"I don't think we need be alarmed," said Rob, in a low tone to his friends. "If these people had meant us any harm we'd have been foolish to go out in their boats with them and leave our guns. Now we're here safe with all our guns and other stuff, and here's this boy with us, too. If they had not felt friendly toward us they would never have let him stay here all night. Too bad we can't understand their talk, and just have to guess at things; but that's the way I guess it."

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A moment later there came the sound of a loud voice at the door. It opened, and the swarthy face of the Aleut chief peered in. He jabbered in his native language to the boy, who replied briefly and composedly. The chief now pushed his way into the hut, and, much to the annoyance of the white occupants, he was followed by a dozen other natives, who came crowding in and filling the place with the rank smell of wet fur and feathers. They seated themselves around the edge of the barabbara, and one of them presently began to make a fire.

"Dis barabbara—*my* peoples!" said the chief. "My families come here all light, all light, all light!"

"Just as I thought," said Rob, aside, to the others. "It is we who are the visitors, not they. John, you act as interpreter. Ask him how far it is to Kadiak."

The keen-witted chief caught the sound of the latter word.

"You come Kadiak?" he said. "Come dory? You no got-um schooner?"

"Schooner by-and-by," broke in Rob, hurriedly. "Our peoples come."

The chief sat thoughtful for a time, his cunning eyes looking from one to the other.

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"What you give go Kadiak?" he asked, at length.

"Schooner come by-and-by," retorted Rob, coldly.

The chief chuckled to himself shrewdly.

"Where bad mans go?" he asked, after awhile.

Rob shrugged his shoulder and pointed toward the mountains, as though he did not know where the refugee might be.

After awhile the old native produced from under his coat three handsomely made *kamelinkas*, or rain-proof coats, made of membranes. He pointed to the clothing of the boys and made signs of rain.

"You like-um?" he asked. "Me like-um lifle."

Rob shook his head, but the old man persisted. Finally Rob was seized of a happy idea.

"S'pose you go Kadiak," he said. "You come back with schooner, maybe so we give one rifle,

two rifle."

This had precisely the opposite effect from that intended. The chief guessed that, after all, the boys did not know when any boat would come for them. The cunning eyes of the native grew ugly now.

"*My barabbara!*" he said. "You go. S'pose you no give lifle! Me take-um all light, all light, all light!" [Pg 133]

"Hold on to your guns, boys!" called Rob, quickly. "Don't let them get hold of one of them."

Then he resumed with the chief. "Heap shoot!" said he, patting his rifle. "You no take-um. S'pose you get-um schooner, maybe so we give one rifle, two rifle; maybe so flour—sugar; maybe so hundred dollar. Our peoples plenty rich."

The chief seemed sulky and not disposed to argue, but the young boy at his side spoke to him rapidly for a time, and for some reason he seemed mollified. Rob pressed the advantage. Drawing a piece of worn paper from his inner coat-pocket, he made signs of writing with a stub of pencil which he found in another pocket.

"You see talk-talk paper?" he went on. "S'pose you take talk-talk paper by Kadiak, we give-um one rifle."

The chief grinned broadly and reached out his hand to take Rob's rifle from him, but the latter drew it back.

"No give-um rifle now," he insisted. "When bidarka go, you take-um talk-talk paper, we give-um rifle. No! No give-um rifle now. We keep-um boy here all right, all right, all right. No keep-um boy, no give-um rifle. No get-um schooner, no get-um boy." [Pg 134]

This was not very good talking, but it was not bad reasoning for a boy; and, moreover, it seemed to go home. The old Aleut sat and thought for a while. Evidently he either was willing to exchange his son for so good a rifle, or else he felt sure that no harm would come to the boy. Turning to the latter, he talked with him for some moments earnestly, the boy answering without hesitation. At last the young Aleut arose, edged through the crowd, and sat down beside John, putting his hand on the arm of the latter as though to call him his friend.

Rob drew a sigh of relief. Although he no more than half understood what had gone on, he reasoned that the boy had agreed to remain with them until word was brought back from the settlement. How long that might be, or in what form help might come, he could only guess. Keeping his own counsel, and preserving as stern an expression as he could, Rob sat and looked at the Aleut chieftain steadily.

The situation was suddenly changed by a shout from the direction of the beach. Led by the chief, the natives all now hurried out of the barabbara. The young boy remained. In a few moments he crawled out and presently dragged in after him the wet bear-skins, making signs that they would be spoiled if left in the rain. Having done this, he motioned to the boys to put on the *kamelinkas* which had been left in the hut by the chief and then to follow him. [Pg 135]

Guessing that there might be events of interest on the beach, they adopted his suggestions and hastened out into the rain.

When they reached the top of the sea-wall the cause of the excitement was apparent. The natives were hurrying as fast as they could go in a body up the beach. Perhaps a half-mile from where they stood they could see a vast dark shape half awash in the heavy surf. Around it bobbed a few dark spots which they saw to be bidarkas. From these, and from the natives gathered at the edge of the water, there came, as the boys could see, one harpoon after another. It was plain that the whale, sickened by its wound and buffeted by the heavy weather, had been driven close in shore, and here had been attacked and finished at short range by the natives who had been watching for its appearance.

XIX

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HOPE DEFERRED

Of course the boys could not help joining the hurrying throng which now was thickening about the stranded whale. John and Jesse were much excited, but Rob remained more

sober and thoughtful, even as they finally stood on the beach where the Aleuts were working at the giant carcass of the whale, which, pierced by a half-dozen lances and bristling with short harpoons, was now quite dead, and fastened to the shore by a score of strong hide lines.

"There's the whale all right," said he to his two friends. "It's a good thing for these people, I suppose; but it's a very bad thing for us."

Jesse looked at him in inquiry, and Rob went on:

"Don't you see that they'll camp here now for days, and maybe weeks? They'll eat this thing as long as it is fit to eat, and probably a good deal longer; and meantime they are not going to take out any word from us to the settlements, if they really intend to go there at all."

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"That's so," said John. But his hopeful temperament cast off troubles readily. "We can't do anything more than just wait, anyhow; and I suppose that our friend here"—he motioned to the Aleut boy—"will see that we get our share of the whale meat."

The boys now saw that whale-hunting among the Aleuts is a partnership affair, a whole village sharing equally in the spoils. Every man of the party now went to work. Some of them mounted the slippery back of the dead whale and hacked away at the hide, laying bare strips of the thick white blubber. Skilfully enough, for those possessing no better tools, they got off long strips of the blubber, which they carried high up the beach above the tide. Some of them carefully worked at the side of the whale where the deadly harpoon had done its work. Cutting down, they disclosed the broken head of slate buried deep in the body of the whale, the wound now surrounded by a wide region of inflamed and bloodshot flesh. This they carefully cut out for a distance of two or three feet on each side of the wound, and this seemed to be all the attention they paid to the preparation of the flesh for food. As the rain was now falling steadily they did not pause to build fires, but here and there a man could be seen eating raw whale meat, cutting off the strip close to his lips with his knife, in the curious fashion which always seems to the white race so repulsive.

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The young Aleut looked among the pieces of flesh as they were carried high up the bank of sea-wall, and at last selected a few smaller portions which he carried with him when at last the boys turned back toward the barabbara. He also got a good-sized sack of salt and one or two battered cooking utensils. It was plain that whatever his relatives might wish to do, or whatever right they had to turn intruders out of their own barabbara, he himself intended to cast in his lot with the white boys.

The latter knew no alternative but to allow matters to stand as they did. The gloomy weather, however, oppressed their spirits. They had now been gone from civilization for a considerable time, and if truth be told they were becoming not a little uneasy about their situation. They had no means of telling how far the settlement might be, and they were indeed as completely lost as though they were a thousand miles from any white man's home. As a matter of fact, the part of the great island where they now were cast away had scarcely been visited by a white man, on an average, once in twenty years since the days of the Russian occupancy.

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Most of that day they spent inside the barabbara waiting for the rain to cease; but as the clouds broke away in the afternoon they ventured out once more to see what was going on along the beach.

"Why, look there!" said Rob, pointing toward the mouth of the bay. "They're leaving—half of them are gone already!"

Rough as the sea now was, and heavily loaded as were all the boats with the flesh of the whale, it was none the less obvious that members of the party were starting out for home, perhaps disposed to this by the discomfort of life in rough weather with no better shelter than they could find on this somewhat barren coast. These natives nearly always hunt in districts where they know there can be found a barabbara or so, and such huts are used as common property by all who find them, although the loose title of ownership probably rests in the man or family who first erected them. When so large a party as that now present travelled together, it was certain that they could find no adequate shelter unless they constructed it for themselves; and the Aleut, after all, is not like the American Indian, who makes himself comfortable where night finds him, but is rather a village-dweller, who rarely wanders farther from home than a day's journey or so in his bidarka.

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All this, of course, was more or less Greek to the boys who stood watching the thinning party, as one bidarka after another was skilfully run out through the surf and as skilfully put under way in the long swell of the sea. At last a well-known figure detached itself from a group where he had been talking and approached them. The Aleut chief addressed himself once more to Rob.

"My peoples go now," he said. "Me like-um lifle."

"When you go Kadiak?" asked Rob.

"Maybe seven week, four week, ten—nine week all light, all light, all light," said the chief, amiably. "You make-um talk-talk ting. Give me! You give-um lifle now."

Rob turned to the other boys.

"We'll hold a council," said he. "Now, what do you think is best to do?"

The others remained silent for a time.

"Well," said Jesse, at length, "I want to go home pretty bad. He can have my rifle if he wants it, if he'll take a letter out to John's Uncle Dick at Kadiak."

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"I think it's best," said John. "We'll have two rifles left, and that will be all we really need. Let's go and write the note and take the chance of its ever getting out. Anyway, it is the best we can do."

They returned to the barabbara, where Rob wrote as plainly as he could, with deep marks of the pencil, as follows:

"Mr. Richard Hazlett, Kadiak.

"DEAR SIR,—We are all right, but don't know where we are, or what date this is, or which way Kadiak is. We came down in the dory. Travelled all night. Are safe and have plenty to eat, but want to go home. Please send for us, and oblige

"Yours truly, —."

"Do you think that'll do all right, boys?" he asked.

The others nodded assent, and so each signed his name. Folding up the paper and tying it in a piece of the membrane which he cut off a corner of his *kamelinka*, Rob finally gave the packet to the old chief.

"Plenty talk-talk thing," he said. "You bring peoples—get-um schooner—my peoples give-um flour, sugar, two rifle, hundred dollars."

Without further comment than a grunt the old chief stowed the packet in an inside pocket of his feather jacket, and swung Jesse's rifle under his arm, not neglecting the ammunition. He had eaten heavily of whale meat and seemed to be pretty well beyond emotion of any sort. Certainly he turned and did not even say good-bye to his son as he swung into the front hatch of his bidarka, followed by another paddler, and headed toward the mouth of the bay, almost the last of the little craft to leave the coast.

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The boys stood looking after him carefully. The presence of these natives had, it is true, offered a certain danger, or at least a certain problem, but now that they were gone the place seemed strangely lonesome, after all. Rob heard a little sound and turned.

Jesse was not exactly crying, but was struggling with himself.

"Well," he admitted, "I don't care! I *do* want to go home!"

XX

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THE SILVER-GRAY FOX

After the natives had departed, the young castaways, quite alone on their wild island, felt more lonesome and more uneasy than they had been before. The wilderness seemed to close in about them. None of them had any definite hope or plan for an early rescue or departure from the island, so for some two or three weeks they passed the time in a restless and discontented way, doing little to rival the exciting events which had taken place during the visit of the natives. It was now approaching the end of spring, and Rob, more thoughtful perhaps than any of the others, could not conceal from himself the anxiety which began to settle upon him.

In these circumstances Rob and his friends found the young Aleut, with his cheerful and care-free disposition and his apparent unconcern about the future, of much comfort as well as of great assistance in a practical way. They nicknamed the Aleut boy Skookie—a

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shortening of the Chinook word *skookum*, which means *strong*, or *good*, or *all right*. Their young companion, used as he was to life in the open, solved simply and easily all their little problems of camp-keeping. Under his guidance, they finished the work on the bear-skins, scraping them and rubbing them day after day, until at last they turned them into valuable rugs.

It was Skookie, also, who showed them where to get their salmon and codfish most easily. In short, he naturally dropped into the place of local guide. The native is from his youth trained to observation of natural objects, because his life depends upon such things. With the white man or white boy this is not the case. No matter how much instinct he may have for the life of the wilderness, with him adjustment to that life is a matter of study and effort, whereas with the native all these things are a matter of course. It may be supposed, therefore, that this young Aleut made the best of instructors for the young companions who found themselves castaway in this remote region.

Thus, none of the three white boys had noted more than carelessly the paths of wild animals which came down from the surrounding hills to the shores of the lagoon near which they were camped, although these paths could be seen with ease by any one whose attention was attracted to them. One day they were wandering along the upper end of the lagoon where the grass, matted with several seasons' growth and standing as tall as their shoulders, stood especially dense. They noticed that Skookie stooped now and then and parted the tangled grass with his hands. At last, like a young hound, he left their course and began to circle around, crossing farther on what they now discovered to be an easily distinguishable trail made by some sort of small animal.

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"What is it? What's up, Skookie?" asked John, whose curiosity always was in evidence.

The Aleut boy did not at first reply, because he did not know how to do so. He made a sort of sign, by putting his two bent fingers, pricked up, along the side of his head like ears.

"Wolf!" said John.

"No," commented Rob. "I don't think there are any wolves on this island; at least, I never heard of any so far to the West. What is it, Skookie?"

The boy made the same sign, and then spread his hands apart as if to measure the length of some animal.

"Fox!" cried Jesse, with conviction; and Skookie, who understood English better than he spoke it, laughed in assent.

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"Fokus," he said, repeating the word as nearly as he could. Now he traced out the path in the grass for them, and, beckoning them to follow, showed where it crossed the tundra and ran along the stream, headed back to the higher hills which seemed to be the resort of the wild animals, from which they came down to feed along the beach.

"It's as plain as the nose on a fellow's face," said John. "And some of these paths look as if they were a good many years old."

Indeed, they could trace them out, many of them, worn deep into the moss by the dainty feet of foxes which had travelled the same lines for many years. It was a curious thing, but all these wild animals, even the bears, seemed not to like the work of walking where the footing was soft, so they made paths of their own which they followed from one part of the country to another. On this great Alaskan island nearly every mountain pass had bear trails and fox paths leading down to the valleys along the streams or from one valley over into another. The foxes as well as the bears seemed to find a great deal of their food along the beaches.

As the young native ran along the fox trail the others had difficulty in keeping up with him.

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"What's the matter with him? What's up, Rob?" panted John, who was a trifle fat for his years. "Why doesn't he keep in the plain trails?"

"Let him alone," said Rob. "He may have some idea of his own. See there, he is heading over toward the beach."

They followed him along the faint trail, dimly outlined at places in the moss, and soon they caught the idea which was in his mind. The path headed toward the beach and then zig-zagged, paralleling it as though some fox had come down and caught sight or scent of something interesting and then had investigated it cautiously. Others had trodden in his foot-prints, and so made this path, which at length straightened out and ran directly to the beach just opposite the place where the dead whale lay.

"Plenty—plenty!" said Skookie, pointing his short finger to the trail and then down to the

beach where the carcass of the whale lay. Whether he meant plenty of fox or plenty of food for the foxes made little difference.

"They're feeding on the whale, now that the boats have gone," explained Rob. "That is plain. Skookie is just showing us the new trail they have made the last few nights."

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Skookie turned back and began to follow the trail toward the mountain. Without comment the others followed him, and so they ran the faint path back until it climbed directly up the steep bluff, fifty feet in height, and struck a long, flat, higher level, where the foxes all seemed to have established an ancient highway. Several trails here crossed, although each held its own way and did not merge with the others; as though there were bands of foxes which came from one locality and did not mingle with the others.

"Now, what made him come up here?" asked John, whose shorter legs were beginning to tire of this long walk. "We're getting a good way from home."

"Just wait," advised Jesse. "We'll learn something yet, I shouldn't wonder. Skookie's after something; that's plain."

Indeed, the young Aleut, not much farther on, began now to stoop and examine the trail closely. At length he pointed his brown finger at a certain spot near the trail. The others bent over the place.

"Something's been here," said Jesse. The moss had been dug out and put back again.

Skookie smiled and walked on a little farther and showed them several other such places a few yards apart. He held up the fingers of one hand.

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"Five *klipsie*," he said, and then swept an arm around toward the face of the mountains, remarking: "My peoples come here."

"Oh," said Rob; "he means that here is where his family come to set their *klipsie* traps for foxes. I suppose these places are where the same *klipsies* were set five different times. I have heard that when they catch a fox in one place they always take up their trap and move it on a little way so that the other foxes may not be frightened away by the smell of the dead fox or the trap."

"I wonder," said Jesse, "if any fox would have good fur this late in the spring."

"He might," said Rob, "if he had been living all the time up in the mountains near the snow; but as the natives trap a good deal along the beach, I suppose they took up their traps some time ago. They never like to take fur unless it is good, of course."

"Anyhow," said Jesse, "I shouldn't mind trying once for a fox. We might get a good one. I've heard they catch foxes sometimes—silver-grays or blacks, you know—that are worth three or four hundred dollars."

"Or even more," added Rob; "but that is when they're very prime, and when they bring the top of the market."

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Skookie looked from one to the other, but finally made up his own mind. He led out on the way toward the barabara, where very methodically he set to work carrying out his purpose. He rummaged among the *klipsie* butts in the back part of the hut until he got one to suit him, and then without any hesitation led the way a few hundred yards distant from the hut where, parting the grass, he disclosed the cache or hiding-place where the owners of the *klipsies* had secreted the traps; they, in their cunning, not wishing to leave the entire trap in the possession of any stranger who might come to the house.

Fumbling in this heap of narrow sticks, each of which was about as long as a boy's arm, Skookie at last picked out one which suited him. They discovered that the end of it was armed with four or five spikes apparently made of old nails hammered to a point and filed into a barb.

