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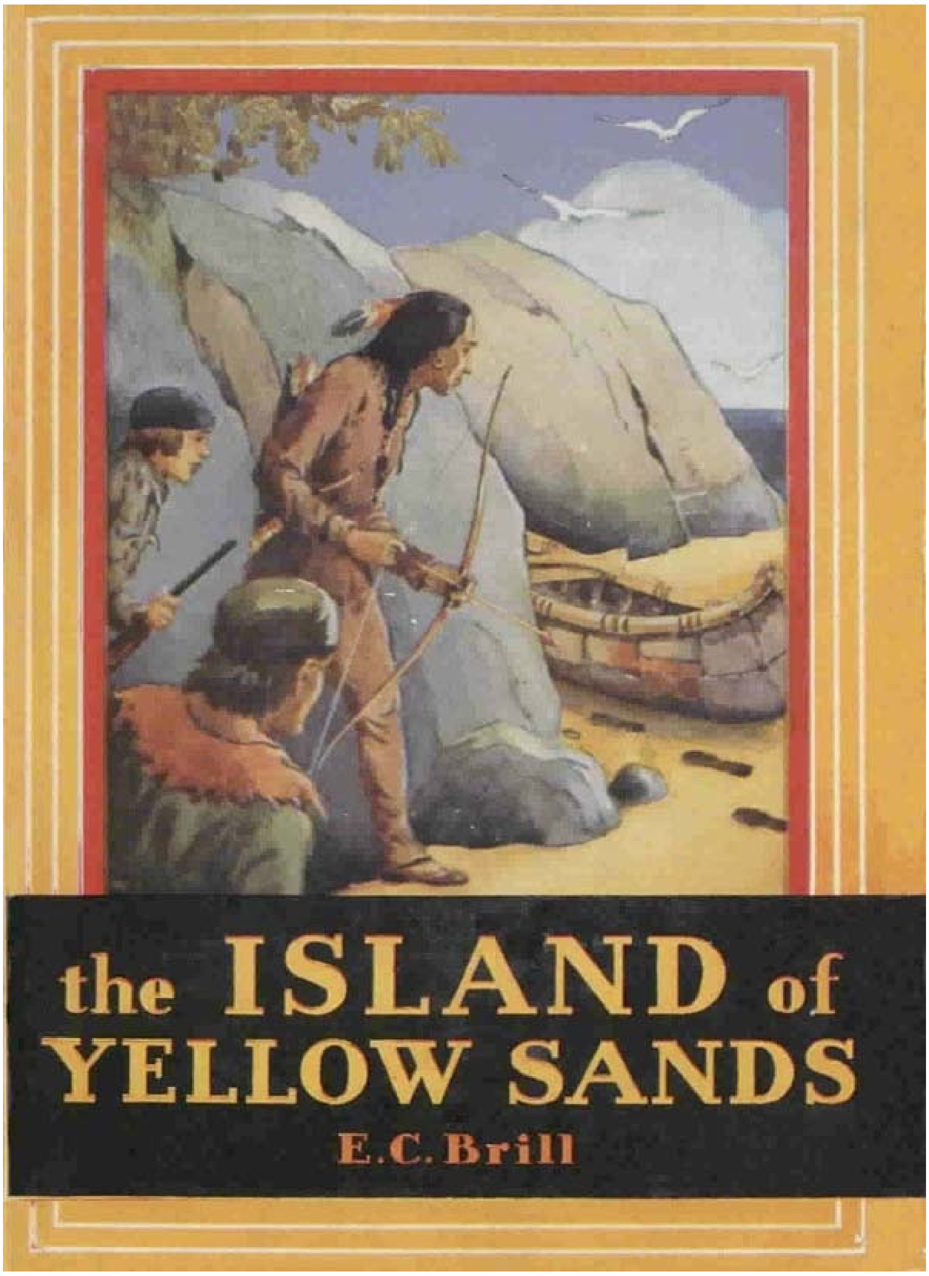

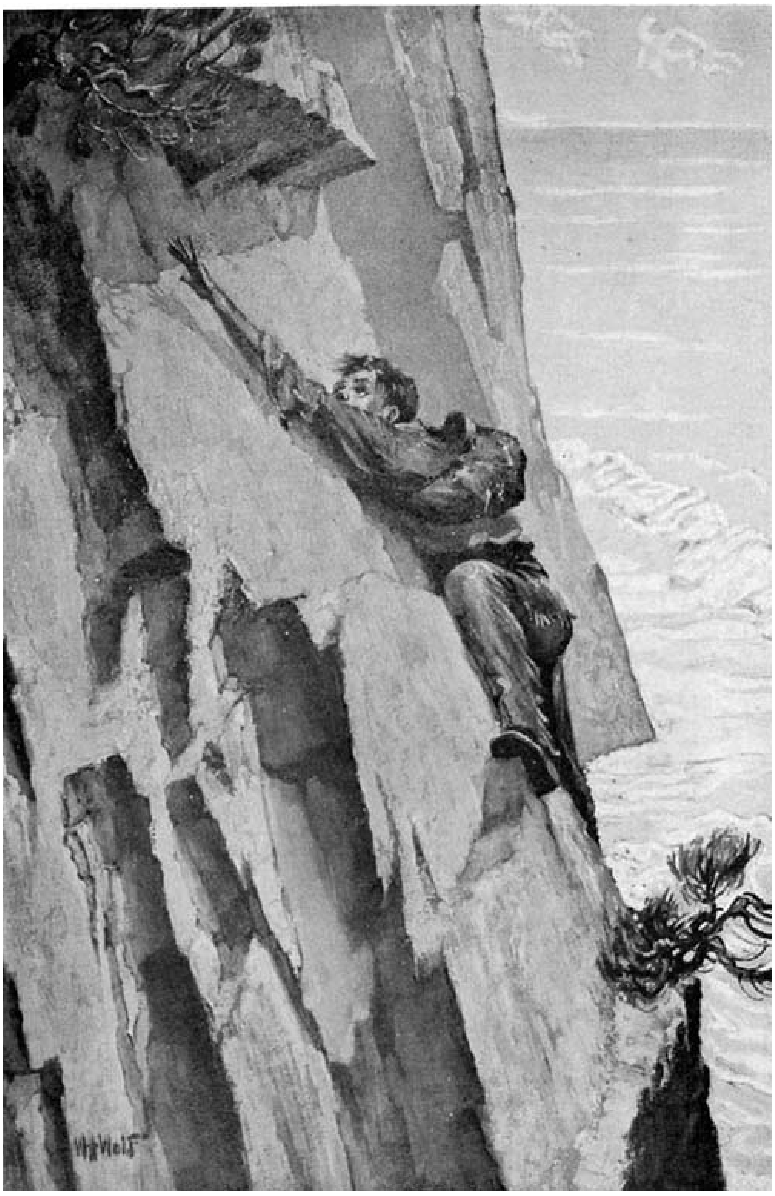

"IT WAS A DANGEROUS ASCENT."
"The Island of Yellow Sands." *See* page 120

The Island of Yellow Sands

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 SAND

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The Island of Yellow Sands

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The Island of Yellow Sands

I

THE ISLE WITH THE GOLDEN SANDS

“My white brother speaks wisdom.”

The two boys were startled. The red-haired one, who had been lying on the ground, scrambled to his feet. The other, a wiry dark-skinned lad, sprang from his seat on a spruce log and seized the newcomer by the hand.

“Etienne, Nangotook,” he cried, “how came you here?”

“Even as you, little brother, over those great waters.” The Indian made a gesture towards the lake, which gleamed between the long point and the island that protected the bay of the Grande Portage from wind and waves. “I have listened to the words of this other white brother and found them good,” he added, with a grave glance at the surprised face of the red-haired boy. “He would deal justly with my people as with his own.”

“That would he, even as I would,” the dark lad exclaimed. “He is my good friend and comrade Ronald Kennedy of Montreal. And this, Ronald,” he added, completing the introduction, “is Nangotook, the Flame, called by the good fathers Etienne, friend of my father and of my own childhood.”

The greetings over, the Indian seated himself on the log beside Jean. “And will my little brother be a trader to steal the wits of the Indian and take his furs away from him?” he asked.

“Not I, Nangotook, unless I can be an honest one and give the trapper and hunter fair return for his pelts. Though,” Jean added more thoughtfully, “I am eager indeed to gain gold, and I know not how it is to be done except through trade with the savages.”

“Gold,” said the Ojibwa thoughtfully. “White men would do all things for gold. Why is my brother Jean in need of it? What could gold give him better than this?” He stretched out his arm with a sweeping gesture that embraced the water, still glowing with the soft light of the afterglow, and the rocky wooded shores.

“It would give back the land and the house on the beautiful St. Lawrence, the house where my father was born,” Jean answered, his face softening. “You know the place, Etienne, and you know how my father loves it. And now, if he had but the money, he could buy it back, but it is a great sum and he has it not.”

The Indian nodded in silence. After a moment, fixing his dark eyes on Jean’s, he said slowly, “How then if some man should lead my brother and his comrade with hair like the maple leaf before it falls, to a place where they can gather much gold and load with it many canoes?”

The two boys stared at him.

“You are making game of us,” cried Jean indignantly.

“Nay, little brother. I will tell you the story.” And the Indian settled himself more comfortably on the log.

“Among my people,” he began, “a tale is told of an island lying far out in the wide waters. On that island is a broad beach of sand, a beach unlike any other, for the sand is of a yellow more bright and shining than the birch leaf when the frost has touched it.”

“Gold?” queried Jean. “I have heard that there is gold on the shores and islands of this lake, but no white man has found it.”

“As the story is told among my people,” Nangotook continued, without heeding the interruption, “many summers ago three braves were driven by the wind on the shore of that island. They loaded their canoe with the sand, and started to paddle away. Then a man, as tall as a pine tree and with a face like the lightning in its fierceness, appeared on the sands and commanded them to bring back the gold. They did not heed, and he waded into the water, and, growing greater and more terrible at every step, gained on them swiftly. Then they were sick with fear, and agreed to return to the land and empty out the yellow sand they had stolen. When not one grain remained in the canoe, the manito of the sands allowed them to go.”

“That is the story of the Island of Yellow Sands,” said Jean, as Nangotook paused. “I recall it now. I heard it in childhood. Many have sought that island, but none has found it. Do you mean that you know where it is and can lead us there?”

The Ojibwa nodded. “My grandfather saw the island once many summers ago, when a storm had driven him far out in the lake. But the wind was wrong and the waves were rolling high on the beach, so he could not land. He was close enough to see the sands gleaming in the sunlight. He knew them for the same as the piece of yellow metal a medicine man of his clan had taken from a Sioux prisoner. The Sioux had bought it from one whose people lived far towards the setting sun. That metal was what the white men call gold, and are always seeking. I heard my grandfather tell the tale while the winter snow whistled around the lodge.”

“And he told you how to reach the island?” asked Ronald. “Why did he not go back and bring away some of the gold?”

"He had no need of the yellow sands, and he feared the manito that was said to guard them."

"And do not you fear the manito?" Jean questioned.

The Indian shook his head. "I am a Christian," he said proudly, "and the good fathers have taught me that I need fear no evil spirits, if I remain true in my heart to the great Father above. Then too," he added in a lower voice, "I have a mighty charm," his hand touched the breast of his deerskin tunic, "which protects me from all the spirits of the waters and the islands."

The two lads were not surprised at this strange intermingling of savage superstition and civilized religion. Such a combination did not seem as contradictory to them, in that superstitious age, as it would to a modern boy. Jean merely replied very seriously that he had heard that the golden sands of the island were guarded, not only by the spirit himself, but by gigantic serpents, that came up out of the water, and fierce birds and beasts which, at the command of the manito, attacked the rash man who attempted to land.

At that the Indian smiled and, leaning forward from his log, said in a low voice, "Nay, little brother, many tales are told that are not true. May not the red men wish to keep the white men from the islands of this great water, and so tell them tales to frighten them away? Is it not right that we should keep something to ourselves, not the yellow sands only but the red metal that comes from the Isle Minong? My brother has heard tales of Minong, some white men call it the Isle Royale. Yet I have been there and others with me, and after we had sacrificed to the manito of the island, we carried away pieces of red metal, and no evil befell us."

"My uncle," remarked Ronald, "told me of a man he knew, Alexander Henry, once a partner in the Company, and even now connected with it, I believe, who went in search of the Island of Yellow Sands. But when he reached it, there were no golden sands at all, only the bones of dead caribou."

"He never reached the island," said Nangotook scornfully. "Those who guided him misled him, and let him think he had been to the right place. The true Island of Yellow Sands is many days' journey from the island where he landed."

"And you know where it is?"

"I know in what part of the waters it lies, where to leave the shore and how to head my canoe," the Ojibwa replied confidently. "If my brothers fear not a hard and dangerous journey, I will take them there. I know not whether the charm I bear will protect them also," he added more doubtfully.

"We are willing to risk that," Ronald answered promptly. "We're not fearing a little danger and hardship, if there is chance of reaching the island with the sands of gold."

"It is not that we fear to go," put in Jean, "but how can we find an opportunity? We cannot ask for leave from the fleet, for then we must tell our purpose, and that would never do."

"No," Ronald agreed, "we must be keeping our plans secret, so we may be the first to land. Then the gold will be ours by right of discovery. 'Tis not likely we could obtain leave anyway, if we asked for it, whatever our purpose, and——"

He was interrupted by the Indian, who made a gesture of silence. Glancing about, the boys saw several men in the scarlet caps and sashes of canoemen, approaching along the shore. Nangotook rose from the log.

"To-morrow, after the sun has gone to rest, I will speak to my brothers again," he said in a low voice. "Let them be at this spot." Without waiting for a reply, he slipped swiftly and silently away among the trees.

Before the canoemen drew near enough to speak to them, the boys were making their way towards the post. They kept back from the shore, in the dusk of the woods, that they might not have to encounter the newcomers, who appeared to be strangers to them.

Jean Havard and Ronald Kennedy had come to the Grande Portage, on the northwest shore of Lake Superior, as canoemen in the service of the Northwest Fur Company. Ronald's uncle was a partner in the Company, and the boy had been ambitious to follow the life of the fur-trader. Both he and Jean had found the long trip from the Sault interesting and well worth while, in spite of its hardships and strenuous toil. They were outdoor lads, with a plentiful share of the hardihood and adventurous spirit of the outdoor men of their time. Since reaching the Portage, however, they had begun to question whether they really wished to make fur-trading their life-work. Ronald, especially, an honest, straightforward Scot with a strong sense of fair play, had been sickened and roused to indignation by many of the tales told by men from the north and west who had come to the Portage with their loads of furs. It seemed to the boy that most of the traders cared for nothing but gain and were far from honest in their methods. They boasted of giving liquor to the Indians, stealing their wits away, and obtaining their furs, the earnings of a whole winter's work and hardship, for next to nothing. To the boys this seemed a miserable, heartless way of doing business. Both were eager for the life of the explorer. They longed to push through the wilderness and see strange lands, but the regular work of the fur-trader, carried on as it was by most of these men, had lost its attractiveness.

Ronald, as well as Jean, was poor and had his own way to make. He knew that his uncle had planned to get him into the Northwest Company’s permanent service. From a practical point of view the opportunity would be a good one. He would have a chance to advance. He might even become some day a member of the Company, and make a fortune. But he hated the idea of being compelled to use the methods which seemed a matter of course to most of the “northmen”. He had been vigorously expressing his disgust with the whole sordid business, when Nangotook had interrupted him. The Indian had made it plain that he had been listening to the boy’s remarks and had approved of them.

The Ojibwa’s extraordinary proposition had put the rights and wrongs of the fur trade quite out of the two lads’ heads for the time being. They were fired with a desire to go in quest of the wonderful island. It might be a mere myth indeed, but they were willing to believe that it was not. Nangotook’s grandfather had seen it, and Jean declared that he had never known Nangotook to lie. In those days, even in the last decade of the eighteenth century, very little was known about the islands of Lake Superior. The great central expanse of the lake was unexplored. Who could tell what wonders it might contain?

II

THE GRANDE PORTAGE

That night and the next day the two lads’ heads were full of the Island of Yellow Sands. They wanted to be alone to discuss the Indian’s tale, but found it impossible to avoid their companions. Moreover they had few idle moments, for the Northwest Fur Company’s station was a busy place that July day in 179—. Nearly a thousand men were gathered at the post, and there was much work to be done.

The Bay of the Grande Portage, where the station was located, is on the northwest shore of Lake Superior, a few miles south of the Pigeon River. The river forms a part of the line between the United States and the Dominion of Canada. Although the peace treaty that followed the Revolution had been signed, defining the boundary, the Northwest Company, a Canadian organization, still maintained its trading post on United States ground. The place had proved a convenient and satisfactory spot for the chief station, that marked the point of departure from Lake Superior for the country north and west.

Separated from a much larger bay to the northeast by a long point of land, and further cut off from the main lake by an outlying, wooded island, Grande Portage was well screened from all winds except the south. The land at the head of the bay formed a natural amphitheatre and had been cleared of woods. On one side of the open ground, underneath a hill more than three hundred feet high, with higher hills rising beyond, a cedar stockade walled in a rectangular space some twenty-four rods wide by thirty long. Within the stockade were the quarters of the men in charge of the post, clerks, servants, artisans and visiting traders and members of the Company, as well as the buildings where furs, supplies and goods for trade were stored and business transacted. There also was the great dining hall where proprietors, clerks, guides and interpreters messed together.

Outside the stockade were grouped tents and upturned canoes, supported on paddles and poles. The tents were the temporary homes of the “northmen,” the men who went to the far north and west for furs. The “comers and goers” or “pork eaters,” as the canoemen who made the trip between Montreal and the Portage, but did not go on to the west, were called, slept under their canoes. In that queer town of tents and boats, men were constantly coming and going; clerks and other employees from the fort; painted and befeathered Indians, many of them accompanied by squaws and children; and French-Canadians and half-breed voyageurs, strikingly clothed in blanket or leather tunics, leggings and moccasins of tanned skins, and scarlet sashes and caps.

Offshore a small sailing vessel of about fifty tons burden lay at anchor. This boat was to take a cargo of pelts back across the lake, but the main dependence of the Company was placed upon the great fleet of canoes. Other smaller canoes were arriving daily from the northwest or setting out in that direction, the route being up the Rivière aux Tourtres, now known as Pigeon River, the English translation of the French name. The mouth of the stream is about five miles northeast of Grande Portage Bay, and the falls and rapids near the outlet were so many and dangerous that boats could not be paddled or poled through them. So the canoes from the west had to be unloaded several miles above the mouth of the river, and the packages of furs carried on the backs of men over a hard nine-mile portage to the post, while provisions and articles of trade were taken back to the waiting canoes in the same way. This was the long or great portage that gave the place its name.

Busy with their work, and surrounded almost constantly by the other voyageurs, the boys had no opportunity to discuss the prospect of reaching the Island of Yellow Sands, but Jean found a chance to answer some of Ronald’s questions about the tall Ojibwa. The Indian’s gratitude and devotion to Jean’s father dated from fifteen years back, when the elder Havard had saved him from being put to death by white traders at the Sault de Ste. Marie, for a crime he had not committed. Convinced of Nangotook’s innocence, Havard had induced the angry men to delay the execution of their sentence, and had sought out and brought to justice the real offender, a renegade half-breed. For that service the Indian had vowed that his life belonged to his white brother. The Ojibwa and the Frenchman had become fast friends, for Nangotook, or Etienne, as the French priests, in whose mission school he had been trained, had christened him, was one of the higher type of Indians, possessing most of the better and few of the worse traits of his tribe. He visited Havard at his home on the St. Lawrence, and there became the devoted friend of little Jean, then a child of three.

Since that first visit, Nangotook had appeared at the Havard home a number of times, after irregular intervals of absence, sometimes of months, again of years. Although, until the night before, it had been more than four years since Jean had seen him, the Ojibwa had apparently not forgotten either his gratitude to the elder Havard or his affection for the boy. That gratitude and affection had led him to offer to guide the two lads to the wonderful island. Jean and his father needed gold, so Nangotook intended that they should have gold, if it was in his power to help them to it. Ronald was Jean’s friend, and the Indian was willing to include him also. Moreover what he had overheard of the Scotch boy’s remarks about the way some of the traders treated the Indians had pleased Nangotook. He had taken the teachings of the missionary priests seriously and had grasped at least a little of their meaning. By nature moderate and self-controlled, he realized the disasters that were coming upon his people through the physical degradation, idleness and other evils that followed overindulgence in the white man’s liquor. So Ronald’s disgust at the unscrupulousness of many of the traders in their dealings with the savages had met with his approval, and had made the Indian the lad’s friend.

It was nearly sunset when the two boys slipped away from the camp to the secluded spot where they were to meet Etienne. Seating themselves on the fallen tree trunk, they began at once to talk of the subject uppermost in their thoughts. In a week or two the canoes would be ready to start back around the shore of the lake to the Sault, and thence to Montreal, where they would arrive late in September. Jean and Ronald, however, were not obliged to return the whole distance, although, up to the night before, they had intended to do so. They had spent the previous winter at the Sault de Ste. Marie, the falls of the river St. Mary which connects Lake Superior with Lake Huron. Jean had been staying with a French family there, friends of his father, while Ronald, who had made the trip from Montreal with his uncle in the autumn, had remained, after the latter’s return, as a volunteer helper to the Company’s agent at the Sault. Before pledging him to the Company’s service for a term of years, his uncle had wished him to learn whether he really liked the business of fur-trading. When, in the spring, the canoe fleet from Montreal had arrived at the Sault, it had been short handed. Two men had been killed and several seriously injured in an accident on the way. So it happened that Jean and Ronald, expert canoemen and eager to make the Superior trip, had been engaged with three others. Their contracts were only for the voyage from the Sault to the Grande Portage and back again to the Sault, and they were under no obligation to go on with the fleet to Montreal.

Whether there would be time, before cold weather and winter storms set in, to come back to the lake and join the Indian in a search for the Island of Yellow Sands, they could not be sure until they had consulted him. They hoped ardently that they could make the attempt that year, for who could tell what might happen before another spring? As Ronald pointed out, Etienne alone knew how to reach the island. If anything should go wrong with him, they would have no guide. Moreover, in the interval, some other white man might discover the place. Indeed Etienne, though Jean thought that unlikely, might take it into his head to lead some one else there.

They were discussing this question, when, just as the sun was sinking, the Indian joined them. It soon became evident that he was bent on leading them on the adventure, and they were quite as eager to follow him. He seemed certain that there would be ample time, unless they were delayed by unusually bad weather, to make at least one trip from the Sault to the mysterious island and back, before winter set in. He would furnish a small canoe, and would bargain at the trading post for the supplies they would need. He was well known at the Sault, and his arrival there would excite no comment. But he cautioned them to keep their plans secret, lest others should forestall them in the discovery of the gold. They must disappear quietly and join their guide at a spot agreed upon, several miles from the little settlement. As rapidly as possible they would paddle along the north shore of Lake Superior to the place where they must strike out into the open lake. The voyage from shore to island could be undertaken only in the best of weather, but it could be made, he assured them, in a few hours. After they had loaded their canoe with as much sand as it would carry, they would return to the shelter of the shore, and make their way back to the eastern end of the lake. Not far from the Sault he knew a safe, well hidden spot where they could secrete the bulk of their precious cargo, until they could find an opportunity to return to the island for more.

Any scruples the lads might have felt at leaving the Sault without letting their friends know where they were going, were soon overcome by the lure of the adventure as well as of the gold itself. They comforted their consciences with the thought that, once they had found the yellow sands, they would make everything right by taking Jean’s father and Ronald’s uncle into confidence and partnership. Then they would secure, or build, a small sailing vessel, and bring away from the island all the gold they would ever need. M. Havard could buy back the old home on the St. Lawrence that financial reverses had forced him to lose. Jean glowed with the thought of the happiness his father and mother would feel at returning to their dearly loved and much mourned home. Ronald was an orphan, the uncle in Montreal being his only near relative, and the latter was wealthy and not in need of help. But the boy had already planned a great future for himself. First he would go to college in Montreal and perhaps even in England for a time, until he learned all the things an explorer ought to know. Then he would make up an expedition to the north and west, and, not being dependent on trade for gain, would penetrate to new lands and would add, not only to his own glory and renown, but to that of his country as well.

After their plans had been perfected, so far as they could be at that time, Nangotook left them, but the two lads lingered to discuss their hopes and dreams. As they were sitting on the log, watching the moonlight on the peaceful waters of the bay, and talking in low but eager voices, Jean's keen ears caught the sound of a snapping twig and a slight rustle among the trees behind him. He rose quickly to his feet and peered into the shadows, but could distinguish nothing that could have made the sounds. Ronald also took alarm. They ceased their conversation, and slipped quietly back among the trees and bushes. In the darkness they could find no trace of anything disturbing, but the thread of their thoughts had been broken, and they felt strangely uneasy. With one accord they turned in the direction of the camp, and made their way towards it without speaking. As they approached the edge of the clearing, they saw ahead of them the dark figure of a man slip out from among the trees and go swiftly, but with an awkward gait, across the open. His stiff ankle and out-turning right foot betrayed him.

"Le Forgeron Tordu," exclaimed Ronald. "Do you suppose he was listening to us?"

"I fear it," answered Jean. "We were fools not to be more cautious. I would give much to know just what he overheard."

"He may not have been listening at all," Ronald returned. "Perhaps he was merely passing through the woods and didn't hear us, or paid no heed even if he caught the sound of our voices. Unless he were close by he couldn't have understood, for we were speaking softly."

Jean shook his head doubtfully. "I hope he heard nothing," he said. "There is not another man in the fleet I would so fear to have know our plans. He is not to be trusted for one moment. There is nothing evil he would shrink from, if he thought it to his advantage."

"Well," was Ronald's answer, "he's not fond of you and me, that is certain, but what harm can he do? Since Etienne left, I am sure we have not been saying anything about the island itself or how to reach it. Indeed he told us little enough. He merely said it lies south of a point on the north shore, the Rock of the Beaver he called it, but he didn't tell us where on the north shore that rock is. Have you ever heard of such a place, Jean?"

The French lad shook his head, then said with an air of relief, "It is true Le Forgeron can have learned nothing of importance, if he has been listening. He was not near when Etienne was there or Etienne would have discovered him. Trust Nangotook not to let an enemy creep up on him without his knowing it. But we must be more careful in the future."

The camp was ruddy with the light of fires and noisy with the voices of men, talking, laughing, singing, quarreling. Many of the voyageurs were the worse for too much liquor, which flowed far too freely among the canoemen. But the canoe where the boys lodged was near the edge of the camp, and they were able to avoid the more noisy and boisterous groups.

The night was fine, and they had no need of shelter. Wrapping themselves in their blankets, they stretched out, not under the canoe, but in its shadow, a little way from the fire. Around the blaze the rest of the crew were gathered, listening to the tale that one of the Frenchmen was telling with much animation and many gestures. Ordinarily the boys would have paused to hear the story, for they usually enjoyed sitting about the camp-fire to listen to the tales and join in the songs. They had no taste for the excesses and more boisterous merry-making of many of the men and youths who were their companions, but, as both boys were plucky, good-natured, and always willing to do their share of the work, their temperate and quiet ways did them no harm with most of their rough fellows, and they were by no means unpopular. That night, however, they took no interest in song or story. Their minds were too full of the fascinating adventure in which they had enlisted.

III

RONALD MAKES AN ENEMY

During the days that passed before their departure from the Portage, the two lads saw Etienne only twice more and then for but a few minutes. The last of the northmen arrived, the portaging was completed, the furs sorted and made into packages of ninety to one hundred pounds each, and everything was ready for the homeward trip.

One fine morning, when the sky was blue and the breeze light, the first canoes of the great return fleet put out from shore. The birch canoes of the traders were not much like the small pleasure craft we are familiar with to-day. Frail looking boats though they were, each was between thirty and forty feet long, and capable of carrying, including the weight of the men that formed the crew, about four tons. In each canoe were a foreman and a steersman, skilled men at higher wages than the others and with complete authority over the middlemen. The foreman was the chief officer of the boat, always on the lookout to direct the course and passage, but he shared responsibility with the steersman in the stern. Three or four boats made up a brigade, and each brigade had a guide who was in absolute command.

The long, slender, graceful canoes, picturesque in themselves, were filled with even more picturesque canoemen: Indians, French half-breeds, many of them scarcely distinguishable from their full-blooded Indian brothers, and white men, French-Canadians for the most part, in pointed scarlet caps that contrasted strongly with their swarthy, sun-bronzed faces. Singing boat songs, the men dipped their paddles with swift and perfect unison and rhythm, and the canoes slipped over the quiet water as smoothly and easily as if they were themselves alive. The clear depths of the lake reflected the deep blue of the sky, while the rocky shores, crowned or covered to the water's edge with dark evergreens and bright-leaved birches, made a fitting background.

The canoes of each brigade kept as close together as possible, but all the brigades did not start at the same time. When the last one was ready to put off, the first was apt to be a number of days and many miles ahead. In calm weather the canoes, though heavily loaded, made good speed, four miles an hour being considered satisfactory progress. The trips to and from the Sault were always made as rapidly as wind and waves would permit, but the number of days required depended on the weather encountered. The birch canoes could not plow through the middle of the lake as the steamers of to-day do, but were obliged to skirt the shore and take advantage of its shelter. The daring voyageurs often took chances that would seem reckless to us, and paddled their frail boats through seas that would have swamped or destroyed them, had they not been handled with wonderful skill by the experienced Canadians and Indians. But there were always periods of storm and rough weather when the boats and their precious cargoes could not be trusted to the mercy of the waters. Then the canoemen had to remain in camp on shore or island, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for days. During the outward trip delays had not disturbed Jean and Ronald, but had been enjoyed as welcome periods of rest from the hard and incessant labor of paddling. On the return journey, however, the two were all impatience.

On the way out the two lads had traveled in the same canoe, but for the trip back, they were assigned, much to their disgust, to different boats. It did not add to Ronald's satisfaction to find that he had been placed in the same canoe with the man whom he had suspected of listening when he and Jean had been talking over their plans. Le Forgeron Tordu was the steersman. The foreman was Benoît Gervais, Benoît le Gros or Big Benoît he was usually called, a merry giant of a Frenchman, with a strain of Indian blood, who, in spite of his usual good nature, could be trusted to keep his crew in admirable control and to handle even the evil tempered Le Forgeron. The latter was known far and wide throughout the Indian country. He was always called Le Forgeron, the blacksmith, or in Ojibwa, Awishtoya. His real name no one seemed to know, but the nickname had evidently been given him because of his unusual skill as a metal worker. The epithet "tordu" or "twisted" referred to his deformity, his right leg from the knee down being twisted outward, and his ankle stiff. His nose also was twisted to one side, and there was an ugly scar on his chin. It was said that these disfigurements were the marks of the tortures he had suffered, when scarcely more than a boy, at the hands of the Iroquois.

Skilled smith though he was, Le Forgeron Tordu did not choose to settle down and work at his trade. Occasionally he took employment for a short period at one of the trading posts or as a voyageur. He had tremendous physical strength and far more intelligence than the average canoeman, but his violence, ugly temper, and treacherous craftiness made him a dangerous employee or companion. Most of the time he lived with the Indians, among whom he had the reputation of a great medicine man or magician. Yet he professed to be of pure Norman French blood, and did not have the appearance of a half-breed, though cruel enough in disposition for an Iroquois.

For the first two days everything went well with the brigade to which the boys belonged, for the skies were blue and the winds light. To make the most of the good weather the men paddled long hours and slept short ones. On the beaches where they camped, after they had made their fires and boiled their kettles, they needed no shelter but their blankets wrapped about them, as they lay stretched out under the stars.

The two lads' muscles had been hardened on the outward trip, and they were in too much haste to reach the Sault to complain of the long hours of work. Neither did they have any fault to find with the food, monotonous enough as such meals would seem to boys of to-day. The fare of the voyageurs consisted almost entirely of corn mush. The corn had been prepared by boiling in lye to remove the outer coating of the kernels, which were then washed, crushed and dried. This crushed corn was very much like what is now called hominy, an Indian name. It was mixed with a portion of fat and boiled in kettles hung on sticks over the fire. When time and weather permitted, nets and lines were set at night and taken up in the morning, supplying the canoemen with fish, but there was never any time for hunting or gathering berries, except when bad weather or head winds forced the voyageurs to remain on shore.

The third day of the trip a sudden storm compelled the brigade to seek the refuge of a sheltered bay. The two canoes in which the boys traveled were beached nearly half a mile apart. During the storm, which lasted into the night, the lads were unable to get together. The next morning the sky was clear again, but a violent northwest wind prevented the launching of the boats. Since they could not go on, the canoemen were at liberty to follow their own devices. Some of them sat around the fires they had kindled in the lea of rocks and bushes, mended their moccasins and other clothing, and told long tales of their adventures and experiences. Others wandered about the beach and the adjacent woods, seeking for ripe raspberries or hunting squirrels, hares and wood pigeons. A group of Indian wigwams on a point was visited by a few of the men, who bartered with the natives for fish, maple sugar and deerskin moccasins.

For Ronald the Indian fishing camp had no particular attraction, and he started to walk around the bay to the place where Jean’s canoe was beached. On the way he climbed a bluff a little back from the water, and lingered to eat his fill of the ripe wild raspberries that grew along the top. As he pushed his way through the brush, he heard the sound of voices from the beach below and recognized the harsh, rough tones of Le Forgeron. Just why he turned and went to the edge of the bluff in the direction of the voices, Ronald did not know. Instinct seemed to tell him that the Twisted Blacksmith was up to some mischief. Parting the bushes, he looked down on an Indian lodge. He was surprised to see a wigwam in that place, for it was at least a quarter of a mile from the point where the temporary village stood. Near the wigwam Le Forgeron was sitting cross-legged on a blanket, smoking at his ease, while a squaw, bending over a small cooking fire, was preparing food for him, venison, the boy’s nose told him, as the savory odor rose on the wind.

“Make haste there, thou daughter of a pig,” the Blacksmith was saying roughly, “and take care that the meat is not burned or underdone or I will burn thee alive in thine own fire.”

The Indian woman shrank back as if frightened, and, as she turned her head, Ronald saw that she was old and withered, and, from the way she groped about, he judged her to be nearly if not quite blind. She made a motion to withdraw from the fire the piece of venison she was broiling on a wooden spit, that rested on two sticks driven into the ground, but, whether through fear or blindness, she struck the stick with her hand instead of grasping it, and spit and meat went into the fire.

Le Forgeron uttered an ugly oath and sprang to his feet. “I’ll teach you how to broil meat, old witch,” he cried. Before Ronald could free himself from the bushes, the Blacksmith had seized the frightened old woman and had thrust her moccasined foot and bare ankle, for she wore no leggings, into the fire. She gave a scream of pain and terror, and Ronald, without pausing to think, launched himself over the edge of the bluff in a flying leap. He landed on the sand close to where the old squaw was struggling in Le Forgeron’s grasp, and brought a stout stick, that he had used a few moments before to kill a snake, down on the Blacksmith’s neck and shoulder. Surprised at the attack, Le Forgeron flung the squaw from him and turned on the boy, reaching for his knife as he did so. He made a quick lunge at Ronald, who jumped aside just in time and seized him by the arm that held the knife. At the same moment he heard a shout from beyond the lodge and recognized Jean’s voice. Ronald, though a strong and sturdy lad, was no match for Le Forgeron, but he hung on to the Frenchman’s right arm like a bulldog. The Blacksmith flung his left arm out and around the boy’s waist, to crush him in his iron grasp. Ronald heard Jean’s shout close by, and then, just as he thought his body would be crushed in the Blacksmith’s terrible grip, there came from the top of the bluff a roar like that of a mad bull, and Benoît le Gros launched his great body down on the struggling pair as if to bury them both.

But Big Benoît did not bury Ronald. The boy went down on the sand, found himself loose, rolled completely over and picked himself up, just in time to see the giant foreman hurl his steersman into the breakers that were rolling on the beach. Then he strode in after him, seized him by the back of the neck and pulled him out again, dazed, bloody, choking with the water he had swallowed. Le Forgeron Tordu was beaten. There was no fight left in him for the time being, but he was far from being subdued. He cast an ugly look at the two boys, but for the moment he was unable even to swear. With an imperious gesture Big Benoît motioned him to go back down the beach towards camp. Le Forgeron went, but as he passed Ronald he gave him a look so full of vindictive hatred it fairly chilled the lad’s blood. There was no need of voice or words to express the threat of vengeance. That look was enough.

In the meantime the Indian woman had disappeared, and, though the boys sought for her to discover how badly she had been burned and to see if they could do anything to relieve her suffering, they could not find her. When Ronald returned to the camping place of his own crew, he found the brigade guide in conversation with Big Benoît. The boy was summoned to tell his story, and did so in a few words. He admitted having attacked Le Forgeron first and gave his reason. Benoît added his evidence, for he had seen the Indian woman crawl away and thrust her smoking, blackened moccasin into the water. The guide grunted a malediction upon Le Forgeron, whom he called the “king of fiends,” and dismissed the boy. Later Benoît informed him that he had been transferred to the canoe where Jean was, and added, with a grin, that he was sorry to lose a lad who was not afraid to attack the Blacksmith, but that it was best the two should be separated. “Look to yourself, my son,” he said, laying a kindly hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Le Forgeron does not forget a grudge.”

For two days strong winds prevented the continuance of the journey, but Ronald, having been transferred to the same canoe with Jean, kept clear of Le Forgeron.

The delay vexed the impatient boys, who felt that every lost hour was shortening the time they could give to the search for the strange island. At last, during the night, the wind changed to another quarter and went down, and for the remainder of the voyage the weather was generally favorable. There were several delays, but none so long as the first, and the Sault was reached in fairly good time.

The visits of the brigades were the great events of the year at the trading post of Sault de Ste. Marie. The few whites and half-breeds that formed the little settlement, and most of the Indians of the Ojibwa village near by, were on hand to receive the voyageurs. But Nangotook, who should have been awaiting the boys, was nowhere to be seen.

The Northwest Company’s agent and Jean’s friends had expected the lads to go on to Montreal with the fleet, and the two were hard put to it to find excuses for lingering. The men who had been injured in the accident of the spring before, and who had been left behind to recover, were strong enough to resume their places at the paddles, so the lads’ services were not actually needed, and no pressure was put upon them to go on. As day after day of impatient waiting passed without any sign of their Indian guide, Jean and Ronald began to wonder if they had been foolish to remain behind. Until the prospect of adventure and riches had opened before them, they had not dreamed of spending another winter at the Sault. Even when they had decided not to go on with the fleet, they had hoped that they might accomplish their treasure-seeking trip in time to allow them to return to Montreal or at least to Michilimackinac, under Etienne’s guidance, before winter set in.

IV

LAUNCHED ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE

On the morning of the third day after the departure of the last brigade of the fleet, Etienne appeared at the Sault. At the post he purchased a supply of corn, a piece of fat pork, some ammunition and tobacco and two blankets, and was given credit for them, promising to pay in beaver skins from his next winter’s catch. Of the two lads he took no notice whatever, but his behavior did not surprise them. They knew exactly what was expected of them, and in the afternoon of the day he made his purchases, they left the post quietly. Wishing to give the impression that they were going for a mere ramble, they took no blankets, but each had concealed about him fish lines, hooks, as much ammunition as he could carry comfortably and various other little things. The fact that they were carrying their guns, hunting knives and small, light axes, did not excite suspicion. Game was extremely scarce, especially at that time of year, in the vicinity of the post, the Indians and whites living largely on fish. One of the half-breeds laughed at the boys for going hunting, but they answered good-naturedly that they were not looking for either bears or moose.

While in sight of the post and the Indian camp, the two lads went at a deliberate pace, as if they had no particular aim or purpose, but as soon as a patch of woods had hidden the houses and lodges from view, they increased their speed and made directly for the place where they were to meet Etienne. The spot agreed upon was above the rapids, out of sight of the post, where a thick growth of willows at the river’s edge made an excellent cover. There they found the Ojibwa, in an opening among the bushes, going over the seams of his canoe with a piece of heat-softened pine gum. He grunted a welcome, but was evidently not in a talkative mood, and the boys, knowing how an Indian dislikes to be questioned about his affairs, forbore to ask what had caused his long delay. They had expected to start at once, but Etienne seemed in no hurry. When he had made sure that the birch seams were all water-tight, he settled himself in a half reclining position on the ground, took some tobacco from his pouch, cut it into small particles, rubbed them into powder and filled the bowl of his long-stemmed, red stone pipe. He struck sparks with his flint and steel, and, using a bit of dry fungus as tinder, lighted the tobacco. After smoking in silence for a few minutes, he went to sleep.

“He thinks it best not to start until dark,” whispered Jean to his companion. “Doubtless he is right. We might meet canoes on the river and have to answer questions.”

Ronald nodded, but inaction made him restless, and presently he slipped through the willows and started to make his way along the shore of the river. In a few moments Jean joined him, and they rambled about until the sun was setting. When they returned to the place where Etienne and the canoe were concealed, they found the Indian awake. He had made a small cooking fire and had swung his iron kettle over it. As soon as the water boiled, he stirred in enough of the prepared corn and fat to make a meal for the three of them. While they ate he remained silent and uncommunicative.

Dusk was changing into darkness when the three adventurers launched their canoe. They carried it into the water, and Ronald and Jean held it from swinging around with the current while Nangotook loaded it. To distribute the weight equally he placed the packages of ammunition, tobacco, corn and pork, a birch-bark basket of maple sugar he had provided, the blankets, guns, kettle and other things on poles resting on the bottom and running the entire length of the boat. A very little inequality in the lading of a birch canoe makes it awkward to manage and easy to capsize. When the boat was loaded Ronald held it steady, while the Indian and Jean stepped in from opposite sides, one in the bow, the other in the stern. Ronald took his place in the middle, and they were off up the River Ste. Marie, on the first stage of their adventure.

