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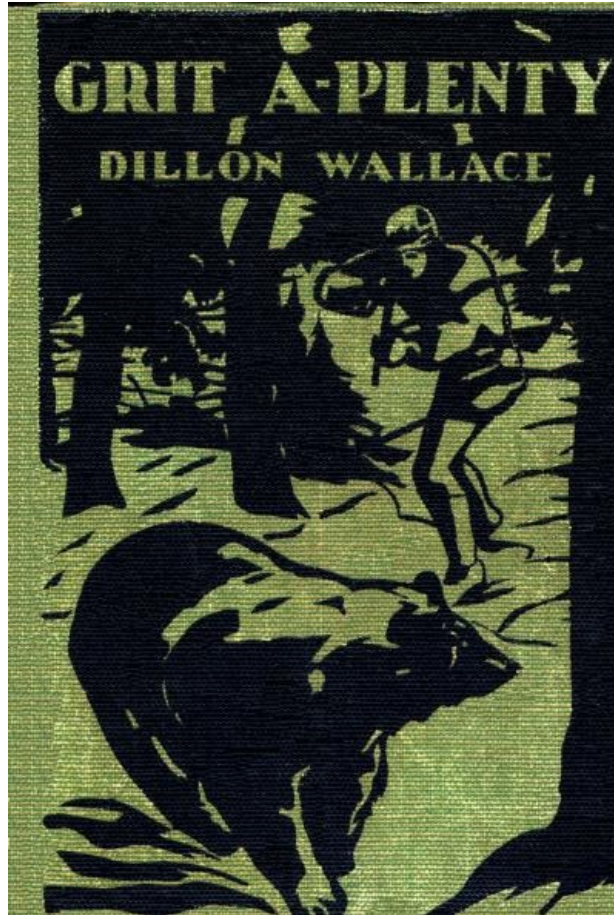
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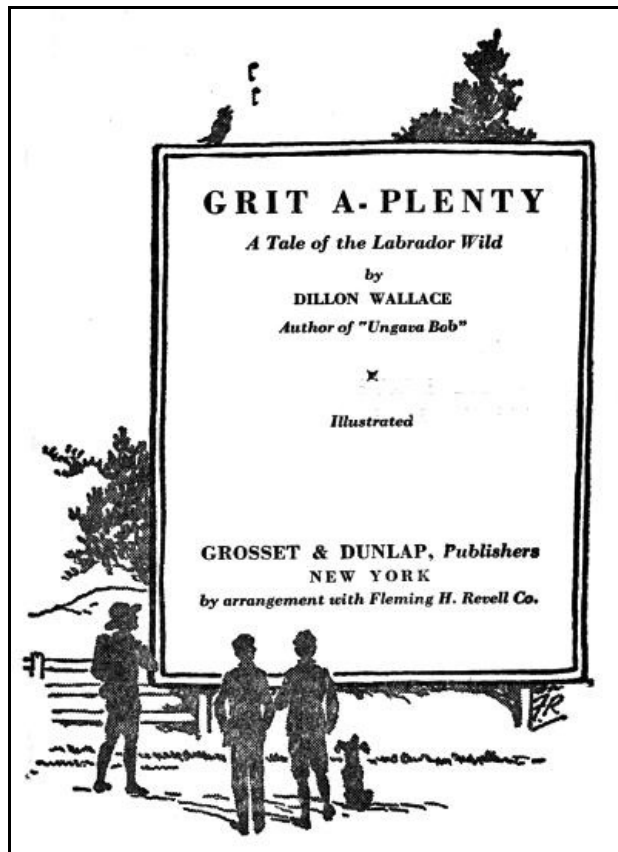
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**GRIT-A-PLENTY
DILLON WALLACE**



GRIT A-PLenty
A Tale of the Labrador Wild

by
DILLON WALLACE
Author of "Ungava Bob"

Illustrated

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TO
THE BRAVE
JAMIES AND DAVIDS AND ANDYS

**EVERYWHERE
WHO KEEP THEIR GRIT
AND DO THEIR BEST
WHEN THE MISTS
HANG LOW**

“If you and I—just you and I—
Should laugh instead of worry;
If we should grow—just you and I—
Kinder and sweeter hearted,
Perhaps in some near by and by
A good time might get started;
Then what a happy world 'twould be
For you and me—for you and me!”

FOREWORD

Tempting boys to be what they should be—giving them in wholesome form what they want—that is the purpose and power of Scouting. To help parents and leaders of youth secure *books boys like best* that are also best for boys, the Boy Scouts of America organized EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY. The books included, formerly sold at prices ranging from \$1.50 to \$2.00 but, by special arrangement with the several publishers interested, are now sold in the EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY Edition at \$1.00 per volume.

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We know so well, are reminded so often of the worth of the good book and great, that too often we fail to observe or understand the influence for good of a boy's recreational reading. Such books may influence him for good or ill as profoundly as his play activities, of which they are a vital part. The needful thing is to find stories in which the heroes have the characteristics boys so much admire—unquenchable courage, immense resourcefulness, absolute fidelity, conspicuous greatness. We believe the books of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY measurably well meet this challenge.

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA,

James E. West [Handwritten Signature]

Chief Scout Executive.

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I

THE CABIN AT THE JUG

THE Jug, as Thomas Angus often remarked, was as snug and handy a place to live as ever a man could wish. Ten miles up the Bay was the trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at Wolf Bight, twelve miles directly across the Bay from the Jug, the trading post of Trowbridge & Gray, and then only five miles to the eastward, at Break Cove, lived Doctor Joe.

"Neighbors right handy all around," declared Thomas, "and no chance of ever gettin' lonesome."

The Jug was a well sheltered bight on the north side of Eskimo Bay, and here, in the edge of the forest, stood Thomas' cabin.

Near by the cabin Roaring Brook rushed down through a gorge in a vast hurry to empty its sparkling waters into the bight; and behind the cabin, shrouded in silence and mystery, stretching away into unmeasured distances, lay the great unpeopled wilderness.

"Room enough," said Thomas, "for a man to stretch himself."

The Angus home was much like every other trapper's home in the Eskimo Bay country, though somewhat larger and more commodious, perhaps, than was usual. Thomas believed in "comfort, and plenty o' room to stretch, indoors as well as out," and this sentiment led him to make no stint of timber or labor when he builded.

"The timber is here for the takin', and right handy," said he, "and a bit more work don't matter."

The cabin was built of logs, and faced the south, with its entrance through an enclosed porch on the western gable. This porch served both as a protection from winter storms and as a store room. Here were kept dog harness, fish nets, and innumerable odds and ends incident to the life and occupation of a trapper and fisherman. And in one end of the porch, neatly piled in tiers, was an ever-ready supply of firewood.

A door from the porch led into a living room crudely and primitively furnished, but possessed of an indescribable atmosphere of cozy comfort. The uncarpeted floor, the home-made table, the chests which served both as storage places for clothing and as seats, the three crude but substantial home-made chairs, and the shelves for dishes, were scoured clean and white with sand and soap, for Margaret, through her Scotch ancestry, had inherited a penchant for cleanliness and neatness.

"I likes to keep the house tidy," she said to Doctor Joe once, when he complimented her. "'Tis a wonderful comfort to have un tidy and clean."

There were three windows, draped with snow-white muslin—an unusual luxury. Two of these windows looked to the southward to catch the sun with its cheer, and before them lay the wide vista of Eskimo Bay, and beyond the Bay the grim, snow-capped peaks of the Mealy Mountains. The other window was in the rear, but here the view was restricted by the forest, which sheltered the cabin from the frigid northern blasts of the sub-arctic winters.

A big box stove, which would accommodate great billets of wood, and crackled cheerily, and a bunk built against the wall like a ship's bunk, and which served Thomas as a bed, completed the furnishings.

Originally the cabin had contained no other rooms than the living room and the porch, but when the children came, and grew, Thomas, with his desire for "plenty o' room to stretch," erected an addition on the eastern end, which he partitioned into two sleeping compartments, one for Margaret and the other for the boys.

Mighty content were Thomas Angus and his family. A snug cabin, a neighbor "right handy," the trading posts near enough to visit now and again on business or on pleasure, and enough to eat—what more could be desired?

Thomas Angus was a good hunter, and provided well for his family, which in Labrador means that for the most part his catch of fur was good in winter, his fish nets yielded well in summer, and therefore his flour barrel was seldom empty.

Bread and pork, with no stint of tea, and a bit of molasses for sweetening, together with such game as he might kill, sat a table that to Thomas Angus and his family was bountiful and varied enough, if not luxurious. There were no potatoes or other vegetables, to be sure, for gardens do not thrive in this far northern land; but they did not mind that, for they had never eaten vegetables. We do not miss what we have never had, and the more we have the more we demand. And so it was that Thomas Angus and his family were happy and content enough with what to you and me would have been privation.

"'Tis a wonderful fine livin' we has here," said Thomas, "and we're thankful to th' Lard for providin' it."

Mrs. Angus had been dead these five years. Her grave, marked by a rude wooden slab, was in a little fenced-in clearing behind the house. Her death was the greatest sorrow that had ever visited the Anguses. Thomas dug the grave himself, as a last service to his wife, and when he and the neighbors lowered Mrs. Angus into her deep, cold bed, and covered her with frozen clods of earth, and he and the mourning children returned to the empty cabin, he comforted them with the philosophy of his simple Christian faith.

"'Tis the Lard's will," he said. "The work He had for Mother to do on earth was ended, and He called her away. 'Tis a bit hard on us that's left behind, and we'll be missin' her sore, but we'll bear un without complaint because 'tis the Lard's will. We mustn't forget—though we'll be like to forget sometimes—that Mother's still livin'. 'Twas only the body that she was through usin' that we buried out there. Who can know but she may be right with us now, though we can't see her? And maybe she's seein' us all the time, and knowin' all we does and talks about."

Margaret, then a little maid of twelve, took her mother's place as housekeeper, and bravely did her best to mother the boys. In these five years she had grown into a handsome, rosy-cheeked lass of seventeen, and as capable and fine a housekeeper as you could find on the whole Labrador.

David and Andy, too, had developed with the years from energetic small boys into broad-shouldered, bronze-faced, brawny lads. David, nearly sixteen, and Andy, fourteen, lent a hand at anything that was to be done indoors and out. They kept the water barrel filled from Roaring Brook, they helped cut the firewood and haul it with the dogs, and sawed and split it into proper size for the big box stove. In summer they did their part at the salmon and trout fishing and in winter they kept the house supplied with partridges and rabbits and other small game. In Labrador every one must do his part, and lads learn early to bear their share of the responsibilities of life, and so it was with David and Andy. And adventures, too, they had, for in that brave land adventures come often enough.

Jamie, the youngest of the family, was ten, and as cheerful and lusty and fine a little lad as ever lived. But Jamie's sight was failing.

"They's a smoke in the house," said Jamie when he awoke one morning.

"They's no smoke in the house," protested Andy.

"But I sees un! I sees un!" insisted Jamie.

"'Tis the sleep in your eyes yet," suggested David. "'Twill pass away when you wakes."

And so Jamie said no more, believing it was the sleep in his eyes, and he rubbed them to drive it away, and dressed, and looked out of the window toward the bay.

"They's a mist on the water," said Jamie.

"They's no mist," denied Andy. "'Tis fine and clear, and the sun shines wonderful bright."

"I sees the sunshine, but 'tis not bright. They's a mist," Jamie insisted.

And the mist had remained, and thickened gradually with the passing weeks. It was in the beginning of July when the mist had first appeared before Jamie's eyes, and before the month was ended he complained that he could no longer see the Mealy Mountains across the bay, with their glistening white snow-capped peaks. And this was too bad, for Jamie loved the mountains rising so brave and changeless like a row of great rugged giants guarding and holding the world firm beyond the restless waters of the bay. Jamie always felt that he could depend upon the mountains, and he had a fancy, when of evenings the setting sun tipped their white summits with its last glow, that it was a bit of the dazzling light of heaven breaking through the sky when God reached down to kiss the world good night.

And it had been many days now since Jamie had seen his loved mountains. Even the point, at the entrance to the bight, had become veiled in haze and seemed to have moved far out into the bay, as it used to do when the fog hung low on murky days, and Jamie's sight was as keen as David's and Andy's.

In the beginning Thomas gave little heed to Jamie's complaints of the mist, for he was busy then at his fishing.

"'Tis a bit of a strain," said he, "and 'twill soon pass away. A bit of the burn and glare of the spring sun upon the snow, left in the eyes to shade un. 'Twill soon pass away."

One day in late August, when Doctor Joe was over at The Jug, as he often was, he heard Jamie complain of the mist, and Doctor Joe asked Jamie many questions, and looked long and hard into Jamie's eyes, and when he was going, and Thomas walked down to the beach to help him launch his boat, he told Thomas that the mist would not clear up of itself.

"And is it a sickness, then, and a bad un?" asked Thomas, aroused to great concern, for he had vast faith in Doctor Joe's opinion.

"I can't say yet for a certainty how bad it is, but 'tis a sickness, and may grow worse, if it's the kind of sickness I take it to be," said Doctor Joe. "Don't worry about it yet, Thomas. I'll be up again soon and look into the eyes again, and see how they're doing."

"Can't you mend un?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"We'll see. We'll see what we can do," and Doctor Joe's voice was hearty and reassuring, as he launched his boat and pulled away down the bight.

Thomas Angus and Doctor Joe were great friends. Margaret and the boys called Doctor Joe "Uncle," and they were as fond of him as they could have been had he really been their uncle; and he, on his part, was

mightily fond of them. He had come to the Bay three years before Mrs. Angus died, and had now lived at Break Cove and on the coast for eight years.

It was on a blustery July evening that they had first seen him, driving up the bay in an old open boat with a ragged leg-o-mutton sail. Thomas hailed him and he turned in at The Jug in response to Thomas's invitation to spend the night, for a Labrador man will never permit a stranger to pass his home without a hail and an invitation, and a cheering welcome, warmed with a cup of tea and a snack.

Doctor Joe was a nervous man, with the appearance of one who had been ill. His hand was unsteady, with a tremor—unlike the steady, strong hand of the Labrador man. Thomas saw at once that he was no Labrador man. Any one could have seen that with half an eye. His speech and manner, too, were not of the coast, his skin had not the deep bronze tan of the people, and his dress was not the dress of the native.

But Thomas liked the stranger, and urged him to "'bide for a time at The Jug," and for several days he remained as Thomas's guest, asking many questions about the country and manner of life of the folk who lived there, and of the methods of trapping and hunting, and bartering fur and fish.

He introduced himself to Thomas as Joseph Carver, and explained that he had come from the South as a passenger on the mail boat, which he had left at Fort Pelican, eighty miles down the bay, and her nearest port of call. And at length he announced that he had decided to settle here and build a cabin, and turn hunter and trapper, and make The Labrador his home.

"'Twill be a strange life for you," said Thomas.

"Yes," said Doctor Joe, "a strange life."

Then Doctor Joe turned his attention to the selection of a suitable place to build his cabin, and cruising along the shore one day fell upon Break Cove, which he liked immensely, and here he declared his home should be. Thomas, after the manner of the country, and because he was glad to have so near a neighbor, turned to and helped Doctor Joe, and presently they had as snug a little cabin built and furnished as a man could wish for, and here Doctor Joe began his new life in a new land.

He was a mystery to the Bay folk at first, coming as he had, and a mystery to Thomas, too. Sometimes he seemed as gay and happy as ever a man could be, but there were days when he was silent and grave and troubled, like a man with a great load of sorrow upon his soul.

There was one autumn evening, a fortnight after Doctor Joe had established himself in the new cabin, when Thomas, who had been down the bay hunting geese, ran his boat into Break Cove to pay his neighbor a call, and to leave with him one of the fine fat geese he had shot. The candle was lighted and the cabin door stood open. As Thomas approached with the goose he saw Doctor Joe, a wild, hunted look upon his face, pacing up and down the room, and Thomas heard him exclaim:

"I can't endure it! I cannot, cannot endure it! Another month and I'd be safe! But I can't hold out! I must give up! Oh, God, have mercy on me!"

Thomas withdrew silently. He had never seen Doctor Joe, or any one else for that matter, act so strangely. His kindly heart was troubled. Then light broke. His neighbor was ill and in pain, or was troubled, and he must help him. He turned back to the cabin door, and called out cheerily:

"Evenin', Sir!"

Doctor Joe ceased his pacing, as he beheld Thomas in the open doorway.

"Good evening," he greeted, sitting limply down, and wiping perspiration from his forehead with a handkerchief. And within himself Thomas marveled that Doctor Joe should be so warm, for the air was chill enough, and the fire in the box stove had been neglected and was none too good. "Come in, Thomas."

"I was passin'," said Thomas, coming within, "and I thought I'd stop for a bit t' smoke a pipe with you. But you're ailin', sir?"

"No—yes—just a little out of sorts," admitted Doctor Joe. "But I'm glad to see you, neighbor! I'm glad you came! I thank God you came!" he added fervently. "Perhaps I was lonely. I know that I need your company, Thomas."

"There's a goose I brought you, sir," and Thomas laid the game upon the table, "but 'twill not be right for you to 'bide here alone, ailin' as you are. Come along to The Jug and 'bide a day or two with us, till you feels mended, *whatever*."

"Thank you, Thomas, you're a good friend and neighbor," assented Doctor Joe, with evident relief. "I'll go with you. The pull over in your boat will do me good, and I need your company."

"And bring your cures so you'll have un to take, an' you needs un," suggested Thomas solicitously, as Doctor Joe arose and took his adiky from a peg.

"Your company will be the best remedy, Thomas," remarked Doctor Joe, drawing the adiky over his head. "There are some disorders medicine will not cure—only change and good comradeship, and sweet, sympathetic friendship, such as you are giving me."

"You're always welcome at The Jug, *whatever*!" Thomas assured heartily, though he did not in the least understand the import of what Doctor Joe had said.

But as the weeks passed, and the cold of the long winter settled upon the land, Doctor Joe adapted himself to the life of the Bay, and entered heartily into his business of trapper, and soon it was discovered that he was a jolly neighbor, and the Bay folk as well as Thomas accepted him as one of them, and forgot the mystery, and were ever ready to lend him a hand, and give him hints that helped him vastly in learning his new trade, for he was clumsy enough at setting traps at first.

In return Doctor Joe was always on hand with a well-filled medicine case when he heard that any one was sick, and he displayed wonderful skill. He had supplied himself with medicines, he explained, because they were always handy, where there was no doctor to call. And when Bill Campbell's boy laid the calf of his leg open with an ax, and Doctor Joe sewed it up, and bound it, as the folk had never seen a wound bound before, it was agreed he was the cleverest man in that line on the whole coast.

Then it was that they had begun to call him "Doctor Joe," and he had accepted the new name as a compliment, and with rare good nature, and soon he was "Doctor Joe" to every one, and a welcome visitor wherever he went.

II

THE THICKENING MIST

A FORTNIGHT passed, after the evening when Doctor Joe had spoken to Thomas of the mist in Jamie's eyes, before he appeared again at The Jug. It was early morning, and the family were at breakfast when he breezed in, without knocking—for in that country folk do not knock as they enter, and every one is welcome at all times.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed. "Just in time, and I'm as hungry as an old grampus. What is it? Fried whitefish! Margaret, you must have expected me and read my mind, for I'd rather have fried whitefish for breakfast, the way you cook them, than anything else I can think of!"

"Then I'm glad I cooked un," laughed Margaret. "But you likes most anything we *ever* has."

"That's true, because you cook everything so well," complimented Doctor Joe, seating himself by Jamie. "I'm not much of a cook myself, you know."

"You're a rare fine cook, now, *I* thinks," broke in David. "I always likes your cookin' when I eats un."

"Anybody's cooking is good to a husky, healthy lad like you," laughed Doctor Joe.

"We're wonderful glad t' see you, Doctor Joe," said Thomas. "I've been wonderin', now, why you didn't come over this fortnight. The boys pulled over to Break Cove yesterday lookin' for you, fearin' you might be aillin'."

"And didn't find me!" exclaimed Doctor Joe, helping himself liberally to fish. "Well, the day after I was here I left for Fort Pelican to meet the mail boat and get some medicines that I thought I might need in the winter from the mail boat doctor, and to mail an important letter. How have you all been?"

"Not so bad—except Jamie," said Thomas. "His eyes are growin' mistier."

"Eh!" ejaculated Doctor Joe, looking down at Jamie. "Mistier, are they? That's what I'm here about—mostly—to see what we can do about that mist. We'll have a look at the eyes pretty soon, Jamie."

"I'm thinkin' 'tis truly a mist fallin' thick, and holdin' thick all the time," declared Jamie.

"We'll see about that! We'll see!" said Doctor Joe.

And after breakfast he again looked carefully into Jamie's eyes, and again asked Jamie many, many questions, and then walked out with Thomas where they could talk alone.

"And what you think'n *now* of Jamie's eyes?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"'Tis a strange disease, and a serious one," said Doctor Joe. "Inside everybody's eyes there's a fluid forms. When the eyes are healthy the fluid keeps working away naturally through small outlets. If the outlets for the fluid get stopped, there's no way for it to escape, and it fills up inside until it presses on the eyes, and the sight begins to fail, and after a time if the fluid is not let out the eyes go blind. There's only one way to cure the complaint, and that is by a difficult and delicate operation for the purposes of opening the passages and drawing the fluid out and relieving the pressure."

"Do you mean—cuttin' the eyes open?" asked Thomas in dismay.

"Yes," said Doctor Joe, "and the cutting has to be done just right, or it fails. I once knew a surgeon who sometimes succeeded in performing the operation successfully, but he was in New York—a long, long way from here. The letter I posted the other day in Fort Pelican was for this doctor. I wrote to ask if he is still in New York, and if he is there if he will operate on Jamie's eye if we take the lad to him."

"Suppose, now, he'll do the cuttin', how can we ever get Jamie to he?" asked Thomas.

"I'll take him on the mail boat. We can't get away this fall, though, for it isn't likely I'll get an answer before the Christmas mail, after the boat has made her last fall trip. But," continued Doctor Joe, "I hope Jamie's eyes will not be too misty by spring. If he loses his sight before spring there'll be no use operating, for then the sight can't be brought back."

"And if—if the doctor cuts un—and he fails—what'll happen to Jamie then?" asked Thomas fearfully.

"He'll be blind," said Doctor Joe. "But if the doctor doesn't do the cutting Jamie will *surely* go blind. This is the only chance to save his sight."

"An' supposin'," asked Thomas, "you gets no answer from the great doctor, will Jamie have to go blind all his life?"

"Let us hope he's there—let us pray he is," said Doctor Joe.

"But suppose—suppose he'll not be there. Be there no one else?" Thomas insisted.

"I—don't know," admitted Doctor Joe. "I don't know. Once I knew another surgeon—a young man—who performed such operations, but he went wrong and lost his skill and had to stop operating. I'd not like to trust Jamie with him. But we'll hope the great doctor is in New York."

They stood in silence for a little.

"Poor little lad! Poor little lad!" sighed Thomas, finally.

"'Tis hard," sympathized Doctor Joe, who was fond of Jamie. "And there's another thing, Thomas," he continued. "You and I must catch more fur this year than we ever caught before, for there's the mail boat and another steamer to pay the passage on, and they charge a good deal. Trowbridge & Gray pay good prices for fur, and pay cash. Let us hope one of us will catch a silver fox. We'll need it. I'll put in all I earn to help save Jamie's sight."

"Aye," said Thomas, "We'll do our best, and—Doctor Joe—I'm wonderful thankful to you."

"Thomas, I owe it to you to do everything I can for Jamie, even if I didn't want to do it so much for Jamie's own sake," and Doctor Joe's voice was strangely husky. "You've helped cure me of a dreadful disease—I hope I'm cured—I pray God that I am—but I still need your help and friendship to make me strong."

"Me—cure you of something?" asked Thomas, mystified. "I was never givin' *you* medicine, or curin' *you* of any ailment!"

"Yes—the best kind of medicine—your friendship—when I came here, and ever since. Some day I'll tell you about it, but not now—not yet, Thomas Angus. Now we must think of Jamie, and do our best."

"Aye, and do our best," said Thomas.

Thomas Angus had always done his best with cheerful heroism, and how he hoped now to improve upon the best is hard to guess. Down on The Labrador every man must do his best all of the time if he would keep the flour barrel filled and run no debt with traders. In that stern land there can be no idling or wasting of time, and men work as though it were a joy, and the folk endure hardships without ever knowing they are hardships, and are happy, too, withal. Life there is grim and real.

Every boy and every girl, too, learns early to do his or her part, and accept what comes without complaint.

Young lad though he was, Jamie heard Doctor Joe's verdict bravely, and accepted his affliction as one of the ups and downs of life. Until now he had been hoping each night when he went to sleep that when he opened his eyes in the morning he would find that the mist had lifted while he slept. Now this hope was gone. But there was still the hope that some day the great doctor to whom Doctor Joe had written, would cut the mist away, and hope is a wonderful thing for the building of courage.

"Keep your grit, lad," said Thomas. "Doctor Joe says you'll find th' mist gettin' thicker and th' world growin' darker for a time, and I'm thinkin' you'll need grit a plenty. Grit's a great thing t' have—a stout heart like a man's, now, and plenty o' grit, is a wonderful help."

"I'll keep my grit, *whatever*," declared Jamie, "an' I'll keep my heart stout, like a man's."

"That's fine now! I'm proud o' my fine, brave lad!" encouraged Thomas. "I'll be bound Doctor Joe'll find a way sooner or later, by hook or by crook, t' lift th' mist."

The fishing season was at an end, and Thomas and the boys had made a good catch. They had nearly enough salmon and trout salted in barrels to pay for their winter's supply of flour and pork, in barter, at the post. This had never happened before, but this year there had been an uncommon run of salmon.

"We'll load un in th' boat and take un to the post tomorrow," said Thomas, as they sat at tea on the evening when the last barrel was headed. "'Tis a clever catch, and we has un when we needs un th' most."

"And I hopes," said David, dipping a spoonful of molasses into his tea, "'Twill be a fine year for fur, and us and Doctor Joe'll sure get th' fur t' pay for Jamie goin' for th' cure."

"Pop'll get th' fur—Pop and Uncle Joe," broke in Andy. "*Pop's* a wonderful hunter."

"We'll get un if 'tis t' be got," declared Thomas. "Oh, aye, we'll get un."

"There comes Doctor Joe," Andy announced, as Doctor Joe, walking up from the landing place, passed the window, singing in a rich tenor voice:

"The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true.
And all about troubles that never come true.
The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true."

"I wonder, now," said Thomas, "if 'taint true—that song Doctor Joe is singin'."

Just then the door opened and in walked Doctor Joe himself.

"Always just in time!" he exclaimed.

"Set in! Set in!" said Thomas heartily, visibly cheered by Doctor Joe's coming.

"That I will," accepted Doctor Joe. "I was lonely at Break Cove alone, and I pulled over in the skiff for a chat, and to spend the night—and to have a look at Jamie's eyes."

It was always a treat to have Doctor Joe with them for a night. When he and Thomas lighted their pipes in the evening, and the big box stove was crackling cheerily, he thrilled them with stories of other and far-off lands. Thomas was no less interested than Margaret and the boys in his wonderful tales of the great outside world, and of the great city in which he had once lived—of the mighty buildings that towered high, high up into the skies—of the rushing railway trains—and their wonderful speed—of people so numerous that they crowded one another on the streets, and where you might meet thousands and thousands of people and never know one by name, and where half a hundred families might live in a single house.

"I'd like wonderful well t' have a look at un," said Thomas, "but I wouldn't want t' have t' stay long in *such* a place. There wouldn't be room t' stretch."

"No," agreed Doctor Joe, "you wouldn't care to stay there."

"And how's th' huntin'?" asked David. "Seems like there wouldn't be game enough for 'em all t' hunt, and I'm wonderin', now, how they gets their meat."

Then Doctor Joe had to tell them about cattle and sheep, the great stock ranges and stock yards, and how the animals were butchered and the meat sold.

"I wouldn't want t' eat th' meat of animals I raised up like that," declared Margaret. "'Tis wonderful hard and cruel t' tie un up like that and kill un. They don't have a chance t' get away, like th' deer has here."

"But there are plenty of people there," said Doctor Joe, "who eat the meat every day without giving a thought to that, but who think it very cruel to hunt and kill deer and other wild animals."

"But th' deer and wild game has a chance t' get away and save themselves," insisted Margaret. "The poor cows and sheep don't have a chance at all. There must be wonderful strange folk in th' world t' think 'tis wrong t' hunt deer."

"I'm thinkin'," suggested Thomas, "that th' Lard puts cows and sheep in th' world for people t' kill and t' eat when they needs un. 'Tis right for th' folk there t' kill th' cows and sheep t' get meat. 'Tis right for us here t' kill deer and such game as we can, t' eat. We couldn't live without un. 'Tis th' different ways th' Lard has of givin' them meat an' givin' us meat."

"That's sound reasoning," observed Doctor Joe.

And so they talked until bedtime, and then, at Thomas's request Doctor Joe read aloud from the scriptures, and Thomas offered an evening prayer, for on The Labrador, where there are no churches, but where folk live near to God, their Christian faith is great, and they do not forget to give thanks for their blessings, and to worship Him.

Then Doctor Joe spread his blankets upon the floor, for in that country visitors and travelers carry their beds with them, and there is welcome and room enough for all in every house.

"I'll stay and help you load your fish," suggested Doctor Joe, when they had eaten breakfast the following morning. "You've two good, stout helpers, but an extra one, I take it, won't be in the way."

"'Twill be a great help," said Thomas. "The boys finds th' barrels heavy liftin', and an extra hand would help us wonderful much."

"And get un done quicker," suggested David, "and then we'll get away to th' post on this tide."

"All right," said Doctor Joe, "let's go to it."

Below the house Thomas had built of stones and logs a short jetty, which served as a wharf for loading and unloading his big boat. The barrels of fish were rolled down to the jetty, and the boat brought alongside.

"Now," said Thomas, "'twill be easy work. Davy and Andy can roll the barrels to us, Doctor Joe, whilst you and I lifts un down into the boat and stows un. They're a bit heavy, but we can manage without troubling with a rope t' lower un down, and 'twill save time."

"All right," agreed Doctor Joe. "Let them come, boys."



"Aye, feel of un and rub the numbness out"

"Aye," laughed Davy, "we'll let un come fast as ever you and Pop can lift un."

And so they were doing well enough, and making quick work of it, until the last barrel came, and the boat was so crowded with cargo that the standing room for Thomas and Doctor Joe was narrow and cramped.

"Have you a good footing there?" asked Doctor Joe, when the barrel was balanced on the end of the jetty and they were ready for the lift.

"'Tis all right," said Thomas, "let her come."

And then Thomas slipped, and though Doctor Joe did his best to prevent it, the barrel crashed down upon Thomas's leg, and when Doctor Joe and David lifted it and released him, Thomas discovered that he could not stand upon the leg.

"She'll soon be all right," said Thomas. "She's just numbed a bit with the weight."

"Let me feel of it," suggested Doctor Joe, proceeding to examine the leg.

"Aye, feel of un, and rub th' numbness out," said Thomas.

"Too bad! Too bad!" exclaimed Doctor Joe, presently. "The leg is broken."

And so indeed it proved.

Doctor Joe and the boys carried Thomas to the house and laid him in his bunk. Then Doctor Joe cut some sticks of proper length and size and wrapped them with pieces of old blanket, and with David's help set the leg and deftly bound the splints into place with bandages which Margaret had quickly prepared under his direction as he worked.

"There you are," he said, finally, standing up and surveying his work. "Does it feel comfortable, Tom?"

"Not so bad," answered Thomas. "Will th' lashin's hold, now?"

"I'll warrant that!" assured Doctor Joe.

"And is she like t' be straight and stout again when she heals?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"Straight and stout as ever she was," promised Doctor Joe, "but you'll have to lie still for a month or six weeks, and then you'll be on crutches for a time. I'll look after you, Tom."

"And I can't go to my trappin' grounds, then, before th' New Year, *whatever*?" Thomas asked anxiously.

"No—not before the New Year—whatever—nor after the New Year—not this winter—I'm afraid," said Dr. Joe, reluctantly.

A shadow passed over Thomas's face, but he said nothing.

"I'm sorry," sympathized Doctor Joe.

"'Twere a blessin' you were here t' mend un," said Tom.

"Yes," agreed Doctor Joe, "it was well I was here to set it."

"I wouldn't mind so much if 'tweren't for Jamie," continued Thomas. "How, now, can we ever get th' money t' pay th' lad's way t' have th' great doctor cure him?"

But this was a question Doctor Joe could not answer, and he was sorely troubled.

"Pop," said Jamie, who had come close to his father's bed, "we'll keep our grit, both of us, now."

"Aye, lad, we'll keep our grit, you and me," and there was a choke in Thomas's voice as he reached for Jamie's hand, which Jamie gave him after passing it before his eyes in a vain effort to brush the mist away, which was a habit with him of late.

III

DOCTOR JOE

DOCTOR Joe's usually jovial face had suddenly become drawn and tired. He had not answered Thomas's question, "How, now, can we ever get th' money t' pay th' lad's way t' have th' great doctor cure him?" How, indeed, could they get the necessary money? What could they do to save Jamie's eyes without money? And he was thinking of the years before he came to The Labrador—of what he had once been—of the years that he had spent on The Labrador as a hunter and fisherman. Had his life been wasted? he asked himself.