Skookie now took this arm of his *klipsie* to where he had left the butt or hub of the trap, and he loosened up the heavy, braided cord of sinew which passed from end to end through the butt. He pushed the butt end of the arm in between these sinews so that pulling it sidewise twisted the sinews. Then he drove tight the wedges at each end of the hub, so straining the sinews tightly about the arm of the trap. Thus, as the boys readily saw, a great force was exerted when the arm of the trap was pulled back.

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"That is what they call 'torsion,' I think," said Rob. "It is like a gate-spring which pushes hard when you twist it. Look at those sinews—thick as your thumb—and even one little sinew is strong enough to hang an ox!"

Skookie went on with his work until he thought the strain on the arm was sufficient. Then he pulled the arm back and caught it under a slight notch which was cut in the side of the hub, which itself was open on one side to allow the passage of the arm. When the trap was thus set it lay flat on the ground, and Skookie motioned the boys to keep away from it—something which all were willing to do, for the barbed arm of the *klipsie* resembled nothing so much as a fanged serpent with its head back ready to strike a terrible blow.

“Natives get caught in these traps sometimes,” said Rob; “so the old trappers tell me. Sometimes they get crippled for life. You see, these iron points here strike a man just about at the knee joint, and that’s pretty bad when there is no doctor around.”

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Skookie, going ahead with his work, fumbled in his pocket and fished out a piece of hide cord, which he measured off to a certain length between his arms; then, picking up a bit of stick, he whittled out a pointed peg and attached one end of his cord to this, while he arranged the other so that it would control the trigger which held the arm in place on the farther side of the *klipsie* bow. Now he stretched out his cord and pushed the peg into the earth as though it crossed a fox path, and made a motion of a fox walking along and touching his leg against the cord. To do this he took a long stick instead of using his own limb.

Whang! went the *klipsie*, the fanged arm whirling over so fast that the eye could hardly follow it, and burying its points in the ground. Skookie laughed and danced up and down, showing how it certainly would have killed a fox had the latter been there.

“Come on,” said John; “let’s go set it somewhere.”

“All light!” said Skookie, who understood a great many words from their apparent connection. He took up his trap, with the hub under his arm, and headed off up the beach toward the spot where they had first seen the fox trail two or three hours before.

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Following along the faint trail for some distance, but taking care not to step in it, he at length struck it where it passed through the tall grass. Here he squatted down and made some sort of strange passes over his trap, mumbling certain words in a strange tongue. Like all of his people, Skookie was superstitious. What he wanted to do now was to wish his trap good-luck. Having attended to this part of his ceremony, he drew his knife and began to detach a square of the thick, matted moss, making a cavity about arm’s distance at one side of the path. In this hole he buried the hub of the *klipsie* and covered it carefully with moss, so that nothing was left to show. The arm, which lay back still farther in the grass, he covered up lightly so that it also would be concealed from view. Then, carefully, he stretched his trigger string across the path, mixing it up with some of the dried spears of grass so that it lay a foot or less above the level of the path, or at just about the height at which the fore-legs or breast of the fox would strike it as the animal came walking down the trail. Having bent the grass above his *klipsie*, and arranged everything so that the place showed no signs of what had been going on, Skookie at last smiled, stood back, and looked cheerfully at his work; then he cast a glance toward the skies, and made a sign with his fingers held downward as though to indicate falling rain.

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“Bime-by water!” he said.

“He means that he wants it to rain,” said Rob, “so that the scent will all be washed off from the trap and from the ground around it.”

“Well,” said John, “if the water is about the way it averages, he won’t have to wait longer than to-night for his rain.” Which, indeed, was the case, for in the night, while they were all safely in the barabbara around the fire, the rain came as usual, sufficient to blot out all trace of their late work on the fox trails.

The following morning the boys at once began to wonder what luck had met their trapping operations. It did not appear to them likely that they would catch anything the first night; but Skookie, it seemed, was of a different opinion. After breakfast he led the way to the place where the trap lay, and without hesitation walked into the tall grass, stooped down, and at once held up to view a long, dark animal at sight of which the boys uttered a joint whoop of joy!

“We got him!” said John. “We certainly did get a fox, and the very first night, too.”

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“Yes,” agreed Rob, “we did more than that: we got a silver-gray fox, and a mighty good one at that. Was there ever such luck, I do wonder!”

Skookie took it all as a matter of course, but the others were much excited over this discovery. They put the silky, handsome animal upon the ground and began to smooth out its fur. The fangs of the *klipsie* had struck it in the back of the neck and killed it instantly,

so that the coat remained quite smooth and undisturbed by any struggles. It was long and silky—dark, with white-tipped tail, and gray extremities on all the hairs of the back.

“This skin ought to be worth anyhow one hundred dollars,” said Rob, critically. “At least that would be my guess at it. The natives don’t often get that much, but sometimes a trader will buy a skin for fifty dollars and sell it for five or six hundred. That all depends on the sort of market he finds.”

“Anyhow,” said Jesse, “it proves that Skookie can trap foxes all right.”

The young Aleut was not disturbed by this praise, and proceeded to further prove his ability as a trapper. Having again set his *klipsie* at a point a few yards farther down the trail, he took up the dead fox and led the way back to the barabbara, where he undertook to carry the carcass in for his skinning operations. [Pg 156]

At this Rob demurred, for he had already seen proof of the custom of the native trappers, who nearly always skin out their game at the fireside of the barabbara, and who are very careless where they leave the carcasses.

“No, you don’t!” said Rob. “We’ve just cleaned out that house, and we don’t want it mused up again so soon. Let’s go over to the beach and skin our fox.”

Skookie, always docile and willing to obey, once more led the way, carrying the fox under his arm. At last he seated himself on the ground, sharpened his knife-blade on a stone, and began to skin out the fox, much as an old trapper would. He made a cut from one hind leg to the other, cut off the tail bone, pulled the tail off clean by the use of two sticks clamped against the bone, and proceeded to remove the skin from the body without splitting it along the belly—“casing” it, as trappers call it. So carefully did he do his work that he did not make the slightest cut around the eyes or ears or nostrils, and even brought off the whiskers of the muzzle without disfiguring the skin in the least. [Pg 157]

Next he found a spreader, or tapering board, under the eaves of the barabbara, and over this he stretched his fox-skin, inside out, setting it away in the back part of the barabbara, where it would slowly dry without being exposed to the fire.

“Well, he certainly is a trapper, all right,” said John, admiringly. “Now I believe we could do that sort of thing ourselves. I don’t see any reason why we shouldn’t get a lot of foxes here, and maybe make some money out of the skins some day.”

Rob shook his head. “I don’t think so,” said he. “Even this skin, although it is not yet rusty from the sunlight, is not perfectly prime, as you can see by looking at the inside of the skin. A really prime skin is white and clear, and you can see that this one is just a little blue along the back. That isn’t a good sign to me.”

Rob’s guess as to the fur soon proved to be correct. For four more nights they watched their *klipsie* trap without success. On the fifth morning they found another dead fox in the trap, with the barbs through his back. This, however, was only a “cross” fox, and his fur proved so worn and rusty that Skookie scornfully refused to take off the hide. That ended their fox-trapping, for Rob refused to allow any more foxes to be killed. Skookie, apparently willing to go on with his work, or to stop as they preferred, smilingly took up his *klipsie*, after he had sprung the trap, detached the arm, and restored the separated parts to their original hiding-places. [Pg 158]

“Plenty times my peoples come here,” he said, smiling.

“That means,” said Jesse, “that some time or other, if we have luck, we may be discovered here by his people, even if our own people never find us.”

“Yes,” Rob added, “but I only hope that may be before winter comes and leaves us unable to get out.”

XXI

AN ALEUT GOOSE-HUNT

Although utterly remote from the ordinary haunts of man, our young hunters found their new environment one free from monotony, after all. The sea was never twice the same, and even the weather was capricious enough to afford variety. As spring wore on the region seemed to teem with wild life, whether on the earth, in the water, or the air. The gulls,

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crows, ravens, and eagles were continually passing, with clouds of shags or cormorants, which nested on the rocks a mile or so down the bay, together with numbers of oyster-birds, whale-birds, and other strange fowl of the outlying coast.

Each night and morning also there passed up the lagoon a stream of honking and chattering wild-fowl, the largest of which and most valuable, though least attainable, were the great Canada geese, which frequented this part of the island in large numbers.

"If only we could get hold of some of those fellows," said John, longingly, one morning, as they saw an especially fine flock pass slowly up toward the head of the lagoon. "I'll warrant they'd be good to eat. See, some of them can hardly fly yet, they're so young." [Pg 160]

"Yes," said Jesse, "if we had only thought of it last week, they probably would not have been able to fly at all—flappers, they call those young birds. Then we might possibly have killed some of them in the grass at the head of the lagoon."

"We could kill all we wanted now with the rifles," commented Rob; "but, as I said awhile ago, I don't think we ought to use rifle ammunition for killing birds. No one can tell how much we may need our cartridges later on. No, I don't think we will get any geese unless we can catch them with our hands. I haven't much faith in those throwing-cords that Skookie was showing us."

John turned to his friend Skookie. "S'pose you catch-um geese, Skookie?" he asked.

The Aleut boy surprised them very much by his sudden use of English.

"Sure!" he said. He had perhaps learned this word from associating with whites somewhere down the coast.

His prompt reply made them all laugh, but none the less it was of yet greater interest than this. [Pg 161]

"How do you mean, Skookie?" asked Rob. "How can you catch a goose when you have no gun? You can't get close enough."

It was always a problem how much English the Aleut understood or did not understand. Now he made his answer by diving into the back of the barabbara and coming out with the curious bunch of thongs which the boys had noticed him carrying when they first encountered him on the beach—a dozen thongs attached to a common centre, each being a couple of yards in length, and each bearing at its extremity a perforated ivory ball perhaps of an ounce or so in weight.

"Well, that don't look very much like a goose-hunt to me," said John; "but it seems to me I've read about the Eskimos using something of this sort. Maybe it'll work on geese, though it looks like a mighty funny kind of shot-gun to me."

"It's an old weapon of wild people," said Rob. "I've read about that sort of thing. They use it in South America for catching animals, and there they call it the *bol*as, or balls. I think they use stones down there, and of course they are a great deal heavier than these little ivory weights."

He motioned to Skookie to show how he proposed to use this curious device. The Aleut, understanding perfectly what was required, again caught the thongs by their central ring and deftly began to whirl them about his head. Aiming at a post which stood up in the grass near the barabbara, he finally cast loose his whirling thongs, which promptly wrapped tightly around the post as they flew. The young brown hunter grinned at this, and all the boys were surprised at the force with which the thongs clung about the object of the aim. [Pg 162]

"Jinks!" said John. "I shouldn't wonder if they'd kill a bird, if they hit it, or anyhow tie it up. The question is, how can you get close enough to the geese to catch them with this sort of arrangement. A goose is about the wildest thing in the world. I don't suppose Skookie could hit anything very far."

"I don't know," mused Rob. "But why not let him try? If the birds are done nesting, and the young ones are flying, they would make a mighty good addition to our table if we could get some of them."

Another flock of geese passed by. Rob pointed from the thong-cords toward the geese.

"S'pose you catch-um?" he asked of Skookie.

The boy smiled, and without a word picked up his thongs and led the way along the shore of the lagoon. The others followed, seeing that he proposed to capture some wild-fowl in the native way, as he had once before intimated might be done. [Pg 163]

He was no bad hunter, this young savage. After locating a big flock of geese which were sunning themselves on the mud flats close to the grass, he led his companions far back from the water, making a wide détour. At length he began to approach the fowl from a point where they would be concealed by the heavy grass. It seemed an age to the white boys, but Skookie was in no hurry. Like a cat he crawled and crawled, a few inches at a time, until finally he reached a point where they could hear the contented croaking and jabbering of the geese as they rested, entirely unsuspecting of any danger. It must be remembered that in this part of the world the wild-fowl are seldom if ever disturbed, and hence are far less suspicious than when they are near to civilization. If these honkers suspected anything at all now, they did no more than occasionally lift their heads and crane their long necks around. They could see nothing, because their pursuers were all crouched low beneath the tops of the grasses.

The Aleut boy kept on his stealthy approach—little by little—until finally he was within thirty or forty yards of the edge of the water, along which the great wild-fowl were scattered. Rob nudged him to get up and throw, but Skookie knew his own business better. Without uttering a sound he crawled forward rapidly a few paces, on his hands and knees, then sprang to his feet and ran rapidly through the grass toward the edge of the water, uttering the while wild whoops as he began to swing the thongs about his head.

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“Look out!” cried John. “They’ll all get away! Why don’t he throw?”

But Skookie did not undertake to throw so long as the geese were on the ground. He knew that the young geese were weak and not used to flight, and that even at its best a wild goose is slow and heavy to take wing.



**THE ALEUT BOY LAUNCHED HIS
MISSILE INTO THE MASS OF
FLYING FOWL**

All these geese, some scores of young and old, intermingled, now began to scream, squawk, and honk, and clumsily to take wing as best they could. Thus they rose in a confused brown mass, almost in the face of the young hunter, who advanced rapidly, whirling the weighted cords about his head. At precisely the right instant, and not upset by the sudden clamor of the rising fowl, the Aleut boy straightened his arm in front of him and launched his missile with precision into the very middle of the flapping mass of flying fowl.

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The execution done was perhaps no more than he expected, but as the white boys saw his success they broke into a cheer. As the startled flock screamed and honked away, down came two of the fowl, one with broken wing and another laid fair about the neck by the gripping cords which had encircled it. Before they could escape, all the boys were after them, plunging into the mud and water, careless of anything but their game. They found that one of their geese was an old gander, but the other was a fat young bird, which John fondled with the utmost interest.

"I'll bet you this one'll be good to eat!" said he. "Let's go back and see how it goes."

"I wonder if you ever will get enough to eat, John!" said Rob, reprovingly. "We have only had breakfast an hour or so. But I'm agreed that young wild goose will make a good change of diet for luncheon."

He patted Skookie on the shoulder to compliment him on his skill.

"Plenty times me catch-um," said Skookie, proudly, as he untangled his cords. "Plenty times my peoples come dis place."

Whether he meant that his people had been hunting here very often, or intended to hunt here often, they could not understand. Happier than they had been for some days, they went back to the hut, picked the old goose, skinned out the breast of the young one, and began, somewhat unskilfully, to prepare for the cookery of their new game. The best they could do was to cut the breast of the fowl into strips and fry it with some of the bear fat in the broken skillet. Even so, they found it delicious eating.

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Skookie, after the fashion of his people, sat on the ground cross-legged, and when it came his turn to help himself from the common dish he plunged his fingers into the hot contents, and fishing out a long piece introduced it into his mouth. When his mouth was full as it would hold he took his knife-blade, and after his fashion cut off a piece close to his lips, on the outside—the way in which most of these Northwestern natives eat their meat. The other boys, who had been reared with different ideas of table manners, looked at him with surprise. Skookie did not seem to notice, but munched away contentedly, repeating the performance now and then.

"If that's the way they eat up here," said John, at last, "I suppose we ought to learn how to do it." So saying, soberly he began to sharpen his knife on a near-by stone, as he had seen Skookie do, and, taking a piece of goose breast in one hand, he partly filled his mouth and undertook to cut it off at the proper length. At once he uttered a wild cry, and dropped both knife and morsel to the ground. Blood flowed from his face, and he clapped his hand to the end of his nose, which he had nearly severed with the stroke of his knife, as it had slipped unexpectedly through the piece of meat.

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"Now look at you!" said Jesse. "You've pretty near cut off your nose; that's what you've done. That comes of forgetting the way you were brought up. Come here—let me see how badly you're hurt."

Skookie broke out into wild peals of laughter at this mishap, which left John none too well pleased. Rob and Jesse, however, bent over him as he whimpered with the pain, and did what they could to make amends for the disaster.

"Hot water is best for a cut," said Rob, taking their tea-vessel from the fire and looking about for a piece of rag. Thus, in short, by the free use of hot water, he did at length stop the flow of blood in part, at least.

"John," said he, at last, "you came mighty near spoiling your beauty. Your nose is turned up, anyhow, and now you have nearly cut off a half inch more of it. Lucky for you the cartilage was tough, or you would have looked more like an Ethiopian than an American. I guess it will grow fast again, although you will have to wear a handkerchief tied around your face and head for some time."

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"I don't care," mumbled John. "I wanted to see how they did it."

"Well, you know now," Rob assured him, in a matter-of-fact way. "But I would suggest that you eat in the ordinary civilized fashion after this, because you haven't any more nose than you need, and your mother might not like you to come home with a part of it missing."

It was some days before the smart of this wound was entirely gone, but it may be said that in time it healed and left but a slight scar at the lower end of the nose, although John for some days went about with a handkerchief tied about his face. This did not prevent his taking part in future goose-hunts, which came to be a regular part of their programme.

Before the geese had become too wise they succeeded in killing several dozen with the thongs, each of them taking his turn and throwing them, which they found not so difficult an art to master, after all. Skookie showed them how to smoke the breasts of these wild-fowl so that they would keep, and thus they made a valuable addition to their stores.

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SPORT WITH THE SALMON

"*Natu* salmon," said Skookie one morning, poking his head in at the door of the barabbara, where the others still sat, washing up the breakfast dishes.

"What's that he says, John?" asked Rob, who seemed less ready than the younger boy to pick up the native speech.

"*Natu* means *nothing* or *no* or *not*," interpreted John. "What's the matter with the salmon, Skookie?"

They all crawled out of the low-hung door and followed the Aleut to the spot where they had left their fish concealed. They found nothing but stripped bones. Around the spot hung a crowd of great ravens and crows, protesting at being disturbed at this easy meal.

"We had six fine salmon there last night," grieved Jesse. "They're awfully hard to catch now, too, because they've got shy in the shallow water. They're all down in the big hole at the mouth of the creek, and it's going to be harder and harder to get any. As for the whale meat that the old chief left, I don't suppose it was salted enough, and it probably won't keep."

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"We'll have to build some sort of shelter for our fish and game," said Rob, looking at the havoc which had been wrought by the birds. "It isn't right to waste even salmon, abundant as they are—although they may not be so abundant after this, as you say, Jesse."

"I'll tell you what," said John, after a moment's thought, "I've got an idea!"

"Well, what is it?"