Where the river narrows opposite Point aux Pins, which to this day retains its French name meaning Pine Point, there was a group of Indian lodges, but the canoe slipped past so quietly in the darkness that even the dogs were not disturbed. The voyageurs rounded the point and, turning to the northwest, skirted its low, sandy shore. The water was still, and in the clear northern night, traveling, as long as they kept out from the shore, was as easy as by daylight.

As they neared Gros Cap, the “Big Cape,” which, on the northern side, marks the real entrance from Ste. Mary’s River into Whitefish Bay, Nangotook, in the bow, suddenly made a low hissing sound, as a warning to the boys, and ceased paddling, holding his blade motionless in the water.

The others instantly did the same, while the Indian, with raised head, listened intently. Evidently he detected some danger ahead, though no unusual sound came to the blunter ears of the white boys.

Suddenly resuming his strokes, Nangotook swerved the canoe to the right, the lads lifting their blades and leaving the paddling to the Ojibwa. As they drew near the shadow of the shore, the boys discovered the reason for the sudden change of direction. Very faintly at first, then with increasing clearness, came the sound of a high tenor voice, singing. It was an old song, brought from old France many years before, and Jean knew it well.

"Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui a le cocur gai;
Tu as le coeur a rire,
Moi je l'ai-t-a pleurer,"

sang the tenor voice. Then other voices joined in the chorus.

"Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

A rough translation would be something like this:

"Sing, nightingale, sing,
Thou who hast a heart of cheer,
Hast alway the heart to laugh,
But I weep sadly many a tear.
  A long, long time have I loved thee,
  Never can I forget my dear."

By the time these words could be heard distinctly, the adventurers had reached a place of concealment in the dark shadow of the tree-covered shore. There they remained silent and motionless, while three canoes, each containing several men, passed farther out on the moonlit water. They were headed for the Sault, and were evidently trappers or traders from somewhere along the north shore, coming in to sell or forward their furs and to buy supplies. Not until the strangers were out of sight and hearing, did the treasure-seekers put out from the shadows again.

At sunrise they made a brief halt at Gros Cap for breakfast, entering a narrow cove formed by a long, rocky point, almost parallel with the shore. There, well hidden from the lake among aspen trees and raspberry and thimbleberry bushes, they boiled their corn and finished the meal with berries. The thimbleberries, which are common on the shores and islands of Superior, are first cousins to the ordinary red raspberry, though the bushes, with their large, handsome leaves and big, white blossoms, look more like blackberry bushes. The berries are longer in shape than raspberries, and those the boys gathered that morning, with the dew on them, were acid and refreshing. Later, when very ripe, they would become insipid to the taste.

Anxious to take advantage of the good weather, the three delayed only long enough for a short rest. The sun was bright and a light breeze rippled the water, when they paddled out from the cove. Jean started a voyageur's song.

"La fill' du roi d'Espagne,
Vogue, marinier, vogue!
Veut apprendre un metier,
  Vogue, marinier!
Veut apprendre un metier.
  Vogue, marinier!

"The daughter of the king of Spain,
Row, canoemen, row!
Some handicraft to learn is fain,
  Row, canoemen!
Some handicraft to learn is fain,
  Row, canoemen."

Ronald joined in the chorus, though his voice, not yet through changing from boy's to man's, was somewhat cracked and quavering. The Indian remained silent, but his paddle kept time to the music.

They were still in the shadow of the cliff of Gros Cap, rising abruptly from the lake, while to the north, eight or ten miles away across the water, they could see a high point of much the same general appearance, Goulais Point, marking the northern and western side of a deep bay. The water was so quiet that, instead of coasting along the shores of Goulais Bay, they risked running straight across to the point, saving themselves about fifteen miles of paddling.

The traverse, as the voyageurs called such a short cut across the mouth of a bay, was made safely, although the wind had risen before the point was gained. They proceeded along Goulais Point, past the mouth of a little bay where they caught a glimpse of Indian lodges, and through a channel between an island and the mainland. The lodges doubtless belonged to Indians who had camped there to fish, but the travelers caught no glimpse of them and were glad to escape their notice.

The wind, which was from the west, was steadily rising, and by the time the point now called Rudderhead was reached, was blowing with such force that the traverse across the wide entrance to Batchewana Bay was out of the question. The voyageurs were obliged to take refuge within the mouth of the bay, running into a horseshoe shaped indentation at the foot of a high hill. There a landing was made and a meal of mush prepared.

By that time the adventurers were far enough away from the Sault not to fear discovery. Any one going out from the post in search of them might easily follow the two boys’ trails to the spot where they had met Etienne. The lads chuckled to think how their aimless wanderings after that, while they were waiting for darkness, might confuse a search party. It was unlikely, however, that any one would worry about them or make any thorough search for them, until several days had passed. They were now fairly launched on their adventure and their hopes were high.

V

THE GRAVE OF NANABOZHO

The sun set clear in a sky glowing with flame-red and orange, but the wind blew harder than ever, and forced the adventurers to camp in the cove. They were tired enough to roll themselves in their blankets as soon as darkness came, for they had not taken a wink of sleep the night before. Protected from the wind, they needed no overhead shelter.

When the complaining cries of the gulls waked the lads at dawn, the wind was still strong, but from a more southerly direction. While the open lake was rough, the bay might be circled without danger, so, without waiting for breakfast, the three launched the canoe. Jean, who was in the stern, baited a hook with a piece of pork, and, fastening the line to his paddle, let the hook, which was held down by a heavy sinker, trail through the water, the motion of the paddle keeping the line moving.

As they were passing a group of submerged rocks at the mouth of a stream, a sudden pull on the line almost jerked the paddle out of his hands. The fish made a hard fight, but Etienne handled the canoe skilfully, giving Jean a chance to play his catch. He finally succeeded in drawing it close enough so that Ronald, leaning over the side of the boat, while the Indian balanced by throwing his body the other way, managed to reach the fish with his knife. It proved to be a lake trout of about six pounds. Landing on a sandy point that ran out from the north shore of the bay, the boys prepared breakfast. Broiled trout was a welcome change from corn, and the three ate every particle that was eatable.

The wind continuing to blow with force, they camped on the point, and spent the rest of the day fishing and hunting. Fishing was fairly successful, but they found no game, not even a squirrel. The only tracks observed were those of a mink at the edge of a stream. An abundance of ripe raspberries helped out their evening meal, however. The wind lessened after sunset, but the lake was too rough for night travel. So the treasure-seekers laid their blankets on the sand for another good night’s sleep.

Nangotook woke at dawn and roused the boys. The sky, dappled with soft white clouds and streaked with pink, was reflected in the absolutely still water. So the three got away at once and, making a traverse of five or six miles across an indentation in the shore to the end of another point, were soon out of Batchewana Bay.

Going on up the shore, the travelers rounded Mamainse Point, and ran among rock islets, some of them bare, some with a tuft of trees or bushes at the summit. The islands they had passed in the southeast corner of the lake had been flat and sandy. From Mamainse on, although many of the larger islands and the margin of the shore continued low, the general appearance of the land was very different. High cliffs formed a continuous rampart a little back from the water and were covered with trees down to the beach, the silvery stems and bright green of the birches and aspens standing out against the darker colors of spruce and balsam. This was true north shore country, contrasting strongly with most of the south shore.

All day the wind was light, and the voyageurs made upwards of forty miles, reaching Montreal River before dark. As the canoe turned towards the broad beach where the stream enters the lake, the boys ceased paddling, leaving Etienne to make the landing. The Indian took a long stroke, then held his paddle motionless, edge forward and blade pressed against the side of the boat, until the momentum slackened, made another stroke, held the blade still again, then a third and rested until the bow ran gently on the sand. The moment it struck, before the onward motion ceased, the three rose as with one movement, threw their legs over the sides, Etienne and Jean to the right, Ronald to the left, and stepped out into the water without tipping the canoe. Then the boys lifted it by the cross bars and carried it beyond the water line.

The beach jutted out across the mouth of the river, partly closing it, while a bar, about six feet below the surface, extended clear across. Farther back were large trees, and the place was in every way a satisfactory camping ground.

After the evening meal, the boys, hoping to secure a fish or two for breakfast, went out in the canoe to set some lines. Trolling had been unsuccessful that day. In the meanwhile Etienne was examining an old trail that led up-stream. The deep, clear, brown waters emptied into the lake through a kind of delta, partly tree covered, but farther up they raced down with great force through a steep-walled, rock chasm. The trail, which proved that Indians were in the habit of frequenting the place, interested Nangotook for it bore signs of recent use. So he followed it.

Suddenly, as he rounded a clump of birches, he saw two men coming towards him. Luckily they were both looking in the other direction at the moment when the Ojibwa caught sight of them. Before they could turn their heads, he was out of view, squatted in the dark shadow behind an alder bush. Though he had but a glimpse of them, he recognized one, a white man with twisted nose and a scar on his chin. The other was an Indian, a stranger to him. As soon as the two men had passed, Nangotook rose and followed them cautiously, making his way among trees and bushes at the edge of the trail. The long twilight was deepening to darkness, and it was not difficult to keep hidden. The men went on along the trail for a way, then turned from it and struck off into the woods. Nangotook did not pursue them farther. Satisfied that they were not headed for the camp on the beach, he went on rapidly and joined the boys at the fire. In a few words he told them of the encounter.

The lads were amazed. At first they could scarcely believe it was really Le Forgeron Tordu Etienne had seen. The Blacksmith had left the Sault with his brigade for Montreal nearly two weeks before. He must have deserted below the Sault, have returned past the post and come on to the northeast shore. Desertion from the fleet was a serious matter, for the canoemen were under strict contract, and the guilty man was liable to heavy punishment. Le Forgeron had been a steersman too, and that made his offense worse. It was scarcely possible that he could have been discharged voluntarily, but if he had taken the risk of desertion, it must have been for some very important or desperate purpose.

The knowledge that the evil Frenchman was so near made the lads uneasy. Remembering the look of bitter hatred the Blacksmith had given him, and Big Benoit’s warning to look to himself, Ronald felt, for the first time in his life, the chill dread that comes to one who is followed by a relentless enemy. He pulled himself together in a moment, however. If Le Forgeron was following them, it could not be merely to obtain vengeance for the blow the lad had given him. That cause seemed altogether too slight to account for desertion and the long trip back to Superior. It was probable that he had heard more of their plans that night at the Grande Portage than they had believed he could have heard, and was bent on securing the gold for himself.

While Ronald was pondering these things, Jean was telling Nangotook of their suspicions that Le Forgeron had overheard them, of his treatment of the squaw, of Ronald’s attack on him and of Big Benoit’s fortunate appearance. Nangotook listened silently, and nodded gravely when the boy had finished his tale, but the two could not read in his impassive face whether he shared their fears or not.

From a tree overhead a screech owl uttered its eerie cry, the long drawn closing tremolo on one note sounding like a threat of disaster. Perhaps the Indian took the sinister sound for a warning, for he rose from the log where he was sitting and went down to the water’s edge. When he returned, he said decisively, “Sleep now little while. Then go on in dark.”

The boys concluded he was as anxious as they to get away from the neighborhood of Le Forgeron.

Ronald could not sleep much that night, and when he did drop off for a few moments, the slightest sound was enough to arouse him. By midnight the water was still, and, at Nangotook’s command, the boys launched the canoe. The Indian in the bow, the three paddled noiselessly away from their camping ground, going slowly at first for fear of striking a bar or reef. Though they scanned the shore, they could see no sign of Le Forgeron’s camp-fire. Had he gone on ahead of them, they wondered.

All the rest of the night they traveled steadily, and did not make a landing until the sun had been up for more than an hour. Then they stopped long enough to boil the kettle and eat their breakfast of corn and pork.

The wind had come up with the sun, and before they had gone far from the little island where they had breakfasted, the gale threatened to dash the canoe on the shore, where breakers were rolling. The travelers were driven to seek refuge behind a sand-bar at the mouth of a small stream. Then the wind began to shift about from one point to another. Rain clouds appeared, and a succession of squalls and showers kept the impatient gold-seekers on shore until the following morning.

The sky was still cloudy and threatening, but the water was not dangerously rough, when they put out from the shelter of the sand-bar. A head wind made progress slow, as they went on up the shore and around the great cape which some early explorer had named Gargantua, because of a fancied resemblance to the giant whose adventures were told by Rabelais, a French writer of the first half of the sixteenth century.

A short distance east of the Cape, Nangotook directed the canoe towards a small rock island, one of a group. “Land there,” he said laconically.

“Why should we be landing on that barren rock?” questioned Ronald in surprise.

“Grave of great manito, Nanabozho,” the Indian answered seriously.

Ronald opened his mouth to speak again, but Jean punched him with his paddle as a warning to ask no further questions. Nangotook ran the canoe alongside a ledge of rock only slightly above the water. There he stepped out. The others followed and lifted the boat up on the ledge. Without waiting for them, Nangotook climbed swiftly over the rocks. Ronald would have followed him, but Jean took the Scotch boy by the arm.

“He goes to make an offering to the manito,” the French lad said, “and to ask him to send us fair weather and favorable winds for our voyage.”

“But Nangotook says he’s a Christian,” the other replied. “Why is he making sacrifices to heathen gods then?”

Jean shrugged his shoulders. “A savage does not so easily forget the gods of his people,” he said. “I have heard of this place before. Let us look around a bit while he is offering his sacrifices.”

The island proved to be a mere rock, barren of everything but moss, lichens, a few trailing evergreens, and here and there such scattering, stunted plants as will grow with almost no soil. Part of the rock looked as if it had been artificially cut off close to the water line, while the rest ran up steeply to a height of thirty or forty feet. At several spots the two lads found the remains of offerings made by passing Indians, strands of sun-dried or decaying tobacco, broken guns, rusty kettles and knives, bits of scarlet cloth, beads and trinkets. Evidently the savages reverenced the place deeply and believed that the spirit of the great manito made it his abode.

What interested the boys more than Indian offerings was several clearly defined veins of metal running through the rock. Here and there in the veins were holes indicating that some one, white man or Indian, had made an attempt to mine. Moss and stunted bushes growing in the holes proved that the prospecting must have been done a number of years before. Ronald, who knew a little of geology, said there was certainly copper in the rock, and he thought there might be lead, and perhaps silver, which, he explained, was sometimes found in conjunction with copper.

“The man I was telling you about,” Ronald concluded, “old Alexander Henry, who looked for the Island of Yellow Sands, but who went to the wrong place Etienne says, did some mining along this east and north shore. Perhaps he opened these veins, but if he did, it must have been twenty or thirty years ago.”

The three did not remain long on the island. Around Cape Gargantua the shore had become more abrupt and more broken, with sheer cliffs, deep chasms, ragged points and islands. The rocks were painted with a variety of tints, caused by the weathering of metallic substances and by lichens that ranged in color from gray-green to bright orange. It was slow work paddling in the rough water, but before night the travelers reached a good camping ground, among birch trees, above a steep, terraced beach in the shadow of the high cliffs of Cape Choyye.

Near their landing place the boys came upon a broad sheet of red sandstone sloping gradually into the water. The rock was scored with shallow, winding channels and peppered with smooth holes, some of them three or four feet deep. Many of the cavities were nearly round, but one was in the shape of a cloven hoof. When the Indian saw the place he looked awed and muttered, “Manito been here.” Jean, too, was much impressed, and hastened to make the sign of the cross over the cloven footprint, but Ronald laughed at him. The holes were perfectly natural, he said. He pointed out in many of them loose stones of a much harder rock, and suggested that, at some previous period when the lake level must have been much higher, the friction of such stones and boulders against the softer sandstone, as they were washed and churned about by the waves, might have ground out the cavities. The shallow channels were probably chiseled by the grating of sand and small pebbles. Nangotook paid no attention whatever to Ronald’s explanation, and even Jean did not seem entirely convinced. He shook his head doubtfully over the cloven hole.

VI

ALONG THE NORTH SHORE

Apparently the great Nanabozho looked upon the treasure-seekers with favor, for the next morning dawned bright, clear and with a favorable breeze. They started early to the tune of

> “Fringue, fringue, sur la rivière,
> Fringue, fringue, sur l’aviron.”
>
> “Speed, speed on the river,
> Speed, speed with the oar.”

Making good time, they continued northward into Michipicoten Bay. On the Michipicoten River, which empties into the head of the bay, was a trading station. They did not wish to land there, but hoped to pass unobserved and to avoid any one going to or coming from the post. It was late in the season for white men to be traveling towards the western end of the lake, and questions or even unspoken curiosity might be embarrassing.

So, on reaching a beach, the only one they noticed along that bold, steep stretch of shore, they decided to land and wait for darkness before running past the post.

The manito continued to be kind to them, for during the afternoon a haze spread over the sky. When the fog on the water became thick enough to furnish cover, the adventurers set out again, paddling along the steep shore, gray and indistinct in the mist, the Indian keeping a sharp lookout for detached rocks. As they neared the mouth of the Michipicoten, they went farther out, and passed noiselessly, completely hidden in the fog. Not caring to risk traveling in the thick obscurity of a foggy night, they made camp before dark a few miles beyond the river.

The next morning they embarked at dawn and went on under cover of the fog, but the rising sun soon dispersed it. They were now traveling directly west. After passing Point Isacor, they could see clearly, ten or twelve miles to the south, Michipicoten Island or Isle de Maurepas, as the French named it, after the Comte de Maurepas, minister of marine under Louis XV. Alexander Henry the elder visited that island, and it was the Indians who guided him there who told him of another isle farther to the south, where the sands were yellow and shining. According to Nangotook, those Indians had deliberately deceived the white man, taking him intentionally to the wrong island. The boys gazed with new interest at the high pile of rock and forest, and Jean related to Ronald a legend that one of the old French missionaries had heard from the savages more than a century before and had written down.

“The savages told the good Father,” began Jean, “that four braves were lost in a fog one day, and drifted to that island. Wishing to prepare food, they began to pick up pebbles, intending to heat them in the fire they had lighted, and then drop them into their basket-ware kettle to make the water boil. But they were surprised to find that all the pebbles and slabs on the beach were of pure copper. At once they began to load their canoe with the copper rocks, when they were startled by a terrible voice calling out in wrath. ‘Who are you,’ roared the great voice, ‘you robbers who carry away my papoose cases and the playthings of my children?’ The slabs, it seems, were the cradles, and the round stones, the toys, of the children of the strange race of manitos or supernatural beings who dwelt, like mermen and mermaids, in the water round about the island. The frightful voice terrified the savages so they dropped the copper stones, and put out from the shore in haste. One of them died of fright on the way to the mainland. A short time later a second died, and then, after he had returned to his own people and told the story, the third. What became of the fourth the savages did not say. It is said,” concluded Jean, “that the island is rich in copper and other metals, so it well may be, as Etienne suggests, that such tales were told to frighten the white men and keep them from the place.”

That night the eager gold-seekers traveled until after midnight, pausing at sundown only long enough for supper and a brief rest. As the darkness deepened, the wavering flames of the aurora borealis, or northern lights, began to glow in the northern and western sky. From the sharply defined edge of bank of clouds below, bands and streamers of white and pale green stretched upwards, flashing, flickering and changeable. Sometimes glowing spots appeared in the dark band, again streamers of light shot up to the zenith, the center of brightness constantly shifting, as the flames died out in one place to flare up in another.

The Ojibwa hailed the “dancing spirits” as a good omen, and the boys were inclined to agree with him. All the evening the lights flashed and glowed, but when, after midnight, the travelers rounded the cape known as Otter’s Head, from the upright rock surmounting it, the streaks and bands were growing faint, and by the time a landing had been made in the cover beyond, they had faded out entirely.

Whether the aurora borealis was to be considered a good sign or not, fortune continued to favor the voyageurs the next day. They put up a blanket sail attached to poles, and ran before a favorable wind most of the twenty-five miles to the mouth of White Gravel River. There they remained until nightfall, for they were anxious to avoid another trading post some twenty miles farther up the shore, near the mouth of the Pic River.

Glad of exercise after being cramped in the canoe, the boys made their way along the bank of White Gravel River for about two miles, where they discovered a round, deep, shaded pool, alive with darting shadows. They cut fishing poles and had an hour of fine sport. As they were going on up-stream, they heard the calling and cooing of wood pigeons, and soon came upon a great flock of the birds. The trees were covered with them, and the air fairly full of them, flying up, darting down, and wheeling about in the open spaces, singly and in squads and small flocks. So plentiful were the pigeons, and so little disturbed by the lads’ presence, that the two might have killed hundreds had they chosen, but they were not greedy or wanton sportsmen, and shot only as many as they thought they could eat for supper, reserving the trout for breakfast.

A grove of trees and bushes hid the camp, and the canoe was beached on the inner side of the sand-bar that partly concealed the entrance to the stream. Ever since Etienne had seen Le Forgeron Tordu at Montreal River, he had taken precautions to select camping places where the three would not be noticed by any one passing on the lake. If the Twisted Blacksmith were coming up the shore on some business of his own that had nothing to do with them, the gold-seekers had no wish to attract his attention. If he was following them, they hoped to give him the slip. Just as the sun was setting that night, as Jean was plucking the pigeons and Ronald was preparing to kindle the cooking fire, their attention was attracted by the harsh screaming of gulls. Looking out through their screen of bushes, the lads saw a canoe, about the size of their own, passing a little way out. It was going north, and contained two men, one evidently an Indian, the other from his dress a white man or half-breed. The boys could not see him plainly enough to be sure, but they had little doubt the white man was Le Forgeron. Etienne was some distance away gathering bearberry leaves to dry and mix with his smoking tobacco to make kinni-kinnik. So he did not see the canoe go by.

The sight of the passing voyageurs caused the three to delay going on until twilight had deepened to darkness, and then they traveled in silence, and watched the shore closely for signs of a camp. They saw none, however, ran past the mouth of the Pic without encountering any one, and landed in a bay a few miles farther on. Ahead of them lay a very irregular shore with many islands, rocks and reefs, which they did not dare to try to thread in the darkness.

In spite of their night run, they embarked early and passed through a labyrinth of islands. In a winding passage they met a canoe containing an Indian, his squaw, three children and two pointed-nosed, fox-eared dogs. The boys thought this Indian family particularly unattractive looking savages. They had very flat faces and large mouths and were ragged and disgustingly dirty, but they were evidently good-natured and ready to be friendly, for man, woman and children grinned broadly as they called out “Boojou, boojou,” the Indian corruption of the French “Bonjour.” The man held up some fish for sale, but Nangotook treated him with dignified contempt, grunting an unsmiling greeting, shaking his head at the proffered fish, and passing by without slowing the strokes of his paddle. As he left the Indian canoe astern, he growled out a name that Ronald could not make out, but that Jean understood.

“Gens de Terre,” the boy exclaimed. “These are the shores where they belong. They seldom go as far south as the Sault. Some call them Men of the Woods. They are dirty, but very honest. The traders say it is always safe to give them credit, for rarely does one of them fail to pay in full. They are good tempered too, but when food is scarce I have heard they sometimes turn Windigo.” The lad shuddered and crossed himself. Windigo is the Indian name for a man who has eaten human flesh and has learned to like it. Both Indians and white men believed that such a savage was taken possession of by a fiend. Men suspected of being Windigos were shunned and feared by red men and white alike.

The voyageurs made a traverse of several miles, and ran among a cluster of little islands abreast of Pic Island, a rock peak rising about seven hundred feet from a partly submerged ridge. Fog, blown by a raw, gusty wind delayed them considerably that day. After running on a hidden rock and starting a seam in the canoe, they were finally compelled to camp on a rock islet near shore. There they dined on blueberries, and slept on thick beds of moss and low growing blueberry and bearberry plants.

The following day, after a sharp north wind had driven away the fog, they went on, and passed the Slate Islands, high and blue, seven or eight miles across the water. At supper time they entered a little cove, where they were horrified to find signs of a recent tragedy. A canoe was floating bottom up, the beach at the head of the cove was strewn with pelts, the sand trampled and blotched with dark patches. Near by were the ashes of a camp-fire.

Nangotook looked the place over carefully, then remarked, “Awishtoya been here.”

“Why do you say that?” exclaimed Jean. “What makes you think so?”

“Trapper going to Pic with winter’s catch,” the Indian explained. “Awishtoya found him, attacked him, killed him maybe,” and he pointed to the blood stains in the sand. “Broke open his packs and took best furs. These no good,” touching one of the abandoned skins with his foot.

“Something of the kind must have happened here,” Ronald agreed, “and Le Forgeron would not be above such a deed. Do you see anything to prove he did it, Etienne?”

The Ojibwa shook his head. “No need to prove it,” he said. “Awishtoya came this way. Always there are evil deeds where he goes.”

From the ashes of the fire and the condition of the sand, the Indian thought the deed a recent one, committed not longer ago than the night before, perhaps that very day. The three righted the canoe, but found nothing about it to show its owner. Though they searched the shores of the cove, they did not discover the body of the murdered man, if he had been murdered, or any further traces of him or of the man or men who had attacked him. The marks in the sand were so confused, indicating a desperate struggle, that not much could be read from them, but Nangotook thought there had been at least three men in the affray.

The boys had no desire to linger in the cove. As soon as the evening meal was over, they launched their canoe, and traveled far into the night, most of the time against a troublesome head wind. Near the entrance to what is now called the North Channel, which leads into Nipigon Bay, they made camp.

The lads were growing very impatient. It seemed to them they never would reach the Rock of the Beaver, as Nangotook had called the spot where they were to strike south across the open lake. They were beginning to wonder if he were taking them clear back to Grande Portage, for they had now come considerably more than two-thirds of the way. Up to that time the Ojibwa had given them no hint of the location of the Rock, except to say that it was on the north shore, but that night he volunteered some information. “Only one day more,” he said, “one good day.”

VII
THE ROCK OF THE BEAVER

The next morning at dawn the sky was mottled with scudding clouds driven by an east wind. The prospect was not promising, but the wind was in the right direction for sailing, and the voyageurs put out in haste, rigging their blanket sail. It was their intention to pass outside the islands that almost block the entrance to Nipigon Bay. They made good time before the breeze, though the waves followed the frail craft perilously, and the three were soon well soaked with cold spray. But the wind changed to the southeast, and dark blue clouds, with slanting lines of rain below them, began to roll up. The sail had to be lowered, and, as the wind increased and blew in gusts and squalls, it took all the canoemen’s skill to keep from swamping before they gained the eastern end of the great Island of St. Ignace.

There they were glad to run into a long bay or cove, protected by high peaks and ridges on either side and by a small island at the entrance and another large one, now known as Simpson’s Island, across a narrow channel to the east. To the head of the cove, where a small stream entered it, they paddled, and found a landing place. There they stowed the supplies under the canoe, placing them on poles and paddles to keep them off the wet ground, for rain had begun to fall.

Making camp in the rain is an unpleasant task, but they needed a better shelter than the small canoe would afford. So they left the beach, and explored the woods for a good spot where they could build a lodge in the Indian fashion. A considerable distance back from the water, Etienne found, at last, a spot level and open enough.

Ronald and Jean cleared the ground, while the Indian cut young birch trees and stripped larger ones of their bark. Ronald was expert with an ax and wasted no blows. Bending a sapling over with his left hand, he gave it a sharp clip, then bending it the other way, another quick stroke, and it was down. Bushes were cut or pulled up, loose rocks thrown to one side, troublesome roots grubbed up, and hummocks leveled with vigorous strokes of the back of the ax. In an incredibly short time the camping ground was fairly smooth and level. Then Nangotook set up a frame, thrusting the butts of the trees he had cut into the ground, and bending together and interlacing the tops. This framework he and the boys covered with sheets of birch bark, “wig-wass” Nangotook called the bark. They did not take time to sew the pieces together, but overlapped them and placed more poles against them to keep them in place. The ground within the lodge, or “wigwam,” as the Ojibwa called it, was hastily strewn with spruce branches. The shelter was completed none too soon. Just as Jean was carrying in an armful of the gray moss or lichen that almost covered many of the spruce trees, hanging down from them and giving them the appearance of being bearded with age, there came a wild burst of rain and hail that rattled on the bark walls like bullets.

The rest of that day and night and most of the next day rain fell with scarcely a pause. The disgusted gold-seekers were compelled to remain within shelter, going out only long enough to cut wood for the fire and to catch a few fish.

Late in the afternoon the rain ceased, and the gray clouds showed signs of breaking. Hares seemed to be plentiful on the island, and Etienne went out to set some snares, while the two boys climbed up through the dripping woods, over slippery moss and rocks, to a spot where they could see out over the lake. The water was still rough, but the wind had shifted to the north and gave promise of clearing weather. They hoped they might be able to go on by morning. According to Etienne the Rock of the Beaver was only a half day’s journey away.

On their way back to camp they came suddenly within range of a plump hare that was feeding on a large red mushroom. Ronald, who was on the lookout for game, made a lucky shot. Though hare flesh is not at its best while the animal still wears his gray-brown summer coat, the fresh meat was more than welcome to the voyageurs. There was other game on the island, for they saw tracks, half washed out by the rain, that Jean was sure were those of caribou, and the Indian said there were moose prints in a boggy place near where he set his snares. When the boys went down to the bay for water, they found signs that both mink and marten had been there before them, and in the night they were awakened several times by the sharp, cat-like snarl of a lynx. They found no indications that any one had trapped in the vicinity the winter before, however.

The next morning dawned fair with a light breeze, and the adventurers hastened down to the shore where the canoe lay. Jean gave a cry of dismay when he turned over the boat. Under it they had left most of the ammunition and all of the food supplies they did not want to use immediately. Now everything, except the paddles and the poles, was gone.

“Stolen,” cried Jean in great excitement. “Le Forgeron Tordu has been here, the fiend! It is some of his evil work.”

“It is evil work, surely,” Ronald answered more quietly, but his blue eyes hardened and his square jaw set. To break into another man’s cache or steal his provisions was the most serious of offenses in the wilderness among white men and Indians alike, an offense that might even be punished with death.

Nangotook, after one glance under the canoe, had set himself to examining the tracks that led to the water. “One man,” he remarked briefly, “two trips. Other man stay in canoe. Last night or this day early.” The footprints had been made since the rain. There were no signs that a canoe had been brought ashore, so the Ojibwa inferred that the boat had remained on the water with at least one man to handle it. To track the thieves was impossible, for, as the Indian said disgustedly, “Canoe leave no trail.”

There was no way to prove that the Frenchman and his companion were the thieves. The things might have been taken by some wandering Indians, but it would have been difficult to convince either Ronald or Jean of such a probability.

The loss of supplies was very serious, and made it all the more necessary for the treasure-seekers to make haste to the Island of Yellow Sands. Fate continued to be against them, however. By the time they reached the mouth of the cove, the wind, that had been so light at dawn, had come up and was blowing hard from the worst of directions for them, the southwest, rolling great waves against the outer rocks of the island. If they kept to their intended course, they would have to paddle in the trough. It seemed as if Nanabozho had repented of his former kindness, and was trying to keep them from their goal as long as he could.

Etienne took one look out across the water. Then, with a grunt, he signaled Ronald to turn and run north, up the channel between the end of St. Ignace and its neighbor island. Once on the north side of St. Ignace, they would find protection from the wind, though to go that way would add at least fifteen miles to their journey.

Well sheltered by the high cliffs, that rose steeply from the water, and the peaks and ridges beyond, the adventurers made good time, and their hopes rose. Their course led them about twenty miles along the steep and continuous north wall of the island. Then, at the western end of St. Ignace, they turned into a narrow strait between that island and the east cliffs of the long point that forms the western boundary of Nipigon Bay. Through the strait, with high walls and forest clad slopes on either side, they paddled for eight or ten miles farther, until the channel divided into two, at the end of an island. They took the right hand passage, but, as its opening was towards the southwest, the waves were running into it so strongly, that they could not go far, and were soon obliged to seek shelter in a little bay. The boys were disgusted at the delay, but Etienne’s assurance that the Rock of the Beaver was scarcely more than an hour’s travel away raised their spirits.

When, late in the afternoon, the wind and waves having gone down somewhat, they launched the canoe once more and paddled on down the channel, their hearts were as light as if the Island of Yellow Sands lay in sight. Careless whether Le Forgeron might be somewhere within hearing, Jean started to sing:

“M’en revenant de Saint André,
J’ai vu le loup, le r’nard passer.”

“As I was returning from St. André,
I saw the wolf and the fox pass by.”

Ronald joined in the chorus,

“L’on, ton, laridon danée,
L’on, ton, laridon dai,”

but the Indian as usual kept silence.

Coming out from the strait, they rounded the point of an island, and found themselves among small islands and islets. Towards one of the islets Nangotook directed that the canoe be steered. There was no beach, so the landing had to be made with extreme care. To keep the canoe from being battered on the rocks, two of the poles, that lay along the bottom, were taken up and lashed, one to the bow, the other to the stern. The larger ends of the poles were placed on a ledge and weighted down with slabs of rock. In this way the canoe was held safe and steady in deep water.

As soon as the boat was made fast, Nangotook led the eager lads across the islet to the outer shore. There he paused and pointed dramatically to a great rock that towered above their heads. On its gray face was the crude outline of an animal done in some dull red pigment. The shape of the figure and especially its trowel-like tail showed plainly that it was intended to represent a beaver. This was the Rock of the Beaver, the point from which they were to start south over the open lake.

Nangotook seemed to hold the rough drawing in great respect and veneration. The Ojibwa nation, like other Indian races, is divided into a number of clans or families, each supposed to be descended from and under the protection of some mythical, magical beast or bird. Nangotook belonged to the Amik or Beaver Clan, and his totem, his protecting spirit, was the Great Beaver. The figure on the rock was very old, he said. It had been there in his grandfather’s youth, and, although it was exposed to wind and rain, it had never been obliterated. Ronald thought it showed signs of having been retouched not long before, for the paint in some parts was much brighter and fresher than in others, the tail being particularly distinct. When he pointed this out to Nangotook, the latter admitted that some of the lines, when they began to grow faint, might have been repainted from time to time by medicine men.

A little way out from the end of the island another rock rose from the water. Nangotook explained that, in starting across the lake, the travelers must keep the outer rock and the one that bore the figure of the beaver directly in line as long as they could be distinguished, and go on in the same direction, until the Island of Yellow Sands came in view. In order to keep the course true, it would be necessary to steer by the stars, so the trip must be made by night, a clear, calm, starlit night.

That night was not favorable, for the waves were still too high, so the three camped on another and more hospitable island, a short distance from the Island of the Beaver.

VIII

STORM AND WRECK

The next evening was exactly right for the trip. The sky was clear, and the surface of the lake was scarcely rippled by the light southwest breeze. The sun had set before the adventurers put off from their camping place. Nangotook directed their course to the Island of the Beaver, and ran the canoe up to the same ledge where they had landed the day before. Bidding the boys remain with the boat, he stepped out on the rock, but the lads were curious to know his purpose, so Jean followed him at a respectful distance. Peeping around the corner of the high pile of rocks, the boy saw the Indian standing where he could command a good view of the figure painted there. He gazed up at it while he muttered a few words in his own language. Then he stretched out his arm towards each of the four points of the compass in turn, threw a sacrifice of tobacco into the water, and said a few more words in conclusion. Though the French lad knew something of the Ojibwa tongue, he could not understand what Nangotook said, but he felt sure that, Christian though the Indian considered himself, he was praying to the manitos of winds and waters for protection, a prosperous voyage and a safe return. While Nangotook was making his offering, Jean slipped hastily back to the canoe, reaching it before the Ojibwa came in sight.

The western sky was still flushed and bright with the northern afterglow, when the gold-seekers paddled around the little Islet of the Beaver. As they left the outer end, Jean caught sight of a thin line of smoke rising straight up from another island not a quarter of a mile away. Some one else was camping only a short distance from their own camp.

Due south they steered. Ronald and the Indian were at the paddles, while Jean, sitting with his face to the north, kept his eyes on the two rocks, and warned the others if they swerved in the least from their course. From time to time, not willing to trust wholly to the boy, Nangotook turned his head to make sure their course was true. The lads' hearts were beating fast with excitement, for the great adventure had really begun. Nangotook was silent and stolid. If he were excited or eager, apprehensive or fearful of the risk they were running in putting out into the open lake in search of a place said to be guarded by spirits, animals and serpents, he gave no sign.

In the clear, light, northern evening, the two high rocks were visible to the keen sight of the voyageurs until they were a long way out. Before he lost sight of his landmarks, the Indian took a careful observation of the sky, where the stars were beginning to appear, that he might be able to steer by them and hold his course true. He said that, according to his grandfather's story, the island should be reached long before dawn. In the hope of catching some glimpse of the land they sought, the boys had gazed again and again, during the day, out across the water, but, though the sky was blue overhead, the distance had been hazy, and no faintest shadow of land was to be seen in that direction. When they had asked Etienne if the island was ever visible from the spot where they were, he had said he did not know. He had never seen it, but perhaps the air had never been clear enough when he had passed that way.

Until after midnight all went well. The night was brilliantly clear, the canoe moved easily over the ripples, and everything seemed to favor the adventure. Then the breeze died down entirely. The dip of the paddle blades alone broke the smooth surface of the water. The air was unusually warm for night time on Lake Superior, and there was something ominous in the stillness.

Lightning began to flash low down on the southern horizon, and the gleams disclosed a bank of clouds. The adventurers increased the swiftness and strength of their paddle strokes. The distant growling of thunder reached their ears. As flash after flash lit up the sky, they could see the clouds growing and spreading. The stars were losing some of their brilliancy. A light haze seemed to be veiling them. The thunder rolled louder and nearer, the intervals between flash and sound decreased. The clouds from south and west were moving more rapidly, and the breeze was beginning to blow up in fitful puffs and gusts.

The voyageurs did not think of turning back. They had come too far. If Nangotook's information was correct, the island could not be many miles away. In the lightning flashes Jean thought he could make out a dark line on the water far ahead. To go back would be suicidal, for they must have come considerably more than half-way.

One after another the stars were swallowed up by the clouds. The gusts of wind grew stronger, the lake was roughening. In a very short time there would be no stars left to steer by, and the wind was so fitful and unsteady in direction that it was no guide. The night had grown very dark, and the lightning revealed nothing but heaving water below and moving clouds overhead. If Jean had really seen land, the waves now hid it from view.

Every moment the adventurers thought the storm must break, and yet it did not. The sky remained overcast, the thunder rolled and grumbled, the lightning flashed, now overhead, now low on the horizon, first in one quarter, then in another. But no rain fell. There must be worse coming. Still it did not come. Would it hold off until daybreak, until they could see land and reach it?

Even for skilled canoemen there was danger enough. The wind came in squalls, sending the waves first one way, then another. Nangotook had to be constantly on the alert to turn the canoe this way and that, a difficult task in the darkness. As the wind increased and the waves rolled higher, he ordered the others to cease paddling. One man must take all the responsibility. He must act so quickly that there was no time to give orders to another. It was no longer a question of getting ahead but of keeping the canoe right side up. The buoyant, but frail, little craft must mount each wave at just the right angle. It must be held steady when it shot down the other side and through the trough between. The shifting squally wind made frequent, sudden twists of the paddle necessary, and to prevent the canoe from careening, the body of the paddler must be thrown in the opposite direction. The poise of his body was almost as important as the handling of the paddle. Whatever happened, Ronald and Jean must remain motionless, never for one moment shifting their weight unless the Indian so ordered. The whole fate of the three rested on his skill and judgment.

So they went on and on, in imminent peril every moment, on through the black night, lit up only by the lightning flashes, which revealed to them nothing but a world of threatening sky and tossing water. All sense of direction was gone. Nangotook’s only aim was to keep the canoe from being swamped, and it did not seem as if he could accomplish that feat much longer. It was not surprising that the two lads, living in that superstitious age, began to wonder if the spirits of the lake were not arrayed against them, struggling to keep them from the wonderful island where the sands were of gold. Had a manito risen out of the water and promised them a safe return to shore if they would give up their quest, they would have been glad to agree to anything. But no manito appeared, and the situation, instead of improving, grew steadily worse.

They had become convinced that the storm was one of wind and lightning only, when suddenly the rain came in a dash so fierce that swamping seemed inevitable. Jean and Ronald bailed for their lives. Fortunately the wind had lessened with the burst of rain that seemed to flatten out the waves, so it was possible for the lads to bail. Fast and frenziedly as they worked, they refrained by instinct from moving their bodies any more than was absolutely necessary. The chief danger for the moment was that the canoe might fill and sink. Had the violent rain been of long duration that disaster could not have been prevented, but luckily the deluge lasted but a very few minutes, ceasing as suddenly as it had begun.

With the passing of the rain, the wind steadied, blowing strong and cold, instead of in shifting squalls. Evidently the weather was clearing. Patches of star sprinkled sky began to appear and disappear and appear again, as the storm clouds broke and scattered, scudding before the wind. The waves were high, and the canoe was still in great peril. It was borne along rapidly, and the Indian had his hands full to keep the waters from overwhelming it. It was tossed up and down until it seemed about to turn end over end. But Nangotook’s trained judgment, cool head and iron wrist and forearm continued to triumph in the struggle.

As the sky cleared the boys could see, from the faintness of the stars, that day was dawning. Then just as hope began to be renewed in them, the sound of breakers ahead reached their ears. The Ojibwa gave his paddle a twist to swerve the canoe to the right, but the wind counteracted his effort, and before he could turn sufficiently, a dark mass of rocks loomed up close by. As the canoe was lifted on the crest of a wave, he could see the pale gleam of the spray that dashed against that rock wall. With a supreme effort, and at the risk of overturning his craft, he succeeded in swinging to the right, beyond the reach of the surf. He had barely made the turn, when a big wave carried the canoe by the rock wall, so close in that an outstretched hand could almost have touched it.

The dangerous manœuver of turning again, to run in on the lea side of the rocks, was accomplished safely. Suddenly the three adventurers found themselves in almost still water, so completely were they sheltered from the wind. The Indian paddled slowly along, straining his eyes to find a rift or a beach where a landing could be made. He had taken but a few strokes when he discerned a blacker gap in the dark rock. That gap was the entrance to a narrow passage, so pitchy black that he could not tell whether it was long or short. Even his keen eyes could not see the dangers ahead. The stern of the canoe had scarcely passed into the rift, when the bow struck sharply on a submerged rock. A great hole was torn in the birch bark, and the water rushed in.

