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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF ***

Produced by Don Kostuch

THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF



DILLON WALLACE

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July 31, 1913.

TO THE PUBLIC--

In the execution of its purpose to give educational value and moral worth to the recreational activities of the boyhood of America, the leaders of the Boy Scout Movement quickly learned that to effectively carry out its program, the boy must be influenced not only in his out-of-door life but also in the diversions of his other leisure moments. It is at such times that the boy is captured by the tales of daring enterprises and adventurous good times. What now is needful is not that his taste should be thwarted but trained. There should constantly be presented to him the books the boy likes best, yet always the books that will be best for the boy. As a matter of fact, however, the boy's taste is being constantly visited and exploited by the great mass of cheap juvenile literature.

To help anxiously concerned parents and educators to meet this grave peril, the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America has been organized. EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY is the result of their labors. All the books chosen have been approved by them. The commission is composed of the following members: George F. Bowerman, Librarian, Public Library of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.; Harrison W. Graver, Librarian, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pa.; Claude G. Leland, Superintendent, Bureau of Libraries, Board of Education, New York City; Edward F. Stevens, Librarian, Pratt Institute Free Library, Brooklyn, New York; together with the Editorial Board of our Movement, William D. Murray, George D. Pratt and Frank Presbrey, with Franklin K. Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian, as Secretary.

In selecting the books, the Commission has chosen only such as are of interest to boys, the first twenty-five being either works of fiction or stirring stories of adventurous experiences. In later lists, books of a more serious sort will be included. It is hoped that as many as twenty-five may be added to the library each year.

Thanks are due the several publishers who have helped to inaugurate this new department of our work. Without their co-operation in making available for popular priced editions some of the best books ever published for boys, the promotion of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY would have been impossible.

We wish, too, to express out heartfelt gratitude to the Library Commission, who, without compensation, have placed their vast experience and immense resources at the service of our Movement.

The commission invites suggestions as to future books to be included in the Library. Librarians, teachers, parents, and all others interested in welfare work for boys, can render a unique service by forwarding to National Headquarters lists of such books as in their judgment would be suitable for EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY.

Signed, James E. West.

THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF



"They were startled by blood-curdling whoops, and a half-dozen Indians, guns levelled, rose upon the shore" (See page 95).

EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY--BOY SCOUT EDITION

THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF

A TALE OF ADVENTURE WITH "UNGAVA BOB"

BY

DILLON WALLACE

AUTHOR OF

UNGAVA BOB, ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF

SHAD TROWBRIDGE OF BOSTON

On a foggy morning of early July in the year 1890, the Labrador mail boat, northward bound from St. Johns, felt her way cautiously into the mist-enveloped harbour of Fort Pelican and to her anchorage.

For six days the little steamer had been buffeted by wind and ice and fog, and when at last her engines ceased to throb and she lay at rest in harbour, Allen Shadrach Trowbridge of Boston, her only passenger, felt hugely relieved, for the voyage had been a most unpleasant one, and here he was to disembark.

In June, Allen Shadrach Trowbridge--or "Shad" Trowbridge as the fellows called him, and as we shall call him--had completed his freshman year in college. When college closed he set sail at once for Labrador, where he was to spend his summer holiday canoeing and fishing in the wilderness.

This was the first extended journey Shad Trowbridge had ever made quite alone. For many months he had been planning and preparing for it, and he promised himself it was to be an eventful experience.

He was standing now at the rail, as the ship anchored, peering eagerly through the mist at the group of low, whitewashed buildings which composed Fort Pelican post of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at the dim outline of dark forest behind--a clean-cut, square-shouldered, athletic young fellow, who carried his head with the air of one possessing a fair share of self-esteem and self-reliance, and whose square jaw suggested wilfulness if not determination.

The rugged surroundings thrilled him with promise of adventure. The historic post of the old fur traders, the boundless, mysterious forest, and the romantic life of the trappers and dusky tribes which it sheltered, were pregnant with interest. But his wildest dreams could not have foretold the part Shad Trowbridge was destined to play in this primordial land and life before he should bid farewell to its bleak coast.

"A rough-looking country," remarked the steward, joining Shad at the rail.

"It's glorious!" exclaimed Shad enthusiastically. "A real frontier! And back there is a real wilderness! Just the sort of wilderness I've dreamed about getting into all my life."

"The deck of the mail boat's about as near as I want to get to it," said the steward with a deprecatory shrug. "It's a land o' hard knocks and short grub. You'd better leave it to the livyeres and Indians, young man, and go back to God's country with the ship."

"No, thank you," said Shad. "I'm going to have a rattling good summer hunting and fishing here before I see the ship again."

"When we come on our next voyage, a fortnight from now, you'll be standing out there on the dock looking for us, and mighty glad to see us," laughed the steward. "You'll have all you want of The Labrador by then. Shall I put your things ashore?"

"Yes, if you please--all but the canoe. I'll paddle that over, if you'll send a man to help me launch it."

"Pooh!" thought Shad, as the steward left him. "Hard knocks and short grub! Of course there would be some hard knocks, but he expected that, for he was going to rough it! But with the woods full of game and fish there'd be plenty to eat! He didn't expect any Pullman-car jaunt; he could have had that at home. What kind of a fellow did the steward take him for, anyway?"

A half-dozen natives on the boat wharf watched Shad curiously as he paddled to a low stretch of beach adjoining the wharf, and two of them strolled down to inspect his canoe when he lifted it out of the water and turned it upon its side at a safe distance above the lapping waves.

"Now she's what I calls a rare fine canoe," observed one, a tall, big-boned, loose-jointed fellow with a straggly red beard, and picturesquely attired in moleskin trousers tucked into the tops of sealskin boots, a flannel shirt, a short jacket, and the peakless cap of the trapper.

"That she be, Ed, an' a wonderful sight better'n th' bark canoes th' Injuns uses," agreed the other, a powerful, broad-shouldered, deep-chested man, who wore a light-cloth adicky, but whose dress was otherwise similar to that of his companion.

