

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Connie Morgan in the Fur Country

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Connie Morgan in the Fur Country

Author: James B. Hendryx

Release date: April 21, 2009 [eBook #28574]

Most recently updated: January 4, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by K Nordquist, Greg Bergquist and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net> (This book was produced from scanned images of public domain material from the Google Print project.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONNIE MORGAN IN THE FUR COUNTRY

Transcriber's Note

The punctuation and spelling from the original text have been faithfully preserved. Only obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

Connie Morgan in the Fur Country

By James B. Hendryx
· ILLUSTRATED ·

By James B. Hendryx

The Promise

The Gun Brand

The Texan

The Gold Girl

Prairie Flowers

Connie Morgan in Alaska

Connie Morgan with the Mounted

Connie Morgan in the Lumber Camps

Connie Morgan in the Fur Country



"For there, standing close beside the fire, his head and huge shoulders thrust into the doorway, his eyes gleaming like live coals, stood the great grey leader of the wolf pack."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

CONNIE MORGAN IN THE FUR COUNTRY

BY
JAMES B. HENDRYX
AUTHOR OF "CONNIE MORGAN IN ALASKA," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED

G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

The Knickerbocker Press

1921

Copyright, 1921
by
James B. Hendryx

Made in the United States of America



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—DOG, OR WOLF?	1
II.—'MERICAN JOE	17
III.—NERVE	32
IV.—BRASS	49
V.—THE PLAGUE FLAG IN THE SKY	76
VI.—AT THE END OF RENÉ'S TRAIL	95
VII.—AT FORT NORMAN	111
VIII.—BAIT—AND A BEAR	123
IX.—OUT ON THE TRAP LINE	138
X.—THE TRAIL OF THE <i>CARCAJO</i>	149
XI.—THE CARIBOU HUNT	168
XII.—THE TRAIL IN THE SNOW	184
XIII.—AT THE CAMP OF THE <i>HOCH</i> -RUNNERS	200

XIV.—THE PASSING OF BLACK MORAN	216
XV.—SETTING THE FOX TRAPS	238
XVI.—THE VOICE FROM THE HILL	254
XVII.—THE LAKE-OF-THE-FOX-THAT-YELLS	269
XVIII.—THE MAN IN THE CAVE	290

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"FOR THERE, STANDING CLOSE BESIDE THE FIRE, HIS HEAD AND HUGE SHOULDERS THRUST INTO THE DOORWAY, HIS EYES GLEAMING LIKE LIVE COALS, STOOD THE GREAT GREY LEADER OF THE WOLF PACK" <i>Frontispiece</i>	
"IN THE WHIRLING BLIZZARD, WITHOUT PROTECTION OF TIMBER, ONE PLACE WAS AS GOOD AS ANOTHER TO CAMP, AND WHILE THE INDIAN BUSIED HIMSELF WITH THE DOGS, CONNIE PROCEEDED TO DIG A TRENCH IN THE SNOW"	54
"THE THIRD DAY DAWNED COLD AND CLEAR, AND DAYLIGHT FOUND THE OUTFIT ON THE MOVE"	70
"IT WAS A TERRIBLE THING TO LOOK UPON TO THOSE TWO WHO KNEW ITS SIGNIFICANCE—THAT FLAG GLOWING LIKE A SPLOTCH OF BLOOD THERE IN THE BRAZEN SKY"	80
"THE SNARE WAS SET ONLY A FOOT OR TWO FROM THE STUFFED RABBIT SKIN AND STICKS AND BRUSH SO ARRANGED THAT IN ORDER TO REACH THE RABBIT THE LYNX MUST LEAP STRAIGHT INTO THE SNARE"	130
"MERICAN JOE CLIMBED THE TREE AND A FEW MINUTES LATER CONNIE HEARD THE BLOWS OF HIS BELT AX AS HE HACKED AT THE LIMB THAT HELD THE CLOG"	156
"AS DARKNESS SETTLED OVER THE NORTH COUNTRY, A LITTLE FIRE TWINKLED IN THE BUSH, AND THE ODOUR OF SIZZLING BACON AND FRYING LIVER PERMEATED THE COZY CAMP"	182
"AS HE STEPPED THROUGH THE DOORWAY HE WAS SEIZED VIOLENTLY FROM BEHIND"	218

CHAPTER I

DOG, OR WOLF?

IN the little cabin on Ten Bow Waseche Bill laid his week-old newspaper aside, knocked the ashes from his pipe against the edge of the woodbox, and listened to the roar of the wind. After a few moments he rose and opened the door, only to slam it immediately as an icy blast, freighted with a million whirling flakes of snow, swept the room. Resuming his seat, he proceeded very deliberately to refill his pipe. This accomplished to his satisfaction, he lighted it, crammed some wood into the little air-tight stove, and tilted his chair back against the log wall.

"Well, son, what is it?" he asked, after a few moments of silence during which he had watched his young partner, Connie Morgan, draw rag after rag through the barrel of his rifle. [Pg 2]

"What's what?" asked the boy, without looking up.

"What's on yo' mind? The last five patches yo've drug through that gun was as clean when they come out as when they went in. Yo' ain't cleanin' no rifle—yo' studyin' 'bout somethin'."

Connie rested the rifle upon his knees and smiled across the little oilcloth-covered table: "Looks like winter has come in earnest," he said. "Listen to her trying to tear the roof off. I've been wishing it would snow for a week."

"Snow fer a week?"

"No. Wishing for a week."

"Well, now it's come, what yo' goin' to do with it?"

"I'm going out and get that Big Ruff."

"Big Ruff! Yo' mean kill him?"

Connie shook his head: "No. I'm going to catch him. I want him."

Waseche laughed: "What in thunder do yo' want of him, even pervidin' he's a dog, which the chances is he ain't nothin' but a wolf. An' yo' don't even know they's any such brute rompin' the hills, nohow. Stories gits goin' that-a-way. Someone, mebbe, seen a dog or a wolf runnin' the ridge of Spur Mountain late in the evenin' so he looked 'bout half agin the size he was, an' they come along an' told it. Then someone else sees him, er another one, an' he recollects that he heard tell of a monst'us big wolf er dog, he cain't recollect which, so he splits the difference an' makes him half-dog an' half-wolf, an' he adds a big ruff onto his neck fer good measure, an' tells it 'round. After that yo' kin bet that every tin-horn that gits within twenty mile of Spur Mountain will see him, an' each time he gits bigger, an' his ruff gits bigger. It's like a stampede. Yo' let someone pan out mebbe half a dozen ounces of dust on some crick an' by the time the news has spread a hundred mile, he's took out a fortune, an' it's in chunks as big as a pigeon's aig—they ain't nary one of them ever saw a pigeon's aig—but that's always what them chunks is as big as—an' directly the whole crick is staked an' a lot of men goes broke, an' some is killed, an' chances is, the only ones that comes out ahead is the ones that's staked an' sold out." [Pg 3]

"But there are real wolf-dogs—I've seen plenty of 'em, and so have you. And there are real strikes—look at Ten Bow!"

"Yeh, look at it—but I made that strike myself. The boys down to Hesitation know'd that if I said they was colour heah it was heah. They didn't come a kihootin' up heah on the say-so of no tin-horn."

"Yes, and there's a big wolf-dog been over on Spur Mountain for a week, too. I didn't pay any attention when I first heard it. But, Dutch Henry saw him yesterday, and today when Black Jack Demeree came up with the mail he saw him, too." [Pg 4]

Waseche appeared interested: "An' did they say he was as big as a cabin an' a ruff on him like the mainsail of a whaler?"

"No, but they said he was the biggest dog they ever saw, and he has got the big ruff, all right—and he was running with two or three wolves, and he was bigger than any of them."

"Well, if Dutch Henry an' Black Jack seen him," agreed Waseche with conviction, "he's there. But, what in time do yo' want of him? If he was runnin' with wolves he's buildin' him up a pack. He's a bad actor. You take them renegade dogs, an' they're worse than wolves an' worse than dogs—an' they're smarter'n most folks." [Pg 5]

"That's why I want him. I want to make a leader out of him."

"You can't catch him—an' if you could, you couldn't handle him."

"I'll tell you more about that after I've had a try at him," grinned the boy.

"Who's going along?"

"No one. I don't want to divide him up with anyone, and anyone I could hire wouldn't be worth taking along."

"He'll eat you up."

"I hope he tries it! If he ever gets that close to me—he's mine!"

"Or yo'll be his'n," drawled Waseche Bill. "Howevah, if I was bettin' I'd take yo' end of it, at that."

Connie rose, laid the rifle upon the table, and began to overhaul his gear. Waseche watched him for a few moments, and blew a cloud of blue smoke ceilingward: "Seems like yo' jest nach'llly cain't set by an' take things easy," he said; "heah's yo', with mo' money than yo' kin eveh spend, gittin' ready to hike out an' live like a Siwash in the bush when yo' c'd go outside fer the winteh, an' live in some swell hotel an' nothin' to do but r'ar back in one of them big leatheh chairs with yo' feet in the window an' watch the folks go by."

[Pg 6]

Connie flashed him a grin: "You've got as much as I have—and I don't notice you sitting around any swell hotels watching the folks go by."

Waseche's eyes twinkled: and he glanced affectionately at the boy: "No, son. This heah suits me betteh. But, yo' ain't even satisfied to stay heah in the cabin. When my laig went bad on me an' I had to go outside, you hit out an' put in the time with the Mounted, then last winteh, 'stead of taking it easy, you hit out fo' Minnesota an' handed that timbeh thievin' bunch what was comin' to 'em."

"Well, it paid, didn't it?"

"Sho' it paid—an' the work with the Mounted paid—not in money, but in what yo' learnt. But you don't neveh take things easy. Yo' pa was like that. I reckon it's bred in the bone."

[Pg 7]

Connie nodded: "Yes, and this winter I've got a trip planned out that will make all the others look piking. I'm going over and have a look at the Coppermine River country—over beyond the Mackenzie."

Waseche Bill stared at the boy in astonishment: "Beyond the Mackenzie!" he exclaimed, then his voice dropped into a tone softly sarcastic. "Yo' ought to have a right pleasant trip. It ain't oveh a thousan' miles oah so, an' only about fifteen er twenty mountain ranges to cross. The trail ought to be right nice an' smooth an' plain marked. An' when yo' git theah yo' sho' ought to enjoy yo'self. I caint' think of no place in the world a man had ought to keep away from worse than right theah. Why, son, they tell me that beyond the Mackenzie they ain't *nothin'*!"

"There's gold—and copper," defended the boy.

"Did Dutch Henry an' Black Jack Demeree tell yo' that, too?"

Connie laughed: "No, I read about it in a book."

Waseche snorted contemptuously, "Read it in a book! Look a heah, son, it don't stand to reason that if anyone know'd they was gold an' coppeh up theah they'd be foolin' away theah time writin' books about it, does it? No suh, they'd be be right up amongst it scoopin' it out of the gravel, that's wheah they'd be! Books is redic'lus."

[Pg 8]

"But the man that wrote the book didn't know where the gold is——"

"You bet he didn't! That's the way with these heah fellows that writes books. They don't know enough about gold to make 'em a livin' diggin' it—so they write a book about it. They's mo' ways than one to make a livin' out of gold—like sellin' fake claims, an' writin' books."

"I'm going to roll in, now, because I want to get an early start. It's that book up there on the shelf with the green cover. You read it, and when I come back with Big Ruff, we'll talk it over."

Again Waseche snorted contemptuously, but a few minutes later as he lay snuggled between his blankets, Connie smiled to himself to see his big partner take the book from the shelf, light his pipe, and after settling himself comfortably in his chair, gingerly turn its pages.

Spur Mountain is not really a mountain at all. It is a long sparsely timbered ridge only about seven hundred feet in height that protrudes into the valley of the Ten Bow, for all the world like a giant spur. The creek doubles sharply around the point of the spur which slants upward to a deep notch or pass in the range that separates the Ten Bow from the valley of the Tanana.

[Pg 9]

It was past noon when Connie Morgan swung his dogs from the creek-bed and headed back along the base of the spur toward the main range. He had covered the fifteen miles slowly, being forced almost constantly to break trail ahead of the dogs through the new-fallen snow.

He turned into a patch of timber that slanted obliquely upward to the crest of the ridge, and working his outfit halfway to the top, pitched his tent on a narrow ledge or shoulder, protected from every direction by the ridge itself, and by the thick spruce timber. The early darkness had settled when he finished making camp and as he ate his supper he watched the stars appear one

by one in the heavens. After replenishing his fire, he removed his *mukluks* and mackinaw, and slipped into his sleeping bag.

Two hours later he opened his eyes and listened. From beyond the ridge—far down the valley of the Ten Bow, floated the long-drawn howl of a wolf. A moment of silence followed, and from across the valley sounded an answering call. Outside the little tent a dog whined softly. The boy smiled as his eyes rested for a moment upon the glowing coals of his fire. "What anybody wants to live in a city for when they can lie out in the timber and listen to that, is more than I know—I love it!" The next moment he was sitting bolt upright, his hands fighting his sleeping bag, as the hair of his scalp seemed to rise like the quills of an enraged porcupine, and a peculiar tickly chill ran down his spine. The silence of the night was shattered by a sound so terrible that his blood seemed to chill at the horror of it. It was a wolf cry—but unlike the cry of any wolf he had ever heard. There was a swift rush of dark bodies and Connie's four dogs dived into the tent, knocking him over in their haste, their feet scratching up a shower of snow which caused the glowing coals of the little fire to sizzle and smoke. The cry of the wolves had floated—but this new cry seemed to hurl itself through the night—a terrifying crescendo of noise that sounded at once a challenge and wail. For a full minute after the sound ceased the boy sat tense and motionless, staring wide-eyed beyond the fire, while behind him, in the farthest corner of the tent the *malamutes* huddled and whined. Then he shook himself and laughed. "Some howl!" he muttered, "I bet they heard that in Ten Bow. That's the Big Ruff, all right—and he ain't far away."

Hastily wriggling from his sleeping bag the boy drew on his *mukluks* and mackinaw and stepped from the tent. Overhead the stars glittered brilliantly, and he noted with satisfaction that objects were visible at a distance of several hundred yards against the background of new-fallen snow. Drawing a heavy parka over his mackinaw, he fastened on his snowshoes, caught up his rifle, and headed upward for the crest of the ridge. "Maybe I can get a look at him anyway," he thought. "He'll gather his wolves and the chances are that sometime before morning they'll run the ridge."

A half-hour later the boy slipped into a tangle of brush that marked the upper end of his patch of timber. The bare summit of the ridge stretched away in the half-light to merge in a mysterious blur with the indistinct valley of the Ten Bow. The wind was blowing gently from the ridge and the boy figured that if the wolf pack followed the summit as he hoped, they must pass within twenty yards of him. "If it don't go and cloud up before they get here I can see 'em plain as day," he thought, as he settled himself comfortably for his long wait. An hour passed and the boy was thankful he had thought to bring his parka. Mushing a hard trail, a man can dispense with his parka at twenty degrees below zero, but sitting still, even at zero, the heavy moosehide garment is indispensable. For another hour Connie divided his attention between watching the fantastic changes of pale aurora and scanning the distant reach of the ridge. He shifted his weight to his other hip to stretch a cramped leg; and suddenly became motionless as a stone. Far down the ridge his trained eye had caught a blur of motion. His fists clenched in anticipation as he stared into the dim distance. Yes, there it was again—something moving, like a swift shadow along the bald surface of the snow. Again the silent shadow shape vanished and again it appeared—nearer, now—near enough so that the boy could distinguish not one, but many shapes. In fascination he watched that silent run of the wolf pack. Nearer they swept, running easily and swiftly along the wind-swept ridge. Instinctively Connie reached for his rifle but withdrew his arm before his hand touched the weapon.

There were ten or twelve wolves in all, but his attention was riveted upon the leader. Never in his life had he seen such an animal. In the starlight his coat gleamed like molten silver in contrast with the dark tawny coats of the pack that ran at his heels. They reached a point nearly opposite to the boy's hiding place, and distant not more than fifty yards, when suddenly the huge leader halted in his tracks. So sudden was his action that the wolves running behind him were unable to stop until they had carried six or eight yards beyond. One or two jostled the leader in passing and were rewarded with swift, silent slashes of his great jaws. Luckily for themselves, the culprits escaped death by inches, and leaping swiftly aside, mingled with their companions, while the great grey leader stood squarely upon his feet sniffing the air.

Connie's heart raced wildly as he stared at the magnificent animal. It seemed incredible that the brute had caught his scent against the wind, and yet, if not, why had he halted so suddenly? And why did he stand there sniffing the air? The wolves settled upon their haunches with tongues a-loll and eyed their leader, or moved nervously back and forth in the background sniffing inquisitively. During this interval the boy took in every detail of the great brute he had set out to capture. More conspicuous even than his great size was the enormous ruff of long hair that covered the animal's neck and shoulders—a feature that accentuated immeasurably the ferocious appearance of the pointed wolfish muzzle and gleaming eyes. Every detail of coat, of muzzle, of eyes, of ears, or of legs bespoke the wolf breed—but there were other details—and the heart of the boy leaped as he noted them. The deep, massive chest, the peculiar poise of the head, and the over-curl of the huge brush of the tail showed unmistakably the breed of the dog. "I wonder what his heart is?" thought Connie. "Is it wolf, or dog, or part wolf and a part dog?" As these thoughts flashed through his mind the boy saw the great grey shape turn abruptly and trot toward the opposite side of the ridge at a right angle to his former course. The wolves followed at a respectful distance and as they disappeared over the crest Connie wriggled from his place of

concealment and crawling to the top, peered down the slope.

The wolves had vanished completely. Nothing was in sight except the long white sweep of snow, with here and there a black patch of bushes and scrub. He was about to return to his camp when, from one of the patches of scrub burst a scattering of tawny shapes. Singly, and in groups of two or three, crowding each other in their mad haste, they fled into the open and ranging themselves in a semicircle, waited expectantly. Presently another wolf emerged from the thicket, dragging himself on his belly, ploughing the snow. As Connie watched curiously he noticed that the wide, flat trail left by the slowly crawling wolf showed broad, dark streaks and blotches. The waiting wolves knew the meaning of that darkened trail and the next moment they were upon him. Connie shifted his position for a better view of this midnight tragedy of the wild, when his foot caught under a root concealed by the snow and he pitched heavily forward. To save himself he grasped the dead branch of a stunted tree. The branch snapped with a report that rang through the silence of the night like an explosion and the boy pitched headforemost into the snow. The great grey leader shot from the scrub, and with the pack at his heels disappeared in the thicker timber at the base of the ridge.

[Pg 16]

CHAPTER II

[Pg 17]

'MERICAN JOE

WHEN Connie regained his feet Spur Mountain was silent as the tomb, and for several moments he stood motionless gazing at the tawny shape that lay still at the end of the stained trail, and at the patch of scrub from which the shape had emerged. What was in that dark patch of brush? Why had the wolves burst from it in terror? Why had the great leader stayed until the snapping of the limb had frightened him away? And what had happened to the wolf that lay dead in the snow? Slowly the boy returned to his hiding place, picked up his rifle, and descended the slope toward the patch of scrub. He stooped to examine the body of the wolf. As he rolled it over his thoughts leaped to the great grey leader. "Maybe his heart's all wolf," he muttered thoughtfully, as he stared at the long slash that extended from the bottom of the flank upward almost to the backbone—a slash as clean as if executed with a sharp knife, and through which the animal's entrails had protruded and his life blood had gushed to discolour the snow. "What did he do it for?" wondered Connie as he turned from the carcass and proceeded cautiously into the scrub.

[Pg 18]

Ten yards in he stumbled over a snow-covered object. It was a sledge of curious design. "That's no Alaska sled," he muttered, as he stared about him, his eyes seeking to pierce the darker gloom of the scrub. A few feet from him was a curious white mound. Before the mound were many wolf tracks, and there it was that the blotched trail began. Moving cautiously, the boy examined the irregular snow-covered mound. At the point where the wolf tracks converged he noticed a small triangular patch of darkness close to the ground. Stooping he examined it closely and found to his surprise that it was the opening of a shelter tent or wikiup. Dropping upon his hands and knees he peered inside. In the darkness he could make out nothing. Throwing off his mittens, he lighted a match, and as the tiny flame threw its feeble light upon the interior he made out at the farther side a gruesome looking mound of blankets. The match burned his finger tips and the miserable shelter was once more plunged in blackness. Involuntarily Connie shuddered. His first inclination was to leave that place—to return to his camp and harness his dogs and hit the back trail for Ten Bow—then, tomorrow—Even with the thought his jaw stiffened: "If I do it'll be because I'm afraid," he sneered. "What would my dad have done? What would Waseche do? Or Dan McKeever? Or any of the boys? The very last thing in the world they would do would be to run away! And I won't either. The first thing is to find out who he is and how he comes to be lying dead way up here on Spur Mountain."

[Pg 19]

Methodically the boy kicked the snow back from the door of the low shelter tent, and gathering some dry branches built a fire. Then he crawled inside, and by the light of the crackling flames proceeded to examine the interior. One glance told the story. A battered aluminum kettle, a small frying pan, and a canvas bag which contained nothing but a small handful of tea, and the blankets he was wrapped in, constituted the man's whole outfit. There was no grub—no weapon of any kind with which to procure grub. He laid a hand on the blanket to roll the man toward the light—and started so violently that he sent the frying pan rattling against the kettle. For, instead of the rigid corpse of solid ice he had expected to find, the blanket yielded beneath the pressure of his hand! Either the man was alive, or had died so recently that his body had not had time to freeze! Recovering himself instantly, Connie ran his hand beneath the blanket. Yes, he was alive—there was heat there—not much—but enough body-warmth to show that he still lived. Scooping up a kettle of snow the boy set it upon the fire and, as it melted, without uncovering the man, he fell to beating him with his fists, to stimulate the lagging circulation. Heating the frying pan he thrust it into the canvas bag and slipped it under the blankets and went on with his beating. When the water began to boil, he withdrew the bag and threw the tea into the kettle. Then he removed the outer blanket and succeeded in rolling the unconscious form nearer to the fire. When he uncovered the face he saw that the man was an Indian—a young buck of twenty-five or thirty, and he wondered the more at his plight. Removing the kettle from the fire, he set it beside

[Pg 20]

[Pg 21]

him and succeeded in propping the Indian's head upon his knees. With a tin cup, he dipped some scalding tea from the kettle and allowing it to cool a little, dropped a small quantity between the man's lips. At the third dose, the Indian shuddered slightly, his lips moved, and he swallowed feebly. The next time he swallowed as much as a spoonful, and then, double that amount. After that his recovery was rapid. Before the cup was half empty he had opened his eyes and blinked foolishly into Connie's face. He gulped eagerly at the hot liquid, but the boy would allow him only a mouthful at a time. When the cup was empty Connie refilled it. The Indian's lips moved. He seemed to be trying to speak.

"Talk English?" encouraged the boy with a smile.

The other nodded: "Yes—*kloshe wawa*—me spik good."

"What's your name—*kahta mika nem*?"

The Indian seemed delighted to find that the boy could speak the jargon. He smiled: "*Nika nem* 'Merican Joe." And having imparted the information, plunged into a rabble of jargon that the boy was at his wit's end to follow.

[Pg 22]

He stopped him in the middle of it: "Look here, 'Merican Joe, you talk English—she best to talk. You know all 'bout English?"

"Yes."

"Well, you talk it then. Listen—I've got a camp over across the ridge. Plenty grub. I go get grub. You stay here. Half an hour I come back. We eat big."

The Indian nodded vigorously, and as Connie turned toward the door he recoiled, and involuntarily drew the knife from his belt. For there, standing close beside the fire, his head and huge shoulders thrust into the doorway, his eyes gleaming like live coals, stood the great grey leader of the wolf pack!

'Merican Joe struggled to his elbow and stretched his hand toward the superb brute: "Ah, come Leloo! *Nika skookum tkope leloo!*" (My big white wolf). With a bound the great animal was at the Indian's side, nuzzling, rooting at him, licking his hands and face with his long red tongue. Connie sat fascinated at the sight, as the Indian tugged playfully at the pointed ears and buried his hand in the long shimmering hair of the enormous ruff. Then the great brute settled down close against the blanket and, raising his head, eyed Connie indifferently, and as if to emphasize his indifference he opened his huge jaws in a prodigious yawn—a yawn that exposed the interior of his cavernous mouth with its wealth of gleaming fangs.

[Pg 23]

The Indian thumped the brute on the ribs and pointed to the boy. "*Skookum tillicum.*" Leloo rose, stalked to the boy, deliberately sniffed him over from top to toe, and resumed his place.

"Is he yours?" asked Connie eagerly. "Where did you get him? Have you got any more of 'em?"

'Merican Joe laughed: "No—no more! No more lak heem een de worl'. Leloo you frien', now. You com' een de daytam—een de night—Leloo no hurt."

"I hope you're right," laughed the boy, "I'm going after that grub now." And throwing some more wood on the fire, he slipped from the scrub. As he did so, there was a scattering of tawny shapes, and where the carcass of the dead wolf had been, there were only gnawed fragments of bones.

When he returned Leloo met him at the edge of the scrub, eyed him for a moment, and turning deliberately, led the way to the shelter tent.

[Pg 24]

Connie viewed 'Merican Joe's attack on the food with alarm. In vain he cautioned the Indian to go slow—to eat lightly at first—but his only answer was a grin, and a renewed attack on the grub. The boy had brought with him from the camp, three cans of baked beans, a bag of pilot bread, and several pounds of pemmican, and not until the last vestige of food was consumed, did 'Merican Joe even pause. Then he licked his fingers and asked for more. Connie told him that in the morning they would break camp and hit for Ten Bow. Also, that when they crossed the ridge he could have all the grub he wanted, and with that the Indian had to content himself. While 'Merican Joe ate the boy cooked up some fish for Leloo, who accepted it from his hand and then settled himself beside him upon the blanket.

"Where did you come from? And where are you are going? And how did you come to be out of grub?" asked Connie, when 'Merican Joe had lighted a villainous looking black pipe.

"Me—I'm com' far," he pointed toward the east. "I'm goin' to Kuskokwim. A'm liv' on Kuskokwim—be'n gon' t'ree year. I'm los' my outfit w'en de ice brek on Charley River, 'bout ten day 'go."

[Pg 25]

"And you kept on for the Kuskokwim without any grub, and with no rifle!"

"Yes—I'm lucky I'm hav' my blankets an' kettle on de front of de sled—de ice no ketch."

"But where did you get the dog—or wolf—or whatever Leloo is?"

"I'm git heem ver' far—" again he paused and pointed to the east.

"Beyond the big mountains?"

"Yes."

"Beyond the big river—the Mackenzie?"

"Yes. I'm desert from de whaler wan year 'go. I com' on de—w'at you call Innuut. I liv' wit dem long tam. All tam snow. All tam ice. All tam col'. 'Cross de big water—de sea—" he pointed north. "Cross on ice. Com' on de lan'—beeg lan', all rock, an' snow an' ice. We hunt de musk ox. T'ree, four day we mush nort'. *Spose* bye-m-bye we fin' ol' *igloo*. Woof! Out jomp de beeg white wolf! Mor' bigger as any wolf I ever seen. I take my rifle an' shoot heem, an' w'en de shot mak' de beeg noise, out com' anudder wan. She aint' so beeg—an' she ain' white lak de beeg wolf. She ron an' smell de dead wolf. She look on us. She look on our sled dogs. She com' close. Den she run off agin. An' she mak' all de tam de leetle whine. She ain' no wolf—she dog! Bye-m-bye she ron back in *igloo*. Ol' Sen-nick him say dat bad medicine—but me, I ain' care 'bout de Innuut medicine, an' I fol' de dog. I start to crawl een de *igloo* an' dat dog she growl lak she gon eat me oop. I com' back an' mak' de snare an' pull her out, an' I gon' on een, an' I fin' wan leetle pup. He ees de gran pup. Him look lak de beeg white wolf an' I ketch um. Een de snow w'ere de roof cave een sticks out som' seal-skin *mukluks*. Lays a dead man dere. I tak hol' an' try to pull um out but she too mooch froze. So I quit try an' lef' heem dere."

[Pg 26]

"Was it a white man?" cried Connie.

'Merican Joe shook his head: "I ain' know—I can't pull heem out. Dat good plac' to lef' heem anyhow. He frooze lak' de iron. I hont roun' an' he ain' lef' no grub. Him starve an' freeze, an' hees dogs is all dead but wan, an' she mate oop wit' de beeg white wolf. I giv' ol' Sen-nick de dog an' I kep' de pup. See, Leloo ees de pup. Mos' two year ol'—an' de bes' sled dog een all de worl'!"

[Pg 27]

As Connie watched 'Merican Joe refill his pipe he thought how near history had come to repeating itself. The boy studied Leloo as he lay quiet upon the edge of the blanket. He had heard of the great white wolves that inhabit the drear lone lands that lie beyond the arctic coast—larger even than the grey caribou wolves of the barren lands. He knew, now, that these stories were true.

"You called Leloo a dog," he said, "but he's only half dog, and sometime he may turn wolf."

'Merican Joe shrugged: and eyed the great wolf-dog sombrely: "No, him ain' never turn wolf—Leloo. Him half-wolf—half-dog, but de wolf an' de dog ain' separat', lak de front legs, an' de hin' legs. De wolf an' de dog is mix', lak de color een de hair. You savvy? Leloo ain' never all wolf—an' he ain' never all dog. All de tam' he wolf an' dog mix'."

Connie nodded eagerly. "I see!" he answered, and his thoughts flew to the great brute he had seen only a few hours before running at the head of the wolf pack. No hint of the dog in that long-drawn wolf-howl that had brought him tensely erect in his tent and started the hair roots to prickling along his scalp, and no hint of the dog in the silent slashes with which he had resented the crowding of the pack. And yet a few moments later he had defended his helpless master from that same wolf pack—and in defending him with the devotion of the dog, he had ripped with the peculiar flank-slash that is the death thrust of the wolf. Later, in the tent, he had fawned dog-like upon his master—but, wolf-like, the fawning had been soundless.

[Pg 28]

"You know Leloo well," he said.

'Merican Joe smiled: "I raised heem from de pup. I learn heem to pull. He ees de gran' leader. I train heem to hont de caribou—de moose—de deer. I show you som' tam. He kin fight—kill any dog—any wolf. He ain' never git tire. He work all day lak de dog—an' all night mebbe-so he ron wit' de wolf-pack."

"You say you've been over east of the Mackenzie; is there gold over there?"

"I ain' see no gold."

"I'm going over there."

"W'en you go?"

"Just as soon as I can get an outfit together."

"Me—I'm goin' 'long."

"Going along! Will you go?"

'Merican Joe nodded: "You *skookum tillicum*. 'Merican Joe, she dead—she starve—she froze—you com' 'long, mak' de fire—give de grub—I ain' dead no mor'. I go 'long."

[Pg 29]

"Do you think there's a good chance to prospect over there? What's the formation?"

"I ain' know mooch 'bout dat, w'at you call, fo'mation. Plent' riv—plent' crick. Mebbe-so plent' gol'—I ain' know. But, on de barrens is Injuns. W'en I com' way from de Innuut, I fin' um. Dey got

plent' fur. Eef you got nuff stake for tradin' outfit you mak' de beeg money—you ain' care eef de gol' aint' dere."

"You meaning trading with the Indians—free trading?"

"Yes—de free traders skin 'em—dey cheat 'em—an' sell de hooch—"

"But—the Hudson's Bay Company! How about them?"

"De H.B.C. all right—but dey ain' go out after de Injun. Dey got de reg'lar post. De Injun got to mush mebbe-so mor' as hondre mile—two hondre. *Spose* de free traders ketch um firs'. De Injun never git to de post. You got nuff for de stake?"

[Pg 30]

Connie laughed: "Yes, I've got enough for the stake, all right. But I'm not so keen for the trading outfit. We can take along some traps, though, and if there isn't any gold—we'll take out some fur. And, you'll sure go with me? When can you start?"

The Indian glanced out of the low door. "It daylight—le's go."

"But, how about the Kuskokwim?"

'Merican Joe shrugged. "Kuskokwim kin wait. She ain' no good. Me—I'm stay 'long wit' you. You pay me wages w'at you want. I good man—me. You wait—I show you. You good man, too. I seen plent' good man—plent' bad man—I know—me."

The Indian reached out his hand, and Connie shook it—and thus was the bargain struck.

"Will you sell Leloo?" asked the boy.

The Indian shook his head: "No!"

"Five hundred dollars?"

"No! Fi' hondre dolla—fi't'ousan' dolla—no!" The Indian crawled out the door followed by Connie and Leloo. Going to the sled, 'Merican Joe picked up a loop of *babiche* line and threw it about Leloo's neck. He handed the end of the line to Connie. "Leloo heem you dog," he said.

[Pg 31]

"What!" cried the boy.

"Heem b'long you—I giv' heem—"

"No! No! Let me buy him."

The Indian drew himself erect: "I ain' sell Leloo. You giv' me my life—I giv' you Leloo. Me—'Merican Joe good man. You good man. Wan good man wit' anodder. It ees frien's."

So Connie Morgan took the line from the hand of 'Merican Joe and as his eyes rested upon the superb lines of the great silver brute, his heart thrilled with the knowledge that he was the possessor of the greatest wolf-dog in all the North.

CHAPTER III

[Pg 32]

NERVE

ON the morning after Connie Morgan had hit the trail for the avowed purpose of capturing the huge wolf-dog that had been reported on Spur Mountain, his big partner, Waseche Bill, lighted his pipe and gazed thoughtfully through the window of the little log office which was situated on the bank of Ten Bow Creek, overlooking the workings. His eyes strayed from the intricate system of pipes and flumes to the cloud of white vapour that rose from the shaft house where the never-tiring steam-point drills forced their way slowly down, down, down into the eternal frost.

"Jest three years ago since me and the kid staked this valley," he mused. "An' now we're rich—an' I'm an 'office miner' with a game laig, an' more gold than I could spend if I lived to be as old as Methooslum."

His glance strayed to the modern building across the creek with its iron roof, and white painted siding. In this building, erected a month before, were the general offices of the partners, the construction and hydraulic engineers, the chemist, the purchasing agent, the paymaster, the bookkeeper, and a score of clerks and stenographers.

[Pg 33]

There, also, Waseche Bill had had his own office, as general manager of the mine, but after an uncomfortable four weeks of hardwood floors, ground glass doors, and polished desk tops, he moved his office into the one-roomed log cabin across the creek, and upon this, the first day of his installation in his new quarters, he grinned happily out of the window as he watched Cain, the construction engineer, wallow through the new-fallen snow and climb the slippery bank, on his first trip of consultation. And Waseche's grin widened as he heard the engineer endeavouring to remove the snow and sticky mud from his boots before entering.

"Stomp 'em off inside, Cain," he called. "The floor's solider, an' you'll have better luck."

"Beastly place for an office!" growled the engineer, as he unrolled a blue print, spread it upon the rough pine desk, and glanced with disapproval about the room. "Your office in the main building was so much more convenient."

[Pg 34]

"Yup," answered Waseche. "That was the trouble. About every five minutes in would pop one of you birds an' pester me with some question or 'nother. What I hire you-all for is to get results. What do I care whether you use a double-jointed conniption valve, or a reverse English injector on the donkey engine, so you get the water into them sluices? Or what do I care whether the bookkeeper keeps all the accounts separate, or adds gum-boots, an' cyanide, an' sandpaper, an' wages all up in one colyumn? Or whether the chemist uses peroxide of magentum, or sweet spirits of rawhide, so he gits the gold? The way it is now, you-all's goin' to do a little figgerin' fer yourself before you'll wade through the water an' mud, or waller through the snow, to git over here. An' besides I cain't think right without I can rare back with my feet on the table an' my back ag'in' a good solid log wall."

Cain, who understood and loved his employer, chuckled heartily. A few minutes later he rolled up the blue print and buttoned his mackinaw. "By the way, Waseche," he said, with his hand in the door latch, "I'm sending you over a stenographer——"

[Pg 35]

"*Me* one!" cried Waseche Bill in alarm.

"Yes, you need one. Be reasonable, and let me talk for a minute. Here you are, one of the gold magnates of Alaska, and a lot of the correspondence that comes in you've got to handle yourself. You know your spelling and Mr. Webster's don't always agree, and your handwriting is almost illegible in pencil—and worse in ink——"

"Well, ain't we got a half dozen stenographers now?"

"Yes, but they're all up to their ears in work, and we've been paying them overtime to transcribe your scrawls into readable English. So I heard of this fellow in Fairbanks, and sent for him. He came in yesterday, with Black Jack Demeree's mail team." Cain's eyes twinkled as he paused and grinned. "He's only been in the country a few weeks—a rank *chechako*—but try to put up with him, because stenographers are hard to get and he seems to be a good one. I'll send him over with a couple of men to carry his outfit. I thought I ought to break the news to you——"

"An' I ort to break your neck," growled Waseche. "But send him along—mebbe my spellin' an', as the fellow says, chiropody, aint what it ort to be—anyway we'll try him."

[Pg 36]

A few minutes later the door opened and a couple of miners entered with a chair and a table, upon which they deposited a typewriter. Waseche glared as the miners withdrew, and a young man of twenty-one or-two stepped into the room. He was a tall, pale young man with store clothes and nose glasses. Waseche continued to glare as the newcomer addressed him:

"Is this Mr. Antrim? I'm the new stenographer. You were expecting me, sir?"

Waseche eyed him from top to toe, and shook his head in resignation. "Well—almost, from what Cain said—but not quite. Was you born in servitude?"

The newcomer shifted his weight to the other foot. "Sir?" he asked, doubtfully.