"We're in a tight pinch, but hard luck is bound to come now and again," said Thomas, at length, startling Doctor Joe out of his reveries, "and we'll try not to worry about un. If 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes needin' t' be cured 'twouldn't be so bad."

"No, if 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes it wouldn't be so bad. If 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes," said Doctor Joe.

And then he turned and went out of doors and down to the beach, and for a little while paced up and down, with his head bent in thought.

There is no regret in life so bitter as regret for indiscretions that have ruined a career and ended life's hopes and ambitions. The world is a desolate place indeed for a man to live in when he has no ambition and no goal of attainment. He is simply existing—a clog in the moving throng of doers. The man who does not go forward must of necessity go backward. There is no room in the hustle and bustle and jostle along the trail of life for one to stand still.

Now, as Doctor Joe paced the beach, he was thinking of these things and looking in retrospection upon his own life. What a wreck he had made of it! Once he had all but gained his life's ambition, and a noble ambition it was. Through years of toil and tireless effort he had ascended the ladder of attainment. He had reached a high place in the world. In those days he was strong and able and self-reliant. The top round of the high ladder which he had climbed so tediously was within his grasp. Then came a day when he lost his balance and slipped and fell to the very bottom. In an hour all that he had worked for and hoped for and won was lost, and with it his courage and ambition.

Doctor Joe, contemplating his past and reviewing the train of circumstances which had ended his career, showered upon himself bitter denunciation and condemnation. He had indulged in appetites which had seemed innocent and harmless enough at first, but which had gradually and insidiously wormed their way into his soul until they had gained possession of him and had become his master. Then they had mercilessly ruined him and wrecked his life. Even the little fortune he had accumulated was lost. If he had only clung to that, at least, he would now be in position to meet the expense of Jamie's necessary surgical operation.

"Oh God!" he moaned. "This boy's future and happiness are in my hands! What can I do? What can the impotent wreck that I am, do?"

What, indeed, could Doctor Joe do? He was so indifferent a trapper that his earnings barely served to supply him with the ordinary comforts and necessities of life. The journey to New York would be an expensive one, and there appeared to him no other way by which Jamie's sight could be saved.

Through the mist of departed years Doctor Joe turned back in fancy to his own boyhood home. He saw his father's house, where he had grown to young manhood, and had planned the great things he was to do in the world. That was when life and the world with all their possibilities lay before him. Now they were behind him. There were no hopes or prospects for the future beyond a hand-to-mouth living from day to day, with a gray shadow upon the past.

He saw the path leading up from the village street to the door of his father's cottage, and the green, well-kept lawn on either side, and his mother's flower beds which she loved so well and nurtured with her own dear hands. He was there again in fancy. An odor of roses and sweet peas and honeysuckles came to his nostrils. He could see the fat, saucy robins hopping about upon the grass. And there was his mother at the door! How gentle and loving she always was. How she used to tuck him into bed and kiss him good night, when he was little. What plans she built for him, and how she always told him that he must be a generous and noble man when he grew up.

And then he passed on to the years when he helped his father, after school hours, in the little store around the corner, and the terrible day when his father died quickly, to be soon followed by his mother. How desolate the world seemed then! What a lonely struggle lay before him!

And when his father's estate was settled, and the store and the home were sold, and he left the village, he had barely enough money in his pocket to meet his first year's expenses at college. But he had vowed to make his way, as his mother had wished, and also to be her ideal of a man.

The years that followed were years of struggle, for it was not easy with bare hands to finish his education. But in those days he had brains and hope and courage, and the basic tenacity that will not surrender. And he was inspired in those early years by a profound belief that his mother was near him. He could not see her, but her spirit walked with him and watched over him. It gave him courage to feel her near him, and kept him straight when he was tempted to do wrong, for he would permit himself then to do nothing of which his mother would disapprove.

But somehow, later on in life, he had drifted away from her. He did not think of her so often, and with passing years her memory dimmed, and sometimes he forgot to be true to himself and to her ideals.

Doctor Joe's thoughts dwelt for a time on the thing which had caused his downfall. What a friend it had seemed at first, but how, when it gained possession of him it tortured and finally ruined him. And here he was now—just a bit of human driftwood, cast up by the tide of events upon a far shore.

"Well," said Doctor Joe, finally, lifting his head and looking about him, "there's one consolation. Driftwood in this land may be used as firewood, to help warm freezing fingers. It's a better fate than falling into a city sewer, or being cast upon a city's garbage heap."

And so Doctor Joe recalled himself to the present, and its necessities and obligations. What could he do?

There was Thomas up in the cabin lying helpless with a broken leg, and Jamie going blind.

"If I were only the man I once was! If I were only the man I should be!" he mused. "Then I might help them. But I'm a pretty useless stick here, or anywhere. I've lost courage and ability. I'm not even an ordinary trapper."

It was a hard problem to solve. The breaking of Thomas's leg would not ordinarily have been so serious a matter. But Jamie's eyes were at stake. If Jamie were to go to New York to be operated upon there must be money. If Thomas could not hunt, where possibly could the money be had?

"Well," said he finally, "I don't see any way just at present, but there's no use worrying. If I worry they'll all worry, and it will do them no good. I'll do my level best, and put a cheerful face on things, and keep smiling. That seems to be all there is to do just now."

With this decision Doctor Joe turned sharply upon his heel and strode briskly back to the cabin, singing as he went and as he entered:

"Old Worry's my foe, and he always brings woe,
And he follows about wherever I go.
He's always on hand, and he makes the world blue,
And all about troubles that never come true.

"The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true—
And all about troubles that never come true.
The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true.

"I'll put them behind me and be a real man,
And I'll smile and be cheerful, as any one can;
For it's foolish to fret, and worry, and stew,
And all about troubles that never come true."

"I likes that song," said Thomas as Doctor Joe came in. "It kind of makes me feel better."

"There is something cheering about it," agreed Doctor Joe, "and the best of it is, it's true that the most of the things we worry about never happen."

"I think you're right about that," said Thomas.

"And now," continued Doctor Joe, "I've decided to stop here and look after you and things generally, while David and Andy take the fish to the post, if Margaret won't find me in the way," and Doctor Joe turned to Margaret.

"Oh, sir, you're *never* in the way!" Margaret protested. "'Tis wonderful kind of you to stop with us. 'Tis fine of you!"

"'Tis that," agreed Thomas heartily.

"Then I'll stay," said Doctor Joe, "until the lads get back. Unless there's a contrary wind tomorrow they'll be back tomorrow evening, and I can go home then, and make things snug for winter over at Break Cove. Then I'll come back here now and again and spend Saturdays with you if you like."

"Will you, now? Will you do that?" asked Thomas eagerly.

"Yes," assured Doctor Joe, "you're likely to get contrary, and if I'm around I'll make you behave and do as you're told."

"I'm thinkin' 'twill get tiresome layin' here, and," grinned Thomas, "I'm like t' get cross and want t' get up and stretch, and if I does—if I does, Doctor Joe, you're like t' have *your* hands full o' business if you tries t' stop me."

"I'll take care of you!" laughed Doctor Joe. "Just let's agree, if things get tedious, we'll keep cheerful and not let anything we can't help worry us."

"Aye," said Thomas, "we'll agree to that, though I'm not doubtin' 'twill be a bit hard now and again to be cheery with a broken leg all lashed up like mine is, and me on my back."

And so it was agreed that they were to look misfortune squarely in the face, as brave men should, without flinching. And need enough they were to have, in the months to come, for all the courage and fortitude they possessed.

IV

INDIAN JAKE, THE HALF BREED

AS soon as ever Margaret could get them a cup of tea and a snack to eat, David and Andy were to be off upon their voyage to the post. They were good boatmen and sailors, both of them, for down on The Labrador every lad learns the art of sailing early. Often enough they had made the journey to the post in the small boat. But now they were to be entrusted with the big boat, and with the season's catch of fish as cargo, and they were to purchase the winter's supplies for the house. This was an important mission indeed.

David, as skipper of the big boat, and Andy as crew, therefore felt a vast deal of responsibility, when Thomas called them to his bedside and gave David the final instructions. They were to bring back with them flour, pork, tea and molasses for the house, and woolen duffle, kersey and moleskin cloth for clothing, besides

many little odds and ends to be purchased at the store. Then there were verbal messages to be delivered to Mr. MacCreary, the factor, and to Zeke Hodge, the post servant.

"And tell Mr. MacCreary I may be askin' he for more debt than I been askin' for many a year," added Thomas with a tinge of regret, for it had been his pride to avoid debt. "But tell he I'll pay un. I'll pay un all when my leg is mended and I gets about again."

"I'll tell he, sir," said David.

"'Twouldn't be so bad, now, if you had two more years on your shoulders, Davy, lad," Thomas continued, a little wistfully. "You could tend my trail then, and we might get th' money t' send Jamie for the cure."

"I'm 'most sixteen!" David boasted. "I could tend un now. I *knows* I could, an' you'd let me try un."

"You're too young yet, lad," Thomas objected. "You're too young to be alone up there in th' bush, I couldn't rest easy with you up there alone."

"I could try un, *whatever*," persisted David, eagerly.

"I'm not sayin' you couldn't tend th' traps, lad," assured Thomas, with pride. "You'd tend un, and not slight un. But a lad o' your age is too young t' be reasonable always. You'd take risks on nasty days, and run dangers. No," he added decidedly, "I couldn't think o' lettin' you go alone. If anything were to happen to you I never could rest easy again."

David was plainly disappointed, for he felt the reliance and self-confidence of youth, and the romance and adventure of a winter's isolation on the far-off trail appealed to him. And in his heart perhaps he resented what he deemed his father's lack of confidence in him as a woodsman. It is the way of boys the world over to place their judgment sometimes above that of their elders.

The two lads ate their snack and drank their tea hurriedly, for the day was none too long, and then, with Doctor Joe to accompany them to the jetty and see them off with a cheery farewell, they loosed the boat from her moorings and David, with a long sculling oar, worked her down through The Jug and beyond the Point, where her sails caught the wind. Then David put away the sculling oar, shipped the rudder, and took the tiller, and turning to Andy he said:

"Since Pop broke his leg I been thinkin' wonderful hard, Andy."

"What you been thinkin', Davy?" asked Andy.

"I been thinkin' I've got t' hunt now, *whatever*," announced David. "I'm goin' t' ask Pop again t' let me hunt his trail this winter. He were sayin' I can't, but somebody *must* hunt un, and I'm th' only one t' do it. We got t' have fur t' pay for th' cure o' Jamie's eyes, and Pop can't hunt, and they's no way t' get un if I don't hunt. If we don't get un, Jimmie'll go blind, and we *must* get un, *whatever*. You'll have t' do my work about home and hunt th' meat and feed th' dogs, and get th' wood."

"Pop won't let you go t' Seal Lake alone!" exclaimed Andy, startled by David's apparent revolt against his father's decision. "He said you couldn't!"

"Yes he will. You'll see," declared David. "I has a plan, an' Pop'll let me go, I'm thinkin', when he hears un. And 'tis th' only chance t' save Jamie from goin' blind. I can't make th' hunt Pop would, but I'll do my best, and anyway I'm 'most a man. I'll soon be sixteen!"

David, standing in the stern of the boat, drew himself to his full height and squared his shoulders, and indeed he was a stalwart lad, and Andy was proud of his big brother.

"You *is* fine and strong!" said Andy in admiration.

"Aye, that I be," admitted David with no little pride, "and you're fine and strong, too, for your age. You can handle th' dogs and 'tend th' traps about home, and look after things whilst I'm away, and we'll show Pop and Doctor Joe what *we* can do."

"And Pop lets you go!" said Andy. "But I'm wonderful afraid, now, he won't let you go."

"But I has a plan. *You'll* see," said David with assurance.

"What's your plan, now?" asked Andy.

"'Tis a plan come t' me while Doctor Joe were settin' Pop's leg," said David, "but I weren't tellin' he about un when he speaks of my goin'. I wanted t' find out first. Indian Jake is back in th' Bay, and he's wantin' a place t' hunt on shares because he can't buy his own traps. He's been away two years, and th' Company won't let he have traps on debt because he's owin' so much there already that he didn't pay before he goes away. Trowbridge & Gray won't let he have traps because he took his fur away two years ago when he were owin' so much, and didn't try t' clear up any of his debt. Pop's got plenty o' traps, and my plan is t' have Indian Jake hunt along o' me on shares."

"It seems like cheatin' for Indian Jake t' take his fur away when he were owin' a debt t' th' Company," suggested Andy.

"'Tweren't honest," agreed David, "but he's sayin' now if he has a chance he'll pay his debt. It seems hard for he not t' have a chance, and by huntin' on shares along o' me 'twill give he a chance, and 'twill help us. Pop will have a third o' Indian Jake's hunt, and he's 'most as good a hunter as Pop. Then I'll have some one t' hunt with, and I'll be safe, and Pop won't mind my goin'. All o' my hunt and a third o' Indian Jake's, I'm thinkin', would be 'most as much as Pop's would ha' been if he hadn't broke his leg. Then Pop and Doctor Joe will sure have th' money t' pay for fixin' Jamie's eyes."

"Oh, I *hopes* he'll let you go!" exclaimed Andy. "Th' plan *is* fine!"

David's plan was an ambitious one. Thomas had stated that he would be quite too young for another two years to endure the hardship and danger and isolation of the winter fur trails. But if he could arrange for Indian Jake to accompany him, his father might consent. Jamie's eyes were at stake, and that was the vital thing. David felt that no sacrifice or risk was too great if they could save Jamie from blindness, and he hoped that his father would, after consideration, take the same view.

It is rare that even an old, experienced trapper, enters the far Labrador wilderness without a companion, though Thomas, who knew no danger where he himself was concerned, had usually hunted alone. It is the custom of trappers to work in pairs, with a central meeting point where at stated intervals, sometimes once a fortnight and sometimes at the end of each week, they may enjoy each other's society for a day or two, and, if necessary, lend each other assistance.

David was aware, however, that at this late season the trappers had already gone to their trails, or had already completed their arrangements for the winter. Therefore he had decided upon making a bargain, if possible with Indian Jake, the only hunter in the Bay, so far as he knew, who had no trail to hunt. It was only

under these circumstances that he suggested the half breed as his hunting companion, for he was a man whom no one trusted. This general lack of confidence in Indian Jake might lead his father to refuse to grant his request, but he was determined to do his utmost to induce him to grant it.

Hugely interested, and more or less excited with their project, the boys talked and schemed, until at length the line of whitewashed buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company's post came into view.

"There's the Post!" exclaimed David. "I hope Indian Jake is stoppin' there yet."

"'Twill be fine, now, if he is, and if he'll go, and Pop lets he have th' trail t' hunt along with you. The Indian tents are all gone," said Andy, indicating a long stretch of beach to the eastward of the post which had been occupied by Indian camps during the summer.

"Yes," said David, "they mostly goes th' middle of August t' hunt deer before th' fur hunt begins. We won't see them again till the break-up next spring, *whatever*."

They were silent for a little, and then David, pointing to the rolling wilderness to the westward remarked:

"It looks fine t' me out there! And think o' th' martens and foxes and lynx! It's full o' fur, Andy, waitin' t' be trapped, and if Pop lets me go, I can trap *some* of un, *whatever*!"

"There's Indian Jake! See him? The lanky one!" exclaimed Andy, as the boat drew near the wharf and four men came out of one of the buildings and down the wharf to meet them.

"Sure 'tis he! And there's Uncle Ben Rudder and Hiram Muggs, along with Zeke Hodge! They must be gettin' their winter outfit. I'm wonderful glad Indian Jake's here!" exclaimed David.

Zeke Hodge, the Company's servant, with the assistance of the three, quickly unloaded the boat.

"Where's your pop? Makin' ready for th' winter huntin'?" asked Zeke, as the boys came ashore after discharging the cargo and making the boat fast.

"He broke his leg this mornin' whilst we were loadin' th' boat," said David. "Doctor Joe was there and fixed un, but Pop won't be out o' bed for five or six weeks, *whatever*, and won't be strong to go t' th' huntin' th' whole winter."

"Good gracious! Good gracious! Dear eyes!" exclaimed Uncle Ben Rudder, a grizzled, stockily-built old trapper of sixty years or thereabouts. "Broke his leg! Tom Angus went, now, and broke his leg, did you say?"

"Aye, Uncle Ben, broke un clear off, but she's fixed good and proper, and Doctor Joe says she'll heal fine," David explained.

Zeke, and Hiram Muggs and Indian Jake all declared it was "too bad, and a sore misfortune, just at th' beginnin' o' th' huntin' season," and Uncle Ben exclaimed:

"Tom Angus broke his leg! Dear eyes! But Doctor Joe'll fix un! Good gracious, yes! He'll fix un! He's a wonderful man, now, is Doctor Joe!"

"Too bad he can't hunt," remarked Indian Jake. "His trail up on Seal Lake is one o' th' best in th' country. Too bad t' let it stand idle."

"Hum-m-m!" grunted Uncle Ben.

"'Tis a fine trail," agreed David, "and Pop makes fine hunts on it."

"He might let some one hunt it on shares?" suggested Indian Jake.

"Tom Angus won't need much help in decidin' whether he wants his trail hunted on shares or no," Uncle Ben broke in with some asperity. "Tom Angus is a great man t' decide for himself what he's wantin', and what he's not wantin'. Good gracious! Tom Angus can decide for himself!"

With this outburst Uncle Ben followed Zeke and Hiram into Zeke's cabin, in response to Zeke's suggestion that "supper was 'most ready and they might as well go in," but Indian Jake tarried behind with David and Andy.

Indian Jake, the half-breed, was not a native of the Bay. He had appeared here first some five years before, coming from "somewhere south," and after trapping in the vicinity for three seasons, disappeared. During this time, as David had explained to Andy, he had contracted a debt, and when he left he took with him furs which should rightfully have been used in discharging it. Now after two years he had returned, to remain permanently, as he stated, in the Bay.

He was a tall, muscular fellow, with the dark red skin, straight black hair and swinging stride of the Indian. A pair of keen, restless black eyes and a beaked nose, suggested the hawk. His features, however, were not those of an Indian, and plainly indicated a mixed ancestry.

"I'd like t' hunt your father's trail on shares," suggested Indian Jake, when he was alone with David and Andy.

"Pop's got two trails up at Seal Lake," said David. "I knows his old trail, and I were thinkin' t' hunt she myself if Pop lets me, and I'm not doubtin' he would if some one were along with me huntin' th' new trail. He's got all th' traps for th' new trail. I were goin' t' ask you t' speak to he about un, Jake."

"I'd like t' hunt with ye, Davy. I think we'd get along fine," said Indian Jake, smiling down ingratiatingly at David, and Indian Jake had a bland and pleasant smile when he chose, in spite of his beaked nose and hawk's eyes.

And so it came about that Indian Jake went to The Jug the next day with David and Andy. And because there was such urgent need of money, and also because David pleaded so hard, and Indian Jake was so good a trapper—for no one doubted his ability—it was decided that not only David, but Andy also, should go with Indian Jake to Seal Lake for the winter, as we shall presently see.

The boys were pleased beyond measure, for now each felt he was in truth to take a man's place and do his part in earnest, and they were quite sure that the problem of getting the money to pay the expense of curing Jamie's eyes was solved. And perhaps, too, they were pleased with the promise of adventure, for every red-blooded boy loves adventure; and to be buried in the depths of the great wilderness for many months, with no other companion than Indian Jake, was adventure in itself. And, indeed, there was to be plenty of it for both of them, and of hardships, too.

"Then you'll be goin' home with Andy and me tomorrow to ask Pop?" inquired David expectantly.

"Yes," said Indian Jake, with undoubted satisfaction. "I'll go back with you."

David could scarce suppress his excitement, but neither he nor Andy nor Indian Jake himself thought best to refer to the arrangement when, a moment later, they followed the others into Zeke Hodge's cabin. Tea was ready, and they drew up to the table with Zeke and Hiram and Uncle Ben.

In the center of the clean-scoured, uncovered table was a big, steaming dish of stewed porcupine and

doughboys, and at either end a plate piled high with huge slices of bread, and when Zeke had asked the blessing, Mrs. Hodge and Kate, her fifteen-year-old daughter, poured tea and otherwise served the men while they ate.

"Porcupine! Dear eyes! Porcupine!" exclaimed Uncle Ben, helping himself generously. "Where'd ye get un, Zeke? They're wonderful scarce these days. *Wonderful* scarce! I ain't seen one since last spring."

"Right back here in th' green-woods," said Zeke. "I heard th' dogs yelpin' this mornin'; and I goes t' see what 'tis all about. There sat th' porcupine hunched up, and th' old dogs in a circle around he, doin' th' yelpin', and two of th' young dogs pawin' at their noses and whinin', with their mouths full o' quills."

"Huh-huh," chuckled Uncle Ben. "Th' old uns knew enough t' keep away from danger. They'd been there theirselves, or seen them that had, and th' young dogs had t' get hurt t' learn enough t' leave dangerous things alone."

"It took me an hour t' pull th' quills out o' their noses and mouths with a pair of pincers," said Zeke. "They'll know enough t' give porcupines room after this."

"Some folks is like porcupines," observed Uncle Ben, glancing at Indian Jake, who seemed quite unconscious of the thrust. "It's best not t' have any dealin's with un."

David and Andy were too full of their plans, and too hungry, and well occupied with the toothsome dish, to heed Uncle Ben's suggestion. And though many times that evening, while the men sat smoking their pipes and talking about this and that, Uncle Ben made blunt and cutting remarks that were aimed at Indian Jake's character and honesty, the half-breed kept his temper and silence, with a remarkable display of self-control. Once or twice, to be sure, a sneering smile stole upon his face. It might have been that he held the esteem of the others in fine contempt, or possibly he awaited a better opportunity for accounting and revenge.

But so far as David and Andy were concerned, they were thinking only of Indian Jake's ability as a trapper, and were quite transported by the belief that they had already solved the problems of the future. With Indian Jake's help they were well satisfied the money would be earned to pay for Jamie's cure. It only remained to gain their father's consent to David's plan. They were optimists. They believed that what they wished to be, would be, if they did their best to make their wishes realized. Only experience can teach that the best laid plans sometimes fail.

V

UNCLE BEN GIVES WARNING

IN the beginning Thomas had a decided feeling of uncertainty concerning Indian Jake, because of Indian Jake's record of two years before. The debt that he had left unpaid was for provisions and clothing which had been advanced him by the Hudson's Bay Company that he might subsist during the hunting season, and with the understanding that he would pay the indebtedness by trading in at the Company's store the furs he trapped.

It was a debt of honor, thought Thomas and the other Bay folk, and the furs, to their way of thinking, belonged rightfully to the Company; and therefore, in taking them away with him, Indian Jake had actually been guilty of dishonesty. Indian Jake agreed with Thomas, who stated his opinion plainly to the half-breed.

"I know the furs were the Company's," said Indian Jake, "but I had reasons for goin'. Now I've come back t' straighten up what I owe. All I want is a chance, and I can't pay what I owe if nobody gives me the chance, and down t' th' tradin' posts they won't trust me, and nobody else wants to, unless you do."

"Well," said Thomas, after a little consideration, "I'll do it. 'Tis a fine place for fur where I traps, and you'll make a fine hunt."

"But you'll be huntin' one trail, and if I let Davy go he'll be huntin' another, and Davy'll only see you once a week, *whatever*. 'Twill be a wonderful lonely time for Davy between times alone, and he might have a mishap, for 't isn't natural for a young lad t' be over careful. I'm not thinkin' I'll let he go, Jake. You'll have t' hunt alone. Davy's too young yet for th' work."

"It's all the same t' me," said Indian Jake, "huntin' alone or with company."

"Oh, but, Pop," pleaded David in deep disappointment. "I'll be wonderful careful. I'll 'bide in th' tilts when th' weather's too nasty t' be out. I *wants* t' go. I'll get *some* fur, *whatever*, and we needs un all to pay for th' cure t' Jamie's eyes."

Jamie's eyes! Thomas looked at Jamie, who was standing at the window, vainly trying to peer through the ever-present mist, and as he saw Jamie raise his hand to brush the mist away a great lump came into his throat.

"Davy," said he, after a little silence, "you're a brave lad, and careful, but 'tis a wonderful lonely place up there, trampin' th' trails. The storms come sudden and awful sometimes, and it takes a man's strength to face un. 'Tis frostier there, too, than here. There's none o' th' comfort o' th' home you've always been used to. I'd never rest easy if I let you go and you never came back."

"But," insisted David, "I'll be careful and come back—and Jamie mustn't be let t' go blind. 'Twould be worse for he than bein' dead. *Let* me go, Pop!"

"I'll think about un—I'll think about un," said Thomas, and he closed his eyes to think.

At the end of ten minutes, when Thomas opened his eyes again, he had decided, and turning to Indian Jake, he said:

"I'm thinkin', now, I'll let Davy go, and I'll let Andy go along t' keep Davy company and help he. The two will be company for each other, and doin' th' work together they'll get over th' trail faster than ever Davy

could alone, and if they's a mishap, one can help the other. But you'll have t' keep an eye to un, Jake!"

"It's all the same to me, whether one or both of 'em go," said Indian Jake. "I'll keep an eye on 'em, so they won't get in trouble."

"Thank you, Pop! I'll be wonderful careful," said David, with vast relief and satisfaction.

"Are you meanin' *I'm t' go t' th' trails, too?*" asked Andy, who had been standing with David and Indian Jake by the bedside.

"Aye, Andy, lad," said Thomas, "you'll go along and help Davy."

"Oh—Pop!" exclaimed Andy, which was all his emotions and excitement would permit him to say.

"Is you glad, now?" asked Thomas with a smile, for he knew very well how glad Andy was. It is the greatest wish of every lad on The Labrador to go to the trails and hunt, as his father does, and eagerly he waits for the time when he may go. It is a brave life, that, living in the midst of the great wilderness, surrounded by its ever-present mysteries, and what boy is there who does not wish to do brave deeds? 'Tis a man's work, following the trails, and the trapper plays a man's game, and what boy does not wish to play a man's game?

"Oh, I'm *wonderful* glad!" exclaimed Andy.

"'Twill be fine t' have Andy along!" broke in David, "and we'll hunt fine together."

"We'll hunt un the best ever we can," asserted Andy.

And thus it had been decided, and the plan seemed a good one to Doctor Joe, for it was the only solution of the problem of how to get the money that would be so necessary the following summer.

Nevertheless, neither Doctor Joe nor Thomas could quite rid himself of a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty as to the wisdom of permitting the boys to enter the wilderness with Indian Jake. They could not forget his record, in spite of his fair promises, and try as they would they could not feel complete confidence in him.

The days that followed were busy ones at The Jug. It was the middle of the first week in September, and Indian Jake was eager to be away to the trapping grounds the following Monday, for it would be a three weeks' journey, and with the coming of October the lakes might be expected to freeze at any time. They would travel by boat and therefore it was essential that they arrive at their destination on Seal Lake before the freeze-up came.

And so there was great hustle and bustle, assembling the outfit and getting all in readiness. And Margaret, too, was no less busy than the others, working early and late preparing the warm clothing that the boys would need.

Each was to be supplied with two adikys, one of heavy kersey cloth and one of moleskin. The latter, with its close-woven, smooth surface, would be an excellent protection from the wind, and snow would not readily cling to it, and it was made large enough to wear over the former. Both garments were fitted with hoods, and the hood on the kersey adiky was trimmed with fur around the face to add to its warmth and comfort. These garments were to be drawn on over the head like a sweater, but were loose and roomy. There were no buttons, and no openings where snow could sift in, and a drawstring around the face permitted them to be adjusted snugly to the cheeks, though there was no attempt to have them cover nose or mouth, for were that done the moisture from the breath would freeze upon the face and cause painful frostbite.

Then in each outfit there were a half dozen pairs of slippers, or socks, made of heavy woolen blanket duffle, to wear inside the buckskin moccasins, and two pairs of mittens of the same material to wear inside buckskin mittens, and each had a pair of moleskin cloth leggings.

Some of these things the boys already possessed, as they did round, peakless muskrat skin caps that could be drawn down over the ears and worn inside the adiky hood, but Margaret went carefully over all, to be quite sure everything was in the best of order.

Other clothing and equipment consisted of moleskin trousers, several pairs of buckskin moccasins for winter wear, and kneehigh sealskin boots for the milder weather of autumn and spring; buckskin mittens, underwear, heavy outer shirts, ordinary knit socks, a sleeping bag for each lined with Hudson's Bay Company blankets, cooking utensils, axes, files for sharpening axes, and a mending kit containing needles and thread for making repairs. And each was supplied with a 44-40 carbine, and a quantity of ammunition. These were their especial pride. David had been presented with his rifle the previous winter by Thomas, and Andy was to have an old one which his father had used before he purchased one of a later model.

Indian Jake assembled the general camp equipment and the provisions, the latter consisting chiefly of flour, pork, tea, a small keg of molasses, and salt, packing everything into snug, convenient packages, that could be handled easily.

Jamie was vastly interested in the preparations. He did little things to help the boys, and Indian Jake permitted him to hold open the mouths of the bags as he packed them, to Jamie's delight, and made the lad feel that he was really of much assistance, and the two became the best of friends.

Doctor Joe had gone home to Break Cove on the evening that the boys had returned from the post with Indian Jake, and was not expected back until Sunday. They were surprised, therefore, to see his boat coming up the bight on Saturday morning, and astonished when Doctor Joe announced upon his arrival that he had decided not to go to his old trapping grounds that winter.

"I've been thinking matters over," he explained, "and if you'll let me, I'll make The Jug my home this winter. I'll hunt up here, Thomas, where you used to hunt before you took the Seal Lake trail, when the children were small, and you had to be home o' nights. My old trail is pretty well hunted out, anyhow, and I'll do better here where there hasn't been any trapping since you quit."

"'Tis wonderful good of you," said Thomas.

"I know well enough," continued Doctor Joe, "that unless you're watched pretty closely, and I see you every day you'll be trying to use that leg some day before you should, and perhaps break it again. With this arrangement I'll be here every night and keep track of you, and look after Jamie's eyes, if they need it. Once a week isn't often enough. I can feed the dogs, too, and do the other rough work that's too hard for Margaret, and that she shouldn't try to do."

"I were thinkin' o' Margaret feedin' th' dogs," said Thomas, "and I don't like to have her do it. They knows a lass can't master un, and they'd be like t' turn on her some time."

And thus it was arranged, to the vast satisfaction of Thomas and Margaret, as well as Doctor Joe, that The

Jug was to be his home while the boys were away. And Jamie was mightily pleased, for Doctor Joe would be jolly company of evenings, singing in his fine voice, as no other in the Bay could sing, and telling him stories such as no one else could tell.

Everything was in readiness on Saturday night, in order that Sunday might be observed as a day of rest. Thomas would permit no work to be done about his home on Sunday that could as well be done another day. Like most of the Bay folk, his faith was simple and literal.

"'Tis wrong t' work and 'tis wrong t' shoot on a Sunday," said he, "and anything that 'tis wrong t' do brings bad luck in th' end if you does un. 'Tis goin' contrary t' th' Almighty."

And so the day was spent in quietude and rest indoors, which pleased Jamie greatly, for he was no less excited than David and Andy, and he was glad to have them near. They had suddenly become heroes in his sight, and indeed they *were* heroes, aye, and soldiers, too, going into the deep wilderness to battle with death-dealing blizzards and bitter, changeless cold for the sake of those they loved.

"And you and Andy makes a good hunt, and gets th' fur t' pay for havin' th' mist took out o' my eyes," said Jamie, passing his hand before his eyes in a pitiful little attempt to brush the mist away that he might see David's features more plainly, "and th' great doctor cures un, *I'll* go to Seal Lake some time and hunt, too."

"We'll do our best, now," assured David, "an' *we'll* get th' fur, never fear."

"That we will," said Andy, squaring his shoulders.

"Pop says you'll have t' keep plenty o' grit," warned Jamie.

"We'll keep plenty o' grit," said Andy.

"And a stout heart, like a man's," added Jamie.

"And we'll keep our hearts stout like a man's," said Andy proudly.

It was to be a long time before the family should be together again, and Margaret had the dinner table set close to Thomas's bunk. Doctor Joe had shot a great fat goose the day before—the first of the season—and Margaret cooked it for their Sunday dinner. Then there was bread and tea, and a fine big tart of bake-apple berries. And a cozy feast they had, with the fire in the big stove crackling merrily, for it was raw and cold outside. And though Thomas must needs lie flat upon his back he enjoyed the feast as well as any of them, for Margaret attended to that, in her gentle, thoughtful way.

When dinner was cleared away Doctor Joe told them stories, and at Margaret's request sang for them, and when he sang some hymns they all joined with him—even Thomas, with a great bellowing voice. It was a day to be remembered, and David and Andy were to think of it often in the months to come, as they wearily tramped silent white trails, or sat of evenings in lonely tilts.

It was after candlelight, and they were at tea, that evening, when suddenly the door opened and in walked Uncle Ben Rudder and Hiram Muggs. Uncle Ben led Hiram directly to Thomas's bed, and Thomas greeted them warmly.

"Good gracious! Good gracious!" exclaimed Uncle Ben. "To think, now, that Thomas Angus went and broke his leg! Dear eyes!"