"She have better lines than th' Injun craft," said the one addressed as Ed, eyeing the canoe critically.

"An' she's stancher--a wonderful lot stancher," continued the other.

"She is a pretty good canoe, and a splendid white-water craft," Shad remarked, to break the ice of reserve, and to give the two trappers the opening for conversation for which they were evidently hedging.

"Aye, sir," said the man in the adicky, "they's no doot o' that. Her lines be right, sir. She'd be a fine craft in th' rapids, now--a fine un."

"Be you comin' far, an' be you goin' back wi' th' ship?" asked Ed, unable to restrain his curiosity longer.

"I came from Boston, and if I can get a guide I shall stay for the summer and take a canoe trip into the country," answered Shad.

"I'm thinkin' you can get un in th' shop," suggested Ed.

"Get them in the shop?" asked Shad, in astonishment, not quite certain whether he was misunderstood, or whether the trapper was making game of him. Ed's respectful manner, however, quickly satisfied him that the former was the case.

"Aye," said Ed. "They keeps a wonderful stock o' things in the shop."

"I refer to a man," explained Shad. "I wish to employ a man to go into the country with me to show me about and to assist me."

"'Tis a pilot you wants!" exclaimed Ed, light breaking upon him.

"O' course 'tis a pilot!" broke in the other, with an intonation that suggested scorn of Ed's ignorance. "A pilot an' a guide be th' same thing. A pilot be a guide, an' a guide be a pilot."

"I'd like wonderful well t' pilot you myself, sir, but I couldn't do it nohow," volunteered Ed, in a tone of apology. "You see, I has my nets out, an' I has t' get in firewood for th' wife, t' last she through th' winter whilst I be on th' trail trappin'. An Dick here's fixed th' same. Dick an' me's partners fishin', an' he gives me a hand gettin' out wood, an' I helps he. This be Dick Blake, sir," continued Ed, suddenly remembering that there had been no introduction, "an' I be Ed Matheson."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," Shad acknowledged. "My name is Trowbridge. Perhaps you may be able to tell me where I can employ a guide. I would appreciate your assistance."

"Le'me see," Ed meditated. "Now I'm thinkin' Ungava Bob might go," he at length suggested. "He were home th' winter, an' they hauled a rare lot o' wood out wi' th' dogs, an' his father can 'tend th' nets. What d'you think, Dick?"

"Aye, Ungava Bob could sure go, whatever," agreed Dick.

"'Ungava Bob' sounds interesting," said Shad. "How old a man is this Ungava Bob, and is that his real name, or is 'Ungava' a title?"

"He's but a lad-eighteen year old comin' September--but a rare likely lad--good as a man. Aye, good as a man," declared Ed.

"His real name be Bob Gray," explained Dick, "but we calls him 'Ungava Bob' for a wonderful cruise he were makin' two year ago comin' winter."

"Seventeen years of age, and already so famous as to have won a title! I'm interested, and I'd like to hear more about him," suggested Shad.

"An' you wants t' hear," said Ed. "But now we be a-standin' an' a-keepin' you, when you wants t' see Mr. Forbes."

"Yes, I wish to see Mr. Forbes, if he is the factor of the post, but you haven't detained me in the least. I can see him presently," reassured Shad.

"Mr. Forbes be wonderful busy till th' ship goes, an' she'll be here for nigh an hour yet," advised Ed.

"Very well, I'll not call on him, then, till the ship goes," decided Shad, "and I'd be glad to hear something of Ungava Bob's travels, in the meantime."

"We might step into th' men's kitchen, where there be seats an' we can talk in comfort," suggested Ed. "This fog be wonderful chillin' standin' still."

"That's a good suggestion," agreed Shad. "The fog is cold." And he followed the two trappers down the long board walk to the men's kitchen.

II

THE LURE OF THE WILDERNESS

"Ungava Bob's father's name be Richard Gray," began Ed, while he cut tobacco from a black plug and stuffed it into his pipe, when they were presently seated in the men's kitchen. "Dick's name, here, be Richard, too, but we calls he 'Dick,' and Richard Gray, 'Richard,' so's not t' get un mixed up. You see, if we calls un both 'Dick' or both 'Richard,' we'd never be knowin' who 'twas were meant."

"I see," said Shad.

"Well, Richard were havin' a wonderful streak o' bad luck," continued Ed, striking a match and holding it aloft for the sulphur to burn off, "wonderful hard luck. His furrin' fails he two years runnin', an' then th' fishin' fails he, an' his debt wi' th' Company gets so big he's two year behind, whatever, th' best he does." Ed paused to apply the match to his pipe.

"Were you ever noticin', Mr. Toobridge--"

"*Tumbridge*," corrected Dick.

"Be it 'Toobridge' or 'Tumbridge,' sir?" asked Ed, unwilling to accept Dick's correction.

"Trowbridge."

"Leastways Toobridge were nigher right than Tumbridge," declared Ed, looking disdainfully at Dick. "Were you ever noticin' how bad luck, when she strikes a man's trail, follows him like a pack o' hungry wolves? Well, just at th' time I'm speakin' about, Richard's little maid Emily falls off a ledge an' hurts she so she can't walk. They tries all th' cures they knows, but 't weren't no good, an' then they brings Emily here t' Pelican, t' see th' mail-boat doctor when th' ship comes.

"Th' mail-boat doctor tells un th' only cure is t' take she t' th' hospital in St. Johns, an' so they fetches Emily back t' Wolf Bight, for a trip t' St. Johns takes a wonderful lot o' money, an' Richard ain't got un.

"Bob thinks a wonderful lot o' Emily. He be only sixteen then, but a rare big an' stalwart lad for his years, an' unbeknown t' Richard an' his ma he goes t' Douglas Campbell, an' says t' Douglas, an' he lets he work th' Big Hill trail on shares th' winter, he's thinkin' he may ha' th' luck t' trap a silver fox, an' leastways fur t' pay t' send Emily t' th' hospital."