Waseche deliberately filled his pipe and, tilting his chair against the wall, folded his arms. "Yup—that's what I meant—that 'sir,' an' the 'Mister Antrim.' I ain't no Englishman. I'm an American. I ain't no 'sir,' nor likewise 'mister.' My name's Waseche Bill. It's a good name—good enough to live by, an' to be called by—an' good enough to write at the bottom of a check. What's yourn?"

[Pg 37]

"Percival Lafollette."

"Percival Lafollette," repeated Waseche, gravely rolling the name upon his tongue. "'Was you in the original Floradora Sextette?"

"Why, no, sir——"

"No what?"

"No—no——" stammered Percival, in confusion.

"That's it—no!—just plain *no*! When you've got that said, you're through with that there partic'lar train of thought."

"No—they were girls—the Floradora Sextette."

"So they was," agreed Waseche, solemnly. "Did you bring the mail over?"

"Yes, s—yes, here it is." He placed a handful of letters on the pine table that served as Waseche's desk.

"All right, just take off your cloak an' bonnet, an' pry the lid off that there infernal machine, an' we'll git to work."

A few minutes later the new stenographer stood at attention, notebook in hand. Waseche Bill, who had been watching him closely, noted that he shivered slightly, as he removed his overcoat, and that he coughed violently into a handkerchief. Glancing into the pale face, he asked abruptly: "Sick—lunger?"

[Pg 38]

Percival nodded, and Waseche motioned him close, and when he stood at his side reached out and unbuttoned his vest, then his thin shirt, and took his undershirt between his thumb and finger. Then he snorted in disgust. "Look a-here, young fellow, you an' me might's well have it out. I aint' a-goin' to have no lunger workin' fer me!"

At the words, the other turned a shade paler, buttoned his clothing, and reached for his overcoat.

"Come back here! Where you goin'?"

"Why—I thought——"

"You ain't hired to think. I've got a shanty full of thinkers over acrost the crick. You're hired to spell. An' after a while you'll learn that you'll know more about what I'm sayin' if you wait till I git through. In the first place, fire that there book an' pencil over in the corner, an' put on your coat an' hat an' hit over to Scotty MacDougall's store an' tell him to give you a reg'lar man's outfit of clothes. No wonder you're a lunger; dressin' in them hen-skins! Git plenty of good thick flannel underwear, wool socks, *mukluks*, a couple of pairs of good britches, mackinaw, cap, mittens, sheep-lined overcoat—the whole business, an' charge 'em up to me. You didn't come through from Fairbanks in them things?"

[Pg 39]

"Yes, Mr. Demeree——"

"You mean Black Jack?"

"Yes, Black Jack loaned me a parka."

"Well, git now—an' put them new duds on, an' come back here, pausin' only long enough to stick them hen-skins in the stove—shoes, overcoat, an' the whole mess. You're in a man's country, now, son," continued Waseche in a kindly tone. "An' you've got to look like a man—an' act like a man—an' *be* a man. You've got a lot to live down—with a name like that—an' a woman's job—an' a busted lung—an' a servant's manners. I never seen anyone quite so bad off to start with. What you'll be in a year from now is up to you—an' me. I guarantee you'll have good lungs, an' a man's name—the rest is fer you to do. Git, now—an' hurry back."

The young man opened his lips, but somehow the words would not come, and Waseche interrupted him. "By the way, did you tell anyone your name around here?" he asked.

[Pg 40]

The other shook his head, and as he turned to get his overcoat a commotion drew both to the window. A dog team was climbing the creek bank. Connie Morgan was driving, urging the dogs up the deep slope, and on the sled was an Indian wrapped in blankets. Neither Connie nor the Indian received more than a passing glance, for in the lead of the team, sharp pointed muzzle low to the ground and huge shoulders heaving into the harness, was the great wolf-dog that Connie had found guarding the unconscious form of his master from the attack of the wolf pack. A cry escaped the stenographer's lips and even Waseche gasped as he took in the details of the superb animal.

Percival instinctively drew closer. "It's—it's—the great wolf we saw on the trail! Black Jack Demeree said he'd never seen his like. Oh, he can't get in here, can he?"

Waseche shook the speaker roughly by the shoulder. "Yes—he can," he answered. "He'll be in here in just about a minute—an' here's where you start bein' a man. Don't you squinch back—if he eats you up! The next ten minutes will make or break you, for good an' all." And hardly were the words out of his mouth than the door burst open and Connie entered the office, closely followed by the Indian and Leloo, the great ruffed wolf-dog.

[Pg 41]

"I got him, Waseche!" he cried. "He's mine! I'll tell you all about it later—this is 'Merican Joe."

The Indian nodded and grinned toward the boy.

"*Skookum tillicum*," he grunted.

"You bet!" assented Waseche, and as Connie led the great dog to him, the man laid his hand on the huge ruff of silvered hair.

"Some dog, son," he said. "The best I ever seen." He flashed a swift glance at Percival who stood at his side, and saw that his face was white as death, that his lips were drawn into a thin, bloodless line, and that little beads of sweat stood out like dew on the white brow. But even as he looked, the stenographer stretched out his hand and laid it on the great dog's head, and he, too, stroked the silvery hair of the great ruff.

Waseche, noticing that Connie cast an inquiring glance at the newcomer, introduced him, abruptly: "Son, this here's Roarin' Mike O'Reilly, from over on the Tanana. He's our new

[Pg 42]

stenographer, an' while he goes an' gits on his reg'lar clothes, you an' me an' the Injun will knock off fer noon, an' go over to the cabin."

During the preparation of the midday meal Connie told Waseche of how he had found 'Merican Joe, starved and unconscious in his little snow-covered shelter tent, and of how, out of gratitude, the Indian had presented him with Leloo. Waseche eyed the great ruffed animal sombrely, as Connie dwelt upon his curiously mixed nature—how he ran the ridges at night at the head of the wolf pack, and of how, ripping and slashing, he had defended his helpless master against the fangs of those same wolves.

"Well, son," he drawled, when the boy had concluded, "he's the finest brute I ever seen—barrin' none. But keep your eye on him. If he ever gits his dates mixed—if he ever turns wolf when he'd ort to be dog—*good-night!*"

"I'll watch him," smiled the boy. "And, Waseche, where do you think 'Merican Joe came from?"

[Pg 43]

"Well," grinned his big partner, "fetchin' such a lookin' brute-beast as that along with him—I'd hate to say."

"He came from beyond the Mackenzie! He knows the country."

"That's prob'ly why he come away," answered Waseche, dryly.

"But he's going back—he's going with me. We're going to hit the trail for Dawson tomorrow, and hit across the mountains by way of Bonnet Plume Pass, and outfit at Fort Norman on the Mackenzie, and then strike out for the eastern end of Great Bear Lake, and the barren grounds. We're going to trap the rest of the winter and next summer we're going to prospect and figure on starting a trading post. We've got it all worked out."

"Oh, jest like that, eh? It ort to be right smart of a little ja'nt. With nothin' between Dawson an' Fort Norman—an' nothin' beyond."

"We might make another strike. And if we don't we can trap."

"Yup, that's a great idee—that trappin'. If you both work like a dog all winter out in them there barren lands, an' freeze an' starve, an' have good luck with your traps, you'd ort to clean up as much as two dollars a day."

[Pg 44]

"But look at the country we'd see! And the fun we'd have!"

"Ain't they country enough to see here in Alaska? An' as fer fun—some folks idee of humour gits me! Who ever heard of anyone goin' 'leven hundred miles into nowheres for to have fun? I tell you, son, I've know'd stampedes to start on mighty slim information, but never as slim as what you've got. I read your book, an' all them old parties had to go on was the stories of some Injuns—an' the whole mess of 'em's be'n dead most two hundred years! An' I think the book's a fake, anyhow—'cause I don't believe gold's been invented that long! No, sir, take it from me, it's the dog-gonedest wild goose chase ever undertook by anyone—but, at that—if it wasn't for this game laig of mine, I b'lieve I'd go 'long!"

After dinner Connie started to overhaul his trail outfit while Waseche looked on. After a while the man rose, and put on his mackinaw.

"I've got to go back to the office," he said. "Me an' Roarin' Mike O'Reilly has got to tackle that mail."

[Pg 45]

Connie shot his big partner a long, sidewise glance. "He must be some rough bird to earn a name like that over on the Tanana."

"Rough as pig iron," answered Waseche solemnly. "He eats 'em alive, Roarin' does."

"What—pancakes?"

"Yup—pancakes, an' grizzlies. Roarin' Mike, he takes 'em as they come. Didn't you see him lay holt of your wolf-dog?"

"Yes," answered the boy, as solemn as an owl. "And I don't like folks to be so rough with Leloo."

"He promised he wouldn't hurt your dog when we seen you comin' up the hill."

"It's a good thing you've got him where you can keep your eye on him. If he ever gets loose he's liable to run the crew off the works."

"Yup. I'll watch out for that. He's a stenographer. It's claimed he kin spell—better'n what I kin. An' when he gits a letter wrote down, it kin be read without a jury."

"I think you've picked a winner, at that, Waseche. I was watching him when he put out his hand to touch Leloo. He would rather have shoved it into the fire. There's something to him, even if the names did get mixed on the package when they shipped him in. I suppose that somewhere over on the Tanana there's a big, red-eyed, double-fisted roughneck charging around among the

[Pg 46]

construction camps packing a name like 'Nellie.'"

Waseche grinned. "Percival Lafollette, to be exact. I furnished the Roarin' Mike O'Reilly part, along with a full an' complete outfit of men's wearin' apparel. When he gets to where he can live up to the Roarin' Mike name, he can discard it an' take back his own. Might's well give the boy a chanct. Cain thought he'd put it over on me, 'count of my movin' my office where he'd have to waller acrost the crick to it. But I'll fool him good an' proper. The kid's a lunger, an' the first thing to do is to git him started in to feelin' like a man. I figured they was somethin' to him when I first seen him. If they wasn't, how did he get up here in the middle of Alaska an' winter comin' on—an' nothin' between him an' freezin' but them hen-skin clothes? An' I was watchin', too, when he laid his hand on the dog's head. He was so scairt that the sweat was jest a-bubblin' out of him—an' yet, he retch out an' done like I done—an' believe me, I wasn't none too anxious to fool with that brute, myself. I done it to see if he would. I'm goin' to take holt an' make a reg'lar man out of him. I figger we kin git through the office work by noon every day. If we don't, them birds over in the thinkers' shack is in for more overtime. In the afternoons I'm goin' to keep him out in the air—that's all a lunger needs—plenty air, an' good grub. We'll tromp around the hills and hunt. We'll be a pair to draw to—him with his busted lungs, an' me with my game laig. We was all *chechakos* onct. They's two kinds of *chechakos*—the ones with *nerve* an' the ones with *brass*. The ones with the real nerve is the kind that stays in the big country. But the other kind of *chechakos*—the ones with brass—the bluff an' bluster—the counterfeit nerve that don't fool no one but theirself—the luckiest thing that can happen to them is they should live long enough to git back to the outside where they come from—an' most of 'em's lucky if they live long enough to starve to death."

[Pg 47]

"I guess he's the first kind," opined Connie. "When I come back I expect he'll be a regular sourdough."

[Pg 48]

"When you're gone I reckon I'll jest have him move his traps up here. I won't be so lonesome, an' I can keep cases on him—"

"But—" interrupted Connie.

Waseche divined his thoughts and shook his head. "No, they ain't no danger. My lungs is made of whang leather, an' besides, he ain't no floor spitter—I watched him in the office. Even if he was it wouldn't take mor'n about a minute to break him of that."

By nightfall Connie and 'Merican Joe had the outfit all ready for the trail, and the following morning they departed at daylight, with half of Ten Bow waving good-bye, as the great silver wolf-dog swung out onto the long snow trail at the head of the team.

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 49]

BRASS

It was high noon, just two weeks from the day Connie Morgan and 'Merican Joe pulled out of Ten Bow, and the two halted their dogs on the summit of Bonnet Plume Pass and gazed out over the jumbled mass of peaks and valleys and ridges that lay to the eastward. The first leg of the long snow trail, from Ten Bow to Dawson, had been covered over a well-travelled trail with road houses at convenient intervals. Over this trail with Connie's team of seven big malamutes, headed by the great ruffed wolf-dog, they had averaged forty miles a day.

At Dawson they outfitted for the trip to Fort Norman, a distance of about five hundred miles. Connie was fortunate in being able to purchase from a prospector eight Mackenzie River dogs which he presented to 'Merican Joe, much to the Indian's surprise and delight. The Alaska sled was replaced by two toboggans, and 'Merican Joe nodded approval at Connie's selection of supplies. For from now on there would be no road houses and, for the most of the way, no trail. And their course would thread the roughest country on the whole continent. Therefore, the question of outfitting was a problem to be taken seriously. Too little grub in the sub-arctic in winter means death—horrible, black-tongued, sunken-eyed death by starvation and freezing. And too much outfit means overstrain on the dogs, slower travel, and unless some of it is discarded or *cached*, it means all kinds of trouble for the trail mushers.

[Pg 50]

The surest test of a sourdough is his outfit. Connie figured the trip should take thirty-five days, which should put them into Fort Norman on the fifth of November. But Connie had been long enough in the North to take that word "should" none too literally. He knew that under very favourable conditions the trip might be made in twenty days, and he knew also that it might take fifty days. Therefore although the month was November, a very favourable month for hunting, and the country to be traversed was good game country, he did not figure his rifle for a single pound of meat. If meat were killed on the journey, well and good. But if no meat were killed, and if they lost their way, or encountered blizzard after howling blizzard, and their journey lengthened to fifteen or twenty days beyond the estimated time, Connie was determined that it should also be well and good.

[Pg 51]

He remembered men who had been found in the spring and buried—*chechakos*, most of them who had disregarded advice, and whose outfits had been cut down to a minimum that allowed no margin of safety for delay. But some of them had been sourdoughs who had taken a chance and depended on their rifles for food—it had been the same in the end. In the spring the men who buried them read the whole story of the wilderness tragedy in visiting their last few camps. Each day the distance between them shortened, here a dog was killed and eaten, here another, and another, until at the very last camp, half buried in the sodden ashes of the last fire, would be found the kettle with its scraps of moccasins and bits of dog harness shrivelled and dried—moccasin soup, the very last hopeless expedient of the doomed trail musher. And generally the grave was dug beside this fire—never far beyond it.

[Pg 52]

And so Connie added a safety margin to the regular sub-arctic standard of grub for the trail, and when the outfit pulled out of Dawson the toboggans carried three and one half pounds of grub apiece for each of the thirty-five days, which was a full half pound more than was needed, and this, together with their outfit of sleeping bags, clothing, utensils, and nine hundred pounds of dog food, totalled thirteen hundred and fifty pounds—ninety pounds to the dog, which with good dogs is a comfortable load.

The summit of the Bonnet Plume pass is a bleak place. And dreary and bleak and indescribably rugged is the country surrounding it. Connie and 'Merican Joe, seated in the lee of their toboggans, boiled a pot of tea over the little primus stove.

"We've made good time so far," said the boy. "About three hundred miles more and we'll hit Fort Norman."

'Merican Joe nodded. "Yes, but we got de luck. On dis side we ain' gon' hav' so mooch luck. Too mooch plenty snow—plenty win'. An' tonight, mor' comin'." He indicated the sky to the northward, where, beyond the glittering white peaks, the blue faded to a sullen grey.

[Pg 53]

"You're right," answered Connie, dropping a chunk of ice into his cup of scalding tea. "And I'd sure like to make a patch of timber. These high, bare canyons are rotten places to camp in a blizzard. If you camp in the middle of 'em you've got to tie yourself down or the wind might hang you on a rock somewhere, and if you camp out of the wind against a wall, a snow cornice might bust loose and bury you forty feet deep."

'Merican Joe grinned. "You sourdough—you know. I know you sourdough w'en I seen you han'le de dogs—an' I know w'en you buy de grub. But mos' I know w'en you pack de toboggan—you ain' put all de grub on wan toboggan an' all de odder stuff on de odder toboggan—"

Connie laughed. "Lots of men have made that mistake. And then if they get separated one dies of starvation, and the other freezes to death, or if they lose one toboggan they're in the same fix."

'Merican Joe returned the dishes and stove to the pack and glanced at the sky. "I ain' t'ink we mak' de timber tonight. She git dark queek now—seven, eight mile mor' we got to camp."

[Pg 54]

"Yes," assented Connie. "And the days are getting so short that from now on we'll quit camping at noon. We'll pull once and make a day of it—anyway till we get a moon."



"In the whirling blizzard, without protection of timber, one place was as good as another to camp, and while the Indian busied himself with the dogs, Connie proceeded to dig a trench in the snow."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

To this plan the Indian readily agreed and a moment later struck out ahead as "forerunner" to break trail for the dogs. Despite the fact that there was more snow on the eastern slope, the two soon found it insufficient to check the toboggans upon the series of steep pitches and long slopes they now encountered. At the end of a mile a halt was made, Connie's dogs were turned loose to follow, both toboggans were hitched behind the Mackenzie River dogs, and while 'Merican Joe plodded ahead, Connie had all he could do at the tail rope. An hour later the wind suddenly changed and came roaring out of the north. The whole sky became overcast and stinging particles of flinty snow were driven against their faces. The storm increased in fury. The stinging particles changed to dry, powdery snow dust that whirled and eddied about them so thickly that Connie could not see the dogs from the rear of the toboggans. Covering their noses and mouths, the two bored on through the white smother—a slow moving, ghostly procession, with the snow powder matted thick into the hairy coats of the dogs and the clothing of the mushers. Not until darkness added to the impenetrability of the storm did 'Merican Joe halt. In the whirling blizzard, without protection of timber, one place was as good as another to camp, and while the Indian busied himself with the dogs Connie proceeded to dig a trench in the snow. This trench was as long as the toboggans, and wide enough to accommodate the two sleeping bags placed side by side. Three feet down the boy struck ice. The sleeping bags, primus stove, and part of the food were dumped into the trench. The loaded toboggans were tipped on edge, one along either side, and the heavy canvas shelter tarp was stretched over these and weighted down by doubling its edges under the toboggans. The open ends were blocked with snow, the dogs fed and left to make their own beds, and the two crawled into their snug quarters where by the light of a candle they prepared a good hot meal on the little stove and devoured it in warmth and comfort while the storm roared harmlessly over their heads.

For two days they were storm bound, venturing out only to feed the dogs and from time to time to relieve the tarp roof of its burden of snow. The third day dawned cold and clear, and daylight found the outfit on the move. They were following a creek bed, and the depth of the snow, together with the easing of the slope, permitted the use of both teams. No halt was made at noon and when they camped at dark they estimated they had made fifteen miles. Five days of fair cold weather followed and each night found them from fifteen to eighteen miles from the camp of the night before. No game had been sighted, but on two of the nights Leloo had left camp, and once, from some ridge far to the northward, they had heard his long-drawn howl of the kill.

On the sixth day another storm broke. They were following the snow-covered bed of a fair-sized river which Connie hoped would prove to be the head-waters of the Gravel, which empties into the Mackenzie some forty-five miles above Fort Norman. They had left the highest mountains behind, and patches of timber appeared at frequent intervals along the banks of the stream. As

[Pg 55]

[Pg 56]

[Pg 57]

the storm thickened they camped, setting up their tent in the shelter of a thicket, and in the morning they pushed on despite the storm. It was nearly noon when Connie called to 'Merican Joe, and when the Indian made his way back, the boy pointed to Leloo. The great wolf-dog had halted in the traces and stood with nose up sniffing the air, while the huge ruff seemed to swell to twice its size, and the hair along its spine bristled menacingly.

They had stopped opposite a patch of timber taller than any they had passed, the tops of the trees being visible between the gusts of whirling snow. "Moose or a bear in there," ventured Connie. "Let's go get him."

'Merican Joe shook his head. "No. Leloo, he ketch de man scent. He ain' ac' lak dat for moose an' bear."

"Man scent! What would any men be doing up here?"

The Indian shrugged. "Hunt, trap, mebbe-so prospeck. Com' on, le's go. It ain' no good we go in dere." He paused and pointed to the dog. "Bad mans in dere—Leloo, he know. Bad mans smells one way—good mans smells anudder way. Leloo ain' git mad for good mans."

[Pg 58]

"We can't go away and leave them," Connie answered. "They may be out of luck—may need help."

Again 'Merican Joe shrugged, but offered no further objection, and releasing Leloo from his harness the two followed him into the timber. A short distance back from the edge they came upon a rude log cabin, glaringly the work of inexperienced builders. No tracks were seen about the door, and no smoke rose from the stovepipe that served as a chimney. 'Merican Joe pushed open the door.

"It's 'bout time you was comin'—an' me crippled," came a petulant voice from the bed. "But what do you care—" The voice ceased suddenly, and 'Merican Joe sprang back from the doorway so swiftly that he knocked Connie into the snow. As the boy picked up himself he again heard the voice. "Git out of here, you thievin' Injun or I'll blow yer head off!"

Ignoring the protest of 'Merican Joe, Connie thrust his head in at the doorway. "What's the matter with you?" he asked, sharply. "Are you crazy?"

[Pg 59]

The man in the bed stared a moment and with seeming reluctance lowered his rifle. "Who're you?" he asked, sullenly. "If you want grub y're out of luck. We ain't got none to spare—an' I got a rifle here that says you don't git none of it." Involuntarily, Connie's glance swept the supplies piled along the walls and upon the shelves, and estimated a four-man outfit.

"How many of you are there?" he asked. "And why haven't you got a fire?"

"They's two of us, an' I ain't got no fire 'cause my partner ain't showed up to build none. I'm crippled—sunk an ax in my foot a couple days back."

"Where is your partner?"

"I dunno. He went to look at the traps yesterday an' he ain't got back yet." He noticed the snow clinging to Connie's garments. "Is it snowin'?" he asked, in sudden alarm.

"Snowing!" exclaimed the boy. "Of course it's snowing—it's been snowing since yesterday noon."

The man's voice dropped into a whine. "The winders is frosted so you can't see out. I bet he's lost. Go find him, can't you? What're you standin' there fer?"

[Pg 60]

Righteous indignation succeeded the flash of disgust engendered by the man's first words. And Connie stepped closer. "Look here, who do you think you're talking to? I don't know who you are, and I don't want to. What I can't figure is how you ever got this far. If nobody else had bothered to knock some common sense and decency into you it's a wonder your partner hasn't. But I guess he don't know the difference between you and a man or he wouldn't be your partner." Connie turned on his heel and started for the door.

"Hey, where you goin'?" wailed the man on the bunk.

"I'm going out and tend to my dogs," answered the boy.

"Build a fire first, an' cook me some grub! I ain't had nothin' since yesterday."

"After the dogs," said Connie as he banged the door behind him.

"Le's mush," said 'Merican Joe, when they returned to the dogs.

Connie grinned. "No, we can't do that. I've seen some pretty raw *chechakos*, but never one like him. If we pulled out they'd probably both die."

[Pg 61]

'Merican Joe gave an expressive shrug. "*S'pose* we ain't got no grub. He ain' care *we* die."

"No, but we're men, and he——"

"He ain' so good lak Injun dog," interrupted 'Merican Joe.

"Just about—but we can't go off and leave him, at that."

Twenty minutes later Connie and the Indian entered the cabin.

"You took yer time about it," complained the man. "Hustle around now an' cook me up a meal of vittles."

"Where's your firewood?" asked the boy, smothering his wrath.

"Go out an' cut it, same as we do."

"Don't you keep any ahead, nor any kindlings?"

"Naw, it's bad enough to cut a little at a time."

Connie's glance sought the room. "Where's the ax?"

"Out in the brush, I guess. My partner cut the wood last. I don't know where he left it."

"Well, it's under about two feet of snow now," answered the boy dryly, as 'Merican Joe departed to get their own ax and cut some wood.

[Pg 62]

By the time the cabin was warmed and the man fed, the storm had ceased. "Let me have a look at your foot," said Connie. "I expect it had better be tended to." The man assented, and the boy turned back the covers and, despite much groaning and whining complaint, removed the bandage and replaced it with a clean one.

"Pretty bad gash," opined Connie. "How did it happen?"

"Cuttin' firewood—holdin' the stick with my foot an' the ax struck a knot."

"You've got to learn a lot, haven't you?"

"What d'you mean—learn? How you goin' to cut firewood without you hold it with yer foot?"

"Nex' tam dat better you hol' de chunk wit' you neck," advised 'Merican Joe.

"Is that so! Well, believe me, I ain't takin' no advise offen no Siwash, nor no kid, neither!"

Connie pulled his cap down over his ears and drew on his mackinaw and mittens. "We're wasting time here, the days are short and if we're going to find your partner we've got to get at it. How long is your trap line, and where does it run?"

[Pg 63]

"We got about twenty-five martin traps out. They're acrost the river up the first crick—strung along about three or four mile."

"Twenty-fi' trap! Three or four mile!" exclaimed 'Merican Joe. "How long you be'n here?"

"Just a month. What's the matter with that? We've got eight martin an' a wolverine an' a link!"

The Indian gave a snort of contempt. "Me—if I ain' set mor' trap as dat every day I ain' t'ink I done nuttin'." He followed Connie to the door.

"You might's well move yer junk in here if you got your own grub. You kin keep the fire goin' nights in case Tom don't show up, an' besides I ain't had no one to talk to fer goin' on two months except Tom, an' we don't git on none too good."

"Thanks," said Connie. "But we'll put up the tent when we come back—we're a little particular, ourselves."

"They ain't no use of both of you goin' out to hunt him. One of you stay here and tend the fire, an' cook supper in case the other one don't git back in time."

Connie glared at the man for a moment, and burst out laughing. "If you had a little more nerve and a whole lot less *brass*, there might be some hope for you yet," he opined. "Did your partner have any dogs with him?"

[Pg 64]

"Naw, we had six when we come in, but they was worked down skin pore when we got here, an' some of 'em died, an' the rest run off. They wasn't no good, nohow."

Connie banged the door in disgust and, taking Leloo with them, the two struck across the river. They found the creek without difficulty and had proceeded scarcely a mile when Leloo halted in his tracks and began sniffing the air. This time the hair of his neck and spine did not bristle, and the two watched him as he stood, facing a spruce-covered hill, his head moving slightly from side to side, as his delicate pointed nostrils quivered as if to pick up some elusive scent. "Go on, Leloo. Go git um!" urged 'Merican Joe, and the wolf-dog trotted into the spruce, followed by Connie and the Indian. Halfway up the slope the dog quickened his pace, and coming suddenly upon a mound in the new-fallen snow circled it several times and squatted upon his haunches. It took Connie and the Indian but a few moments to scrape away the snow and disclose the skinned carcass of a moose.

[Pg 65]

'Merican Joe pointed to the carcass. "It be'n snowin' quite a w'ile w'en he skin de moose. He ain' goin' carry dat hide far. She heavy. He ain' know nuttin' 'bout skinnin', an' lef' lot of meat stick to de hide. He start hom' an' git los'."

"Lost!" exclaimed Connie. "Surely he wouldn't get lost within a mile of his cabin!"

'Merican Joe nodded. "Him *chechako*—git los' anywheres. Git los' somtam w'en she snowin' bad, hondre steps from cabin. Me—I know. One git los' an' froze dead, wan tam, he go for water not so far you kin t'row de stone."

"Well, he's probably home by this time. If he was lost he'd camp, and he's had plenty of time since it stopped snowing."

The Indian was not so hopeful. "No, I'm t'ink he ain' got sense 'nough to camp. He walk an' git scare, an' den he mebbe-so run till he fall down."

"He won't do much running with that hide," grinned Connie. "Let's separate and hunt for him. Come, Leloo—go find him!"

The two continued to the top of the timbered slope. "I don't see how anyone could possibly get lost here. Surely he would know enough to go down hill to the creek, and follow it to the river, wouldn't he?"

[Pg 66]

"No, w'en dey git scairt dey don't know up an' down an' crossways."

As the two were about to separate both suddenly paused to listen. Faintly upon the air, seemingly from miles away, came the call of a human voice. Leloo heard it too, and with ears stiffly erect stood looking far out over the ridges. Raising his rifle, Connie fired into the air, and almost immediately the sound of the shot was answered by the faint call for help.

"That's funny," cried the boy. "Sound don't travel very fast. How could he possibly have answered as soon as that?"

Placing his hands to his mouth, 'Merican Joe launched a yell that seemed fairly to tear through the spaces, echoing and re-echoing across, the valley.

Again came the answering call, faintly, as from a great distance. Locating the direction of the sound which seemed to come from somewhere near the head of a parallel valley, they plunged straight down the opposite slope. At the bottom they paused again, and again the Indian sent his peculiar penetrating yell hurtling through the air. Again it was answered, but this time it came from up the slope. Faintly it reached their ears, seemingly farther away than before. The sound was repeated as the two stood looking at each other in bewilderment.

[Pg 67]

'Merican Joe's eyes seemed bulging from his head. "*Tamahnawus*," he whispered. "W'at you call, de ghos'. He git froze, an' hees ghos' run 'roun' de hills an' yell 'bout dat! Me—I'm gon'!" Abruptly the Indian turned and started as fast as his webs would let him in the direction of the river.

"Come back here!" cried Connie. "Don't be a fool! There ain't any *tamahnawuses*—and if there are, I've got the medicine that will lick 'em! I brought one in once that had run a whole tribe of Injuns off their hunting ground."

'Merican Joe, who had halted at the boy's command, looked dubious. "I ain' huntin' no *tamahnawus*—I ain' los' none!"

"You come with me," laughed the boy, "and I'll show you your *tamahnawus*. I've got a hunch that fellow has dropped into a cave or something and can't get out. And he can't be so very far off either."

[Pg 68]

With Connie in the lead they ascended the slope in the direction of the sound which came now from a point upstream from where they had descended. Once more Leloo paused and sniffed, the hair of his back bristling. Whatever the object of his attention, it seemed to lie beneath the outspreading branches of a large spruce. Connie peered beneath the branches where an oblong of snow appeared to have been disturbed from under the surface. Even as he looked the sound of a voice, plain enough now to distinguish the words, reached his ears.

"Git me out of here! Ain't you never comin'? Or be you goin' to leave me here 'cause I burnt them pancakes?"

"Come on out," called Connie. "What's the matter with you?"

"Come on out! How kin I? Who be you?"

Connie reached the man's side and proceeded to scrape away the snow, while 'Merican Joe stood at a respectful distance, his rifle at full cock. "Come on Joe!" the boy called, at length. "Here's your *tamahnawus*—and it's going to take two of us to get him out."

[Pg 69]

When the snow had been removed both Connie and the Indian stared in surprise. There lay the man closely wrapped in his moose skin, fur side in, and the heavy hide frozen to the hardness of

iron!

"I'm all cramped up," wailed the man. "I can't move."

The man was wrapped, head and all, in the frozen hide. Fortunately, he had left an air space but this had nearly sealed shut by the continued freezing of his breath about its edges.

Rolling him over the two grasped the edge of the heavy hide and endeavoured to unroll it, but they might as well have tried to unroll the iron sheathing of a boiler.

"We've got to build a fire and thaw him out," said Connie.

"Tak' um to de cabin," suggested the Indian. "Kin drag um all same toboggan."

The plan looked reasonable but they had no rope for a trace line. Connie overcame the difficulty by making a hole with his hand ax in a flap of the hide near the man's feet, and cutting a light spruce sapling which he hooked by means of a limb stub into the hole.

[Pg 70]

By using the sapling in the manner of a wagon tongue, they started for the cabin, keeping to the top of the ridge where the snow was shallow and wind-packed.

All went well until they reached the end of the ridge. A mile back, where they had ascended the slope, the pitch had not been great, but as they neared the river the sides grew steeper, until they were confronted by a three hundred foot slope with an extremely steep pitch. This slope was sparsely timbered, and great rocks protruded from the snow. Connie was for retracing the ridge to a point where the ascent was not so steep, but 'Merican Joe demurred.



"The third day dawned cold and clear, and daylight found the outfit on the move."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

"It git dark queek, now. We git um down all right. Turn um roun' an' mak de pole lak de tail rope on de toboggan—we hol' um back easy." The early darkness was blurring distant outlines and the descent at that point meant the saving of an hour, so Connie agreed and for the first twenty yards all went well. Then suddenly the human toboggan struck the ice of a hillside spring and shot forward. The pole slipped from the snowy mittens of the two and, enveloped in a cloud of flying snow, the man in the frozen moose hide went shooting down the slope! Connie and 'Merican Joe barely saved themselves from following him, and, squatting low on their webs they watched in a fascination of horror as the flying body struck a tree trunk, shot sideways, ploughed through the snow, struck a rock, bounded high into the air, struck another rock and, gaining momentum with every foot, shot diagonally downward—rolling, whirling, sliding—straight for the brink of a rock ledge with a sheer drop of twenty-five or thirty feet. Over the edge it shot and landed with a loud thud among the broken rock fragments of the valley floor.

[Pg 71]

"We ought to have gone back!" shuddered the boy. "He's dead by this time."

'Merican Joe shrugged. "Anyhow, dat com' queek. Dat better as if he lay back onder de tree an'

froze an' starve, an' git choke to deat' w'en his air hole git froze shut. He got good strong coffin anyhow."

Relieved of their burden it was but the work of a few moments to gain the floor of the valley and hasten to the form wedged tightly between two upstanding boulders, where they were greeted by the voice of the man raised in whining complaint.

[Pg 72]

"Are you hurt?" eagerly asked Connie, kneeling at the man's side and looking at him closely.

"Naw, I ain't hurt but can't you pick out no smoother trail? I'm all jiggled up!" In his relief at finding the man unharmed, Connie laughingly promised a smoother trail, and as he and the Indian pried him from between the rocks with a young tree, the boy noted that the frozen moose hide had scarcely been dented by its contact with the trees and rocks.

In the cabin the stove was crammed with wood and the man laid upon the floor close beside it, but it was nearly daylight the following morning before the hide had thawed sufficiently for the combined efforts of Connie and the Indian to unroll it. All night the two tended the fire and listened to the petty bickering and quarrelling of the two helpless partners, the man in the bunk taunting the other with being a fool for wrapping up in a green moose hide, and being in turn called a fool for chopping his own foot. It was disgusting in the extreme to Connie but at last the humour of the situation got the better of his disgust, and he roared with laughter, all of which served to bring down the combined reviling of both men upon his head.

[Pg 73]

When at last the man was extricated from his prison and found to be little the worse for his adventure, he uttered no word of thanks to his rescuers. Indeed, his first words were in the nature of an indirect accusation of theft.

"Whur's my marten?" he asked, eying them with suspicion.

"What marten? We didn't see any marten," answered the boy.

"Well, I hed one. Tuk it out of a trap just before I seen the moose. It's funny you didn't see it." Connie answered nothing, and as the man devoured a huge breakfast without asking his rescuers to join him, he continued to mutter and growl about his lost marten. Daylight was breaking and Connie, bottling his wrath behind tight-pressed lips, rose abruptly, and prepared to depart.

"Whur you goin'?" asked the man, his cheeks distended with food. "You lay around here soakin' up heat all night; looks like you could anyways cut a little wood an' help worsh these dishes! An', say, don't you want to buy some moose meat? I'll sell you all you want fer two-bits a pound, an' cut it yerself."

[Pg 74]

For a moment Connie saw red. His fists clenched and he swallowed hard but once more his sense of humour asserted itself, and looking the man squarely in the eye he burst into a roar of laughter, while 'Merican Joe, who possessed neither Connie's self-restraint nor his sense of humour, launched into an unflattering tirade of jumbled Indian, English, and jargon, that, could a single word of it have been understood, would have goaded even the craven *chechakos* to warfare.

Two hours later, as they sat in their cozy tent, pitched five miles down the river, and devoured their breakfast, Connie grinned at his companion.

"Big difference in men—even in *chechakos*, ain't there, Joe?"

"Humph," grunted the Indian.

"No one else within two hundred miles of here—his partner crippled so he never could have found him if he tried, and he never would have tried—a few more hours and he would have been dead—we come along and find him—and he not only don't offer us a meal, but accuses us of stealing his marten—and offers to *sell* us moose meat—at two-bits a pound! I wish some of the men I know could have the handling of those birds for about a month!"

[Pg 75]

"Humph! If mos' w'ite men I know got to han'le um dey ain' goin' live no mont'—you bet!"

"Anyway," laughed the boy, "we've sure learned the difference between *nerve* and *brass*!"

CHAPTER V

[Pg 76]

THE PLAGUE FLAG IN THE SKY

IT was nearly noon of the day following the departure of Connie Morgan and 'Merican Joe from the camp of the two *chechakos*.

The mountains had been left behind, and even the foothills had flattened to low, rolling ridges which protruded irregularly into snow-covered marshes among which the bed of the frozen river looped interminably. No breath of air stirred the scrub willows along the bank, upon whose naked

branches a few dried and shrivelled leaves still clung.

'Merican Joe was travelling ahead breaking trail for his dogs and the boy saw him raise a mittened hand and brush at his cheek. A few minutes later the Indian thrashed his arms several times across his chest as though to restore circulation of the blood against extreme cold. But it was not cold. A moment later the boy brushed at his own cheek which stung disagreeably as though nipped by the frost. He glanced at the tiny thermometer that he kept lashed to the front of his toboggan. It registered zero, a temperature that should have rendered trailing even without the heavy parkas uncomfortably warm. Connie glanced backward toward the distant mountains that should have stood out clean-cut and distinct in the clear atmosphere, but they had disappeared from view although the sun shone dazzlingly bright from a cloudless sky. A dog whimpered uneasily, and Connie cracked his whip above the animal's head and noted that instead of the sharp snap that should have accompanied the motion, the sound reached his ears in a dull pop—noted, too, that the dogs paid no slightest heed to the sound, but plodded on methodically—slowly, as though they were tired. Connie was conscious of a growing lassitude—a strange heaviness that hardly amounted to weariness but which necessitated a distinct effort of brain to complete each muscle move.