"'Twas a sorry mishap," sympathized Hiram, a wiry, active little man of few words.

"Aye," agreed Thomas, "but it might ha' been worse. I were thinkin' how hard 'twould ha' been when the children were little, or a season when th' fishin' were poor, and I were in debt with nothin' ahead for th' winter."

"H-m-m-m," grunted Uncle Ben. "I suppose nothin's so bad it couldn't be worse, but bad's bad enough for all that. Good gracious, yes!"

"Well," said Thomas, "we have t' take things as they come, good or bad, and th' best way, t' my thinkin', is t' take un without complaint. But set in now, and have tea."

When tea was cleared away, and Indian Jake and Hiram and Doctor Joe were smoking their pipes comfortably at the other end of the room, Uncle Ben seated himself by Thomas's bed and asked:

"How about th' huntin', Tom? I says to myself, when Davy tells me you broke your leg, 'Tom'll need some one, now, t' hunt his trail on shares. Good gracious, yes!' and so I speaks t' Hiram, and Hiram says he'll hunt un, and here Hiram is, ready t' go."

"Why, I got un all fixed for Indian Jake t' hunt un, along with Davy and Andy, and they starts in th' marnin'," explained Thomas.

"H-m-m-m!" grunted Uncle Ben. "Th' Lard helps them that's got common sense. Good gracious! What's Indian Jake like t' do? You know Indian Jake. He's like t' make off with all th' fur. Good gracious, you know *him!*"

"Well," said Thomas, a tinge of regret in his voice, for Hiram was both a good hunter and reliable man, "Indian Jake has my word he's t' go, and Tom Angus never goes back on his word."

Uncle Ben grunted and grunted, and was soon in such ill humor because Thomas would not listen to his arguments to change his plan that he spread his blankets upon the floor, crawled into them, and was presently snoring uproariously.

And there was no doubt that Thomas had some misgivings about Indian Jake, because of Indian Jake's bad record. And there was no doubt, too, that these misgivings had been increased by Uncle Ben, whose advice the folk of the Bay were accustomed to heed, for Uncle Ben's judgment was in the long run uncommonly sound.

"But a man's word is a man's word," said Thomas to himself, "and when a man gives un there's no goin' back on it, for that wouldn't be straight dealin', and first to last the man that keeps his word and deals straight comes out on top."

And so Thomas kept his word and stuck to his bargain, as any man should, and in the twilight of Monday morning the boat was loaded, and when David and Andy said farewell Thomas told them to do their best, and Doctor Joe told them to stand up to their work like men, and Jamie told them to keep their grit, and Margaret cried a little, for The Jug was to be a lonely place now.

And then, with David and Andy waving to those on shore, the boat moved down the bight and out into the bay, until it passed from view around the point, and the three voyageurs were on their way at last to the great wilderness which was to hide them in its silent and mysterious depths for many long months.

VI THE TRAPPING PARTNER

"**T**H' wind's freshenin', and she feels like snow. I'm expectin' a white camp tonight," observed Indian Jake when they had passed out of The Jug and out of the view of the cabin.

"She does feel like snow," said David, "but it's a good wind for us, and if she holds where she is we'll make a fine run up Grand Lake."

"Yes," agreed Indian Jake, blowing a mouthful of smoke from his pipe and watching its direction. "She's east nor' east now, and fine. We'd better not lose any time stopping at the post."

"No," said David, "not with a fine breeze like this. Pop was four days gettin' up th' Lake last year, with contrary winds."

It was a somber morning. Gray clouds hung low and the wind was damp and cold, but it was a fair wind, and before nine o'clock they came abreast the post. Zeke Hodge saw them and hailed and they answered his hail, but passed on into the river without stopping, at which Zeke marveled, for he had never before known a boat to pass the post without pausing at least for a brief call.

The tide was nearing flood, and this was vastly to their advantage in counteracting the river current, and the five miles to Grand Lake was accomplished in an hour.

"Oh, 'tis grand!" exclaimed Andy when the long vista of lake appeared before them.

"Aye," said David, "'tis that, and that's why she's called Grand Lake, I'm thinkin'."

At the eastern end of the lake, where they entered it, both the northern and southern shores were lined with low hills wooded to their summits with spruce, white birch, balsam fir, and tamarack, the foliage of the latter making golden splotches in the green. Some few miles up the lake the wooded hills on its southern shore gave place to naked mountains, with perpendicular cliffs rising sheer from the water's edge for several hundred feet, grim and austere, but at the same time giving to the landscape a touch of grandeur and majestic beauty. In the far distance to the westward high peaks in an opalescent haze lifted their summits against the sky.

The vast and boundless wilderness inhabited by no human being other than a few wandering Indians, lay in somber and impressive silence, just as God had fashioned it untold ages before, untouched and unmarred by the hand of man. There were no smoking chimneys, no ugly brick walls, no shrieking locomotives; no sound to break the silence save the cry of startled gulls, soaring overhead, the honk of a flock of wild geese in southern flight, and the waves lapping upon the rocky shore. The air was fresh and spicy with the odor of balsam and other forest perfumes. It was a wilderness redolent with suggestions of mysteries hidden in the bosom of its unconquered and unmeasured solitudes and waiting for discovery.

"It makes me feel wonderful strange—t' think I'm goin' in there," remarked Andy presently, gazing away over the dark forest which receded to the northward over rolling hills, "and t' think we're t' be gone till th' break-up next spring, an' won't see Pop or Margaret or Doctor Joe for so long."

"Not gettin' sorry you're goin', now, be you?" grinned Indian Jake.

"No, I'm not gettin' sorry. Not me! I'm wonderful glad t' be goin'," Andy asserted stoutly.

"Better not think about the folks and home too much, or you'll be gettin' homesick," counseled Indian Jake.

"I'm not like t' get homesick!" and Andy's voice suggested that nothing in the world was less likely to happen.

"Ah, but you'll have a sore trial, lads," said Indian Jake. "Wait till we're deep in th' trails, and winter settles, and th' wind cuts t' th' bone, and th' shiftin' snow blinds you, and th' cold's like t' freeze your blood, and t' have t' fight it for your very life. *Then's* th' time that you'll be tried out for th' stuff that's in you—both of you. And you can't rest then, for there's fur t' be got out of th' traps, and there's no one t' get it but you, and you *got* t' get it. Then, lads, you'll be thinkin' of your warm snug home at The Jug, with its big stove, and your cozy nest of a bed. There's no rest for the trapper that makes a good hunt, lads. 'Tis the man that rests when th' storms blow wild and the cold settles bitter and fierce, that makes th' poor hunt. 'Tis always so with work."

"We'll stick to un, and make th' good hunt," David declared stoutly.

"Aye, we'll stick to un, and not be gettin' homesick, either. We'll have plenty o' grit," said Andy.

"That's the way to talk, lads!" said Indian Jake heartily. "Stick to it, lads, and have grit a plenty, and you'll make a good hunt."

"But I was thinkin' o' what a wonderful big place 'tis in there," and Andy was again gazing at the forest-clad hills.

"'Tis a *big* place," said Indian Jake.

"Pop says," continued Andy, "that 'tis so big they's no end to un."

"Aye," agreed Indian Jake, "no end to un."

"And there'll be nobody but just us in there," and there was awe in Andy's voice.

"Just us," said Indian Jake.

Snow was falling when they made camp that evening in the shelter of the forest on the lake shore, and cozy and snug the tent was with a roaring fire in the stove, and the wind swirling the snow outside, and moaning through the tree tops. Indian Jake had said little during the afternoon, but now as he fried a pan of pork by the light of a sputtering candle, while David and Andy laid the bed of fragrant spruce boughs, he volunteered the information that they would be in the Nascauppee River early in the morning.

"That's fine," said David. "We made a wonderful day's travel, now, didn't we?"

Indian Jake did not reply, and the boys, too, fell into silence, until supper was eaten and Indian Jake had lighted his pipe. Then David asked:

"Where were you livin' before you came to th' Bay, Jake?"

"South," grunted Indian Jake.

"Did your folks live there?" asked Andy.

"Yes," answered Indian Jake.

"Why don't yo bring un t' th' Bay t' live, now you're here?" asked Andy. "'Twould be fine t' have your folks t' live with you."

"Because I can't," replied Indian Jake, in a tone that implied he was through talking.

"I'm wonderful sorry," sympathized Andy.

"It's too bad, now," said David.

Indian Jake grunted again, but whether it was a grunt of appreciation or of resentment that they should have asked the questions, they could not tell, and quietly they spread their sleeping bags and slipped into them. They were to learn as the weeks passed that Indian Jake had a double personality—that he was both an Indian and a white man—and that he possessed traits of character peculiar to both.

It was Andy's first night in camp, and for a time he lay awake wondering if Jamie and his father and Margaret were very lonely without him and David. And then he fell to listening to the wind and the crackling fire in the stove, and to watching in the dim light of the candle the dark outline of Indian Jake's figure crouched before the stove and silently smoking. The half-breed's face with its beaked nose was never a pleasant thing to see, and now it looked unusually sinister and forbidding to Andy. Presently it began to fade, and a great black wolf took its place, and Andy dreamed that the wolf was crouching over him and David, ready to devour them.

He awoke with a start. The candle light was out and all was darkness and strangely silent, with no sound save David's deep breathing and the moan of wind through the trees. It was weird and lonely there in the darkness, and when Andy thought of how long it would be before he and David returned to The Jug again, it seemed still lonelier.

"I must have plenty o' grit, and keep a stout heart, the way Jamie is doing," he thought, and it gave him courage, and he slept again.

VII

IN THE HEART OF THE WILDERNESS

THE boys were awakened in the morning by Indian Jake entering the tent with a kettle of water for the tea. The candle was lighted, and the half-breed, in better humor, or at least more talkative than on the previous evening, greeted them with a cheerful enough:

"Mornin', lads."

"Mornin'," said they, and David added: "Did much snow fall?"

"Just a light fall, and it's clear and fine, and the wind's about gone."

There was no time for dawdling in bed, and the two lads sprang up and made their simple toilet. Already the tent was warm, and they rolled their sleeping bags and tied them into neat bundles, and then sat by the cozy, crackling stove while Indian Jake fried the pork and made the tea.

"Will we get to the rapids today, Jake?" asked David, when finally Indian Jake, after removing the pan of pork from the fire and placing it before them on the ground, poured tea into the tin cups they held out to him.

"If the wind don't come contrary to us," said Indian Jake, dipping a piece of bread into the pan and bringing it forth dripping with hot grease. "It's a long pull from the mouth of the river ag'in' th' current, but we'll try for it. We'll be losin' no time, leastways, for there's no time t' be lost if we gets t' Seal Lake before th' freeze up, with our late start."

"We'll work hard for it, *whatever*," declared David. "'Twould be a bad fix t' be caught by th' ice before we gets to Seal Lake."

"That it would," agreed Indian Jake. "But you lads are goin't' find the work gettin' there harder'n any work you ever had t' do."

The first hint of dawn was in the East when they broke camp and set forward upon their journey again. The air was brisk and frosty, but when the sun rose it shone warm and mellow, and the snow melted and trickled in glistening rivulets which ran down everywhere over the rocks to join the river. That day they reached the rapids, and then followed many days of tedious, back-breaking toil as they ascended into the higher country—days when the boys needed all the grit that was in them, and stout hearts, too.

Sometimes Indian Jake and David pulled the boat at the end of a rope, while Andy, with an oar as a rudder, or standing in the bow with a long pole, steered it away from the shore and prevented its running afoul of rocks. Thus they traversed a brook for some miles, when it became necessary to circumvent a section of the river where it thundered down through the hills in a great white torrent no boat could stem.

From the head of the brook there was a carry, or portage, as they called it, of nearly two miles. Over this portage the boat must needs be hauled foot by foot, overland. Several round sticks were cut for rollers, and the boat drawn over them by David and Indian Jake, while Andy attended to placing the rollers and keeping them in position.

Then the provisions and other equipment were carried on their backs to the place where the boat was to be launched. Indian Jake bore tremendous burdens, with his voyageur's tumpline, which is the Indian's way. And David and Andy, with combined shoulder and head straps, staggered after him with as heavy loads as they could carry, and did their best. Even then it was necessary to make three journeys over the trail before the last pack was delivered at the place where the boat had been carried. A whole day was occupied in

transferring the boat, and the larger part of another day in transferring the goods, but Indian Jake cheered the lads with the assurance that it was the longest portage, and therefore the hardest work they would encounter on the journey.

"I'm glad enough of that," declared David. "I'm about scrambled, and I'm feelin' like I couldn't go much farther till I rests."

"That's just like I feels, too," admitted Andy.

"We'll make camp here for the night," said Indian Jake, "because 'tis the best place to camp we'll come to before dark finds us. But every time we feels weary we can't stop to rest. Travelers must keep goin' often enough when they're tired. There'll be tired days enough, too, before we reach Seal Lake, and there'll be tireder days on th' fur trails in th' winter, and you lads promised you'd keep your grit."

"Aye," admitted David, shamed by the rebuff, "we promised, and we'll be keepin' our grit. I was forgettin', when I made complaint."

"And I was forgettin', too," said Andy.

Indian Jake never complained, and never admitted he was tired, and never again did he hear complaint from either David or Andy, though often enough they were almost too weary of evenings to eat their supper.

Whether Indian Jake appreciated their self-restraint and sturdy tenacity, or accepted it as a matter of course, he never commented upon it or uttered a word of approval, though he presently began to treat them more as companions and veterans than as novices. Sometimes he even asked David's opinion upon some point, and when he did this David felt vastly complimented, for there was no better woodsman in the country than Indian Jake.

The nights were growing frosty. The ground was hard frozen, and the bowlders at the water's edge were coated with ice. But the river itself, too active to submit so early to the shackles of approaching winter, went rushing along in its course, now quietly, with a deep, dark, sullen current, now thundering over rocks in wild, tempestuous rapids that made the heart thrill with its force and power. Day and night the rush of waters was in the ears of the travelers, but withal it was a pleasant sound. They thought of the river as a mighty living thing, and as a companion, despite the toil it demanded of them.

"Th' river roarin' out there makes me solemn, like," remarked Andy one evening after they had eaten supper and sat by the crackling stove while Indian Jake quietly puffed at his pipe.

"How, now, does she make you solemn?" asked David.

"I were thinkin' how she keeps rushin' on an' roarin' that way, always," Andy explained. "She were goin' that way before we were born, and she'll keep goin' that way after we're dead, no matter how old we lives t' be. She'll keep goin', and goin', and goin', and there's never like t' be an end t' her goin' till th' world comes to an end. And I were thinkin' how much she'll see that none of us'll ever see. Other folks'll be comin' in here t' trap just like we're comin' now—after we're dead—and we won't know it, but th' river will."

"And there's no end t' th' water that feeds her," added David. "I wonders where it all comes from."

"I wonders, now," mused Andy.

"There's no doubtin', now, she's been runnin' like that since th' Lard made th' world," continued David. "'Tis hard t' understand where all th' water comes from."

"I'm thinkin', now," and Andy's voice was filled with awe, "th' Lard made un that way, and fixed un so there'd never be lack o' water. I wonders, now, if th' Lard keeps watchin' her all th' time, and if she'd go dry if He didn't keep lookin' out for un."

"Th' Lard watches un all th' time," said David. "There's no doubtin' that. Th' Lard watches out for everything, and He even knows what we're thinkin' this minute."

"I wonders if He does, now?" and Andy's eyes were filled with wonder. "Do you think, Jake, th' Lard made th' river, and keeps watch that she's always got plenty o' water?"

Indian Jake shifted uneasily, and reaching over to snuff the candle, grunted:

"Hugh! I think sometimes the devil made her, th' way we have t' fight her t' get up t' Seal Lake."

"'Tweren't th' devil!" objected Andy, horrified at the suggestion. "'Twere th' Lard made she. We couldn't get t' Seal Lake without she, though she is a bit hard t' go up sometimes."

"Pop says th' Lard makes it hard for us t' master th' good things He makes for us," said David. "That's so we'll know how good they are after we masters un."

"You lads'll be gettin' homesick, and you talks about such things," broke in Indian Jake, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "It's time t' turn in."

And so the days of toil continued, until one morning they entered a lake, and David gave a shout of joy and announced to Andy that the work of long carries and hauling the boat through rapids was at an end.

"We're 'most to th' Narrows tilt," said he. "This is th' lower end of Seal Lake, and just above here is th' Narrows."

And so it proved. When presently the lake narrowed down into a short strait and directly opened into a far extending expanse of water, David pointed excitedly to the eastern shore, some four hundred yards above, with the exclamation:

"There 'tis, Andy! There 'tis! See un?"

And a few minutes later the boat's prow grounded upon a sandy beach at the point David had indicated and at the mouth of a small river which emptied into Seal Lake at the head of the Narrows, and there in the edge of the forest that bordered the beach nestled the little log hut they called a "tilt."

"Here we are at last," said Indian Jake, who was in an amiable state of mind, "and I take it you lads are glad enough t' be here."

"'Tis fine!" exclaimed Andy.

"'Tis that," seconded David, "and fine t' get here ahead o' th' freeze-up."

"Now we'll tidy th' place up and get it ready to stop in," said Indian Jake, "and store our outfit away."

Even Andy had to stoop to enter the low door, though, within, the ceiling was amply high for Indian Jake to stand erect. The room was about ten feet square, and was fitted with low bunks on two sides. It contained a sheet-iron tent stove, with the pipe, which answered the double purpose of pipe and chimney, extending up through the roof.

They set about at once to make the place hospitable and comfortable. Rubbish was cleared away and the earthen floor swept clean with a handful of twigs, which answered well enough in lieu of a broom. Then

fragrant balsam and spruce boughs were spread upon the bunks for a bed, and finally the outfit was carried up from the boat and conveniently disposed of, and a fire kindled in the stove.

The relaxation after the long, hard journey, was doubly acceptable. The wood crackling in the stove, the spicy perfume of balsam, and the sense of a secure retreat, gave the tilt an air of coziness and comfort the boys had not experienced since leaving The Jug. This was to be their headquarters and their home for many months, and their place of rest and relaxation.

David brought a kettle of water from the lake and set it on for dinner, while Indian Jake turned some flour into a pan, and began dexterously mixing dough for hot bread.

"We made good time," he remarked good-naturedly, as he fitted a cake of dough into the frying pan. "It's the second day of October, and the lake won't fasten for another week, *whatever*. There's some geese about yet, and we'll get some of 'em. They'll make a good change now and again, later on."

"That'll be fine!" exclaimed David.

"We'll do all th' huntin' we can in daylight," said Indian Jake, "and of evenings get our stretchin' boards in shape for the time when we'll need 'em. And I expect there'll be some pa'tridges—"

Indian Jake suddenly paused in his work to listen. He had but a moment to wait, when there broke forth startlingly near a heart-rending howl. It rose and fell in mournful cadence, dying finally in a long-drawn "Woo-oo-oo," so near that it sent the blood tingling in shivering waves up the spines of the boys.

VIII

ANDY'S BEAR HUNT

"**W**OLVES!" said Indian Jake, resuming his cooking with unconcern. "They must be the other side of the little river, or they'd smell our smoke. The wind's blowin' up from that way."

"Are they like t' trouble us?" asked Andy anxiously.

"They'll keep clear of *us*, never fear," declared David stoutly. "I'd like t' get a shot at un once."

"They're likely under cover o' th' woods," said Indian Jake. "But you might have a look and see."

David took his rifle and went cautiously out of the door, but presently returned to report that the wolves, which were still crying, were, as Indian Jake had supposed, hidden in the woods on the opposite side of the river.

"They won't bother us," said Indian Jake. "Wolves are mostly too much afraid of the man smell to be troublesome. We might go after 'em, but they're hard t' get at, and we wouldn't stand much chance of seein' 'em."

"Will they be like t' come at us on th' trails?" asked Andy.

"Not much fear of that," reiterated Indian Jake. "Mostly they follows the caribou, and keeps clear of men. Slice some pork, Davy; and Andy, you put the tea over. The water's boilin'."

"I'm wonderin', now, how many of un there is," said Andy as he made the tea.

"Two was all that sounded," explained Indian Jake. "One was a good piece off, and called lonesome, like he wanted company, and the other that answered was handy by. They'll likely be gettin' together."

When dinner was eaten, Indian Jake lighted his pipe with a shaving which he whittled and ignited at the vent in the stove door, and while David and Andy washed the dishes, busied himself with an examination of the stretching boards which Thomas had used the previous year. These were of different sizes, and properly shaped to fit the pelts of martens, foxes and other animals hunted along the trails.

Hunters remove the skins from the animals whole and draw them tightly over the board with the fleshy side of the pelt on the outside. It is then scraped with a knife until all adhesions of flesh and fat are removed, and the board, with the skin still upon it, is hung from the ceiling until the pelt is thoroughly dried. When properly cured and in condition for packing, it is removed from the board and placed with other pelts, as they accumulate, in a clean bag, which is usually suspended from a rafter, where neither moisture nor animals can attack it.

Pelts dry quickly, and therefore comparatively few boards, assorted to suit the size and form of the various animals, are sufficient for the hunter's purpose.

It was discovered that Thomas had left in the tilt an ample supply for his own use, but now both Indian Jake and David must be equipped.

"We'll be needin' a few more," said Indian Jake, "and we better make 'em while we has time. I'll cut two or three dry butts, and split 'em, and whenever we have time we can work 'em down."

"I'll go along and help," David volunteered, for he and Andy had finished their dish-washing, "but there'll be no need o' your comin', Andy. You can 'bide here in th' tilt and rest up."

"I'm rested," declared Andy, resenting the imputation that he was in greater need of rest than David. "I'll take my gun and see if there's any pa'tridges around. They'll go fine for supper, now, an' I finds any."

"They will that," assented Indian Jake. "And see, now, that you bring some back."

"I'll do my best," said Andy, proudly taking down his gun, and slinging his ammunition bag over his shoulder. "We'll have pa'tridges for supper, *whatever*."

Andy had hunted partridges and rabbits, and such small game as could be found in the woods near The Jug, since he was nine years old and strong enough to hold a gun to his shoulder. His father gave him an old trade gun—a muzzle-loading piece—when he was ten years of age. It was a gun which had been cut down because of a defect near the muzzle, and with its shortened barrel was quite light enough for him to aim with ease. Later on Thomas had permitted him to use the rifle which he now carried, and he had become an

excellent rifle shot. The lads of The Labrador begin early to learn their trade, and to love it, too.

It was no new experience, therefore, for Andy to be alone in the woods, and as he stole quietly through the trees he felt a deal of confidence in his ability as a hunter and that he should make good his boast to bag enough partridges for supper.

A little distance from the tilt he turned down to the lake shore, lined here by scrubby willow brush, in the hope of finding willow ptarmigans, white grouse of the North, feeding upon the tender ends of the willows. But unrewarded he finally turned back again into the deeper spruce woods, and had gone but a little way when a small flock of spruce grouse rose from the ground and, unconscious of danger and quite fearless, took refuge in a tree. At easy range Andy had no difficulty in clipping the heads from five of the birds with his rifle bullets before the remaining ones took flight.

"I knew I'd get un!" exclaimed Andy exultantly, gathering up the game. "Now we'll have a fine supper."

He drew a stout buckskin thong from his pocket, and at intervals of about two inches made five slip nooses. Through each of these he passed the legs of a bird, and drawing tight the ends of the thong, made them secure. Tying the thong firmly around his waist, his game thus carried made no burden, and left his hands free.

"Now," said he, "I'll see what Seal Lake looks like."

A little to the right of where Andy had killed the partridges rose a naked, rocky hill, and turning toward it he quickly began ascending. A hundred feet up its side he passed the last scrubby spruce tree. On the central plateau of Labrador the tree line seldom rises far above the base of the hills. It was a steep, rocky climb, but Andy was accustomed to scrambling over rocks, and in a few minutes he had gained the summit.

Turning toward the lake he discovered its far-reaching waters extending a full half-hundred miles to the westward. Its extreme end was hidden in the boundless forest which, punctured by rocky, snow-clad hills, rolled away as far as his eye could reach. For a considerable distance to the northward he could trace, like a silver thread, the sparkling waters of the Nascaupée. To the southeast lay piled in massive grandeur an array of great white mountains. On the sides of some of them high mica cliffs reflected the sun like disks of burnished silver.

Near by, to the south, a curl of smoke rose above the forest green, and this he knew to be the tilt. Eastward from the tilt splotches of water could be discerned, where the little river ran down to join Seal Lake.

Andy was used to wild nature, but this provided an element of romance new to him. Here at his feet, in all its silent and magnificent grandeur, stretched the great primordial wilderness which had been the scene of his father's exploits. This, too, was the scene of strange, weird tales of stirring adventures to which he had listened so often. Here men had fought wild beasts. Here men had starved, and here had been enacted heroic deeds, the narrative of which never failed to thrill him. Was he destined to take part in like adventures, and like deeds of heroism?

He was awed by the immensity of the solitudes. A lump came into his throat and tears into his eyes, as he looked away over the vast silence to the horizon. This was God's land, just as God had made it. No man lived here, or had ever lived here. There was no human habitation within the limitless boundaries of these rolling miles of forest and mountain, save the little tilt from which the curl of smoke was rising, and no other human beings than himself and David and Indian Jake.

Then there came upon Andy a realization of his own smallness and insignificance, and a wave of fear swept over his heart. Here in this boundless wilderness he was to face the rigors of a long, sub-arctic winter, with all its privations and hardships, cut off from all communication with the greater world outside. For many, many months he would have no word from his father or Margaret or Jamie or Doctor Joe, or know how they fared, or whether the mist in Jamie's eyes was thickening or no. It was not strange then if Andy experienced a sudden longing for home and a touch of homesickness.

But Andy was brave and full of courage, and presently throwing back his head, he laughed, to drive away the fear and the loneliness.

"Huh!" he said, "there's nothin' to be scared of. Pop says th' Lard'll take care of us, and we does our best t' take care of ourselves. There's fur here, and Davy and I must get un, t' cure Jamie's eyes, and we *will* get un, *whatever*. I'll have plenty o' grit, and a stout heart like a man's, and 'twon't be so long when we goes home again."

With this he set out down the hill. His descent was on the opposite side from that which he had ascended, and he came upon steep, rocky cliffs that he must needs circumvent; and so he was picking his way, looking only to his steps and giving too little heed to other matters, when suddenly, as he rounded the last high ledge above the timber line, he was startled by a savage growl. And there, in the edge of the woods, and so near that Andy barely escaped colliding with it, was a great black bear. The animal, no less surprised at Andy's sudden appearance around the ledge than was Andy at meeting the bear, rose upon its haunches, assuming a distinctly belligerent attitude.

Instinctively Andy sprang aside, and under cover of the trees. The bear, content to be unmolested, made no attempt to follow. Black bears attack only when protecting their young, when wounded, or when driven to bay. Under other conditions they are overwilling to seek safety in retreat.

This bear was no exception to the rule. He had, as yet, no quarrel with Andy. His sole object in displaying teeth and claws was self-protection. So long as Andy evinced no intention of injuring him, he was well content to let Andy go his way, while he went his own.

Perceiving that the bear was not following him, Andy quickly turned about to discover that it had also turned about, and was slowly, and with dignity, retreating.

Then it occurred to Andy that he could never return to the tilt and tell David and Indian Jake that he had encountered a bear and permitted it to escape without ever firing a shot. Indian Jake would gibe him and David would think him a coward, and he *would* be a coward! He would never be able to face the world again without an inner sense of shame at his cowardice, if he permitted fear to overcome his duty as a hunter! But he was not afraid! He had simply been surprised and startled! At this season the bear would be in prime condition. Its meat was good to eat and its skin was valuable, and no valuable skin must escape.

These thoughts flashed through Andy's mind in the instant that he realized that the bear had turned about and was passing out of range, and without further hesitation he raised his rifle and fired.

The bullet, not well directed, struck the animal in the flank. With a growl it swung around and began biting at the wound. A second bullet grazed its ear, and Andy, in excitement, permitted the third to go wide of its mark.

The bear, now thoroughly aroused and angered, charged directly at Andy. There were two cartridges remaining in the rifle, and Andy was immediately aware that those two cartridges must be effectively placed. He must kill the bear, or the bear would kill him, for there is no middle ground of compromise with a wounded bear.

There was small time for planning his course of action, and Andy made no plans, but permitted instinct to guide him. He sprang behind a convenient tree, and with the assistance of the tree to steady his aim, sent another bullet at the approaching animal. The shot took effect, but served to retard the bear's advance for only a moment. Then Andy fired the remaining cartridge. It went wild, and the bear, bellowing with rage, rushed at its enemy and tormentor.

IX

THE STEALTHY MENACE OF THE TRAIL

THERE were cartridges enough in Andy's bag, but he had no time now to reload, and dropping the rifle he seized the low hanging limb of a tamarack tree, swung himself up, and clambered to a limb above barely in time to escape a stroke of the bear's powerful paw.

Then it was that Andy remembered that bears can climb quite as well as men, and this wounded and blood-bespattered bear proved himself an excellent climber indeed. Up the tree he came, with an agility that was alarming, and Andy, now thoroughly frightened, slid out upon the limb upon which he was perched, to escape the long reach of the great paw.

Andy was cornered. He was certain that death awaited him. In some degree his mind became dulled and paralyzed with the thought. In a disconnected way he wondered whether the bear would tear him badly, or be content to kill him and leave his body for foxes and wolves to devour. In that moment he was not greatly concerned about it. He was little more interested in it than he would have been in tomorrow's weather.

But the instinct of self-preservation never becomes extinct so long as life remains, and acting upon that instinct rather than upon any definite plan Andy slid farther out upon the limb. As the bear followed he continued to slide, when of a sudden the supple ends of the limb bent beneath his weight, he lost his grip, and went tumbling to the ground, leaving the baffled and astounded bear upon the limb.

Andy was on his feet in an instant. With the knowledge that he was at least temporarily out of reach of the creature and its terrible claws, his mind awoke with new hope of escape.

His rifle lay within reach, and seizing it he hurriedly jammed a cartridge into the magazine, threw the lever back, drew it forward again with a click, and was in time to place the muzzle of the rifle almost against the bear's body, over its heart, as it descended, backing down the tree trunk.

There was a report, the bear loosed his hold, and fell in a heap upon the ground. Andy was safe, and realizing the fact, his strength left him, and he stood, trembling, and so weak that for a little he could scarce move.

A half hour later when Andy appeared at the tilt he had nearly regained his usual composure. David and Indian Jake were busy near the door splitting slabs from dry spruce butts, and looking up Indian Jake asked, jocularly:

"Where be th' pa'tridges we're goin' to have for supper? I suppose you got a fine lot of 'em? I never was so hungry for pa'tridges in my life."

"Here they be," replied Andy, lifting the skirts of his adiky and displaying the five birds tied to his belt.

"You did get un, now, didn't you?" said Indian Jake.

"Andy's a rare good pa'tridge hunter," David asserted, resenting Indian Jake's implication that he might not be. "He knows how t' find th' birds when they're about, and he knows how t' shoot un, too."

"And this ain't all th' game I'm gettin'," said Andy, who had stood with fine unconcern, gloating in the surprise he had in store for them. "I killed a bear back here by th' hill. We better go and skin he, an' bring in th' meat, I'm thinkin'!"

"A bear!" exclaimed David and Indian Jake incredulously.

"Aye," said Andy, "and a fine big un, too. He's prime, and has a rare good skin."

There was no doubt that Andy was in earnest, and Indian Jake and David lost no time in securing their rifles and following him as he led them proudly back to the scene of his encounter.

The bear was, as Andy had declared, fine and fat, with a glossy, well-furred pelt. And, while they removed the pelt from the carcass, and dressed and cut the meat into convenient pieces for carrying back to the tilt, Indian Jake and David must needs hear the story of Andy's adventure in detail. And Indian Jake, who took things for granted, and rarely complimented any one, praised Andy's courage, and David declared no one could have done better "in such a tight fix," and Andy was quite swelled up with pride, and glad of the adventure, now that it had ended so happily.

Bear steak was a rarer treat than boiled spruce partridge, and Indian Jake quite forgot his earlier longing for a partridge supper. Indian Jake had indeed never been in such good humor. He declared that he had never eaten finer bear's meat, and that no one could wish for a better meal, and the boys quite heartily agreed with him. And when they were through eating, and he had lighted his pipe, Indian Jake told them stories of Indian hunters who had lived and had their adventures in these very forests where they were

camped. It was a rare evening, that first evening in the tilt, and one to be remembered.

Geese were not nearly so plentiful as they had hoped. The larger flocks had already passed to the southward, for winter was near at hand, and only small, belated flocks of stragglers remained. Nevertheless, by hard, persistent hunting, seven geese and twelve ducks were bagged during the succeeding week, before the last goose and duck to be seen until spring returned, had disappeared.

The weather was cold enough now to keep the bear's meat and birds well frozen. Thus they would remain sweet and good until needed, and it was pleasant and safe to have an ample supply of fresh meat to draw upon as required.

The trail along which David and Andy were to set their traps extended eastward through the forest, and on the southern side of the small river at the mouth of which the Narrows tilt was situated, to another tilt on the shores of Namaycush Lake, a distance of twenty-five miles. Midway between the Narrows and Namaycush Lake tilts was another, known to the hunters as the "Halfway tilt." From the Namaycush Lake tilt the trail swung out through the forest, circuited a great open marsh, and returned again to the tilt. From this point it followed westward along the northern bank of the river, turned in at the Halfway tilt, and thence continued westward on the northern side of the river, to return to the Narrows tilt again.