"Who is Douglas Campbell?" asked Shad.

"Oh, every one knows he, an' a rare old man he be. He comes t' th' Bay from th' Orkneys nigh forty year ago, workin' as servant for th' Company, an' then leavin' th' Company t' go trappin'. He done wonderful well, buyin' traps an' openin' new trails, which he lets out on shares. Th' Big Hill trail up th' Grand River were a new one.

"Well, Bob goes in wi' me an' Dick an' Bill Campbell, Douglas's lad, we workin' connectin' trails, an' he done fine. He starts right in catchin' martens an' silver foxes--a wonderful lot for a lad--"

"He only catches one silver, barrin' th' one after he were lost!" broke in Dick. "Now don't go yarnin', Ed."

"Leastways, he gets one silver an' a rare lot o' martens an' otters up t' Christmas, an' a plenty t' send Emily t' th' hospital.

"Then Micmac John--he were a thievin' half-breed as asks Douglas for th' Big Hill trail, an' feels a grudge ag'in' Bob because Douglas give un t' Bob--Micmac goes in an' steals Bob's tent when Bob were up country after deer. A snow comin' on--'twere wonderful cold--Bob gives out tryin' t' find his tilt, an' falls down, an' loses his senses. When he wakes up he's in a Nascauppee Injun tent, th' Injuns comin' on he where he falls an' takin' he with un.

"Bob not knowin' th' lingo they speaks, an' they not knowin' his lingo, an' he not knowin' how far they took he before he wakes up, or rightly how t' find his tilt, he sticks t' the' Injuns, an' they keeps workin' north till they comes t' Ungava."

"A wonderful trip that were! A wonderful trip! No man in th' Bay were ever t' Ungava before, so we calls he 'Ungava Bob,'" interrupted Dick.

"Then Bob works cross th' nu'th'ard country with huskies," continued Ed, "an' up th' coast with huskies, until he goes adrift on th' ice--him an' his two huskies he has with he--an' when they thinks they's lost, or like t' be lost, they comes on a tradin' vessel froze in th' ice an' loaded wi' tradin' goods an' furs, an' not e'er a man aboard she. Bob an' th' huskies sails th' vessel in here, when th' ice breaks up, an' th' ship goes free.

"That were just one year ago. Me an' Dick gets out from th' trails th' day Bob gets home, an' Douglas goin' with us, we sails th' vessel, which were 'The Maid o' the North,' t' St. Johns, an' Bob gets fifteen thousand dollars salvage money. A rare lot o' money, sir, that were for any man t' have, let alone a lad."

"What happened to the little girl--his sister?" asked Shad.

"She goes t' th' hospital, an' comes back t' Wolf Bight in September, cured an' fine. She be a fine little maid, too--a fine little maid," Ed asserted.

"What was done to the half-breed Indian--Micmac John, I think you called him?"

"Micmac? Oh, he were killed by wolves handy t' th' place th' Injuns finds Bob. Me, wi' Bill an' Dick, here, goes lookin' for Bob an' finds Micmac's bones where th' wolves scatters un, an' handy to un is Bob's flatsled an' thinkin' they's Bob's remains I hauls un out in th' winter, an' his folks buries un proper for his remains before he gets out in th' spring."

"What an experience for a kid!" exclaimed Shad. "He must have had some rattling adventures?"

"Aye, that he did," said Ed. "'Twould be a long story t' tell un all, but there were one, now--"

"Now don't go yarnin', Ed," interrupted Dick, who had stepped out of doors and returned at this moment. "Ed never tells un straight, Mr. Trunbridge."

"Troobridge," broke in Ed.

"Trowbridge," volunteered Shad.

"Mr. Trowbridge," continued Dick. "He makes un a lot worse'n Bob tells un. Fog's clearin', Ed, an' we better be goin' after we eats dinner."

"That we had, an' the fog's clearin'," agreed Ed.

"But how about Ungava Bob? I'd like to meet him. Do you really think I may be able to engage him to guide me on a two or three weeks' trip?" asked Shad.

"Aye," said Ed. "I'm thinkin', now, you might. Bob's not startin' for th' trails for three weeks, whatever, an' he's bidin' home till he goes, an' not wonderful busy. I'm thinkin' Bob could go."

"That settles it," Shad decided. "I'll look him up."

"You'll be welcome t' a place in our boat," suggested Dick. "'Tis a two-days' sail, wi' fair wind. They's plenty o' room, an' we can tow th' canoe. Me an' Ed lives at Porcupine Cove, an' you can paddle th' canoe over from there t' Wolf Bight in half a day, whatever."

"Done!" exclaimed Shad.

With the assurance of Mr. James Forbes, the factor, that the rivers flowing into the head of the Bay, a hundred miles inland from Fort Pelican, offered good canoe routes, Shad felt that a kind fate had indeed directed him to Fort Pelican, and that he had been particularly fortunate in meeting the two trappers.

"Bob Gray will be a good man for you if you can engage him, and I think you can," said Mr. Forbes. "Bob has had some truly remarkable adventures, and he's an interesting chap. Ed Matheson will probably relate these adventures to you, properly embellished, if you go up the Bay with him and Dick Blake. Take Ed's stories, though, with a grain of salt. He is a good trapper, but he has a vivid imagination."

Shad accepted Mr. Forbes's invitation to dine in the "big house," as the factor's residence was called, and when, after dinner, Mr. Forbes accompanied him to the wharf, the trappers had already stowed his outfit into their boat, and the two men were awaiting his arrival. No time was lost in getting away. Sail was hoisted at once, and with Shad's canoe in tow the boat turned westward into the narrows that connect Eskimo Bay with the ocean.

"Th' wind's shifted t' nu'th'ard, and when we gets through th' narrows there'll be no fog," Dick prophesied, and his prophecy proved true. Presently the sky cleared, the sun broke through the mist, the freshening north wind swept away the last lingering fog bank, and as a curtain rises upon a scene, so the lifting fog revealed to Shad Trowbridge the weird, primitive beauty of the rugged northland that he was entering.