As the canoe filled and settled, Nangotook climbed out on the rock where the boat had struck, but Ronald and Jean were less fortunate. They could not reach bottom and were compelled to swim. They had only a few strokes to go in the cold water and black darkness, however, before their feet touched solid rock. Scrambling up a slippery slope, they were soon out of the water, on a narrow, shelving ledge running along a steep wall. From near by Nangotook called to them. Making their way cautiously along the ledge in the direction of his voice, they soon reached the head of the rift, which the Indian had already gained.

There on a beach of sloping boulders and large pebbles, safe from wind and waves, the three crouched. Whether the canoe and its contents could be raised they would not know until daylight came, but they were too thankful for their own safety to worry about anything else. Sincerely, though silently, the two lads, each in his own way, thanked God for their deliverance, while the Indian spoke a few words in his own language and in a low voice. Whether his gratitude was directed to the Christian God, to Nanabozho or some other manito of the lake, or to the mysterious charm he carried in the breast of his tunic, the lads could not tell, probably to a combination of the three.

There among the rocks, the seekers after the golden sands remained safe, but chilled and miserable enough, until daylight came. They did not talk, but the boys could not help wondering if the place where they had taken refuge might not be some part of the Island of Yellow Sands itself. To be sure, they had encountered no sand of any kind, only rocks and pebbles, but whether the wonderful beach Etienne had described ran clear around the mysterious island or only fringed a part of it they did not know. Perhaps at that very moment of chilled misery the golden sands might lie but a few feet away from them.

IX

THE HOME OF THE GULLS

At first all that the castaways knew of their situation was that they were in a narrow cleft of rock. As the light increased, they discovered that the vertical rock walls, which rose high above their heads, came together a little way beyond where the three were huddled, forming a V-shaped cove. The waters of the lake extended into the rift about half its length. Then came a shelving beach of boulders and large, smooth, rounded pebbles. With the dawn, gulls, in ever increasing numbers, began to circle overhead, keeping up an incessant crying, now high pitched and whining, now harsh and guttural.

As soon as the light was strong enough, Etienne and the boys, chilled and stiff, scrambled down to the water’s edge to look for the sunken canoe. They were relieved to find that it had not drifted out into the lake. There it lay, one end tilted up on the sharp edged rock, where it had struck, the other in deep water. One of the paddles Etienne had saved, the other had disappeared. The canoe and its contents must be raised and brought ashore at once, before the castaways even climbed the rocks to see where they were.

Their supplies were scanty enough. A few handfuls of corn had remained of the food they had kept with them when in their lean-to on St. Ignace. After leaving their camping ground there, they had lived on hare meat and fish, and, before they had paddled away from the Rock of the Beaver, they had wrapped the corn in a piece of birch bark. They rescued the package, but it was not water-tight, and the corn was a pulp. The powder that the boys had carried on their persons was wet, too, from their plunge in the lake. Only the Indian, who had not been in over his knees, had saved his dry. He had also saved his most precious possession, next to his mysterious charm, his red stone pipe with the bowl carved in the form of a beaver and the stem decorated with copper bands. All three guns had had a thorough wetting.

The corn and powder was spread on convenient, flat-topped rocks, the soaked blankets on the pebbles, to dry in the sun. Then Nangotook and the lads succeeded in raising the canoe and carrying it up on the bit of beach. Fortunately the roll of birch bark, the ball of spruce roots and the pieces of gum, they had provided for repairs, were unharmed. The hole in the bottom of the canoe was large and jagged, but by no means beyond mending. Before they began that task, however, the castaways decided to climb the rocks and have a look about them. They were dripping wet, and, as Lake Superior water is cold even in summer, they needed sun, wind and exercise to dry and warm them.

At the head of the fissure they found a place in the ribbed and seamed rock wall, where they could scramble up. They had to go one at a time, and it was Ronald who led the way. Around his head gulls whirled, screaming, and, as he neared the top, they swooped down so threateningly that he remembered the story of the ferocious birds and beasts that guarded the Island of Yellow Sands. His heart beat quickly as he thrust his head above the top of the wall and looked about him. The prospect was not encouraging. Waving his arms to ward off the gulls, which darted down, with menacing wings and beaks, almost in his face, he scrambled up until he stood on the verge of the rift.

This place was surely not the Island of Golden Sands. There were no sands of any kind, and such a heap of barren rocks could scarcely be called an island. One glance showed him why the gulls had disputed his way so fiercely. The lonely rock was a nesting place. The air seemed full of great white birds, wheeling, sailing, swooping on their long wings, and making a deafening din with their angry cries, harsh, mocking, threatening. As Ronald moved forward, hundreds of brownish-gray young birds plunged into the water and swam away to join the flocks of old ones that were riding the waves a little distance out.

For the moment the boy took small interest in gulls, young or old. His disappointment was too keen. He had actually hoped that he might be on the mysterious island he was seeking. Instead he had been cast ashore upon a bare pile of rocks. Jean and Nangotook soon joined him. The French youth’s long face and the Ojibwa’s grunt of disgust showed plainly their disappointment.

The three strained their eyes over the waters in every direction. The sky was blue, but the light haze of morning lay on the lake, shrouding the distance. Other scattered rocks could be discerned, but no continuous shore line was visible. At first the two boys could see nothing that gave them any hope. Nangotook, however, gazed intently towards the southwest. Then he stretched out his arm and pointed.

“Island off there. Reach it in little while,” he said.

“It is only a pile of rocks like this,” replied Ronald in a disgusted tone.

“No,” the Indian returned quietly. “Larger, with trees.”

Though the lads were unable to make out what Nangotook said he saw, they were cheered by his words. They knew that, keen-eyed as they were, they were no match for him in eyesight, and were content to take his word that to the southwest of them, not far away, lay an island with trees. Their spirits rose at once. Surely that must be the place they were seeking. They did not know how many miles they had come after the clouds had blotted out the guiding stars, or how far they might have been driven from their course, but they were very ready to believe that they could not be much out of the way, and that the land to the southwest must be the sought-for island. Before they could reach it, though, the canoe must be mended.

After scrambling about the rocks for a while, the gold-seekers returned to the cove. There they found that the gulls had stolen most of the corn. Leaving it unguarded had been an inexcusable piece of carelessness, for which Etienne blamed himself. The birds must have stolen his wits first, he said. The three were ravenously hungry, so Ronald climbed out of the rift again to search for a place where he could fish with some hope of success.

He took his station at the most favorable looking spot, where a projecting wall of rock and a number of large fragments, broken off at some time long past, sheltered the water. Into the quiet pool he dropped his hook. While he fished, Jean and Etienne mended the canoe.

Soon after Ronald let down his line, he caught the smallest lake trout he had ever seen, much too small for three. After that, luck forsook him. Half the morning he patiently fished the pool, but did not get a bite. The rest of the forenoon he spent climbing about the rocks, seeking other spots to fish from and trying every place that was possible. Then he gave it up for the time, cleaned his little fish, and lighted a fire of dry moss and small sticks. The iron kettle had disappeared. The boys could not understand how the waves had managed to wash the heavy thing away, but all their searching had failed to bring it to light. So Ronald split his trout and broiled it on green twigs. Divided among the three, it only whetted their appetites.

Time passed slowly on the wind-swept rock. With small, tough spruce roots, called “wattap” by the Indians and voyageurs, a neat patch of bark was sewed over the hole in the canoe, and the seams carefully daubed with heat-softened pine gum. As the day advanced, the wind came up, and, by the time the canoe was ready to be put in the water, the crests of the waves were breaking in foam. The lake was much too rough to make leaving the rock advisable.

The boys fished continually, but without luck. It began to look as if they must eat gull or go without food, and gulls are far from good eating. Only intense hunger would have driven the lads to try one.

There were gulls’ nests everywhere, although they could hardly be called nests in the usual sense of the word, being mere collections of sticks, leaves and bits of lichen and moss placed in crevices and hollows of the rock. No fresh eggs were to be found. The mottled gray-brown plumage of the young birds was scarcely distinguishable from the rock itself as they crouched close to it. They were hard to catch for all were able to swim, and immediately plunged into the water when disturbed. Most of them had learned to fly too, and could rise circling overhead with the white-winged adult birds.

Jean noticed one young gull hopping up and down in a strange manner, flapping its wings. As he watched it, it ran down a sloping bit of rock, still moving its wings, rose unsteadily in the air, made a few uncertain, awkward motions, trying its wings and learning to manage them, then flew out over the water as if it had always been used to flying. He watched it circle about and then light in a clumsy and inexperienced manner. Wings raised straight over its back, it dropped heavily into the water, going clear under. Rising to the surface, it arranged its feathers and swam about, holding its head high as if proud of its achievement. Jean felt sure that was the young gull’s first flight, and was surprised at the rapidity with which it had learned to sail and wheel about in the air.

It was nearly sunset before the castaways had any luck with their fishing, and then it was Nangotook who made the catch. He had noticed several gulls hovering over and swooping down into the lake at a little distance out, near a solitary rock that raised its head two or three feet above the water. It was evident that the birds were fishing. So the Indian launched the mended canoe, and, taking Jean with him, went out to the spot. With the sinking sun the wind was going down, and paddling was no longer dangerous. Passing close to the rock, he handed the paddle to Jean and dropped his line quietly over the side. In a few minutes there was a strong pull. Then a battle began, the Ojibwa playing his fish with skill, letting out his line when his game made a dash, pulling in the slack swiftly hand over hand as the fish changed its mind and darted towards the boat, or slowly, steadily drawing it in without pulling too strongly. Jean devoted his attention to the canoe, which pitched about, and had to be turned and paddled this way and that in accordance with the actions of the fish and the Indian’s sharp orders. Finally, after a struggle that lasted for ten minutes or more, Nangotook succeeded in bringing the tired fish almost up to the boat. Pulling in the line quickly with one hand, he reached far out over the gunwale, Jean hastily balancing by leaning the other way, and plunged his knife into the fish just below the mouth. He held it up exultingly. It was a lake trout of eight or ten pounds weight.

When the two boys, rolled in their blankets, lay down that night in a crevice of the rock, where moss and trailing cedar made a thin but not to be despised bed, they were feeling very hopeful. They had eaten a good meal of trout, the night was fair, the wind had subsided, the prospect of reaching the island to the southwest was good. In discouragement over their surroundings, they had rather forgotten at times during the day, their thankfulness for having been saved from the storm of the night before. Now, however, with renewed hope and bodily comfort, their gratitude for their rescue returned, and with it a very kindly feeling for the barren rock that had sheltered them from the fury of the lake. Surely that land to the southwest must be the Island of Yellow Sands. As the air had cleared during the day, they had been able to make it out more plainly, and the lads had become convinced by their own eyes that it was no mere rock like the one they were on. Ronald had asked whether it might not be some point or headland of the lake shore, but Etienne had shaken his head.

“South shore too far away,” he had replied. “Island out there. Island of Yellow Sands, just like my grandfather said.”

X

THE ISLAND TO THE SOUTHWEST

The breeze still blew from the north the next morning, but the waves were not high enough to forbid crossing the three or four miles of open water that separated the adventurers from the land to the southwest. Before starting out, Nangotook, to gain the good favor of the manito, threw into the lake another offering of tobacco, though he had little left. The two paddles, that had remained in the canoe when it sank, had evidently been washed out of the cove, so the trip had to be made with one blade, the Indian wielding it.

The boys’ minds were full of the land they were approaching, and they discussed its possibilities earnestly, but the Ojibwa was silent, apparently devoting his whole attention to his paddling. As they drew near the unknown island, the lads searched it eagerly with their eyes, but they could discover no indication of a sand beach. A rocky point, spotted with the white bodies of the gulls resting upon it, ran out into the water. Back from the point rose high ground covered with trees.

Clouds had begun to fleck the blue sky, and the breeze had gained in force. The rocks, exposed to the wind and dashed with spray, afforded no good landing place. So the three went on between the point and the small rock islands and reefs that lay out from it, the boys on the watch for the gleam of golden sands. Nangotook, heedful of hidden points and reefs, kept his eyes on the water most of the time.

No yellow sands came into view. There was one stretch of beach, but it showed no gleam of gold. Apparently it was just ordinary sand, and Nangotook did not think landing worth while, but paddled by. Beyond another stretch of broken and tumbled rocks, a small opening, cutting into the island between high portals, came into view. The Indian’s curiosity must have been aroused, for he headed the canoe into the narrow channel.

Then an unexpected and beautiful sight met the eyes of the wanderers. They found themselves in a peaceful harbor, almost round, and wooded with evergreens to the water line. Directly in front of them, as they entered, the ground was low, but to right and left it rose high, spruces and balsam firs standing in thick ranks to the summit. The gap through which they had come was a mere cut in a tree-clothed ridge, which stretched away on either side. Ronald confided to Jean that it looked as if some giant manito had taken a bite out of the ridge, but he was careful not to let Nangotook overhear the remark. There was no sand of any kind to be seen, but, in spite of their disappointment, the boys voiced their admiration of this beautiful, landlocked harbor. The Ojibwa’s usually impassive face wore a look in which relief seemed mingled with surprise, and he spoke a few words in his own language, and quickly cast a pinch of tobacco into the water. It was no wonder that he felt such an attractive place must be the dwelling of some spirit.

By that time the sky had become thickly overcast, and, as the gold-seekers circled the wooded shore, rain began to fall. They made a landing on the trunk of a cedar, that had tilted over until it lay almost flat on the water, and lifting out the canoe, hid it in the thick growth. In spite of the rain, the boys were eager to explore. They had seen nothing very encouraging so far, but they were by no means convinced that this was not the mysterious island they sought. How could they be sure the golden sands did not lie just over there beyond the forest?

Curiously enough it was the Indian who hung back and wanted to delay exploration until the weather cleared. He did not give any good reason for waiting, but his disinclination to begin the search was so plain, that the boys grew impatient and told him if he did not want to go he could stay behind. They were going to see what was on the other side of the woods. When he found they were determined, he joined them, but, contrary to his usual custom, he did not lead the way. It was the Scotch boy who took the lead.

Striking through the woods where they had landed, they went up the ridge. As they climbed, the way became steep and rocky. The spruces and balsams stood less thickly on the summit, and, if the weather had been clear, the adventurers might have obtained a good view of their surroundings, but the rain was falling so thick and fine, more like a dense mist than rain, that they could see only a few feet beyond where they stood. It was quite impossible to tell what sort of shore lay beyond and below the woods.

“It is scarcely worth while to seek for golden sands or anything else in this thick weather,” Jean remarked. “We must wait until it passes.”

“Go back to bay, make camp, catch some fish,” said Etienne, in his brief, abrupt way.

Ronald was reluctant to give up, but there seemed nothing else to do, and the mention of fish reminded him he was very hungry, so he yielded, not very good-naturedly. It was the Ojibwa that led the way this time, and a steep, dripping, slippery way it was, down through the woods to the bay.

Probably that bay had never been fished by any creature but the gulls that swooped down on the small fishes that swam too near the surface. The water abounded in little fish, but they were lake herring, which are really not herring at all, and will not take a hook. The lads had no net, and failing to catch anything in the bay, were obliged to go out through the channel. There, above a sunken reef, they secured three good sized lake trout.

In the meantime Etienne had found and made ready a camping place, and had built a small bark lodge. The rain continued steadily, and the three spent the rest of the day under shelter.

Rain was still coming down the next morning, and the weather had turned so cold that the boys would not have been surprised if snow had fallen, though it was still early in September. By the time another supply of fish had been caught and fire-wood cut, they were glad to seek the wigwam. There they remained most of the day, resting on couches of balsam and spruce, covered with blankets, and passing the time talking, mending their moccasins and dozing. In the center of the wigwam they kept a small fire going, the smoke finding its way out through a hole in the roof. The lads tried to persuade Nangotook to tell of his adventures and exploits, but he seemed disinclined to talk, and passed the day in morose and sullen silence. Jean could not imagine what had come over the usually good-natured Ojibwa.

Late in the afternoon the rain ceased, and Jean and Ronald climbed up over their trail of the day before. Nangotook only grunted when they proposed the trip, and did not accompany them. The sky was still overcast and the distance hazy, but from the top of the ridge, a hundred feet or more above the lake, the two lads could look down upon a rocky shore to their left and across a stretch of lower land to the right. What the shore was like beyond that low land they could not tell. There might be, indeed it seemed probable from the lay of the land that there was, a beach on that side of the island. Ahead of them the trees obstructed the view.

They made their way along the ridge, a rough way, over slippery rocks, along the verge of steep declivities, among spruce and balsam trees, until they came out from woods on almost bare rocks. They had reached the southern end of the island, where rock walls and slopes descended to the water, vertically in some places, more gently in others. Everywhere there was rock, no beaches, no sand.

The sun had set behind heavy clouds, and the gray sky shed little light. No land was visible across the water, in the growing darkness and haze of the gloomy, sullen evening. Depressed and silent, the two lads stumbled back along their trail, finding it with difficulty in the blackness of the woods. Their confidence was dwindling, though they tried to comfort themselves with the thought that they had not explored all of the island yet. The shore beyond the lower land to the west of the ridge was their only real hope.

That night Jean dreamed that he went to that shore by night, and found the golden sands gleaming in the moonlight. Then, just as he stooped to gather up a handful, there came a strange, rustling sound over his head. He looked up, and an enormous bird with open beak and fiery eyes was swooping down on him. He tried to run, to wave his arms, to shout, but not a muscle could he move, not a sound could he make. The bird’s great wing brushed his head. He made a tremendous effort and broke the spell that bound him. With a little cry he sprang out of his blanket and on to his feet, just as some heavy, furry, spitting object grazed his shoulder and landed in the bed he had left.

The animal was as badly frightened as the boy. It uttered a shrill screech, and sprang for the patch of dim light that marked the entrance to the shelter. Unfortunately Ronald was lying directly across its path. Aroused by the screech, he raised himself up. The heavy ball of fur struck him full in the body, knocking him flat again. The impact broke the beast’s leap, and it fell sprawling across the lad’s breast. Its vicious, cat-like snarl was close to his ear, he felt its hot breath on his face. Too terrified to cry out, he upheaved his body in an effort to throw off the creature. Its sharp claws tore through his blanket coat, and he tried to get a hold on its throat.

Just at that moment, Jean precipitated himself full upon both Ronald and the animal. The attack was too much for the fierce cat. It slipped out from between the two and sprang clear of the entrance, before Jean’s knife could find it.

The boys disentangled themselves from the blankets and balsam branches, each assuring the other that he was not seriously hurt. Although dawn had come, darkness still lingered in the heavily shaded shelter. The fire was out, but, with sparks from his flint and steel, Jean lighted a roll of dry birch bark. As it flared up, they could see the hole in the roof of branches where the animal had fallen through.

“It was attracted by the fish,” said Ronald. “A lynx——”

With a startled exclamation, Jean interrupted him. “Where is Nangotook?”

Nangotook had disappeared. His blanket lay on his balsam couch, his gun beside it, but he was gone. In the light of their flickering birch torch, the two lads stared at one another. The Ojibwa had not run away from the cat, of course. He had left his blanket before the beast came through the roof, and had stepped over Ronald without waking him. What could have moved him to steal away without arousing them?

“Do you think he has deserted us?” Ronald asked.

“That is impossible,” Jean replied emphatically. “Nangotook is loyal. He would not desert us, whatever might befall us.”

“I should have been saying the same two days ago,” agreed his companion, “but now I’m not so sure. He was acting strangely all day yesterday. I think he begins to regret this voyage and to dread what lies before us.”

“He has not been like himself since we landed in this place,” Jean admitted. “I know not what has come over him, unless it is fear of the manitos of the lake and the islands. He thinks perhaps that the spirits send storm and disaster to keep us from the golden sands. Either he loses faith in his charm, or fears it will protect him only, not you and me.”

“What is his charm? Do you know? Have you ever seen it?”

“I think I saw it yesterday. Once when I came into the lodge, he was sitting by the fire looking at something he held in his hand. In the firelight it looked like a nugget of copper. It was a queer shape, something like a fish, but one end was like a beaver’s tail, and it was rubbed bright. As I moved nearer for a better look, he heard me, closed his hand over the piece of copper, and glanced around. Then he slipped it into a little deerskin bag, his medicine bag, I suppose, without giving me another glimpse of it. You know the beaver is his totem. But even if he fears his charm will fail him, I am sure he would not desert us.”

“I scarcely believe myself that he would,” Ronald returned. “Where would he go? He would not be starting across the water on such a threatening night.”

“He will return before long. I am sure of it,” was Jean’s confident assertion.

XI

NANGOTOOK RECONNOITERS

The cat-like tracks of the animal that had attacked the lads were plainly marked in the rain-softened earth and leaf mould. They were the prints of a lynx of unusual size. It was lucky for Ronald that he had slept in his heavy coat, or the beast’s claws might have injured him seriously. As it was, they had torn through his clothes, and had inflicted a shallow but painful scratch on his breast.

The boys cut more fuel and broiled their fish for breakfast. They were just finishing the meal, when the bushes parted suddenly and Nangotook stood before them.

Jean rose to his feet. “Where have you been, Nangotook?” he exclaimed. “We were just about to follow your trail to see if any evil had overtaken you.”

“Little brother need have no fear,” Nangotook answered with more amiability than he had shown the night before. “The Ojibwa brave can take care of himself—with other men,” he added, after a moment’s pause. Perhaps he was not so sure of being able to hold his own with spirits or supernatural beings.

Knowing that he would tell them what he had been doing when he was ready to speak, and not before, the lads forbore to question him. Instead they told him of the beast that had fallen into the lodge. Nangotook examined the tracks with interest. “Big lynx,” he said. “We track him and find where he lives.”

“’Tis hardly worth while to be doing that,” objected Ronald. “His pelt is not at its best now, and anyway we’re not hunting for pelts. We must examine every yard of the shore of this island. I feel sure there’s a beach beyond the lower ground, and it may be the one we’re looking for.”

“Yes,” agreed Jean, “we must go over there at once.”

The Indian made no reply, but continued to eat his fish in silence. When he had finished, he rose to his feet. “Come,” he said briefly. “I show you tracks not made by lynx.”

He led the boys behind the wigwam and a little way through the thick woods. There he stopped and pointed to some marks in the soft ground under a spruce tree.

“A man,” Jean exclaimed, dropping on his knees to examine the prints.

“Two men,” corrected Nangotook.

“What are they? Did you follow them?” cried Ronald. “How did you come upon their trail?”

In the brief, abrupt manner in which he usually gave information when action impended, Nangotook explained that he had waked in the night with the feeling that some strange thing or person was near by. He had lain quiet, listening. From a big cedar that overhung the lodge, he had heard the faint rustle of foliage, the creaking of a limb. There was little wind, and that sixth sense, by which an Indian distinguishes sounds, told the Ojibwa that the noises were made by animal or man. Something warned him of danger. As he lay listening, his suspicions were confirmed. He heard a scraping as if some hard substance rubbed the bark of the tree. Then the branches creaked more loudly, and there came a thud as of something heavy striking the ground. But that was not all. Just as the heavy thing struck the earth, the Indian’s keen ears detected a whispered exclamation, an oath in French. That sound must have dispelled from his mind the fear, if he had felt it, that the thing in the tree might be some supernatural being. Indian manitos, spirits or fiends would not be apt to swear in French.

The full, slow breathing of the two boys indicated that they had not been disturbed. Lying perfectly still, Nangotook also breathed deeply and regularly, so that any one listening might think that all three slept soundly. He did not want the spy, whoever he was, to suspect that any one was awake and listening. The Indian heard no more rustlings or scrapings, however. There was nothing to suggest that the man approached nearer.

For a long time Nangotook lay perfectly still. Then, feeling sure that the spy had taken himself off, he rose noiselessly, cast away his blanket, and, knife in hand, stepped over Ronald and out of the lodge. It was useless to try to track the uninvited visitor in the darkness. It was the canoe the Ojibwa was anxious about. Making his way to the place where it was hidden, he found it safe and undisturbed.

On the bay, and along the edge of the woods that grew down to it, there was more light, for day was dawning. As Nangotook started to turn back towards camp, he caught sight of something floating on the water near by. He crawled out on the leaning tree trunk where he and his companions had landed two days before, reached for the thing and secured it. It was a small piece of deerskin, such as travelers usually carried for moccasin patches. It did not belong to him or to either of the boys, and it had not been in the water long, for it was scarcely wet. To the Indian it was sure proof that the night visitor had come by water. He looked for the place where the man’s canoe had come in, and soon found the spot, under a thick, overhanging tangle of trees and bushes, where he would not have noticed signs of landing had he not been searching for them.

Returning to his own hidden canoe, he put it in the water, shoved off, and paddled noiselessly along close to shore. He had not gone far, when he heard, from the direction of the camp, the sharp screech of a lynx, but he paid no heed. It was the cry of a real lynx, not a human imitation, and the thought that the two boys might be in any danger from that fierce, but, as far as man is concerned, cowardly animal, never occurred to him. He was seeking to discover whether the stranger’s canoe had come from somewhere on the bay or through the channel. The depth of the water enabled him to keep close in to the shore, which he eyed keenly in the half light of the gray, gloomy dawn. He skirted the higher land, then the low ground opposite the entrance, finding nothing to indicate that a boat had ever run in anywhere.

It was not until he had gone more than half-way around and had come to rising ground again, that he observed a suspicious looking spot. He paused to examine it, and found a landing place, with a distinct trail leading away from it. The tracks showed that two men had come and gone that way. Probably they had carried their canoe with them, for he did not find it hidden anywhere, though he sought for it. The tracks had been made since the rain, and there had been no attempt to obliterate them. Nangotook followed them across to the north shore of the island, where he had not been before.

There, among the rocks, the trail ended abruptly. He searched, but could find no more tracks. Finally he became convinced that the men must have lowered the canoe down a cleft in the rock wall to the water.

Where had they gone? He had no way of telling. The outlying rocks were wave washed, and afforded no shelter. There was no other land visible. A short distance out, the morning mists lay thick on the lake. There might be hidden land off there somewhere, or the canoe might have gone along shore, but which way or how far he could not guess. So he turned back the way he had come.

He paddled across the bay, and landed at the place near the camp where the two men had come ashore. From there they had proceeded very cautiously, and had left little trace of their passage through the woods. It was with considerable difficulty that the Ojibwa tracked them to the tall spruce. The spruce was at least a hundred and fifty feet from the hut, but the men must have climbed it and made their way, as squirrels might, from one tree to another until they reached the cedar that overhung the shelter. The thick growth made such a feat possible for active men.

One of them, however, had missed his hold in the darkness, and had fallen from the cedar. A hollow in the soft leaf mould showed where he had struck the ground. It was then he had uttered the exclamation in French that had convinced Nangotook the spy was neither animal nor spirit. He had climbed the tree again, for there were no other tracks to be found, and had gone back in the same way. Perhaps only one man had made the trip from tree to tree, the other waiting for him at the tall spruce.

With intense interest and excitement the boys listened to the Ojibwa's story. The spies might be wandering Indians who had come to the island in search of copper. It was said that many of the islands of the lake bore copper in loose pieces that could be picked up on the shores. One of the visitors, however, had uttered an oath in French.

"Can you make any guess who those men are?" Ronald asked, anxiously, when the Ojibwa had finished his tale.

Nangotook nodded gravely. "One Indian, Cree, I think," he said, "the other Awishtoya."

"Are you sure? How can you tell?" cried both boys.

Nangotook pointed to the tracks. "One man lame," he said. "Walk heavier with right foot, and foot turn out. Some places, across the bay there, tracks show it plain. Following us for something. Bad man, Awishtoya."

XII

OVER THE CLIFFS

Le Forgeron Tordu, or Awishtoya, as the Indians called him, had surely been following the gold-seekers. Was it the smoke of his fire they had seen when they were leaving the Rock of the Beaver? He might have watched them start out and have noted their course, but they had seen no canoe in pursuit. How could he have followed in darkness, wind and rain? It seemed incredible that he had been able to do so, and had come safe through the storm to the island where they now were. Yet Nangotook was sure of the footprints, sure they had been made by the Blacksmith and his Indian companion. Ronald suggested that perhaps the evil Frenchman or the Cree knew how to reach the Island of Yellow Sands, knew the way better indeed than Nangotook knew it, and had not followed them, but had come direct.

"If that be true," cried Jean. "If they know the way, and have come straight here, it means that we are even now on the Island of Yellow Sands."

"We can find out only by exploring the place," Ronald replied promptly. "That is the first thing for us to be doing. We must look for the beach of gold. We can be seeking for some signs of Le Forgeron at the same time."

Nangotook made no objection that time, and seemed less inclined to hold back. Nevertheless, he allowed Ronald to take the lead. Going through the woods by a different route from the one they had followed before, they came to the level stretch of ground they had seen from the ridge. They were no longer in the forest, but were obliged to penetrate a thick and high growth of alders, high-bush cranberries, and other shrubs. Wherever the bushes left room for them to grow, the little bunchberry or dwarf cornel plants, with their clusters of red berries, covered the ground. Beyond the patch of bushes, which was not more than a quarter of a mile wide, the treasure-seekers hoped to find a sand beach, *the* sand beach for which they were searching.

They pushed their way through the growth as rapidly as they could and soon came out upon a rocky shore that descended straight to the water, bunchberries, bearberries and other plants growing to the verge. The disappointment was a bitter one. The lads had fully expected to find a sand beach there, and their hopes of yellow sands had been high. They were not ready to give up even then, but followed along the shore until they reached the high barren rocks at the southern extremity of the island, where they had been the day before. Not a grain of gold was to be found.

"No yellow sands on this island," the Ojibwa said, with a shake of his head, as they turned back from the rocks of the southern end.

"But you said this was the place," cried Jean with impatience. "You said so when we first saw it from that heap of rocks where we were stranded. You said it was the island your grandfather saw."

Nangotook did not deign to reply, but Ronald was not yet willing to abandon the search.

"There is one stretch of shore remaining we know nothing of," he said. "We must search every inch of it before we can be sure. It may be that the beach is only a short one, but even a hundred feet of sands of gold would mean a fortune for us."

So the treasure-seekers returned to the bay, crossed it in the canoe, and explored the whole northern half of the island. The north end was quite as discouraging as the south. Everywhere the shore was of rock, rising in palisades or composed of tumbled heaps of boulders, around and among which the water washed. In one place the explorers came to a bay partly protected by a reef, but on its pebble beach there were no golden grains. The beach they had passed on the day of their arrival the two boys examined thoroughly, digging up the sand here and there in the hope of finding some bits of yellow metal, but not a trace could they discover. Even Ronald gave up at last, forced to admit that they had not yet reached the island they were seeking. In his disappointment he began to doubt that the Island of Yellow Sands existed anywhere but in the Indian’s imagination. He confided to Jean that he did not believe Nangotook’s grandfather had ever seen such a place. His discouragement was the more complete, because, with the exception of the small rocky islets near at hand, they could get no glimpse of any other land.

Jean, however, clung to the belief that the sought-for island might not be far off. It was not strange that they could not get sight of it, for the day remained thick and cloudy, fog on the water shutting off their view, and blotting out even the rock where they had been storm-bound.

All that day the three, especially the Indian, had kept a lookout for some trace of their visitors of the night before, but had found no sign. The boys concluded that Le Forgeron and his companion had not merely paddled along shore and landed at some other spot, but had left the island entirely. Where had they gone? Though some of the outlying islets bore a few trees and bushes, none seemed to afford a sufficient shelter for a camp. No one would choose such an exposed spot, with a good camping place close at hand. The disappearance of Le Forgeron further convinced Jean that there must be other land not far off.

Nangotook was not so sure that the Frenchman had left the island. Though they had found no further traces of the man, he might be concealed somewhere. It was evident that the Ojibwa himself had reason to fear Le Forgeron. Apparently he thought the Blacksmith might return to their camp again that night and do them some injury, for he proposed that they move to another spot not so deep in the woods, where they could keep a better lookout for danger. The lads were more than willing, and he selected a place at the southern end of the island, on open ground, a little distance from the woods. There, where they could not be approached under cover of the trees, the three built another lodge. While the boys cut balsam for their beds and fire-wood for cooking, Nangotook went back to the bay, launched the canoe, and paddled it through the entrance and around the outer shore to the end of the island. Then they hoisted it up the rocks and carried it to their camp, where they placed it, bottom side up, close to the wigwam.

Supper that night was a pleasant change from the fish diet of the past few days. The evening before, the Indian had set some snares, using fish-line for the nooses, and had caught a hare. To take the place of the missing kettle, he had made a birch-bark basket in two compartments between which the water could circulate. Having filled the basket about half full of water, he placed in one compartment the meat, cut into small pieces, and some little tubers he had dug. Meanwhile stones had been heating in the fire. When they were red hot, he lifted them, one at a time, with two sticks, and carefully immersed them in the water in the other compartment, setting it to boiling. The tubers he called waub-es-see-pin. They were a little like potatoes, and, stewed with the hare meat, the lads found them good.

All night the fire was kept going, and the Indian remained awake and alert until daylight, when he roused Jean to take his place. There were no signs that either man or beast had approached the camp.

The weather remained raw and threatening and the lake was hazy with cold mist. After noon, Ronald, growing restless, set off to hunt and explore. Etienne had gone to look at his snares, and Jean remained in camp. Ronald followed the ridge to the bay, then made his way around to the extreme inner end, where the waters of the bay were separated from the lake by a narrow strip of land. From there he struck along the lake shore to the place where the track Etienne had followed the morning before ended abruptly. The boy’s mind was busy with the problem of the appearance of Le Forgeron on the island and his departure from it. Why had he come there and where had he disappeared to? The lad went clear to the northern end. Gulls were everywhere, swimming in the lake, diving through the waves, flying overhead and resting on the rocks. The place seemed alive with them. Ronald paused for a few moments to look out over the water. The sun had broken through the clouds, and they were scudding before a strong wind. In the distance he could discern the rock that had sheltered his companions and himself. The clearing weather gave him hope that they would be able to leave the island soon, and it was in better spirits that he turned to go.

On the way back, he climbed about on the rocks to get a view down on the palisaded cliffs, which were not quite like anything he had seen before. In some places the columns were in two or three rows, one row rising above another, the lower one starting at water level and running up like a flight of steps. After he had passed this singular place, he noticed, as he looked down from the top of a vertical wall of rock, that the waves, instead of breaking into foam against it, seemed to be passing under it. “There must be a cave down there,” he thought. Balancing himself on the very edge of the cliff, he leaned forward in an attempt to see the hole where the water washed in.

Then something struck him suddenly, heavily, on the head and shoulders, and he toppled over. The blow had taken him wholly by surprise, and there was nothing to catch hold of. He went down into the lake. His head struck a rock, and he knew nothing more.

XIII

THE CAMP IN THE CAVE

When Ronald regained consciousness, he found himself in semi-darkness, and it was several moments before he could make out his surroundings. He was lying with his body in the water, but his head and shoulders on shelving rock. Just as he opened his eyes, a wave swept over his breast, the cold spray striking his face. As the water receded, it seemed to pull at his legs, but his body was lodged in a shallow rift of the rock, and the drag of the water was not strong enough to dislodge him. A little way above his head he could discern in the gloom, a dark rock ceiling. As soon as he was able to connect his thoughts with what went before his plunge over the cliff, he realized that he was probably in one of the caves that he had guessed must penetrate the rock at the water line.

His head ached, and when he put his hand to his forehead, he felt that it was wet with something thicker and stickier than lake water. He had cut his head on a rock when he fell into the water. It was striking the rock, rather than plunging into the lake, that had made him lose consciousness. He wondered that he had not been drowned. It was not the first time in his rather adventurous life that he had come near to drowning. It was strange, he thought, that he was not strangling and gasping for breath, his throat, nose and lungs full of water. Surely his head could not have been under more than a moment. Yet he had been washed into the hole in the rock.

His limbs were so numb with cold he could scarcely use them, but he managed to roll over and crawl farther up the slanting shelf on which he lay. This rock incline was at the inner end of the cave, which, as he could see in the half light, was small and low. When he was close against the rear wall he was above the reach of the waves, but he could not rise to a sitting position without striking his head against the ceiling.

Then he remembered his gun. He slipped back down the slope and searched for it as best he could, but failed to find it. Probably it had fallen out of his hand when he tumbled over the cliff. He was almost out of ammunition anyway, so the loss was not very serious.

The really serious thing was his situation there in the cave. How was he to get out? Of course he could swim, breasting the waves that washed into the opening, but after he had passed the entrance, it would be no easy feat, with such a sea running, to swim along shore looking for a place where he could climb up. It would take strenuous exertion to keep from being dashed against the rocks. His limbs were stiff and numb from the cold water, his head aching and dizzy, and he felt himself in poor trim for such a struggle.

Perhaps there was some other opening from the hole. He could see that the sloping shelf extended part way along the sides. Crawling to the left, he found the wall continuous. There was no exit on that side. He rolled over and crawled back and around to the right of where he had been lying. In the dim light he could discern a black streak just where the shelf ended. The streak proved to be, as he had hoped, a rift in the rock. The rear and side walls, running almost at right angles, did not quite come together, leaving a narrow break he could just squeeze his body into. The rift was dark, the rock closing overhead, and, as there was not room for him to stand upright, he was obliged to crawl, but the bottom sloped sharply upward, and he could see dim light ahead. He hoped that he had found a way to reach the top of the cliff. He had not crawled more than fifty feet, however, when he came to the end of the passage. It did not lead to the top, but opened out on a narrow ledge about half-way up the side wall of another cave.

This cave was larger and higher than the one he had just left, and on its farther side there was a pebble beach fifteen or twenty feet wide. Ronald stared at that stretch of beach in amazement, for there on the pebbles glowed the live embers of a fire. The boy’s eyes searched every foot of the cavern. It was better lighted than the other hole, for the entrance, though narrow, was much higher, and even the nooks and corners were not dim enough to conceal from his keen eyes any one in hiding. Not a living thing, man, animal or bird, was to be seen. Men had been there only a short time before, but they had gone and taken their belongings with them.

To reach the beach Ronald had to let himself down into the water. The bottom was rock and he succeeded in wading around the cave without going in above his knees. For some reason the waves did not come into this cavern so strongly.

On the beach he found that the fire had been made between drift logs laid close enough together to allow a kettle or pan to rest on them. Near by was a bed of balsam branches and other traces of a camp. He remembered that the trail Etienne had followed had ended near this place. Surely this camp in the cave accounted for the disappearance of the Frenchman and the Cree. They had been here not later than a few hours before.

The boy’s mind reverted to his plunge over the cliff. He knew well that he had not merely slipped and fallen. Something had struck him a heavy blow from behind. He and his comrades had come upon no traces of large animals on the island. Moreover Ronald did not know of any animal, that, unprovoked, would be likely to attack a man in such a manner. The inference was plain. Either Le Forgeron or his Indian companion had stolen up on him from behind and had knocked him over the cliff. What reason could the Blacksmith have for such an assault? Revenge undoubtedly for Ronald’s attack on him when he was torturing the poor old squaw. But surely he had not come all this distance back from the Sault for a mere act of vengeance. It must be, the lad thought, that Le Forgeron was following the three adventurers with the intention of taking the golden sand for himself. If they were near the gold, and he knew it, he might wish to make away with them before they actually reached the spot. But if he wanted to get rid of them, why had he not attacked their camp two nights before, when he had the advantage and could have slain them all in their sleep? Perhaps he had had such an intention, but had given it up after falling from the tree, fearing that Nangotook at least might have heard him. There was also the possibility that Le Forgeron might not know just where the yellow sands lay, and that he did not want to destroy all of the party until they had guided him to the place. He had merely seized the opportunity to get even with a personal enemy, as he certainly considered Ronald, by making away with him in a manner that would seem wholly accidental. At any rate Ronald was convinced that the Frenchman had made a deliberate attempt upon his life. A glint came into the lad's blue eyes, and his mouth set in a determined line. Instead of frightening him, the treacherous, cowardly assault had merely steeled his determination to outwit the Blacksmith and, in defiance and despite of him, to find and take possession of the golden sands.

All these thoughts flashed through the lad's mind in the few moments that he spent in examining the camping place on the pebbles. Then he commenced to search for a way out of the cave. Except the rift by which he had come, there was no break anywhere in the rock walls. It was evident that there was no exit except by water. He must make his attempt that way.

Exercise had dried his clothes somewhat, but he felt chilled to the bone. He took off his heavy blanket tunic, and noticed as he did so that his knife was missing. It had not fallen from the sheath, for the sheath was gone too, the leather thong that held it to his belt cut cleanly. He whistled between his teeth at the discovery.

Vigorously he rubbed his limbs, then rolled up the tunic and fastened it around his neck by the sleeves, leaving his arms free for swimming, and stepped into the water again. Keeping as close to the wall as he could, he waded to the entrance of the cave, where he paused, waist deep in water, to look out. The sky was blue, the wind blowing strongly, and the waves rolling high, but rocks just outside protected the entrance somewhat. He could make his start in comparatively smooth water, but a few strokes either way would bring him out into the force of the waves. He did not hesitate long, for he must make the attempt sooner or later. He could not trust to his friends ever finding him in that well hidden cave. Even if they followed his trail to the place where he had fallen over, he was not sure that he would hear them, or that, calling from below, he could make them hear his voice above the noise of the surf.

He was standing at the threshold of the cave, on a ledge across the entrance. The outer side ran straight down, sheer with the wall above the opening, and one step would take him into unknown depths. He made the plunge, but had scarcely taken three strokes, when he saw that he was close to the rift where the Frenchman and the Cree, according to the Ojibwa's reckoning, must have lowered their canoe and scrambled down to it. If they could go up and down there so could he, provided he could get in without being thrown in forcibly by the water and his brains dashed out against the walls. The waves were rolling straight into the rift. He must let himself be carried in, and trust to his strength to resist being battered against the rocks.