"You know, there was Uncle Dick's fishing-rod we brought with us in the dory. I took it out and pushed it under a log at the top of the beach wall. Now, I put that rod in the boat carefully myself, because I knew how much Uncle Dick thought of it. I don't suppose he'll thank us for bringing it away, because it's his best trout rod."

"I don't see what use it would be to us," said Jesse. "It's too light to tie a grab hook to, and even if you hooked it into a salmon the rod would break."

"Yes," said Rob, "a trout rod isn't meant in any case for fish as heavy as this. Besides, you see, these salmon never take a fly; even if we had any flies to go with the rod, or any line, or any reel, for that matter."

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"The reel is on the butt joint of the rod; I'm pretty sure I saw it there. Come, let's find out! I tell you, I've got an idea," insisted John.

They all repaired to the beach where, as promised, John produced the rod from its hiding-place under the drift-wood log. True, the reel was there in place. Without delay he put the joints of the rod together, finding some difficulty in this, for the rain and salt air had not improved it in the least. None the less they threaded the line through the guides and found that everything was serviceable.

"Uncle Dick would not care," said John, "if he knew just how we are situated."

"Still, I don't get your idea," began Rob.

"Well, I don't know whether or not it's a very good one," answered John; "but who's got a few little hooks to lend me now?"

"Here are two or three," said Jesse, fishing in his pockets. "They're about big enough for bait hooks for trout, but salmon won't take any bait. I don't see what you mean."

John made no comment, but cut off two or three short pieces of the line about a foot in length. To each of these he attached one of the sharp-pointed little hooks and fastened them at intervals a couple of feet apart on the line. One hook he tied at the end of the line itself.

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"Oh, I see!" said Rob. "You mean to throw that outfit as though it were a fly."

John nodded. "If you can cast as light a thing as a little trout fly with this rod," he said, "you ought to be able to cast these hooks—larger, not much heavier, and just about right to go straight. Anyhow, let's go down and try."

"Good idea!" agreed Rob. And they all departed, the Aleut boy with them, to the lower reaches of the stream, where, as has been said, the salmon now more frequently resorted.

As they stood on the bank above the big pool they looked down into it, and saw that the sea-

tide run of the salmon had brought in the average number of fish. The whole interior of the pool, which otherwise would have had a dark-green appearance, seemed to be made up of melted silver layers, all in motion. There were hundreds of fish moving about, up and down, and round and round, hesitating about following up the thread of the fresh water, and not wanting to go back to the salt water, which lay behind them.

“My gracious, there’s about a million in there!” exclaimed John, peering over the edge.

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“Yes, but Skookie couldn’t get any with the snag-pole now,” said Rob. “They’re getting wise and stay too far out. I shouldn’t wonder if your idea was a good one, if only that rod were stronger.”

Rob rubbed his chin meditatively. “You are welcome to try first. I don’t want to break that rod, and I know what will happen if you hook on to a big fish with it.”

John set his lips in determination, none the less, and stepped down to the edge of the pool. Slowly the interior mass of silver seemed to grow fainter. The fish saw him, and moved gently away to the opposite side of the pool. Presently, however, they could see the shining mass edge back again to the centre of the pool, where the deeper water was over the gravel.

John began to cast the hooks back and forward above his head, as every fisherman does in casting a fly. Little by little he lengthened the line, still keeping it in the air, until he saw he had out enough to reach well across the pool. Then, gently as he could, he dropped the line and its gang of hooks on the surface of the water. The hooks, being small, were not heavy enough to sink the line directly. John waited and allowed it to settle until the hooks were flat on the bottom on the farther side of the pool. He looked down on the water and saw the silvery mass divided in two sections, as though the line had cut it. The keen eyes of the fish, heedless as they usually are in the spring run, had now grown more suspicious, and they settled apart as the line came across them, visible against the sky as they looked up from below.

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John made no motion for a time; but at last, as the fish began to settle back, he gently raised the tip of the rod, and began to work the hooks toward him across the pool in short, steady jerks. At first the line was too low to pass near the main body of the fish, but as it shortened the hooks began to travel up through the depth of the pool. Then, all at once—he never knew how, exactly—something startling happened. There was a sudden breaking of the surface of the pool into a shower of spray, and with a mad rush a big salmon twelve or fifteen pounds in weight nearly jumped into his face as he stood at the edge of the water.

Frightened, he dropped the tip of the rod, and every boy present gave an exclamation of surprise. The words were not out of their mouths before, suddenly, the water on the far side of the pool was broken and the spot at John’s feet was vacant. The fish, swift as lightning, had tumbled back after its leap across the pool and gone up on the other side in an attempt to escape the hooks, one of which, by chance, had fastened in the lower jaw. Therefore, as the fish could keep its mouth closed, it was ready for as fair a fight as though it had taken the fly, although little can be said in praise of foul-hooking a fish under any circumstances save those such as now existed, for these boys were in need of food.

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John had caught trout before, and had seen many a good fish handled on a fly-rod. After the first rush or two of the fish he gathered in the line rapidly with his left hand and put a strain on the rod. The salmon at first did not attempt to repeat its earlier mad rushes, but in fright began to circle the pool, scattering all the other fish into a series of silver splashes as they spread this way and that.

Having got in touch with the fish, and finding that the hook still held, John now reeled in all the slack and settled down to a workman-like fighting of the fish, the others standing near him and volunteering suggestions now and then, of course.

“The tide’s coming in all the time,” said John. “If this fish ever leaves the pool and starts across on the flats, I don’t see what I’m going to do, because the creek’s too deep to wade now.”

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The salmon, however, obligingly kept to the pool, once in a while making a mad leap into the air and shaking himself. Skookie, without advice from any one, stationed himself at the foot of the pool, and whenever the fish headed that way, he tossed a stone in front, heading it back and keeping it from running out toward the sea. Finally he motioned Jesse to take up this work, and without removing any of his scanty clothing, or asking advice from any one, walked up above the place where John was standing and deliberately plunged into the creek and swam across, taking up a position on the opposite side of the pool, where the tide-water was beginning to spread out into the flats. Thus the boys had the pool surrounded, and whenever the fish started one way in dangerous fashion, a stone thrown in

front of him would usually turn him. All John had to do was to keep the strain of the rod on his fish and to see that he had plenty of line on the reel.

They fought the old fellow in this way for more than half an hour, until John's arms fairly ached from the strain of the rod—a sturdy split bamboo of the best American make, which well withstood the skilful use it now was receiving. There is no need to break a fly-rod when the reel is full of line, and the strain can be eased to suit the rushes of the fish.

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“Well, I don't see that we are much closer to our salmon than we were when we began,” said Rob, at last. “It's good fun, but a slow way of getting salmon. Can't you pull him in on the line?”

John shook his head. “I'm afraid it would break,” said he. “Never you mind. We'll get Mr. Salmon before we're through. I can handle him all right, I'm pretty sure.”

He came near speaking too early, however, for now, with some impulse of its own nature, the salmon concluded it had had enough of this sort of thing and decided to go back to sea. With a long, straight rush it headed for the bottom of the pool. Rob and Jesse began to cast in rocks, but in spite of all their splashing the fish kept on taking out yard after yard of John's line. At last John, still using all the strain the rod would stand, was obliged to follow on shore. The fish turned the corner of the pool and entered the narrow gut in the rocks which led out to the sea, where the creek entered it over a wide flat of shingle. John was able to keep his feet in the hurried rush along shore, and he kept touch with the fish all through the narrows and until it had reached the shallows, where the flats were now covered two or three feet deep with the advancing tide. Here the last inch of his line was exhausted, and he himself, desperate in his anxiety to keep his fish and to save his rod, followed until he was waist deep in the sea. The salmon did not swerve, but headed straight for some distant haunt which perhaps it remembered as existing out there in the ocean.

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At length John could go no farther with safety, and in desperation gave the fish the butt, as an angler says. The rod bent up into a splendid arch, all its strength being now pitted against the power of the swimming fish.

The latter, somewhat tired by its long flight, felt this added resistance of the rod, and unable to gain any more line, since there was no more to gain, and to ease itself of the strain, flung itself high into the air just as the last limit of the rod was reached. Down it came with a splash, but this time apparently confused; for as it fell on the water and chanced to head up-stream, it started directly back over the course it had come. The long slack of the line could not be recovered fast enough to follow it, but the hook held. A moment later the fish was back in the pool, the line back on the reel, and John, perspiring and flushed, was still master of the situation.

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After that matters were simpler. The fish was more tired, and its leaps into the air were shorter and more feeble.

Without advice from any one, Skookie now ran out into the grass and found his long salmon gaff. Wading at the edge of the pool, he made one or two ineffectual attempts to gaff the salmon; then flinging the pole across the creek to the others, again he plunged in, swam across, and took up his stand near John, who by this time had shortened the line and was fighting the fish close in.

“Now we'll get him!” cried Rob. “Go slow there, John. Don't let him break away. He's headed in now. Just lead him in. There!”

With a swift, sure movement the Aleut boy had gaffed the salmon, and an instant later it was flapping high and dry at the top of the bank. It seemed to them this was a better fish than any they had taken directly with the snagging-pole, although, as a matter of fact, it was the latter implement, after all, which had landed the fish.

John sat down on the shingle, tired after the long fight. He patted the rod affectionately.

“Talk about fun!” said he; “this is the *only* way to catch fish.”

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Indeed, this proved much to be the truth within the next few days, for the salmon became so wary as to make it hard to reach them by anything but a long line. Sometimes it would be an hour before they could foul-hook a fish, but in this way they got a number of salmon—some of them fastened around the head, one or two, strangely enough, directly in the mouth, and several directly under the back fin. Again a fish might be hooked close to the end of the tail, and in such cases it was almost impossible to land it for a long time. But with skill and care the fly-rod, devoted to this somewhat crude form of sport, held its own, and much more than paid for itself in actual food, not to mention the added sport.

AMONG THE EAGLES

The routine of camp life, where one is obliged to do all the cooking and other work, besides providing food, is ordinarily enough to keep the camper pretty busy. The boys usually found enough to do with their hunting, fishing, cooking, and other work, but sometimes in these long Alaska days, where for almost twenty-four hours the sun shone and the darkest night was scarcely more than an hour or so of twilight, they found time to wander around their island in exploring expeditions.

At times they climbed one peak or another almost to the top, but from the loftiest eminences they attained they could see nothing of the interior of the island except more and more sharp and rugged peaks thrusting themselves up—a mountain region which, indeed, is little known by any white man, or even by the natives, who rarely go far inland.

A customary journey for them was along one or the other of the river valleys which came down to their bay, the mouths of which they could reach in calm weather easily by a short journey in the dory. Their favorite valley was that running back from what they called "Gull Rocks." It was traversed by a good salmon river and was much frequented by wild animals. As it chanced, they did not run across any more bear, although continually here and elsewhere they saw signs where these great animals had done their work in salmon-fishing—heaps of bones where scores of fish had been partially stripped of their flesh.

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On one particular day, as the young adventurers passed up this valley on an all-day tramp, they found the salmon heaps especially abundant, and observed that the numbers of crows and eagles were more than usually great.

"I think it's a new run of fish coming in," said Rob. "Probably the 'humpies' are beginning to run. They're bigger than the red salmon, which we've been having so far. They're better to eat, too; even the bears know that. We'd better look out or we may run across more bear in here than we want. See here where this big fellow was eating last night. I suppose he has gone back into the mountains somewhere by now. And here is where some foxes have come down and eaten what the bears left; and the crows are waiting to eat what the foxes left. And look there, at that fish-eagle! Old Mr. Osprey is working for his breakfast now."

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He pointed to a large, grayish bird which was circling above them, its neck bent down as it peered intently at the surface of the stream below.

"Watch him!" said Jesse. "There!"

All at once the osprey, which had been uttering a low sort of whistle, folded its wings and darted down, swift as a flash, at an angle of about forty-five degrees. With a resounding smack, and in a cloud of white spray, it disappeared from view beneath the surface of the water; but instantly, with a vast flapping, it rose and fought to get wing-hold on the air. Taking flight only with the utmost effort, the boys saw that it held in its talons a big salmon whose weight was all it could manage to bear away.

"Well, what do you think of that?" said Jesse. "Didn't he do it easy? I should think he would break his back, hitting the water that hard."

"Yes," commented John; "if a fellow dives from a place ten feet high it's fall enough for him; but this fish-hawk came from two or three hundred feet up in the air. They must be put together pretty strong or they'd smash themselves. Look at him go!"

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Uttering now its shrill whistle, the osprey rose higher and higher in a wide circle, endeavoring to carry off its prize. Something seemed to agitate the bird, and a moment later the boys saw what this was. High up above, in still larger circles, was a larger bird—a male bald eagle, which now drew into position directly above the osprey.

"Now watch, and you will see some fun," said Rob. "No wonder Mr. Osprey is mad; he's going to lose his fish—that's what's going to happen to him. Watch that eagle!"

The two birds kept their relative positions—the osprey, either angry or frightened, still struggling to get away with its prey; the eagle, easily circling above it, itself now and then uttering a shrill cry—a scream-like whistle that could be heard at a great distance.

At last the osprey gave up the struggle and attempted to escape. With difficulty it detached one foot from the fish, which now fell down at full length and disarranged the osprey's flight. Finally it succeeded in shaking the talons of the other foot free. The osprey made a swift side dash and left the salmon to fall, at a height of, perhaps, one hundred and fifty feet or so.

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The eagle, which seemed to be twice that high above the ground, now performed a feat which the boys could never understand. They did not see how he could fall much faster than the fish; yet before their eyes they saw the great bird half fold its wings and dart down swift as a flash. Before the salmon had struck the ground the eagle struck it, fair, with both feet, and, never touching the earth itself, swung in a wide, low circle, itself master by robbery of the prize which the labor of the fish-hawk had won.

“Look at that old thief!” said Rob. “It’s a funny thing to me that an eagle can’t very often catch fish for himself, plentiful as they are here. Yet you’ll notice that if an eagle is on a tree directly over the salmon he can’t start quick enough to catch a fish—it’ll always swim away from him. They catch some in shallow water, but they don’t seem to be very good fishermen after all. A bald-headed eagle would rather steal a fish from an osprey than to catch one for himself, and we’ve just seen how it’s done. Watch the old thief!”

The eagle, apparently contented with his morning’s work, leisurely rose and flapped on his way toward a clump of small cotton-woods. At the summit of a small tree he perched, holding the fish under his feet and uttering now some short, shrill cries, which the boys could hear answered from the heap of brush which they saw was the nest prepared by these birds. There were scores of these rude nests scattered along the timber flats.

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“Let’s go and see what they do now,” suggested Rob.

As they approached they saw the male bird clumsily flap down to the nest, where it dropped the fish. The hen eagle fell upon it with short, savage screams and began to tear it apart. They also saw, now and again bobbing above the rim of the nest, the heads of two young eagles.

Rob cast a critical look at the trunk of the tree. “I can climb that tree,” said he, at last, “and I have a mind to turn the tables on that old thief up there.”

He pointed to the male eagle, which was now flapping in short circles above the top of the tree, uttering hoarse cries of anger.

“You’d better look out,” said John; “old Mother Eagle will pick your eyes out if you’re not careful.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” said Rob; “but I’ll take care. Anyhow, here goes!” So saying, he threw off his coat and began to ascend the tree, a feat which grew easier as he reached the wide-spreading limbs. In a few minutes he stood almost under the nest. Here he kept his left arm in front of his face and made feints with a piece of branch at the mother eagle, which indeed came dangerously close to him. The boys below began to flop their arms and throw up their coats. At length both of the parent birds, contrary to what might be believed or may have been written regarding them, turned tail like cowards and abandoned their young to their fate. They perched on trees a hundred yards or so distant, and watched to see what would go forward. Rob worked his way on up the tree and peered curiously over the edge of the wretched brush-heap which served as the nest. Here he saw two large, ungainly young birds, not yet able to fly, but able to spit, scratch, and flap their wings. Getting a good foothold on a supporting branch, Rob made several attempts to get hold of the young birds. Finally he succeeded in getting one by the neck, and with a jerk threw it out so that it fell flapping to the ground. Skookie would have killed it at once, but the others stopped him. A few moments later they were owners of both these birds, and Rob had rejoined his companions at the foot of the tree.

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“I’ll tell you what,” said he, as he wiped the perspiration from his face; “let’s see if we can’t make pets of these eagles. We nearly always have more than we can eat, and it’s the same sort of food these birds are used to; so why shouldn’t we tie them up and keep them around the hut? Maybe they’ll scare the crows and ravens away from our fish.”

“That’s a fine idea,” said John. “We’ll just try that. I had a couple of hawks once for pets. They ate a great lot, and they fought you, too, for a long while. My hawks used to lie on their backs and grab me by the hand every time I tried to feed them. I suppose these eagles will be worse yet.”

“Anyhow, we’ll try them,” said Rob. “Let’s wrap them up in our coats and take them down to the boat.”

This they did, and although the old eagles followed them for two or three miles, sometimes coming rather close, and frequently uttering their wild calls of anger, the boys had no trouble in making away with their young captives. The birds seemed rather stupid than otherwise, and were as ready to eat food from human hands as from the talons of their parents. They did not really become tame, but, having learned their source of food, in a few days became so indifferent to human presence that they would only ruffle up their scanty

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crests and beat their wings a little when approached. They never allowed one to put a hand on their heads, and, indeed, were very far from being friendly. Their presence about the camp, however, did serve in part to mitigate the nuisance of crows and ravens, which continually hovered about, trying to steal from the scaffold where the boys kept their supplies of meat and fish. All boys like pets, and these found their strange captives interesting enough at least to help pass the time.

XXIV

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AN ADVENTURE ON THE GULL ROCKS

"I'll tell you, fellows," began Rob, a day or so after they had brought home the young eagles—"I'll tell you what we ought to do to-day after we have got the breakfast dishes done. Let's make a trip over to the big rocks beyond, where we went with Jimmy that time. If the eggs are not all hatched, and if these birds keep on laying, as maybe they do, we might still get some fresh eggs."

"That would be fine," said John, "because I for one am getting just a little tired of salmon all the while. I'd give anything for a good piece of bread and butter."

"Or pie," said Jesse, his mouth almost watering.