The atmosphere, so lately clogged with mist, had suddenly become transparent. To the southward, beyond a broad stretch of gently heaving waters, rose a range of snow-capped mountains, extending far to the westward. Reaching up from the nearby northern shore of the bay, and stretching away over gently rolling hills lay the boundless evergreen forest.

Somewhere in the distance a wild goose honked. White-winged gulls soared gracefully overhead. Now and again a seal rose to gaze for an inquisitive moment at the passing boat, and once a flock of ducks settled upon the waters. The air was redolent with the pungent odour of spruce and balsam fir--the perfume of the forest--and Shad, lounging contentedly at the bow of the boat, drank in great wholesome lungfuls of it.

All this was commonplace to the trappers, and quite unmindful of it Ed Matheson launched upon tales of stirring wilderness adventures in which his imagination was unrestrained, save by an occasional expostulation from Dick.

The wild region through which they were passing gave proper setting for Ed's stories, and Shad, a receptive listener, wished that he, too, might battle with nature as these men did. How tame and uneventful his own life seemed. Already the subtle lure of the wilderness was asserting itself.

Three days after leaving Fort Pelican, Shad and the two trappers sailed their dory into Porcupine Cove. It was mid-afternoon, and Shad, impatient to reach Wolf Bight and begin his explorations in company with Ungava Bob, prepared for immediate departure, after a bountiful dinner of boiled grouse, bread, and tea in Dick Blake's cabin.

"Better 'bide wi' me th' evenin'," invited Dick, "an' take an early start in th' mornin'. Th' wind's veered t' th' nor'-nor'west, an' she's like t' kick up some chop th' evenin', an' 'tis a full half-day's cruise t' Wolf Bight, whatever."

"I can make it all right," insisted Shad. "Bob may not be able to give me much time, and I want to take advantage of all he can give me."

"Well, if you must be goin', I'd not hinder you; but," continued Dick, "keep clost t' shore, until you reaches that p'int yonder, an' then make th' crossin' for th' south shore, keepin' that blue mountain peak just off your starboard bow, an' you can't be missin' Wolf Bight. If th' wind freshens, camp on th' p'int, an' wait for calm t' make th' crossin' t' th' s'uth'ard shore."

"Thank you, I'll follow your advice," said Shad.

"Wait, now," called Ed, who had disappeared into the cabin, and reappeared with a rope. "I'm thinkin' I'll lash your outfit t' th' canoe. They's no knowin' what's like t' happen, an' 'tis best t' be sure, whatever."

Shad felt truly grateful to the two bronzed trappers as he shook their hands and said adieu to them. It was only his impatience to plunge into the deep forests reaching away to the westward, and a growing curiosity to meet Ungava Bob, that induced him to decline the sincerely extended hospitality of Blake and Matheson.

Afternoon was waning into evening when Shad reached the point Dick had indicated, and the rising breeze was beginning to whip the wave crests here and there into white foam.

Dick Blake had advised him to camp here if the wind increased. It had increased considerably, but Shad had set his heart upon reaching Wolf Bight that night, and he did not wish to stop. The sun was setting, but there was to be a full moon, and he would be able to see nearly as well as by day. The sea, though a little rougher than it had been during the afternoon, was not, after all, he argued, so bad.

"I'll make a try for it, anyhow; I know I can make it," said he, after a little hesitation, and turning his back upon the point he paddled on.

Presently, however, he began to regret his decision. With the setting sun the wind increased perceptibly. The sea grew uncomfortably rough. Little by little the canoe began to ship water, and with every moment the situation became more perilous.

Now, genuinely alarmed, Shad made a vain attempt to turn about, in the hope that he might gain the lee of the point and effect a landing. But it was too late. He quickly found that it was quite impossible to stem the wind, and he had no choice but to continue upon his course.

With full realization of his desperate position, Shad paddled hard and paddled for his life. He was a good swimmer, but he knew well that were his canoe to capsize he could not hope to survive long in these cold waters.

The canoe was gradually filling with water, but he dared not release his paddle to bail the water out. With each big sea that bore down upon him he held his breath in fear that it would overwhelm him.

Nearer and nearer the south shore loomed in the moonlight, and with every muscle strained Shad paddled for it with all his might. If he could only keep afloat another twenty minutes!

But he had taken too desperate a chance. His goal was still a full mile away when a great wave broke over the canoe. Then came another and another in quick succession, and Shad suddenly found himself cast into the sea, struggling in the icy waters, hopelessly far from shore.

III

UNGAVA BOB MAKES A RESCUE

Twilight was settling into gloom, and the first faint stars were struggling to show themselves above the distant line of dark fir and spruce trees that marked the edge of the forest bordering Eskimo Bay. Dark cloud patches scudding across the sky, now and again obscured the face of the rising moon. A brisk northwest breeze was blowing, and though it was mid-July the air had grown chill with the setting of the sun.

Ungava Bob, alone in his boat, arose, buttoned his jacket, trimmed sail, and by force of habit stood with his left hand resting upon the tiller while he scanned the moonlit waters of the bay before resuming his seat.

He was a tall, square-shouldered, well-developed lad of seventeen, straight and lithe as an Indian, with keen, gray-blue eyes, which seemed ever alert and observant. Exposure to sun and wind had tanned his naturally fair skin a rich bronze, and his thick, dark-brown hair, with a tendency to curl up at the ends, where it fell below his cap, gave his round, full face an appearance of boyish innocence.

He was now homeward bound to Wolf Bight from the Hudson's Bay Company's post on the north shore, where he had purchased a supply of steel traps and other equipment preparatory to his next winter's campaign upon the trapping trails of the far interior wilderness; for Bob Gray, though but seventeen years of age, was already an experienced hunter and trapper.