[Pg 77]

Suddenly 'Merican Joe halted and, removing his mitten, drew his bare hand across his eyes. Connie noticed that the air seemed heavy and dead, and that he could hear his own breathing and the breathing of the dogs which had crouched with their bellies in the snow whimpering uneasily. Wild-eyed, the Indian pointed aloft and Connie glanced upward. There was no hint of blue in the cloudless sky. The whole dome of the heavens glared with a garish, brassy sheen from which the sun blazed out with an unwholesome, metallic light that gleamed in glints of gold from millions of floating frost spicules. Even as the two stood gazing upward new suns formed in the burnished sky—false suns that blazed and danced and leaped together and re-formed.

[Pg 78]

With a cry of abject terror 'Merican Joe buried his face in his arms and stood trembling and moaning, "*Hyas skookum kultus tamahnawus—mesahchee tamahnawus!*" (a very strong bad spirit—we are bewitched). The words puled haltingly from lips stiff with fright. The next moment the boy was beside him, thumping him on the back and choking him roughly:

"*Tamahnawus* nothing!" he cried. "Buck up! Don't be a fool! I've seen it before. Three years ago—in the Lillimuit, it was. It's the white death. Waseche and I hid in an ice cave. Tonight will come the strong cold."

The boy's voice sounded strangely toneless and flat, and when he finished speaking he coughed. 'Merican Joe's hands had dropped to his side and he stood dumbly watching as Connie loosened the heavy woollen muffler from his waist and wound it about the lower half of his face. "Cover your mouth and don't talk," the boy commanded. "Breathe through your muffler. We can still travel, but it will be hard. We will be very tired but we must find shelter—a cave—a cabin—a patch of timber—or tonight we will freeze—Look! Look!" he cried suddenly, pointing to the northward, "a mirage!"

[Pg 79]

Both stared awe-struck as the picture formed rapidly before their eyes and hung inverted in the brassy sky just above the horizon foreshortened by the sweep of a low, snow-buried ridge. Both had seen mirages before—mirages that, like a faulty glass, distorted shapes and outlines, and mirages that brought real and recognizable places into view like the one they were staring at in spell-bound fascination. So perfect in detail, and so close it hung in the heavy, dead air that it seemed as though they could reach out and touch it—a perfect inverted picture of what appeared to be a two or three mile sweep of valley, one side sparsely wooded, and the other sloping gently upward into the same low-rolling ridge that formed their own northern horizon. Each stunted tree showed distinctly, and in the edge of the timber stood a cabin, with the smoke rising sluggishly from the chimney. They could see the pile of split firewood at its corner and even the waterhole chopped in the ice of the creek, with its path leading to the door. But it was not the waterhole, or the firewood, or the cabin itself that held them fascinated. It was the little square of scarlet cloth that hung limp and motionless and dejected from a stick thrust beneath the eave of the tiny cabin. It was a horrible thing to look upon for those two who knew its significance—that flag glowing like a splotch of blood there in the brazen sky with the false suns dancing above it.

[Pg 80]

"The plague flag!" cried Connie.

And almost in the same breath 'Merican Joe muttered:

"De red death!"



"It was a terrible thing to look upon to those two who knew its significance—that flag glowing like a splotch of blood there in the brazen sky."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

Even as they spoke the cabin door opened and a man stepped out. His features were indistinguishable, but both could see that he was a large man, for his bulk had filled the doorway. He swung a heavy pack to a toboggan which stood waiting before the door with the dogs in harness. The next moment the form of a woman appeared in the doorway. She evidently called to the man, for he halted abruptly and faced about, shook his fist at her and, turning, resumed his course, while with an appealing gesture the woman stretched out her arms toward him.

[Pg 81]

Then rapidly as it had formed, the picture faded and the two awe-struck watchers stood gazing at the frost spicules that glittered brassily in the unwholesome light of the false suns.

Once more the Indian buried his face in his arms and muffled, moaning words fell from his lips: "De red death—de white death! It is *mesahchee tamahnawus!* We die! We die!"

Again Connie shook him roughly, and meeting with no response, beat his arms from his face with the loaded butt of his dog whip.

"You're a crazy fool!" cried the boy, with his lips close to the Indian's ear. "We're *not* going to die—anyway, not till we've had a run for our money! We're going to mush! Do you hear? *Mush!* And we're going to keep on mushing till we find that cabin! And if you hang back or quit, I'm going to wind this walrus hide whip around you till I cut you in strips—do you get it?" And, without another word, the boy turned, whipped the dogs to their feet, and leaving the river abruptly, led off straight into the north across the low, snow-covered ridge.

[Pg 82]

Of the two brothers Bossuet, Victor, the elder, was loved in the North; and René was hated. And the reason for this lay in the men themselves. Both were rivermen—good rivermen—and both laboured each year during the long days of the summer months, together with many other rivermen, in working the Hudson's Bay brigade of scows down the three great connecting rivers to the frozen sea. For between Athabasca Landing and Fort McPherson lie two thousand miles of wilderness—a wilderness whose needs are primitive but imperative, having to do with life and death. And the supplies for this vast wilderness must go in without fail each year by the three rivers, the Athabasca, the Slave, and the Mackenzie. These are not gentle rivers flowing smoothly between their banks, but are great torrents of turbulent waters that rush wildly into the North in miles upon miles of foaming white water, in sheer cascades, and in boiling, rock-ribbed rapids. So that the work of the rivermen is man's work requiring skill and iron nerve, and requiring also mighty muscles for the gruelling portages where cargoes must be carried piece by piece over rough foot trails, and in places even the heavy scows themselves must be man-hauled around

[Pg 83]

cascades.

Seeing the two brothers together, the indiscriminating would unhesitatingly have picked René, with his picturesque, gaudy attire, his loud, ever-ready laughter, his boisterous, bull-throated *chansons*, and his self-confident air, as the typical man of the North. For beside him Victor, with faded overalls, his sockless feet thrust into worn shoes, his torn shirt, and his old black felt hat, cut a sorry figure.

But those who know recall the time that old Angus Forgan, the drunken trader of Big Stone, fell out of a scow at the head of the Rapids of the Drowned. They will tell you that of the twenty rivermen who witnessed the accident only two dared to attempt a rescue, and those two were René and Victor Bossuet. And that René, being the stronger, reached the struggling man first and, twisting his fingers into his collar, struck out for a flat shelf of rock that edged the first suck of the rapids. They will tell you how he reached the rock and, throwing an arm upon its flat surface, endeavoured to pull himself up; but the grip of the current upon the two bodies was strong and after two or three attempts René released his grip on the drowning man's collar and clambered to safety. Then they will tell you how Victor, who had managed to gain shore when he saw René reach the rock, plunged in again, straight into the roaring chute, of how he reached Forgan in the nick of time, of how the two bodies disappeared completely from view in the foaming white water, and of how a quarter of a mile below, by means of Herculean effort and a bit of luck, Victor managed to gain the eddy of a side channel where he and his unconscious burden whirled round and round until the rivermen running along the bank managed to throw a rope and haul them both to safety.

[Pg 84]

Also, they will tell you of Gaspard Petrie, a great hulking bully of a man, who called himself "The Grizzly of the Athabasca," whose delight it was to pick fights and to beat his opponents into unconsciousness with his fists. And of how the mighty Petrie whose ill fame had spread the length of the three rivers, joined the brigade once at Fort McMurry and of how the boisterous René became the bright and shining mark of his attentions, and of the fight that sent René to the brush before he was "licked," after which René stood the taunts and insults of "The Grizzly of the Athabasca" for many days like the craven he was, before the eyes of all men, until one day Petrie used words that brought insult upon the mother of René—who was also the mother of Victor. René paid them no heed but Victor rose from his place beside the fire and slowly removed his mackinaw and his torn felt hat and, walking over to Petrie, demanded that he retract the words. "The Grizzly of the Athabasca" eyed him in astonishment, for Victor had been a figure in the brigade so insignificant as to have entirely escaped his attention. The ramping one threw out his huge chest and roared with laughter. "See!" he taunted, "the weasel defies the bear!" And with that he reached out and with his thumb and forefinger grasped Victor by the nose and jerked him roughly toward him.

[Pg 85]

The next instant the air rushed from his throat in a grunt of agonized surprise for the violent jerk on his nose seemed to release steel springs in Victor's body and before Petrie could release his grip both of Victor's fists and the heel of one shoe had been driven with all the force of mighty muscles directly into the bully's stomach. The unexpected onslaught staggered the huge bully, and then began the fight that ridded the rivers of Gaspard Petrie. In and out flashed the lighter man, landing a blow here and a kick there—round and round, and in and out. "The Grizzly of the Athabasca" roared with rage, and struck mighty blows that, had they landed, would have annihilated his opponent on the spot but they did not land. Victor seemed tireless and his blows rained faster and faster as his opponent's defence became slower and slower. At last, from sheer exhaustion, the heavy arms could no longer guard the writhing face and instantly Victor began to rain blow after blow upon eyes and nose and mouth until a few minutes later "The Grizzly of the Athabasca" collapsed entirely, and whimpering and puling, he retracted his words, and then amid the frenzied jeers of the rivermen, he made up his pack and slunk away into the bush—and the fame of Victor Bossuet travelled the length of the three rivers. Thus it was that Victor became known as the better man of the two. But it was in the winning of Héléne Lacompte that he gained his final triumph. René had boasted upon the rivers that he would marry her,—boastings that reached the ears of the girl in her father's little cabin on Salt River and caused her to smile. But as she smiled her thoughts were not of René and his gaudy clothing, his famous blue *capote*, his crimson scarf, and his long tasselled cap of white wool—but of Victor—who spoke seldom, but saved his money each year and refrained from joining in the roistering drinking bouts of the rivermen.

[Pg 86]

[Pg 87]

Then one day at Fort Norman in the hearing of all the rivermen René boldly told her that he was coming to take her when the scows returned, and she laughingly replied that when she changed her name from Lacompte, she would take the name of Bossuet. Whereat René drank deeper, bragged the more boisterously, and to the envy of all men flaunted his good fortune before the eyes of the North. But Victor said nothing. He quit the brigade upon a pretext and when the scows returned Héléne bore the name of Bossuet. For she and Victor had been married by the priest at the little mission and had gone to build their cabin upon a little unnamed river well back from the Mackenzie. For during the long winter months Victor worked hard at his trap lines, while René drank and gambled and squandered his summer wages among the towns of the provinces.

[Pg 88]

When René heard of the marriage he swore vengeance, for this thing had been a sore blow to his pride. All along the three rivers men talked of it, nor did they hesitate to taunt and make sport of René to his face. He sought to make up in swashbuckling and boasting what he lacked in courage. So men came to hate him and it became harder and harder for him to obtain work. At last, in great anger, he quit the brigade altogether and for two summers he had been seen upon the rivers in a York boat of his own. The first winter after he left the brigade he spent money in the towns as usual, so the following summer the source of his income became a matter of interest to the Mounted Police. Certain of their findings made it inadvisable for René to appear again in the towns, and that autumn he spent in the outlands, avoiding the posts, stopping a day here—a week there, in the cabins of obscure trappers and camping the nights between, for he dared not show his face at any post. Then it was he bethought himself of his brother's cabin as a refuge and, for the time being laying aside thoughts of vengeance, he journeyed there.

[Pg 89]

He was welcomed by Victor and Héléne and by the very small Victor who was now nearly a year old. Victor and Héléne had heard of the threats of vengeance, but knowing René, they had smiled. Was not René a great boaster? And the very young Victor, who knew nothing of the threats, thought his big uncle a very brave figure in his blue *capote*, his red muffler, and his white stocking cap of wool.

René worked willingly enough side by side with Victor upon the trap line, and with the passing of the days the envy of his brother's lot grew, and in his heart smouldered a sullen rage. Here was Victor, a man at whom nobody would look twice in passing, happy and contented with his little family, untroubled by any haunting fear of the hand of the law, enjoying the respect of all men, and a veritable hero the length of the three rivers. And beside him, of his own flesh and blood, was himself, a bold figure of a man, a roisterer and a poser, who had sought to gain the admiration and respect of the men of the rivers without earning it, and who had failed—and failed most miserably. The sullen rage grew in his heart, and he plotted vengeance by the hour—but his hand was stayed by fear—fear of Victor and fear of the law.

[Pg 90]

And so a month passed, and one day as the two brothers finished their lunch and lighted their pipes upon a log beside a tiny fire, Victor spoke that which for several days had been passing in his mind: "It has been good to have you with us, my brother," he began, being a man of indirect speech.

"The joy has been all mine, I assure you," replied René, wondering what would come next.

"But three people eat more than two, and I laid in supplies for two to last until the holiday trading."

"I have no money, but I will leave the pay for my keep at Fort Norman next summer."

A swift flush of anger reddened the cheek of Victor. "Pay! Who talks of pay? Think you I would accept pay from my own brother?"

"What then?"

[Pg 91]

"Only this, you must make the trip to Fort Norman for food. I will give you a note to McTavish, and the stuff will be charged to me. It is three days travelling light, and four on the return. You can take my dogs. They know the trail."

There was a long pause before the younger man spoke. "I cannot go to Fort Norman. I cannot be seen on the river."

Victor glanced up in surprise. "Why?"

René shifted uneasily. "The police," he answered. "They think I have broken their law."

"Have you?" The older man's eyes were upon him, and René groped in his mind for words. "What if I have?" he blurted. "What was I to do? I cannot work with the brigade. They will not have me. Because I am a better man than the rest of them, they are jealous and refuse to work beside me." René rose from the log and began to strut up and down in the snow, swinging his arms wide and pausing before his brother to tap himself upon the chest, thrown out so the blue *capote* swelled like the breast of a pouter pigeon. "Behold before you one whose excellence in all things has wrought his ruin. Julius Cæsar was such a man, and the great Napoleon, and I, René Bossuet, am the third. All men fear me, and because of my great skill and prodigious strength, all men hate me. They refuse to work beside me lest their puny efforts will appear as the work of children. I am the undisputed king of the rivers. Beside me none——"

[Pg 92]

Victor interrupted with a wave of his hand. "Beside you none will work because of your bragging!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You are a good enough riverman when you mind your business, but there are plenty of good—and some better. What law have you broken?"

"I have traded *hooch* upon the rivers."

"And when you found that the men of the Mounted were upon your trail you came here," continued the older man. "You thought you would be safe here because the police, knowing of your loud-bawled threats against me, would think we were mortal enemies."

"You knew of that—of my threats?" gasped René in surprise, "and you allowed me to stay!"

Victor laughed shortly. "Of course I knew. But what are threats between brothers? I knew they were but the idle boastings of a braggart. You would not dare harm me, or mine. You are a great coward, René, and it is to laugh and not to fear. You strut about like a cock partridge in the springtime, you clothe yourself with the feathers of the bluejay, and speak with the tongue of the great grey wolf but your heart is the heart of the rabbit. But talk gets us nowhere. We will go to the cabin, now. In the morning I will start for Fort Norman, and you will remain to look after Hélène and the little Victor." The older man rose and faced his brother. "And if harm comes to either of them while I am gone *may the wolves gnaw your bones upon the crust of the snow*. That little cabin holds all that I love in the world. I never boast, and I never threaten—nor do I ever repent the work of my hands." He paused and looked squarely into his brother's eyes, and when he spoke again the words fell slowly from his lips—one by one, with a tiny silence between—"You have heard it, maybe—scarcely disturbing the silence of the night—that sound of the crunching of bones on the snow." A hand of ice seemed to reach beneath René's blue *capote* and fasten upon his heart, there came a strange prickling at the roots of his hair, and little chills shot along his spine. Somewhere back in the forest a tree exploded with the frost, and René jumped, nervously. Then, side by side, the brothers made their way to the cabin in silence.

[Pg 93]

[Pg 94]

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 95]

AT THE END OF RENÉ'S TRAIL

THE ridge up which Connie Morgan laboured at the head of his dogs was a sparsely timbered slope which terminated in a rounded crest a mile away. To the boy that smoothly rolling sky line looked ten miles ahead of him. No breath of wind stirred the stinging dead air. His snowshoes became great weights upon his feet which sought to drag him down, down into immeasurable depths of soft warm snow. The slope which in reality was a very easy grade assumed the steepness of a mountain side. He wanted above all things to sleep. He glanced backward. 'Merican Joe's team had stopped, and the Indian was fumbling listlessly with his pack. Halting his own dogs, the boy hastened back. The effort taxed his strength to the limit. His heavy whiplash swished through the air, and 'Merican Joe straightened up with a howl of pain.

"Come on!" cried Connie, as he prepared to strike again. "That cabin's only just over the ridge, and if you stop here you'll freeze!"

[Pg 96]

"No use," mumbled the Indian. "De red death—de white death. We goin' die annyhow. Me—I'm lak I'm sleep."

"You mush!" ordered the boy. "Get up there and take my dogs and I'll take yours. No more laying down on the job or I'll lay on this whip in earnest. If we mush we'll be there in an hour—*Skookum* Injun! Where's your nerve?"

'Merican Joe smiled. "*Skookum tillicum*," he muttered gravely, pointing his mittened hand toward the boy. "Me I'm go 'long wit' you till I die. We mak' her, now. We speet on de *kultus tamahnawus* in hees face!"

"You bet we will!" cried the boy. "Get up there now, and keep those dogs moving. I'll follow along with yours."

A half hour later the two stood side by side upon the crest of the ridge and looked down into the valley. Both were breathing heavily. Each had fallen time out of number, but each time had scrambled to his feet and urged on his dogs. As they stood now with the false suns dancing above them, the cold seemed to press upon them like a thing of weight. Connie glanced at his thermometer. It had dropped forty degrees! Across a half mile of snow they could see the little cabin in the edge of the timber. Only, now the smoke did not rise from the chimney but poured from its mouth and fell heavily to the roof where it rolled slowly to the ground. Motioning with his arm, 'Merican Joe led off down the slope and Connie followed, holding weakly to the tail rope of his toboggan. The going was easier than the ascent had been, but the "strong cold" seemed to strike to the very bone. After what seemed hours, the boy found himself before the door of the cabin. Beside him 'Merican Joe was bending over unharnessing the dogs. Connie stooped to look at the thermometer. "Seventy-two below!" he muttered, "and she only goes to seventy-six!"

[Pg 97]

Frantically the boy worked helping 'Merican Joe to unharness the dogs and when the last one was freed he opened the door and, closely followed by the Indian, stumbled into the cabin.

The next thing Connie knew he was lying on a bunk and a woman was seated beside him holding a spoon to his lips while she supported his head on her arm. The boy swallowed and a spoonful of hot liquid trickled down his throat. He felt warm, and comfortable, and drowsy—so drowsy that it was with an effort that he managed to swallow other spoonfuls of the hot liquid. Slowly he opened his eyes and then struggled to a sitting posture. 'Merican Joe sat upon the floor with his back against the log wall. He became conscious of a stinging sensation in his face and he

[Pg 98]

prodded his cheek with an inquisitive finger.

The woman noticed the action. "It is not bad," she explained. "Your nose and your cheeks they were frozen but I thawed them out with the snow." Suddenly her expression changed and a look of fear haunted her eyes. She pointed toward the door. "But—what is it—out there? The sky is all wrong. There are no clouds, yet it is not blue, and there are many suns that move and jump about. It is a time of great evil. Did you not see the plague flag? And my man is away. Maybe it is the end of all things. I am afraid. Why are there many suns?"

"It is the white death," answered the boy. "You needn't fear. Only stay in the house and don't breathe the outside air. I have seen it once before. Tonight will come the northern lights and they will hiss and pop and snap. And they will be so bright it will look like the whole world is on fire. Then the wind will come, and tomorrow it will be gone, and everything will be the same as before."

[Pg 99]

"I have heard of the white death," said the woman. "My father and some of the old men have seen it—beyond Bear Lake. My father and some of the others crawled under their blankets and lay for more than a day but some of the old men died."

The thin wail of an infant sounded from a pole crib at the other end of the room, and the woman rose quickly and crossed to its side. Connie saw her stoop over the crib and mutter soft, crooning words, as she patted the tiny bed clothing with her hand. The wailing ceased, and the woman tiptoed back to his side. "It is the little Victor," she explained, and Connie noticed that her eyes were wet with tears. Suddenly she broke down and covered her face with her hands while her body swayed to and fro. "Oh, my little man! My little soft baby! He must die—or be terribly scarred by the hand of the red death! So beautiful—so little, and so good, and so beautiful! And I have nothing to feed him, for René has taken the milk. René is a devil! I would have killed him but he took the gun." The woman stopped speaking, and the silence of the little cabin was punctuated by the sound of her muffled sobs.

[Pg 100]

Connie felt a strange lump rising in his throat. He swallowed and attempted to speak, but the result was a funny noise way back in his throat. He swallowed several times and when he finally spoke his voice sounded hard and gruff. "Quit crying, mam, and help me get this straight. I don't believe your little kid's got the smallpox." He paused and glanced about the room. "This ain't the kind of a place he'd get it—it's too clean. Who told you it was the red death?"

"Oh, no one told me! Who is there to tell? René is a liar, and my man has gone to Fort Norman. But," she leaped to her feet and regarded Connie with a tense, eager look, "can it be that you are a doctor?" The next instant she turned away. "No—you are but a boy!"

"No," repeated Connie, "I am not a doctor. But I used to be in the Mounted and I learned all there was in the manual about smallpox and I've seen a good deal of it. What makes you think it's smallpox?"

[Pg 101]

"I have seen, on his little chest—the red blotches. What else could it be?"

"How long has he been sick?"

"Since day before yesterday."

"Did he have any fits? Did he vomit? Did he run up a high fever?"

"No—none of these things. But he has not wanted much to eat—and on his chest are the blotches."

"Let's look at 'em."

The woman led the way to the crib and lifting the baby from it, bared his chest. Connie examined the red marks minutely. He felt of them with his fingers, and carefully examined the forehead along the roots of the hair. Then he turned to the woman with a smile. "Put him back," he said quietly. "He's a buster of a kid, all right—and he ain't got smallpox. He'll be well as ever in three or four days. He's got chicken pox—"

The woman clutched at his arm and her breath came fast. "Are you sure?" she cried, a great hope dawning in her eyes. "How can you tell?"

"It's all in the manual. Smallpox pimples feel hard, like shot, and they come first on the face and forehead, and there is always high fever and vomiting, and the pimples are always round. This is chicken pox, and it ain't dangerous, and I told you I used to be with the Mounted, and the Mounted is always sure. Now, what about this Rainy person that stole the little kid's milk?" But the woman was paying no attention. She was pacing up and down the floor with the baby hugged to her breast—laughing, crying, talking to the little one all in the same breath, holding him out at arm's length and then cuddling him close and smothering him with kisses. Then, suddenly, she laid the baby in his crib and turned to Connie who, in view of what he had seen, backed away in alarm until he stood against the door.

[Pg 102]

"Ah, you are the grand boy!" the woman exclaimed. "You have saved the life of my little Victor! You are my friend. In four days comes my man—the little one's papa, and he will tell you better

than I of our thanks. He is your friend for life. He is Victor Bossuet, and on the rivers is none like him. I will tell him all—how the little one is dying with the red death, and you come out of the strong cold with the frost in the nose and the cheeks, and you look on the little Victor who is dying, and say '*non*,' and pouf! the red death is gone, and the little baby has got only what you call chickiepok! See! Even now he is laughing!"

[Pg 103]

"He's all right," smiled Connie. "But you're way off about my curing him. He'd have been well as ever in a few days anyhow and you'd have had your scare for nothing."

The woman's voluble protest was interrupted by a wail from the infant, and again her mood changed and she began to pace the floor wringing her hands. "See, now he is hungry and there is nothing to feed him! René is a devil! He has taken the milk."

"Hold on!" interrupted Connie. "Was it canned milk? 'Cause if it was you don't need to worry. I've got about a dozen cans out there on the toboggan. Wait and I'll get it." He turned to the Indian who had been a silent onlooker. "Come on, Joe, crawl into your outfit. While I get the grub and blankets off the toboggans, you rustle the wood and water—and go kind of heavy on the wood, 'cause, believe me, there ain't any thermometer going to tell us how cold it will get tonight."

A quarter of an hour later Connie dragged in a heavy canvas sack and two rolls of blankets just as 'Merican Joe stacked his last armful of wood high against the wall. "I fed the dogs," said the boy as he rummaged in the bag and handed the cans of milk one by one to the woman, "and I could tell your husband is an old-timer by the looks of his dog shelter—warm and comfortable, and plenty of room for two teams. I can find out all I want to know about a man by the way he uses his dogs."

[Pg 104]

"He is the best man on the rivers," repeated the woman, her eyes shining, as she opened a can of milk, carefully measured an amount, added water, and stirred it as it heated on the stove. Connie watched with interest as she fed it to the baby from a spoon. "Again you have saved his life," she said, as the last spoonful disappeared between the little lips.

"Aw, forget that!" exclaimed the boy, fidgeting uncomfortably. "What I want is the dope on this Rainy—how did he come to swipe the kid's milk? And where is he heading for? I'm in something of a hurry to get to Fort Norman, but I've got a hunch I'm due for a little side trip. He ain't going to be far ahead of me tomorrow. If he holes up today and tonight I'll catch up with him along about noon—and if he don't hole up—the white death will save me quite a bit of trouble."

[Pg 105]

"Ah, that René!" exclaimed the woman, her face darkling with passion, "he is Victor's brother, and he is no good. He drinks and gambles and makes the big noise with his mouth. Bou, wou, wou! I am the big man! I can do this! I can do that! I am the best man in the world! Always he has lived in the towns in the winter and spent his money but this winter he came and lived with us because his money was gone. That is all right he is the brother of my husband. He is welcome. But one does not have to like him. But when my husband tells him to go to Fort Norman for food because we did not know there would be three, he made excuse, and my husband went and René stayed. Then the next day the little Victor was sick, and I saw the hand of the red death upon him and I told René that he should run fast after Victor and tell him. But he would not! He swore and cursed at his own ill luck and he ran from the house into the woods. I made the plague flag and hung it out so that no traveller should come in and be in danger of the red death."

[Pg 106]

"By and by René came in from the woods in a terrible rage. He began to pack his outfit for the trail and I stayed close by the side of my little one for fear René would do him harm in his anger. At last he was ready and I was glad to see him go. I looked then and saw that he had taken all the food! Even the baby's milk he had taken! I rushed upon him then, but I am a woman and no match for a big man like René, and he laughed and pushed me away. I begged him to leave me some food, and he laughed the more—and on my knees I implored him to leave the baby's milk. But he would not. He said he had sworn vengeance upon Victor, and now he would take vengeance. He said, 'The brat will not need the milk for he will die anyway, and you will die, and Victor will follow me, and I will lead him to a place I know, and then he will die also.' It was then I rushed for the gun, but René had placed it in his pack. And I told him he must not go from a plague house, for he would spread the terrible red death in all the North. But he laughed and said he would show the North that he, René Bossuet, was a god who could spread death along the rivers. He would cause it to sweep like a flame among the rivermen who hated him, and among the men of the Mounted."

[Pg 107]

The woman paused and Connie saw that a look of wonderful contentment had come into her eyes.

"The good God did not listen to the curses of René," she said, simply, "for as I lay on the floor I prayed to Him and He sent you to me, straight out of the frozen places where in the winter no men are. Tell me, did not the good God tell you to come to me—to save the little baby's life?" There was a look of awed wonder in the woman's eyes, and suddenly Connie remembered the mirage with the blazing plague flag in the sky.

"Yes," he answered, reverently, "I guess maybe He did."

That night the wind came, the aurora flashed and hissed in the heavens, and early in the morning when Connie opened the door the air was alive with the keen tang of the North. Hastily he made up his pack for the trail. Most of the grub he left behind, and when the woman protested he laughed, and lied nobly, in that he told her that they had far too much grub for their needs. While 'Merican Joe looked solemnly on and said nothing.

[Pg 108]

With the blessing of the woman ringing in their ears they started on the trail of René Bossuet. When they were out of sight of the cabin, the Indian halted and looked straight into the boy's eyes.

"We have one day's grub, for a three-day's trail if we hit straight for Fort Norman," he announced. "Why then do we follow this man's trail? He has done nothing to us! Why do you always take upon yourself the troubles of others?"

"Where would *you* have been if I didn't?" flashed the boy angrily. "And where would the trapper have been and that woman and little baby? When I first struck Alaska I was just a little kid with torn clothes and only eight dollars and I thought I didn't have a friend in the world. And then, at Anvik, I found that every one of the big men of the North was my friend! And ever since that time I have been trying to pay back the debt I owe the men of the North—and I'll keep on trying till I die!"

With a shrug 'Merican Joe started his dogs and took up the trail. Two hours later Connie took the lead, and pointed to the tracks in the snow. "He's slowing up," he exclaimed. "If we don't strike his camp within a half an hour, we'll strike—something else!"

[Pg 109]

A few minutes later both halted abruptly. Before them was a wide place in the snow that had been trampled by many feet—the soft padded feet of the wolf pack. A toboggan, with its pack still securely lashed, stood at the end of René Bossuet's trail. Small scraps of leather showed where the dogs had been torn from the harness. Connie closed his eyes and pictured to himself what had happened there, in the night, in the sound of the roaring wind, and in the changing lights of the brilliantly flashing aurora. Then he opened his eyes and stepped out into the trampled space and gazed thoughtfully down upon the few scattered bits that lay strewn about upon the snow—a grinning skull, deeply gored here and there with fang marks, the gnawed ends of bones, and here and there ravellings and tiny patches of vivid blue cloth. And as he fastened the toboggan behind his own and swung the dogs onto the back-trail, he paused once more and smiled grimly:

[Pg 110]

"He had always lived in the North," he said, "but he didn't know the North. He ran like the coward he was from the red death when there was no danger. And not only that, but he stole the food from a woman and a sick baby. He thought he could get away with it—'way up here. But there's something in the silent places that men don't understand—and never will understand. I've heard men speak of it. And now I have seen it—the working of the justice of the North!"

CHAPTER VII

[Pg 111]

AT FORT NORMAN

No trading post in all the North is more beautifully situated than Fort Norman. The snug buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northern Trading Company are located upon a high bank, at the foot of which the mighty Mackenzie rushes northward to the frozen sea. On a clear day the Rocky Mountains are plainly visible, and a half mile below the post, Bear River, the swift running outlet to Great Bear Lake, flows into the Mackenzie. It is to Fort Norman that the Indians from up and down the great river, from the mountains to the westward, and from Great Bear Lake, and a thousand other lakes and rivers, named and unnamed, to the eastward, come each year to trade their furs. And it was there that Connie Morgan and 'Merican Joe arrived just thirty-seven days after they pulled out of Dawson.

Except at the time of the holiday trading, winter visitors are few at the isolated post, and the two were heartily welcomed by the agents of the rival trading companies, and by the two priests of the little Roman Catholic Mission.

[Pg 112]

Connie learned from the representatives of both companies that from all indications fur would be plentiful that year, but both expressed doubt that Fort Norman would get its share of the trading.

"It's this way," explained McTavish, a huge, bearded Scot, as they sat about the fur trader's roaring stove upon the evening of their arrival. "The mountain Indians—the moose eaters, from the westward—are trading on the Yukon. They claim they get better prices over there an' maybe they do. The Yukon traders get the goods into the country cheaper, an' they could sell them cheaper, an' I ain't blamin' the Indians for tradin' where they can do best. But, now comes reports of a free trader that has trailed up the Coppermine from the coast to trade amongst the caribou eaters to the eastward. If that's so—an' he gets 'em to trade with him—God help those Indians along towards spring."

The man relapsed into silence and Connie grinned to himself. "They've had it all their way up here for so long it makes them mad if anybody else comes in for a share of their profits," thought the boy. Aloud, he asked innocently:

[Pg 113]

"What's the matter with the free traders?"

McTavish frowned, and Berl Hansen, the Dane who managed the affairs of the Northern Trading Company's post, laughed harshly.

"Go down along the railroads, boy," he said, "if you want to see the handiwork of the free traders, an' look at the Indians that has dealt with 'em. You can see 'em hanging around them railroad towns, that was once posts where they handled good clean furs. Them Injuns an' their fathers before 'em was good trappers—an' look at 'em now!"

"Yes," interrupted Connie, "but they are the victims of the bootleggers and the whiskey runners! How about the free trader that won't handle liquor?"

"There ain't no such a free trader!" exclaimed Hansen, angrily. "They're a pack of lying, thievin'——"

"There, there, Berl, lad!" rumbled McTavish, checking the irate Dane, who had fairly launched upon his favourite theme. "Ye're right, in the main—but the lad's question was a fair one an' deserves a fair answer. I'm an older man, an' I've be'n thirty years in the service of the Company. Let me talk a bit, for there are a few traders that for aught I know are honest men an' no rum peddlers. But, there's reasons why they don't last long." The old Scotchman paused, whittled deliberately at his plug tobacco, and filled his pipe. "It's this way," he began. "We'll suppose this trader over on the Coppermine is a legitimate trader. We will handle his case fairly, an' to do that we must consider first the Hudson's Bay Company. For two hundred an' fifty years we have been traders of the North—we know the needs of the North—an' we supply them. The Indian's interests are our interests, and we trade nothing but the best goods. For two centuries an' a half we have studied the North and we have dealt fairly. And may I say here," with a glance toward Hansen, "that there are several other companies with sound financial backing and established posts that have profited by our experience and also supply only the best of goods, and deal fairly. With them we have no quarrel—honest competition, of course, we have—but no quarrel. Comes now the free trader. He is a man of small capital. His goods are cheap, they are of inferior quality. He cannot give 'debt,' as the credit of the North is called. He cannot carry a large number of Indians for six months or a year as we do. If he attempts it, his creditors press him and he goes to the wall—or the Indians find out before time for payment comes that the goods are inferior, and they repudiate their debt. It is bad all around—bad for the Indians, bad for the free traders, and bad for us——"

[Pg 114]

[Pg 115]

"I should think it would be good for you," interrupted Connie.

The factor shook his head: "I told you the Indians' interests are our interests. I will show you. Take it at this very post. We will suppose that the beaver are becoming scarce around here; what do we do? We say to the Indians, 'Do not kill any beaver this year and next year.' And they obey us—why? Because we will not buy any beaver here during that time. They will not kill what they cannot sell. Then, when the beavers have become numerous again, we resume trade in them. Were it not for this policy, many fur-bearing animals that once were numerous would now be extinct.

[Pg 116]

"But—suppose there are free traders in the country—we will pay nothing for beavers, so they begin to buy them cheap—they can name their own price, and the Indians will keep on killing them. The Indian says: 'It is better that I should sell this beaver now at six skins than that my neighbour should sell him in two years at twelve skins.' Then, soon, there are no more beavers left in that part of the country. Another thing, in the fur posts our word is law. We tell the Indians when they can begin to take fur, and when they must stop. The result is we handle only clean, prime pelts with the flesh side white as paper. With the free trader a pelt is a pelt, prime or unprime, it makes no difference. So the killing goes merrily on where the free traders are—and soon all the fur-bearing animals are exterminated from that section. What does the free trader care? He loads his fly-by-night outfit into canoes or a York boat, and passes on to lay waste another section, leaving the poor Indians to face the rigours of the coming winter with ruined credit, cheap, inadequate clothing, cheap food, and worthless trinkets, and their hunting grounds barren of game."

[Pg 117]

"But," objected Connie, "suppose a free trader dealt in goods as good as yours——"

McTavish laughed. "I have yet to see that trader in thirty years' experience. Admit that his goods did measure up to our standard. What would he have to charge for them? We buy in vast quantities—in some cases we take the entire output of factories, and we have an established system of transportation to get it into the wilds. No free trader can compete with us—cost plus freight would ruin him, especially as he must allow the Indians a debt."

"How much debt do they get?"

"That depends upon several things. First of all upon the Indian—his reputation for honesty, and

his reputation as a hunter. It also depends upon the size of his family, the distance of his hunting ground from the post, and his general prospects for the season. It varies from one hundred to five or six hundred, and in exceptional cases even to a thousand skins."

"What do you mean by a skin?"

"A skin," explained McTavish, "is our unit of trade. Instead of saying a certain thing is worth so many dollars, we say it is worth so many 'skins' or 'made beaver.'. At this post the value of the made beaver is a half-dollar." The factor opened a drawer and drew forth a handful of brass tokens which he handed to Connie for inspection. "These are skins, or made beaver. We offer an Indian so many skins for his pack of furs. He has little idea of what we mean when we tell him he has five hundred skins' worth of fur, so we count out five hundred of these made beaver—he can see them, can feel them—the value of his catch is immediately reduced to something concrete—something he can understand—then we take away the amount of his debt, and if there are still some made beaver remaining, he knows he has something left over to spend for finery and frippery. Rarely does he use these extra skins for the purchase of food or necessary clothing—he contracts a new debt for that. But, wait till spring when the Indians come in, and you will witness the trading for yourself. It is then you will see why it is that the free trader has small chance of doing business at a profit north of sixty."

[Pg 118]

"But, why wouldn't it be just as easy to figure it in dollars?" asked the boy.