"Now, there you go," said Rob, "talking about things we can't have. Why, I wouldn't give a cent for a piece of pie myself—that is, not unless it was a piece of real cherry pie, with fresh cherries, the kind we used to get—" All three boys looked at one another and broke out laughing.

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"Anyhow," said John, "maybe we can make a sort of pie after the salmon-berries get ripe. At least we could if we had a little flour and lard and baking-powder and things—"

"And if we knew how," added Jesse. "It seems to me the best thing we can do, the way things are, is to go egg-hunting as Rob suggests."

There was perhaps more wisdom in Rob's plan than any one of the boys knew at first. He was old and wise enough to know that the best way to keep them all from homesickness was to be busy all the time. This discovery is not new among military men, or those who lead exploring parties, although it was one which Rob thought out for himself; so now he went on:

"We'll just take the dory," he said, "and slip down the coast beyond the mouth of the creek, and so on beyond the rocks where Jimmy and we all went when we got the sea-parrot hides. There are rocks over there, tall needles with straight sides, that have got thousands of birds of all sorts on them."

"What will we do with our eagles?" asked Jesse, hesitating.

"We can leave them plenty of food, and put a few boards together so that they can get under in case the crows or ravens should attack them. They will get along all right, I am sure."

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"I'd like to go with Skookie in the bidarka," said John, but Rob shook his head.

"No, you don't," he said, "you go in the dory with the rest of us. That boy is all right, but he might not be strong enough to handle a bidarka in a high sea; and up here we never can tell when the wind is going to come up."

"Suppose it did upset," said John, sturdily. "I have been out of it, here in the lagoon."

"Yes, but that is different from getting upset out there in the middle of the bay. You know perfectly well that you could not get back in again; and swimming out there is something different from the lagoon, where the bank is right at hand all the time. I don't even like to go very far out in the dory; but see, it is fair and calm just now. So hurry up and let's get away. Get all the rope you can, too, fellows, because we may have to go down the face of the rock to get at the nests."

"I have seen pictures of that," said Jesse—"how the egg-gatherers go down in a rope handled by other men up above them on the rocks. Do you suppose that three of us could pull the other fellow up and down? Skookie here looks pretty strong."

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"I don't know," said Rob, "but we'll take the rope along and see how it works out."

Not long after they were safely off in the big dory, which, under two pairs of oars and with the wind favorable, astern, made very good time down the long spit at the mouth of the creek. Beyond that point they were obliged to take to the open bay, quite out of touch of land, for a distance of a mile and a half. This brought them to the foot of a small, rocky island, out of which arose two or three sharp, column-like groups of rocks which, as Rob had said, were literally covered with nesting birds.

"We'll have to get around behind," said Rob; "nobody could climb up on this side, that's sure."

Scrambling over the loose rocks, left wet and slippery by the tide, they passed to the rear of these pillars, first having made fast the dory so that it could not be carried away. In the pools of sea-water they found many strange shells and several specimens of the squid, or cuttle-fish, upon which Skookie fell gleefully. He and his people are fond of this creature as an article of food; but its loathsome look turned the others against it, so that with reluctance he was forced to throw them away again. [Pg 195]

At the back of the largest of these rock pinnacles they stood in hesitation for a moment, for the ascent seemed hard enough. At last, however, Rob found a sort of cleft or large crack, which seemed to lead up toward the top, and whose rough sides seemed to give foothold sufficient for a bold climber. "Here we go, fellows!" he said, and so started on up, hand over hand, the best he could. To their satisfaction, however, they found the going not so hard as it had looked from below. At the top, the sides of the cleft seemed to pinch together, so that in some places they were obliged to climb as a chimney-sweep does, their legs pressed across the open space; but as they were all out-of-door boys and well used to Alaska mountain work, they went ahead fearlessly and soon found themselves at the summit of the tower-like rock, whence they had a splendid view of the bay and the surrounding country. Startled by their presence, the sea-birds took wing in hundreds and thousands, soaring around them, flapping almost in their faces, and uttering wild, discordant cries. The boys fought these off as they began to explore the top of the rock.

"Mostly little gulls here," said John, "and I never heard they were good to eat. I don't like the look of these eggs, either. Looks as if we were too late for a real good egg season." [Pg 196]

"Well," said Rob, "anyhow, we have had a good climb and a good look over the country. Now, what I propose to do is to see what there is lower down on the face of the cliff. I'm sure there's a lot of sea-parrots there, because I can see them flying in and out down below."

"Let me go down, Rob," said John. "I'm lighter than you are."

"No," said Jesse, "I think I ought to go down, because I am even lighter than you, John, and Rob is stronger than either of us."

"I'll tell you how we'll fix that," said Rob. "We'll tie the end of the rope around this big rock here; and I'll pass the other end through my belt and pay it out as I climb down. I won't need to put all my weight on the rope, but will just use it to steady me as I climb. If I have any trouble getting up, why, then you three fellows can see what you can do toward pulling. Don't you let it slip, now. And if I shake the rope three times, then you begin to pull. You can signal me the same way if I get where you can't see me, or where you can't hear me call for the noise the birds are making." [Pg 197]

It was really a dangerous thing which Rob proposed to do, but boys do not always stop to figure about danger when there is something interesting ahead. Passing the rope through his belt as he had said, he kept hold of the free end with one hand, and so, picking his way from one projecting point to another, he began slowly to pass down the seaward face of the rock, which proved to be not so steep as it had seemed from below, although ridged here and there with sharp walls or cut banks, which crossed from almost one face of the pinnacle to the other.

Rob's daring was rewarded by the finding of countless numbers of nests of the sea-parrots, which were bored back straight into the face of the cleft. "Here they are, boys!" he called back, his voice being even by this time barely distinguishable amid the clamor of the gulls and other wild birds which continuously circled about.

Rob thrust his arm into one of these holes in the cleft, and was lucky enough to catch a female parrot by the neck and to pull her out without any injury to himself. For a time he examined the bird, laughing at its awkward movements when he flung it on the rocks at last, uninjured. Then he edged on along the rock face, his foot on a sort of narrow shelf and his body guided by the supporting rope. "I can get a lot of them here!" he called up to his friends. [Pg 198]

A moment later he pushed his arm again into an aperture among these nests. At once he uttered a sudden, sharp cry and pulled out his arm. His finger had been bitten almost to the bone by the hornlike beak of one of the birds. The pain of this alone would have been bad enough, but now it caused a still more serious accident.

As Rob shook his bleeding finger at his side, and half raised his left arm to fend off the rush of two or three angry wild birds, he suddenly slipped with one foot at the edge of the narrow shelf on which he stood, and before he could catch his balance or do more than tightly grasp the free end of the rope which passed under his belt, over and down he went.

For one swift instant he saw the long, white, curling breakers on the beach below him, for he fell face downward, his body or feet scarcely touching the rocky wall. He never knew quite how it happened, but in some way the rope jammed at his belt, and before he had fallen more than fifteen or twenty feet he found himself fast, but swinging like a plummet at the end of the line, entirely out of touch, with either hands or feet, with the face of the rocky wall. Below him he could faintly hear the murmur of the sea on the rocks a hundred and fifty feet below. Above him he could see nothing but the edge of the shelf over which he had fallen. As soon as he could control himself, he called aloud again and again, but he got no answer. If his friends above heard him, their answer was drowned by the clamor of the wild birds. Here, then, was the most serious situation in which he had ever found himself in all his life.

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Up above, on the summit of the rock, the boys had seen the sudden jerk on the rope and noticed that now it was motionless, whereas before it had trembled and shifted as Rob moved along the shelf. Skookie was the first to divine what had happened. He pointed to the cord, now tense and stiff, and leaned out over the rim, peering down at the shelf where Rob had stood.

"Him gone!" said he, turning back a sober face. "Pretty soon him die now, I guess."

Jesse and John looked at each other with white faces. They sprang to the rope, but hesitated, fearing lest touching it might prove dangerous.

"Wait," said Jesse. "Let's look around first and get our wits together. One thing is certain, he is down there at the end of this. If the rope was not fast to him it would be loose and we could pull it up. That means that he is alive yet, anyhow, I am sure." He leaned far out over the rim of the summit, and between his hollowed hands called down: "Don't be afraid, Rob! We'll pull you up pretty soon!"

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Dangling far down at the end of the rope, Rob at first grew faint and dizzy. He dared not look below him, but had presence of mind enough to keep his eyes fixed on the nearest part of the cap of the rocky wall, so that he was less dizzy, although he whirled round and about at the extremity of the rope, which it seemed to him would almost cut him in two. None the less he made the end all the more secure about his waist; then once in a while he would ease the strain by lifting a little with a hand above his head. He shifted the rope until the noose came closer under his arms, realizing that he must not exhaust his strength in trying to raise his weight hand over hand. Thus, after the first few minutes of fright and after he had dared to open his eyes and take stock of the dangerous plight in which he found himself, he began calmly to reason, as very often one will who finds himself in imminent peril, the situation being too serious to allow him time for fright.

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Skookie sat down apathetically on the rocks and made no move. "Get up there, Skookie!" said Jesse. "Why do you act like a dummy? Nobody is dead yet. We're going to haul him up; don't you see? Now get hold of the rope—all of us; now, all together!"

They lifted as hard as they could, but, do their best, they could gain almost nothing on the rope. Little as that was, Rob felt it down below and knew that they were trying to save him.

"Now what shall we do?" John asked Jesse, in distress. "If we can't pull him up—and maybe we'd cut the rope on the rocks trying to do that—why, then, how is he going to get out of that?"

Skookie, seeing that they had but little success in lifting the heavy weight at the other end of the rope, now, without any orders, tried a plan of his own. Passing along the edge of the rim of rock off to the right, he found a place where he could descend for at least a short distance. He disappeared below, but presently came back, his face lighted up with the first sign of hope it had shown.

"Dis way!" he said; "dis way!" and made motions that they should pull on the rope and shift it to the right as far as they were able. The young native's sharp eyes had seen that if Rob could get to a place a little farther at one side than where he hung, he could get his feet against the rock, and so, perhaps, help himself more than otherwise would be possible.

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A little consultation followed at the top of the rock, then inch by inch the boys edged the rope along. Rob found himself, without any effort of his own, gradually approaching the face of the rock. At last he could kick it; and so he helped himself, pendulum fashion, until finally he got a hand on a rocky point, and so could rest his weight on the rough surface. To him even this vantage-ground seemed as if it were actual safety, so much better was it than swinging helpless like a fly on a cord. When his weight was taken from the rope those above at first thought that he had fallen to the foot of the cliff; but now he gave the signal of three short jerks, and they saw that he must have reached some place where he could support his weight. At this they broke out into a shout of joy.

“Now, what will we do?” asked Jesse, thoughtfully. “We won’t pull up until he signals us again, I guess. Maybe he will try to come up himself, steadying himself by the rope, the way he went down. I wish we could see where he is.”

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This chance counsel of Jesse’s was precisely the best thing that could have happened, for Rob had now determined to help himself by climbing up the rope hand over hand in the attempt to reach the ledge from which he had fallen. How he was going to get over the edge he could not clearly see, but he was now convinced that the friction on the rope was such that his friends could not haul him up, and that if he were saved he must save himself by getting above that projecting edge.

Slowly he began to feel his way up the rock, supporting his weight as much as possible without the use of the rope, until, half leaning against the rock and half pulling on the rope, which was now shifted to a point directly above his head, he reached a place where he could no longer keep in touch with the rocky face. Then bravely, as should any one who finds himself in such straits, he swung out and rapidly began to climb up the rope, hand over hand, sailor fashion.

He reached the edge of the rock, and perhaps might have been able in some way to get above it without injury, although, on the other hand, he might never have been able to get across unaided. What happened was that the boys up above, seeing the rope again agitated and not certain what their best course now might be, laid hold of it and began to pull as hard as they could. The result was that Rob’s left hand, just as he reached the rim of rock, was caught under the rope. He flung his other hand around the corner, caught the rope, and scrambled up on one knee just as the strong heave from above tore the rope almost through his fingers, cutting them open as they lay against the rocks.

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The pain was intense, but he hardly minded that, for he saw now that he was again in safety. From there on up the face of the rock he scrambled on hands and knees, slipping and falling, but still going up, assisted by the steady pull, hand over hand, of his friends, who now saw what had happened, and who encouraged him with their shouts. So, none of them knew just how, presently he found himself at the summit once more, the others about him, all talking at once.

Rob held up his mangled hand, from which the blood was now flowing freely. The wounds to his fingers were really serious, but he bore the pain as bravely as he could, although his face was white.

“Anyhow, I got back,” said he, shaking the blood from his hand. “I think the best thing we can do now is to start on home. I ought to do something for this hand as soon as possible.”

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They were all pale and very much frightened. All at once Rob began to tremble, his hands and legs shaking uncontrollably. The nervous strain having now relaxed, the full shock of terror and pain set in, as often is seen in the cases of grown men similarly situated. It was some time before he recovered sufficiently to be able to risk the dangerous climb down the cliff on the inner side of the pinnacle. At last, however, they found themselves again safely in the dory, where, of course, his companions would not allow him to think of rowing. Progress against the wind and sea they found now much slower, and it was almost an hour before they reached the mouth of the creek, where Rob could land on the beach and so walk up toward the hut. By that time his hand was badly swollen and giving him intense pain.

The boys did not attempt to take the dory around to the landing opposite to the hut, but left it moored at the creek mouth. They did not talk a great deal as they returned to the barabbara at the close of their disastrous day. The pain which Rob suffered gave them all concern. It was Skookie once more who proved himself resourceful. Without asking leave of any one, he crossed the lagoon on the stepping-stones and disappeared in the thicket beyond. A few minutes later he appeared with his hands full of coarse green leaves with slender, lance-shaped tips, the name of which none of the boys ever knew.

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“*Karosha*,” he said—“all right, all right,” and so proceeded to bind these on Rob’s wounded

fingers. Having wrapped them in a number of the leaves, he led Rob to the edge of the creek, and here made up a big ball of mud, which he plastered over the entire hand.

"Now I am a pretty sight," said Rob. "I was going to wash my hands, but maybe this will do. I have heard that natives sometimes know a thing or two about taking care of such things."

The native lad's knowledge of simples proved more efficient than any of them had dreamed. In the course of half an hour Rob's face brightened. "Why," said he, "I don't believe it hurts so badly now. Skookie, you are a great little doctor." And, indeed, that night he slept as soundly as any, although they all spent less time than usual that evening in talk about the doings of the day.

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CRIPPLES' CASTLE

"Well," said Jesse, just before noon of the following day, as he stooped to enter the door of the barabbara, "accidents never come singly." His face was drawn with pain, as Rob, to whom he spoke, noticed.

"What's up, Jess?" asked Rob. "Has anything happened?"

"I struck my foot against an old nail or something of the sort," answered Jesse. "A piece of an old *klipsie* was lying out in the grass, and it has cut through my shoe and gone into my foot."

Rob sat up on the blanket where he had been nursing his own crippled hand. "An old nail!" he said. "Lucky if it wasn't worse! No telling what the point of it might do toward poisoning the wound. I'll tell you right now that I don't want even any rusty nails around my feet, let alone the irons of an old fox trap."

"I've heard of such things as lockjaw," said Jesse. "There was a boy in our town had it, and he was just walking along and struck his foot against an old nail in a shingle." His face seemed grave.

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"Now, don't go to talking about that," said Rob. "When a fellow gets scared of anything is when he catches it. They say that if a man goes to Africa and expects to come down with a fever he always does, and if he doesn't think anything about it he probably gets along all right. Now, let's have a look at your foot. Take off your shoe; and put the kettle on the fire, so that we can get some warm water. The first thing always is to keep a cut clean; and I have read, too, that where there is any rusty nail or toy pistol around the best thing is to keep a wound open."

"That doesn't seem to be the way you are treating your fingers," said Jesse, looking at the cloth in which Rob still kept a big poultice of black mud.

"Well, a poultice draws poison out of a wound, you see," said Rob, "and mud is good for that. We had a pointer dog once, and he came home with his face all swelled up, and my father said he had been bitten by a snake. We didn't know what to do, but the dog did; he wouldn't let any one touch him, but went off to a slough back of the house and lay down in the mud, and he kept his head in the mud for two or three days. He got well all right. Your foot cannot be any worse than if you had been snake-bitten, surely, and you and I ought to have as much sense as the dog. My hand does not hurt now, and I'll warrant Skookie and I will fix up your foot in a jiffy."

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He put his head out of the door and called for John and Skookie, both of whom presently came, the latter soon returning with a double handful of mud, for which Rob had asked. Meantime they had taken off Jesse's shoe and stocking, cleaned the wound, and Rob had cut it open even a little wider with his knife—at which Jesse made a wry face.

"I hate to do it, Jess," said Rob, "but that is what I read doctors do in a case like this. Now for a good poultice. You will be all right in a day or so."

In truth, they very probably did the very best that could be done in such circumstances. There might have been serious trouble from a wound from an old *klipsie* barb. Surgeons have died from poison received from knives used in post-mortem work. Lockjaw might very well follow upon a wound from a piece of dirty iron of this kind; but, luckily, the germ of that disease seemed not to exist in this case; at least the treatment which Rob applied proved quite effective and no evil results followed. Although Jesse limped for a time, in a

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few days he became quite well, and the swelling in the foot amounted to very little.

"But now," said John one morning, as the three of them sat by the fireside in the barabbara, "we are a fine-looking lot, aren't we? Just look at us—every one of us has got something the matter with him!" They all took a glance and broke out in a loud laugh together, in which Skookie joined uproariously. As a matter of fact, each one of them was wearing a bandage. Rob had his hand done up, Jesse's foot was encased in a mud plaster, and John still wore his handkerchief tied over his nose, whose tip he had nearly severed in his attempt at eating after the Aleut fashion.

"Well," said Rob, "it's lucky that none of us is hurt bad enough to cripple him seriously, anyway; although I guess Skookie will have to do most of the work of getting wood and water for a day or so yet."

"There's no reason why I could not carry wood and water," said John. "My nose is not in the road."

"I shouldn't say it was," said Jesse. "It never was long enough to get in the road, John, and it seems as though you had tried your best to shorten it as it was." They never tired of laughing at John for his clumsiness in Aleut table manners.

