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Author: Ethel C. Brill
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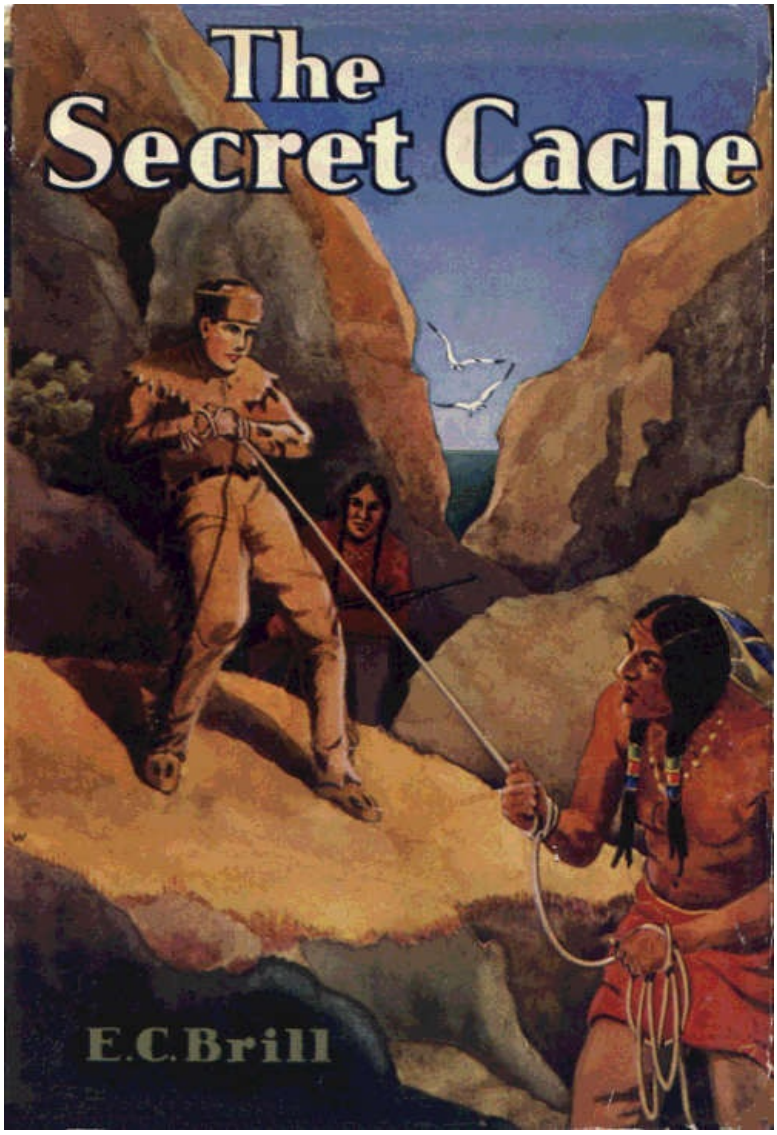

"MONGA LOOKED BACK ONCE JUST IN TIME
TO SEE ONE OF THE GIANTS SPRING UP OUT
OF THE ROCKS."
"The Secret Cache." (See Page 277)

THE SECRET CACHE

AN ADVENTURE AND MYSTERY
STORY FOR BOYS

BY
E. C. BRILL

ILLUSTRATED

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

ADVENTURE AND MYSTERY STORIES FOR BOYS

By E. C. BRILL

Large 12 mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE SECRET CACHE
SOUTH FROM HUDSON BAY
THE ISLAND OF YELLOW SANDS

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THE SECRET CACHE

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I
THE BIRCH BARK LETTER

On the river bank a boy sat watching the slender birch canoes bobbing about in the swift current. The fresh wind reddened his cheeks and the roaring of the rapids filled his ears. Eagerly his eyes followed the movements of the canoes daringly poised in the stream just below the tossing, foaming, white water. It was the first day of the spring fishing, and more exciting sport than this Indian white-fishing Hugh Beaupré had never seen. Three canoes were engaged in the fascinating game, two Indians in each. One knelt in the stern with his paddle. The other stood erect in the bow, a slender pole fully ten feet long in his hands, balancing with extraordinary skill as the frail craft pitched about in the racing current.

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The standing Indian in the nearest canoe was a fine figure of a young man, in close-fitting buckskin leggings, his slender, muscular, bronze body stripped to the waist. Above his black head, bent a little as he gazed intently down into the clear water, gulls wheeled and screamed in anger at the invasion of their fishing ground. Suddenly the fisherman pointed, with a swift movement of his left hand, to the spot where his keen eyes had caught the gleam of a fin. Instantly his companion responded to the signal. With a quick dig and twist of the paddle blade, he shot the canoe forward at an angle. Down went the scoop net on the end of the long pole and up in one movement. A dexterous flirt of the net, and the fish, its wet, silvery sides gleaming in the sun, landed in the bottom of the boat.

The lad on the bank had been holding his breath. Now his tense watchfulness relaxed, and he glanced farther up-stream at the white water boiling over and around the black rocks. A gleam of bright red among the bushes along the shore caught his eye. The tip of a scarlet cap, then a head, appeared above the budding alders, as a man came, with swift, swinging strides, along the shore path.

“Holá, Hugh Beaupré,” he cried, when he was close enough to be heard above the tumult of the rapids. “M’sieu Cadotte, he want you.”

The lad scrambled to his feet. “Monsieur Cadotte sent you for me?” he asked in surprise. “What does he want with me, Baptiste?”

“A messenger from the New Fort has come, but a few moments ago,” Baptiste replied, this time in French.

Hugh, half French himself, understood that language well, though he spoke it less fluently than English.

“From the Kaministikwia? He has brought news of my father?”

“That M’sieu did not tell me, but yes, I think it may be so, since M’sieu sends for you.”

Hugh had scarcely waited for an answer. Before Baptiste had finished his speech, the boy was running along the river path. The French Canadian strode after, the tassel of his cap bobbing, the ends of his scarlet sash streaming in the brisk breeze. **[9]**

Hastening past the small cabins that faced the St. Mary’s River, Hugh turned towards a larger building, like the others of rough, unbarked logs. Here he knew he should find Monsieur Cadotte, fur trader and agent for the Northwest Fur Company. Finding the door open, the lad entered without ceremony.

Monsieur Cadotte was alone, going through for a second time the reports and letters the half-breed messenger had brought from the Company’s headquarters on the River Kaministikwia at the farther end of Lake Superior. The trader looked up as the boy entered.

“A letter for you, Hugh.” He lifted a packet from the rude table.

“From my father?” came the eager question.

“That I do not know, but no doubt it will give you news of him.”

A strange looking letter Cadotte handed the lad, a thin packet of birch bark tied about with rough cedar cord. On the outer wrapping the name “Hugh Beaupré” was written in a brownish fluid. Hugh cut the cord and removed the wrapper. His first glance at the thin squares of white, papery bark showed him that the writing was not his father’s. The letter was in French, in the same muddy brown ink as the address. The handwriting was good, better than the elder Beaupré’s, and the spelling not so bad as Hugh’s own when he attempted to write French. He had little difficulty in making out the meaning. **[10]**

> “My brother,” the letter began, “our father, before he died, bade me write to you at the Sault de Ste. Marie. In March he left the Lake of Red Cedars with one comrade and two dog sleds laden with furs. At the Fond du Lac he put sail to a bateau, and with the furs he started for the Grand Portage. But wind and rain came and the white fog. He knew not where he was and the waves bore him on the rocks. He escaped drowning and came at last to the Grand Portage and Wauswaugoning. But he was sore hurt in the head and the side, and before the setting of the sun his spirit had left his body. While he could yet speak he told me of you, my half-brother, and bade me write to you. He bade me tell you of the furs and of a packet of value hid in a safe place near the wreck of the bateau. He told me that the furs are for you and me. He said you and I must get them and take them to the New Northwest Company at the Kaministikwia. The packet you must bear to a man in Montreal. Our father bade us keep silence and go quickly. He had enemies, as well I know. So, my brother, I bid you come as swiftly as you can to the Kaministikwia, where I will await you.

Thy half-brother,
Blaise Beaupré or Attekonse, Little Caribou.”

Hugh read the strange letter to the end, then turned back to the first bark sheet to read again. He had reached the last page a second time when Cadotte’s voice aroused him from his absorption.

“It is bad news?” the trader asked.

“Yes,” Hugh answered, raising his eyes from the letter. “My father is dead.”

“Bad news in truth.” Cadotte’s voice was vibrant with sympathy. “It was not, I hope, *la petite vérole*?” His despatches had informed him that the dreaded smallpox had broken out among the Indian villages west of Superior. **[11]**

“No, he was wrecked.” Hugh hesitated, then continued, “On his spring trip down his boat went on the rocks, and he was so sorely hurt that he lived but a short time.”

“A sad accident truly. Believe me, I feel for you, my boy. If there is anything I can do——” Cadotte broke off, then added, “You will wish to return to your relatives. We must arrange to send you to Michilimackinac on the schooner. From there you can readily find a way of return to Montreal.”

Hugh was at a loss for a reply. He had not the slightest intention of returning to Montreal so soon. He must obey his half-brother’s summons and go to recover the furs and the packet that made up the lads’ joint inheritance. Kind though Cadotte had been, Hugh dared not tell him all. “He bade us keep silence,” Little Caribou had written, and one word in the letter disclosed to Hugh a good reason for silence.

Jean Beaupré had been a free trader and trapper, doing business with the Indians on his own account, not in the direct service of any company. Hugh knew, however, that his father had been in the habit of buying his supplies from and selling his pelts to the Old Northwest Company. Very likely he had been under some contract to do so. Yet in these last instructions to his sons, he bade them take the furs to the *New* Northwest Company, a secession from and rival to the old organization. He must have had some disagreement, an actual quarrel perhaps, with the Old Company. The rivalry between the fur companies was hot and bitter. Hugh was very sure that if Monsieur Cadotte learned of the hidden pelts, he would inform his superiors. Then, in all probability, the Old Northwest Company’s men would reach the cache first. Certainly, if he even suspected that the pelts were destined for the New Company, Cadotte would do nothing to further and everything to hinder Hugh’s project. The boy was in a difficult position. He had to make up his mind quickly. Cadotte was eying him sharply and curiously. **[12]**

“I cannot return to Montreal just yet, Monsieur Cadotte,” Hugh said at last. “This letter is from my half-brother.” He paused in embarrassment.

Cadotte nodded and waited for the boy to go on. The trader knew that Jean Beaupré had an Indian wife, and supposed that Hugh had known

it also. Part Indian himself, Cadotte could never have understood the lad's amazement and consternation at learning now, for the first time, of his half-brother.

"My father," Hugh went on, "bade Blaise, my half-brother, tell me to—come to the Kaministikwia and meet Blaise there. He wished me to—to make my brother's acquaintance and —and receive from him—something my father left me," he concluded lamely.

Cadotte was regarding Hugh keenly. The boy's embarrassed manner was enough to make him suspect that Hugh was not telling the truth. Cadotte shrugged his shoulders. "It may be difficult to send you in that direction. If you were an experienced canoeman, but you are not and ——"

"But I *must* go," Hugh broke in. "My father bade me, and you wouldn't have me disobey his last command. Can't I go in the *Otter*? I still have some of the money my aunt gave me. If I am not sailor enough to work my way, I can pay for my passage." **[13]**

"Eh bien, we will see what can be done," Cadotte replied more kindly. Perhaps the lad's earnestness and distress had convinced him that Hugh had some more urgent reason than a mere boyish desire for adventure, for making the trip. "I will see if matters can be arranged."

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II
THE SLOOP "OTTER"

His mind awhirl with conflicting thoughts and feelings, Hugh Beaupré left Cadotte. The preceding autumn Hugh had come from Montreal to the Sault de Ste. Marie. Very reluctantly his aunt had let him go to be with his father in the western wilderness for a year or two of that rough, adventurous life. Hugh's Scotch mother had died when he was less than a year old, nearly sixteen years before the opening of this story. His French father, a restless man of venturesome spirit, had left the child with the mother's sister, and had taken to the woods, the then untamed wilderness of the upper Great Lakes and the country beyond. In fifteen years he had been to Montreal to see his son but three times. During each brief stay, his stories of the west had been eagerly listened to by the growing boy. On his father's last visit to civilization, Hugh had begged to be allowed to go back to Lake Superior with him. The elder Beaupré, thinking the lad too young, had put him off. He had consented, however, to his son's joining him at the Sault de Ste. Marie a year from the following autumn, when Hugh would be sixteen.

Delayed by bad weather, the boy had arrived at the meeting place late, only to find that his father had not been seen at the Sault since his brief stop on his return from Montreal the year before. The disappointed lad tried to wait **[15]**

patiently, but the elder Beaupré did not come or send any message. At last, word arrived that he had left the Grand Portage, at the other end of Lake Superior, some weeks before, not to come to the Sault but to go in the opposite direction to his winter trading ground west of the lake. There was no chance for Hugh to follow, even had he known just where his father intended to winter. By another trader going west and by a Northwest Company messenger, the boy sent letters, hoping that in some manner they might reach Jean Beaupré. All winter Hugh had remained at the Sault waiting for some reply, but none of any sort had come until the arrival of the strange packet he was now carrying in his hand. This message from his younger brother seemed to prove that his father must have received at least one of Hugh's letters. Otherwise he would not have known that his elder son was at the Sault. But there was no explanation of Jean Beaupré's failure to meet the boy there.

Hugh was grieved to learn of his parent's death, but he could not feel the deep sorrow that would have overwhelmed him at the loss of an intimately known and well loved father. Jean Beaupré was almost a stranger to his older son. Hugh remembered seeing him but the three times and receiving but one letter from him. Indeed he was little more than a casual acquaintance whose tales of adventure had kindled a boy's imagination. It was scarcely possible that Hugh's grief could be deep, and, for the time being, it was overshadowed by other feelings. He had been suddenly plunged, it seemed, into a strange and unexpected adventure, which filled his mind to the exclusion of all else.

He must find some way to reach the Kaministikwia River, there to join his newly discovered Indian brother in a search for the wrecked bateau and its cargo of pelts. Of that half-brother Hugh had never heard before. He could not but feel a sense of resentment that there should be such a person. The boy had been brought up to believe that his father had loved his bonny Scotch wife devotedly, and that it was his inconsolable grief at her death that had driven him to the wilderness. It seemed, however, that he must have consoled himself rather quickly with an Indian squaw. Surely the lad who had written the letter must be well grown, not many years younger than Hugh himself. **[16]**

As he walked slowly along the river bank, Hugh turned the bark packet over and over in his hand, and wondered about the half-breed boy who was to be his comrade in adventure. Attekonse had not spent his whole life in the woods, that was evident. Somewhere he had received an education, had learned to write French readily and in a good hand. Perhaps his father had taught him, thought Hugh, but quickly dismissed that suggestion. He doubted if the restless Jean Beaupré would have had the patience, even if he had had the knowledge and ability to teach his young son to write French so well.

Uncertain what he ought to do next, the puzzled boy wandered along, glancing now and then at the canoes engaged in the white-fishing below **[17]**

the rapids. That daring sport had lost its interest for him. At the outskirts of an Indian village, where he was obliged to beat off with a stick a pack of snarling, wolf-like dogs, he turned and went back the way he had come, still pondering over the birch bark letter.

Presently he caught sight once more of Baptiste's scarlet cap. No message from Cadotte had brought the simple fellow this time, merely his own curiosity. Hugh was quite willing to answer Baptiste's questions so far as he could without betraying too much. Seated in a sheltered, sunny spot on an outcrop of rock at the river's edge, he told of his father's death. Then, suddenly, he resolved to ask the good-natured Canadian's help.

"Baptiste, I am in a difficulty. My half-brother who wrote this,"—Hugh touched the bark packet —"bids me join him at the Kaministikwia. It was my father's last command that I should go there and meet this Blaise or Little Caribou, as he calls himself. We are to divide the things father left for us."

"There is an inheritance then?" questioned Baptiste, interested at once.

"Nothing that amounts to much, I fancy," the lad replied with an assumption of carelessness; "some personal belongings, a few pelts perhaps. For some reason he wished Blaise and me to meet and divide them. It is a long journey for such a matter."

"Ah, but a dying father's command!" cried Baptiste. "You must not disobey that. To disregard the wishes of the dead is a grievous sin, and would surely bring you misfortune."

"True, but what can I do, Baptiste? Monsieur Cadotte doesn't feel greatly inclined to help me. He wishes me to return to Montreal. How then am I to find an opportunity to go to the Kaministikwia?" **[18]**

Baptiste took a long, thoughtful pull at his pipe, then removed it from his mouth. "There is the sloop *Otter*," he suggested.

"Would Captain Bennett take me, do you think?"

"I myself go as one of the crew. To-morrow early I go to Point aux Pins. Come with me and we shall see."

"Gladly," exclaimed Hugh. "When does she sail?"

"Soon, I think. There were repairs to the hull, where she ran on the rocks, but they are finished. Then there is new rigging and the painting. It will not be long until she is ready."

That night Hugh debated in his own mind whether he should tell Cadotte of his proposed visit with Baptiste to Point aux Pins. He decided against mentioning it at present. He did not know what news might have come in Cadotte's despatches, whether the trader was aware of the elder Beaupré's change of allegiance. At any rate, thought the lad, it would be better to have his passage in the *Otter* arranged for, if he could persuade her captain, before saying anything more to anyone.

Early the next morning Baptiste and Hugh embarked above the rapids in Baptiste's small birch canoe. The distance to Point aux Pins was short, but paddling, even in the more sluggish channels, against the current of the St. Mary's River in spring flood was strenuous work, as Hugh, wielding the bow blade, soon discovered. Signs of spring were everywhere. The snow was gone, and flocks of small, migrating birds were flitting and twittering among the trees and now and then bursting into snatches of song. The leaves of birches, willows and alders were beginning to unfold, the shores showing a faint mist of pale green, though here and there in the quiet backwaters among rocks and on the north sides of islands, ice still remained. **[19]**

At Point aux Pins, or Pine Point, was the Northwest Company's shipyard. In a safe and well sheltered harbor, formed by the long point that ran out into the river, the sailing vessels belonging to the company were built and repaired. The sloop *Otter*, which had spent the winter there, was now anchored a little way out from shore. The repairs had been completed and a fresh coat of white paint was being applied to her hull. Tents and rude cabins on the sandy ground among scrubby jack pines and willows housed the workers, and near by, waiting for the fish cleanings and other refuse to be thrown out, a flock of gulls, gray-winged, with gleaming white heads and necks, rode the water like a fleet of little boats. As the canoe approached, the birds, with a splashing and beating of wings, rose, whirled about in the air, and alighted again farther out, each, as it struck the water, poising for a moment with black-tipped wings raised and half spread.

On a stretch of sand beyond the shipyard, Baptiste and Hugh landed, stepping out, one on each side, the moment the canoe touched, lifting it from the water and carrying it ashore. Then they sought the master of the sloop.

Captain Bennett was personally superintending the work on his ship. To him Baptiste, who had been previously engaged as one of the small crew, made known Hugh's wish to sail to the Kaministikwia. The shipmaster turned sharply on the lad, demanding to know his purpose in crossing the lake. Hugh explained as well as he could, without betraying more than he had already told Cadotte and Baptiste. **[20]**

"Do you know anything of working a ship?" Captain Bennett asked.

"I have sailed a skiff on the St. Lawrence," was the boy's reply. "I can learn and I can obey orders."

"Um," grunted the Captain. "At least you are a white man. I can use one more man, and I don't want an Indian. I can put you to work now. If you prove good for anything, I will engage you for the trip over. Here, Duncan," to a strapping, red-haired Scot, "give these fellows something to do."

So it came about that Hugh Beaupré, instead of going back at once to the Sault, remained at the Point aux Pins shipyard. He returned in the *Otter*, when, three days later, she sailed down the St. Mary's to the dock above the rapids where she was to receive her lading. In the

meantime, by an Indian boy, Hugh had sent a message to Cadotte informing him that he, Hugh Beaupré, had been accepted as one of the crew of the *Otter* for her trip to the Kaministikwia. Cadotte had returned no reply, so Hugh judged that the trader did not intend to put any obstacles in the way of his adventure.

The goods the sloop was to transport had been received the preceding autumn by ship from Michilimackinac too late to be forwarded across Superior. They were to be sent on now by the *Otter*. A second Northwest Company ship, the *Invincible*, which had wintered in Thunder Bay, was expected at the Sault in a few weeks. When the great canoe fleet from Montreal should arrive in June, part of the goods brought would be transferred to the *Invincible*, while the remainder would be taken on in the canoes. Hugh was heartily glad that he was not obliged to wait for the fleet. In all probability there would be no vacant places, and if there were any, he doubted if, with his limited experience as a canoeman, he would be accepted. He felt himself lucky to obtain a passage on the *Otter*. **[21]**

The sloop was of only seventy-five tons burden, but the time of loading was a busy one. The cargo was varied: provisions, consisting largely of corn, salt pork and kegs of tried out grease, with some wheat flour, butter, sugar, tea and other luxuries for the clerks at the Kaministikwia; powder and shot; and articles for the Indian trade, blankets, guns, traps, hatchets, knives, kettles, cloth of various kinds, vermilion and other paints, beads, tobacco and liquor, for the fur traders had not yet abandoned the disastrous custom of selling strong drink to the Indians.

During the loading Hugh had an opportunity to say good-bye to Cadotte. The latter’s kindness and interest in the boy’s welfare made him ashamed of his doubts of the trader’s intentions.

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III
DRIVEN BEFORE THE GALE

On a clear, sunny morning of the first week in May, the Northwest Company’s sloop *Otter*, with a favoring wind, made her way up-stream towards the gateway of Lake Superior. At the Indian village on the curve of the shore opposite Point aux Pins, men, women, children and sharp-nosed dogs turned out to see the white-sailed ship go by. Through the wide entrance to the St. Mary’s River, where the waters of Lake Superior find their outlet, the sloop sailed under the most favorable conditions. Between Point Iroquois on the south and high Gros Cap, the Great Cape, on the north, its summit indigo against the bright blue of the sky, she passed into the broad expanse of the great lake. The little fur-trading vessels of the first years of the nineteenth century did not follow the course taken by the big passenger steamers and long freighters of today, northwest through the middle of the lake. Instead, the Captain of the *Otter* took her almost

directly north.

The southerly breeze, light at first, freshened within a few hours, and the sloop sailed before it like a gull on the wing. Past Goulais Point and Coppermine Point and Cape Gargantua, clear to Michipicoton Bay, the first stop, the wind continued favorable, the weather fine. It was remarkably fine for early May, and Hugh Beaupré had hopes of a swift and pleasant voyage. So far his work as a member of the crew of six was not heavy. Quick-witted and eager to do his best, he learned his duties rapidly, striving to obey on the instant the sharply spoken commands of master and mate. **[23]**

At the mouth of the Michipicoton River was a Northwest Company trading post, and there the *Otter* ran in to discharge part of her cargo of supplies and goods. She remained at Michipicoton over night, and, after the unloading, Hugh was permitted to go ashore. The station, a far more important one, in actual trade in furs, than the post at the Sault, he found an interesting place. Already some of the Indians were arriving from the interior, coming overland with their bales of pelts on dog sleds. When the Michipicoton River and the smaller streams should be free of ice, more trappers would follow in their birch canoes.

As if on purpose to speed the ship, the wind had shifted to the southeast by the following morning. The weather was not so pleasant, however, for the sky was overcast. In the air was a bitter chill that penetrated the thickest clothes. Captain Bennett, instead of appearing pleased with the direction of the breeze, shook his head doubtfully as he gazed at the gloomy sky and the choppy, gray water. A sailing vessel must take advantage of the wind, so, in spite of the Captain’s apprehensive glances, the *Otter* went on her way.

All day the wind held favorable, shifting to a more easterly quarter and gradually rising to a brisk blow. The sky remained cloudy, the distance thick, the water green-gray. **[24]**

As darkness settled down, rain began to fall, fine, cold and driven from the east before a wind strong enough to be called a gale. In the wet and chill, the darkness and rough sea, Hugh’s work was far harder and more unpleasant. But he made no complaint, even to himself, striving to make up by eager willingness for his ignorance of a sailor’s foul weather duties. There was no good harbor near at hand, and, the gale being still from the right quarter, Captain Bennett drove on before it. After midnight the rain turned to sleet and snow. The wind began to veer and shift from east to northeast, to north and back again.

Before morning all sense of location had been lost. Under close-reefed sails, the sturdily built little *Otter* battled wind, waves, sleet and snow. She pitched and tossed and wallowed. All hands remained on deck. Hugh, sick and dizzy with the motion, chilled and shivering in the bitter cold, wished from the bottom of his heart he had never set foot upon the sloop. Struggling to keep his footing on the heaving, ice-coated deck, and to hold fast to slippery, frozen ropes, he was of little enough use, though he did his best.

The dawn brought no relief. In the driving snow, neither shore nor sky was to be seen, only a short stretch of heaving, lead-gray water. Foam-capped waves broke over the deck. Floating ice cakes careened against the sides of the ship. On the way to Michipicoton no ice had been encountered, but now the tossing masses added to the peril.

Midday might as well have been midnight. The falling snow, fine, icy, stinging, shut off all view more completely than blackest darkness. The weary crew were fighting ceaselessly to keep the *Otter* afloat. The Captain himself clung with the steersman to the wheel. Then, quite without warning, out of the northeast came a sudden violent squall. A shriek of rending canvas, and the close-reefed sail, crackling with ice, was torn away. Down crashed the shattered mast. As if bound for the bottom of the lake, the sloop wallowed deep in the waves. **[25]**

Hugh sprang forward with the others. On the slanting, ice-sheathed deck, he slipped and went down. He was following the mast overboard, when Baptiste seized him by the leg. The dangerous task of cutting loose the wreckage was accomplished. The plucky *Otter* righted herself and drove on through the storm.

With the setting of the sun, invisible through the snow and mist, the wind lessened. But that night, if less violent than the preceding one, was no less miserable. Armored in ice and frozen snow, the sloop rode heavy and low, battered by floating cakes, great waves washing her decks. She had left the Sault on a spring day. Now she seemed to be back in midwinter. Yet, skillfully handled by her master, she managed to live through the night.

Before morning, the wind had fallen to a mere breeze. The waves no longer swept the deck freely, but the lake was still so rough that the ice-weighted ship made heavy going. Her battle with the storm had sprung her seams. Two men were kept constantly at the pumps. No canvas was left but the jib, now attached to the stump of the mast. With this makeshift sail, and carried along by the waves, she somehow kept afloat. **[26]**

From the lookout there came a hoarse bellow of warning. Through the muffling veil of falling snow, his ears had caught the sound of surf. The steersman swung the wheel over. The ship sheered off just as the foaming crests of breaking waves and the dark mass of bare rocks appeared close at hand.

Along the abrupt shore the *Otter* beat her way, her captain striving to keep in sight of land, yet far enough out to avoid sunken or detached rocks. Anxiously his tired, bloodshot eyes sought for signs of a harbor. It had been so long since he had seen sun or stars that he had little notion of his position or of what that near-by land might be. Shadowy as the shore appeared in the falling snow, its forbidding character was plain enough, cliffs, forest crowned, rising abruptly from the water, and broken now and then by shallow bays lined with tumbled boulders. Those shallow depressions promised no shelter from wind and waves, even for so small a ship as the *Otter*.

No less anxiously than Captain Bennett did Hugh Beaupré watch that inhospitable shore. So

worn was he from lack of sleep, exhausting and long continued labor and seasickness, so chilled and numbed and weak and miserable, that he could hardly stand. But the sight of solid land, forbidding though it was, had revived his hope.

A shout from the starboard side of the sloop told him that land had appeared in that direction also. In a few minutes the *Otter*, running before the wind, was passing between forest-covered shores. As the shores drew closer together, the water became calmer. On either hand and ahead was land. The snow had almost ceased to fall now. The thick woods of snow-laden evergreens and bare-limbed trees were plainly visible. **[27]**

Staunch little craft though the *Otter* was, her strained seams were leaking freely, and her Captain had decided to beach her in the first favorable spot. A bit of low point, a shallow curve in the shore with a stretch of beach, served his purpose. There he ran his ship aground, and made a landing with the small boat.

His ship safe for the time being, Captain Bennett's next care was for his crew. That they had come through the storm without the loss of a man was a matter for thankfulness. Everyone, however, from the Captain himself to Hugh, was worn out, soaked, chilled to the bone and more or less battered and bruised. One man had suffered a broken arm when the mast went over side, and the setting of the bone had been hasty and rough. The mate had strained his back painfully.

All but the mate and the man with the broken arm, the Captain set to gathering wood and to clearing a space for a camp on the sandy point. The point was almost level and sparsely wooded with birch, mountain ash and bushes. Every tree and shrub, its summer foliage still in the bud, was wet, snow covered or ice coated. Birch bark and the dry, crumbly center of a dead tree trunk made good tinder, however. Baptiste, skilled in the art of starting a blaze under the most adverse conditions, soon had a roaring fire. By that time the snow had entirely ceased, and the clouds were breaking.

Around the big fire the men gathered to dry their clothes and warm their bodies, while a thick porridge of hulled corn and salt pork boiled in an iron kettle over a smaller blaze. The hot meal put new life into the tired men. The broken arm was reset, the minor injuries cared for, and a pole and bark shelter, with one side open to the fire, was set up. Before the lean-to was completed the sun was shining. In spite of the sharp north wind, the snow and ice were beginning to melt. A flock of black-capped chickadees were flitting about the bare-branched birches, sounding their brave, deep-throated calls, and a black and white woodpecker was hammering busily at a dead limb. **[28]**

No attempt was made to repair the ship that day. Only the most necessary work was done, and the worn-out crew permitted to rest. A lonely place seemed this unknown bay or river mouth, without white man's cabin, Indian's bark lodge or even a wisp of smoke from any other fire. But the sheltered harbor was a welcome haven to the sorely battered ship and the

exhausted sailors. Wolves howled not far from the camp that night, and next morning their tracks were found in the snow on the beach close to where the sloop lay. It would have required far fiercer enemies than the slinking, cowardly, brush wolves to disturb the rest of the tired crew of the *Otter*. Hugh did not even hear the beasts.

[29]

IV
THE ISLE ROYALE

Shortly after dawn work on the *Otter* was begun. The water was pumped out, most of the cargo piled on the beach, and the sloop hauled farther up by means of a rudely constructed windlass. Then the strained seams were calked and a few new boards put in. A tall, straight spruce was felled and trimmed to replace the broken mast, and a small mainsail devised from extra canvas. The repairs took two long days of steady labor. During that time the weather was bright, and, except in the deeply shaded places, the snow and ice disappeared rapidly.

From the very slight current in the water, Captain Bennett concluded that the place where he had taken refuge was a real bay, not a river mouth. He had not yet discovered whether he was on the mainland or an island. The repairs to his ship were of the first importance, and he postponed determining his whereabouts until the *Otter* was made seaworthy once more. Not a trace of human beings had been found. The boldness of the wolves and lynxes, that came close to the camp every night, indicated that no one, red or white, was in the habit of visiting this lonely spot.

[30]

On the third day the sloop was launched, anchored a little way from shore and rigged. While the reloading was going on, under the eyes of the mate, the Captain, with Baptiste and Hugh at the oars, set out in the small boat for the harbor mouth.

The shore along which they rowed was, at first, wooded to the water line. As they went farther out and the bay widened, the land they were skirting rose more steeply, edged with sheer rocks, cliffs and great boulders. From time to time Captain Bennett glanced up at the abrupt rocks and forested ridges on his right, or across to the lower land on the other side of the bay. Directly ahead, some miles across the open lake, he could see a distant, detached bit of land, an island undoubtedly. Most of the time, however, his eyes were on the water. He was endeavoring to locate the treacherous reefs and shallows he must avoid when he took his ship out of her safe harbor.

An exclamation from Baptiste, who had turned his head to look to the west and north, recalled the Captain from his study of the unfamiliar waters. Beyond the tip of the opposite or northwestern shore of the bay, far across the blue lake to the north, two dim, misty shapes

had come into view.

“Islands!” Captain Bennett exclaimed. “High, towering islands.”

Baptiste and Hugh pulled on with vigorous strokes. Presently the Captain spoke again. “Islands or headlands. Go farther out.”

The two bent to their oars. As they passed beyond the end of the low northwestern shore, more high land came into view across the water.

“What is it, Baptiste? Where are we?” asked Hugh, forgetting in his eagerness that it was not his place to speak. **[31]**

“It is Thunder Cape,” the Captain replied, overlooking the breach of discipline, “the eastern boundary of Thunder Bay, where the Kaministikwia empties and the New Fort is situated.”

“Truly it must be the Cap au Tonnerre, the Giant that Sleeps,” Baptiste agreed, resting on his oars to study the long shape, like a gigantic figure stretched out at rest upon the water. “The others to the north are the Cape at the Nipigon and the Island of St. Ignace.”

“We are not as far off our course as I feared,” remarked the Captain with satisfaction.

Hugh ventured another question. “What then, sir, is this land where we are?”

Captain Bennett scanned the horizon as far as he could see. “Thunder Cape lies a little to the north of west,” he said thoughtfully. “We are on an island of course, a large one. There is only one island it can be, the Isle Royale. I have seen one end or the other of Royale many times from a distance, when crossing to the Kaministikwia or to the Grand Portage, but I never set foot on the island before.” Again he glanced up at the steep rocks and thick woods on his right, then his eyes sought the heaving blue of the open lake. “This northwest breeze would be almost dead against us, and it is increasing. We’ll not set sail till morning. By that time I think we shall have a change of wind.”

Their purpose accomplished, the oarsmen turned the boat and started back towards camp. Hugh, handling the bow oars, watched the shore close at hand. They were skirting a rock cliff, sheer from the lake, its brown-gray surface stained almost black at the water line, blotched farther up with lichens, black, orange and green-gray, and worn and seamed and rent with vertical cracks from top to bottom. The cracks ran in diagonally, opening up the bay. As Hugh came into clear view of one of the widest of the fissures, he noticed something projecting from it. **[32]**

“See, Baptiste,” he cried, pointing to the thing, “someone has been here before us.”

The French Canadian rested on his oars and spoke to Captain Bennett. “There is the end of a boat in that hole, M’sieu, no birch canoe either. How came it here in this wilderness?”

“Row nearer,” ordered the shipmaster, “and we’ll have a look at it.”

The two pulled close to the mouth of the fissure. At the Captain's order, Baptiste stepped over side to a boulder that rose just above the water. From the boulder he sprang like a squirrel. His moccasined feet gripped the rim of the old boat, and he balanced for an instant before jumping down. Hugh, in his heavier boots, followed more clumsily. Captain Bennett remained in the rowboat.

The wrecked craft in which the two found themselves was tightly wedged in the crack. The bow was smashed and splintered and held fast by the ice that had not yet melted in the dark, cold cleft. Indeed the boat was half full of ice. It was a crude looking craft, and its sides, which had never known paint, were weathered and water stained to almost the same color as the blackened base of the rocks. The wreck was quite empty, not an oar or a fragment of mast or canvas remaining.

The old boat had one marked peculiarity which could be seen even in the dim light of the crack. The thwart that bore the hole where the mast had stood was painted bright red, the paint being evidently a mixture of vermilion and grease. It was but little faded by water and weather, and on the red background had been drawn, in some black pigment, figures such as the Indians used in their picture writing. Hugh had seen birch canoes fancifully decorated about prow and stern, and he asked Baptiste if such paintings were customary on the heavier wooden boats as well. **[33]**

"On the outside sometimes they have figures in color, yes," was the reply, "but never have I seen one painted in this way."

"I wonder what became of the men who were in her when she was driven on these rocks."

Baptiste shook his head. "It may be that no one was in her. What would he do so far from the mainland? No, I do not think anyone was wrecked here. This bateau was carried away in a storm from some beach or anchorage on the north or west shore. There is nothing in her, though she was right side up when she was driven in here by the waves. And here, in this lonely place, there has been no one to plunder her."

"Do no Indians live on this big island?" queried Hugh.

"I have never heard of anyone living here. It is far to come from the mainland, and I have been told that the Indians have a fear of the place. They think it is inhabited by spirits, especially one bay they call the Bay of Manitos. It is said that in the old days the Ojibwa came here sometimes for copper. They picked up bits of the metal on the beaches and in the hills. Nowadays they have a tale that spirits guard the copper stones." **[34]**

"If there is copper on the island perhaps this boat belonged to some white prospector," suggested Hugh.

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps, but then the Indian manitos must have destroyed him."

“Well, at any rate the old manitos haven’t troubled us,” Hugh commented.

Again Baptiste shrugged. “We have not disturbed their copper, and—we are not away from the place yet.”

The inspection of the wreck did not take many minutes. When Baptiste made his report, the Captain agreed with him that the boat had probably drifted away from some camp or trading post on the mainland, and had been driven into the cleft in a storm. As nothing of interest had been found in the wreck, he ordered Baptiste and Hugh to make speed back to camp.

By night the reloading was finished and everything made ready for an early start. After sunset, the mate, adventuring up the bay, shot a yearling moose. The crew of the *Otter* feasted and, to celebrate the completion of the work on the sloop, danced to Baptiste’s fiddle. From the ridges beyond and above the camp, the brush wolves yelped in response to the music.

[35] Baptiste’s half superstitious, half humorous forebodings of what the island spirits might do to the crew of the *Otter* came to nothing, but Captain Bennett’s prophecy of a change of wind proved correct. The next day dawned fair with a light south breeze that made it possible for the sloop to sail out of harbor. She passed safely through the narrower part of the bay. Then, to avoid running close to the towering rocks which had first appeared to her Captain through the falling snow, he steered across towards the less formidable appearing northwest shore. That shore proved to be a low, narrow, wooded, rock ridge running out into the lake. When he reached the tip of the point, he found it necessary to go on some distance to the northeast to round a long reef. The dangerous reef passed, he set his course northwest towards the dim and distant Sleeping Giant, the eastern headland of Thunder Bay.

To the relief of Hugh Beaupré, the last part of the voyage was made in good time and without disaster. The boy looked with interest and some awe at the towering, forest-clad form of Thunder Cape, a mountain top rising from the water. On the other hand, as the *Otter* entered the great bay, were the scarcely less impressive heights of the Isle du Paté, called to-day, in translation of the French name, Pie Island. Hugh asked Baptiste how the island got its name and learned that it was due to some fancied resemblance of the round, steep-sided western peak to a French paté or pastry.

[36] By the time the sloop was well into Thunder Bay, the wind, as if to speed her on her way, had shifted to southeast. Clouds were gathering and rain threatened as she crossed to the western shore, to the mouth of the Kaministikwia. The river, flowing from the west, discharges through three channels, forming a low, triangular delta. The north channel is the principal mouth, and there the sloop entered, making her way about a mile up-stream to the New Fort of the Northwest Company.

From the organization of the Northwest Fur Company down to a short time before the opening of this story, the trading post at the Grand Portage, south of the Pigeon River, and

about forty miles by water to the southwest of the Kaministikwia, had been the chief station and headquarters of the company. The ground where the Grand Portage post stood became a part of the United States when the treaty of peace after the Revolution established the Pigeon River as the boundary line between the United States and the British possessions. Though the Northwest Company was a Canadian organization, it retained its headquarters south of the Pigeon River through the last decade of the eighteenth century. In the early years of the nineteenth, however, when the United States government proposed to levy a tax on all English furs passing through United States territory, the company headquarters was removed to Canadian soil. Near the mouth of the Kaministikwia River on Thunder Bay was built the New Fort, later to be known as Fort William after William McGillivray, head of the company.

[37]

V
THE HALF-BREED BROTHER

The Northwest Fur Company's chief post was bustling with activity. The New Fort itself, a stockaded enclosure, had been completed the year before, but work on the log buildings within the walls was still going on. Quarters for the agents, clerks and various employees, storehouses, and other buildings were under construction or receiving finishing touches. When the sloop *Otter* came in sight, however, work ceased suddenly. Log cabin builders threw down their axes, saws and hammers, masons dropped their trowels, brick makers left the kilns that were turning out bricks for chimneys and ovens, the clerks broke off their bartering with Indians and half-breed trappers, and all ran down to the riverside. There they mingled with the wild looking men, squaws and children who swarmed from the camps of the voyageurs and Indians. When the *Otter* drew up against the north bank of the channel, the whole population, permanent and temporary, was on hand to greet the first ship of the season.

From the deck of the sloop, Hugh Beaupré looked on with eager eyes. It was not so much of the picturesqueness and novelty of the scene, however, as of his own private affairs that he was thinking. Anxiously he scanned the crowd of white men, half-breeds and Indians, wondering which one of the black-haired, deerskin-clad, half-grown lads, who slipped so nimbly between their elders into the front ranks, was his half-brother. Many of the crowd, old and young, white and red, came aboard, but none sought out Hugh. He concluded that Blaise was either not there or was waiting for him to go ashore.

[38]

Hugh soon had an opportunity to leave the ship. He had feared that he might be more closely questioned by Captain Bennett or by some of the crew about what he intended to do at the Kaministikwia, and was relieved to reach shore without having to dodge the curiosity of his companions. Only Baptiste asked him where he

expected to meet his brother. Hugh replied truthfully that he did not know.

Unobtrusively, calling as little attention to himself as possible, the boy made his way through the crowd, but not towards the New Fort. No doubt the Fort, with all its busy activity in its wilderness surroundings, was worth seeing, but he did not choose to visit the place for fear someone might ask his business there. He was keenly aware that his business was likely to be, not with the Old Northwest Company, but with its rival, the New Northwest Company, sometimes called in derision the X Y Company. In a quandary where to look for his unknown brother, he wandered about aimlessly for a time, avoiding rather than seeking companionship.

The ground about the New Fort was low and swampy, with thick woods of evergreens, birch and poplar wherever the land had not been cleared for building or burned over through carelessness. Away from the river bank and the Fort, the place was not cheerful or encouraging to a lonely boy on that chill spring day. The sky was gray and lowering, the wind cold, the distance shrouded in fog, the air heavy with the earthy smell of damp, spongy soil and sodden, last year's leaves. Hugh had looked forward with eager anticipation to his arrival at the Kaministikwia, but now all things seemed to combine to make him low spirited and lonely. **[39]**

That the X Y Company had a trading post somewhere near the New Fort Hugh knew, but he had no idea which way to go, and he did not wish to inquire. At last he turned by chance into a narrow path that led through the woods up-river. He was walking slowly, so wrapped in his own not very pleasant thoughts as to be scarcely conscious of his surroundings, when a voice sounded close at his shoulder. It was a low, soft voice, pronouncing his own name, "Hugh Beaupré," with an intonation that was not English.

Startled, Hugh whirled about, his hand on the sheathed knife that was his only weapon. Facing him in the narrow trail stood a slender lad of less than his own height, clad in a voyageur's blanket coat over the deerskin tunic and leggings of the woods and with a scarlet handkerchief bound about his head instead of a cap. His dark features were unmistakably Indian in form, but from under the straight, black brows shone hazel eyes that struck Hugh with a sense of familiarity. They were the eyes of his father, Jean Beaupré, the bright, unforgettable eyes that had been the most notable feature of the elder Beaupré's face.

"Hugh Beaupré?" the dark lad repeated with a questioning inflection. "My brother?" **[40]**

"You are my half-brother Blaise?" Hugh asked, somewhat stiffly, in return.

"*Oui,*" the other replied, and added apologetically in excellent French, "My English is bad, but you perhaps know French."