Suddenly, as he looked over the troubled sea, a small black object rising upon the crest of a wave far to leeward caught his eye. The small black object was Shad's canoe, and one with less keen vision might have passed it unnoticed, or seeing it have supposed it belated debris cast into the bay by the rivers, for the spring floods had hardly yet fully subsided. But Bob's training as a hunter taught him to take nothing for granted, and, watching intently for its reappearance from the trough of the sea, he presently discerned in the moonlight the faint glint of a paddle.

"A canoe!" he exclaimed, as he sat down. "An' what, now, be an Injun doin' out there this time o' night? An' Injuns never crosses where this un be. I'll see, now, who it is, an' what he's up to, whatever," and, suiting the action to the resolve, he shifted his course to bear down upon the stranger.

The hunter instinctively attributes importance to every sign, sound, or action that is not in harmony with the usual routine of his world, and by actual investigation he must needs satisfy himself of its meaning. This is not idle curiosity, but an instinct born of necessity and life-long training, and it was this instinct that prompted Ungava Bob's action in turning from his direct course homeward.

"'Tis no Injun," he presently said, as with a nearer approach he observed the stroke. "'Tis too long an' slow a paddle-stroke."

This puzzled him, for he knew well every white settler of the Bay within a hundred miles of his home, and he knew, too, that only some extraordinary mission could have called one of them abroad so late in the evening, and particularly upon the course this canoe was taking at a season of the year when all were employed upon their fishing grounds.

Gradually he drew down upon the canoe, until at length he could make out its lines, and observed that it was not a birch bark, the only sort of canoe in use in the Bay by either Indians or white natives. The canoeist, too, was a stranger in the region. Of this he had no doubt, though he could not see his features.

He was well within hailing distance, though it was evident the stranger in the canoe had not yet discovered his approach, when a black cloud passed over the face of the moon, plunging the sea into darkness, and when the moon again lighted the waters canoe and canoeist had vanished as by magic.

Like a flash, realising what had happened, Bob seized a coil of rope, made one end fast to the stern of his boat, grasped the coil in his right hand, and, tense and expectant, scanned the sea for the reappearance of the unfortunate stranger.

Presently he discovered the submerged canoe directly ahead, and an instant later saw Shad rise to the surface, strike out for it, and catch and cling to the gunwale.

Bob poised himself for the effort, and as he scudded past, measuring the distance to a nicety, deftly cast the line directly across the canoe and within the reach of Shad's hand, shouting as he did so:

"Make un fast!"

Without looking for the result, he sprang forward, lowered sail, shipped the oars, pulled the boat about, and Shad, who had caught the rope, had scarcely time to thrust it under a thwart and secure it before Bob, drawing alongside, caught him by the collar of his shirt and hauled him aboard the boat. Seizing the oars again, and pulling safely free from danger of collision with the canoe, Bob hoisted sail, brought the boat before the wind, and resuming his seat astern had his first good look at his thus suddenly acquired passenger.

Shad, amidships, was engaged in drawing off his outer flannel shirt, from which he coolly proceeded to wring, as thoroughly as possible, the excess water, before donning it again.

Not a word had passed between them, and neither spoke until Shad had readjusted his shirt, when, by way of opening conversation, Bob remarked:

"You'm wet, sir."

"Naturally," admitted Shad. "I've been in the Bay, and the bay water is surprisingly wet."

"Aye," agreed Bob, "'tis that."

"And surprisingly cold."

"Aye, 'tis wonderful cold."

"And I'm profoundly grateful to you for pulling me out of it."

"'Twere fine I comes up before your canoe founders, or I'm thinkin' you'd be handy t' drowned by now."

"A sombre thought, but I guess you're right. A fellow couldn't swim far or stick it out long in there," said Shad, waving his arm toward the dark waters. "I'm sure I owe my life to you. It was lucky for me you saw me."

"'Tweren't luck, sir; 'twere Providence. 'Twere th' Lord's way o' takin' care o' you."

"Well, it was a pretty good way, anyhow. But where did you drop from? I didn't see you till you threw me that line a few minutes ago."

"I were passin' t' wind'ard, sir, when I sights you, an' not knowin' who 'twere, I sails close in till I makes you out as a stranger, an' then you goes down an' I picks you up."

"That sounds very simple, but it was a good stunt, just the same, to get me the line and come around in this chop the way you did, and then haul me aboard before I knew what you were about--you kept your head beautifully, and knew what to do--and you only a kid, too!" added Shad, in surprise, as the moonlight fell full on Bob's face.

"A--kid?" asked Bob, not quite certain what "kid" might be.

"Yes--just a youngster--a boy."

"I'm seventeen," Bob asserted, in a tone which resented the imputation of extreme youth. "You don't look much older'n that yourself."

"But I am--much older--I'm eighteen," said Shad, grinning. "My name's Trowbridge--Shad Trowbridge, from Boston. What is your name? Let's get acquainted," and Shad extended his hand.

"I'm Bob Gray, o' Wolf Bight," said Bob, taking Shad's hand.

"Not Ungava Bob?" exclaimed Shad.

"Aye, they calls me Ungava Bob here-about's sometimes."

"Why, I was on my way to Wolf Bight to see you!"

"T' see me, sir?"

"Yes, I came up from Fort Pelican to Porcupine Cove with two trappers named Blake and Matheson, and they told me about you. They said I might induce you to take a trip with me."

"A trip with you, sir?"

"Yes. I want to take a little canoe and fishing trip into the country, and Blake and Matheson suggested that you might have two or three weeks to spare and could go along with me. I'll pay you well for your services. What do you think of it?"

"I'm--not just knowin'," Bob hesitated. "I leaves for my trappin' grounds th' first o' August t' be gone th' winter, an'--I'm thinkin' I wants t' stay home till I goes--an' my folks'll be wantin' me home."

"Well, let's not decide now. We'll talk it over to-morrow."

"You'm cold," said Bob, after a moment's silence, reaching into a locker under his seat and bringing out a moleskin adicky. "Put un on. She's fine and warm."