[Pg 119]

McTavish laughed. "There were several reasons, although, with the government paying treaty in cash nowadays, the Indians are beginning to know something of money. But the main reason is that when the made beaver was first invented, no one seems to know just when or where or by whom, there was no money in the country—everything was traded or bartered for some other thing. And because the skin, and particularly the beaver skin, was the thing most bartered by Indians, the unit of value came to be known as a 'skin' or 'made beaver.' Another reason why money has never been popular with us is because of its destructibility. Take this post, for instance. Suppose we were compelled to ship silver dollars back and forth between here and Edmonton? Ten thousand of them would weigh close to six hundred pounds! Six hundred pounds would mean, on scows, six pieces—and mighty valuable pieces too, to be loaded and unloaded a dozen times, carried over portages, shot through dangerous rapids, carried up and down slippery river banks and across slippery planks to the scows. Suppose one of these pieces were dropped overboard by one of the none too careful half-breed rivermen? The Company would lose just so many dollars. Or, suppose the riverman very conveniently dropped the piece into the water where he could recover it again? A dollar is a dollar—it can be spent anywhere. But suppose that the piece contained only a supply of these brass 'made beaver'—the whole ten thousand would only make one piece—and if it dropped into the river the Company would lose only so much brass. Then if the riverman afterward recovered it, instead of finding himself possessed of dollars which he could spend anywhere, he would only have a hundred pounds or so of brass tokens whose value had been cancelled. And, again, the expense of transportation, even granted the consignment arrived safely at its destination, would be against the dollar. One hundred pounds, where freight costs sixteen cents a pound to move, is much cheaper to move than six hundred pounds."

[Pg 120]

"Yes," agreed Connie, "but how about using paper money?"

"Worse, and more of it!" exclaimed McTavish. "In the first place the piece, or package, would be lighter and of greater value—therefore much easier to make away with. Some lone bandit, or gang of bandits, might find it well worth their while to hold up the scow brigade and make off with that little piece. And, besides, until very recently, the Indians have had no sense of the value of paper money. An Indian cannot see why one piece of paper should be worth five dollars, and another exactly like it in size and colour should be worth ten, or twenty, or fifty—and another piece of paper be worth nothing at all. I am sure no one at the posts would welcome the carrying on of business upon a cash basis—I know I should not. The Canadian North is the cleanest land in the world, in so far as robbery is concerned, thanks to the Mounted. But with its vast wilderness for hiding places and its lack of quick transportation and facility for spreading news, I am afraid it would not long remain so, if it became known that every trading post possessed its cash vault. As it is, the goods of the North, in a great measure, protect themselves from theft by their very bulk. A man could hardly expect to get out of this country, for instance, with even a very few packs of stolen fur. The Mounted would have him before he could get half way to the railroad."

[Pg 121]

[Pg 122]

"It seems funny," grinned Connie, "to find an outfit that doesn't like to do business for cash!"

"Funny enough, till you know the reason—then, the most natural thing in the world. And, there is yet one more reason—take the treaty money. The Indians bring the treaty money to us and buy goods with it. We make the profit on the goods—but if they had bought those same goods for fur—we would have made the profit on the fur, also—and primarily, we are a fur company—although every year we are becoming more and more of a trading company and a land company. I am glad I shall not live to see the last of the fur trade—I love the fur—it speaks a language I know."

A short time later the company broke up, Berl Hansen returned to his own quarters, and Connie and 'Merican Joe were given the spare room in the factor's house where for the first time

since leaving Dawson they slept under a roof.

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 123]

BAIT—AND A BEAR

THE business of outfitting for the balance of the winter occupied two whole days and when it was finished down to the last item Connie viewed the result with a frown. "It's going to take two trips to pack all that stuff. And by the time we make two trips and build a cabin besides, we won't have much time left for trapping."

"Where you headin' for?" queried McTavish.

"Somewhere over on the Coppermine," answered the boy. "I don't know just where—and I guess it don't make much difference."

The big Scotchman laughed. "No, lad, it won't make no great difference. What put it in your head to trap on the Coppermine?"

"Why, the truth is, it isn't so much the trapping I'm interested in. I want to try my hand at prospecting over there."

"Gold?"

"Yes—mainly."

[Pg 124]

McTavish shook his head forebodingly.

Connie smiled. "You don't believe there's any gold there?" he asked. "'Gold's where you find it,' you know."

"There must be lots of it there, then. Nobody's ever found it. But, it's a bad time of year to be hittin' for the Coppermine country. It's bleak, an' barren, an' storm ridden. An' as for trappin' you'll find nothin' there to trap but foxes this time of year, an' you won't be able to do any prospectin' till summer. You might better trap in closer to the post this winter, an' when the lake opens you can take a York boat an' a canoe an' cover most of the distance by water."

Connie frowned. "I started out for the Coppermine," he began, but the factor interrupted him with a gesture.

"Sure you did—an' you'll get there, too. It's this way, lad. You're a sourdough, all right, I knew that the minute I saw you. An' bein' a sourdough, that way, you ain't goin' to do nothin' that it ain't in reason to do. There's a deal of difference between a determination to stick to a thing an' see it through in the face of all odds when the thing you're stickin' to is worth doin'; an' stickin' to a thing that ain't worth doin' out of sheer stubbornness. The first is a fine thing an' the second is a foolish thing to do."

[Pg 125]

"I guess that's right," agreed Connie, after a moment of silence.

"Of course it's right!" interrupted McTavish. "You ought to find a good trappin' ground down along the south shore, somewheres between the Blackwater and Lake Ste. Therese. Ought to be plenty of caribou in there too, an' what with droppin' a few nets through the ice, an' what you can bring in with your rifles you won't need to draw in your belts none."

"How far is it from here?" asked the boy.

"Not over a hundred an' fifty miles at the outside, an' if you'll wait around a couple of days, there'll be some of the Bear Lake Indians in with some fish from the Fisheries. They're due now. You can hire them for guides. They'll be bringin' down a couple of tons of fish, so they'll have plenty sled room so you can make it in one trip."

And so it was decided that Connie and 'Merican Joe should winter somewhere on the south shore of Great Bear Lake, and for a certain band of Indians that had established their camp upon the river that flows from Lake Ste. Therese into the extreme point of McVicker Bay, it was well they did.

[Pg 126]

The Bear Lake Indians appeared the following day, delivered their fish at the post, and Connie employed two of them with their dog teams to make the trip. The journey was uneventful enough, with only one storm to break the monotony of steady trailing with the thermometer at forty and even fifty below—for the strong cold had settled upon the Northland in earnest.

Upon the sixth day 'Merican Joe halted the outfit upon the shore of a little lake which lay some five miles from the south shore of Keith Bay. "Build camp here," he said, indicating a low knoll covered with a dense growth of spruce. Connie paid off the guides with an order on the Hudson's Bay Company, and hardly had they disappeared before he and 'Merican Joe were busy clearing away the snow and setting up the tent that was to serve as temporary quarters until the tiny

cabin that would be their winter home could be completed.

The extra sled provided by the Indians, and the fact that they were to go only a comparatively short distance from the post, had induced Connie to add to his outfit a few conveniences that would have been entirely out of the question had he insisted in pushing on to the Coppermine. There was a real sheet iron stove with several lengths of pipe, a double window—small to be sure, but provided with panes of glass—and enough planking for a small sized door and door frame. Although the snow all about them showed innumerable tracks of the fur bearers, the two paid no attention to them until the cabin stood finished in its tiny clearing. And a snug little cabin it was, with its walls banked high with snow, its chinks all sealed with water-soaked snow that froze hard the moment it was in place, and its roof of small logs completely covered with a thick layer of the same wind-proof covering.

[Pg 127]

On the morning following the completion of the cabin Connie and 'Merican Joe ate their breakfast by candlelight. Connie glanced toward the pile of steel traps of assorted sizes that lay in the corner. "We'll be setting them today, Joe. The fox tracks are thick all along the lake, and yesterday I saw where a big lynx had prowled along the edge of that windfall across the coulee."

[Pg 128]

'Merican Joe smiled. "Firs' we got to git de bait. Dat ain' no good we set de trap wit'out no bait."

"What kind of bait? And where do we get it?" asked the boy.

"Mos' any kin'—rabbit, bird, caribou, moose. Today we set 'bout wan hondre snare for de rabbit. We tak' de leetle gun 'long, mebbe-so we git de shot at de ptarmigan."

"Why can't we take a few fox traps with us? We could bait 'em with bacon, or a piece of fish."

"No, dat ain' no good for ketch de fox. Dat leetle fox she too mooch smart. She hard to trap. She ain' goin' fool wit' bacon an' fish. She stick out de nose an' smell de man-smell on de bacon an' she laugh an' run away. Same lak de fish—she say: 'De fish b'long in de wataire. How he git t'rough de ice an' sit on de snow, eh?' An' den she run 'way an' laugh som' mor'. We ain' goin' trap no fox yet annyhow. Novembraire, she mos' gon'. Decembraire we trap de marten an' de *loup cervier*. In Janueer de marten curl up in de stump an' sleep. Den we trap de fox. She ain' so smart den—she too mooch hongre."

At daylight the two started, 'Merican Joe leading the way to a dense swamp that stretched from the lake shore far inland. Once in the thicket the Indian showed Connie how to set snares along the innumerable runways, or well-beaten paths of the rabbits, and how to secure each snare to the end of a bent sapling, or tossing pole, which, when released by the struggles of the rabbit from the notch that held it down, would spring upright and jerk the little animal high out of reach of the forest prowlers. During the forenoon Connie succeeded in shooting four of the big white snowshoe rabbits, and at the noon camp 'Merican Joe skinned these, being careful to leave the head attached to the skin.

[Pg 129]

"I didn't know rabbit skins were worth saving," said Connie, as the Indian placed them together with the carcasses in the pack.

"You wait—by-m-by I show you somet'ing," answered the Indian. And it was not long after the snare setting had been resumed that Connie learned the value of the rabbit skins. As they worked deeper into the swamp, lynx, or *loup cervier* tracks became more numerous. Near one of the runways 'Merican Joe paused, drew a skin from his pack, and proceeded to stuff it with brush. When it had gained something the shape of the rabbit, he placed it in a natural position beneath the low-hanging branches of a young spruce and proceeded to set a heavier snare with a larger loop. The setting of this snare was slightly different from the setting of the rabbit snares, for instead of a tossing pole the snare was secured to the middle of a clog, or stout stick about two inches in diameter and four feet long. The ends of this clog were then supported upon two forked sticks in such manner that the snare hung downward where it was secured in position by tying the loop to a light switch thrust into the snow at either side. The snare was set only a foot or two from the stuffed rabbit skin and sticks and brush so arranged that in order to reach the rabbit the lynx must leap straight into the snare. The remaining rabbit skins were similarly used during the afternoon, as were the skins of two ptarmigan that Connie managed to bring down.

[Pg 130]

"Use de skin for bait de *loup cervier*, an' de meat for bait de marten—dat de bes' way," explained 'Merican Joe, as they worked their way toward the edge of the swamp after the last snare had been set.



"The snare was set only a foot or two from the stuffed rabbit skin and sticks and brush so arranged that in order to reach the rabbit the lynx must leap straight into the snare."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

The early darkness was already beginning to fall when Connie stopped suddenly and stared down at the snow at the base of a huge mass of earth and moss that had been thrown upward by the roots of a fallen tree. The thing that caught the boy's attention was a round hole in the snow—a hole hardly larger in diameter than a silver quarter, and edged with a lacy filigree of frost spicules. The boy called to 'Merican Joe who had paused to refasten the thongs of his rackets. At the first glance the Indian's eyes lighted:

[Pg 131]

"Bear in dere!" he exclaimed. "We dig um out. We git plenty meat—plenty bait—an' de good skin besides."

"Hadn't we better wait till tomorrow and bring the heavy rifle?" Connie asked. "We can't kill a bear with this dinky little twenty-two."

"We ain' need no gun. Me—I cut de good stout club, an' you tak' de ax. De bear she too mooch sleepy to do no fightin'. Den we git de toboggan an' haul um in. We only 'bout wan half-mile from camp. Tomor' we got plenty bait, we set de marten trap. We skin de bear tonight we save wan whole day." As he talked, the Indian felled a small birch and trimmed about five feet of its trunk which measured about two inches and a half in thickness. "Dat fix um good, an' den we cut de t'roat," he explained, brandishing the club in the air.

[Pg 132]

"I don't know," replied Connie, dubiously. "Waseche and I have killed several bears, and there was a time or two when a couple of good thirty-forty's came near not being big enough."

'Merican Joe grinned. "Dat was grizzlies. I ain' t'ink de grizzly com' so far from de montaine. Dis leetle black bear, she ain' lak to fight mooch."

"I hope you're right," grinned the boy, as he fell to work helping the Indian to trample the snow into good solid footing for a space of ten feet or more about the airhole. This done, they removed snowshoes and coats and with ax and pole attacked the snow that covered their quarry.

"I feel um!" cried the Indian, as he thrust his pole deep into the snow after five minutes of hard work. "We wake um up firs', an' when he stick out de head we bang um good." 'Merican Joe continued to ram his pole into the snow where he had felt the yielding mass of the bear's body, all the time haranguing the bear in jargon, addressing him as "cousin," and inviting him to come out and be killed, and in the same breath apologizing for the necessity of taking his life.

[Pg 133]

Then—very suddenly—"cousin" came out! There was a mighty upheaval of snow, a whistling snort, and a mountain of brown fur projected itself into the rapidly gathering dusk. 'Merican Joe

struck valiantly with his club at the monstrous head that in the half-light seemed to Connie to measure two feet between the ears. The boy heard the sharp crack of the weapon as it struck the skull, and the next instant he heard the club crashing through the limbs of a small spruce. The infuriated bear had caught it fairly with a sweep of his giant paw. Then Connie struck with his ax, just as 'Merican Joe, with the bear almost upon him, scrambled into the branches of a tree. The boy's blow fell upon the bear's hip, and with a roar the great brute whirled to meet the new attack as Connie gathered himself to strike again.

Then, a very fortunate thing happened. When 'Merican Joe had removed his snowshoes he had stuck them upright in the snow and hung his coat over them. The figure thus formed caught the bear's attention, and with a lurch he was upon it. There was a crackling of ash bows as the snowshoes were crushed in the ponderous embrace. And, seeing his chance, Connie darted forward, for the momentum of the bear's lurch had carried him on to all fours in the soft snow at the edge of the trampled space. As the huge animal struggled, belly deep, the boy brought the bit of his ax down with all his force upon the middle of the brute's spine. The feel of the blow was good as the keen blade sank to the helve. The next instant the ax was jerked from his hands and the boy turned to collide with 'Merican Joe, who had recovered his club and was rushing in to renew the attack. Both went sprawling upon the trodden snow, and before they could recover their feet the bear was almost upon them. They sprang clear, the Indian waiting with upraised club, but the bear advanced slowly, ripping and tearing at the snow with his huge forepaws with their claws as long as a man's fingers. Down came the Indian's club upon the broad skull, but there was no rearing upward to ward off the blow, and then it was that both saw that the animal was dragging its useless hinder part. Connie's ax had severed the animal's backbone, and so long as they kept out of reach of those terrible forepaws they were safe. While the Indian continued to belabour the bear's head, Connie managed to slip around behind the animal and recover his ax, after which it was but the work of a few moments to dispatch the huge bear with a few well-directed blows.

[Pg 134]

[Pg 135]

It was almost dark when the two stood looking down upon the carcass of the great barren ground grizzly.

"So that's your little black bear that don't like to fight much!" grinned Connie.

'Merican Joe returned the grin. "All de tam kin learn somet'ing new. Nex' tam we dig out de den bear we bring de big gun 'long. Annyhow, we git mor' bait an' dog feed, an' de good meat, an' de bigger skin, an' we git mor', w'at you call, excite!" He placed his foot upon the head of the dead bear. "Dat too bad we got to kill you, cousin. But Injun an' white boy got to git de meat to eat, an' de bait to ketch de leetle marten. We mooch oblig' you ain' kill us."

'Merican Joe's crushed snowshoes and his coat were dug out of the snow, and together the two managed to work the carcass on to its back. The Indian proceeded to build a fire by the light of which he could skin the bear while Connie fastened on his own rackets and hit out for the cabin to procure the toboggan and dogs, and an extra pair of snowshoes. An hour later he returned, just as 'Merican Joe was stripping the hide from the hind legs. While Connie folded it into a convenient pack, the Indian took the ax and chopped off the bear's head which he proceeded to tie to the branches of a small spruce at the foot of which the animal had been killed.

[Pg 136]

"What in thunder are you doing?" asked the boy.

'Merican Joe regarded him gravely. "Mus' hang up de skull right where he git kill," he answered.

"Why?"

"Cause *Sah-ha-lee Tyee*, w'at you call, de Great Spirit, he com' 'long an' count de bears in de springtime. He count de Injun, too, an' de moose, an' de beaver' an' all de big people. *S'pose* he ain' fin' dat bear. He ain' know dat bear git kill. He t'ink dat bear ain' wake up yet, or else he hide in de den. If de skull ain' hang up she git cover up wit' leaves, or sink in de swamp, an' *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* no kin fin'. But, w'en he see skull hang up, he say: 'De Injun kill de bear an' git meat. Dat good. I sen' um nodder bear.' So de bear always plenty in de Injun country. De white men com' 'long an' kill de bear. Dey ain' hang up de skull—an' by-m-by, w'ere de white man live de bears is all gon'."

[Pg 137]

The duty performed to 'Merican Joe's satisfaction, the carcass and skin were loaded on to the toboggan and by the thin light of the little stars they started the dogs and wended their way across the narrow lake to the little cabin in the spruce grove, well satisfied with their first day of trapping.

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 138]

OUT ON THE TRAP LINE

CONNIE MORGAN was anxious to be off on the trap line early in the morning following the

adventure with the bear. But 'Merican Joe shook his head and pointed to the carcass of the bear that for want of a better place had been deposited upon the floor of the cabin. "First we got to build de *cache*. We ain' got no room in de cabin—an' besides, she too warm for keep de meat good. De dog, an' de wolf, an' de *loup cervier*, an' de *carcajo*, w'at you call 'Injun devil,' dey all hongre an' hunt de meat. We got to build de *cache* high up."

The first thing, of course, was to locate the site. This was quickly done by selecting four spruce trees about three inches in diameter and ten feet apart, and so situated as to form the corner posts of a rude square. Taking his ax, the Indian ascended one of these trees, lopping off the limbs as he went, but leaving the stubs for foot and hand holds. About twelve feet from the ground he cut off the trunk just above the place where a good stout limb stub formed a convenient crotch. The other three trees were similarly treated. Four strong poles were cut and placed from one crotch to another to form the frame of the *cache*. These poles were cut long enough to extend about four feet beyond the corner posts. Upon this frame-work lighter poles were laid side by side to form the platform of the *cache*—a platform that protruded beyond the corner posts so far that no animal which might succeed in climbing one of the posts could possibly manage to scramble over the edge. The corner posts were trimmed smooth, and a rude ladder, which consisted simply of a young spruce with the limb stubs left on for the rungs was made. The last step in the completion of the *cache* was to cut down all trees whose limbs overhung in such manner that a *carcajo* could crawl out and drop down upon the platform, and also those trees whose proximity might tempt a lynx to try a flying leap to the *cache*.

[Pg 139]

When the carcass of the bear had been quartered and deposited upon the platform, the brush and limbs cleared away, and the ladder removed, the two trappers gazed in satisfaction at their handiwork. The stout *cache*, capable of protecting several tons of meat from the inroads of the forest prowlers, had been constructed without the use of a single nail, or bit of rope, or thong, and with no tool except an ax!

[Pg 140]

It was noon when the task was completed, and after a hasty lunch of tea, bear's liver, and bannock, 'Merican Joe selected fifteen small steel traps which he placed in his pack sack. He also carried a light belt ax, while Connie shouldered the larger ax and reached for the 30-40 rifle. 'Merican Joe shook his head.

"Dat ain' no good to tak' de big gun. Tak' de leetle wan an' mebbe-so you git som' mor' bait."

"Yes, and what if we run on to another one of your little black bears that don't like to fight? And what if we should see a caribou? And suppose we found a lynx in one of those snares?"

"We ain' goin' hunt no caribou. We goin' set marten traps, an' if we com' on de bear den we wait an' com' back som' odder time."

"But suppose there is a lynx in one of those snares?" persisted the boy.

"Let um be in de snare. We ain' goin' to de swamp. Dat ain' no good to go 'long de trap line too mooch. Let um be for week—mebbe-so ten day. We go runnin' t'rough de woods every day same place, we scare everyt'ing off. Anyhow, we ain' need de big gun for de *loup cervier*. De leetle gun better, he don' mak' so big hole in de skin. An' if de *loup cervier* is in de snare, we ain' need no gun at all. She choke dead."

[Pg 141]

A half mile from camp, 'Merican Joe set his first trap. The place selected for the set was the trunk of a large spruce that had been uprooted by the wind, and leaned against another tree at an angle of forty-five degrees. Two blows of the light belt ax made a notch into which the small steel trap fitted perfectly. The bait was placed upon the tree trunk just above the trap and a small barrier of bark was constructed close below the trap in such a manner that the marten in clambering over the barrier must almost to a certainty plant at least one fore foot upon the pan of the trap. The trap chain was secured to the tree so that when the marten was caught he would leap from the trunk and hang suspended in the air, which would give him no chance to free himself by gnawing his leg off above the jaws of the trap. This leaning tree set was 'Merican Joe's favourite with the steel traps.

[Pg 142]

A particularly ingenious set was made upon the trunk of a standing tree whose bark showed tiny scars and scratches that indicated to the practised eyes of the Indian that it was frequently ascended by martens. In this case two short sticks were sharpened and driven into the tree trunk to form a tiny platform for the trap. Some slabs were then cut from a nearby dead spruce and these also were sharpened and driven into the trunk on either side of the trap. Then a piece of bark was laid over the top for a roof, and the bait placed in the back of the little house thus formed. The marten must enter from the bottom and in order to reach the bait, the only possible spot for him to place his feet would be upon the pan of the trap.

Several sets were also made on the ground in places where the sign showed right. These ground sets were made generally at the base of a tree or a stump and consisted of little houses made of bark, with the bait in the back and the trap placed between the door and the bait. In the case of these sets, instead of securing the chain to the tree or stump, it was made fast to a clog, care being taken to fasten the chain to the middle of the stick.

[Pg 143]

Three or four sets were made for mink, also. These sets were very simple, and yet the Indian

made them with elaborate care. They consisted in placing the trap just within the mouth of a hole that showed evidence of occupation, after first scooping out a depression in the snow. The trap was placed in the bottom of the depression and carefully covered with light, dry leaves that had been previously collected. 'Merican Joe took great care to so arrange these leaves that while the jaws, pan, and spring were covered, no leaves would be caught in the angle of the jaws and thus prevent their closing about the leg of the mink. The leaves were now covered with snow, and the chain carried outward, buried in the snow, and secured to a tossing pole.

The short sub-arctic day had drawn to a close even before the last set was made, and in the darkness the two swung wide of their trap line, and headed for the cabin.

"Fifteen sets isn't so bad for an afternoon's work," opined Connie, "especially when you had to do all the work. Tomorrow I can help, and we ought to be able to get out all the rest of the marten traps. There are only fifty all told." [Pg 144]

"Fifty steel traps—we git dem set first. We gon 'bout t'ree, four mile today. We use up de steel trap in 'bout fifteen mile. Dat good—dey too mooch heavy to carry. Den we begin to set de deadfall."

"Deadfalls!" cried Connie. "How many traps are we going to put out?"

"Oh, couple hondre marten an' mink trap. We git de trap line 'bout fifty mile long. Den we set lot more *loup cervier* snare."

They swung out on to their little lake about a mile above the camp and as they mushed along near shore Connie stopped suddenly and pointed to a great grey shape that was running swiftly across the mouth of a small bay. The huge animal ran in a smooth, easy lope and in the starlight his hair gleamed like silver.

"Look!" he whispered to the Indian. "There goes Leloo!" Even as he spoke there came floating down the wind from the direction of the timber at the head of the lake, the long-drawn howl of a wolf. Leloo halted in his tracks and stood ears erect, motionless as a carved statue, until the sound trailed away into silence. A fox trotted out of the timber within ten yards of where the two stood watching and, catching sight of Connie as the boy shifted his twenty-two, turned and dashed along a thin sand point and straight across the lake, passing in his blind haste so close to Leloo that his thick brush almost touched the motionless animal's nose. But the big ruffed wolf-dog never gave so much as a passing glance. [Pg 145]

"That's funny," whispered Connie "Why didn't he grab that fox?"

"Leloo, he ain' fool wit' no fox tonight," answered 'Merican Joe. "He goin' far off an' run de ridges wit' de big people." And even as the Indian spoke, Leloo resumed his long, silent lope.

"I sure would like to follow him tonight," breathed the boy, as he watched the great dog until he disappeared upon the smooth, white surface of the lake where the aurora borealis was casting its weird, shifting lights upon the snow.

The weather had moderated to about the zero mark and by the middle of the following afternoon 'Merican Joe set the last of the remaining marten traps. Connie proved an apt pupil and not only did he set fourteen of the thirty-five traps, but each set was minutely examined and approved by the critical eye of 'Merican Joe. When the last trap was set, the Indian commenced the construction of deadfalls, and again Connie became a mere spectator. And a very interested spectator he was as he watched every movement of 'Merican Joe who, with only such material as came to hand on the spot, and no tools except his belt ax and knife, constructed and baited his cunningly devised deadfalls. These traps were built upon stumps and logs and were of the common figure-of-four type familiar to every schoolboy. The weight, or fall log, was of sufficient size to break the back of a marten. [Pg 146]

"De steel trap she bes'," explained the Indian. "She easy to set, an' she ketch mor' marten. Wit' de steel trap if de marten com' 'long an' smell de bait he mus' got to put de foot in de trap—but in de deadfall she got to grab de bait an' give de pull to spring de trap. But, de deadfall don't cost nuttin', an' if you go far de steel trap too mooch heavy to carry. Dat why I set de steel trap in close, an' de deadfall far out."

For four days the two continued to set deadfalls. The last two days they packed their sleeping bags, camping where night overtook them, and the evening of the fourth day found them with an even two hundred traps and thirty lynx snares set, and a trap line that was approximately fifty miles long and so arranged that either end was within a half mile of the cabin. [Pg 147]

"We go over de snare line in de swamp tomor'," said 'Merican Joe, as they sat that night at their little table beside the roaring sheet-iron stove, "an' next day we start over de trap line."

"About how many marten do you think we ought to catch?" asked Connie.

The Indian shrugged: "Can't tell 'bout de luck—sometam lot of um—sometam mebbe-so not none."

"What do you mean by a lot?" persisted the boy.

"Oh, mebbe-so, twenty—twenty five."

"About one marten for every eight or ten traps," figured the boy.

The Indian nodded. "You set seven steel trap an' catch wan marten, dat good. You set ten deadfall an' ketch wan marten, dat good, too."

"We've got six lynx snares down in the swamp to look at tomorrow. How many lynx are we going to get?" [Pg 148]

'Merican Joe grinned. "Mebbe-so not none—mebbe-so one, two. Dat all tam bes' we count de skin w'en we git hom'."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, eh?" laughed Connie.

The Indian looked puzzled. "W'at you mean—chicken hatch?" And when the boy explained to the best of his ability the old saw, 'Merican Joe, who had never seen a chicken in his life, nodded sagely. "Dat right—an' you ain' kin count de fur hatch first, nieder."

CHAPTER X

THE TRAIL OF THE *CARCAJO*

AT daylight next morning they crossed the narrow lake, travelling light, that is, each carried only his lunch in his pack sack, and Connie carried the light rifle, while 'Merican Joe dragged an empty toboggan upon which to haul home the rabbits and the lynx if they were lucky enough to get one.

The toboggan was left at the edge of the swamp and the two entered and plunged into the maze of rabbit paths that crisscrossed the snow in all directions. The first two snares were undisturbed, the third was pushed aside and had to be readjusted. Where the fourth and fifth snares had been a white snowshoe rabbit dangled from each tossing pole, and they were promptly transferred to the pack sacks and the snares reset.

Numerous new snares were set, the old ones adjusted, and the rabbits taken from the tossing poles of the lucky ones. One snare was missing altogether, and 'Merican Joe pointed to the tracks of a large wolf. "He run 'long an' git de foot or de nose in de snare, but she ain' strong 'nough to hold um," he explained. At noon they camped at the place where 'Merican Joe had skinned the rabbits on the first trip. They had twelve rabbits in the packs and these they *cached* to pick up on the return. [Pg 150]

It was not long after they resumed operations on the snare line that Connie, with a whoop of delight, dashed toward the spot where the first lynx snare had been set. The sparse underbrush had been broken down, and for a considerable space the snow had been torn up and trampled in a manner that told of a furious struggle. And right in the middle of the trampled space lay the body of a huge lynx doubled into a curious ball and frozen to the hardness of iron. The struggle had evidently been brief but furious, and terminated with the lynx sealing his own doom. Finding himself caught and held by the ever tightening noose, he had first tried to escape by flight, but the clog immediately caught on the underbrush and held him fast. The infuriated animal had then begun a ferocious attack upon the clog, which showed the deep scars of teeth and claws, and had wound up by catching his powerful hind feet upon the clog, one on either side of the center where the snare was fastened, and by straining the great muscles of his legs, literally choked himself to death. [Pg 151]

More rabbits were added to the packs, and a short time later another *cache* was made. Connie wanted to set some more lynx snares, but they had shot no rabbits, and it was impossible to skin the frozen ones they had taken from the snares without wasting time in thawing them out.

"Let's use a whole one," suggested the boy. "We've got lots of 'em, and a lynx is worth a rabbit, any time."

'Merican Joe objected. "We got plenty rabbit today—mebbe-so nex' tam we ain' got none. It ain' no good we waste de rabbit. S'pose we leave de rabbit for bait; de wolf an' de fox he com' long an' he too mooch smart to git in de snare, but he git de rabbit jes' de sam'. Anyhow, we ain' kin make de rabbit look lak he sittin' down w'en de hine legs is stickin' down straight lak de sawbuck. Nex' tam we got plenty rabbit skin for set de snare—de *loup cervier* she run all winter, anyhow."

The next four lynx snares were undisturbed, but the sixth and last had disappeared altogether. [Pg 152]

"It held him for a while, though," said Connie, as he gazed in disappointment at the snow which had been scratched and thrown in all directions by the big cat.

The Indian laughed aloud at the evident disappointment that showed in the boy's face.

"I don't see anything so funny about it!" frowned Connie.

"Dat mak' me laugh I see you sorry 'bout lose de *loup cervier*. You rich. You got plenty money. An' when you lose wan *loup cervier*, you look lak you los' de gol' mine."

"It isn't the value of the skin!" exclaimed the boy, quickly. "But when I start to do a thing I like to do it. It don't make any difference what it is, and it don't make any difference whether the stakes are high or low. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right. And if it's worth starting, it's worth finishing."

'Merican Joe nodded: "I know. We go finish um *loup cervier*, now."

"What do you mean—finish him?" cried Connie, pointing to the tracks in the snow that led from the scene of the brief struggle with the snare—tracks that showed where the lynx had fled in powerful, fifteen-foot leaps. "That don't look much like we'd finish that fellow, does it? Believe me, he left here in a hurry! He's probably climbing the North Pole right now!"

[Pg 153]

"I ain' know nuttin' 'bout no Nort' Poles. W'ere you t'ink de stick go w'at we fix on de snare?"

Connie examined the scene of the struggle minutely, kicking the loose snow about, but failed to find the clog.

"Why, he skipped out, clog and all! That clog wasn't very heavy."

"No, she ain' heavy, but she fasten in de middle, an' she ketch in de brush an' hol' *loup cervier* tight, you bet! You ain' see no track w'ere de stick drag, eh?"

Connie scrutinized the trail of the lynx, but the snow gave no sign of the clog. He turned a puzzled glance upon the Indian. "That's funny. He certainly didn't leave it here, and he couldn't have dragged it without leaving a trail, even if it hadn't caught on the brush."

Again 'Merican Joe laughed. "No, he ain' leave it—an' he ain' drag it. He ol' man *loup cervier*—he smart. He fin' out he ain' kin break loose, an' he ain' kin drag de stick, so he pick him up an' carry him in de mout'. But he ain' so mooch smart lak he t'ink. De firs' t'ing de *loup cervier* do w'en you chase um—he climb de tree. He t'ink de snare chase um—so he climb de tree. Den, by-m-by he git tire to hol' de stick in de mout' an' he let him go. Den he set on de limb long time an' growl. Den he t'ink he go som' mor', an' he start to climb down de tree. An' den de stick ketch on de limb an' he can't git down. He pull an' fight, but dat ain' no good—so he giv' de big jump—an' den he git hung—lak de mans do w'en dey kill nodder mans. Com' on—he ain' lak to go far. He lak to climb de tree. We fin' um queek."

[Pg 154]

That 'Merican Joe knew what he was talking about was soon demonstrated. For several hundred yards the tracks led straight through the swamp. Suddenly the Indian halted at the foot of a spruce that reared high above its neighbours and pointed to the snow which was littered with needles and bits of bark. There were no tracks beyond the foot of the tree, and Connie peered upward, but so thick were the branches that he could see nothing. Removing his snowshoes and pack, 'Merican Joe climbed the tree and a few moments later Connie heard the blows of his belt ax as he hacked at the limb that held the clog. There was a swish of snow-laden branches, and amid a deluge of fine snow the frozen body of the lynx struck the ground at the boy's feet.

[Pg 155]

Loading himself with as much as his pack sack could hold, the Indian struck off to get the toboggan, leaving Connie to pack the carcass of the lynx and the remaining rabbits back to the noon-time *cache*. This necessitated two trips, and when Connie returned with the second load he found 'Merican Joe waiting. "Thirty-two rabbits and two lynx," counted Connie as they loaded the toboggan. "And let's beat it and get 'em skinned so we can start out in the morning on the real trap line."

The rabbits were placed just as they were upon the platform of the *cache*, to be used as needed, and the evening was spent in thawing and skinning the two lynx.

"Why don't you rip him up the belly like you did the bear?" asked Connie, as the Indian started to slit the animal's head.

"No. Skin um, w'at you call, case. De bear an' de beaver skin flat. Case all de rest. Start on de head lak dis. Den draw de skin down over de body. You see she com' wrong side out. Den you finish on de tail an' de hine legs an' you got um done—all de fur inside, and de flesh side out."

[Pg 156]

Connie watched with interest while the Indian skillfully drew the pelt from the carcass and stretched it upon splints prepared with his belt ax.

"Now you skin nex' wan," smiled the Indian. "I bet you mak' de good job. You learn queek."

Connie set to work with a will and, in truth, he did a very creditable job, although it took him three times as long as it had taken the Indian, and his pelt showed two small knife cuts. "Now what do we do with 'em?" he asked when he had his skin all stretched.

"Dry um."

Connie started to place them close to the hot stove, but 'Merican Joe shook his head.



"'Merican Joe climbed the tree and a few minutes later Connie heard the blows of his belt ax as he hacked at the limb that held the clog."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

"No! Dat ain' no good!" he exclaimed. "Dat fat she melt an' de heat she dry de skin too queek, an' she git, w'at you call, grease burnt. Dat why we nail de bear skin on de outside of de cabin. De skin she got to dry in de cold. W'en de frost dry um, den we mus' got to scrape all de fat an' de meat off, an' wash um, and dry um ag'in—den we got de good prime skin." The Indian fastened a stout piece of line into the nose of each pelt, and climbing the ladder, secured them to one of the poles of the *cache* in such manner that they hung free to the air, and yet out of reach of any prowling animals. When they returned to the cabin 'Merican Joe proceeded to cut thick slices from the hams of the two lynx carcasses.

[Pg 157]

"Is that good for bait?" asked the boy.

'Merican Joe laughed. "Dat too mooch good for bait!" he exclaimed. "We goin' have dat meat for de breakfas'."

"For breakfast!" cried Connie. "You don't mean you're going to eat lynx meat! Why, a lynx is a cat!"

"Mebbe-so cat—mebbe-so ain't. Dat don't mak' no differ' w'at you call um. You wait, I fry um an' I bet you t'ink dat de bes' meat you ever eat."

"I don't believe I could tackle a cat," grinned the boy.

"Dat better you forgit dat cat business. If it good, it good. If it ain' good, it ain' good. W'at you care you call um cat—dog—pig? Plenty t'ing good to eat w'en you fin' dat out. De owl, she good meat. De musquash, w'at you call de mushrat—dat don' hurt de meat 'cause you call um rat! De skunk mak' de fine meat, an' de porkypine, too."

[Pg 158]

"I guess Injuns ain't so particular what they eat," laughed Connie.

"De Injun know w'at de good meat is," retorted 'Merican Joe. "By golly, I seen de white mans

eat de rotten cheese, an' she stink so bad dat mak' de Injun sick."

"I guess you win!" laughed the boy. "I've seen 'em too—but you bet I never ate any of it!"

"You try de *loup cervier* steak in de mornin'," the Indian urged earnestly. "If you don' lak him I bet you my dogs to wan chaw tobac'!"

"I don't chew tobacco," Connie grinned, "but seeing you've gone to all the trouble of slicing the meat up, I'll take a chance."

"How you lak him, eh?" 'Merican Joe grinned across the little table at Connie next morning, as the boy gingerly mouthed a small piece of lynx steak. Connie swallowed the morsel, and, without answering, took another bite. There was nothing gingerly about the action this time, and the Indian noted that the boy's jaws worked with evident relish. [Pg 159]

"Well," answered Connie, when the second morsel had gone the way of the first, "if the rest of the things you were telling me about are as good as this, all I've got to say is: Bring 'em along!"

Daylight found them on the trap line with sleeping bags and provisions in their packs, for it would require at least two days to "fresh up" the line.

At noon they camped for lunch almost at the end of the line of steel traps. So far they had been unusually lucky. Only two traps had been sprung empty, and eight martens and a mink were in the pack sacks. Only two of the martens, and the mink were alive when found and Connie quickly learned the Indian method of killing a trapped animal—a method that is far more humane and very much easier when it comes to skinning the animal than the white man's method of beating him on the head with the ax handle. With the latter practice the skull is crushed with the result that there is a nasty mess which discolours the flesh side of the pelt and makes very disagreeable work for the skinner.