"Let it be French then, though I doubt if I speak it as well as you."

A swift smile crossed the hitherto grave face. "I was at school with the Jesuit fathers in Quebec

four winters," Blaise answered.

Hugh was surprised. This new brother looked like an Indian, but he was no mere wild savage. The schooling in Quebec accounted for the well written letter. Before Hugh could find words in which to voice his thoughts, Blaise spoke again.

"I was on the shore when the *Otter* arrived. I thought when I saw you, you must be my brother, though you have little the look of our father, neither the hair nor the eyes."

"I have been told that I resemble my mother's people." Hugh's manner was still cool and stiff.

Without comment upon the reply, Blaise went on in his low, musical voice with its slightly singsong drawl. "I wished not to speak to you there among the others. I waited until I saw you take this trail. Then, after a little while, I followed."

"Do you mean you have been following me around ever since I came ashore?" Hugh exclaimed in English.

"Not following." The swift smile so like, yet unlike, that of Jean Beaupré, crossed the boy's face again. "Not following, but,"—he dropped into French-"I watched. It was not difficult, since you thought not that anyone watched. We will go on now a little farther. Then we will talk together, my brother." **[41]**

Passing Hugh, Blaise took the lead, going along the forest trail with a lithe swiftness that spurred the older lad to his fastest walking pace. After perhaps half a mile, they came to the top of a low knoll where an opening had been made by the fall of a big spruce. Blaise seated himself on the prostrate trunk, and Hugh dropped down beside him, more eager than he cared to betray to hear his Indian brother's story.

A strange tale the younger lad had to tell. Jean Beaupré had spent the previous winter trading and trapping in the country south of the Lake of the Woods, now included in the state of Minnesota. Blaise and his mother had remained at Wauswaugoning Bay, north of the Grand Portage. Just at dusk of a night late in March, Beaupré staggered into their camp, his face ghastly, his clothes blood stained, mind and body in the last stages of exhaustion. At the lodge entrance he fell fainting. It was some time before his squaw and his son succeeded in bringing him back to consciousness. In spite of his weakness he was determined to tell his story. Mustering all his failing strength, he commenced.

Before the snow had begun to melt under the spring sun, he had started, he told them, with one Indian companion and two dog sleds loaded with pelts, for Lake Superior. Travelling along the frozen streams and lakes, he reached the trading post at the Fond du Lac on the St. Louis River. While he was there, a spell of unusually warm early spring weather cleared the river mouth. The winter had been mild, with little ice in that part of the lake. At Fond du Lac Beaupré obtained a bateau, as the Canadians called their wooden boats, and rigged it with mast and sail. He and his companion put their furs aboard, and started up the northwest shore of Lake Superior. **[42]**

Thus far he succeeded in telling his story clearly enough, then, worn out with the effort, he lapsed into unconsciousness. Twice he rallied and tried to go on, but his speech was vague and disconnected. As well as he could, Blaise pieced together the fragments of the story. Somewhere between the Fond du Lac and the Grand Portage the bateau had been wrecked in a storm. When he reached this part of his tale, Jean Beaupré became much agitated. He gasped out again and again that he had hidden the furs and the "packet" in a safe cache, and that Blaise and his other son Hugh must go get them. He called the furs his sons' inheritance, for he was clearly aware that he could not live. The pelts were a very good season's catch, and the boys must take them to the New Northwest Company's post at the Kaministikwia. But it was the packet about which he seemed most anxious. Hugh must carry the packet to Montreal to Monsieur Dubois. Blaise asked where his brother was to be found, and received instructions to go or send to the Sault. Before the lad learned definitely where to look for the furs and the packet, Jean Beaupré lapsed once more into unconsciousness. He rallied only long enough for the ministrations of a priest, who happened to be at the Grand Portage on a missionary journey.

Though Hugh had scarcely known his father, he was much moved at the story of his death. He felt a curious mixture of sympathy for and jealousy of his Indian half-brother, when he saw, in spite of the latter's controlled and quiet manner, how strongly he felt his loss. Hugh respected the depth of the boy's sorrow, yet he could not but feel as if he, the elder son, had been unrightfully defrauded. The half-breed lad had known their common father so much better than he, the wholly white son. For some minutes after Blaise ceased speaking, Hugh sat silent, oppressed by conflicting thoughts and feelings. Then his mind turned to the present, practical aspect of the situation. **[43]**

"It will not be an easy search," he remarked. "Have you no clue to the spot where the furs are hidden?"

"None, except that it is a short way only from the place where the wrecked boat lies."

"Where the boat lay when father left it," commented Hugh thoughtfully. "It may have drifted far from there by now."

"That is possible. I could not learn from him where the wreck happened, though I asked several times. The boat was driven on the rocks. That is all I know."

"And his companion? Was he drowned?"

Blaise shook his head. "I know not. Our father said nothing of Black Thunder, but I think he must be dead, or our father would not have come alone."

"How shall we set about the search?" **[44]**

"We will go down along the shore," Blaise replied, taking the lead as if by right, although he was the younger by two or three years. "We will look first for the wrecked bateau. When we have found that, we will make search for the cache of furs."

Hugh's thoughts turned to another part of his half-brother's tale. "Tell me, Blaise," he said suddenly, "what was it caused my father's death, starvation, exhaustion, hardship? Or was he hurt when the boat was wrecked? You spoke of his blood-stained clothes."

"It was not starvation and not cold," the half-breed boy replied gravely. "He was hurt, sore hurt." The lad cast a swift glance about him, at the still and silent woods shadowy with approaching night. Then he leaned towards Hugh and spoke so low the latter could scarcely catch the words. "Our father was sore hurt, but not in the wreck. How he ever lived to reach us I know not. The wound was in his side."

"But how came he by a wound?" Hugh whispered, unconsciously imitating the other's cautious manner.

Blaise shook his black head solemnly. "I know not how, but not in the storm or the wreck. The wound was a knife wound."

"What?" cried Hugh, forgetting caution in his surprise. "Had he enemies who attacked him? Did someone murder him?"

Again Blaise shook his head. "It might have been in fair fight. Our father was ever quick with word and deed. The bull moose himself is not braver. Yet I think the blow was not a fair one. I think it was struck from behind. The knife entered here." Blaise placed his hand on a spot a little to the left of the back-bone.

"A blow from behind it must have been. Could it have been his companion who struck him?" **[45]**

"Black Thunder? No, for then Black Thunder would have carried away the furs. Our father would not have told us to go get them."

"True," Hugh replied, but after a moment of thought he added, "Yet the fellow may have attacked him, and father, though mortally wounded, may have slain him."

A quick, fierce gleam shone in the younger boy's bright eyes. "If he who struck was not killed by our father's hand," he said in a low, tense voice, "you and I are left to avenge our father." It was plain that Christian schooling in Quebec had not rooted out from Little Caribou's nature the savage's craving for revenge. To tell the truth, at the thought of that cowardly blow, Hugh's own feelings were nearly as fierce as those of his half-Indian brother.

[46]

VI
DOWN THE NORTHWEST SHORE

Hugh slept on board the *Otter* that night and helped with the unloading next day. His duties over, he was free to go where he would. To Baptiste's queries, he replied that he had seen his half-brother and had arranged to accompany

him to the Grand Portage. Later he would come again to the Kaministikwia or return to the Sault by the southerly route. Having satisfied the simple fellow's curiosity, Hugh went with him to visit the New Fort.

Baptiste had a great admiration for the Fort. Proudly he called Hugh's attention to the strong wooden walls, flanked with bastions. He obtained permission to take his friend through the principal building and display to him the big dining hall. There, later in the year, at the time of the annual meeting, partners, agents and clerks would banquet together and discuss matters of the highest import to the fur trade. He also showed Hugh the living quarters of the permanent employees of the post, the powder house, the jail, the kilns and forges. When the Fort should be completed, with all its storehouses and workshops, it would be almost a village within walls. Outside the stockade was a shipyard and a tract of land cleared for a garden. Hugh, who had lived in the city of Montreal, was less impressed with the log structures, many of them still unfinished, than was the voyageur who had spent most of his days in the wilds. Nevertheless the lad wondered at the size and ambitiousness of this undertaking and accomplishment in the wilderness. Far removed from the civilization of eastern Canada, the trading post was forced to be a little city in itself, dependent upon the real cities for nothing it could possibly make or obtain from the surrounding country.

To tell the truth, however, Hugh found more of real interest and novelty without the walls than within. There, Baptiste took him through the camps of Indians, voyageurs and woodsmen or coureurs de bois, where bark lodges and tents and upturned canoes served as dwellings. In one of the wigwams Blaise was living, awaiting the time when he and his elder brother should start on their adventurous journey. **[47]**

Already Blaise had provided himself with a good birch canoe, ribbed with cedar, and a few supplies, hulled corn, strips of smoked venison as hard and dry as wood, a lump of bear fat and a birch basket of maple sugar. He also had a blanket, a gun and ammunition, an iron kettle and a small axe. Hugh had been able to bring nothing with him but a blanket, his hunting knife and an extra shirt, but, as he had worked his passage, he still possessed a small sum of money. Now that he was no longer a member of the crew of the *Otter*, he had no place to sleep and wondered what he should do. Blaise solved the problem by taking him about a mile up-river to the post of the New Northwest or X Y Company, a much smaller and less pretentious place than the New Fort, and introducing him to the clerk in charge. Blaise had already explained that he and Hugh were going to get the elder Beaupré's furs and would bring them back to the New Company's post. So the clerk treated Hugh in a most friendly manner, invited him to share his own house, and even offered to give him credit for the gun, canoe paddle and other things he needed. Hugh, not knowing whether the search for the furs would be successful, preferred to pay cash.

From the X Y clerk the lad learned that his father, always proud and fiery of temper, had, **[48]**

the summer before, taken offence at one of the Old Company's clerks. The outcome of the quarrel had been that Beaupré had entered into a secret agreement with the New Company, promising to bring his pelts to them. The clerk warned both boys not to let any of the Old Company's men get wind of their undertaking. The rivalry between the two organizations was fierce and ruthless. Both went on the principle that "all is fair in love or war," and the relations between them were very nearly those of war. If the Old Company learned of the hidden furs, they would either send men to seek the cache or would try to force the boys to bring the pelts to the New Fort. The X Y clerk even hinted that Jean Beaupré had probably been the victim of some of the Old Company's men who had discovered that he was carrying his furs to the rival post. Hugh, during his winter at the Sault, had heard many tales of the wild deeds of the fur traders and had listened to the most bitter talk against the X Y or New Northwest company. Accordingly he was inclined to believe there might be some foundation for the agent's suspicions. Blaise, however, took no heed of the man's hints. When Hugh mentioned his belief that his father had been murdered because of his change of allegiance, the younger boy shrugged his shoulders, a habit caught from his French parent.

"That may be," he replied, "but it is not in that direction *I* shall look for the murderer." And that was the only comment he would make. **[49]**

To avoid curiosity and to keep their departure secret if possible, the boys decided not to go down the north branch of the Kaministikwia past the New Fort, but upstream to the dividing point, then descend the lower or southern channel. Early the third morning after Hugh's arrival, they set out from the New Northwest post. Up the river against the current they paddled between wooded shores veiled by the white, frosty mist. Without meeting another craft or seeing a lodge or tent or even the smoke of a fire, they passed the spot where the middle channel branched off, went on to the southern one, down that, aided by the current now, and out upon the fog-shrouded waters of the great bay. Hugh could not have found his way among islands and around points and reefs, but his half-brother had come this route less than two weeks before. With the retentive memory and excellent sense of direction of the Indian, he steered unhesitatingly around and among the dim shapes. When the sun, breaking through the fog, showed him the shore line clearly, he gave a little grunt of satisfaction. He had kept his course and was just where he had believed himself to be.

This feat of finding his way in the fog gave the elder brother some respect for the younger. Before the day was over, that respect had considerably increased. As the older boy was also the heavier, he had taken his place in the stern, kneeling on his folded blanket. Wielding a paddle was not a new exercise to Hugh. He thought that Blaise set too easy a pace, and, anxious to prove that he was no green hand, he quickened his own stroke. Blaise took the hint and timed his paddling to his brother's. Hugh was sturdy, well knit and proud of his muscular strength. For a couple of hours he kept up the **[50]**

pace he had set. Then his stroke grew slower and he put less force into it. After a time Blaise suggested a few minutes' rest. With the stern blade idle and the bow one dipped only now and then to keep the course, they floated for ten or fifteen minutes.

Refreshed by this brief respite and ashamed of tiring so soon, Hugh resumed work with a more vigorous stroke, but it was Blaise who set the pace now. In a clear, boyish voice, which gave evidence in only an occasional note of beginning to break and roughen, he started an old French song, learned from his father, and kept time with his paddle.

"Je n'ai pas trouvé personne
Que le rossignol chantant la belle rose,
La belle rose du rosier blanc!"

Roughly translated:

"Never yet have I found anyone
But the nightingale, to sing of the lovely rose,
The lovely rose of the white rose tree!"

At first Hugh, though his voice broke and quavered, attempted to join in, but singing took breath and strength. He soon fell silent, content to dip and raise his blade in time to the younger lad's tune. An easy enough pace it seemed, but the half-breed boy kept it up hour after hour, with only brief periods of rest. **[51]**

Hugh began to feel the strain sorely. His arms and back ached, his breath came wearily, and the lower part of his body was cramped and numb from his kneeling position. He had eaten breakfast at dawn and, as the sun climbed the sky and started down again, he began to wonder when and where his Indian brother intended to stop for the noon meal. Did Blaise purpose to travel all day without food, Hugh wondered. He opened his lips to ask, then, through pride, closed them again. Blaise, just fourteen, was nearly three years younger than Hugh. What Blaise could endure, the elder lad felt he must endure also. He did not intend to admit hunger or weariness, so long as his companion appeared untouched by either. With empty stomach and aching muscles, the white boy plied his paddle steadily and doggedly in time to the voyageur songs and the droning, monotonous Indian chants, the constantly repeated syllables of which had no meaning for him.

It was the weather that came to Hugh's rescue at last. After the lifting of the chill, frosty, morning fog, the day was bright. The waters of Thunder Bay were smooth at first, then rippled by a light north breeze. As the day wore on, the breeze came up to a brisk blow. Partly protected by the islands and points of the irregular shore, the two lads kept on their way. The wind increased. It roughened every stretch of open water to waves that broke foaming on the beaches or dashed in spray against the gray-brown rocks. Paddling became more and more difficult. Blaise ceased his songs. As they rounded a low point edged with gravel and sand, and saw before them a stretch of green-blue water swept by the full force of the wind into white-tipped waves, the half-breed boy told Hugh to steer for the beach. A few moments later he gave his elder brother a quick order to cease paddling. **[52]**

Realizing that Blaise wished to take the canoe in alone, Hugh, breathing a sigh of relief, laid down his paddle. The muscles of his back and shoulders were strained, it seemed to him, almost to the breaking point, and he felt that, in spite of his pride, he must soon have asked for rest. Without disturbing the balance of the wobbly craft, he tried to rub his cramped leg muscles. He feared that in trying to rise and step out, he might overturn the boat, to the mirth and disgust of his Indian brother.

With a few strong and skillful strokes, Blaise shot the canoe into the shallow water off the point. When the bow struck the sand, with a sharp command to Hugh, he rose and stepped out. As quickly as he could, Hugh got to his feet, and managed to step over the opposite side without stumbling or upsetting the canoe. Raising the light bark craft, the two carried it up the shelving shore, to the bushes that edged the woods, well beyond the reach of the waves.

The canoe carefully deposited in a safe spot, Hugh turned to Blaise. “Shall we be delayed long, do you think?” he asked. **[53]**

Blaise gave his French shrug. “It may be that the wind will go down with the sun.”

“Then, if we are to stay here so long, a little food wouldn’t come amiss.”

The younger boy nodded and began to unlash the packages which, to distribute the weight evenly, were securely tied to two poles lying along the bottom of the canoe. Hugh sought dry wood, kindled it with sparks from his flint and steel, and soon had a small fire on the pebbles. From a tripod of sticks the iron kettle was swung over the blaze, and when the water boiled, Blaise put in corn, a little of the dried venison, which he had pounded to a powder on a flat stone, and a portion of fat. He had made no mention of hunger, but when the stew was ready, Hugh noticed that he ate heartily. Meanwhile the elder boy, tired and sore muscled, watched for some sign of weariness in his companion. If Blaise was weary he had too much Indian pride to admit the fact to his new-found white brother.

The open lake was now rich blue, flecked with foamy whitecaps, the air so clear that the deep color of the water formed a sharp cut line against the paler tint of the sky at the horizon. The May wind was bitterly cold, so the lads rigged a shelter with the poles of the canoe and a blanket. The ground was so hard the poles could not be driven in. Three or four inches down, it was either frozen or composed of solid rock. The boys were obliged to brace each pole with stones and boulders. The blanket, stretched between the supports, kept off the worst of the wind, and between the screen and the fire, the two rested in comfort. Hugh soon fell asleep, and when he woke he was pleased to find that Blaise had dropped off also. Perhaps the latter was wearier than he had chosen to admit.

The wind did not go down with the sun, and the adventurers made camp for the night. Both blankets would be needed for bedding, so the screen was taken down and the canoe propped up on one side. Then a supply of wood was gathered and balsam branches cut for a bed. **[54]**

After a supper of corn porridge and maple sugar, the two turned in. Blaise went to sleep as soon as he was rolled in his blanket, but Hugh was wakeful. He lay there on his fragrant balsam bed in the shelter of the canoe, watching the flickering light of the camp fire and the stars coming out in the dark sky. Listening to the rushing of the wind in the trees and the waves breaking on the pebbles and thundering on a bit of rock shore near at hand, surrounded on every side by the strange wilderness of woods and waters, the boy could not sleep for a time. He kept thinking of his roving, half-wild father, and of the strange legacy he had left his sons. Twice Hugh rose to replenish the fire, when it began to die down, before he grew drowsy and drifted away into the land of dreams.

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VII
AT WAUSWAUGONING

Hugh woke chilled and stiff, to find Blaise rekindling the fire. The morning was clear and the sun coming up across the water. Winds and waves had subsided enough to permit going on with the journey.

Cutting wood limbered Hugh’s sore muscles somewhat, and a hot breakfast cheered him, but the first few minutes of paddling were difficult and painful. With set teeth he persisted, and gradually the worst of the lameness wore off.

Skirting the shore of Lake Superior in a bark canoe requires no small amount of patience. Delays from unfavorable weather must be frequent and unavoidable. On the whole, Hugh and Blaise were lucky during the first part of their trip, and they reached the Pigeon River in good time. Rounding the long point to the south of the river mouth, they paddled to the north end of Wauswaugoning Bay.

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Hugh was gaining experience and his paddling muscles were hardening. He would soon be able, he felt, to hold his own easily at any pace his half-brother set. So far Blaise had proved a good travelling companion, somewhat silent and grave to be sure, but dependable, patient and for the most part even tempered. His lack of talkativeness Hugh laid to his Indian blood, his gravity to his sorrow at the loss of the father he had known so much better than Hugh had known him. Blaise, the older boy decided, was, in spite of his Quebec training and many civilized ways, more Indian than French. Only now and then, in certain gestures and quick little ways, in an unexpected gleam of humor or sudden flash of anger, did the lad show his kinship with Jean Beaupré.

Satisfactory comrade though the half-breed boy seemed, Hugh was in no haste to admit Blaise to his friendship. Since first receiving his letter, Hugh had felt doubtful of this Indian brother, inclined to resent his very existence. Their relations from their first meeting had been entirely peaceful but somewhat cool and stiff. As

yet, Hugh was obliged to admit to himself, he had no cause for complaint of his half-brother's behavior, but he felt that the real test of their companionship was to come.

The search for the cache of pelts had not yet begun, but was to begin soon. It was into his wife's lodge at Wauswaugoning Bay that Jean Beaupré had stumbled dying. Somewhere between Grand Portage Bay, which lies just to the west and south of Wauswaugoning, and the Fond du Lac at the mouth of the St. Louis River, the bateau must have been wrecked and the furs hidden.

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The two boys landed on a bit of beach at the north end of the bay, hid the canoe among the alders, and set out on foot. Blaise fully expected to find his mother awaiting him, but the cleared spot among the trees was deserted. Of the camp nothing remained but the standing poles of a lodge, from which the bark covering had been stripped, and refuse and cast-off articles strewn upon the stony ground in the untidy manner in which the Indians and most of the white voyageurs left their camping places. With a little grunt, which might have meant either disappointment or disgust, Blaise looked about him. He noticed two willow wands lying crossed on the ground and pegged down with a crotched stick.

"She has gone that way," said the boy, indicating the longest section of willow, pointing towards the northeast.

"If she travelled by canoe, it is strange we did not meet her," Hugh remarked.

Blaise shrugged. "Who knows how long ago she went? The ashes are wet with rain. I cannot tell whether the fire burned two days ago or has been out many days. There is another message here." He squatted down to study the shorter stick. At one end the bark had been peeled off and a cross mark cut into the wood. The marked end pointed towards a thick clump of spruces.

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The boy rose and walked towards the group of trees, Hugh following curiously. Blaise pushed his way between the spruces, and, before Hugh could join him, came out again carrying a mooseskin bag. In the open space by the ashes of the fire, he untied the thong and dumped the contents. There was a smaller skin bag, partly full, a birch bark package and a bundle of clothing. Tossing aside the bundle, Blaise opened the small bag, thrust in his hand, then, with the one word "manomin," passed the bag to Hugh. It was about half full of wild rice grains, very hard and dry. The bark package Blaise did not open. He merely sniffed at it and laid it down. Hugh, picking it up and smelling of it, recognized the unmistakable odor of smoked fish. The bundle, which the younger boy untied next, contained two deerskin shirts or tunics, two pairs of leggings of the same material and half a dozen pairs of moccasins. All were new and well made, the moccasins decorated with dyed porcupine quills, the breasts of the tunics with colored bead embroidery.

The lad's face lighted with a look of pleasure, and he glanced at Hugh proudly. "They are my mother's work," he said, "made of the best skins, well made. Now we have strong new clothes for

our journey."

"We?" replied Hugh questioningly.

"Truly. There are two suits and six pairs of moccasins. Look." He held up one of the shirts. "This she made larger than the other. She knows you are the elder and must be the larger." He handed the shirt to Hugh, following it with a pair of the leggings. Looking over the moccasins, he selected the larger ones and gave them also to his white brother. "They are better to wear in a canoe than boots," he said.

For a moment Hugh was silent with embarrassment. He was touched by the generosity of the Indian woman, who had put as much time and care on these clothes for her unknown stepson as upon those for her own boy. He flushed, however, at the thought of accepting anything from the squaw who had taken his mother's place in his father's life. Yet to decline the gift would be to offer a deadly insult not only to the Indian woman but to her son as well.

"I am obliged to your mother," Hugh stammered. "It was—kind of her." **[59]**

Blaise made no other reply than a nod. He appeared pleased with the appearance and quality of the clothes, but took it as a matter of course that his mother should make them for Hugh as well as for himself.

"I wish she had left more food," he said after a moment, "but at this time of the year food is scarce. That manomin is all that remained of the harvest of the autumn. We have eaten much of our food. We must fish when we can."

"Can't we buy corn and pork from the traders at the Grand Portage?" Hugh inquired.

Blaise shook his head doubtfully. "We will try," he said.

He put the food back in the mooseskin bag and hung it on a tree. Then he turned to Hugh and said softly and questioningly, "You wish to see where we laid him?"

Hugh nodded, a lump rising in his throat, and followed his brother. Beyond the clump of spruces, in a tiny clearing, was Jean Beaupré's grave. Hugh was surprised and horrified to see that it was, in appearance, an Indian grave. Poles had been stuck in the ground on either side, bent over and covered with birch bark. The boy's face flushed with indignation.

"Why," he demanded, "did you do that?" He pointed to the miniature lodge.

Blaise looked puzzled. "It is the Ojibwa custom."

"Father was not an Ojibwa. He was a white man and should have been buried like a white man and a Christian," Hugh burst out. **[60]**

Blaise drew himself up with a dignity strange in so young a lad. "He *was* buried like a Christian," he replied quietly. "Look." He pointed to the rude cross set up in front of the opening to the shelter, instead of the pole, with offerings and trophies hung upon it, usually placed beside Ojibwa graves. "The good father absolved him and read the burial service over him," the lad

went on, “and I placed the cross there. Then the friends of my mother covered the spot according to the Ojibwa custom. Our father was an Ojibwa by adoption and it was right they should do that. Now no Ojibwa will ever disturb that spot.”

Hugh’s anger had been cooling. After all, his father had thrown in his lot with the Indians and they had meant to honor him. At least he had received Christian burial, and it was something to know that his grave would not be disturbed. In silence Hugh turned away. He could not quite bring himself to apologize for his hasty words.

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The relations between the half-brothers were more than ordinarily cool the rest of that day. Blaise, travelling overland by a trail he knew, went to the Grand Portage Bay in quest of supplies. Even before the formation of the Northwest Company, the bay had been a favorite stopping place, first for the French, and then for the English traders who followed the Pigeon River route to the country west of the lake. An old Indian trail led from the bay to a spot on the river above the falls and rapids that make its lower course unnavigable. Gitchi Onegam Kaministigoya the Indians had called the trail and the bay, “the great carrying place of the river that is hard to navigate.” Early in the history of the fur trade, the white traders began to use that trail, portaging their goods some nine miles from the bay to the river and bringing the bales of furs back over the same route.

Since the Old Northwest Company had removed its headquarters to Thunder Bay and had practically abandoned the Pigeon River route for the Kaministikwia, Grand Portage was not so busy a place, but the Old Company still maintained a post at the partly deserted fort on the north shore of the bay. On the west side the chief post and headquarters of the New Company also remained open for business. Blaise visited both posts, only to find that, as the winter’s supplies were almost exhausted and no one knew when fresh stores would arrive, nothing could be spared.

Anxious to avoid questions, Hugh had not accompanied Blaise. He occupied himself with fishing from the canoe, and caught one lake trout of about three pounds weight. Making a grill of willow twigs resting on stones over the coals, he had the trout ready to broil when Blaise returned. The common way of cooking fish among both the Indians and white men of the woods was to boil them, but Hugh, recently from the civilized world, preferred his broiled, baked or fried.

Blaise, after one mouthful, deigned to approve his elder brother’s cooking. “It is good,” he said. “I have not eaten fish so cooked since I ate it on Fridays in school at Quebec.”

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Neither lad had anything more to say during the meal or for some time afterwards. Finally Blaise put his hand in the leather pouch he wore at his belt, drew out something and handed it to Hugh. The latter unwrapped the bit of soft doeskin and found his father’s gold seal ring. He glanced quickly up at Blaise.

“It is yours,” the younger brother said. “I gave it not to you before, because I liked not to part with it.”

Moved by a generous impulse, Hugh stretched out his hand to return the ring, but Blaise would not take it.

“No,” he said firmly. “You are the elder son. It is yours.”

The adventurers intended to continue their trip next day, but fate was against them. Before dawn rain was beating on the canoe that sheltered them, and the thundering of the waves on the rocks in the more exposed part of the bay sounded in Hugh’s ears as he woke. That storm was the beginning of a period of bad weather, rain, fog, and wind that cleared the air, but rose to a gale, lashing the waters of the bay to white-capped waves that did not diminish until hours after the wind had blown itself out. Eight days the two camped in a hastily built wigwam on Wauswaugoning Bay, fishing when they could, and snaring one lean hare and a few squirrels. They hunted for larger game and found some deer tracks, but did not catch sight of the animals. As for birds, they saw none but gulls, a loon or two and an owl, and did not care to try anything so tough and strong for food. So they were obliged to consume a good part of their corn.

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VIII
THE BLOOD-STAINED TUNIC

But a few days of May remained when Hugh and Blaise left Wauswaugoning. Their progress was necessarily slow, not only on account of delays due to wind and weather, but because they were obliged to skirt the shore closely, entering each bay and cove, rounding every point, and keeping keen watch for any sign of the wrecked boat. They had no clue to the spot where it lay. It might have been thrown up on the open shore, or driven into some rock-infested bay or stream mouth. At each stream they made a close examination, ascending a short distance, by canoe where that was possible, or up over the rocky banks on foot. They had searched the mouths of more than a dozen streams and creeks when they came to one, where Blaise, in entering, cautioned Hugh to steer far to one side. Almost across the river mouth extended a long bar of sand and gravel, covered by an inch or two of water, for the river was still high from the spring flood. Bars or rock reefs were, Hugh was learning, common characteristics of the streams emptying into Superior. To enter them without accident required care and caution.

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The bar was passed, but further progress up-stream proved impossible. The current was strong, and just ahead were foaming rapids where the water descended among rocks and over boulders. Steering into a bit of quiet backwater behind the bar, the boys found a landing place and carried the canoe ashore. Then they scrambled up the bank a short distance, searching the stream mouth for signs of the wreck. Caught in a blossoming serviceberry bush growing on a rock at the very

edge of the river, Blaise found an old moccasin. He examined the ragged, dirty, skin shoe in silence for a moment. Then, hazel eyes gleaming, he held the thing out to Hugh.

“It is my mother’s work,” he said in tense tones. Hugh snatched the worn moccasin. “Do you mean this was my father’s?”

Blaise nodded. “It is my mother’s work,” he repeated. “I would know it anywhere, the pattern of quills, the shaping, even the skin. It is from the elk hide our father brought from the region of the great river.” He made a gesture towards the southwest, and Hugh knew he referred to the Mississippi. “See, it is just like ours,” Blaise concluded, holding up one foot.

Hugh glanced from the almost new moccasin to the ragged one, and drew a long breath. “Then it may be about here somewhere father was wrecked.”

“We must make search,” was the brief reply.

Thoroughly they searched, first the banks of the stream, then the lake beach, parallel ridges of flat flakes of rock pushed up by the waves. They even examined the ground beyond the beach, a rough slope composed of the same sort of dark rock flakes, partly decomposed into crumbly soil. The two pushed through the bushes and small trees that sparsely clothed the stony ground, but nowhere did they find any sign of wrecked boat or hidden cache. Yet they did find something, something that hinted of violence and crime.

Well up from the shore and not far from the stream bank, Hugh came upon an open space, where a ring of blackened stones and ashes showed that a cooking fire had burned. He took one look, turned and plunged into the bushes to find Blaise. But he stopped suddenly. His foot had come in contact with something that was not a rock, a stump or a stick. Stooping, he pulled from under a scraggly wild raspberry, where it had been dropped or thrust, a bundle. Unrolling it, he found it to be a ragged deerskin tunic, damp, dirty and bearing dark stains. The boy stood transfixed staring at the thing in his hands. After a moment he raised his head and shouted for Blaise. **[65]**

Blaise answered from near by, but to Hugh it seemed a long time before the younger boy came through the bushes. In silence the elder handed the other the stained shirt. Blaise took it, examined it quickly and uttered an Indian grunt.

“Blood?” asked Hugh pointing to the stains.

Blaise grunted assent.

“Father’s blood?” Hugh’s voice broke.

Blaise looked up quickly. “No, no. Black Thunder’s.”

“How do you know?”

“By this.” The lad pointed to a crude figure, partly painted, partly embroidered in black wool, on the breast of the tunic. “This is Black Thunder’s mark, the thunder bird. Without doubt this shirt was his.”

“But how did it come here? There’s no sign of **[66]**

the wrecked boat."

Blaise shook his head in puzzlement. "I do not understand," he said slowly.

The half-breed lad was keen witted in many ways, but the white boy's mind worked more quickly on such a problem. "It may be," Hugh speculated, "that they were wrecked farther along the shore. Coming on by land, they camped here and some accident happened to Black Thunder, or perhaps he had been bleeding from a hurt received in the wreck, and he changed his shirt and threw away the bloody one."

"Where was it?" asked Blaise.

"Under this raspberry bush, rolled up."

"And why think you they camped here?"

"I'll show you."

Hugh led the way to the little clearing. Carefully and absorbedly Blaise examined the spot.

"Someone has camped here," he concluded, "but only a short time, not more than one night. He made no lodge, for there are no poles. He cut no boughs for beds, and he left scarce any litter. It may be he cooked but one meal and went on. If he lay here for the night, the marks of his body no longer remain. If anyone was slain here," he added after a moment, "the rains washed out the stains. It was a long time ago that he was here, I think."

"If Black Thunder was killed here," Hugh questioned, "what was done with his body?"

Blaise shrugged. "There is the lake, and a body weighted with stones stays down."

"Then why was his blood-stained shirt not sunk with him?" **[67]**

"That I know not," and the puzzled look returned to the lad's face.

"Might it not be that father was wearing Black Thunder's shirt and that the stains are from his wound?"

"He wore his own when he came to the lodge, and the stains are in the wrong place. They are on the breast. No, he never wore this shirt. The blood must be Black Thunder's."

The sun was going down when the two boys finally gave up the search for the wrecked boat or some further trace of Jean Beaupré and his companion. Neither lad had any wish to camp in the vicinity. Blaise especially showed strong aversion to the spot.

"There are evil stories of this river," he explained to his brother. "If our father camped here, it was because he was very weary indeed. He was a brave man though, far braver than most men, white or red."

"Why should he have hesitated to camp here?" Hugh inquired curiously. "It's true we have seen pleasanter spots along this shore, yet this is not such a bad one."

“There are evil stories of the place,” Blaise repeated in a low voice. “The lake from which this river flows is the abode of a devil.” The boy made the sign of the cross on his breast and went on in his musical singsong. “On the shores of that lake have been found the devil’s tracks, great footprints, like those of a man, but many times larger and very far apart. So the lake is called the ‘Lake of Devil Tracks’ and the river bears the same name. It is said that when that devil wishes to come down to the shore of the great lake to fish for trout, it is this way he comes, striding along the bed of the river, even at spring flood.”

Hugh Beaupré, half Scotch, half French, and living in a time when the superstitious beliefs of an earlier day persisted far more actively than they do now, was not without his share of such superstitions. But this story of a devil living on a lake and walking along a river, struck him as absurd and he said so with perfect frankness. **[68]**

“Surely you don’t believe such a tale, Blaise, and neither did my father.”

“I know not if the tale is true,” the younger boy answered somewhat sullenly. “Men say they have seen the footprints and everyone knows there are devils, both red and white. Why should not one live on that lake then? How know we it was not that devil who killed Black Thunder and left the bloody tunic under the raspberry bush as a warning to others not to camp on his hunting ground? I am no coward, as I will speedily show you if you want proof, but I will not camp here. If you stay, you stay alone.”

“I don’t want to stay,” Hugh replied quickly. “Devil or not, I don’t like the place. We’ll go on till we find a better camping ground.”

In the light of the afterglow, which was tinting sky and water with pale gold, soft rose and lavender, and tender blue, they launched their canoe again and paddled on. The peace and beauty around him made the sinister thing he had found under the raspberry bush, and the evil deed that thing suggested, seem unreal to Hugh, almost as unreal as the devil who lived at the lake and walked down the river to his fishing. Nevertheless he turned his eyes from the soft colors of sky and water to scan the shore the canoe was skirting. Not a trace of the wrecked bateau appeared, though both boys watched closely. **[69]**

Several miles beyond the Devil Track River, they made camp on a sloping rock shore wooded with spruce and balsam, where nothing worse than a plague of greedy mosquitoes disturbed their rest. Hugh thought of suggesting that the horde of voracious insects might have been sent by the evil spirit of Devil Track Lake to torment the trespassers. Fearing however that a humorous treatment of his story might offend the halfbreed lad’s sensitive pride, he kept the fancy to himself.

Going on with their journey the next morning, the two came to the spot known to the French fur traders and to the English who followed them as the Grand Marais, the great marsh or meadow. There a long sand and gravel point connects with a low, marshy shore, a higher, rocky stretch, once a reef or island, running at

right angles to the gravel spit. The T-shaped projection forms a good harbor for small boats. Closely scanning every foot of beach and rock shore, Hugh and Blaise paddled around the T. On the inner side of the spit, they caught sight of what appeared to be part of a boat half buried in the sand and gravel. They landed to investigate. The thing was indeed the shattered remnants of a wreck, old and weathered and deep in sand and pebbles. It was not Jean Beaupré's boat, but a birch canoe.

Leaving the T, the lads skirted the low, curving shore. When they rounded the little point beyond, they discovered that the waves, which had been increasing for some hours, had reached a height dangerous to a small boat. The time was past noon, and Blaise thought that the sea would not be likely to go down before sunset. So he gave the word to turn back and seek a camping ground. In the angle of the T just where the sand spit joined the rocky reef, they found shelter. [70]

Realizing that they must conserve their scanty food supply, the two, instead of eating at once, went fishing in the sheltered water. Hugh, in the stern of the canoe, held the hand line, while Blaise paddled. Luck was with them and when they went ashore an hour later they had four fine trout, the smallest about three and the largest at least eight pounds. In one thing at least, cooking fish, Hugh excelled his younger brother. He set about broiling part of his catch as soon as he had cleaned them. Without touching their other supplies, the lads made a hearty meal of trout.

The wind did not fall till after sunset. Knowing it would be some hours before the lake would be calm enough for canoe travel, the boys prepared to stay where they were till morning. The night was unusually mild for the time of year, so they stretched themselves under their canoe and let the fire burn itself out.

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IX
THE GIANT IROQUOIS

At dawn Hugh woke and found his half-brother stirring.

"I go to see how the lake appears," Blaise explained.

"I'll go with you," was Hugh's reply, and Blaise nodded assent.

They crawled out from under the canoe, and, leaving the beach, climbed up the rocky cross bar of the T-shaped point. The younger boy in the lead, they crossed the rough, rock summit, pushing their way among stunted evergreens and bushes now leafed out into summer foliage. Suddenly Blaise paused, turned his head and laid his finger on his lips. Hugh strained his ears to listen, but could catch no sound but the whining cry of a sea-gull and the rippling of the water on the outer rocks. Blaise had surely

heard something, for he dropped on hands and knees and crept forward. Hugh followed in the same manner, trying to move as noiselessly as the Indian lad. With all his caution, he could not avoid a slight rustling of undergrowth and bushes. Blaise turned his head again to repeat his gesture of silence.

After a few yards of this cautious progress, Blaise came to a stop. Crawling up beside his brother, Hugh found himself on the edge of a steep rock declivity. Lying flat, screened by an alder and a small balsam fir, he looked out across the water. He saw what Blaise had heard. Only a few hundred feet away were two canoes, three men in each. Even at that short distance Hugh could barely detect the sound of the dipping paddles and the water rippling about the prows. His respect for his half-brother's powers of hearing increased. **[72]**

The sun had not yet risen, but the morning was clear of fog or haze. As the first canoe passed, the figures of the men stood out clear against lake and sky. Hugh's attention was attracted to the man in the stern. Indeed that man was too notable and unusual a figure to escape attention. A gigantic fellow, he towered, even in his kneeling position, a good foot above his companions. A long eagle feather upright from the band about his head made him appear still taller, while his huge shoulders and big-muscled arms were conspicuous as he wielded his paddle on the left side of the canoe.

Hugh heard Blaise at his side draw a quick breath. "Ohrante!" he whispered in his elder brother's ear. "Do not stir!"

Obeying that whispered command, Hugh lay motionless, bearing with Spartan fortitude the stinging of the multitude of mosquitoes that surrounded him. When both canoes had rounded a point farther up the shore and vanished from sight, Blaise rose to his feet. Hugh followed his example, and they made their way back across the rocks in silence. By the time camp was reached, the elder brother was almost bursting with curiosity. Who was the huge Indian, and why had Blaise been so startled, even frightened, at the sight of him?

"Who is Ohrante?" Hugh asked, as he helped to lift the canoe from the poles that propped it. **[73]**

"He is more to be feared than the devil of the lake himself," was the grim reply. Then briefly Blaise told how the big Indian, the summer before, had treacherously robbed and slain a white trader and had severely wounded his Ojibwa companion, scalped him and left him to die. The wounded man had not died, though he would always be a cripple. He had told the tale of the attack, and a party of Ojibwas, led by Hugh's father, had pursued Ohrante and captured him. They were taking him back to stand trial by Indian law or to be turned over to white justice,—there was some disagreement between Jean Beaupré and his companions as to which course should be followed,—when the giant made his escape through the help of two of the party who secretly sympathized with him and had fled with him. From that day until this morning, when he had recognized the big Indian in the passing canoe, Blaise had heard nothing of Ohrante.

“But two men went with him when he fled,” the boy concluded. “Now he has five. He is bold to return so soon. I am glad he goes up the shore, not down. I should not wish to follow him or have him follow us. He hated our father and nothing would please him more than to get us in his hands. I hope my mother is with others, a strong party. I think Ohrante will not risk an encounter with the Ojibwas again so soon, unless it be with two or three only.”

“Isn’t he an Ojibwa himself?” Hugh asked. **[74]**

“No, he is a Mohawk, one of the Iroquois wolves the Englishmen have brought into the Ojibwa country to hunt and trap for the Old Company. It is said his mother was an Ojibwa captive, but Ohrante is an evil Iroquois all through.”

“Monsieur Cadotte says the bringing in of Iroquois hunters is unwise policy,” Hugh remarked.

“The company never did a worse thing,” Blaise replied passionately. “The Iroquois hunters trap and shoot at all seasons of the year. They are greedy for pelts good and bad, and care not how quickly they strip the country of beasts of all kinds. If the company brings in many more of these thieving Iroquois, the Ojibwa, to whom the land belongs, will soon be left without furs or food.”

“That is short-sighted policy for the company itself, it seems to me,” commented Hugh.

“So our father said. He too hated the Iroquois intruders. He told the men of the company they did ill to bring strange hunters into lands where they had no right. Let the Iroquois keep to their own hunting grounds. Here they do nothing but harm, and Ohrante is the worst of them all.”

Hugh had scarcely heard the last part of the lad’s speech. His mind was occupied with a thought which had just come to him. “Do you think,” he asked suddenly, “that it was Ohrante who killed father?”

“I had not thought it till I saw him passing by,” Blaise replied gravely. “I believed it might be another enemy. Now I know not what to think. I cannot believe the traders have brought Ohrante back to hunt and trap for them. And my heart is troubled for my mother. Once when she was a girl she was a captive among the Sioux. To be captured by Ohrante would be even worse, and now there is no Jean Beaupré to take her away.” **[75]**

“Do you mean that father rescued her from the Sioux?” Hugh asked in surprise.

“He found her among the Sioux far south of here on the great river. She was sad because she had been taken from her own people. So he bought her from the chief who wished to make her his squaw. Then our father brought her to the Grand Portage. There the priest married them. She was very young then, young and beautiful. She is not old even now, and she is still beautiful,” Blaise added proudly.

Hugh had listened to this story with amazement. Had he misjudged his own father? Was it to be wondered at that the warm-hearted young

Frenchman should have taken the only possible way to save the sad Ojibwa girl from captivity among the cruel Sioux? The elder son felt ashamed of his bitter thoughts. Blaise loved his mother and was anxious about her. Hugh tried to comfort his younger brother as well as he could.

“The willow wand showed that your mother had gone up the shore,” he hastened to say. “Ohrante is not coming from that way, but from the opposite direction, and there are no women in his canoes. Surely your mother is among friends by this time, and Ohrante, the outlaw, will never dare attack them.”

“That is true,” Blaise replied. “She cannot have fallen into his hands, and he, with so few followers, will not dare make open war.” He was silent for a moment. Then he said earnestly, “There is but one thing for us to do. We must first find the wreck and the cache, as our father bade us. Then we must track down his murderer.” [76]

Hugh nodded in perfect agreement. “Let us get our breakfast and be away then.”