He had scarcely an instant of time to make the decision. He was borne in, almost grazing the wall, straight towards the place where the foam dashed to the top of the cliff. He would be thrown against the rock, battered, stunned. But, as he was carried in, he caught sight of a point of rock projecting from the wall just above where his head would pass. Instinctively he threw up his right arm and grasped that rock, his fingers gripping the tough stem of the stunted, trailing juniper that grew upon it. With the pull of the water below and the weight of his soaked garments, it seemed as if his arm would be torn out of the socket, but he held on, and, with a mighty effort, raised himself up until he could grasp the rock with his other hand also. Luckily the strong stem of the juniper and its tough roots, that had penetrated deep into the cracks and crannies, held fast, and the boy was able at last to pull himself clear of the water.

He was safe for the moment, but what was he to do next? How was he to reach the spot, near the head of the rift and beyond the foam-dashed wall where he could climb to the top? There was no possible way to reach it, unless he let himself down into the water again, and took the risk of being carried against the rock by the waves. He gave a little whistle between his teeth. Apparently he was worse off, much worse off, than he had been in the cave. He had better have stayed there, but it was of no use regretting that now.

He turned to examine the cliff behind him. The only possible place of ascent was just where the point of rock he was clinging to projected from the wall. There the wall was not quite perpendicular, there were a few crannies and holes, and from the top another trailing juniper sprawled part way over and hung down a few feet. It was a dangerous ascent, but a possible one. He could not remain where he was, inactive, the cold wind blowing on his soaked clothes, without chilling to the bone.

Crouched on the projecting rock, he wrung the water out of his clothes as well as he could without taking them off. There was no room to do that. Then he crawled along a little, put the fingers of his right hand into a hole in the cliff, and cautiously pulled himself up to a standing position, leaning against the wall. Clinging with his fingers and moccasined toes to every little cranny and hollow, his body sprawled flat against the rock, he made his way, slowly, carefully up, a few inches at a time, until he could grasp with his left hand the stout hanging stem of the juniper. After that it was easier, and he pulled himself safely over the edge not far from the place where he had fallen down.

As soon as he was safe again, Ronald became conscious that his head was throbbing painfully. He had hardly felt it since he came out of the crack into the larger cavern. He was shivering with cold too, and his one desire was to get back to camp as soon as possible.

The sun was setting when he came out of the woods at the southern end of the island. He shouted, and Jean appeared from the other side of the cabin, where, out of range of the wind, he was getting supper. He waved his hand in cheery greeting, then stopped and stared at the figure Ronald presented, his clothes only half dried, his cap gone, his hair and forehead stained with blood.

“*Ciel!* What has come to you?” he cried. His startled exclamation brought the Indian around the hut.

Crouched close to the fire, upon which Jean heaped fuel, Ronald told the story of his adventures. The others listened, each according to his nature, Jean with amazed expression and frequent exclamations and questions, Etienne silently, with grave, stern face.

When Ronald had finished, the Indian made but one comment. “Your guardian spirit must be very powerful,” he said, “or the manito of the waters favors you.” Then, as if remembering suddenly that he was a Christian, he hastened to add in a devout tone, “The good God above was indeed watching over you.”

“’Tis true I have been miraculously saved,” Ronald replied, “but why, think you, is Le Forgeron on this island? Are we near the Island of Yellow Sands then? I would that we could resume our search for it.”

“We will resume it as soon as this gale blows itself out,” replied Jean confidently. “We are near it I am sure, and now we know which way to go.”

“What do you mean?” cried Ronald. “Have you gained some new knowledge then?”

“Truly we have,” Jean answered springing to his feet. “Look, over there!” And he pointed across the water to the southwest.

Ronald rose and gazed. The wind had driven away cloud, mist and haze. Land, for days shut off by thick weather, was distinctly visible.

XIV

LOST IN THE FOG

All that night the wind blew a gale, dashing the waves on the rocks, where they broke in showers of foam and spray that gleamed white in the moonlight, for the sky was cloudless and the air clear and cold.

When the gold-seekers looked off across the water next morning they met with a surprise. Far away to the west stretched a dim blue shape like the figure of a gigantic man lying on his back.

“The Cape of Nanabozho,” exclaimed the Indian in an awe-struck tone.

“The Sleeping Giant himself,” the lads cried, and Jean added, “Are we not then far west of our course? Surely we should not be able to see the Pointe au Tonnerre.”

Nangotook shook his head. “Who knows,” he said, “how far the Cape of Thunder may be seen? Is it not the home of Nanabozho himself? Who knows that it may not come and go in the sight of men at the will of the manito?”

“But,” objected Ronald, “you said that island on the east shore was the grave of Nanabozho. What has he to do with the Cape of Thunder?”

Nangotook looked puzzled. “It is true,” he said slowly, “my people say the manito makes his dwelling on that island to the east, but they say also that the Cape of Thunder is formed in his likeness, and they leave offerings to him there. It may be,” the Ojibwa added, his face clearing, “that part of the time he lives in one place, part of the time in the other. Why not? Spirits may be in many places. They do not travel slowly like men, who creep along with much labor. What do the manitos know of paddling and of portages? They cross high hills at a stride, and the land and water are alike to them. Do not the white fathers say that God is a spirit and that He is everywhere?”

“Hush, hush, Etienne!” cried Jean scandalized. “Would you speak of the good God and your heathen manitos in the same breath, and even compare them with Him? And you a Christian! It is sacrilege!”

The Ojibwa looked abashed. “I *am* a Christian, I worship the one great spirit as the fathers taught me,” he answered somewhat sullenly. He started to turn away, but Ronald spoke to him.

“Surely,” the boy insisted, “we’re out of our course. We’ve been driven too far to the west, and must seek our island towards the east. Is that not true?”

“It may be,” Nangotook grunted, “if that is the true cape.”

“Of course it is the cape. What else could it be?”

“A sign from the manito himself,” growled the Indian, and turned his back.

The lads were not unimpressed by Nangotook’s words and manner. The dim figure, like a great man outstretched in sleep, seemed mysterious and uncanny enough to their imaginations. Thunder Cape is the eastern boundary of Thunder Bay on the northwest shore of Superior, and it is only its highest part that is visible far across the lake, the lower land sinking entirely out of view and leaving the Giant lying solitary on the water.

“Etienne says it is a sign,” Jean remarked in a low voice. “Does he think the omen good or bad, I wonder?”

Ronald shook his head. “I doubt if he knows what he thinks, but what is that to us? If we ever find the gold, we will secure it in spite of all the Indian devils in the lake.” He spoke hotly, eager to prove to himself as well as to his companion that he had no faith in or respect for the power of such heathen spirits and demons.

Jean looked a little frightened at his friend’s bold tone. Nangotook turned on him with a stern face. “Speak not so of the manitos of these waters,” he said peremptorily, “lest you rouse their wrath and bring disaster on us all.” And with a glance of scorn at the offending lad, he walked away.

“Nangotook is but a weak kind of Christian,” Ronald remarked sneeringly. “He still puts his faith in these manitos of his and fears them.” The boy was smarting under the Indian’s rebuke.

Jean shook his head doubtfully. “He is a Christian,” he replied, “but, being an Indian, he has seen instances of the power of the spirits of the lake. I, too, am a Christian, as you very well know, and have no veneration for such savage gods and devils, but I have heard strange tales of their doings and of the power of their priests. Father René says the medicine men’s gifts are surely of the devil, but that good Christians who put their faith in a higher power need have no fear of them. Yet I can see no good in offending the spirits needlessly, and bringing their enmity upon us by foolish speeches.”

To this argument, which indicated that Jean upheld the Indian in his rebuke, Ronald found no ready answer. Indeed in his heart he was not so contemptuous of the manito’s powers as he appeared, and was just a bit uneasy over his own defiance. The feeling was not strong enough, however, to shake his determination to find the wonderful island and to carry off a goodly sample of its golden sands.

The wind was still blowing so strongly from the west as to make traveling impossible. Ronald had suffered no ill effects, except a little stiffness of the muscles, from his soaking and chilling of the day before, but the wound on his forehead and a lump on the back of his head pained him considerably, so he did not care to exert himself. He remained in camp, spending his time mending his clothes and making a hare skin cap to replace the toque he had lost when he fell over the cliff. The others fished on the lea side of the island, visited the snares, and searched for some signs of the man or beast that had attacked the boy. With the exception of some footprints at the edge of the cliff, prints made by a larger moccasin than Ronald wore, there was no trace of the mysterious enemy. The tracks were found in one place only, where a little earth had lodged on the rock. On the almost bare rocks round about, no marks were discernible. Jean and Etienne would have been glad to explore the caves under the cliff, but the high wind of that day and the following one made it impossible to use the canoe on that side of the island.

The second evening after Ronald’s fall from the cliff, a wonderful aurora borealis, more brightly colored than any the boys had ever seen, waved its streamers of green, yellow, orange and flame-red over the northern sky. Nangotook regarded it with awe, and muttered something in his own language that the boys could not understand.

The next night the wind went down with the sun, but when the lads crept into their blankets, the long roll of the waves had not subsided enough to make launching the canoe safe. Since they had learned of the presence of an enemy on the island, one or another of the three had kept awake and watchful all night. When Ronald took his turn before dawn, he left the wigwam and scrambled down the rocks to get a drink of water. He was pleased to find that the waves had smoothed out into long, gentle swells. “We can surely cross to that other land to-day,” he thought. He was too impatient to put off departure, however. Why wait till daylight? The sun would come up in another hour or two. If they started at once, they could make the trip before there was any danger of the wind rising again, and, moreover, their enemies, who might be on the watch somewhere, would be less likely to see them go.

The lad returned to the shelter, aroused the others and explained his plan. Jean was eager to go, and Nangotook grunted his assent. The idea of stealing a march on their enemies appealed to the Indian’s love of strategy. Dawn was just beginning to break, when everything was ready. But Nangotook suddenly became reluctant to start out. He pointed to the mist that lay on the water and dimmed the stars. “Fog come soon,” he said.

“’Tis only the morning haze,” replied Ronald. “’Tis not thick enough to hinder us, and it will disappear at sunrise.”

“We shall be there by sunrise if we start now,” Jean added confidently. “That land is not far away. An hour’s paddling will surely take us there.”

“Better wait and see,” said the Ojibwa.

But the boys insisted. They were impatient to be gone, and could not endure the thought of further delay. Ronald especially was stubbornly determined. He knew better than to accuse Nangotook openly of cowardice, but he hinted so plainly that the Indian might be influenced by fear, that the latter’s pride was touched. Suddenly breaking short the argument, he picked up the canoe, stalked into the water with it, and held it ready for the lads to step in.

They began their trip in silence. During the stay on the island Nangotook had whittled out two paddles to replace the ones they had lost, and now, as was his custom, he took the bow, with Jean in the stern. In the dim light and the haze they could not make out the land to which they were going, but they knew the direction, and had no fear of missing the place unless the mist grew denser.

It did grow denser. The light breeze was almost directly south now and it brought the fog. Gradually, and at first almost imperceptibly, the haze thickened. Nangotook and the boys paddled with all their strength and speed, the latter confident that they would soon reach their destination, the Indian so silent and stolid that it was impossible to guess at his thoughts. Then suddenly, all in a moment as it seemed, the fog folded them in its thick white blanket. Nangotook grunted as if to say “I told you so,” but did not lessen the speed of his stroke. To turn back was useless. There was better chance of keeping their direction true if they went ahead, for in turning they would almost inevitably lose their bearings.

The breeze was driving the fog, and as they went on, Jean and Ronald were sure, from the angle at which they took the waves and the way the breeze struck them, that they were keeping the course and would soon reach land. They strained their ears for the sound of water lapping on rocks or sand beach, and peered through the thickness for the shadowy, looming shape of cliffs or trees.

On and on they went. The fog whitened with the coming of dawn, but did not lessen or disperse. It blew and shifted from time to time, but never thinned enough to give them a clear view for more than a few feet in any direction. Either the land they had seen was much farther away than they had estimated, or they were out of their course. The Indian had nothing to say, and the lads could not tell whether he had really lost his bearings and knew it, or believed himself to be going in the right direction. When they questioned him, he answered only with grunts. They had scorned his advice, and had hurt his pride by implying that he was afraid to set out. Now he was letting them take their punishment.

They were certainly being well punished. As they paddled on through the fog, without a sound or glimpse of anything that suggested land, both boys grew very uneasy. After all, perhaps Nangotook had been right, perhaps the sleeping Nanabozho had actually shown himself to them as a warning to their rashness, or perhaps Ronald’s bold speech had really offended some manito. Neither boy would have admitted to the other that he had such thoughts, but they lived in a superstitious age, and there were many strange tales current among the voyageurs of the powers of the Indian spirits and of their priests or shamans.

The brightening of the fog showed the advance of day. Yet the adventurers went on and on and on. The thought occurred to both lads that the land they had seen might not be real at all, but only a mirage or a false appearance sent by the evil spirits to lure them to their deaths. There in that dense, chilling mist, cut off as it seemed from the world of men, and going perhaps into the very middle of the great lake, whose mysteries neither Indian nor white man had ever fully penetrated, such thoughts were far from pleasant.

Even fear could not still the pangs of hunger in healthy boys, however, or make them quite forget that they had had no breakfast. The birch basket still held the remains of the hare stew from their evening meal, so Ronald helped himself to a share of it, and then took the stern paddle while Jean breakfasted. Nangotook, however, refused to give up his paddle or to eat.

The day wore away, and still the blades dipped with regular rhythm. The stroke was slower and easier now, for there was no reason, lost as they were for haste or speed. They paddled merely to keep headway on the canoe and to strike the waves at the right angle. And still, hour after hour, they went on and on, Jean and Ronald taking turns at the stern paddle, the Indian never yielding up his place in the bow.

Ronald was plying his paddle mechanically, a dull apathy having settled down on his spirit, as the hour of silence and white mist passed, and Jean, stretched out on the bottom of the canoe, had fallen asleep when Nangotook, who had been sullenly silent all day, spoke suddenly. “Land,” he said and jerked his head towards the left.

Ronald woke from his stupor at once. The first thing he noticed was that the mist was a little less thick, for he could see Nangotook more distinctly, the next thing he observed was that the water was perfectly smooth, without even a ripple, and the third and most important was a dim, scarcely discernible something, a shadow of a shape, on the left hand. He called to Jean and the latter sat up and stared at the shadow.

At the Indian’s order Ronald swerved the canoe in that direction. There was no sound of surf, yet the approach must be made cautiously, for rock shores are far more common on Lake Superior than sand beaches. A careful stroke and paddles lifted, another stroke and paddles lifted again, and then the bow grated gently. Without hesitation Nangotook stepped over the side, while

Ronald held the canoe stationary with his paddle.

XV
STRANDED

It was not a sand beach the canoe had grated upon, but solid rock. The three adventurers stepped over the side, and, carrying the canoe, waded up a slope of rock until they were well above the water line. The fog was so thick they could see almost nothing of their surroundings. Scrambling over unfamiliar rocks slippery with moisture, when they could not see where they were going, was too perilous an undertaking to be worth attempting. There was nothing to do but wait until the fog cleared. So they unloaded the canoe, turned it over, propped it up, and settled themselves on their blankets in its shelter. Waiting was chilly, dreary work, but they were cheered by the knowledge that the mist was thinning. They did not have to wait long. Before the veiled sun sank to its setting, the fog, though it did not disappear, became so thin that climbing about was no longer dangerous.

The lads were eager to learn what sort of land they had reached. The place certainly abounded in gulls. The birds welcomed the lifting of the fog with such a chorus of shrill and whining cries, that the boys feared they had landed on another mere pile of rocks, one of those desolate and wind-swept spots where the gulls love to nest. There was always the chance, however, that the golden sands might lie close by.

Once more Etienne hung back and let Ronald take the lead. The Indian’s superstitious dread of what they might encounter had probably not been lessened by the Scotch boy’s defiance of the manitos or by the subsequent experience in the fog. No ravenous beast or hideous serpent appeared to threaten the treasure-seekers, however, no enormous shape towered out of the mist to warn them back. Only the gulls disputed their way as they climbed about the rocks. They soon discovered that the place was either a narrow point or an island. Where they had landed, it was only a few rods wide. Further exploration proved it to be an island, about two miles long, and nowhere more than a quarter of a mile broad. There was no golden sand, only sandstone rock in slanting, overlapping sheets and blocks with upturned edges. A narrow belt of small trees and shrubs ran along the highest part. Everywhere were gulls, young and old, and the remains of their nests. By the time the setting sun had gilded the mist with red and gold, the three had examined the island very thoroughly.

After sunset the fog thickened again, and before dark turned into cold rain. There was nothing on the island to eat, the attempt to fish was unsuccessful, and the castaways were reluctant to use the handful of crushed corn they had saved so carefully for an emergency. They would eat it next day if they could get nothing else, but for that night they decided to go supperless. Everything on the island was dripping wet, so they did not attempt to light a fire, but crept under the upturned canoe and wrapped themselves in their damp blankets. With the rain came wind, blowing in gusts and squalls.

In spite of hunger and discomfort, the lads went to sleep. They were awakened suddenly by a terrific blast of wind that blew directly into the propped up canoe, lifted the light birch craft as if it had been a dried leaf, and whirled it away in the darkness. In an instant the three were out of their blankets, up and scrambling over the slippery rocks. They could not find the canoe again, though they sought everywhere for it, endangering their necks again and again in the black darkness, wind and rain. At last, after Ronald had plunged down a steep slope into the water and narrowly missed drowning, and Jean had stumbled over the upturned edge of a broken block and wrenched his ankle, they gave up in despair. If the canoe had not been carried away across the water, they might find it, or the battered remains of it, in the morning, but to attempt further search that night would be useless and foolhardy.

The only thing they could do was to crouch down in such shelter as the belt of trees afforded, and wait for dawn. They could not even search out a good place, but were compelled to make the best of what was close at hand. The stunted trees and bushes protected them but little from the rain and the wind, that came in violent squalls, now from one quarter, now from another.

It seemed as if the night never would end, but towards morning the wind steadied and the rain ceased. Breaking through the clouds at the horizon, the sun rose red in a wind-torn sky. The waves were dashing their spray up to the very edge of the band of trees, and there was no sign of the canoe. There were other things to be seen, however. Rocks and reefs and islets, almost smothered in foam, were visible to east and south, while to west and north, at a distance of several miles, stretched what appeared to be continuous land, rising high.

The boys marveled at the sight, and at once questioned the Indian about the Island of Yellow Sands. “What was it your grandfather said about the island, Etienne?” Jean asked. “Did he not describe it? Was it large or small, high or low?”

Etienne shook his head. “That I cannot tell you, little brother,” he replied. “My grandfather told of nothing but the beach with the yellow sands and the waves rolling high upon it. Whether the island was large or small, high or low, wooded or barren, I do not remember that he said. In some of the tales, it is said that fierce beasts came out of the woods to attack the braves who tried to carry away the sand, but whether those tales are true or are only told to frighten the white man and keep him away from the gold, I do not know.”

While Etienne was speaking, Ronald had been gazing intently at the stretch of land hazy and blue in the distance. When the Indian had finished, the boy said slowly: “I do not believe that land can be the island we seek. If the Island of Yellow Sands were as large and high and plainly visible as that, some one would have found and explored it long ago. No, that is either part of the mainland, or one of the greater islands that men know. Surely to have escaped the white men’s eyes for so many years, the Island of Yellow Sands must be small and low and inconspicuous.”

“So it would seem indeed,” agreed Jean. “That land may be, as you say, a part of the main shore of the lake, or one of the great islands, Royale, Philippeau or Ponchartrain. Yet we can scarcely be sure that the island we seek is not a large one, just because men have not found it. Who, either white man or red, has ever traveled over all this great lake? The canoes go along the shores, and even the sailing vessels follow their regular courses. No man knows what may lie in the center of these waters. Is that not true, Nangotook?”

The Ojibwa nodded in assent. “Many tales are told,” he replied solemnly, “but they are only tales. No man knows.”

“There is one thing certain,” said Ronald the practical, “we can’t find out what that land is until we cross to it, and we can’t cross until we have a craft of some kind.”

“And even though we had the best of canoes,” Jean added, “we could not go through this sea.”

“Then ’tis something to eat we must be seeking first,” the younger boy responded. “I’m hungry indeed, but not quite ready to eat gull, until we see if we can find other food.”

All efforts to obtain anything else eatable failed Fishing from the rocks, even in those patches quiet water that were sheltered from wind and waves, brought no result. Nothing edible grew on the island but a few blueberries and bearberries, and the gulls had stripped the plants of their fruit. The castaways had to eat bark, leaves and roots, or try the flesh of the gulls.

They attempted to capture some of the young gulls by creeping up on them and seizing them or striking them with a canoe paddle, but all the young were full grown, able to swim and fly, and were so shy and wary that not even Nangotook succeeded in killing one. Snaring was equally unsuccessful, and some of the precious ammunition had to be sacrificed. Ronald was the best shot of the three, so the hunting was entrusted to him. Every time he fired, the birds rose from the rocks in a screaming cloud of gray and white, but he was fortunate enough to secure several. He shot young gulls, thinking they would be tenderer than the old.

The birds were plucked, cut up and boiled, and the two hungry boys and the Indian devoured every bit of the strong, fishy tasting meat. Their uninviting meal down, they set about constructing some kind of a craft to take them away from the island when the waves should go down. The trees were all small and unsuitable for canoe making. The best the three could do was to build a raft. They felled the straightest of the little trees, trimmed them of their branches, and bound them together with tough roots and strips of bark. So much of the growth on the exposed rock was stunted and twisted by the winds, that straight trunks were few. The harsh cries of the gulls seemed to mock at their efforts, but they finished their task at last, just as the sun was setting. Though the raft was small, rough and very imperfect, they believed it would hold them up and enable them to reach the distant shore in calm weather.

They had decided to make directly for that shore. The other islands and islets, visible from the one where they were stranded, appeared to be mere heaps of wind and wave-swept rock. It seemed unlikely that any sand whatever was to be found on the and the danger of trying to coast such rock piles in a clumsy raft was too great to be risked. If the gold-seekers could but reach a forested shore, where they could build another canoe, they might return and explore every island, but they must have a good boat first.

XVI

ISLAND OR MAINLAND?

To navigate Lake Superior on a raft was a perilous undertaking, but the attempt had to be made. Hoping to reach their destination before the wind came up again, the castaways started at dawn, while the mists still lay on the water and the land to north and west showed shadowy and indistinct. When the three, with their scanty equipment, had taken their places, the rude raft had all it would carry. It seemed as if an added pound or two might easily sink it. Etienne and Ronald knelt one on each side to ply the paddles, which fortunately had not been blown away, while Jean, who was of lighter build, sat between them, legs extended. The course was northwest, for in that direction the land seemed nearest.

All went well at first, but progress was very slow, and, before they had gone two miles, the wind was rising with the advancing day, and was threatening to make the raft unmanageable. As the mists cleared away, the voyageurs discovered that the land in front of them extended as far as they could see in either direction. On the left, to the southwest, it curved around and shut off the lake, but did not furnish much protection, for the shore on that side lay at least ten miles away. Evidently they were in a large bay, ten or twelve miles long and three or four broad, protected on the west and north by high land, partly cut off from the lake by rock islands to the south and southeast, but open to the northeast, and affording little shelter for small craft. As the wind rose and the ripples changed to waves, the peril of their position increased, and Ronald and the Ojibwa had their hands full guiding their clumsy craft and making headway. Every few moments a wave washed on it and sometimes over it, and the three were soon wet to their waists. But they managed to stick to the raft and continued to make some progress towards land.

The danger increased momentarily, and, as they approached a rocky shore, they lost control of the raft in the rising wind. The paddles were no longer of avail in handling the unwieldy thing. Wind and water took it wherever they would, the Indian and the boys washed and rolled about by the waves, but clinging with fingers and toes to the roots and bark ropes that bound the logs together. The boys’ only hope was that they would be carried ashore.

Unluckily rocks off the shore were in the way. A gust of wind bore the raft full on a jagged, upturned edge of rock, a sharp point penetrated between two of the slender poles and ripped through the fastenings. The raft hung suspended at an angle, the waves washing it, the castaways clinging to the slanting surface. The raft was doomed. It could not last many minutes without splitting in two. If they were to gain the shore, they must swim for it. Fortunately it was only a few feet away.

Ronald, who was the best swimmer of the three, went first, his blanket and the rest of his belongings fastened to his shoulders, Etienne’s gun, for Ronald had lost his own, held over his head with one hand, while he swam with the other. The waves bore him along, but his greatest danger was from the rocks, and he had to be on the lookout for a place where he could land without bruising himself against them. He rounded a projecting point, which broke the force of the water, and succeeded in making a landing just beyond. Then, having pulled himself up a steep, slippery slope, he turned to see how his companions were faring.

Jean and the Ojibwa had left the raft at the same moment, but the latter, like many Indians, was a poor swimmer. In spite of the fact that he was not burdened with a gun and could use both arms, he had fallen behind Jean and was making bad work of the short passage. In safety Jean passed the point Ronald had gone around, but Etienne, caught by an unusually large wave, was borne against a rock, striking the side of his head.

The moment Ronald saw what had happened, he plunged into the water again, shouting to Jean as he did so. Jean turned back at once, ducking through an advancing wave like a sea-gull. The Indian had gone under, and a receding wave had dragged him back from the rock. Just as he was being washed against it again, Jean, dropping his gun, seized him with one hand. He was unconscious, and Jean could hardly have managed him alone in such a heavy sea. Ronald reached him in a moment, however, and together they towed the inert body to shore, and succeeded in dragging and hoisting it up the rocks to safety.

It was the blow on the side of the head that had made Nangotook lose consciousness, for he had not swallowed much water. The boys laid him face downward and lifted him at the waist to get rid of what little water he had taken in, but it was several minutes before he came to. He had nothing to say about the accident and offered no thanks for the rescue, but it was evident from his changed manner that he was not unmindful that his companions had saved his life. Ever since Ronald had defied the manitos and had appeared to question Nangotook’s courage, the latter had been morose, gruff and silent, and had shown plainly that the Scotch lad had offended him deeply. Now, however, he seemed to think they were quits, for the angry mood had passed and he was himself again.

The adventurers were disappointed to find they had not reached the mainland, but were on an island about a mile long and half a mile wide in its broadest part. It was of irregular shape, two little bays running into it on the east and west, almost cutting it in two. The island was covered with trees, among them birches large enough to make the construction of a canoe possible. Other islands lay near at hand, while what they took to be the main shore was not more than half a mile away. Reaching it would be a simple matter, as soon as they had built a canoe.

The most important thing at the moment, however, was food. They had eaten nothing that day, and nothing the day before but a very insufficient amount of gull flesh. In a birch bark receptacle wrapped in Jean’s blanket, was the small quantity of corn, not more than two handfuls, they had saved so carefully. Convinced that they would soon be able to reach the land to the west, and that there must be game on so large a tract, they decided to eat this last remnant of their provisions. Etienne made another bark cooking vessel and prepared a rather thin soup of the corn. They made way with every drop and hungered for more.

Then Ronald sought for game while the Indian and Jean began canoe making. Ronald met with no success. Not a trace of game of any kind could he find. Apparently there was not even a squirrel on the island, and no gulls frequented it. He tried fishing from shore and rocks, but did not get a bite. Once more the wanderers were obliged to lie down for the night supperless, while from somewhere across the water an owl hooted derisively.

“If that fellow comes over here where we can get him, he’ll be howling in a different tone,” growled Ronald. He was so hungry he would not have rejected an owl, in spite of its animal diet.

“The great horned one is far too wise to come close enough for us to catch or shoot him,” Jean replied.

All three had worked late by firelight that night. They were expert at canoe building, and, though they did not appear to hurry, but performed each step of the operation carefully and thoroughly, they wasted few motions. Without any ready made materials, however, and no tools except their axes, knives and a big, strong needle for sewing, the task was necessarily a slow one and could not be completed in one day. They had felled suitable trees, white cedar for the frame and birch for the covering, and had skilfully peeled the birch bark, stripping a trunk in a single piece and scraping the inner surface as a tanner scrapes leather. Their ball of wattap and chunk of gum were gone, so they had to dig small spruce roots and gather spruce gum, soak, peel and split the roots and twist the strands into cord, and boil the gum to prepare it for use. Ribs, gunwales, cross pieces and sheathing had to be hewed and whittled out of the tough, elastic, but light and easily cut cedar wood, and soaked to render them as pliable as possible.

An open space, with soil deep enough to hold stakes, had been selected, and the stakes cut and driven in to outline the shape of the canoe. Within them the frame was formed, large stones being placed on the ribs to keep them in shape until dry. Slender cross pieces or bars strengthened and held the ribs in place, and the ends were pointed and fitted into holes in the rim, then bound with wattap. The pieces of bark, which had been sewed together, were fitted neatly over this frame, and wattap was wrapped over and over the gunwale and passed through bark and ribs. Next to the bark, and held in place by the ribs, strips of cedar, shaved as thin as the blade of a knife, were placed to form sheathing. The last process was the gumming of the seams to make them water-tight. The gum, softened by heat, was applied, and the seams carefully gone over with a live coal held in a split stick, while, with the thumb of the other hand, the canoe maker pressed in the sticky substance.

The boat was done at last, and, though made without saw, hammer, chisel, plane, nails, boards or paint, was, when completed and put in the water, a strong, sound, light, graceful, well-balanced craft that satisfied even the Indian’s critical eye. It floated buoyantly, and was water proof in every seam.

During the boat building, a few small fish had been caught, but no one had had half enough to eat. As the three paddled away in their new canoe, they debated whether they had better land at once or skirt the shore looking for possible beaches. They were not yet fully convinced that they might not be near the yellow sands. Food, not sand, was the first necessity, however, and Nangotook and Jean expressed themselves in favor of landing immediately and looking for game. But Ronald pointed out that they had scarcely any ammunition left, and that to catch game with snares and traps would be slow work. They had better try for fish first, he said, and they could do that while going along shore. Jean at once agreed, and Nangotook, when he saw the others were both against him, grunted his assent. So, when close to a gently sloping rock beach, they turned and paddled northeast, with a fishing line attached to the stern paddle.

They had gone but a little way, when a pull at the line signaled a bite. The fish did not make as hard a fight as the lake trout they had caught before, while fishing in the same manner, and when Jean pulled it over the side, he was disappointed to find that it was a siskiwit or lake salmon. Siskiwit are not very good eating for they are very fat and this was a small one weighing not over three pounds. Hungry as they were, they decided to try their luck again, in the hope of getting a better and larger fish, but after paddling for fifteen or twenty minutes and catching another larger siskiwit, they could wait no longer.

They put in to the rock beach very carefully, stepping out into the water before the bow grounded, to avoid scraping the new canoe. There on the rock Ronald and Etienne made a fire of moss, bark and birch wood, while Jean cleaned the fish. The boiled siskiwit was very fat and oily, but the three were so nearly starved that it seemed a feast to them. As they had not been accustomed to use salt with their food they did not miss that luxury. While the lads were preparing the meal, Etienne had discovered a well defined hare runway. The boys had to admit that a supply of food was a prime necessity, and they agreed to camp where they were until next day and make every attempt to secure game.

After Etienne had gone to set his snares, Ronald and Jean crossed the sloping rock beach, which was rough and scored. A little back from the water’s edge it was covered more or less thickly, first with lichens, and then with moss, bearberry plants and creeping evergreens. Looking for signs of game, they pushed their way through spruce and birch woods, stopping several times to set snares where hares had made a runway or squirrels had left a little pile of cone scales, with the seeds neatly extracted, at the foot of a spruce. The two had been going through the woods for perhaps half a mile, when they came out suddenly on the shore of a body of water.

“A bay,” exclaimed Jean, “who would have looked for one here?”

“It looks more like a lake,” Ronald replied. “The water is brownish like the little streams we’ve seen, and there is no opening in sight.”

Jean shook his head. “Just because we cannot see an opening is no sign that there is none,” he said. “Shores that look continuous are not always so, as you well know. Unless we have reached the mainland, this must be a landlocked bay. It is surely too large for a lake within an island.”

“It looks to me as if we *had* reached the mainland,” Ronald answered. “See how high the land towers beyond this lake or bay. If this is an island it must be Minong or Philippeau, and our Island of Yellow Sands lies far to the east. Let us go back for the canoe and cross this lake or skirt its shores. We have time enough before darkness comes.”

XVII

A CARIBOU HUNT

From the outer shore to the interior bay or lake was not what voyageurs would call a hard portage, for the distance was less than half a mile and the ground not very irregular, the hills and ridges being low. Nangotook and Jean bore the light canoe on their heads, while Ronald went first to clear the way. The woods of spruce, balsam and birch were open enough in many places to allow the canoe to go through easily. Where the growth was more dense, a few strokes of Ronald’s ax disposed of the branches that hindered progress. On the higher ground were open rock spaces, while in the depressions grew thick patches of alders, hazels, red osier dogwood, ground pine and the fern-like yew or ground hemlock. On the red berries of the yew flocks of white-throated sparrows were feeding, their brightly striped heads conspicuous among the green.

The shore where the explorers launched the canoe was rocky, but overgrown with small plants and bushes. They paddled northeast at first, seeking for an opening. Finding the body of water landlocked on the east and north, they continued on around. The south shore was rather low, but the north was of a different character. A narrow beach was bordered by an irregular ridge of boulders and fragments of rock, which looked as if it might have been pushed up by waves or ice. The beach was composed principally of pebbles and rock fragments, and there was no indication of yellow sands. The sun was sinking when the three reached a spot opposite the place where they had embarked, and they went on only far enough to make sure that there was no chance of golden sands in that direction. By the time they had crossed to the southern shore, they were very sure they were on a lake, not a bay. The southwestern end appeared to be much narrower than the northeastern and gave no indication of any opening larger than might be made by a small stream flowing in or out. They had passed the mouths of several such brooks.

As they neared the shore, they noticed, a little distance away, three loons, an old one and two young, swimming and diving. Just as the boys were carrying up the canoe, the old bird rose with a great flapping of wings and spatting of the water with its feet. Its wild, long drawn cry rang out like a derisive laugh. “A-hah-weh mocks us,” said the Indian.

There were jays and woodpeckers in the woods, but the loons were the only birds the explorers had seen on the lake, though they had kept a lookout for ducks. They had caught a good string of little fish, however, a kind of perch. While Etienne and Ronald carried the canoe back over the portage, Jean tried his luck in a small stream that issued from the lake, near where they had first reached its shores, and emptied into the big lake not far from their camp. He soon had half a dozen brook trout. On his way back he found a squirrel caught in one of the snares. So the campers had both fish and meat, a very little meat, for their evening meal.

After supper the three held a serious council. The middle of September had come, and the woods were taking on an autumnal appearance. The birch, aspen and mountain ash leaves were turning and beginning to fall, the blueberries and raspberries and most of the thimbleberries were gone, flocks of migrating birds were to be seen nearly every day on their way south, and the squirrels and chipmunks were busy laying up stores of cones and alder seeds. When the gold-seekers had left the Sault, they had fully expected to be on their way back, their canoe loaded with golden sand, before this. If they were to find the island they must do it soon, for autumn changes to winter rapidly on Lake Superior, the return journey would be a long one, and bad weather might cause much delay. But where should they go? In what direction should they search? How could they tell in what quarter the Island of Yellow Sands lay?

Nangotook showed plainly that his first concern was to return to the shore of the lake. Soon would come storms and cold, he said, and if bad weather found them on some small island in the middle of the lake they would starve. The Island of Yellow Sands might be sought in the spring when there would be more time to look for it. At the present time the manitos were not favorable to the quest. The lads had offended the spirits of the lake and islands, especially Nanabozho himself,—and the Indian looked sternly at Ronald. There was no foretelling what disaster might come to them if they persisted in the search. Another year the spirits might be more friendly, but now they had sent warnings. First there had appeared the cape of Nanabozho and directly afterwards the northern lights flaming in the sky.

“But,” objected Jean, “you said before, several times, that the northern lights were a good omen. Why do you now call them a warning?”

“There was no red in the lights we saw first,” replied Nangotook. “The last time they were red with anger, the color of blood and of the fire that destroys the lodge and turns the green forest to black. So will the manito destroy us if we heed not his warnings.”

“Take shame to yourself as a poor Christian, Etienne,” cried Jean indignantly. “Whatever the power of the Indian spirits, and I do not deny that they have power over heathens, that of the good God is greater. If we trust in Him and do no evil, we need not fear. We have started on this quest, and it would be disgrace to us to turn back so soon. You were as eager as we at first.

Surely you will not desert us now?”

“My little brother knows that I will never desert him,” said the Ojibwa proudly. “Where he goes I will go also. I have given my counsel. I have warned him. Now I will keep silence.” After that he refused to take any part in the discussion.

Jean and Ronald were agreed on one point. They were determined to continue their search for the golden sands. Both were almost certain that the place where they then were was not the one they were seeking. Ronald believed that they were farther west than they ought to be, on one of the great islands, Royale, which the Indian called Minong, or the mythical Philippeau, that the old explorers placed on their maps. He was in favor of striking out to the east, but Jean admitted that he dreaded paddling straight out into the lake, without any idea of their location or where they were going. From the rocky island where they had landed in the fog, they had not been able, when the weather cleared, to make out any land to the east except some small islands lying near by and of the same character as the one where they were. They must explore those islands to make sure that no golden beaches were to be found there. If they found nothing, Jean wished, instead of striking out into the lake, to travel along the shore to the northeast, in the hope of obtaining some idea of their real situation and some clue to the direction they should take. Ronald admitted the reasonableness of Jean’s plan, but was reluctant to give up his own. They failed to come to a definite decision that night.

It was the wind that settled the dispute. The morning was calm, but before the explorers had skirted the rock shores of all the islands that defined the southeastern limits of the bay, the wind was blowing strong and cold from the north. They found crossing the bay to the shelter of the shore difficult and dangerous enough. Paddling in such a strong side wind out into the open lake was out of the question. If they went along shore, however, they would be well protected by high land.

That morning they found two hares caught in the snares. A lynx had robbed a third snare. Hares seemed plentiful in that vicinity, for several had come out into the open in plain sight the night before. The least move towards them startled them back into the thicket, and the campers did not wish to waste any ammunition as long as they could use snares. For the boy or man who is not compelled to find his food or his living in the wilderness, snaring and trapping are cruel and wholly unnecessary. They are certainly not sport, and there is no excuse for indulging in them. But Jean and Ronald, brought up in a more brutal age, were accustomed to consider the trapping of animals as a legitimate and natural means of livelihood. To set traps was to them the easiest and best way to obtain food and furs. They were not cruel by nature, but they had probably never considered for one moment the painful sufferings of a hare hanging by its neck in a noose. Indeed in their time, animals were commonly supposed to be so far below man in every way as to have scarcely any feelings at all.

It was not until afternoon that the adventurers started to paddle along shore to the northeast. For about two miles they ran between outlying, wooded islands and the main shore, then along an unprotected coast of gently sloping dark rock, with many cracks and crevices, but almost no projecting points of any considerable length. Above the water line, dark green moss and lichens grew in patches, farther up were juniper and creeping plants, and beyond them bushes and forest. There were no sands, and no large bays, coves or harbors. The day was brilliantly bright and clear, but across the water to the east no sign of land was visible, even to the Indian’s keen eyes.

For nearly two hours the explorers paddled along the rock shore, then, on rounding a slight projection, came suddenly to an inlet. The place looked as if it might be the mouth of a river, and curiosity led them to turn in. Up the inlet they paddled for about a mile, to a spot where a stream discharged. Beyond the mouth of the stream the cove made a turn to the left, extending at least another mile in that direction. The place was a beautiful one, with thickly wooded shores and points, but the three did not delay longer to investigate it.

As they went on along the rock coast, the wind became more easterly, and clouds began to fleck the deep blue. Paddling was not so easy, although they were still fairly well protected. Four or five miles beyond the inlet, the shore made a sudden turn, and they found themselves going directly north, with the northwest wind striking them at an angle. As they proceeded, the water grew rougher and navigation more difficult. Just as the sun was setting, they were glad to put into another cove that cut into the land in a westerly direction.

As they were paddling slowly along, undecided whether to make a landing or turn back and attempt to go on along shore, Jean uttered a sudden low but surprised exclamation, and pointed to the summit of the high ridge that stretched along the north side of the cove. There, in an open space, beyond a twisted jack pine tree and plainly outlined against the sky, stood an animal with spreading antlers.

“Addick!” whispered the Indian, while Ronald exclaimed, “A caribou!”

There was now no further question of going on. The opportunity to obtain a store of meat was too good. The wind was blowing from the animal to the hunters, and it had not caught their scent or heard them, but while they looked for a landing place, it saw them and moved away to cover. It went deliberately. Possibly it had never seen a man before, and did not know enough to be badly frightened. The travelers were too far away for a shot anyway.

They landed near the head of the bay on a sandy beach, and organized their hunt. Only one gun remained, for Jean’s had been lost when he and Ronald rescued Etienne from drowning. There was enough ammunition for four or five shots. It would not do to miss even once, so Ronald was entrusted with the gun. He was to climb the ridge and make his way towards the place where they had seen the animal, while the others went around to head it off and drive it back towards Ronald, if that should be necessary.

The ridge proved to be about a hundred feet high, steep and rocky on its south side and scatteringly clothed with aspen and jack pines. When he reached the top, near the place where the caribou had appeared, Ronald had some difficulty in finding the animal’s tracks on the almost bare rock. Presently, however, he came across a half eaten clump of reindeer moss, and the mark of a spreading hoof in a patch of earth in a hollow. Once on the caribou’s trail, he tracked it along the ridge for a little way, noticing, as he went, a hare runway and some lynx tracks. The trail led him down into a gully, and through the aspens and birches that grew there, to the north side of the ridge and into a bog. There in the thick sphagnum moss, the spreading hoof prints were plain.

With the idea that the bog might be the caribou’s refuge when disturbed, Ronald made his way very cautiously. It was well that he went so quietly, for suddenly, as he rounded a clump of tamaracks, he came in plain view of his game, head down, contentedly browsing a bog plant. The animal was only a few yards away and a perfect mark, but Ronald, experienced hunter though he was, felt his arm tremble as he raised his gun. He had never hunted before when so much depended on his aim, or when his ammunition was so precious. Luckily the caribou had caught neither sound nor scent of him, and he had time to steady himself before firing. He did not waste his powder. The animal sprang into the air, plunged forward a few steps and fell in its tracks.