The first live marten was in one of the "ground set" traps and upon the approach of the trappers he arched his back and stood at bay, emitting sharp squalls and growls of anger. 'Merican Joe simply planted his snowshoe on him, pressing him into the snow, then with one hand he reached down and secured a firm hold on the animal's neck and gradually worked the fore part of his body from under the snowshoe, taking care to keep the hinder part held fast by the web. Snapping the mitten from his other hand, the Indian felt just behind the lower ribs for the animal's heart, and grasping it firmly between thumb and fingers he pulled quickly downward. The heart was thus torn from its position and the animal died instantly and painlessly. The mink which was suspended by the tossing pole, and the other marten which had fallen victim to one of the "tree sets," of course, could not be held by the snowshoe. As both were caught by the fore leg, a loop of copper wire was slipped about their hind legs and the animals thus stretched out and dispatched in the same manner as the first. [Pg 160]

As these three animals were not frozen, 'Merican Joe skinned them at the noon camp, thereby doing away with the weight of the useless carcasses.

"What are we going to do when we finish up this trap line?" asked Connie. "It won't be time to look at the snares again." [Pg 161]

"No. We tak' a day an' res' up, an' skin de martens an' stretch um. Den we mus' got to git som' dog feed. We put out de fish nets an' hunt de caribou. Leloo, he be'n killing caribou wit' de wolf pack—he ain' hongre w'en we feed de dogs."

But the revelation of the next few miles drove all thought of a day of rest or a caribou hunt from the mind of the Indian, for real trouble began with the second trap visited in the afternoon. This trap which had been set upon the trunk of a leaning tree, was found dangling empty by its chain, and held firmly between its jaws was the frozen leg of a marten. The keen eyes of 'Merican Joe saw at a glance that the animal had neither gnawed nor twisted its own way out of the trap but had been torn from it by violence. The Indian scowled darkly at certain telltale tracks in the snow, and an exclamation of anger escaped him.

Connie laughed. "Now who's growling about the loss of a skin? One marten more or less won't make much difference."

'Merican Joe continued to scowl. "No, one marten don't mak' mooch differ', but we ain' goin' to git no more marten on dis trap line *s'pose* we ain' kill dat *carcajo*! He start in here an' he clean out de whole line. He steal all de marten, an' he bust up de deadfalls. An' we got to ketch um or we got got to move som' nodder place!" And in all truth, the Indian's fears were well justified. For of all the animals of the North, the *carcajo* is the most hated by the trappers. And he has fairly earned every bit of hatred he gets because for absolute malicious fiendishness this thick-bodied brute of many names has no equal. Scientists, who have no personal quarrel with him, have given him the dignified Latin name of *gulo luscus*—the last syllable of the last word being particularly apt. In the dictionaries and encyclopædias he is listed as the glutton. In the United States he is commonly known as the wolverine. The lumberjacks call him the Injun devil. While among the trappers and the Indians themselves he is known as the *carcajo*, or as bad dog—which is the Indian's idea of absolute cussedness and degeneracy. [Pg 162]

Connie broke the silence that had fallen upon the two as they stared at the empty trap. "Well, we won't move!" he cried. "There's no measly *carcajo* going to run me out of here! We'll get busy, and in two or three days from now we'll have that scoundrel's hide hanging up on the *cache* with the lynx skins!"

[Pg 163]

The Indian nodded slowly. "Mebbe-so—mebbe-so not. De *carcajo*, she smart. She hard to ketch."

"So are we smart!" exclaimed the boy. "Come on—let's go!"

"Ain' no good we go 'long de trap line. De trap she all be bust up. We go back to de cabin an' git som' beaver trap, an' we start out on de odder end an' back-track 'long de trap line. Mebbe-so de *carcajo* ain' had time to git over de whole line yet. Anyhow, we got to set plenty trap for him."

Hastening back to the cabin, the frozen martens were thawed out and skinned, and 'Merican Joe made up his pack for the trail. Connie refrained from asking questions, as the Indian solemnly made up his queer pack, but the boy resolved to keep his eyes open the following day, for of all the things the Indian placed in his pack sack, there was nothing that appeared to be of any use whatever except the six stout beaver traps.

[Pg 164]

Daylight next morning found them at the end of the trap line which they back-trailed for some five or six miles without seeing any signs of the presence of the *carcajo*. They had four martens in their packs, and Connie was beginning to believe that the outlook was not so bad after all, when they suddenly came upon one of the deadfalls literally torn to pieces. There had been a marten in this trap, but nothing remained of him except a few hairs that clung to the bark of the fall-log. The bait was gone, the bait house was broken apart, and the pieces strewn about in the most savage and wanton manner. The tracks were only a few hours old, and Connie was for following them and killing the marauder with the rifle. But 'Merican Joe shook his head: "No, we ain' kin fin' him. He climb de tree and den git in nodder tree an' keep on goin' an' we lose time an' don' do no good. He quit here las' night. He start in ag'in tonight w'ere he leave off. We go back, now, an' set som' trap w'ere he ain' be'n."

Retracing their steps to the first unmolested deadfall, the Indian set one of the beaver traps. But instead of baiting it, or setting it at the opening of the bait house, he carefully scooped a depression in the snow at the back of the house. Placing the trap in this depression so that it lay about two inches below the level of the snow, he carefully laid small clusters of needles from the pan outward so that they rested upon the jaws. This was to keep the snow from packing or freezing on the trap which would prevent it from springing. When the trap was completely covered the Indian took two pieces of crust from the snow and, holding them above the trap, rubbed them together, thus grinding the snow and letting it fall upon the needles until the whole was covered with what looked like a natural fall of snow. "De *carcajo* he com' to de trap at de back an' break it up," he explained as he stood up and examined his handiwork critically.

[Pg 165]

"I hope he tries it on that one," grinned Connie, as he followed the Indian who had already started for the next set.

This set was different, in that it was not made at any trap. The Indian paused beside a fallen log and with the ax cut a half-dozen green poles. These he cut into three-foot lengths and laid them one on top of the other in the shape of a three-cornered crib. Then he took from the pack some of the articles that had excited Connie's curiosity. An old coat, tightly rolled, was first placed within the enclosure of the crib. Then several empty tin cans were placed on top of the coat, and covered with an old scrap of canvas. On top of the canvas were placed the snowshoes that had been crushed by the bear. Four of the beaver traps were now set, one on each side of the crib, close to the wall and one on top of the snowshoes inside the enclosure. The traps on the outside were covered in exactly the same manner as the trap set at the deadfall, and the one inside was simply covered with an old worn-out sock.

[Pg 166]

"Where does the bait go?" asked Connie, as he glanced curiously at the contrivance.

"De bait she all ready. We ain' want no meat bait. De *carcajo* com' 'long, she see de leetle log house. She sniff 'roun' an' she say: 'Dis is wan *cache*. I bust him up an' steal all de t'ings.' An' so he go to bust up de *cache* an' de firs' t'ing she know she got de leg in de trap. Dat mak' him mad an' he jump 'roun' an' by-m-by anodder leg gits in odder trap, an' by golly, den he ain' kin git away no mor'!"

[Pg 167]

"Why don't you fasten the chains to the big log, instead of to those light clogs?" asked the boy.

"Dat ain' no good way to do," replied the Indian. "If she fasten on de big solid log, de *carcajo* git chance to mak' de big pull. He git w'at you call de brace, an' he pull an' pull, an' by-m-by, he pull hees foot out. But w'en you mak' de trap on de clog he ain' kin git no good pull. Every tam he pull, de clog com' 'long a leetle, an' all he do is drag de stick."

The remaining trap was set at another deadfall, and the two trappers returned home to await results. But while they waited, they were not idle. The dog food was running low, so armed with ice chisels and axes they went out on to the snow-covered lake and busied themselves in setting their whitefish nets through the ice.

THE CARIBOU HUNT

CONNIE MORGAN and his trapping partner, 'Merican Joe, bolted a hurried breakfast. For both were eager to know the result of their attempt to trap the *carcajo* that had worked such havoc with their line of marten and mink traps.

"Suppose we do catch this one?" asked Connie as he fastened his rackets. "Won't there be an other one along in a day or two, so we'll have to do it all over again?"

"No," explained the Indian. "*Carcajo* no like nodder *carcajo*. In de winter tam de *carcajo* got he's own place to hunt. If nodder wan comes 'long dey mak' de big fight, an' wan gits lick an' he got to go off an' fin' nodder place to hunt. Injun hate *carcajo*. Marten hate um. Mink, an fox hate um. Deer hate um. All de peoples hate um—de big peoples, an' de leetle peoples. *Carcajo* so mean even *carcajo* hate *carcajo*!"

A yell of triumph escaped Connie as, closely followed by 'Merican Joe, he pushed aside the thick screen of spruce branches and came suddenly upon the crib-like *cache* that the Indian had constructed to entice the malicious night prowler. For right in the midst of the wreckage of the *cache*, surrounded by the broken snowshoes, the tin cans, the old coat, and the sticks that had formed the crib, was the *carcajo* himself, a foreleg in one trap and his thick shaggy tail in another! When he caught sight of the trappers the animal immediately showed fight. And never had Connie seen such an exhibition of insensate ferocity as the *carcajo*, every hair erect, teeth bared, and emitting squall-like growls of rage, tugged at the rattling trap chains in a vain effort to attack. Beside this animal the rage of even the disturbed barren ground grizzly seemed a mild thing. But, of course, the grizzly had been too dopey and dazed from his long sleep, to really put forth his best efforts.

[Pg 169]

"Shoot um in de ear," advised 'Merican Joe, "an' it ain' no hole in de hide an' it kill um queek." And, holding the muzzle of the little twenty-two close, Connie dispatched the animal with one well-placed shot. The next instant, 'Merican Joe was laughing as Connie held his nose, for like the skunk, the *carcajo* has the power to emit a yellowish fluid with an exceedingly disagreeable odour—and this particular member of the family used his power lavishly.

[Pg 170]

"He too mooch smart to git in de trap in de snow," said the Indian, pointing to the dead *carcajo*. "He climb up on de log an' den he jump 'cross de leetle space an' put de foot in de trap on top of de pile. Den w'en he git mad an tear up de *cache* an' try to git loose, he sit down in wan more trap, an it ketch him on he's tail."

While 'Merican Joe drew the shaggy brownish-black skin from the thick body, Connie recovered the traps, removed the clogs, and *cached* them where they could be picked up later. Neither of the two traps that had been set at the backs of the marten traphouses had been disturbed, and as Connie gathered these and placed them with the others, he learned of the extreme wariness and caution of the *carcajo*. For the snow told the story of how the prowler had circled the traphouses several times, and then lumbered on, leaving them untouched.

"It's a wonder you don't cut some steaks out of him," grinned the boy as he looked at the fat carcass.

[Pg 171]

The Indian shook his head. "No. De *carcajo*, an' de mink, an' de marten, an' de fisher, an' de otter ain' no good to eat. W'en you fin' de Injun w'at eat 'em—look out! Dat one bad Injun, you bet!"

The work of "freshing up" the trap line in the wake of the *carcajo* took almost as long as the laying of a new line. For the marauder had done his work thoroughly and well. Hardly a trap was left unmolested. In some places the snow showed where he had eaten a marten, but in most instances the traps were simply destroyed apparently from sheer wantonness. Three or four martens and one lynx were recovered where they had been taken from the traps, carried off the line for some distance, and buried in the snow.

By evening of the third day the task was finished and the two trappers returned to their cabin.

The following day was spent in getting ready a trail outfit for the caribou hunt. Both of the toboggans and dog teams were to be taken to haul home the meat, and provisions for a week's trip were loaded. Only a few caribou tracks had been seen on the trap line and 'Merican Joe believed that more would be found to the south-eastward.

[Pg 172]

The first night on the trail they camped at the edge of a wide *brule*, some twenty miles from the cabin. No caribou had been sighted during the day, although tracks were much more numerous than they had been in the vicinity of the cabin. 'Merican Joe had not brought his heavy rifle, preferring instead the twenty-two, with which he had succeeded in bringing down four ptarmigan. And as they sat snug and cozy in the little tent and devoured their supper of stew and tea and pilot bread, Connie bantered the Indian.

"You must think you're going to sneak up as close to the caribou as I did to the *carcajo*, to get one with that gun."

'Merican Joe grinned. "You wait. You see I git mor' caribou wit' de knife den you git wit' de big gun," he answered. "Me an' Leloo, we ain' need no gun, do we, Leloo?" The great wolf-dog had been secured in the tent to prevent his slipping off during the night, and at the mention of his name he pricked up his ears and searched the faces of the two, as if trying to figure out what all the talk was about. Far away in the timber a wolf howled, and Leloo's eyes at once assumed an expression of intense longing and he listened motionless until the sound died away, then with a glance at the *babiche* thong that secured him, settled slowly to the robe and lay with his long pointed muzzle upon his outstretched forepaws, and his dull yellow eyes blinking lazily.

[Pg 173]

Early the following morning they skirted the south shore of Lake Ste. Therese, crossed the river, and headed for a range of hills that could be seen to the south-eastward. The day was warm, ten to fifteen degrees above zero, and the gusty south-east wind was freighted with frequent snow squalls. Toward noon, as they were crossing a frozen muskeg, Connie, who was in the lead, stopped to examine some fresh caribou tracks that led toward the timber of the opposite side in a course nearly parallel with their own. 'Merican Joe halted his team and came forward. Leloo nosed the tracks and, with no more show of interest than a slight twitching of the ears, raised his head and eyed first 'Merican Joe, then Connie. The trail was very fresh and the scent strong so that the other dogs sniffed the air and whined and whimpered in nervous eagerness. The trail was no surprise to Leloo. So keen was his sense of scent that for a quarter of a mile he had known that they were nearing it. Had he been alone, or running at the head of the hunt-pack, he would even now have been wolfing down huge mouthfuls of the warm, blood-dripping meat. But this case was different. At this moment he was a dog, and not a wolf. His work was the work of the harness. Leloo's yellow eyes scrutinized the faces of his two masters as they talked, for he had been quick to recognize Connie as his new master, although he never quite renounced allegiance to the Indian. He obeyed alike the command of either, and both were too wise in the way of dogs to try him out with conflicting commands just to see "which he would mind."

[Pg 174]

Leloo knew that his masters would do one of two things. Either they would follow the caribou and kill them, or they would ignore the trail and hold their own course. He hoped they would decide to follow the caribou. For two or three days he had been living on fish, and Leloo did not like fish and only ate them when there was nothing else to eat. He watched 'Merican Joe return to his dogs, and fairly leaped into the collar as Connie swung him on to the trail. Two bull caribou had gone that way scarcely an hour before. There would be a kill, and plenty of meat.

[Pg 175]

A quarter of a mile before reaching the timber, Connie, who was in the lead, swerved sharply from the trail and headed toward a point that would carry them to the bush well down wind from the place the caribou had entered. Leloo cheerfully followed for he understood this move, and approved it. Arriving in the scrub, Connie and 'Merican Joe quickly unharnessed the dogs and tied all except the wolf-dog to trees. The boy removed the rifle from the toboggan and threw a shell into the chamber.

"Hadn't we better put a line on Leloo?" he asked as they started in the direction of the trail.

'Merican Joe laughed; "No, Leloo he know 'bout hunt—you watch. You want to see de gran' dog work you jes' shoot wan caribou. Leloo he git' de odder wan, you bet!"

"You don't mean he'll get him unless he's wounded!"

"Sure, he git him—you see! If you shoot wan an' wound him, Leloo git de good wan first, an' den he go git de wounded wan."

[Pg 176]

They cut the trail at the edge of the muskeg and immediately circled down wind. Leloo trotted quietly beside them, and now and then Connie noted twitching of the delicate nostrils. Suddenly the animal halted, sniffing the air. The ruff bristled slightly, and turning at a right angle to the course, the dog headed directly into the wind.

"He ketch um," said 'Merican Joe. "Close by. Dat ain' no trail scent—dat body scent!"

The spruce gave place to willows, and creeping to the edge of a frozen marshy stream, they saw the two caribou feeding upon the opposite side.

Connie set for two hundred yards and fired. The larger bull reared high in front, pitched sidewise, and after several lurching leaps, fell to the snow. The other headed diagonally across the open at a trot. Beside him Connie heard a low growl, there was a flash of silver, and Leloo shot into the open like an arrow. For several seconds the bull trotted on, unconscious of the great grey shape that was nearly upon him. When he did discover it and broke into a run it was too late. As if hurled from a gun the flying wolf-dog rose from the snow and launched himself at the exposed flank of the fleeing caribou, which was whirled half way around at the impact. Leloo sprang clear as the stricken animal plunged and wobbled on his fast weakening legs. The caribou staggered on a few steps and lay down. And the wolf-dog, after watching him for a moment to make sure he was really done for, trotted over and sniffed at the bull Connie had shot.

[Pg 177]

While 'Merican Joe, with a quick twist of his sheath knife, cut the stricken animal's throat,

Connie examined the wound that had brought him down. Leloo had returned to his kill, and as the boy glanced up the great wolf-dog opened his mouth in a prodigious yawn that exposed his gleaming fangs, and instantly the boy remembered the words of Waseche Bill, "Keep your eye on him ... if he ever turns wolf when he'd ort to be dog ... good-night." "It would be 'good-night,' all right," he muttered, as he turned again to look at the wound—a long slash that had cut through the thick hide, the underlying muscles, and the inner abdominal wall and literally disembowelled the animal as cleanly as though it had been done with a powerful stroke of a sharp knife.

[Pg 178]

"W'at you t'ink 'bout Leloo, now?" grinned the Indian, as he rose from his knee and wiped his bloody knife upon his larrigan.

"I think he's some killer!" exclaimed the boy. "No wonder you don't carry a rifle."

"Don't need no gun w'en we got Leloo," answered 'Merican Joe, proudly. "De gun too mooch heavy. Injun ain' so good shot lak de w'ite man. Waste too mooch shell—dat cost too mooch."

The butchering and cutting up of the two caribou took less than an hour, during which time 'Merican Joe found that no matter how much of a *chechako* Connie was in regard to the furbearers, he had had plenty of experience in the handling of meat. When the job was finished, the meat was covered with the hides, and taking only the livers and hearts with them, the two started for the toboggans. The low-banked, marshy river upon which they found themselves made a short turn to the northward a short distance farther on, and they decided to circle around far enough to see what lay beyond the wooded point. Rounding the bend, they came upon what was evidently a sluggish lake, or broadening of the river, its white surface extending for a distance of two or three miles toward the north. Far beyond the upper end of the lake they could make out another ridge of hills, similar to the one to the southward toward which they were heading. They were about to turn back when Connie pointed to Leloo who was sniffing the air with evident interest. "He smells something!" exclaimed the boy, "maybe there are some more caribou in the willows a little farther on."

[Pg 179]

The Indian watched the dog narrowly: "Noe he ain' git de body scent—dat de trail scent. Mus' be de strong scent. He smell um down wind. We go tak' a look—mebbe-so we git som' mor' meat."

Keeping close to shore they struck northward upon the surface of the lake and ten minutes later, 'Merican Joe uttered an exclamation and pointed ahead. Hastening forward they came upon a broad trail. As far as they could see the surface of the snow was broken and trampled by the hoofs of hundreds and hundreds of caribou. The animals had crossed the lake on a long slant, travelling leisurely and heading in a north-westerly direction for the hills that could be seen in the distance. The two bulls they had killed were evidently stragglers of the main herd, for the trail showed that the animals had passed that same day—probably early in the morning.

[Pg 180]

"We go back an git de dogs and de outfit, an' follow um up. We git plenty meat now. Dat good place we camp right here tonight an' in de mornin' we follow 'long de trail." The short afternoon was well advanced and after selecting a camping site, the Indian hung the livers and hearts upon a limb, and the two struck out rapidly for the toboggans.

After hastily swallowing a cold lunch, they harnessed the dogs and worked the outfit through the timber until they struck the river at the point where they had slipped upon the two caribou. As they stepped from the willows Connie pointed toward the opposite shore. "There's something moving over there!" he exclaimed. "Look—right between the meat piles! A wolf I guess."

'Merican Joe peered through the gathering dusk. "No, dat *loup cervier*. De wolf ain' hunt dead meat." Leloo had caught a whiff of the animal and the hairs of his great ruff stood out like the quills of an enraged porcupine. Stooping, the Indian slipped him from the harness and the next instant a silver streak was flashing across the snow. The *loup cervier* did not stand upon the order of his going but struck out for the timber in great twenty-foot bounds. He disappeared in the willows with the wolf-dog gaining at every jump, and a moment later a young spruce shivered throughout its length, as the great cat struck its trunk a good ten feet above the snow. Connie started at a run, but 'Merican Joe called him back.

[Pg 181]

"We tak' de outfit long an' load de meat first. We got plenty tam. Leloo hold um in de tree an' den we go git um." Picking up Leloo's harness the Indian led the way across the river where it was but the work of a few minutes to load the meat on to the toboggans.

When the loads were firmly lashed on, the toboggans were tipped over to prevent the dogs from running away, and taking the light rifle the two went to the tree beneath which Leloo sat looking up into the glaring yellow eyes of the lynx. One shot placed squarely in the corner of an eye brought the big cat down with a thud, and they returned to the outfit and harnessed Leloo. When they were ready to start, 'Merican Joe swung the two caribou heads to the top of his load.

[Pg 182]

"What are you packing those heads for?" asked Connie.

"Mus' got to hang um up," answered the Indian.

"Well, hang them up back there in the woods. There's a couple of handy limb stubs on that tree we got the lynx out of."

The Indian shook his head. "No, dat ain' no good. De bear head mus' got to git hang up right where she fall, but de deer an' de moose and de caribou head mus' got to hang up right long de water where de canoes go by."

"Why's that?"

The other shrugged. "I ain' know 'bout dat. Mebbe-so w'en *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* com' to count de deer, he com' in de canoe. I ain' care I know so mooch 'bout why. W'en de Injuns hang up de head in de right place, den de deer, an' de bear, an' all de big peoples ain' git all kill off—an' w'en de w'ite mans com' in de country an' don't hang up de heads, de big peoples is all gon' queek. So dat's nuff, an' don't mak' no differ' 'bout why."



"As darkness settled over the North Country, a little fire twinkled in the bush, and the odour of sizzling bacon and frying liver permeated the cozy camp."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

At the bend of the river 'Merican Joe hung up the heads upon a couple of solid snags, and a short time later they were pitching their little tent upon the camp site selected beside the caribou trail. As darkness settled over the north county, a little fire twinkled in the bush, and the odour of sizzling bacon and frying liver permeated the cozy camp.

[Pg 183]

CHAPTER XII

[Pg 184]

THE TRAIL IN THE SNOW

It was noon the following day when they overtook the caribou herd, half way between the northern extremity of the lake and the range of hills. A halt was called upon the margin of a small lake along the shores of which the stragglers could be seen feeding slowly along.

"Dat bes' we ain' kill only 'bout six—seven today. Dat mak' us work pretty good to git um cut up before de night com' long an' freeze um. Tomorrow we kill eight—nine mor' an' dat be nuff."

The dogs were unhitched and tied to trees, and Connie started to loosen the rifle from its place

on top of one of the packs. But the Indian stayed him: "No, dat ain' no good we mak' de shoot. We scare de herd an' dey travel fast. We let Leloo kill um, an' dat don't chase um off. Dey t'ink Leloo wan big wolf, an' dey all de tam git kill by de wolf, an' dey don't care."

So armed only with their belt axes and knives, they struck out for the herd accompanied by Leloo who fairly slavered in anticipation of the coming slaughter. And a slaughter it was, as one by one the stricken brutes went down before the deadly onslaught. What impressed Connie more even than the unerring accuracy of the death stroke was the ominous silence with which the great wolf-dog worked. No whimper—no growl, nor whine, nor bark—simply a noiseless slipping upon the selected animal, and then the short silent rush and a caribou staggered weakly to its knees never to rise again. One or two bawled out as the flashing fangs struck home, but the sound caused no excitement among the others which went on feeding as if nothing had happened. This was due to the cunning of Leloo—partly no doubt a native cunning inherited from his father, the great white wolf from the frozen land beyond the frozen sea—partly, too, this cunning was the result of the careful training of 'Merican Joe, who had taught the wolf-dog to strike only those animals that were separated from their fellows. For had the killer rushed blindly in, slashing right and left the herd would have bunched for defence, and later have travelled far into the hills, or struck out for the open tundra.

[Pg 185]

When six animals were down, Leloo was called off, and Connie and the Indian set about skinning and cutting up the carcasses.

"I see where we're going to make about two more trips for this meat," said Connie. "We've got more than we can pack now, and with what we kill tomorrow, it will take at least three trips."

'Merican Joe nodded. "Yes, we build de *cache*, an' we pack all we kin haul, an' com' back w'en we git time. Anyhow, dat ain' so far lak we gon' on dem odder hills. We strike mos' straight wes' from here we com' on de cabin."

[Pg 186]

The killing and cutting up was finished by noon next day, and when darkness fell the two gorged an enormous meal of bannocks and liver, and retired to their sleeping bags for a well-earned rest. For the two toboggans stood loaded with meat covered tightly with green hides that had already frozen into place, and formed an effective protection against the pilfering of the dogs, three or four of which were amazingly clever sneak-thieves—while at least two were out-and-out robbers from whose depredations even the liver sizzling in the frying pan was not safe. The same precaution of covering was taken with the meat on the platform of the pole *cache*, for while its height from the ground protected it from the prowlers, the frozen hides also protected it from the inroads of the "whiskey jacks," as the voracious and pestiferous Canada jays are called in the Northland. For they are the boldest robbers of all, not even hesitating to fly into a tent and grab some morsel from the plate of the camper while he is eating his meal. These birds scorn the cold, remaining in the far North all winter, and woe betide the unprotected piece of meat they happen to light upon, for though it be frozen to the hardness of iron, the sharp bills of these industrious marauders will pick it to the bone.

[Pg 187]

The pace was slow next day owing to the heavy loads, each toboggan carrying more than one hundred pounds to the dog. But the trail to the cabin was not a long one and the trappers were anxious to carry with them as much meat as possible, to avoid making another trip until well into fox trapping time. It was late in the afternoon when Connie who was travelling ahead breaking trail, paused at the edge of a clump of spruce and examined some tracks in the snow. The tracks were made by a pair of snowshoes, and the man who wore them had been heading north-east. 'Merican Joe glanced casually at the tracks. "Som' Injun trappin'," he opined.

[Pg 188]

"White man," corrected Connie, "and I don't believe he was a trapper."

The Indian glanced again at the trail. "Mebbe-so p'lice," he hazarded.

"Not by a long shot! If there was any patrol in here there'd be sled tracks—or at least he'd be carrying a pack, and this fellow was travelling light. Besides you wouldn't catch any men in the Mounted fooling with snowshoes like that!" The boy pointed to the pattern of a track. "Those are bought rackets from the outside. I saw some like 'em in the window of a store last winter down in Minneapolis. They look nice and pretty, but they're strung too light. Guess we'll just back track him for a while. His back trail don't dip much south, and we won't swing far out of the way."

'Merican Joe expressed indifference. "W'at you care 'bout de man? We ain' los' nuttin'. An' we ain' got to run way from de p'lice."

Connie grinned. "No, and believe me, I'm glad we haven't got to! They're a hard bunch to run away from. Anyway, this fellow is no policeman, and I've just got a hunch I'd like to know something about him. I can't tell why—just a hunch, I guess. But somehow I don't like the looks of that trail. It don't seem to *fit*. The tracks are pretty fresh. We ought to strike the remains of his noon camp before long."

[Pg 189]

The Indian nodded. "All right, we follow um. You know all 'bout de man trail. Som' tam you know all 'bout de fur trail, too—you be de gran' trapper."

The back trail held its course for a few miles and then swung from the westward so that it

coincided with their own direction. At the point where it bent from the westward, they came upon the man's noon-time camp.

"Here's where he set his pack while he built his fire," pointed the boy. "He didn't have much of a pack, just a sleeping bag and a couple of day's grub rolled up in it. Here's where he set his rifle down—it was a high power—little shorter and thinner butt than mine—a thirty-thirty, I guess. He ain't a *chechako* though, for all he's got bought snowshoes. He tramped out his fire when he went, and he didn't throw away his tea-grounds. Whoever he is, he's got a camp not farther than two days from here, or he'd never be travelling that light in this country."

[Pg 190]

A few miles farther on Connie again halted and pointed to another trail that converged with the one they were following. They had been travelling upon the ice of a small river and this new trail dipped into the river bed from the north-eastward.

"It's the same fellow!" cried the boy. "This trail was made yesterday. He camped somewhere ahead of us last night and went back where he came from today. Left his own back trail here—thought it was easier to follow on up the river, I guess. Or, maybe he wanted to dodge some bad going. Where he came from isn't so far away, either," continued the boy, "he was travelling light yesterday, too."

They had proceeded but a short distance when 'Merican Joe called a halt. He came forward, and looked intently at Leloo who was the leader of Connie's team. Connie saw the great wolf-dog was sniffing the air uneasily.

"What is it?" he asked of 'Merican Joe.

"Injuns. Big camp. Me—I kin smell de smoke."

[Pg 191]

Connie sniffed the air, but could smell nothing. "How far?" he asked.

"She straight ahead on de wind—mebbe-so two, t'ree mile."

The banks of the small river they were following became lower as they advanced and finally disappeared altogether as the stream wound its way through a frozen swamp. In the swamp they encountered innumerable trails of snowshoes that crossed each other at every conceivable angle.

"Squaw tracks," grunted 'Merican Joe. "De squaw got to ten' de rabbit snare. Dat mak' um work pretty good. Injun don't buy so mooch grub lak de wi'te mans, an' every day de squaw got to ketch 'bout ten rabbit. If dey got mooch—w'at you call *tenas-man*?"

"Children—kids," supplied Connie.

"If dey got mooch kids dey mus' got to ketch 'bout twenty rabbit every day."

"Why don't they go after caribou?"

"Yes, dey hunt de caribou w'en de caribou com' roun'. But dey can't go mebbe-so hondre mile to hunt de caribou. Dey live on de rabbit, an ptarmigan, an' fish in de winter tam, an' w'en de bad rabbit year com' 'long den de Injun he's belly git empty an' de ribs stick out an' he too mooch die from de big hongre."

[Pg 192]

They were nearing the village. Sounds of a dog fight reached their ears, the savage growls of the combatants, and the yapping and barking of the pack that crowded about them. Then the hoarse call of an Indian, and a yelping of dogs as the man evidently worked on them industriously with a club.

They emerged suddenly from the thick growth of the swamp on to the ice of the broader stream which connects Lake Ste. Therese with McVicker Bay of Great Bear Lake. The village was located upon the opposite bank which rose some twelve or fifteen feet above the river ice. Through the gathering darkness Connie made out some five or six log cabins, and many makeshift dwellings of poles, skins and snow blocks.

Their appearance upon the river was the occasion for a pandemonium of noise as the Indian dogs swept out upon the ice to greet them with barks, yaps, growls, whines, and howls. Never had the boy seen such a motley collection of dogs. Big dogs and little dogs, long tailed, short tailed, and bob tailed—white dogs and black dogs, and dogs of every colour and all colours between. In only two particulars was there any uniformity—they all made some sort of a noise, and they were all skin-poor.

[Pg 193]

Heads appeared at the doors of various dwellings, and a little knot of Indians gathered at the top of the bank, where they waited, staring stolidly until two heavily loaded toboggans came to a halt at the foot of the steep bank.

Greetings were exchanged and several invitations were extended to the travellers to spend the night—one Indian in particular, who spoke a few words of English and appeared to be rather better dressed than the others, was very insistent, pointing with evident pride toward the largest of the log houses. But they declined with thanks, and indicated that they would camp a short distance below the village where a more gently sloping bank gave promise of ascent for the

heavily loaded toboggans. As they proceeded along the foot of the bank, an Indian lurched from one of the skin dwellings, and leered foolishly at them from the top of the bank. Sounds issued from the shack as of voices raised in quarrel, and Connie and 'Merican Joe exchanged glances as they passed on to their camping place.

[Pg 194]

An hour later as they were finishing their supper, an Indian stepped abruptly out of the darkness, and stood blinking at them just within the circle of light from the little fire. He was the Indian they had seen lurch from the dwelling.

"Hello," said Connie, "what do you want?" The Indian continued to stare, and Connie tried jargon. "*Iktah mika tika?*" But still the man did not answer so the boy turned him over to 'Merican Joe who tried out several dialects and gave it up. The Indian disappeared as abruptly as he had come, and a few moments later stepped again into the firelight. This time he carried a large beaver skin which he extended for inspection. Connie passed it over to 'Merican Joe.

"Is it a good skin?" he asked.

"Good skin," assented 'Merican Joe, "Wan' ver' big beaver ..."

"How much?" asked Connie, making signs to indicate a trade.

The Indian grunted a single word. "*Hooch!*"

"Oh—ho, so that's it!" cried the boy. "I knew it when I saw him the first time. And I knew that trail we've been following this afternoon didn't look right. I had a hunch!"

[Pg 195]

He handed the Indian his skin and shook his head. "No got *hooch*." It took the man several minutes to realize that there was no liquor forthcoming, and when he did, he turned and left the fire with every evidence of anger. Not long after he had gone, another Indian appeared with the same demand. In vain Connie tried to question him, but apparently he knew no more English or jargon than the first.

"We've got to figure out some scheme to gum that dirty pup's game!" cried the boy. "I just wish I was back in the Mounted for about a week! I'd sure make that bird live hard! But in the Mounted or out of it, I'm going to make him quit his whiskey peddling, or some one is going to get hurt!"

'Merican Joe looked puzzled. "W'at you care 'bout dat? W'at dat mak' you mad som' wan sell Injun de *hooch*?"

"What do I care! I care because it's a dirty, low-lived piece of work! These Injuns need every bit of fur they can trap to buy grub and clothes with. When they get *hooch*, they pay a big price—and they pay it in grub and clothes that their women and children need!"

[Pg 196]

'Merican Joe shrugged philosophically, and at that moment another Indian stepped into the firelight. It was the man who had insisted upon their staying with him, and who Connie remembered had spoken a few words of English.

"You looking for *hooch*, too?" asked the boy.

The Indian shook his head vigorously. "No. *Hooch* bad. Mak' Injun bad. No good!"

Connie shoved the teapot into the coals and motioned the man to be seated, and there beside the little fire, over many cups of strong tea, the boy and 'Merican Joe, by dint of much questioning and much sign talk to help out the little English and the few words of jargon the man knew, succeeded finally in learning the meaning of the white man's trail in the snow. They learned that the Indians were Dog Ribs who had drifted from the Blackwater country and settled in their present location last fall because two of their number had wintered there the previous year and had found the trapping good, and the supply of fish and rabbits inexhaustible. They had done well with their traps, but they had killed very few caribou during the winter, and the current of the river had taken many of their nets and swept them away under the ice. The rabbits were not as plentiful as they had been earlier in the fall, and there was much hunger in the camp.

[Pg 197]

They traded as usual, and had gotten "debt" at Fort Norman last summer before they moved their camp. Later in the summer two men had come along in a canoe and told them that they would come back before the mid-winter trading. They said they would sell goods much cheaper than the Hudson's Bay Company, or the Northern Trading Company, and that they would also have some *hooch*—which cannot be obtained from the big companies.

Yesterday one of these men came into the camp. He had a few bottles of *hooch* which he traded for some very good fox skins, and promised to return in six days with the other man and two sled loads of goods. He told them that they did not have to pay their debt to the companies at Fort Norman because everything at the fort had burned down—all the stores and all the houses and the men had gone away down the river and that they would not return. The Indians had been making ready to go to the fort to trade, but when they heard that the fort was burned they decided to wait for the free traders. Also many of the young men wanted to trade with the free traders because they could get the *hooch*.

[Pg 198]

The Indian said he was very sorry that the fort had burned, because he did not like the free traders, and he wanted to pay his debt to the company, but if there was nobody there it would be no use to make the long trip for nothing.

When he finished Connie sat for some time thinking. Then, producing a worn notebook and the stub of a pencil from his pocket he wrote upon a leaf and tore it from the book. When he spoke it was to 'Merican Joe. "How long will it take you to make Fort Norman travelling light?" he asked.

"'Bout fi', six, day."

"That will be ten or twelve days there and back," figured the boy, as he handed him the note.

"All right. You start in the morning, and you go with him," he added, turning to the Indian.

"That white man lied! There has been no fire at the fort. He wants to get your skins, and so he lied. You go and see for yourself. The rest of them here won't believe me if I tell them he lied—especially as the young men want the *hooch*. I have written McTavish to send someone, back with you who has the authority to arrest these free traders. I'm going to stay to get the evidence. In the meantime you send your hunters on our back trail and they will find many caribou. Divide the meat we have on the sleds among the people—the women and the children. It will last till the men return with the meat. I am going to follow the free traders to their camp."

[Pg 199]

It took time and patience to explain all this to the Indian but once he got the idea into his head he was anxious to put the plan into effect. He slipped away and returned with two other Indians, and the whole matter had to be gone over again. At the conclusion, one of them agreed to accompany Connie, and the other to distribute the meat, and to lead the caribou hunt, so after unloading the sleds and making up the light trail outfits, they all retired to get a few hours' sleep for the strenuous work ahead. How well they succeeded and how the free traders—but, as Mr. Kipling has said, that is another story.

CHAPTER XIII

[Pg 200]

AT THE CAMP OF THE *HOCH*-RUNNERS

THE late winter dawn had not yet broken when the little camp on the outskirts of the Indian village was struck and two dog teams drawing lightly loaded toboggans slipped silently into the timber. When out of sight and sound of the village the two outfits parted.