Blaise was untying the package of maple sugar. He took out a piece and handed it to Hugh. “We make no fire here,” he said abruptly. “The Iroquois is not yet far away. He might see the smoke. We will go now. When the wind rises again we can eat.”

Hugh was hungry, but he had no wish to attract the attention of the huge Mohawk and his band. So he made no objection, but nibbled his lump of sugar as he helped to load the canoe and launch it. Before the sun peeped over the far-away line where lake and sky met, the two lads were well on their way again.

[77]

X
THE LOOMING SAILBOAT

Though favored by the weather most of the time for several days in succession, the brothers went ahead but slowly. The discovery of the worn moccasin and the stained tunic had raised their hopes of finding the wrecked bateau soon. At any moment they might come upon it. Accordingly they were even more vigilant than before, anxiously scanning every foot of open shore, bay, cove, stream mouth and island.

One evening before sunset, they reached a beautiful bay with small islands and wooded shores, where they caught sight of a group of bark lodges. Blaise proposed that they land and bargain for provisions. There proved to be about a dozen Indians in the encampment, men, squaws and children. Luckily two deer and a yearling moose had been killed the day before, and Blaise, after some discussion in Ojibwa, succeeded in obtaining a piece of fresh venison and another of moose meat. The Indians refused Hugh’s offer of payment in money, preferring to exchange the meat for ammunition for their old,

flint-lock muskets. They were from the deep woods of the interior, unused to frequenting trading posts, and with no idea of money, but they understood the value of powder and shot.

To one of the men Blaise spoke of having seen the outlaw Ohrante. The Ojibwa replied that he had heard Ohrante had come from his hiding place seeking vengeance on those who had captured him. He had never seen the giant Iroquois, the man said, but he had heard that it was through his great powers as a medicine man that he had escaped from his captors. Without divulging that he was the son of the man who had led the expedition against Ohrante, Blaise asked the Indian if he knew when and where the outlaw had first been seen since his exile. **[78]**

“I was told he was here at this Bay of the Beaver late in the Moon of the Snow Crust,” the Ojibwa replied, and the boy’s hazel eyes gleamed.

Not until they had made camp did Blaise tell Hugh of the information he had received.

“In the Moon of the Snow Crust!” the latter cried. “That is February or March, isn’t it? And it was late in March that father died!”

The younger boy nodded. “Ohrante killed him, that I believe. Some day, some day——” Blaise left the sentence unfinished, but his elder brother had no doubt of the meaning. Hugh’s heart, like the younger lad’s, was hot against his father’s murderer, but he remembered the powerful figure of the Iroquois standing out dark against the dawn. How and when would the day come?

After thoroughly exploring the Bay of the Beaver that night, the boys were off shortly after dawn the next morning. Just as the sun was coming up, reddening the white mist that lay upon the gently rippling water, they paddled out of the bay. As they rounded the southern point, Blaise uttered a startled exclamation.

Hugh, in the stern, looked up from his paddle. “A ship!” he cried. **[79]**

Coming directly towards them, the light breeze scarce filling her sail, was a ship. So high she loomed through the morning mist Hugh thought she must be at least as large as the *Otter*, though she seemed to have but one square sail. What was a ship doing here, so far south of the Kaministikwia and even of the Grand Portage? Did she belong to some of the Yankee traders who were now invading the Superior region? Hugh knew he had been in United States waters ever since passing the mouth of the Pigeon River.

And then, as the canoe and the ship approached one another, a curious thing happened. The ship shrank. She was no longer as large as the *Otter*. She was much smaller. She was not a ship at all, only a wooden boat with a sail. There was something about the light and the atmospheric conditions, the rising sun shining through the morning mist, that had deceived the eye and caused the approaching craft to appear far taller than it really was.

The sailboat was coming slowly in the light wind. As the boys paddled past, they saw it was a

small, flat-sided, wooden boat pointed at both ends. It was well loaded and carried three men. Hugh shouted a greeting and an inquiry. A tall fellow in blanket coat and scarlet cap, who was steering, replied in a big, roaring voice and bad French, that they were from the Fond du Lac bound for the Kaministikwia.

Blaise had been even more amazed than Hugh at the deceptive appearance of the sailboat. When they landed later to inspect a stream mouth, the half-breed said seriously that some spirit of the lake must have been playing tricks with them. He wondered if one of the men aboard that bateau was using magic. **[80]**

“I doubt that,” Hugh answered promptly. “I think the queer light, the sunrise through the mist, deceived our eyes and made the boat look taller. Once on the way from Michilimackinac to the Sault, we saw something like that. A small, bare rock ahead of us stretched up like a high island. The Captain said he had seen the same thing before in that very same spot. He called it ‘looming,’ but he did not think there was anything magical about it.”

Blaise made no reply, but Hugh doubted if the lad had been convinced.

Several times during the rest of the trip down shore, the boys met canoes loaded with trappers and traders or with families of Indians journeying to the Grand Portage or to the New Fort. The two avoided conversation with the strangers, as they did not care to answer questions about themselves or their destination.

The journey was becoming wearisome indeed. The minuteness of the search and the delays from bad weather prolonged the time. Moreover the store of food was scant. The lads fished and hunted whenever possible without too greatly delaying progress, but their luck was poor. Seldom were they able to satisfy their hearty appetites. They lay down hungry under the stars and took up their paddles at chilly dawn with no breakfast but a bit of maple sugar. Hugh grew lean and brown and hard muscled. Except for the redder hue of his tan, the light color of his hair and his gray eyes, he might almost have been whole brother to Blaise. The older boy had become expert with the paddle and could hold his own for any length of time and at any pace the half-breed set. As a camper he was nearly the Indian lad’s equal and he prided himself on being a better cook. It would take several years of experience and wilderness living, however, before he could hope to compete with his younger brother in woodcraft, weather wisdom or the handling of a canoe in rough water. **[81]**

As mile after mile of carefully searched shore line passed, without sign of the wrecked bateau or trace of Jean Beaupré’s having come that way, the boys grew more and more puzzled and anxious. Nevertheless they persisted in their quest until they came at last to the Fond du Lac.

Fond du Lac means literally the “bottom of the lake,” but the name was used by the early French explorers to designate the end or head of Lake Superior, where the River St. Louis discharges and where the city of Duluth now stands. To-day the name is no longer applied to the head of the lake itself, but is restricted to the

railway junction and town of Fond du Lac several miles up the river. There was no town of Fond du Lac or of Duluth in the days of this story. Wild, untamed, uninhabited, rose the steep rock hills and terraces where part of the city now stands.

As they skirted the shore, the boys could see ahead of them a narrow line stretching across the water to the southeast. That line was the long, low point now known as Minnesota Point, a sand-bar that almost closes the river mouth and served then, as it does now, to form a sheltered harbor. Drawing nearer, they discovered that the long, sand point was by no means bare, much of it being covered more or less thickly with bushes, evergreens, aspens and willows. The two lads were weary, discouraged and very hungry. Since their scanty breakfast of wild rice boiled with a little fat, they had eaten nothing but a lump of sugar each, the last remnant of their provisions. Nevertheless they paddled patiently along the bar to the place where the river cut diagonally through it to reach the lake. Entering the narrow channel, they passed through to absolutely still water. **[82]**

The sun was setting. Unless they went several miles farther to a trading post or caught some fish, they must go to sleep hungry. They decided to try the fishing. Luck with the lines had been poor throughout most of the trip, but that night fortune favored the lads a little. In the shallower water within the bar, they caught, in less than half an hour, two small, pink-fleshed lake trout, which Hugh estimated at somewhat less than three pounds each.

On the inner side of the point, the brothers ran their canoe upon the sand beach. Then they kindled a fire and cooked their long delayed supper. When the meal was over, nothing remained of the fish but heads, fins, skin and bones.

Usually both fell asleep as soon as they were rolled in their blankets. That night, on the low sand-bar, the mosquitoes came in clouds to the attack, but it was not the annoying insects that kept the boys awake. They wanted to talk over their situation. **[83]**

“It seems,” Hugh said despondently, “that we have failed. That wrecked boat must have been battered to pieces and washed out into the lake. Our only chance of discovering the cache was to find the boat, and that chance seems to be gone.”

“There is still one other chance, my brother,” Blaise replied quietly. “Have you forgotten what we found at the River of Devil Tracks? We must go back there and make search again.”

“You are right,” was Hugh’s quick rejoinder. “We didn’t find any sign of the boat, yet it may once have been there or near by.”

Blaise nodded. “The bateau was perhaps driven on the bar at the river mouth and afterwards washed out into the lake. We must make speed back there. But, Hugh, if it was Ohrante who killed our father, he may also have found the furs.”

“And carried them away.” Hugh slapped

savagely at a mosquito. “I have thought of that. I believe in my heart that Ohrante killed father. Yet the murderer may not have taken the furs. Father told you he was wrecked in a storm, and, unable to carry the furs with him, he hid them. That much you say he made clear. When and where he was attacked we do not know, but I believe it must have been after he cached the furs. When he told of the wreck and the hiding of the pelts, he said nothing of his wound?”

“Nothing then or afterwards of the wound or how he got it. He bade me seek you out and find the furs and the packet. When I asked him how he came by the hurt, he was beyond replying.” [84]

Both boys were silent a moment listening to the howling of a lonely wolf far off in the high hills to the north.

Then Hugh said emphatically, “We must go back and search every inch of ground about that river. We will not give up while a chance remains of finding the cache,” he added with stubborn determination.

[85]

XI
THE FIRE-LIT ORGY

Before starting back the way they had come, the brothers had to have provisions. Early the next morning they went up the St. Louis River. Beyond the bar the river widened to two miles or more. In midstream the current was strong, but Hugh steered into the more sluggish water just outside the lily pads, reeds and grass of the low shore. About three miles above the mouth, a village of bark lodges was passed, where sharp-nosed dogs ran out to yelp and growl at the canoe.

A short distance beyond the Indian village stood the log fort and trading post of the Old Northwest Company’s Fond du Lac station, one of several posts that were still maintained in United States territory. The two boys landed and attempted to buy provisions. Blaise was not known to the clerk in charge, and Hugh, when asked, gave his middle name of MacNair. Jean Beaupré had passed this post on his way down the river, and the lads did not know what conversation or controversy he might have had with the Old Company’s men. So they thought it wise to say nothing of their relationship to the elder Beaupré. Brought up to be truthful and straightforward, Hugh found it difficult to evade the clerk’s questions. The older boy left most of the talking to the younger, who had his share of the Indian’s wiliness and secretiveness. Blaise saw nothing wrong in deceiving enemies and strangers in any way he found convenient. To Hugh, brother and comrade, Blaise would have scorned to lie, but he did not scruple to let the Northwest Company’s man think that he and Hugh were on their way from the south shore to the Kaministikwia in the hope of taking service with the Old Company.

The post could spare but little in the way of provisions. Less than a half bushel of hulled corn, a few pounds of wild rice, left from the supply brought the preceding autumn from the south shore, and a very small piece of salt pork were all the clerk could be persuaded to part with. As they were leaving he gave the boys a friendly warning. [86]

“Watch out,” he said, “for an Iroquois villain and his band. They are reported to be lingering along the north shore and they are a bad lot. He used to be a hunter for the company, but he murdered a white man and is an outcast now, a fugitive from justice. The rascal is called Ohrante. If you catch sight of a huge giant of an Indian, lie low and get out of his way as soon and as fast as you can.”

On the way back to the river mouth, the lads stopped at the Indian village. After much bargaining in Ojibwa, Blaise secured a strip of dried venison, as hard as a board, and a bark basket of sugar. To these people the lad spoke of the warning the clerk had given him, but they could tell him no more of the movements of Ohrante than he already knew.

The brothers were glad to get away from the Indian encampment and out on the river again. The village was unkempt, and disgustingly dirty and ill smelling. It was evident that most of the men and some of the squaws were just recovering from a debauch on the liquor they had obtained from the traders. [87]

“They are ruining the Ojibwa people, those traders,” Blaise said angrily, after the two had paddled a short distance down-stream. “Once an Ojibwa gets the habit of strong drink, he will give all he has for it. The rival companies contend for the furs, and each promises more and stronger liquor than the other. So the evil grows worse and worse. In the end, as our father said, it will ruin the Ojibwa altogether.”

Hugh did not reply for a moment, then he said hesitatingly, “Did father buy pelts with drink?”

“Not the way most of the others do,” Blaise replied promptly. “Liquor he had to give sometimes, as all traders must, now the custom is started, but our father gave only a little at a time and not strong. Whenever he could he bought his furs with other things. Always he was a friend to the Ojibwa. He became one of us when he married into the nation, and he was a good son, not like some white men who take Ojibwa wives. Many friends he had, and some enemies, but few dared stand against him. He was a strong man and a true one.”

Blaise spoke proudly. Once again Hugh, though glad to hear so much good of his adventurous father, felt a pang of jealousy that the half-breed boy should have known and loved him so well.

Departure was delayed by rain and a brisk wind from the lake, that swayed and bent the trees on the exposed bar, drove the waves high on the outer shore and blew the sand into food and cooking fire. Not until late afternoon of the next day did Hugh and Blaise succeed in getting away. They paddled till midnight and, determined to make the greatest possible speed up the shore, took but four hours’ rest. All the [88]

following day they travelled steadily, then camped at a stream mouth and were away again at dawn. Bad weather delayed them that day, however, and caused a late start next morning. Eager to get ahead, they did not land to prepare food until mid-afternoon. After the meal and a rest of not more than a half hour, they resumed their paddles.

Even the going down of the sun did not persuade them to cease their labor. There would be no moon till towards morning, but the brothers paddled on through the darkening twilight. The wind was light, merely rippling the water, and they wanted to get as far on their way as possible.

Blaise, in the bow, was still steadily plying his blade, when, through the blackness of the gathering night, he caught sight of a spark of light. He uttered an exclamation and pointed to the light with his paddle.

“A camp,” he said, speaking softly as if he feared being overheard even at that distance. “It is best to avoid it.”

As they went on, the light grew stronger and brighter. A fire was blazing in an open spot on an island or point. Tiny black figures became visible against the flames. The sounds of shouts and yells were borne across the water. Something out of the ordinary was going on. That was no mere cooking fire, but a huge pile, the flames lighting up the land and water. Around the blaze, the black figures were capering and yelling. Was it some orgy of devils? Had the place where the fire burned been near the Devil Track River, even Hugh might have thought this a feast of fiends. But it was some miles away from the Devil Track. Moreover, his ears assured him that the yells, sounding louder and louder, were from the throats of men, not of spirits. **[89]**

Blaise had been considering his whereabouts. With the Indian’s keen sense of location and accurate memory of ground he has been over, he had concluded that the place where the fire burned was the rocky end of an island he remembered passing on the way down. The island lay close in, only a narrow waterway separating it from the heavily wooded main shore where trees grew down to the water’s edge.

Paddles dipped and raised noiselessly, the canoe slipped through the water. Blaise set the pace, and Hugh kept the craft close in the shadow of the wooded mainland. As they drew nearer the island, Blaise raised his blade and held it motionless. Hugh immediately did the same. The canoe, under good headway, slipped by, without a sound that could be distinguished from the rippling of the water on the rocks of the island. Hidden in the blackness beyond the circle of wavering firelight, the two gazed on a fear-inspiring scene.

Close to the leaping flames, lighted clearly by the glare, rose the white stem of a tall birch. Tied to the tree was a man, his naked body red bronze in the firelight and streaked with darker color. Five or six other figures were leaping and yelling like fiends about the captive, darting in on him now and again to strike a blow with club, **[90]**

knife or fire brand. The meaning of the horrid scene was plain enough. An unlucky Indian captive was being tortured to death.

It was not the tortured man, however, or the human fiends dancing about him that held Hugh's fascinated gaze. Motionless, arms folded, another figure stood a little back from the fire, a towering form, gigantic in the flickering light.

Paddles raised, rigid as statues, scarcely daring to breathe, the two lads remained motionless until the slackening and swerving of their craft made it necessary for Blaise to dip his blade cautiously. They were beyond the fire now and still in the deep shadow of the overhanging trees. But the waterway between shore and island was narrow. Until they had put a greater distance between themselves and the hideous, fire-lit picture, they could feel no assurance of security. Keeping close to shore, they used the utmost caution. At last a bend in the mainland, with a corresponding curve in the island, hid the fire from sight. Looking back, they could still see the light of the flames through the trees and on the water, but the blazing pile itself was hidden from view.

Even then the two boys relaxed their caution but little. Near exhaustion though they were, they paddled on and on, with aching muscles and heads nodding with sleep. Not until they were several miles away from the island orgy of Ohrante and his band, did the brothers dare to land and rest. Too weary to cook a meal, each ate a lump of maple sugar, sucked a bit of the hard, unchewable, dried venison, rolled himself in his blanket and slept.

[91]

[92]

XII
THE HUNGRY PORCUPINE

Hugh was alone in a canoe struggling to make headway against the waves. Bearing down upon him, with the roaring of the storm wind, was an enormous black craft with a gigantic form towering in the bow and menacing him with a huge knife. The boy was trying to turn his canoe, but in spite of all his efforts, it kept heading straight for the terrifying figure.

From somewhere far away a voice shouted, "Hugh, Hugh." The shouts grew louder. Hugh woke suddenly to find his half-brother shaking him by the shoulder. Storm voices filled the air, wind roared through the trees, surf thundered on the rocks. A big wave, curling up the beach, wet his moccasins as he struggled to his feet.

Wide awake in an instant, Hugh seized his blanket and fled up over the smooth, rounded pebbles out of reach of the waves. In a moment he realized that Blaise was not with him. He looked back—and then he remembered. The supplies, the canoe, where were they? He and his brother had unloaded the canoe as usual the night before, had propped it up on the paddles, and had crawled under it. But, overcome with

weariness, they had left the packets of food and ammunition lying where they had been tossed, on the lower beach. Now, in the dull light of dawn, Hugh could see the waves rolling in and breaking far above where the packages had been dropped. The canoe had disappeared. It took him but a moment to grasp all this. He ran back down the beach to join Blaise, who was plunging in to his knees in the attempt to rescue what he could.

"The canoe?" Hugh shouted. **[93]**

"Safe," Blaise replied briefly, and made a dash after a retreating wave, seizing a skin bag of corn just as it was floating away.

At the same instant Hugh caught sight of a packet of powder, and darted after it, a bitter cold wave breaking over him just as he bent to snatch the packet.

The two worked with frantic haste, heedless of the waves that soaked them above the knees and sometimes broke clear over their heads as they stooped to seize bag or package. They saved what they could, but the dried meat, one sack of corn, Hugh's bundle of extra clothing, the roll of birch bark and the pine gum for repairing the canoe, had all gone out into the lake. The maple sugar was partly dissolved. Some of the powder, though the wrapping was supposed to be water-proof, was soaked, and Hugh's gun, which he had carelessly left with the other things, was so wet it would have to be dried and oiled before it could be used. Blaise had carried his gun to bed with him, and it was safe and dry.

Even the half-breed boy, who usually woke at the slightest sound, had been so tired and had slept so heavily that the rising of the wind and the pounding of the waves had not disturbed him. It was not until a strong gust lifted the canoe from over his head, and a falling paddle struck him sharply, that he woke. He had sprung up, seized the overturned canoe and carried it to the shelter of a large rock. Then he had returned, flung his gun and the paddles farther up the beach, and had aroused the still sleeping Hugh. **[94]**

When everything they had rescued had been carried beyond the reach of the waves and placed in the lee of a rock out of the wind, the two boys skirted the beach in the hope that the meat, corn or clothes might have been cast up in some other spot. The beach, at the head of a small and shallow cove, was not long. When Hugh had gone as far over pebbles and boulders as he could, he scrambled up the rock point that bounded the cove on the north and followed it to the end, without seeing anything of the lost articles. As he reached the bare rock tip, the sun was just coming up among red and angry clouds across the water, flushing with crimson and orange the wildly heaving waves. The wind was a little east of north. No rain had fallen where the boys were camped, but Hugh felt sure from the clouds that a storm must have passed not many miles away. The little cove being open and unprotected to the northeast, the full force of the wind entered it and piled the waves upon the beach.

When Hugh returned to the camping place, he found that Blaise, who had gone in the other

direction, had had no better luck. The strong under pull of the retreating waves had carried the lost articles out to deep water.

Going on with the journey in such a blow was out of the question. The boys made themselves as comfortable as possible behind a heap of boulders out of the wind. **[95]**

“I wish we knew in which direction Ohrante is bound,” Hugh said, as he scraped the last morsel of his scanty portion of corn porridge from his bark dish, with the crude wooden spoon he had carved for himself.

“He went up the shore as we came down,” Blaise replied. “He is probably going down now. Somewhere he has met his enemies and has taken one prisoner at least.”

“I wish we might have travelled farther before camping,” Hugh returned.

Blaise shrugged in his French fashion. “He cannot go on in this weather, and we cannot either. Passing him last night was a great risk. I knew that all their eyes would be blinded by the fire glare, so they could not see into the shadows, else I should not have dared. All went well, yet we must still be cautious and make but small fires and little smoke.”

“No column of smoke can ascend high enough in this gale to be seen,” Hugh argued.

“But the smell will travel far, and the wind blows from us to them. Caution is never wasted, my brother.”

Forced to discontinue the journey for most of the day, the lads spent the time seeking food. They were far enough from Ohrante’s camp to have little fear that any of his party would hear their shots, yet they chose to hunt to the north rather than to the south. With some of the dry powder and the shot that had been saved, Blaise started out first, while Hugh spread the wet powder to dry on a flat rock exposed to the sun but sheltered from the wind. Then he cleaned and dried his gun and greased it with pork fat before leaving camp.

Hugh wandered the woods in search of game for several hours. He did not go far back from shore. Traversing the thick woods, where there was much undergrowth, was difficult and he did not greatly trust his own woodcraft. He had no wish to humiliate himself in his half-brother’s eyes by losing his way. Moreover, as long as he kept where the wind reached him, he was not much annoyed by the mosquitoes, at their worst in June. Whenever he reached a spot where the wind did not penetrate, the irritating insects came about him in clouds, settling on his hands, face, wrists and neck and even getting inside his rather low necked, deerskin shirt. **[96]**

Whether he did not go far enough into the woods or for some other reason, his luck was not good. He shot a squirrel and a long-eared, northern hare or snowshoe rabbit and missed another, but did not catch a glimpse of deer, moose, or bear. Neither squirrel nor rabbit meat was at its best in June, but it was at least better than no meat at all. Carrying his meager bag, he returned late in the afternoon. He found Blaise

squatting over a small cooking fire. The iron kettle gave out a most appetizing odor. The younger boy had secured three plump ruffed grouse. In the Lake Superior wilderness of that day no laws prohibited the shooting of game birds out of season. The stew which appealed so strongly to Hugh's nostrils was made up of grouse and squirrel meat, with a very little salt pork to give it savor.

The wind had fallen and since noon the waves had been going down. By sunset, though the lake was by no means smooth, travel had become possible for skilled canoeists. Had Hugh and Blaise not been in such a hurry to put distance between themselves and Ohrante, they would have waited until morning. They were so anxious to go on that they launched the canoe while the afterglow was still reflected in pink and lavender on the eastern sky. A few miles would bring them to the Devil Track River, but, not choosing to camp in that evil spot, Blaise insisted on landing about a mile below the stream mouth. **[97]**

Leaving their camp early next morning, the two started overland to the Devil Track. All day long they sought for some trace of the hidden cache. Not until after sunset did they cease their efforts. Weary and disheartened they returned to their camping place, Hugh in the lead. They had left the canoe turned bottom up over their supplies and well concealed by a thicket of red-stemmed osier dogwoods. The elder brother's sharp exclamation when he reached the spot made the younger one hasten to his side.

"Look!" cried Hugh, pointing to the birch craft.

Blaise did not need to be told to look. The ragged, gaping hole in the bark was too conspicuous. "A porcupine," he exclaimed.

"It was the devil in the form of a porcupine, I think," Hugh muttered. "What possessed the beast?"

"He smelled the pork and gnawed his way through to it. The porcupine loves all things salt. We will see." **[98]**

Blaise was right. When the canoe was lifted, the boys discovered that the small chunk of salt pork was gone, taken out through the hole the beast had gnawed. Nothing else was missing.

"Either he didn't like the other things or the pork was all he could carry away at one trip," said Hugh. "If we had stayed away a little longer, he might have made off with the corn and the sugar as well."

"The loss of the pork is bad," Blaise commented gravely. "The hole in the canoe is bad also, and we must delay to mend it."

The loss of the pork was indeed serious. The rabbit and the squirrel Hugh had shot the day before had been eaten, and nothing else remained but a few handfuls of corn and a little sugar. So once more, after setting some snares, the lads went to sleep supperless. They slept with the corn and sugar between them for protection.

Blaise might have suspected that the fiend of the

river had put a spell on his snares, for in the morning he found them all empty. The dry, stony ground showed no tracks. If any long-legged hare had come that way, he had been wary enough to avoid the nooses.

After the scantiest of breakfasts the boys set about repairing the canoe. Luckily the ball of wattap, the fine, tough roots of the spruce prepared for use as thread, had not been lost when the waves covered the beach at their former camp. From a near-by birch Blaise cut a strong, smooth piece of bark without knotholes. With his knife he trimmed the ragged edges of the hole. Having softened and straightened his wattap by soaking it, he sewed the patch on neatly, using a large steel needle he had bought at the trading post at the Kaministikwia. [99]

In the meantime Hugh sought a pine grove up the river, where he obtained some chunks of resin. The resin he softened with heat to a sticky gum and applied it to the seams and stitches. Blaise went over them again with a live coal held in a split stick, and spread the softened resin skillfully with thumb and knife blade. Then the canoe was left bottom side up for the gum to dry and harden.

In spite of the fact that the boys, on their way down the shore, had searched the land to the east of the Devil Track with considerable thoroughness, they were determined to go over it again. By means of a fallen tree and the boulders that rose above the foaming rapids, they crossed the river where it narrowed between rock walls. Late in the afternoon, Blaise, scrambling up a steep and stony slope well back from the stream, heard two shots in quick succession and then a third at a longer interval, the signal agreed upon to indicate that one or the other had come across something significant. The sounds came from the direction of the lake, and Blaise hastened down to the shore.

[100]

XIII
THE PAINTED THWART

Blaise found Hugh stooping over a heap of shattered, water-stained boards, crude planks, axe hewn from the tree.

“Can this be the boat, do you think?” Hugh asked.

Blaise shook his head doubtfully. “It was not here on the beach when we came this way before.”

“Yet it may be part of the wreck washed from some outer rock and cast here by that last hard blow,” reasoned the older boy.

“That is possible. If we could find more of it, the part that bears the sign——”

“What sign? You told me of no sign. I have often wondered how, if we found a wrecked boat, we

should know whether it was the right one."

"Surely I told you of the sign. The board that bears the hole for the mast is painted with vermilion, and on it in black is our father's sign, the figure that means his Ojibwa name, 'man with the bright eyes, the eyes that make sparks.' Twice the sign is there, once on each side of the mast."

Hugh was staring at his younger brother. Black figures on a vermilion ground! Where had he seen such a thing, seen it recently, since he left the Sault? Then he remembered. "Show me, Blaise," he cried, "what that figure looks like, that means father's Indian name."

Blaise picked up a smooth gray flake and with a bit of softer, dark red stone scratched the figure. **[101]**

"That is it," Hugh exclaimed. "I have seen that wrecked boat, a bateau with the thwart painted red and that very same figure drawn in black."

"You have seen it?" The younger brother looked at the elder wonderingly. "In your dreams?"

"No, I was wide awake, but it was a long way from here and before ever I saw you, Blaise." Rapidly Hugh related how he and Baptiste had examined the old bateau in the cleft of the rocks of the Isle Royale.

Blaise listened in silence, only his eyes betraying his interest. "Truly we know not where to search," he said when Hugh had finished. "The bateau drifted far. How can we find where it went upon the rocks?"

"I don't believe it drifted far. If it was so badly damaged father had to abandon it, could it have floated far? Surely it would have gone to the bottom. When that boat was carried across to Isle Royale, I believe father and Black Thunder were still in it with all their furs. The storm drove them out into the lake, they lost their bearings, just as we in the *Otter* did. They were borne away and dashed by the waves into that crack in the rocks. Near there somewhere we shall find the cache, if we find it at all."

Hugh spoke confidently, very sure of his own reasoning, but the younger lad was not so easily convinced.

"How," Blaise questioned, "did he come away from that island Minong if he was wrecked there? He could not come by land and the bateau is still there."

"He made himself a dugout or birch canoe to cross in when the weather cleared." **[102]**

"But then why came he not to Wauswaugoning by canoe?"

“Because,” persisted Hugh, “when he reached the mainland he fell in with some enemy here at the Devil Track River. We know his wound was not received in the wreck. You yourself say it was a knife wound. Black Thunder wasn’t killed in the wreck either. They escaped unharmed but the bateau was beyond repair. So they built a canoe and crossed to this shore. Here they were set upon and Black Thunder was killed and father sorely wounded.”

Again the sceptical Blaise shook his head. “Why were they away down here so far below the Grand Portage? And why, if they had a canoe, brought they not the furs and the packet with them?”

Hugh was aware of the weak links in his theory, yet he clung to it. “Maybe they did bring them,” he said, “but couldn’t carry them overland, so they hid them.”

“No, no. Our father told me that the furs were not far from the wreck. He said that three or four times. I cannot be mistaken.”

“Perhaps their canoe wasn’t big enough to hold all of the pelts,” Hugh speculated. “What they did bring may have fallen into Ohrante’s hands. So father spoke only of the rest, hidden in a secret place near the wreck. To me that seems reasonable enough. But,” he admitted honestly, “I don’t quite understand how they came to be so far down the shore here, and, if the packet is valuable, why didn’t father bring that with him if he brought anything? And why didn’t he tell you that the storm drove him on Isle Royale?”

“You forget,” Blaise said slowly, “that our father’s body was very weak and his spirit just about to leave it. I asked him where to find the bateau. He told me of the way it was marked, but he could say no more. I think he could not hear my questions.” **[103]**

Both lads were silent for several minutes, then Hugh said decisively, “Well, Blaise, there are just two things we can do, unless we give up the quest entirely. We can go back down the shore, searching the land for some sign of the cache, or we can cross to Isle Royale, find the cleft in the rocks where the bateau lies, and seek there for the furs and the packet. I am for the latter plan. To search the whole shore from here to the Fond du Lac for a hidden cache to which we have no clue seems to me a hopeless task.”

“But to cross that long stretch of open water in a small canoe,” Blaise returned doubtfully.

“We must choose good weather of course, and paddle our swiftest to reach the island before a change comes. Perhaps we can rig some kind of sail and make better time than with our paddles.”

It was plain that Hugh had made up his mind to return to Isle Royale. Hitherto he had been content to let Blaise take the lead, but now he was asserting his elder brother’s right to leadership. Better than his white brother, Blaise understood the hazards of such an undertaking, but the half-breed lad was proud. He was not going to admit himself less courageous than his elder brother. If Hugh dared take the risk, he, Little Caribou, as his mother’s people called him,

dared take it also.

The brothers must provision themselves for the trip. Even if they reached the island safely and in good time, they could not guess how long their search might take, or how many days or weeks they might be delayed before they could return. Fresh supplies might have reached the Grand Portage by now and corn at least could be bought. From the Indians always to be found near the posts, other food supplies and new moccasins might be obtained. [104]

Considering food supplies reminded the lads of their hunger. They decided to devote the remaining hours of daylight to fishing for their supper. They would start for the Grand Portage in the morning. Blaise paddled slowly along a submerged reef some distance out from shore, while Hugh fished.

In a very few minutes he felt a pull at his line. Hand over hand he hauled it in, Blaise helping by managing the canoe so that the line did not slacken even for an instant. Nearer and nearer Hugh drew his prize, until he could see the gleaming silver of the big fish flashing through the clear water. Then came the critical moment. He had no landing net, and reaching over the side with net or gaff would have been a risk at best. Without shifting his weight enough to destroy the balance, while Blaise endeavored to hold the canoe steady with his paddle, Hugh must land his fish squarely in the bottom. With a sudden swing, the long, silvery, dark-flecked body, tail wildly flapping, was raised from the water and flung into the canoe. Almost before it touched the bottom, Hugh had seized his knife and dealt a swift blow. A few ineffectual flaps and the big fish lay still.

"Fifteen pounds at least," Hugh exulted. "I have seen larger trout, but most of them were taken in nets." [105]

"They grow very big sometimes, two, three times as big, but it is not good to catch such a big one with a line. Unless you have great luck, it overturns your canoe."

The sight of the big trout sharpened the boys' hunger pangs and took away all zest from further fishing. They paddled full speed for shore and supper.

Favored by good weather they made a quick trip to the Grand Portage. In the bay a small ship lay at anchor, and they knew supplies must have arrived.

"That is not the *Otter*," Hugh remarked as they paddled by.

"No, it is not one of the Old Company's ships. I think it belongs to the New Company."

"I'm glad it isn't the *Otter*," Hugh replied. "I shouldn't know how to answer Baptiste's questions."

The ship proved, as Blaise had guessed, to belong to the New Company. She sailed the day after the boys arrived, but had left ample supplies. They had no difficulty in buying the needed stores, though Hugh's money was exhausted by the purchases. He left explanations

to Blaise, confident that his younger brother could not be persuaded to divulge the destination or purpose of their trip.

Again bad weather held the lads at the Grand Portage and Wauswaugoning. The last day of their stay, when they were returning from the New Company's post, they came upon the camp of the trappers whose bateau had loomed like a ship through the morning mist when the boys were leaving the Bay of the Beaver. Hugh recognized at once the tall fellow in the scarlet cap who had replied to his shout of greeting. The trappers had disposed of their furs at the Old Company's post and were about to leave. They were going to portage their supplies to Fort Charlotte above the falls of the Pigeon River and go up the river in a canoe. Hugh inquired what they intended to do with their small bateau which was drawn up on the shore. **[106]**

"You want it?" the leader questioned in his big voice.

"Will you sell it?" the boy asked eagerly.

The man nodded. "What you give?"

Hugh flushed with chagrin, remembering that all his money was gone. Blaise came to the rescue by offering to trade some ammunition for the boat. The man shook his head. Blaise added to his offer a small quantity of food supplies, but still the fellow refused. "Too little," he grumbled, then added something in his curious mixture of Scotch-English and Ojibwa. He was a Scotch half-breed and Hugh found his dialect difficult to understand.

Blaise shrugged, walked over to the boat and examined it. He turned towards the man and spoke in rapid Ojibwa. The fellow answered in the same tongue, pointing to the lad's gun.

"What does he say?" asked Hugh.

"I told him his bateau needs mending," Blaise answered in French, "but he will not trade for anything but my gun, which is better than his. I will not give him the gun. Our father gave it to me." **[107]**

Hugh understood his half-brother's feeling, but he was eager to secure the boat. "He may have my gun," he whispered. He knew that the tall fellow understood some French. "Tell him if he will include the sail—he had one, you know—I'll give him my gun and some ammunition. Mine doesn't shoot as accurately as yours, but it looks newer."

Blaise made the offer in Ojibwa, Hugh repeated it in English, and after an unsuccessful attempt to get more, the man agreed. He put into the boat the mast and canvas, which he had been using as a shelter, and Hugh handed over the gun and ammunition.

The rest of the day was spent in making a few necessary repairs to the bateau, and the following morning, before a light southwest breeze, the lads set sail. Blaise knew nothing of this sort of water travel, but Hugh had handled a sailboat before, though never one quite so clumsy as this crude, heavy bateau. The boat was pointed at both ends, flat bottomed and

built of thick, hand-hewn boards. It carried a small, square sail on a stubby mast. With axe and knife Hugh had made a crude rudder and had lashed it to the stern in the place of the paddle the trappers had been content to steer with. Blaise quickly learned to handle the rudder, leaving Hugh free to manage the sail. It was a satisfaction to the older boy to find something in which he excelled his younger brother and could take the lead. It restored his self-respect as the elder. Blaise, on the other hand, obeyed orders instantly and proved himself as reliable a subordinate as he had been leader. The breeze holding steady, the bateau made fairly good speed. They might possibly have made better time in a canoe, but the new mode of travel was a pleasant change from the constant labor of plying the blades.

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Had the lads but known it, their wisest course would have been to cross directly from the Grand Portage to the southwestern end of Isle Royale and then skirt the island to its northeast tip. But they had no map to tell them this. Indeed in those days the position of Isle Royale was but imperfectly understood. It had been visited by scarcely any white men and was avoided by the Indians. During the boys' detention at the Grand Portage, rain and fog had rendered the island, some eighteen or twenty miles away, invisible. The day they set sail the sky was blue overhead, but there was still haze enough on the water to obscure the distance. It was not strange that they believed Isle Royale farther off than it really was. From its northeastern end the *Otter* had sailed to the Kaministikwia, and Hugh took for granted that the shortest way to reach the island must be from some point on Thunder Bay. He was aware of the deep curve made by the shore to form the great bay, and realized that to follow clear around that curve would be a loss of time. Instead of turning north to follow the shore, he held on to the northeast, along the inner side of a long line of narrow, rocky islands and reefs, rising from the water like the summits of a mountain chain and forming a breakwater for the protection of the bay.

[109]

It was from one of those islands, now called McKellar Island, south about two miles from the towering heights of the Isle du Paté and at least fifteen miles by water from the southern mouth of the Kaministikwia, that the adventurers finally set out for Isle Royale. Before they dared attempt the perilous sail across the long stretch of the open lake, they remained in camp a day to let the southwest wind, which had risen to half a gale, blow itself out. Wind they needed for their venture, but not too much wind.

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XIV
SAILING TOWARDS THE SUNRISE

"Truly the spirit of the winds favors us." Blaise forgot for the moment his Christian training and

spoke in the manner of his Indian forefathers. He had waked at dawn and, finding the lake merely rippled by a steady west breeze, had aroused Hugh.

So anxious were the two to take advantage of the perfect weather that they did not wait for breakfast, but hastily flung their blankets and cooking utensils into the boat. With the two strong paddles included in the purchase, they ran the bateau out of the little cove where it had lain sheltered. Then, hoisting the sail, they steered towards the dawn.

Hugh Beaupré never forgot that sail into the sunrise. Ahead of him the sky, all rose and gold and faint green blending into soft blue, met the water without the faintest, thinnest line of land between. Before and around the boat, the lake shimmered with the reflected tints that glorified even the patched and dirty sail. Was he bound for the other side of the world, for some glorious, unearthly realm beyond that gleaming water? A sense of mingled dread and exultation swept over the boy, his face flushed, his gray eyes sparkled, his pulse quickened. He knew the feeling of the explorer setting out for new lands, realms of he knows not what perils and delights.

The moment of thrill passed, and Hugh turned to glance at Blaise. The younger boy, his hand on the tiller rope, sat like a statue, his dark face tense, his shining hazel eyes betraying a kindred feeling to that which had held Hugh in its thrall. Never before in all their days of journeying together had the white lad and the half-breed felt such perfect comradeship. Speech was unnecessary between them. **[111]**

As the sun rose higher and the day advanced, Blaise was not so sure that fortune was favoring the venture. The wind sank until the water was broken by the merest ripple only. There was scarcely enough pressure against the sail to keep the boat moving.

“At this rate we shall be a week in reaching the island,” said Hugh, anxiously eying the canvas. “We can go faster with the paddles. Lash the rudder and we’ll try the blades.”

For the first time since they had changed from canoe to sailboat Blaise voiced an objection. “To paddle this heavy bateau is hard work,” he said. “We cannot keep at it all day and all night, as we could in a bark canoe. As long as the wind blows at all and we move onward, even slowly, we had best save our strength. Soon we shall need it. Before the sun is overhead, there will be no wind at all, and then we must paddle.”

Hugh nodded agreement, but, less patient than his half-brother, he found it trying to sit idle waiting for the gentle breeze to die. Blaise had prophesied truly. Before noon the sail was hanging loose and idle, the water, blue under a cloudless sky, was without a wrinkle. It is not often really hot on the open waters of Lake Superior, but that day the sun glared down upon the little boat, and the distance shimmered with heat haze. The bateau had no oars or oarlocks, only two stout paddles, and paddling the heavy, clumsy boat was slow, hot work. **[112]**

Pausing for a moment’s rest after an hour’s steady plying of his blade, Hugh uttered an

exclamation. “Look, Blaise,” he cried. “We haven’t so far to go. There is the Isle Royale ahead, and not far away either.”

He pointed with his blade to the hazy blue masses across the still water. High the land towered, with points and bays and detached islands. Encouraged by the sight, the two bent to their paddles.

In a few minutes Hugh cried out again. “How strange the island looks, Blaise! I don’t remember any flat-topped place like that. See, it looks as if it had been sliced off with a knife.”

The distant shore had taken on a strange appearance. High towering land it seemed to be, but curiously level and flattened at the top, like no land Hugh had seen around Lake Superior.

“There is something wrong,” the boy went on, puzzled. “We must be off our course. That is not Isle Royale, at least not the part I saw. Where are we, Blaise? Are we going in the wrong direction? Can that be part of the mainland?”

“It is not the mainland over that way,” Blaise made prompt reply. “It must be some part of Minong.” He used the Indian name for the island.

“But I saw nothing the——” Hugh began, then broke off to cry out, “Look, look, the island is changing before our eyes! It towers up there to the right, and over there, where it was high a moment ago, it shrinks and fades away!” **[113]**

“It is some enchanted land,” the younger boy murmured, gazing in wonder at the dim blue shapes that loomed in one place, shrank in another, changed size and form before his awestruck eyes. “It is a land of spirits.” He ceased his paddling to cross himself.

For a moment Hugh too was inclined to believe that he and his brother were the victims of witchcraft. But, though not free from superstition, he had less of it than the half-breed. Moreover he remembered the looming of the very boat he was now in, when he had first seen it in the mists of dawn, and also the rock that had looked like an island, when he was on his way from Michilimackinac. The captain of the ship had told him of some of the queer visions called mirages he had seen when sailing the lakes. Turning towards Blaise, Hugh attempted to explain the strange sight ahead.

“It is the mirage. I have heard of it. The Captain of the *Athabasca* told me that the mirage is caused by the light shining through mist or layers of cloud or air that reflect in some way we do not understand, making images of land appear where there is no land or changing the appearance of the real land. Sometimes, he said, images of islands are seen upside down in the sky, above the real water-line. It is all very strange and no one quite understands why it comes or how, but there is no enchantment about it, Blaise.”

The younger boy nodded, his eyes still on the changing, hazy shapes ahead. Without reply, he resumed his paddling. How much he understood of his elder brother’s explanation, Hugh could not tell. At any rate Blaise was too proud to **[114]**

show further fear of something Hugh did not seem to be afraid of.

In silence the two plied their paddles under the hot sun, but the heavy wooden boat did not respond like a bark canoe to their efforts. Progress was very slow. White clouds were gathering in the south, moving slowly up and across the sky, though the water remained quiet. The clouds veiled the sun. The distant land shrank to a mere blue line, its natural shape and size, and seemed to come no nearer for all their efforts. Both boys were growing anxious. After the heat and stillness of the day, the clouds, slow moving though they were, threatened storm. The two dug their blades into the water, straining muscles of arms and shoulders to put all their strength into the stroke.