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"Now, see here, Jess," said John, "if you keep on making fun of my nose I won't give you any more mud for your old foot. I'm the only one that is not taking the mud cure excepting Skookie. I might just advise you two that about all our salt whale meat is gone, and it is too late now to get any more. It is about time we did some fishing, it seems to me."

"Well, I don't want to sit around this way all the time," said Jesse. "I am for going out in the dory and trying for some fresh codfish. I'm rather tired of salmon again."

"That's right," said Rob. "I was just going to say the same thing. Back home we used to like salmon better than codfish, because the codfish was always salt. Salmon used to be forty cents a pound back in the States, but out here, where we can catch forty pounds in an hour, we don't like it as well as codfish. All right, Jess, I'm game to go down to the mouth of the creek where we left the dory, and go out in the bay for a try after cod. But how will you get down there with your foot all tied up?"

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Jesse put his hand on Skookie's shoulder. "Oh, that will be easy," said he. "Skookie and I will go down the creek in the bidarka."

They agreed to this plan, and Jesse, hobbling out to the edge of the lagoon, picked up one of the bidarka's paddles—a narrow-bladed, pointed implement such as the Aleuts always use—rested the end of the paddle on the bottom on the other side of the bidarka, and, steadying himself by this means, slipped into place in the front hatch of the boat, just as one would step into a tottery birch-bark, although not even the latter can be more ticklish than one of these skin-covered native boats. Skookie was less particular, but, with the confidence born of long experience, took a running jump as he pushed off the bidarka and scrambled into the rear hatch. An instant later his own paddle was in motion, and Jesse and he made good speed down the creek. All the boys had by this time learned something about the use of the bidarka, and could handle themselves fairly well without swinging the craft from side to side as they paddled. Jesse always thought that the paddles were too small, but the only answer Skookie made to this criticism was, "My peoples long time make paddles dis way."

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The four met at the mouth of the creek, and soon they launched the faithful dory, in which they always kept their cod-lines on the hand-reels under the stern seat. Skookie took command of the expedition, for he seemed to know instinctively where the best fish could be found. Under his instruction he and John paddled the boat out fifty fathoms or so from the extreme beach point, where he motioned John to take up his hand-line while he held the boat in place. "Plenty deep waters here," he said; "plenty dose codfish."

"Sure!" said John. "Here's right where Jimmy took us the first time."

The boys threw over their lines, letting the heavy leads of the big hooks sink into more than one hundred feet of water. They had not long to wait, for the codfish seemed to be extremely numerous hereabout. John gave a sudden jerk and began to pull in rapidly, hand over hand. After a time they could see the gleam of a ten-pound codfish coming up to the surface on the line, rolling and twisting lazily and making no great fight. With a whoop John threw him into the boat, where the fish seemed even too lazy to flap about very much. It was a fine, dark fish, and Skookie gave it his professional approval as he rapped it over the head. Hardly had John gotten his fish into the boat before Jesse also began to pull in and added a second prize. Rob was fishing on the opposite side of the boat, and using a sort of squid with lead run around the hook, much like a bluefish squid. He was pulling the bait up and down with long jerks, as the native codfishers do, when all at once he felt something

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strike. "This fish seems mighty heavy," said he, "and it runs around different from a cod." None the less, he kept on pulling in line, and at length saw the gleam of a fish. "Humph!" said he, "no wonder it pulls hard! I've hooked it right square in the side. It pulls harder than a foul-hooked salmon, down that deep in the water. I wonder what it is?"

It was a flat, shiny fish, handsome enough to look at, but Skookie shook his head. "Him no good," said he, and at once threw it overboard.

"I think that is what the sailormen call a silver hake," said Rob; "but if Skookie doesn't approve of it, I guess we won't take any chances."

The fish kept on biting at Rob's peculiar lure and at the pieces of salmon which the other boys used as bait. In the course of an hour they had the bow end of the dory well piled up with codfish, and Rob declared that they had enough. They also had nearly a dozen gnarled, knobby-looking fish, mostly all head, which Skookie insisted were better than codfish, to which they later all agreed. Sailors call these fish "sea-lawyers," because of their wide mouths, as they explain it. They rowed in to the beach near the mouth of the creek and dressed their fish on the shore not far from the salmon pool. After this they lay about in the sunshine of a beautiful day and idled away an hour or two more.

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"I'll tell you what, fellows," said John, after a time, as he stopped throwing pebbles into the pool, "we ought to have some sort of a camp down here at the mouth of the creek, too. Look over there at that rock face on the other side of the creek; that would be a fine place to build another house. I think it would be fun."

"But look at us, all crippled up as we are," said Rob. "We never were in as bad shape to go to work."

"Oh, well," demurred Jesse, "we wouldn't have to do it all in one day. I think, too, it would be some fun to build a barabbara all of our own."

"I suppose we could float some logs down the creek," said Rob, "and maybe pick up some drift-wood on the beach and tow it around with the dory. And there's some drift right here at the mouth of our creek. We could build it over there just back of those scrubby trees, and with the cover of those and the tall grass no one could see it from the water unless he looked mighty close. And, as John says, it might save us a walk once in a while."

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"If that wasn't a rock wall over there," said Jesse, "we could make a dugout; but there isn't any cave or opening in the rock there."

"No," said Rob, "and we can't build a bark house like a Chippewa, nor a mat house like a Siwash, nor a tepee like a Sioux. On the whole, I have noticed that every country knows how to build its own houses best. The natives here make barabbaras because they have material for that sort of house, and they seem to do pretty well, if they do smoke a little."

"Suppose we build a barabbara, then," suggested Jesse.

"Ask Skookie," suggested Rob.

But Skookie, although he knew perfectly well what they were talking about, did not grow very enthusiastic over the idea. He could see no use in doing any work which was not absolutely necessary. "S'pose got plenty barabbara now, all light," he said, pointing up the creek at their camp. The others, however, overruled him, and when he saw his companions at work he fell to as enthusiastically as any, and they found his suggestions of the greatest value.

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At first they marked out a place about twelve feet square or so on the ground, and cleared it of grass, rocks, and pebbles. To this they dragged some of the drift logs which they found near by, and so began a rough sort of foundation. They had no nails which they could spare and not even a hammer, but the axe they found very useful in shaping the ends of the logs so that they would stay in place. They drove stakes to hold the corners together better and to keep the walls from falling down; and between the logs they put in chinking of moss, grass, and mud. Even before the end of their first day they had quite a start on their new house, and were eager for the next day's work, sore and crippled as they were.

On the following day they made house-building their first order. By noon they had their side walls fairly well laid up with logs, which now gave them some trouble to hoist and to keep in place. They towed drift-wood now into the creek, having used up most of the material which lay close at hand.

The roof gave them the most trouble. They built their side walls about four feet high, but they did not know how to keep the roof from falling in. They did not wish to plant any poles in the centre of the barabbara, as that would take up too much room and would interfere

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with the fireplace. They had no means of joining or framing any timbers for the roof, and they did not know how to make an arch. At last Jesse hit upon an idea.

"I'll tell you," said he; "we'll get some long poles and rest them on the top of the walls and plant the ends in the dirt and weight them down with rocks there. Then the other ends will stick in over the walls toward the centre, and will do for rafters for us to put our roof on. We'll leave a hole in the centre where the rafters don't meet. In that way we can have a roof without any posts in the middle of our house, so that the inside will all be clear room."

This crude idea of architecture appealed to the others and, indeed, proved rather effective, although it was different from the plan on which their old barabbara was built. They had some trouble in getting poles sufficiently long, but at last succeeded. On these they laid such flatter pieces as they could find in the drift-wood wreckage, piecing out the roof with poles and covering it all with grass and moss. Over this they put yet other timbers, and stones, and finished all with a heavy cover of dirt. This labor occupied them all that day and nearly three days more, as neither Rob nor Jesse was in very good condition to do much work. At last, however, they saw their new barabbara completed. It could hardly be seen from the opposite side of the creek, and any one passing the mouth of the creek on the bay would never have detected it at all.

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Tired by their labors, they lay down on the grass in front and looked at their structure. "I'll tell you," said John, rubbing his dirty hands over his face to wipe the perspiration from his eyes; "we'll call this 'Cripples' Castle.' I don't think it's bad for the time we have put in, when there wasn't one of us feeling very well. But Rob's hand is pretty near well now, and Jesse's foot is getting better, and my nose is not going to come off, after all. We'll call it 'Cripples' Castle,' but hope that our luck will be better in it."

"Come on, let's go inside," said Jesse. So they crawled into the ragged hole in the wall which they had left for a door. They found the interior spacious enough for their needs, and the roof in the centre was stronger than that of their old barabbara. They got some firewood together, and with Skookie's help piled the floor under the eaves thick with sweet-smelling grasses from the flats near by. That night, when the Alaska sun gradually retired for its short rest, they sat around a brightly burning fire in the interior of their castle and ate the heartiest meal they had known for some time. It was then that Rob produced a surprise for the others.

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"Now we have got some of our old dried bear meat," said he. "I suppose it's good, but it doesn't look it now—and a little salt whale and plenty of fresh codfish and salmon; and Skookie has got some of those white mock radishes of his, of which we don't know the name. But it seems to me that everything runs to meat. How would you like to have some onions?"

"Onions!" exclaimed Jesse; and "Onions!" repeated John after him. "Nothing would be better, but we haven't got any."

Rob produced from behind his back a small sack which they found contained a few of these precious bulbs, most valued of almost any vegetable in the far north.

"Where did you get those?" asked John. "They certainly didn't grow here."

"No," said Rob; "I found this little sack hidden back under the *klipsies* in the far end of the old barabbara up there. I suppose some native hid it there when they came down in the bay after their whale. Anyhow, we have been on meat diet so long that I will take the liberty of using these, no matter whom they belong to. Of course we're not living much on salt meat, but even if we don't get scurvy we ought to have all the vegetables and green things we can get hold of. Now, onions mayn't smell as nice as some things, but there's no better medicine in this sort of life."

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"Leave them to me," said John, who had grown to be quite a good cook, perhaps by reason of his natural inclination for good things to eat. "I'll make a stew of them with some of that bear meat and some of Skookie's bulbs here. I'll bet we'll have the finest meal to-night we have ever had on the island." And so they all agreed. Late that night they rolled up in their bedding on the grass beds of their new house, and soon slept soundly within close reach of the waves of the sea, whose steady sound along the beach came to them far more plainly here than had been the case at the older barabbara.

After this the boys used this new house more than the older house, and little by little moved most of their belongings down there, although they still kept their flag-staff up on the upper beach in the hope that some passing vessel might come into their bay and see their signal.

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THE JOURNEY AND THE STORM

"Now I've got a notion," said Rob, one morning not long after they had finished their new barabbara, "that if we were asked about this big island where we are living we couldn't tell very much regarding it. We've only been over a little strip of country around here. I don't suppose we've ever been more than five or six miles from camp yet, even when we climbed highest in the mountains beyond the creek. Yet we can see over thirty miles of country from here. I'd sort of like to have a trip up one of those other valleys." He pointed a hand to the farther shore of the bay which lay before their gaze, level and calm as a mirror.

"That's what I've thought more than once, too," said Jesse. "Why not make an exploring expedition over there?"

"We couldn't do it and get back in time for supper," demurred John.

"No," smiled Rob, "but we could have several suppers over there. Why not go across and camp out a night or two, and just rough it a little bit? You can see that there are pine woods on the mountains over there, and wherever there is pine it is always comfortable camping. We could take some grub along, of course, and our rifles."

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"How'd we sleep?" asked Jesse. "It has a way of raining in this country every once in awhile."

"Well," said Rob, "we could sit under a tree if we had to. I don't suppose we could make a bark shelter, and we have nothing that would do for a tent; but we have our *kamelinkas*, and the blanket we made out of the sea-parrot breasts. We'd get along somehow. What do you say, Skookie?"

Skookie grinned, understanding what was on foot. "All light—all light!" he said.

"Agreed then, fellows," said Rob. "And we'll start this very morning, because the bay is perfectly calm and there seems no danger of rough weather. It'll be cold up in the mountains, so we'll take one blanket for each two of us, and those that don't carry blankets will carry grub. We two will take our rifles, John, and Skookie the axe. We'll get on famously, I am sure."

The boys began to put out the different articles on the ground for packing. "Now we don't want to make our packs too heavy," said Rob. "The best way to pack is with a pair of overalls."

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"How do you mean?" asked John.

"Well, you put all your things down on a piece of canvas or something, and you lash it tight with a rope, making a bundle about twice as long as it is wide, so that it will lie lengthwise on your back. You put your cord around each end, and then around it all lengthwise. Now you take your pair of overalls and straddle the legs across the lengthwise rope until it comes to the cross rope around the lower end. Then you take the ends of the legs and spread them apart at the other cross rope, wide enough for your shoulders to go in, leaving enough of the legs for shoulder-straps. Then you tie the ends of the legs fast to the cross ropes with small cords. There you are with the best kind of pack straps, which don't weigh anything and don't cut your shoulders. The legs of the overalls are soft, you see. Big Mike showed me how to do this, back home. He used to pack two sacks of flour up the Chilkoot Pass on the snow."

"Yes," said Jesse, "I've heard about that way, and seen men pack that way, too. There's only one thing that makes me against it now."

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"What's that?" asked Rob, thoughtlessly.

"We haven't got the overalls!"

Rob's face fell as he rubbed his chin. "That's so," he admitted, "we haven't! And our trousers are getting pretty badly worn and wouldn't do for pack straps. I suppose we'll have to cut strips of seal leather or take a piece off our bear hides. Well, we won't make the packs heavy, anyhow, and we'll take it slow and easy."

Within an hour they had stowed their equipment in the dory and pushed off, all of them rowing and paddling. They thought they would soon be across the bay, whose opposite shore looked quite close; but they were somewhat startled to see how long it took them actually to make the distance, which must have been some six or eight miles. The bay, however, remained quiet and their progress was steady, although they were all very tired

by the time they landed on the opposite beach, at the mouth of the valley which they purposed to explore.

"It seems wilder over here," said John. "Look how rough the mountains seem and how thick the timber is on above there. And I don't see any barabbara over here."

"There's something that looks like one, back from the beach a little way," said Jesse, pointing out what seemed like a low heap of earth. They went over and found it to be, indeed, the ruins of an old barabbara, which looked as though it had not been occupied for a lifetime. The roof had fallen in and the walls were full of holes, so that it was quite unfit for occupancy. They left it and passed up the beach, where they saw the ruins of several other houses, no doubt occupied by natives very long ago. Beyond this a short distance, not far from a deep path which was worn in the tundra by the wild game, they saw a number of rude posts standing at different angles, loosely embedded in the soil, and in some instances fallen and rotting in the grass. Some of these had rude cross-arms at their tops, others two cross-arms, the lower one nailed up at a slant. The boys regarded these curiously, but Skookie seemed anxious to move on.

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"Why, what's up, Skookie? What's the matter?" asked Rob. "What do these posts mean, that look like crosses?"

"Dead mans here—plenty, plenty dead mans, long time," said Skookie. "No mans live here now. I'm not like dis place."

"Why," said Rob, "they're graves, and these are crosses—I think that one with the double arms must be one of the old Russian crosses. Was there ever a village here, Skookie?"

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The Aleut lad nodded his head. "Long times, my peoples live here some day. Russian mans come here, plenty big boats; plenty shoot my peoples. Dose Russian mans make church here, show my peoples about church. Bime-by Russian mans go way. Bime-by my peoples get sick, plenty sick; all die, all dead mans here. My peoples go way, never come back no more. I'm not like dis place." He shuddered as he looked at the grave posts, and was eager to go on.

"That must have been seventy-five years ago," commented Rob. "Perhaps small-pox killed off the villagers who built this little town. See, the wind and the weather have polished these posts until they are white as silver. Well, I don't know but I'm ready to go on myself."

Shouldering the packs which they had put down when they paused for their investigation, they took their way on up the ancient trail made by the bears and possibly once beaten by human feet. Once they came upon the fresh trail of a giant bear which had passed the night before, according to Skookie, but as the animal had swung off to the left and out of their course, they made no attempt to follow it; and if truth be told, they seemed now so far from home in this new part of the country, and were so depressed by the thought of the abandoned village, that something of their hunting ardor was cooled for the time. The walking across the mile of meadow-like tundra was hard enough, and they were glad when they reached the rockier bank of the stream which came down, broad and shallow in some places, narrow and tumbling in others. Here sometimes they waded in the water to escape the tangled thickets of alder interspersed with the prickly "devil's club," peculiar to all Alaska—a fiendish sort of plant covered with small spines, which grows in all fantastic shapes, but which manages to slap one somewhere, no matter where one steps upon it, and whose little prickly points detach themselves and remain in the flesh. Our young explorers, however, were used to Alaska wilderness travel, and they took all of this much as matter of course, pushing steadily on up the valley until they reached a fork, where to the right lay rather better going and larger trees.

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They concluded to bear up the right-hand cañon, and, pausing only for a bit to eat, about the middle of the afternoon, they had perhaps gone six or eight miles from the sea-shore when they concluded to camp for the night.

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They were now at the foot of a dense mountain forest, where the shadows lay thick and cold, and there seemed something sinister in the silence all about them. None the less, they soon had a good camp-fire going, and with the axe they proceeded to make a sort of lean-to shelter out of pine boughs. Rob picked out a place near a big fallen log, drove in two crotches a little higher than his head, and placed across them a long pole; then from the log to this ridge-pole they laid others, and thatched it all with pine boughs until they had quite a respectable house. On the floor they spread out a deep bed of pine boughs, and so sat back under their shelter, with their fire roaring and crackling in front of them; and all agreed that they had a very comfortable camp. Pretty well worn out by the hard work of the day, for their packs and rifles had grown unspeakably heavy, they ate their supper of dried meat and smoked salmon, and so curled up in their blankets, too tired to stay awake.

The next morning they were up, feeling much more courageous after their good rest.

"I think it might be a good plan," said Rob, "to leave one of the grub packs here; and if we camp farther on to-night, and decide to go yet deeper into the island, to leave a little grub at each camp, of course swung up so that nothing can get at it to eat it."

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"How far do you want to go?" asked John, whose legs were rather short, and who was feeling a little stiff after his first day's travel.