Connie Morgan, accompanied by an Indian named Ton-Kan, swung his great lead-dog, Leloo, to the eastward, crossed the river, and struck out on the trail of the free trader; while 'Merican Joe with Pierre Bonnet Rouge, the Indian who had told them of the free trader's plans, headed north-west in the direction of Fort Norman.

It was nearly noon six days later that they shoved open the door of the trading post and greeted McTavish, the big bewhiskered Scotchman who was the Hudson's Bay Company's factor.

"What are ye doin' back here—you? An' where is the lad that was with ye? An' you, Pierre Bonnet Rouge, where is the rest of your band? An' don't ye ken ye're two weeks ahead of time for the tradin'?"

[Pg 201]

"*Oui, M's'u*," answered the Indian. "But man say—"

He was interrupted by 'Merican Joe who had been fumbling through his pockets and now produced the note Connie had hastily scribbled upon a leaf of his notebook.

McTavish carried the scrap of paper to the heavily frosted window and read it through slowly. Then he read it again, as he combed at his beard with his fingers. Finally, he laid the paper upon the counter and glanced toward a man who sat with his chair tilted back against the bales of goods beyond the roaring stove.

"Here's something for ye, Dan," he rumbled. "Ye was growlin' about fightin' them ice *bourdillons*, here's a job t'will take ye well off the river."

"What's that?" asked Dan McKeever—*Inspector* Dan McKeever, *now*, of N Division, Royal Northwest Mounted Police. "It better be somethin' important if it takes me off the river, 'cause I'm due back at Fort Fitzgerald in a month."

"It's important, all right," answered McTavish, "an lucky it is ye're here. That's one good thing the rough ice done, anyhow. For, if it hadn't wore out your dogs you'd be'n gone this three days. D'ye mind I told ye I'd heard they was a free trader over in the Coppermine country? Well, there's two of 'em, an' they're workin' south. They're right now somewheres south of the big lake. They've run onto the Dog Ribs over near Ste. Therese, an' they're tradin' em *hooch*!"

[Pg 202]

"Who says so?" asked the Inspector, eying the two Indians doubtfully.

"These two. Pierre Bonnet Rouge I have known for a good many years. He's a good Indian. An' this other—he come in a while back with his pardner from over on the Yukon side. His pardner is a white man, an' about as likely a lookin' lad as I've seen. He's over there now on the trail of the free traders an' aimin' to stand between them 'an the Indians till someone comes with authority to arrest them."

"Who is this party, an' what's he doin' over in that country himself?"

"He's just a lad. An' him an' his pardner, here, are trappin'. Name's Morgan, an——"

Big Dan McKeever's two feet hit the floor with a bang, and he strode rapidly forward. "*Morgan, did you say? Connie Morgan?*" [Pg 203]

'Merican Joe nodded vehemently. "Yes, him Connie Mo'gan! Him wan *skookum tillicum*."

The big inspector's fist smote the counter and he grinned happily. "I'll say he's *skookum tillicum*!" he cried. "But what in the name of Pat Feeney is he doin' over here? I heard he'd gone outside."

"D'ye know him?" asked McTavish, in surprise.

"*Know him!* Know him, did you say? I do know him, an' love him! An' I'd rather see him than the Angel Gabriel, this minute!"

"Me, too," laughed McTavish, "I ain't ready for the angels, yet!"

"Angels, or no angels, there's a kid that's a *man*! An' his daddy, Sam Morgan, before him was a man! Didn't the kid serve a year with me over in B Division? Sure, Mac, I've told you about the time he arrested Inspector Cartwright for a whiskey runner, an'——"

McTavish interrupted. "Yes, yes, I mind! An' didn't he fetch in Notorious Bishop, whilst all the rest of you was tearin' out the bone out in the hills a-huntin' him?" [Pg 204]

"That's the kid that done it! An' there's a whole lot more he done, too. You don't need to worry none about yer Injuns as long as that kid's on the job."

"But, ye're goin' to hurry over there, ain't you? I hate to think of the lad there alone. There's two of them traders, an' if they're peddlin' *hooch*, they ain't goin' to care much what they do to keep from gittin' caught."

Dan McKeever grinned. "You don't need to worry about him. That kid will out-guess any free trader, or any other crook that ever was born. He's handled 'em red hot—one at a time, an' in bunches. The more they is of 'em, the better he likes 'em! Didn't he round up Bill Cosgrieve an' his Cameron Creek gang? An' didn't he bring in four of the orneriest cusses that ever lived when they busted the Hart River *cache*? An' he done it alone! Everyone's got brains, Mac, an' most of us learns to use 'em—in a way. But, that kid—he starts in figurin' where fellers like us leaves off!"

"But this case is different, Dan," objected the factor. "He was in the Mounted then. But what can he do now? He ain't got the authority!" [Pg 205]

McKeever regarded the Scotchman with an almost pitying glance. "Mac, you don't know that kid. But don't you go losin' no sleep over how much authority he ain't got. 'Cause, when the time comes to use it, he'll have the authority, all right—if he has to appoint himself Commissioner! An' when it comes right down to cases, man to man, there's times when a six-gun has got more authority to it than all the commissions in the world."

"But they're two to one against him——"

"Yes, an' the kid could shoot patterns in the both of 'em while they was fumblin' to draw, if he had to. But the chances is there won't be a shot fired one way or another. He'll jest naturally out-guess 'em an' ease 'em along, painless an' unsuspectin' until he turns 'em over to me, with the evidence all done up in a package, you might say, ready to hand to the judge."

McTavish smote his thigh with his open palm. "By the great horn spoon, I'll go along an' see it done!" he cried. "We'll take my dogs an' by the time we get back yours will be in shape again. My trader can run the post, an' I'll bring in them Dog Ribs with me to do their tradin'." [Pg 206]

The Indian, Ton-Kan, who accompanied Connie proved to be a good man on the trail. In fact, the boy wondered, as he followed with the dog team, if the Indian did not show just a little too much eagerness. Connie knew something of Indians, and he knew that very few of them possessed the zeal to exert themselves for the good of the tribe. Their attitude in regard to the troubles of others was the attitude of 'Merican Joe when he had shrugged and asked, "W'at you care?" Pierre Bonnet Rouge, Connie knew to be an exception, and this man might be too, but as he understood no word of either English or jargon, and Connie knew nothing of the Dog Rib dialect, the boy decided to take no chances, but to keep close watch on the Indian's movements when the time for action came.

In the afternoon of the second day Connie exchanged places with the Indian, he himself taking the lead and letting Ton-Kan follow with the dogs. The boy figured that if the trader had expected

to be back at the village in six days, his camp could not be more than two days away, travelling light. That would allow him one day to pack his outfit for the trail, and three days to reach the Indian village travelling heavy. Therefore, he slowed the pace and proceeded cautiously.

[Pg 207]

Connie's experience as an officer of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police had taught him something of the law, and of the value of securing evidence. He knew that if he himself could succeed in buying liquor from the free traders he would have evidence against them under the Northwest Territories Act upon two counts: having liquor in possession in prohibited territory, and selling liquor in prohibited territory. But what he wanted most was to get them under the Indian Act for supplying liquor to Indians, and it was for this purpose he had brought Ton-Kan along. The boy had formulated no plan beyond the first step, which was to have the Indian slip into the traders' camp and purchase some liquor in payment for which he would give a beautiful fox skin, which skin had been carefully and cunningly marked the night before by himself and Pierre Bonnet Rouge. With the liquor as evidence in his possession his course would be determined entirely by circumstances.

The early darkness was just beginning to fall when, topping a ridge, Connie caught the faint glimmer of a light at the edge of a spruce thicket beyond a strip of open tundra. Drawing back behind the ridge Connie motioned to the Indian to swing the dogs into a thick clump of stunted trees where they were soon unharnessed and tied. Loosening the pack Connie produced the fox skin while the Indian lighted a fire. A few moments later the boy held out the skin, pointed toward the camp of the free traders, and uttered the single word "*hooch*."

[Pg 208]

Notwithstanding the Indian's evident eagerness to reach the trader's camp, he hesitated and made signs indicating that he desired to eat supper first—and Connie's suspicion of him immediately strengthened. The boy shook his head, and reluctantly Ton-Kan obeyed, but not without a longing look toward the grub pack.

When he had disappeared over the ridge Connie hastily bolted some bannocks and a cold leg of rabbit. Then he fed the dogs, looked to his service revolver which he carried carefully concealed beneath his mackinaw, slipped Leloo's leash, and moved silently out on to the trail of the Indian. Skirting the tundra, he kept in the scrub, and as he worked his way cautiously toward the light he noted with satisfaction that his own trail would excite no suspicion among the network of snowshoe tracks that the free traders had made in visiting their rabbit snares. In the fast gathering darkness the boy concealed himself in a bunch of willows which commanded a view of the door and window of the tiny cabin that lay half-buried in the snow. It was an old cabin evidently, reinked by the free traders. The light shone dully through the little square window pane of greased paper. The Indian had already been admitted and Connie could see dim shadows move across the pane. The great wolf-dog crept close and, throwing his arm about the animal's neck, the boy cuddled close against the warm shaggy coat. A few minutes later the door opened and Ton-Kan reappeared. Immediately it slammed shut, and Connie could dimly make out that the Indian was fastening on his snowshoes. Presently he stood erect and, as the boy had expected, instead of striking out for camp across the open tundra, he gave a hurried glance about him and plunged into the timber.

[Pg 209]

Instantly the boy was on his feet. "I thought so, Leloo," he grinned. "I thought he was awfully anxious to get that *hooch*. And when he wanted to wait and eat supper first, I knew that he figured on pulling out and wanted a full belly to travel on."

[Pg 210]

"He won't travel very far nor very fast," muttered the boy, as he circled the little clearing. "Because it's a cinch he didn't get anything to eat out of those birds—they'd take the fox skin for the *hooch*, and they're not giving away grub." Leloo walked beside him, ears erect, and every now and then as they glanced into the boy's face, the smouldering yellow eyes seemed to flash understanding.

Darkness had settled in earnest, and it was no easy task to pick up the trail in the scrub among the crisscrossed trails of the free traders, especially as the boy did not dare to strike a light. He had carefully studied the Indian's tracks as he had mushed along behind the dogs until he knew every detail of their impression, but in the darkness all trails looked alike. Time and again he stooped and with his face close to the snow, examined the tracks. Time and again he picked up the trail only to lose it a moment later. Then Leloo took a hand in the game. Connie's attention was drawn to the dog by a low whine, and stopping he found the great animal sniffing the fresh trail. "Good old dog!" whispered the boy, patting the great head. Understanding what was wanted the wolf-dog bounded off on the trail, but Connie called him back. "If I only dared!" he exclaimed under his breath. "You'd run him down in five minutes—but when you did—what then?" The boy shuddered at the recollection of the stricken caribou and the swift silent rush with which the great silvered brute had launched himself upon them. "I'm afraid you wouldn't savvy the difference," he grinned, "and I don't want old Ton-Kan cut plumb in two. If you'd only throw him down and hold him, or tree him like you did the *loup cervier*, we'd have him in a hurry—and some time I'm going to train you to do it." A sudden thought struck the boy as he met the glance of the glowing yellow eyes. "If I had something to tie you with, I'd start the training right now," he exclaimed. A hasty search of his pockets produced a length of the heavy line that he and 'Merican Joe used for fishing through the ice.

[Pg 211]

It was but the work of a moment to secure the line about the neck of the wolf-dog and lead him to the spot where he had nosed out the Indian's trail. With a low whine of understanding the great beast struck straight into the timber, the confusion of tracks that had thrown Connie completely off in the darkness, offering no obstacle whatever to the keen-scented dog. As Connie had anticipated, Ton-Kan did not travel far before stopping to sample the contents of the bottle. A half-hour after the boy took the trail he pulled the straining Leloo to a stand and peered through the scrub toward a spot at the edge of a thick windfall where the Indian squatted beside a tiny fire. Holding Leloo close in, Connie silently worked his way to within twenty feet of where the Indian sat, bottle in hand, beside his little fire. The man drank from the bottle, replaced the cork, rose to his feet, and with a grunt of satisfaction, rubbed his stomach with his mittened hand. Then he carefully placed the bottle in the snow, and moved toward a small dead spruce to procure firewood. It was but the work of a moment for Connie to secure the bottle, and at the sound Ton-Kan whirled to find himself confronted by the smiling boy. With an exclamation of rage the Indian sprang to recover his bottle, and the next instant drew back in terror at sight of Leloo who had stepped in front of the boy, the hair of his huge ruff a-quiver, the delicately pointed nose wrinkled to expose the gleaming white fangs, and the yellow eyes glowing like live coals.

[Pg 212]

"Thought you'd kind of slip one over on me, did you?" smiled the boy as he made signs for the Indian to follow, and headed for the sled. "You did drink part of the evidence, but we've got enough left to hold those birds for a while—and I'm going to get more."

[Pg 213]

The boy led the way back to the sled with Ton-Kan following dejectedly, and while the Indian ate his supper, Connie did some rapid thinking. The meal over he took the Indian's blankets from the sled and, together with a two days' supply of grub, made them into a pack, which he handed to Ton-Kan and motioned for him to hit the back trail. At first the Indian feigned not to understand, then he protested that he was tired, but the boy was unmoved. When Ton-Kan flatly refused to leave camp Connie drew his watch from his pocket, held up three fingers, meaningly, and called Leloo to his side. One glance at the great white wolf-dog with his bristling ruff settled the argument, and with a grunt of fear, the Indian snatched up his pack and struck out on the back trail with an alacrity that belied any thought of weariness. Alone in the camp the boy grinned into the embers of the little fire. "The next question," he muttered to himself, "is where do I go from here? Getting rid of Ton-Kan gets the odds down to two to one against me, but what will I do? I haven't got any right to arrest 'em. I can't stay here, because they'll be hitting the back trail for the Indian camp in the morning, and the first thing they'll do will be to run on to my trail. Then they'll figure the Mounted is on to them and they'll beat it, and make a clean get-away. That would keep the *hooch* away from this bunch of Indians, but they'd trade it to the next bunch they came to. I ain't going to let 'em get away! I started out to get 'em and I will get 'em, somehow. Guess the best way would be to go straight to the shack and figure out what to do when I get there." Suiting the action to the word, the boy carefully cached the bottle of liquor and packed his outfit. Then he harnessed his dogs. When it came the turn of the leader, he whistled for Leloo, but the great wolf-dog was not to be found. With a sudden fear in his heart, the boy glanced toward the back trail. Had the great brute understood that Connie and the Indian were at outs and had he struck out on the trail to settle the matter in his own way? Swiftly the boy fastened on his snowshoes, and overturning the sled to hold the other dogs, he headed back along the trail. He had gone but a few steps, however, before he halted and pushing the cap from his ears, listened. From a high ridge to the northward, in the opposite direction from that taken by the Indian, came the long howl of a great grey caribou-wolf, and a moment later came an answering call—the weird blood-chilling, terrible cry of the big white wolf-dog. And then Connie returned to his outfit, for he knew that that night Leloo would run with the hunt-pack.

[Pg 214]

[Pg 215]

CHAPTER XIV

THE PASSING OF BLACK MORAN

[Pg 216]

A STRING of curses that consigned all Indians to regions *infra-mundane*, greeted Connie's knock upon the door of the cabin of the free traders.

"I'm not an Indian!" answered the boy. "Open the door and let a fellow in! What's the matter with you?"

Connie could hear muttered conversation, as one of the occupants stumbled about the room. Presently a light was struck and the door flew open. "Who be you, an' what d'ye want? An' what you doin' trailin' this time o' night, anyway?"

The man who stood framed in the doorway was of huge build, and scowling countenance, masked for the most part by a heavy black beard.

Connie smiled. "My partner and I are trapping over beyond the Injun village, about forty miles southwest of here, and the Injuns told us that there were some free traders up here some place. We're short of grub and we thought that if we could get supplies from you it would save us a trip clear to Fort Norman."

[Pg 217]

"Turn yer dogs loose an' come in," growled the man, as he withdrew into the cabin and closed the door against the cold. If Connie could have seen, as he unharnessed his dogs, the swift glances that passed between the two occupants of the cabin, and heard their muttered words, he would have hesitated a long time before entering that cabin alone. But he did not see the glances, nor did he hear the muttered words.

As he stepped through the doorway, he was seized violently from behind. For a moment he struggled furiously, but it was child's play for the big man to hold him, while a small, wizened man sat in his underclothing upon the edge of his bunk and laughed.

"Frisk him!" commanded the big man, and the other rose from the bunk and removed the service revolver from its holster. Then, with a vicious shove, the big man sent Connie crashing into a chair that stood against the opposite wall. "Sit there, you sneakin' little pup! Thought you could fool us, did you, with yer lies about trappin'? Thought we wouldn't know Constable Morgan, of the Mounted, did you? You was some big noise on the Yukon, couple years back, wasn't you? Most always goin' it alone an' makin' grandstand plays. Thought you was some stuff, didn't you?" The man paused for breath, and Connie scrutinized his face, but could not remember to have seen him before. He shifted his glance to the other, who had returned to the edge of the bunk, and was regarding him with a sneering smirk.

[Pg 218]

"Hello, Mr. Squigg," he said, in a voice under perfect control. "Still up to your old crookedness, are you? It's a wonder to me they've let you live this long."

The big man interrupted. "Know him, do you? But you don't know me. Well, I'll tell you who I be, and I guess you'll know what yer up against. I'm Black Moran!"

"Black Moran!" cried the boy. "Why, Black Moran was——"



"As he stepped through the doorway he was seized violently from behind."

Drawn by Frank E. Schoonover

"Was drownded when he tried to shoot them Pelly Rapids about three jumps ahead of the police boat, was he? Well, that's what they said but he wasn't, by a long sight. When the canoe smashed I went under all right but the current throw'd me into a eddy, an' when the police boat went down through the chute I was hangin' by my fingers to a rock. The floater they found later in the lower river an' said was me, was someone else—but I didn't take the trouble to set 'em right—not by a jug full, I didn't. It suited me to a T."

[Pg 219]

"So you're the specimen that murdered old man Kinney for his dust and——"

"Yup, I'm the party. An' they's a heft of other stuff they've got charged up agin me—over on the Yukon side. But they ain't huntin' me, 'cause they think I'm dead." There was a cold glitter in the man's eye and his voice took on a taunting note. "Still playin' a lone hand, eh? Well, it got you at last, didn't it? Guess you've saw the handwritin' on the wall by this time. You ain't a-goin' no place from here. You've played yer string out. This here country ain't the Yukon. They ain't nobody, nor nothin' here to prevent a man's doin' just what he wants to. The barrens don't tell no tales. Yer smart, all right—an' you've got the guts—that's why we ain't a-goin' to take no chances. By tomorrow night it'll be snowin'. An' when the storm lets up, they won't be no cabin here—just a heap of ashes in under the snow—an' you'll be part of the ashes."

[Pg 220]

Connie had been in many tight places in his life, but he realized as he sat in his chair and listened to the words of Black Moran that he was at that moment facing the most dangerous situation of his career. He knew that unless the man had fully made up his mind to kill him he would never have disclosed his identity. And he knew that he would not hesitate at the killing—for Black Moran, up to the time of his supposed drowning, had been reckoned the very worst man in the North. Escape seemed impossible, yet the boy showed not the slightest trace of fear. He

even smiled into the face of Black Moran. "So you think I'm still with the Mounted do you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, we don't think nothin' like that," sneered the man. "Sure, we don't. That there ain't no service revolver we tuk offen you. That there's a marten trap, I s'pose. 'Course you're trappin', an' don't know nothin' 'bout us tradin' *hooch*. What we'd ort to do is to sell you some flour an' beans, an' let you go back to yer traps."

"Dangerous business bumping off an officer of the Mounted," reminded the boy.

[Pg 221]

"Not over in here, it ain't. Special, when it's comin' on to snow. No. They ain't no chanct in the world to git caught fer it—or even to git blamed fer it, 'cause if they ever find what's left of you in the ashes of the cabin, they'll think it got afire while you was asleep. Tomorrow mornin' yo git yourn. In the meantime, Squigg, you roll in an' git some sleep. You've got to take the outfit an' pull out early in the mornin' an' unload that *hooch* on to them Injuns. I'll ketch up with you 'fore you git there, though. What I've got to do here won't take me no longer than noon," he glanced meaningly at Connie, "an' then, we'll pull out of this neck of the woods."

"Might's well take the kid's dogs an' harness, they might come in handy," ventured Mr. Squigg.

"Take nothin!" roared Black Moran, angrily. "Not a blame thing that he's got do we take. That's the trouble with you cheap crooks—grabbin' off everything you kin lay yer hands on—and that's what gits you caught. Sometime, someone would see something that they know'd had belonged to him in our possession. Then, where'd we be? No, sir! Everything, dogs, gun, sled, harness an' all goes into this cabin when she burns—so, shut up, an' git to bed!" The man turned to Connie, "An' now, you kin roll up on the floor in yer blankets an' pretend to sleep while you try to figger a way out of this mess, or you kin set there in the chair an' figger, whichever you want. Me—I'm a-goin' to set right here an' see that yer figgerin' don't 'mount to nothin'—see?" The evil eyes of Black Moran leered, and looking straight into them, Connie deliberately raised his arms above his head and yawned.

[Pg 222]

"Guess I'll just crawl into my blankets and sleep," he said. "I won't bother to try and figure a way out tonight—there'll be plenty of time in the morning."

The boy spread his blankets and was soon fast asleep on the floor, and Black Moran, watching him from his chair, knew that it was no feigned sleep. "Well, of all the doggone nerve I ever seen, that beats it a mile! Is he fool enough to think I ain't a-goin' to bump him off? That ain't his reputashion on the Yukon—bein' a fool! It ain't no ways natural he should take it that easy. Is he workin' with a pardner, that he expects'll git here 'fore mornin', or what? Mebbe that Injun comin' here after *hooch* a while back was a plant." The more the man thought, the more uneasy he became. He got up and placed the two rifles upon the table close beside him, and returned to his chair where he sat, straining his ears to catch the faintest night sounds. He started violently at the report of a frost-riven tree, and the persistent rubbing of a branch against the edge of the roof set his nerves a-jangle. And so it was that while the captive slept, the captor worried and fretted the long night through.

[Pg 223]

Long before daylight, Black Moran awoke Squigg and made him hit the trail. "If they's another policeman along the back trail, he'll run on to Squigg, an' I'll have time fer a git-away," he thought, but he kept the thought to himself.

When the man was gone, Black Moran turned to Connie who was again seated in his chair against the wall. "Want anything to eat?" he asked.

"Why, sure, I want my breakfast. Kind of a habit I've got—eating breakfast."

"Say!" exploded the man, "what ails you anyway? D'you think I'm bluffin'? Don't you know that you ain't only got a few hours to live—mebbe only a few minutes?"

[Pg 224]

"So I heard you say;" answered the boy, dryly. "But, how about breakfast?"

"Cook it, confound you! There it is. If you figger to pot me while *I'm* gittin' it, you lose. I'm a-goin' to set right here with this gun in my hand, an' the first move you make that don't look right—out goes yer light."

Connie prepared breakfast, while the other eyed him closely. And, as he worked, he kept up his air of bravado—but it was an air he was far from feeling. He knew Black Moran by reputation, and he knew that unless a miracle happened his own life was not a worth a gun-wad. All during the meal which they ate with Black Moran's eyes upon him, and a gun in his hand, Connie's wits were busy. But no feasible plan of escape presented itself, and the boy knew that his only chance was to play for time in hope that something might turn up.

"You needn't mind to clean up them dishes," grinned the man. "They'll burn dirty as well as clean. Git yer hat, now, an' we'll git this business over with. First, git them dogs in the cabin, an' the sled an' harness. Move lively, 'cause I got to git a-goin'. Every scrap of stuff you've got goes in there. I don't want nothin' left that could ever be used as evidence. It's clouded up already an' the snow'll take care of the tracks." As he talked, the two had stepped out the door, and Connie stood beside his sled about which were grouped his dogs. The boy saw that Leloo was missing, and

[Pg 225]

glanced about, but no sign of the great wolf-dog was visible. "Stand back from that sled!" ordered the man, as he strode to its side. "Guess I'll jest look it over to see if you've got another gun." The man jerked the tarp from the pack, and seizing the rifle tossed it into the cabin. Then he slipped his revolver into its holster and picked up Connie's heavy dog-whip. As he did so Connie caught just a glimpse of a great silver-white form gliding noiselessly toward him from among the tree trunks. The boy noted in a flash that the cabin cut off the man's view of the wolf-dog. And instantly a ray of hope flashed into his brain. Leloo was close beside the cabin, when with a loud cry, Connie darted forward and, seizing a stick of firewood from a pile close at hand, hurled it straight at Black Moran. The chunk caught the man square in the chest. It was a light chunk, and could not have possibly harmed him, but it did exactly what Connie figured it would do—it drove him into a sudden rage—with *the dog-whip in his hand*. With a curse the man struck out with the whip, and as its lash bit into Connie's back, the boy gave a loud yell of pain.

[Pg 226]

At the corner of the cabin, Leloo saw the boy throw the stick. He saw it strike the man. And he saw the man lash out with the whip. Also, he heard the boy's cry of pain. As the man's arm drew back to strike again, there was a swift, silent rush of padded feet, and Black Moran turned just in time to see a great silvery-white shape leave the snow and launch itself straight at him. He saw, in a flash, the red tongue and the gleaming white fangs, and the huge white ruff, each hair of which stuck straight out from the great body.

A single shrill shriek of mortal terror resounded through the forest, followed by a dull thud, as man and wolf-dog struck the snow together. And then—the silence of the barrens.

It was long past noon. The storm predicted by Black Moran had been raging for hours, and for hours the little wizened man who had left the cabin before dawn had been plodding at the head of his dogs. At intervals of an hour or so he would stop and strain his eyes to pierce the boiling white smother of snow that curtained the back-trail. Then he would plod on, glancing to the right and to the left.

[Pg 227]

The over-burden of snow slipping from a spruce limb brushed his parka and he shrieked aloud, for the feel of it was a feel of a heavy hand upon his shoulder. Farther on he brought up trembling in every limb at the fall of a wind-broken tree. The snapping of dead twigs as the spruce wallowed to earth through the limbs of the surrounding trees sounded in his ears like—the crackling of flames—flames that licked at the dry logs of a—burning cabin. A dead limb cracked loudly and the man crouched in fear. The sound was the sound of a pistol shot from behind—from the direction of Black Moran.

"Why don't he come?" whispered the wizened man. "What did he send me alone for? Thought I didn't have the nerve fer—fer—what he was goin' to do. An' I ain't, neither. I wisht I had—but, I ain't." The man shuddered: "It's done by this time, an'—why don't he come? What did I throw in with him fer? I'm afraid of him. If he thought I stood in his way he'd bump me off like he'd squ'sh a fly that was bitin' him. If I thought I could git away with it, I'd hit out right now—but I'm afraid. If he caught me—" The wizened man shuddered and babbled on, "An' if he didn't, the Mounted would. An' if they didn't—" again he paused, and glanced furtively into the bush. "They *is* things in the woods that men don't know! I've heered 'em—an' seen 'em, too. They *is* ghosts! And they *do* ha'nt men down. They're white, an—it's beginnin' to git dark! Why don't Moran come? I'd ruther have him, than *them*—an' now there's another one of 'em—to raise out of the ashes of a fire! I'd ort to camp, but if I keep a pluggin' along mebbe I kin git to the Injun village. 'Taint fur, now—acrost this flat an' then dip down onto the river—What's that!" The man halted abruptly and stared. "It's one of 'em now!" he faltered, with tongue and lips that felt stiff. "An' it's covered with fine white ashes!" He knew that he was trembling in every limb, as he stared at the snow-covered object that stood stiffly beside the trail only a few yards ahead. "Nuthin' but a stump," he said, and laughed, quaveringly. "Sure—it's a stump—with snow on it. I remember that stump. No—it wasn't here where the stump was. Yes, it was. It looks different with the snow on it. Gosh, a'mighty, it's a ghost! No 'taint—'taint moved. That's the stump. I remember it. I says to Moran, 'There's a stump.' An' Moran says, 'Yup, that's a stump.'" He cut viciously at his dogs with the whip. "Hi yu there! Mush-u!"

[Pg 228]

[Pg 229]

At the door of the little cabin Connie Morgan stared wide-eyed at the thing that lay in the snow. Schooled as he was to playing a man's part in the drama of the last great frontier, the boy stood horror-stricken at the savage suddenness of the tragedy that had been enacted before his eyes. A few seconds before, he had been in the power of Black Moran, known far and wide as the hardest man in the North. And, now, there was no Black Moran—only a grotesquely sprawled *thing*—and a slush of crimson snow. The boy was conscious of no sense of regret—no thought of self-condemnation—for he knew too well the man's record. This man who had lived in open defiance of the laws of God and of man had met swift death at the hand of the savage law of the North. The law that the men of the outlands do not seek to explain, but believe in implicitly—because they have seen the workings of that law. It is an inexorable law, cruel, and cold, and hard—as hard as the land it governs with its implacable justice. It is the law of retribution—and its sentence is PAY.

[Pg 230]

Black Moran had paid. He had played his string out—had come to the end of his trail. And Connie knew that justice had been done. Nevertheless, as the boy stood there in the silence of the barrens and stared down at the sprawling form, he felt strangely impressed—horrified. For,

after all, Black Moran had been a human being, and one—the boy shuddered at the thought—who, with murder in his heart, had been ill equipped for passing suddenly into the presence of his God.

With tight-pressed lips the boy dragged the body into the cabin and covered it with a blanket, and then, swiftly, he recovered his rifle and revolver, harnessed his dogs, and struck out on the trail of Squigg. An hour after the storm struck, the trail was obliterated. Here and there, where it cut through thick spruce copses, he could make it out but by noon he knew he was following only its general direction. He knew also that by bearing slightly to the southward he would strike the river that led to the village of the Indians.

[Pg 231]

It was nearly dark when he came out upon a flat that even in the gloom and the whirling snow he recognized as the beaver meadow from which the trail dipped to the river. Upon the edge of it he halted to examine the spruce thickets along its western side, for signs of the trail of Squigg, and it was while so engaged that he looked up to see dimly in the white smother the form of the man and his dog-team. The man halted suddenly and seemed to be staring at him. Connie stood motionless in his tracks, waiting. For a long time the man stood peering through the flying snow, then the boy saw his arm raise, heard the crack of his whiplash, and then the sound of his voice—high-pitched and unnatural it sounded coming out of the whirling gloom: "Hi yu, there! Mush-u!"

Not until Squigg was within ten feet of him did the boy move, then he stepped directly into the trail. A low, mewling sound quavered from the man's lips, and he collapsed like an empty bag.

"Stand up!" ordered the boy, in disgust. But instead of obeying, the man grovelled and weltered about in the snow, all the while emitting an incoherent, whimpering wail. Connie reached down to snatch the man to his feet, when suddenly he started back in horror. For the wailing suddenly ceased, and in his ears, high and shrill, sounded a peal of maniacal laughter. The eyes of the man met his own in a wild glare, while peal after peal of the horrible laughter hurtled from between the parchment-like lips that writhed back to expose the snaggy, gum-shrunken teeth.

[Pg 232]

Horrible as had been the sight of Black Moran lying in the blood-reddened snow, the sight of Squigg wallowing in the trail and the sound of his weird laughter, were far more horrible. The laughter ceased, the man struggled to his feet and fixed Connie with his wild-eyed stare, as he advanced toward him with a peculiar loose-limbed waddle: "I know you! I know you!" he shrielled. "I heard the flames cracklin', an' snappin'! An' now you've got me, an' Moran's comin' an' you'll git him, an' we'll all be ghosts together—all of us—an' we'll stand like stumps by the trail! I'm a stump! I'm a stump! Ha, ha, ha. He, he, he! I'm a stump! I'm a stump!"

"Shut up!" cried Connie in desperation, as he strove to master an almost overwhelming impulse to turn and fly from the spot. "Crazy as a loon," thought the boy, with a shudder, "and I've got to take him clear to Fort Norman, alone!" "I'm a stump, I'm a stump," chanted the man, shrilly, and the boy saw that he had come to a rigid stand close beside the trail.

[Pg 233]

With a final effort Connie pulled himself together. "I've got it to do, and I'll do it," he muttered between clenched teeth. "But, gee whiz! It will take a week to get to Fort Norman!"

"I'm a stump, I'm a stump," came the monotonous chant, from the rigid figure beside the trail.

"Sure, you're a stump," the boy encouraged, "and if you'll only stick to it till I get the tent up and a fire going, you'll help like the dickens."

Hurrying to his dogs the boy swung them in, and in the fast gathering darkness and whirling snow he worked swiftly and skillfully in pitching the little tent and building a fire. When the task was finished and the little flames licked about his blackened teapot, he sliced some fat pork, threw a piece of caribou steak in the frying pan, and set it on the fire. Then he walked over to where Squigg stood repeating his monotonous formula.

[Pg 234]

"Grub's ready," announced the boy.

"I'm a stump. I'm a stump."

"Sure you are. But it's time to eat."

"I'm a stump, I'm a stump," reiterated the man.

Connie took hold of him and essayed to lead him to the fire, but the man refused to budge.

"As long as you stay as stiff as that I could pick you up and carry you to the tent, but suppose you change your mind and think you're a buzz saw? Guess I'll just slip a *babiche* line on you to make sure." The man took not the slightest notice as the boy wound turn after turn of line about his arms and legs and secured the ends. Then he picked him up and carried him to the tent where he laid him upon the blankets. But try as he would, not a mouthful of food would the man take, so Connie ate his supper, and turned in.

In the morning he lashed Squigg to the sled and with both outfits of dogs struck out for Fort Norman. And never till his dying day will the boy forget the nightmare of that long snow-trail.

Two men to the sled, alternating between breaking trail and handling the dogs, and work at the gee-pole, is labour enough on the trail. But Connie had two outfits of dogs, and no one to help. He was in a snow-buried wilderness, back-trailing from memory the route taken by the Bear Lake Indians who had guided him into the country. And not only was he compelled to do the work of four men on the trail, but his camp work was more than doubled. For Squigg had to be fed forcibly, and each morning he had to be lashed to the sled, where he lay all day, howling, and laughing, and shrieking. At night he had to be unloaded and tended like a baby, and then put to bed where he would laugh and scream, the whole night through or else lie and whimper and pule like a beast in pain.

[Pg 235]

On the fifth day they came suddenly upon the noon camp of the party from Fort Norman, and before Connie could recognize the big man in the uniform of an Inspector of the Mounted he was swung by strong arms clear of the ground. The next moment he was sobbing excitedly and pounding the shoulders of Big Dan McKeever with both his fists in an effort to break the bear-like embrace.

"Why, you doggone little *tillicum!*" roared the man, "I know'd you'd do it! Didn't I tell you, Mac? Didn't I tell you he'd out-guess 'em? An' he's got the evidence, too, I'll bet a dog! But, son—what's the matter? Gosh sakes! I never seen you *cryin'* before! Tell me quick, son—what's the matter?"

[Pg 236]

Connie, ashamed of the sobs that shook his whole body, smiled into the big man's face as he leaned heavily against his shoulder: "It's—nothing, Dan! Only—I've been five days and nights on the trail with—*that!*" He pointed toward the trussed figure upon the sled, just as a wild peal of the demoniacal laughter chilled the hearts of the listeners. "And—I'm worn out."

"For the love of Mike!" cried the big Inspector, after Connie lay asleep beside the fire. "Think of it, Mac! Five days an' five nights! An' two outfits!"

"I'm sayin' the lad's a man!" exclaimed the Scotchman, as he shuddered at an outburst of raving from Squigg. "But, why did he bring the other sled? He should have turned the dogs loose an' left it."

For answer McKeever walked over to Squiggs' sled and threw back the tarp. Then he pointed to its contents. "The evidence," he answered, proudly. "I knew he'd bring in the evidence."

"Thought they was two of 'em, son," said McKeever, hours later when they all sat down to supper. "Did the other one get away?"

[Pg 237]

The boy shook his head. "No, he didn't get away. Leloo, there, caught him. He couldn't get away from Leloo."

"Where is he?"

Connie glanced at the big officer curiously: "Do you know who the other one was?" he asked.

"No. Who was it?"

"Black Moran."

"Black Moran! What are you talkin' about! Black Moran was drowned in the Pelly Rapids!"

"No, he wasn't," answered the boy. "He managed to get to shore, and then he skipped to the other side of the mountains. The body they pulled out of the river was someone else."

"But—but, son," the big Inspector's eyes were serious, "if I had known it was *him*—Black Moran—he was the hardest man in the North—by all odds."

"Yes—I know," replied the boy, thoughtfully. "But, Dan, he PAID. His score is settled now. I forgot to tell you that when Leloo caught him—he cut him half in two."

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 238]

SETTING THE FOX TRAPS

AFTER turning over the prisoner to Inspector McKeever, Connie Morgan and 'Merican Joe accompanied the men from Fort Norman back to the Indian village where they found that the party of hunters had succeeded in locating the caribou herd and had made a big kill, so that it had been unnecessary for the men to use any of the *cached* meat.

Preparation was at once started by the entire population to accompany McTavish back to the post for the mid-winter trading. In the Indian's leisurely method of doing things these preparations would take three or four days, so Pierre Bonnet Rouge, who seemed to be a sort of chief among them, dispatched some of his young men to haul in all the meat that the two partners had *cached*. Meanwhile, leaving Mr. Squigg at the village in the care of McTavish,

Connie piloted Inspector McKeever to the little cabin of the free traders. For McKeever had known Black Moran over on the Yukon, and had spent much time in trying to run him down in the days before his reported drowning, and he desired to make absolutely sure of his ground before turning in his report upon the death of so notorious a character.