A crinkle, a ripple was spreading over the green-blue water. A breeze was coming up from the southwest. Hugh laid down his blade to raise the sail. In the west the rays of the setting sun were breaking through the clouds and dyeing them crimson, flame and orange. He was glad to see the sun again, for it brought him assurance that he was keeping the course, not swinging too far to north or south.

The breeze, very light at first, strengthened after sunset and became more westerly, the most favorable direction. The clumsy boat and square sail could not be made to beat against the wind, but Hugh's course was a little north of east. He could sail directly with the wind and yet be assured of not going far out of his way. The farthest tip of land ahead, now freed from the false distortions of mirage, he took to be the end of the long, high shore, where, in the fissure, he and Baptiste had found the old bateau. That land was still very far away, other islands or points of the main island lying nearer. **[115]**

As darkness gathered, the breeze swept away the clouds, and stars and moon shone out. Sailing over the gently heaving water, where the moonlight made a shimmering path, was a pleasant change from paddling the heavy boat in the heat of the day. The boys' evening meal consisted of a few handfuls of hulled corn and some maple sugar, with the clear, cold lake water for drink. Both Blaise at the tiller and Hugh handling the sheet found it difficult to keep awake. The day had been a long one, but they must remain alert to hold their course and avoid disaster.

They were approaching land now. In the moonlight, to avoid islands and projecting rocks was not difficult. Sunken reefs were harder to discern. Only the breaking of waves upon the rocks that rose near to the surface betrayed the danger. So the steersman shunned points and the ends of islands from which hidden reefs might run out. Hugh would have been glad to camp on the first land reached, but he knew he ought to take advantage of the favorable wind and get as near as possible to the spot where the wreck lay. Shaking off his drowsiness, he gave his whole attention to navigation.

Several islands and a number of points, that might belong either to the great island or to smaller bordering ones, were passed before reaching a low shore, well wooded, which Hugh felt sure he recognized. He remembered that the **[116]**

Otter had been obliged to go far out around the tip to avoid a long reef. He warned Blaise to steer well out, but the latter did not go quite far enough and the boat grazed a rock. No damage was done, however. The bateau was now headed for a strip of much higher land, showing dark between sky and water. Hugh thought that must be the towering, tree-crowned, rock shore he recalled. To land there tonight was out of the question. The moon had gone down, and to run, in the darkness, up the bay to the spot where the *Otter* had taken shelter might also prove difficult. Hugh decided they had better tie up somewhere on the point they had just rounded. He lowered the sail and both boys took up their paddles. For some distance they skirted the steep, slanting rock shore where the trees grew down as far as they could cling.

One mountain ash had lost its footing and fallen into the lake. To the fallen tree Hugh tied the boat, in still water and under the shadow of the shore. Then he and Blaise rolled themselves in their blankets and lay down in the bottom. Heedless of the dew-wet planking they were asleep immediately. The water rippled gently against the rough sides of the boat, an owl in a spruce sent forth its eerie hoots, from across the water a loon answered with a wild, mocking cry, but the tired lads slept on undisturbed.

XV
THE RIFT IN THE ROCK

The brothers were in the habit of waking early, but it had been nearly dawn when they lay down, and, in the shadow of the trees, they slept until the sun was well started on his day's journey. When they did wake, Hugh's first glance was towards the land across the water.

There was no mistaking that high towering shore, steep rocks at the base, richly forest clad above. It was the same shore he had seen weeks before, the first time dimly through fog and snow, again clear cut and distinct, when he and Baptiste had rowed Captain Bennett out of the bay, and yet a third time from the deck of the *Otter* as she sailed away towards Thunder Cape.

"We have come aright, Blaise," said Hugh with satisfaction. "That is the place we seek, and it can't be more than a mile away. Do you see that spot where the trees come to the water, that tiny break in the rocks? It is a little cove with a bit of beach, and in that stretch of rocks to the left is the crack where the old boat lies. I'm sure of the spot, because from the *Otter*, when we were leaving, I noticed the bare rock pillars of that highest ridge away up there, like the wall of a fort among the trees. It doesn't show quite so plainly now the birches are in leaf, but I'm sure it is the same. There are two little coves almost directly below that pillared rock wall, and the cliff is a little farther to the left. Oh, but I am hungry," he added. "We must have a good breakfast before we start across."

Over the short stretch of water that separated the low point from the high shore, the bateau sailed before the brisk wind. The stretch of gray, pillared rock, like the wall of a fortress, high up among the greenery, served as a guide. As the boat drew nearer, the twin coves, shallow depressions in the shore line separated by a projecting mass of rock, came clear to view. [118]

“Steer for the cliff just beyond the left hand cove,” Hugh ordered. “We’ll run in close and then turn.”

Blaise obediently steered straight for the mass of rock with the vertical fissures, as if his purpose were to dash the boat against the cliff. As they drew close, Hugh gave a shout.

The crack had come into view, a black rift running at an angle into the cliff. As the boat swung about to avoid going on the rocks, the younger boy’s quick eye caught a glimpse, in that dark fissure, of the end of a bateau. To give him that glimpse, Hugh had taken a chance of wrecking their own boat. Now he was obliged to act quickly, lowering the sail and seizing a paddle.

In the trough of the waves, they skirted, close in, the steep, rugged rocks. Almost hidden by a short point was the bit of beach at the end of the first of the twin coves. With a dexterous twist of the paddles, the boys turned their boat and ran up on the beach. Landing with so much force would have ground the bottom out of a birch canoe, but the heavy planks of the bateau would stand far worse battering.

The appearance of the cove had changed greatly since that day when Hugh and Baptiste had rowed past. Then the bushes, birches and mountain ash trees that ringed the pebbles had been bare limbed. Now, with June more than two-thirds gone, they were all in full leaf. Big clusters of buds among the graceful foliage of the mountain ashes were almost ready to open into handsome flowers. The high-bush cranberries bore white blossoms here and there, and the ninebark bushes were covered with masses of pinkish buds. Though Hugh’s mind was on the wreck, his eyes took note of the almost incredible difference a few weeks had made. His nose sniffed with appreciation the spicy smell of the fresh, growing tips of the balsams, mingled with the heliotrope-like odor of the tiny twin-flowers blooming in the woods. He did not let enjoyment of these things delay him, however. [119]

“Now,” he cried, when he and Blaise had pulled up the boat, “we must get into that crack. We can’t reach it from the water in this wind. Perhaps we can climb down from the top.”

Up a steep rock slope, dotted with fresh green moss, shiny leaved bearberry, spreading masses of juniper and a few evergreen trees growing in the depressions, he hastened with Blaise close behind. Along the top of the cliff they made their way until they reached the rift. Though the sides of the crack were almost vertical, trees and bushes grew wherever they could anchor a root. Through branches and foliage, the boys could get no view of the old boat at the bottom.

“We must climb down,” said Hugh.

"It will be difficult," Blaise replied doubtfully. "To do it we must cling to the roots and branches. Those trees have little soil to grow in. Our weight may pull them over." [120]

"We must get down some way," Hugh insisted. "We shall have to take our chances."

"The wind and waves will calm. We have but to wait and enter from the water."

Hugh had not the Indian patience. "The wind is not going down, it is coming up," he protested. "It may blow for a week. I didn't come here to wait for calm weather. I'm going down some way."

He wriggled between the lower branches of a spruce growing on the very verge of the crack and let himself down a vertical wall, feeling with his toes for a support. Carefully he rested his weight on the slanting stem of a stunted cedar growing in a niche. It held him. Clinging with fingers and moccasined feet to every projection of rock and each branch, stem or root that promised to hold him, he worked his way down. He heeded his younger brother's warning in so far as to test every support before trusting himself to it. But in spite of his care, a bit of projecting rock crumbled under his feet. His weight was thrown upon a root he had laid hold of. The root seemed to be firmly anchored, but it pulled loose, and Hugh went sliding down right into the old boat. The ice, which had filled the wreck when he first saw it, had melted. The bateau was more than half full of water, into which he plumped, splashing it all over him. He was not hurt, however, only wet and shaken up a bit.

Blaise had already begun to follow his elder brother into the cleft, when he heard Hugh crash down. Halfway over the edge, the younger boy paused for a moment. Then Hugh's shout came up to him. "All right, but be careful," the elder brother cautioned. [121]

Light and very agile, the younger lad had better luck, landing nimbly on his feet on the cross plank of the old boat. It was the vermilion painted thwart that had held the mast. Eagerly both lads bent over it to make out, in the dim light, the black figures on the red ground.

"It is our father's sign," Blaise said quietly, "our father's sign, just as I have seen it many times. This was his bateau, but whether it was wrecked here or elsewhere we cannot tell."

"I believe it was wrecked here," Hugh asserted. "See how the end is splintered. This boat was driven upon these very rocks where it now lies, the prow smashed and rents ripped in the bottom and one side. But it is empty. We must seek some sign to guide us to the furs. We need more light."

"I will make a torch. Wait but a moment."

Blaise straightened up, hooked his fingers over the edge of a narrow, rock shelf, swung himself up, and ascended the rest of the way as nimbly as a squirrel. In a few minutes he came scrambling down again, holding in one hand a roughly made torch, resinous twigs bound together with a bit of bearberry vine. With

sparks from his flint and steel, he lighted the balsam torch. It did not give a very bright light, but it enabled the boys to examine the old bateau closely. The only mark they could find that might have been intended as a guide was a groove across the fore thwart. At one end of the groove short lines had been cut diagonally to form an arrow point.

"The cache, if it is on the island, must be sought that way," said Blaise. **[122]**

"The arrow surely points up the crack. We'll follow it."

The smashed bow of the boat was firmly lodged among the fragments of rock upon which it had been driven. Over those fragments, up a steep slope, the boys picked their way for a few yards, until the walls drew together, the fissure narrowing to a mere slit. By throwing the light of the torch into the slit and reaching in arm's length, Hugh satisfied himself that there were no furs there. Nevertheless the arrow pointed in that direction. He looked about him. The left hand wall was almost perpendicular, solid rock apparently, with only an occasional vertical crack or shallow niche where some hardy bit of greenery clung. But from the right wall several blocks had fallen out. On one of those blocks Hugh was standing. He held the torch up at arm's length.

"There's a hole up there. Such a place would make a good cache."

"Let me up on your shoulders," Blaise proposed, "and I will look in."

Sitting on Hugh's shoulders, Blaise threw the light of the torch into the hole. Then he reached in his arm. "There are no furs here," he said.

Hugh had been almost certain he had found the cache. He was keenly disappointed. "Are you sure?" he cried. **[123]**

"Yes. It is a small place, just a hole in the rock. Let me down."

"There are no furs there," Blaise repeated, when he had jumped down from Hugh's shoulders. "But something I found." He held out a short piece of rawhide cord.

Hugh stared at the cord, then at his half-brother. "You were not the first to visit that hole then. What is the meaning of this?" He took the bit of rawhide in his fingers.

"I think it means that the furs have been there, but have been taken away," was the younger lad's slow reply. "It is a piece from the thong that bound a bale of furs. That is what I think."

"Someone has found the cache and taken away the pelts."

"I fear it," agreed Blaise. Though he spoke quietly, his disappointment was as strong as Hugh's.

"That someone is probably one of the Old Company's men. Then the furs are lost to us indeed. Yet we do not know. How did anyone learn of the cache? It may have been Black Thunder of course, but then what was the

meaning of the blood-stained shirt? No, we don't know, Blaise. Our furs may be gone for good, but we can't be sure. Father may have put them in there out of reach of the storm and later moved them to some other place, or they may never have been in that hole at all. Some animal may have carried that bit of rawhide there."

Blaise shook his head. "What animal could go up there?" **[124]**

"A squirrel perhaps, or a bird, a gull. Anyway we can't give up the search yet, just because we have found a bit of rawhide in a hole in the rocks. That would be folly. Perhaps the arrow points up the rift to some spot above. We can't climb up here. We must go back."

The two returned to the wreck and climbed up the way they had come down. Hugh again in the lead, they followed along the top of the rift to its head. There they sought earnestly for some sign that might lead them to the cache, but found none. When at sunset they gave up the search for that day, their fear that the furs had been stolen from the hole in the rock had grown near to a certainty. Well-nigh discouraged, they went back to the beach in the shallow cove where they had left their boat.

"Why is it, Blaise," Hugh asked, as they sat by the fire waiting for the kettle to boil, "that no Indians dwell on this big island? It is a beautiful place and there must be game and furs for the hunting."

Blaise gave his characteristic French shrug. "I know not if there is much game, and Minong is far from the mainland. I have heard that there is great store of copper in the rocks. The Ojibwas say that the island was made by the giant Kepoochikan. Once upon a time the fish quarrelled with Kepoochikan and tried to drown him by making a great flood. But he built a big floating island and made it rich with copper and there he took his family and all the kinds of birds and beasts there are. When the water, which had spread over the whole earth, stopped rising, he told a gull to dive down to the bottom and bring up some mud. The gull could not dive so far, but drowned before he reached the bottom. Then Kepoochikan sent a beaver. The beaver came up almost drowned, but with a ball of mud clutched tight in his hands. Kepoochikan took the mud and made a new earth, but he kept the island Minong for his home. After many years there was another giant, the great Nanibozho, who was chief of all the Indians on the new land Kepoochikan had made. Nanibozho is a good manito and Kepoochikan a bad one. They went to war, and Nanibozho threw a great boulder from the mainland across at Kepoochikan and conquered him. The boulder is here on Minong yet they say. Since then Nanibozho has guarded the copper of Minong, though some say his real dwelling place is on Thunder Cape. Off the shore and in the channels of Minong he has set sharp rocks to destroy the canoes that approach the island, and he has many spirits to help him guard the treasure." **[125]**

"That is only a tale, of course," said Hugh somewhat disdainfully. "We of the ship *Otter* camped here several days and we saw or heard no spirits. We found nothing to fear."

“You sought no copper,” was the retort. “It is said that sometimes Kepoochikan and Nanibozho fight together on the rocks and hurl great boulders about. Strange tales there are too of the thick forest, of the little lakes and bays. There is one place called the Bay of Manitos, where, so I have heard, dwell giant Windigos and great serpents and huge birds and spirits that mock the lonely traveller with shouts and threats and laughter.”

“Surely you do not believe such tales, Blaise,” Hugh protested, “or fear such spirits.” [126]

“I know that neither Kepoochikan nor Nanibozho made the world,” the younger boy replied seriously. “My father and the priests taught me that the good God made the world. But whether the tales of giants and spirits are true, I know not. That I do not fear them I have proved by coming here with you.”

To that remark Hugh had no answer. To believe or be inclined to believe such tales and yet to come to the enchanted island, to come with only one companion, surely proved his half-brother’s courage. Indeed the older boy had no thought of questioning the younger’s bravery. He had come to know Blaise too well.

[127]

XVI
THE CACHE

The night being clear, the boys did not trouble to prepare a shelter. They merely cut some balsam branches and spread them smoothly on the beach. Strange to say, the more superstitious half-breed lad fell asleep immediately, while the white boy, who had scorned the notion of giants and manitos, found sleep long in coming. That night seemed to him the loneliest he had ever spent. Camp, on the trip down and up the main shore, had, to be sure, usually been made far from the camps of other men. But there *were* men, both red and white, on that shore. When the lake was not too rough, there was always the chance that the sound of human voices and the dip of paddles might be heard at any time during the night, as a canoe passed in the starlight.

Here, however, the whole length and breadth of the great island,—which the two lads believed even larger than it really is, some fifty miles in length and twelve or fourteen broad at its widest part,—there lived, so far as they knew, not one human being. Never before had Hugh felt so utterly lonely, such a small, insignificant human creature in an unknown and unfeeling wilderness of woods, waters and rocks. The island was far more beautiful and hospitable now than it had appeared when he visited it before, but then, almost uncannily lonely and remote though the place had seemed, he had had the companionship of Baptiste and Captain Bennett and the rest of the ship’s crew.

Yet what was there to fear? It was not likely that Isle Royale contained any especially fierce [128]

beasts. There were wolves and lynxes, but they were skulking, cowardly creatures, and, in the summer at least, must find plentiful prey of rabbits and other small animals. Moose too there were and perhaps bears, but both were harmless unless attacked and cornered. It was not the thought of any animal enemy that caused Hugh's uneasiness, as he lay listening to the night sounds. His feeling was rather of apprehension, of dread of some unknown evil that threatened his comrade and himself. He tried to shake off the unreasonable dread, but everything about him seemed to serve to intensify the feeling, the low, continuous murmur of the waves on the rocks, the swishing rustle of the wind in the trees, the long-drawn, eerie cries of two loons answering one another somewhere up the bay, the lonely "hoot-ti-toot" of an owl. Once from the wooded ridges above him, there came with startling clearness the shrill screech of a lynx. But all these sounds were natural ones, heard many times during his adventurous journey. Why, tonight, did they seem to hold some new and fearful menace?

Disgusted with himself, he resolved to conquer the unreasonable dread. Will power alone could not triumph over his unrest, but physical weariness won at last and he fell asleep. A brief shower, from the edge of a passing storm-cloud, aroused him once, but the rain did not last long enough to wet his blanket, and he was off to sleep again in a few minutes.

Hugh woke with a start. Dawn had come, but the little cove was shrouded in white mist. Beside him on the balsam bed, Blaise was sitting upright, his body rigid, his bronze face tense. He was listening intently. Hugh freed his arms from his blanket and raised himself on his elbow. Blaise turned his head. **[129]**

"You heard it?" he whispered.

"Something waked me. What was it?"

"A gun shot."

"Impossible!"

"I heard it clearly. I had just waked."

"Near by?"

"Not very far away. Up there somewhere."

Blaise pointed to the now invisible woods above the sheer cliff that formed the central shore of the cove between the beaches. "It is hard to be quite sure of the direction in this fog, and there was only one shot."

For some minutes the two lads sat still, listening, but the sound was not repeated. It seemed incredible that any human being should be so near on the big island where neither white men nor Indians were ever known to come intentionally. Hugh was inclined to think Blaise mistaken. The younger boy had certainly heard some sharp sound, but Hugh could scarcely believe it was the report of a gun.

However, the mere suspicion that any other man might be near by was enough to make the boys proceed with the greatest caution. Veiled by the fog,—which had been caused by the warm **[130]**

shower falling on the lake during the night,—they could be seen only by someone very near at hand, but there were other ways in which they might be betrayed. The sound of their voices or movements, the smell of the smoke from their cooking fire might reveal their presence. The secret nature of their quest made them anxious that their visit to the island should not become known. So they lighted no fire, breakfasting on the cold remains of last night's corn porridge sprinkled with maple sugar. They talked little and in whispers, and took care to make the least possible noise.

Having decided to give at least one more day to the search for the furs, the lads climbed the steep slope and made their way to the head of the fissure. Up there the fog was much less thick than down in the cove. The crack in the rock had narrowed to a mere slit almost choked with tree roots upon which fallen leaves and litter had lodged. Near the edge, in a depression where there was a little soil, stood a clump of birch sprouts growing up about the stump of an old broken tree. In their search for some blaze or mark that might guide them, the two thought they had examined every tree in the vicinity.

That morning, as he was about to pass the clump of birches, Hugh happened to notice what a rapid growth the sprouts had made that season. The sight of the new growth suggested something to him. He began to pull apart and bend back the little trees to get a better view of the old stump. There, concealed by the young growth, was the mark he sought. A piece of the ragged, gray, lichen-scarred bark had been sliced away, and on the bare, crumbly wood had been cut a transverse groove with an arrow point.

Hugh promptly summoned Blaise. The cut in the old stump seemed to prove that the furs might not, after all, have been stolen from the hole in the rocks. The arrow pointed directly along the overgrown crack, which the lads traced for fifty or sixty feet farther, when it came abruptly to an end. They had come to a hollow or gully. The crack showed distinctly in the steep rock wall, but the bottom of the hollow and the opposite gradual slope were deep with soil and thick with growth. The rift, which widened at the outer end into a cleft, ran, it was apparent, clear through the rock ridge that formed the shore cliff. The searchers had now reached the lower ground behind that ridge. Which way should they turn next? **[131]**

That question was answered promptly. The abrupt face of the rock wall was well overgrown with green moss and green-gray lichens. In one place the short, thick growth had been scratched away to expose a strip of the gray stone about an inch wide and six or seven inches long. The clean-cut appearance of the scratch seemed to prove that it had been made with a knife or some other sharp instrument. So slowly do moss and lichens spread on a rock surface that such a mark would remain clear and distinct for one season at least, probably for several years. There was no arrow point here, but the scratch was to the left of the crack. The boys turned unhesitatingly in that direction.

The growth in this low place was dense. They **[132]**

had to push their way among old, ragged birches and close standing balsams draped with gray beards of lichen which were sapping the trees' life-blood. Everywhere, on the steep rock wall, on each tree trunk, they sought for another sign. For several hundred yards they found nothing, until they came to a cross gully running back towards the lake. In the very entrance stood a small, broken birch. The slender stem was not completely severed, the top of the tree resting on the ground.

"There is our sign," said Blaise as soon as he caught sight of the birch.

"It is only a broken tree," Hugh protested. "I see nothing to show that it is a sign."

"But I see something," Blaise answered promptly. "First, there is the position, right here where we need guidance. The tree has been broken so that it points down that ravine. The break is not old, not weathered enough to have happened before last winter. Yet it happened before the leaves came out. They were still in the bud. It was in late winter or early spring that tree was broken."

"Just about the time father must have been on the island," Hugh commented.

Blaise went on with his explanation. "What broke the tree? The wind? Sound birches are not easily broken by wind. They sway, they bend, sometimes they are tipped over at the roots. But the stem itself is not broken unless it is rotten or the storm violent. Here are no signs of strong wind. There are no other broken trees near this one."

"That is true," murmured Hugh looking about him.

"Now we will look at the break," Blaise continued confidently. "See, the trunk is sound, but it has been cut with an axe, cut deep and bent down. And here, look here!" His usually calm voice was thrilling with excitement. He was pointing to some small cuts in the white bark just below the break. **[133]**

"J. B., father's initials!" cried Hugh.

Blaise laid his finger on his lips to remind his companion that caution must still be observed. They had heard no further sound and had seen no sign of a human being, but the half-breed lad had not forgotten the sharp report that had so startled him in the dawn. It was best to move silently and speak with lowered voice.

Blaise led the way down the narrow cross gully, so narrow that where a tree grew,—and trees seemed to grow everywhere on this wild island where they could push down a root,—there was scarcely room to get by. After a few hundred yards of such going, the ravine began to widen. The walls became higher and so sheer that nothing could cling to them but moss, lichens and sturdy crevice plants. Under foot there was no longer any soil, only pebbles and broken rock fragments. Ahead, beyond the deep shadow of the cleft, lay sunlit water. This was evidently another of the fissures that ran down through the outer rock ridge to the water, fissures that were characteristic of that stretch of shore.

“We are coming back to the lake through another crack much like the one where the old boat lies,” said Hugh. “We must be off the trail somewhere. There is no place here to hide furs.”

Blaise, who was still ahead, did not answer. He was closely scanning the rock wall on either side. A moment later, he paused and gave a little grunt of interest or satisfaction. **[134]**

“What is it?” Hugh asked.

Blaise took another step forward, and pointed to the right hand wall. A narrow fissure extended from top to bottom. So narrow was the crack that Hugh rather doubted whether he could squeeze into it.

“I will go first, I am smaller,” Blaise suggested. “If I cannot go through, we shall know that no man has been in there.”

Slender and lithe, Blaise found that he could wriggle his way through without much difficulty. The heavier, broader-shouldered Hugh found the task less easy. He had to go sidewise and for a moment he thought he should stick fast, but he managed to squeeze past the narrowest spot, to find himself in an almost round hollow. This hole or pit in the outer ridge was perhaps twenty feet in diameter with abrupt rock walls and a floor of boulders and pebbles, among which grew a few hardy shrubs. It was open to the sky and ringed at the top with shrubby growth. Hugh glanced about him with a keen sense of disappointment. Surely the furs were not in this place.

Blaise, on the other side of a scraggly ninebark bush, seemed to be examining a pile of boulders and rock fragments. The older boy rounded the bush, and disappointment gave way to excitement. By what agency had those stones been heaped in that particular spot? They had not fallen from the wall beyond. The pit had no opening through which waves could wash. Had that heap been put together by the hand of man? Was it indeed a cache?

Without a word spoken, the two lads set about demolishing the stone pile. One after another they lifted each stone and threw it aside. As he rolled away one of the larger boulders, Hugh could not restrain a little cry. A bit of withered cedar had come to light. With eager energy he flung away the remaining stones. There lay revealed a heap of something covered with cedar branches, the flat sprays, withered but still aromatic, woven together closely to form a tight and waterproof covering. Over and around them, the stones had been heaped to conceal every sprig. **[135]**

With flying fingers, the boys pulled the sprays apart. There were the bales of furs each in a skin wrapper. The brothers had found the hidden cache and their inheritance. Both lads were surprised at the number of the bales. If the pelts were of good quality, no mean sum would be realized by their sale. They would well repay in gold for all the long search. Yet, to do the boys justice, neither was thinking just then of the worth of the pelts. Their feeling was rather of satisfaction that they were really carrying out their father’s last command. The long and difficult search was over, and they had not failed in it.

They lifted the packages from a platform of poles resting on stones. The whole cache had been cleverly constructed. No animal could tear apart the bales, and, even in the severest storm, no water could reach them. Over them the branches had formed a roof strong enough to keep the top stones from pressing too heavily upon the furs.

"But where is the packet?" cried Hugh. "It must be inside one of the bales, but which one I wonder." [136]

"I think it is this one," Blaise replied.

The package he was examining seemed to be just like the others, except that into the rawhide thong that bound it had been twisted a bit of scarlet wool ravelled from a cap or sash. Blaise would have untied the thong, but the impatient Hugh cut it, and stripped off the wrapping. The bale contained otter skins of fine quality. Between two of the pelts was a small, flat packet. It was tied with a bit of cedar cord and sealed with a blotch of pitch into which had been pressed the seal of the ring Hugh now wore.

"Shall we open this here and now, Blaise?" Hugh asked.

"That is for you to say, my brother. You are the elder."

"Then I think we had best open it at once."

Hugh broke the seal and was about to untie the cord, when from somewhere above the rim of the pit, there rang out a loud, long-drawn call, "Oh-eye-ee, oh-eye-ee-e." It was not the cry of an animal. It was a human voice.

[137]

XVII
THE SEALED PACKET

Hastily Hugh thrust the unopened packet into the breast of his deerskin tunic, and looked up apprehensively at the border of green about the rim of the pit. The man who had shouted could not be far away. There might be others even nearer. If anyone should push through that protecting fringe of growth, he would be looking directly down on the two lads. The bales would be in plain view.

Hugh thought quickly. "We must conceal the furs again, Blaise," he whispered, "until we can find some way to get them to the boat."

Blaise nodded. "We will take them away at night."

Rapidly and with many an apprehensive glance upward, the two replaced the bales on the platform of poles, covered the heap with the cedar boughs and built up the stones around and over the whole. They were in too great haste to do as careful a piece of work as Jean Beaupré had done. Their rock pile would scarcely have stood close scrutiny without betraying

something suspicious. From above, however, its appearance was innocent enough, and no chance comer would be likely to descend into the hole.

Squeezing through the narrow slit, the brothers examined the cleft that ran down in a steep incline of rock fragments to the water. The simplest plan would be to bring the boat in there. With strangers likely to appear at any moment, it would be best to wait until nightfall. The two decided to return to the cove where they had camped, and wait for darkness. **[138]**

Back through the fissure and over the low ground behind the shore ridge, they made their way cautiously, silently. They went slowly, taking pains to efface any noticeable tracks or signs of their passage, and watching and listening alertly for any sight or sound of human beings. A rustling in the bushes caused both to stand motionless until they caught sight of the cause, a little, bright-eyed squirrel or a gray-brown snowshoe rabbit with long ears and big hind feet. Both boys would have liked that fresh meat for the dinner pot, but they had no wish to attract attention by a shot.

When they reached the top of the cliff, they found that the fog had entirely disappeared, driven away by a light breeze. As they went down the steep, open slope to the little beach, they knew themselves to be exposed to the view of anyone who might happen to be looking out from the woods bordering the cove. Anxiously they scanned woods, rocks and lake, but saw no sign of any human being. Not a living creature but a fish duck peacefully riding the water was to be seen. The boat and supplies were undisturbed.

The boys stayed quietly in the cove during the remaining hours of daylight. The beach was partially hidden from the water by the end of the shore ridge, and screened on the land side by the dense growth of trees and bushes bordering the pebbles. Beyond the beach was a vertical rock cliff sheer to the water from its forested summit. Then came another short stretch of pebbles bounded by a low rock wall and protected by the jutting mass of rock, only scantily wooded, that formed the dividing line between the twin coves. To anyone standing over there or among the trees at the edge of the high central cliff, the boys and their boat would have been in plain sight. The shot Blaise had heard in the early dawn had come from somewhere above that cliff, but it was not likely that the man who had fired that shot was still there. Doubtless he had been hunting. At any rate the lads had no better place to wait for darkness to come. They were at least far enough from the pit so their discovery by wandering Indians or white hunters need not lead to the finding of the furs. As the day wore on, the brothers cast many an anxious glance around the shores of the cove. They were startled whenever a squirrel chattered, a woodpecker tapped loudly on a branch, or two tree trunks rubbed against one another, swayed by a stronger gust of wind. **[139]**

As their food was ill adapted to being eaten raw, they permitted themselves a small cooking fire, taking care to use only thoroughly dry wood and

to keep a clear flame with as little smoke as possible. After the kettle had been swung over the fire, Hugh drew from his breast the packet and examined the outside carefully. The wrapping was of oiled fish-skin tied securely.

“Shall we open it, Blaise?” he asked again.

The younger boy cast a quick glance about him, at the rock slope they had descended, the dense bushes beyond the pebbles, the forest rim along the summit of the high central cliff, the rough, wave-eaten rock mass across the cove. Then his eyes returned to his companion’s face and he nodded silently. **[140]**

Curious though he was, Hugh was deliberate in opening the mysterious packet. He untied the cord and removed the outer cover carefully not to tear it. Within the oiled skin wrapper was still another of the finest, whitest, softest doeskin, tied with the same sort of bark cord. The cord had been passed through holes in a square of paper-thin birch bark. On the bark label was written in the same faint, muddy brown ink Blaise had used:

“To be delivered to M. René Dubois,
At Montreal.
Of great importance.”

Hugh turned over the packet. It was sealed, like the outer wrapper, with drops of pitch upon which Jean Beaupré’s seal had been pressed. For several minutes the boy sat considering what he ought to do. Then he looked up at his half-brother’s equally grave face.

“I don’t like to open this,” Hugh said. “It is addressed to M. René Dubois of Montreal and it is sealed. I think father intended me to take it to Monsieur Dubois with the seals unbroken. Doubtless he will open it in my presence and tell me what it contains.”

Blaise nodded understandingly. He had lived long enough in civilization to realize the seriousness of breaking the seals of a packet addressed to someone else. “That Monsieur Dubois, do you know him?” he inquired.

“No, I didn’t know my father had any friends in Montreal. He never lived there, you know. His old home was in Quebec, where I was born. I don’t remember that I ever heard of Monsieur René Dubois, but my relatives in Montreal may know him. Probably I can find him. If I can’t, then I think it would be right to open this packet, but not until I have tried. Shall I take charge of this, Blaise?” **[141]**

“You are the elder and our father said you must take the packet to Montreal.”

To the impatient Hugh the wait until the sun descended beyond the woods of the low point across the water seemed long indeed. He found it hard to realize that only two nights before he and Blaise had reached the point and had tied up there. They had surely been lucky to find the cache of furs so soon.

Not until the shadows of the shore lay deep upon the water did the lads push off the bateau. They paddled silently out of the little cove and close

under the abrupt, riven rocks, taking care not to let a blade splash as it dipped and was withdrawn. The water was rippled by the lightest of breezes, and the moon was bright. The deep cleft where Jean Beaupré's wrecked boat lay was in black darkness, though. Hugh could not even make out the stern. His mind was busy with thoughts of the father he had known so slightly, with speculations about his coming to the island, about the way he had left it. Through what treachery had he received his death blow?

Another rift in the rock was passed before the boys reached a wider, shallower cleft they felt sure was the one leading to the cache. Cautiously they turned into the dark mouth of the fissure and grounded the boat on the pebbles, water-worn and rounded here where the waves reached them. Overhead the moonlight filtered down among the thick sprays of the stunted cedars that grew along the rim and even down into the crack. But the darkness at the bottom was so deep the brothers could proceed only by feeling their way with both hands and feet. In this manner they went up over pebbles and angular rock fragments to the narrow slit in the wall, and squeezed through in pitch blackness to the circular hollow. **[142]**

There was moonlight in the pit, but the cache, close under the rock wall, was in the shadow. So difficult did the boys find it to remove the stones in the darkness, that they decided to risk lighting a torch. During the afternoon Blaise had made a couple of torches of spruce and balsam. He lighted one now and stuck it in a cranny of the rock just above the heap of stones. By the feeble, flickering and smoky light, the cache was uncovered. Pushing and hauling the bales through the narrow crack was difficult and troublesome. The larger ones would not go through, and had to be unwrapped and reduced to smaller parcels. Even by the dim light of the torch, the boys could see that the furs were of excellent quality. Before loading, the bateau had to be pushed out a little way, Blaise standing in the water to hold it while Hugh piled in the bales. Then both climbed in and paddled quietly out of the crack.

There was not breeze enough for sailing. Hugh and Blaise were anxious to get away from the spot where they had found the furs and had heard the shout, but paddling the heavily laden bateau was slow work. Without a breeze to fill the sail, they were loth to start across the open lake, so they kept on along shore to the northeast. When they had put a mile or more between themselves and the place where they had found the furs, they would camp and wait for sunrise and a breeze. **[143]**

Slowly and laboriously they paddled on, close to the high shore. The calm, moonlit water stretched away on their left. The dark, forest-crowned rocks, huge, worn and seamed pillars, towered forbiddingly on the other side. At last the wider view of the water ahead and the barrenness of the tumbled rocks to the right indicated that they were reaching the end of the shore along which they had been travelling.

"We'll land now," said Hugh, "as soon as we can find a place."

The abrupt, truncated pillars of rock were not so high here, but were bordered at the water's edge with broken blocks and great boulders, affording little chance of a landing place. By paddling close in, however, slowly and cautiously to avoid disaster, the boys discovered a niche between two blocks of rock, with water deep enough to permit running the boat in. There they climbed out on the rock and secured the bateau by a couple of turns of the rope around a smaller block. In rough weather such a landing would have been impossible, but on this still night there was no danger of the bateau bumping upon the rocks. Farther along Blaise found a spot where the solid rock shelved down gradually. Rolling themselves in their blankets, the brothers stretched out on the hard bed.

[144] The plaintive crying of gulls waked Hugh just as the sun was coming up from the water, a great red ball in the morning mist. "I don't like this place," he said as he sat up. "We can be seen plainly from the lake."

"Yes," Blaise agreed, "but we can see far across the lake. If a boat comes, we shall see it while it is yet a long way off. I think we need not fear anything from that direction. No, the only way an enemy can draw near unseen is from the land, from the woods farther back there."

"The water is absolutely still," Hugh went on. "There isn't a capful of wind to fill our sail, and we can't paddle this loaded boat clear across to the mainland. We must find a better place than this, though, to wait for a breeze. I am going to look around a bit."

[145] The lads soon found that they were near the end of a point, a worn, wave-eaten, rock point, bare except for a few scraggly bushes, clumps of dwarfed white cedar and such mosses and lichens as could cling to the surface. Farther back were woods, mostly evergreen. The two felt that they must find a spot where they could wait for a wind without being visible from the woods. Yet they wanted to remain where they could watch the weather and get away at the first opportunity. At the very tip of the point, the slate-gray rocks were abrupt, slightly overhanging indeed, but in one spot there lay exposed at the base a few feet of low, shelving, wave-smoothed shore, which must be under water in rough weather. On this calm day the lower rock shore was dry. There, in the shelter of the overhanging masses, the boys would be entirely concealed from the land side. A little farther along on the end of the point, rose an abrupt, rounded tower of rock. Between the rock tower and the place they had selected for themselves was a narrow inlet where the bateau would be fairly well hidden. They shoved the boat out from between the boulders, where it had lain safe while they slept, and paddled around to the little inlet. On the wave-smoothed, low rock shore, they kindled a tiny fire of dry sticks gathered at the edge of the woods, and hung the kettle from a pole slanted over the flames from a cranny in the steep rock at the rear.

[146] The wind did not come up as the sun rose higher, as the lads had hoped it would. The delay was trying, especially to the impetuous Hugh. They had found the cache, secured the

furs and the packet, and had got safely away with them, only to be stuck here on the end of this point for hours of idle waiting. Yet even Hugh did not want to start across the lake under the present conditions. Paddling the bateau had been laborious enough when it was empty, but now, laden almost to the water-line, the boat was far worse to handle. Propelling it was not merely hard work, but progress would be so slow that the journey across to the mainland would be a long one, with always the chance that the wind, when it did come, might blow from the wrong quarter. The bateau would not sail against the wind. To attempt to paddle it against wind and waves would invite disaster. Sailing the clumsy craft, heavy laden as it was, across the open water with a fair wind would be quite perilous enough. There was nothing to do but wait, and this seemed as good a place in which to wait as any they were likely to find.

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XVIII
THE FLEEING CANOE

As the morning advanced, the sun grew hot, beating down on the water and radiating heat from the rocks. Scarcely a ripple wrinkled the blue surface of the lake, and the distance was hazy and shimmering. An island with steep, straight sides, four or five miles northeast of the point, was plainly visible, but Thunder Cape to the west was so dim it could barely be discerned. The day was much like the one on which the lads had come across from the mainland.

Hugh grew more and more restless. Several times he climbed the only climbable place on the overhanging rock and peeped between the branches of a dwarfed cedar bush. He could see across to the edge of the woods, but he discovered nothing to either interest or alarm him. By the time the sun had passed the zenith, he could stand inaction no longer. He was not merely restless. He had become vaguely uneasy. The boat was hidden from his view by the rocks between. In such a lonely place he would have had no fear for the furs, had it not been for the shot and the call he and Blaise had heard.

“Someone might slip out of the woods and down to the boat without our catching a glimpse of him,” Hugh remarked at last. “I’m going over there to see if everything is all right.”

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To reach the boat, he was obliged to climb to his peeping place and pull himself up the rest of the way, or else go around and across the top of the steep rocks. He chose the latter route. The boat and furs he found unharmed. The only trespasser was a gull that had alighted on one of the bales and was trying with its strong, sharp beak to pick a hole in the wrapping. He frightened the bird away, then stopped to drink from his cupped palm.

A low cry from Blaise startled him. He glanced up just in time to see his brother, who had

followed him to the top of the rocks, drop flat. Curiosity getting the better of caution, Hugh sprang up the slope. One glance towards the west, and he followed the younger lad's example and dropped on his face.

"A canoe! They must have seen us."

Cautiously Hugh raised his head for another look. The canoe was some distance away. When he had first glimpsed it, it had been headed towards the point. Now, to his surprise, it was going in the opposite direction, going swiftly, paddles flashing in the sun.

"They have turned about, Blaise. Is it possible they didn't see us?"

"Truly they saw us. My back was that way. I turned my head and there they were. My whole body was in clear view. Then you came, and they must have seen you also. They are running away from us."

"It would seem so indeed, but what do they fear? There are four men in that canoe, and we are but two."

"They know not how many we are. They may have enemies on Minong, though I never heard that any man lived here." **[149]**

"Something has certainly frightened them away. They are making good speed to the west, towards the mainland."

The boys remained stretched out upon the rock, only their heads raised as they watched the departing canoe.

"They turn to the southwest now," Blaise commented after a time. "They go not to the mainland, but are bound for some other part of Minong."

"They were bound for this point when we first saw them," was Hugh's reply. "We don't know what made them change their minds, but we have cause to be grateful to it whatever——What was that?"

He sprang to his feet and turned quickly.

"Lie down," commanded Blaise. "They will see you."

Hugh, unheeding, plunged down to the bateau. It was undisturbed. Not a living creature was in sight. Yet something rattling down and falling with a splash into the water had startled him. He looked about for an explanation. A fresh scar at the top of the slope showed where a piece of rock had chipped off. Undoubtedly that was what he had heard. His own foot, as he lay outstretched, had dislodged the loose, crumbling flake.

Reminded of caution, Hugh crawled back up the slope instead of going upright. The canoe was still in sight going southwest. Both boys remained lying flat until it had disappeared beyond the low point. Then they returned to the low shore beneath the overhanging rock. For the present at least there seemed to be nothing to be feared from that canoe, but would it return, and where was the man who had fired the shot and later sent that call ringing through the **[150]**

woods? Did he belong with the canoe party? Had he gone away with them, or was he, with companions perhaps, somewhere on the wooded ridges? The boys did not know whether to remain where they were or go somewhere else.

The weather finally brought them to a decision. All day they had hoped for a breeze, but when it came it brought with it threatening gray and white clouds. Rough, dark green patches on the water, that had been so calm all day, denoted the passing of squalls. Thunder began to rumble threateningly, and the gray, streaked sky to the north and west indicated that rain was falling there. The island to the northeast shrank to about half its former height and changed its shape. It grew dimmer and grayer, as the horizon line crept gradually nearer.

“Fog,” remarked Blaise briefly.

“It is coming in,” Hugh agreed, “and this is not a good place to be caught in a thick fog. Shall we go back into the woods?”

“I think we had best take the bateau and go along the other side of this point. We cannot start for the mainland to-night, and we shall need a sheltered place for our camp.”

The fog did not seem to be coming in very rapidly, but by the time the bateau had been shoved off, the island across the water had disappeared. The breeze came in gusts only and was not available for sailing. So the lads were obliged to take up their paddles again.

Beyond the tower-like rock there was a short stretch of shelving shore, followed by abrupt, dark rocks of roughly pillared formation. Then came a gradual slope, rough, seamed and uneven of surface. It looked indeed as if composed of pillars, the tops of which had been sliced off with a downward sweep of the giant Kepoochikan’s knife. The shore ahead was of a yellowish gray color, as if bleached by the sun, slanting to the water, with trees growing as far down as they could find anchorage and sustenance. These sloping rocks were in marked contrast to those of the opposite side of the point, along which the boys had come the night before, where the cliffs and ridges rose so abruptly from the lake. **[151]**

After a few minutes of paddling, the brothers found themselves passing along a channel thickly wooded to the water-line. The land on the right was a part of the same long point, but on the left were islands with short stretches of water between, across which still other islands beyond could be seen. The fog, though not so dense in this protected channel as on the open lake, was thickening, and the boys kept a lookout for a camping place.

When an opening on the left revealed what appeared to be a sheltered bay, they turned in. Between two points lay two tiny islets, one so small it could hold but five or six little trees. Paddling between the nearer point and islet, the boys found themselves in another much narrower channel, open to the northeast, but apparently closed in the other direction. Going on between the thickly forested shores,—a dense mass of spruce, balsam, white cedar, birch and mountain ash,—they saw that what they had **[152]**

taken for the end of the bay was in reality an almost round islet so thickly wooded that the shaggy-barked trunks of its big white cedars leaned far out over the water. The explorers rounded the islet to find that the shores beyond did not quite come together, leaving a very narrow opening. Paddling slowly and taking care to avoid the rocks that rose nearly to the surface and left a channel barely wide enough for the bateau to pass through, they entered a little landlocked bay, as secluded and peaceful as an inland pond.