The entire length of the trail was about sixty miles, and the distance from tilt to tilt constituted a day's work. Thus, setting out from the Narrows tilt on Monday morning, they would stop that night in the Halfway tilt, Tuesday and Wednesday nights in the Namaycush Lake tilt, Thursday night again at the Halfway tilt, and reach the Narrows tilt on Friday night, to remain there until Monday morning. This gave them Saturday and Sunday for rest, and to make necessary repairs to clothing and equipment. It also permitted an allowance for delay in case of severe storms.

Indian Jake's trail took a northerly direction from the Narrows tilt, and with tilts at similar intervals made a wide circuit, returning, as did the other trail, to the Narrows tilt. Thus it was arranged that each week Indian Jake and the boys should spend the period from Friday evening until Monday morning together.

It was the middle of October when they awoke one morning to hear the wind howling and shrieking outside. Upon opening the tilt door David was met by a cloud of swirling, drifting snow, and when he went to the river for a kettle of water he found it necessary to use his ax to cut a water hole through the ice. For three days and nights the storm raged over the wilderness, and when at length it passed, a new, intense, penetrating cold had settled upon the land. The long Labrador winter had come.

"Now," said Indian Jake, "it's time to get the traps set and the trails shaped up."

Two long Indian toboggans, or "flat sleds," as they called them, were leaning against the tilt. A supply of provisions and their sleeping bags were lashed securely upon these, and in the cold, frosty dawn of a Monday morning Indian Jake, hauling one, set out to the northward, and with David hauling the other, the two boys crossed the little river upon its hard frozen surface and plunged into the forest to the eastward, and the tedious rounds of the long white trail were begun.

The first journey of the season over a trail is always hard, for there is no hope that the next trap may hold a valuable pelt. So it was with David and Andy, though the novelty of the experience kept them to some extent buoyed and interested. But the work was hard, nevertheless. So far as possible they used the stumps that Thomas had used the previous year for their marten traps, but still there was the necessity of cutting and trimming new stumps. The snowshoeing, too, was far from good, for in the shelter of the trees the snow was soft, and they sank half way to their knees at every step. Out on the open marshes, however, where the wind had packed the snow firmly, they walked with ease. Here it was, in open, wind-swept regions, that they set their fox traps.

The silence was appalling. Down at The Jug there was always at least the howling and snarling of the dogs to break the quiet, when ice in winter throttled the otherwise unceasing song of Roaring Brook. But here in the wilderness no sound disturbed the monotonous stillness, save the winter wind soughing through the tree tops. It was a new world to the lads, and the world that they had known seemed far, far away.

Withal, that first week was a trying one, and when, late on Friday evening they glimpsed at a distance the Narrows tilt, and saw smoke issuing from the pipe, they welcomed it joyfully, and were glad enough to be back. Upon entering they found Indian Jake busily engaged preparing supper, the tilt cozy and warm, and the kettle boiling merrily. A pot of partridges simmering upon the stove sent forth an appealing odor. Then they realized how very lonely they had been.

"How you making it, lads?" asked Indian Jake cheerily.

"Not so bad," answered David stoutly.

"'Tis wonderful fine t' see you, Jake," exclaimed Andy.

"'Tis that," agreed David.

Indian Jake laughed.

"'Twas—'twas growin' lonesome out there," explained Andy.

"Yes," said Indian Jake, "it is lonesome out there till you get used to it."

"It seems a wonderful long time since we left the Jug," observed Andy, as they ate supper.

"Not so long," said David, a little inclined to brag.

"No only a month yet. But," condescendingly, "'tis like t' seem long the first time. 'Twas so when I was up here with Pop last year. But I'm not mindin' un now."

"You was lonesome enough up at the Namaycush Lake tilt," Andy retorted.

"'Twon't help any t' talk about un," warned Indian Jake. "You'll be gettin' homesick at the start."

But after this the hope that each trap would reward them with a fine pelt kept alive their keen interest in the work. And, too, they were doing exceedingly well. Before the middle of December they had captured fourteen martens, one red, one cross, and two white foxes, which was quite as well, Indian Jake declared, as he had done, and was very well indeed, and they were proud.

"And it's all prime fur except th' first two martens we got," said David.

"We're makin' a grand hunt, Davy!" exclaimed Andy, enthusiastically.

"That we are!" agreed David.

The cold was tightening with each December day. Wild, fierce storms sprang up suddenly, and the air was filled with blinding clouds of snow. But David and Andy kept steadily at their work, with "plenty of grit, and stout hearts," lying idle only when it would have been too dangerous or foolhardy to venture forth from the

protection of the tilts. This is the portion of the fur hunter's existence.

But neither David nor Andy gave thought to the hardships he was experiencing. They had expected them, and they were accustomed to cold weather and deep snows. They were always glad, however, to reach the snug shelter of the tilts, of nights.

Their excellent success kept them in good spirits and contented at their work for the most part, though sometimes, when drifting snows clogged the traps, and days were spent in clearing them, the trails grew tedious, and then it was quite natural that they should long for the return of summer, and for home.

Nothing occurred to vary the monotonous routine of the days until late one December afternoon. The previous night had been one of wind and drifting snow. The fox traps lay deeply covered by drifts, and since early morning they had been clearing and resetting them. The long northern twilight was at hand, and, plodding silently along toward the Namaycush Lake tilt, still three miles away, they were thinking of the hot supper and warm fire, and hours of rest that should presently be theirs, when suddenly David stopped and listened intently.

"What is it?" asked Andy.

"'Tis something following us," answered David after a moment's silence.

"I hears nothing," said Andy.

"But 'tis there!" insisted David. "I *feels* un!"

A little longer they listened, and then passed on.

"There *is* somethin'!" exclaimed Andy presently, in an awed voice. "I feels un too."

Closer and closer the something seemed to come, stealing after them stealthily through the shadows of the forest. With the instinct of those born and bred to the solitudes, they felt the presence, and were certain it was there, though they could neither hear nor see it.

Again and again they paused expectantly to listen, and at length their keen ears caught a light, stealthy tread.

X

THE FIGHT WITH A WOLF PACK

"**H**EAR un! Hear un coming!" exclaimed Andy in a hushed voice.

"'Tis just back there in th' bush, but I can't see un!" said David, under his breath.

"Take a shot, anyhow," suggested Andy, who had lashed his own rifle on the load, that he might carry an ax, which was constantly required in the work about the traps.

"Not till we sees un," David objected. "Pop says never shoot at what you don't see."

They hurried a little now, though pausing frequently to peer into the forest gloom behind them. Twilight was thickening. The thing, whatever it was, that followed them was growing bolder and less careful to conceal its movements. With little effort they could quite plainly hear the tread of soft footfalls on places where the snow was covered by an icy crust. It was not, however, until the stovepipe of the tilt, standing in black silhouette above a great snowdrift that nearly covered the little log building, had risen into view, that Andy, looking back, exclaimed:

"There 'tis, now! There 'tis! Wolves!"

David stopped, and turning about beheld five great fearsome gray creatures. It was at least a relief to know what manner of beast stalked them. There is attached to a hidden, skulking enemy a mystery that accentuates the sense of peril. But now the danger was real enough.

When the boys stopped, the wolves stopped also, and in full view sat upon their haunches, with lolling red tongues, greedily observing their intended victims. They were not above fifty yards distant, and a cold chill ran up the lads' spines as they beheld them.

"Shoot now!" said Andy, tensely, after a moment's silence.

Dropping the hauling rope of the toboggan from his shoulders, David without a word slipped his rifle from the loose sealskin case in which he carried it, took careful aim, and pulled the trigger.

"Snap!" went the hammer, but there was no explosion.

A wolf sprang to his feet, and baring his ugly white fangs emitted a snarl that sent a fresh tingle down the boys' spines.

"The firing pin is froze!" exclaimed David, again cocking the rifle and aiming.

Again there was a snap but no explosion. Again he tried, and again the cartridge failed to explode.

"Pick up th' gun case, Andy, and walk ahead," directed David, in a voice tense with excitement, as he readjusted the hauling ropes upon his shoulders. "Don't run, now, b'y, and don't hurry. Pop says never run from wolves. If you do, they're like t' close in on us."

"We're most to th' tilt," said Andy nervously, as he obeyed David's instructions and set forward, with David in the rear, at their usual pace.

When David and Andy moved the wolves followed. With every step they gradually but perceptibly drew a little closer. When the outline of the tilt appeared through the thickening twilight the animals were not ten yards behind the nervous, frightened boys. David, glancing back, could see the bristling hair above the powerful shoulders, and the ugly red lolling muzzles of the beasts.

"Get in quick and light th' candle, Andy!" he directed when at last they reached the door. "Hurry, now! They're like t' rush any minute!"

Snow had drifted against the door and clogged it, and it seemed to David that Andy would never get it

open. The wolves were edging closer—closer—closer. They were not twenty feet away when at last the doorway was cleared and Andy sprang into the tilt, shouting to David to hurry, while he nervously lighted the candle.

In momentary fear of being charged by the pack and torn to bits, David had stood facing the wolves as they edged in, inch by inch. Andy's shout, and the flare of the candle within the tilt brought assurance of safety, and with his face still to the wolves he backed into the door, drawing the toboggan after him.

"Come, Andy, now, help me pull her! Help me pull her!" David shouted, tugging with frenzied energy at the loaded and unwieldy toboggan.

Lashed upon the toboggan were their sleeping bags and two of the finest martens they had captured during the winter. If he abandoned it, David was well aware that the wolves would destroy everything it contained, and with never a thought that the wolves would be so bold as to attempt to follow him and Andy into the tilt, he determined also to save their belongings.

Andy sprang to his assistance, and the two boys pulled with all their strength, but as they might well have known, the toboggan was quite too long for the narrow tilt, and when they had drawn it in as far as they could, an end still blocked the doorway, and they could not close the door.

Then it was that the heads of two wolves, ravenous, and grown exceeding bold, fearless even of the candle light, appeared at the entrance, determined, it was apparent, to make an attack, whether or no.

David, in desperation, instinctively seized his rifle, threw it to his shoulder, with the muzzle almost touching the leading wolf, and pulled the trigger.

There was an explosion, a snarl, and the wolf fell at David's feet. The frozen firing pin was at last released. With lightning speed he threw forward and drew back the lever, and fired again, and the other wolf fell. Stooping low, with the rifle still at his shoulder, he discovered the three other wolves slinking in the twilight just outside the door, and again his rifle rang death to a wolf. But this was to be his last victim, for the two remaining animals turned, and faded in the gathering gloom.

"'Twas a narrow escape!" exclaimed Andy, sitting limply down upon the edge of a bunk.

"That it was!" and David, no less excited and relieved, was visibly shaking.

"They might have got us!" said Andy, weakly.

"They might have, but they didn't, and they didn't get th' martens or tear up our sleeping bags, either," and the trembling but proud David seated himself by Andy's side, to recover his composure.

"You kept your grit, and were wonderful brave, Davy," said Andy admiringly.

"Oh, 'twasn't anything," and David, with a brave show, arose and began unlashng the toboggan. "You kept your grit just as much, Andy. If you had run, or hadn't got the door open or the candle lit, we'd sure been killed."

"'Twere fine th' gun went off, but 'tis strange she didn't go off when you tried her before," suggested Andy.

"If I'd tried un once more out where we first saw th' wolves, she'd have gone off, but I gives up too soon," said David. "'Th' tryin' I did loosed th' ice around th' firin' pin. I just *had* t' try un when th' wolves started in after us; and she were all right."

And so it is, much too often in life. We give up too soon. We would turn many a failure into success if we would but keep on trying, and doing our best, and not permit ourselves to become discouraged.

When the toboggan was unloaded they took it out, dragged in the dead wolves where they would not freeze, and after they had kindled a fire and eaten their supper, removed the pelts from the three, and fine big pelts they were.

XI

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

EVEN their first marten had not given the boys the degree of satisfaction they derived from the capture of the wolf pelts. They had experienced an adventure, too, that had impressed upon them the need of constant watchfulness, and it was agreed that in future each should carry his rifle, and be assured that it was always in serviceable condition.

"I'm thinkin', now," observed Andy, as he and David scraped the pelts, "that these must be th' same wolves we heard the day we comes t' Seal Lake. They've been 'bidin' close by ever since, like as not."

"It's like as not they're th' same," agreed David, "but they were never 'bidin' so close all this while without showin' themselves. They makes their hunt where there's deer, and I'm thinkin' there's deer not far away."

"Some deer's meat would go fine," suggested Andy.

"'Twould, now," said David. "'Tis strange we've seen no deer footin' anywhere th' whole winter."

"Maybe th' deer are comin' handy, and that's what brings th' wolves back," said Andy.

"They're like t' be on th' open meshes," said David. "We may see signs of un tomorrow."

"And if we does, we'll have a deer hunt!" exclaimed Andy, expectantly.

"We will that!" declared David, "even if we are a day late gettin' back t' th' Narrows tilt."

The adventure of the evening occupied their conversation until the wolf pelts were scraped and hung to dry. Then David filled the stove with wood, and blowing out the candle they slipped into their sleeping bags.

"I'm wonderin', now," mused Andy, after they had lain a little while in silence, "what Pop will say when we tells him about th' wolves."

"He'll say we did fine gettin' three good skins," said David proudly. "They're all prime, and worth four dollars each, *whatever*."

"'Tis a fine day's hunt!" enthused Andy, adding: "But I wouldn't want t' be chased by un again!"

"Aye, 'twere a close call," admitted David. "After this we'll both carry our rifles, and we'll be sure they're workin' all right."

"And I'm thinkin'," said Andy, "th' Lard was on th' lookout for us, and He made your rifle go off, Davy, just th' right time."

"Aye," said David, "just th' right time."

"When I said my prayer," continued Andy reverently, "I thanked th' Lard for standin' by us."

"So did I," admitted David, "and I thanked He for th' three wolf skins and th' two martens. They're a big help toward payin' for Jamie's cure, and we gets un all in *one* day."

"I wonders," and Andy's voice was filled with awe, "if Mother knows about un, and if she's glad?"

"And I wonders, too!" said David, in subdued and reverential voice. "If she knows about un, she's wonderful glad, Andy—and—I'm always thinkin, she does see us, Andy, and everything we does. She were tellin' me once, Andy, before she dies, that when th' Lard takes she away to be an angel, she'll always keep close to us in spirit. She were sayin' she always wants us to know she's close by watchin' us and helpin' us, even if we can't see her."

"I'm thinkin' then," breathed Andy, looking about him in the darkness as though half expecting to see his mother's form, "she might be right close to us now, and—maybe—she's touchin' us. Do you—do you think she *is*, Davy?"

"They's—no knowin'," said David in a half whisper, no less awed by the thought than was Andy. "I'm thinkin' if th' Lard lets th' angels do what they wants t' do, Mother's right here now. Th' Lard would never be denyin' His angels, for He wants th' angels t' be happy, and Mother never'd be happy if she couldn't be with us."

The lads lay silent for a little, pondering upon the mystery of life beyond the grave. Before their fancy's vision there arose a picture of the gentle mother who had been taken from them so long ago, and who had loved them so well.

"Davy," whispered Andy presently, "you awake?"

"Yes," answered David, "I'm wonderful wakeful."

"I wish," said Andy wistfully, "Mother'd come and put her hand on my forehead and kiss me good night, like she used to, so I'd feel her. I'm—wantin' her wonderful bad—I'm lonesome for she—Davy."

"Maybe she's doin' it, Andy," said David. "Maybe she's kissin' us both, and touchin' us and lovin' us like she used to do. Maybe she *is*, Andy, and we don't know it, because th' touch of angels is so light we never could feel un."

Perhaps she was. Who knows? Who can tell when loved ones beyond the grave come to caress us and minister to us, and to rejoice and sorrow with us? Our ears are not attuned to hear their dear voices, our eyes have not the power to see their glorious presence.

Never since coming into the wilderness had the isolation of the great solitudes impressed David and Andy so deeply as now. Their imagination was awake. In fancy they could see, reaching away into unmeasured miles on every side of the little tilt which sheltered them, the silent, white, unpeopled wilderness. There was no one to turn to for companionship. Even Indian Jake, sleeping soundly, doubtless, in some far distant camp, seemed no part of their world. The crackling fire in the stove accentuated the silence that surrounded them. An ill-fitting stove cover permitted flickering rays of light to escape from the stove, and dance in ghostly manner upon the ceiling. Weird shadows rose and fell in dark corners. There was small wonder that the two lads should be lonely, and heart hungry. It was quite natural that at such a time they should long for a mother's gentle caress and loving sympathy.

All of us are Davids and Andys sometimes. God pity the man that forgets the tender love and ministry and willing sacrifice of his mother. God pity the man who grows too old to wish sometimes for his mother's love and sympathy and steadfast faith in him when others lose their faith. What courage it would give him to fight the battles of life! So long as his mother's memory lives green in a man's heart, and he feels her dear spirit near him, he cannot stray far from the paths of rectitude.

But the day's work had been hard, and David and Andy were weary. Presently their eyes closed, and they were lost in the sound and dreamless sleep of robust youth.

There is no dawdling in bed of mornings for the trapper. His day's work must be done, and the hours of light in this far northern land are all too short. And so, as was their custom, David and Andy, in spite of their previous day's excitement and hard work, were up and had a roaring fire in the stove a full hour before daybreak.

"I'm wonderful glad," remarked David, as he came in with a kettle of water and placed it on the stove, "that we don't have to haul the flat sled with us around th' mesh today. Maybe we'll have a chance t' look for deer."

"We'll hurry over th' trail, and get through settin' up th' traps early," said Andy. "'Tis wonderful cozy here in th' tilt, and if we don't find deer signs 'twill be fine t' get back early."

"I'll tell you, now, what we'll do," suggested David. "I'll take th' n'uth'ard side, and you th' s'uth'ard side, and we'll each go over half th' trail instead of both travelin' together over all of un, and we'll get through in half th' time. We'll meet in th' clump of spruce on th' easterly side of th' mesh, where we always stops t' boil th' kettle."

"That's a fine plan!" exclaimed Andy. "When we gets there t' boil th' kettle we'll have all th' traps set up, and if neither of us sees any deer footin' we'll know there's none about. If there's no deer about, we can come right back t' th' tilt."

"I'm thinkin', now, you hopes we'll see no deer footin'," grinned David, adding understandingly: "'Tis hard gettin' started o' mornings sometimes for me, too, and I'm thinkin' how fine th' tilt'll be to get back to. But I never minds un after I gets started."

"I don't mind after it gets fair daylight," asserted Andy.

As they talked Andy sliced some fat pork into the frying pan, while David stirred baking powder and salt into some flour, poured water into the mixture and proceeded to mix dough. When the pork was fried to their

taste, which was far from crisp, Andy removed the slices one by one on the end of his sheath knife and placed them on a tin plate. A quantity of hot grease remained in the frying pan, and into this David laid a cake of dough which he had moulded as thin as possible, and just large enough to fit nicely into the pan.

Presently the cake, swollen to many times its original thickness, and deliciously browned, was removed. Another took its place to fry, while the boys turned to their simple, but satisfying, breakfast with amazing appetites.

When they had finished their meal David fried two additional cakes, which utilized the remaining dough. These, with some tea, a tin tea pail, two cups and a small tin box containing sugar, he dropped into a ruck sack, and the preliminaries for their day's work were completed.

Then the two lads drew on their kersey and moleskin adikys, David slung the ruck sack upon his back, and, each bearing his rifle and a light ax, they passed out into the leaden-gray light of the winter morning.

Dawn was fading the stars, which glimmered faintly overhead. The crunch of their snowshoes was the only sound to break the silence. Rime hung in the air like a feathery veil, and the bushes, thick-coated with frost flakes, rose like white-clad ghosts along the trail.

The air was bitter cold. The boys caught their breath in short gasps as the first mouthfuls entered their lungs. David in the lead, and Andy following, neither spoke until at the end of five minutes' brisk walking they emerged from the cover of the forest upon the edge of a wide, treeless marsh, where they were to part.

"I'll be like t' travel faster than you do, Andy," said David, pausing, "and when I gets to th' clump o' spruce I'll put a fire on and boil th' kettle, and wait, and there'll be a good fire when you gets there."

"And if I gets there first, I'll put a fire on," said Andy, by way of a challenge.

"You'll never beat me there," laughed David. "Your legs are too short."

"You'll see, now," and Andy swung off at a trot along the southerly side of the marsh, while David turned to the northerly course.

That portion of the trail which Andy was to follow skirted the edge of the marsh for a distance of nearly two miles. Then in a circuitous course it wound for some three miles through a scant forest of gnarled, stunted black spruce. Beyond this, and a mile across another marsh, was the thick spruce grove which had been designated as their meeting point, and where they were accustomed to halt to boil their kettle and eat a hasty luncheon on their weekly tour.

The other end of the trail, which David had chosen, was longer by a mile. Its entire distance, from the place where the boys separated, to the clump of spruce trees, lay over exposed marshes. On windy days, with no intervening shelter, this open stretch was always cold and disagreeable, and there was never a time when they were not glad to reach the friendly shelter of the trees. It was usual, in traveling together, as they always had heretofore, to attend the traps on this end of the trail in the forenoon, and those on the end which Andy was now following, in the afternoon.

Though Andy's legs were short, they were hard and sinewy and he swung along at a remarkably good pace. Now and again he stopped to examine a trap; then, breaking into a trot to make up the time lost, he hastened to the next trap. Thus the two miles to the edge of the timber were quickly laid behind him, and he entered the forest just as the sun, rising timidly in the Southeast, cast its first slanting rays upon the frozen world.

Andy stood for a little in the edge of the trees to get his breath and to watch the glorious lighting of the wilderness. The bushes, thick-coated with tiny frost prisms flashing and scintillating in the light as though encrusted with marvelously brilliant gems, were afire with sparkling color. Even the rime in the air caught the fire, and the marsh became a great, transparent opal, of wonderfully dazzling beauty.

"'Tis a fine world t' live in," said Andy to himself. "'Twould be terrible t' be blind and never see all th' pretty sights. Th' great doctor'll cure Jamie, and then he'll see un all again, too. We'll work wonderful hard t' get th' money t' pay for th' cure. We'll *have* t' get un, *whatever*."

Neither the fox traps on the marsh nor the marten traps in the woods yielded Andy any fur, but as he passed from the woods to the last stretch of marsh he comforted himself with the reflection:

"We can't expect fur *every* day. Two martens and three wolves yesterday made a fine hunt for th' week, even if we gets no more this trip. But Davy's like t' get something, and we're like t' get more before we reaches th' Narrows tilt Friday."

Then he hurried on, for he must needs make good his boast that he would reach the spruce grove before David. No smoke could he see rising above the trees as he approached. David at least had not yet lighted the fire. Andy was jubilant and in high spirits to find that David was not there ahead of him, and had not been there since their visit the previous week.

It was a matter of a few minutes' work to light a fire, and presently Andy had a cozy blaze. Then he broke an armful of spruce boughs, for a seat, and kicking off his snowshoes, settled himself comfortably before the fire to await David's appearance.

"If I had th' kettle, now, I'd put un over," said Andy. "But Davy'll soon be here."

An hour passed, and David did not appear. Andy had traveled at such good speed that he had reached the rendezvous a half hour before midday, but David should not have been long behind him. Another hour passed. A northeast breeze had sprung up, and the sky had become overcast. Andy observed uneasily that a storm was brewing. He donned his snowshoes, replenished the fire, and walked out a little way in the direction from which David should come, and to the outer edge of the trees. He stood very still, and listened, but there was no sound, and David was nowhere to be seen.

Andy reluctantly returned to the fire to wait. He was growing anxious and concerned. Surely David should have appeared before this unless—and Andy grew frightened at the thought—unless some accident had happened to him.

During the next half hour Andy's concern became almost panic. He began to picture David attacked and destroyed by a pack of wolves! Or perhaps his rifle had been accidentally discharged, and injured or killed him! Andy had heard of such accidents more than once. Whatever the reason for David's delay, it was serious. No ordinary thing would have prevented him from keeping his appointment.

Andy could stand the suspense no longer. He arose, slipped his feet into his snowshoes, and at a half run set out upon the trail in the direction from which David should have come.

XII

ALONE IN THE STORM-SWEPT FOREST

AS Andy ran he looked eagerly for signs of David. Snow had fallen during the preceding week, and fresh tracks would have been easily distinguishable. The accumulation of a single night's rime would have sufficed for that. Therefore David could not have passed this way without leaving a boldly marked trail upon the snow, and in attending to the traps this was indeed the only route he could have taken.

In one of the traps a mile from the spruce grove was a handsome cross fox. Andy paused to kill it, and put it out of misery, then hurried on. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been elated at the capture of the fox, for it bore a valuable pelt. Now he scarcely gave it a thought, so great was his anxiety for David's safety. In another trap was a dead rabbit, but he passed it without stopping.

Andy had followed the trail for upwards of three miles when, rounding a clump of willow brush he came suddenly upon David's snowshoe tracks. An examination disclosed the fact that David had come to this point and then turned about and retraced his steps toward the tilt. This was peculiar, and Andy was perplexed, but a hundred yards farther on came the explanation, when he discovered the tracks of a band of caribou crossing the trail at right angles and leading in a northerly direction, with David's tracks following them. The discovery lifted a load of anxiety from Andy's heart. David was hunting caribou, and no doubt safe enough. There was no further cause for worry.

An examination of the trail disclosed the fact that there were seven caribou in the band. They had passed this way since early morning, for no rime had accumulated upon the tracks. David, upon encountering them had doubtless hurried on to summon Andy, but upon reconsideration had turned about to follow the caribou at once, rather than chance their escape through the delay that this would occasion. He had doubtless hoped to find them feeding near by. Indeed they could not have been far in advance of David.

With the relief of his anxiety for David's safety, Andy felt keenly disappointed, if not resentful, that he had not been permitted to join David in the caribou hunt. This was an experience to which he had looked forward. It had been agreed that if signs of caribou were discovered they should hunt them together, and in his disappointment Andy felt quite sure that an hour's delay would not have made much difference in the probabilities of success.

"Anyhow," said he after a few minute's indecision, "I'll follow. If Davy's killed un he'll need me to help he, and if they've gone too far and he hasn't killed un, I'll meet he comin' back."

The trail made by David and the caribou led Andy in a winding course over the marsh for a distance of nearly two miles, and then plunged into the forest. The rising wind was shifting the snow in little rifts over the marsh, and before Andy entered the forest the first flakes of the threatened storm began to fall.

Under the shelter of the trees the snow was light and soft. Because of this traveling became more difficult, and Andy was forced to reduce his trot to a fast walk. For a time the trail continued to lead almost due north. Then it took a turn to the westward. At the point of the turn the caribou had stopped and circled about, and in taking their new course had traveled more rapidly. Something had evidently aroused their suspicions of lurking danger. The gait at which they had traveled, however, indicated that they were not yet thoroughly frightened, or else were uncertain of the direction in which the suspected danger lay.

"They got a smell of something that startled un," observed Andy, "and 'tweren't Davy. Th' wind were wrong for that. They never could have smelled he with th' wind this way."

Snow was now falling heavily, but the trail was still plain enough. A half mile farther on the caribou tracks made another sharp turn, this time to the southward, turning about toward the marsh. There was no doubt now that they had been frightened. Their trail evidenced that here they had broken into a run.

"Whatever it were that scared un," said Andy, "it scared un bad here, and they've gone where Davy could never catch up with un."

Just beyond the place where the caribou had made the last turn, another trail came in from the north. Andy examined it carefully, and though the rapidly accumulating snow had now nearly hidden the distinguishing marks, he had no difficulty in recognizing the new trail as one made by wolves.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "'Twere wolves scared un! They didn't get th' scent rightly back there, but here they got un, and I hopes they'll get away safe!"

A further examination disclosed the fact that David had stopped, too, and examined the tracks. He had doubtless concluded that continued pursuit of the caribou was useless, for his tracks, now nearly covered by the fresh snow, turned toward the marsh in a direction that would lead him back by a short cut to the point in the fur trail where he had left it to follow the caribou.

"He's gone back to finish th' last end of th' trail," said Andy. "He'll be fearin' something has happened t' me when he don't find me at th' spruce trees. I'll have t' hurry."

David's tracks were becoming fainter and fainter with every step, and Andy had not gone far when the last trace of them was lost. He knew the general direction, however, that David would take, and was not greatly concerned or alarmed until he suddenly realized that darkness was settling. Until now he had lost all count of passing time.

He had also been too deeply engrossed in the caribou trail, and in overtaking David, to give consideration to the storm. Now, with the realization that night was falling, he also awoke to the fact that the wind had risen into a gale, and that with every moment the storm was gathering new strength. He could hear it roaring and lashing the tree tops overhead. A veritable Arctic blizzard was at hand.

In the cover of the thick spruce forest Andy was well protected from the wind, though even here snow fell so thickly that he could see but a few feet in any direction.

By the short cut Andy soon reached the edge of the timber, where trees gave way to the wide open space of the marsh. Here he was met by a smothering cloud of snow, and a blast of wind that carried him from his feet. He rose and tried again to face it, but was forced to turn about and seek the shelter of the trees.

The wind came over the marsh, now in short, petulant gusts, now in long, angry roars, sweeping before it swirling clouds of snow so dense that no living creature could stand before it. The storm was terrifying in its fury.

For a moment Andy was dazed and overcome by his encounter. Then came realization of his peril. To reach the tilt he must either cross the marsh or make a wide detour to the westward through the forest. The former was not possible, and if he attempted to make the detour darkness would certainly overtake him before he could attain half the distance. Impeded by the thick falling snow, any attempt to travel after night would certainly lead to disaster. He would probably lose his direction, and be overcome by exhaustion and the bitter, penetrating cold.

What was he to do? He was without other protection than the clothes he wore. There was no shelter nearer than the tilt. He had no food. He had eaten nothing since the early breakfast in the tilt, and his healthy young appetite was crying for satisfaction.

Andy was suddenly seized by panic, and he began to run, in a wild and frenzied hope that he might reach the tilt before darkness closed upon the wilderness. But he quickly became entangled in low hanging branches, and, sent sprawling in the snow, was brought to a sudden halt.

The shock returned him again to sane reasoning. Taking shelter under the thick overhanging limbs of a spruce tree, he stopped to think and plan. He could not run, and unless he ran he could not reach the tilt that night. He was marooned in the forest, that was plain. There was no course but to make the best of it until morning. It was also plain that he would perish with the cold unless he could devise some means of protection. The moment he ceased his exertions he felt a deadly numbness stealing over him.

"I must do something before dark, and I must have plenty o' grit," he presently said. "I must keep a stout heart like a man. Pop says there's no fix so bad a man can't find his way out of un if he uses his head and does his best, and prays th' Lard to help he."

And so Andy, in simple words and briefly, said a little prayer, and then he used his head and did his best to make the prayer come true.

XIII

A NIGHT IN THE OPEN

THERE was no time to be lost. The long northern twilight was already waning. Hastened by the storm, darkness would come early.

"The Injuns get caught out this way often enough, when they're huntin'," said Andy, by way of self-comfort. "They finds a way to make out. They just gets a place in th' lee, where th' wind can't strike un, and puts on a good fire. That's all they ever does. But," he continued doubtfully, "they're used to un, and I never stopped out without a tent, *whatever*."

Bivouacking in a blizzard, with a thirty-degrees-below temperature and no blankets or other protection, was an emergency Andy had never before been called upon to meet. Now he turned to it uncertainly.

Reconnoitering he discovered, near at hand, a large fallen tree, partly covered by the snow. Close to the butt of the fallen tree stood a big, thickly foliated spruce tree, the outer ends of its branches bending so low that the tips were enveloped by the deep snow.

"'Twill make a shelter, *whatever!*" exclaimed Andy, encouraged. "A little fixin', and maybe 'twon't be so bad, in under the branches. They'll make a cover from the snow."

With his ax he at once cut off the limbs of the spruce tree on the side next the fallen trunk. This made an opening that would serve as a door. Under the arching branches was a circular space, thatched above by foliage. Removing one of his snowshoes, and utilizing it as a shovel, he cleared the space of snow. Then donning his snowshoes again he cut several branches, which he thatched upon the overhanging limbs of the tree, thus increasing the protection of his cover from fresh drift. This done, he banked snow high against the branches around the entire circle, save at the opening facing the fallen tree.

Now breaking a quantity of boughs and arranging them as a floor for his improvised shelter, he made a comfortable bed.

The next consideration was wood, and fortunately there was no lack of this. Everywhere about, as is usual in primordial forests, were dead trees, that would burn readily. Andy selected three that were perhaps six inches thick at the butt, and not too large for him to handle easily. These he felled with his ax, trimmed off the branches, and cutting the logs into convenient lengths for burning, piled them at one side of the entrance to his shelter. He now chopped into small firewood a quantity of the branches, adding them to his reserve supply of fuel.