[Pg 239]

Connie had placed the man's body in the cabin, and as the two pushed open the door Dan McKeever stepped forward and raised the blanket with which the boy had covered it. The big officer stooped and peered into the face of the dead man. Finally, he rose to his feet with a nod: "Yes, that's Black Moran, all right. But, gosh, son! If I'd know'd it was him that you was up against over here, I wouldn't have been so easy in my mind. You sure done a big thing for the North when you got him."

"I didn't get him, Dan. It was Leloo that got him—look there!"

McKeever stooped again and breaking back the blood-soaked clothing examined the long deep gash that extended from the man's lower ribs to the point of his hip. Then he turned and eyed Leloo who stood looking on with blazing eyes, his great silver ruff a-quiver. "Some dog!" he exclaimed. "Or is he a dog? Look at them eyes—part dog, part wolf, an' mostly devil, I'd say. Look out, son, if he ever goes wrong. Black Moran looks like he'd be'n gashed with a butcher's cleaver! But, at that, you can't lay all the credit on the dog. He done his share all right, but the head work—figurin' out jest what Black Moran would do, an' jest what the dog would do, an' throwin' that chunk at jest the right second to make 'em do it—that's where the brains an' the nerve comes in —"

[Pg 240]

"It was mostly luck," interrupted Connie.

The big officer grinned. "Uh-huh," he grunted, "but I've noticed that if there's about two hundred per cent brains kind of mixed in with the luck, a man's got a better show of winnin' out in the long run—an' that's what you do."

"What will we do with him?" asked the boy after McKeever had finished photographing the body, and the wolf-dog, and Connie, and such of the surroundings as should be of interest in connection with his report.

"Well, believe me," answered the officer, "I ain't goin' to dig no grave for him in this frozen ground. We'll jest throw a platform together in that clump of trees, an' stick him up Injun fashion. I'd cremate him, like he was goin' to do to you, but he was so doggone tough I don't believe nothin' would burn but his whiskers, an' besides I don't want to burn the cabin. It's got a stove, an' it might save some poor fellow's life sometime."

[Pg 241]

The early winter darkness had fallen when the work was finished, and Connie and McKeever decided to wait until morning before striking out for the village.

After supper the big Inspector filled his pipe and glanced about the little room. "Seems like old times, son—us bein' on trail together. Don't you never feel a hankerin' to be back in the service? An' how comes it you're trappin' way over here? Did you an' Waseche Bill go broke? If you did, you've always got a job in the service, an' it beats trappin' at that."

Connie laughed. "You bet, Dan, if I ever need a job I'll hit straight for you. But the fact is Waseche and I have got a big thing over at Ten Bow—regular outfit, with steam point drills and a million dollars' worth of flumes and engines and buildings and things——"

"Then, what in time are you doin' over here trappin' with a Siwash?"

[Pg 242]

"Oh, just wanted to have a look at the country. I'll tell you, Dan, hanging around town gets on my nerves—even a town like Ten Bow. I like to be out in the open where a fellow has got room enough to take a good deep breath without getting it second-handed, and where you don't have to be bumping into someone every time you turn around. You know what I mean, Dan—a long trail that you don't know the end of. Northern lights in the night-sky. Valleys, and mountains, and rivers, and lakes that maybe no white man has ever seen before, and a good outfit of dogs—that's playing the game. You never know what's going to happen—and when it does happen it's always worth while, whether it's striking a colour, or bringing in *hooch*-runners."

The big Inspector nodded. "Sure, I know. There ain't nothin' that you know the end of that's worth doin'. It's always what lies jest beyond the next ridge, or across the next valley that a man wants to see. Mostly, when you get there you're disappointed—but suppose you are? There's always another ridge, or another valley, jest beyond. An' if you keep on goin' you're bound to find somethin' somewheres that's worth all the rest of the disappointments. And sometime, son, we're goin' to find the thing that's bigger, or stronger, or smarter than we are—an' then it'll get us. But that's where the fun comes in."

[Pg 243]

"That's it, exactly!" cried the boy his eyes shining, "and believe me, Dan—that's going to be some big adventure—there at the end of the last trail! It'll be worth all the others—just to *be there!*"

"Down in the cities, they don't think like we do. They'd ruther plug along—every day jest like the days that's past, an' jest like all the days that's comin'."

Connie interrupted him: "Down in the cities I don't care what they think! I've been in cities, and I *hate* 'em. I'm glad they don't think like we do, or they'd be up here plastering their houses, and factories, and stores all over our hills and valleys."

"Wonder who stuck this shack up here," smiled McKeever, glancing inquisitively around the room. "Looks like it had been here quite a while. You can see where Black Moran an' Squigg rammed in fresh chinkin'."

[Pg 244]

Connie nodded. "Some prospector or trapper, I guess. I wonder what became of him?"

McKeever shook his head. "Maybe McTavish would know. There's nothin' here that would tell. If he pulled out he took everything along but the stove, an' if he didn't the Injuns an' the Eskimos have carried off all the light truck. There was a fellow name of Dean—James Dean, got lost in this country along about six or seven years back. I was lookin' over the records the other day, an' run across the inquiry about him. That was long before my time in N Division. There was a note or two in the records where he'd come into the country a couple of years before he'd disappeared, an' had traded at Fort Norman an' at Wrigley. The last seen of him he left Fort Norman with some supplies—grub an' powder. He was prospectin' an' trappin'—an' no one ever seen him since. He was a good man, too—accordin' to reports. He wasn't no *chechako*."

"There you are!" exclaimed Connie, "just what we were talking about. I'd give a lot to know what happened at the end of his trail. I've seen the end of a lot of those trails—and always the signs told the story of the last big adventure. And always it was worth while. And, good or bad, it was always a man's game they played—and they came to a man's end."

[Pg 245]

"Gee, Dan, in cities men die in their beds!"

Upon the evening before the departure of the Indians who were to accompany McTavish and McKeever back to Fort Norman for the mid-winter trading, Connie Morgan, the factor, and the big officer sat in the cabin of Pierre Bonnet Rouge and talked of many things. The owner of the cabin stoked the fire and listened in silence to the talk, proud that the white men had honoured his house with their presence.

"You've be'n in this country quite a while, Mac," said Inspector McKeever, as he filled his pipe from a buckskin pouch. "You must have know'd something about a party name of James Dean. He's be'n reported missin' since six or seven years back."

"Know'd him well," answered McTavish. "He was a good man, too. Except, maybe a leetle touched in the head about gold. Used to trap some, an' for a couple of years he come in twice a year for the tradin'. Then, one time he never come back. The Mounted made some inquiries a couple years later, but that's all I know'd. He had a cabin down in this country some place, but they couldn't find it—an' the Injuns didn't seem to know anything about him. Pierre, here, would know, if anyone did." He turned to the Indian and addressed him in jargon. "*Kumtux Boston man nem James Dean?*"

[Pg 246]

The Indian fidgeted uneasily, and glanced nervously, first toward one window and then the other. "*S'pose memaloose,*" he answered shortly, and putting on his cap, abruptly left the room.

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed McKeever. "Says he thinks he's dead, and then up an' beat it. The case might stand a little investigatin' yet. Looks to me like that Injun knew a whole lot more than he told."

McTavish shook his head. "No, Dan, I don't think ye're right. Leastways, not altogether. I've known this band of Indians for years. They're all right. And Pierre Bonnet Rouge is the best one of the lot. His actions were peculiar, but they were actions of fear, not of guilt or of a man trying to cover up guilty knowledge. He believes Dean is dead—and for some reason, he fears his ghost."

[Pg 247]

"The factor is right," agreed Connie. "There's some kind of a *tamahnowus* that he's afraid of—and somehow he believes it's connected with Dean."

McKeever nodded. "That's about the size of it. And when you run up against their superstitions, you might as well save your time as far as any investigatin' goes. I'd like to know what's on his mind, though."

"Maybe I'll run on to the end of his trail," said Connie. "It's a pretty cold trail by this time—but I might."

"Maybe you will, son," assented McKeever. "An' if you do, be sure to let me know. I'd kind of like to clean up the record."

Good-byes were said the following morning, and Connie and 'Merican Joe, their sleds piled high with caribou meat, pulled out for their little cabin where for the next three days they were busy freshening up their trap line, and resetting rabbit and lynx snares.

"Dat 'bout tam we start in to trap de fox, now," observed 'Merican Joe, as he and Connie finished skinning out the last of the martens that had been taken from the traps. "Dat de bes' kin' trappin'. De leetle fox she de smartes' of all de people, an' w'en you set de fox trap you never kin

[Pg 248]

tell w'at you goin' git."

"Never can tell what you're going to get?" asked Connie. "Why, you're going to get a fox, if you're lucky, ain't you?"

"Yes—but de fox, she so many kin'. An' every kin' some differ'. De bes' fox of all, he is de black wan, den com' de black silver, an' de silver grey. Dem all fine fox, an' git de big price for de skin. Den com' de cross fox. Lots of kin' of cross fox. Firs' com' de black cross, den de dark cross, den de common cross, den de light cross. All de cross fox pret' good fox, too. Den com' de blue fox—dark blue, an' light blue. Den com' de red fox—bright red, an' light red, an' pale red—de pale red ain' no mooch good. She de wors' fox dere is. Even de white fox is better, an' de white fox is mor' differ' as all de fox. She de only fox w'at is good to eat, an' she de only fox w'at is easy to trap. She ain't got no sense. She walk right in de trap. But de res' of de fox she plent' hard to trap—she ain' goin' roun' where she git de man-scent. Dat why I hang de two pair of moccasins an' de mittens out on de *cache*, so she don' git no camp-scent on 'em."

[Pg 249]

The following morning 'Merican Joe took from the *cache* the dozen steel traps he had placed there when the platform was first built. Also he brought down the moccasins and mittens that had lain exposed to the air. Then, drawing on the mittens, he proceeded to cut into small chunks portions of the carcass of the bear which he placed in a bag of green caribou skin.

"Those traps look pretty small for foxes," opined Connie, as he reached to pick one up from the snow.

'Merican Joe pushed back his hand before it touched the trap. "Don't pick 'em up!" he cried, "Dey git de man-scent on 'em. W'at you t'ink I'm keep 'em out on de *cache* for? W'en you touch dem trap you got to put on de mitten lak I got—de mitten dat ain' be'n in de cabin. An' dem trap ain' too leetle. If you set de beeg trap for de fox, dat ain' no good. She git caught high up on de leg, an' de beeg spring bre'k de leg an den de leg freeze an' in wan hour de fox giv' de pull an' de leg twist off, an' de fox run away—an' nex' tam you bet you ain' ketch dat fox no mor'. Any fox she hard to ketch, but de t'ree legged fox she de hardes' t'ing in de worl' to trap—she too mooch smart. You got to git de trap jes right for de fox. You got to ketch 'em right in de pads where de foot is thick an' strong an' don' bust an' freeze. Den you hol' 'em good."

[Pg 250]

Slipping on the outside moccasins over their others, the two trappers struck out for a small lake they had passed on the caribou hunt—a lake that lay between the foot of a high ridge and the open tundra upon which they had struck the trail of the two caribou bulls. Connie carried the light rifle, and Leloo accompanied them, running free.

That night they camped comfortably upon the shore of the lake, with their blankets spread beneath a light fly. They slept late and it was long after sunrise the following morning when they started out with their traps. Fox tracks were numerous along the shore, some of them leading back onto the ridge, and others heading across the lake in the direction of the open tundra. Connie was beginning to wonder why 'Merican Joe did not set his traps, when the Indian paused and carefully scrutinized a long narrow point that jutted out into the lake. The irregularity of the surface of the snow showed that the point was rocky, and here and there along its edge a small clump of stunted willows rattled their dry branches in the breeze. The Indian seemed satisfied and, walking to the ridge, cut a stick some five or six feet long which he slipped through the ring of a trap, securing the ring to the middle of the stick. A few feet beyond one of the willow clumps, nearly at the end of the point, the Indian stooped, and with his ax cut a trench in the snow the length of the stick, and about eight or ten inches in depth. In this trench he placed the stick, and packed the snow over it. He now made a smaller trench the length of the trap chain, at the end of which he pressed the snow down with the back of his mitten until he had made a depression into which he could place the trap with its jaws set flat, so that the pan would lie some two inches below the level of the snow. From his bag he drew some needles which he carefully arranged so that they radiated from the pan to the jaws in such manner as would prevent snow from packing down and interfering with the springing of the trap. Then he broke out two pieces of snow-crust and, holding them over the depression which held the trap, rubbed them together until the trap was completely covered and the snow mounded slightly higher than the surrounding level. He then rubbed other pieces of crust over the trenches which held the clog, and the trap-chain. When that was finished he took from the bag a brush-broom, which he had made of light twigs as he walked along, and dusted the mounded snow lightly until the whole presented an unbroken surface, which would defy the sharpest-eyed fox to discover it had been tampered with. All this the Indian had done without moving from his tracks, and now from the bag he drew many pieces of bear meat which he tossed on to the snow close about the trap. Slowly, he backed away, being careful to set each snowshoe in its own track, and as he moved backward, he dusted the tracks full of snow with the brush-broom. For fifty or sixty feet he repeated this laborious operation, pausing now and then to toss a piece of meat upon the snow.

[Pg 251]

[Pg 252]

Connie surveyed the job with admiration. "No wonder you said foxes are hard to trap if you have to go to all that trouble to get 'em," smiled the boy.

"It ain' hard to do. It is, w'at you call careful. You mak' de trouble to be careful, you git de fox—you ain' mak' de trouble you ain' git no fox. Odder peoples you kin git mebbe-so, if you ain' so

[Pg 253]

careful, but de fox, an' de wolf, you ain' git."

Leloo circled in from the ridge, and Connie called to him sharply. "Wish we hadn't brought him along," he said. "I'm afraid he'll get to smelling around the bait and get caught."

'Merican Joe shook his head. "No. Leloo, he ain' git caught. He too smart. He know w'at de bait for. He ain' goin' for smell dat bait. If de meat is 'live, an' run or fly, Leloo he grab him if he kin. If de meat dead Leloo he ain' goin' fool wit' dat meat. You feed him dead meat—me feed him dead meat—he eat it. But, if he fin' dead meat, he ain' eat it. He too mooch smart. He smart lak de wolf, an' he smart lak de dog, too."

CHAPTER XVI

[Pg 254]

THE VOICE FROM THE HILL

THE shore of the lake was irregular, being a succession of rocky points between which narrow bays extended back to the foot of the ridge which grew higher and higher as the two progressed toward the upper end of the lake, where it terminated in a high hill upon the sides of which bold outcroppings of rock showed at intervals between thick patches of scrub timber.

It was well toward the middle of the afternoon when the two reached the head of the lake, a distance of some five or six miles from the starting point. All the steel traps had been set, and 'Merican Joe had constructed two deadfalls, which varied from those set for marten only by being more cunningly devised, and more carefully prepared.

"The other shore ain't so rough," said Connie, when the second deadfall was finished. "We can make better time going back."

'Merican Joe swept the flat, tundra-skirting eastern shore with a glance. "We ain' fool wit' dat shore. She too mooch no good for de fox. We go back to camp an' tomor' we hont de nudder lak!"

[Pg 255]

"Look, what's that?" exclaimed Connie pointing toward a rocky ledge that jutted from the hillside a few rods back from the lake. "It looks like a *cache*!"

'Merican Joe scrutinized the arrangement of weather-worn poles that supported a sagging platform, and with a non-committal grunt, led the way toward the ledge. The spot was reached after a short climb, and by ascending to another ledge close behind the first, the two were able to look down upon the platform, which was raised about eight feet from the floor of its rock-ledge.

"Funny bunch of stuff to *cache*!" exclaimed the boy. "I'll tell you what it is, there's a grave here. I've seen the Indians over on the Yukon put stuff out beside a grave. It's for the dead man to use in the Happy Hunting Ground."

The Indian shook his head. "No. Ain' no grave here."

"Maybe they buried him there beside the rock," ventured the boy.

[Pg 256]

"No. Injun ain' bury lak' white man. If de man ees here, she would be on de rocks, lak de *cache*. Injun lay de dead man on de rock an' mak' de leetle pole house for um."

"Well, what in thunder would anyone want to *cache* that stuff 'way out here for? Look, there's a blanket, and it's been here so long it's about rotted to pieces, and a pipe, and moccasins, and there's the stock of a rifle sticking out beneath the blanket—those things have been there a long time—a year or two at least. But there's grub there, too. And the grub is fresh—it hasn't been there more than a month."

'Merican Joe was silent, and as the boy turned toward him, he caught him glancing furtively over his shoulder toward the dark patches of timber that blotched the hillside. "I ain' lak dis place. She no good," he muttered, as he caught the boy's glance.

"What's the matter with it?" smiled Connie. "What do you make of it?"

For answer, 'Merican Joe turned abruptly and descended to the shore of the lake. At the extremity of a rocky point that afforded a sweeping view of the great hillside, he stopped and waited for Connie to join him. "Dis place, she ain' no good," he reiterated, solemnly.

[Pg 257]

"What's the matter with it?" repeated the boy. "You said all along, until we came across that *cache*, that it was a dandy lake to trap foxes on."

"Good for fox, mebbe—but no good for Injun. Me—I'm t'ink I'm pull up dem trap, an' fin' som' nudder place."

"Pull up nothing!" cried the boy. "After all that work setting them? Buck up! What's the matter with you anyhow?"

"Dat *cache*—she lak you say—lak de grave *cache*. But dey ain' no grave! Dat mus' got to be de

tamahnowus cache!"

"*Tamahnowus cache!*" laughed the boy. "*Tamahnowuses* don't make caches. And besides there ain't any *tamahnowuses*! Don't you remember the other *tamahnowus*—that turned out to be a man in a moose hide? I've heard a lot about 'em—but I never saw one yet."

'Merican Joe regarded the boy gravely. "Dat better you don't see no *tamahnowus*, neider. You say, 'ain' no *tamahnowus*, 'cos I ain' see none'. Tell me, is dere any God?"

[Pg 258]

"Why, yes, of course there's a God," answered the boy, quickly.

The Indian regarded him gravely. "Me—I ain' say, 'ain' no God 'cos I ain' see none'. I say, dat better I ain' mak' dat white man God mad. But, jus' de same, I ain' goin' mak' no *tamahnowus* mad, neider."

"All right," smiled Connie. "We won't make him mad, but I'm going to find out about that *tamahnowus*—you wait and see. I wonder who built that *cache*?"

"Dat Dog Rib *cache*," promptly answered the Indian.

"Probably the Injuns up at the village will know about it. They'll be back from Fort Norman in a few days, and I'll ask Pierre Bonnet Rouge."

Avoiding the rough shore, the two struck out for camp down the middle of the ice-locked lake where the wind-packed snow gave excellent footing. The air was still and keen, the sky cloudless, and Connie watched the sun set in a blaze of gold behind the snow-capped ridge to the westward. Suddenly both halted in their tracks and glanced into each other's faces. From far behind them, seemingly from the crest of the hill they had left, sounded a cry: "*Y-i-i-e-e-o-o-o!*" Long-drawn, thin, quavering, it cut the keen air with startling distinctness. Then, as abruptly as it had started, it ceased, and the two stood staring. Swiftly Connie's glance sought the bald crest of the hill that showed distinctly above the topmost patches of timber, as it caught the last rays of the setting sun. But the hill showed only an unbroken sky-line, and in the dead silence of the barrens the boy waited tensely for a repetition of the wild cry. And as he waited he was conscious of an uncomfortable prickling at the roots of his hair, for never had he heard the like of that peculiar wailing cry, a cry that the boy knew had issued from the throat of no wild animal—a wild cry and eerie in its loud-screamed beginning, but that sounded half-human as it trailed off in what seemed a moan of quavering despair.

[Pg 259]

The cry was not repeated and Connie glanced into the face of 'Merican Joe who stood with sagging jaw, the picture of abject fear. With an effort, the boy spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, for he well knew that it would never do to let the Indian see that his own nerve had been momentarily shaken:

[Pg 260]

"Someone lost up in the hills, I guess. We'd better go hunt him up."

The Indian's eyes stared wide with terror, his lips moved stiffly and the words rasped huskily: "*Tamahnowus!* She git dark. We git to camp. Mak' de big fire. *Tamahnowus* she no lak' de fire." And without waiting for a reply, he struck off down the lake as fast as his snowshoes would let him. And Connie followed, knowing that in the approaching darkness nothing could be done toward clearing up the mystery of that loud-drawn wail.

That night the boy slept fitfully, and each time he awoke it was to see 'Merican Joe seated close beside the huge fire which he kept blazing high all the night through. Breakfast was finished just as the first grey light of dawn showed the outlines of the ridge. 'Merican Joe watched in silence as Connie made the remaining grub into a pack. "Take down the fly," ordered the boy, and the Indian obeyed with alacrity. Folding the fly, he added the blankets to the pack, fastened on his snowshoes and struck out toward the north-west.

"Here, where you going?" cried Connie.

[Pg 261]

The Indian paused. "Goin' back to de cabin, jus' so fas' lak I kin."

"No you ain't," laughed the boy. "You're going with me, and we're going to find out all about who, or what made that racket last night."

"No, no, no! I ain' got to fin' dat out! Me—I *know!*"

"You don't know a thing about it. Listen here. That sound came from that high hill, didn't it?"

The Indian glanced fearfully toward the hill, the outline of which was just visible at the head of the lake, and nodded.

"Well, we're going to circle that hill. There has been no fresh snow for ten days or two weeks, and if we circle the base of it we'll strike the trail of whoever is on the hill. Then we can follow the trail."

"I ain' want no trail! *Tamahnowus* she don' mak' no trail. Dat hill she b'long to *tamahnowus*. I ain' want dat hill. Plent' mor' hill for me. An' plent' mor' lak' to trap de fox. An' besides, we ain' got nuff grub. We got to git back."

"We've got enough grub for today and tomorrow if we go light on it. It won't take us long when we strike the trail to follow it up on to the hill. Come on, buck up! There may be someone up there that needs help—maybe someone that is in the same fix you were when I found you back on Spur Mountain."

[Pg 262]

"Ain't no one up dere. I ain' hang roun' on Spur Mountain an' yell lak *tamah nawus*. Me—I'm too mooch dead."

"Come on. Are you going with me?"

The Indian hesitated. "If we go roun' de hill an' ain' fin' no track, den we hit for de cabin?" he asked, shrewdly.

"Yes," answered the boy, confident that they would strike the trail by circling the hill, "if we don't strike the trail of whoever or whatever made that sound, we'll hit back to the cabin."

"All right, me—I'm go 'long—but we ain' strike no trail. *Tamah nawus* don' mak' no trail." Connie struck out with the Indian following, and as they reached the summit of the ridge that paralleled the shore of the lake, the sun showed his yellow rim over a distant spruce swamp, and at the same instant, far away—from the direction of the hill, came once more the long-drawn quavering yell. 'Merican Joe whirled at the sound and started out over the back trail, and it required a full fifteen minutes of persuasion, ridicule, entreaty, and threat before he reluctantly returned and fell in behind Connie.

[Pg 263]

At the base of the hill, the boy suggested that they separate and each follow its base in opposite directions, pointing out that much time could be saved, as the hill, which was of mountainous proportions, seemed likely to have a base contour of eight or ten miles. But 'Merican Joe flatly refused. He would accompany Connie, as he had agreed to, but not one foot would he go without the boy. All the way up the ridge, he had followed so closely that more than once he had stepped on the tails of Connie's snowshoes, and twice, when the boy had halted suddenly to catch some fancied sound, he had bumped into him.

It was nearly sundown when the two stood at the intersection of their own trail after having made the complete circuit of the hill. Fox tracks they had found, also the tracks of wolves, and rabbits, and of an occasional *loup cervier*—and nothing more. Connie had examined every foot of the ground carefully, and at intervals had halted and yelled at the top of his lungs—had even persuaded 'Merican Joe to launch forth his own peculiarly penetrating call, but their only answer was the dead, sphinx-like silence of the barrens.

[Pg 264]

"Com' on," urged 'Merican Joe, with a furtive glance into a nearby thicket. "Me—I got nuff. I know we ain' goin' fin' no track. *Tamah nawus* don' mak' no track."

"*Tamah nawus*, nothing!" exclaimed Connie, impatiently. "I tell you there ain't any such thing. If we had grub enough I'd stay right here till I found out where that yell comes from. There's no sign of a camp on the hill, and no one has gone up or come down since this snow fell. There's something funny about the whole business, and you bet I'm going to find out what it is."

"You say we no fin' de track, we go back to de cabin," reminded the Indian.

"Yes, and we will go back. And then we'll load up a sled-load of grub, and we'll hit right back here and stay till we get at the bottom of this. The sun will drop out of sight in a minute, and then I think we'll hear it again. We heard it last evening at sundown, and at sunrise this morning."

"I ain' wan' to hear it no mor'," 'Merican Joe announced uneasily. "Dat ain' no good to hear."

[Pg 265]

Extending upward clear to the crest of the hill, directly above where the two stood, was an area half a mile wide upon which no timber grew. Here and there a jumbled outcropping of rock broke the long smooth sweep of snow upon which the last rays of the setting sun were reflected with dazzling brightness. As Connie waited expectantly he was conscious of a tenseness of nerves, that manifested itself in a clenching of his fists, and the tight-pressing of his lips. His eyes swept the long up-slanting spread of snow, and even as he looked he heard 'Merican Joe give a startled grunt, and there before them on the snow beside an outcropping of rocks not more than three hundred yards from them, a beautiful black fox stood clean-cut against the white background, and daintily sniffed the air. Connie's surprise was no less than the Indian's for he knew that scarcely a second had passed since his eyes had swept that exact spot—and there had been no fox there.

The sunlight played only upon the upper third of the long slope now, and the fox lifted his delicately pointed muzzle upward as if to catch some fleeting scent upon the almost motionless air. Then came that awful cry, rising in a high thin scream, and trailing off as before in a quavering wail of despair.

[Pg 266]

As Connie stared in amazement at the black fox, there was a swift scratching of claws, and a shower of dry snow flew up, as Leloo like a great silver flash, launched himself up the slope. For a fraction of a second the boy's glance rested upon the flying grey shape and once more it sought the fox—but there was no fox there, only the low rock-ledge outcropping through the snow. Instantly the boy sprang after Leloo, disregarding the inarticulate protest of 'Merican Joe, who

laboured heavily along in his wake, hesitating between two fears, the fear of being left alone, and the fear of visiting the spot at which had appeared the fox with the voice of a man.

As Connie reached the rock-ledge he stopped abruptly and stared in surprise at Leloo. The great wolf-dog's nose quivered, and his yellow eyes were fixed with a peculiar glare upon a small irregular hole beneath a projecting lip of rock—a hole just big enough to admit the body of the fox. Even as the boy looked, the long hairs of Leloo's great ruff stiffened, and stood quiveringly erect, a low growl rumbled deep in the dog's throat, and with a curious tense stiffness of movement, he began to back slowly from the hole. Never for an instant did the low throaty growl cease, nor did the fixed yellow eyes leave the black aperture. Not until he had backed a full twenty feet from the hole did the dog's tense muscles relax and then his huge brush of a tail drooped, the hair of his ruff flattened, and he turned and trotted down the back trail, pausing only once to cast a hang-dog glance up the slope.

[Pg 267]

Connie was conscious of a strange chill at the pit of his stomach. Why had Leloo, the very embodiment of savage courage, backed away from that hole with every muscle tense, and why had he hit the back trail displaying every evidence of abject terror? The boy had seen him run foxes to earth before, and he had never acted like that. He had always torn at the edges of the hole with fang and claw. A hundred times more terrifying than even the fox with the strange human cry, was the action of the wolf-dog. Without moving from his tracks, the boy examined the rock-ledge. It was probably twenty feet in length, and not more than four or five feet high, and he saw at a glance that the small irregular hole was the only aperture in the mass of solid rock. His eyes swept the surrounding hillside but with the exception of numerous fox tracks that led to and from the hole, the surface of the snow was unbroken.

[Pg 268]

The sunlight had disappeared from the crest of the hill. On the lower levels the fast deepening twilight was rendering objects indistinguishable, when Connie turned to 'Merican Joe, who presented a pitiable picture of terror. "Let's go," he said, shortly. "We'll have a moon tonight. We can travel till we get tired."

And 'Merican Joe without waiting for a second invitation struck off down the hill after Leloo, at a pace that Connie found hard to follow.

CHAPTER XVII

[Pg 269]

THE-LAKE-OF-THE-FOX-THAT-YELLS

LEAVING 'Merican Joe to look after the line of marten and mink traps, Connie Morgan struck out from the little cabin and headed for the Indian village. Straight to the cabin of Pierre Bonnet Rouge he went and was welcomed by the Indian with the respect that only the real sourdough ever commands in the Indians of the North. For Pierre knew of his own knowledge of the boy's outwitting the *hooch*-runners, and he had listened in the evenings upon the trail to Fort Norman, while big Dan McKeever recounted to McTavish, as he never tired of doing, the adventures of Connie in the Mounted.

After supper, which the two ate in silence, while the squaw of Bonnet Rouge served them, they drew up their chairs to the stove. The boy asked questions as to the success of the trading, the news of the river country, and prospects for a good spring catch. Then the talk drifted to fox trapping, and Connie told the Indian that he and 'Merican Joe had set some traps on the lake a day's journey to the south-eastward. Pierre Bonnet listened attentively, but by not so much as the flicker of an eyelash did he betray the fact that he had ever heard of the lake. Finally, the boy asked him, point-blank, if he had ever been there. Connie knew something of Indians, and, had been quick to note that Pierre held him in regard. Had this not been so, he would never have risked the direct question, for it is only by devious and round-about methods that one obtains desired information from his red brother.

[Pg 270]

Pierre puffed his pipe in silence for an interminable time, then he nodded slowly: "Yes," he answered, "I be'n dere."

"What is the name of that lake?"

"Long tam ago *nem* 'Hill Lak'. Now, Injun call um 'Lak'-of-de-Fox-Dat-Yell'."

"You have seen him, too—the fox that yells?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"Yes. I kill um two tam—an' he com' back."

"Came back!" cried the boy. "What do you mean?"

"He com' back—an' yell w'en de sun com' up. An' w'en de sun go down he yell on de side of de hill."

[Pg 271]

"But surely he couldn't yell after you'd killed him. You must have killed the wrong fox."

"No. Wan tam I trap um, an' wan tam I shoot um—an' he com' back an' yell."

"Where did you trap him? At the hole that goes under the rocks?"

"No. Wan tam I trap um on de shore of de lak'. An' wan tam I watch um com' out de hole an' shoot um."

"But the one you trapped—how do you know that it was the same one? There's lots of foxes over there."

"Yes, I trap odder wans, too. Kin tell de fox dat yell. He wear de collar."

"Wears a collar!" cried the boy. "What do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"No. He *tamahnawus* fox. He wear de collar."

"What kind of a collar?"

"Ermine skin collar—always he got it on."

"Look here," exclaimed Connie, shortly. "Are you lying to me? Do you expect me to sit here and believe any such rot as that? Did you save the collars? I want to look at 'em."

"De collar, an de skin, dey on de *cache* at de end of dat lak'."

[Pg 272]

"What do you leave the black fox skins out there for, they're worth a lot?"

The Indian shrugged. "I ain' want for mak' de *tamahnawus* mad. I put de skin an' de collar under de blankets on de *cache*."

"Are they there now?"

The Indian shrugged. "I ain' know dat. Mebbe-so *tamahnawus* fox com' an' git he's skin an' he's leetle w'ite collar an' wear um agin."

"But you've been to the *cache* lately. There was grub on it that hadn't been there more than a month at the most."

"Yes. I got bad luck w'en I kill dem fox, so I build de *cache* an' mak' de *tamahnawus* de present. All de tam I tak' mor' grub, an' now I ain' got de bad luck."

For a long time Connie was silent as he went over in his mind step by step the happenings at the lake where 'Merican Joe had set the fox traps. Then he thought over what Pierre Bonnet Rouge had told him, but instead of clearing things up, the Indian's words had only served to deepen the mystery of the fox that yelled like a man. Suddenly the boy remembered the action of Pierre when McTavish had asked him if he knew anything about James Dean, the missing prospector. He glanced at the Indian who was puffing his pipe in silence, and decided to risk another direct question although he knew that in all probability Pierre Bonnet Rouge would relapse into a stubborn muteness; for in matters touching upon his superstitions, the Indian is a man of profound silence. "I won't be any worse off than I am, now," thought the boy, "if he don't say another word—so here goes." He addressed the Indian gravely.

[Pg 273]

"Pierre," he began, watching the man narrowly to note the effect of his words, "you know I am a friend of yours, and a friend of the Indians. I gave them meat, and I saved them from being robbed by the *hooch*-runners." The Indian nodded, and Connie felt encouraged to proceed. "Now, I believe there is something else beside a *tamahnawus* down there at Hill Lake. And I'm going back there and find out what it is."

Pierre Bonnet Rouge shook his head emphatically. "No. I ain' goin' 'long. I w'at you call, learn lesson for fool wit' *tamahnawus*."

"That's all right. I won't ask you to go. I am not afraid of the *tamahnawus*. If 'Merican Joe won't go with me, I'll go alone. I want you to tell me, though, what became of James Dean? Is he mixed up in this?"

[Pg 274]

The Indian smoked without answering for so long a time that the boy feared that he would never speak, but after a while he removed the pipe from his mouth and regarded the boy sombrely. "You *skookum tillicum*," he began, gravely. "I ain' lak I see you mak' de *tamahnawus* mad. De *tamahnawus*, she mor' *skookum* as you. She git you. I tell you all I know 'bout dat *tamahnawus*. Den, if you goin' back to de lak—" he paused and shrugged meaningly, and turning to the squaw, who had finished washing the supper dishes, he motioned with his hand, and the woman threw a brilliant red shawl over her head and passed out the door.

Pierre Bonnet Rouge refilled his pipe, and hunching his chair closer to Connie, leaned toward him and spoke in a low tone. "She start long tam ago—six, seven year. We camp on de Blackwater. Wan tam in de winter, me, an' Ton-Kan, an' John Pickles, we go on de beeg caribou hunt. We swing up by de beeg lak' an' by-m-by we com' on de cabin. She w'ite man cabin, an' no wan hom', but de fresh track lead sout'. Ton-Kan, he t'ink de man got de *hooch* to trade an' he want som' *hooch*, an' John Pickles too—so we fol' de track. By-m-by we com' to Hill Lak', an' de man she got de leetle camp by de hill. He ain' got no *hooch*. We got som' fox trap 'long, so we

[Pg 275]

mak' de camp. Plent' fox track roun' de lak', an' we say tomor' we set de trap. Dat night com' de man to de camp. Say, 'nem James Dean.' Say, 'w'at you Injun goin' do?' I say, 'we goin' trap de fox. He ain' lak dat. By-m-by he say, 'you got look out. De *tamahnowus* fox here. She talk lak de man.' I ain' b'lieve dat. I t'ink he say dat 'cos he wan' to trap de fox. But Ton-Kan an' John Pickles git scare. I say, 'de *tamahnowus* ain' git you, he mebbe-so ain' git me, neider.' He say, 'me—I got de strong medicine. De *tamahnowus* she know me. She do lak I say.' I ain' b'lieve dat, an' he say, 'You wait, I show you. I go back to my camp an' mak de medicine an' I tell de *tamahnowus* to burn de snow out on de lak'. He go back to he's camp an' Ton-Kan an' John Pickles is ver' mooch scare. De night she ver' black. Wan tam I t'ink I hear som' wan walk out on de lak', but I ain' sure an' Ton-Kan say dat *tamahnowus*. Den he point out on de lak' an' I kin see leetle fire lak' de eye of de fox in de dark. Den she mak de leetle spark, an' she move 'long ver slow. I laugh an' I say, 'Dat James Dean out dere, she mak de fire to scare Injun.' Den rat behine me som' wan laugh, an' stands James Dean, an' he say, 'No, James Dean is here. Dat de *tamahnowus* out on de lak'. He burn de snow, lak I tell um.' I say, 'Mebbe-so, de piece of rope burn lak dat.' An' he say, 'No, dat ain' no rope. Dat *tamahnowus* burn de snow. You t'ink you smart Injun—but I show you. If dat is rope she goin' out pret' queek, ain' it? She can't mak' de big fire?' I say, 'No, rope can't mak' no big fire.' 'A'right,' he say, 'I tell de *tamahnowus* to mak' de beeg fire dat mak' de lak' all light.' Den he yell at de *tamahnowus*. He say, 'Mak' de beeg fire! Mak' de beeg fire!' But she ain' mak' no beeg fire, an' de leetle fire crawl slow out on de snow, an' I laugh on heem. He say, 'De *tamahnowus* ain' hear dat. I got yell louder.' So he yell louder, 'Mak' de beeg fire! Mak' de beeg fire!' An den." Pierre Bonnet Rouge paused and shuddered. "An' den de beeg fire com'! So queek—so beeg you kin see de trees. An' den she all dark, so black you can't see nuttin'. An' James Dean laugh. An' Ton-Kan, she so scare she howl lak' de dog. An' John Pickles, she try to dig de hole in de snow an' crawl in. An' me—I'm so scare I can't talk.

[Pg 276]

"Nex' mornin' w'en she git light nuff to see we go 'way from dat lak' jes' so fas lak we kin, an' we ain' stop till we git to de Blackwater." Pierre Bonnet Rouge lapsed into silence, and at length Connie asked:

"But the *cache*? And the foxes that wore the collars?"

"Nex' year I hunt caribou agin, but I ain' go by Hill lak', you bet. Young Injun 'long *nem* Clawhammer, an' we swing roun' by de beeg lak' an' com' by de cabin. Lots of tracks, but I ain' see James Dean tracks. By-m-by, we com' on de camp of 'bout ten Innu. Dey mak' de track by de cabin, an' dey got all de stuff out. I ain' see James Dean. *S'pose* James Dean dead. He los' de medicine, an' de *tamahnowus* git um.