"Well, I don't know," answered Rob, "but if you fellows agree, I'd be for going at least a day's march farther up this valley. It'll be colder, and it'll be harder climbing, but the footing will be better and we can take our time. I'd like to see if there isn't some sort of a pass up here, the other side of which leads down into the interior. I've always heard that the arms of the sea came pretty near cutting this island in two, along about the middle somewhere. We might have to take a look over on the other side of the island sometime, if we stayed here five or ten years, you know!"

The other boys looked sober at this sort of a jest, but pluckily agreed to go on for at least one more day. This they did not regret, for they found themselves now in a country savoring more of the mountains than of the sea. Snow lay just above them, but the tops of the mountains seemed fairly open. Their little valley had a steady ascent, although by this time its watercourse had dwindled to a stream over which they could step as they pleased. Along the stream there showed the inevitable trail of the giant Kadiak bears which for hundreds of years had made these paths over all the passes down to the streams. Fresh bear signs the boys saw in abundance, but did not stop to hunt.

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Once, as they crossed their stream, they passed the mouth of a short, steep little ravine which opened down into the valley. Here Rob's eye detected something white. Stepping over in that direction, he called the others. "Look here, fellows, here's a great big bear skull all by itself!"

They stood about this object, which certainly was enough to puzzle them. There it lay, entirely stripped of all flesh, and very white, although the bone was not badly bleached by the elements as yet. There was not the sign of any struggle anywhere about, nor was there the least particle of any other bones. They searched for the remainder of the skeleton of the animal, but found nothing of the sort anywhere about. There lay the grinning skull, far up here in the mountains, with nothing to tell whence it came or how it happened to be there.

"My, wasn't it a *whale!*" exclaimed Jesse. "See, it's almost as long as my arm. I'll bet it's eighteen or twenty inches long, measured as it is. But what could have killed it? Nothing could kill a bear except another bear; but that wouldn't account for the head being here all alone. Skookie, what do you think about this?"

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"My peoples, maybe so," said Skookie.

"Your peoples? Why, I thought you said no one lived over on this side. And we've seen no signs of hunting here anywhere."

Skookie went on to explain. "S'pose my peoples hunt. Kill big bear. Some mans take hide, some mans take meat, some mans take head. Dis head not good for eat, but very much heavy. Some mans get tired, lay it down here; maybe so birds eat-um all up but bone."

"But how long ago did all this happen, Skookie?" asked John.

"I dinno."

"And where did the hunters come from?" asked Rob.

"I dinno. Maybe so Eagle Harbor, maybe so Old Harbor."

"Which way is Old Harbor, Skookie?" asked Rob, suddenly.

The lad pointed back across the mountains, beyond the bay, and beyond their camp on the farther side. "Plenty far," he said.

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"Then which way is Eagle Harbor—I suppose you mean a native village."

"Eagle Harbor dis way." And Skookie pointed across the head of the pass toward which they were travelling up the valley.

"How far?" demanded Rob.

"I dinno," answered Skookie; "plenty miles, maybe so. My peoples live Old Harbor."

Rob studied for a moment. "I'll bet that if we kept on," said he, "until we came to the top of

this divide, we'd find the head of a river running down the other way. Like as not it would go to some bay where Eagle Harbor village is. Well, that makes the island seem not quite so big. Come on, let's go on up to the top of this pass, anyhow."

So they plodded on, but did not reach the summit that night, nor did they find any further solution to the riddle of the lost bear skull, which latter Rob left in the trail, intending to pick it up on their return, although Skookie seemed to be averse to this performance; owing, no doubt, to some of his native superstitions. That night they camped high up in an air which was very cold, so that they shivered before morning, although their fire of little logs had not yet burned out.

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By noon of the next day, two camps out from the sea, and at a distance of perhaps twenty-five miles or more, they reached what was plainly the divide between this valley and another leading off to the northwestward. Here they paused. Before them stretched a wilderness of upstanding mountain peaks into which there wound the narrow end of a new valley, widening but slightly so far as their eyes could trace it.

"Eagle Harbor that way, Skookie?" asked Rob, leaning on his rifle and looking out over the wild sea which lay before him.

"I dinno," said Skookie.

"How far do you think it is?"

"I dinno."

The Aleut lad was truthful, for neither he nor any of his family had ever crossed the island here, and he knew nothing of what lay ahead. Plainly uneasy now, Skookie had had enough of travel away from camp. "Maybe go back now?" he asked Rob, inquiringly.

"I suppose so," replied the latter, "although I'd jolly well like to go over in here a little farther. I've a notion we'd come out somewhere closer to Kadiak town; and maybe we'd run across some native who would take us in. But there doesn't seem to be any game except once in a while a ptarmigan—those mountain grouse that strut and crow around here on the snow, and aren't big enough to waste rifle ammunition on. Maybe it's safer to go back to our camp and wait for a month or so more at least. What do you say, fellows?"

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The others, who were very tired and a little uneasy at being so far from what was their nearest approach to a home, voted for the return. So, after a rest at the summit, where cutting winds soon drove them back, they shouldered their lighter packs and began to retrace their way down the valley to the sea.

Now they did not have to build any shelters for the night and could use their old camps. They found that their appetites were increased by their hard work, so that after the last camp they had little left to carry except their blankets and guns, although Rob manfully insisted on carrying out the great bear skull, which he found quite heavy enough before the end of the journey.

When at last they left the mountains and crossed the tundra to the deserted village near which they had left their dory moored, they saw that a change had come over the weather. In the north a black cloud was rising, and the surface of the bay, although little broken by waves so far as they could see, had a steely and ominous look.

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"Maybe so rain bime-by," said Skookie.

Rob studied the bay and the sky for some time. "What do you say, boys?" he asked. "Shall we try to make it across to-night? I don't like the look of things out there, and you know it's a long pull."

"Well," said John, "I'm for starting across. There's no place to stop here, and I don't like this place any more than Skookie does, anyhow."

Jesse agreed that they might probably better try to make their home camp, as their supplies were low, and since, if stormy weather came, it might be a long time before they could cross the bay.

"All right, then," said Rob; "but we've got to hurry."

Skookie also was plainly nervous. They rushed the dory from its moorings, and all taking oars and paddles, gave way strongly as they could. At that time there were no waves of consequence, only a long, slow motion like the pulse of the sea which came down from the outer mouth of great Kaludiak Bay. The wind had not yet risen, although steadily the twilight seemed to thicken.

For three-quarters of an hour they made good progress. Then they noticed that their boat began to pitch a little, and small, choppy waves raced by. A strong slant of wind was coming down from another valley farther toward the mouth of the bay, opposite which they passed, when they left at one side the long spit of land which had served as shelter to their part of the inner bay.

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Evidently the wind was freshening. A fine spindrift settled on the farther side of the bay, so that at times their own shore was cut out from view for many moments. Night, too, was now coming. Without a word the boys bent to their oars, thoroughly alarmed. Rob and Skookie were perhaps the calmest of the four, and Rob undertook to do what he could to encourage his companions.

"One thing you want to remember, boys," said he, "and that is that one of these dories will stand almost as much sea as a ship, if you handle her right. We'll keep her quartering into the waves, and will keep on rowing all night if we have to. Never mind where we strike the shore on the other side—we won't try to come out just at our camp. I only hope we can make it above the mouth of our creek, because if we go below that point we might drift twenty miles, clear to the far end of the bay. Don't pull too hard now and get fagged, but keep up a steady lick. Jesse, you'd better get in the stem and let John and Skookie each pull an oar. I'll take the other pair. Get your tin pail ready, Jesse, and if we take in any water, keep it bailed out the best you can."

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The others were plucky, although every one was anxious. The little crew kept sturdily at the oars, facing what was a situation serious enough to daunt even the strongest men. These Alaskan storms are dangerous even to the most powerful vessels, and no coast in the world has a longer record of shipwreck and lost vessels of which no trace ever is found.

When once fairly out in the middle of the bay, the boys got a notion of the power of the sea such as they never before had known in their lives and thought never again to repeat. Clouds now obscured the sky. The wind increased steadily, coming in directly from the mouth of the great bay, and bringing with it all the power of the mighty Pacific Ocean. As these young adventurers looked over their shoulders it was a truly terrifying spectacle which met their gaze.

In steady succession, a few moments apart, there came down into the bay, apparently reaching from side to side across it, long black hills of water, great, roller-like waves which did not break but came in black and oily. Each one, as it towered above the little boat, seemed about to engulf it, but in some way the splendid little dory found its way up the side and across the crest; and then they would see the great, silent black hill of water swing on into the bay and pass out of sight, only to be followed by another. The wind was not yet strong enough to break the tops of the waves, and fortunately the tide was coming in, so that there were no rips, which would surely have swamped their little craft.

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"Keep on pulling, boys!" cried Rob. "We're doing finely. She rides these big waves like a duck. She's a splendid boat!"

Skookie did not say anything, but once in a while cast an anxious eye toward the head of the bay.

"Is it all right, Skookie?" asked Rob.

"I dinno," answered Skookie, and bent again to his oar.

"So long as the sea doesn't break," said Rob, "we can ride these rollers all right. It's when she goes white that you want to look out."

Perhaps this was precisely what Skookie had feared. Within three minutes after Rob had spoken what he had dreaded actually occurred. They were riding steadily up toward the top of a long, oily wave whose leeward side was quite unbroken, when, just as they reached the top, the wind seemed to tear the crest of the wave into shreds. Without warning, a great, boiling surge of white, hissing water came up all around them. It was as though some angry spirit of the deep had risen up from below and tried to pull them down.

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The white water poured in over the gunwale and half filled the dory, which seemed on the point of sinking before the long wave crept away, growling, as though disappointed at being baffled in its purpose.

Jesse, who had left the stern seat and was crouched in the bottom of the dory, uttered a cry of affright.

"Quiet, there!" called out Rob, sharply. "Bail, bail as fast as you can! Hurry up!"

Thoroughly frightened, but rallying to his young commander's voice, Jesse obeyed, and

bailed rapidly as he could, the sloshing water now leaving him for the bow, and now flooding him to the knees as it swept back to the stern when the bow arose. The dory yawed and veered unsteadily. Had they struck another piece of white water the end must have come for them, for their craft would have been beyond the control of their weary arms. Good-fortune was with them, however, and Jesse's efforts steadily lightened their little ship, while the others kept her headed up, quartering into the long waves.

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How long they rowed in this heart-breaking manner none of them ever knew, but it seemed many hours. No doubt it was two or three hours before they began to reach the shelter of the nearest projecting point on the farther side of the bay. By this time they were nearly worn out, their arms trembling, and their faces pale from over-exertion, but they dared not stop, and so pulled on as best they could. All at once Skookie spoke.

"*Karosha!*" he exclaimed. "Pretty soon all light, all light! I hear-um water over dar."

He meant that he now could hear the surf breaking along the beach on their side of the bay. The roar of the waves became plainer and plainer as they pulled in, and now the rollers became less gigantic, and their headway increased as the wind was shut off by the promontory at the head of their beach.

The sound of the breaking surf was ominous enough of itself. In these wild seas it is not every one who can take in a boat safely through such waters. Rob was wise enough to ask counsel of Skookie in this matter, when at last they could see the rim of white water breaking madly along the shingle.

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The young Aleut did not seem much concerned. He told them to stop rowing when they approached the first long ridge of breaking water, and with his own oars he held the boat for a minute, looking astern and waiting for the right instant. A great wave came in toward them, but just before it broke Skookie gave a shout and they all fell to their oars, going in just with the crest of this wave and keeping just ahead of where it broke. Thus their boat was carried high up the beach.

At the right instant overboard went Skookie waist deep in the surging white water. In an instant Rob was out on the other side. The receding wave almost swept the dory back, but they held her; and another, lifting her clear and carrying the boys off their feet for a moment, flung her yet farther up the beach and at the edge of the high-water mark. As she grounded this time they were all out and helped run her up high and dry. Here they made her fast by the painter to a jagged rock which projected from the wall at the edge of the beach. Then, too tired to do anything further, and trembling now in the reaction which followed the peril from which they had escaped, they flung themselves panting on the beach, with pale faces looking out into the stormy sea which thundered at their feet. They were all sobered thoroughly by their experience. At last Rob spoke, standing up preparatory to the walk down the beach toward their old barabbara.

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"I know what I thought out there when she broke under us," said he; "and I know what I *did*, too."

"Yes, and," said Jesse, as he and the others rose to follow him, "I know what *I'm* going to do before I go to sleep to-night, too. I'm going to remember my prayers."

XXVII

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THE MAN-HUNT

For several days after their fortunate escape from the storm at sea the boys were willing enough to lie around their camps, resting, undertaking no labor beyond that necessary in getting their daily food. About this latter there was rarely any difficulty at all.

Of course, after a time all the birds in the lagoon were easily frightened away, but once in a while during the coming week the young hunters repeated their hunt with the thongs, and finally saw quite a heap of smoked goose-breasts accumulate on their drying-rack, where some of the bear meat still remained, as well as a goodly number of split salmon.

The gulls' nests and the salmon stream afforded their best source of supply, each practically exhaustless at that season. The salmon came practically to their very door, and, provided as they were now with salt, there was small excuse for any of them going hungry. So easy, indeed, did life become, so far as food was concerned, that, as has been stated above, a certain monotony, not to say anxiety, settled upon them all. This, however, was one

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day broken by an event of most startling interest.

They were following down the salmon creek, with the intention of taking a few fish at the pool near the mouth, when all at once the young Aleut, whose keen eyes were ever searching the country both far and near, paused and gave a low exclamation as he pointed to the mud near the banks.

"Bad mans come!" he said.

They peered where he pointed. Sure enough, there was the mark of a man's foot, evidently that of a man wearing *muklaks*, or seal boots. The boys looked at one another.

"Him come," said Skookie, making signs of catching salmon. He made other signs of going to sleep, putting his hands against his cheek and closing his eyes, and then pointing up the hills. He pointed from the hills to the creek. Thus the boys knew what he meant, what they at once suspected to be the truth—that their late prisoner Jimmy was hiding out in the mountains, and coming down like a wild animal to make his living on the salmon run.

This was a situation which at once seemed to them very grave.

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"He has not left, after all," said Rob, moodily. "I wish we had him under lock and key again. The question is, are we going to catch him again, or is he going to catch us first? That's what I want to know."

"What do you mean?" asked John. "He's free, and we don't know where he is. Surely you don't mean that we ought to go and hunt him up?"

"I feel just this way," answered Rob, "as I always have about anything of the sort—if there's going to be trouble, let us have it over and done with. For one, I don't relish lying awake night after night wondering if our camp is going to be surprised; and neither do I like to walk these shores wondering if this fellow is going to slip an arrow into one of us from the grass."

"Wouldn't we be safe in the house?" asked Jesse.

"We can't stay in the house all the time, and we would not be safe even there. No, it looks as though we ought to go out and hunt this fellow up and see what he is doing and intends to do."

Without further words they turned back toward the house, followed by the Aleut boy, who looked from one to the other as if wondering what their words signified. This he discovered a few moments later, when Rob and John both emerged, each with a loaded rifle under his arm.

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"Come on," said Rob, and led the way, splashing through the shallow water at the foot of the lagoon which separated them from the mountain-side beyond.

They climbed in silence for some time, steadily ascending the steep face of the snow-capped mountain which lay before them. Again they saw the wonderful pictures afforded by this region, where both ocean and mountains blend in the landscape. As now and then they paused for breath, they turned to look at the wonderful view of the great bay, the silver thread of the lagoon and creek, and the low, round dot made by their hut upon the flat. Above them circled many of the great bald eagles, which occasionally departed for their salmon-fishing in the stream. Once or twice they heard the sharp bark of a fox concealed in the alder thickets, and as they reached the upper slopes, where the snow still lay, frequently they saw the mountain ptarmigan, at this altitude still in its white winter plumage. These birds, when alarmed, would fly but a short way and then poise in the air, uttering a sharp, crowing cackle, soon to alight and stand motionless on the snow. All these scenes of wild nature were noted by the boys, though perhaps not so much as they might have been had they not been upon so serious an errand.

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From time to time they caught the trail of the fugitive across the snow-field, where it could be seen for half a mile at a stretch. Beyond such a snow-field they came across the ashes of a fire which had been built behind a clump of rocks out of sight from the beach below. There were some half-burned bones, which showed that some one had cooked fish here. Skookie, making the sign of sleep, or night, held up six fingers, to show that it had been that many days since the fugitive had been here.

They managed to puzzle out the trail for some distance up the mountains from this point, but finally lost it on a bare rock ridge which thrust up well toward the peak of the mountain between two snow-fields. Skookie, stooping down and hunting like a dog among the half-bare rocks, slowly puzzled out the trail for a time. Evidently the man they wanted had made a practice of sleeping far back in the mountains. For a time they almost despaired of

discovering him, until at last Jesse, whose eyes were always keen, pointed out what he thought were tracks leading across a snow-bank a quarter of a mile ahead. Hastening thither, they gained a half-mile more in their pursuit, but finally were obliged to halt puzzled at a bare rim of rock, beyond which and below them lay a wide expanse of rough country broken by cañons and covered by a dense alder growth, the only timber of that region.

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In that broken country hiding might have been offered for a regiment, almost, it seemed. Rob suggested that it was perhaps as well to return to camp and give up the search.

"Hold on a minute," said Jesse. "Look over there! I think I see something."

He pointed ahead and below at some object a half-mile farther on. Presently they all saw it—a figure visible against the snow which lay along the edge of a sharp cañon wall. A moment later it was lost as it moved into the cover of the alder thicket; but even as they hesitated they saw arising a thin wreath of blue smoke, which proved to them that the figure they had seen was a man, and no doubt the one for whom they were looking.

Skookie looked serious, his brown face drawn into a frown of anxiety and fear.

"Bad mans, bad mans!" he said, over and over again, shaking his head.

"Come on, fellows!" was Rob's comment, and he plunged on down the rock face, hurrying to get his party out of sight as quickly as possible. Once lower down, and near the elevation of the smoke at the cañon side, concealment was much easier, and from this point they stalked the hidden fugitive much as they would have done with a big-game animal had they been pursuing it.