Ronald set up a shout and sprang forward. His call was not needed, for the report of his gun was enough to summon his companions. The Ojibwa, who had been skirting the north side of the ridge, was not far away and soon made his appearance. Jean was going along the summit and had more difficulty in locating the sound of the shot, but arrived at the edge of the gully in time to catch sight of the others making their way through it with their game.

They had no intention of paddling farther that night. The next thing to do was make camp, cook themselves a good meal of meat and dry the rest for future use. With such a supply, they were equipped to start out into the open lake as soon as they could decide which way to go. Much encouraged, they selected a place on the flat topped ridge, and set about their task.

XVIII

MINONG

The caribou meat was cut into thin strips and laid on a frame of poles and twigs raised a few feet above the ground. Then a fire was kindled under it, and the meat turned occasionally to dry evenly in the heat and smoke. Rain was threatening, so a protecting roof of bark, with a few smoke holes, was raised over the frame, and a wind shield set up on the east side. The propped up canoe furnished enough shelter for the campers.

To keep the fire going under the drying frame, and to prevent wild animals, which might be attracted by the smell of the meat, from approaching it, the three took turns remaining awake that night. Several times dark shapes were discerned moving beyond the firelight, and cat-like eyes gleamed in the shadows of the trees and bushes, but the lynxes were suspicious of the fire. Whenever the watcher made a threatening movement, they took fright, and it was not necessary to waste shots on them.

Before morning rain began to fall, fine and cold, but it ceased after sunrise. The lake was still rough, the wind a little east of north, the sky gray with scudding clouds, and the air so cold and raw that, September though it was, a snowstorm would not have surprised the voyageurs.

After breakfast the boys set out to explore, curious to learn something of the lay of the land about them, and hoping that they might come across another caribou. They descended the north side of the ridge, crossed the bog, sinking to their ankles in the wet moss and underlying mud, penetrated the bordering growth of alders, willows and other bushes, and went through tamaracks and balsams to higher ground. The country proved to be a succession of ridges and depressions. The explorers found themselves going up and down almost continually, over rocky slopes and through deep leaf mould and moss-covered boggy places, until, after climbing a ridge, they came again to the water, a strait, as it appeared, of not more than half a mile in width, extending in either direction. By that time the wind was blowing the clouds away, and the air was clearing. Beyond the strait the boys could see wooded land rising up and up in successive ridges.

As they stood looking at the high land across the water, Jean said thoughtfully, “I feel strongly that we should climb those hills, and try to get our bearings before we go farther. From there we can surely tell whether we are on mainland or island. If this is an island, we may be able to see the shore and find some landmark to show us in what part of the lake we are. Then we can decide which way to go.”

Ronald nodded. “From that island where we were staying so long,” he said, “we saw the Sleeping

Giant. If it was really the cape and not the deceitful appearance of the mirage, we may be able, from that high place, to see it again. Then truly we shall know that we're not many miles from the northwest shore, on Royale or one of the other great islands. I've felt loath to be spending time on such an inland trip, but there seems no good prospect of going forward by water to-day. By this time all of our meat must be well enough dried so we need not be keeping up the fire. We will go back, bring the canoe, cross this stretch of water and strike inland at once."

The two boys hastened back the way they had come. Etienne agreed to their plan, but said they must first put their store of meat in a safe place where the lynxes could not get at it. So it was wrapped tightly in several large sheets of bark, tied firmly with withes, and suspended by tough spruce roots, which would not break and could not be easily gnawed through, from the branch of a gray pine tree. A lynx might crawl out on the branch and drop down on the swinging bundle, but he would have hard work to tear it open. As a final protection the Indian had rubbed the smooth bark covering with caribou fat until it was so slippery that the surprised cat must slide off the moment he touched it, before he had a chance to dig his sharp claws in. At least that was what Etienne said would happen to Besheu, the lynx, if he tried to investigate the package. Doubtless he would not make the attempt in the daytime anyway, and they would surely be back before night.

While the lads were away, Etienne, though he had not left the drying meat for more than a few minutes at a time, had discovered that their camp was on a cape or promontory. He believed that, by paddling a little way to the north along shore, they could reach, without portaging, the strait or bay the boys had found. At least they might arrive at a spot where they would be separated from that strait by a point or narrow stretch of land only. Though the head wind was strong, they decided to make the attempt. To carry the canoe so far through woods and bogs would be slow, hard work.

Running out of the bay, they headed towards the north. After struggling against wind and waves for half or three-quarters of a mile, going part of the time among little rock islets and passing the mouths of several small bays, the voyageurs reached, as the Indian had foretold, the stretch of water the boys had come out upon. It was partly protected from the wind, and they crossed without difficulty. They could see that the strait extended for several miles at least on either hand, and was bounded by what appeared to be continuous land on both sides, but they could not tell positively whether the shores ran together in the distance or whether there was an opening between them.

The gold-seekers landed on low ground near the mouth of a small stream, concealed the canoe among the bushes and started inland. At first they kept to the main direction of the stream, though they did not always follow it closely, as it made several bends and turns and in some places its banks were so overgrown that the explorers would have had to cut a way through. The conditions along the brook seemed to be continually changing. It made its way through thick forest of spruce, birch and white cedar, among thickets of alder, dogwood and mountain maple, where the leaves were turning yellow and red and beginning to fall, it rippled and foamed over rocks through narrow gullies between steep ridges, slipped quietly along among aspens and birches, and crept sluggishly through bogs covered with spongy moss, pitcher plants, labrador tea and other bog growths. When the stream made a bend to the southwest, the explorers parted company with it, and struck off to the northwest.

Their way lay over a succession of ridges, but they were reaching higher and higher ground. Most of the time they traveled through more or less open woods, but sometimes over steep stretches of bare, rocky hillside. The forest was principally evergreen, and there was one tract of towering white pines, some of them with trunks three or four feet in diameter. As the rise became steeper, the bare rock slopes more frequent, the three, feeling that they must be near the summit of the highest ridge, pressed forward eagerly. Even the Indian increased the speed of his springy, tireless stride, so that the boys, strong and active though they were, had hard work keeping up with him. He was the first to climb the final steep slope. The lads could see him standing motionless gazing towards the west and north. Jean, whose lighter weight gave him an advantage over Ronald in climbing, scrambled up next, and uttered a sharp exclamation. Sky and air had cleared while the explorers were making their way through the woods, and he could see far over the water.

There, faint and blue, was the Cape of Thunder, the Sleeping Giant, the rock figure of the manito Nanabozho. The view was not quite the same as the one from the island where they had been wind-bound so long, but the outlines were unmistakable. It was not the Giant alone that was visible in the distance. Farther to the north were misty headlands barely discernible, while to the south of the Cape was another blue outline. As Jean was straining his eyes to make out every bit of land visible, Ronald joined him. Jean turned to his companion excitedly.

"See," he said, pointing first to the blue shape farthest to the south, then to the others, "the Isle de Paté] the Pointe au Tonnerre, and away to the north the headlands of the great bay beyond. Now we know where we are indeed."

"On Minong," said Nangotook conclusively. "Grande Portage over there," and he pointed to the west. No shore line was visible, but the boys knew from the positions of Pic Island, as it is now called in translation of the French name, and Thunder Cape, that the Portage must be somewhere in that direction.

"Yes," agreed Ronald, "we're not on the shore, that is certain, and this is no small island. We must have come fifteen or twenty miles along its shore, and we’ve not crossed half-way.” He pointed to the land that lay below them, thick woods and stripes and spots of gleaming water, stretching for several miles, and beyond that land the open lake. “We’re surely on Minong or Philippeau.”

“Minong,” insisted the Indian positively. “I have been on this island before, but it was from the direction of the setting sun we came, not from the rising sun.”

“You landed on the west side then?” asked Jean. “That is why you did not recognize the place this time?”

“Thought it was Minong all the time,” replied Nangotook, “not sure. Sure now.”

“You’re certain ’tis not Philippeau?” Ronald questioned.

The Indian nodded. “Been here,” he repeated. “Philippeau——” He shook his head. “Maybe there is such an island, maybe not. I never saw it, never knew Indian who had seen it.”

“But white men have seen it,” said Jean. “I never heard of one who had landed on it, but some have caught sight of it, on clear days, far across the water. They have put it on their maps, but always east of Royale, or Minong as you call it. No, we cannot be on Philippeau, but perhaps we can get a glimpse of it.”

Turning, the French boy gazed intently in the other direction, the one in which they had come. He could see the narrow ribbon of the strait or harbor they had crossed, wooded islands beyond it, and the open lake stretching to the horizon, but no faintest shadow of distant land in that direction. A look of disappointment crossed his face. It was not so much Philippeau for which he was seeking as the mysterious, the much desired Island of Yellow Sands.

“Etienne,” he said soberly, “do you really believe there is any Island of Yellow Sands? Do you suppose we shall ever find it?”

“My grandfather saw it,” the Ojibwa replied. “I have told you the story. Whether we shall reach it I know not. The manitos of the lake seem unfriendly to us. Give up the search, little brother, at least until the snows have come and gone once more. Be warned in time.”

“We will not give it up,” cried Ronald hotly. “To be turning back, while we still have time to find and secure the gold before winter comes, would be foolish as well as craven. But ’tis of no use to seek it near here. We’re too far south and west, according to Nangotook’s own story. We must travel on to the north end of this island first. From there we may get a glimpse of the place we seek. If not, we can at least strike north and east for a day or even a half day’s journey. If then we come not within sight of the isle, it will be time enough to give up the search. What say you, Jean?”

“I am as loath to give it up as you,” Jean replied, “and,” he added more cheerfully, “I think your plan a good one. As you say, we can at least postpone talk of turning back until we have made one more attempt. Let us return to our camp and be in readiness to go on. The strait we crossed is somewhat sheltered. We can go on along it, perhaps to-*night, to-morrow at the latest.”

The Indian said nothing. Jean glanced at his impassive face, then thinking to change the subject, asked, “What came you to the island for, Etienne? You say you have visited it before.”

“For copper, little brother,” the Ojibwa answered. “On the northern side of this island, copper stones can be picked up from the shores and dug out of the hillsides, sometimes in pieces as large as my hand,” holding out his closed fist, “not in such little bits as this,” and he pointed with his toe to the rock at his feet.

The boys had been too much interested in the distant prospect to notice the rock on which they stood. Now as they glanced down, Jean uttered an exclamation, “Look, Ronald, this is copper rock indeed.” Scattered here and there were streaks and flecks of free metal.

Ronald bent to examine it “Truly it is copper,” he said, “but in bits too small to be of any value. Had we time we might prospect and come upon larger veins. ’Tis like enough that this whole ridge is rich with it. But we’ve no time to make a search. We’re seeking a far more precious metal, where it may be gathered easily without the labor of digging and blasting.” And he started to lead the way back over their trail.

The trip down the ridge and to the shore was made much more quickly than the upward journey. The explorers had not taken the trouble to blaze their way, though Nangotook had sliced off a branch here and there with his ax. In the woods the signs of their passage were clear enough for an experienced woodsman to follow almost without conscious thought, while the downward slope of the ground most of the way to the stream, and the Indian habit of taking swift but sure note of surroundings furnished them with more than sufficient guidance everywhere. Nangotook led again and went swiftly and unhesitatingly, scarcely appearing to look about him.

During the whole trip up and back they saw no caribou tracks, but they came upon many traces of hares and lynxes, squirrels scolded at them from the trees, and, as they reached the stream, a mink, that had been fishing, glided swiftly up the opposite bank. Ronald inquired if the Indians ever trapped on Minong, but Etienne answered that he had never heard of any one wintering there. “Too far from mainland,” he said. “Too hard to get across when wind blows and storm comes.”

They found the canoe safe, their camping place undisturbed, and the package of caribou meat untouched. The wind was now directly in the north, and the harbor or strait was well enough protected by its northwest shore to make traveling along it safe. Delaying only for a meal of caribou meat, the three embarked again, with the intention of going as far as possible before darkness came.

XIX
LE FORGERON TORDU AGAIN

The stretch of water proved to be a long bay, with continuous shore on its northwest side, and a chain of wooded islands sheltering it from the southeast. The gold-seekers paddled steadily until nightfall compelled them to make a landing in a little cove beyond a point. Navigation through unknown waters, where reefs and shoals might be encountered, was perilous in the darkness. Though sharp and cold, the night was clear, so the three did not crawl under the canoe, but lay down in the open with their feet to the fire. When they woke at dawn, the fire had gone out, and ground and trees around them were silvered with white frost. The boys were stiff and chilled, but the exercise of cutting wood, and a breakfast of hot caribou broth, made from the dried meat boiled in the birch bark basket, soon warmed them.

Paddling out from the cove, their blades keeping time to

“L’on, ton, laridon, danée,
L’on, ton, laridon, dai,”

they continued to the northeast along a rock coast, now rising in steep cliffs, again sloping gradually to the water, but broken, eaten out, riven and piled up into all sorts of shapes. The protecting islands, a half mile or more away, became smaller, farther apart and more barren. Soon the rock shore terminated in a point, and the travelers turned to the north, ran past the end of the point, and found themselves crossing another bay. To left and to right were wooded islands, while ahead stretched a long, forest-crowned ridge, which appeared to be several hundred feet high.

“That must be part of the same ridge we climbed,” said Ronald eyeing it with interest.

The Indian grunted an assent. “Runs through whole of Minong,” he replied.

The rising wind, penetrating between the islands, made paddling hard work, until the voyageurs reached the shelter of the high ridge. There, turning to the northeast again, they followed a narrow passage between ridge and islands, where the water was scarcely disturbed by a ripple. But when they came out from shelter, near the end of a long, high point, the full force of the wind struck them, and they were glad to turn back and make a landing on a bit of pebble beach.

Before they turned, however, they saw, as they looked out over the heaving waves of the lake, a bit of land to the northeast. When they had carried the canoe up on the beach, the two boys with one accord started to make their way to the end of the point, in the hope of getting a better view of the speck of land across the water. They estimated that it was four or five miles away. It was exactly in the direction they intended to take in their search for the Island of Yellow Sands. Was it the long-sought-for island, lying now in plain view?

Nangotook, who had followed the lads, did not think so. “Island we came from,” he said briefly, pointing to it.

“You mean the place where we were wind-bound so long?” Jean asked. “I cannot think it. That must be farther away. Think how long we traveled in the fog!”

“May have been going round and round part of the time. No way to tell after fog got thick. Over there,” and Nangotook pointed across the water to the west of the bit of land, “Nanabozho.”

The Sleeping Giant was faintly but unmistakably discernible lying on the water. When the boys considered his position, and the view they had had of him from the island, they began to be afraid that Nangotook was right, that the land to the northeast was only the place where they had been delayed so long, and not the Island of Golden Sands. They were loath to give up their new-born hope, however. As Ronald said, the only way to find out was to go and see. To cross those heaving waves in the teeth of the strong north wind was out of the question. Once more they must wait for favorable weather.

They went back to the more sheltered spot where they had landed. There they came upon something that put their disappointment, at not being able to cross to the island, out of their heads for the time being. Farther along the pebble beach they found the ashes of a fire and the bones and uneatable remains of a hare. Near by was the pole skeleton of a shelter, resting against the face of a rock. The Indian, after examining the place closely, concluded that the fire had been burning and the hare had been dressed and cooked since the rain of two nights before, but he doubted if the shelter had been occupied the past night. Probably the campers had not been away from the place over thirty-six hours at the farthest.

The boys were greatly excited over the find. Was this the camp of Le Forgeron Tordu and his Indian companion, and were the two still on their trail? The only way to answer the first question was to find their tracks. The pebble beach retained no clear traces of moccasined feet, and the men had doubtless departed by canoe, but back from the beach, part way up the slope, where the trees stood thick and the rock was covered with a layer of leaf mold, Jean came upon tracks. Unhesitatingly Nangotook pronounced the prints those of a man whose right foot turned out and who threw his weight more heavily upon that foot than upon the left. Not far away the Ojibwa found other tracks, made by another man. This trail he succeeded in following through the woods to the top of the ridge, where, in a narrow rock opening, a hare runway, he discovered the remains of a snare. The noose had been taken away, but the fence of twigs, leading to the spot where it had been set, remained.

It now seemed perfectly clear that the Frenchman and his Indian companion had been camping on the beach not longer ago than the morning before. Apparently Le Forgeron was still in pursuit of the gold-seekers. Had he seen them set out from the island before dawn, and had he followed? Nangotook thought that very unlikely. He did not believe Le Forgeron had been where he could observe their departure. If he had been hiding anywhere on the island, it must have been in one of the caves on the north shore. Yet it did not seem likely that he had crossed from the island after the lifting of the fog, for the winds had been strong ever since. Nangotook doubted if the Blacksmith could have made his way across the stretch of open lake at any time during the past five days. He came to the conclusion that Le Forgeron must have crossed before the others left the island, perhaps immediately after he or his companion had hurled Ronald from the cliff. Ronald, however, pointed out that the wind and waves had been very unfavorable at that time, and the Indian was forced to admit that the boy was right. Unable to solve the problem, he shook his head doubtfully. “Awishtoya evil man,” he said, “very evil. Maybe he can put spell on waters and go when he pleases.”

“I have heard it said that he has sold himself to the devil,” Jean replied seriously, “so it may be indeed as you say. He may have seen us go, though, and if he followed he was caught in the fog too, and may have reached this place by accident. One thing is certain. He has been here. Surely it is not so important to know just when he came, as to discover where he has gone and whether he will return.”

“You are right,” Ronald agreed. “We must be tracking this enemy of ours. Unless he’s in league with the evil one, he has not crossed to that island over there within the last two days, that is sure. The wind and waves have been too high. And if that’s the island we came from, he would have no reason for going back. We had best be searching for him in the other direction.”

“We go in canoe up this water then,” and Nangotook pointed along the channel to the southwest, “and we take all the meat with us. Awishtoya has taken the apakwas from his wigwam. Yet he may come back. If we leave anything he will find it.”

“That is true,” cried Jean. “We must take everything with us, and leave no trace behind. This is no place for us to camp, if there’s a chance that Le Forgeron may return.”

Carefully the Indian erased all signs of their visit to the beach and to the woods and rocks near by. Stepping backwards, his body bent almost double, he smoothed out with his hands the tracks he and the boys had made in the adjacent forest. When he had completed his task, he was sure no traces remained that might not have been made by some passing animal.

Then the three embarked and paddled back through the quiet channel between point and islands. They penetrated to the head of a long narrow bay, that lay parallel to the one they had come through that morning and the evening before. There were many islands, and the shores were forested to the water’s edge. Though the searchers scanned the rocks and woods closely, they found no clear signs that a canoe had ever run in anywhere along either shore or on any of the islands. Several times they examined likely looking places, but always without definite result. Not one sure trace of Le Forgeron Tordu or of any human being did they find, though they made the complete circuit of the shore, reaching at last the rocky point they had passed that morning. So thorough was their search that it occupied most of the day.

Though they discovered no more clear signs of their enemy, the trip was not altogether fruitless, for, as they went along, they caught several fish, lake trout of smaller size than those they had taken out in the lake. Near the head of the bay Jean hooked a pickerel, and, at the mouth of a small stream, several brook trout. The explorers landed on a small, well wooded island, that lay across a narrow stretch of water from the inner side of the point to the east of the bay, and cooked their fish and made camp.

Etienne had almost convinced the boys that the island to the northwest was the one where they had been wind-bound. Nevertheless they were anxious to reach it, for they had resolved to strike out from there to east and north, in one more effort to find the land of golden sands. But the spirits of the lake were still against them, and four days longer they were held prisoner on the end of Minong. During most of the time the open lake was very rough. Traveling several miles across it, against a head or side wind, was far too perilous to be attempted in so frail a craft as a bark canoe. Only once for a few hours did the wind swing to a more favorable quarter, the south, and then it brought thick mist followed by fine, cold rain, almost as blinding as the fog. A strong west wind dispersed rain and mist and blew away the clouds, but made crossing as dangerous as ever.

Impatient as the treasure-seekers were during all that time, they could do nothing but make the best of the delay. They camped on the small island, where no enemy could approach under cover, and continued their search for Le Forgeron Tordu. Climbing to the top of the high ridge, they looked down another long bay, parallel with the two they were familiar with, and to wooded land and other stretches of water beyond. They were determined to explore that bay, but the strong wind and dangerous, outlying reefs made rounding the long point out of the question. So they were obliged to carry the canoe up the ridge, a hard and laborious portage, and with much difficulty take it down the steep north side. They caught a good supply of fish in that third bay, and found slight signs on two of the islands that human beings might have been there not many days before. But there were no clear tracks they could identify as those of the lame Frenchman. On the farther shore of the bay, near its head, they thought they had come upon a trail, but soon made up their minds that it was only the old track of some wild animal.

Wishing to save their dried meat for emergencies, they made every effort to obtain enough fresh meat and fish to sustain them. As only three rounds of ammunition remained for the one gun, Nangotook spent part of his time making bows and arrows for himself and Jean, leaving the gun to Ronald, who could be trusted not to waste his powder. The Ojibwa strung his bow with twisted caribou sinew, braided at the ends. The arrow shafts he made of serviceberry wood, straightening them by drawing them through a hole he had bored in a piece of bone. Some of the arrows, with points of wood hardened in the fire, were intended for shooting birds and squirrels. Others had heads of bone or chipped stone, let into a slit or groove in the end of the shaft and bound tight with soaked sinew, which contracted when dry. Nangotook insisted that the feathers used must be those of a bird of prey, or else the arrows would not be sufficiently deadly. Coming one day upon several hawks, which circled within easy range, as they prepared to dart down on a flock of migrating small birds that had paused to rest and feed among the alders, Ronald sacrificed one of his precious charges of ammunition to bring down one of the marauders. With hawk feathers, carefully cut and placed to give just the right weight and balance, Nangotook feathered his arrows. When he had constructed two bark quivers, the primitive hunting equipment was ready.

The Ojibwa demonstrated the use of the new weapon by shooting a squirrel and a gull in quick succession, and the boys, admiring his skill, at once set to work to practice with the other bow. Ronald, who was proud of his marksmanship, was chagrined to find that not only Nangotook but Jean could easily outshoot him both in range and accuracy. In his childhood the French lad had played with bows and arrows made by Nangotook, who had taught him how to use them, while to Ronald the weapon was entirely new.

The hide of the caribou was cured and dressed, and part of it made into new moccasins to replace the wanderers’ worn and ragged ones. From a bone that he had saved for the purpose, Nangotook also made, with much labor, a knife such as his ancestors must have used before the white men brought them steel and iron. Ronald’s knife had been lost or taken from him when he fell over the cliff, and the Indian insisted that the lad take his. He could use the bone one just as well, he said, and when Ronald hesitated to accept the gift, showed such plain signs of offense, that the boy hastened to take it to make amends. He guessed that this was Nangotook’s way of expressing gratitude for his rescue from drowning.

XX

THE NORTHEASTER

Late in the afternoon of the fourth day after the gold-seekers had reached the long point, the wind went down, and by an hour after sunset the waves had subsided enough to make crossing to the island to the northeast possible. So the three set out immediately, and made the traverse safely. Though twilight was deepening to darkness when they drew near the land, they had no difficulty in recognizing the place. It was not their Island of Golden Sands. To find that they must go farther north and east. It would have been useless to begin their search just then, however, for clouds were gathering and the night promised to be a black one. That they might camp nearer the northern end, that was to be their starting point, they paddled along the southeast shore of the island to the sand beach beyond the landlocked bay.

Before midnight they were awakened by a rain storm. With that storm began a period of almost heart-breaking waiting, that roused in the Indian the most gloomy fears, well-nigh discouraged Jean, and would have had the same effect on Ronald had he not clung with determined stubbornness to his purpose. There were times during the week of delay, when even he was almost ready to give up, but he kept his wavering to himself, insisting always that they must make one more attempt to find the golden sands. Not all of the weather that hindered them was of a kind the boys would ordinarily have called unpleasant. Most of the days were bright, but the wind blew incessantly, now from one point, now from another, but always so strongly that to start off into the open lake would have been the utmost folly. All the voyageurs’ strength and skill must have been spent in keeping the canoe from swamping, and, even if they had escaped drowning, they could have made almost no headway towards north and east.

They were anxious to save their precious caribou meat, so they made every effort to trap and shoot hares and squirrels, and to catch fish, but their luck was poor. Either there were very few of the little animals on the island or they had become exceedingly shy, for during the whole week but one hare and three squirrels were taken. The wind blew so hard that fishing was possible only in the bay or on the lee side of the island. From the inner bark of the cedar, softened by soaking, Etienne and the boys laboriously rolled and twisted enough tough cord for a small net, and by setting this at night and taking it up in the morning, they managed to get a few lake herring. But the catches, even with the net, were scanty, and the best efforts of the three were not sufficient to supply them with enough game and fish to keep them nourished. They were forced to eat so much of the dried caribou meat that their supply disappeared alarmingly.

For future use in lodge building, they prepared several *apakwas*, as Etienne called them, long strips composed of squares of birch bark sewed together with the cedar twine. These apakwas could be rolled and carried in the canoe, and were all ready to be wrapped around the framework of a wigwam.

During all that week the gold-seekers found no new traces of Le Forgeron, though they took advantage of an east wind one day to explore the caves on the northwest side of the island. The withered evergreen couches and the ashes of the fire were still on the beach in the largest cave, but there was nothing to indicate that any one had been there since Ronald’s visit.

A favorable day dawned at last, with a light breeze and blue sky, although a filmy haze lay on the water in the distance. The Ojibwa feared fog, but Ronald would wait no longer.

“There will never be a morning when something may not happen,” he cried impatiently. “If we fail to take this opportunity, there may not be another for days to come. We can be turning back any moment danger threatens, but we must take some chances no matter how good the conditions. Surely not one of us is fearing a risk, when there’s so much to gain, if we’re successful.”

Ronald had tried to speak without offense, but the Indian knew that the boy was making a direct appeal to his courage, and he was too proud to hesitate longer.

“Come then,” he said, “and may the manitos,—and the good God be kind to us.”

Their course of action, as soon as the weather should be favorable, had been decided long before. From the northern end of the island they would travel directly east for two hours, then turning north they would go in that direction for the same length of time, when, if they had not caught sight of the island they sought, they would turn to the east again for an hour’s paddling, then to the north for another hour and so on. If by sunset they were not in sight of their destination, Ronald consented to give up the search, and make for the nearest land, or if no land was in sight, to steer straight for the north shore. Indeed it seemed likely that by that time, unless they were hindered by contrary winds, they might be able to discern the shore and make directly towards it. The plan was a desperate one. Their only possibility of success, or even of reaching the north shore alive, lay in the continuance of good weather, and all three were familiar enough with the uncertainty and fickleness of Lake Superior winds and storms to realize in some degree the recklessness of the attempt. But the boys were young and rash. They had come through many dangers without serious accident. The very fact that their canoe had outridden the fearful storm on the night when they left the Rock of the Beaver, encouraged them to believe that they might get through safely even though the weather should change for the worse. Whatever the Ojibwa’s feelings were, he gave no sign, taking his place in the canoe in silence, and without a trace of emotion on his impassive face.

At first all went well, the wind was light, the waves scarcely high enough to be called waves, and the canoe made good speed to the east. To the north over the water they could see, among its companion islets, the rock that had sheltered them from the force of the storm. It was to the east, however, that they gazed eagerly. They went on in that direction for the agreed upon two hours, estimating the time by counting their paddle strokes. No island came into view. So they turned to the north. For two hours more they traveled steadily, but, though their eyes searched the water ahead and to either side, they caught no glimpse of land. The sun was shining and the sky blue overhead, yet a thin haze, diffused through the air, made it impossible to see any great distance. After two hours’ journey to the north they turned again to the east. Before they had gone far they noticed that the weather was beginning to thicken, the blue overhead was turning to gray, the breeze that had been so light all the morning was freshening, and becoming northeasterly. The signs made the boys uneasy, but Nangotook gave no indication of noticing them.

By the time they had traveled their hour to the east and had turned north again, the wind had strengthened so that paddling at an angle against it became hard work. The sky had grown lead gray, and, without the sun to guide them, the boys wondered how they were to keep their course. The distance was too hazy to afford any chance of discerning the north shore. They held on doggedly, but they had not been paddling north an hour when rain began to fall, fine and cold. It was driven from the northeast by the wind, that grew constantly stronger, penetrating their heavy clothes with its damp chill. All hope of finding the Island of Yellow Sands that day vanished from their hearts. Moreover the north shore must still be far away, and there seemed no chance of gaining it against a northeast storm that was steadily increasing in fury.

They struggled forward against wind and waves for a little while longer, but their paddles were of almost no avail to make headway. The most they could do was to keep the canoe right side up and avoid shipping water enough to sink it. At last the Indian did the only wise thing he could do under the circumstances. He gave the order to turn the boat and run with the wind. They could no longer make way against it, but, if they could keep the canoe from being swamped by following waves, the gale might bear them back to Minong and safety. The northwest direction of the storm was at least favorable to the attempt. The chief danger in running with the wind would be from the following waves that might easily overwhelm them. To increase their speed the boys tried to raise a sail, but a sudden gust, accompanied by sleet, which drove down upon them with great force, tore the blanket from their hands and blew it away. They could ill afford to spare their blankets, and they made no further attempt at sailing.

All their efforts were now devoted to keeping the canoe from being caught and up-ended or deluged by the waves, and in bailing out the water that threatened to swamp it. The wind blew a gale, lashing them with rain and stinging sleet that would have chilled them through if they had not had to work so hard. As it was they were so wholly taken up with the struggle to keep from going to the bottom, that they had no time to think of bodily discomfort, even though their clothes were soaked, their faces stinging, their hands aching with cold.

In a far shorter time than it had taken them to paddle to the north and east, the wind bore them back to the southwest. So close to its northwestern side that they could distinguish its cliffs through the rain and sleet, they ran by the island they had left a few hours before. There was no possibility of making a landing, and they began to fear that they would be borne past Minong also.

The great island extends several miles farther to the westward, however, and its outlying points and small islands lay directly in their way, too directly for safety. Their course was a little too westerly to take them close to the high ridge. They were driven past the land that lay to the northwest of the ridge, and down among islands and reefs. At no time since the storm broke had they been in more imminent peril. The gale was so strong, the waves so high, they could no longer steer their little craft. They were carried close to reefs and islands, missing by a few feet or even inches being cast upon the rocks. Yet they found no place where, with a sudden twist of the paddle, they might shoot through into shelter.

The thundering of breakers sounded straight ahead. Through the rain and sleet, land appeared suddenly. Powerless to escape it, they had just time to lift their paddles from the water, when the surf caught the canoe and flung it on the beach. Instantly they were over the side, struggling for a foothold on the slippery pebbles, as the receding wave tried to drag them back. Grasping the bars of the canoe, they managed to scramble up the narrow beach with it, but before they could bear it to safety, another wave caught them and flung them forward on their faces. Jean lost his hold. But Etienne and Ronald clung to it, and, resisting the pull of the water, managed to drag the boat forward into a thicket above the reach of the waves.

The three were safe, though somewhat bruised and battered, but the canoe was split and shattered by its rough handling, and, what was worse, everything it had contained had been thrown out into the water. Scarcely waiting to get their breaths, the castaways set about rescuing what they could. By running down the narrow, slanting beach and plunging into the water between waves, they managed to save the gun and one bow. In a desperate attempt to rescue the package of food, Jean was caught by a wave and might have been drowned, if Ronald had not seized him in time and dragged him back. The bark-covered package was carried out to deep water and disappeared. One of the blankets and the roll of apakwas were flung high on shore, and caught in a stunted bush that ordinarily would have been well above water line. Fortunately the three always carried their light axes, their knives, fishing tackle and other little things on their persons, so those were saved also. Everything else, including the other blanket, the caribou hide, and the cedar cord net, was lost.

XXI

COMPELLED TO GIVE UP THE SEARCH

In the woods back from the beach, the castaways built a rough wigwam. Even in the partial protection of the trees, it was hard work in the driving rain and sleet, but all three were soaking wet and bitterly chilled. They had to have shelter and warmth. Fortunately the roll of apakwas had been saved. Poles were set up, and Nangotook and Jean, beginning at the bottom, wrapped the apakwas around the framework, each strip overlapping the one below, so that the water could not run down between. More poles and branches were tied with withes over the bark covering to hold it in place.

In the meantime Ronald had been cutting fuel. The wood was wet and coated with ice. Even the Indian might have striven in vain for a blaze had he not been lucky enough to find a small, dead birch, that contained, within its protecting bark, dry heart wood that crumbled to powder. With this tinder he succeeded in kindling bark and fine shavings. Then he added dead limbs split into strips, and finally larger birch wood and resinous spruce. On one side of the fire, which had been made within the lodge, Ronald piled the wood he had cut, and on the other the three crouched to dry their soaked clothes and warm their chilled bodies. They had nothing to eat, and no way of getting anything in the bitter, driving storm, which was continually growing worse.

A miserable night they spent in that rude shelter, huddled together on damp evergreen branches, under their one remaining blanket, which they had dried before the fire. Surf lashed the beach, and the wind roared in the tree tops, that swayed and clashed together, the trunks creaking as if they must snap off and be hurled down on the wigwam. Sleet and frozen snow rattled on the bark covering. It was lucky indeed for the treasure-seekers that they had been cast ashore before the storm reached its height. Long before nightfall it had grown so violent that there was not one chance in a thousand for a canoe to live through it.

The northeaster continued to rage with varying degrees of fury for two more days. Rain, sleet and snow did not fall constantly, but came in showers and squalls, with intervals between, while the gale blew unceasingly, though not always with equal violence, and the sun never showed itself. In the quieter intervals Nangotook and the boys cut fuel for the fire and sought for food, but during the more furious spells they were compelled to remain under shelter. Even if the canoe had not been too badly damaged to float, they could not have gone on the water to fish, and all efforts to catch anything from the shore failed. If there were any animals in the vicinity, they were not abroad in the storm, but remained snug in their holes and lairs, and, the ground being covered with icy snow, no tracks revealed their hiding places. Nangotook dug down through snow and ice for some roots he knew to be edible, and the boys found a few hazelnuts. It was too late for berries; they had all fallen or been eaten by birds and animals. So little could the castaways find that was eatable that they were even glad of alder seeds. Under-nourished as they were, they felt the chilling cold all the more severely, and both boys agreed that they had never put through so miserable a period as those three nights and two days.

It was no wonder that Nangotook felt this to be the final and unmistakable warning of the manito that they must give up the search for the treasure that belonged to him. On the second night of the storm he had a dream that strengthened his conviction. Very seriously and impressively he related the dream to the lads in the morning.

“While my body slept,” he said, “Amik, the Great Beaver, appeared to me. He was larger than the greatest moose. His body filled the wigwam. There was no room for his tail, so it stuck out of the door. He looked at me sternly, and in a voice that drowned the clashing of the trees in the wind and the rattling of the sleet against the bark, he asked me why I had not heeded the warnings. I tried to answer, but could not, for my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. Then he spoke again, and forbade me, and the white men with me, to go farther out into the lake. We must turn back to shore, he said, and again he asked why I had not gone back when I had been warned the first time, and the second time, and the third time. Then I loosened my tongue from the roof of my mouth, and answered that the white youths were young and rash and would not turn back. ‘The manitos of the waters and the islands are angry with you,’ Amik replied. ‘If the white youths will not turn back, they must be destroyed. I warn you because you are of my blood. Leave them to their fate, and return to the shore before it is too late.’ But I gathered up my courage and answered Amik. ‘Grandfather,’ I said, ‘I cannot leave them. It was I who led them on this adventure, and if I should leave them and go back without them, I should be a coward and dishonored. If they must perish, I too must perish.’ The Great Beaver looked at me, and was silent a long time. ‘If you will not leave them, make them turn back,’ he said, and his voice was like thunder rolling in the wigwam and his look was even sterner than before. ‘Make them turn back. The manitos are angry. They lose patience. I have warned you.’ And then he disappeared and I woke, and the flesh stood up in little points all over my body, and my tongue was dry, and my hair prickled at the roots, and I knew I must heed Amik’s warning. Turn back, my brothers, before it is too late!”

Even Ronald felt no inclination to laugh at Nangotook’s vision. While he had no faith in such a creature as the Great Beaver, the dream itself impressed him deeply. Belief in the mysterious character and meaning of dreams was common among all men at that time. The boy was not less superstitious than the average man of his period and race. From childhood he had heard the Scottish tales of dreams and warnings and second sight, and to these old world superstitions had been added others native to the new world. He had refused to regard the northern lights or the sudden appearance of the Sleeping Giant as a warning, but such a dream as this was a different matter. In spite of its fantastic form he felt, with the superstitious feeling of the time, that it might be a real warning or foreshadowing of disaster to come. He strove to shake off the impression the dream had made upon him, but found he could not. Indeed it affected him even more than it seemed to affect Jean.

The storm could not last forever, and when, on the third morning, the castaways found that the wind had abated and the sun was breaking through the clouds, they were encouraged to believe that the worst was over. They had thought themselves on a point of the main island, but soon discovered that their refuge was in reality a narrow island about two miles long. Other land lay close by, but before they could reach it or even fish successfully, they must repair the canoe. So Etienne set about the task, replacing the broken ribs and sheathing, sewing on patches and gumming the strained seams. During the storm it had been impossible to do such work in the open, and the hut had been too small to hold both the canoe and its crew.

While Etienne worked on the canoe, the boys made another search for food. Through the icy snow, which was disappearing rapidly wherever the sun could reach it, they tramped and scrambled about among the trees and along the pebbly beaches, rocks and boulders, but obtained nothing except a few hazelnuts and one squirrel that Ronald killed with a stone.

Jean caught sight of the glossy brown, rat-like head of a mink swimming near shore, saw the head go under suddenly, and waited to see if the small fisher would secure its prey. In a moment the head reappeared, and the slim-bodied little animal swam to shore, a small fish in its mouth. It laid the fish down to kill it by biting it through the neck, but at that instant Jean sprang forward. A mink is very fierce and brave for its size, and this one stood over its catch for a moment snarling, then, with an almost incredibly swift movement, seized the fish, turned and took to the water. Farther along the bank it landed again, and, like a brown streak, it was away and out of sight, long before the boy had gone half-way to its landing place. His plan to frighten it, so it would leave its catch, had failed completely.

The canoe having been repaired, and a slender meal of squirrel broth and hazelnuts eaten, the three set out from the south shore of the little island. To the southwest, separated by a very narrow channel, was more land. The water was quiet, and they paddled slowly along, fishing lines out. Soon they discovered that they were in a bay, the land closing in ahead of them. Lake herring were jumping about them, and, with a bark scoop attached to a pole, Ronald succeeded in taking a few to be used as bait for larger fish. The fishermen circled the bay, and rounded a point almost opposite the southern end of the island where they had been storm-bound. They found themselves in a very narrow cove, scarcely a quarter of a mile broad in its widest part and perhaps two miles long. In that narrow harbor they caught in quick succession, with the herring bait, three large pickerel, each one giving them a lively fight before it was landed. Another they lost when it snapped the line. Elated over their good luck, they returned to their camp to clean and cook their fish.

The hearty meal put new strength into the boys, and for the first time since they were cast ashore in the storm they felt equal to making plans for the future. The prospect was serious enough. October, “the moon of the falling leaf,” as the Ojibwa called it, had come, and the storm and snow of the last few days had given the wanderers a foretaste of winter. There might be, probably would be, many good days before winter set in in earnest, but on the other hand, they knew that genuine winter might come at any time, for the autumn season on Lake Superior is a very uncertain one. Real winter might hold off until well into November or December and give them time to reach the Sault in safety, but it had been known to arrive in October. They could put little trust in the weather, and the way back to the River Ste. Marie was long. Moreover if they were to make the journey with any show of speed, they must be provisioned for it. The first necessity was a supply of food.

Even Ronald had given up hope of finding the Island of Yellow Sands that year. They could spend no more time in seeking for it. The risk of the search, in the autumn storms and rough weather, had become too great even for him. The adventurers had been almost miraculously saved three times, from thunder storm, fog and northeaster, but surely it would be tempting Providence to undertake any more such rash voyages. He did not admit that Nangotook’s dream had anything to do with his decision, but in reality the dream had not been without influence. Had conditions been favorable, the warning alone would not have turned him back, though it might have made him apprehensive and uneasy, but all the conditions were unfavorable, and common sense and superstition both urged abandonment of the search.

Nangotook emphatically declared that he would have nothing to do with any further search for the island that autumn. He could never look Jean’s father in the face again, he said, if he did not take the boy back safe. The Indian showed such determination that the boys realized nothing could move him from his decision. He would find some means of preventing the others from making another attempt, if they showed any disposition to do so. “He would knock us over the head to keep us quiet, and paddle off with us in the opposite direction, if he could not handle us any other way,” Ronald confided to Jean later.

So, with reluctance, but from a necessity they could not blind their eyes to, the boys postponed the search for the golden island, and turned their thoughts to getting back to the Sault. To strike out directly for the north shore seemed as perilous as seeking the island. Yet they must reach the mainland some way. Nangotook counseled that, instead of traveling to the north, they try to reach the northwest shore, Grande Portage, if possible, by going west. They were now somewhere on the northwest side of Minong. A number of years before, Nangotook, with others of his tribe, had crossed to the island from a point on the shore a little to the north of Grande Portage. They had steered southeast, he said, and making the journey between sunrise and noon, had reached Minong at its lower end. From there they had gone northeast along the shore of the island to a cove with a narrow entrance, where they had obtained a store of copper. The band or bracelet, decorated with a pattern of incised lines, which he wore on his arm, was made from that copper, he said. Returning the same way, they had again crossed safely. The leader of the party had said that his tribe, from times long past, had always taken that route to Minong, because the distance from the shore was shortest that way. If the weather turned bad, the trip from the lower end of the island to the cove, where copper was so plentiful, could be made overland. The Ojibwa advised accordingly that the three try first to make their way along shore, by water if they could, by land if necessary, to the southwest end of the island, and then across to Grande Portage. There they could get a supply of food and ammunition, blankets and other things for the long trip to the Sault, or, if winter came early, they might remain at the Portage until spring. His plan seemed a wise one, and the lads readily agreed to it. There was something cheering in the thought that the trading post at the Grande Portage lay no farther away. Surely there was a good chance of reaching it before winter set in. The Sault de Ste. Marie seemed terribly remote.