“We couldn’t find a better place,” said Hugh, looking around the wooded shores with satisfaction, “to wait for the weather to clear. We are well hidden from any canoe that might chance to come along that outer channel.”

The little pond was shallow. The boat had to be paddled cautiously to avoid grounding. Below the thick fringe of trees and alders, the prow was run up on the pebbles.

“We might as well leave the furs in the boat,” Hugh remarked.

“No.” Blaise shook his head emphatically. “We cannot be sure no one will come in here. The furs we can hide. We ourselves can take to the woods, but this heavy bateau we cannot hide.”

“I’m not afraid anyone will find us here.”

“We thought there was no one on Minong at all. Yet we have heard a shot and a call and have seen a canoe.” **[153]**

“You’re right. We can’t be too cautious.”

While Hugh unloaded the bales, Blaise went in search of a hiding place. Returning in a few minutes, he was surprised to find the boat, the prow of which had just touched the beach, now high and dry on the pebbles for half its length. Hugh had not pulled the boat up. The water had receded.

“There is a big old birch tree there in the woods and it is hollow,” Blaise reported. “It has been struck by lightning and is broken. We can hide the furs there.”

“Won’t squirrels or wood-mice get at them?”

“We will put bark beneath and over them, and we shall not leave them there long.”

“I hope not surely.”

Blaise lifted a bale and started into the woods. Hugh, with another bale, was about to follow, when Blaise halted him.

“Walk not too close to me. Go farther over there. If we go the same way, we shall make a beaten trail that no one could overlook. We must keep apart and go and come different ways.”

Hugh grasped the wisdom of this plan at once. He kept considerably to the left of Blaise until he neared the old birch, and on his return followed still another route. He was surprised to find that the water had come up again. The pebbles that had been exposed so short a time before were now under water once more. The bow of the bateau was afloat and he had to pull it farther

up.

“There is a sort of tide in here,” he remarked as Blaise came out of the woods. “It isn’t a real tide, for it comes and goes too frequently. Do you know what causes it?” [154]

“No, though I have seen the water come and go that way in some of the bays of the mainland.”

“It isn’t a true tide, of course,” Hugh repeated, “but a sort of current.”

Going lightly in their soft moccasins, the two made the trips necessary to transport the furs. They left scarcely any traces of their passage that might not have been made by some wild animal. Hugh climbed the big, hollow tree which still stood firm enough to bear his weight. Down into the great hole in the trunk he lowered a sheet of birch bark that Blaise had stripped from a fallen tree some distance away. Then Hugh dropped down the bales, and put another piece of bark on top. The furs were well hidden. From the ground no one could see anything unusual about the old tree.

Returning to the shore, the two pushed off the boat and paddled to another spot several hundred yards away. There Hugh felled a small poplar and cut the slender trunk into rollers which he used to pull the heavy bateau well up on shore where it would be almost hidden by the alders.

Night was approaching and the wooded shores of the little lake were still veiled in fog. The water was calm and the damp air spicy with the scent of balsam and sweet with the odor of the dainty pink twin-flowers. On the whole of the big island the boys could scarcely have found a more peaceful spot. The woods were so thick there seemed to be no open spaces convenient for camping, so the brothers kindled their supper fire on the pebbles above the water-line, and lay down to sleep in the boat. [155]

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XIX
THE BAY OF MANITOS

The night passed quietly, unbroken by any sound of beast, bird or man, until the crying of the gulls woke the sleepers in the fog-gray dawn. Chilled and stiff, they threw off their damp blankets and climbed out of the bateau. By dint of much patience and a quantity of finely shredded birch bark, a slow fire of damp wood was kindled, the flame growing brighter as the wood dried out.

After he had swallowed his last spoonful of corn, Hugh remarked, “If we are held here to-day, we must try for food of some kind. We haven’t hunted or fished since we left the mainland, and our supplies are going fast.”

Blaise nodded. “We need fire no shots to fish.”

Fishing in the little pond did not appear

promising. When the boys attempted to paddle through the passageway, they ran aground, and were forced to wait for the water to rise and float the boat. The same fluctuation they had noticed the day before was still going on. Luck did not prove good in the narrow channel, and they went on into the wider one between the long point and the row of islands. The fog was almost gone, though the sky was still gray. Would the weather permit a start for the mainland?

Turning to the northeast, they went the way they had come the preceding afternoon. As they approached the end of the last island, they realized that this was no time to attempt a crossing. Wind there was now, too much wind. It came from the northwest, and the lake, a deep green under the gray sky, was heaving with big waves, their tips touched with foam. The bateau would not sail against that wind. To try to paddle the heavily-laden boat across those waves would be the worst sort of folly. **[157]**

Turning again, they went slowly back through the protected channel, Hugh wielding the blade while Blaise fished. Luck was still against them. Either there were no fish in the channel or they were not hungry. On beyond the entrance to the hiding place, the two paddled. Passing the abrupt end of an island, they came to a wider expanse of water. They were still sheltered by the high, wooded ridges to their right, where dark evergreens and bright-leaved birches rose in tiers. In the other direction, they could see, between scattered islands, the open lake to the horizon line. Misty blue hills in the distance ahead, beyond islands and forested shores, indicated another bay, longer and wider than the one the *Otter* had entered.

Blaise, who was paddling now, raised his blade and looked questioningly at Hugh. The latter answered the unspoken query. “I am for going on. We have seen no signs of human beings since that canoe, and we need fish.”

Blaise nodded and dipped his paddle again. As they drew near a reef running out from the end of a small island, Hugh felt his line tighten. Fishing from the bateau was much less precarious than from a canoe. Without endangering the balance of the boat, Hugh hauled in his line quickly, swung in his fish, a lake trout of eight or ten pounds, and rapped it smartly on the head with his paddle handle. He then gave the line to Blaise and took another turn at the paddle. In less than ten minutes, Blaise had a pink-fleshed trout somewhat smaller than Hugh’s. **[158]**

Then luck deserted them again. Not another fish responded to the lure of the hook, though they paddled back and forth beside the reef several times. They went on along the little island and up the bay for another mile or more without a nibble. It was a wonderful place, that lonely bay, fascinating in its wild beauty. Down steep, densely wooded ridges, the deep green spires of the spruces and balsams, interspersed with paler, round-topped birches, descended in close ranks. Between the ridges, the clear, transparent water was edged with gray-green cedars, white-flowered mountain ashes, alders and other bushes, and dotted with wooded

islands. Far beyond the head of the bay blue hills rose against the sky. The fishing, however, was disappointing, and paddling the bateau was tiresome work, so the lads turned back.

As they passed close to an island, the younger boy's quick eye caught a movement in a dogwood near the water. A long-legged hare went leaping across an opening.

"If we cannot get fish enough, we will eat rabbit," said the boy, turning the boat into a shallow curve in the shore of the little island. "I will set some snares. If we are delayed another day, we will come in the morning to take our catch." **[159]**

Tying the boat to an overhanging cedar tree, the brothers went ashore. On the summit of the island, in the narrowest places along a sort of runway evidently frequented by hares, Blaise set several snares of cedar bark cord. While the younger brother was placing his last snare, Hugh returned to the boat. He startled a gull perched upon the prow, and the bird rose with a harsh cry of protest at being disturbed. Immediately the cry was repeated twice, a little more faintly each time. Hugh looked about for the birds that had answered. No other gulls were in sight. Then he realized that what he had heard was a double echo, unusually loud and clear. Forgetting caution he let out a loud, "Oh—O." It came back promptly, "Oh—o, o—o."

"Be quiet!" The words were hissed in a low voice, as Blaise leaped out from among the trees. "Canoes are coming. We must hide."

He darted back into the woods, Hugh following. Swiftly they made their way to the summit of the island. The growth was thin along the irregular rock lane. Blaise dropped down and crawled, Hugh after him. Lying flat in a patch of creeping bearberry, the younger lad raised his head a little. Hugh wriggled to his side, and, peeping through a serviceberry bush, looked out across the water.

The warning had been justified. Two canoes, several men in each, were coming up the bay. The nearest canoe was not too far away for Hugh to make out in the center a man who towered, tall and broad, above the others. The boy remembered the gigantic Indian outlined against the sky, as his canoe passed in the early dawn. He saw him again, standing motionless, with folded arms, in the red light of the fire. **[160]**

Blaise, close beside him, whispered in his ear, "Ohrante himself. What shall we do?"

If the canoes came down the side of the island where the bateau was, discovery was inevitable. For a moment, Hugh's mind refused to work. A gull circled out over the water, screaming shrilly. Like a ray of light a plan flashed into the boy's head.

"Stay here," he whispered. "Keep still. Remember the 'Bay of Spirits.'"

Swiftly Hugh wriggled back and darted down through the woods to the spot where the bateau lay. He crouched behind an alder bush, drew a long breath, and sent a loud, shrill cry across the water. Immediately it was repeated once, twice,

ringing back across the channel from the islands and steep shore beyond. Before the final echo had died away, he sent his voice forth again, this time in a hoarse bellow. Then, in rapid succession, he hooted like an owl, barked like a dog, howled like a wolf, whistled piercingly with two fingers in his mouth, imitated the mocking laughter of the loon, growled and roared and hissed and screamed in every manner he could devise and with all the power of his strong young lungs. The roughened and cracked tones of his voice, not yet through turning from boy's to man's, made his yells and howls and groans the more weird and demoniac. And each sound was repeated once and again, producing a veritable pandemonium of unearthly noises which seemed to come from every side.

Pausing to take breath, Hugh was himself startled by another voice, not an echo of his own, which rang out from somewhere above him, loud and shrill. It spoke words he did not understand, and no echo came back. A second time the voice cried out, still in the same strange language, but now Hugh recognized the names Ohrante and Minong and then, to his amazement, that of his own father Jean Beaupré. For an instant the lad almost believed that this was indeed a "Bay of Spirits." Who but a spirit could be calling the name of Jean Beaupré in this remote place? Who but Blaise, Beaupré's other son? It was Blaise of course, crying out in Ojibwa from up there at the top of the island. He had uttered some threat against Ohrante. **[161]**

Suddenly recalling his own part in the game, Hugh sent out another hollow, threatening owl call, "Hoot-ti-toot, toot, hoot-toot!" The ghostly voices repeated it, once, twice. Then he wailed and roared and tried to scream like a lynx. He was in the midst of the maniacal loon laugh, when Blaise slipped through the trees to his side.

"They run away, my brother." The quick, flashing smile that marked him as Jean Beaupré's son crossed the boy's face. "They have turned their canoes and paddle full speed. The manitos you called up have frightened them away. For a moment, before I understood what you were about, those spirit cries frightened me also."

"And you frightened me," Hugh confessed frankly, "when you shouted from up there." **[162]**

A grim expression replaced the lad's smile. "The farther canoe had turned, but the first still came on, with Ohrante urging his braves. Then I too played spirit! But let us go back and see if they still run away."

Hugh sent out another hoarse-voiced roar or two and Blaise added a war whoop and a very good imitation of the angry cat scream of a lynx. Then both slipped hurriedly through the trees to the top of the island and sought the spot where they had first watched the approaching canoes. The canoes were still visible, but farther away and moving rapidly down the bay.

"They think this a bay of demons," Hugh chuckled. "The echoes served us well. But what was it you said to them, Blaise?"

"I said, 'Beware! Come no farther or you die,

every man!’ They heard and held their paddles motionless. Then I said, ‘Beware of the manitos of Minong, O Ohrante, murderer of our white son, Jean Beaupré.’”

“Blaise, I believe it *was* Ohrante who killed father.”

“I know not. The thought came into my head that if he was the man he might be frightened if he heard that the manitos knew of the deed. And he was frightened.”

“Did he order the canoe turned?”

“I heard no order. He sat quite still. He made no move to stay his men when they turned the canoe about. Ohrante is a bold man, yet he was frightened. That I know.” **[163]**

“Was it one of those canoes we saw yesterday, do you think?”

“It may be, but Ohrante was not in it. He is so big, far away though they were, we should have seen him.”

“We couldn’t have helped seeing him. I wonder if they came around the end of the long point. How could they in such a sea?”

“It may be that the waves have gone down out there. See how still the water is in here now.”

“Then we can start for the mainland. We must go back. The canoes are out of sight.”

“No, no, that would be folly. If they go straight out of this bay all will be well, but we know not where they go or how far or where they may lie in wait. No, no, Hugh, we have frightened them away from this spot, but we dare not leave it ourselves until darkness comes.”

[164]

XX
HUGH CLIMBS THE RIDGE

The small island was scarcely a half mile in circumference, and it did not take Hugh and Blaise long to explore it. Its only inhabitants appeared to be squirrels, hares and a few birds. Breakfast had been light, and by mid-afternoon the boys were very hungry. The lighting of a fire involved some risk, but they could not eat raw fish. On a bit of open rock at the extreme upper or southwest end of the island, they made a tiny blaze, taking care to keep the flame clear and almost smokeless, and broiled the fish over the coals. The meal put both in better spirits and helped them to await with more patience the coming of night.

The evening proved disappointing. The sun set behind black clouds that came up from the west. The water was calm, the air still and oppressive, and above the ridges lightning flashed. The prospect of making a start across the open lake was not good. Yet in one way the threatening weather served the lads well. The night was

intensely dark. The lightning was too far away to illuminate land or water, and this black darkness furnished good cover. When they pushed off from the little island, they could see scarcely a boat's length ahead.

Close to the shores of the islands and the long point, they paddled, avoiding wide spaces, which were, even on this dark night, considerably lighter than the land-shadowed water. As he sat in the stern trying to dip and raise his paddle as noiselessly as his half-brother in the bow, Hugh felt that the very bay had somehow changed its character. That morning the place had seemed peaceful and beautiful, but to-night it had turned sinister and threatening. The low hanging, starless sky, the dark, wooded islands, the towering ridge, its topmost line of tree spires a black, jagged line against the pale flashes of lightning, the still, lifeless water, the intense silence broken only by the far-away rumble of thunder and the occasional high-pitched, squeaking cry of some night bird, all seemed instinct with menace. The boy felt that at any moment a swift canoe, with the gigantic figure of Ohrante towering in the bow, might dart out of some black shadow. Frankly Hugh was frightened, and he knew it. But the knowledge only made him set his teeth hard, gaze keenly and intently into the darkness about him and ply his paddle with the utmost care. What his half-brother's feelings were he could not guess. He only knew that Blaise was paddling steadily and silently. **[165]**

In the thick darkness, the older boy was not quite sure of the way back to the hidden pond, but Blaise showed no doubt or hesitation. He found the channel between the point and the chain of islands, and warned Hugh just when to turn through the gap into the inner channel. When it came to feeling the way past the round islet and through the narrow passage, Hugh ceased paddling and trusted entirely to Blaise. The latter strained his eyes in the effort to see into the darkness, but so black was it on every hand that even he had to depend more on feeling with his paddle blade than on his sense of sight. It was partly luck that he succeeded in taking the boat through without worse accident than grating a rock. He did not attempt to cross the little pond, but ran the bateau up on the pebbles just beyond the entrance. **[166]**

Hugh drew a long sigh of relief. They were back safe in the hidden pond near the cache of furs. The sense of menace that had oppressed him was suddenly lifted, and he felt an overpowering physical and mental weariness. Blaise must have had some similar feeling, for he had not a word to say as they climbed out of the bateau and pulled it farther up. In silence he lay down beside Hugh in the bottom of the boat. In spite of the rumbling of the thunder, and the flashing of the lightning, the two boys fell asleep immediately.

The storm passed around and no rain fell, but the sleepers were awakened towards dawn by a sharp change in the weather. The air had turned cold, wind rustled the trees, broken clouds were scudding across the sky uncovering clear patches. The morning dawned bright. The little pond was still, but it was impossible to tell what the weather might be outside. The only way to

find out was to go see. Their adventure of the day before had made the boys more than ever anxious to get away from Isle Royale at the first possible moment. Yet the thought that Ohrante might be lurking somewhere near made them cautious. They hesitated to leave their hiding place until they were sure they could strike out across the lake. To load the furs and start out, only to be obliged to turn back, seemed a double risk.

“If the lake is rough it is likely that Ohrante and his band have not gone far,” Blaise remarked. “They may be in this very bay.” **[167]**

“That does not follow,” Hugh replied quickly and with better reasoning. “There was a long interval between the time when we saw them and the coming of the storm-clouds. Because the lake was rough in the morning is no sign it was rough all day. They must have come in here from somewhere, and we know that the wind changed. The water in the bay was as still as glass last night. Ohrante was surely well frightened and I have little doubt they made good speed away from the Bay of Spirits.” Hugh was silent for a few moments. Then he asked abruptly, “What would happen if we should encounter Ohrante? He can’t know what brought us here, and we have done him no harm. Why should he harm us when he has nothing against us?”

“He has this against us, that we are the sons of Jean Beaupré.”

“He doesn’t know we are.”

“He knows me. He has seen me more than once and knows me for the son of my father. Ohrante forgets not those he has seen.”

“I didn’t know he knew you. He can’t know me. Probably he doesn’t even know that father had another son. I’ll go alone in the bateau, Blaise, down the channel, and see how the lake looks.”

“No, no,” Blaise objected. “You must not take such a risk. If you go out there, I will go too.”

“That would spoil the whole plan. If Ohrante catches sight of you, it will be all up with both of us. He doesn’t know me. If he glimpses me, he may even be afraid to show himself. He may think me one of a party of white men, and he is a fugitive from justice.” **[168]**

Blaise shook his head doubtfully.

“Well, at any rate,” Hugh protested, “I shall have a better chance if you aren’t with me. I don’t believe I shall see anything of Ohrante or his men, but I run less risk alone. I will be cautious. I’ll not expose myself more than I can help. Instead of going out along the point by water, I’ll paddle across the channel and then take to the woods. I can climb to the top of the ridge, under cover all the way, and look out across the lake. It can’t be very far up there. I shall be back in an hour. You must stay here and guard the furs.”

The expression of the younger lad’s face betrayed that he did not like this new plan much better than the first one, but he voiced no further objection.

Hugh pushed off the bateau, waved his hand to the sober-faced Blaise, and paddled through the narrow waterway and out of sight. After his brother had gone, Blaise picked his way along the shore of the pond and into the woods to the cache. He found no signs of disturbance around the old birch, and, climbing up, he looked down into the hollow. The rotten wood and dead leaves he and Hugh had strewn over the bark cover seemed undisturbed. Satisfied that the furs were safe, Blaise climbed down again. He was reminded though that Hugh still had the packet. He wished he had asked his elder brother to leave it behind.

The half-breed boy waited with the patience inherited from his Indian mother. But when the sun reached its highest point he began to wonder. Surely it could not take Hugh so long to cross to the point, climb to the top and return. From experience of untracked woods and rough ridges, Blaise knew the trip was probably a harder one than Hugh had imagined, but the latter was not inexperienced in rough going. Unless he had encountered extraordinary difficulties, had been obliged to go far around, or had become lost, he should have been back long before. The possibility that Hugh had become lost, Blaise dismissed from his mind at once. With the ridge ahead and the water behind him, only the very stupidest of men could have lost himself in daylight. That he had come to some crack or chasm he could not cross or some cliff he could not scale, and had been compelled to go far out of his way, was possible. Blaise had come to know Hugh’s stubborn nature. If he had started to go to the top of the ridge, there he would go, if it was in the power of possibility. **[169]**

There seemed to be nothing Blaise could do but wait. Even if he had thought it wise to follow his elder brother, he had no boat. Sunset came and still no Hugh. The lad felt he could delay action no longer.

The pond was in the interior of a small island. Blaise made up his mind to cross to the shore bordering on the channel that separated the island from the long point. Through the woods he took as direct a route as he could. The growth was thick, but there was still plenty of light. In a very few minutes he saw the gleam of water among the trees ahead. He slipped through cautiously, not to expose himself until he had taken observations. His body concealed by a thick alder bush, he looked across the strip of water, studying the opposite shore line. **[170]**

The shore was in shadow now and the trees grew to the water. Letting his eyes travel along foot by foot, he caught sight of the thing he sought, a bit of weather-stained wood, not the trunk or branch of a dead tree, projecting a little way from the shadow of a cedar. That was the end of the bateau. Hugh had crossed the channel, had left his boat and gone into the woods.

Slipping between the bushes, Blaise glanced along his own side of the channel, then made his way quickly to the spot where a birch tree had toppled from its insecure hold into the water. With his sharp hatchet, the boy quickly severed the roots that were mooring the fallen tree to the shore. Then, with some difficulty, he **[171]**

succeeded in shoving the birch farther out into the channel and climbing on the trunk. His weight, as he sat astride the tree trunk between the branches, pulled it down a little, but the upper part of his body was well above water. The channel was deep, with some current, which caught the tree and floated it away from shore. Like most woods Indians and white voyageurs, Blaise was not skilled in swimming, but the water was calm and, as long as he clung to his strange craft, he was in no danger of drowning. Leaning forward, he cut off a branch to use as a paddle and with it was able to make slow headway across. He could not guide himself very well, and the current bore him down. He succeeded with his branch paddle in keeping the tree from turning around, however. It went ashore, the boughs catching in a bush that grew on the water's edge, some distance below the spot where the bateau was drawn up in the shelter of the leaning cedar.

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XXI
THE GRINNING INDIAN

When Hugh passed out of the narrow channel into the wider one, he ran his eyes searchingly along the opposite shore, alert for any signs of human beings. Then he looked to the right and left, up and down the channel and the shores of the small islands. He saw nothing to cause him apprehension. Putting more strength into his paddle strokes, he crossed as quickly as he could, and ran the bateau in beside a leaning cedar tree with branches that swept the water. The bow touched the shore, and Hugh climbed out and made the boat fast. He felt sure it would be concealed from down channel by the thick foliage of the cedar. From up channel the bateau was not so well hidden, but this place seemed to be the only spot that offered any concealment whatever, so he was forced to be content. He would not be gone long anyway, and he was well satisfied that Ohrante and his band would not return soon to the Bay of Manitos.

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This was by no means the first time Hugh had been through untracked woods and over rough ground, yet he found the trip to the ridge top longer and more difficult than he had expected. The growth, principally of evergreens, was dense and often troublesome to push through. The bedrock, a few feet from shore, was covered deeply with soft leaf mould and decayed wood and litter, forming a treacherous footing. Sometimes he found it firm beneath his feet, again he would sink half-way to his knees. Wherever a tree had fallen, lightening the dense shade, tangles of ground yew had sprung up. The rise on this side of the point was gradual compared with the abrupt cliffs of the northwest side, but the slope proved to be, not an unbroken grade, but an irregular succession of low ridges with shallow gullies between. By the general upward trend, occasional glimpses of the water behind him, and the angle at which the sunlight came through the trees, Hugh kept his main direction, going in as straight a line as

he could. Under ordinary circumstances he would have used his hatchet to blaze his way, so that he might be sure of returning by the same route, but he hesitated to leave so plain a trail. It was not likely that Ohrante would come across the track, but Hugh was taking no chances. If the giant Iroquois should come down the channel and find the bateau, a blazed trail into the woods would make pursuit altogether too easy. Though he was in too great a hurry to take any particular care to avoid leaving footprints, Hugh did not mark his trail intentionally and even refrained from cutting his way through the thick places. The whole distance from the shore to the summit of the highest ridge probably did not exceed a mile, and did not actually take as long as it seemed in the climbing.

He hoped that he might come out in a bare spot where he could see across the water, but he was disappointed. The ridge was almost flat topped and trees cut off his view in every direction. Going on across the summit, however, he pushed his way among the growth, to find himself standing on the very rim of an almost vertical descent. He looked directly down upon the tops of the sturdy trees and shrubs that clung to the rock by thrusting their roots far into holes and crannies. Beyond stretched the lake, rich blue under a clear sky. A little to his left, a projecting block of rock a few feet below offered a chance for a better view. He let himself down on the rock and took an observation. The lake was not too rough to venture out upon, when the need of crossing was so great. He noted with satisfaction that the breeze was only moderate. The direction, a little east of north, was not unfavorable for reaching the mainland, though steering a straight course for the Kaministikwia would be impossible. **[174]**

Hugh turned to climb back the way he had come down. He gave a gasp, almost lost his footing, and seized a sturdy juniper root to keep himself from falling. Directly above him, on the verge of the ridge, stood a strange man, from his features, dark skin and long black hair evidently an Indian,—but not Ohrante. It flashed through Hugh’s mind that on level ground he might be a match for this fellow. They were not on level ground though. The Indian had the advantage of position. Moreover Hugh’s only arms were the hatchet and knife in his belt. The Indian carried a musket ready in his hand. That he realized to the full his advantage was proved by the malicious grin on his bronze face. There was no friendliness in that grin, only malevolence and vindictiveness.

Hugh knew himself to be in a bad position. Probably the Indian was one of Ohrante’s followers, and they were a wild crew, outlaws and renegades, their hand against every man and every man’s hand against them. The picture of the prisoner being tortured in the firelight crossed the boy’s mind in a vivid flash, and a shudder crept up his back. Then the grin on the Indian’s face sent a wave of anger over Hugh that steadied him. He must be cool at all costs and not show fear. **[175]**

Moving a step, to a more secure footing, he looked the fellow straight in the eyes. “Bo jou,” Hugh said, using the corruption of the French “Bon jour” common among traders and Indians.

“Bo jou, white man,” the other replied in French.

Both were silent for a moment. Hugh did not know what to say next and the Indian seemed content to say nothing. Suddenly Hugh made up his mind, resolving on a bold course.

“What is this place?” he asked. “Is it island or mainland?”

“Ne compr’ney,” was the only answer.

Hugh took the phrase to be an attempt to say that the other did not understand. He repeated his questions in French, then tried English, but the Indian merely stared at him, the sardonic grin still distorting his lips, and replied in the same manner. Either he really did not understand, the two French phrases being all the white man’s speech he knew, or he did not wish to talk. Yet Hugh made another attempt at conversation.

“I was driven here in the storm last night,” he volunteered, “and my canoe wrecked and my companion drowned. We were on our way down shore from the New Fort with our winter supplies, but they are all lost. What is this place? I never saw it before and I do not like it. This morning I heard strange sounds, unlike any I ever heard made by man or animal. The devil was at large I think,” and he crossed himself in the French manner. **[176]**

During the speech Hugh had kept his eyes closely fixed on the Indian’s face. He thought when he mentioned the strange sounds that he detected a quiver of interest, but it was gone in an instant. The fellow merely repeated his singsong “Ne compr’ney.” There was no use saying more. Determined not to show that he expected or feared any violence, Hugh started to climb up the projecting rock. Somewhat to the boy’s surprise, the Indian made no move to stop him. However, he kept his gun ready for instant use.

After gaining the top Hugh was in a quandary how to proceed. He did not believe the man’s intentions were friendly. Would it be wise to strike first? At the thought, his hand, almost unconsciously, sought his knife. Before he could grasp the handle, the Indian made a swift movement, and the end of the musket barrel rested against Hugh’s chest. The flint-lock musket was primed and cocked, ready to fire. Resistance was useless. Hugh stood motionless, looked the fellow in the eye and feigned anger.

“What do you mean?” he cried, trying to make his meaning plain by his voice and manner even though his captor could not understand the words. “What do you mean by threatening me, a white man, with your musket?” **[177]**

The gun was moved back a trifle, but the bronze face continued to grin maliciously. To show that he was not afraid, Hugh took a step forward, and opened his mouth to speak again, but the words were not uttered. As his weight shifted to his forward foot, he was seized from behind, and thrown sidewise, his head crashing against the trunk of a tree.

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XXII
BLAISE FOLLOWS HUGH'S TRAIL

Blaise had no difficulty finding the place where Hugh had gone into the woods. The white boy thought he had been careful about leaving a trail, but to the half-breed lad the indications were plain enough. Most of the tracks were such as might have been made by any large animal, but Blaise knew Hugh had landed at this spot intending to go directly to the ridge top. The younger boy was confident that trampled undergrowth, prints in the leaf mould, freshly broken branches, were all signs of his brother's passage.

At first he followed the trail easily, but the long northern twilight was waning. As the darkness gathered in the woods, tracking grew increasingly difficult. Blaise had no wish to attract attention by lighting a torch. As he penetrated the thick growth, he was not only unable to find Hugh's trail, but was obliged sometimes to feel his own way and was in grave doubt whether he was going aright. Coming out into a more open spot, where several trees had fallen, he examined, as well as he could in the dim light, the moss-covered trunks for some sign that Hugh had climbed over them. A fresh break where the decayed wood had crumbled away under foot, a patch of bruised moss, the delicate fruiting stalks broken and crushed, were enough to convince him that he was still on the right track.

Alternately losing the trail and finding it again, he came to the summit of the ridge. Crossing the top, he found himself on the rim of the cliff, but not in the same spot where his brother had come out. He had missed Hugh's trail on the last upward slope, and was now a hundred feet or more to the left of the projecting block of rock. For a few minutes Blaise stood looking about him. He glanced out over the water, noting that the sky was partly cloud covered. He could make out the low point, and he realized that the rock shore with the fissures must lie almost directly below him. The twin coves, where he and Hugh had camped, could not be far to the left. Blaise was not concerned just now with either place, he was merely obeying the Indian instinct to note his whereabouts and to take his bearings. [179]

The lad was at a loss how to proceed. That Hugh had reached the rim of the ridge somewhere along here seemed more than probable. Where had he gone then? Blaise could scarcely believe that his elder brother had attempted to climb down that abrupt descent. If he had gone down there and through the woods and over the rocks to the water, he could have got no better view of the open lake,—and Hugh had been in haste. No, he had certainly not gone down there of his own accord. If he had started back the way he had come, what had happened to him? Blaise shook his head in perplexity. Of only one thing was he sure. Some disaster had overtaken Hugh. Had he made a misstep and plunged down the cliff, or had Ohrante something to do with his

disappearance?

[180] The first thing to do, Blaise decided, was to search along the ridge top for some further sign of Hugh or of what had befallen him. He turned to the right and made his way along as close to the edge as he could, stooping down every few paces to seek for some clue. The night was lighter now, for the moon had come out from behind the clouds. When he reached the spot just above the projecting rocks, Blaise stopped still. There was no need to search for signs here, they were quite plain. The moon shone down on the little open space where Hugh and the strange Indian had confronted one another. It was clear to the half-breed boy that there had been a struggle. The gray caribou moss was crushed and trampled and torn up by the roots. A branch of a little jackpine on the edge of the opening showed a fresh break and hanging from that branch was a torn scrap of deerskin. But that was not all. Lying on the moss, in plain sight in the moonlight, was a small, dark object, a bit of steel such as was commonly used with a piece of flint for fire making. Blaise picked up the steel. It was the one Hugh carried, beyond doubt.

[181] What did those marks of struggle mean? They were too far back to indicate that Hugh had lost his footing and slipped over the edge, seizing the tree to keep himself from falling. No, that was quite impossible, for the jackpine grew at least ten feet from the rim of the cliff. Had Hugh fought with some animal? Blaise knew of no animal likely, at that season of the year, to make an unprovoked attack upon a man. He felt sure that Hugh had too much sense to strike first with knife or hatchet at a bear or moose. Moreover if an animal had slain him it would scarcely have carried him away. Every indication pointed to an encounter, not with a beast, but with a man. Hugh must have come across Ohrante or some of his followers. Had they killed him or taken him prisoner? If they had killed him they would not have troubled to take away his body. They would have taken his scalp and gone on their way,—unless of course they had thrown him over the cliff. Blaise looked down the abrupt descent, now bathed in moonlight. Should he seek down there for Hugh or in some other direction? He decided to look around a little more before attempting to climb down.

Almost immediately he found further traces. Beyond the jackpine more crushed moss and broken bushes and trampled undergrowth showed plainly that someone, more than one man probably, had gone that way not many hours before, had gone boldly and confidently, careless of leaving a trail. Blaise dropped on his knees to make a closer examination. The moonlight helped him, and he soon came to the conclusion, from the shape of a footprint impressed clearly in a bit of loose earth, that one man at least had gone in that direction, whether he had come that way or not. The print was too large for Hugh’s foot, but, a little farther on, Blaise found another smaller track that he thought might be Hugh’s. It pointed the same way as the larger print.

[182] The beginning of the trail was now plain, but could he follow it in the darkness of the woods? He must try anyway. He would go as far as he

could, taking care not to lose the tracks.

Blaise did not succeed in following far. No longer was he aided by any knowledge of the general direction those he was pursuing would be likely to take. Under the trees the moonlight was of little assistance. He soon lost the tracks and was compelled to go back to the starting point. He tried again and lost the trail a second time. A white boy, in his anxiety and impatience, would probably have persisted in the hopeless attempt, and would have lost the trail and himself. But Blaise was part Indian. Anxious though he was over Hugh's fate, he knew when to wait as well as when to go forward. By daylight he could doubtless find the trail easily, and could cover in a few minutes ground that in darkness might take him hours, if he could find his way over it at all. He seated himself on a cushion of dry caribou moss near the rim of the ridge to wait, sleeplessly and watchfully.

Dawn came at last. When the light was strong enough to make it possible to find his way through the woods, Blaise again took up the trail. The tracks he had started to follow and had lost in the first bit of dense growth, led him, not through, but around the thick place, into a sort of open rock lane bordered with trees and running along the ridge top. To his great surprise, when he reached the end of the open stretch, he came upon a clearly defined trail. It was not merely a track made by one or two men coming and going once. It gave evidence of having been travelled a number of times. The soft moccasins of the Indian do not wear a path as quickly as the boots of the white man, but this trail was well enough trodden to be followed easily. No blazes marked the trees and no clearing had been done other than the breaking or hacking off of an occasional troublesome branch. The men who made that trail had gone around the obstacles, instead of cutting through or removing them, but any white man who knew anything of woods' running could have followed it.

The half-breed boy hastened along without hesitation, scarcely thinking of the trail itself, but with eyes and ears open for signs of other human beings. That travelled way must lead, he felt sure, to some more or less permanent camp. Had Hugh fallen into Ohrante's hands or into those of some tribe of permanent inhabitants of Minong? Blaise hoped heartily that it might be the latter. Even if they were inclined to be hostile, he feared such an unknown people less than he did the too well known Iroquois. **[183]**

Going noiselessly, with every sense alert, the boy caught sight of something moving among the trees ahead. Instantly he dropped to the ground and slipped like a snake among trees and bushes and through undergrowth to the left of the trail. Behind a dense clump of balsams that had sprung up about a parent tree, he lay motionless. When he thought he had waited long enough, he crept cautiously back towards the trail. Moving bushes a little distance away in the direction from which he had come, a glimpse of a black head told the boy he had just missed an encounter.

A short distance farther on, the trail turned to the right and plunged down an abrupt descent. **[184]**

Then the way wound up and down over low ridges, the outer slopes of which were steep to abruptness, and through boggy ravines with thick growth and treacherous moss and mud. Following a general downward trend, the trail led at last to almost level ground. Now Blaise went forward with the utmost caution, for he felt that the end must be near at hand. On this lower ground, near the water, the village or camp must be situated. Presently the lad stopped, stood still and sniffed the air. He smelled smoke.

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XXIII
A CAPTIVE

Hugh's fall stunned him for a moment, and that moment was his undoing. When he came to himself, he was propped against the tree, his knife and hatchet gone. Two Indians were binding his wrists with a rawhide rope. Dizzy, his head spinning, he fought to free himself, but to no avail. The knots were tied, and he struggled to his feet to confront the malicious grin of the young Indian whom he had first encountered, and the ugly, lowering face of another, older savage of short, squat figure. It must have been this fellow's long, strong arms that had seized and thrown the boy. Recovering himself a little, Hugh looked desperately about for a way of escape. His captors understood that glance. The squat man seized his arm in a grip that almost made the boy cry out, while the young fellow, who had picked up his long gun, raised it threateningly.

In spite of his aching head, the sickness at his stomach and a general feeling of misery and despair, physical and mental, the boy made an heroic effort to stand erect and, with calm and impassive face, look his enemies in the eye. He knew that to show weakness or fear would only make matters worse. He must assume an indifference and unconcern he was far from feeling, at the same time keeping alert for any chance of gaining an advantage.

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He was not left long in doubt of his captors' immediate intentions. With a guttural grunt, the man who held his arm turned him about and led him around the jackpine, the other following, musket ready. They went through the woods, and came out into an open rock lane bordered with trees and bushes. There they turned to the right. It was of no use to struggle. Hugh had no chance to get away. Even if he had been able to break loose from the iron grip of the squat man, or, by thrusting out a foot, trip him and twist himself from the Indian's grasp, he could not hope to escape the fellow with the gun. The latter would most certainly have shot him or clubbed him into unconsciousness.

Hugh went in silence, until they entered a trail leading from the open lane. Then he attempted a question. "Where do you take me, to whom?" he asked.

Receiving no answer but the young fellow's

singsong “Ne compr’ney” and a sullen grunt from the older savage, the boy made another attempt. Loudly and vigorously, to make his anger clear by his voice and manner, he uttered an indignant protest. What did they mean by such treatment of a white man of peaceable and friendly intentions, who had never done wrong to them or to any other Ojibwa? He voiced his indignation in both English and French, apparently without effect, except to cause the squat Indian to tighten his grip and the grinning one to prod the captive in the back with his musket.

Curiously enough, that prod, instead of frightening the lad, made him blaze with anger. The blood surged to his face. With difficulty he restrained himself from turning to give battle. But one cool spot in his brain told him that such an act would be suicide. He must keep his wrath under control and use guile instead of force, if he was ever to see Blaise again and escape with their joint inheritance. So he controlled himself and went quietly where his captors led him. Questions and protests were worse than useless. **[187]**

It was not a path they were following, merely a trail trodden down more or less by use. As Indians and woodsmen always go single file, the way was narrow. The squat Indian went ahead, the end of the rawhide that bound Hugh’s wrists wrapped about his hand. He went rapidly, and Hugh, his arms extended in front of him, had to step quickly to keep from being dragged. Behind him the other man gave him an occasional reminder by touching him between the shoulders with the gun barrel. Every time he felt that touch, wrath surged up in Hugh. The boy would have been less than human if he had not been afraid of the fate in store for him, but he was proving himself the true son of his father. Every threat or insult produced in him a hot anger that, for the moment, completely blotted out fear. Yet he strove to hold himself in check, to keep calm and silent and to appear unconscious of the fellow behind him.

Had Hugh not been active and light-footed, he could not have kept pace with his guards on the rough and winding trail. The squat Indian showed not the slightest consideration for his captive. Hugh knew that if he lagged, tripped or fell, he would be dragged along regardless of his comfort. In addition he would probably be kicked or prodded by the man behind. So he exerted himself to keep up the swift pace with truly Indian agility. **[188]**

The trail turned to the right and led to the edge of an abrupt decline. The older Indian let go his hold of the boy, to climb down, but the other man kept the muzzle of his gun between Hugh’s shoulders. The lad wondered if the two expected him to go down that almost vertical descent with bound arms. He was still wondering when the Indian in front reached the bottom. The man in the rear, without warning, suddenly seized the boy about the waist, swung him off his feet, and literally dropped him over the edge.

Hugh went sliding down, trying to save himself from too rapid a descent by gripping the rock with his moccasined feet. In a flash he saw that he would land right in the arms of the man at the bottom. If he could only strike the Indian in

the stomach with enough force to knock him down, and then dodge aside swiftly before the other fellow could pick up his gun again—— Far more quickly than it can be told the plan was born in the boy's mind. The squat Indian's long arms were stretched out and up. His powerful hands gripped Hugh. The lad tried to throw himself forward, but the sturdy figure stood firm. The Indian swung Hugh around, and in an instant had him flat on his back in a tangle of prickly juniper. The captive's one attempt to escape had failed.

Bruised and battered by his slide down the rocks, Hugh was jerked to his feet. The younger savage was beside him now, ready to take up his position in the rear. The two wasted no time. The older man gripped the rawhide again and the march was resumed. Speed was not slackened even in the steep places, and Hugh was put to it to keep up and not lose his footing. The general course was downward, until they reached almost level ground, thickly wooded with evergreens, where the trail led over many fallen tree trunks, decayed and moss covered. Then they went up a few feet of rise, like a low and ruinous rock wall. To his left among the trees, Hugh could see the gleam of water. **[189]**

The squat Indian sprang down from the natural wall, and Hugh leaped with him, to avoid being dragged down. He found himself almost on a level with the water, among scattering broad-leaved trees and bushes. A few steps farther and, rounding a clump of mountain ash, he came in sight of a small birch bark lodge, of the conical wigwam form sometimes used by the Ojibwas for temporary dwellings to be occupied a few days or a week or two. The more permanent lodges were commonly of a different shape with rounded roofs. In a moment another, slightly larger wigwam came in view. A thin curl of smoke rose from the remains of a fire, and a canoe lay on the sand beach. No human beings were to be seen.

The two Indians marched their captive to the cleared spot where the fire smouldered. Then, before the boy realized his intention, the squat man turned quickly, put his arm about Hugh's waist, tripping him cleverly at the same time, threw him backwards to the ground and sat upon him. Without a word spoken, the grinning savage dropped his musket, seized a strip of rawhide and set to work to tie the prisoner's ankles together. Hugh attempted to kick, but the squat man prodded him unmercifully in the stomach. The boy realized that he could not help matters by struggling. The younger Indian completed his work, rose to his feet and grinned down at him derisively. The older man tested the cord on Hugh's wrists, pulled it a little tighter and got to his feet, to the great relief of the sore and suffering captive. The squat Indian was heavily built, and Hugh felt that a few moments more of that weight on his middle would crush him flat. He strove to control his features, however, and not to let his misery, indignation and despair show in his face. **[190]**

Evidently the pair considered their work completed, or perhaps they had tired of tormenting the prisoner. At any rate they left him to himself. For a time Hugh lay perfectly still, too miserable for effort of body or mind. His

head still pained him from the fall against the tree, he had several sore bruises on his body, his arms and shoulders ached from being held so long in one position, the thongs cut into his wrists and ankles, and he was sick at the stomach from the treatment he had just received. As he lay on his back, his captors were no longer within his range of vision, but he did not flatter himself that he was unwatched. That the two were not far away he knew from the sound of their voices that came to him at intervals from somewhere down by the water. There was no need for them to watch him closely, he thought bitterly. Bound as he was and unable to even raise himself to his feet, he had not the slightest chance of escape.

After a while he began to feel better, and his hopes rose a little. Turning his head from side to side, he looked about for some way to help himself. He could no longer hear the voices of the Indians nor could he catch any glimpse of them. Everything about him was quiet, except for the ripple of the water on the sand and gravel of the beach, and the occasional cries of a small flock of gulls. **[191]**

There was something familiar about this spot, this stretch of sandy ground, with its sparse growth of trees and bushes, and its curving beach. Beyond and above, the tree-covered ridges towered. Hugh managed to roll over on his side, and looked across a narrow blue channel to another thickly wooded shore, where the trees ran down to the water. He knew the place now. On that stretch of sand and pebbles, Captain Bennett had beached the *Otter*. Hugh himself had helped to clear the very spot where the wigwams now stood. The place looked somewhat different, to be sure, with all the ice and snow gone and the trees and bushes in full summer green.