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They paused at last at the rim of a shelving rock which projected out at the top of the cañon wall. The smell of the smoke was strong in their nostrils, and they knew that they were near the end of their hunt. Somewhere below them, perhaps within a few yards or feet, the fugitive must be lying; but, although they peered over cautiously, they could see no one. As a matter of fact, a shallow cavern existed directly under them in the side of the cañon wall, and it was at the mouth of this that the Aleut had built his fire.

Seeing no sign of life, Rob proceeded to dispose his forces with the purpose of surrounding his man. He motioned to Jesse and the Aleut boy to remain at the rim of the cañon, and, sending John to a point below, he himself climbed down on the upper side of the fire. When he reached a point where he could see into the mouth of the cave and realized that very probably this was the abode of the escaped Aleut, he waited until he saw John in position below, and then as they both covered the mouth of the cave with their guns he gave a loud call:

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"Here, you, Jimmy, come out of that!"

They all heard a low exclamation, which assured them that their man was at home; but at first he refused to appear. Rob called out loudly again, half raising himself above a rock behind which he had taken shelter against any surprise.

Presently they heard a voice raised, not in defiance, but in entreaty. They scarcely recognized the figure which limped to the mouth of the cave, so gaunt and haggard did it seem. It was, indeed, their late prisoner, but now bent and weak, as though ill and half starved. He held his bow and arrows in one hand over his head, but the bow was not strung. Evidently he intended to surrender without any resistance.

"Good mans, good!" he repeated, beating on his breast.

They closed in on him now and took away his weapons. The Aleut boy jabbered at him in excited tones, apparently accusing or reproaching him. Jimmy edged away from him and looked at the white faces of the others, which regarded him sternly but with no apparent anger. He sadly pointed to his leg, which had been injured by a fall on the rocks. Evidently he wanted to tell them that if they would take him back on the old footing he, for his part, would be glad enough to come, if only they would keep the savage brown boy away from him.

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"Now we've got him," said Rob, at last, "and what shall we do with him?"

"We'll have to take him down," said John. "He'd just about die if we left him up here; and I don't believe he'll make us trouble any more. Besides, we've got Skookie here to watch him now."

Rob debated the matter in his mind for some time, but finally agreed that Jimmy would probably make them no more trouble, since he very possibly was hiding out more in fear of them than in any wish to harm them. Reasoning that one or both of these natives might be

useful in later plans, he at last held out his hand to Jimmy, and with some effort persuaded Skookie that it would be better for him to shake hands with Jimmy than to take a rifle and shoot him, as the boy seemed more disposed to do. He knew that these natives soon forget their animosities.

Thus at length they started down the mountain along the trail, which Jimmy pointed out, hobbling along in advance. In a couple of hours they were at the top of the high rock face above the mouth of the creek. Here Jimmy paused and anxiously scanned the entire expanse of the adjacent cove and the long line of the beach beyond. He seemed overjoyed that there was no longer any sign of the hostile party which had come in pursuit of him. At least the boys guessed that was what he felt, and guessed also that he had been coming down to the stream at night and not in the daytime, perhaps thus sustaining the fall which had hurt his leg.

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They were hungry that night as they cooked their evening meal in the smoky barabbara.

"No watch to-night, boys!" said Rob. "These two friends can watch each other, if they feel like it, but I think we may sleep without anxiety."

"For a prisoner, it looks to me that Jimmy was very glad to be caught," remarked John.

XXVIII

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A HUNT FOR SEA-OTTER

Two or three days more passed in this strange situation, but nothing took place which even to Rob's watchful eye seemed to indicate any danger from either of their Aleut companions. In the wilderness the most practical thing is accepted as it appears, without much argument, if only it seems necessary; so now this somewhat strangely assorted company settled down peaceably into the usual life of the place, until an event happened which brought them all still more closely together.

They were going over to the beach to see that their flag-staff was still in proper position, when Jesse's keen eyes noted at the edge of the beach a small, dark object which had been cast up by the waves. A moment's examination proved to them that this was nothing less than a sea-otter cub, a small animal not much larger than a wood-chuck, but with a long, pointed tail, and covered with short, soft fur. All these boys had lived in Alaska long enough to know the great value of the fur of the sea-otter, which even at this time was worth more than a thousand dollars a skin. They reasoned that since this cub had come ashore there might be older otters about. The cause of the death of the cub they never knew; nor, indeed, do even the native hunters always know what kills the otters which they find sometimes cast up by the waves on the beaches. Some natives say that in very cold winter weather an otter may freeze its nose, so that it can no longer catch fish, and thus starves to death. Some, of course, are shot by hunters who never find them. It is customary for the profits of such a find to be divided among the tribe or family making the discovery, and even in case a hunter can prove that he has shot an otter at sea which has come ashore, the finder receives a certain proportion of the profits, most of the hunting done by these natives partaking of a communal nature.

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"This fur is still good," said Rob, pulling at it. "It hasn't been dead very long, so maybe its mother is still around, or its daddy. That would be something worth while, wouldn't it? Five hundred to fifteen hundred dollars, perhaps."

The older Aleut was standing on the summit of the sea-wall, shading his eyes and looking steadily out over the waves. At last he gave a loud, sharp call, in which an instant later the Aleut boy joined. The two ran first toward the dory, which lay on the sea-beach, where it had been left after the last voyage for eggs, but an instant later they turned back to the lagoon where the bidarka lay, and made motions that this should be carried across and launched.

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Rob and John hurried for their rifles. Jimmy caught up his bow and arrows, and the Aleut boy his short spear. They hurried the bidarka across the sea-wall to the open water of the bay. Jimmy resumed his watch from the summit of the sea-wall. For what seemed a half-hour he stood motionless and staring out over the bay. Then again he called aloud and, hurriedly lifting his bow string into the notch, ran down to the bidarka, motioning to Rob to take his seat in the rear hatch.

"You others get into the dory with Skookie," called out Rob, even as the strong sweep of

Jimmy's paddle swept them free of the shingle.

To launch the heavy dory was something of a task for the younger boys, but in their excitement they accomplished it, so that the two boats were soon out for yet another of the wild sea-hunts of this far-away coast.

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The method of the natives who hunt the sea-otter is to make a surround with a fleet of bidarkas, much as they hunt the whale; but this, of course, was impossible now. None the less, Jimmy, who assumed the position of master of the hunt, motioned to the Aleut boy in the dory to keep off to the left, while he and Rob circled far to the right in the bidarka.

To the Aleut mind nothing approaches a sea-otter hunt, for it affords not only the keenest sport, but the greatest possible financial reward. The method of the hunt is somewhat complicated in some of its features. When the otter dives the boats gather in a circle, and as soon as it appears every Bowman does his best to strike it with an arrow. The first arrow to strike the otter makes the latter the property of the lucky Bowman, who, of course, knows his own arrow by his mark. As, however, the first arrow may not stop the otter, the "owner," as the boats close in upon the game, may very probably call out what he will pay for another arrow lodged in the body of the otter. Instances have been known where the first Bowman has in his excitement pledged away more in arrow-interest than the total value of the skin amounts to, so that he is actually loser instead of gainer by the transaction. The arrow closest to the tail is the one which most prevents the otter from diving; hence the value of the arrows is measured by the distance from the tail, the arrow of each man being so marked that it cannot be mistaken.

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All of this etiquette of the otter-hunt was, of course, unknown to the white boys, whose main interest, indeed, was one of sport rather than of profit. They were keen as the natives, none the less, and eagerly watched every signal given by the leader of the hunt.

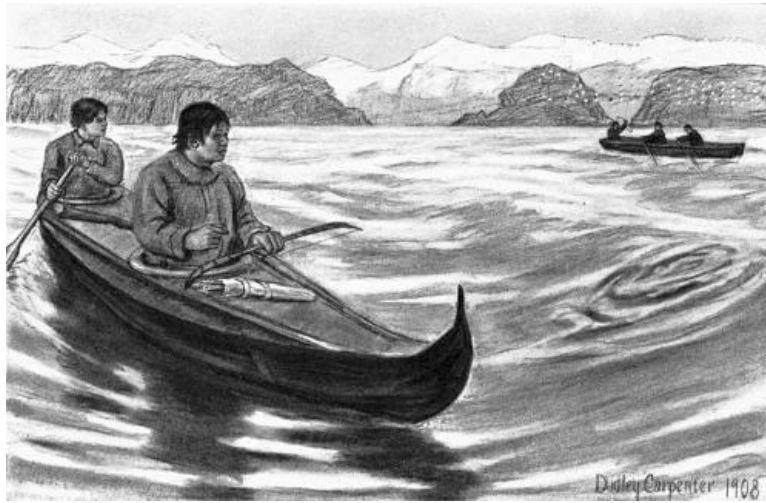
At last Jimmy held a paddle up in the air, a signal for the other boat to slow down. A moment later Rob spied the otter lying stretched out motionless on the water as though asleep, as indeed likely was the case, since that is the method of sleep practised by this species. Now, a few fathoms at a time, the native edged the bidarka up toward his game, precisely as the Aleut chief had approached the whale. The dory, no longer rowed furiously, but now paddled silently by John and Skookie, approached on the other side. As they now were on a comparatively smooth sea, and not more than fifty yards from the animal, Rob motioned to his companion to allow him to fire with his rifle, but the latter emphatically refused. He knew that an arrow safely lodged is more sure to bring the sea-otter into possession than a rifle-ball, which might kill it, only to cause it to sink and be lost.

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Jimmy now laid down his paddle, took up his bow and arrows, and signalled to Rob to paddle ahead slowly. A few yards farther he motioned for the headway to be checked, and just as the bidarka stopped he launched his barbed arrow with a savage grunt.

The weapon flew true! A wide rush of bubbles showed where an instant before the otter had lain.

Both otter and arrow had disappeared, but the Aleut sat waiting grimly, although the boys in the other boat gave a yell of exultation. In a few moments the wounded animal showed a hundred fathoms ahead. Here, stung by the pain of the bone head, which had sunk deep into its back, it swam confusedly for a moment at the surface. The shaft of the arrow had now been detached from the loose head cunningly contrived by the native arrow-makers, and a long cord, which attached the arrow-head to the shaft, and which was wound around the latter, now unreeled and left the shaft floating, telltale evidence of the otter's whereabouts, even when it dived.



**BOTH OTTER AND ARROW HAD DISAPPEARED,
BUT THE ALEUT SAT WAITING GRIMLY**

Jimmy tried a long shot as the bidarka swept ahead under Rob's paddle, but this time he missed, and down went the otter again. It did not dive deep, however, and the shaft of the arrow told where it might be expected. As its round head, with bright, staring eyes, thrust up above the water, there came the twang of the young Aleut's bow, and the second arrow chugged into the body of the otter. Even the older hunter greeted this shot with applause.

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The otter, however, is hard to kill with an arrow of this sort, since its skin is loose and tough. The creature dived once more, but the second floating shaft now began to handicap its motions. Both boats followed it from place to place as it swam. At last, almost exhausted, it showed once more, and the older Aleut sent home an arrow at the back of its head which killed it at once. He hauled up across the bidarka deck the body of the otter, a dark-brown creature, even at that season fairly well furred, and in weight about that of a good-sized dog.

Now and again calling out in sheer exultation at the success of this strange hunt, they all now turned ashore. That day they had plenty to do in skinning the otter and making a rude stretching-board for the great skin. The boys were all astonished to see how much larger it stretched than had seemed possible from the size of the body of the animal itself; but the hide of the sea-otter lies in loose wrinkles, so that it may bend and turn freely as a snake when making its way in the water. They found the skin to be more than six feet long from tip to tip.

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The young friends engaged in some speculation as to how much the skin might bring at the Seattle market. One thing of value it seemed to establish beyond doubt—Jimmy and Skookie, as they both worked at fleshing the hide, had dropped their mutual suspicions and become hunting companions.

XXIX

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UNCERTAINTY

Midsummer came and passed, and still no sign from the outer world came to relieve the growing anxiety of the boys so long marooned on these unfrequented shores. They had kept very small account of the passing of the days, and perhaps none of them could have told how many weeks had elapsed since the beginning of their unwilling journey from Kadiak. They no longer knew the days of the week; and, indeed, had any of their relatives seen them now, with their shoes worn to bits, their clothing ragged and soiled, and not a hat or cap remaining between them, they might have taken their sun-browned faces and long hair to be marks of natives rather than of white boys of good family.

It is not to be supposed, however, that they had given up all hope, or that at any time they had allowed themselves to indulge in despondency. Rob especially, although serious and quiet, all the time was thinking over a plan. This, one day, he proposed to the others.

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"I have resolved," said he, "that if you other boys agree, we will start for home just one month from to-day."

They sat looking at him in silence for some time.

"How do you mean?" asked Jesse, his eyes lighting up, for he was the one who seemed most to feel homesickness.

"I mean to start back to Kadiak, where we came from!"

"Yes, and how can we tell which way Kadiak is?" inquired John.

"I'll tell you how," said Rob. "We will travel, of course, in our dory, which will carry our camp outfit and food enough to last for a great many days, even if we should prove unable to take any codfish or salmon along the coast."

"But which way would we go?" insisted John.

"The opposite of the way we came," smiled Rob. "A tide brought us into this bay. The same tide on the turn would carry us out of the bay. To be sure, the wind may have had much to do with our direction, but it is only fair to suppose that if we came down the east coast of Kadiak on an ebb we would go up that same coast on the flood. At least, if we could do no better, we would be leaving a place where no word seems apt to get to us."

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"It would be a risky voyage," said Jesse. "I didn't like it out there on the open sea!"

"There is some risk in staying here," was Rob's answer. "Whether or not those natives took our message to Kadiak, they certainly will tell all the other villagers that we are here. In time they will know we are helpless. It may be only a matter of days or weeks before they will come and do what they like with us—steal our guns and blankets, and either take us far away, or leave us to shift for ourselves as we can."

"Could we send Jimmy out with another message?" suggested John.

"I doubt it," answered Rob. "If he wanted to leave here he could take the bidarka almost any night and escape, but I believe he is afraid to leave the bay lest he may be found by some of these villagers whom he has offended. I don't think Skookie would go anywhere with him. As it is, one is a foil to the other here with us, but each is afraid of the other away from us!"

"But don't you suppose that Skookie's people will come back after him sometime?"

"True enough, they may; but who can tell the Aleut mind? I don't pretend to. Of course, by the late fall, say November, when the snows come and the fur is good, I don't doubt these people will come back here to trap foxes, for that is evidently a regular business here; but that would mean that we would have to winter either with them or by ourselves; and I want to tell you that wintering here alone is an entirely different proposition from summering here, now when the salmon are running and we can go out almost any day and get codfish, not to mention ducks and geese. Besides, our people would be driven frantic by that time. On the other hand, if we were lucky enough to make it to Kadiak we would get there in time to find your uncle Dick, or at least to get a boat home to Valdez sometime within a month after we got to Kadiak. Of course, we don't know anything about the country between here and there. The whole coast may be a rock wall, for all we know."

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"The steamers have government charts to tell them where to go," mused John; "but we haven't any chart, and we don't even know in what direction of the compass we ought to sail, even if we had a compass."

"Before ships could have charts," said Rob, "it was necessary for some one to discover things all over the world. I suppose that's the class we're in now—we're the first navigators, so far as help from any one else is concerned. In Alaska a fellow has to take care of himself, and he has to learn to take his medicine. Now none of us is a milksop or a mollycoddle."

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"That's the talk!" said John. "For my part, if Jesse agrees, we'll try the journey back in the dory. But if we're going to undertake it we ought to begin now to lay in plenty of supplies."

"I have been thinking of that," said Rob, "and so I move we begin now to get together our provisions."

From that time on they all worked soberly and intently, with minds bent upon a common purpose. They hunted ducks and geese regularly now, curing the breasts of the wild fowl on their smoke-rack. Codfish they did not trouble to take for curing in any great quantity, as they knew they could secure them fresh at almost any point along these shores. Salmon they smoked in numbers, for now the run of the humpback salmon was on, replacing the earlier one of the smaller red salmon. Part of their dried bear meat, now not very palatable, they still had left. They even tried to dry in the sun some of the bulbs which the natives occasionally brought in. Their greatest puzzle was how they could carry water, for, since

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they knew nothing of the coast ahead, they feared that they might be obliged to pass some time without meeting a fresh-water stream. At last John managed to make Jimmy understand what they required, and he, grinning at their ignorance, showed them how they could make a water-cask out of a fresh seal-skin, of which they now had several from their hunting along the coast.

"Now," said John, when finally they had solved that problem, "we've got to have a sail of some sort."

"And not a piece of canvas or cloth as big as your hand," said Rob, ruefully. "I admit that a sail would be a big help, for we could rig a lee-board for the dory. Then, if the wind was right, we could get back to Kadiak in a day, very likely; for we couldn't have been much more than that time in coming down here without a sail."

It taxed John's ingenuity as interpreter for a long time to make the natives understand what he now required. At last, by means of his clumsy attempts to braid a sort of mat out of rushes and grass, they caught his idea and fell to helping him. That week they finished a large, square mat, fairly close in texture, which they felt sure could be used as a square-rigged sail. They prepared a short mast and spars for this, and as they reviewed the progress of their boat equipment they all felt a certain relief, since all of them were more or less familiar with boat-sailing.

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"I hate to go away and miss all the foxes we could get at the carcass of that whale this fall," said Rob one morning, as he stood at the sea-wall and watched three or four of these animals scamper off up the beach when disturbed at their feeding on the carcass. "In fact, I feel just the way we all do, pretty much attached to this place where we've had such a jolly good time, after all; but we've got to think of getting home some way. We've got our water-cask ready, and our sail is done, and we've got two or three hundred pounds of fairly good provisions. We'll pull the dory up to the beach here opposite our camp and get her loaded. What time do you say, John? And what do you think, Jesse? What time shall we set for the start?"

John and Jesse stood, each breaking a bit of dried grass between his fingers as he talked. At last John looked up.

"Any time you say, Rob," he answered, firmly.

"To-morrow, then!" said Rob.

They stood for a moment, each looking at the other. For weeks they had been in anxiety, for many days extremely busy, most of the time too methodical or too intent to experience much enthusiasm. Now a sudden impulse caught all three—the spirit of resolution which accomplishes results for man or boy. Suddenly John waved his hand above his head.