"Thank you. I'm thoroughly chilled," Shad admitted, gratefully accepting the adicky and drawing it on over his wet clothing.

"Pull th' hood up," suggested Bob. "'Twill help warm you."

"There, that's better; I'll soon be quite comfortable."

"We don't seem to be making much headway," Shad remarked, observing the shore after a brief lapse in conversation.

"No," said Bob, "th' canoe bein' awash 'tis a heavy drag towin' she, but we'll soon be in th' lee, an' out o' danger o' th' sea smashin' she ag'in' th' boat, an' then I'll haul she alongside an' bring your outfit aboard."

They were slowly approaching the south shore and presently, as Bob had predicted, ran under the lee of a long point of land, where in calmer water the canoe was manoeuvred alongside, and Shad's outfit, so fortunately and securely lashed fast by Ed Matheson, was found intact, save the paddle which Shad had been using.

The things were quickly transferred to the boat, and, this accomplished, Bob bailed the canoe free of water, dropped it astern, now a light and easy tow, and catching the breeze again in the open, turned at length into Wolf Bight, where he made a landing on a sandy beach.

"That's where I lives," said Bob, indicating a little log cabin, sharply silhouetted against the moonlit sky, on a gentle rise above them.

When the canoe, quite unharmed, was lifted from the water and all made snug, Shad silently followed up the path and into the door of the darkened cabin, where Bob lighted a candle, displaying a large square room, the uncarpeted floor scoured to immaculate whiteness, as were also the home-made wooden chairs, a chest of drawers, and uncovered table.

There were two windows on the south side and one on the north side, all gracefully draped with snowy muslin. A clock ticked cheerfully on a rude mantel behind a large box stove. To the left of the door, a rough stairway led to the attic, and the rear of the room was curtained off into two compartments, the spotlessly clean curtains of a pale blue and white checked print, giving a refreshing touch of colour to the room which, simply as it was furnished, possessed an atmosphere of restfulness and homely comfort that impressed the visitor at once as cosy and wholesome.

"My folks be all abed," explained Bob, as he placed the candle on the table, "but we'll put a fire on an' boil th' kettle. A drop o' hot tea'll warm you up after your cold souse."

"I would appreciate it," said Shad, his teeth chattering.

"Be that you, Bob?" asked a voice from behind the curtain.

"Aye, Father," answered Bob, "an' I has a gentleman with me, come t' visit us."

"Now that be fine. I'll be gettin' right up," said the voice.

"Put a fire on, lad, an' set th' kettle over," suggested a woman's voice, "an' I'll be gettin' a bite t' eat."

"Please don't leave your bed," pleaded Shad. "It will make me feel that I am causing a lot of trouble. Bob and I will do very nicely."

"'Tis no trouble, sir--'tis no trouble at all," the man's voice assured.

"Oh, no, sir; 'tis no trouble," echoed the woman's voice. "'Tis too rare a pleasure t' have a visitor."

Both spoke in accents of such honest welcome and hospitality that Shad made no further objection.

The fire was quickly lighted, and Shad, as the stove began to send out its genial warmth, had but just removed his borrowed adicky when the curtain parted and Mr. and Mrs. Gray appeared.

"Mr. Trowbridge, this be Father and Mother," said Bob; adding as a second thought, "Mr. Trowbridge lives in Boston."

"'Tis fine t' see a stranger, sir," welcomed Richard Gray, as he shook Shad's hand warmly, "an' from Boston, too! I have hearn th' fishermen o' th' coast tell o' Boston more'n once, but I never were thinkin' we'd have some one from Boston come t' *our* house! An' you comes all th' way from Boston, now?"

"Yes," admitted Shad, "but I feel sure I'm causing you and Mrs. Gray no end of inconvenience, coming at this time of night."

"Oh, no, sir! 'Tis no inconvenience in th' least. We're proud t' have you," assured Mrs. Gray, taking his hand. "Why, you'm wet, sir!" she exclaimed, noticing Shad's clinging garments, and her motherly instinct at once asserted itself. "You must have a change. Bob, lad, hold th' candle, now, whilst I get some dry clothes."

"Please don't trouble yourself. I'm very comfortable by the fire; indeed, I am," Shad protested.

But Bob nevertheless held the candle while his mother selected a suit of warm underwear, a pair of woollen socks, a flannel outer shirt, and a pair of freshly washed white moleskin trousers from the chest of drawers.

"These be Bob's clothes, but they'll be a handy fit for you, I'm thinkin', for Bob an' you be as like in size as two duck's eggs," she commented, looking the two over for comparison. "Now, Bob, light a candle an' show Mr. Trowbridge above stairs. When you're changed, sir, bring your wet things down, an' we'll hang un by th' stove t' dry."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Gray," said Shad gratefully, turning to follow Bob.

In the attic were three bunks spread with downy Hudson's Bay Company blankets, two stools, and a small table. It contained no other furniture, but was beautifully clean. There was an open window at either end, one looking toward the water, the other toward the spruce forest, and the atmosphere, bearing the perfume of balsam and fir, was fresh and wholesome.

"I sleeps here," informed Bob, placing the candle on the table and indicating one of the bunks, "an' you may have either o' th' other beds you wants. Now whilst you changes, sir, I'll bring up th' things from th' boat. Here's a pair o' deerskin moccasins. Put un on," he added, selecting a new pair from several hanging on a peg.

Shad made his toilet leisurely, and as he turned to descend the stairs with his wet garments on his arm he met the appetising odour of frying fish, which reminded him that he had eaten nothing since mid-day and was ravenously hungry.

In the room below he found the table spread with a white cloth. A plate of bread and a jar of jam were upon it, and at the stove Mrs. Gray was transferring from frying-pan to platter some deliciously browned brook trout. Bob, with his father's assistance, had brought up Shad's belongings from the boat, and Richard was critically examining Shad's repeating rifle.