Again using a snowshoe as a shovel, he cleared the snow from the butt of the fallen tree, which he had decided should be the back log of his fire. This done, he split a quantity of small kindling wood. He now secured a handful of the long, hairy moss that hangs close to the limbs and trunks of spruce trees in the northern forest, and using it as tinder quickly lighted his fire against the back log. Leaning over it to protect it from falling snow until the carefully placed kindling wood was well ablaze, he added pieces of smaller branches, and finally sticks of the larger wood. Then, with a sigh of relief, Andy drew back under the cover of his shelter to test the efficiency of his efforts.

Almost immediately a genial warmth began to pervade the interior of the cave beneath the tree. The fire crackled and blazed cheerfully. The thick thatching of boughs proved an excellent protection from the snow and such wind as penetrated the depths of the forest. The success of the experiment was assured.

It was quite dark now, but Andy, for the present at least, was safe and comfortable enough. Quick planning, energetic action, and instinctive resourcefulness, had saved him from the terrible blizzard that was sweeping over the marsh and lashing through the tops of the forest trees with growing fury.

Andy sat lax and limp for a little while. He had worked with almost frenzied exertion. Now he felt like one who had but just, and barely, escaped a great peril. Presently he drew off his outer adiky, shook the snow from it, and drawing it on again proceeded to arrange himself comfortably.

"'Tis almost as snug as the tilt," he said presently. "Pop were right when he says there's no fix too big to get out of, if you goes about un right. If I'd kept scared, and hadn't tried, I'd perished, and now I'm safe whilst I 'bides here. If I only had something t' eat!"

Comfort is comparative. What might be a severe hardship under some circumstances might become the height of luxury and comfort under others. Andy's retreat appealed to him now, after his battle with the storm, as most luxurious and comfortable. The wind howling and shrieking through the treetops brought to the lad's ears a constant reminder of what might have been his fate, and served to add to the snugness of the shelter and cozy cheerfulness of the fire.

Now that he was safe from the storm for the time being, his thoughts turned to David. He did not know how far David was in advance of him. He had no doubt he had hurried on to the spruce grove, and not finding him there had set out for the tilt, but he could never have reached it before the storm broke.

This thought rendered Andy miserable. His imagination pictured David stark and frozen out on the storm beaten marsh. His misery grew almost to anguish until, in his better judgment, he reasoned that, like himself, David must have taken refuge in the forest, and that David knew better than he how to protect himself. Then he remembered Doctor Joe's song, and accompanied by the roar of wind overhead, sang in a subdued voice:

"The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true.
And all about troubles that never come true."

This comforted him, and when he had finished he said, decisively:

"There's no use worrying about something that I don't know has happened, and the most of th' things we worries about never does happen. I'll just think that Davy's safe and sound in the tilt, or snug and safe somewhere in the green woods. And like as not, too, he's worryin' about me."

With this determination Andy replenished the fire, and, with his feet toward it, stretched out upon the boughs to sleep. "The Lard took care o' Davy and me last evenin' when th' wolves chased us," he mused. "They were close t' gettin' us but th' Lard made Davy's rifle shoot th' right time. *I'm* thinkin' now He didn't just save us t' leave Davy t' perish in th' snow. He'll take care o' Davy *whatever*."

This was the logic of his simple faith. It soothed him and quieted his fears. Weary enough he was, for the day's work had been hard and trying and presently he slept. Several times during the night he was awakened by the cold, when the fire burned low, and each time he huddled close to the blaze until his half congealed blood was warmed and the camp regained its comfort. Then he would lie down again to fall asleep with the shriek and roar of wind in his ears.

Finally he awoke to find that the wind had lost much of its force, and looking upward through the treetops he saw the glimmer of a star. The cold had grown more intense. His feet and hands were numb. He piled some of the small branch wood upon the coals and as it burst into flame added some of the larger sticks.

"It must be comin' mornin', and th' storm's about blown over," he said thankfully, listening for the wind, when he sat down again. "I'm thinkin', now, 'twill soon be clear of shiftin' snow on th' mesh, and soon as I'm warmed I'll see how 'tis, *whatever*."

Despite his resolution not to worry, Andy was far from satisfied of David's safety. Now as he sat by the fire he began again to picture David lying out on the marsh somewhere, stark and dead. The longer Andy permitted his mind to dwell upon the possibility of such a tragedy having taken place, the more probable it seemed. The snow-clad forest had never been so grim and silent. A foreboding of some horrible tragedy was in his heart. He could restrain himself no longer.

The numbness was hardly yet out of his hands and feet when he hurriedly arose, put on his snowshoes, shouldered his rifle, and picking up his ax, rushed out into the dim-lit forest to grope his way through trees to the marsh.

Fitful gusts of wind were still blowing over the marsh, driving the snow in little swirling clouds. Light clouds lay in patches against the sky, and between them the stars shone with cold, metallic brilliance.

Andy could see clearly enough here. The wind was in his back, and taking a short cut, that would reduce the distance by nearly half, he swung out at a trot toward the tilt. He would look there first, and if David were not in the tilt he would follow the trail back to the spruce grove.

XIV A MAN'S GAME

BY the short cut over the marsh it was not far to the tilt. At the end of a half hour's steady running Andy reached the woods that bordered the western side of the marsh. It was here, at the edge of the forest, that he and David had parted the previous morning.

The storm had obliterated every trace of their snowshoe tracks, but Andy stooped to hastily search, in the

dim starlight, for some recent sign of David's passing. There was no sign, and in feverish anxiety to reach the tilt he tried to run, but in the shadows of the trees he collided with overhanging limbs, and was compelled to pick his way more slowly. Presently his sharp eyes made out, through an opening, the stovepipe, rising above the drift which marked the position of the tilt.

It was now that silent, dark hour just before dawn. Andy was sure that if David was there he would be up, preparing to set out with the first hint of light. If he were up he would have a fire in the stove, and smoke would be issuing from the pipe. Between hope and fear Andy's heart almost stopped beating. He peered intently, but could see no smoke. He hurried on, and a few steps farther the stovepipe was thrown out in silhouette against the sky, and rising from it was a thin curl. There was fire in the stove! David was there!

"Davy! Davy! Davy!" Andy shouted, half sobbing, with the break of the nervous strain.

The door of the tilt opened, and David, bareheaded and wildly excited, came rushing out.

"Oh, Andy! Andy! Is you safe?" he cried, passing his arm around Andy's shoulder in a depth of affection and passionate relief, and drawing Andy into the warm tilt, while Andy made a brave effort to restrain his tears.

"Oh, Davy!" broke in Andy, half crying with joy. "I were fearin' for you so! I were thinkin' of you out there—in th' mesh—dead! And oh, Davy, I were—afraid—afraid for you!"

"And I were afraid for you, Andy!" choked David. "I were never doubtin' you were lost and perished! I couldn't sleep for thinkin' of un, and I couldn't go to look for you with th' drift and darkness! I just had t' 'bide here till day broke! I tries and tries t' go, but th' drift drove me back, and I knows I'll have t' wait for day."

While Andy removed his outer garments and David prepared breakfast, Andy described his experiences, and how he had made his shelter.

"Doctor Joe's song helped me a wonderful lot," said he. "It's turned out t' be a true song, too. We were both safe, and there wasn't anything for either of us t' worry about after all. And, Davy, I kept my grit, now, didn't I?"

"That you did!" declared David admiringly. "Even Indian Jake or Pop couldn't have fixed out a better place t' 'bide till th' storm passed."

"Davy," said Andy reverently, "I'm thinkin' th' Lard were lookin' out for us, now, weren't he, Davy? And—Davy—maybe Mother was lookin' out for us, too!"

"Aye," said David, "th' Lard *were* lookin' out for us, and I'm not doubtin' Mother was near, and helpin' us, too."

While they ate their breakfast David told of his own experiences.

"After I runs on th' deer footin' crossin' th' path," he explained, "I sets right out t' get you, Andy. But all at once I thinks that, th' footin' being fresh, th' deer is like as not 'bidin' right handy, and if I loses time goin' for you I might miss un. So I turns back and goes after un."

"I sees where they makes a turn and gets scared, but I weren't thinkin' o' wolves, and I keeps hurryin' on. I must have been right handy to un when I hears a wolf howl, and right after that I comes t' th' place where th' deer turned down toward th' mesh again and th' wolf tracks came in. Then I knows they're gone, and there's no use keepin' after un.

"I turns down then by a short cut t' th' next trap beyond where I leaves th' trail t' turn into th' green woods. Snow were just beginnin' t' spit as I comes out on th' mesh."

"It were just beginnin' t' spit," broke in Andy, "as I goes in th' woods."

"You must have turned into th' woods t' th' westward of where I comes out, and that's why I didn't see you," suggested David.

"When I gets t' our trail I sees your footin' comin' this way. Th' snow wasn't enough yet t' cover un, so I could tell 'twas fresh footin'. I says t' myself, 'Andy's got hungry and tired waitin' for me, and he's gone back t' th' tilt. He's tended th' traps t' th' east'ard, and I'll take a short cut."

"I didn't hurry, and before I gets out of th' mesh snow was comin' thick and th' wind was rising, and it was gettin' pretty nasty on th' mesh.

"When I gets t' th' tilt and finds you're not here I'm thinkin' you've just been a bit slow, and that you'll be along soon.

"So I puts a fire on and boils th' kettle. When th' kettle boils and you don't come, I puts on my 'diky and goes out t' th' mesh t' look. I never saw th' wind rise th' way she had in that little while. It took me off my feet and sent me flat when I tries t' face un. Then I knows I can't go on th' mesh t' look for you, and I knows you can't stay there and live.

"I was scared! I tries four or five times t' get out t' look for you, Andy, but I has t' give un up."

"I'm thinkin' you couldn't go far in *that* drift!" exclaimed Andy. "I tried un too, and she knocked me flat."

"Well," concluded David, "that was all I could do, except t' pray th' Lard t' spare your life, Andy. I had t' 'bide here, and 'twas th' hardest night I ever spent, waitin' here alone for day t' come so's I could look for you, and sore afraid for you, Andy. 'Twas your grit, b'y, that pulled you through."

"And I tries," said Andy, "t' keep a stout heart like a man's, but at th' end, when I was most t' th' tilt, I had t'—give in."

"You kept a wonderful stout heart, Andy," David declared admiringly. "I'd have given up before you did, I knows. I'm doubtin' I ever could have made th' fine shelter you made, too."

While the storm had probably not covered the marten traps, perched as they were upon high stumps, and under cover of the woods, the exposed fox traps on the marsh were doubtless all clogged by drift, and would be ineffective unless cleared. The cross fox, too, which Andy had killed and left in the trap, must be secured. It was deemed advisable, therefore, to attend to these duties at once.

It was full daylight when the boys set out upon their day's work. The wind had settled now into a cold, cutting breeze, which was disagreeable enough but which did not interfere with rapid walking. They scanned the marsh for signs of the caribou but no evidences were found. With wolves on their trail the caribou had doubtless fled the country, and with them, immediate prospects of fresh venison.

"'Twere too bad we missed un," David deplored. "I was almost to un, I knows, when th' wolves started in. I wish we could get some deer's meat."

With every day the wilderness was becoming more naked and stern and repellent. In the forest the snow had risen until it reached and enveloped the lower limbs of the trees. Ravines were nearly filled with snow.

Willow brush, forming barriers around the marshes, were now quite hidden by great drifts, and rose in mighty ramparts of snow. The business of following the fur trails was growing more difficult with every round of the traps. But the depths of winter had not yet been reached. In the weeks to come the grip of Arctic cold was to tighten still harder and harder upon the bleak wilderness and the living things that occupied it. The two lads had a man's game to play, and they were to have need enough of all the grit they possessed.

XV A DAY ON THE ICE

SAVE on rare occasions Indian Jake was silent, and it seemed to the boys sullen. He had told them little of his success on the trail, or whether or not his hunt was good. But when they appeared at the Narrows tilt and told of their adventures with the wolves and with the storm, his stoic Indian reserve vanished for the evening. He asked many questions. He appeared deeply concerned and wished to know of their daily experiences, and details of the furs they had accumulated in the other tilts.

"You're making a fine hunt," he complimented. "As fine a hunt as your father could have made."

"We've got a fine lot o' fur," admitted David, with just pride, "but we been hopin' for a silver fox."

"That isn't strange," and the half-breed smiled, in his peculiar way. "Every hunter is looking for a silver fox all the time, but not many get 'em."

"If we don't get un," said David, "Andy and me have made a good hunt anyhow, and we won't be complainin' about un."

"That we have," seconded Andy.

"A fine hunt," agreed Indian Jake.

"How have you been doin', Jake?" asked David "You never say much about un."

"Not so bad," admitted Indian Jake.

"Have you got much fur?" persisted David.

"Oh, I've got some. I been thinkin'," suggested Indian Jake, turning the subject, as he always did, from himself to the boys, "that you lads better bring all your furs from the other tilts down here to the Narrows tilt."

"Maybe 'twould be a good plan," David agreed.

"Yes," continued Indian Jake, "and then you'll have it all together."

"'Twill make a fine showin' when we has un all together," enthused David.

"Yes," said Indian Jake, "and we can go over it together and see what it's worth."

"We'll fetch un all down here next trip," agreed David. "I'd like t' see un all laid out together."

"And every trip you'd better bring down what you catch," suggested Indian Jake. "It's better to keep all your fur in one place."

"Aye," said David, "I'm thinkin' 'tis better."

"And will you be bringin' all your fur here too?" asked Andy.

"No," answered Indian Jake, "it's better to keep 'em separate. If I had mine here we might be gettin' 'em mixed, and we wouldn't know which was which. I'll keep mine up to my first tilt."

"I'm thinkin' we'd know all *our* fur," persisted Andy. "I don't see how we'd be like t' get un mixed."

"There's no tellin' but we would, though," persisted Indian Jake.

"Davy and I knows *our* fur," insisted Andy. "We've looked at un so many times, and counted out th' price they'll be like t' bring, we'd know un anywhere."

"We'll be gettin' more fur," David explained, "and we may not be able t' tell all til' new fur like we do that we got now."

"No," said Indian Jake, "nobody can remember all the fur he gets. I can't tell all mine so I'd know 'em, if they were with others."

"Davy and I could tell ours," again insisted Andy; "th' new uns just like th' old uns, no matter how many we gets."

"We won't mix 'em," and Indian Jake spoke with finality. "I'll leave mine up at my first tilt."

"Aye, that will be best, Andy," said David. "Jake's right about un. Then we'll just have ours here, and we'll know all we has here is ours, and Jake'll have his separate, and know all he has is his."

Thus the argument ended. No further reference was made to the matter until several weeks later, when David and Andy recalled it vividly, and the earnestness with which Indian Jake had urged his point.

This was in mid-December, and in accordance with the suggestion the boys brought the furs to the Narrows tilt the following Friday. Indian Jake examined them with eagerness. He was interested for their sake in their success, the boys were sure, and this pleased them. In spite of his periods of sullenness, and his reticence, the boys liked him and had faith in him.

"It is a *fine* catch of fur," declared Indian Jake, when he had carefully inspected each pelt. "Your father'll be proud of you! With what more you'll get before we strike up th' traps in th' spring, there'll be plenty to pay for th' little lad's cure."

"Do you think so, now?" asked David eagerly.

"I'm sure of it," declared Indian Jake. "You lads have made a fine hunt. 'Twould be a fine hunt for any man, and an old hunter, too."

"And we're like t' get as many more, *whatever*, ain't we?" asked Andy enthusiastically.

"Yes," said Indian Jake, "and they'll be prime for some time yet, and bring th' top price."

The boys were made happy indeed by Indian Jake's commendation and valuation of their furs. Indian Jake had a keen eye for furs. He was an acknowledged judge, and his valuation could be relied upon. They never questioned this. It imbued them with new fervor and ambition for their work. It made the toil of it appear less formidable. Thus it is always in life. A word of praise and commendation will often lighten another's burden beyond measure. And success breeds desire for greater success. The higher one climbs, the higher one wishes to climb.

The survey of the pelts placed Indian Jake in a most amiable mood that evening. It was one of the occasions when he threw off his too frequent attitude of sullen silence. He chatted with the boys and told them tales of personal adventure and experiences, while he smoked. Indeed he had never been so companionable.

"Well, lads," said he at length, "it's time t' turn in. I'm thinkin' I'll try for some fish tomorrow. I'm gettin' hungry for fish, and they's plenty of 'em in th' lake. We may's well have some."

"Can we get un through th' ice?" asked David eagerly.

"We can make a try for it," said Indian Jake, knocking the ashes from his pipe and filling the stove with wood, preparatory to "turning in."

Accordingly, the following morning after they had eaten breakfast, Indian Jake produced some fish hooks and a cod line from his personal kit, and while David and Andy washed dishes he cut the cod line into three lengths of about thirty feet. To each of these he attached a hook, and just above the hook a leaden snicker. Then, winding the lines separately and neatly upon sticks, he detached several small strips of rind from a piece of pork and baited the hooks. The additional strips of rind he wrapped in a piece of cloth, and thrust them into his pocket.

"There's the fishing outfit all ready; one for each of us," he announced, laying them aside. "There's no use goin', though, till light. They's plenty of time."

"Will we get trout?" asked David.

"No," said Indian Jake. "Whitefish, maybe. Namaycush, maybe. Maybe nothin' but pike. And maybe nothin' at all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Andy expectantly. "I've heard Pop tell about gettin' wonderful big namaycush out'n th' lakes!"

"I've seen 'em," said Indian Jake, "that would go upwards of forty pound. And I've heard of 'em running close to sixty pound."

"Did you ever get any in Seal Lake like that?" asked David excitedly.

"No; not in Seal Lake," admitted Indian Jake. "But they're here, and we're like t' get 'em. I've been thinkin' that tomorrow week will be Christmas, and if we could get some fish 'twould make a fine change for Christmas dinner from pa'tridges and rabbits."

"'Twould that!" enthused David. "I'm wonderful hungry for fish, too. But I was forgettin' about Christmas. Up here on th' trails I never thinks of un at all."

"We'll have t' fix up a good feed for Christmas," declared Indian Jake, "and we'll make it out somehow. Even if 'tis only fish."

As soon as it was light, and long before sunrise, the three with their improvised fishing tackle, and each carrying his ax, set forth upon Seal Lake. Indian Jake led the way to a point a half mile from the tilt, and directly above the Narrows.

"We'll cut our holes here," he announced. "Spread out a little and don't cut 'em too near together."

It was no small task. A coating of hard-packed snow was first removed. Then came the ice, which was now over three feet in thickness. The holes when finished were three feet in diameter at the top, tapering down to a foot and a half at the bottom like a funnel.

"Now," said Indian Jake when all was ready, "we'll see whether we're goin't' get any fish."

David's baited hook had hardly sunk below the surface of the water when he felt a tug, and an instant later he drew out a whitefish that he was quite sure weighed four pounds at the very least. A little later Indian Jake drew out another, and almost at the same moment Andy gave a shout as he landed still another.

"Looks like we're goin' t' get whitefish, *whatever*," said Indian Jake.

Standing still upon the open ice soon became cold and disagreeable work. The lines quickly became encrusted with a thick coating of ice, and it was necessary to keep them moving up and down in the hole, else the water would freeze at once. Even then they must clear away the accumulated ice frequently.

With the rising sun a breeze sprang up from the west to add to the discomfort, and presently Indian Jake, unhooking a whitefish, asked:

"How many fish you got, lads?"

"I've got four fine ones," David announced.

"I've got three," said Andy.

"I've got three, and that makes ten," calculated Indian Jake. "That's all we'll use this week and next week and th' week after. They's no need standin' here and freezin', and we might as well go back t' th' tilt. Pull in, boys, and we'll go."

Indian Jake and David drew in their lines, and proceeded to clear them of ice, but Andy, with his still in the water hole, was making no preparation to leave.

"Come, Andy," David shouted. "Jake and me are 'most ready to go."

"I can't," answered Andy. "My hook's snagged on something, and I can't pull un in."

"Let me try her," said Indian Jake, who had wound his line, and was picking up the frozen fish and dropping them into an empty flour bag he had brought for the purpose.

"Here, try un," and Andy surrendered the line to Indian Jake, just as the line gave a mighty tug.

"Why, you've got a fish on there!" exclaimed Indian Jake. "He's as big as a porpoise, too, whatever he is!"

Vastly excited, the lads watched Indian Jake manipulate the line, drawing the fish nearer and nearer the hole.

"He's most t' th' hole!" cried David, no less excited than Andy. "Watch out now! Watch, now! You're gettin' he, Jake!"

"There he is!" shouted Andy, when, a moment later, the head of an immense fish appeared at the end of the line in the water hole.

"Here!" directed Jake. "You lads take th' line and hold steady! Don't jerk; just keep a steady pull! Don't let it slip back any!"

David and Andy seized the line as directed, and held tight. Indian Jake, regardless of the cold, threw off his right mitten, drew his sheath knife from his belt, and leaning far over the hole drove it with a hard, quick blow into the top of the fish's head. Then flinging the knife out upon the ice, he plunged his hand into the water, slipped his fingers under the gills of the fish, and drew it out upon the ice. Then without a moment's delay he thrust his hand under his adiky to dry it, and prevent its freezing.

"That's one of 'em," he said coolly. "That's a namaycush, and a forty pounder if he's anything."

Of course Andy was proud, though he did not claim all the credit of catching the big namaycush. The glory of such a fish was quite enough, in his estimation, to be distributed among the three.

"Now we'll have fish for half th' winter, *whatever!*" he declared.

"That we will, now!" said David.

"And good eatin', too," said Indian Jake, recovering his mitten. "There's no better eatin' than namaycush."

With his sheath knife Indian Jake severed the head, cut open the fish, and cleaned it.

"Now 'twon't be so heavy to carry," he explained.

Already it was stiffening with the cold, and Indian Jake, lifting it to his shoulder, set out for the tilt, while David and Andy with the bag of whitefish, followed.

They were nearing the tilt when suddenly Indian Jake paused and peered intently up the lake shore. David and Andy followed his gaze and saw something, close in the edge of the trees, move.

"Deer!" exclaimed Indian Jake.

The three ran for their rifles.

XVI

CHRISTMAS EVE ON THE FUR TRAILS

INDIAN Jake flung the big namaycush into the snow at the tilt door. David and Andy dropped the bag of whitefish by its side, and all, rushing into the tilt, seized their rifles and cartridge bags.

"You lads go up through th' woods and look for 'em on that side," directed Indian Jake. "I'll go up along th' shore. We'll be sure to get 'em one side or the other."

Without a word David and Andy, at a run, but with as little noise as possible, took the direction indicated. Indian Jake, running where he was hidden by brush, stooping low where there was danger that the caribou might see him, followed the ice close to the shore where overhanging brush offered cover to his movements, but where there was firm footing, and he could travel at good speed.

As they neared the place where the caribou had last been seen, the boys moved more cautiously. They stole through the trees without a sound. Their rifles were held ready for instant use.

Suddenly a shot rang out. At the same instant came a sound of crashing bushes, and three caribou burst through the willow brush that lined the lake, and dashed into the forest. David and Andy threw their rifles to their shoulders and fired simultaneously, but with one fleeting glimpse the animals were lost among the thick foliage of the spruce trees.

"They're gone!" exclaimed David in great disappointment. "We missed un, and we won't get any of un now!"

"Jake got in one shot," consoled Andy. "Maybe he knocked *one* of un down *whatever.*"

"Let's have a look where they went through," suggested David, leading the way.

"What's that? Did you hear that?" asked Andy, as the sound of a movement came to their ears.

"It's a deer!" shouted David excitedly, running in the direction the caribou had taken. "We hit un! We knocked one down! See un?"

They had indeed wounded a big caribou. Hidden by the trees it had run for a score of yards before it fell, and had been out of their line of vision until they reached a point where they had a clear view of the trail the fleeing caribou had made in the snow. The caribou was now vainly struggling to regain its feet, and a bullet from David's rifle was sent to end its suffering.

"A good shot!" said Indian Jake, who had heard the firing and now overtook the boys.

"Did you knock one down too?" asked Andy excitedly.

"No, I made a clean miss of 'em," Indian Jake confessed. "They got a sniff of us and took fright, and I just took a chance shot. You lads made good shootin' t' catch 'em running!"

"We never thought we touched un," said David "We never has time t' take fair aim. We just pulls up and lets go."

"'Twas quick shootin'," declared Andy. "I wonder which of us hit un—you or me—Davy?"

But they were never to know that, and it mattered little. They had secured fresh meat, which was needed, and that was the chief consideration.

"He's good and fat," said David, prodding the carcass with his toe. "He's like t' have four fingers o' fat on *his* back."

"And we'll have deer's meat for Christmas!" exclaimed Andy.

"We'd better skin him right away, before he freezes," said Indian Jake, drawing his sheath knife.

With David's assistance Indian Jake deftly and quickly removed the skin, while Andy hurried to the tilt to fetch an ax and a toboggan. Then they dressed the carcass, cut the meat into convenient pieces, and in less

than half an hour were returning to the tilt with an abundant supply of fresh meat, and very well satisfied with the result of their morning's work.

The meat of the bear which Andy had killed at the time of their arrival had long since been consumed. Of late they had relied upon rabbits and partridges, and, save for a limited stock of pork, were without fat, which is a necessity in the severe climate of the North. As David had said, the caribou was fat, and in splendid condition, and yielded them an abundant store for several weeks.

They were as hungry as wolves when they drew the toboggan load of meat before the tilt door. David kindled a fire at once, while Andy put over the kettle and Indian Jake cut some luscious steaks to fry, and their dinner became a feast.

"Now," said Andy, "we'll have meat and fish both for Christmas, but I'll be missin' th' plum duff. I wish we'd brought some currants and then we could have the duff, and as fine a Christmas dinner as ever we has at home."

"You're wishin' for a lot, seems to me," remarked Indian Jake.

In the afternoon a platform was erected outside, upon which to store the meat and fish. Here the reserve supply would remain frozen until required, and at the same time be safe from the attack of animals. And when they set out upon the trails on Monday morning both Indian Jake and the boys placed liberal pieces of venison upon their toboggans, with which to stock their other tilts.

The following Friday evening David and Andy reached the Narrows tilt in advance of Indian Jake. They had hurried, for this was Christmas eve, and they wished a long evening to talk of those at home. It was to be the first Christmas they had ever spent from home, and all day a picture of the snug, warm cabin at The Jug had been before them as they trudged through the silent, snow-clad wilderness.

It was cold. Their adikys were thickly coated with hoar frost. The fur of the hoods, encircling their faces, was heavy with ice, accumulated moisture from the breath.

Twilight was deepening, and the snow-covered tilt within was dark. David lighted a candle, and the boys picked the ice from their eyelashes—always a painful operation. A handful of birch bark and some split wood had been left ready prepared, and David thrust them into the stove and applied a match. A moment later the fire was roaring cheerfully.

Then they unpacked their toboggan, stowed the things in the tilt, and Andy took his ax and the kettle to their water hole while David with his ax went out to the elevated platform and secured a generous portion of the frozen namaycush. And when presently Andy returned with the kettle of water and David with the fish, the tilt was as warm and comfortable as any one could wish.

"Now," said David as they removed their adikys, and after shaking the frost from them hung them upon pegs, "we'll have a fine rest till Monday. We can sleep till daybreak if we wants. There'll be no workin' on Christmas, *whatever*."

"And we'll have a fine dinner tomorrow," Andy appended enthusiastically, "and have all day t' talk and do as we please."

"That we will," said David.

"I wish, now, we had some currants t' make th' plum duff like Margaret always makes on Christmas," said Andy wistfully. "We'll have a good dinner, but 'twill be no different from what we has every day."

"We've only been havin' th' deer's meat this week, and we never tires of un, and we've got plenty t' eat, *whatever*," said David.

"That we has, and 'tis wonderful good!" agreed Andy. "We has a fine snug place t' rest in, and as fine grub as any one could want, and enough t' be thankful for. I were just wishin' for plum duff so's t' have somethin' different on Christmas. But we're hunters now, and we can't expect all the fine things we has at home."

"Plum duff!" the exclamation came from Indian Jake, who had come so silently that the boys had not heard him until at that moment he opened the door. "Plum duff in a huntin' camp! Ain't you forgot about plum duff yet? You'll be wantin' sweets next!"

"I was just *wishin'*," explained Andy.

"They's no use wishin' for things can't be had," said Indian Jake, pushing back the hood of his adiky and warming his fingers for a moment before going out of doors to unpack his toboggan.

Indian Jake was, to all appearances, in no very good humor. The boys fell silent, while David proceeded to fry a pan of fish. Presently the half-breed returned with his belongings, and stowing them under his bunk he remarked:

"Don't meddle with un, now."

After he had hung up his adiky he lighted his pipe and smoked silently, speaking never a word, and seemingly forgetful of the boys' presence, until David announced:

"Grub's ready, Jake."

This was an appealing announcement. The half-breed knocked the ashes from his pipe, helped himself liberally, and at once became more sociable.

"What fur this week?" he asked expectantly, as he ate.

"One marten and one red," announced David. "How'd you make out, Jake?"

"Not so bad," said Indian Jake. "Did you fetch th' marten and red down?"

"Yes, you can see un after supper if you likes," offered David.

"This is fine fish," remarked Indian Jake, after a little. "'Twas a fine catch, Andy."

"Aye, 'twere that!" admitted Andy. "But I never could have got he without you and David helpin'."

Indian Jake was silent again, and scarcely spoke another word during the whole evening. He examined the marten and fox skins, when David produced them, with an eye of critical appraisal and evident appreciation, but offered no comments. Once or twice, as the boys chatted of home and made an effort to draw him into the conversation, he merely grunted the briefest reply. Indeed it seemed to be his wish to be left to his pipe and his thoughts, undisturbed, and they said no more to him nor he to them.

XVII

INDIAN JAKE'S SURPRISE

DAVID and Andy had agreed to sleep later on Christmas morning. This was to be a day of rest and recreation. Sleeping late meant, to them, until break of day. But Indian Jake arose at the usual early hour, and his movements aroused the boys, and through force of habit they sat up in their bunk.

"No need of you fellers gettin' up yet unless you want to," said Indian Jake cheerfully. "I had some things I wanted t' do, so I got up t' get un done before breakfast. I'll call you when breakfast is ready. This is Christmas, you know."

"Thank you, Jake," yawned David, snuggling back into his sleeping bag. "I'm thinkin' I'll take another snooze, then. Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas to both of you!" broke in Andy, who, following David's example, settled down again into his bag. "I'm thinkin' I'll snooze some more, too."

"The same to you, lads! I'll call you when I'm through fussin' around." The half-breed spoke with unusual heartiness and good nature. It was evident that his mood of silence and sullen indifference of the previous evening had passed, and that he was in an excellent frame of mind.

Indian Jake proceeded at once to put flour into the mixing pan, and to knead a quantity of dough. Then, assuring himself by their heavy breathing that the boys were soundly sleeping, he cautiously drew from beneath his bunk a two-quart covered pail that served him, when on the trail, as a cooking kettle. Lifting the cover, he examined the contents.

"They're all right," he said. "They'll do. They've been froze ever since I picked 'em in September."

He now lay down, side by side, two of the boards used for stretching fox pelts, and cutting a piece of dough from the mass in the mixing pan, he placed it upon the boards, and proceeded to roll it thin with the end of a round, dry stick. This done to his satisfaction, he turned up the edges of the dough on all sides, and poured upon it the contents of the pail, which proved to be cranberries. These he spread evenly over the dough, and rolling it up, placed it in a small bag of cotton cloth which he produced from his kit bag. The bag containing dough and berries, was now deposited in the tin pail, the cover replaced, and the pail set behind the stove.

"The lads'll never look into that," he observed, "and she'll be safe enough there, and won't get chilled till I wants her."

He again reached under his bunk and drew forth a package which he had deposited there with the kettle and other personal belongings upon his arrival the previous evening. Looking furtively, to make certain the boys were not awake and observing him, he undid this, and there appeared a big fat goose, all picked and cleaned. He proceeded at once to cut this into sections, which he dropped into the large cooking kettle which was one of the furnishings of the tilt.

"There," he said, after covering the goose with cold water, putting the lid on the kettle and placing it beside the other, behind the stove, "she's froze pretty hard, but that'll draw th' frost out, and I can set her on when I'm ready, and cook her in the same water."

Turning then to the dough remaining in the pan, he began to mould it into cakes, and fry it after the usual fashion.

"Plum duff!" he muttered to himself as he placed the frying pan on the stove. "If we're goin' t' keep Christmas we may's well keep her right, and surprisin' is a part of keepin' her. 'Twon't do any harm t' surprise 'em, and make 'em feel good. They'll like me better for it. They like me pretty well now. They brought the fur down, and I didn't have t' show 'em what I had. I wonder how much they'd like me if they knew what I'm plannin' t' do when we goes out in th' spring!"

When Indian Jake had finished bread baking it was broad daylight, and when presently he called the boys several loaves of the hot bread were ranged upon a board by the stove, tea was made and caribou steaks were frying, and the tilt was filled with the pleasant odor of cooking.

"Oh, but it smells good!" exclaimed Andy, springing out of his bunk.

"I feel like I could eat a whole deer!" declared David.

"Well, get washed up, then!" grinned Indian Jake "Breakfast is ready and waitin'."

A storm had sprung up in the night. As they ate they could hear the wind howling around the tilt, and dashing snow in spiteful gusts against the door. But with the cheerful, crackling fire in the stove they were as warm and cozy as any one could wish, and after breakfast, when Indian Jake lighted his pipe and the boys snuggled down in vast and luxurious contentment, Andy remarked:

"'Tis fine t' feel we can 'bide inside, and don't have t' go out in th' snow t' cut wood or anything. 'Tis a fine day for Christmas."