Hugh's thoughts turned from the memory of that other camp to the present situation. He pulled at the thongs that bound him and tried to loosen them by wriggling his hands and feet, but it was of no use. The cords, instead of loosening, only cut into his wrists and ankles more painfully. He was just about to attempt to sit up, when the gruff voice of the older of his captors sounded close by, just beyond his head. Hugh composed himself to lie still. The Indian came near and looked down frowningly on the lad, then seated himself at a little distance and went to work on a piece of deerskin he was fashioning into moccasins. Hugh was familiar enough with Indian ways to grasp the significance of the fact that the man was making his own moccasins. That was women's work, if there were women about. It was evident that in this camp there were no squaws, or the braves would not be doing squaws' work. **[192]**

Growing tired of watching his guard at his task, Hugh closed his eyes. The sun was warm and in this sheltered place there was little breeze. He felt very tired and all things around him conspired to make him drowsy. In a few minutes the captive had fallen fast asleep.

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XXIV
IN THE HANDS OF THE GIANT

The sound of voices waked Hugh. He opened his eyes to find, looking down on him, the young Indian and a repulsive fellow with a strip of dirty red cloth bound about his black hair. The latter had evidently just come from visiting his snares, for he was carrying two rabbits. When he saw that Hugh was awake, he turned away, the young fellow, after favoring the boy with another of his malicious grins, following him. From the position of the sun Hugh knew that he had not slept long, but his head felt better and the sick feeling had passed.

Long and tedious hours of waiting followed. At least one of the Indians was in sight and hearing every moment. Hugh was hungry, but he was offered no food, thirsty, but he disdained to ask for a drink. He strove to lie quiet and to keep his feelings of discomfort, anxiety and apprehension from his face. The ground was hard, the sun beat down upon his head and face, and he could not move to a more comfortable spot. Only with difficulty could he roll over on his side. His mental suffering, however, was far worse than his physical discomfort and pain.

Why was he treated in this way? Into whose hands had he fallen? What were they going to do to him and for what or whom were they waiting? The one possible explanation of his treatment was that he had fallen into the hands of Ohrante's little band of outlaws. Why should even they want to take him prisoner? Was Ohrante looking for the hidden cache? A cold chill ran up Hugh's spine, as he remembered the packet in the breast of his shirt. If he had only had sense enough to leave that packet with Blaise! It must surely come to light should his captors strip him to torment or torture him. Torture! He recalled the fiendish scene in the firelight. Was that what it meant to fall into the hands of the giant Iroquois? The boy dared not think of that. He tried to assure himself that the outlaw had nothing against him. At any rate he must not give way to fear. If he could keep cool and alert, he might yet find some way out of the perils that threatened him. He *must* find a way. **[194]**

With such thoughts running through his head, the time dragged painfully. Late in the afternoon, the younger Indian renewed the fire and hung over it an iron pot of water. Into the pot he put several handfuls of wild rice and rabbit meat cut into small pieces. The odor was tempting to Hugh's nostrils, but he strove to keep his hunger from showing in his face.

Sunset came. The stew was ready, but the pot was not unslung. The three Indians sat about the fire, the younger one whiling away the time by playing on a crude native flute with three holes. The sounds produced were mournful and monotonous and did not inspire cheerfulness. The other two savages sat idle, eying the seething mixture in the kettle, but none made a move to dip into it. They were certainly waiting for the return of the rest of the band. Unusually well disciplined savages, Hugh thought them, to

postpone their own supper until their chief arrived.

The squat man turned his head, gave a little grunt, rose and walked away towards the beach. The young fellow ceased his flute playing and followed, the other remaining to watch the stew. Hugh heard a canoe grate lightly on the gravel, a few words exchanged. He rolled over on his side, and saw, striding towards him—Ohrante. There could be no mistaking that huge form, looking more gigantic than ever as it towered over the prostrate lad. **[195]**

For an instant Hugh forgot all else in wonder at the Indian's size. Ohrante was not less than seven feet in height, with proportionate breadth of shoulder and depth of chest. Then, as he gazed into the face looking down on him, a veritable panic of fear shook the lad. It was not an ugly face. In its outlines and proportions, its strongly cut, regular features, it was unusually handsome for an Indian. But there was an inhuman hardness about it, a fiercely piercing quality in the eyes, cruel lines about nostrils and lips, a general expression of bitter and vindictive malevolence that appalled the boy. A shudder passed through him, yet, fascinated, he could not take his eyes from the dark, piercing ones.

Ohrante spoke, and Hugh gave a start of surprise. It was not the words that amazed him. All the Indian said was, "Who are you, white man? How come you here?" A simple question in curiously accented English. It was the voice that surprised Hugh. Weak, high pitched, almost squeaking, such a voice as the boy had never heard in an Indian before, it was ludicrously incongruous with the size and appearance of the evil giant. Instantly the spell in which Ohrante had held him was broken. So great was the revulsion of feeling that Hugh actually wanted to laugh. Luckily he realized that to take any notice of the giant's weak point would surely arouse his bitterest hatred. Self-possession regained, Hugh controlled his features and answered steadily. He had had plenty of time that long afternoon to plan the story he was to tell. **[196]**

"I am Hugh McNair. I came here by accident. High winds drove me out of my course and against the great rocks yonder." He jerked his head in the direction of the mouth of the bay. "My canoe was wrecked, all my winter supplies lost, my comrade drowned." He paused, rather surprised at the readiness with which he told his false tale. Ordinarily Hugh was truthful, inclined to regard a lie as a coward's refuge, but he had no intention of divulging his true name and purpose to his father's bitterest enemy.

Ohrante seemed to consider the reply. Then he spoke again. "Minong far from mainland," he said in his bad English. He was suspicious of the tale, but the boy was prepared for doubt.

"We were going from the New Fort at the Kaministikwia," Hugh went on to explain. "We had sold our furs and had all our supplies for the winter. Also we were very sleepy. We had drunk deep and we did not take care where we went. Then came the wind."

Hugh was watching Ohrante's face closely, but he could not tell whether the Iroquois believed the story or not, or indeed how much of it he **[197]**

understood. He made no reply except a queer little sound in his throat. Because of his high-pitched voice, that sound could not be called a grunt, and Hugh was at a loss to know whether it meant assent, disbelief or contempt. Before he could add anything more to his story, the giant turned abruptly away, walked over to the fire and seated himself on a log.

Immediately one of his followers removed the pot, and, with a long-handled, crudely carved wooden spoon, ladled out a generous portion of the stew into a birch bark dish. The chief received the dish in silence and commenced to eat, picking out the bits of meat on the point of his knife, and taking up the rice on the flat of the blade. After he had finished the more solid part of the food, he drank the soup and passed the dish back to be refilled.

The other Indians, eight in number, stood or sat about in silence. Not until the chief had finished his second portion and had signified, by turning the empty dish upside down on the ground, that he had had enough, did they venture to approach the kettle, each with his own bark or wooden bowl. Ohrante said something to the squat man who had been one of Hugh's captors, pointing to the boy as he spoke. At once the man, carrying his own dish of stew, went over to the captive, seated himself cross-legged beside him, took up a piece of meat on the point of his knife and held it to Hugh's lips. In this way he fed the lad about half the contents of the dish, reserving the rest for himself for fear the kettle might be empty. Neither the wooden dish nor the knife blade was very clean, but Hugh was too hungry to be particular. He could have eaten more, but he was thankful to get anything. Whatever the fate in store for him, he was apparently not to be starved to death. He risked asking for a drink, making signs to explain his meaning, and the Indian brought him some water from the lake in a bark cup.

Ohrante did not speak to Hugh again that night, or show any further interest in him. He was left lying bound and was not even given a blanket. Early in the evening, Ohrante retired alone to the smaller of the two wigwams, and a little later the others, all except the young fellow with the malicious grin, crowded into the larger dwelling. The young Indian, rolled in a dirty blanket, lay down on the opposite side of the fire from the prisoner. **[198]**

Hugh's arms and legs had grown so numb that he no longer felt the galling of the cords, but he was very sore and uncomfortable from lying on the hard ground. He had no wish to sleep, he was too eager to find some means of escape. If he could bring his bonds in contact with a coal from the fire, he might burn them enough so that he could pull them apart. He hitched nearer the flickering blaze and turned on his side towards it. The light was full on the face of the Indian beyond. Hugh could see that the man's eyes were open and fixed upon him. His lips were grinning in the evil fashion the boy knew all too well.

Hugh settled himself as comfortably as he could and closed his eyes. After what seemed a long time, the deep breathing of the guard seemed to prove that he slept. The captive opened his eyes **[199]**

and, cautiously and with painful effort, rolled nearer to the fire. There was a low grunt from the Indian. He rose, came over to Hugh, seized him by the shoulder and roughly dragged him back from the fire. Then he passed a skin rope about the boy's body under the arms and tied it to a strong young birch. The rope was long and did not prevent Hugh from lying down and turning from side to side, but it effectually anchored him too far from the fire to put his plan into operation. His guard had probably divined his intention. So ended the captive's attempt to escape. There was nothing left for him but to sleep, if he could, and gather strength and courage for whatever the morrow might bring. It was long before he slept, however, and the discomfort of his position waked him frequently. At last the chill of early dawn refused to let him sleep longer.

He had not long to wait before the camp was stirring. The man with the scarlet head band set about preparing a breakfast of boiled fish. Hugh's guard of the night took his gun and went away somewhere. Breakfast was eaten at sunrise, and this time Hugh's hands were unbound that he might feed himself, but he was left tied to the tree. It was some time before the numbness wore off so that he could use his hands freely. His first attempts to manage his food amused the Indians, and the boy felt the blood rise to his cheeks at their grins and unintelligible gibes.

Breakfast was over when the young fellow with the grin returned. He talked with Ohrante, and afterwards the chief came over to Hugh and began to ask questions. Again the boy was almost moved to mirth at the contrast between the giant's appearance and his voice. As Ohrante went on with his questioning, however, Hugh almost forgot the ludicrous voice. His replies kept his wits busy. The Iroquois wanted to know whether Hugh trapped for himself or traded with others for furs, whether he sold to the Old Company or to the New, where he intended to winter and other particulars. Hugh had believed that he had his story well planned, but several of the questions were unforeseen, and he was obliged to think quickly and invent as he replied. Telling a false tale was not such a simple matter this morning, and he was not at all sure that he made his convincing. After Ohrante turned away, Hugh was left wondering if his answers had allayed the giant's suspicions or aroused them.

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XXV
THE CHIEF OF MINONG

Hugh had expected to learn his fate that morning and had braced himself for the ordeal, but Ohrante paid no further attention to him. With six of his band the Iroquois left the camp. From where he sat propped against the birch trunk, Hugh could see the two canoes start up the bay. His wrists had been bound again and he was tied to the tree. The squat man and the ugly

fellow with the scarlet head band, who had remained to guard the captive, evidently considered him so secure that he did not need close watching. Shortly after the canoe had disappeared, both men went off somewhere out of sight and hearing.

Now was his chance, thought Hugh, if he could only find some way to loose his bonds. He pulled and wriggled and twisted, but to no avail. His captors had done their work too well. His struggles only drew the knots tighter. He sank back inert and disheartened.

“Take heart.”

The whisper was so low Hugh doubted his ears. He turned his head. Prone on the ground in the shadow of a willow lay a slim figure, the black head raised ever so little.

“Blaise!”

The head shook in warning. Wriggling like a snake, Blaise drew close.

“Untie me,” Hugh breathed. **[202]**

“No, not till night. The guards are too near. When all sleep, I will come again.”

“That may be too late,” Hugh protested.

“They will do nothing to-day. Ohrante wishes to take you to the mainland, and to-day the lake is rough. Keep a strong heart, my brother.”

Blaise wriggled back to the shelter of the willows, and was gone without a sound. He was out of the way none too soon. The guttural voice of the squat man came to Hugh’s ears. In a few moments both guards were back, carrying a birch basket of fish.

That day was even longer to Hugh than the preceding one. The sun climbed and descended so slowly it seemed almost to stand still. Though his guards left him alone several times, he neither saw nor heard anything more of Blaise. That did not worry Hugh. He knew that somewhere, not far away, his younger brother was hiding, awaiting the coming of darkness. The knowledge put new heart and spirit into the prisoner. If only the Indians did not capture Blaise, there was a good chance of getting away safely. Hugh felt sure that he did not need to fear violence from his captors just yet. Blaise had said that Ohrante meant to carry the prisoner to the mainland. The lad must have had some good reason for thinking that. Probably he had overheard the Indians’ conversation. In this manner the captive, propped against the birch, in the thin shade of its foliage, speculated on the movements and plans of his captors and his rescuer. To speculate and plan was all he could do.

About the middle of the afternoon one of the canoes returned with Ohrante and two of his followers. The men who had remained behind prepared a meal of the fish they had brought in that morning, boiled in the big kettle. Hugh was given a portion and his hands were again untied that he might eat. His pleasure in the fresh lake trout was rather spoiled by its having been sweetened with maple sugar. He had grown well **[203]**

used to eating his meat and fish without salt, but he had not learned to enjoy the Indian custom of using sugar instead.

After the meal, Ohrante again approached the boy. For a few moments the big man stood looking down at him fixedly and in silence, and Hugh strove to meet the piercing gaze boldly. Presently the giant began to speak. His English was bad and interspersed with Indian words, at the meaning of which Hugh could only guess. His speech, as well as the boy could make it out, was something like this:

“White man, whether the tale you tell is true or false I know not. When I look at you I think of a white man I knew and hated and took revenge upon. Yet you are not like him. Your hair, your eyes are pale. It matters not. I hate all white men. White men are my enemies. When a white man falls into my hands I treat him as a great chief should treat his enemies.” He paused to let the words sink in, his dark face hard as stone.

The impressiveness and dignity of the chief’s deliberate address were rather spoiled in effect by his ridiculously weak and broken voice, like the changing tones of a boy, but Hugh could not fail to perceive the threat conveyed.

“You are mistaken, great chief,” he replied quietly, using as a bit of flattery the title Ohrante had given himself. “The white men are not the enemies of the Indians. They wish the Indians no evil, only good. The white men know no reason why the peace between themselves and the Ojibwas should not last forever.” **[204]**

“Ojibwa!” Ohrante made a gesture of contempt. “The Ojibwa may be a slave of the white men if he wishes. I, Ohrante,”—he drew himself up a little straighter, keeping his fierce eyes on the boy’s face to observe what effect the name had —“I, Ohrante, am no Ojibwa. I was born a Mohawk of the great six nations. Now I and my braves have taken another name, a name not for the white man’s ears or lips, the name of the ancient race of warriors and giants who once lived on Minong, the blood of whose chiefs flows in my body. We will draw others to us, build up a strong nation, and drive the white men from all the lands about the great waters.” He made a sweeping gesture with one long, big-muscled arm.

Hugh could scarcely believe his ears. The giant Indian must be insane to be the victim of such an illusion of greatness. Hugh knew nothing of any ancient race upon Minong, although Baptiste had told him that the Indians, in days gone by, were supposed to have come to the island from time to time for copper. For all he knew, Ohrante might be a direct descendant of those old miners, but his speech was none the less absurd. Its vanity and pomposity were in such violent contrast to the weak, nasal voice in which it was uttered that the boy forgot his own peril in his desire to laugh. He controlled himself and for a few moments made no answer. Ohrante also remained silent. As the two gazed into one another’s eyes, a daring idea entered the lad’s head. Ohrante’s talk of the ancient race of warriors and giants recalled the tales told by Baptiste and Blaise and the trick he and his brother had already played upon the big Mohawk. **[205]**

“You speak,” Hugh said, “of the ancient race who once lived on this island. I have heard that the inhabitants of Minong were not human at all, but were, and indeed still are, spirits and fiends and frightful creatures unlike man or beast. Once I laughed at those tales, but now that I am on Minong, I laugh no more. I myself have seen and heard strange things on this island. If I were not a good Christian, I should be sore afraid of this enchanted land. Have you seen or heard aught of those strange beings, great chief?”

Hugh’s eyes were fastened on Ohrante. When he mentioned the spirits and fiends he noticed a slight change in the huge man’s face. As the boy went on, Ohrante’s composure was so far shaken that he drew a quick breath and one of his big hands clenched with a convulsive movement. Hugh was pleased with his strategy. He had found the giant’s weak spot. Brave he might be in contact with his fellow men, but of unearthly beings he was superstitiously afraid. Hugh feigned not to notice, and in a moment Ohrante had covered his agitation with a show of indifference.

“No, white man,” he lied proudly, “I have heard nothing and I fear nothing.” Then he changed the subject. “When the waves go down in the lake out there, we leave Minong. We go to the place of vengeance, where Ohrante puts all his prisoners to death. On the Island of Torture both white men and Ojibwas may find the signs and learn how the Chief of Minong takes vengeance on his enemies. Prepare for the torture, white man, for not even your white God can save you.” And turning, the big chief strode away. **[206]**

“Yet I think He will save me,” Hugh said to himself, “through my brother Blaise.”

It was after sundown when the other canoe returned, with the four remaining members of the band. They brought with them a quantity of moose meat, the best parts of a young animal. Immediately the kettle was swung over the fire. The odor of the cooking meat was tempting to Hugh’s nostrils, but he was not offered any. His captors evidently considered that he had had sufficient food for that day. The whole band feasted on moose, and the camp did not become quiet until much later than on the previous night.

Hugh was left tied to the tree, his wrists and ankles bound. No one took enough pity on him to throw a blanket over him. This time it was the squat man who lay down by the fire. He must have been very sure the prisoner could not get away. Moreover the enormous amount of meat he had eaten made the man especially drowsy. His loud breathing soon proved that he was sleeping soundly.

Under the birch tree, beyond the light of the flickering fire, Hugh lay, tense and anxious. He heard the snores of his guard, and other sounds of heavy slumbering from the larger wigwam. Why did not Blaise come? Except the breathing of the sleeping Indians and the low ripple of the water on the beach, not a sound broke the silence of the night. Every sense on the alert, Hugh waited through the long minutes. It seemed to him hours must have passed since the guard lay down by the fire. **[207]**

What was that rustle in the willows? It was the slightest of sounds, but his ear caught it. Was it only a rabbit? He felt a touch on the rope that bound him to the tree, then a sharp jerk. The rope sagged down. Fingers grasped his shoulder and sent a shiver of excitement through his body. A hand slipped swiftly down his left arm, something cold touched his wrists, slipped between them. There was another little jerk, and his arms were free. His numb hands dropped to the ground, began to tingle. He did not dare to try to raise himself to a sitting position for fear of making a noise. Then his ankles fell apart, and he knew that bond had been cut also. Yet, motionless, he waited for orders.

The hand touched his shoulder again. Lips brushed his ear, as a voice whispered in the softest of hisses, “Roll over and follow.”

Hugh obeyed unquestioningly. As he rolled over, he realized that the cord was still attached to his left wrist. There came a gentle pull, and he understood. Blaise had hold of the cord. This was his method of guiding his brother. Hugh attempted to crawl forward, but his legs and feet were so numb he found progress difficult. They dragged like logs. He could not move them lightly and noiselessly, yet he must go noiselessly to escape.

The cord on his wrist slackened. Blaise had sensed the difficulty. His shoulder brushed Hugh as he crawled back to the latter’s side. In a moment he was silently but vigorously rubbing and kneading Hugh’s calves, ankles and feet. Hot prickles of feeling began to course through the numb legs. After a few moments of stinging pain, the blood was running normally again, and the numbness was gone. Still the wigwams remained silent and the squat Indian by the fire snored on. An Indian in his wild state is commonly supposed to sleep lightly and wake at the slightest sound, and so he does if he is where there may be danger, and has not eaten or drunk too much. The Indian is human, however. A full and hearty meal, accompanied by a sense of security, can cause him to sleep as soundly as any well fed white man.

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XXVI
ESCAPE

Taking the lead again, Blaise crawled cautiously and silently away from the vicinity of the fire and the wigwams. Hugh, his legs and feet once more under control, followed close behind, Blaise still guiding him by the cord attached to his wrist. The half-breed boy seemed able to glide like a snake without a sound, but Hugh was less experienced in stealth. In spite of all his care, the bushes he brushed rustled now and then. The noises were very slight, but each rustle or creak brought the lad’s heart into his mouth. Yet the Indian by the fire lay still, and no sound came from the wigwams.

At last the fugitives were far enough from the

camp, and well screened by trees and bushes, so they dared go upright. Blaise had kept his sense of direction in the darkness and knew where he wanted to go. Turning to the right, he led Hugh across level ground and through open growth of birches and poplars. Then he turned again. A little farther on he paused among some alders, handed Hugh the cord, uttered a low whisper of caution, and slipped between the bushes.

Hugh carefully pushed his way through, and stopped still. Before him lay the lake, the ripples lit by the stars and moon. Glancing along the narrow strip of sand that separated him from the water, he could make out a dark shape lying above the reach of the waves. It was an overturned canoe. Blaise had circled about in the woods and had come back to the shore. A little way beyond the canoe, back from the beach and hidden from where Hugh stood by trees and bushes, was the Indian camp. This was a dangerous manœuvre of his younger brother's and at first Hugh could see no reason for it. Why had not Blaise led straight back through the woods and up the ridge? The bateau, to which they must trust to get clear away, was on the other side of those ridges. *Was* the bateau still there or had the Indians found it? **[210]**

Blaise was moving swiftly along the beach, and, after hesitating a moment, Hugh followed. He was relieved to find that the alder bushes still screened them from the camp. They could launch the canoe without being visible from the wigwams or from the spot where the fire burned. The canoe was not one of those he had seen Ohrante's band using, but a small craft, barely large enough to hold two men. Silently the boys turned it over, carried it down the beach and placed it in the lake. Blaise, standing in the water to his knees, held the boat while Hugh stepped into the stern. The younger boy took his place in the bow, the paddles dipped.

Hugh had expected to steer around the inner beach and on up the long bay. He was astonished when Blaise signalled him to go the other way. This was indeed a risk. The older boy would have protested, had he dared speak loud enough to make his brother hear. But they were too near the camp to chance conversation, whatever foolhardy venture Blaise might be planning. Moreover Hugh knew that the half-breed lad was far from foolhardy and must have good reason for what he was doing. The elder brother obeyed the signal and said nothing. **[211]**

Crouched as far down in the canoe as they could kneel and still wield their paddles, the two dipped the blades noiselessly. A few strokes and they were out of the shelter of the fringe of bushes. They were passing the camp, where the ground was open from lodges to beach. Fearfully Hugh glanced in that direction. He could make out the dark bulk of one of the wigwams and near it the dull glow of the dying fire. His guard lay beside that fire. If the man should wake and raise his head, he could scarcely fail to see the passing canoe, a dark, moving shape on the moonlit water. A vigorous but careful stroke, and both lads held their paddles motionless while the canoe slipped by of its own momentum. It made no sound audible above the rippling of the water on the pebbles. The squat Indian slept on.

A clump of mountain ash, leafy almost to the ground, came between the canoe and the fire. The paddles dipped again. In a few moments the slight projection, scarce long enough to be called a point, had been rounded. The wigwams and the fire were hidden by trees and bushes.

Hugh drew a long breath and put more speed into his strokes. The brothers were moving down the bay, and he realized now the reason for their manœuvre. Had they struck through the woods to the ridge, they would inevitably, in spite of the greatest care and caution, have left a trail. The canoe left no tracks. When they passed out from the narrowest part of the channel, they were obliged to put strength and vigor into their paddling, for they were going almost directly against the fresh wind. They kept as close to the right hand shore as they dared, and so had some protection. Vigorous and careful handling were necessary, however, to make headway in the roughening water. **[212]**

As they went by one of the shallow curves that could scarcely be called coves, Blaise uttered a little exclamation and pointed with his paddle to a black object moving on the water. As Hugh looked, the thing turned a little, and he could make out, in silhouette, great branching antlers. A moose was swimming from one shore of the little indentation to the other.

“There is meat to last us a long time,” he muttered regretfully, “if only we dared risk a shot.”

Blaise laughed softly. “We could not shoot if we wished. Neither has a gun.”

“True. When you set out to find me, Blaise, why didn’t you bring yours?”

The lad in the bow shrugged slightly. “I could not use it without a noise, and I wished not to be burdened with it. Let us not talk now. Voices carry far in the night.”

Hugh heeded the warning. As the bay widened, the force of wind and waves increased. The lads were paddling northeast, almost in the teeth of the wind. Hugh began to doubt whether they would be able to round the long point, or even keep on along it much farther. Blaise had no intention of rounding the point, however. He had another plan. As they passed the twin coves, where they had camped while they sought for the cache of furs, he turned his head ever so slightly and spoke.

“Steer into the crack where we carried out the furs.” **[213]**

Hugh replied with a word of assent and steered close under the riven rock wall. The water was slightly sheltered, and the waves were running past the fissures, not into them. The canoe slipped by the stern of the wrecked bateau, projecting from the crack into which it had been driven. The narrow rift was passed. At the wider black gap, Hugh made the turn. In response to his brother’s quick “Take care,” he held his paddle steady.

The canoe glided into the gap, slowed down. Before the bottom could grate on the pebbles, Blaise had warned Hugh to step over the side.

The latter found himself in the water above his knees.

“We must take the canoe well up the crack and hide it,” he said.

“And risk its discovery, which would put Ohrante on our trail? No, lay your paddle in the bottom. Turn around, but do not let go.”

Hugh did not at first grasp the half-breed lad’s intention, but he obeyed. When Hugh had turned, Blaise spoke again.

“Push out with all your strength. Now.”

Together they gave the light craft a strong shove and let go. It slid over the water, out from the mouth of the rift. The wind caught it and it was borne away in the moonlight.

“The wind will take it up the bay,” the younger boy explained. “It may stay right side up, it may not. It may be shattered on the rocks or washed on some beach. Wherever Ohrante finds it, it will be a long way from here.” **[214]**

“It will not help him to pick up our trail certainly,” Hugh exclaimed. “That was a clever thought, Blaise.”

Blaise turned to lead the way up the crack. It was black dark in the fissure. Patches of moonlit sky could be seen overhead, between the branches and spreading sprays of the cedars, but no light penetrated to the bottom. Guiding themselves by their outstretched hands, and feeling for each step, as they had done on that other night when they had entered this cleft, the two made their way up. As he thought of that other night, Hugh put his hand to his breast to feel if the precious packet was still there, attached to a piece of fish line around his neck. It was luck that the Indians had merely taken his weapons and had not searched him.

Feeling along the left wall of the gap, Blaise found the slit that led into the pit where the furs had been concealed, but he did not squeeze through. He led on up the wider rift. Where the walls were less sheer and trees grew on the gully bottom, pushing through in the darkness became increasingly difficult. When the brothers had come that way in daylight, they had found it troublesome enough. Now exposed roots and undergrowth snared Hugh’s toes, rocks and tree trunks bruised his shoulders, prickly evergreen branches scratched his face and caught his clothes. These were small troubles, however, not to be heeded by a fugitive flying from such a cruel fate as Ohrante had in mind for him. The boy’s only desire was to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the giant Mohawk. Indeed he had to hold himself in restraint to keep from panic flight.

After a few hundred feet of stumbling, groping progress, the two came to the broken birch, ghostly in the moonlight which shone down into the open space where the guide tree stood. They paused for a moment. On either hand and ahead the growth was thick. **[215]**

“Which way now?” Hugh whispered the words as if he still feared an enemy lurking near.

“Straight ahead to the top of the high ridge. It will be difficult. I know not if we can do it in the darkness.”

“We must do it,” said Hugh emphatically.

Blaise nodded. “We will try,” he agreed.

The ground was low here, protected from the lake by the rock ridge with its rifts and cracks. A few steps beyond the little birch, the lads found themselves in a veritable tangle of growth, through which but little light penetrated from the sky. They struggled forward among close standing, moss-draped, half dead evergreens and old rotten birches, their feet sinking deep into the soft leaf mould and decayed wood that formed the soil. Where fallen trees had made an opening that let in a little light, thickets of bushes and tangles of ground yew had grown up, more difficult to penetrate than the black woods. Compelled to make their way, for the most part, by feeling instead of sight, they could go but slowly. Hugh soon lost all sense of direction, and he wondered whether Blaise knew where he was going.

Rising ground and a thinning of the woods reassured the white boy. They must be going up the ridges, not back towards the Indian camp. He marvelled that Blaise had managed to find the way. Blaise was far from infallible though, and there soon came a time when he did not think it wise to go farther. They had climbed a steeper slope, treading firmer soil and outcroppings of rock, but still in thick woods, and had reached a small rock opening overgrown with moss and low plants. The sweet perfume of the carpet of twin flowers he could not see came to Hugh’s nostrils. Blaise stopped and peered about him. Clouds must have covered the moon, for the open space was very dark. **[216]**

“We had best wait here,” he said after a few moments. “If the moon shines again, or after dawn comes, I will climb a tree and see where we are.”

“Don’t you know where you are?” Hugh asked.

“I am not certain. How can I be certain in the darkness, when I have never come this way before? I think our way lies over there.” He pointed across the opening. “We are on the top of a low ridge, but if we go down where the trees stand thick, we may lose our way and much time also. We are well hidden here. When Ohrante wakes, he will not know which way to seek. It will be long before he finds our trail.”

“I hate to stop as long as we can go on.”

“I too, my brother, but I think we shall gain time, not lose it if we wait for light.”

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XXVII
WHAT BLAISE OVERHEARD

Far from the Indian camp and well hidden, the brothers could risk conversation. Instinctively they kept their voices low. Hugh was curious to learn how Blaise had crossed from the pond in the small island to the long point, and Blaise equally eager to hear how Hugh had fallen into Ohrante's hands. Seated on moss patches in the rock opening, they satisfied each other's curiosity on those points. Then Blaise went on to tell how he had tracked his elder brother. When he had smelled smoke he had known he must be near a camp.

"I heard the rippling of water," the boy said in his soft singsong. "Then I caught the sound of men's voices. I left the trail and crept towards the water. I peeped through the alders and saw the lake and the beach. Canoes lay on the pebbles, but no man was in sight. I wished to find out if you were in the camp. So I went back into the woods and crawled towards the voices. I crept from tree to tree and bush to bush, and found myself behind a wigwam. I lay flat and tried to peep around it, but a clump of willows was in the way, and I could see nothing. I crawled like a snake for the willows. I looked through them and saw you, my brother, bound to the birch. My heart gave a leap when I saw you unharmed and knew there was yet time to steal you away. I saw Ohrante too. He sat by the fire and ate. He turned his head, and I feared his sharp eyes might find me through the willows, so I crept away. I went back into the woods and hid not far from the trail. The Iroquois I had seen on the trail returned. Crawling nearer the camp again, I heard him talk to Ohrante, but I could not understand, for he spoke the Iroquois language. I saw no way to get you away before nightfall, and I feared they might carry you off somewhere in a canoe where I could not follow.

"Back to the beach I went and hid myself in the alders near the big canoes. I saw Ohrante and six others go away. By their moccasins I knew that two were Iroquois, the others Ojibwas and Crees. A small canoe was left on the beach. When Ohrante had been gone a while, I heard voices, and two more men came along the shore from the camp. One carried a net of cedar cord. He had an ugly face and a red band around his head. The other, a short, strong man, I knew at once. He is Monga, an Ojibwa, one of the two who helped Ohrante to escape. The two sat down on the sand just below where I was hidden, and I crawled nearer to listen to what they said as they mended their net. They spoke Ojibwa. Red Band has not been with Ohrante long. He asked what the chief would do with the white captive. Monga,—his name means the *loon*,—answered that Ohrante would take the white man to the mainland, to the Isle of Torture, but they could not start to-day because the wind was too strong and the lake too rough. Red Band was not pleased. He said he wished the chief would let the white men alone until his people were stronger. Monga said that Ohrante hated all white men. When the trader Beaupré escaped his vengeance——" **[218]**

"What?" interrupted Hugh. "He said 'the trader Beaupré'?" **[219]**

"Yes. When the trader Beaupré escaped Ohrante's vengeance, the chief swore to kill every white man who fell into his hands."

“But what did he mean by father’s escaping Ohrante’s vengeance?”

“It was as we thought,” Blaise replied, his voice low and tense. “It was Ohrante who brought our father to his death. Red Band said it was true that Beaupré escaped, but in his escape he received his death wound.”

“That explains what we found at the Devil Track River.”

“Yes. From what they said it seems that our father and Black Thunder both fell into Ohrante’s hands. In some way they escaped, but they were overtaken at the River of Devil Tracks. They fought and our father got away again, but sorely wounded. That is the way I put together the things I heard the two men say.”

“How comes it then that the bateau and furs are here on Isle Royale? Did Ohrante bring them here?”

“I think Ohrante knows nothing of the furs. When we first saw him here I thought he had come to Minong to seek the furs, but no, this is not the first time he has been here. His braves call him ‘Chief of Minong.’ I think he fled here, he and Monga and the other man who helped him, when he escaped from our father and the Ojibwas. I know not when the rest of the band joined him, but I believe Ohrante and those two were living somewhere on this island when white men and red sought them and could not find them. This I know, here on Minong Ohrante captured our father and Black Thunder. Monga said it was strange that two white men had been found here, where no man was believed to come. Both Jean Beaupré and the new white captive pretended to be only traders, he said, and told tales of how they were driven here by storm and wrecked on the rocks. The chief believed Beaupré’s story, but now that this other white man came with the same tale, Ohrante began to doubt. He thought perhaps they came to spy on him.” **[220]**

“I feared Ohrante did not believe me,” Hugh confessed, “but it made little difference what story I told. He says he hates all white men and intends to destroy them and drive them out of this country. He thinks he is destined to be some sort of king over this part of the world. Did those two say more of father?”

“No, their net was finished and they went out in the little canoe. At once I sought you, my brother, but I dared not cut your bonds. The two were only a little way out in the bay. Later I listened to them talk again. I could not get the meaning of all they said, but I think Ohrante intends to hold a council on that island where he tortures his prisoners. I am sure that others are to meet him there to join his band.”

“And he was reserving me to be put to death by torture as a sort of entertainment for his new adherents, I suppose,” Hugh muttered grimly. “That is not the part in the performance I should choose to play. Perhaps I can find some other part more to my liking.” A daring suggestion had come into his mind as Blaise told of the council on the “Island of Torture.” “Did you learn when the meeting was to be?” Hugh asked abruptly. **[221]**

“It is to be soon, I think. They wait only for safe weather to make the crossing.”

Hugh was silent in frowning thought. When he spoke, it was not of the council. “It is plain to see what happened,” he said musingly. “The storm bore father and his comrade here to this island. Their boat was driven into that crack in the rocks and wrecked. Ohrante came upon them, took them captive and carried them to the mainland. Father must have had some warning, though, for he hid the pelts and the packet. I wonder, Blaise, if, when he was first wrecked, he put the furs up on that rock shelf to keep them dry and safe. Then, afterwards, when he learned Ohrante was near, he moved the bales to a more secret spot farther from the wreck.”

Blaise nodded. “It may be,” was all he said.

“We were right all the time,” Hugh added, “in believing that Ohrante had something to do with father’s death.”

“I felt in my heart that Ohrante was the guilty one,” the younger lad replied simply.

“Yet of course it may not have been Ohrante himself who gave father his death blow,” Hugh mused.

Blaise waved away his brother’s reasoning with a gesture. “It matters not whether Ohrante himself or one of his men struck the blow. It is not the knife that we punish when a murder is committed, but the man who wields the knife. Ohrante is that man. It was he who captured our father, who would have put him to the torture, who caused his death.” **[222]**

“And Ohrante shall pay for it,” Hugh broke in passionately. “He shall pay soon if we can but reach the mainland in time. The sky is lighter, Blaise,” he added, looking up above the surrounding tree tops. “We must be moving.”

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XXVIII
CONFUSING THE TRAIL

Looking around for a tall tree, Blaise found a tapering spruce, growing in a pocket of deeper soil and towering above its fellows. The stubs of the lower branches, that, deprived of light by adjacent trees, had died and fallen off, formed a ladder, up which he climbed, Hugh not far behind. Reaching the live limbs, they pushed their way among the thick masses of dark green needles. The smaller lad went on until the slender spire bent threateningly under his weight.

The moon had come out from behind the clouds, and the paling sky foretold the dawn. From his perch above the surrounding trees, Blaise could see the water, and, across it, the narrow black line of the low point. On the other side, directly below him, he could make out from the growth that the ground dipped down. Beyond the slight dip, the rising ranks of trees betrayed the

steepness of the ascent. A little to his right and far up, his keen eyes detected a bare stretch of rock between the masses of foliage above and below. He took a long look in every direction, then started to climb down.

Hugh, learning from the movement of the branches above him that Blaise was descending, also moved farther down. There, resting on a stout limb, he waited for his brother.

"What did you make out?" he asked eagerly. "I could see that we are part way up the ridges. Have we kept a straight course?" **[224]**

"Yes, we have come straighter than I feared, but we are scarce more than half-way up, and we must go farther to the left. You remember that bare cliff?"

"The wall, like a fortification, that we saw from across the bay?"

"The same. We cannot climb that place. We must go to the left to avoid it. Come, we must make haste."

Darkness still lay deep in the woods, as the two plunged down the short slope into a narrow and shallow gully. Through the thicker growth at the bottom, they threaded their way to the left a hundred yards or more, then began to ascend again. The rapidly rising ground, interrupted by shallow depressions only, served as a guide. Where the slope was regular and not too steep and there was soil enough to anchor them, trees grew thick, but abrupt bare places, masses of tumbled rocks and almost vertical walls made up much of the way. The northwestern side of the long point was far more abrupt than the southeastern, but the increasing light made it possible for the boys to choose their path. They were no longer compelled to proceed by sense of feeling only. Sound of wind, active of limb, and goaded on by the signs of breaking day, they climbed swiftly and without pause.

Crossing a narrow shelf of broken rock débris, that had crumbled into soil deep enough to bear trees, they came to the last rise. By going farther to the left, they had thought to avoid the bare, pillared, rock ramparts, and had indeed escaped the steepest and highest stretch. Nevertheless the cliff before them was almost vertical, and clothed with only an occasional sturdy, dwarfed mass of cedar or trailing juniper, a little seedling tree, stunted bush or tiny plant, growing in crevice or hollow, and the ever present, tight clinging moss and lichens. Had the ancient rock not been ribbed and blocked and weathered, it would have been unclimbable. The splitting off of blocks and scaling away of flakes, which had crumbled into débris at the foot of the cliff, had left shelves and crannies affording some foothold and finger-hold to the active climber. **[225]**

It was a bad place to go up but not an impossible one. The fugitives paused only long enough to select what appeared to be a possible route up a sort of flue, caused by the falling out of one of the pillars. Blaise went first, and Hugh would have followed close behind, had not the half-breed boy bade him, somewhat sharply, wait below. If Blaise lost his hold and slipped back, it would not advantage him any to take his elder

brother down with him. The lad was nearing the top when he let his weight rest too heavily on an insecure ledge. The rock flaked off, and he was left hanging, one hand thrust into a crack, the other clinging to a cedar stem. Down below, Hugh held his breath in suspense. For the interval of an instant, while the agile climber drew up his left foot and thrust his toes into a cranny, the cedar held. Then its roots pulled loose. But Blaise managed to keep his balance, and quickly hooked his strong fingers around the rim of the hole where the cedar clump had been growing. In a few moments he was over the top, and it was Hugh's turn to make the ascent.

The scaling away of the piece of rock that had formed the narrow ledge made it necessary for Hugh to take a slightly different route up the flue. He was heavier than Blaise and for him the climb was even more perilous. Profiting by his younger brother's experience, Hugh trusted to crannies and cracks into which he could thrust his fingers and toes, rather than to the more treacherous projections. Climbing cautiously, he reached the summit without accident. **[226]**

The growth on the ridge top prevented the boys from seeing to the east, but the sky was now so light they knew sunrise could not be far away. Hurrying across the summit, they came out upon the southeastern slope. From there they could see the rose pink flush of day.

The southeastern side of the high ridge was far less abrupt than the northwestern. Except for occasional open rock stretches, it was, however, thickly forested. In spite of the rough going, the fugitives made good speed on the down grade. Nimbly the light-footed Blaise threaded his way among trees and undergrowth, and sprang down the open slopes. Hugh, to whose feet the very thought of the cruel Iroquois seemed to give wings, kept close behind. In a shorter time than they would have believed possible, they were at the edge of the water.

Blaise glanced towards the woods across the channel. "That is not the island where the little lake is," he said. "We are too far down. The bateau is over that way." Without waiting for Hugh to reply, the lad turned to the right and began to make his way along shore. **[227]**

A moment later, Hugh, following closely, said anxiously, "We are leaving a plain trail here. The ground is damp and there is much undergrowth."

"We cannot help that. If we must leave a trail, we will use it to lead our enemies astray, Step as lightly as you can, and in a little while I will show you a trick." Hugh had been possessed with the fear that some of Ohrante's men might have discovered the boat and taken it away. He was greatly relieved to find it tied to the overhanging tree where he had left it.

"Take the bateau," the younger boy ordered, "and paddle down to the place where we came out of the woods. I will join you there."

"What are you going to do?"

"Lead our enemies astray. If they find my tracks near their camp and follow them, they may also find the trail down to this place. They must not

think that we crossed the water from here. I shall make tracks, plain tracks, from here down towards the mouth of the bay, beyond the place where you and I came out of the woods a little while ago."

"But in our old trail from here to the ridge top the footprints point up, not down."

"Yes, and we have not time to go back and make new. I hope they will think we travelled both ways on that trail. I will go back a little way and make a few prints leading down."

While Hugh was untying and pushing off the bateau, Blaise, going carefully and lightly, followed for a little way the route he had taken when he went in search of his white brother. Then, turning, he came back, leaving here and there clear impressions to show direction. Twenty or thirty feet from the shore, he branched off to the left, making tracks leading to the alongshore trail, but avoiding the spot where the bateau lay. He then went on towards the mouth of the bay, carefully obliterating all toe marks that pointed up the channel, and making sure to leave some pointing down. **[228]**

In the meantime Hugh had pushed off the bateau. He noticed that the boat had left no clear traces, except where the rope had rubbed the bark from the limb around which it had been tied. That scar might easily have been made by the claws of some animal climbing out over the water. To make such an origin seem more likely, he scratched the scar lengthwise several times with his thumb nail. As he paddled along close to shore, he came upon the tree Blaise had crossed on, and pushed it out into mid channel.

About a hundred feet below the place where they had come out of the woods, Hugh joined Blaise. Here they took pains to leave distinct signs that a boat had been pulled up on shore. They wished their pursuers to see that they had taken to the water at this spot. Their intention was to lead Ohrante, should he find their trail, away from the island where the furs were hidden.

"Wouldn't it be possible, Blaise," Hugh questioned, "to load the furs and start across the lake at once? If the wind is right, I am willing to risk Ohrante's seeing us and giving chase. With a good breeze we can outdistance his canoes."

Blaise shook his head. "We could not run away from him in this wind. Last night it was nearly northeast, but now it is northwest. Surely you noticed that when we were on the ridge top. We cannot make speed with this heavy bateau against the wind. Yet it is not too strong for canoes to go against it, if the men at the paddles have skill. No, we must wait till the wind changes or till darkness comes again. Now we will carry our false trail farther." **[229]**

Blaise steered the boat straight across the channel to the outer end of the opposite island. Between steep, high, bare masses of detached rock and the small island itself, a reef extended, the inner end rising out of the water to form a beach of boulders and pebbles. The boys ran the bateau on the pebbles and jumped out. They could see off across the open water to the east, where the sun was already above the horizon.

“Here,” said Blaise, “we will leave the ashes of a fire, as if we had stopped to cook a meal. Make haste and get wood.”