"Let me have un," said he, putting down the gun, and reaching for the wet garments on Shad's arm proceeded at once to spread them upon a line behind the stove.

"Set in an' have a bite, now. You must be wonderful hungry after your cruise," invited Mrs. Gray.

"'Tis only trout an' a bit o' bread an' jam an' a drop o' tea," Richard apologised, as he joined Shad and Bob at the table, "but we has t' do wi' plain eatin' in this country, an' be content with what th' Lord sends us."

"Trout are a real luxury to me," assured Shad. "We are seldom able to get them at home, and a trout supper is a feast to be remembered."

"Well, now! Trout a luxury!" exclaimed Richard. "About all we gets t' eat in th' summer is trout an' salmon, an' we're glad enough when th' birds flies in th' fall."

"What birds do you get?" asked Shad.

"Duck and geese, and there's plenty of partridge in the winter," explained Richard.

"An' I were thinkin', now, you might not care for un," said Mrs. Gray. "I'm wonderful glad you likes un."

Richard asked the blessing, and then invited Shad to "fall to," and frequently urged him to take more trout and not to be "afraid of un," a quite unnecessary warning in view of Shad's long fast and naturally vigorous appetite.

"Mr. Trowbridge wants me t' go on a fortnight's trip up th' country with he," remarked Bob, as they ate.

"A trip up th' country?" inquired Richard.

"Yes," said Shad, "a fishing and canoeing trip."

"But Bob's t' be wonderful busy makin' ready for th' trappin'," Richard objected.

"So he tells me," said Shad, "but perhaps if we talk it over to-morrow you can make some suggestion."

"Aye," agreed Richard, with evident relief, "we'll talk un over to-morrow."

When the meal was finished, Richard devoutly offered thanks, after the manner of the God-fearing folk of the country.

The mantel clock struck two as they arose from the table. Dawn was breaking, for at this season of the year the Labrador nights are short, and Shad, at the end of his long and eventful day, was quite content to follow Bob above stairs to his attic bunk.

IV

AWAY TO THE TRAILS

Sunshine was streaming through the open south window of the attic when Shad awoke. Just outside the window a jay was screeching noisily. Bob's bunk was vacant. It was evident that Shad had slept long and that the hour was late, and he sprang quickly from his bed and consulted his watch, but the watch, flooded with water when the canoe capsized the night before, had stopped.

He paused for a moment at the open window to look out upon the nearby forest and expand his lungs with delicious draughts of the fragrant air. It was a glorious day, and as he left the window to make a hasty toilet his nerves tingled in eager anticipation, for he was at last at the threshold of the great Labrador wilderness--his land of dreams and romance. He was certain it held for him many novel experiences and perhaps thrilling adventures. And he was not to be disappointed.

His clothes, which Richard had hung to dry by the stove the night before, lay on a stool at his bedside, neatly folded. Some one had placed them there while he slept. He donned them quickly, and descending to the living-room found the table spread and Mrs. Gray preparing to set a pot of tea to brew.

"Good morning, sir," she greeted, adding solicitously: "I hopes you had a good rest, and feels none the worse for gettin' wet last evenin'."

"Good morning," said Shad. "I rested splendidly, thank you, and feel fine and dandy. Whew!" he exclaimed, glancing at the mantel clock. "Twelve o'clock!"

"Aye. We was wonderful careful t' be quiet an' not wake you, sir," she explained. "'Tis well t' have plenty o' rest after a wettin' in th' Bay. Dinner's just ready," and going to the open door she called, "Emily! Emily!"

A young girl, perhaps twelve years of age, quickly entered in response to the summons. She was clad in a cool, fresh print frock and wore deerskin moccasins upon her feet. Her wavy chestnut-brown hair, gathered with a ribbon, hung down her back; her oval face, lighted by big blue eyes, was tanned a healthy brown, and Shad thought her a rather pretty and altogether wholesome looking child, as she paused in confusion at the threshold upon seeing him.

"Emily, dear, get Mr. Trowbridge a basin o' water, now; he's wantin' t' wash up," directed Mrs. Gray. "Mr. Trowbridge, this is our little maid, Emily."

"I'm glad to know you, Emily," said Shad courteously. "Have you quite recovered from your injury? When I was at Fort Pelican I heard all about you and your trip to St. Johns."

"It's fine now, thank you, sir," answered Emily, flushing to the roots of her hair.

"Yes, Emily's fine an' well now, sir," assured Mrs. Gray, as Emily turned to fill the basin of water. "But she were wonderful bad after her fall till she goes t' th' hospital in St. Johns t' be cured. They's a fresh towel on the peg above th' bench, sir, an' a comb on th' shelf under th' mirror by th' window," she continued, as Emily placed a basin of water on a bench by the door.

"Thank you," acknowledged Shad, turning to complete his toilet.

"Now, Emily, dear, call Father an' Bob," said Mrs. Gray; "dinner's sot." And Emily, glad of a respite from the embarrassing presence of the stranger, ran out, presently to return with her father and Bob.

When dinner was disposed of, Richard suggested that it was "wonderful warm so handy t' th' stove," and leaving Mrs. Gray and Emily to clear the table he conducted Shad and Bob to a convenient seat near the boat landing, where they could enjoy a cooling breeze from the bay. Here he drew from his pocket a stick of very black and very strong-looking tobacco, and holding it toward Shad, asked:

"Does you smoke, sir?"

"No, thank you," declined Shad. "I had just learned to smoke when I entered college, but I was trying for a place on the 'varsity nine, and I had to drop smoking. A fellow can't play his best ball, you know, if he smokes. So I quit smoking before I formed the habit."

"Is that a game like snowshoe racin'!" asked Bob.

"Oh, no!" and Shad described the game and its tactics minutely, with thrilling detail of battles that his college nine had won and lost upon the diamond.

"Well, Bob," Shad asked finally, "have you decided to go with me for a trip into the country?"

"I'm not rightly knowin', sir, where you wants t' go," said Bob.