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"Three cheers!" he exclaimed.

They gave them all together.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

XXX

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"BLOWN OUT TO SEA!"

Meantime, what had happened in the outer world during all these months? What had been the feelings of Mr. Hazlett on that day in early spring as, hour after hour, he walked Kadiak dock and peered into the fog in vain, waiting for the boat which did not appear? And what of his feelings as all that day and night passed, and yet another, with no answer to his half-frenzied search of the shores close to the town, of the decks of the still lingering steamer, and of the surroundings of the Mission School across the strait? None could answer his questions, and no guess could be formed as to the missing dory and its crew, until at last there were discovered the two natives who had rowed the dory away from the *Nora*.

These told how the boat had disappeared while they were absent. They had thought that the boys had made their way back to town. Now, finding that such had not been the case, they expressed it as their belief that when the latter had pitted their weak strength against the Pacific Ocean they had failed and had been blown out to sea.

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"Blown out to sea!" How many a story has been written in that phrase! How could this anxious watcher face the parents of those boys and tell them news such as this? At least for a time he was spared this, for no boat would go back to Valdez within a month, and those who awaited news were Alaska mothers and knew the delays of the frontier. None the less, Mr. Hazlett had borne in upon him all the time the feeling that he himself had been responsible for this disaster. Even as he set to work to organize search-parties he felt despair.

The natives, not clear as to the instructions given them, had supposed that they were to go in search of the revenue-cutter *Bennington*; yet as a matter of fact that vessel was moored on the western instead of the eastern side of the island at the time, whereas it seemed sure that the dory with the missing boys must have been carried along the east coast of the island, and not through the straits to the westward.

Mr. Hazlett knew well enough the strength of the outgoing Japan Current here. A boat might be carried to Asia, for all one could tell to the contrary, although its occupants must long ere that have perished from hunger and thirst. And what chance had a small boat in waters so rough as those of this rock-bound coast, risky enough for the most skilled navigators and in the best of vessels? Was not all this coast-survey work intended to lessen the danger of navigation, even for the most skilled commanders? What chance had these, weak, young, and unprepared, who had thus been thrust into such perils? All that could be held sure was that the boys had disappeared as completely as though the sea had opened up and swallowed boat and all!

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Duty now required that Mr. Hazlett should report on board the *Bennington*; so, after a few days spent in fruitless searching within reach of Kadiak town, he took the pilot-boat and hastened over to the west side of the island where the *Bennington* lay at anchor, with her boat crews engaged in the tedious work of making coast soundings.

Mr. Hazlett laid before Captain Stephens the full story of the mysterious loss of his young charges. The face of the old naval officer grew grave, and for some moments he turned away and engaged in thought before he spoke. Then he turned sharply to his executive officer.

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"Call in the boat crews, sir!" he commanded. "We move station within the hour!"

"Then you mean that you are going to help search for them?" asked Mr. Hazlett.

"With all my heart, sir!" said the rough commander. "I have boys of my own back in New England. We'll comb this island rock by rock, and if we suspect foul play we'll blow every native village off the face of it!"

The hoarse roar of the *Bennington's* deep-throated signal-whistles echoed along the rock-bound shore. Within an hour her boats were all stowed, and with each man at his quarters the trim cutter passed slowly down the west coast of the island.

"I'm not supposed to be a relief expedition," muttered Captain Stephens, "and I s'pose we'll all lose our jobs with Uncle Sam; but until we do, I figure that Uncle Sam can better afford to lose three months' time of this ship's crew than it can three bright boys who may grow up to be good sailors sometime.

"We'll skirt the island in the opposite direction from that in which the youngsters probably went," said he, turning to Mr. Hazlett. "We'll have to stop at every cannery and settlement, and the boat crews will need to search every little bay and coast."

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"You talk as though you hoped to find them," said Mr. Hazlett, catching a gleam of courage from the other's resolute speech.

"Find 'em?" said Captain Stephens. "Of course we'll find 'em; we've *got* to find 'em!"

XXXI

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THE SEARCH-PARTY

It should be remembered that the coast of the great Kadiak Island is here and there indented with deep bays, which at one point nearly cut it in two. Had the boys known it, they were, in their camp near the head of Kaludiak Bay, not more than thirty miles distant across the mountain passes to the head of Uyak Bay, which makes in on the west side of the island, and which was the first great inlet to be searched by the boat crews of the

Bennington. The total coast-line of so large a bay is hundreds of miles in extent, and broken with many little coves, each of which must be visited and inspected, for any projecting rock point might hide a boat or camp from view.

On this great bay there were two or three salmon-fisheries in operation, and as these always employ numbers of natives who come from all parts of the island, Captain Stephens had close inquiries made at each; but more than two weeks passed and no word could be gained of any white persons at any other portion of the island.

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"Naturally we won't hear anything on this side," said Captain Stephens to Mr. Hazlett. "Not many natives from the east coast come over here to work, and from what I know of the prevailing tides and winds I am more disposed to believe that they have been carried off toward the southeast corner of the island. The land runs out there, and, granted any decent kind of luck, the boys probably made a landing—if they could keep afloat so far."

"But what may have happened to them before this?" began Mr. Hazlett.

"Tut, man! We've all got to take our chances," replied the old sea-dog. "They've done their best, and we must do our best, too."

Week after week, hour after hour, and, as it seemed, almost inch by inch, the cutter crawled on around the wild coast of Kadiak, tapping each arm and inlet, literally combing out the full extent of the broken shore-line. So gradually they passed below the southern extremity of the island, worked up from the southeast, and one day came to anchor not far from the native settlement known as Old Harbor. Here a breakdown to their machinery kept them waiting for ten days. Meantime, the boat crews were out at their work. One day a young lieutenant came in and with some excitement asked to see the captain.

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"I have to report, sir, that I think we've got word of those boys!" he said, eagerly, as he saluted.

"How's that? Where? Go on, sir!"

"There's a big boat party back from Kaludiak Bay, sir. They were in there on a whale-hunt several weeks ago. They saw a camp with three white boys and one refugee Aleut."

"Arrest every man Jack of them and bring them in!" roared Captain Stephens.

"Already done that, sir!" reported the lieutenant. "They are in the long-boat alongside."

"Then bring them here at once!"

A few moments later he and Mr. Hazlett found the deck crowded with a score of much-frightened natives.

"Who's the interpreter here?" commanded the captain.

A squaw-man who for some years had lived with the natives was pushed forward. He was none too happy himself, for he expected nothing better than intimate questions regarding certain wrecking operations which for years past had gone on along this part of the coast.

"Now tell me," began Captain Stephens, "what do you know about those boys over there? Why didn't these people bring out word to the settlement? What are you looking for here? Do you want me to blow your village off the rocks? Come, now, speak up, my good fellow, or you'll mighty well wish you had!"

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Suddenly Mr. Hazlett uttered an exclamation and sprang toward one of the natives who carried a rifle in his hand.

"That gun belonged to Jesse, the son of my neighbor Wilcox at Valdez!" he exclaimed. "Tell me where you got it, and how!"

As may be supposed, it was the Aleut chief whom he addressed, and the latter now engaged in a very anxious attempt at explanation. He declared at first that the boys had given him this rifle as a present; then he admitted that he had promised to take a message up to Kadiak, going on to say that he had intended to do this, but that his wife had been sick, that he had been kept at the village by many things, etc.

"He's an old liar, without doubt," said Captain Stephens. "Half of this band of natives down here are afraid to come to Kadiak because of the debts they owe the company store. They are wreckers, renegades, and thieves down here, and you can't believe a word of them. I've half a mind to hang the lot of them at the yard-arm, and good riddance of them at that!"

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The old chief understood something of what was going on, and now began to beg and blubber.

"Me good mans!" he repeated, beating on his chest.

"He says that he's got a boy of his own over there with the others in Kaludiak Bay. He's got a message written out by the boys, but the truth is he was afraid to go to town with it. Says the renegade Aleut over there was a good hunter, but a dangerous man—he stole their sacred whale harpoon here and made away with it—"

"But the message!" insisted Mr. Hazlett.

So at last the old chief fumbled in his jacket, and pulled out a soiled and crumpled paper nearly worn in bits. Enough of it at least remained to show the searchers that when it was written the boys were all alive and well, and were expecting help.

"The old fellow says he was expecting to take the paper up to town sometime this fall," went on the interpreter. "Says the boys had plenty to eat—fish and birds, and they had killed three bears—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Captain Stephens.

"Yes, says they had killed an old she bear and two cubs, and had the hides hung up—says the Aleut man had run away when they left—says they all killed a whale before they left, and left the boys as well fixed as they are here in this village. He can't understand why you should be anxious about them, when his own boy is over there, too. Says he can take you over there all right if you want to go."

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"The little beggars!" said Mr. Hazlett, smiling for the first time in weeks. "We may get them yet."

"Get them? Of course we will!" growled Captain Stephens. "We'll have them aboard by this time to-morrow. Their camp isn't more than seventy-five miles from here at most."

The whistle of the *Bennington* once more roared out, and with the rattle of her anchor chains again the cutter pushed on up the coast, carrying with her, without asking their consent, the entire party of natives, who now fell flat on the deck in terror, supposing that they were being carried off to the white man's punishment for native misdeeds.

XXXII

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THE DESERTED CAMP

"So the plucky little dogs killed a bear, eh?" went on Captain Stephens, as he paced up and down the deck. "I'll warrant they've had a deuce of a good time in there all by themselves, and they'll be sorry to be disturbed. Find them! Of course we will—find them fat as seals and happier than we are!"

In spite of all this both he and Mr. Hazlett were uneasy enough when finally the *Bennington* steamed majestically through the narrow mouth of Kaludiak Bay—the first steamer ever to awaken the echoes there—and finally swung to her anchor at a point indicated by the Aleut chief.

But to the whistle there came no answer of a rifle-shot, no signal fluttered, and no smoke was seen. The Aleut chief now became genuinely frightened as he pointed out the landing-place opposite to the barabbara, which, of course, could not be seen by reason of the low sea-wall.

The rattle of the davit blocks followed that of the anchor chains as a bow boat was launched.

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"Go aboard, Mr. Cummings!" said Captain Stephens. "Take Mr. Hazlett and this old chief, and don't you come back without those boys! They're only out hunting somewhere, or else they'd have a fire going."

As the bow of the boat grated on the shingle Mr. Hazlett sprang ashore, and, under guidance of the Aleut, hastened over the sea-wall and across the flat to the barabbara. All was deserted and silent! No smoke issued from the roof, and not the slightest sound was to be heard. No boat appeared at the shore of the lagoon. The Aleut chief threw himself on the ground and began to chant.

Mr. Hazlett kicked open the door of the hut and pushed in, searching the half-dark interior. Only the whitened ashes showed a former human occupancy. It was not until, in his

despair, he had turned to leave that he saw, fastened by a peg to the inside of the door, a brief note on a bit of paper.

"Mr. Richard Hazlett," it read. "All well. We sailed about July 30th. Love to the folks." Signed to this were the names of the three boys.

"God bless them!" he muttered. "They knew I'd come! Why did I not come soon enough! But where did they sail—which way—and what has become of them?" [Pg 284]

He turned to the grovelling native.

"You lying coward!" said he. "Take me to them now, or by the Lord you'll swing for it! Do you hear?"

The old man wept bitterly. "My boys go, too," he wailed. "Bad mans go, maybe so! Maybe so all dead now!"

In answer he was caught by the arm and hastened back to the gravely waiting boat crew. It was a saddened party which reported the truth on board the *Bennington*.

"Get under way, Mr. Cummings!" ordered Captain Stephens. "We've not lost them yet. The writing is pretty fresh on that note. We haven't passed them anywhere below, and they must be on their way back to Kadiak."

Without delay the *Bennington* once more took up her course and, emerging from the mouth of Kaludiak, headed northward up the east side of the island. Within ten miles the sharp-eyed Aleut detected a flat bit of beach, and the interpreter suggested that a boat be sent ashore to examine it, as it was sometimes used as a camping-place. When the lieutenant returned he reported that he had found poles cut not long before and used as a shelter support. A fire had been built not more than a week ago, in his belief. It might or might not be the camping-place of the missing boys. [Pg 285]

The face of Captain Stephens brightened. "Of course it's those boys!" he said. "I tell you, those youngsters are *sailors*. We'll find them all lined up on Kadiak dock waiting for us—and me obliged to report to Washington that I've spent two months with this vessel hunting for them! God bless my soul!" However, it was satisfaction and not anxiety which caused his eyes to glisten.

Precautions were not ceased, and the boats continued to comb out every open bay which could not be searched with the ship's glasses. Finally they reached the mouth of Eagle Harbor, near the entrance to which the boats discovered yet another camp-fire, probably marking the limits of another day's journey of the young voyagers.

"Plucky little dogs—plucky!" grumbled the captain. "They're not old women like you, Hazlett! They can take care of themselves all right!"

The interpreter stepped up. "The old man says there's a village at the head of this harbor," he began. "Says there may be a few people living there, though most of them have likely gone to the fisheries. He thinks the village ought to be examined." [Pg 286]

"Go in with the boat, Mr. Cummings!" ordered Captain Stephens. "It'll keep you overnight. As for me, I don't dare risk the tide-rips between these rocks and that big island over there—which must be Ugak Island, I suspect. I'm going to drop back and go outside that island, and to-morrow I'll meet you thirty miles up the coast. Comb out the bay! If the boys have left the village they've very likely sailed for the opposite point of this bay, and maybe you'll get word of them at one place or the other."

XXXIII

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SAVED!

It was a night of anxiety and expectation on the *Bennington*, and, as the cutter swung at anchor north of the bold and dangerous point of Ugak Island, every one on board was astir at early dawn.

"Boat on the larboard bow, sir!" reported an ensign, soon after Captain Stephens was known to be awake in his cabin.

"What boat is it?" inquired the latter, eagerly, throwing open the dead-light of his room and gazing out along the shore.

"It's our boat, sir, with Lieutenant Cummings."

"Any passengers aboard?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

The captain slammed shut the dead-light and turned moodily to his desk. He did not seem to enjoy the breakfast which one of the cook's men presently brought to him.

"Tell Lieutenant Cummings to report as soon as he comes aboard," he commanded.

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Lieutenant Cummings, however, far from being discouraged, was much elated when he appeared, smiling, at the captain's door.

"They slept at the village, sir," he said. "Five persons in all. Everybody's gone from the village but one or two old people, and these report that the boys came in there for water and to see what news they could get. They had a young native boy with them and a full-grown Aleut. They put him in irons—"

"Put him in irons!" roared Captain Stephens. "God bless my soul! Those young rascals will be sending out to look after *us* before long! Sailors!—and they've got a man in *irons*!"

"They say the Aleut was afraid to go to town," resumed the lieutenant, "and tried to escape. They halted him and kept him under guard all night. The five of them left yesterday about noon, and as they were seen not far from the mouth of the bay toward evening, they're very likely camped not far around the point yonder, sir."

"Get under way!" ordered Captain Stephens. "I've got a little professional pride about this thing, and I don't want those youngsters to beat the *Bennington* into port! Full speed ahead!"

Half an hour later the *Bennington* poked her nose around the next bold promontory of the east coast of Kadiak. One more broad bay lay before them.

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Tossing up and down on the waves, half-way or more across, was a small, dark object!

The eyes of the old Aleut were first to discover this, and he began to shout and gesticulate as several pairs of glasses were turned upon it. Old Captain Stephens broke out in a string of nautical ejaculations, which need not be printed in full. "Look at that!" he cried. "Talk about *sailors*! See 'em go! They wouldn't reef a point if they could—and I guess they can't, for they seem to have a board or something for a sail. And they've got leeboards down. They've got two oars out for steering-gear. By the great horn spoon! Cummings, crack on more steam or they'll beat us to New York! Why, dash my eyes, Hazlett, you old woman, didn't I *tell* you you couldn't lose those boys?"

The gentleman whom he addressed smiled rather crookedly but could find no speech.

The whistle of the *Bennington* roared out three times in salute. At once the distant dory came about and laid a long tack to intercept the course of the cutter. In a few minutes she was within hailing distance. The crew of the *Bennington* were along the rail, and without orders they greeted the young sailors with a cheer.

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"By gad!" said Captain Stephens, turning away. "It's worth a couple of months of Uncle Sam's time to see a thing like that. There's where we get our *men*! Safe? Humph!"

Rob, John, and Jesse, all ragged and bare-headed, stood up in the pitching dory, calling out and waving their hands. First they passed up their prisoner, and an instant later they were on board and in the middle of excited greetings. These over, they hurriedly explained the events covering the strange situations which have been recounted in our earlier pages. Meantime, Skookie was standing silently and stolidly at the side of his father, who made no such great excitement over him. The boys now introduced him, with the highest praise for his faithfulness and a plea that something be done for his reward.

"So far as that is concerned," said Mr. Hazlett, "every decent native concerned in this shall have more than justice done to him. I'll put the boy into the Mission School at Wood Island, if he likes, and he shall have all the clothes he needs, and something besides. It's lucky for this bunch of natives that we don't put them all in jail. How about this man they tell me you've been keeping prisoner?" continued Uncle Dick.

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"Please, sir," said Rob, earnestly, "don't be hard with him. I'm not sure that we understand all about the way these natives think. He tried to get away from us, and we tied him up because we needed him as a pilot. We didn't know the way back to town, you see, because when we came down the coast it was all in a fog and we couldn't see anything."

"Rather risky pilot, from what I hear," commented Uncle Dick.

"I believe he was more scared than anything else," went on Rob. "He never really made us any trouble, and he did a lot of work for us for which we have promised him pay. We've got to keep our word to all these people, you know. But, if you please, we'd rather pay money to them than to give up our rifles; and we'd like Jesse's rifle back."

"That will be easy," said Uncle Dick. "All these people will count themselves fortunate. But what a lot of them we'll have to ship back down the coast to Old Harbor—I suppose we'll have to charter a schooner for that!"

"I say, Uncle Dick," broke in John, eagerly, "if you send a schooner down, *couldn't we boys go along with her?*" [Pg 292]

Uncle Dick looked at him quizzically for a moment.

"You could not!" he answered, briefly.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE YOUNG ALASKANS ***

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