XXII

THE INDIAN MINES

Because of the necessity of obtaining food, it was not likely that the trip to the southwest end of Minong could be made continuously, but Nangotook and the boys agreed to start in that direction on the following morning and go as far as they could. They paddled up the bay they had named Pickerel Cove, but the fish were not biting. The head of the cove was separated from the open lake by a narrow bit of land, so they went ashore and carried the canoe across. Jean remarked that there was one advantage in having no food or equipment. Portaging was made easy.

When they reached the lake they found the water rough, but they managed to go on along the shore, and across the mouth of a small bay. Rounding a point beyond, they came to the entrance of another larger bay. After one swift glance about him, Nangotook gave a grunt of satisfaction.

“Know this place,” he said over his shoulder. “Place where copper is. We get some for arrow-*heads.”

The boys were ready to agree to the proposal, especially when the Indian explained that beyond the bay lay a stretch of steep, continuous cliffs, affording no shelter and perilous to skirt in the increasing north wind. Entering the bay was difficult enough, for treacherous reefs and rocks surrounded and extended into its mouth. Nangotook picked the channel wisely, however, and piloted the canoe safely through the dangerous entrance. He had said that copper stones could be picked up from the beaches, so a landing was made on a stretch of gravel protected by the point they had just rounded.

The beach was disappointing. Bits and grains of pure copper were strewn about, both above and below the water line, but they were all so small that a great many would have to be melted together to make one arrowhead. After searching for larger pieces and failing to find them, the Ojibwa shook his head, muttered the one word “Ka-win-ni-shi-shin,” “no good,” and turned back to the canoe.

Jean and Ronald followed him, and they paddled along the beach, rounded another point and landed on the other side of it, on the north shore of a little inlet that opened from the large bay and ran at right angles to it. This place was evidently an old camping ground, for bleached and decaying lodge-poles were standing a little back from the shore. Nangotook was sure they were the remains of the wigwam he and his companions had built on his former visit to the island. After examining the ground carefully, he said he did not think any one had camped there since. The summit of the hill, that rose to the north of the camping ground, had been a good place for hares, he added. He would go and set some snares, while the boys fished.

The lads were disappointed at not being shown at once the rich stores of copper that Nangotook had led them to believe were to be found in this place, but food was always a necessity. When the canoe had been overturned in the surf, they had saved the gun and one bow, but they had no ammunition and no arrows. So they went to fishing cheerfully enough. By the time the Indian returned from setting his snares, they had caught two small lake trout. They cleaned and cooked their catch, but to their surprise Nangotook refused to touch the food. He did not want anything to eat, he said.

After the meal, the three took to the canoe and went on up the bay. It proved to be a long and narrow cove, which cut at an angle through alternating wooded ridges and valleys. The long bays they had visited before had lain *between* ridges, that stretched parallel with the waters, but this one occupied a break in the hills, as if it had been cut through them. Landing on the west side, the Indian led the boys up a thickly forested ridge. As they neared the top, Jean caught sight of something that aroused his interest. He turned from Nangotook’s trail, and began pushing through a thicket. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry and disappeared. Ronald, who was only a few paces ahead of his friend, turned back at once. Making his way through the underbrush more cautiously than Jean had done, Ronald found himself balancing on the very edge of a deep hole. At the bottom Jean was just picking himself up, more surprised than hurt.

“Tonnerre,” he exclaimed indignantly, “who would have looked for such a pit on the side of a hill? I was going along all right, and then, all of a sudden, I was down here.”

“You are in too much haste to dig for the red metal, little brother,” Nangotook called to him. The Indian had reached the edge of the hole almost as quickly as Ronald, and stood grinning down on Jean.

“What do you mean by that, Etienne?” the lad answered, as he began to climb up the steep and ragged slope. “What has digging for copper to do with my falling into this pit?”

The Ojibwa made no answer until Jean had reached the top. Then with a gesture that embraced the hole and its sides, he asked abruptly: “What think my brothers of this place?”

Puzzled by his question, the boys glanced around. The pit was roughly oval in shape, and perhaps thirty feet deep. Its steep sides were of rock, bare in some places, in others clothed with bushes and moss. In the bottom grew a clump of good sized birch trees, that partly concealed the opposite side of the depression.

“’Tis a queer looking hole to be found on the side of a hill as Jean says,” Ronald remarked, as his eyes took in the details. “It looks almost as if it had been dug by the hand of man.”

“And so it was,” Nangotook replied, “by the hand of man or manito, I know not which. This is one of the pits where, many winters ago, my people took out the red metal that the white man calls copper.”

“Do you mean this is a savage mine?” cried Jean excitedly. “Surely no one has worked it for years. See how the trees and bushes have covered it.”

“That is true, little brother. I can show you many such holes on the hills around this inlet of the waters, and I know of but one where copper has been taken out either in my time or in my father’s. They are very old, these holes, and no one knows surely who first made them. There is a tale that they were dug by the manitos of the island. One of my people, many winters ago, did a service to the manitos, and in return they showed him how to break up the rock and take out the red metal. Then they gave to him and to those who should come after him the right to carry it away. The good fathers say that such tales are not true, but I know not. This I know, only a certain brotherhood of my people has the privilege of breaking off the copper, though any one may gather the pieces that lie about the shores. Of that brotherhood I am a member.”

It occurred to Jean to wonder what the manitos, if there were such beings, would think of Nangotook’s bringing to the copper mines two white men, who according to the Indian opinion had no right whatever to touch the metal. But he did not put his thought into words. If the idea had not occurred to Nangotook, the lad certainly did not wish to put it into his head. Instead he asked: “But how do your people work these mines without tools?”

The Ojibwa picked up from the edge of the pit a smooth, rounded boulder and handed it to Jean. It was hard and heavy, weighing about ten pounds. “This is one of the tools,” he remarked briefly.

“You make game of us,” Jean retorted. “How can you mine copper by means of a stone like this?”

“That I will show you to-morrow.”

“To-morrow?” cried Ronald. “Why wait so long, when we need copper for our arrowheads? Isn’t there some place about here where we can dig out or pick up enough at once, so we can be on our way to-morrow?”

The Indian shook his head. “Pieces on the shore all little and no good,” he said. “I will show you more holes like this. Then we go back to camp. I will make ready, and to-morrow we come again for copper.”

The boys knew from his tone that he had made up his mind, and that argument would be of no use whatever, so they followed him silently around the edge of the pit. He led them up the ridge and across the summit, calling their attention to other holes, varying in size and depth. Many were mere shallow depressions almost filled with soil, and all were more or less overgrown with trees and bushes. The boys would not have recognized most of these places as ancient mines, if Nangotook had not pointed them out. In some of them grew spruces of a height and girth to prove that the pits had not been mined for at least a hundred, perhaps several hundred, years. Round boulders, more or less embedded in earth and leaf mold, showed here and there among the underbrush, and the boys dug up several to examine them. They found them all of the same hard, dark stone. Many were broken and chipped, and the lads concluded that they must have been used as hammers to break up the rock.

The pits seemed to run in rows across the ridge top, following veins of metal, and the boys marveled at the patient labor that had been spent on them. With the primitive tools the savages had used, many, many years must have been consumed in excavating the holes, especially if, as Nangotook had said, mining operations had been confined to some one brotherhood or society of medicine men. It seemed unlikely that even the chosen clan had ever spent all of its time in mining. Probably its members only visited the island occasionally and stayed for a few days or weeks, taking out a little of the metal and carrying it away in their canoes. Utensils and ornaments of copper were not uncommon among the Indians, and the metal must have been much more in demand before the white man introduced iron kettles and steel knives.

The explorers did not go down the other side of the ridge, which was steep and abrupt, but turned back and descended the more gradual slope they had come up, finding old pits most of the way to the base. The place was of great interest to the boys and they were reluctant to leave it, but Nangotook seemed to have some urgent reason for getting back to camp. When they arrived there, he borrowed the knife he had given to Ronald, saying he wanted to make something, and then told the lads that he wished to be left alone and that they had better go fish.

Understanding that his preparations for mining, whatever they might be, were of some secret nature, connected undoubtedly with the superstitions and ritual of the mining clan, Ronald and Jean launched the canoe again and paddled up the cove. Their fishing was successful, and, after they had caught enough for supper and breakfast, they decided to explore the cove to its head. A little beyond the place where they had landed with Nangotook, Jean called Ronald’s attention to a big, white-headed eagle perched on a dead limb of a tall, isolated pine near the shore. While they were watching the bird, it suddenly spread its great wings, left its perch and sailed away. As the boys drew near the spot, they could see, far up in the tall tree, a solid mass of something. “An eagle’s nest,” cried Ronald. “I never had a good look at one.” And he turned the canoe towards shore.

“There will be no young. They have flown long ere this,” Jean answered, “and the nest is only a collection of sticks.”

“I’m going to have a look at it though,” was Ronald’s reply. And he did, climbing at least fifty feet up the tall pine to examine the nest of sticks and moss. He found it to be five feet or more across the top and at least as many deep, and he guessed from its construction that it had been used for several years, additions having been built on every year. Before he descended, he took a long look from his high perch over water, shore and woods. As he glanced about, his eye was arrested by something that surprised him greatly. From a clump of birches at the foot of a slope across the cove, a slender thread of smoke was ascending. It was a very faint wisp of white, as if from a small, clear flamed cooking fire, but the lad’s eyes were keen and he was sure he could not be deceived. As soon as he had made certain that it was really smoke he saw, he descended quickly and told Jean of the discovery.

“It may be merely an Indian or two come here for copper,” he said.

“And it may be Le Forgeron Tordu still on our track,” Jean added.

“If it is, he’ll gain nothing by following us now,” Ronald replied. “We shall not lead him to the Island of Yellow Sands this year, that is certain.”

“No,” answered Jean with a laugh, “if he is following us for that, we have cheated him sorely. We may take that much comfort for not having found the island ourselves. He will be in a fine rage when he discovers he has had his journey all for nothing.”

“He will surely,” Ronald chuckled, “but,” he added more seriously, “he’ll seek some way to make us smart for the trick we’ve played him, we may be sure of that. He’ll hate us more deeply, and Le Forgeron’s hate is not to be despised.”

“It were best for us to keep out of his way then,” the French youth replied soberly. “It may be that he does not know yet that we are anywhere near. Instead of going on to the end of this bay, we will return and tell Etienne what we have seen. If he chooses, he can spy upon that camp. We had best leave such spying to him, who is more skilled at it than we are.”

For once Ronald agreed to the more cautious course. As they returned down the cove, they caught a glimpse of three caribou on an open slope, and the sight almost drove the thought of the Twisted Blacksmith out of their heads. The hillside was probably a regular feeding ground, for, even from the water, the light colored patches of reindeer moss could be seen plainly among the dark green trailing juniper. A caribou would furnish a good supply of meat for the three, as soon as they had the means to shoot it. To secure such large game with bow and arrow would not be easy, for they would have to creep up very close for a good shot, but they had confidence in Etienne’s skill with the bow, if not in their own.

The lads reached their camping ground just as the sun was setting, eager to tell the Ojibwa of the wisp of smoke and the caribou, but they did not have a chance that night. He was nowhere to be seen when they landed. On searching for him, they came upon a small lodge of bark and poles concealed behind a clump of birches, several hundred yards from their camp. The lodge was tightly closed, and steam was issuing in wisps from little interstices between the bark sheets. The Indian had built a sweating lodge, and had sealed himself up in it. On red hot stones he had thrown water to make a steam bath. His tunic, leggings and moccasins hanging on a tree were further proof of what he was about.

“This is why he would not eat,” said Jean. “He was fasting, and now he is purifying himself after the savage custom. That is what he meant by preparing for the mining. It is doubtless part of the ceremony performed by the savage miners whenever they come to Minong.”

Ronald shook his head. “If all the savages, who pretend to be Christians, go back to their old heathen customs whenever occasion offers, as Etienne does, I fear they’re not very well converted,” he said.

Jean nodded. “The good fathers thought him one of the best,” he replied, “and indeed he is. My father says Etienne comes nearer to living a Christian life than any other savage convert he has ever known. But I am afraid it takes many years and much care and teaching to purge out the old heathen notions from the heart of a savage. Their people have been heathens for so long, you see, and they have so many customs and ceremonies and traditions that have come down from generation to generation. Perhaps we need not wonder that they are not made into new men in a few years.”

XXIII

MINING AND HUNTING

When Etienne emerged from the sweating lodge, he took a swift dip in the lake, but refused to eat, and went at once to his couch of balsam branches. It was not until morning that the boys told him about the smoke wisp Ronald had seen and the caribou on the ridge. He made no comment and again refused food. While the lads were preparing breakfast, he went to examine his snares, and returned with two hares. The appearance of the animals was a strong reminder that winter was not far off, for they had begun to change their grayish-brown summer coats for the winter white. The feet, ears, nose, front of the head and part of the legs of one of them were conspicuously white, though the rest of its fur remained brown. The coats of the others did not show so much change.

After the lads had finished their breakfast, the three launched the canoe, putting into it a cedar shovel and three large birch buckets the Indian had made. They went ashore not far from their former place of landing, and Nangotook led them to the foot of a ridge, where a stream flowed through a narrow, swampy valley. There they filled the buckets, and then climbed up a well defined and partly cleared trail to the summit. Close to the edge they came upon a pit that showed plain signs of having been worked in recent years. It was without trees or bushes, though the sides were partly covered with moss and trailing plants. On the bottom, surrounded by leaves, sticks and earth, and standing in shallow water, which, that morning, bore a thin coating of ice, was a detached mass of rock that might have weighed two tons. Even from the edge of the hole, Jean and Ronald could see that the rock was composed largely of copper. A primitive ladder, made of a single pole with cross pieces tied on with strips of rawhide, rested against the side of the pit. Though grayed and stained by the weather, the ladder seemed perfectly sound, and the boys scrambled down, eager to examine the rock mass.

They found that the copper rock rested on poles, and was held away from the farther wall of the pit by the trunk of a tree wedged behind it. Around it, in the shallow water and leaves, were many stone hammers, most of them broken, and heaps of charred and blackened sticks. Jean, poking about in the rubbish to get out one of the round stones, uncovered a large bowl of cedar wood, that had been almost entirely buried. Nangotook had not followed the lads down into the pit. Looking up, they noticed that he had kindled a small fire almost on the edge, and was carefully placing something in the flames.

“He is making a sacrifice,” whispered Jean to Ronald, “that is what he brought the fish head for.”

Nangotook had carried with him from camp a fish’s head carefully wrapped in a bit of birch bark. From the odor that drifted down to them, the boys knew he had also offered up some of his precious kinni-kinnik, tobacco mixed with bearberry leaves. Standing on the edge of the pit as the burnt offering was consumed, he gazed down at the copper rock and said a few words in his own language. Then, apparently satisfied that the required ceremonies had all been performed, he climbed down the ladder and prepared to begin work.

With the cedar shovel, he scraped off the rubbish that had accumulated on top of the rock. The pure copper showed plainly in a number of places, but it was evident that much work had been done on the mass, for all the knobs and projections had been hammered away, leaving the surface almost smooth. There seemed to be no place where any of the metal could be broken off, and the boys wondered how Nangotook would manage without steel tools. The Indian did not seem concerned, however. He examined the surface carefully, then ordered the lads to collect kindling and fuel. One side of the mass was composed of what appeared to be a thin sheet of dark rock. On top, just where the free copper and this dark rock came together, Nangotook made a fire, feeding it until it burned hot and clear. When he thought the surface had been heated sufficiently, he hastily scraped off the embers, and picking up a bucket of water he had placed within reach, dashed it quickly over the hot rock. A cloud of steam arose, there was a sharp, cracking report, and a thin piece of rock split off from the mass and fell into the puddle below. Seizing the second pail, which Ronald swung up to him, the Indian emptied it, then followed with the third. The cold water striking the hot surface had split off a part of the sheet of dark rock, but had not exposed enough of the copper to satisfy the Indian miner. Twice he repeated the process, making a hot fire, raking it off when the rock was thoroughly heated, and throwing cold water on it. After the third operation he gave a grunt of satisfaction. A ledge of copper lay exposed.

Raising one of the heavy stones, he struck it against the exposed metal and broke off a small corner. Pure copper is a comparatively soft metal, and heating and dashing with cold water anneals or softens it still more. With a heavy stone maul and, part of the time, with the aid of a wedge-shaped piece of hard rock used as a chisel, Nangotook hammered and split off pieces of the metal. The boys would gladly have helped him with his laborious mining, but he would not let them take part in the actual operations. They might carry water from the stream, gather fuel for the fire, find and hand him another stone sledge when he splintered the one he was using, but the actual processes of fire making, rock splitting and beating off copper, he would not permit them to share. Evidently by Ojibwa tradition, this peculiar mining had something of a sacred or mysterious character, and, to his mind, must be performed by one of his own medicine clan, duly appointed, initiated and trained for the work. The boys knew enough of Indian customs to understand this, so they did not urge their help upon him, but merely obeyed orders.

Such mining was slow work. The rock had to be heated and cooled several times, and the wielding of the stone maul was heavy labor, but at last Nangotook obtained copper enough for his immediate purpose. As they were returning down the cove, he told the boys that the pit where they had been working was the same he and his companions had taken metal from on his previous visit to the island, and the only one he knew of that had been worked in recent years. Jean had picked up a stone hammer with a groove around it, and he showed it to the Indian and asked him what the groove was for. Nangotook answered that a handle of some sort had been attached to the boulder. One of the party he had come to the island with had used such a hammer, he remembered, with a withe twisted about it to hold it by, but he had broken the stone and had thrown it aside. Nangotook thought this might be the very stone. It was not customary to use handles, he said, but he did not know why. Ronald asked how the copper mass came to be in the bottom of the pit. Had it been split off from the side, or was it found by digging down? Nangotook could not answer the question. The rock had been in the same place when he was there before, though then it was well covered with moss and earth, as if it had not been disturbed for a number of years. The tree trunk wedged behind it had been there too, but he and his companions had made the ladder.

No wisp of smoke, was to be seen where Ronald had noticed it the day before, but caribou were again discovered feeding on the ridge, near the spot where the lads had caught a glimpse of them.

The rest of the day and evening were spent in bow and arrow making. Laying a piece of copper on a hard, smooth stone, Nangotook hammered it out with another stone, heating the metal and plunging it in water from time to time, to keep it soft enough to be worked without cracking. When it was hammered out thin at the edge, he could cut it with a knife. After an arrowhead had been properly shaped, he went over it carefully with light, quick blows, to harden it as much as possible without getting it out of shape. Even at the best, copper heads were somewhat soft, but they did not split and warp like bone tips. Their main advantage over stone ones was that they could be made in much less time. Moreover flints suitable for arrowheads were difficult to find. Nangotook made a few sharp pointed bone tips in addition to the copper ones. The latter were attached to shafts of serviceberry wood in the same way as the flint and bone heads, and the shafts were straightened by being pulled through the hole in the piece of bone the Indian had used in his former arrow making. A gull, which Jean caught in a snare, baited with a piece of fish and set on the rocks, furnished feathers for the arrows. Hawk or eagle feathers would have been better, Nangotook insisted, but he had no way of obtaining either without ammunition or finished arrows. He also made another bow, using hare sinew well twisted and braided.

The weather next day was favorable for continuing the journey, but the lads were eager for a caribou hunt, not only for the sake of the sport, but because they sorely needed the nourishing meat. So departure was postponed. When the three reached the place where the animals had been seen the day before, they found distinct trails running in two directions. As they had guessed, the rocky ridge, where the reindeer lichen grew in abundance, was a favorite caribou resort. The hunters decided to separate, Nangotook following one trail and the boys the other. They had only two bows, so Ronald was without a weapon.

Along the top of the ridge, the lads followed the trail, going quietly and cautiously not to disturb the game, if it should happen to be near by. As Jean, who was in advance with the bow, rounded a thicket of leafless bushes, he came upon a place where fire, kindled perhaps by lightning striking a tree, had swept the ridge summit. Small birches, alders and low bushes had grown up among the fallen and standing skeletons of the evergreens, and, scratching about among the underbrush and fallen leaves, were a flock of birds. With a backward gesture, Jean motioned to Ronald, who was just behind him, to stand still. Creeping forward a little to get within range, he fitted an arrow to the string, drew it back and let fly. So swiftly and noiselessly did the arrow pierce the bird, that the rest of the flock did not take fright, and Jean had a chance to make a second shot. That time the whistling of the shaft alarmed the birds. Some of them ran off into the brush, while three rose with a loud whirring noise and a swift direct flight that carried them out of range in a moment. However, Jean had secured two plump, full grown, sharp-tailed grouse. The hunting expedition had begun well.

Not far beyond the spot where Jean killed the grouse, the boys came to a fresh caribou trail, made that morning they were sure, which crossed the older one. They followed the new track, going more cautiously than ever, for the beast might be just ahead. The trail led them down the side of the ridge, and across a bog covered with sphagnum moss stiff with the frost of the night before. There the animal had stopped several times to feed. After a somewhat winding course through the bog, it had climbed another hill beyond.

Jean had a feeling that, when he came to the top of that hill, he would find his game sunning itself in the open. So he bade Ronald keep back, and went very carefully. Through a leafless bush he caught sight of spreading antlers. Cautiously he crept around the bush. He could see the animal’s head and horns above a clump of tiny balsams, but the little trees hid the body. Moreover the range was too great for Jean’s skill and strength. Etienne might have sent a shaft from that distance with a strong enough pull to pierce his game, but Jean felt sure that he could not do so. He must go nearer. Fortunately the wind was blowing towards the hunter, and the beast was wholly unaware of the danger threatening. It lowered its head to graze, and Jean crept forward towards the clump of balsams. He reached them safely, without betraying himself by so much as a snapped twig or the rustle of a dry leaf. Crouching behind the little trees, he peeped around them.

The caribou’s body was plainly exposed, and so close that the boy felt he could not miss. Straightening himself suddenly but noiselessly, he drew back his bowstring and let fly. He struck the beast squarely, but though he had aimed for the heart, his arrow evidently did not pierce that vital spot. The caribou felt the sting of the wound, sprang into the air and was off at a great pace. After it sped Jean, his moccasined feet scarcely seeming to touch the rocks, moss and intervening low bushes, as he cleared them.

XXIV

NANGOTOOK’S DISAPPEARANCE

Had the caribou not been badly wounded, pursuit would have been hopeless, but it was bleeding freely, as its trail showed. Nevertheless it led the boys a long chase, down the hillside, along thickly wooded, low ground, through a gap between ridges and to the edge of a brook. There, exhausted by loss of blood, it sank down among the thick underbrush. But when it caught sound or scent of the hunters, the beast struggled to its feet again, and attempted to cross the stream. Jean, pushing through the bushes, caught sight of it, and let fly another arrow. He hit his mark, and the caribou fell before it could reach the other side.

After the lads had recovered their breath, they pulled the dead animal out of the shallow water. To take such a load up the ridge would be hard work, and Ronald suggested that they try following the brook.

“It empties into the cove of course,” he said. “When we reach there, one of us can go back along shore for the canoe.”

The banks of the brook were thickly covered with trees and bushes. With their heavy load tied to a pole and carried between them, the boys made slow progress. More than once they wished they had turned back the other way. At last they came to a place where the brook rippled down a slope into a marsh, and joined a larger stream that wound sluggishly, in many turns and twists, through the tall, ripe grass and sedges. On the farther side of the larger stream was a dense belt of leafless shrubs that appeared to stand almost in the water, and beyond them thick cedar woods.

“Now where are we?” exclaimed Ronald disgustedly. “It seems I guessed wrong about this little brook. I never thought of its emptying into another stream.”

“I’m not sure you were so very wrong,” Jean replied. “We could see when we paddled up the cove that it was low and swampy at its head. This may well be the very swamp. If we follow it we can soon discover.”

Accordingly, turning to the north, they made their way along the higher ground. The marsh was roughly triangular in shape and, as they went on towards its base, they soon found that Jean was right. Beyond a belt of rushes and other aquatic plants, the waters of the cove came in view. When the boys reached the shore, Jean offered to go for the canoe while Ronald kept watch over the game. Ronald did not like inaction, but he knew his friend was the better woodsman, and could make his way through the forest and over rough ground almost as rapidly and tirelessly as Nangotook himself. So the Scotch lad set himself to wait as patiently as he could.

The cove was longer, and the distance from the head to the place where the hunters had first landed was considerably farther, than Jean had thought. He had supposed that he might have half a mile to go, but it was really two or three times that far. He found the canoe safe, and saw no sign of the Indian’s having returned from the hunt.

To let Nangotook know who had taken the canoe and when, the boy left an Indian sign. He drove a straight stick in the ground in an open place and scratched a line in the earth along the shadow the stick cast. When Nangotook returned, he would be able to tell, from the difference in the position of the shadow at that time and the mark on the ground, how far the sun had traveled in the meantime. On a piece of birch bark Jean scratched with the point of his knife a large J and beneath it two arrows pointing opposite ways. This bit of bark he pegged to the ground beside the stick, with one arrow pointing up the cove, the other down, signs of the way he had gone and that he would return.

When the two lads reached the rendezvous again with their game, they rather expected to find Nangotook waiting for them. He was not there, so they decided to go on to camp. Ronald helped Jean to dress and cut up the caribou. Then, leaving his companion to begin the drying process, he went back for the Ojibwa.

The hunter had not arrived, and there was nothing to do but wait. Ronald occupied the time in fishing, paddling about where he would be in plain sight from shore and could be easily hailed. The afternoon drew to a close, and still Nangotook did not return.

“He must have followed his game a long way,” thought Ronald, “or else he missed the caribou entirely and is looking for other tracks. We’ll have the laugh on him if he fails to get anything.”

The sun had set behind threatening clouds, and, as darkness deepened, Ronald became a little uneasy. Could anything have happened to Nangotook, he wondered, but he put the idea out of his head. The Indian was abundantly able to take care of himself. He had merely gone far in pursuit of game. It was slow work coming back in the darkness, especially if he were heavily loaded.

Ronald went ashore, kindled a cooking fire and broiled a fish for his supper. He was sorry he had not brought some of the fresh meat with him, but he had not expected to stay so long. After he had finished his meal, he sat down on a fallen tree beside his little fire and waited as patiently as he could.

Time dragged slowly. Ronald was meditatively chewing a wintergreen leaf and thinking back over the search for the golden sands, when he was startled by an owl that hooted from a tree above his head, the long-drawn, blood-chilling, hunting cry of the great horned owl. The big bird swooped down suddenly and flew out over the water with noiseless wings. A little later he heard its call again from far away. There was a scratching on the bark of a tall tree near by, and for a moment a red squirrel broke out in peevish chattering. Ronald half rose from his seat, thinking the little animal's excitement might mean Nangotook's approach. But no one appeared and all was silent again, except for the faint lapping of the water and the monotonous rustling of the spruce needles in the light breeze.

The night was growing very chilly, and the boy replenished his fire, regretting that he had not gathered more fuel while he could see to get it. Clouds covered the sky and the darkness was thick. He fell into a doze, from which he woke suddenly, as a small, slim, black form glided by his feet and disappeared in the water. The mink had made no sound, but its mere presence had somehow served to arouse his suspicious senses. The fire was almost out. As the boy stooped to put on the last of his wood, he heard in the distance the snarling, cat-like screech of a lynx. He made an instinctive movement of disgust. He loathed lynxes more than any other animal, the treacherous, cruel cats. Most beasts had something noble about them, however fierce they might be, he thought, but in the lynx he could see no good whatever. He remembered the time the cat had fallen through the roof of the shelter, and the scrimmage he and Jean had had with the beast. That was the night Etienne had heard Le Forgeron and had found his footprints and those of his companion. Then a disturbing thought flashed into the boy's mind, and he sat upright on his log, wide awake.

Could it be that Le Forgeron was preventing Etienne's return? Had it been the smoke from the Blacksmith's fire he had seen, and had Le Forgeron by some trick waylaid the Indian and killed him or badly injured him? Ronald had no doubt of the fight Nangotook would put up if attacked. But if he had been taken by surprise and attacked two to one——A dash of rain interrupted the lad's thoughts. He had no idea how far advanced the night was, for the stars were all obscured. He sprang up, groped his way to the canoe, turned it over, propped up one side with the paddles, and crept under it. By the time he had settled himself, the rain was coming down hard.

Ronald slept no more that night. His mind was too full of anxiety, his apprehensions and imagination too wide awake. He tried to convince himself that Nangotook had gone too far in pursuit of game to get back before dark, so had camped and waited for daylight. The lad could convince his reason of all this but not his imagination. It kept picturing to him how the Ojibwa might have been ambushed or waylaid by his enemies, and left dead in his tracks. He began to worry about Jean alone in the camp. If the evil Frenchman had made way with Nangotook, would not the next move be to steal upon the camp at night and get Jean also? At that point in his imaginings, common sense reasserted itself. What possible reason could the Frenchman have for destroying them all? If he knew why they had come back to the lake, and was following them, he would surely not want to put them out of the way until they had led him to the golden sands. "But," whispered his imagination, "he might work to separate you and get rid of you two boys. He *did* try to get rid of *you* when he knocked you over the cliff. He might think he could force or bribe Nangotook to lead him to the island." In such manner the lad's thoughts and feelings argued with one another through the rest of the night, which seemed to him well-nigh endless.

Dawn came at last, and Ronald crawled out of his shelter. The rain had ceased, but the morning was cold and raw, and he was stiff and shivering. He had made up his mind to return to camp first and see if Jean was safe. Then they would cache their meat supply, come back, and follow Nangotook's trail, to find out what had become of him.

Ronald paddled back to the camping ground at his best speed. When he entered the little bay he was relieved to see Jean.

Jean turned at Ronald's shout. Seeing the latter returning alone, he stared in amazement, and then ran down to the water calling out questions. When he had heard Ronald's story, his anxiety was even greater than his comrade's, for Nangotook had always been a devoted friend to him, and Jean was very fond of the Indian. Hurriedly the two took the meat from the fire, wrapped it in bark, and hung it in a tree for safe keeping. Then, waiting only long enough to eat a little of the broiled meat, they launched the canoe and made speed back to the place where Ronald had passed the night. Before taking to the trail, however, they carried the canoe some distance from the landing place, hid it in a thicket, and did their best to erase all signs that might lead to its discovery. If Le Forgeron Tordu were anywhere about, the lads had no intention of letting him steal the canoe while they were searching for Nangotook.

XXV

THE RED SPOT AMONG THE GREEN

Jean and Ronald went first to the spot on the ridge where the three hunters had separated. From there they attempted to trace the caribou trail Nangotook had set out to follow. It was a well traveled track, which had evidently been much used by the animals, and was not difficult to follow for a mile or more. Then the boys lost it in a bog, where the rain of the night before had soaked the spongy moss and had caused it to expand and blot out all tracks. There were plenty of evidences that caribou had visited the place more than once. Here and there plants and bushes had been nibbled and cropped, and small trees had been stripped of bark and branches far above where hares could reach. Evidently the caribou had wandered about all over the bog to feed, but had made no well defined trail through it.

When the lads tried to determine which way the animals had gone, and Nangotook after them, they encountered a difficult problem. In the woods that encircled the wetter and more open part of the bog, there were half a dozen breaks where caribou might have gone through and where the Indian might have followed their tracks. Jean and Ronald examined all of the openings, and tried to decide which one Nangotook had probably used. The ground was still spongy, and the rain had obliterated all footprints. The trees and bushes around one of the openings showed signs of recent nibbling, however, and the boys decided to try that one. But they had not gone far when they lost all trace of the trail, if trail it really was. There were no more nibbled trees, and no indications that any animal had ever been through the thick tangle of standing and fallen cedar and black spruce.

The two retraced their steps to the bog, and tried another of the openings, to meet with a similar disappointment. The third attempt was more successful. The track was faint indeed, so faint that Ronald could never have followed it if he had been alone, but Jean was a better woodsman, with a surer instinct for a trail. He led the way, through swamp woods, and up rising ground, partly wooded, partly open, until they reached a spot where they could look out over the lake to the north. There, along the ridge, the reindeer lichen had been cropped close in many places, proving beyond a doubt that caribou had been there, whether they had come the way the boys had just traveled or not. From the ridge top the descent to the lake was steep, with broken cliffs and a rough, inhospitable, stony beach at the base. After Jean had climbed a jack pine to get a better view of the surroundings, the two followed along the ridge to the southwest, noting the cropped moss and nibbled bushes as they went.

Reaching a gully, which bore signs that the animals might have gone that way, the boys scrambled through it and down over the rocks to the narrow, stony beach. A rocky, wooded island, perhaps a quarter of a mile out and almost parallel with the shore, served as a slight windbreak and had probably aided in the formation of the beach, which was about a mile in length. Beyond it on either hand the cliffs rose straight from the water.

Finding nothing to indicate that Nangotook had visited the beach, the lads climbed up the broken cliffs, and followed the shore to the northeast for a couple of miles until they came out on a point across the cove from their camp. There they saw a caribou feeding, but the beast took alarm before Jean was within range, and made off so rapidly that pursuit was useless. They had found no trace of Nangotook.

Worried and puzzled, but still hoping that while they were searching for him, the Indian might have returned to the rendezvous, the two boys made their way along the west shore of the cove, to the place where they had left the canoe. The boat was undisturbed, and there were no signs of the Ojibwa.

All that day and the two following, they searched for Nangotook. They explored all the tracks and suggestions of tracks that led from the bog where the caribou fed. They went along the cliffs beyond the gully, where they had descended to the shore, until they came to an indentation in the coast line, a great open bay, only partly protected by islands. Several times they saw caribou, but were not able to approach near enough for a successful shot.

The two also explored the whole western side of the cove to its head, and went up the stream to its source, a long, narrow, crook-shaped lake. On the third day of their search, they examined the east shore of the harbor, although it did not seem likely that Nangotook had been there. It was possible, however, that he might, in his pursuit of game, have been led around the head, across the marsh and stream and down the east side. The boys crossed the little inlet where their camp lay, and examined, as thoroughly as they could, both the lower ground and the ridge that ran at an angle with the cove. Along that ridge, and down its southeastern slope they came across a number of old pits, but all overgrown and showing no signs of having been mined for many years.

At the base of the ridge, a little back from the shore, in a grove of birch trees, the lads found the remains of a camp. It was from this place that Ronald had seen the thin wisp of smoke ascending. The camp had evidently been a temporary one, for no lodge had been built. Probably the campers had used their canoe for shelter, though there were no marks in the ground to show where it had rested on paddles or poles. Neither were there any foot-*prints, but that was not surprising, for the ground was rocky, with only shallow soil that would not take deep imprints. The ashes and charred sticks of the fire remained, and stumps, with the ax marks plain upon them, indicated where wood had been cut. A large birch had been partly stripped of its bark, doubtless for the purpose of repairing the canoe, or making utensils of some kind. Bones, bits of skin, fish scales and heads, and the uneatable parts of hares, squirrels and birds, were strewn about the ground in the Indian manner. The untidiness did not prove that the camp was necessarily an Indian one, however, for the white forest-wanderers were usually quite as careless of neatness and cleanliness as the savages themselves. Jean and Ronald, who piled fish and game refuse in a heap a little distance from the camp, and out of sight and smell, were far more particular than most of the wilderness travelers.

Though they could find no direct evidence, the lads were certain in their own minds that this camp had belonged to Le Forgeron Tordu and his Cree companion. They could not have explained why they were so sure, but they *were* sure nevertheless. They were convinced, too, that there was some connection between the camp and the disappearance of Nangotook, although they had not come upon the slightest evidence of foul play. After examining the place closely, they concluded that the camp ground had not been used for several days. Jean thought, from the appearance of the ashes, that the fire had not been burning since the last rain, and no rain had fallen since the night Ronald had spent waiting for the Ojibwa to return from the hunt. There was no discernible trail that led any distance from the camp. Very likely the campers had come to the spot by water and had departed in the same way. So the finding of the place, instead of helping to solve the problem of Nangotook's disappearance, only increased the boys' perplexity as well as their uneasiness.

Late in the afternoon of the same day, they saw something else that troubled them. Having searched everywhere for some trace of their companion, they were in a state of puzzlement over what to do next, but too restless to remain quiet. So they paddled to the entrance of the cove, and made their way out among the reefs, and along the base of the steep cliffs to the southwest. As they were going slowly along, with a line and hook attached to the stern paddle, Jean, who was in the bow, caught sight of some bright red thing gleaming among the green of evergreen trees on an outlying rocky island. With an exclamation, he pointed out the bright spot to Ronald, who had but a glimpse of it before it disappeared.

"There's a man on that island," said Jean excitedly. "That was a bit of his toque."

"It looked like it," Ronald admitted, "but it may have been only the autumn red of a rowan tree."

"No, no," Jean replied quickly. "That was no mountain ash tree. It would not have disappeared that way. We should still be able to see it. The red spot moved quickly and disappeared among the green. Yet there is no wind. I tell you it is a man. It is Le Forgeron, I am sure."

"That may be true," Ronald answered. "At any rate we must find out. If we can get on the track of the Blacksmith we may discover what has become of Etienne. I have little hope that he still lives, but at least we may find out how he died. We can't be leaving this place to make our way to the Grande Portage while there's any chance that he may return. Yet if we do not go soon, winter may catch us and hold us prisoner."

Jean nodded gravely. "We cannot rest till we find out what that red thing is," he said. "But if it is Le Forgeron's toque, it would not be wise to approach too closely now. We will go back to our camp again, as if we had noticed nothing, and after darkness comes, we will paddle across to that place and look for what we may find."

Ronald agreed at once. Not to excite suspicion if any one was watching from the island, they went on a little farther before turning, then paddled slowly back, as if their whole attention were devoted to their fishing.

After darkness had come, the two lads embarked again, made their way out among the rocks at the mouth of the harbor, and paddled towards the island. They wielded their blades silently, but darted as rapidly as they could across the open water. In spite of the fact that the moon had not yet risen, they were afraid their canoe could be seen by any keen-eyed person who might be looking that way. As they approached the island, they watched closely for the gleam of a campfire or for any sign of life, but no light glowed through the trees that clothed the central part of the rock island, and no movement was visible. Drawing near to land, the boys slowed their stroke and crept quietly along shore, searching the shadows for a landing place. A little cove in the rocks appeared to be a likely place, and, running in, they found a bit of pebble beach where they succeeded in making a safe landing. They concealed the canoe in a cleft of the rocks, where the shadows lay black, and then started to reconnoiter.

Cautiously and noiselessly they climbed the rocks to the patch of woods. An owl flew out on silent wings, and sailed down so close to Ronald's head that it startled him for a moment. No sound, but the rustling of evergreen needles in the light breeze and the low rippling of the water in the crannies of the rock shore below, disturbed the utter stillness. With the exception of the ghostly owl, there seemed to be no life whatever on the island.

In the darkness of the trees and bushes, they had to proceed very carefully. They did not attempt to go through the center of the wooded patch, but made their way along its edge, on the alert every moment for some sign of a camp. So cautiously did they move, stopping every few paces to listen and peer into the shadows, that it took them a long time to go the short distance to the southern end of the island, and before they reached it, the moon had risen and was lighting up the bare rocks and the water beyond.

So far the two had come upon no traces of either man or beast, but there, in the moonlight, Jean discovered a bent and broken serviceberry bush, where something, man or animal, had pushed through. He dropped on his knees to look for tracks, but could find no trace of footprints in the thin soil that only partly covered the rock. As he rose to his feet, he sniffed the air like an animal that catches a scent.

"Smoke," he whispered to Ronald.

Ronald, who had been examining a patch of moss at his feet, trying to make out whether it had been trodden on or not, turned his head in the direction of the wind and sniffed also. "Yes," he whispered back, "some one has a fire over there in the woods. We must be finding out about it." And stepping in front of Jean, he pushed through the bushes.

As the two made their way among the trees, going very cautiously over the rough ground, where broken rocks, cropping out everywhere and hidden in the shadow of the stunted and twisted spruces, made progress difficult, the smell of smoke came more and more strongly to their nostrils. Though as yet they could not see it, the camp-fire must be close at hand, they thought, and they went carefully that no sound might betray their presence. A faint, crackling noise reached their ears. It grew rapidly louder. Gleams of red appeared through the tree trunks ahead. Ronald stopped short, stared a moment, then turned to Jean, who had come up to him.

“That is no camp-fire,” he exclaimed, with a note of alarm in his low pitched voice.

Jean looked where the other pointed and gave a little gasp. “The woods are on fire,” he whispered. “The canoe, quick! Out of the trees to the rocks and around that way.”

XXVI

THE BURNING WOODS

As they hastened back through the woods, the boys’ one thought was to reach the canoe. They knew there was no chance of checking the fire, which apparently had a good start and would sweep the island from end to end. The wind was north, so, thinking they would be out of the worst of the heat and smoke on that side, they chose the northwestern or outer shore, though it was unknown ground to them, for they had come around the inner side at the edge of the woods. Light though the breeze was, the fire spread rapidly. The spruces flared up like torches, the flames running along the limbs and leaping from tree to tree. The resinous branches and needles made a loud crackling noise as they burned, broken by an occasional crash, as some tree, fire-eaten at its base, toppled over and fell against its fellows or broke through and measured its length on the ground.

The belt of almost bare rock between the lake and the woods was wider on the outer shore than on the inner, but the rocks, rising steeply from the water, were extremely rough and broken. Deep cracks had to be leaped, scrambled through or followed up until they could be crossed. In a very few minutes the trees, across the narrow open strip from the boys, were blazing. Though the lads were to the windward of the fire, the heat scorched them, and the smoke at times was almost suffocating. Either the wind was becoming variable or the heated air from the burning caused erratic currents, for frequent puffs and gusts of flame and smoke were carried towards the refugees. They kept as near the water and as far from the fire as they could, scrambling over rocks, jumping chasms, climbing slopes, slipping and falling sometimes, when the waves of pungent, stinging smoke choked and blinded them.