Hugh did not need to be warned to make haste. A small fire was soon kindled on the pebbles where it could not spread, then partly stamped out and left smouldering. As the boys embarked again, Hugh glanced back to satisfy himself that the wind was not carrying any sparks towards the woods. Heretofore he had always drenched his cooking fire before leaving camp, but to have poured water on this one would have defeated his younger brother’s purpose. Blaise wanted the recent kindling of the fire to be in plain evidence.

“Where we have gone from here our enemies cannot tell,” he explained. “They will find no tracks or signs on this little island except around the fire. Then they will be sure we have gone by boat, but which way they will not know.” **[230]**

“Which way shall we go?” Hugh questioned.

“Back to our camp in the little inland lake, but not down the channel next the point. We will steer around these big rocks and up the other side of this island.”

The two paddled the bateau around the rocks and up along the southeastern side of the small island. High in the center and heavily wooded, it hid them completely. Their route led them into the open end of the narrow strait that cut into the other island where the furs were hidden. They passed the gap with its two tiny islets, where heretofore they had gone in and out, and were soon back in the little pond.

“I don’t know whether we are wise to stay here,” Hugh said thoughtfully, as they drew the boat up on the narrow beach. “We have tried to confuse our trail, yet if Ohrante tracks us across the high ridge and down to the water, he will surely search all these islands. This is almost too perfect a hiding place. If those Indians are familiar with this ‘Bay of Spirits’ they will think of this place at once. Then we shall be caught like rats in a trap.”

“You are right to call this the ‘Bay of Spirits,’” Blaise replied. “By that name Monga and Red Band spoke of it. But I think they have never been here but that one time. From what they said I think they have always made their camps on the part of Minong that lies the other side of the high ridge. And now both Monga and Red Band have great fear of this bay.”

Hugh chuckled. “So has the mighty chief Ohrante. I saw his fear in his face when I spoke of hearing strange noises. I am wondering, though, if he should track us here, if he will not suspect a trick.” **[231]**

“Something more than the voices has frightened them,” Blaise went on. “The second time I listened to those two, Monga told Red Band of huge giants at the end of the point.”

“Giants? Did he mean those pillars of rock?”

“No, the giants were alive and moved.”

“Some old superstition, Blaise.”

“Monga said he saw the giants, Hugh, he and others of the band.”

“We spent nearly a day on that point and we saw no giants. If Monga saw anything there it must have been you and me. I don’t understand how those fellows in that canoe could have missed seeing us. Blaise,”—a sudden light of understanding dawned in Hugh’s face,—“Blaise, do you remember how hot and still it was, and how the haze shimmered on the water? And do you recall the day we crossed to the Isle Royale, the very same sort of day? We saw the mirage, high mountains towering up where later we found there were no real mountains. Do you remember too when we left the Bay of the Beaver, how we saw coming towards us through the morning mist, what we thought was a ship, so tall it looked, but when it drew nearer it shrank to a mere sailboat?”

“I remember those things.” Blaise was staring at Hugh’s excited face. **[232]**

“Don’t you understand then? Don’t you see how it was that Monga and those others in that canoe saw giants on the end of the point? On that hot, still day, as they came across the water and looked through the shimmer of the heat haze, they saw us there on the open rocks. We ourselves saw that island far out greater than it really was and distorted. Do you remember how it shrank afterwards? To those men in that canoe we too were distorted and loomed up huge and tall like giants. That was what frightened them. That explains their hasty flight. We were the giants on the end of the point!”

Blaise was still staring, but his look of puzzlement had given way to one almost of awe. “It may be as you say,” he replied slowly. “Monga thought it was Kepoochikan and Nanibozho. I cannot understand it at all, that enchantment you call mirage that makes men see mountains that are not there and turns bateaus into ships and men into giants.”

“I don’t understand it either,” Hugh admitted, **[233]**
“and neither did the captain of the *Athabasca*. He said it was just one of the secrets of nature that we don’t understand yet. Surely the mirage is nothing to fear. It has stood us in good stead by frightening away Ohrante’s men and causing them to stand in terror of this bay. No wonder we scared them away with the echoes. They must have been frightened when they came in here. If only their fear is strong enough to keep them away now, we are safe. But we dare not trust too much to that. We must hide ourselves as well as we can. The entrance to this little lake is narrow and I think I see a way to block it so it will look as if no boat could have gone through. First, though, let us eat something if there is anything left.”

“There is a little corn, if no animal has stolen it,” Blaise replied. “I too am sore hungry, for I have eaten nothing but a few green bearberries since I set out in search of you.”

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XXIX

The corn, in its bark wrapping, was found untouched, hanging from the birch where Blaise had left it. Not daring to kindle a fire for fear the smoke might betray them, Hugh put the dry, hulled kernels in the kettle with cold water to soften them. Then he spoke again of his plan to block the entrance to the pond.

“That cedar that leans far down over the water,” he explained, “looks as if it was almost ready to fall of its own weight. If we could pull or push it down, it would go clear across that narrow channel.”

“But then we could not take our bateau through.”

“Oh, we can easily chop out a section when we are ready to go.”

“If anyone is near he will hear the sound of the axe.”

“It is better to risk that, Blaise, than to leave the entrance open. We will go look at the tree and see what we can do.”

The leaning, top-heavy cedar had tipped so far that several of its roots had pulled loose from their anchorage, bringing with them a section of the shallow soil and exposing the rock below. On one side the roots still held, supplying enough nourishment to the limbs to keep part of them alive. Some of the thick sprays of foliage were brown and dead, but many were still green and flourishing. The tree certainly looked as if the slightest additional strain would tip it the rest of the way. Before testing it, the boys noted where it would fall. It stood a few feet above the water and slanted out at an angle across the passageway. **[235]**

“It will not catch in any tree when it goes down,” Hugh observed. “Fresh breaks in other trees or bushes would betray how recently it had fallen. Of course the fact that it is partly green will prove it hasn’t been down very long.”

“An uprooted tree lying in the water will stay green for many days,” Blaise replied.

“I think we had better try to push it over,” Hugh decided. “To make a way out to-night we shall not need to chop through the trunk. This end will be high enough from the water so, by cutting off a few of the lower limbs, we can take the boat underneath.”

“If the water is deep enough at this side,” added Blaise.

First attempts to bring down the slanting tree failed, however. It was not so insecure as it appeared. The tough roots that still held were stronger anchors than the boys had suspected. Pushing and pulling with all their might had little effect.

“We must cut away some of the roots that are holding,” Hugh said at last. “Lend me your hatchet, Blaise. Ohrante has mine.”

The roots were tough, but the little axe was

sharp and Hugh's blows vigorous. He cut every root he could reach, and the tree trembled, swayed and tipped, pulling up more rootlets and chunks of soil.

"It will come now. It needs just a little more weight. Here, Blaise." [236]

Hugh returned the hatchet, jumped upon the leaning trunk and made his way along it. The tree swayed with the added weight. As he went farther up and out, the strain on the few roots was too great. With a rending sound they tore up the shallow soil, and the cedar crashed down across the channel.

Hugh had expected the tree to go suddenly, and he kept a firm hold, but he was jarred and drenched in the splash. The trunk, where he was clinging, did not go under water, and he scrambled quickly back to shore. All the roots were in the air now, and the tree slanted down from the butt, instead of up. The crown rested in the shallow water and against the opposite shore. The entrance to the little pond was both well closed and effectually concealed.

Hugh uttered a little exclamation of satisfaction. "It must look from out there," he said, nodding towards the water beyond, "like a perfectly natural accident. This old cedar is the best of screens. I don't believe anyone coming around that little island and seeing this fallen tree would guess there was a lake or bay in here. Of course if he came so close he could peep through the branches, he might be able to see water beyond, but he would never guess that a boat could go in. If anyone came up here, though, he would see the freshly upturned earth and the cut ends of the tree roots. But the bushes hide this spot from the water and there is nothing to bring anyone ashore here. We shall be better hidden than we could have hoped."

"Yes, it was a good thought, my brother. We will go back now and bring the bateau around to this side of the little lake. Then if anyone looks through the branches and sees the water beyond, he cannot see the bateau or us. If he tries to cut a way through, we shall hear him and be warned. The sun climbs high. We must make haste." [237]

Without pausing to reply, Hugh led off at once, back to the beach and around to the spot where the boat lay. Quickly and carefully, the brothers erased all signs of their camp that might be seen from across the pond. Hugh gathered up the remains of the fire and was about to throw them into the water, when Blaise stopped him. The charred sticks might float across, and betray that someone had camped there. So Hugh carried the blackened bits back into the woods, and then washed every trace of ashes from the pebbles and sand. The mast and sail, which had been left on shore, were laid in the boat, and the lads paddled around to a spot less than a hundred feet from the end of the blockaded passageway. With the poplar rollers they had used before, they drew the bateau up on shore, where it could not be seen by anyone peeping through the barrier.

The sun would soon be directly overhead. Ohrante had had several hours to find Hugh's trail. The boy did not believe that the Iroquois

would let him escape without some effort to trace and recapture him. Even now the Chief of Minong or some of his followers might be near at hand. It would be wise to lie low and keep very quiet, restricting conversation to necessary whispers. After chewing, as well as he could, some of the partly softened corn, Hugh stretched himself out on the narrow beach to let the sun dry his clothes.

Waiting quietly for Ohrante to come and find him proved nerve wracking. After what seemed a long period of inaction, he raised himself on his elbow and hitched nearer his younger brother. The latter was sitting close to the bateau, his eyes closed, apparently asleep. **[238]**

“Blaise, I’m going up through the woods to find some spot where I can see out. Then if anyone comes near our barrier I shall know it.”

The half-breed boy had opened his eyes at the first word. “We must take great care,” he replied in the softest of whispers. “The cracking of a twig, the moving of a bush may betray us. Yet I am ready to take the risk if you are.”

“We’ll both go then, and we’ll not take more risk than we can help.”

Blaise nodded and rose. Slipping into the woods just beyond where the boat lay, he threaded his way among trees and bushes. Hugh followed quite as cautiously. It was but a short distance, and after a few steps Blaise dropped to his hands and knees. Hugh followed his example, and remained motionless while the other crept ahead and disappeared behind a clump of balsams.

The older boy waited several minutes, then ventured forward. Beyond the balsams he paused, but could catch no glimpse of Blaise among the dense growth. The sunlight between the trees ahead showed him that he must be close to the margin of the woods. Lying almost flat, he wriggled along until he could see a patch of water. For a moment he lay still, looking and listening. Then he crept forward again and took his station behind a thick mass of cedar needles. In its youth this cedar had been bent almost double by some weight, a fallen tree probably, and had grown in that misshapen form, branching and leafing out in dense sprays clear to the ground. Peeping around the green screen, Hugh found he was but a few feet from the edge of the water. The sheltered bay was without a ripple, the sun hot, the woods still, the silence unbroken by even the twitter of a bird or the hum of an insect. **[239]**

The boy was about to raise himself for a better view, when, from the water, a sound came to his ears. The very slightest of sounds it was, but he lowered his head instantly. He wriggled a little farther back behind the cedar masses and lay motionless. The sound came again, the slightest suggestion of rippling water. But the bay was smooth and still. What he heard was the dipping of a paddle blade, the ripple of water against the side of a boat.

For a few moments Hugh dared not try to look. Then curiosity got the better of fear. Raising his head ever so little, he found a peep-hole between the cedar sprays and put his eye to it.

He could see a bit of the round, wooded islet, a section of the shore opposite and, on the water between, a birch canoe. It held three men. The bow-man was the tall young Iroquois who had first taken Hugh prisoner. The man in the middle wore a red band about his long black hair. As the canoe came nearer, Hugh could see that the steersman was the squat Ojibwa from whose custody he had escaped. Ohrante had not killed the guard then, but no doubt some heavy punishment hung over Monga's head if he did not find Hugh and bring him back. He was desperate enough to dare return to the dreaded Bay of Manitos.

The canoe came slowly, the man in the bow watching the water. It was shallow between the round islet and the blocked entrance to the little pond. Would the fallen cedar deceive the Indians or not? Hugh held his breath. **[240]**

The bow-man straightened a little, glanced towards the cedar, then looked back at the water again. Red Band's eyes were on his paddle. Monga's head turned from side to side, as he scanned the shore and the woods for any sign that the fugitive had been there. His glance swept the barrier. He twisted his paddle. The canoe swerved nearer to the blocked passage.

The man in the bow uttered a sharp hiss of warning. For an instant Hugh feared that the fellow had caught sight of him through the leafy screen. But the warning was of shallows ahead. The steersman dipped his paddle and swerved the canoe again, this time away from the fallen cedar. He did not cast another glance in that direction, as the canoe came on past the barrier. The "tide," as Hugh had called it, was out. The water was at its lowest point of fluctuation. No one could suspect a navigable channel where the uprooted tree lay.

It was plain that the Indians intended to round the little islet. To do so they must pass close to the shore where Hugh was. He lowered his head cautiously and lay prone and motionless. He could hear the gentle ripple of the water as the canoe slipped through it. Then a harsh voice spoke. So close it seemed that the lad almost jumped, and a shudder of fear passed through him. In an instant he realized that the voice was Monga's and that it came from the water, not from the land. The tall fellow answered briefly, and Monga grunted an abrupt rejoinder. What they said Hugh could not guess, for they spoke in Ojibwa. **[241]**

The slight sounds of dipping paddles and rippling water grew fainter and fainter, then ceased. Hugh drew a long breath, raised his head a little and looked through the peep-hole. The canoe was no longer in sight. It could not be far away, though, so he lay still. He was just wondering whether it would be safe now to try for another and wider view of the bay and strait, and had raised his head to reconnoiter, when he caught sight of a crouching figure slipping swiftly between the trees towards him. For an instant his heart seemed to stop beating, then he saw that it was Blaise approaching.

The younger brother dropped down beside the elder. "They are gone," he whispered. "Let us go back."

XXX
THE FLIGHT FROM MINONG

The canoe had gone by, but the boys did not abate their caution and watchfulness one whit, as they made their way back to the shore of the pond.

“That danger seems to be over,” Hugh remarked, his voice still lowered to a whisper, as he came out of the woods near the boat. “Blaise, could you understand what those two said? Were you near enough to hear?”

“I was but a little way beyond you, my brother. I heard every word. There is bad blood between Monga and the young Iroquois. It was the Iroquois who wished to come up this way. They found the ashes of our fire at the end of that island out there. Monga thinks we went on across the mouth of this long bay. He wished to seek us in that direction, but when the Iroquois found the passage between these islands, he forced Monga to come up here first. He is sure now that we are not in here. So they go the way Monga wishes.”

“Then we are safe from those three for some hours at least, but I wish we knew where Ohrante and the others are.”

“Ohrante must hold Monga, and perhaps the Iroquois, to blame for your escape. If they take you not back, it will go hard with them. It may be that Ohrante has sent them to seek you and himself waits at the camp, or he may search in the other direction. Perhaps he will not come into this Bay of Manitos at all.” [243]

“Very likely he is glad of an excuse to stay out,” returned Hugh with a grin. “Ohrante may be brave as a lion with other men, but I think he is not quite so bold with spirits.”

“No man is,” Blaise replied simply. “I am not sure that Ohrante is very brave. He is cruel and treacherous, but brave in the way our father was? No, I think he is not brave like that.” The lad gave one of his characteristic French shrugs.

Hugh made no answer. He discounted his brother’s opinion of Ohrante somewhat. Blaise was half Ojibwa, of the Algonquin stock, and the ancient hatred between Algonquin and Iroquois had not died out and probably never would die. The boy was naturally unwilling to admit any good qualities in the self-styled “Chief of Minong,” half Mohawk by blood and wholly so by training. But Ohrante, thought Hugh, must have some unusual qualities, since, in spite of the ancient hate, he had attracted to his band Ojibwas as well as Iroquois.

“Yet, we know not,” Blaise went on after a moment, “how near the others may be, or how soon Monga may return this way. We dare not venture out until darkness comes.”

Sunset came at last and twilight. The last morsels of the maple sugar and the soaked corn [244]

made up the evening meal. Blaise slipped through the woods once more, and reported the outer bay and strait empty of all life except a pair of fish ducks. Then he and Hugh pushed off the bateau and crossed the pond. No more peaceful spot could be imagined. The still water reflected the motionless trees and the soft colors of the sky. From the woods came the clear, plaintive notes of a thrush.

Landing, the lads went directly to the old birch, and were relieved to find no signs that anyone had been near it. Blaise climbed the tree and let himself down into the hole. Hugh then followed him up, received the bales the younger boy handed him and lowered them to the ground. Squirrels or wood-mice had nibbled the outer wrappings, but had not penetrated to the pelts. When all the packages were out of the tree, the two carried them to the shore and stowed them in the boat. Once more they paddled across the lake and took the sail aboard. They did not set up the mast, as they wished to push the boat under the fallen cedar. Beaching the bateau close to the end of the barrier, they set to work to cut a way through.

They had only the one little axe, and Hugh wielded that, climbing out on the tree to reach the limbs he wished to cut. Blaise, standing in the shallow water, trimmed off smaller branches with his stout knife. Working with skill and speed, they soon had the lower limbs cleared away from the under side of the trunk. There appeared to be room enough to push the bateau through, but the water at that spot was very shallow. The boat grounded on the rock bottom. The lads unloaded most of the furs, and succeeded in dragging the lightened bateau over the shallows. Then they had to carry the bales through the woods, and reload. All this work they were forced to do as quietly as possible. The blows of the axe could not be muffled, but the two made no noise they could avoid. They did not dare light a torch, but the sky was clear and the northern twilight long. Darkness had settled down, however, by the time they were ready to leave their island of refuge.

In that sheltered place, they were unable to tell whether there was breeze enough to aid or hinder them, but they had made up their minds to leave the Bay of Spirits. If possible they would start for the mainland, by sail if they could, by paddle if they must. If the wind was so strong against them that they could not cross, they would go on in the other direction, and find some temporary hiding place farther from the camp of the Chief of Minong. **[245]**

Straight out through the quiet water of the narrower channel, shadowed by the black, wooded masses of the islands to right and left, they paddled. Darkness and still water made the shallows treacherous, but they had noted the channel on their way in that morning, and made their way out again without accident.

Suddenly Blaise in the bow gave a quick, low hiss. Hugh knew that the alarmed warning meant, not mere shallow water ahead, but some graver danger. He obeyed the signal and steered into the deep shadow of the island close by. The boat scraped the rocks and came to a stop. Looking out from the protecting gloom, across

the moonlit lake, Hugh caught sight of the cause of his brother's alarm. A canoe, paddled swiftly, was crossing the open water beyond the islands, going north. Would it turn up the bay? Hugh sat motionless, his paddle handle gripped tightly. Then he drew a breath of relief. The canoe had not turned. It went straight on and disappeared from sight.

Hugh moved forward to speak to Blaise. "The fellows who were after us," he whispered, "going back to camp. They have given up the chase." **[246]**

"I could make out but two men," Blaise replied.

"You couldn't be certain there weren't three," Hugh argued, "unless you can see much better at night than I can."

Blaise shook his head doubtfully. "The canoe was headed for the long point. They must be some of Ohrante's men."

"None of them was big enough to be Ohrante himself. We could see them well enough to make sure of that."

The brothers waited in the shadow for several minutes, then ventured on. As they came out from the shelter of the islands, a light southeast breeze, that barely rippled the water, struck them.

"A favorable enough wind, if we want to go direct to the Kaministikwia," remarked Hugh, "but do we?"

"It is at the Kaministikwia where we must sell the furs."

"But how about our revenge on Ohrante? Are we to let him meet those reinforcements at his Torture Island, and then go on capturing innocent people and putting them to death for his own pleasure? Ohrante is a menace to both white men and Ojibwas, Blaise."

"Yes, I know that," the younger lad replied slowly, "but what can you and I alone do against him and his band and the new braves who come to join him? I am as eager as you to see Ohrante destroyed. I long to avenge my father by doing the deed with my own hands, but we must plan cautiously. If we are over rash, we shall fail." **[247]**

"What would you do then, Blaise?"

"I would go quickly to the Kaministikwia, leave the furs there, and find other men to go with us to the Isle of Torture."

"That will take a long time," Hugh objected. "We may be too late."

"Then we will cross to Minong again. We know where his camp is. Oh, we can find men eager to seek out Ohrante and his wolf pack wherever they may be, and destroy them like the wolves they are. The X Y agent will help us to raise a party. Ohrante was brought into this country by the Old Company. He is a skillful hunter and took to them many pelts."

"True. The New Company will be glad to help capture the fellow no doubt," Hugh agreed.

“But you and I, as our father’s sons, will claim the right to deal with him.” There was a hard, fierce note in the lad’s voice. Jean Beaupré had not been a mild man, yet it was not so much the hot-tempered French father that spoke now in the son, as the fierce, implacable savage. Bitterly as Hugh hated the giant Mohawk, he sensed something different and alien in his half-brother’s passion. Through the weeks of constant association with Blaise, Hugh had ceased ordinarily to think of him as Indian, but now, for the moment, he was not Blaise Beaupré, but Attekonse, Ojibwa. Yet it was the white boy who was the most impatient at the thought of delay in dealing with Ohrante.

The wind, however, had apparently settled the question. The breeze would carry the boat northwest to Thunder Bay, but would be more hindrance than help in going southwest to Grand Portage. In the lee of an island, the brothers raised their mast and ran up their sail. As they paddled out from shelter, the breeze caught the canvas and they were off across the lake. **[248]**

Clouds had covered the moon, and it was too dark to sight Thunder Cape. The boys could do nothing but run before the wind and trust to it to carry them somewhere near their destination. At any rate they were leaving Minong and putting the miles between themselves and the cruel, self-appointed chief of the island. That wonderful and beautiful island, which the white men had appropriately called Royale, deserved a better king, and the first step in the right direction was to depose the present usurper, thought Hugh with grim humor.

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XXXI
WITH WIND AND WAVES

In the light breeze the bateau sailed but slowly, and the boys, in their impatience, strove to increase speed by helping with the paddles. As they went farther out, however, the wind increased, and before long they laid aside the blades, satisfied that they were making fairly good progress.

Overhead the stars shone dimly. To the south and east, the sky was banked with masses of cloud. Hugh, glancing that way, felt uneasy. A rain-storm coming down upon the heavily loaded, open bateau would be unpleasant if not disastrous. From the behavior of the sail, he knew that the wind was less steady. During the past two months he had learned something of the moods of Lake Superior, and he understood that he must be ready for a sudden shift. He had been handling both sheet and tiller, but now he turned the steering over to his brother.

The change of wind came suddenly and with force. For a few moments Hugh had his hands full. Blaise obeyed orders on the instant, sail and boat were swung about, and were soon running freely before the wind again.

"We may not reach the Kaministikwia so soon as we hoped," Hugh commented, when the momentary danger was past. "The wind seems to be taking us where it chooses. As near as I can tell we must be running almost directly west now instead of northwest." [250]

Blaise looked up at the only patch of clear sky visible. "Yes, I think we go west. If the wind holds steady we shall reach the shore somewhere between the Kaministikwia and the Grand Portage. If it shifts again——" He broke off with a shrug.

"If it shifts again," Hugh took up the words, "we shall reach somewhere sometime, unless we go to the bottom. Even that would be a better fate than falling into Ohrante's hands."

The breeze was increasing in force, the waves running ever higher. Hugh and Blaise were kept busy and alert. Before the wind, the bateau was sailing swiftly enough so that there was little danger of following seas actually swamping it, but, heavily laden, it rode low, with little buoyancy. Every time it pitched down into the trough of the waves it shipped water. Those were the dangerous moments. With the utmost care in handling sail and rudder, the brothers could do little to insure against disaster. To keep straight before the wind, not to lose control of sail or rudder, and to take the chances with coolness and composure was about all there was to do. As they drove on in the darkness, now riding high on the summit of a wave, now pitching down between walls of water, they lost all count of time.

The waves seemed to be flattening out a little. Surely they were less high and long, yet they were even more troublesome, for they had grown choppy and uneven. When Blaise steered straight with them, Hugh found the sail swinging around. When he sailed directly before the wind, the boat pitched at an angle with the waves. [251]

"The wind has shifted again," he said anxiously.

"It comes from the northeast now," Blaise returned.

Both were too busy and anxious to talk. Hugh confined his speech to sharply given orders and Blaise to answering grunts. The spray of breaking waves soaked them both, time and again. The boat was shipping a good deal of water, but bailing was impossible. The elder brother had his hands full with the sail, the younger was compelled to give all his attention to steering.

Gradually conditions improved. The wind steadied and the waves obeyed it. Once more the bateau could ride them straight, while running directly before the breeze. The clouds were broken now, moving swiftly across the sky, covering and uncovering the moon and stars. Whenever the boys dared to take their eyes from sail and water, they glanced upward. When enough sky had been blown clean to show them the position of the moon and principal stars, both lads were surprised to learn that dawn was not nearer. It seemed to them that they had been pitching about in the waves for a very long time, yet the day was still hours away.

The wind continued strong, the waves were higher than ever, but the brothers had gained more confidence in the sailing qualities of the boat and in their own ability to handle it. Less water was being shipped, and by bailing when they had a chance, they managed to keep it from rising too high. Now that the sky was clearing and there was more light on the lake, they could see farther across it. As the boat rose to the top of a wave, Blaise said suddenly, “L’isle du Paté.” [252]

Hugh looked quickly and, before the bateau pitched down between the waves, he caught a glimpse of a compact, abrupt, black mass towering from the water not many miles to his right. There seemed to be no chance of reaching the mouth of the Kaministikwia though. To turn and run in past the south side of Pie Island was out of the question. The square sail would be worse than useless, and the laden bateau would inevitably be swamped in the trough of the waves.

The stars were waning in the paling sky. The short summer night was drawing to a close and dawn was approaching. South and west of Pie Island and nearer at hand, lower lines of shore appeared, the chain of islands from one of which the adventurers had set out for the Isle Royale. Those islands, across several miles of heaving water, were still too far away to be reached. Wind and waves were carrying the bateau by. The sun, coming up in an almost clear sky, found the boat still running southwest on a course almost parallel with the unattainable chain of islands.

As the hours passed, the boys were encouraged to discover that they were drawing gradually nearer and nearer to the islands on the right. What was still better, they were bearing straight towards land ahead, continuous, high land they knew must be the main shore. It seemed that they must reach the mainland not many miles to the southwest of the place where the chain of islands diverged from it. Hugh had long since ceased to be particular where he landed, if it was only in some spot where food might be obtained. Rations the day before had been very scanty, and he was exceedingly hungry. [253]

The wind was strong but steady, the waves long and high. The bateau, as it plunged down into the trough, continued to ship a little water, but the boys kept it down by bailing when a hand and arm could be spared. They were borne nearer and nearer to the land. As they ran past a group of small islets not more than a half mile distant, with a larger and higher island showing beyond them, Hugh glanced that way and considered trying to turn.

Blaise guessed his brother’s thought. “The mainland is not far now,” he said, “and we go straight towards it. Let us go on until we can land without danger to the furs. There will be more chance to find food on the mainland also.”

Both of the younger boy’s arguments had weight with Hugh. He gave up the idea of attempting to turn, and they went on with wind and waves. At the end of another hour they were bearing down upon an irregular, rocky point.

“Is that island or mainland, do you think?” Hugh inquired.

“Mainland,” was the unhesitating reply. “I remember the place. Have I not passed it three times in the last two moons?”

Hugh made no answer. He himself must have passed that spot twice within two months, but there were so many rocky points along the shore. Hugh was observing enough in the white man’s way, but he did not see how Blaise could remember all those places and tell them apart. [254]

The bateau ran close to the point. When a bay came into view, Hugh expected Blaise to steer in, but the latter made no move to do so.

“It is steep and rocky there,” he explained, with a nod towards the abrupt-shored cove. “Beyond yet a little way is a better place, shallow and well protected.”

Past another point and along a steep rock shore they sailed. Here they were in much calmer water, for the points broke the force of wind and waves. As they approached a group of small islands, Blaise remarked, “It is best to take down the sail. We can paddle in.”

Accordingly Hugh lowered the sail and took up his paddle, while Blaise steered the bateau in among the islets. In a few moments the haven lay revealed, an almost round bay, its entrance nearly closed by islets. The islands and the points on either side were rocky, but the shores of the bay were low and densely wooded with tamarack, cedar and black spruce. The water was almost calm, and the boys made a landing on a bit of beach on the inner side and under the high land of the right hand point.

Hugh had not realized that he was particularly tired. The strain of the dangerous voyage had kept him alert, but he had had no sleep for two nights. Now, suddenly, an overpowering weariness and weakness came over him. His legs almost collapsed under him. He dropped down on the beach, too utterly exhausted to move. He was on solid land again, but he could scarcely realize it. His head was dizzy, and the moment his eyes closed he seemed to be heaving up and down again. [255]

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XXXII
THE FIRE AT THE END OF THE TRAIL

When Hugh woke, the dizziness and sense of swaying up and down were gone. He sat up, feeling strangely weak and hollow, and looked about him. The bateau was drawn up on the beach, but Blaise was nowhere in sight. From the shadows Hugh could tell that the sun was on its downward journey. He had slept several hours. He was just gathering up his courage to get up, when he heard a stone rattling down the rock hill behind him. Turning his head, he saw Blaise descending. The boy was carrying several fish strung on a withe. Hugh eyed those fish with hungry eyes. He could almost eat them raw, he

thought. He got to his feet and looked around for fuel. Not until he had a fire kindled, and,—too impatient to let it burn down to coals or to wait for water to heat,—was holding a piece of fish on a crotched stick before the blaze, did he ask his younger brother where he had been.

“I slept for a while,” Blaise admitted, “but not for long. My hunger was too great. I took my gun and my line and climbed to the top of the point. I went along the steep cliff, but I found no game and no tracks. Then I came to that rocky bay. The shores are steep there and the water clear. I climbed out upon a rock and caught these fish. They are not big, but they are better than no food.”

“They certainly are,” Hugh agreed whole-heartedly. **[257]**

The elder brother’s pride in his own strength and endurance was humbled. He had slept, exhausted, for hours, while the half-breed boy, nearly three years younger than himself, had walked two or three miles in search of food.

When no eatable morsel of the fish remained, the brothers’ thoughts turned to their next move.

“We are far nearer the Grand Portage than the Kaministikwia,” Hugh said thoughtfully. “We had better follow my first plan and go down the shore instead of up. We can surely find others at the Portage willing to go with us against Ohrante.”

“It is all we can do,” Blaise assented, “unless we wait here for the wind to change. It is almost from the north now. We must go against it if we go up the Bay of Thunder. The other way, the shore will shelter us. But we cannot start yet. We must wait a little for the waves to go down.”

“And in the meantime we will seek more food,” Hugh added. “Why not try fishing among those little islands?”

The channels among the islets proved good fishing ground. By sunset the lads had plenty of trout to insure against any danger of starvation for another day at least. The waves had gone down enough to permit travel in the shelter of the shore. Sailing was out of the question, and paddling the laden bateau would be slow work, but Hugh was too impatient to delay longer, and Blaise more than willing to go on.

After half an hour of slow progress, the younger brother made a suggestion. “We are not far from the Rivière aux Tourtres now.” He used the French name for the Pigeon River, a name which seems to mean “river of turtles.” The word *tourtres* doubtless referred to turtle doves or pigeons. “To paddle this bateau,” Blaise went on, “is very slow, and to reach Wauswaugoning by water we must go far out into the waves around that long point below the river mouth. But along the south bank of the river is an Ojibwa trail. At a bend the trail leaves the river and goes on across the point to Wauswaugoning. We shall save time if we go that way, by land.” **[258]**

“What about the boat and the furs?”

“We will leave them behind. There is a little cove

near the river mouth where the bateau will be safe. The furs we can hide among the rocks. We shall not be gone many days if all goes well. No white man I think and few Ojibwas go that way. An Ojibwa will not disturb a cache," Blaise added confidently.

"Yet I don't like the idea of leaving the furs," Hugh protested.

"They will be safer there than at the Grand Portage, where the men of the Old Company might find them."

"Why not turn them over to the X Y clerk at the Portage?" Hugh questioned.

"No, no. If our father had wanted them taken there he would have said so. Again and again he said to take them to the New Company at the Kaministikwia. He had a debt there, a small one, and he did not like the man in charge at the Grand Portage. There was some trouble between them, I know not what."

Blaise was usually willing to yield to his elder brother's judgment, but this time he proved obstinate. Jean Beaupré's commands must be carried out to the letter. His younger son would not consent to the slightest modification. **[259]**

Darkness had come when the two reached the mouth of the Pigeon River, but the moon was bright and Blaise had no difficulty steering into the little cove. Alders growing down to the water concealed the boat when it was pulled up among them. Blaise assured Hugh that, even in daylight, it could not be seen from the narrow entrance to the cove. The mast was taken down and the sail spread over the bottom of a hollow in the rocks. On the canvas the bales of furs were piled, and a blanket was thrown over the heap. The boys cut several poles, laid them across the hole, the ends resting on the rock rim, and covered them with sheets of birch bark, stripped from an old, half-dead tree. The crude roof, weighted down with stones, would serve to keep out small animals as well as to shed rain. All this work was done rapidly by the light of the moon.

The cache completed, Blaise led Hugh to the opening of the trail at the river mouth. The trail, the boy said, had been used by the Ojibwas for many years. A narrow, rough, but distinct path had been trodden by the many moccasined feet that had travelled over it. The moonlight filtered through the trees, and Blaise, who had been that way before, followed the track readily. With them the brothers carried the remaining blanket, the gun, ammunition, kettle and the rest of their fish. As Blaise had said, the trail ran along the south bank until a bend was reached, then, leaving the river, went on in the same westerly direction across the point of land between the mouth of the Pigeon River and Wauswaugoning Bay. The whole distance was not more than three miles, and the boys made good time. **[260]**

Hugh thought they must be nearing the end of the path, when Blaise stopped suddenly with a low exclamation. The elder brother looked over the younger's shoulder. Among the trees ahead glowed the yellow light of a small fire.

“Wait here a moment,” Blaise whispered. And he slipped forward among the trees.

In a few minutes he was back again. “There are three men,” he said, “sleeping by a fire, a white man and two Ojibwas. One of the Ojibwas I know and he knew our father. We need not fear, but because of the white man, we will say nothing of the furs.”

The two went forward almost noiselessly, but, in spite of their quiet approach, when they came out of the woods by the fire, one of the Indians woke and sat up.

“Bo-jou,” remarked Blaise.

The second Indian was awake now. “Bo-jou, bo-jou,” both replied, gazing at the newcomers.

The white man rolled over, but before he could speak, Hugh sprang towards him with a cry of pleasure. “Baptiste, it is good to see you! How come you here?”

“Eh lá, Hugh Beaupré, and I might ask that of you yourself,” returned the astonished Frenchman. “I inquired for you at the Grand Portage, but the men at the fort knew nothing of you. When I said you were with your brother Attekonse, one man remembered seeing him with a white man. That was all I could learn. I was sore afraid some evil had befallen you. You are long in returning to the Sault.” **[261]**

“Yes,” Hugh replied with some hesitation. “I have stayed longer than I intended. Is the *Otter* at the Grand Portage, Baptiste?”

“No, she has returned to the New Fort. I came on her to the Grand Portage. We brought supplies for the post and for the northmen going inland to winter. There was a man at the Portage, a Canadian like myself, who wanted sorely to go to the Kaministikwia. He has wife and child there, and the mate of the sloop brought him word that the child was very sick. So as I have neither wife nor child and am in no haste, I let him have my place. Now I am returning by canoe, with Manihik and Keneu here.”

At the mention of their names, the two Indians nodded gravely towards Hugh and repeated their “Bo-jou, bo-jou.”

“We camp here until the wind goes down,” Baptiste concluded.

During the Frenchman’s explanation, Hugh had been doing some rapid thinking and had come to a decision. He knew Baptiste for a simple, honest, true-hearted fellow. In one of his Indian companions Blaise had already expressed confidence.

“Baptiste,” Hugh asked abruptly, “have you ever heard of Ohrante, the Iroquois hunter?”

There was a fierce grunt from one of the Indians. The black eyes of both were fixed on Hugh. **[262]**

“Truly I have,” Baptiste replied promptly. “As great a villain as ever went unhanged.”

“Would you like to help get him hanged?”

Keneu sprang to his feet. It was evident he had understood something of what Hugh had said. “I go,” he cried fiercely in bad French. “Where is the Iroquois wolf?”

“There is an island down the shore,” Hugh went on, “the Island of Torture, Ohrante calls it, where he and his band take their prisoners and torture them to death. Sometime soon he is to hold a sort of council there.”

“How know you that?” Baptiste interrupted.

“I shall have to tell you the whole story.” Hugh turned to his half-brother. “Blaise, shall we tell them all? Baptiste I can trust, I know.”

“As you think best, my brother.”

Sitting on a log by the fire at the edge of the woods, while the moonlight flooded the bay beyond, Hugh related his strange tale to the amazed and excited Canadian and the intent, fierce-eyed Keneu, the “War Eagle.” The other Indian also watched and listened, but it was evident from his face that he understood little or nothing of what was said. Hugh made few concealments. Frankly he told the story of the search for the hidden furs, the encounters with Ohrante and his band, the capture and escape, and what Blaise had learned from overhearing the conversations between Monga and the Indian with the red head band. Hugh did not mention, however, the packet he carried under his shirt, nor did he say definitely where he and Blaise had left the bateau and the furs. Those details were not essential to the story, and might as well be omitted.

“We know now it was through Ohrante father was killed,” the boy concluded, “and we, Blaise and I, intend that the Iroquois shall pay the penalty for his crime. He has other evil deeds to pay for as well, and that isn’t all. As long as he is at liberty, he is a menace to white man and peaceable Indian alike. He calls himself Chief of Minong, and he has an ambition to be a sort of savage king. He is swollen with vanity and belief in his own greatness, and he seems to be a natural leader of men, with a sort of uncanny influence over those he draws about him. One moment you think him ridiculous, but the next you are not sure he is not a great man. If he succeeds in gathering a really strong band he can do serious harm.” **[263]**

Keneu gave a grunt of assent, and Baptiste nodded emphatically. “He must be taken,” the latter said.

“Taken or destroyed, like the wolf he is,” Hugh replied grimly. “We have a plan, Blaise and I.”

For nearly an hour longer, the five sat by the fire discussing, in English, French and Ojibwa, Hugh’s plan. Then, a decision reached, each rolled himself in his blanket for a few hours’ sleep.

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XXXIII
THE CAPTURE OF MONGA

Baptiste's canoe was large enough to accommodate Hugh and Blaise, and the party were up and away early. The lake was no longer rough, so they made good time through Wauswaugoning Bay and around the point to the Grand Portage. Though Baptiste had been employed, in one capacity or another, by the Old Northwest Company, he was under no contract. An independent spirited fellow, who came and went much as he pleased, he did not feel under any obligation to the Old Company and was not an ardent partisan of that organization, so he made no objection when Hugh proposed that they try the X Y post for help in their undertaking. The men of either company would be glad no doubt to lay hands on the rascally Iroquois but the X Y men's grievance was the stronger, since Ohrante had been in the employ of the Old Company when he committed his first crime. The white man he had slain was an independent trapper, affiliated with neither company, but Jean Beaupré had been under contract, for the one season at least, to the New Company. To learn that he too had come to his death through the Giant Mohawk would add fuel to the flame of the X Y men's anger.

Shunning the Old Company's dock, the party crossed the bay to the X Y landing. At the post Hugh and Blaise told as much of their story as was essential to prove that they had really encountered Ohrante, had learned his plans and knew where to lay hands on him. The time for the annual meeting of the New Northwest Company, still held at the Grand Portage post, was approaching. None of the partners or leading men had yet arrived, but most of the northmen, as the men who wintered inland west of the lake, were called, had come with their furs, and a considerable number of Indians were gathered at the post. The agent in charge could not leave, but in a very few minutes the boys had recruited a dozen men, half-breeds and Indians, with one white man, a Scotchman, to lead them. **[265]**

It would not do to approach the Island of Torture in too great force. Hugh and Blaise, with Baptiste and the two Indians, were to go first, find out whether Ohrante's recruits had assembled and watch for the coming of the chief himself. The men from the Grand Portage, in two canoes, would start later. Hugh had a very simple plan, which promised to be effective, to prevent Ohrante from leaving his council island before the Grand Portage party arrived.

The plan of campaign arranged, the scouts got under way at once. As they rounded the high point to the south and west of the Grand Portage Bay, they noticed, coming from the open lake, a large canoe with only two men. It was headed straight for the land, but suddenly swung about and turned down shore. Blaise, who was second from the bow, raised his paddle for a moment, while he gazed intently at the other canoe.

Turning his head, he called back to Hugh and Baptiste, "Red Band! We must catch them. It is Red Band and I think Monga." **[266]**

"*Vite!* Make speed!" ordered Baptiste. "We will separate those two from the rest of Ohrante's rascals."

He scarcely needed to give the command. Keneu, in the bow, had already quickened his

powerful stroke. The others followed his lead and the five blades dipped and rose with vigorous, rapid rhythm. The Indians ahead did their best, bending to their paddles with desperate energy, but their canoe was fully as large as Baptiste's and they were two paddles to five. The pursuers gained steadily. They must certainly overtake the fugitives.

Suddenly the fleeing canoe swerved towards the land. Keneu saw in an instant what the two men were trying to do. They intended to beach their boat and take to the woods, trusting to lose their pursuers in the thick growth. The Indian bowman gave a sharp order. Baptiste's canoe swung in towards shore. It must cut off the fugitives, get between them and the land. The shore was steep and rocky, and there was no good place to beach a boat. Yet so great was the panic of Monga and Red Band that they kept straight on. Despairing of escape by water, they were ready to smash their canoe on the rocks and take a chance of reaching land.

They did not even get near to the shore. In their panic haste, they failed to notice a warning ripple and eddy ahead. Their canoe struck full on the jagged edge of a rock just below the surface. The pursuers were close enough to hear the ripping sound, as the sharp rock tore a great gash in the thin bark. The water rushed in. Red Band sprang from the bow, but Monga remained where he was in the stern, the canoe settling under him. **[267]**

The pursuers bent to their paddles and shot towards the wrecked boat. They reached the spot just as Monga was going down, but they did not intend to let him escape them by drowning. Keneu reached out a sinewy arm and seized the sinking man by the neck of his deerskin shirt, while the others threw their bodies the other way and backed water to hold the canoe steady and keep it off the sharp rock.

The sensation of going down in that cold water must have instilled in Monga a dread greater than his fear of capture, for he made no struggle to free himself. As if the fellow had been a fish too large to be landed, his captors passed him back from hand to hand until he came into the keeping of the other Indian in the stern. The captive could not be pulled aboard, so Manihik ordered him to hold to the rim. Kneeling face towards the stern, he held Monga by the shoulders, and towed him behind the canoe till Keneu found a landing place.

Red Band had disappeared. Blaise, who had watched, felt sure Monga's companion had not reached shore. He had gone down and had not come up. Either he was unable to swim or had struck his head on a rock. Whatever had happened, there was no sign of him.

When shallow water was reached, Manihik took good care that his dripping prisoner should not escape. Monga was towed ashore and his wrists and ankles bound with rawhide rope. He said not a word, his broad face sullen and set. **[268]**

Not until Blaise had asked him several questions in Ojibwa, did the captive deign to speak. Even then he answered with reluctance, a word or two at a time in sullen grunts. Then a question suddenly loosed his tongue, and he poured out a

torrent of guttural speech. The other two Indians and Baptiste, who understood a little Ojibwa, listened intently, but Hugh could make out no word, except the names Ohrante and Minong.