They discussed the furs they had accumulated, and what they were likely to get before the season closed, and the price the furs would bring, and the boys were made vastly happy by Indian Jake's reassurance that they already had, he was quite certain, enough to pay the expenses of Jamie's operation. Then it was quite natural they should be deeply concerned about their father's broken leg, and whether it was healing, and whether or not the mist in Jamie's eyes was continuing to thicken. Indian Jake was wholly optimistic.

"Your father's up and about before this," he cheered. "He's feedin' th' dogs and 'tendin' t' things, and like as not doin' some huntin' close by Th' Jug. There's no need worryin' about Jamie's eyes, either. Doctor Joe's lookin' out for them. He'll see to 'em and take care of 'em. He'll never let th' lad go blind." Indian Jake's positive manner lent this assurance the character of certainty. It seemed to remove from the day the last cloud, and they fell to speculating upon what the folk were doing at The Jug, and how they were enjoying the Christmas day.

And thus they talked of this and that until at length Indian Jake announced that it was time to "think of dinner," and reaching behind the stove brought forth the big kettle containing the goose, and set it upon the

fire, after taking a surreptitious peek under the cover.

"What'll we have for dinner?" asked David. "I'm gettin' hungry already."

"Meat and other things. They's no knowin' what all," answered Indian Jake cautiously.

"What'll there be t' have besides meat?" asked Andy curiously.

"Whitefish, maybe—and other things. But I don't want any questions asked," warned Indian Jake. "I'm gettin' dinner. You'll see what we have when th' time comes."

Indian Jake was most mysterious, and he was in great good humor with it all. The boys were keyed to a high state of expectancy. Something unusual was surely in store for them. The kettle boiled and in due time sent forth a most delicious and appetizing odor. The boys speculated and endeavored to identify the odor until suddenly David, with a happy thought, exclaimed:

"She smells like goose!"

"Where'd I be gettin' goose *this* time o' year?" asked Indian Jake, as though it were a most preposterous suggestion. "Didn't we eat all the geese we had frozen up after the bear's meat was gone?"

"Aye," admitted David regretfully, "we ate un all; but she *smells* wonderfully like goose, and I wish she were goose!"

"She ain't deer's meat, *whatever!*" declared Andy.

"You'll see when the time comes," was all the satisfaction Indian Jake would give them, as he partially lifted the lid and threw some salt into the kettle as seasoning. Then, pouring boiling water into the kettle containing the pudding, he placed it also on the stove.

"What's in *that*, now?" asked Andy.

"They's no tellin'," Indian Jake grinned. "They might be 'most anything. Davy, get a pan of whitefish ready to fry, whilst I mix some dumplings for th' big kettle. We'll start in with whitefish."

The boys could scarcely contain their curiosity. The mystery was thickening, and the odor of goose was growing more appealing. Even when Indian Jake dropped the dumplings into the kettle, and they took big whiffs when he lifted the lid, they could make nothing of it.

"Oh-h-!" breathed Andy ecstatically. "But that smells good! And I'm hungrier'n I ever was in my life!"

"So be it!" declared David, turning the fish.

Indian Jake brewed the tea, and at last dinner was ready.

"Don't eat too much of th' fish," he cautioned. "That's just a starter."

And so maintaining his air of mystery, and keeping the boys in suspense until the last moment, he lifted the cover from the kettle at the proper time with the announcement:

"It's goose, lads, with dumplin's. You guessed right."

"Oh! Goose! Goose!" exploded Andy.

"I thought she smelled wonderfully like goose!" exclaimed David.

Indian Jake grinned broadly.

"This is just the best Christmas dinner we ever could have!" enthused Andy, as Indian Jake dished him a liberal portion.

"Where'd you get un, Jake?" asked David, as Indian Jake filled his plate. "After the bear's meat were gone I were thinkin' we ate th' last goose we had."

"I shot un just before th' freeze up," explained Indian Jake. "I was huntin' up near where my first tilt is, and I left un in th' tilt where she froze up and kept good, and I kept un for a Christmas feed. And now we're havin' th' feed!"

But it *was* a dinner! And how they ate! They were sure the goose was every whit as good as though it had been fresh killed! It was fat and tender as ever a goose could be, and Indian Jake explained that while it was a big goose, it was a young one! And the dumplings! They were light and fluffy, and there was plenty of gravy to cover them!

"Don't eat too much, now!" warned Indian Jake. "Save room for what's comin'!"

Something was surely coming! Whatever it was, it bobbed merrily in the kettle, making the cover dance and jingle a lively tune. At last Indian Jake arose, and, taking the mixing pan, cleaned and dried it carefully.

The boys were on tiptoes, with curiosity and expectation. Indian Jake had never done anything with so much deliberation in his life! Satisfied, finally, that the pan was quite dry, he lifted the lid of the kettle and disclosed a cotton bag filled almost to bursting. With the point of his sheath knife he lifted the tied end of the bag cautiously, seized it quickly, and transferred the bag from the boiling water into the pan.

"Duff!" shouted Andy. "Plum duff!"

"Um-m-m! Plum duff!" echoed David.

Indian Jake ripped the bag its length, and with a dexterous movement lifted it, leaving the pudding naked, and disclosed in all its glory, announcing as he did so:

"Cranberry puddin'!"

Then he cut it into three big portions, and covering each with molasses, in lieu of sauce, passed one to each of the boys.

"There 'tis," he said. "Go to un, and see how you like un!"

Like it! They were both quite sure they had never eaten *such* a pudding in all their life. Andy declared it "A wonderful lot better than plum duff!" It was a fit crown for the dinner.

Indian Jake explained that he had picked the berries one day when they were making a portage along the Nascauppee River. He had put them in the tea pail which he used on his trail, and there he found them when he opened the pail at his first tilt. They were frozen, and he stowed them away with other things under his bunk, and quite forgot them until he heard Andy wishing for plum duff on the day they killed the caribou.

"Then I makes up my mind if you wants plum duff so bad, we'll use t' berries and have some," he concluded.

"You've been thinkin' up a wonderful lot o' surprises for us," said Andy appreciatively.

The wind continued to howl and the snow to drift outside, but it troubled them not in the least. They were as snug and warm and satisfied as ever mortals can be. They were as happy, too—only David and Andy complained that they had eaten too much. But that is characteristic of boys the world over, on such occasions. And as for Indian Jake, he had reason to be the happiest of the three, for there is no happiness so complete as that which comes from giving others pleasure.

And if it were to be measured by appreciation rather than by variety or quality of cooking, or manner of service, I daresay nowhere in all the world was a better dinner served that Christmas day than in the little Narrows tilt on Seal Lake, in the heart of the Labrador wilderness.

XVIII SNOWBLIND

TIGHTER and tighter grew the grip of winter. As January advanced the days grew longer, and the weather became more bitterly and terribly cold. The great white, limitless wilderness was frozen now into a silence awful in its solemnity. Even the wild creatures of the forest feared the blighting hand of the frost king, and lay quiet in their lairs, and the traps yielded small returns for the tremendous effort put forth by the hunters. It seemed to David and Andy as they plodded the dreary trails during this period that they were the only living things in all the silent, solitary world.

Sudden and terrible, too, were the storms—so terrible that no man could have resisted exposure to them. And sometimes the trappers were held prisoners for days at a time in the tilts, for to have gone forth would have been to go to certain destruction.

This was a trying period. Idleness always breeds discontent, and the trappers chafed, and became moody, when storms interfered with the regular routine of their work. Following the Christmas celebration, Indian Jake lapsed into his customary habit of long, silent broodings, when he seemed to have no wish for companionship and was scarcely aware of the boys' presence.



"We've been goin' long enough to be at the tilt," said David

With the end of February and coming of March the cold gradually, though reluctantly, lessened. The animals began again to stir more actively and the traps to yield, as in earlier winter. There were still the storms to contend against, however. They came now with even less warning than formerly, and David and Andy found themselves in many a tight pinch, and had adventures a-plenty, but adventure is the daily portion of the trapper. They suffered with frost-bitten cheeks and noses now and again, but they never thought of this as a hardship. Every one who ventures forth in a Labrador winter expects sooner or later to have frost-bitten cheeks and nose, and seldom is he disappointed.

"I'm wishin', now, I had my snow glasses here, but they're down in th' tilt," remarked David one bright morning in early April when the snow, reflecting the sun rays, glistened with dazzling brilliancy.

"I'm wishin' I had mine, too, but I didn't bring un, either," said Andy. "'Twas a bit hazy when we left th' tilt, and I didn't think I'd need un."

"'Tis time t' wear un now, and we mustn't come out again without un, whether 'tis hazy or no. There'll be a bad glare on th' snow out on th' mesh today," David predicted.

"'Twon't be long now till we strikes up th' traps, will it?" asked Andy.

"Th' fur'll be good till th' end of April, and we'll strike up th' end of April, whatever," said David.

"I'm wonderin' and wonderin' how Pop's leg is, and how th' mist in Jamie's eyes is. I'll be wonderful glad t' get home," and there was longing in Andy's voice.

"I hope Pop's 'most well, and th' mist isn't gettin' thicker. I been wonderin' and wonderin', too."

"We got a fine lot o' fur, Davy. Pop'll be wonderful glad."

"That he will. We've got 'most as much as Pop got last year."

"With Pop's share o' Indian Jake's, and with what Doctor Joe gets, I'm thinkin' there'll be plenty t' pay for

Jamie's goin' t' have th' great doctor cut th' mist away and maybe t' pay for part of next year's outfit too."

"Aye, plenty, but I has a wonderful strange feelin' lately, Andy, about Indian Jake not tellin' what fur he has. Indian Jake's fine, though, and I take it 'tis just his way."

"He don't talk much, Davy."

"No, he don't talk much, and he never tells us what fur he's gettin'. I wonders why?"

"I wonders why, now?"

Thus discussing Indian Jake's strange behavior and stranger reticence, and conversing of home, a subject of which they never tired, they traveled on and out upon the dazzling white of the marsh. As David had predicted, the glare was intense, and when they reached the cluster of spruce trees where they were accustomed to boil their kettle for dinner at midday, Andy complained that his eyes pained him badly and he could not see aright.

"We'll wait a bit, till th' noon glare is past," suggested David. "There's plenty o' time t' get back t' th' tilt, with th' long day now. My eyes hurt wonderful bad too."

So they built up their fire and for an hour lounged upon a seat of spruce boughs they had arranged, holding their eyes closed, while they talked, to relieve them from the intense light reflected by the snow. The rest, however, was of no avail. The pain in their eyes grew steadily worse, and it was becoming more difficult to raise the lids, and presently David announced that they had best return to the tilt as quickly as possible.

"'Tis hard t' see anything," said Andy, as they set forth.

"'Tis snowblindness. We'll go straight for th' tilt," suggested David, "and not stop t' fix th' traps."

A wind was springing up and very soon the sky became overcast. In a little while snow began to fall. David in advance, Andy directly behind him, the two walked for a time in silence. At length David stopped.

"Andy, b'y, can you see th' trail?" he asked. "My eyes is wonderful bad."

"No," said Andy, "'tis growing dark t' me."

The snow thickened as they plodded along, and the rising wind whirled it about in clouds.

"'Twill be a nasty night," remarked David at the end of another hour.

"'Twill that," agreed Andy.

"I'm glad we turned back when we did," said David.

For a long time neither spoke. Both were stumbling. The pain in their eyes was intense, and it was only with the greatest effort that they could open them for brief intervals.

"We've been goin' long enough t' be at th' tilt," said David, breaking the silence again.

"I were thinkin' so," said Andy.

Again they walked on in silence, each with the fear in his heart that they were lost, but neither voicing it until suddenly David stopped with the exclamation:

"We're not on th' mesh at all, Andy! We're on th' river!"

And sure enough, turning to the right they discovered the thick willow hedge which lined the river bank.

"Th' snow is so deep on th' ice I didn't know th' difference," explained David.

"And I didn't know th' difference," said Andy.

"We missed th' tilt, and—and I'm afraid we'll have a hard time, between th' blindness and th' storm, findin' it, Andy," David said, hesitatingly.

"We'll—we'll have a hard time," agreed Andy.

"But," said David, with hope in his voice, "if we keeps goin' down th' river we'll come t' th' Half-way tilt, *whatever*, and from th' time we been walkin' we must have come a long way down th' river now. If we keeps goin' we'll sure come t' th' Half-way tilt before dark."

"We'll sure come to un if we keeps goin'," said Andy.

"Keep plenty o' grit," cheered David.

"Aye, plenty o' grit—and a stout heart," said Andy.

The wind was steadily increasing, and even now driving the snow down the river valley in suffocating clouds, but the two boys kept bravely on. Once Andy fell, and David helped him up, and a little later he stumbled and fell again, and again David helped him to his feet.

"I'm—wonderful—tired," said Andy.

"'Tis wearisome work," soothed David.

"'Tis growin' night," said Andy.

"Aye, 'tis growin' night," David admitted reluctantly.

Again and again Andy stumbled and fell, and presently David relieved him of his rifle and carried both his own and Andy's.

"I'm—so—sleepy," breathed Andy.

"Keep your grit, Andy," David cheered, though his own voice betrayed the overpowering weariness that was stealing over him.

"We'll—keep—our—grit," murmured Andy in a strange and scarcely intelligible voice.

Whenever Andy fell now, as he did with growing frequency, David found it necessary to exert his utmost strength to lift the boy to his feet. At length the horrible truth forced itself upon David. Half blind and exhausted, they were hopelessly lost in the wilderness, amidst the terrors of a northern blizzard.

Staggering with weariness and exhaustion, he dragged the half unconscious Andy through the first fortunate opening in the willow brush upon which he stumbled as he blindly groped his way. In doing so he had a vague, forlorn hope that in the shelter of the forest he might succeed in kindling a fire. But here, as everywhere, utter darkness surrounded him, made darker by his attack of snowblindness, and he dared not release for an instant his grip upon Andy's arm, in fear that he might lose him.

Now, when Andy fell, David, who held his arm, fell with him, and lying there a sense of vast relief stole over David, and he wished to sleep. He could hear the wind shrieking and moaning through the tree tops. It seemed far away, and lying there in the snow beyond its reach he was warm and comfortable, and his eyes were heavy. Suddenly the realization that they must keep moving at whatever cost of effort flashed upon his brain, and rising to his knees he shook Andy, and with desperation called to him to get up, and finally dragged himself and Andy to their feet.

"Keep—your—grit—Andy! We—must—keep our—grit, b'y!" he encouraged.

"Keep—our—grit," mumbled Andy, and the two staggered forward again.

And then there came before David's half-closed, blinded eyes what appeared like a dim cloud of fire, rising out of the blackness. Clinging to Andy's arm, he lurched forward, and stumbled and fell, with Andy by his side, and with the far-away moan of the wind in his ears, like distant unearthly voices. And now he lay still and did not try to rise.

XIX

THE HALF BREED DESERTS

DAVID was vaguely aware of a babel of human voices, and that he was being lifted, and then came a sudden consciousness of warmth, accompanied by the pleasant odor of burning wood.

He attempted to open his eyes, but the effort resulted in such sharp pain that he directly closed them again. Dimly, however, he had seen in the brief interval his eyes were open that Andy was by his side, and the dark forms of Indians bending over them, and the blaze of a fire. Then he fell into the heavy slumber of complete exhaustion.

With returning consciousness the following day David's first thought was that he was in his bunk in the Namaycush Lake tilt. He could hear the blizzard still raging outside. Vaguely he felt relieved that the storm would not permit him and Andy to venture out upon the trails, and that he might rest a little longer, for he was aware of an unusual lassitude and weariness and a desire to remain in bed.

Then there stole upon him the recollection of the terrible struggle in the blizzard, how Andy had become exhausted, and his own desperate effort to keep Andy upon his feet and to keep moving himself. Dimly he recalled the faint cloud of fire that had suddenly risen before him in the darkness at a moment when he felt his strength exhausted and he sank into the snow, and then the sensation of warmth, the vision of Indians and the echo of voices.

David's senses were awake now, and sitting up he attempted to look about him. Faintly, as through a smoke, he saw a fire and an Indian woman bending over it. Two Indians sat opposite, smoking, and there were other Indians by the fire. He recognized at once the interior of an Indian wigwam. Then the pain in his eyes compelled him to close them again immediately.

"Beeg snow. Mooch bad," said one of the Indians good-naturedly, observing that David was awake.

"Where am I?" asked David.

"Sa-peesh tent," said the Indian.

"Andy! Is Andy all right?" David asked apprehensively.

"Andy sleep mooch," laughed the Indian. "Heem all right."

David was vastly relieved by this assurance. He knew Sa-peesh, the old Mountaineer Indian, well, for Sa-peesh had camped at the post each summer for as many years as David could remember, and of all the Indians that came there was the only one who could speak English.

With Sa-peesh's limited command of English, and the few Indian words that David understood, he presently learned that he and Andy had fallen headlong against the wigwam in the night, that the Indians had thus discovered and rescued them, and that they were quite welcome to remain until they were sufficiently recovered from exhaustion and snowblindness to return to the tilts. He also learned that they were a considerable distance to the eastward of Namaycush Lake, and had doubtless traveled up, instead of, as they had supposed, down, the river.

Satisfied with the assurance that Andy was quite safe, David lay back again upon the bed of boughs, as there was nothing else to do, and as he lay there he recounted to himself the happenings of the previous day.

The cloud of fire that had appeared so suddenly before him, then, was the Indians' tent, with the firelight filtering through it and he whispered a little prayer of thanksgiving that God had guided him and Andy to it—and that they had kept their grit. Then he heard a movement by his side, and Andy's voice speaking his name.

"Here I be, Andy!" said David eagerly. "How you feelin'?"

"Not so bad if 'tweren't for th' hurt in my eyes. Where are we, Davy?" asked Andy.

"In Sa-peesh's tent, and away up th' river instead o' down," answered David. "We ran into their tent in th' dark. 'Twas good we kept our grit, Andy, or we'd ha' perished before we got here."

"We *did* keep our grit, now, didn't we Davy, and stout hearts, too?" and there was pride and satisfaction in Andy's voice.

"And now," continued David, "we'll be here a week, *whatever*, before th' snowblind leaves us, and then in another fortnight 'twill be time t' strike up th' traps."

"But we made a fine hunt, *whatever*," said Andy.

"That we did!" agreed David. "A fine hunt, now!"

While the boys were talking Mrs. Sa-peesh was dipping generous portions of boiled venison from a kettle that simmered over the fire, and now Sa-peesh interrupted the boys with an invitation to eat, setting before them, at the same time, the dish of venison, two tin cups and a kettle of tea. And though they could open their eyes only to narrow slits, because of the pain, there was no complaint to be made with their appetite, and they managed well enough.

And thus, miraculously, David and Andy were rescued, and they were safe enough, and comfortable enough, too, in the wigwam with Sa-peesh and Mrs. Sa-peesh, and Mesh-tuk (tree), a young Indian who lived with them and hunted with Sa-peesh, and Amish-ku (beaver) and Ni-pit-se (summer), the two children. Amish-ku, a lad of twelve, and Ni-pit-se, a maiden of fifteen years, were exceedingly well pleased that they were to have the companionship of David and Andy for so long, and they chattered to the two boys in their

wild Indian tongue, and there was a deal of sport for all, learning to pronounce each other's strange words.

It was Saturday evening that week when Indian Jake reached the Narrows tilt, for he too had been delayed by the storm. He was not in the least astonished or disturbed that the boys did not appear as usual.

"Held up by the storm," said he to himself. "They'll be here tomorrow."

He was somewhat at a loss to account for their non-arrival on Sunday. The storm had continued but two days, and he could think of no good reason why they should have been delayed longer. He slept not the less soundly, however, Sunday night, and on Monday morning as usual set out upon the weekly round of his trail, well satisfied that the boys would appear later.

He was mystified, however, upon returning the following Friday, to discover that David and Andy had not visited the tilt during his absence, and still more mystified when they failed to appear either that evening or Saturday evening.

"Something has happened," he said, when it grew so late he was assured they would not come. "I'll go over their trail tomorrow and take a look for them."

Accordingly, early on Sunday morning he set out with his long, swinging, rapid stride for the Halfway tilt, and making no pause to visit traps, and not following the windings of the trail but taking a straight course, reached there a considerable time before midday. A brief survey was sufficient to satisfy him that the boys had not been there for many days, and without halting to prepare his dinner he continued to the Namaycush Lake tilt.

It was early afternoon of the long April day when the tilt came into view, and as he approached it his sharp eyes took in every detail of the surroundings. There had been no storm since the blizzard in which David and Andy were lost, and the half-breed was quick to discover no track of snowshoes.

"Not here since the storm!" he exclaimed.

The boys' toboggan leaned against the tilt outside, and within, the half-breed discovered their sleeping bags and other equipment which they usually carried with them. He closed the tilt and set out upon the marsh, but no sign or mark could be found to indicate the course they had taken.

"Lost in the storm," he said, turning back after an hour's fruitless search. "No use looking for them any longer. They've perished. They're buried deep enough under the drifts somewhere, and when the thaw comes they'll be food for foxes and wolves."

Indian Jake proceeded to kindle a fire in the stove, and, while the kettle was boiling, to examine two marten pelts, which hung from the ceiling. These he took down and stuffed into the bosom of his shirt. Then turning his attention to a search for food, he discovered some fat pork and stale camp bread. He sliced some of the pork into a frying pan and placed it upon the stove. Indian Jake was hungry, for he had eaten nothing since early morning.

When he had disposed of his simple and hastily prepared dinner, the half-breed set out upon his return without delay. When night fell the trail was lighted by a brilliant moon, and he did not stop until near midnight, when he reached the Narrows tilt.

Indian Jake kindled a fire, boiled the kettle, and ate a belated supper. Then he took down a bag suspended from the ceiling, opened it, and drew forth the furs which David and Andy had captured during the winter.

The pelts were in the condition in which they had been cured, the fur side turned in, the fleshy side out, for, as previously explained, in skinning a fur-bearing animal the trapper draws the pelt off whole, necessarily turning it as he draws it down over the head, and it is then stretched upon a properly shaped board, after which all fat and fleshy adhesions are scraped away.

One by one Indian Jake turned down each pelt sufficiently to examine the color and texture of the fur, turned it back again, and laid it on the bunk. Thus he first went over the marten pelts, laying them in three piles, graded as to value and quality. In the same manner he graded the fox and mink pelts. There were also four lynx and the three wolf skins. Indian Jake had previously examined every pelt, to be sure, but never before with the careful criticism he now displayed.

This done he mentally calculated the value, and uttered a huge grunt of satisfaction.

"Worth five hundred dollars—maybe six hundred—at the Bay, and they'd bring nine hundred in Quebec. Good! One more round o' th' trail, and I'll strike up, and go. Won't be safe t' wait for the break up. Wish I had my fur here; I'd go in the mornin'!"

The following morning the half-breed left the tilt at the usual hour, gathering his fur at his tilts as he went, and striking up his traps when he had examined them for his week's catch; and on Friday drew his toboggan as usual to the Narrows tilt.

On Saturday Indian Jake assorted his own furs in the same manner in which he had previously assorted those of David and Andy.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Thought I'd tell 'em what I had! Wonder what they'd said t' that!"

And he held up to his admiring gaze a beautiful silver fox skin, shaking it briskly as he did so, that all its glossy luster might appear to advantage.

"Worth six hundred anyhow," he muttered with satisfaction.

Then he drew out another, shook and examined it in like manner.

"Not so good," he said. "Worth four hundred, though, at the Post. Even if I hadn't got these two silvers, it's the best hunt I ever had. Worth with the silvers about fifteen hundred. And Tom Angus thinks he'll get a third of it! Ugh!"

The balance of the day was occupied in getting together the things he wished to take with him. The venison had long since been eaten. There was some whitefish, taken upon a second fishing excursion, four rabbits and several partridges. A small amount of flour, salt pork and tea also remained. These he carefully packed. On Sunday morning Indian Jake lashed upon his toboggan all of the provisions, a cotton tent, a tent stove, his sleeping bag and other equipment, and all the furs.

Snow was falling when the half-breed closed the tilt door, and, hauling his well-laden toboggan, turned southward. Presently the thick falling flakes closed upon him, and covered his tracks, and no sign or mark remained to indicate in which direction he had gone. The Narrows tilt and the fur trails were now deserted

indeed.

XX

A LETTER FROM THE GREAT DOCTOR

THE Jug was lonely enough after the departure of David and Andy in September. Margaret and Jamie missed them, perhaps, more than Thomas, who was accustomed to the solitude of the trails. Margaret was quite sure the place would have been well-nigh unbearable but for Doctor Joe, who went about his work whistling or singing snatches of song, and who always had a smile or a joke when he breezed into the cabin. And his evening stories were something to look forward to.

Doctor Joe was bustling about from morning until night, these days, preparing for his winter's work. There was no end of work to be done about the cabin, that all might be made "ship-shape," as he said, "and snug for any storm that might blow."

Thomas was as patient as ever a man with a broken leg could be. But it was quite natural that he should wish to be up and about. A hundred times during these weeks he asked Doctor Joe if it were not time to take the "lashin's" off his leg, and declared that he was "weary of dawdlin' there in bed." His restlessness was not to be wondered at, for never before in all his life had Thomas Angus "dawdled" in bed for a single day. Thomas Angus had always been an uncommonly strong and healthy man, for which he was duly thankful.

Never once after David and Andy departed did Jamie utter a word of complaint about the mist in his eyes. They had gone forth to do great deeds. They would meet, up there in that lonely land of mystery, many a bitter hardship, and they would have "plenty o' grit, and keep their hearts stout, like a man's," for they had promised their father and Jamie they would. Why, then, should he complain? He, too, must keep plenty o' grit, and a stout heart, and be brave and patient.

Perhaps, too, Jamie was becoming accustomed to the mist, as one will, in time, become accustomed to anything. Perhaps the abounding hope of youth helped him—and with Jamie it was the hope that one day he would see as well as ever he had—for was not the great doctor to work a wonderful cure—when summer came again? Jamie's faith never wavered. He entertained no doubt that David and Andy and Indian Jake would meet with success, and bring back with them the furs necessary to meet the expense of the journey to New York. He never failed to ask for this in his prayers. Oh, that the faith of childhood, simple, abiding, unquestioning, might never be shattered! What a blessed consolation is faith! What a bulwark of strength in time of need!

Jamie often asked Margaret to describe the mountains to him as she saw them from the cabin windows. It was a vast satisfaction to have the assurance that they were still there, big and brave and strong, standing guard over the world beyond the Bay. And sometimes he would ask her to watch for the moment when the light from the setting sun tipped their highest peaks with glory, and tell him when God reached down to kiss the world good night.

"Now that leg!" announced Doctor Joe one day. "We'll take the splints off and see what it looks like."

"I'm wonderful glad t' have un took off," said Thomas, his face brightening visibly.

Doctor Joe laughed, as he went to work, and presently the bandages and splints were removed, and he surveyed the leg.

"I never saw a better job!" he exclaimed. "Straight and fine! It won't be long, Thomas, till you'll forget you ever had a broken leg!"

"She feels strange," remarked Thomas.

"Does she, now?" laughed Doctor Joe.

"Aye, she does that! She pricks and hurts, and she wasn't hurtin' a bit when th' lashin's were on," said Thomas.

"That'll soon pass away. It's the blood circulating," Doctor Joe explained.

And after that it was not long until Thomas was moving about the cabin on a pair of rude crutches Doctor Joe had made for him, and mightily pleased he was.

"Plenty t' be thankful for," declared Thomas. "Here, now I'll soon have as good a pair o' legs as ever I had, with Doctor Joe's mendin', and if Doctor Joe hadn't been here 'tis like as not, and liker too, I'd ha' been crippled for life."

Late in October winter snapped down upon them in a night. Everywhere the great bay was frozen, and there was no longer the sound of lapping waves upon the beach. Very soon, too, the cheerful voice of Roaring Brook, tumbling headlong over the rocks, was hushed into silence.

Rime filled the air, and the cabin windows became thick-crustured with a frost that never melted that livelong winter. Before the end of November the snow lay a full fathom deep every where, and there was no going abroad now, save upon snowshoes.

But there was wood enough ranked high in the shed to keep the big stove roaring and crackling merrily, and the cabin assumed a greater coziness than ever.

Thomas busied himself making snowshoes for future use, mending dog harness, and attending to innumerable odd jobs for which ordinarily in his busy existence he found small leisure.

"'Tis a blessin' t' feel I has th' time for un without neglectin' and makin' a shift of other work," he declared. Thomas found a blessing and a reason for thankfulness in everything.

Each morning almost before the break of dawn Doctor Joe would steal away into the cold, dreary gloom of the silent forest, and each night, as dusk was settling, they would hear his cheery call as he returned. This was the brightest hour of the day for Jamie and Margaret, aye and Thomas, too.

But following the fur trails from morning till night, and day after day, was hard and wearisome work for Doctor Joe. His success as a trapper was indifferent. He was not born and bred to it as were Thomas and the boys. There were days and days when he returned of nights empty handed, but he always wore a cheerful face and a smile when he entered the lighted cabin, no matter how gloomy it may have been in the dark woods. And if Thomas, perchance, had permitted himself to grow down-hearted, Doctor Joe's smile and cheerfulness raised his spirits and drove the gloom away. There is no tonic more potent than a smile and a cheerful face. 'Tis a great mender of a sore heart.

Doctor Joe, however, in spite of his brave front, was deeply troubled at his lack of success on the trail. It was of vital importance that sufficient furs should be had to pay the way for Jamie's operation, and he was not in the least certain of the result of David's and Andy's winter hunt, or altogether satisfied as to their safety. He could never quite clear his mind of doubts as to Indian Jake's responsibility and integrity. So much depended upon the boys and Indian Jake! Jamie's whole future depended upon them or so Doctor Joe believed. He was watching Jamie's eyes carefully and constantly, and there was no doubt that the mist was gradually but constantly thickening.

When the northern posts are ice-bound the last autumn mail for the coast is left by the mail boat each year at a post three hundred miles to the southward, and carried thence to its destination by dog sledge. Customarily this mail reaches the Hudson Bay Post in Eskimo Bay on the evening of the twenty-second or twenty-third of December. Doctor Joe was keenly anxious for its arrival this year, for he was confident it would contain the hoped-for reply from the great New York surgeon, and as the time approached he was indeed in a state of nervous expectancy.

There was still the uncertainty as to whether or no the surgeon would be in New York the following summer. Doctor Joe had promised that he would be there, or at least held out such strong hopes that Jamie and Thomas and Margaret were depending upon them as a promise, and with the utmost faith. Doctor Joe felt the responsibility keenly, and as the weeks wore away this feeling of personal responsibility increased. He did not dare to think of Jamie's future should his plans fail, and when the thought did force itself upon him a strange panic seized him.

Doctor Joe's anxiety was so keen that he must needs lose no time in receiving the letter that he hoped would come to him, and two days before Christmas, when he came home from the trail in the evening, he announced that he was to go to the Post the following morning.

"How would you like to take the cruise with me, Margaret?" he asked. "You haven't been away from The Jug in six months."

"Oh, 'twould be fine!" exclaimed Margaret, delighted at the prospect. "I'd like so much t' go!"

"Then I'll drive the dogs over, and take you," said Doctor Joe. "Your father and Jamie will do very well without you for one day, and I'm not going out on my trail on Christmas eve. Besides, we're very apt to meet Santa Claus, and we mustn't miss seeing him, for he may have something for Jamie, and the old rascal would like as not go right on and never leave it, if we don't remind him."

Doctor Joe gave a quizzical glance toward Jamie, who was immediately intensely excited.

"Jamie and I'll do fine alone for *one* day," declared Thomas, "though I don't know how we'd ever do without Margaret longer than that. It never would do to miss old Santa Claus, though, and Margaret must go along."

"Ask he—ask he—if you sees he, now, t' bring me a knife!" exclaimed Jamie, vastly excited. "A huntin' knife! When th' mist leaves my eyes I'll have un t' use when I goes huntin' with Pop. Tell he that, and he'll sure give un to me!"

"Very well," agreed Doctor Joe, "we'll tell him. But supposing he has no hunting knives? He may be all out of them. Then what shall he bring you?"

"A jackknife," said Jamie, with prompt decision. "A jackknife that'll be all my own."

Accordingly the following morning Doctor Joe made ready the sledge and harnessed the eight big dogs, and when Margaret heard the dogs yelping in eagerness to be away she came running out, all bundled up, her eyes sparkling and face aglow with the prospect of the journey. When she had seated herself in a big box on the rear of the sledge, Doctor Joe wrapped caribou skins about her and tucked her in as snug and warm as could be. Then he seized the front of the komatik, as they called the sledge, jerked it sharply toward him to break it loose from the snow, and as he did so shouted "Oo-isht! Oo-isht!" With a creak the sledge was freed and the dogs, straining at their traces, shot ahead at a gallop down the steep slope to the ice.