One crack was so wide they could not jump it, so steep they could not climb down. Going along its edge, they were led, before they reached a place narrow enough to be jumped, almost into the burning woods, where the chasm became a gully, covered with trees and bushes. Confused by the smoke, Ronald missed his leap, and would have gone to the bottom, if his hand had not grasped a little spruce growing on the brink. By the time Jean had pulled him over the edge, the bushes around them were beginning to burn. As the two boys sprang through, Jean’s tunic caught fire, and he was obliged to tear it off as he ran, and leave it behind. Not until they were at the very edge of the cliffs, were they clear of the blazing bushes.

As they scrambled on along the rocks, the two were in less danger, for the fire had passed through the bordering growth. Trees, bushes and moss still smouldered and smoked and broke out here and there in flames, but the worst of the fire seemed to be over in that part of the island. The smoke was still dense, however, and the rocks so hot in spots that they scorched the boys’ feet through their moccasins. With blackened clothes, blistered skins, stinging eyes, parched throats and bodies dripping with perspiration from the heat and excitement, the two lads reached the cove where they had landed, and made for the place where they had hidden the canoe.

The canoe was gone! Jean and Ronald could scarcely believe their senses. The boat had not burned, for the moss and bushes around the crack where it had been concealed were untouched by the fire. A bare space lay between the bushes and the edge of the woods, and the fire had not leaped across. There was no way the canoe could have disappeared except by human agency. Some one had been on the island when they landed. Probably he had seen them come ashore, had watched them hide their boat, and, as soon as they were out of sight and hearing, had taken possession of it and paddled away. How about the fire then? Had it been accidental, spreading from a carelessly made cooking fire, or had the man who had stolen their canoe deliberately set it and then left them, without means of escape, to perish in the flames, or to die of starvation afterwards?

These thoughts flashed through the heads of both boys as they stood gazing at the empty space where the canoe had been, but a new peril suddenly interrupted their speculations. There on the northeast end of the island, they had thought themselves safe from the fire, but something, a momentary change of the wind perhaps, caused a clump of half burned trees at the edge of the woods to blaze up suddenly, sending sparks far and wide. The sparks leaped the open space, and the dry bushes and stunted evergreens around the lads were on fire almost before the two realized what had happened. They had no time to seek for a place of safety on land. Scrambling down the rocks, the moss and lichens smouldering and bursting into tiny flames under their feet, the two plunged into the water not a moment too soon. The bottom shelved rapidly, and they lost their footing almost immediately. Just ahead of them a solitary rock rose a little above the surface, and a few strokes brought them to it.

There they clung, heads turned from the smoke, noses and throats choked, eyes smarting and blinded, while the fire swept away every bush and plant that grew about the landing place. At first the cold water felt grateful to their heated bodies and blistered skins, though no amount of it seemed to have much effect on their parched and swollen mouths and throats. The rock was too small and sharp pointed for them to climb up on it, and, in spite of the hot waves that swept over them from the fire, they soon began to chill.

After a little the breeze steadied and blew the smoke cloud in the other direction, and the boys were able to breathe again with some comfort, but not until the fire had thoroughly swept the rocks about the cove, did they dare to leave their refuge and swim the few strokes back to shore. The wildest of the fire was over, for the island was small, and the flames had swept it very thoroughly. Smoke still rose thickly though, and here and there parts of standing and fallen trees glowed red or burst out now and then into crackling tongues of fire. The rocks where the fire had taken bushes and moss were still warm, and the warmth was welcome to the lads, who had passed from extreme heat to cold, soaked as they were from their sojourn in the lake. Huddled in a cranny where the breeze did not strike them, they wrung the water out of their clothes, and waited for dawn. Now that the immediate peril seemed over, they found themselves so weary that they even slept a little.

At the first sign of day, they were up and out of their crack in the rock. What was to be done next? They had no canoe and nothing to eat. In their wild trip around the island, Jean had kept hold of his bow and arrows, but when he had plunged into the lake, he had been obliged to drop the bow on the shore. It had fallen on a bed of moss, where they found the blackened remains of the frame. If any animals had survived the fire, by taking to the water or burying themselves in holes, the boys had nothing to shoot them with, though they might make snares of the fishing lines they carried in their pockets. From their first landing, however, the only sign of life they had seen was the owl that had flown down over Ronald’s head.

As soon as the light was strong enough so they could see to find their way about, they set out to explore the burned woods, in the hope of finding a few sound trees for a raft. Luckily neither of them had lost the knife or small ax he carried attached to his belt. The central part of the island, though rough with broken rocks, had been green with spruces, balsams, junipers and moss. Now it was a scene of desolation. Most of the trees were still standing, but charred and blackened from base to summit. Enough trunks and branches, many of them crumbling into charcoal dust and ashes when stepped on, had fallen, however, to make walking through the burned woods difficult. Thinking they would stand the best chance of finding sound trees along the edge of the burning on the north shore of the island, the boys decided to go that way first. The results of their search were not encouraging, although they marked with their axes a few standing trunks they thought they could use.

The sun had not yet risen when they reached the opposite end of the island. Looking off across the water, Ronald was surprised to see something moving through the light mist. He called Jean, and the two soon made out a canoe with one man.

“Perhaps that’s the man who was on the island last night,” Ronald exclaimed, “and our canoe.”

“It may be,” Jean replied, “but that is not the man we saw here among the trees, or, if it is, he has taken off his red toque.” There was no bright color to be seen about the figure in the canoe. “That’s not our canoe either,” Jean added. “It is smaller and not so high in the bow.” Then as the boat drew nearer, he cried out, “It is Etienne!”

Ronald shook his head. “He is too far away. You can’t tell in the mist. Besides, it’s impossible. How could Etienne have come here,—in a canoe?”

“It is *Etienne*. I am sure of it,” Jean repeated. “But he is not making for this place. He intends to pass between this island and the shore.”

“We must hail him, whoever he is,” cried Ronald. “He’ll not refuse to take us off, unless he is Le Forgeron’s Indian, and in that case,” the boy’s face hardened, “we’re two to one.”

He opened his mouth to shout, but Jean stopped him and seized his half raised arm. “We will soon find out if it is Etienne,” he said. Then out across the water, he sent a peculiar, long drawn, wavering cry, not very loud but high pitched and penetrating. The man in the canoe turned his head, held himself motionless a moment, his paddle suspended, then sent back an answering cry, the same except for a falling cadence at the close, while Jean’s call had ended with a rising one.

“It *is* Etienne,” the lad cried, and he sprang down the rocks, waving his arms, and uttering the queer cry a second time.

Again the man in the canoe answered, then turned and paddled towards the island. A few strokes and he was near enough so that even Ronald made sure that it was really the Ojibwa.

If the Indian was surprised to find his two companions on the burned over island, he gave no expression to the feeling. He came in close to the shore, but did not get out of the canoe, holding it off from the rocks with his paddle. “Canoe burned?” he asked briefly.

“Not burned, stolen,” Jean replied, and, without explaining how he and Ronald came to be on the island, he told how they had found the place where they had hidden their boat, empty, though the fire had not reached it.

The Indian cut short the boy’s explanations by motioning both lads into the canoe. When they were settled, he said sharply, “Paddle now. Get back to camp. Talk then.”

After a quick look across the water in the direction he had come, he suited his action to his words, paddling with quick, strong strokes. Seizing the other blade that lay in the boat, Ronald joined in, and they made good speed over the almost still water. Now and then Nangotook looked back over his shoulder. It was evident that he feared pursuit.

They reached the camp just as the sun was rising. Nangotook landed first, and the boys, as they were carrying up the canoe, heard him give a grunt, when he rounded a bush and came in view of the lodge. Only its framework was standing. The bark covering had been stripped off. The Indian stooped to examine the ground. In the ashes, where the fire had been, was the print of a moccasined foot, a large foot that turned out and pressed more heavily on the inner side than on the outer. “Awishtoya,” he growled, and when the boys saw the track they too felt sure that it had been made by the lame Frenchman. They had not left anything of value in the wigwam, except a pile of hare skins, which had disappeared of course. Alarmed for the safety of the dried meat, the lads ran to the tree where they had hung it. The birch bark package was gone. No animal would or could have carried it off in its entirety. The caribou hide, which had been stretched out to cure, had disappeared also.

“It was Le Forgeron’s red toque we saw on that island,” said Jean with conviction. “He was hiding somewhere when we landed. He set the woods on fire to destroy us. Then he took our canoe, came here and stole our meat.”

“There can be no doubt of it,” Ronald agreed.

Nangotook nodded. He was to add his confirmation to Jean’s surmises later. All he said at the time was, “Tell me, my brothers, all that has happened since we parted. Then we can take council together.”

So the boys related how they had searched for him without result, how they had been led to visit the island, and what had happened to them there. When they had finished, Nangotook told his story.

XXVII

NANGOTOOK’S CAPTIVITY

Nangotook had followed the caribou trail to the bog the animals were in the habit of visiting, and there he had wounded a stag so badly that it fell in its tracks. He ran up to it, and, finding it still alive, was stooping to give it the death stroke, when something struck him suddenly on the back of the head, and he knew nothing more. This part of the story he told somewhat shamefacedly. He was at a loss to understand how an enemy could have crept up on him, and blamed himself for allowing the caribou he was stalking to occupy all of his senses, to the exclusion of everything else.

When his spirit came back to his body, he was lying on his back, legs and arms bound, beside a fire, in a little open place surrounded by trees. It was dark, but he could not tell how far advanced the night was, for no stars were visible. On the opposite side of the fire sat the Cree Indian he had seen with Le Forgeron Tordu, and over the flames was a scaffold where meat was drying, the flesh of the caribou he had killed, as he learned later. Nangotook lay still, and, his head being in shadow, his open eyes were not noticed by the Cree. Presently a figure came out of the woods and up to the fire. Nangotook recognized the strong, squat form and ugly, scarred face of Le Forgeron.

After taking a look at the drying meat, the Frenchman came around the fire, and, standing directly over Nangotook, looked down at him. Thinking nothing was to be gained by feigning sleep, the Ojibwa stared back at Le Forgeron defiantly. He expected the taunt and ridicule that are usually heaped upon the Indian captive, but Le Forgeron merely nodded in a friendly manner and sat down beside his prisoner. The reason for his friendliness was not long in appearing. He had a proposition to make.

He knew, he said, that Nangotook and his companions were seeking a rich gold mine, but he, Awishtoya, intended to have that gold for himself. What could boys like the young Havard and the red-haired Kennedy do with such a mine, he asked. They were only lads without sense or judgment. If they found the gold they would go back to Montreal and brag of it, and other men, wiser and cleverer than they, would get control of the mine. All that the boys would ever gain from the discovery would be experience, but no riches. Then what would happen to Nangotook? If he thought he would share in the wealth of the mine, he was mistaken. The young are always ungrateful, and the lads would have no use for their guide once they had found the treasure. But even if they did not prove ungrateful, it would make no difference. They would be powerless to reward him, while the rich and clever men, who would take the mine away from them, would acknowledge no obligation to a poor savage. They would scorn him and kick him out when he went to plead for his share of the gold.

While the white man was presenting his argument, Nangotook kept silent, knowing well what the other was leading up to. At that point, however, it occurred to him that he might gain time and also learn more about what Le Forgeron actually knew of their quest, if he appeared to be influenced by the Frenchman's arguments. So, when the latter described the treatment the poor Indian would receive at the hands of the men who would gain control of the mine, the Ojibwa allowed his expression to change and even gave a little grunt of assent. Thus encouraged, the Blacksmith began to show his purpose more plainly. He admitted with apparent frankness that, while he knew in general where to search for the gold mine, he was not familiar with its exact location. Otherwise he would not have troubled himself to bring Nangotook to his camp. His evil smile conveyed the impression that he would merely have struck the Indian down at the first good opportunity, and so have got him out of his way. However, he had spared Nangotook's life and had brought him here, because he had need of him. Undoubtedly he, Awishtoya, could find the place if he searched closely enough, but the season was getting late, and he wanted to leave the lake before winter came. So he had taken this method, a harsh one he admitted, to have an interview with the Ojibwa and make him a proposition. If Nangotook would abandon his two companions and lead Le Forgeron to the gold mine, he would promise him half of all the wealth obtained from it, a generous offer, for the Indian would share none of the expense of taking out and transporting the gold.

Le Forgeron paused impressively at this point to let the idea sink in. Nangotook appeared to consider the proposition for some moments, then, speaking for the first time, asked what he, a poor Indian, with simple wants, could do with such great wealth.

His question was cleverly framed to give the impression that he knew the wealth in question would be indeed very great. He saw a gleam in the Frenchman's eyes that assured him his shot had struck home.

In answer to the Indian's question, Le Forgeron launched into a long and vivid description of the delights of wealth and of all the wonderful things Nangotook could do with it. Though selfish and evil himself, he was clever enough to realize that the Indian he was dealing with was of a higher type than most of his fellows. He not only described the pleasures of personal indulgence that could be bought with riches, but enlarged upon the opportunity to obtain power and become the greatest chief of the Ojibwas and of all the Indian tribes, able to deal on terms of equality with the white men and their chiefs, even with the great white father across the sea in England and the other white father whom the men who called themselves Americans served! Nangotook could make his own people the greatest, the most prosperous, the happiest of all the Indian nations. He could prevent them from ever knowing famine, or even hunger again, though the game should disappear from the woods, the fish from the lakes, and the wild rice from the streams and the marshes, for he could purchase from the white men great ship loads of flour, pork and all other articles of food. He could supply his people with the best of guns and all the ammunition they needed, with an abundance of iron kettles, utensils and implements of all kinds, the thickest and warmest of blankets, clothes as good as the richest white men wore and luxuries and ornaments that would arouse the envy of all the other tribes. The Ojibwas could tread under their feet their hereditary enemies, the great Sioux nation.

It was a vivid and, to an Indian, an attractive picture Le Forgeron painted, and Nangotook admitted that it would have moved him greatly if he had had any confidence in the good faith and promises of the man beside him. But he knew Awishtoya, and as he lay looking up into his face, appearing to drink in his words, he could see, he declared, the greed and treachery and evil under the innocent expression.

“His words were smooth and sweet to the ear as the maple sap in spring is to the taste,” said Nangotook, “yet I knew that he spoke with a forked tongue, and in his voice I could hear the hissing of the spotted snake.”

The Ojibwa knew better than to refuse the proposition at once however. He must play for time until he could find some means of escape. So he appeared to consider the Blacksmith's offer, but said he could not make up his mind on such an important matter so quickly. He must have time to think. Perhaps by the next morning he would be able to give an answer.

Le Forgeron was familiar with Indian nature and knew he would gain nothing by arguing farther just then, but might lose some of the influence he had already acquired. So he dropped the subject, and leaving his captive's side, ordered the Cree to give “the guest” something to eat. The Cree did as he was commanded, bringing Nangotook a large birch bowl of steaming caribou stew, and untying his hands so he could eat it. After the prisoner had eaten, Le Forgeron offered him some tobacco. Nangotook did not feel that he could refuse it without exciting the white man's suspicions. To have smoked it, however, would have been a sign of peace between them. The Ojibwa, being too honest for that, managed in the darkness to slip the tobacco into his pouch, and to take out a little of his own kinni-kinnik instead. After he had smoked, the Cree tied his hands again, and Nangotook closed his eyes and appeared to sleep.

He had no chance to escape that night. Even if he had been able to loose his bonds, he could not have got away, for one or the other of his captors remained awake to tend the meat on the scaffold. The next morning he still delayed answering Le Forgeron Tordu's proposition, making the excuse that, though he had asked for counsel, his totem or guardian spirit had not signified either in a dream or in any other way what he should do. Awishtoya's words and promises had sounded good to him, he said, but the matter was a serious one. He had never deserted a companion who trusted him, and he was bound especially to Jean Havard by gratitude to Jean's father, who had saved his life. What would become of the two white lads if he forsook them, he asked.

Le Forgeron had been expecting that question, and had a ready answer. If Nangotook would lead him to the gold mine at once, he would then leave the Ojibwa free to return to the two boys, whom he would pledge himself not to injure in the meantime. Of course Nangotook must promise not to reveal to them that he had found the mine. Instead he must tell them that he could not find the place. Then he must take them away immediately to Grande Portage. "In that way," said the crafty Frenchman, "you can fulfill your agreement with me, and at the same time save the lives of your companions, and return the young Havard to his father." Again he smiled his evil smile, hinting that if Nangotook did not accept his proposition, the lives of his comrades would most certainly not be saved.

Again the Indian read the evil purpose underlying the smooth words. He was sure that no matter what agreement he made, the Blacksmith would never, if he could help it, let any of the three escape alive. They knew too much about his plans and purposes. It would be much simpler for him to destroy them all, than to risk their telling tales against him if he found the gold and did not share his fortune with them. The Ojibwa was convinced that Le Forgeron was not the kind of a man to share anything, whatever he might promise. He kept his thoughts to himself though, and, after appearing to consider for some time, answered that he would ask his totem for counsel again that night, and would give his reply the following morning. Once more Le Forgeron, used to dealing with savages who could not be hurried, consented. He had not used all his arguments yet, but was saving the strongest for the last, and he felt very sure he should succeed. Apparently, it did not occur to him that his prisoner might not know just where the gold mine was. He seemed perfectly confident that the Indian could lead him there speedily if he would, and Nangotook was careful not to undeceive him. He knew that his life and that of the two boys hung on the Frenchman's belief that the Ojibwa could be useful to him.

The task of guarding the captive was left to the Cree that day, and he proved a careful and zealous guard. Not for one moment did he go out of sight of his prisoner, and Nangotook, after sounding him cautiously, decided that he could not be tampered with. His loyalty to, or fear of, Awishtoya was too great.

There was no drying meat to be watched that night, and the prisoner hoped for a chance of escape. He had carefully tried his bonds, and had made up his mind that there was no way of slipping or loosening them. He must gnaw through the thongs, cut them by drawing them across something sharp, or burn them by placing them against a live coal. The gnawing would take a long time, and if he was found with partly severed bonds, he knew he would be tied more tightly as a result, his hands bound behind his back probably so that he could not get at them. Up to that time, though his wrists were firmly fastened together, his arms had not been tied to his body. No knives or sharp things were within reach, so he resolved to try burning the thongs.

He lay with his feet to the fire, and to reach it he must roll over and around. He waited for a good opportunity to make the move, but the chance was slow in coming. The Cree slept close to him, and slept very lightly. Every time Nangotook made the slightest movement, the latter either woke or stirred in his sleep as if about to wake. At last the captive succeeded in rolling over and turning part way around, but his guard woke and gave him a brutal kick. It was some time before the Cree settled down to sleep again. As soon as the latter was breathing deeply, Nangotook attempted to turn a little farther, but a stick under him cracked, and the Cree was up in a moment. Probably he suspected what his prisoner was trying to do, for, after giving him another savage kick, he replenished the fire and sat close to it, wide awake, the rest of the night.

Balked in his attempts to escape, Nangotook had to fence for time again. He thought seriously of appearing to agree to Le Forgeron's proposal, and leading him somewhere, anywhere. His ankles would have to be unbound for land traveling, but he knew that he would be forced to go ahead with a loaded weapon at his back. He might have to travel so far before he could escape, that it would be difficult to get back to the boys. Moreover, before they started, either Le Forgeron or the Cree might waylay and destroy the lads. Why the Blacksmith had not done so before that, the Ojibwa could scarcely understand.

Once more he tried to put Le Forgeron off, but this time he did not succeed so well. The Twisted Blacksmith grew angry at the delay and told him sharply that he could not have another night to make up his mind. He must decide before sunset, so they might start that evening. The Frenchman would delay no longer. He thought the time had come to try threats as well as persuasion, so he told Nangotook that unless he agreed promptly it would be the worse for him and his friends. He had the Ojibwa in his power and could do what he willed with him. The two boys were as good as in his hands. They could not escape him. When the three were once "out of the way," he would find the gold anyway, he asserted. He knew the place was near by. A week's search at the farthest must reveal it to him. Then Nangotook would have sacrificed his life and his companions' lives all for nothing, when he might have had wealth and power.

The Indian appeared deeply concerned at these threats, and promised to make up his mind by nightfall. From the white man's remarks he had learned two important things, first that Le Forgeron had no definite idea where the gold mine was, and second that he did not associate it with the Island of Yellow Sands. Whatever he had heard of the lads' conversation that night at the Grande Portage, he had not caught anything that served to connect their search with the island of the Indian tales, tales he must have heard more than once. He knew merely that they were seeking some rich deposit of gold, and he had been following them without any knowledge where they would lead him. It was evident that he suspected the mine was either on or near the island of Minong.

Le Forgeron was both restless and ugly that morning, abusing the Cree until Nangotook wondered the latter did not turn on him. The Indian appeared to be a sort of slave to the white man, and was in deadly fear of him. Probably it was the magic power which the Indians, and many of the whites as well, supposed the Twisted Blacksmith to possess, that his slave dreaded, rather than his brutality or physical strength.

Some time after the sun had reached its height and had begun to decline again, Le Forgeron told the Cree sharply to look to his charge. He was going to leave the island a while he said, but he might be back any time, and unless he found everything to his satisfaction, the Cree knew what would happen. Then he cast a threatening glance at Nangotook, and went limping off among the trees. The captive had suspected from the appearance of the place that the camp was on a small island, but he had not been sure until now. The departure of Le Forgeron worried him, for he feared his enemy might be going to work some evil on the two boys. The man hated Ronald, and would not be content, the Indian believed, with merely killing the lad, but would devise some especially cruel way of getting rid of him. Yet Nangotook could not follow Le Forgeron. Even if he could escape the watchful eyes of the Cree, or manage in some way to overpower him, he could not get away until the Blacksmith came back, for the latter must have taken his canoe. There was nothing for the captive to do but to remain quiet and feign indifference.

Nangotook did not have to give his decision at sunset, for Le Forgeron had not returned. Darkness fell and night came on, but still the Frenchman did not come. The breeze brought the smell of smoke from the northeast. Nangotook was sure the woods were burning somewhere. The smoke grew thicker, and the Cree became anxious, but would not leave his charge even to find out if the fire was on the island.

After a time the smoke thinned, and was hardly perceptible by the time Le Forgeron returned. Nangotook feigned to be sleeping, and the Blacksmith did not disturb him. Le Forgeron seemed restless. He would sit by the fire for a few minutes, then get up and wander off through the woods. As long as his master was awake, the Cree feared to sleep, but both of them quieted down at last. As if to make up for their former wakefulness, they slept with unusual soundness.

When his captors were snoring loudly, Nangotook made another attempt to reach the fire. That time he succeeded. Lying on his side, he stretched his arms out over the embers, and held the thongs against a glowing coal until they were so charred he could pull them apart. He burned his hands and wrists in the process, but he did not heed the pain. When his hands were free, he did not untie his feet immediately, but quietly and slowly, a few inches at a time, dragged himself over the ground, away from the Cree and into the shadows of the trees. There, behind a bush, he untied the cords that were about his ankles, rose to his feet and slipped silently into the woods. The cry of an owl caused him to duck suddenly. The noise must have disturbed Le Forgeron, for Nangotook heard him mumble an oath.

The Ojibwa remained motionless, expecting every moment that his absence would be discovered, and that he would have to run or fight. His bow and arrows, knife and ax had been taken from him when he was first captured, before he regained consciousness. But neither Le Forgeron nor the Cree roused enough to think of the prisoner. He waited a while, until he was sure from their deep breathing that they were sleeping soundly, then slipped away, going in the same direction the Frenchman had gone that morning. The goings and comings of the two had made a clear trail, and even in the darkness Nangotook had no trouble in keeping it. It led him to a rocky shore where a canoe lay above water line.

Day was dawning, and the Ojibwa knew he must hurry. Perhaps it was his haste that prevented him from noticing whether there was another canoe anywhere near by. Indeed he never thought of there being more than one. Embarking at once, he paddled away swiftly but without sound. He could see that the island, where he had been held, was off the main shore of the big island, to the southwest of the cove mouth, and he made speed back towards the camp where he had left his comrades. He was steering to run between the burned island and the shore, when he heard Jean’s call across the water, the Indian call he had taught the lad when he was a little child. Nangotook not only knew the call, but he recognized Jean’s voice and his way of uttering the syllables.

XXVIII

FLEEING FROM LE FORGERON

After Nangotook had finished his narrative, Ronald asked him how Le Forgeron had managed to follow them through storm and fog, and yet not lose track of them. The boys knew that the Indians, among whom he had lived for many years, regarded him as a great medicine man and believed him to have magic powers which they respected and feared. Nangotook answered that the Frenchman had hinted that he had learned of the gold-seekers’ quest in some mysterious way, and had asserted that, from the first, he had had them in his power. They could not escape him, he said, no matter how hard they might try. But the Ojibwa knew that all this might be mere boasting to put his prisoner in awe of him. The fact that Le Forgeron had not discovered that it was the Island of Yellow Sands the three were seeking, as well as his betrayal of his dependence on his captive's leadership, rather destroyed Nangotook's faith in Awishtoya's magic powers. So, in the white man's absence, he had questioned the Cree, leading up to the subject so carefully that the latter had not suspected he was being quizzed.

From what the Cree told him, Nangotook discovered that Le Forgeron had not tracked the treasure-seeking party as easily or readily as he pretended. Whether he had overheard them say something about the Rock of the Beaver, and, knowing the place, had gone there directly, or had trailed them along the north shore of the lake, Nangotook had not learned. At any rate it was the smoke of his fire they had seen when they left the Rock. He had watched them go and had noted their course, but had not followed until darkness came. He did not wish to be observed by them, and had trusted that, if he kept to the same course, he would reach whatever place the gold-seekers were headed for. The Cree evidently believed that it was by Awishtoya's magic powers alone that the two had survived the storm and reached land. Instead of being cast up on a barren rock, as the others had been, they had been driven on the shore of the island that Nangotook and the boys had reached two days later. They had narrowly escaped being battered on the rocks at the northern end, but had managed to avoid wreck, and had found a refuge in the cave where Ronald had discovered the remains of their camp.

It was Le Forgeron who had knocked Ronald over the cliff. The Cree had been in the cave at the time, He had gone out in the canoe and had towed the unconscious boy into the adjoining cavern, where he had taken from him his gun and knife. Awishtoya had ordered him, the Indian said, to kill the lad, if he were not already dead, but because of a dream he had had the night before, which forbade him to take life, even the life of an animal, that day, the Cree had not given the death stroke. He had thought the boy would die anyway, for he did not believe he could get out of the cave without a boat to help him, and he felt sure that his companions would never find him there. Le Forgeron did not go into the hole where Ronald was, so he did not discover that his servant had not carried out his commands. As soon as he had disposed of the lad, the Indian had paddled to the place where the two were in the habit of descending the cliff, and had taken his master into the canoe. Then they had crossed a short stretch of water to a little, outlying, almost barren island, where they had lain hidden among the few stunted trees and bushes until nightfall. Before night the weather had cleared, so they could see the land away to the southwest.

Evidently Le Forgeron had made up his mind that the gold mine was not on the island where they had been staying. He had doubtless spied on the three and had seen no evidence of prospecting. After midnight he ordered the Cree to launch the canoe again, and they made a perilous crossing, with strong wind and high waves, to Minong. There they waited in the camp on the point for several days, one or the other of them on watch day and night for the coming of the gold-seekers' canoe. As the days passed, the Frenchman grew more and more impatient. He was absent from camp most of the time, leaving the Indian to watch for the canoe. Finally Le Forgeron gave up waiting, and the two began a series of wanderings that the Cree evidently did not understand. To Nangotook, however, it was plain that the Blacksmith had been searching for the gold mine. They left the harbor where they had been camping, and explored the whole northern end of the big island, as well as the little islands off its shores. They penetrated to the interior of Minong, traveling along the ridges. In some places they remained for several days at a time, the Cree minding the camp while his master went off by himself. The northeaster did not disturb them seriously, for they were in camp with plenty to eat. At last they reached the cove where the copper mines were.

This was the sum of what Nangotook, by careful questioning and without appearing especially curious, had learned from the Cree. It proved to him that Le Forgeron had not followed the three by any exercise of mysterious powers. If he had used magic, it had been merely to save himself and his companion from storm and waves, and in that respect he had not been any better cared for than Nangotook and the boys. The fog, which had hidden their coming to Minong and had caused them to land many miles from Le Forgeron's camp, had put him off their track, so that it was not until he reached the cove of the copper mines that he found himself in their neighborhood again. It was then that he discovered that he still had three persons, not two, to deal with. His anger at his Indian servant, for not obeying orders and taking Ronald's life, had been so great that he had threatened to kill the Cree, and might have done so, had the latter not fled from him and kept away until his master's fury cooled.

"It would seem," said Jean, when the Indian had finished telling what he had learned, "that, if Le Forgeron thinks we are seeking gold about here somewhere, the wisest course for us is to leave at once, and get as far away as we can before he discovers we have gone. With a good start, and three paddles to his two, we may easily beat him to the Grande Portage and be rid of him. If he has deserted from the fleet, I do not believe he will show himself at any of the Company's posts for some years to come."

Ronald did not like the idea of running away, as he called it. His fiery temper had been aroused by the attempt to destroy his comrade and himself in such a cruel and cowardly way, as well as by the capture of Nangotook. His first impulse was to seek the Frenchman's camp, and have it out with him, but, after a brief argument, the wiser and cooler counsels of Jean and the Ojibwa prevailed. The latter, while he would have liked well to avenge himself on Le Forgeron, felt responsible for the two boys, and was reluctant to expose them to a fight with the cruel and crafty Blacksmith. To be sure they were three to two, but the others had guns and ammunition, which gave them an overpowering advantage. So Nangotook was in favor of getting away first, and settling the score with the Frenchman at some later time. Although he did not say so to the boys, he was determined to seek out Awishtoya and make him pay that score, as soon as the two lads had been returned to their friends.

To Nangotook’s argument, Jean added the opinion that, if they should provoke a fight with Le Forgeron, or attack him, they would put themselves in the wrong, and make themselves liable to punishment for crime, if either of their enemies should escape from their assault, or if the matter should become known in any other way. “There is no way we could punish them except to kill them outright,” he said, “and while I do not doubt Le Forgeron well deserves death, I should be loath to attack him deliberately and in cold blood. If he should attack us, that would be different. Then I should have no compunctions.”

“He will attack us, that is certain, if he finds a chance,” replied Ronald. “It is open warfare between us, and it seems to me only good generalship to strike first and get the advantage.”

In the end, however, he yielded to the counsels of the others, and they prepared to leave their camp at once. The Indian had not taken long to tell his story, and the discussion that followed had lasted but a few minutes. So the morning was but little advanced when they were ready to start. If they paddled out of the cove and along shore, they could hardly hope to escape being seen by their enemies, yet they did not want to delay until nightfall. So they decided to cross the cove and go overland, portaging the canoe, to the bay the boys had found when they were searching for some trace of Nangotook.

They put their plan into execution at once. Paddling across the cove, they landed in a narrow little bay, climbed to the high ground, carrying the canoe, and went along at the top of the cliffs. They chose, so far as they could, ground open enough to allow the canoe to be taken through easily, but with growth sufficiently large and thick to prevent their being seen by any one on the water or on the outlying islands. Conditions on the whole were favorable, and they were able to make good speed without exposing themselves. They went rapidly, but carefully, leaving as little trace of their passage as possible, in the hope that Le Forgeron would not find their trail. The place had been much frequented by caribou, and a broken branch or a bruised bit of moss or lichen would naturally be laid to the animals, unless it bore plain signs of the human. Such plain signs it was their intention to avoid. In one respect, however, luck was against them, for, though they were in need of food, they saw but one caribou, and did not get near enough for a shot. As the boys had been over the ground before, they led the way. When they came to the rift that led down to the pebble beach, Nangotook, pointing to the island that lay out from it, said it was there he had been held a prisoner. He must have been carried down to the beach, while still unconscious, and taken across in Le Forgeron’s canoe.

The refugees launched their boat in a little lake the lads had found, and, after portaging around a beaver dam, paddled down a narrow stream to the great bay.

None of the three had had anything to eat since the night before. The loss of the caribou meat was a serious matter, for, instead of pushing on rapidly as they wished to do, they must delay to hunt and fish. Among the reefs and islands of the bay, they succeeded in catching enough fish for a meal, and, landing on a small island, broiled their catch. Wishing to leave as few traces as possible for Le Forgeron to find, they gathered up the fish cleanings, and even the embers and ashes from the fire, and threw them into the lake. Then Etienne covered the spot where the ashes had been with dry earth and fallen leaves, so cleverly that no one would have suspected that a fire had ever been kindled there.

Taking to the canoe, the voyageurs started to go on with their journey, but, as they paddled out from the shelter of the small island, they discovered that the wind was blowing a gale from the west. By keeping close to shore and taking advantage of every bit of shelter that little islands and points afforded, they managed to make their way through the bay. When they rounded a long point at the southwestern end, however, they found the waves rolling so high and the black clouds coming up the sky so threateningly, that they did not dare to continue along an open and unprotected shore. They were obliged to turn back into the little subsidiary harbor they had just skirted, which cut into the land in a south-*westerly direction at the end of the large bay.

In their anxiety to make speed, they would have tried to go on overland, but the storm broke before they had the canoe out of the water. In the heavy rain and boisterous wind, traveling over rough and unfamiliar ground, carrying the canoe was out of the question. They were forced to crawl under the upturned boat, and wait for the passing of the storm.

The storm was in no haste to pass over. It developed into one of those cold, driving, wind-lashed, autumn rains that may last any length of time, from hours to days. The weather-wise Etienne soon decided that farther travel that day, either by water or land, was out of the question. The three might as well make themselves as comfortable as they could. They had one consolation at least. The storm would delay Le Forgeron as well, if he had succeeded in getting on their track. If he had not found their trail before the rain began, he would not find it at all, for all the traces they had left would be completely washed out.

They did not attempt to build a shelter, but cut evergreen branches, shook the water from them, and covered the ground under the canoe. The driving rain prevented them from finding food. Not an animal or bird ventured forth, and fishing from the shore was without result. So the three went supperless. When their canoe had disappeared from the burning island, the one remaining blanket had gone with it, for the blankets, folded or rolled, were always carried in the canoe to kneel upon or lean against. So the campers had no cover that night but the damp spruce and balsam branches they burrowed into, in the attempt to keep warm. Jean was the worst off, for he did not even have a coat.

XXIX

NEAR STARVATION

The next morning was foggy, but the water was calm, so the voyageurs made an early start. As they had nothing to eat, they did not have to delay for breakfast. In the thick mist, navigation was difficult, however, even for the experienced Ojibwa. Disaster came quickly. They ran too close to an island that lay off the end of the point separating their camping ground from the open lake, struck upon a sharp, submerged rock, and tore a bad hole in the bottom of the canoe. The water came in so rapidly that, to reach shore, Ronald and the Indian had to put all their strength and speed into their paddling, while Jean bailed as fast as he could. It was fortunate that they were only a few hundred feet from the point, or they could not have gained it before the boat filled. They had no time to choose a landing place, and, striking the rocks, damaged the canoe still more.

The bark covering was so badly torn that mending it would take considerable time. So the three decided that breakfast was the first essential. While Ronald gathered fire-wood and Etienne attempted to coax a blaze from the wet materials, Jean looked for a place where he could fish from the shore. From a pool among the rocks, he dipped up some tiny fish that he could use for bait, but neither he nor Ronald succeeded in catching anything large enough to be eaten. Finally they breakfasted on two squirrels that Ronald brought down with stones, scanty fare indeed for three men who had fasted for nearly twenty-four hours.

After they had finished the last drop of the squirrel stew, the two boys decided to go back around the shore to the mouth of a stream they had noticed the day before. There they might be able to catch some brook trout, while Etienne was repairing the canoe.

Accordingly, the two lads scrambled along the rocky point, to the head of the narrow little bay where they had spent the night. They knew that the stream entered the lake at the upper end of another subsidiary bay, that lay parallel to the one where they were. Instead of going around the intervening point, they risked losing themselves in the fog, and struck off through the woods. After climbing a ridge, they came upon the stream they sought, running through a swampy valley. It was not a favorable place for trout, so they continued on down the brook to its mouth, around the end of the little bay, and along higher ground for about two miles, to another larger and more rapid stream, that discharged into the lake through a break between the ridges. The fog was so thick that the lads, had they not been guided by the ridge they traveled along, might easily have become lost and have failed to find the stream they were seeking. Indeed they had underestimated the distance, and had begun to fear they had missed the place, when they came suddenly to the edge of the ravine where the brown waters flowed swiftly down to the lake. The little trout were biting so eagerly that the fishermen soon had fine strings. These were primitive, uneducated trout that had never been fished for, and did not have to be lured with bright colored, artificial flies, but were ready to rise to minnows and even to bare hooks.

The fog was still dense when the boys, well laden with fish, started to make their way back to their camping place, but when they climbed out of the ravine, they found it was no longer a motionless curtain of mist that hung about them, but waves of moisture driven before a raw northeast wind. Before they reached the point where Etienne was at work on the canoe, the fog had turned to rain, cold, fine and mist-like.

“Northeaster coming,” grunted the Indian, without even glancing at the strings of trout. “Find better place and make wigwam quick.”

Hungry though they were, the three did not even wait to cook their fish, but, seizing the canoe, made speed back along the point to look for a sheltered camping spot. The northeast wind swept the whole length of the bay, and it was not until they reached thick woods at its head, that they found a good place. A bit of partly open ground surrounded by trees was hastily cleared and leveled, and a wigwam erected. Not until the hut was finished and a good supply of fire-wood cut and piled inside, did Nangotook allow the boys to even clean their fish. By that time the cold rain was coming down hard, and the wind was bending the tree tops. Within their bark shelter the three, wet, chilled and painfully hungry, sat around their little fire and waited impatiently for the fish to broil. It was well that the lads had brought back long strings, for to their hunger one little trout was scarcely more than a mouthful.

Nangotook’s prophecy was correct. Another northeaster was upon them, not quite so violent as the one they had passed through a short time before, but even more long continued. Four days, the cold, driving storm of rain, wind, sleet and snow lasted, with never a long enough lull to let the waves, that dashed furiously the length of the big, open bay, subside so a canoe could be launched. It was a time of misery for the three wanderers. They had no blankets or furs for covering, but could only burrow down among evergreen branches to keep out the bitter cold.

Jean did not even have a coat, and his shirt, like Ronald’s, was worn and ragged. Neither boy had a change of clothing left. Their moccasins were in rags, and they had no deerskin to make new. Fuel was plenty, but hard to get in the icy storm, and slow to dry so it would burn well enough to give off anything but smoke.

Their greatest misery, however, was due to lack of food. If there were any animals in that part of Minong, they kept to their holes and dens. It was impossible to go out in the canoe, and fishing from the shore brought little result. Once when the storm lulled slightly, Nangotook and Ronald tried to reach the stream where the boys had caught the trout, but before they had fought their way through snow and wind for half a mile, the storm came on again with such violence that they were obliged to turn back. In the quieter intervals they sought for anything eatable that the woods near their wigwam afforded, digging through the frozen snow for roots, picking every nut and seed and dried berry that remained on the bushes, and even stripping the tender inner bark of willows and birches and chewing it. To ease his hunger, Nangotook smoked incessantly. He was out of tobacco, but used bearberry leaves and willow bark in his pipe. He spent most of his time, when compelled by the storm to remain within the lodge, making new bows and arrows and twisting stout cord from the inner bark of the white cedar to weave into a fishing net. In this work the boys joined him.

They attempted to forget their suffering in talk. Jean told all the strange French-Canadian tales and sang all the songs he could remember, from “Marlborough Has Gone to War,”

“Malbrouk se’n va-t-en guerre,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,”

a song brought from old France many years before, to the purely Canadian “Petit Rocher de la Haute Montagne.”

The two lads had heard the latter song many times and were familiar with its story, but they had never felt the tragedy of it so strongly before. It is the death lament of the brave Cadieux, voyageur, trader and interpreter. Cadieux was living with his Algonquin wife and others of her tribe at the Portage of Sept-chutes, or Seven Falls, on the Ottawa River, when news arrived of the approach of a party of Iroquois. The Iroquois would certainly ambush the portage. The only way of escape lay through the rapids. Some one must draw the enemy into the woods and far enough away to give the refugees chance to escape by water unseen. Cadieux and a young Algonquin volunteered for the perilous service. Exposing themselves to view, they drew the Iroquois away from the river, while the rest of the little settlement ran the rapids and escaped. Cadieux and his Algonquin companion became separated, either by accident or design, and the Indian was killed. Three days and nights the Iroquois pursued the white man, who went without sleep all that time. In the meantime his wife and her companions reached safety. Days passed, and Cadieux did not rejoin them as he had agreed to. At last three men set out to seek for him. At Sept-chutes, near the Petit Rocher, or Little Rock, they found a lodge of branches, and beside it, lying in a shallow trench with a cross at its head, the wasted body of Cadieux. On his breast, under his folded hands, was a sheet of birch bark covered with writing, the words, according to tradition, of his death lament. He had become lost in his wanderings and had returned to his starting place, where he had died of exhaustion and starvation.

Suffering from cold and hunger, huddled around the fire in their little wigwam, the wind roaring through the trees overhead, and the snow and sleet beating upon the bark, the lads realized as never before the tragedy of Cadieux’s fate. Unless the storm ceased soon and they found food promptly, they, too, might perish in the wilderness far from human aid. It was no wonder that Jean’s voice, hoarse from cold and weak from hunger, trembled as he sang the closing lines.

“Ces done ici que le mond m’abandonne,
Mais j’ai secours en vous, Sauveur des hommes!
Tres-Sainte Vierge, ah, m’abandonnez pas,
Permettez-moi d’mourir entre vos bras!”

“Here all alone the world abandons me,
In the Saviour of men may my help still be!
Most blessed Virgin, let me not forsaken lie,
But clasped in thine arms, oh allow me to die!”