When Monga paused, Blaise, his hazel eyes shining, turned to his brother. “We have not so many enemies to oppose us as we thought. Ohrante has only five of his old men left. The young Iroquois who captured you is dead.”

“That fellow dead?” Hugh exclaimed. “Are you sure Monga isn’t lying?”

“He speaks the truth, I am certain,” Blaise replied confidently. “When Ohrante found you had escaped, he was in a great rage. He held the young Iroquois, Monga and Red Band to blame, and threatened all three with death, unless they found you and brought you back. Because the small canoe was gone, they believed you had escaped by water. We hoped the empty canoe might drift up the bay, but they found it not. The Iroquois thought you might have gone into the Bay of Manitos. Monga had no wish to go there. He was afraid of the giant manitos, he says, but he was desperate and at last agreed. They found our fire on the stones at the end of that island. Monga believed you had crossed the mouth of the bay and had gone on the other side of Minong, but the Iroquois wished to go up the narrow channel. They went up the channel, as we know, to what they believed to be the end. The shallow water and the fallen cedar deceived them. So they turned back and went on across the mouth of the Bay of Manitos.”

“What were Ohrante and the others doing all that time?” **[269]**

“They searched the western side of Minong. Monga says Ohrante would not go into the Bay of Manitos himself.”

“Then he evidently didn’t suspect our trick.”

“No, but I think perhaps the young Iroquois suspected, and that was why he wished to search the bay.” Blaise went on with his tale. “Monga and Red Band were in despair when they could not find you. They proposed that the three of them should run away to the mainland, but the Iroquois was too proud to be a coward. He wished to go on with the search or go back to take the punishment. So Monga pretended he could see the end of a canoe among the trees on an island. They landed, and Monga and Red Band murdered the Iroquois and left him there. Then they started for the mainland.”

“They were the ones we saw when we were going out of the bay.”

“Yes, they went around the long point, past that bay, and along the northwest side of Minong, but the wind came up and they could not cross. This morning they have crossed over.”

“We should have nothing further to fear from Monga then, even if we had not captured him.” **[270]**

Blaise shrugged contemptuously. “Monga is a coward and a fool. He says he was angry because the traders sold him a bad musket. It exploded when he tried to fire it and blew off his little finger. So he joined the Mohawk wolf who

boasted that he would drive the white men away. Monga thought Ohrante was a great chief and a powerful medicine man, but when he proposed to go to Minong, Monga was afraid. Then Ohrante told him that Minong was a wonderful place where they would grow rich and mighty and have everything they wished. He said he was such a great medicine man that the spirits of the island would do his bidding."

"And they didn't," put in Hugh with a grin.

The swift, flashing smile like his father's crossed the younger boy's face. "Monga was disappointed to find Minong little different from the mainland. When he heard the spirits threatening Ohrante and saw the chief frightened, he began to lose faith in him. You escaped, and Ohrante's medicine was not strong enough to find you and bring you back. He would not even go to the Bay of Manitos to seek you. So Monga knew the Chief of Minong was just a man like other men. He has run away and wants no more of Ohrante."

"Just the same I think we had better keep an eye on him," Hugh decided. "We'll take him with us."

Blaise nodded. "There is still much Monga has not told us," he replied.

It was finally settled that Baptiste and the two Indians should take the prisoner with them, while Hugh and Blaise went on ahead in the captured canoe. It was their plan to approach the Island of Torture under cover of darkness. Conditions being good, the two boys paddled steadily. Late in the afternoon they paused for a meal. They had not many more miles to go, and would wait until nightfall. Before they had finished their supper, Baptiste's canoe came in sight. Monga had expressed willingness to wield a paddle, but Baptiste did not trust him. The "Loon" rode as a compulsory passenger, wrists and ankles still bound. At Hugh's signal, Baptiste ran in to shore to wait with the others for darkness. **[271]**

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XXXIV
MONGA'S STORY

During the enforced wait for nightfall, Blaise put more questions to the Indian prisoner. Monga, anxious to ingratiate himself with his captors, talked freely.

Ohrante, the captive said, after his first crime, capture and escape, had fled with Monga and the other Ojibwa who had helped him to get away. At the lake shore they had come across two Iroquois hunters, the tall fellow with the malicious grin and another. When Ohrante proposed to take refuge on Minong, the Ojibwas held back. The Mohawk, however, told them a long story about how his mother, a captive among the Iroquois, had been a direct descendant of the ancient tribe or clan who had once lived on Minong and had mined copper

there. Her ancestors had been chieftains of that powerful people, Ohrante asserted, and he himself was hereditary Chief of Minong. From his mother's people and also from his father, who was a Mohawk medicine man, the giant claimed to have inherited marvellous magic powers. He had further increased those powers by going through various mysterious experiences and ordeals. The manitos of Minong, he said, awaited his coming. He had had a dream, several moons before, in which the spirits, in the forms of birds and beasts, had appeared to him and begged him to come and rule over them. They would do his bidding and aid him to destroy his enemies and to become chief of all the tribes about the Upper Lakes. He would unite those tribes into a powerful nation and drive the white men from the country.

Persuaded by Ohrante's arguments, the four Indians accompanied him to Minong. Their first camp was made on the southwestern end of the island. There Ohrante and the two Ojibwas, secure from pursuit, remained while the others crossed again to the mainland and brought back more recruits, an Ojibwa, a Cree and another Iroquois hunter. The band of eight roamed about the western side of the island by land and water. Most of the winter they spent in a long, narrow bay, where, according to Monga, they found many pieces of copper. In the spring, in search of the wonders their chief had promised them, they reached the northeastern end of the island. Then came a hard storm of wind, rain and snow, accompanied by fog. Three days after the storm, when the waves had gone down, the band entered, for the first time, the bay west of the long point. There they found and captured Jean Beaupré and Black Thunder. It was evident from Monga's tale that he knew nothing of the hidden furs. Ohrante had accepted the story Jean Beaupré had told of having lost everything in the storm, when his bateau, driven out of its course, had been dashed into a rift in the rocks of the long point. Undoubtedly Beaupré must have had some warning of the approach of the Indians, for he had had time, as the boys knew, to secrete the furs. The fact that Black Thunder had suffered an injury to one leg, when the boat was wrecked, might account for the failure of the two to dodge the giant and his band. **[273]**

When Monga finished this part of his story, Blaise turned from him to translate to Hugh. **[274]**

"Ask him," the elder brother suggested, "if father knew he was on the Isle Royale."

Blaise put the question and translated the reply. "Monga says our father knew not where he was. The weather was thick and cloudy, there was no sun and it was not possible to see far. Our father thought he was somewhere on the mainland. Ohrante did not tell him where he was. The chief wished no man to know the hiding place. The prisoners were kept bound. They were given something cooked from leaves that made them sleep sound. Then they were put in the canoes and taken to the other end of the island. By night they were brought across to the Isle of Torture."

"That explains father's not telling you where he was wrecked. He had no idea he had been driven to Minong. But why did Ohrante bring his

captives away over here? What was his motive? Can you find out?”

Again Blaise asked a question, listening gravely to the answer. “Monga says that he and Ohrante and the other Ojibwa camped on that little island they now call the Isle of Torture, when they first escaped from our father, and Ohrante dreamed that night that he had many white captives and put them to the torture one after another. Monga thinks it was because of that dream that the chief brought his captives over to that island.”

“How did father escape?” Hugh questioned eagerly. **[275]**

Again Blaise turned to Monga, and soon had the rest of the story. At the Torture Island, Ohrante had met with several recruits, who brought with them a supply of liquor stolen from some trading post. The torture of the two captives, Ohrante’s part of the entertainment, was postponed until night. During the day the party feasted and drank. They consumed all of the liquor, which was full strength, not diluted with water as it usually was before being sold to the Indians. By night the whole band were lying about the island in a heavy stupor. Even the lookout, who had been stationed in a tree to give warning of the approach of danger, had come down to get his share.

When the band came to their senses next morning, they found the prisoners gone. The thongs with which they had been tied lay on the ground, one piece of rawhide having been worn through by being pulled across a sharp-edged bit of rock. A canoe was gone and another had a great hole in it, but a third boat, on the other side of the island, the prisoners had not found. Monga’s Ojibwa comrade, the one who had helped Ohrante to escape justice, had been set to guard the captives. In a rage, Ohrante threatened the fellow with torture in their stead. The guard begged to be allowed to track the escaped prisoners, and the chief consented. A high wind had blown all night and the lake was rough, too rough for the fugitives to have travelled far by water. The channel between shore and island was protected from the wind, however, and some of the band crossed and found the canoe the escaped prisoners had used. Black Thunder’s lame leg prevented rapid travelling, and at the Devil Track River, the negligent guard and one of the Iroquois overtook the fugitives. Stealing quietly upon them, the Ojibwa attacked Jean Beaupré, the Iroquois, Black Thunder. Black Thunder struggled desperately, and the Iroquois was obliged to fight for his life. He slew Black Thunder, only to find his Ojibwa companion lying dead a little farther on. Jean Beaupré was gone.

The Iroquois tried to follow Beaupré, but, being himself wounded, fell fainting from loss of blood. Monga and another of the band, sent after the two by Ohrante, found the Iroquois unable to travel without help. It was Monga who had kindled the cooking fire, the remains of which Hugh had found. Blaise spoke of finding the blood-stained tunic and Monga said that the Iroquois had stripped it from Black Thunder, but Monga and the other Indian would not let him carry the shirt away for fear of the vengeance of **[276]**

the thunder bird pictured upon it. The three returned to the Island of Torture without attempting to follow Beaupré farther. When the lake calmed, two of the band took the winter catch of furs to the Grand Portage and exchanged them for supplies. Then the whole party returned to Minong, living for some time at the southern end. In a later raid they captured the unfortunate Indian, Ohrante's personal enemy, whom the boys had seen being tortured. One of the chief's men was killed in the encounter, another deserted and several were left on the mainland to obtain recruits.

The rest went back to Minong and travelled to the northern end again. In the bay west of the long, high point, they found the spot the crew of the *Otter* had cleared, and built their wigwams there. The discovery that someone else had visited the place made Ohrante a bit uneasy, and he kept a lookout stationed on the high ridge. When the Beaupré brothers reached the point, all of the band except two happened to be away on a hunting trip. The two guards, neglectful of lookout duty, had failed to see the lads approach. It must have been one of them who had fired the shot that aroused the boys at dawn. Ohrante and one canoe of the hunting party returned that very day. The call that had so startled Hugh, when he was about to open the packet, was a signal from one of the camp guards to the returning chief. Luckily for the brothers they were well hidden in the pit, and Ohrante and his men were back at their camp long before the two lads reached theirs. The other canoe of hunters did not return until the following day. Luck had been poor, and Monga proposed to his companions that they round the long, high point and look for game on the other side. They were headed towards the rocky tip, when, suddenly, before their astonished eyes, a giant form appeared on the open rocks. The giant turned, looked straight at the canoe, then seemed to sink into the ground. Just as he vanished, however, a second giant, even taller than the first, loomed up. Monga and his comrades turned and fled. Monga looked back once, just in time to see one of the giants spring up out of the rocks, he said. The frightened Indians took refuge beyond the low point on the other side of the bay, and stayed there until the fog came in, before daring to venture to camp. They told Ohrante of seeing Nanibozho and Kepoochikan on the end of the long point, but he, to strengthen his followers' belief in his magical powers, insisted next day on rounding the point. In the Bay of Manitos, the Chief of Minong had the scare of his life. **[277]**

Darkness had come by the time Blaise had learned all this from the prisoner and had translated it to Hugh and Baptiste. It was time to make a start. Monga was left behind, and to prevent his crying out or attracting attention in any way, he was gagged and tied to a tree. Then the others embarked in Baptiste's canoe. The weather favored them. The night was dark, not a ray of moonlight penetrating the thick clouds. Only a light breeze rippled the water and the air was unusually warm. **[278]**

Noiselessly, through the deepest shadows, the canoe approached the Island of Torture. From the upper end, the black mass appeared to be quite deserted. No gleam of fire shone through

the trees. As the canoe slipped along close to the mainland, however, the flickering light of a small fire appeared ahead. That fire was not on the island, but on the mainland opposite. Swerving in to shore, the canoe was brought to a stop, its prow just touching a bit of beach. Without speaking a word, and making scarcely a sound, the five stepped out, deposited the boat upon the pebbles and gathered around it in a knot.

Keneu, his mouth close to the half-breed boy's ear, whispered a word or two. Blaise nodded, and in an instant the Indian was gone into the darkness. Blaise turned to Hugh and explained in the softest of whispers: "Keneu goes to learn who they are." [279]

Silent, almost motionless, the rest of the party remained standing on the bit of beach in the thick darkness of the sheltering bushes. Hugh's eyes were fastened on the black, silent island across the narrow channel. Had Ohrante changed his plans? He felt his younger brother's hand on his arm, and turned about. He could just distinguish a low, hissing sound, which he realized was the Indian making his report to Blaise.

The sound ceased and the boy's lips were at Hugh's ear. "There are four men camping there. One is an Iroquois. They wait for Ohrante to come. Then they go to the island."

"He hasn't come yet, then?" Hugh whispered back.

"No, these are new men except the Iroquois. They come to join Ohrante. They have liquor, but the Iroquois will not let them drink until the chief comes."

"Then the only thing we can do is wait."

"That is all. We can watch the island from here. When Ohrante comes we shall know it."

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XXXV
THE FALL OF THE GIANT

As the wait might be long, the party decided to snatch a few minutes' sleep, one of them remaining on the lookout for the arrival of the Chief of Minong. It was some time after midnight, when Keneu, who was doing guard duty, discerned something moving on the lake, coming down shore. He laid his hand on the half-breed boy's forehead, and Blaise woke at once.

"A canoe," the Indian whispered.

Blaise raised his head to look. "The men from the Grand Portage. What idiots! Why not keep closer in?"

The Indian's hand pressed the lad's shoulder warningly. "Wait," he breathed. "Let them go by."

Secure in the black shelter of the alders that

overhung the bit of beach, Blaise watched the approaching canoe. It came on rapidly, confidently. As it drew close in the darkness of the channel between mainland and island, the boy's eyes could make out no details. But his ears caught something that made him heartily glad he had not signalled that canoe as had been his first thought. What he heard was an order spoken in Ojibwa, in the unmistakable, high-pitched, nasal voice of Ohrante. In obedience to the command, the canoe swung away from the mainland towards the Island of Torture, and disappeared in the blackness of its margin.

Blaise drew a long breath and whispered in Keneu's ear, "Go watch the camp and see what they do." **[281]**

Keneu made no reply, but Blaise knew he was gone, though he heard no sound as the Indian slipped through the bushes. In the same quiet way that Keneu had waked him, by laying his hand on the forehead of each, Blaise aroused his companions. In a few minutes all were sitting up, wide awake, staring at the dark water and the impenetrable blackness of the island. There were no stars or moon. The air was unusually warm and sultry. A pale flash lit up the dark sky for an instant. Some moments later a low rumbling came to their ears. A storm now might spoil all their plans, thought Hugh anxiously.

A gleam of light shone through the trees at the farther end of the island. A fire had been kindled as a signal that the Chief of Minong had arrived. Again the sky was lit by a white flash. Again the thunder rolled and rumbled. From down the channel came a sound of splashing water. No canoe, paddled by Indians, ever made such a splashing as that. "Have they all jumped in? Are they swimming across?" thought Hugh.

Rolling over, he crawled down the beach. His head almost in the water, he gazed down the channel. Another flash of lightning swept the sky. Hugh crouched low, but in the instant of the illumination, he saw, crossing from mainland to island, a canoe with several men, and in its wake something black rising above the water. Hugh could not believe that the swimming thing was really what, in the instant's flash of light, it appeared to be.

He turned to slip up the beach again, and found Blaise at his side. In silence the two went back to their place beside the canoe. A few minutes later, Blaise felt a hand on his shoulder, and Keneu's voice spoke in his ear, in a low, hissing whisper. **[282]**

"They have left their camp. They have crossed to the island, where a fire now burns."

"How many canoes?"

"Only one."

"Are other men coming?"

"I think not. I think they are the only ones."

Hugh was growing impatient. It had been his intention to wait to put his plan into operation until the party on the island had feasted and drunk and were sleeping. The coming storm, however, threatened to thwart his strategy. Bad

weather might drive Ohrante and his band to the mainland in search of better shelter. Even if they remained on the island, a violent storm would delay action. In daylight he could not carry out his scheme, and dawn was not far off. There was grave risk in acting now, but to delay might mean to lose all chance of success. Again the lightning flashed more brightly, the thunder rolled louder and at a shorter interval. He must act now if at all. He put his mouth to his younger brother's ear.

"We must get those canoes. A storm may spoil our chance. We dare not wait."

"Yes," agreed Blaise. He understood the situation quite as well as Hugh. There was no need for more than the one word. **[283]**

"You and I and Keneu will go," Hugh went on. "When we get across, Keneu must remain with our canoe. The others must stay here to stop the men from the Grand Portage when they come."

"Yes," Blaise replied again, and rose to his feet. "Come," he said briefly to the Indian.

In a few whispered words, Hugh explained to Baptiste that he and Manihik must remain where they were. The Frenchman was inclined to grumble. He did not like the idea of the boys' going into action without his support. Hugh was firm, however, and as the whole plan was his, he was by right the leader, so Baptiste was forced to submit. By the time Hugh had finished his explanation, Blaise and Keneu had the canoe in the water.

Just as Hugh, as leader, took his place in the bow, a flash of lightning lit up the sky. The moment the flash was over, the canoe was off, Blaise in the center and Keneu in the stern. The paddling was left to the Indian, Hugh dipping his blade only now and then on one side or the other, as a signal to the steersman.

The natural clearing, where the fire now blazed bright, was at the other end of the little island. If the Indians were all gathered around the fire, they could not see the canoe crossing from the mainland. Someone might be down at the shore, but the attacking party had to take a chance of that. Luckily the short passage was accomplished before the next flash.

On the inner side of the little island, the trees and bushes grew down to the water. In absolute silence, the canoe slipped along, close in. Another bright flash of lightning, quickly followed by a peal of thunder, caused Keneu to hold his blade motionless. The boat was well screened by the trees, however, and there was no sign that it had been observed. **[284]**

That flash of lightning had revealed something to Hugh. Just ahead was a little curve in the margin of the island, and beyond it, a short, blunt projection, a bit of beach with alders growing well down upon it. On the beach were two canoes. To reach the spot, however, it would be necessary to pass an open gap, a sort of lane leading up from the shore to the place where the fire burned. Through the gap the firelight shone out upon the water. It would never do to try to pass in the canoe.

Hugh dipped his paddle and gave it a twist. The Indian understood. He too saw the firelight on the water. The canoe swerved towards shore and slowed down. Before it could touch and make a noise, Hugh was overside, stepping quickly but carefully, to avoid the slightest splash. Blaise followed. Keneu remained in the boat. He allowed his end to swing in far enough so he could grasp an overhanging branch and hold the craft steady.

Now came the most difficult part of the undertaking, to creep in the darkness through the dense growth, which came clear to the water line, around to the beach where the canoe lay. Hugh, as leader, intended to go first, but he did not get the chance. Before he realized what the younger boy was about, Blaise had slipped past him and taken the lead. It was well he did so for Blaise, slender and agile, was an adept at wriggling his way snake-like, and he seemed to have a sixth sense in the darkness that Hugh did not possess. So Hugh was constrained to let his younger brother pick the route. He had all he could do to follow without rustling or crackling the thick growth. Progress was necessarily very slow, only a few feet or even inches at a time. Whenever there came a lightning flash, both lay flat. The flashes were less revealing in the dense growth, and luckily the trees stood thick between the two lads and the fire. **[285]**

Blaise had reached the edge of the gap through which the yellow-red firelight shone. He could see the fire itself, a big, roaring pile, and the figures moving around it. The sound of voices speaking Ojibwa and Iroquois came to his ears. Reaching back with one foot, he gave Hugh a little warning kick, then looked for some way to cross the open space.

The Island of Torture, like most of the islands off the northwest shore of the lake, consisted of a low, flat-topped, rock ridge descending gradually to the water on one side and more abruptly on the other. The lane was a natural opening down a steep slope from the ridge top to the water. Just at the base of the open rock lane, at the very edge of the water, grew a row of low shrubs, so low that they did not shut off the light of the fire, but cast only a narrow line of shadow. The one way to cross that gap without being seen was to crawl along in the shadow of those bushes. The water might be shallow there or it might be deep. Lying flat, Blaise put one hand into the shadowed water. His fingers touched bottom. He felt around a little, then crawled forward. The water proved to be only a few inches deep. Prostrate, he wriggled along the rock bottom in the narrow band of shadow. When Blaise had reached the shelter of the woods beyond, Hugh followed, taking extreme care to slip along like an eel, without a splash. **[286]**

The brothers were now but a short distance from the canoes. The thick growing alders fringing the pebbles shut off the firelight. The chief peril was that someone might be guarding the boats. Eyes and ears strained for the slightest sign of danger, the two crawled forward on hands and knees. They reached the first canoe without alarm and went on to the second. Still hidden from the Indians around the fire, the boys lifted the canoe and turned it bottom side up. Blaise

drew his knife from the sheath and carefully, without a sound of ripping, cut a great hole in the bark, removing a section between the ribs. Then the two carried the boat out a few feet and deposited it upon the water. It began to fill immediately, the water entering the big hole with only a slight gurgling noise. Even that sound alarmed the lads. They beat a hasty retreat and lay close under the alders. The Indians around the fire, however, were too engrossed in their own affairs to heed the sound, if indeed it carried that far.

A man with a full, deep voice was speaking at length, his tones reaching the boys where they lay hidden. Every now and then his listeners broke in with little grunts and ejaculations of approval or assent. A crash of thunder, following close upon a bright flash, drowned his voice. When the rumbling ceased, he was no longer speaking. Something else was happening now. Little cries and grunts, accompanied by the beating together of wood and metal and the click of rattles in rude rhythm, came to the boys' ears. **[287]**

"They are dancing," thought Hugh. "What fools to make such an exhibition here where a boat may pass at any moment! Ohrante is certainly insane or very sure he is invincible. It is time we finished our work."

He missed Blaise from his side, and crept down to the remaining canoe, supposing his younger brother had gone that way. Blaise was not there. Hugh waited several minutes, listening to the grunts and cries, which, low voiced at first, were growing louder and faster as the dancers warmed to their work. Suddenly one of them uttered a yell, which was followed by quite a different sound, an animal's bellow of rage or pain. Hugh was both alarmed and curious. What was going on up there, and what had become of Blaise?

The elder brother crept back across the pebbles, pushed his way cautiously among the alders, and crawled up a short, steep slope topped by more bushes and trees, through which the firelight flickered. The noises of the dance, broken by louder cries and angry bellows, continued. Crouching low in the shadow, Hugh peeped through at the strangest scene he had ever looked upon.

In the open space a big fire blazed, casting its reddish-yellow glare over the picture. Between the fire and the boy, the dancing figures of the Indians passed back and forth, crouching, stamping, gesticulating, to the rhythm of their hoarse cries and the clicking of their weapons and rattles. All were naked to the waist and some entirely so. Their faces and bodies were streaked and daubed with black and white, yellow and red. Near by, in dignified immobility, stood the self-styled Chief of Minong, his tall feather upright in his head band, his face and breast fantastically painted in black and vermilion. His bronze body was stripped to the waist, displaying to advantage the breadth of his shoulders and the great muscles of his long arms. A little shudder passed down Hugh's spine as his eyes rested upon that huge, towering form and the set, cruel face. Yet it was neither the war dance nor Ohrante that held his surprised **[288]**

gaze longest.

A little to one side of the fire, the tall birch rose straight and high above its fellows. To its white stem was tied, not a human victim this time, but the dark form of an animal, a moose. As the beast tossed its head about in frenzy, Hugh could see that its antlers, still covered with the fuzzy velvet, had no broad palms and bore but two points on either side. It was a crotch horn or two year old. Every few moments one or another of the dancers would utter a yell or war whoop, dart towards the captive animal, strike it a swift blow with knife, spear or firebrand, then leap nimbly out of the way of its tossing antlers and flying forefeet. A favorite sport seemed to be to strike the beast upon the sensitive end of the nose with a burning pole. The moose was wild with rage and pain, plunging madly about, swaying the birch almost to breaking. The bonds were strong and the tree failed to snap, yet the boy wondered how long it would be before something gave and freed the frenzied beast. He thought the young moose did not realize his own strength, but when he should find it out, Hugh did not want to be in the way.

The watcher was just about to retreat to the beach, when the dancing suddenly stopped. Drops of rain were beginning to fall, but the shower was not the reason for the cessation of the dancing. Ohrante had raised his arm in an impressive gesture. The dancers lowered their weapons and rattles and drew back to the other side of the fire. Majestically Ohrante stalked forward and confronted the plunging moose. Lightning flashed, thunder pealed, there came a sharp dash of rain, the fire hissing and spitting like a live thing as the drops struck it. But Ohrante did not intend to be deprived of his cruel sport by a mere thunder shower. He held in his right hand a long pole with a knife lashed to the end. Standing just out of reach of the enraged beast’s antlers and forefeet, he lunged directly at its throat. **[289]**

There came a dazzling flash, a flare of light, a stunning crash that seemed to shatter Hugh’s ear-drums. Even as the flash blinded his eyes, they received a momentary impression of a great black object hurtling at and over the giant Indian, as he toppled backward into the fire. The next instant a huge bulk crashed through the bushes almost on top of the boy. A tremendous splash followed.

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XXXVI
HOW BLAISE MISSED HIS REVENGE

The rain came down in torrents. Thunder pealed and crashed, and Hugh, a roaring in his head, his whole body shaking convulsively, lay on his face among the bushes. A hand seized his shoulder and instantly he came to himself. He started up and reached for the knife he had borrowed from Baptiste, then knew it was his half-brother who was speaking.

“Quick,” Blaise whispered. “Follow me close.”

The rain was lessening, the thunder peals were not so deafening. From the beach below came the sound of voices. With bitterness, Hugh realized that he and Blaise had delayed too long. The Indians had reached the one canoe and had discovered that the other was missing.

“They are going to get away. We must do something to stop Ohrante at least.”

“Ohrante is stopped, I think,” Blaise replied quietly. “I go to see.” And he wriggled through the dripping bushes.

Hugh followed close on his younger brother’s heels. Out from the shelter of the trees into the open space the two crawled. Where the fire had blazed there was now only smoke. A flash of lightning illuminated the spot. It seemed utterly deserted except for one motionless form. Without hesitation the brothers crept across the open, no longer single file, but side by side. The thing they had caught sight of when the lightning flashed, lay outstretched and partly hidden by the cloud of smoke from the quenched fire. As they drew near, there was another bright flash. There lay the giant figure of Ohrante the Mohawk, his head among the blackened embers, his broad chest battered to a shapeless mass by the sharp fore hooves of the frenzied moose. Hugh was glad that the flash of light lasted but an instant. The merciful darkness blotted out the horrible sight. He turned away sickened. **[291]**

The report of a musket, another and another, shouts and yells and splashings, came from the channel between island and mainland.

“The men from the Grand Portage,” cried Hugh. “They have come just in time. Not all of Ohrante’s rascals will escape.”

He ran down the open lane, Blaise after him. The flashes and reports, the shouts and cries, proved that a battle was on. The black shapes of canoes filled with men were distinguishable on the water. A pale flash of the now distant lightning revealed to the lads one craft close in shore. It contained but one man.

“Keneu,” Hugh called.

The Indian had seen the boys. He swerved the canoe towards the line of low bushes at the foot of the gap, and Hugh and Blaise ran out into the water to step aboard. The yells and musket shots had ceased. The fight seemed to be over. But another canoe was coming in towards the island beach. Did that boat hold friends or enemies?

“Holá, Hugh Beaupré,” a familiar voice called. “Where are you?” **[292]**

“Here, Baptiste, all right, both of us,” Hugh shouted in reply.

“Thank the good God,” Baptiste ejaculated fervently.

The canoe came on and made a landing on the beach. Hugh, Blaise and Keneu beached their craft near by.

“Did you catch those fellows?” Hugh asked eagerly.

“We sunk their canoe and some are drowned. Others may have reached shore. The rest of our men have gone over there to search. But where is Ohrante? We have seen nothing of him. Is he still on this isle?”

“Yes, he is here,” Hugh replied, a little shudder convulsing his body. “But Ohrante is no longer to be feared.”

“He is dead? Who killed him? One of you?” Baptiste glanced quickly from one lad to the other.

“No, the victim he was torturing killed him.”

“Another victim? What became of him? Did he escape?”

“He escaped. By now he is probably in safety.”

“Good! Then we have——”

A shout from the top of the island interrupted Baptiste. The other men from the canoe, who had scattered to search for any of Ohrante’s band who might be in hiding, had discovered the body. The boys and Baptiste went up to join them, and Hugh described what he had seen and how the Chief of Minong had come to his death.

“A frightful fate truly, but he brought it upon himself by torturing the beast,” the Frenchman exclaimed. “But how was it they had a captive moose? Surely they did not bring it across from the Isle Royale?” **[293]**

“No.” It was Blaise who spoke. “Keneu says the men from the mainland brought the moose. Keneu saw the beast tied to a tree at their camp. It was a two year old and seemed tame. He thought it had been raised in captivity. They brought it to kill for a feast. Hugh and I saw it swim across behind their canoe.”

“Ohrante had no human captive to torture.” Hugh shuddered again, realizing that he himself had been the intended victim. “He had no man to practice his cruelty upon, so he used the animal. What a fiend the fellow was!”

Not one of Ohrante’s band was found on the island. The sudden fall of their chief had so appalled them that they had fled, every man of them, to the beach and had crowded into the one remaining canoe. The explanation of Ohrante’s fate was clear. The lightning had struck the top of the tall birch. The young moose, already wild with pain and fright, was driven to utter frenzy by the crash and shock. It had burst its bonds and plunged straight at its nearest tormentor, knocking him into the fire, stamping upon his body with its sharp hooves, and then dashing for the lake and freedom. A terrible revenge the crotch horn had taken.

Hugh’s plan had been to sink one canoe and steal the other, leaving the Chief of Minong and his followers marooned on the little island. He had hoped that the loss of the boats would not be discovered before morning. Then the besieging party could demand the surrender of Ohrante, promising his followers, if necessary, that they should go free if they would deliver up their chief. Even if they refused, there seemed no chance for Ohrante to get away. Before he **[294]**

could build canoes, the attacking party could easily raise a force sufficient to rush the island. If members of the band should attempt to swim the channel or cross it on a raft, they would be at the mercy of the besiegers. Sooner or later the giant and his men would be compelled to yield.

In accordance with this plan, the boys had set out to make away with Ohrante's canoes. When ample time to carry out the manœuvre had passed, and they did not return, Baptiste had grown anxious. The sounds of the war dance and the bellows of the captive moose, carrying across the water, had increased his alarm. The men from the Grand Portage arriving just before the storm broke, Baptiste signalled them and they held themselves in readiness to go to the rescue of the lads. The watchers saw the lightning strike the island. They heard the tumult as the frightened Indians, believing some supernatural power had intervened to destroy their chief, fled to the beach. At once Baptiste's men, regardless of the storm, started for the island. A flash of lightning showed them a canoe crossing to the mainland. Attack followed and the canoe was sunk or overturned. One boat of the attacking party put into shore to cut off the flight of any of the band who might succeed in reaching land. The other turned to the island.

When the whole force came together at dawn, they had taken two prisoners and had found the dead bodies of two other Indians besides Ohrante. The Mohawk had brought but three men with him and four others had joined him at the island. Three were therefore unaccounted for. They might have been drowned or they might have escaped. The important thing was that Ohrante was dead and his band broken up. **[295]**

The headlong flight of the great chief's followers was explained by one of the prisoners. The Indians had believed the giant Iroquois invincible. He had the reputation, as Monga had said, of being a medicine man or magician of great powers. He claimed to have had, in early youth, a dream in which it was revealed to him that no human hand would ever strike him down. The dream explained the boldness and rashness of his behavior. It also threw light on his fear of powers not human. Suddenly he was felled, not by human hand indeed, but by the dreadful thunder bird and the hooves of a beast which surely must be a spirit in disguise. The invincible was vanquished and his followers were panic stricken. The three men Ohrante had brought from Minong led the flight. They had seen and heard the threatening manifestations of Nanibozho, Kepoochikan and their attendant manitos on that island. Two of the band, the captive said, had been left on Minong to guard the camp. Of them neither Hugh nor Blaise ever heard again. Whether the Indians remained on the island or whether after a time they returned to the mainland and learned of Ohrante's death, the lads never knew.

With the fate of the giant Mohawk all the attacking party were well satisfied except Blaise. He was so glum and silent that Hugh could not understand what had come over the lad. After their return to the Grand Portage, Blaise opened his heart. **[296]**

“I wished to kill our father’s enemy with my own hands,” he confessed to Hugh. “It was the duty of you or me to avenge him, and I wished for the honor. You saw not in the darkness that I took my musket with me. When we crept in the water below that open place, I carried the musket on my back not to wet it. And then when I knelt among the trees and he stood there with his arms folded, I had him in good range. But, my brother, I could not shoot. It was not that I feared for myself or you. No, I felt no fear. I could not shoot him unarmed and with no chance to fight for his life. I am a fool, a coward, a disgrace to the Ojibwa nation.”

“No, no, you are nothing of the kind,” Hugh cried indignantly. “There is no braver lad anywhere. You are no coward, you are a white man, Blaise, and an honorable one. That is why you couldn’t shoot Ohrante in the back from ambush. I know there are white men who do such things and feel no shame. But would father have done it, do you think? Would he?”

A little anxiously, Hugh waited for the answer. He had known his father so little, and Jean Beaupré had lived long among savages. The reply came at last, slowly and thoughtfully.

“No,” said the younger son, “no, our father would never have shot a man in the back.”

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XXXVII
THE PACKET IS OPENED

With eager curiosity Hugh Beaupré sat watching Monsieur Dubois unwrap the mysterious packet. The adventurous journey was over. The ex-members of Ohrante’s band, including Monga, had been turned over to the fur companies to be dealt with. The pelts had been safely delivered to the New Northwest Company at the Kaministikwia, Jean Beaupré’s small debt cancelled, and the rest of the price paid divided between the two boys. The furs had proved of fine quality, and Hugh was well satisfied with his share. He had been given a draft on the company’s bankers in Montreal, who had paid him in gold. Blaise had chosen to take his half in winter supplies, and, with Hugh and Baptiste to back him, had won the respect of the company’s clerk as a shrewd bargainer. At the Kaministikwia, the younger boy had found his mother with a party of her people, and Hugh, less reluctant than at the beginning of his journey, had made her acquaintance. Regretfully parting with Blaise, the elder brother had joined the great canoe fleet returning with the furs. He was able to qualify as a canoeman, and he had remained with the fleet during the whole trip to Montreal. Of that interesting but strenuous journey there is no space to tell here.

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One of the lad’s first acts after reaching the city had been to seek out Monsieur Dubois. Dubois proved to be a prominent man among the French people of Montreal, and Hugh had found him without difficulty. After explaining how he

had come by the packet, the lad had placed it in the Frenchman's hands. He had learned from this thin, grave, white-haired man that he, René Dubois, had lived in the Indian country for many years. During the first months of Jean Beaupré's life in the wild Superior region, Dubois, though considerably older, had been the friend and companion of Hugh's father. When an inheritance had come to him, the elder man had been called back to Montreal, where he had since lived. Beaupré, on his infrequent returns to civilization, had made brief calls on his old comrade, but they had no common business interests and had never corresponded. Monsieur Dubois was, therefore, at a loss to understand why Hugh's father had been so anxious that this packet should reach him.

He undid the outer wrapping, glanced at his own name on the bark label, cut the cord, broke the seals and removed the doeskin. Several thin white sheets of birch bark covered with fine writing in the faint, muddy, home-made ink, and a small, flat object wrapped in another thin cover of doeskin, were all the packet contained. When his fingers closed on the object within the skin cover, the man's face paled, then flushed. His hands trembled as he removed the wrapping. For several moments he sat staring at the little disk of yellow metal, turning it over and over in his fingers. Why it should affect Monsieur Dubois so strongly Hugh could not imagine. It was obvious that the white-haired man was trying to control some strong emotion. Without a word to the boy, he laid the disk down, and Hugh could see that it was a gold coin. Taking the bark sheets from the table where he had laid them, Dubois scanned them rapidly, then turned again to the beginning and read them slowly and intently. When he raised his eyes, Hugh was surprised to see that they were glistening with tears. His voice trembled as he spoke. **[299]**

"You cannot know, Hugh Beaupré, what a great service you have done me. It is impossible that I can ever repay you. You do not understand, you cannot, until I explain. But first I would ask you a question or two, if you will pardon me."

"Of course," replied Hugh wonderingly. "I shall be glad to answer anything that I can, Monsieur Dubois."

"Well then, about that half-brother of yours, what sort of a lad is he?"

"As fine a lad as you will find anywhere, Monsieur," Hugh answered promptly. "When I first received his letter, I was prejudiced against him, I admit." He flushed and hesitated.

Dubois nodded understandingly. "But now?" he questioned.

"Now I love him as if he were my *whole* brother," Hugh said warmly. "We went through much together, he saved me from a horrible fate, and I learned to know him well. A finer, truer-hearted fellow than Blaise never existed."

Again Dubois nodded, apparently well satisfied. "And his mother?" **[300]**

"I was surprised at his mother," Hugh replied with equal frankness. "She is Indian, of course,

but without doubt a superior sort of Indian. For one thing she was clean and neatly dressed. She is very good-looking too, her voice is sweet, her manner quiet, and she certainly treated me kindly. She loves Blaise dearly, and,—I think—she really loved my father."

Once more Monsieur Dubois nodded, a light of pleasure in his dark eyes. "I asked," he said abruptly, "because, you see, she is my daughter."

"Your daughter? But she is an Indian!"

"Only half Indian, but no wonder you are surprised. I will explain."

Monsieur Dubois then told the wondering boy how, about thirty-eight years before, when he was still a young man, he had taken to the woods. It was in the period between the conquest of Canada by the English and the outbreak of the American Revolution, long before the formation of the Northwest Fur Company, when the fur traders in the Upper Lakes region were practically all French Canadians and free lances, each doing business for himself. In due time, René Dubois, like most of the others, had married an Indian girl. A daughter was born to them, a pretty baby who had found a very warm spot in the heart of her adventurous father. Before she was two years old, however, he lost her. He had left his wife and child at an Indian village near the south shore of Lake Superior, while he went on one of his trading trips. On his return he found the place deserted, the signs plain that it had been raided by some unfriendly band. There was no law in the Indian country, and in that period, shortly after the so-called French and Indian War, when the Algonquin Indians had sided with the French and the Iroquoian with the English, conditions were more than usually unstable. For years Dubois tried to trace his wife and daughter or learn their fate, but never succeeded.

"And now," he concluded, his voice again trembling with feeling, "you bring me proof that my daughter still lives, that she was the wife of my friend, and that in his son and hers I have a grandson and an heir." Monsieur Dubois took up the gold coin and handed it to Hugh. One face had been filed smooth and on it, cut with some crude tool, were the outlines of a coat-of-arms. "I did that myself," Dubois explained. "It is the arms of my family. When the child was born, I made that and hung it about her neck on a sinew cord." **[301]**

"And Blaise's mother still had it?" exclaimed Hugh.

"No, she had lost it, but your father recovered it. Read the letter yourself." He handed Hugh the bark sheets.

It was an amazing letter. Jean Beaupré merely mentioned how he had found the Indian girl a captive among the Sioux, had bought her, taken her away and married her. No doubt he had told all this to Dubois before. Beaupré had not had the slightest suspicion that his wife was other than she believed herself to be, a full-blooded Ojibwa. She had been brought up by an Ojibwa couple, but in a Sioux raid her supposed father and mother had been killed and she had been **[302]**

captured. Nearly two years before the writing of the letter, Beaupré had happened to receive a gold coin for some service rendered an official of the Northwest Company. His wife had examined the coin with interest, and had said that she herself had once had one nearly like it, the same on one side, she said, but different on the other. She had always worn it on a cord around her neck, but when she was captured, a Sioux squaw had taken it from her. At first Beaupré thought that the thing she had possessed had been one of the little medals sometimes given by a priest to a baptized child, but she had insisted that one side of her medal had been like the coin. Then he remembered that his old comrade Dubois had told of the coin, bearing his coat-of-arms, worn by his baby daughter. Jean Beaupré said nothing of his suspicions to his wife, but he resolved to find out, if he could, whether she was really the daughter of René Dubois. On this quest, he twice visited the Sioux country west of the Mississippi. The autumn before the opening of this story, he learned of the whereabouts of the very band that had held his wife a captive. After sending, by an Indian messenger, a letter to Hugh at the Sault, asking the boy to wait there until his father joined him in the spring, Beaupré left at once for the interior. He was fortunate enough to find the Sioux band and the chief from whom he had bought the captive more than fifteen years before. The chief, judiciously bribed and threatened, had sought for the medal and had found it in the possession of a young girl who said her mother had given it to her. When Beaupré questioned the old squaw, she admitted that she had taken the coin from the neck of an Ojibwa captive years before. How the Ojibwa couple who had brought the girl up had come by her, Beaupré was unable to find out, but he had no doubt that she was really the daughter of René Dubois. He resolved to send the proof of his wife’s parentage to Montreal by his elder son, if Hugh had really come to the Sault and had waited there. If Hugh was not there, the elder Beaupré would go to the city himself. It was plain that he had not received either of the letters Hugh had sent after him, nor had Hugh ever got the one his father had written him. Fearing that if any accident should happen to him, the coin and the story might never reach his old comrade, Beaupré had written down the tale and prepared the packet. Even in his dying condition he remembered it and told Blaise to go get it. Evidently, when he discovered he was in danger of falling into Ohrante’s hands, he had feared to keep the packet with him, so had hidden it with the furs. If he escaped the giant, he could return for both furs and packet, but if the coin came into Ohrante’s possession it would be lost forever. The letter, however, said nothing of all that. It had undoubtedly been written before Beaupré set out on his home journey.

[303] With deep emotion Hugh deciphered the fine, faint writing on the bark sheets. He was glad from the bottom of his heart that he and Blaise had been able to recover the packet and deliver it to the man to whom it meant so much. If Hugh had had any dreams of some strange fortune coming to himself through the packet, he forgot them when Monsieur Dubois began to speak again.

[304] “I shall go to the Kaministikwia at once, if I can find means of reaching there this autumn. At

least I shall go as far as I can and finish the journey in the spring. Wherever my daughter and my grandson are, I will seek them out. I have no other heirs and Blaise, my grandson, shall take the place of a son. I will bring them back to Montreal, or, if that does not seem best, I will remain in the upper country with them. Whether my grandson chooses to live his life in civilization or in the wilderness, I can provide him with the means to make that life both successful and useful."

The elder brother's heart was glowing with happiness. He knew that his own mother's people would help him to a start in life, and now his younger brother, his half-breed,—no, quarter-breed—brother Blaise would have a chance too. Hugh had no doubt that Blaise Beaupré would make the most of his opportunities.

It only remains to say that when René Dubois saw the mother of Blaise, her resemblance to himself and to her own mother thoroughly convinced him that there had been no mistake. He more than fulfilled to both his daughter and his grandson the promises Hugh had heard him make.

THE END

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