[Pg 277]

"So I keep way from Hill Lak'. T'ree, four year go by, an' de fox trappin' is bad. I ain' so mooch afraid of *tamahnowus* no mor' an' I t'ink 'bout dem plent' fox tracks on Hill Lak' so me an' Clawhammer we go dere. We set 'bout twent' traps de firs' day. Never see so many fox track. We set um by de hill. We git t'rough early an' set up de tent on de shore of de lak'. She almos' sundown an' I look up de hill an' rat beside wan leetle rock-ledge, I see wan fine black fox. I grab de gun, an' tak' de res' on de sled, an' den I hear de yell! It soun' lak' wan man w'at is los'! But it com' from de fox! I shoot queek, an' de fox com' roll down de hill! Clawhammer he run an' git um, an' den we see it—de collar of ermine skin! Den I know dat de *tamahnowus* fox James Dean say talk lak' de man, an' I ver' mooch scare. I ain' tell Clawhammer 'bout James Dean, an' he t'ink som' wan git los' mak' de yell. He ain' see it com' from de fox. I look on dat leetle fox, an' I see he ver' dead. But no blood. De fur jes' scratch' cross de back of de head—but, she ver' dead—I look good.

[Pg 278]

"Clawhammer he wan' to skin dat fox, but I don' know w'at to do. If de Injun kill de fox, he mus' got to skin um. Dat bad to waste de fox. *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* don' want de Injun to waste de peoples. I got to t'ink 'bout dat an' so I lay de fox behine de tent an' mak' de supper. After supper I t'ink long tam. *Tamahnowus*, she bad spirit. *Sah-ha-lee Tyee*, she good spirit. If I skin de fox, *tamahnowus* git mad on me. If I ain' skin de fox, *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* git mad on me. I ain' know w'at to do. I t'ink som' mor'. By-m-by I t'ink dat bes to skin de fox. I ain' know where *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* liv'. If I mak' um mad I ain' kin giv' um no present. Better I mak' *tamahnowus* mad cos he liv' rat here, an' if I mak' um mad I kin give um de present an' mebbe-so he ain' stay mad on me. So, I go behine de tent to git de fox. But, de fox, she gon'! An' de track show she gon' back up de hill, an' I ver' mooch scare—cos she was dead!

[Pg 279]

"In de morning Clawhammer say he look at de traps to de wes', an' swing on roun' de hill to fin' de track of de man w'at git los' an' yell. I ain' say nuttin', an' he start ver' early. I go look at de traps down de lak', an' w'en de sun com' up, I hear de yell agin! An' I ver' mooch scare, cos I'm afraid de *tamahnowus* mad on me for kill de fox w'at yell lak de man. So I go back, an' I skin two fox w'at I ketch in de trap. Clawhammer ain' back, so I go an' build de *cache*. An' I put my blankets an' rifle on it, an' plenty grub, for de present to *tamahnowus*. Clawhammer com' 'long an' he say he ain' fin' no track. He begin to git scare 'bout dat yell, w'en he don' fin' de track. So he show me wan fox what he took from de trap. It is de black fox wit' de ermine collar! Clawhammer ver' mooch scare now. He wan' to run away. But I tell um we got to skin dat fox. If we don' skin um, we goin' to mak' *Sah-ha-lee Tyee* ver' mad. *Tamahnowus* he ver' mad anyhow; so we mak' him de present, an' we skin de fox, an' put de skin an' de collar on de *cache* too. Den mebbe-so *tamahnowus* ain' so mad w'en he git de guns an' de blankets, an' de fox skin back. So

[Pg 280]

we go 'way from dat lak' ver' fas'.

"Dat day I bre'k my leg. An' nex' day Clawhammer's tepee burn up. So we git bad luck. Den de bad luck go 'way, cos *tamahnowus* fin' dat *cache*, an' he ain' so mad. But every tam de leetle moon com' I tak' som' mor' grub to de *cache*. An' so, I keep de luck good."

"And do you think it's still there on the *cache*—the fox skin and the collar?"

The Indian shrugged. "I ain' know 'bout dat. Mebbe-so de *tamahnowus* fox com' an' git he's skin. 'Bout wan year ago Bear Lake Injun, *nem* Peter Burntwood, trap wan fox way up on de beeg lak'. She black fox, an' she got de collar of ermine skin. Me—I'm over to Fort Norman w'en he bring in de skin an' de collar, an' trade de skin to McTavish."

[Pg 281]

"What did McTavish make of it?" asked Connie eagerly.

"He ain' b'lieve dat. He t'ink Peter Burntwood mak' dat collar to fool um. He say Peter Burntwood lak too mooch to tell de beeg lie."

"But didn't you tell McTavish about the fox you shot, and the one you trapped with the collar on?"

"No. I ain' say nuttin'. Dat hurt too mooch to bre'k de leg. I ain' want dat *tamahnowus* mad on me no mor'."

Connie was silent for a long time as he racked his brain for some reasonable explanation of the Indian's strange story, pieced out by what he, himself, had actually seen and heard at the lake. But no explanation presented itself and finally he shook his head.

"W'at you t'ink 'bout dat?" asked Pierre Bonnet Rouge, who had been watching the boy narrowly.

[Pg 282]

"I don't know. There's something back of it all—but I can't seem to figure what it is. I'm going back to that lake, though, and I'm going to stay there till I do know."

The Indian shook his head forebodingly. "Dat better you keep way from dat lak'. She no good. James Dean he fool wit de *tamahnowus*. An' he hav' de strong medicine to mak' de *tamahnowus* do lak' he tell um. But de *tamahnowus* git James Dean. An' he git you—too."

Connie waited for two days after 'Merican Joe returned from the trap line before he even mentioned returning to The-Lake-of-the-Fox-That-Yells, as the Indians had renamed Hill Lake. Then, one evening he began to make up a pack for the trail.

"Were you goin'?" asked 'Merican Joe, eying the preparations with disapproval.

"It's about time we went down and looked at those fox traps, isn't it?" he asked casually. "And we ought to get some more out."

The Indian shook his head. "Me—I'm lak' dat better we let de *tamahnowus* hav' dem fox trap. We go on som' nudder lak' an' set mor'."

[Pg 283]

"Look here!" ripped out the boy, angrily, "if you're afraid to go you can stay here and snare rabbits like a squaw! I ain't afraid of your *tamahnowus*, and I'll go alone! And I'll stay till I find out what all this business is about—and then I'll come back and laugh at you, and at Pierre Bonnet Rouge, too. You're a couple of old women!" 'Merican Joe made no answer, and after puttering a bit he went to bed.

When Connie awakened, before daylight the following morning, the fire was burning brightly in the stove, and 'Merican Joe, dressed for the trail, was setting the breakfast table. Connie drew on his clothing and noticing that the pack he had thrown together the night before was missing, stepped to the door. A pack of double the size was lashed to the sled, and the boy turned to 'Merican Joe with a grin: "Decide to take a chance?" he asked.

The Indian set a plate of beans on the table and looked into the boy's eyes. "Me—I'm t'ink you too mooch *skookum*. Wan tam on Spur Mountain, I say you good man, an' I say 'Merican Joe, she good man, too. But she ain' so good man lak you. She scare for *tamahnowus* mor' as anyt'ing on de worl'. Rat now I'm so scare—me—dat de knees shivver, an' de hair com's from de head an' crawl up an' down de back an' de feet is col' lak de piece of ice, an' de belly is sick lak I ain' got nuttin' to eat in my life. But, I'm goin' 'long, an' I stan' rat beside you all de tam, an' w'en de *tamahnowus* git Connie Mo'gan, by Goss! she got to git 'Merican Joe, too!"

[Pg 284]

The boy stepped to the Indian's side and snatched his hand into both his own. "'Merican Joe," he cried, in a voice that was not quite steady, "you're a brick! You're the best doggone Injun that ever lived!"

"Me—I'm de scarest Injun ever liv'. I bet I lak she was nex' week, an' I was t'ousan' miles 'way from here."

"You're braver than I am," laughed the boy; "it's nothing for me to go, because I'm not scared, but you're scared stiff—and you're going anyway."

"Humph," grinned the Indian, "I ain' know w'at you mean—you say, if you scare, you brave—an' if you ain' scare, you ain' so brave. By Goss! I lak dat better if I ain' so mooch brave, den—an' ain' so mooch scare neider."

Travelling heavy, darkness overtook them some six or eight miles from their destination, and they camped. The sun was an hour high next morning when they pushed out on to the snow-covered ice and headed for the high hill at the end of the lake. 'Merican Joe agreed to look at the traps on the way up while Connie held the dogs to a course parallel to the shore. As the Indian was about to strike out he pointed excitedly toward the point where he had made the first set. Connie looked, and there, jumping about on the snow, with his foot in the trap was a beautiful black fox! It is a sight that thrills your trapper to the marrow, for here is the most valuable skin that it is possible for him to take, and forgetting for the moment his fear of the lake, 'Merican Joe struck off across the snow. A few moments later he halted, stared at the fox, and turning walked slowly back to the sled.

[Pg 285]

"Mebbe-so dat fox is de fox dat yell lak' de man. She black fox, too. Me—I'm 'fraid to tak' dat fox out de trap. I'm 'fraid she talk to me! An' by Goss! She say jus' wan word to me, I git so scare I die!"

Connie laughed. "Here, you take the dogs and I'll look at the traps. I remember where they all are, and I'll take out the foxes. But you will have to reset the traps, later."

[Pg 286]

As Connie approached, the fox jerked and tugged at the chain in an effort to free himself from the trap, but he was fairly caught and the jaws held. Connie drew his belt ax, for 'Merican Joe had explained that the fox is too large and lively an animal to be held with the bow of the snowshoe like the marten, while the trapper feels for his heart. He must be stunned by a sharp blow on the nose with the helve of the ax, after which it is an easy matter to pull his heart. As he was about to strike, the boy straightened up and stared at a small white band that encircled the neck of the fox. It was a collar of ermine skin! And as he continued to stare, little prickly chills shot up and down his spine. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then, pulling himself together, he struck. A moment later the fox's heart-strings snapped at the pull, and the boy released the foot from the trap, and holding the animal in his hands, examined the ermine collar. It was nearly an inch wide, of untanned skin, and was tied at the throat. "No Injun ever tied that knot," muttered the boy, "and there's no use scaring 'Merican Joe any more than necessary," he added, as with his sheath knife he cut the collar and placed it carefully in his pocket, and carrying the fox, proceeded up the shore.

[Pg 287]

In the fifth trap was another black fox. And again the boy stared at the ermine skin collar that encircled the animal's neck. He removed this collar and placed it with the first. 'Merican Joe was a half-mile out on the lake, plodding along at the head of the dogs. The two foxes were heavy, and Connie decided to carry them to the sled.

'Merican Joe stared, wide-eyed, at the catch. "Did dey talk?" he asked, huskily. And when Connie had assured him that they had not, the Indian continued to stare.

"Dat funny we git *two* black fox. De black fox, he ain' so many. You trap wan all winter, you done good. We got two, sam' day. I ain' never hear 'bout dat before!"

"I knew this was a good lake for foxes," smiled the boy. 'Merican Joe nodded, sombrely. "Som't'ing wrong. Dat lak' she too mooch good for fox. Som' t'ing wrong."

The twelfth trap yielded another black fox, and another ermine collar, and as the boy removed it from the animal's neck he gave way to an expression of anger. "What in thunder is the meaning of this? Who is out here in the hills tying ermine collars on black foxes—and why? The most valuable skin in the North—and some fool catches them and ties a collar on them, and turns them loose! And how does he catch them? They've never been trapped before! And how does it come there are so many of them and they are so easy to trap?" He gave it up, and returned to the sled, to show the astounded 'Merican Joe the third black fox. But the Indian took no joy in the catch, and all the time they were setting up the tent in the shelter of a thicket at the foot of the high hill, he maintained a brooding silence.

[Pg 288]

"While you skin the foxes, I guess I'll slip over and have another look at that *cache*," said the boy, when they had eaten their luncheon.

"You sure git back, pret' queek?" asked the Indian, "I ain' want to be here 'lone w'en de sun go down. I ain' want to hear dat yell."

"Oh, I'll be back long before sundown," assured Connie. "That yell is just what I *do want* to hear."

At the *cache* he raised the rotting blanket and peered beneath it and there, as Pierre Bonnet Rouge had told him, was a black fox skin, and its ermine collar. The boy examined the collar. It was an exact counterpart of the three he had in his pocket. He replaced the blanket and walked slowly back to camp, pondering deeply the mystery of the collars, but the more he thought, the more mysterious it seemed.

[Pg 289]

THE MAN IN THE CAVE

It was late afternoon when 'Merican Joe finished skinning the three foxes and stretching the pelts. As the sun approached the horizon Connie seated himself upon the sled at a point that gave him a clear view of the rock-ledge on the hillside. 'Merican Joe went into the tent and seated himself on his blankets, where he cowered with his thumbs in his ears.

The lower levels were in the shadows, now, and the sunlight was creeping slowly up the hill. Suddenly, from the rock-ledge appeared a black fox. Connie wondered if he, too, wore an ermine skin collar. The fox sniffed the air and trotted off along the hillside, where he disappeared behind a patch of scrub. Again the boy's eyes sought the ledge, another fox was trotting away and still another stood beside the rock. Then it came—the wild quavering yell for which the boy waited. The third fox trotted away as the yell came to its wailing termination, and Connie leaped from the sled. "It's just as I thought!" he cried, excitedly. "*The fox never gave that yell!*" The boy had expected to find just that, nevertheless, the actual discovery of it thrilled him with excitement.

[Pg 291]

The head of 'Merican Joe peered cautiously from the tent. "Who giv' um den?" he asked in fear and trembling.

"The man that's at the bottom of that fox-hole," answered the boy, impressively, "and if I'm not mistaken, his name is James Dean."

The Indian stared at the boy as though he thought he had taken leave of his senses. "W'at you mean—de bottom of de fox-hole?" he asked "Dat hole so leetle small dat de fox she almos' can't git out!"

"That's just it!" cried the boy. "That's just why the man can't get out."

"How he git in dere?" asked 'Merican Joe, in a tone of such disgust that Connie laughed.

"I'll tell you that tomorrow," he answered, "after James Dean tells me."

"If de yell com' from de hole, den de *tamahnowus* mak' um," imparted the Indian, fearfully. "An' if he can't get out dat better we let um stay in dere. Ain' no man kin git in dat hole. I ain' know nuttin' 'bout no James Dean."

[Pg 292]

A half-hour before sunrise the following morning Connie started up the slope, closely followed by 'Merican Joe, who mumbled gruesome forebodings as he crowded so close that he had to keep a sharp lookout against treading upon the tails of Connie's rackets. When they had covered half the distance a black fox broke from a nearby patch of scrub and dashed for the hole in the rock-ledge, and as they approached the place another fox emerged from the thicket, paused abruptly, and circled widely to the shelter of another thicket.

Arriving at the ledge, Connie took up his position squarely in front of the hole, while 'Merican Joe, grimly grasping the helve of his belt ax, sank down beside him, and with trembling fingers untied the thongs of one of his snowshoes.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Connie, in a low voice.

"Me—I'm so scare w'en dat yell com', I'm 'fraid I runaway. If I ain' got jus' wan snowshoe, I can't run."

"You're all right," smiled the boy, as he reached out and laid a reassuring hand upon the Indian's arm, and hardly had the words left his lips than from the mouth of the hole came the wild cry that mounted higher and higher, and then died away in a quavering tremolo. Instantly, Connie thrust his face close to the hole. "Hello!" he cried at the top of his lungs, and again: "Hello, in there!"

[Pg 293]

A moment of tense silence followed, and then from the hole came the sound of a voice. "Hello, hello, hello, hello! Don't go 'way—for God's sake! Hello, hello, hello——"

"We're not going away," answered the boy, "we've come to get you out—James Dean!"

"James Dean! James Dean!" repeated the voice from the ground. "Get James Dean out!"

"We'll get you out, all right," reassured the boy. "But tell us how you got in, and why you can't get out the same way?"

"There's no way out!" wailed a voice of despair, "I'm buried alive, an' there's no way out!"

"How did you get in?" insisted the boy. "Come, think, because it'll help us to get you out."

"Get in—a long time ago—years and years ago—James Dean is very old. The whole hill is hollow and James Dean is buried alive."

[Pg 294]

Connie gave up trying to obtain information from the unfortunate man whose inconsistent

remarks were of no help. "I'll see if these rocks are loose," he called, as he scraped the snow away from the edges of the hole and tapped at the rock with the back of his belt ax.

"It ain't loose!" came the voice. "It's solid rock—a hundred ton of it caved in my tunnel. The whole hill is quartz inside and I shot a face and the hill caved in."

A hurried examination confirmed the man's statement. Connie found, under the snow, evidences of the mouth of a tunnel, and then he saw that the whole face of the ledge had fallen forward, blocking the tunnel at the mouth. The small triangular opening used by the foxes, had originally been a notch in the old face of the ledge. The boy stared at the mass of rock in dismay. Fully twelve feet of solid rock separated the man from the outside world! Once more he placed his mouth to the hole. "Hello, James Dean!"

"Hello!"

"Isn't there any other opening to the cave?" he asked.

"Opening to the cave? Another opening? No—no—only my window, an' that's too high."

"Window," cried Connie. "Where is your window?"

"Way up high—a hundred feet high. I've carried forty ton of rock—but I never can reach it—because I've run out of rock—and my powder and drills was buried in the cave-in."

"I'm going to find that window!" cried the boy. "You go back and get as close to the window as you can, and yell and I'll find it, and when I do, we'll pull you out in a jiffy."

"It's too high," wailed the man, "and my rock run out!"

"Go over there and yell!" repeated the boy. "I'll let a line down and we'll pull you out."

Turning to 'Merican Joe, whose nerve had completely returned when he became convinced that the author of the strange yell was a man of flesh and blood, the boy ordered him post-haste to the tent to fetch the three coils of strong *babiche* line that he had added to the outfit. When the Indian had gone, Connie struck straight up the hill, examining the surface of the snow eagerly for sight of a hole. But it was not until two hours later, after he and the Indian had circled and spiralled the hill in every direction, that he was attracted to a patch of scrawny scrub by the faint sound of a long-drawn yell.

Into the scrub dashed the boy, and there, yawning black and forbidding, beneath a low rock-ledge, was a hole at least four feet in height, and eight or nine feet wide. And from far down in the depths came the sound of the voice, loud and distinct now that he stood directly in front of the hole. The boy called for 'Merican Joe, and while he waited for the Indian to come, he noted that the edges of the hole, and all the bushes that over-hung its mouth were crusted thickly with white frost. Carefully he laid flat on his belly and edged himself along until he could thrust his face into the abyss. The air felt very warm—a dank, damp warmth, such as exudes from the depths of a swamp in summer. He peered downward but his eyes could not penetrate the Stygian blackness out of which rose the monotonous wail of the voice.

"Strike a light down there!" cried the boy. "Or build a fire!"

"Light! Fire! Ha, ha, ha." Thin, hollow laughter that was horrible to hear, floated upward. "I ain't had a fire in years, and years—an' no light."

"Wait a minute!" called the boy, and began to collect dry twigs which he made into a bundle. He lighted the bundle and when it was burning fiercely he shouted, "Look out below!" And leaning far inward, he dropped the blazing twigs. Down, down like a fiery comet they rushed through the darkness, and then suddenly the comet seemed to explode and a million tiny flames shot in all directions as the bundle burst from contact with the rock floor. "Pile the sticks together and make a fire!" called the boy, "and I'll toss you down some more!" He could see the tiny red faggots moving toward a central spot, and presently a small blaze flared up, and as more twigs were added to the pile the flame brightened. Connie collected more wood, and calling a warning, tossed it down. Soon a bright fire was burning far below, and in the flickering light of the flames the boy saw a grotesque shape flitting here and there adding twigs to the fire. He could not see the man clearly but he could see that his head and face were covered with long white hair, and that he was entirely naked except for a flapping piece of cloth that hung from his middle.

'Merican Joe arrived with the *babiche* lines, and as the boy proceeded to uncoil and knot them together, he sent the Indian to the tent for some blankets. When he returned the line was ready, with a fixed loop in the end.

"All right!" called the boy, "here comes the line. Sit in the loop, and hold on to the rope for all you're worth, and we'll have you out in a few minutes!" He could hear the man talking to himself as he hovered about the fire so closely that the flames seemed to be licking at his skin.

The man looked upward, and Connie paid out the line. When it reached the bottom, the boy noted that there was only about ten feet of slack remaining, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He

[Pg 295]

[Pg 296]

[Pg 297]

[Pg 298]

could feel the man tugging at the rope, and after a moment of silence the voice sounded from below: "Haul away!"

Connie and 'Merican Joe braced their feet on the rocks and pulled. They could feel the rope sway like a pendulum as the man left the floor, and then, hand over hand they drew him to the surface. While the Indian had gone for the blankets, Connie had cut a stout pole to be used to support the load while they got the man out of the hole. Even with the pole to sustain the weight it was no small task to draw the man over the edge, but at last it was accomplished, and James Dean stood once more in the light of day after his years of imprisonment in the bowels of the earth. With a cry of pain the man clapped his hands to his eyes, and Connie immediately bound his handkerchief over them, as 'Merican Joe wrapped the wasted form in thickness after thickness of blankets. When the blankets were secured with the *babiche* line the Indian lifted the man to his shoulders, and struck out for the tent, as Connie hurried on ahead to build up the fire and prepare some food.

[Pg 299]

The bandage was left on the man's eyes, for the daylight had proved too strong, but after the tent had warmed, the two dressed him in their extra clothing. The man ate ravenously of broiled caribou steak and drank great quantities of tea, after which, the day being still young, camp was struck, and the outfit headed for the cabin.

It was midnight when they drew up at the door, and soon a roaring fire heated the interior. Connie turned the light very low, and removed the bandage from the man's eyes. For a long time he sat silent, staring about him, his eyes travelling slowly from one object to another, and returning every few moments to linger upon the faces of his rescuers. At times his lips moved slightly, as if to name some familiar object, but no sound came, and his eyes followed every movement with interest, as 'Merican Joe prepared supper.

[Pg 300]

When the meal was ready the man stepped to the pole-shelf that served as a washstand, and as he caught sight of his face in the little mirror that hung above it, he started back with a cry of horror. Then he stepped to the mirror again, and for a long time he stared into it as though fascinated by what he beheld. In a daze, he turned to Connie. "What—what year is it?" he asked, in a voice that trembled with uncertainty. And when the boy told him, he stood and batted his squinting eyes uncomprehendingly. "Six years," he mumbled, "six years buried alive. Six years living with weasels, and foxes, and fish without eyes. I was thirty, then—and in six years I'm eighty—eighty years old if I'm a day. Look at me! Ain't I eighty?"

In truth, the man looked eighty, thought Connie as he glanced into the face with its faded squinting eyes, the brow wrinkled and white as paper, and the long white hair and beard that hung about his shoulders. Aloud he said, "No, you'll be all right again in a little while. Living in the dark that way has hurt your eyes, and turned your skin white, and the worry about getting out has made your hair turn grey but you can cut your hair, and shave off your whiskers, and the sun will tan you up again. Let's eat now, and after supper if you feel like it you can tell us how it happened."

[Pg 301]

The man ate ravenously—so ravenously in fact, that Connie who had learned that a starving man should be fed slowly at first, uttered a protest. "You better go a little easy on the grub," he cautioned. "Not that we haven't got plenty, but for your own good. Anyone that hasn't had enough to eat for quite a while has got to take it slow."

The man looked at the boy in surprise. "It ain't the grub—it's the *cooking*. I've had plenty of grub, but I ain't had any fire."

After supper the man begged to be allowed to help wash the dishes, and when the task was finished, he drew his chair directly in front of the stove, and opening the door, sat staring into the flames. "Seems like I just got to look at the fire," he explained, "I ain't seen one in so long."

[Pg 302]

"And you ate all your grub raw?" asked the boy.

James Dean settled himself in his chair, and shook his head. "No, not raw. I might's well begin at the start. There's times when my head seems to kind of go wrong, but it's all right now."

"Wait a few days, if you'd rather," suggested the boy, but the man shook his head:

"No, I feel fine—I'd about give up ever seein' men again. Let's see where'll I begin. I come north eight year ago. Prospected the Coppermine, but there ain't nothin' there. Then I built me a cabin south of the big lake. From there I prospected an' trapped, an' traded with McTavish at Fort Norman. One time I struck some colour on the shore of the lake, right at the foot of the hill where you found me. Looked like it had come out of rotted quartz, an' I figured the mother lode would maybe be in the hill so I fetched my drills, an' powder, an' run in a drift. I hadn't got very far in when I shot the whole face out and busted into a big cave. The whole inside was lined with rotten quartz, but it wasn't poor man's gold. It was a stamp mill claim.

[Pg 303]

"I prodded around in the cave all day, an' that evenin' some Injuns come an' camped near my tent. They was goin' to trap fox, an' I didn't want 'em around, so I went over to their camp an' told 'em there was a *tamahnowus* around. Two of 'em was scairt stiff, but one wasn't. I told 'em they was a fox that could talk like a man. But one buck, he figured I was lyin', so to make the play

good, I told 'em I had the medicine to make the *tamahnowus* do what I told him. I said I would make him burn the snow, so I slips back to my tent and laid a fuse out on the lake, an' put about a pound of powder at the end of it, an' while she was burnin' I went back. The Injuns could see the fuse sputterin' out on the lake, but this one buck said it was a piece of rope I'd set afire. I told him if it was rope it would go out, but if it was *tamahnowus* I'd tell him to make a big fire. So I yelled at the *tamahnowus* a couple of times, and when the spark got to the powder she flashed up big, an' like to scairt them Injuns to death. In the morning they beat it—an' that was the end of them. If you're smart you can out-guess them Injuns." The man paused, and Connie, although he said nothing, smiled grimly for well he knew that the man had paid dearly for his trick.

[Pg 304]

"Nex' day I decided to shoot down a face of the rotten quartz to see how thick she was, an' I drilled my holes an' tamped in the shots, an' fired 'em. I had gone back in the cave, instead of steppin' outside, an' when the shots went off the whole ledge tipped over, an' plugged up my tunnel. I'd shoved my drills an' powder into the tunnel, an' they was buried.

"Well, there I was. At first I yelled, an' hollered, an' I clawed at the rock with my hands. Then I come to. The cave was dark as pitch, the only light I could see come through under the rocks where the foxes use—only they wasn't any foxes then. There I was without nothin' to eat an' drink, an' no way out. I had matches, but there wasn't nothin' to burn. Then I started out to explore the cave. It was an awful job in the dark. Now an' then I'd light a match an' hold it till it burnt my fingers. It was a big cave, an' around a corner of rock, five or six hundred foot back from the hole, I found the window you drug me out through. That let in a little light, but it was high up an' no way to get to it. I heard runnin' water, an' found a crick run right through the middle of that room, it was the biggest room of all. In one place there was a rapids not over six inches deep where it run over a ledge of rocks. I crossed it, an' found another long room. It was hot in there an' damp an' it stunk of sulphur. There was a boilin' spring in there, an' a little crick run from it to the big cold crick. I heard a splashin' in the rapids an' I was so scairt I couldn't run. There wouldn't have been no place to run to if I could. So I laid there, an' listened. The splashin' kept up an' I quit bein' so scairt, an' went to the rapids. The splashin' was still goin' on an' it took me quite a while there in the dark to figure out it was fish. Well, when I did figure it, I give a whoop. I wasn't goin' to starve, anyhow—not with fish, an' a boilin' spring to cook 'em. I took off my shoes an' waded in an' stood still in the rapids. Pretty quick I could feel 'em bumpin' my feet. Then I stuck my hands in an' when they bumped into 'em I'd throw 'em out. I got so I never missed after a couple of years. They run in schools, an' it got so I knew when they was up the river, an' when they was down. I'd scoop one or two out, an' carry 'em to the spring, an' I made a sort of pen out of rocks in the boilin' water, an' I'd throw 'em in, an' a half-hour or so later, they'd be done. But they stunk of sulphur, an' tasted rotten, an' at first I couldn't go 'em—but I got used to it after a while.

[Pg 305]

[Pg 306]

"The first year, I used to yell out the door, about every couple of hours, then three times a day, an' at last I only yelled when the light in the hole told me the sun was going down, an' again when it come up. In summer a rabbit would now an' then come in the hole an' I got so I could kill 'em with rocks when they set for a minute in the light at the end of the hole. They was plenty o' weasels—ermine they call 'em up here, but they ain't fit to eat. Towards spring a couple of black fox come nosin' into the hole, an' I slipped in a rock so they couldn't get out. I done it first, jest to have company. They was so wild, I couldn't see nothin' but their eyes for a long time. But I scooped fish out for 'em an' fed 'em every day in the same place an' they got tamer. Then they had a litter of young ones! Say, they was the cutest little fellers you ever saw. I fed 'em an' after a while they was so tame I could handle 'em. I never could handle the old ones, but they got so tame they'd take fish out of my hand.

[Pg 307]

"All this time I used to go to the hole every day, an' two or three times a day, an' lay with my face in it, so my eyes would get the light. I was afraid I'd go blind bein' all the time in the dark. An' between times I'd carry loose rock an' pile it under that window. I spent years of work on pilin' them rocks, an' then I used up all the rocks an' had to quit.

"When the little foxes got about a quarter grow'd I took 'em one at a time, an' shoved 'em out the hole, so their eyes wouldn't go bad. After a while I could let 'em all out together, an' they would always come back. I was careful to keep 'em well fed. But I didn't dare let the old ones go, I was afraid they'd never come back an' would drag off the little ones, too. It wasn't so long before them six little fellows could beat me scoopin' out fish. Well, one day the big ones got out, an' the little ones followed. They'd clawed the rock away where I hadn't jammed it in tight. I never felt so bad in my life. I sat there in the dark and bawled like a baby. It was like losin' yer family all to once. They was all I had. I never expected to see 'em again. They stayed out all night, but in the mornin' back they all come—big ones an' all! After that I left the hole open, an' they come an' went as they pleased. Well, they had more little ones, an' the little ones had little ones, until they was forty or fifty black fox lived with me in the cave—an' I had 'em all named. They used to fetch in ptarmigan an' rabbits an' I'd take 'em away an' eat 'em. Then one or two begun to turn up missin' an' I figured they'd be'n trapped. That give me an idea. If I could tie a message onto 'em, maybe sometime someone would trap one and find out where I was. But I didn't have no pencil nor nothin' to write on. So I begun tearin' strips from my coat an' pants an' tied 'em around their necks, but the goods was gettin' rottin, an' bushes clawed it off, or maybe the foxes did. I used up my coat, an' most of my pants, an' then I used ermine skins. I figured that if any

[Pg 308]

one trapped a black fox wearin' an ermine skin collar it would call for an investigation. If it was a white trapper he would tumble right away that something was wrong, an' if it was an Injun he would brag about it when he traded the fur, an' then the factor would start the investigation. But nothin' come of it till you come along, although they was several of them foxes trapped—as long as three years back. But I kept on yellin' night an' mornin'. Sometime, I know'd someone would hear. An' that's all there is to it, except that my clothes an' shoes was all wore out—but I didn't mind so much because it was warm as summer all the time, an' no mosquitoes in the cave."

[Pg 309]

"And now you can rest up for a few days, and well take you to Fort Norman," smiled Connie, when the man relapsed into silence, "and you can go out in the summer with the brigade."

"Go out?" asked the man, vaguely. "Go out where?"

"Why!" exclaimed the boy, "go out—wherever you want to go."

The man lapsed into a long silence as he sat with his grey beard resting upon his breast and gazed into the fire. "No," he said, at length, "I'll go to Fort Norman, an' get some drills an' powder, an' shoot me a new tunnel. I'll take a stove so I can have a fire, an' cook. I like the cave. It's all the home I got, an' someone's got to look after them foxes."

"But the gold?" asked the boy. "How about bringing in a stamp mill and turn your hill into a regular outfit?"

[Pg 310]

James Dean shook his head. "No, it would spoil the cave an' besides where would me and the foxes go? That hill is the only home we've got—an' I'm gettin' old. I'm eighty if I'm a day. When I'm dead you can have the hill—but you'll look after them foxes, won't you, boy?"

A week later Connie and 'Merican Joe and James Dean pulled up before the Hudson's Bay Post at Fort Norman, and, as the boy entered the door, McTavish greeted him in surprise. "You're just the one I want!" he cried. "I was just about to send an Indian runner to your cabin with this letter. It come from the Yukon by special messenger."

Connie tore the document open, and as he read, his eyes hardened. It was from Waseche Bill, and it had not been intrusted to "Roaring Mike O'Reilly" to transcribe. It ran thus:

MR. C. MORGAN,

Cannady.

Son, yo better come back yere. Theys an outfit thats tryin to horn in on us on Ten Bow. They stack up big back in the states—name's Guggenhammer, or somethin' like it, an they say we kin take our choist to either fight or sell out. If we fight they say they'll clean us out. I ain't goin' to do one thing or nother till I hear from you. Come a runnin' an' les here you talk.

Your pard,

W. BILL.

[Pg 311]

"What's the matter, son, bad news?" asked McTavish, as he noted the scowling face of the boy.

"Read it," he snapped, and tossed the letter to the big Scotchman. Then stepping to the counter he rapidly wrote a report to Dan McKeever, in re the disappearance of James Dean, after which he turned to 'Merican Joe—"I've got to go back to Ten Bow," he said. "All the traps and the fur and everything we've got here except my sled and dog-team are yours. Stay as long as you want to, and when you are tired of trapping, come on over into the Yukon country, and I'll give you a job—unless the Guggenhammers bust me—but if they do they'll know they've been somewhere when they get through!"

And without waiting to hear the Indian's reply, the boy turned to McTavish and ordered his trail grub, which 'Merican Joe packed on to the boy's sled as fast as the factor's clerk could get it out. "So-long," called Connie, as he stood beside the sled a half-hour later. "Here goes a record trip to the Yukon! And, say, McTavish, give James Dean anything he wants, and charge it to me!"

[Pg 312]

"All right, lad," called the factor, "but what are ye goin' to do? Dan McKeever'll be wantin' to know, when he comes along?"

"Do?" asked the boy.

"Yes, are ye goin' to sell out, or fight 'em?"

"Fight 'em!" cried the boy. "Fight 'em to the last ditch! If they've told Waseche we've *got* to sell, I wouldn't sell for a hundred million dollars—and neither would he! We'll fight 'em—and what's more we'll beat 'em—you wait an' see!" And with a yell the boy cracked his whip, and the dogs, with the great Leloo in the lead, sprang out on to the long, long trail to the Yukon.

THE END.

G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS



Complete Catalogues sent
on application

Connie Morgan in the Lumber Camps

By

James B. Hendryx

Author of "Connie Morgan in Alaska," "Connie Morgan
with the Mounted," etc.

All his many friends will be glad to greet Connie Morgan again.

This time we find him in the timber regions of northern Minnesota, where he solves a mystery that robbed him and his partner of thousands of dollars' worth of logs. He is the same straightforward lad "who finds out what has to be done, and does it the best he knows how."

Mr. Hendryx has lived much in the lumber woods and has written an excellent, exciting story of adventure.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

Connie Morgan in Alaska

By
James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Promise," "The Law of the Woods," etc.
12°. Over twenty illustrations

Mr. Hendryx, as he has ably demonstrated in his many well-known tales, knows his Northland thoroughly, but he has achieved a reputation as a writer possibly "too strong" for the younger literary digestion. It is a delight, therefore, to find that he can present properly, in a capital story of a boy, full of action and adventure, and one in whom boys delight, the same thorough knowledge of people and customs of the North.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

Connie Morgan with the Mounted

By

James B. Hendryx

Author of "Connie Morgan in Alaska"

Illustrated.

It tells how "Sam Morgan's Boy," well known to readers of Mr. Hendryx's "Connie Morgan in Alaska," daringly rescued a man who was rushing to destruction on an ice floe and how, in recognition of his quick-wittedness and nerve, he was made a Special Constable in the Northwest Mounted Police, with the exceptional adventures that fell to his lot in that perilous service. It is a story of the northern wilderness, clean and bracing as the vigorous, untainted winds that sweep over that region; the story of a boy who wins out against the craft of Indians and the guile of the bad white man of the North; the story of a boy who succeeds where men fail.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

The Promise

**A Tale of the Great Northwest and of a
Man Who Kept His Word**

By James B. Hendryx

A tale of a strong man's regeneration—of the transformation of "Broadway Bill" Carmody, millionaire's son, rounder, and sport, whose drunken sprees have finally overtaxed the patience of his father and *the* girl, into a Man, clear-eyed and clean-lived, a true descendant of the fighting McKims.

The Texan

A Story of the Cattle Country

By James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Promise," etc.

A novel of the cattle country and of the mountains, by James B. Hendryx, will at once commend itself to the host of readers who have enthusiastically followed this brilliant writer's work. Again he has written a red-blooded, romantic story of the great open spaces, of the men who "do" things and of the women who are brave—a tale at once turbulent and tender, impassioned but restrained.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

The White Blanket

By

Belmore Browne

Author of "The Quest of the Golden Valley," etc.

12°. *Illustrated*

A sequel to *The Quest of the Golden Valley*, this time taking the chums through the vicissitudes of an Alaskan winter. They trap the many fur-bearing animals, hunt the big game, camp with the Indians, do dog-driving, snowshoeing, etc. With the coming of spring they descend one of the wilderness rivers on a raft and at the eleventh hour, after being wrecked in a dangerous canyon, they discover a fabulous quartz lode, and succeed in reaching the sea coast.

G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York

London

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONNIE MORGAN IN THE FUR COUNTRY ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or

access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on

the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS

OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.