XXX

THE END OF THE TWISTED BLACKSMITH

Somewhat to the boys’ surprise, Nangotook showed no signs, during all those days of suffering, of the sullen moroseness that had characterized his behavior in former periods of misfortune. The Ojibwa was no physical coward, and now that his companions had ceased to defy the spirits of the lake and had turned towards home, he displayed no more fear or hesitation. He was unusually talkative and cheerful, and helped to pass the long hours by relating the interesting experiences of his varied and adventurous life and all the Ojibwa tales and myths he knew, many of them devoted to the adventures and mishaps of the great Nanabozho.

The three made use of every device they could think of to keep up their spirits, but when, at last, the sleet and snow ceased, and morning dawned clear and bright, the two lads were weak with hunger, and Ronald, though more heavily dressed than Jean, had a racking cough that shook him from head to foot. Nangotook showed the effects of privation less than the other two, though he had scarcely eaten his share of the scanty food they had been able to collect.

The wind still blew a gale, a bitterly cold gale from the north, and even the little bay was too rough for travel. Icy snow lay several inches deep in the woods and loaded the evergreens. All that day the three searched the woods and ridges for game, but obtained nothing but a squirrel and two blue jays. There was little indeed to the jays, once their feathers were off. Nangotook put them into the bark pot with the squirrel, and added a handful of hazelnuts and some tubers he had dug, which he called “bear potatoes.” The resulting broth was hot and comforting, if not a very nourishing meal for three starved men.

All the next day the wind continued to blow so hard that the canoe could not be launched or the net set, but Nangotook and Jean went through the woods and over the ridges to the trout stream, and caught good strings of fish. The soup of the night before had made Ronald, in his half starved condition, ill, and he was so weak and coughed so hard that the Indian bade him remain in camp and keep warm and dry.

In spite of the cold wind, the snow had melted rapidly where the sun reached it, and had softened in the woods. By that night the rocks and open places were bare again. The hunters scanned the softened snow eagerly for tracks, but found no signs of hare or caribou, nothing but a few squirrel prints.

All three slept soundly that night, after their meal of broiled trout. By morning the wind had gone down and the waves had subsided so that the canoe could be launched. The voyageurs put out from shore at once. After setting their net in a favorable place, they tried line fishing. While paddling around a group of three small islands that lay in a direct line with the point, they caught two good lake trout. They promptly decided to go ashore, and have breakfast at once. So many rocks sprinkled the water about the islands that they were difficult to approach. A safe landing was made, however, on a shelving rock beach, near an upright heap of boulders with bushes projecting from cracks and crannies.

While Jean was cleaning the fish, Etienne and Ronald, seeking for fire-wood, rounded the heap of rocks, and came suddenly on the remains of a camp. Branches slanted against the rock formed a rude shelter, and near it were the ashes of a fire. Glancing down at the blackened embers, Ronald touched with the toe of his moccasin a charred bone.

“Those fellows had more meat than we’ve seen lately,” he said. “They must have killed a caribou.”

The Indian was staring down at the bone. He stooped and picked it up, examined it a moment, and then held it out to Ronald.

“No addick ever had bone like that,” he said.

“What was it then, a moose?” asked the boy, holding out his hand for it. As he looked at it, his expression of curiosity changed to horror. He glanced up at Nangotook, and saw his own feelings reflected on the Ojibwa’s face. “The leg bone of a man,” the lad said chokingly.

Nangotook nodded, then glanced behind him swiftly, as if expecting to see some evil thing creeping up on him. “Windigo,” he said significantly. It was the name for the mythical, man-eating giants that figure in Ojibwa and other Algonquian legends, a name the Indians have extended to apply to all cannibals or men driven by starvation to feed on other human beings.

There was no mistaking the fact. Among the ashes and strewn about on the ground were other bones that told the story only too plainly. Moreover the deed was a recent one, for the fire had been burning in that spot since the storm cleared, and the charred bones had not lain there long. It was easy enough to see how the tragedy had occurred. A canoe had been cast upon the barren island by the storm, or had run against it in the fog that preceded. There was nothing on the island to eat. Even fuel had been scarce, for only the stumps of the few trees remained and most of the bushes had been cut. One of the men had died, or perhaps another one, crazed with hunger and misery, had murdered him, and the unfortunate had been cooked and eaten.

The horror of the place destroyed the lads’ appetite, and they were in haste to get away, but Nangotook was not ready to leave until he had examined the little rock island from end to end. He may have expected to find the cannibal in hiding somewhere. He did not find the guilty man, but he found further traces of him and of his victim. When the Ojibwa rejoined the boys, who, feeling no desire to see more of the island, had remained near the spot where they had landed, his face wore a look of disgust and loathing such as they had never seen there before. He had identified the victim of the cannibal feast.

“Cree killed Awishtoya and ate him,” he announced positively.

“Awishtoya, Le Forgeron,” cried Jean. “How do you know it was Le Forgeron?”

“Found his head.”

“His head?” gasped both boys.

Nangotook nodded. “Not dead long, only two or three days,” he added. “Found some of his clothes too, all soaked with blood. Cree killed him with knife. Windigo. Have to watch out for him now.” The Ojibwa shared the belief common among his people that a man who had once tasted human flesh acquired a desire for it, and would never be satisfied with anything else. Such men were considered to be only partly human, in league with evil spirits. They were outlaws, to be feared and abhorred and killed on sight, like the deadliest snake or the most dangerous of wild beasts.

Sickened at what they had discovered, the two boys were glad to get away from the ill-omened place. Le Forgeron Tordu was an evil man and their enemy. They knew that he would not have hesitated to destroy them in the most brutal manner, and they could not honestly feel sorrow that he was dead. But the manner of his death had shocked and nauseated them. Not to the worst man on earth could they have wished such a fate. Even stronger was their feeling of horror at the Indian who had done the thing. Nangotook had said that Le Forgeron abused the Cree. Evidently the latter had turned at last and had avenged himself. He had not struck in mere self-defense, however, for the blood-soaked shirt Nangotook had found proved that the Frenchman had been stabbed in the back.

The Ojibwa was deeply concerned over the escape of the murderer. He must have gone away by water, so it was evident that he still had a canoe, probably the one Le Forgeron had stolen from Jean and Ronald, when he set fire to the woods. Apparently then it had not been the loss of their boat, but merely the fury of the storm that had held him and his master prisoners on the little island. If, however, they had been so near to starvation as the Cree’s deed seemed to prove, they must in some way have lost both the caribou meat the Blacksmith had taken from the boys’ cache, and the remainder of their own stock of provisions. Probably they had run on the rocky island in the fog, or had been dashed ashore by the wind, and had lost their provisions and equipment in the wreck, though managing to save their canoe. There was no evidence that they had built a new one. Indeed the stumps of the trees they had cut indicated that no materials fit for canoe making grew on the island.

At any rate the Cree had escaped in some way, and might be at that moment lying in wait for the others on the shores of the bay or on one of the islands. They must keep a close lookout for him. The boys, as well as Nangotook, fully believed that, having once eaten human flesh, the Cree would, as all such Windigos were supposed to do, hunger for more. They devoutly hoped that he had no gun. Had it not been for the fear that he might be well armed, they would have searched the shores and islands for him, but he would surely have the advantage, as they must approach his hiding place by water, while he could lie concealed. If he had a gun, he could easily shoot them from cover. So they decided to waste no time on what would probably be a fruitless, if not a fatal, search, but to take advantage of the good weather to go on as rapidly as possible. Very likely he had left the neighborhood. They might overtake him, and if they did, a Windigo could expect no mercy from them.

They delayed only long enough to cook and eat their fish and to take up their net. Before their gruesome discovery, they had intended to remain at the bay to hunt and fish until the next morning, but so far they had found the place lacking in game. They would go on along shore as far as they could that day, and perhaps they might reach a better hunting ground. At least they would get away from the spot where they had suffered so much. It had acquired an added horror from the hideous tragedy on the little island.

XXXI

THE WINDIGO

The weather favored the voyageurs that day, and they were able to make good time for about twenty miles to a little cove, the mouth of a stream. There they landed to eat a supper of the fish they had caught on the way. The boys felt greatly encouraged when Etienne told them they had almost reached the southern end of Minong. Two or three hours more travel would bring them to a smaller island lying off the end of the large one. From there, he said, the weather favoring them, they could steer a straight course for the northwest shore of the lake and soon reach the Grande Portage. Deeply disappointed though the lads were at not finding the riches they had endured so much to gain, they felt a great sense of relief at the thought that their perilous journey was so near its end.

By the time they had reached the cove, the boys, who had only partly recovered from starvation and suffering, were very tired. After their supper of fish, they were glad to creep into a pile of balsam branches under the canoe and fall asleep immediately. But the night was cold and they had no cover but the branches. Several times one of the three had to crawl out, chilled and stiff, to replenish the fire that burned close to the raised side of the canoe. Usually it was the Indian who took this task upon himself, for he slept lightly and little, ready to spring up at the slightest unusual sound. He did not intend that the Windigo should creep on their camp without his knowing it.

Just as the stars were fading with the dawn, Nangotook was awakened suddenly. He lay still and listened. From up the river came faint sounds, the cracking of twigs, the rustling of branches.

Noiselessly the Indian crept from under the canoe, listened a moment, and then made his way cautiously in the direction of the sounds. There was a splash in the stream. In the faint light he could see a black bulk against the water. Nearer and nearer he crept, until the dark form began to move slowly towards the opposite bank. Then, knowing he would get no better chance for a shot, Nangotook let fly an arrow, and then a second and a third in quick succession. Every arrow hit the mark, the black bulk plunged forward, wavered and fell sidewise with a great splash. The hunter sprang into the stream. Luckily the water, where the beast had fallen, was shallow, and Nangotook soon had his game, a full grown caribou, ashore. Here was meat in plenty for days to come.

He dragged the caribou back to camp and placed it near the fire. The boys were sleeping so soundly that his coming did not wake them, and he crept under the canoe without disturbing them. He did not sleep any more after that, but kept his eye on the meat. Once he heard the pad of soft feet beyond the fire, and rose to send an arrow towards a pair of gleaming eyes. He missed his aim, and the lynx slipped away in the darkness and did not return.

The boys were surprised and delighted when they saw the result of Etienne’s night hunting, but they were also a little chagrined when they realized that they had slept so soundly and carelessly that they had known nothing of what was going on. The day was too windy to permit the voyageurs to start out across the open lake for the northwest shore. They might have continued along the coast of Minong, but, as they had such a short distance to go in that direction, they decided to camp where they were until the caribou meat was dried. The spot was a favorable one, and they might not find another so good. Moreover there might be other game in the neighborhood, and there were certainly fish in the stream and off the rocks at its mouth. The net they had set the night before yielded a good catch of whitefish. It was the caribou meat that tasted best to the boys, however, and put new strength and spirit into them. The gruesome tragedy they had found traces of the day before seemed like a bad dream.

The day, which was bright and pleasant, though windy, was spent in drying the meat, curing the hide, fishing and hunting. The three proposed to collect as large a supply of food as possible. Bad weather might come again at any moment, and they did not intend to be caught in another storm without plenty of food to last them through.

In a marshy place the boys came upon a great flock of wild geese, that had paused, on their way south, to feed. The birds took alarm at once, and, with great flapping of wings and excited honks, followed their leader into the air and away, but Jean succeeded in hitting one as it left the water. He had to wade out into the cold mud and water to his waist to secure the bird, but it was a welcome feast to the three that night. The southward flight of the geese was, however, another reminder of the approach of winter. Nekah, the goose, knew what he was about, said the Ojibwa.

The following morning the voyageurs left the little cove. The south wind was strong enough to make crossing the lake dangerous, but they could go on along shore with little difficulty. They could at least reach the island which Nangotook said lay off a bay at the southern end of Minong. From there the Ojibwa intended, as soon as the weather would permit, to steer directly for the lake shore.

The travelers had rounded the end of Minong, when they came in sight of a canoe at some distance across the water. It held only one man, and they were too far away to make out anything about him, except that he did not wear the scarlet cap of the Canadian voyageur. Was it the Windigo? The boys felt a thrill of excitement, not unmingled with dread. Whether he had seen them or not they could not tell, but they followed as rapidly as they could make the canoe fly over the water. The lone traveler was making for some islands ahead. He passed into a channel between two of them and disappeared.

Without any orders from Nangotook in the bow, Ronald, who was in the stem, steered in the same direction. He wanted to find out if the man ahead was really the Cree murderer. He suspected that Nangotook was ready to kill the Windigo on sight That was the Indian way with such outlaws. Certainly the boy was not inclined to show any mercy to an Indian who had killed and eaten a white man. If he had merely killed the Frenchman,—well, Le Forgeron probably deserved death, and a private quarrel between him and his companion was the business of no one else, Ronald thought, but the evidence seemed to prove that the Cree had treacherously stabbed the white man in the back, for the purpose of eating him. For such hideous crime there could be no excuse, not even starvation, and no mercy for the criminal. That was the code of the Indian, the voyageur and the forest runner.

The pursuers passed through the channel between the two islands, and came out in view of others, large and small. Instantly Nangotook’s keen eyes caught sight of something on one of the little islands that caused him to utter a short grunt, raise his paddle from the water, and gaze intently. Noting his apparent surprise, the boys’ eyes followed the direction of his gaze. From a bare tree on that little island something white was fluttering. It was not a gull roosting. It was too large, and too white, and it fluttered and waved in the wind. It was a white rag, a signal of some kind, a flag of distress.

“Some one is on that island,” cried Jean in great excitement. “He is wrecked or hurt or starving, and he has tied that white thing to the tree to attract attention. We must go there at once. He may be a white man. We must rescue him.”

“Go slow, little brother,” cautioned Nangotook gravely. “Maybe, as you say, there is a man there wrecked and starving, but what if that white thing be only a trap? Where is the canoe we have been following? The Windigo may be trying to get us ashore, so he may murder and eat us.”

“If he is, he will be getting the worst of it,” declared Ronald emphatically. “We are three to one, and the only thing we need be fearing is a gun. If he is decoying us ashore, he will not be firing on us until we have landed, and even then he will try, I think, to use fair words and treachery rather than force. In that we are a match for him, now we are forewarned not to trust him.”

“You speak truly, my brother,” Nangotook answered. “I meant not to go by that island, but to be cautious. It may be that the signal is a true one. We must find out. But we must watch that we are not taken unawares by the evil Windigo. Now that I have warned you, steer for that island, and if the Cree is there, let him look to himself.”

As they approached the place, the three watched eagerly for some indication of what they were to find there. Like most of the islands off Minong, it was rocky, but bore a patch of trees and bushes on its highest part. There seemed nothing unusual about it, but the white rag fluttering from a bare limbed birch tree. Not until they were close in, did Nangotook catch sight of a canoe drawn up on a bit of shelving pebble beach between two great rocks. Silently he pointed it out to the boys. They ran their own canoe upon the same beach and stepped out, the Ojibwa with one hand on his bowstring, an arrow in the other, and his eyes searching the rocks and woods for signs of ambush. He did not relax his vigilance when he heard Jean, behind him, utter a low-voiced exclamation.

The two boys had carried the canoe up the beach, and Jean had turned to look at the other craft that lay there. “Our own canoe,” he whispered to Jean. “It was the Cree for sure.”

Ronald glanced at the boat. There was no mistaking it. The three had built it themselves, and knew every rib and seam. It was wet, too. It had not been out of the water more than a few minutes. Though Nangotook did not turn his head, but still kept running his eyes searchingly over every bush and rock that might offer concealment to an enemy, he heard what Jean said. There was no need for him to examine the canoe. Jean’s testimony was sufficient. The Ojibwa went on up the steep bit of beach, the two lads close behind him, with weapons ready.

Apparently the man who had landed from the canoe had given no thought to being followed, and had made no attempt to hide his trail. He had gone up over the rocks and into the bit of woods, and his track was plain to the Indian. The latter advanced cautiously, the boys equally noiseless, a short distance behind. They had taken but a few steps among the spruce trees, when they were arrested by the sound of voices. There was more than one man on the island then, although there had been but one in the boat The voices were speaking French, one with the guttural accent of the Indian, the other in flowing, mellow tones. Even if the three had not had good evidence that Le Forgeron Tordu was dead, they would never have taken that rich, deep pitched voice for his rough, cracked one. Silently but rapidly, Nangotook slipped forward again, the boys following until he turned and signaled them to halt. After taking a few more steps among the trees, he stopped also.

The mellow voice was speaking, and the boys could hear it plainly. It was a pleasing voice of refined accents, and it spoke excellent French, the French of a man of breeding and education. Even Jean Havard, who was well educated for a Canadian lad of his time and boasted of his pure French blood, did not speak like that. He could make out the unseen man’s words distinctly.

“God will surely bless you through all your days,” the voice said. “Moreover I will see to it, if you will take me safely to the Grande Portage, that you shall be well rewarded in material things as well. Flour, blankets, traps for your hunting, whatever you need or want of such things you shall have. But better than all will be the blessing of God upon you, for saving the life of His servant to carry on His glorious work, and to labor a little longer for the good of your own people.”

The speaker ceased, and for a moment there was silence. Then the other man answered, but his words, spoken in a hoarse voice and guttural accents, were not distinguishable. While the second man was speaking, Nangotook crept forward again. Carefully he slipped between two spruce trees and peeped out from among the branches. He saw before him a rude wigwam in a small natural rock opening. In front of the wigwam stood the tall, black-gowned form of a Jesuit priest in conversation with an Indian. The Indian’s back was towards Nangotook, but the Ojibwa did not fail to recognize him.

“Eh bien, I will be ready in a moment,” said the priest in his deep, mellow voice.

He turned to go into the shelter. Instantly the Cree’s whole aspect changed. He crouched, muscles tense, then leaped forward, like a forest cat, knife raised. But Nangotook was ready for him. His arrow was on his bowstring. Before the Windigo’s knife could reach his unsuspecting victim, the bowstring twanged, and the flying arrow pierced the murderer’s back a little to the left of the spinal column. He sprang back as if recoiling, then fell forward on his face.

XXXII

THE UPROOTED TREE

So instantaneous and noiseless were the Windigo's spring and Nangotook's arrow, that the priest suspected nothing until the thud of the body upon the ground startled him. He turned to find the Cree lying outstretched, the arrow sticking from his back, while the fierce face of the Ojibwa appeared among the spruce branches. Seizing the gold cross that hung on the breast of his black gown, the priest held it out towards the newcomer, and gazed at him for a moment with steady and fearless eyes. Then, without speaking, he knelt beside the fallen Cree. It took him but a moment to ascertain that the man was dead. His eye fell upon the outstretched hand clenching the knife. An expression of horror crossed his fine and sensitive face, and he glanced quickly up at Nangotook, with a look of doubt and questioning.

The Ojibwa had stepped out from among the trees, his weapon lowered. As the priest looked at him, the fierceness faded from the Indian's face. Speaking humbly, like a servant to his master or a child to his teacher, he addressed the Jesuit. "Blame me not, good Father," he said, "that I have slain that murderer with an arrow in the back as I might have killed Maheengun, the wolf, or Besheu, the lynx, when he was mad with the blood thirst. His knife was out. Before a dead leaf fell from that birch tree he would have plunged the knife in your body. He is a Windigo, in league with the evil one and hungering for human flesh. Already he has killed and eaten one man, an evil man to be sure, but a white man and his master."

As Nangotook finished speaking, the two boys, came out from the spruces. Jean sprang forward, pulling off his toque, and knelt before the missionary for his blessing, while Ronald, Scotch Protestant though he was, showed his respect by removing his hare skin cap and standing silent.

When he had given Jean his blessing, and the latter had risen to his feet, the priest looked searchingly into the lad's face and said gravely, "Who are you, my son, and these your companions, and how came you here? Surely you were sent of God to save the humblest of His servants from death at the hands of this poor, crazed savage."

"It is Etienne you should thank for that, reverend Father," Jean answered quickly, "but indeed I believe God led us here, and just in time, for——"

But the priest interrupted him, to speak to the Indian. Nangotook had squatted down by the body of the Cree, and had turned it over to make sure the man was dead. Then he had unlocked the Cree's fingers from his knife, had felt its edge and had just made a motion with the blade towards the neck of the fallen man, when the Jesuit's quick eye noted his action.

"My son," he said sternly, "what is it that you would do? Would you mutilate the body of the man you have killed?"

The Ojibwa looked up into the priest's grave face, and hastened to excuse and explain his action. "The man is a Windigo, good Father," he said. "Windigos are in league with the evil one and are hard to kill. This one seems to have died easily enough, but unless his body is cut to pieces, he may come to life again at any moment and slay us all."

"Nay, my child," the Jesuit answered less sternly, for he understood that the Indian's purpose, however mistaken, was a sincere one. He was not moved merely by a desire to avenge himself on the helpless body of a foe. "Nay, you need have no fear that the spirit of this poor, misguided child of the forest will return to animate his body. Already his soul has gone to other realms to await judgment for its sins. He was possessed of an evil spirit indeed. Though he spoke fair enough and promised to take me to the Grande Portage, I saw the madness in his eye and would not have trusted him, had he not seemed to be sent of God to deliver me from this desolate place. But even for such as he there may be forgiveness, when he has suffered his meed of punishment. I forbid you to mutilate his body. Instead, you and your companions shall kneel with me and pray for the soul of this poor savage, who has been struck down in the moment of his sin, without time for repentance."

Nangotook submitted docilely enough, kneeling beside the priest and remaining reverently silent through the latter's brief prayer.

There was not soil enough on the little island to dig a grave in, so Nangotook and his companions, at the missionary's command, placed the body of the Cree in a hole between the rocks, blocked up the opening with stones and branches, and threw a little earth and leaf mold over the whole. The simple burial service over, they were about to proceed to the canoe, when Jean noticed that the priest's face had turned very white and that he swayed a little and caught at a tree for support.

"You are ill, Father," he exclaimed, and then, guessing the reason for the other's weakness, he added, "Perhaps you suffer from hunger. If so, we are amply provided with meat and will prepare some for you at once."

"Thank you, my son," the Jesuit answered with a faint smile. "I do indeed suffer from hunger, for I have eaten nothing but roots and bark for several days."

His strength exhausted, he was glad to sink down on the ground in front of the wigwam, while the boys and Etienne prepared a meal. The missionary had been too long without hearty food to take anything but a little caribou broth. After he had eaten, he satisfied the boys' curiosity by telling them how he came to be in such a desperate situation.

He had been returning from a trip to an Indian mission on Lake Nipigon, beyond the head of Nipigon Bay, and was bound for another mission on the south shore, traveling in a small canoe with three Indians. They had been delayed by the bad weather, and, anxious to get on, had left their camping place at the foot of Thunder Cape in the night, after the wind had gone down. But the fog had caught them. All their landmarks were blotted out, and the Indians tried to steer by the wind. The air was unusually still, the light breeze coming in little puffs, which must have been variable in direction. The travelers went out of their course, and when the wind rose and began to blow the fog in driving sheets, they were close to Minong. Driven by the storm, they took refuge on the first land they sighted, the little island where the priest was now telling his story. There they remained throughout the northeaster. They were short of provisions, and one of the Indians, who was sick before they left Thunder Cape, died. The other two were sullen and more or less unmanageable. The missionary suspected that they had been tampered with at Lake Nipigon by a medicine man who hated the priest, for the latter's teachings were diminishing the Indian shaman's power over his fellows. Father Bertrand had reason to believe that the medicine man had told the Indians the "black gown" was an evil magician and would bring disaster upon them. The bad weather and other misfortunes of the journey and the sudden, mysterious sickness that had overtaken one of the crew and had ended in his death, bore out the medicine man's prophecies. Though the missionary did everything he could to restore his companions' confidence, they grew more and more sullen and suspicious. To their superstitious fears was added the hatred felt by one of the men, whom Father Bertrand had reprimanded for a heavy sin. He worked upon the fears of the other Indian, to convince him that misfortune would pursue them as long as they remained in company with the black gown. So it happened that, the second night after the storm ceased, when the wind had gone down and traveling was possible, the two Indians stole away while the priest was sleeping, taking the canoe and the few provisions that remained, and leaving the missionary without food or weapons.

Father Bertrand was a young man, not many years from France and unskilled in woodcraft of any kind. But even if he had known how to build a canoe, he was without knife or ax. Moreover there were no large birch trees and no white cedars on the island suitable for the purpose. He tried to fell trees for a raft by burning them at the base, but was not successful. Indeed he came near to setting the woods on fire and so destroying his only shelter. There was no game of any kind, not even gulls, and he had no line or net for fishing. Roots and bark were his only food. As a flag of distress, he fastened one of his undergarments to a bare limbed tree. He did not know that the land he could see from his island was Minong, but supposed himself to be somewhere near the northwest shore of the lake. Though it was late in the season, he hoped that some passing voyageur or Indian might see the signal. If no one saw it, then he knew he must perish, and he resigned himself to God's will, though he admitted that he could not but feel regret that the work he had but just begun should be cut off so soon.

When the Cree appeared, Father Bertrand did not like his looks, for there was a furtive fierceness in his manner that betokened treachery and a wildness in his eye that suggested madness, but the priest hoped nevertheless that this doubtful looking savage might prove the instrument of his rescue. The Cree told him that he was not near the northwest shore, as he had supposed, but off the island of Minong. On the offer of a generous reward, he promised to take the missionary to Grande Portage. But even greed was not strong enough to overcome the Windigo's appetite. The canoe he had left on the beach contained no provisions of any kind, so it was evident that he had either consumed all of his gruesome stock or had lost part of it in some way. The guns had been lost too, or thrown away as useless when the ammunition was gone, for he was armed only with a knife.

When the missionary had finished his tale, the two boys told him theirs. They made no attempt to hide the purpose of their adventure, for they instinctively trusted the grave, fine faced priest. That he could betray their trust did not occur even to Ronald who had no particular love for Jesuits, though he admired their courage and devotion. When Jean related how the three had been obliged to give up the search at last, and frankly expressed his regret and sorrow at their failure to find the golden island, Nangotook interrupted suddenly.

"Nay, little brother," he exclaimed. "You say the journey has failed because we have not reached the Island of Yellow Sands. It is not so. If we had not come on this journey, we could not have saved the life of the good Father, and he would have starved here on this island. Is not the saving of one good life better than the finding of much gold?"

"You are right, Etienne," replied Jean, flushing, ashamed that the Indian should have to teach him such a lesson.

The priest smiled in a kindly manner upon them both, then said gravely to the Ojibwa, "You speak well, my son, and I think you have grasped somewhat of the teachings of the fathers who gave you your education. It is true that you have just performed a deed of violence, but it was a necessary deed, and one that will bring reward and not punishment, for you slew not in revenge or in lust or even to save your own life, but the life of another. Rest assured that God will bless you for the deed, and, as for myself, I will give you such material reward as I am able."

"I want no reward, Father," Etienne answered almost indignantly. "I did not sell you your life. I only ask," he added more humbly, "that you will remember a poor Ojibwa in your prayers."

"Rest assured that I shall always do that," Father Bertrand replied earnestly. "I will pray that God's mercy and blessing and guidance may be with you and with these two lads, all the days of your lives."

The four were silent for a few minutes, the boys and the Indian deeply impressed by the Jesuit's words and manner. Then the priest turned to Jean and said questioningly, “You have not told me, my son, why you and your companion are so eager to find gold. In youths of your age desire for honor, achievement and glory seems more natural than a longing for riches. Take care that you do not let the sin of avarice possess your souls.”

“Indeed it is not avarice, Father,” replied Jean. Eager to justify both himself and his companion, he told of the plans they had made for the use of the gold.

Father Bertrand listened thoughtfully, and when Jean had finished, said with a kindly smile that seemed to light up his stern face, “Your reasons do you credit, especially yours, Jean Havard, since you seek wealth for others rather than for yourself. But your comrade’s ambition is also a justifiable one, if he use only right means to attain it. Your dislike of the evil methods of the fur-traders and your hesitation in following them are a credit to your consciences. It may be that the trade is necessary and legitimate, but I, myself, have learned, in the short time that I have been in the Indian country, that there is much in the manner of carrying on that trade that is wrong and evil and will bring heavy punishment both on the traders themselves and on the savages they corrupt. However, it is not of the fur-trade I intended to speak, but of your own fortunes. You are disappointed that you have not found the gold, but perhaps I can show you something that may allay that disappointment, and bring to you some increase of fortune if not the great riches you have been seeking.”

With that the missionary rose and led the way through the patch of woods towards the farther end of the island, which the lads had not visited. Curious about his meaning, they followed close at his heels.

That end of the island, which was exposed to the wind and waves of the open lake, rose high from the water and, except for a cluster of trees in a depression, was almost bare rock. The clump of trees had fared hard in the northeaster, for several had been broken off and one, the largest spruce on the island, had been uprooted and tipped over. The priest climbed over a tangle of fallen trunks, holding up his black gown that it might not catch in the branches. The boys followed wondering. He pointed to the base of the uprooted spruce. The roots had grown about a large boulder, and, in its fall, the tree had partly overturned the rock, revealing its under side.

The lads gave gasps of astonishment and dropped on their knees beside the boulder. The exposed surface was of almost solid copper, but that was not what caused their exclamation. Through the copper ran two thick veins of another, lighter colored metal.

“Silver, pure silver,” exclaimed Ronald. The veins so recently exposed had scarcely tarnished, and there was no mistaking the metal.

“Yes,” replied the priest. “It is silver and that is not all of it. Look in the hollow there, and you will find other veins. Indeed I have spent some time examining these rocks, and I believe there is much of the metal near the surface. How much there may be underneath no man can tell. It may be there is wealth here, though not such wealth as your golden island would yield. What there is is yours, however. I, the discoverer, will freely make over to you all my rights in it. I know little of metals. Perhaps it would be well for you to examine this end of the island for yourselves before you leave it. You will probably be able to learn more from it than I could.”

XXXIII

THE MINE

The two lads made as thorough an examination of the bare end of the island as they could without pick or drill. A vein with side branches, which Ronald was sure was composed of pure silver, ran the length of the barren end. Whether the vein extended under the woods the full length of the island, they could not tell, but as they traced it to the very edge of the growth, its further extension seemed almost certain. Through the clear water off the outer end of the island, they could see on the rock bottom black patches with a greenish tinge, that Ronald believed marked the course of the vein in that direction. In the canoe they followed those patches until the water became so deep that they could trace them no longer. Both boys were sure they had found a valuable mine, and they were nearly as excited and enthusiastic as if they had come upon the Island of Golden Sands itself. Their failure to find the gold, and the hardships and perils of their long trip, with its heart-breaking delays and disappointments, were almost forgotten in the joy of this sudden and unexpected discovery. Silver was not gold to be sure, but it was the next thing to it, as Jean said. The journey had not been fruitless or in vain. They had saved the life of Father Bertrand, and, as Nangotook had said, “the saving of one good life was better than much gold,” and through the priest they had found a rich silver mine. They had come off well from the adventure, and if they could reach Grande Portage safely, they would have good cause to be well satisfied and profoundly thankful. So it was with light hearts that they launched the two canoes and prepared to put off for the shore of Minong.

The day was too far advanced and the wind too strong to make a start for Grande Portage advisable, but none of the four wanted to camp on the little island, where bad weather, if there should be more of it in store for them, would leave them marooned. As Jean said, they could not eat silver, no matter how rich the mine might be. So they paddled part way up a deep harbor that cut into the end of Minong, and camped on its shore. They found both the fishing and hunting good, and had no difficulty occupying their time for the rest of the day.

The wind went down in the night, and the next day dawned calm, bright and frosty, a fine autumn morning, the best possible weather to traverse the open lake. Firm ice over the shallower water along shore, the evergreens gleaming with white frost, and the sight of a hare whose coat was almost wholly white, were warnings to the travelers that real winter was not far away. Indeed the snow and ice of the last northeaster had not melted in the shady places, and the weather was constantly growing colder.

They started early, after a hearty but hasty breakfast. They had discussed taking both canoes, but had decided they could make better time with one. So they selected the boat they had made themselves, as it was better built and slightly larger than the one Le Forgeron and the Cree had used. Their own boat had been intended for only three people and was well filled with four, but their baggage took up little space. Their possessions, besides the supply of dried meat, consisted of nothing but the caribou hide, some hare skins, their bows and arrows, and a small bundle containing the priest’s vestments and the necessary articles for celebrating the mass. In high spirits they paddled out into the open lake, blades keeping time to

“La fill’ du roi d’Espagne,,
Vogue, marinier, vogue.”

The fact that all went so well that day Jean laid to the rescue of the priest and his presence in the canoe. Etienne agreed with this view, but probably felt also, though he did not give expression to the thought, that the spirits of the lake had ceased to oppose them, now that they had definitely given up the search for the golden sands and had turned towards the shore. Apparently he did not trouble his mind with the thought that the manitos might feel any concern over the silver mine.

Whatever causes the different members of the party might assign for their good fortune, everything surely went successfully. The breeze remained light, the sky blue, during the whole of the trip to the northwest shore, and along its bays, points and islands to the Grande Portage. They reached their destination before night, and caused great surprise when they paddled through the bay and up to the shore in front of the trading post of the Northwest Fur Company, the same post the two lads had left, with the fleet bound for Montreal, so many long weeks before.

The boys had decided before reaching the Portage just how much of their adventures they would tell, and what they would leave untold. Accordingly they said nothing whatever of the Island of the Yellow Sands or of the silver ore they had found. They had made the trip, they admitted, in search of a rich island mine they had heard of, but, not knowing its exact location, they had failed to find it. They made no mention of gold, leaving the others to infer that it was copper or silver they had been seeking. They told of seeing Le Forgeron Tordu and his Cree companion and of the fate of both, but did not indicate in any way that the Frenchman had been in pursuit of them or had tried to injure them. They left out of their narrative Etienne’s captivity and the burning of the woods on the island. As Ronald said, “The man is dead and his fate was a horrible one. Why blacken his memory now that it can do us no good? Unless we should be charged with his death, and that is not likely, we do not need to be telling the whole of the story.”

A swift Indian messenger was leaving the post early next morning with reports and letters for Montreal, and the boys seized the opportunity to write to their relatives and tell them of their safety. For the two lads to accompany the messenger was out of the question, for the Indians and half-breeds, who made the mail trips for the Company, went at such a pace and with such tirelessness that no one untrained for the work could possibly keep up with them. Indeed no one messenger could go the whole distance at such speed. The mail changed hands at each post, fresh men carrying it on. Even had the lads not been tired and worn with their long trip, and with the starvation and exposure they had endured, they would have found the journey with the messengers impossible. There was nothing for them to do but to await a more favorable opportunity.

That opportunity did not come. Rain and high winds arrived before a start could be made, and the bad weather was followed by real winter, that set in early in November, “the freezing moon,” as Nangotook called it. The lads soon realized that they had made the crossing from Minong just in time. Had they delayed longer, they could not have reached Grande Portage until the lake froze over between Minong and the shore. Some winters solid ice did not form clear across, and even when it did, crossing on snowshoes, with the winds sweeping the ice, and a blinding storm liable to come at any moment, was a perilous undertaking. Jean and Ronald shuddered when they thought what a winter on Minong, without warm clothes, food supplies or ammunition, would mean. They were lucky indeed to have reached the trading post.

Father Bertrand was due at an Indian mission on the south shore, and insisted on trying to reach it. He succeeded in engaging a canoe and four Indians to make the trip, but he positively refused to take the boys with him. Even after they reached his destination, it was not likely, he said, that they could find any one willing to go on with them to the Sault. The mission was probably not any too well supplied with food, and he could not carry enough extra, traveling rapidly in his small canoe, to feed the two lads throughout the winter. The Indians who wintered near the mission might be well supplied and they might not. That depended on the fishing and the wild rice crop.

Often famine came upon them before spring. At the Portage there were ample accommodations and supplies, and the boys would be far better off. Etienne agreed with the missionary and urged the lads to remain. As far as he was concerned he would be glad, he said, to accompany them back to the Sault and even to Montreal, but he counseled them not to attempt the journey, which would be one of extreme hardship, if they were able to get through at all. So on his advice, and that of the men at the post, the boys decided to remain where they were until spring. At the first lull in the bad weather, the brave priest bade the lads farewell, gave them his blessing and started on his dangerous journey.

A number of weeks after the departure of the priest, when winter had settled down in earnest, a half-breed messenger, starved, frozen, almost dead, arrived with letters from Montreal and the other posts. The man had had a terrible time getting through, and when the boys heard his tale they were glad they had remained at the Portage. He brought Jean letters from his father and mother, and Ronald one from his uncle. Since the necessity for strenuous action had ceased, the two boys had grown very homesick, especially Jean, who had been tormented with the fear that something might have gone wrong with his father, mother or sisters during his absence. The letters, showing plainly the anxiety those at home had been enduring for months, served to deepen the two lads’ sense of wrong-doing. When word had arrived of their disappearance from the Sault, both Ronald’s uncle and Jean’s father had done everything possible to find them or learn their fate. They had gone to the Sault, but had found only one clue. Jean’s father learned that Etienne had been at the post the same day the lads disappeared, and felt a little comforted, surmising that Jean might have gone away with the Ojibwa on a hunting expedition or for some other purpose. But he was at a loss to understand why the lad had kept such a trip secret. Nevertheless the elder Havard asserted that he was not going to give up hope until he found the Indian and learned definitely that the boys were not with him. His search for Nangotook was fruitless, of course, but he became more and more convinced that they must have left the post together, for what purpose he could not imagine. Word was sent to all the Northwest Company’s posts to be on the lookout for some trace of the three. Only one bit of information was obtained, however. An Indian, a Man of the Woods, and his family, who arrived at the trading station at the Pic River, told of having met a canoe, going west, with three men who answered in a general way to the descriptions of Nangotook, Jean and Ronald. Shortly after the arrival of these Gens de Terre Indians, news reached the Pic of a deed of violence that had occurred in a small bay farther to the west. A half-breed trapper had been attacked and his furs stolen. Two Indians entering the bay late at night had found the body of a man lodged on a sand-bar. In spite of the fact that he had been stabbed in several places and then thrown into the water, he was alive, though unconscious. The Indians had carried him in their canoe to the Pic, where he had recovered consciousness and had told how he had been attacked by two men, an Indian and a white man with a twisted leg. From the half-breed’s description, the agent at the Pic was sure the white man must have been Le Forgeron Tordu, who was wanted by the Company for breaking his contract and deserting the fleet. When Ronald’s uncle, who had learned from Big Benoît of the lad’s fight with Le Forgeron, heard that the Blacksmith had deserted a few miles beyond the Sault and was back on Superior, he wondered if there was any connection between that fact and the disappearance of the boys, and his fears for Ronald were increased. When week followed week with no further news, the anxious relatives almost gave up hope, and Jean’s mother became ill from grief and anxiety.

The wrong the boys had done in stealing away secretly on their mad quest, without telling any one where they were going or leaving some word to allay the anxiety of those at home, had been strongly impressed upon them by Father Bertrand. Grateful though he was to them for his rescue, he did not let that gratitude interfere with a severe reprimand of their wrong-doing. Because God had brought good out of evil and had allowed them to serve Him by saving the life of one of His servants, they need not think, he reminded them sternly, that what they had done was right or that their sin was forgiven or would be forgiven until they had made all the amends possible. God had been merciful to them, said the priest, because they were ignorant, foolish and thoughtless lads, but if they did not profit in the future by the lesson of this experience, it was not likely He would be so patient with them again. So earnestly did he talk to them, that both acknowledged their wrong-doing, and admitted that they had not deserved to come through their adventure so well. The letters from home only strengthened their feelings of regret at what they had done, and Jean especially made up his mind to make up to his mother, for her suffering on his account, in every way that a loving son could.

In their letters the lads had told of the discovery of the silver and Ronald had sent his uncle a bit of the ore, with many injunctions to the messenger not to lose the little package. In his reply the uncle said that the bit of metal had proved to be high grade silver, and that from Ronald’s description he thought the mine might be a rich one. He had talked the matter over with Monsieur Havard, and the latter had agreed to accompany him to the Grande Portage in the spring. The boys were instructed to wait for them. The uncle would bring with him an expert in metals and the necessary tools for prospecting. He would obtain the Northwest Company’s permission to use one of their sailing vessels for the short trip across to Minong, or, if he failed to get such permission, they would cross in canoes. They would make a thorough examination of the little island and its surroundings, and if the prospects looked good, they would get the necessary government permission, and form a mining company in which the two Havards, Ronald, his uncle and the Indian should have the largest shares. They would also put aside a share of the profits for Father Bertrand, who had so generously waived all rights to his discovery. If he would not take the money for his personal needs, he would at least be willing to accept it to carry on his work among the Indians.

Jean and Ronald were enthusiastic over the plan, and, in spite of the waves of homesickness that swept over the former every time he looked at his mother’s letter and thought of the many miles of wilderness between him and his home, the two settled down for the winter with high hopes of the fortune the spring was to bring. In the meantime they were glad to be of what help they could to the clerks at the post, while their spare time could be passed in hunting in the snow-covered woods or fishing with nets or lines set under the ice. In such ways the winter, though it looked long ahead of them, would wear away at last, and spring would bring the returning fleet and with it the other partners in their mining venture, the exploration of their find, the trip home again and preparations for working the silver mine. If the winter days dragged slowly sometimes, there was, at least, much to look forward to.

THE END

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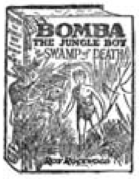

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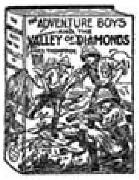

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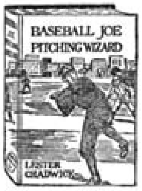

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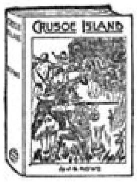

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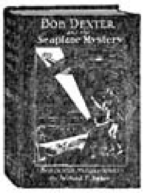

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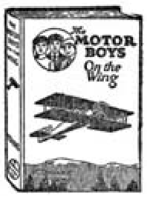

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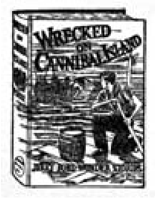

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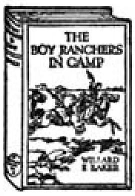

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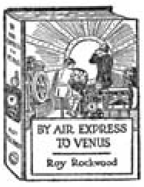
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