The sledge once in motion coasted after the dogs at a mad pace. Doctor Joe, throwing himself upon it, with his feet extending forward and over the side, drove his heels into the snow in rapid succession, while he pulled back with all his might in an effort to retard the speed. Margaret, enveloped by the cloud of snow which Doctor Joe kicked up, clung desperately to the swaying box. It was exciting and thrilling. At the foot of the slope was a mass of ice hummocks, piled up by the tide, and as the dogs and sledge dashed among them the speed slackened. Here, with quick, agile jerks upon the front of the runners, Doctor Joe steered them safely to the smooth white surface of the Bay.

Now the dogs settled to a comfortable trot. Doctor Joe seated himself upon the sledge, and looking back he and Margaret waved their hands gaily to Thomas and Jamie, who were standing at the cabin door, while Thomas told Jamie what was taking place.

It was dusk when the howl of eager dogs announced the return of Doctor Joe and Margaret. Thomas and Jamie hastened to the door, and were in time to greet them as the sledge drew up the incline.

"Oh, we had a fine trip!" exclaimed Margaret enthusiastically, as she threw off the caribou skins and stepped lightly from the box, quite as pleased and excited with her journey and visit to the trading post as any country girl in our land would be with a journey of a hundred miles and a visit to a great city.

"Did you see Santa Claus?" asked Jamie in high expectation.

"Oh, yes, we saw him!" answered Margaret gaily.

"And is he t' come here?" and Jamie was on tiptoe with excitement.

"He's t' come here!" declared Margaret. "He'll not be passing *here*, *whatever!*"

"We told him that he must come *here*, whatever he did!" called Doctor Joe, who was unharnessing the dogs. "We told him 'twould be a sorry day for him if he passed The Jug without stopping."

"O-h-h!" breathed Jamie.

And presently, when Doctor Joe had turned the dogs loose and fed them, he came stamping into the cabin all aglow with the good news of a letter from the great doctor, who had written that he would cut the mist away from Jamie's eyes. That in itself was the greatest Christmas present that could have come to any of them. Jamie asked a hundred questions about it, and they all declared that they were never before in all their lives made so glad of a Christmas eve.

That night, with faith complete, Jamie hung up his stocking, and sure enough on Christmas morning it contained not only the coveted knife but a little package of candy. And to Margaret's great surprise, for she had not in the least expected to be remembered, Santa Claus had brought her a beautiful knitted sweater to wear about when the cabin was chilly, and she was no less happy with the gift than was Jamie with his.

And Thomas and Doctor Joe were as happy as either of them. Santa Claus must be a very happy old man indeed, for the greatest happiness in the world comes from making others happy. And it is not the worth of a gift in money, either, that counts for value, but the depth of love that goes with it. And after all, every one who does his best to make others happy at Christmas time or at any other time is a Santa Claus.

As the weeks passed the mist in Jamie's eyes grew so thick that at length he ceased his old pathetic habit of brushing his hand before them to drive it away. It hurt Margaret's sympathetic heart solely to see him groping for things that were usually near at hand, but which he could not find.

Thomas, who had long since abandoned his crutches, and was as busy as ever, was openly worried over Jamie's condition, and more than once Margaret discovered Doctor Joe staring long and steadily at Jamie with what she thought was a look of fear in his face, and it startled her. Was it possible, she asked herself, that the blindness might come too soon for the great doctor to work his marvelous cure?

But Doctor Joe said there was no cause for worry, on that score, and for the most part he was outwardly cheerful enough. There was still time, he declared—unless the eyes darkened much more rapidly in the coming weeks than they had during the early winter, and there was no reason to expect that they would.

"It all depends now upon the furs the boys and Indian Jake bring out," he said, "and they'll surely bring enough between them to pay expenses. Four hundred dollars will be plenty, and if we have three hundred I'll take Jamie, anyhow. My little hunt will fetch a hundred, and they'll be certain to have enough to make up the balance."

"O, aye, they'll sure have that much," and Thomas brightened.

"The boys should be out the first of June, and Jamie and I will go on the first mail boat, the last of the month," said Doctor Joe. "It all depends on our getting the furs. We *must* have the furs, and there's no reason to doubt we'll have them."

Jamie had faith, and plenty o' grit, too. *He* had no doubt that David and Andy would come home with a fine lot of furs.

And so they all waited and watched hopefully and expectantly for the return of the hunters, never once dreaming of disappointment or failure, or how strangely awry their plans were to go, as so often is the case with the best laid plans.

XXI

THE TRAIL OF THE DESERTER

INDIAN Jake took a straight course down the lake and through the Narrows. Crossing the lower expansion he turned upon the broad white bed of the river. This he followed until he reached a point where the ice, covering the swift flowing current, became unsafe. Here he entered the forest skirting the north bank, and under cover of the trees kept his rapid pace until mid-afternoon.

During the forenoon the storm had been steadily increasing in violence. Traveling had become uncomfortable and difficult, and, choosing a convenient place to pitch his tent, Indian Jake stretched it between two trees. A full ten feet of snow covered the forest floor and with no attempt to clear a camping place he proceeded to make himself comfortable on the surface of the snow.

He first secured the tent around the bottom with long pegs that sunk deep into the snow and held the canvas firm and taut. Then with his ax he cut two green butts of trees, and laying them side by side and a few inches apart just within the tent, erected his tent stove upon them. The green butts would not burn easily, and their ends, extending a considerable distance beyond the stove on each side, would support it and prevent its sinking when the snow beneath melted with the heat. From within the stove he withdrew three lengths of stovepipe, joined them and set them in position, and the stove was ready for a fire.

Before kindling the fire, however, Indian Jake gathered several armfuls of boughs, snapping them from low-hanging limbs with a deft twist of the wrist. These he spread with some care, as a carpet for the tent, and as a protection from the snow beneath. Indian Jake's shelter now prepared to his satisfaction, he unslashed the toboggan, carried the contents within, and stowed them away with a view to comfort and convenience.

Then taking his ax he devoted himself to chopping firewood of proper length for the stove. Swinging his ax dexterously and industriously for thirty minutes, a sufficient supply was accumulated to serve his needs for several hours. This he piled in neat tiers just within the tent entrance, where it would be at hand when required. With a piece of birch bark for tinder, he now lighted a fire in the stove, and taking his kettle and ax went to the river for water.

When he returned a few minutes later the tent was warm and comfortable. He placed the kettle upon the stove, removed his adiky, and turned his attention to the preparation of dinner. Indian Jake had eaten nothing since early morning, and he was hungry.

Some fried whitefish and pork, some generous pieces of camp bread, and several cups of hot tea made a substantial and satisfying meal. When they were disposed of, the half-breed sliced black tobacco from a plug, filled his pipe, lighted it from the fire with a shaving, and settled himself for luxurious rest.

After the manner of those who are much alone, Indian Jake had the habit of thinking aloud, and now he proceeded to converse audibly with himself.

"Fifteen hundred dollars worth of fur," said he. "It's a fine hunt, takin' it all, with what th' lads got. I never had half as much fur at one time in my life before. I made a good hunt myself. With theirs it makes a fine lot. But they're dead, and they'll never know what I got; I never told 'em. And they'll never know what I does with any of it."

He was silent for a time, then continued:

"They was good fellers t' hunt with. They had a good lot o' grit, too. It was pretty hard for 'em sometimes, on nasty days, but they stuck to it, and got th' fur. I had some good times with 'em, too. Had a good time Christmas, surprisin' 'em with th' goose and puddin'. I wonder why 'tis I like t' surprise folks, and get a good time out'n doin' it. I had one surprise for 'em they'll never know about. I wonder how they'd have liked *that* surprise.

"They brought th' fur down to th' Narrows tilt when I told 'em to. Th' little feller wanted me t' bring mine in too, but I wa'n't goin' t' let 'em know what I had. He kinder suspicioned me, or somethin'. The way it turned out their fur was safe enough. I'd have got th' fur anyhow when I went up t' look for 'em.

"If I'd known where their traps were set I could ha' gone over 'em. They might have some fur in 'em. I could 'a' struck 'em up and took care of 'em, too, like I did on my trail. 'Twouldn't have hurt me any to do that much for Tom Angus. He let me hunt his trail. But he'll find 'em when he comes in next fall."

After a little silence he mused:

"I wonder how Tom Angus is goin' t' take it when they don't show up."

Indian Jake's pipe had gone out. He pushed the ashes down in the bowl, relit it, renewed the fire in the stove, and rising looked out between the tent flaps at the falling snow. Returning to his seat he remarked:

"Likely t' be a nasty day tomorrow, and I may as well stay here. No use travelin' in nasty weather. They's plenty o' time. Guess I'll take it easy. Nobody to worry about me, and I'm just as much t' home here as anywhere. I got grub enough. I may meet up with some o' th' Injuns, and I can travel with them.

"Home!" said he, after a silence. "Th' lads were thinkin' a big lot about th' time when they'd go home. Now they'll never go there. Home's th' finest place in th' world t' be when a feller has one. Huh! What's th' use thinkin' about that. I'll be gettin' homesick for a home I ain't got. This tent's a good enough home. It's got t' suit me, anyhow. It's all right."

The next day it stormed, as Indian Jake had predicted, and he did not leave his camp, but the morning following was clear, and he again set forward.

At midday the half-breed halted to boil the kettle, and making his way toward the river to obtain water, he suddenly stopped and sniffed the air. The wind was blowing up from the opposite side of the river.

"Smoke!" he exclaimed. "They's some one camped across the river!"

Cautiously he stole down to the river bank, and from the cover of brush scanned the opposite shore. His sharp eyes quickly detected half hidden by trees and drift, a small log tilt. Smoke was rising from the protruding stovepipe.

"Who can that be trappin' in there?" Indian Jake asked himself.

As though in answer to his question the tilt door opened, and Uncle Ben Rudder, with kettle and ax, came down to the river, cut open a water hole, filled his kettle and returned to the tilt.

"Th' old wolverine!" exclaimed Indian Jake when Uncle Ben had disappeared. "What's he doin' in here? Tried t' keep me from huntin'! If he'd had *his* way Thomas Angus wouldn't have let me have the Seal Lake trail! Always meddlin' with other folks' business! Well, I got th' trail, and th' fur too, you old skunk!"

The half-breed grinned triumphantly, and his face was not pleasant to see then.

"He'll find out somethin' before I'm through with him," added Indian Jake, and turning about with his unfilled kettle he cautiously returned under cover of the trees to his toboggan. "Wouldn't he like t' run on me now! Wouldn't he like t' know about th' fur I've got!"

Indian Jake resumed his journey. To light a fire would be too dangerous, for even with the wind in an opposite direction, a whiff of smoke carried across the river might disclose his presence to Uncle Ben, and Indian Jake had reason to look upon Uncle Ben as an enemy that just at the present time he did not care to encounter.

Camping at night and traveling leisurely by day, Indian Jake continued down the valley of the Nascaupee until, one afternoon, a little way above the place where the river empties into Grand Lake, he fell upon numerous indications of the presence of bears. A careful examination satisfied him that these were made late the previous fall, and that there were at least two, and possibly more bears, hibernating in the immediate vicinity. His Indian instinct to permit no game to escape him was aroused. Presently the bears would come forth from their long winter sleep. They would be hungry, and could easily be trapped. The temptation was too strong to be resisted.

"I'll have time t' get away over th' ice," he decided. "I can fix up some sort of a canoe while I'm waitin', and if I get caught by th' break-up I can make out. Like as not some of th' Injuns'll be along anyhow. They'll let me go along with 'em. I'm thinkin' I'll stay here a while and trap bear."

And so Indian Jake pitched his camp, made himself comfortable, and began the building of deadfalls, in anticipation of the time when the bears would come forth from their dens.

Here in the seclusion of the forest the half-breed was safe enough from discovery. None would pass this way save the Indians who were his friends, and Uncle Ben Rudder, upon whom he looked as an uncompromising enemy. But not until after the break-up in June would Uncle Ben pass down the river and into Grand Lake in his boat. Indian Jake had the advantage of time. He would break camp and be away before June. In any case there was no probability that Uncle Ben would go ashore here, and even though he did, Indian Jake's tent was sufficiently hidden to escape detection. He took good care that this should be the case,

and he also took good care to leave no trace along the river bank that would give hint of his presence, or arouse suspicion that he was in the vicinity.

XXII

THE BURNING TILT

DAVID and Andy were made as comfortable as ever they could be in a wigwam. Sa-peesh and his family, but particularly A-mish-ku and Ni-pit-se, were well pleased to have them there. They had seen none save the members of their own family since the previous autumn, and A-mish-ku, after the manner of boys the world over, craved the companionship of other boys, and he and Ni-pit-se were glad to see new faces and hear new voices.

Ni-pit-se was shy at first, but her timidity passed away quickly enough. And she took it upon herself to minister to David's and Andy's needs, and she found a vast deal of pleasure in nursing them. Their coming, and these new duties, made a welcome break in the monotony of the days, for even an Indian maiden wearies sometimes of the changeless solitary routine of her wilderness life.

And so, despite the pain and discomfort of their temporary affliction, David and Andy were well content, and recovered so rapidly from their attack of snowblindness that they might have returned to their trail at the end of a week but for the fact that Andy's feet were frostbitten, and still too sore to walk so far. And so, of necessity, they tarried another week in the wigwam of Sa-peesh, much to the satisfaction of the A-mish-ku and Ni-pit-se.

During this fortnight the days were rapidly lengthening and the sun was growing stronger, though as yet there was no softening of the snow even at midday and the nights and mornings were crisp and frosty enough. With every day, as the sun grew brighter, the glare on the snow increased until the world was a dazzling expanse of scintillating, blinding light. No longer was it safe to go abroad, even for an hour, with naked eyes, save in dull and cloudy weather.

David and Andy had learned their lesson. They had no intention of becoming snowblind again if it could be avoided. And so, while they waited for Andy's feet to heal, they fashioned, each for himself, a pair of goggles, after the manner of those worn by Sa-peesh and his family.

These goggles were made from round pieces of wood, hollowed out like shells and large enough to cover the eyes comfortably, with the hollows whittled deep enough to permit the eyelids to open and close within them. Two of these were fastened together the proper distance apart to fit the eyes, with a piece of buckskin. In the bottom of each hollow a narrow slit was cut lengthwise of the goggle. Through this slit the wearer was to look. The interior of the hollow was blacked with charcoal from the fire. A buckskin thong fastened to the outer edge of each of the goggles, and tied behind the head, kept them in place.

At length Andy declared that his feet were well enough healed to permit him to return to the trails. Both he and David were anxious to resume their work, for the trapping season was nearing its close. They wished, also, to satisfy Indian Jake's anxiety as to their safety, for they had no doubt he was anxious, and possibly much troubled and mystified at their long absence.

There was much regret in the wigwam of Sa-peesh, and loudly did Sa-peesh and Mrs. Sa-peesh, and especially A-mish-ku and Ni-pit-se lament that the visit should have been so short. It is the custom of Indian women to bestow gifts upon friends setting out upon a journey. This is a pleasant and profitable custom for the friends, and the women believe that the spirits will bless the giver with much good fortune, and thus they are themselves amply recompensed.

Accordingly, when David and Andy made ready for departure on a bright April morning, Mrs. Sa-peesh presented each with a bladder filled with marrow fat, and a quantity of jerked venison, while each received from Ni-pit-se a beautiful pair of bead-embroidered moccasins which she had made with her own hands.

And when they thanked Sa-peesh and everybody for all the kindness that had been shown them, and said farewell, the whole family came out before the wigwam to shout good wishes after them and to wave their hands to them, until the boys were quite out of their sight.

"We'll soon be findin' out, now, what Indian Jake thought when we didn't get t' th' Narrows, and 'twill be three weeks when we gets there Saturday," remarked David.

"I wonders, now, what he thinks about un!" suggested Andy.

"He thinks we perished," said David, "and he's likely been up t' Namaycush lookin' for us. 'Twill be a fine surprise to he when he comes back Saturday."

"'Tis fine t' be alive!" exclaimed Andy, breathing the good pure air.

"'Tis that!" said David, "and t' have such a fine hunt t' take home. Pop'll be wonderful pleased!"

"Won't he now!" Andy agreed. "It won't be much over a month, whatever, will it, Davy, before th' break up, and we can start for home?"

"No, th' last of May, *whatever*," said David, "and won't it be fine, Andy, t' go home with all th' furs? They's plenty, I *knows*, now, t' pay for Jamie goin' t' have th' great doctor cure his eyes. Indian Jake said so, and he's a wonderful good judge. There's our share of his fur, too. And won't it be fine t' have Jamie see again as well as ever he did!"

"Won't it, now!" exclaimed Andy. "'Tis hard t' wait till th' time comes t' go!"

They were a long distance from the tilt. Walking as fast as ever they could, favoring Andy's sore feet, and with a stop only to boil the kettle at noon, it was near sundown when they saw the little log building scarcely visible above the drifts.

"There's no tracks about," said Andy, as they approached the door.

"If Indian Jake came up 'twas a week ago, whatever," suggested David. "Th' snow since then covered his tracks. He was sure t' be lookin' for us when we didn't go t' th' Narrows."

This surmise was confirmed upon entering the tilt. The frying pan used by Indian Jake in cooking his dinner sat unwashed upon the stove, and there were other evidences of his visit. And the boys immediately missed the two marten skins which they had left there, and which the half-breed had taken.

"He were thinkin', now, we had perished, and so he took th' fur," David explained. "He were thinkin' t' take all our fur home t' Pop when he takes his, and he's feelin' dreadful bad about our bein' dead."

"And won't he be glad when we gets t' th' Narrows!" exclaimed Andy.

"That he will!" said David. "'Twill be a fine surprise for he!"

The following morning, with light, expectant hearts, they set out for the Narrows, attending to their snow-clogged traps in the usual manner, and on Friday evening, highly excited at the expected surprise and pleasure of Indian Jake when they appeared, crossed the river ice opposite the tilt.

"He hasn't come yet," said David as they neared the tilt. "Th' snow fell since he left Monday, and there's no tracks where he's come back."

"We'll have a fire, and supper cookin' when he comes, an' won't he be surprised and glad t' see us!" exclaimed Andy.

And so, their hearts filled with the pleasure they anticipated giving Indian Jake, they pushed open the door and entered the tilt. Then they stood aghast, and almost terror stricken.

The place gave unmistakable evidence of having been looted and abandoned. The furs were gone. The tent was not there, nor was the extra tent stove.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Andy, presently, a frightened look on his face.

"Gone!" echoed David. "And he's took all our furs!"

"What—will—Jamie do now?" and Andy was making a manly effort to restrain the tears.

"He'll go—blind!" and David, too, was on the point of tears. "And—we—worked so hard t'—get th' furs t'—save his eyes!"

Neither of them felt like eating, but, by force of habit they lighted a fire in the stove, filled the kettle from the water hole at the lake, and prepared to cook their supper.

"There's no tea! And no flour! And no pork!" announced David after a search. "Indian Jake took all th' grub!"

"Took all th' grub!" exclaimed Andy.

"Aye, all th' grub!" David repeated.

"Whatever will we do now?" asked Andy in consternation.

"They's a bit of tea in our pack on th' toboggan. Unlash un and bring th' things right in, Andy," said David. "We have th' bladders of fat, and most of th' dried deer's meat th' Injuns gave us, and some hard bread left in th' bag too. We'll make out."

There were also three ptarmigans that Andy had shot during the day, and a rabbit they had taken from one of the traps. An inventory assured him that, so far as provisions were concerned, they would do very well indeed for the present.

"Indian Jake didn't take any grub out o' th' Halfway tilt or th' Namaycush Lake tilt, either," said David, as the two stood contemplating their small stock of provisions. "What we has in th' other tilts ain't much, but 'twill have t' do us till th' break up."

"'Twon't last till then!" objected Andy. "And even if it does we won't have any grub left t' eat on th' way home after th' break up."

"We'll have t' make out somehow," insisted David. "We'll fix un this way, Andy. Whilst I tends th' traps you'll hunt for pa'tridges and snare rabbits. With what you kills we'll make out, and save what's in th' tilts t' use goin' home."

"Th' huntin's about over, why can't we strike up and go now?" asked Andy.

"We can't do that," David objected. "We *has* t' wait for th' break up t' take th' boat out. We can't take un out till th' lake and th' river gets free of ice. We'll *have* t' take un, *whatever*, because Pop'll need un t' bring in his outfit when he comes back in th' fall t' hunt."

"We'll have t' take th' tilt stove, too, to use in th' tent goin' out," suggested Andy. "Indian Jake took th' tent stove."

"We won't need un," said David. "We won't have any tent. Indian Jake took un. We'll make out though. 'Twill be warm enough then, but 'tis a rainy time of year, and we'll have t' sleep wet of nights, without a tent or stove."

Supper of boiled ptarmigan, hardtack, marrow fat for butter, and tea was as good a meal as any could wish, and quite as good as any to which David and Andy were accustomed on the trail. But there was the future to be provided for.

"'Tis good Indian Jake didn't take th' grub from th' other tilts," Andy observed, as they made the tilt tidy, for Indian Jake had left it in a state of confusion.

"He took 'most everything else except th' tilts," said David a little bitterly. "With havin' t' keep most of th' flour and pork that's in th' other tilts to use goin' home, it'll take all our spare time huntin' a livin', and we'll have t' make out that way till we goes."

"We might catch some whitefish and namaycush," suggested Andy. "We caught a rare fine lot when we went fishin' with Indian Jake."

"We can now!" agreed David enthusiastically. "Oh, we'll make out fine with th' birds and rabbits we gets, if we can get whitefish and namaycush too. We won't have bread, but th' Injuns mostly does without bread. They make out with what they get huntin' and fishin'."

"We'll try for th' fish tomorrow *whatever*!" said Andy.

"Th' first thing in th' mornin'," seconded David.

A search, however, for Indian Jake's fishing tackle disclosed the fact that he had taken it with him, as he had taken nearly everything else of value. No cod line and not a fish hook could be found, though every nook and cranny of the tilt was inspected.

"We'll have t' give fishin' up," said David, when they had satisfied themselves that no tackle was to be

found. "We can't fish without hooks and line."

"No," admitted Andy dejectedly, "we can't fish."

"But we'll make out, *whatever*," said David confidently. "We'll get birds and rabbits enough, though they're wonderful tiresome eatin', without bread or pork. And goin' out we'll be like t' kill a porcupine or two."

"We'll make out," agreed Andy.

"It's—it's th' fur makes me feel bad," said David after a moment's silence.

"Aye; th' fur," repeated Andy.

"And Jamie," added David, sadly. "I can't get he off my mind. I'd rather be dead myself than have he go blind. 'Tis bein' dead t' go blind, but worse. 'Tisn't natural t' be blind, and folks has t' die some time."

"Th' thought of un makes me feel almost—sick," said Andy.

They fell silent, and for nearly half an hour neither spoke. Then David remarked, a more cheerful note in his voice:

"I been thinkin', now, that we may be misjudgin' Indian Jake. I been thinkin' that maybe when Indian Jake makes up his mind we perished, he has no heart t' keep on trappin' here alone, and he takes th' furs and starts right out with un t' give un t' Pop, and t' tell Pop what he thinks happened to us."

"Do you think that, now?" asked Andy hopefully.

"That's what I thinks," said David, reluctant to abandon faith in Indian Jake even now.

"'Twill be—a terrible worry for Pop—and all of un," suggested Andy.

"Aye," agreed David, "but think how glad they'll be when we comes home safe; and it won't be long, now. Week after next we'll strike up, and th' break-up'll come by th' last of May, *whatever*, and we'll start for home."

"Suppose, now—suppose Indian Jake does as Uncle Ben said he would," Andy suggested apprehensively. "Suppose he don't take th' furs t' Pop, but goes off with un, th' way he did before?"

"I'm—I'm thinkin' he won't do *that*," solaced David, though his voice was not as convincing as Andy would have wished.

"Maybe—there's nothin' t' worry over," agreed Andy.

"That makes me think o' Doctor Joe's song," said David. "Let's sing un, Andy. She's a wonderful cheerin' song."

"Let's do," said Andy, and together they sang, loud and lustily:

"Old Worry's my foe, and he always brings woe,
And he follows about wherever I go.
He's always on hand, and he makes the world blue,
And all about troubles that never come true."

After all, what do any of us gain from worry, though all of us have reason enough for it sometimes. David and Andy resolved to believe that Indian Jake had really gone to The Jug. They were the better and more efficient for believing it. And they resolved to smile and be cheerful, too, and not fret and worry and stew about troubles that might not be troubles at all. But it required grit a-plenty, for often enough a suspicion of Indian Jake forced itself upon them.

On Saturday morning the boys devoted themselves to setting snares for rabbits. A dozen short pieces of stout twine found about the cabin were utilized for this purpose.

Building a snare is a simple process. A sapling is cut and laid across a rabbit run, and about a foot above it. One end of a piece of twine is tied to the sapling directly over the run, while the other end is formed into a noose, and with the bottom of the noose resting on the run, the top reaching to the sapling, it is held in position by upright sticks on each side. Brush is piled so high upon the sapling as to discourage passing rabbits from jumping over. Other brush filled in around both sides of the runway, prevents its going around, and it is thus forced to make a wide detour, which rabbits are not likely to do, or to pass through the noose. In the latter case it can scarcely escape being caught and choked by the noose.

It was interesting work for the boys. It occupied their attention and kept their thoughts free from surmises as to Indian Jake.

"They'll get us some grub, *whatever*," remarked David when the last snare was set. "I wish we could have fished, though. 'Twould have been surer, and rabbits gets t' be such tiresome eatin'."

"But they're better than no eatin'," Andy sagely observed.

"If we gets rabbits enough I'll not be complainin'," said David.

On Sunday morning two rabbits were found in the snares, and one more on Monday morning before the boys set out upon their journey to Lake Namaycush. David attended to the traps, while Andy devoted his attention to hunting, and on Tuesday evening when they reached the Lake Namaycush tilt he had added five spruce partridges, two ptarmigans and a porcupine to their store of provisions in excess of their daily requirements.

"You're doin' wonderful well, Andy," David complimented, as he prepared supper. "You're knockin' over more birds than we can eat."

"I'm thinkin' we are, now," agreed Andy with some pride. "We'll not be goin' hungry, *whatever*."

"I got one marten to-day," continued David. "He's a poor one. Th' fur is all like t' be poor now, I'm thinkin', so we may as well strike up. 'Tis a pity t' kill th' fur when it's too poor t' sell. If we leaves un now we'll get un next year when they're prime. What we gets now won't help out any for Jamie, either."

"Will we strike up before we goes back?" asked Andy.

"We'll have t' come in next week, *whatever*," David explained. "We didn't strike up on th' way in. I'll strike up on th' big mesh tomorrow, and we'll take everything down t' th' Narrows tilt that we'll want t' take down from here and th' Halfway tilt. Next week finish strikin' up, and take care o' th' traps, and our flat sled'll be heavy enough."

Accordingly the following day David struck up, and cached in convenient places the traps on the big marsh trail, and on the return to the Narrows the small remaining stock of flour and pork and tea was taken from the other two tilts to the Narrows tilt, to await the day of their departure for The Jug, and to be kept as a

reserve in case of need.

Andy's gun and the snares continued to keep them well supplied so far as their immediate needs were concerned, though they sorely missed the bread and pork to which they were accustomed, and which even in this brief time they learned to look upon as luxuries. However, adhering to their resolution to deny themselves, they set out upon their final journey to Lake Namaycush with no other provisions than rabbits and partridges, and a small amount of tea.

"I'm glad t' be gettin' ready t' go home," remarked Andy as they sat at supper on the evening they reached the Namaycush Lake tilt. "But it gives me a wonderful sorry feelin' that th' trappin' is all over, and when we leaves here tomorrow we won't come back again t' Namaycush Lake this year."

"That's th' way I feels, too," admitted David. "I've been feelin' that way all th' time I've been strikin' up. I've been thinkin' how much we were expectin' from th' traps when we comes in th' fall, and how we worked for a good hunt; and how—it's all over with now."

"And—not knowin' for sure what Indian Jake does with th' fur," suggested Andy.

"If we only could be sure he took un t' Pop," said David, "and Jamie could go t' th' great doctor t' have his eyes cured—then I'd feel wonderful happy."

"He must have gone t' Th' Jug," Andy said hopefully. "'Tis hard t' think he didn't. And, Davy, we said we'd just keep thinkin' he did."

"Aye, we'll just keep thinkin' he did, and we won't trouble about un," asserted David. "And we'll pray th' Lard 'tis th' way we hopes."

Their thoughts were full of the hopes and aspirations of the first evening when they came to the Namaycush Lake tilt. How dear to us are old aspirations and old hopes, dead, perhaps, with the dead weeks or years that have gone, but still living in our memory like the features of departed friends. Our aspirations may never be attained, our fondest hopes never be fulfilled, but once they encouraged and buoyed us, and made life appear a glorious field of attainment, as indeed it is. If life were never flavored by day dreams, how dull and dreary it would sometimes be.

Great deeds are born in imagination. Imagination prompts us to attainment. It lifts us to higher levels. In the proportion in which we possess it, imagination urges us to apply our ambitions and our efforts to gain the things we dream of. Because of it we climb higher and travel farther, and become so much bigger and nobler men than ever we could have been had we never dreamed.

But, O, the bitter disappointment of shattered hopes! 'Tis a brave man that rises above failure, and tries again. This is the test of a man's mettle. This is God's way, I sometimes think, of sifting the grain from the chaff. The men who are worth while never give up. They stick and stick, and try again and again, until they win out in the end. The others surrender hope at the first reverse, and like chaff are blown away by the wind of oblivion.

David and Andy were silent for a long while. They were living over those early days of the winter when they came upon the trail dreaming of success and determined to attain it. Now the winter was past and the hunting was at an end. Was all their effort lost? Was Jamie, after all, to go blind because one day they neglected the simple precaution of wearing their snow glasses?

"We were expectin' to do so much when we came in th' fall," remarked Andy, sorrowfully, when they had finally filled the stove with wood, and settled in their sleeping bags. "We made a grand hunt, even if Indian Jake stole th' fur. But if he stole un 'twon't do Jamie any good and it's too late now t' catch any more."

"I were thinkin', Andy," said David, clinging to a forlorn hope, "that maybe Doctor Joe were makin' a mistake about Jamie's eyes. Maybe Jamie won't go blind so soon, and next year'll be in time for he t' go t' th' great doctor—if Indian Jake stole th' fur."

"Do you think so, now, Davy?" Andy asked expectantly.

"I'm just sayin' *maybe*," said David, cautiously. "If 'tis so, when Pop'll come next year t' hunt th' Seal Lake trail maybe he'll let me hunt this trail, and we'll be sure *then* t' get fur enough t' pay for th' cure."

"I'd have t' stay home with Margaret, and I'd like t' be here and help hunt th' trail—and—get th' fur t' cure Jamie," said Andy regretfully.

"You'll be helpin', Andy, by stayin' home th' way Pop had t' do this year," comforted David.

And so, in the face of supposed defeat, they planned for the future, and, planning, fell asleep.

It was an hour later when David awoke half suffocated with smoke. His ears at the same time caught the crackling of burning wood. He sprang from his bed, and seizing Andy, shouted:

"Andy! The tilt's afire! Andy, get up!"

In an instant Andy, too, was out of bed.

"Grab your clothes and sleepin' bag," cried David excitedly.

"I'm chokin'!" coughed Andy.

"Hurry!" shouted David. "Hurry, or we'll be caught here!"

There was scarce a moment to spare. The tilt had taken fire from the overheated stove, and one side was already in flames. Fortunately the doorway was clear, and the lads, gaining it, had barely time to pitch their clothing and sleeping bags out into the snow, and themselves escape into the cold night.

FLAMES were already breaking out between the logs on the side nearest to which stood the stove. Smoke was pouring out of the tilt door in a cloud. The boys were dazed and bewildered with their sudden awakening, but the fire was already beyond control, and was so far advanced that any attempt to salvage their belongings would have proved fruitless and foolhardy.

The bitter cold of the April night quickly roused them to activity. David rescued their axes, which were sticking into a stump near the tilt door, and their toboggan which fortunately had not been laid against the tilt, as was customary, was drawn to a safe distance. Then, using the toboggan for a seat, they drew on their clothing, and stood impotently and silently watching the burning tilt.

"I'm glad we didn't have any o' th' traps stowed in there," remarked David presently.

"Our—our rifles are burned!" choked Andy.

"The rifles! I went and forgot un!" exclaimed David, in consternation. "I went and forgot un! I might've pitched un out with th' sleepin' bags!"

"What ever will we do without un?" asked Andy. "We can't do any huntin' now!"

"Our snowshoes!" broke in David. "We clean forgot our snowshoes! We could have saved un, too, if we'd only thought!"

The snowshoes had been hanging on a peg just outside the tilt door, for trappers do not take snowshoes into warm tilts, where the heat would injure the babish, or netting. Smoke issuing from the door had hidden them, and in the bewilderment following their escape the boys had quite forgotten them. Now, like the rifles, the snowshoes were in the ruins of the burning tilt, and destroyed.

This was indeed a sad loss. In the woods snow lay a dozen feet deep, and to move about without the assistance of snowshoes was quite impossible. The game which Andy had accumulated was in the ruins, save two partridges which had been left at the Halfway tilt, and there was no other food nearer than the Narrows. Deprived of their snowshoes they could neither visit their rabbit traps nor set new ones.

"How'll we make out now?" asked Andy hopelessly. "We can't travel without snowshoes."

"Maybe the snow on the river ice is packed hard enough t' bear us," suggested David. "Leastways we'll have t' try un. We've got t' get t' th' Narrows tilt, *whatever*."

Silently they lashed their sleeping bags upon the toboggan and made preparations for a night journey to the Halfway tilt. They could not reconnoiter for a suitable place to build a temporary shelter in the soft snow of the woods, as Andy had done when he was alone. A step beyond the packed snow around the tilt, or the more or less packed path leading down to the lake, where they had a water hole in the ice, would plunge them to their armpits.

"I'll haul th' flatsled," suggested David, tightening the lashings of the toboggan. "You go ahead, Andy, and pick out th' path t' th' water hole. We can make un all right t' th' lake, and we keeps t' th' hard path."

Fortunately it was starlight, and though one or the other now and again stepped off the path, and each time had a brief battle with the deep snow, they at length emerged upon the white expanse of Lake Namaycush. Here the wind had packed the snow so hard that, though they sank nearly to their knees at every step, walking was not unduly difficult until they reached the river bed.

"'Twon't be so good travelin' here as on th' Lake," said David. "But I'm thinkin' we'll make un."

David's prediction was correct. In every turn of the river were deep drifts through which they floundered. Sometimes it became necessary to push the toboggan over these difficult places, using it as a support, working their way foot by foot. Slow and exhausting as it was, they stuck to it with a will, but when day broke they had traveled less than a third of the distance to the Halfway tilt.

"I'm fair scrambled!" Andy at length declared. "I've got t' rest. Can't we put on a fire and 'bide here and rest a little while?"

"Aye," agreed David. "'Tis wearisome work. We'll put on a fire and rest, but we mustn't 'bide here too long. We'll have t' reach th' tilt before night."

An hour's rest, sitting on the toboggan before a cheerful fire in the lee of the river bank, revived them.

"If we only had our snowshoes, and a bit t' eat!" said Andy, when David suggested that it was time to go. "I'm fair starved!"

"And so be I!" David declared. "'Tis a long time since supper last evenin'. We'll have th' partridges, *whatever*, when we gets t' th' Halfway tilt."

"It seems like I never can stand un so long," said Andy. "I'm weak for hunger."

Andy was to learn in the days that followed, what real hunger is, but he was brave enough, and not given to complaint. It is well, sometimes, for all of us to be tried out by the test of experience. Only through experience can we learn the stuff we are made of, and only through deprivations of the comforts to which we are accustomed can we learn to appreciate the good things of life. Most of us are too prone to take things for granted, and to forget that what we have and enjoy are the gifts of a benign Providence.

Many times that day David and Andy declared they "could not walk another step," but they pushed and floundered bravely on until, in the dusk of evening, they stumbled at last into the friendly shelter of the Halfway tilt.

They were almost too weary to build a fire, but hunger conquered weariness, and presently with a roaring fire in the stove, and one of the partridges boiling—for, famished as they were, David insisted that the other one must be reserved for breakfast—they felt more cheerful. Fortunately they had left some tea in the tilt, and while their supper of half a boiled partridge each and a cup of tea was far from satisfying their healthy young appetites, it refreshed them.

"I'm thinkin'," remarked David, as they ate, "we've got a rare lot t' be thankful for. Th' good Lard woke me up just in time last night. If I'd slept a bit longer we'd both been smothered with th' smoke and burned up."

"'Twere lucky you wakes," agreed Andy.

"I'm thinkin' 'tweren't luck, now," protested David. "I'm thinkin' th' Lard were watchin', and wakes us just th' right time."

"And maybe," suggested Andy, in an awed voice, "'twere like we were sayin'. Maybe Mother was close by, watchin', and maybe she asked th' Lard to waken us."

"Yes," said David, "I been thinkin' o' that too. There's no doubtin' spirits walks about, and shows

themselves, too, sometimes. Uncle Hi Roper saw an Injun down t' th' Post one night paddlin' a canoe around. He was an Injun that had been dead fifteen years, *whatever*. Uncle Hi knew he, and called to he, but th' Injun didn't answer because he were just a spirit. He kept on paddlin' and paddlin' in a circle, and never speakin'. It scared Uncle Hi, and he ran in and told Zeke Hodge, and Zeke comes out, but he couldn't see th' Injun then. He'd just disappeared."

"Oh-h!" breathed Andy. "I'd been scared too! But I wouldn't be scared at Mother's spirit."

"I'd—I'd be glad t' see un," said David.

But if their mother's spirit came that night to look lovingly upon her two brave boys, they did not know it. They had rested but a short time the previous night, and, exhausted from their struggle of nearly twenty hours with the snow drifts, they quickly fell into sound and dreamless sleep.

It was long past daylight when they awoke, to the sound of shrieking wind, and when David looked out of the tilt door he was met by a cloud of driving snow.

"'Tis a wonderful nasty day," he said.

"Is it too bad t' travel?" asked Andy, anxiously.

"Aye," said David regretfully. "We never could face un. We'll have t' bide here."

"And we only has one pa'tridge t' eat!" mourned Andy.

"Only one pa'tridge," repeated David solemnly.

"Whatever will we do without eatin'?" asked Andy.

"We'll have t' make un do, *whatever*," declared David. "They's no other way."

"I'm fair starved now," said Andy. "All we had t' eat th' whole of yesterday was half a pa'tridge each."

"We'll make out with un. We've got tea," cheered David. "And maybe th' wind'll pack th' snow so th' travelin'll be better tomorrow—if th' storm breaks. 'Tis like t' be better from this on, anyhow, for th' river's wider."

"If we eats th' pa'tridge now," Andy calculated, "we won't have anything t' eat to-night or in th' marnin'!"

"Suppose," David suggested, "we cooks half of un now, and just drinks th' broth for breakfast, and keeps th' meat for night. Then we'll have th' other half t' eat in th' marnin' before we starts out."

"I'm too hungry t' be waitin' like that," objected Andy. "Let's eat th' meat now and th' broth tonight, and keep th' other half for marnin'!"

David's hunger doubtless cast the deciding vote, for though reason told him the plan he had suggested was the wiser, his hunger got the better of his judgment. And they were still so hungry when the small portion had been disposed of that in the end they ate the broth as well.

It was a miserable day for the lads. No matter what they talked about their conversation always drifted back to food. They could not avoid it, for food was the thing uppermost in their minds.

A hundred times that day one or the other went out of doors into the storm in the hope that they might discover some sign of its abatement, always to be met by the smothering drift, and when they arose the following morning snow was still falling heavily, though the wind had lost much of its force. They ate the half partridge remaining, but it served only to whet their appetites.

"Th' snow's fallin' thicker'n ever," announced David, after an inspection late in the afternoon.

"It just seems like I can't stand un, I'm so hungry!" declared Andy. "Suppose now we start tomorrow marnin', *whatever*. I'm thinkin' we might make un," he added hopefully.

"We never could make un," David objected. "We'd perish. We'll have t' 'bide here till th' weather clears. I'm as famished as you be, Andy, b'y, but we'll have t' put up with un."

"It seems like I'd just die o' hunger!" mourned Andy.

"Sometimes men goes without eatin' for a week," consoled David, "and it don't kill un if they don't give up to un. There'll be some way out. Pop says there's a way out'n every fix if you sticks to it and don't get scared or give up."

"Aye," said Andy, with new courage, "I were thinkin' of that th' time I were caught out above th' big mesh, and then I makes a shelter and I'm all right."

The thought consoled them both, and though still they talked of food, it was now in the manner of planning great feasts when they should reach home.

"We'll have Margaret cook us a fine big mess o' pork, and we'll eat all we wants, with bread and molasses t' go with un," suggested David.

"Oh, but won't that be eatin' now!" enthused Andy. "And there'll be plenty o' trout, too, when we gets out, and salmon'll be runnin' th' middle o' July! I could eat half a salmon now if I had un!"

The wind had died out, though all that night the snow fell, but in mid-forenoon of the following day the clouds lightened, and shortly after noon the sun broke out, warm and brilliant.

"We can start now!" exclaimed Andy, "and we'll make th' narrows tilt before midnight, *whatever*, and have a good supper."

"We can try un," said David dubiously, "but I'm fearin' we'll find th' fresh snow more than we can manage. There's been no wind for a day t' drive un off th' ice, and yesterday and last night it snowed wonderful hard."

David was correct. They had found the river bed badly clogged on their journey down from the Lake Namaycush tilt. Now it was vastly worse. They sank to their waists, the moment they attempted to leave the tilt, and finally, quite satisfied that travel was impossible, they retreated disconsolate and discouraged to the tilt.

"We'll starve now," said Andy, in a tone almost of resignation. "There's no way out."

"'Tis a wonderful bad fix," David admitted.

"I'm growin'—wonderful weak—in th' knees," Andy confessed.

"I feels a weakness, too," said David, "but not so much hunger as yesterday."

"'Tis queer, now, but I'm not feelin' th' hunger so bad, either. But I feels sleepy and weak," Andy agreed.

"I wonders, now, why 'tis? I were thinkin' we'd grow hungrier and hungrier, till we couldn't stand un."

"'Tis strange," admitted David, "not bein' so hungry. But I feels like I could eat anything that could be et, and I'm sleepy, too."

That is the way with folk who starve. While there's a bit of food to be had the appetite remains keen, and troublesome, but when the food is gone, a day or two of fastin' finds the appetite waning, and the eyes

growing heavy and drowsy, and over the body steals lassitude and weariness.

David and Andy were prisoners, but it was not their nature to give up and resign themselves to their fate until every expedient had been tried. Thomas had said there was a way out of every fix. This was a bad fix—the worst they had ever been in, they were sure, but if there was a way out of it they must try to discover the way.

“There *must* be a way, now, Davy!” Andy declared, after a long discussion. “Pop says there’s *no* fix so bad we can’t get out of un if we only thinks out how.”

“If we had any lashin’,” suggested David, “we might fix up somethin’ that would do for snowshoes. But there’s no deerskin, and there’s nothin’ else, I’m thinkin’, would do.”

“There’s th’ rope on th’ flatsled,” said Andy hopefully.

“That wouldn’t make th’ net for one snowshoe,” objected David.

“Let’s get some sticks and bend un into snowshoe frames, and maybe we’ll think o’ some way t’ net un,” suggested Andy. “‘Twill be *tryin’*, whatever!”

“Aye,” agreed David, “‘twill be doin’ somethin’, but I’m seein’ no way t’ make th’ nettin’.”

And so, though it seemed futile enough so far as solving their problem was concerned, they cut the necessary sticks close by the tilt door, and set about their task. With an Indian crooked knife David squared and trimmed the sticks into shape, and, steaming them over the kettle, rendered them pliable. Then they bent and tied them.

All that afternoon and next forenoon they worked unceasingly at their task, and at length the frames of two pairs of bear’s paw snowshoes, each snowshoe with one crossbar to stiffen it, were ready for netting.

But think as they would, that seemed the end. There were no deerskin thongs, and not even rope with which to improvise the netting. The boys were steadily growing weaker, and they had almost decided that after all they were in a “fix” from which there was no possible escape, when Andy made a suggestion that revived their hope.

XXIV

UNCLE BEN APPEARS

“**D**AVY, I’ve got un! I’ve got un!” Andy suddenly shouted, seizing his sleeping bag with a display of frenzied joy.

“Got what?” asked David anxiously.

“Th’ sleepin’ bags! Th’ sleepin’ bags!” said Andy excitedly. “Don’t you see, Davy?”

“Aye, that’s a sleepin’ bag, I sees,” admitted David, quite startled by Andy’s unusual behavior, and certain enough the lad had gone stark mad, as sometimes happens with starving people.

“And we never thought of un!” explained Andy. “We never thought of un, and they right before our eyes all th’ time! We can cut un into strips and net th’ snowshoes with un!”

“Why didn’t we ever think o’ that, now!” exclaimed David, springing up and seizing his sleeping bag, now no less excited than was Andy himself.

It is the obvious that most of us overlook. The simple things that are before us are the things we never see. There, to be sure, were the sleeping bags. Cut into strips, the sealskins of which they were made would serve very well indeed for netting the snowshoes.

“A skin or two out of one of un’ll be plenty,” said David, opening his jackknife and proceeding at once to cut the sinew with which the bag was sewn. “One skin out’n my bag’ll be enough, Andy, don’t cut yours. You’re wonderful at thinkin’ up things, Andy. I never would have thought of un!”

“I just happened t’ think of un first,” said Andy, unwilling to take to himself all the credit.

Presently one of the sealskins was freed from the bag, and while Andy held it, David, working carefully with his jackknife, cutting around the edge in a spiral, soon reduced it into a single long string.

“Now we’ll have to soak un to make un soft,” said David, dropping the lashing into a kettle of water. “‘Twon’t take long.”

Weaving the web upon the frames demanded patience, but late that night the snowshoes were finished, and though they were crude and roughly made, they were strong and serviceable enough for the purpose for which they were required.

“Pop always says right,” remarked Andy, when they hung the four snowshoes on the tilt wall to dry, and stood for a moment surveying their handiwork. “There is always a way out o’ the worst fix ever happened, if we only finds out what ‘tis.”

“Aye,” agreed David, “out of *any* fix!”

“They’ll save our lives,” said Andy. “I—I feels almost like cryin’, Davy.”

“Th’ Lard put un into your head t’ try th’ sealskin, Andy,” David spoke reverently. “Th’ Lard always seems t’ be watchin’ and helpin’ us, whatever happens, and we does what we can t’ help ourselves.”

“Aye,” said Andy, “He does that.”

And all in all the boys were right. He never does much for those who simply pray to Him, and then sit idly with folded hands and expect Him to do the rest. He gave us eyes to see and hands to work and planted in us the power to reason, and He filled the earth with all things necessary for the support of life. He expects us to do our best at all times—to use our brains, and hands and eyes and all our faculties—and then if we have faith He helps us to success, and our success in big things and little things alike depends upon how far we do our best.

It was scarce daybreak when, weak from their long fast, but happy in the assurance that their imprisonment was at an end and that safety was promised them, the boys donned their new snowshoes, and set out to the Narrows tilt.

The snowshoes proved over-small, and sank deeply into the new, soft snow. This held the boys to a slow pace, with the tedious and wearisome effort it demanded, and the sun had set before they made the last turn in the river above the tilt. David was hauling the toboggan, laden with their belongings, while Andy trudged in advance, both dragging their feet with painful effort. Suddenly Andy stopped, peering at the tilt, and shouted excitedly to David:

"Look! Look, Davy! There's some one at the tilt!"

And David, looking, discovered smoke curling cheerfully up from the stovepipe.

Hurrying forward they were met at the door by a welcoming:

"Good gracious! Good gracious! And here you are! Both of you safe and sound. Dear eyes!" and a hearty handshake from Uncle Ben Rudder and Hiram Muggs.

Tears filled the eyes of both the lads as they grasped the big strong hands of their rescuers. The two men were a connecting link with The Jug and home, and with their appearance a vast load of responsibility rolled from the shoulders of David and Andy. Their lonely struggle with the wilderness was at an end.

"Where's Indian Jake? Good gracious, where's Indian Jake?" Uncle Ben exploded.

"We're starvin'. We haven't had anything to eat in days and days," said David, irreverently.

Uncle Ben and Hiram were solicitous at once. They hurried the boys into the tilt, and would not permit them to talk or explain until they had eaten a supper of boiled partridges and camp bread and tea which Hiram had already prepared for himself and Uncle Ben.

"Don't talk, now, but eat! Good gracious! starvin'! Eat, now, lads! Fill up! Fill up!" Uncle Ben kept repeating, though the manner in which the boys ate made it manifestly unnecessary for him to urge them.

When they had eaten until they could eat no more, and altogether more than was well for them, David recounted the events of the preceding weeks, while Uncle Ben interjected at frequent intervals one or all of his favorite exclamations:

"Good gracious! I told you so! D-e-a-r eyes!"

"And," added David at the conclusion of his narrative, "'twas wonderful fine for you t' come here t' help us out."

"And so Indian Jake has gone!" said Uncle Ben. "Good gracious! I warned Thomas Angus not t' trust that half-breed!"

"But—but don't you suppose now he's gone home with th' fur?" asked David anxiously.

"Gone home with un? Good gracious, no! I'd never go home with un!" declared Uncle Ben. "And you saw no tracks which way he were goin'?"

"No," answered David dejectedly, "th' snow had covered un before we gets here."

"Hum-m-m! Hum-m-m!" grunted Uncle Ben several times. "He's well out o' th' country by now. Good gracious, yes! No catchin' him now. And gone with all th' fur! Good gracious! Good gracious me, with all th' fur!"

Then he explained that he and Hiram had gone directly to his home at Tuggle Bight after his visit at The Jug in the fall, and all the way home they had talked of how foolish and headstrong Thomas Angus was in sending Indian Jake to the trails with David and Andy.

"And I says t' Hiram: 'Hiram,' says I, 'Thomas Angus and Doctor Joe has got t' have th' fur them lads gets, t' have th' little lad cured, and we got t' see to it that Indian Jake don't steal un!' Good gracious, yes! I says that t' Hiram. Didn't I, Hiram?"

"You did, now," agreed Hiram.

"Then we fixes it up t' trap along the Nascaupée th' winter, where no one could get out o' th' country without our seein' 'em," continued Uncle Ben. "Dear eyes, we had un all fixed right, but our plan missed fire! Good gracious! She missed fire! Indian Jake must ha' seen our tilt with his Indian eyes, and sneaked past down t' other side o' th' river in th' night, and we never see him! Good gracious, never seen hide or hair or feather of him! He must ha' done that, Hiram?"

"He must ha' done it," said Hiram solemnly.

"I were expectin' he'd try t' steal Tom Angus's third o' th' fur he hunted, *whatever*," declared Uncle Ben, "but I weren't certain he'd steal your fur, too, lads. Good gracious, no! I knew he were bad, but I didn't think he'd do *that*! And he's gone with un all, lock, stock *and* barrel! And we'll never see him again. The *scamp*! Good gracious, yes, a *scamp*! Nothin' else but a scamp, and such a scamp as I never thought lived! D-e-a-r eyes!"

"A *wonderful scamp*!" agreed Hiram.

Uncle Ben and Hiram had struck up their traps, and then come up the river to Seal Lake to "keep an eye," as Uncle Ben said, on Indian Jake until the break-up. They had expected to return with the boys and Indian Jake, stopping at their tilt for their own furs as they passed down the Nascaupée, and then, still acting as guard, continue with the boys until the furs were safely delivered to Thomas at The Jug.

"You lads need us now to cheer you a bit! Dear eyes! You *needs* cheerin'," Uncle Ben declared. "We'll wait here for th' break-up and all go home together, and *we'll* cheer you. Good gracious, yes!"

But now that David and Andy were assured their precious furs were really gone they felt anything but cheered. And that night, and for many nights that followed, their hearts were heavy indeed.

"What, now, would become of Jamie?" was the question always on their mind, and they could not answer it, and they even forgot Doctor Joe's cheerful song.

They could picture Jamie, and their father, and Margaret, and Doctor Joe, with loving and abiding confidence and faith in them waiting at home for their return. Jamie's lifelong happiness depended upon the furs that had been stolen. Doctor Joe had said that Jamie would become blind if he did not go to the great doctor for the cure. Now Jamie could not go, and the ordeal of their homecoming empty-handed, and the disappointment of Jamie and the others, seemed to them more than they could bear. And when they thought of all this they almost regretted that they had not indeed perished in the blizzard, or starved in the tilt.

XXV

“TROUBLES THAT NEVER CAME TRUE”

WITH the coming of May the sun grew bold, and fearlessly poured forth his genial warmth. The end of the reign of the once mighty frost monarch, who had so long ruled the world, was at hand. The snow began rapidly to shrink, rains fell, and presently the ice-clogged river and lake were open and free again.

With the break-up immediate preparations were made for departure, and one day the boat was loaded, and the homeward journey was begun.

The descent of the river was much more rapid than the ascent had been, for now they had the current with them. Below the carry around the big rapids was the tilt where Uncle Ben and Hiram had spent the winter. Here the two men transferred their belongings to their own boat, and three days later the two boats passed out of Grand Lake, and in mid-afternoon reached the Post.

Zeke Hodge met them at the landing with vociferous greetings and welcome, but he could offer no comfort. He had seen nothing of Indian Jake since the day he had observed the half-breed and the boys on their way to the trails the previous autumn.

“Of course not! Good gracious, no!” observed Uncle Ben. “To be sure you didn’t see him. He wouldn’t come this way. He wouldn’t go where folks could see him. The scamp has run out o’ th’ country with all th’ furs!”

And thus, their last hope that Indian Jake might, after all, have returned to The Jug banished, and with no possibility that the half-breed could be overtaken and the furs recovered, David and Andy said good-bye to Uncle Ben and Hiram, and continued upon their journey home with sorrowful and heavy hearts.

The sun was setting when they approached the entrance of The Jug. Evening shadows were already stealing down over the hills when they turned into the bight and the cabin came into view, and the voice of Roaring Brook, shouting a welcome, fell upon their ears.

And then they saw their father and Doctor Joe come hurrying down to meet them at the landing, and Margaret running to join them, as excited as she could be, and finally Jamie—poor, pathetic little Jamie—groping his way more slowly, and shouting to them at the top of his voice.

A moment later they were ashore with Jamie clinging to them, and Margaret hugging them and laughing and crying at the same time, and Thomas and Doctor Joe looking as pleased as ever two men could look.

Then the pent-up sorrow and disappointment in their hearts burst bounds, and these two lads who had fearlessly faced a wolf pack, and braved the wild blizzards and bitter cold of an arctic winter in the wilderness, broke down and wept.

In the cozy shelter of the cabin, in the long twilight, David and Andy told their story. And everybody praised their courage, and nobody blamed them, for they were guilty of no blame.

“You kept plenty o’ grit,” soothed Jamie, “and *you* couldn’t help Indian Jake’s takin’ th’ fur, and—and maybe it won’t be so bad goin’ blind—when I gets used to un.”

Oh, but Jamie, too, had grit, and grit a-plenty.

They tried now, one and all—save Doctor Joe, perhaps—to become reconciled to Jamie’s coming blindness. The great doctor and the marvelous cure were no longer mentioned. Thomas and the boys got the fishing nets out, and methodically went about their duties.

Doctor Joe did not return at once to Break Cove. He seemed to have lost heart and ambition. He ceased to sing his cheerful songs, and he would go out alone and for hours wander away into the forest, or pace up and down the gravelly beach of The Jug, and sometimes, with a frightened look in his face, he would sit and stare at Jamie.

On one of these occasions, on an afternoon a fortnight after the return of David and Andy, Doctor Joe, after watching Jamie for a long while, sprang suddenly to his feet, and, standing a dozen feet from Jamie, held out three fingers of his right hand and asked Jimmie to count them.

“I can’t make un out,” said Jamie. “They’re in a heavy mist.”

“Now count them,” and Doctor Joe moved nearer.

“I can’t make un out,” repeated Jamie.

And Doctor Joe must needs approach within six feet of Jamie before the lad could see them sufficiently well to count them.

When the test was made, Doctor Joe without a word donned his cap and passed out of doors and strode away, up the path and into the forest, and on and on.

Suddenly he stopped, and holding his clenched fist out at arm’s length watched it closely.

“As steady as ever it was!” he said at length. “Perhaps I can do it! If only I haven’t lost my skill! If only I could forget those years and that horrible failure.”

For a little he stood silent, beads of perspiration on his forehead.

“I can’t do it,” he said at length, and turning slowly retraced his steps toward The Jug.

He stopped again, however, as the cabin came into view, and for a long time stood deep in thought.

“But I *must* do it—there’s no other way!” he finally exclaimed with determination. And, turning his back on The Jug, he strode rapidly away toward Break Cove.

It was nearly four hours later when Doctor Joe reappeared at The Jug, with a packet under his arm.

“We were missin’ you,” greeted Thomas, as Doctor Joe entered the cabin. “Set in and have supper with Margaret. She’s kept un on th’ stove for you, and she’s waited t’ eat with you.”

“It’s kind of you, but can you wait a little, Margaret? There’s something I must say to your father before I eat,” and there was a new, strong note in Doctor Joe’s voice.

“Oh, yes,” agreed Margaret cheerfully, “I’m in no hurry.”

“Thomas,” said Doctor Joe, looking straight into Thomas’s face and plunging immediately into the matter, “Jamie’s eyes have reached a point where they must be operated upon at once or he will be beyond human

help. I know you're resigned to this, but I'm not. So long as there is the possibility of saving his sight we must do what there is to do. Thomas, *I shall operate on them, with your consent. I have fetched my instruments from Break Cove.*"

"Can—can *you* do un then?" and Thomas's face brightened with fresh hope.

"There is none but me to do it, and we cannot see the lad go blind without an effort to save his eyes. Thomas, do you believe in me?" There was pathetic pleading in Doctor Joe's voice.

"Believe in you! There's nary a man I believes in more!" and Doctor Joe knew that Thomas was sincere.

"Thank you, Thomas," said Doctor Joe, a quaver in his voice. "That means more to me than you will ever understand. But I must tell you about myself, for I want you to know all about me before I operate upon Jamie's eyes, and when you have heard what I have to say you may not wish to trust me.

"I was once a skilful eye surgeon in New York," he began, after a moment's silence, "and I performed many difficult operations. The one ambition of my life was to be known as the greatest eye surgeon in my country, and my ambition was finally realized.

"But I had become addicted to liquor, which I first took to stimulate me when I was very tired, and to steady my nerves, usually on occasions when I had denied myself proper rest, or when weary from overwork. At length there came a time when I could not do without it, and I always fortified myself with a dose before beginning an operation. Sometimes in the midst of long operations it would lose its stimulating effect to such an extent that my hand would become uncertain and unsteady. One day, because of this, I ruined a patient's sight.

"That was the last operation I ever performed. I turned my patients over to a young surgeon who had assisted me, and he is the great doctor I hoped might operate on Jamie's eyes, for he has taken the place I once held.

"I made a desperate effort to break myself of the liquor habit, but I soon discovered this to be impossible so long as I remained where liquor could be had. It had broken my will and power of resistance, and shattered my nerves to such an extent that I could not again trust myself with the surgeon's knife. The desire for liquor had become a disease with me, as it is with many a man, and in its presence I was irresponsible. Liquor, you know, is a poisonous drug, just as opium is, and the man who becomes addicted to its use is to be pitied.

"There was but one cure for me, and that was to go where it was not to be had. So in desperation I came north to The Labrador, and left the mail boat at Fort Pelican, where I bought the old boat which I was sailing up the bay when you hailed me that day eight years ago. Do you remember, Thomas, how nervous and restless I was?"

"Aye, you were a bit shaky, and we were sayin' you had been sick," admitted Thomas.

"I *was* sick then. If you had not taken me in, a stranger of whom you knew nothing, and had not helped me with your friendship, I should have returned to New York and ruin. I felt that if I could remain until the freeze-up came that year, and the mail boat stopped running, I would have my longings conquered before another summer came around. God knows how hard it was, even then, for me to stay. More than once that fall I said to myself of a night, 'I can't stand it any longer! I must go!' But each morning you held me with kindness, and your sturdy, wholesome life, and each morning I resolved to stay, whatever my suffering might be.

"And so it came to pass that you cured me by reaching out to me a helping hand when I needed it, and so I have remained on The Labrador year after year, until I am cured of my old thirst and no longer feel a desire for liquor. I shall never regain my old position as the greatest eye surgeon in my country, Thomas, but, thank God, I am more than that. I am a sane, strong man again, and after all, man is the greatest thing God ever created."

Doctor Joe, his face beaming, held out his clenched fist, as he had done before in the forest.

"See!" he exclaimed. "There's no shake to that! I've a man's steady nerve, because you cured me, Thomas Angus, by making it possible for me to live as a clean man should."

"'Tis wonderful steady!" said Thomas, quite astonished and moved by Doctor Joe's story.

"And now that you've heard who I am, and what I've been," and there was an anxious look in Doctor Joe's face, "are you willing to trust Jamie's sight with me, Tom? Any doctor might fail, and my hand might not work true, and if I fail, or if I make a mistake, Jamie will never see again. But on the other hand, unless something is done, and done at once, Jamie will surely go blind."

"Doctor Joe," said Thomas in a strangely husky voice, "I'd rather have you do th' cuttin' than the other doctor, *whatever*. I knows what you says is right, and you'll do un better than any other doctor could because you're fond of Jamie and he's fond of you, and you're my friend. Whatever comes of un will be th' Almighty's will, and if Jamie goes blind after th' cuttin' I'll never be complainin'."

"Oh, Doctor Joe!" said Margaret, who had been listening, fascinated by Doctor Joe's story, and whose eyes were moist with tears, "we all trusts you! We trusts you more than we trusts anybody else in the world!" And Doctor Joe's emotions nearly got the better of him when Jamie came over and put his hand in his.

"To-morrow, then," said Doctor Joe, "we'll operate. Jamie, are you afraid to have me cut the mist away?"

"No," said Jamie stoutly, "I'd never be afraid t' have *you* cut un away."

"But you *have* got grit, now!" exclaimed Doctor Joe.

And so, with much hope and much foreboding, Jamie was prepared for the operation the following morning, and he was as brave as ever a little lad could be when, quite unassisted, he climbed upon the operating table which Doctor Joe had improvised.

Then Thomas, under Doctor Joe's direction, applied the ether, while Doctor Joe watched its effect, and quickly Jamie passed into unconsciousness.

Deftly, and with a feather-like touch, Doctor Joe with a delicate instrument made a triangular incision upon the membrane which covered the white of one of Jamie's eyes, and turning the membrane back removed a minute button-shaped piece from the exposed eyeball. Immediately this was done a fluid began to drain through the slight opening, and Doctor Joe spread the membrane back into place.

The other eye was treated in similar manner, and the eyes quickly bandaged by Doctor Joe. And then the unconscious Jamie was gently lifted into Thomas's bunk, which Margaret had prepared for him.

Not a word had been spoken during all this time save by Doctor Joe, as he issued sharp, crisp directions

to Thomas or Margaret. And now, when he looked up, there was a new alert enthusiasm in his face—a something they had never seen there before.

"We never can tell the result," said he, "until the bandage is removed, but I never operated more skilfully. Sometimes it doesn't cure, but it is the only thing to be done in such cases, and we'll hope we have succeeded."

They were still standing by the side of Jamie's bed when the door opened, and David, turning to see who was entering, cried, excitedly:

"Jake! 'Tis Jake! Here's Jake!"

And sure enough it was Indian Jake, with the bags of furs, and when he beheld David and Andy he stood staring at them quite as though they were not boys at all, but ghosts.

Thomas and all greeted Indian Jake as cordially as they could have done had there never been a suspicion of his honesty, and he was contrite and sorry enough that his delay had caused them pain and worry.

"When I thought the lads had perished," said he, "I knew that I'd have t' get out of th' country on snowshoes, so I could haul my load on a flatsled, for I never could have managed the boat over the portage without help, and I started right off. The break-up caught me at the mouth of th' Nascaupsee, where I stopped t' hunt bear. Then I waited till th' Injuns came along with canoes yesterday, and gave me a passage down."

Then he handed David and Andy the furs over the loss of which they had spent so many unhappy days, and opening his own bag of furs he drew forth the better of the two silver foxes, and shaking the pelt well, as he had done in the tilt, held it up for admiration, and when all had marveled at its beauty strode over to the bed of the unconscious Jamie, and laid it upon the blanket.

"It's for the little lad," said he. "Tom, when I heard Uncle Ben tellin' you not t' trust me, and you said you'd promised me th' trail, and a man's word was a man's word, I said t' myself, th' best skin I get this winter goes t' th' little lad that's goin' blind,' and there it is. I didn't tell th' lads because I wanted t' surprise 'em. I like t' surprise folks. It makes me feel good, somehow, inside. I always tries t' be honest, Tom. When I left th' country before with my furs it was because I had word my mother was sick, and I had t' have th' furs t' help her. She died last winter, and then I came back t' th' Bay t' pay my debts."

And so it came about that Indian Jake proved himself an honest man after all, and that every one had misjudged him because they did not understand his motives. So it is too often with all of us. We jump at conclusions, and misjudge people because we do not understand the circumstances that move them to do things of which we do not approve.

They must wait four weeks, Doctor Joe said, before the bandage could be removed from Jamie's eyes, and before they could know whether he was ever to see again. Those were four anxious weeks indeed, but Jamie was patient and confident, and never was there a gentler nurse, or a better one either, Doctor Joe declared, than Margaret.

But at last, in the twilight of an evening, Thomas, Margaret, David and Andy gathered around Jamie, who was sitting in a chair almost too excited to control himself, and every one held his breath as Doctor Joe undid the fastenings of the bandage. For a moment Jamie sat winking and blinking, and then cried out in sheer glee: "Oh, I sees! I sees you all! th' mist is gone. I sees you all plain!"

The joy of that moment cannot be described, but perhaps we can imagine and feel it. The world that opened to Jamie after the long darkness was a more beautiful world than ever it had been before. His loved mountains had never seemed so big and brave as when he was permitted to look at them again, and he was quite sure that never before had the peaks, lighted by the setting sun, been so bright and glorious with heavenly beauty at the moment when God stooped down to kiss the world good night.

And so, after all, they had worried a great deal over troubles that never came true. But nevertheless it had required grit a-plenty to carry them bravely over the dark days when the mists hung low.

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