Shad stated the object of his journey, and the three talked over the possibilities of making such a trip as he desired within the time at Bob's disposal.

"Countin' on bad weather, 'twouldn't be much of a trip you could make in a fortnut, and that'd be th' most time Bob could spare, whatever, with his gettin' ready t' go t' th' trails," Richard finally explained. "His mother an' me be wantin' he home, too, till he goes, for 'twill be a long winter for his mother t' have he away without seein' he.

"Now you says you has no hurry t' go away. Dick Blake an' Bill Campbell goes t' th' handiest tilt o' th' Big Hill trail t' help Bob an' Ed Matheson in with their outfit, an' they starts th' first o' August. Then they comes back t' take their outfits up an' they has t' get in before freeze up.

"You bein' in no hurry, sir, could go with un on th' first trip, an' come back with un, an' that gives you a fine trip an' a fine view o' th' country. It takes un a month t' go in, but runnin' back light wi' th' rapids they makes un in a week, so you gets back th' first week in September month."

"'Twould be grand t' have you along, sir!" exclaimed Bob. "An' I were never thinkin' o' that. Father's wonderful at plannin'."

"Done!" said Shad. "I'll do it, but I hope you won't find me a nuisance around here during the three weeks we have to wait."

"Oh, no, sir! 'Tis a rare treat t' have you visit us, sir!" protested Richard.

And thus it was finally decided.

Bob was very busy during the days that followed. Not only his provision and clothing supply for a ten months' absence from home was to be made ready, but also the full equipment for the new trails to be established.

The necessary traps had already been purchased, but sheet-iron had to be fashioned into stoves and stove-pipe to heat the tents and log tilts, and one new tent was to be made. It was imperative, too, that each minor necessity that the wilderness itself could not readily supply, he provided in advance, and that nothing be forgotten or overlooked.

The establishment of these trails was an event of high importance in the Gray household. Bob's little fortune of a few thousand dollars, derived from the salvage of a trading schooner the previous year, had been deposited in a St. Johns bank, and his thrifty old friend, Douglas Campbell, had suggested that it might be invested to advantage in a small trading venture.

"Bob can lay his trails this winter," said Douglas, "an' next year take some tradin' goods in. Knowin' th' Nascaupée an' Mountaineer Injuns, an' a bit o' their lingo, he'll be able t' do a snug bit o' tradin' with un, along with his trappin'. An' if you opens a little store here at th' Bight next summer, th' rest of you can 'tend un when Bob's inside trappin'.

"I were thinkin', too," said Douglas, "'twould be fine t' send Emily t' St. Johns t' school th' winter, an' she'd learn t' keep th' books. She's a smart lass, an' she'd learn, now, in a winter or two winters, whatever, an' 'twould pay--an' do th' lass a wonderful lot o' good. I'm wantin' a trip t' St. Johns, an' I'd take she on th' mail boat."

There were many long discussions before it was finally decided that Bob should launch upon the venture. Bob's mother opposed it. The terrible winter of suspense when Bob, lost in the snow, was given up for dead, was still a vivid remembrance to her. She recalled those tedious months of grief as one recalls a horrid nightmare, and she declared that another such winter, particularly if she were to be deprived of Emily's society, would be unendurable.

But her objections were finally overcome. Emily was to go to school and it was decided Bob should establish two new trails. One of these he was to hunt himself, the other one Ed Matheson had agreed to hunt on a profit-sharing basis. Dick Blake and Bill Campbell--a son of Douglas Campbell--were to occupy adjoining trails, and the four to work more or less in conjunction with one another.

Shad and Emily became fast friends at once. On pleasant afternoons she would lead him away to explore the surrounding woods in search of wild flowers, and after supper he would tell her fairy tales from Grimm, but best of all she liked his stories from Greek and Roman mythology.

She, and the whole family, indeed, listened with rapt attention when Shad related how Chronos attacked Uranos with a sickle, wounding and driving Uranos from his throne; how from some of the drops that fell from Uranos's wounds sprang giants, the forefathers of the wild Indians; how from still other drops came the swift-footed Furies--the three Erinnyes--who punished those who did wrong, and were the dread of the wicked.

Thus the days passed quickly and pleasantly--even the occasional foggy or rainy days, when Bob and his father worked indoors, and Bob, at Emily's request, recounted very modestly his own adventures. Emily particularly liked to have Bob tell of Ma-ni-ka-wan, an Indian maiden who nursed him back to health after Sish-e-ta-ku-shin and Moo-koo-mahn, Manikawan's father and brother, had found him unconscious in the snow and carried him to their skin wigwam.

"Th' Nascaupees was rare kind t' me," Bob explained to Shad. "They made me one o' th' tribe, Sishetakushin calls me his son, an' they gives me an Indian name meanin' in our talk 'White Brother o' th' Snow.' They were thinkin' I'd stop with un, an' they were wonderful sorry when I leaves un t' come home with th' huskies. Manikawan were a pretty maid--as pretty as ever I see."

"Were she as pretty as Bessie, now?" asked Emily slyly.

"Now, Emily, dear, don't go teasin' Bob," warned Mrs. Gray.

"I were just askin' he," said Emily; "he's so wonderful fond o' Bessie."

"O' course he's fond o' Bessie, and so be all of us. Emily's speakin' o' Bessie Black, sir," Mrs. Gray explained, to Shad. "She's Tom Black's lass. Tom is th' factor's man over t' th' post, an' th' Blacks be great friends of ours. Bessie's but a young maid--a year younger'n Bob. You'll see th' Blacks when you goes over t' th' post with Bob."

"I'm immensely interested in your Indian friends," said Shad. "Manikawan was a little brick, and the Nascaupes bully good fellows. Will there be a chance of my meeting them?"

"No, they camps on lakes down t' th' n'uth'ard in summer," Bob explained. "If you was stayin' th' winter, now, you'd see un."

"I'm almost persuaded to remain on the trails with you all winter, and see something of the life of real, uncivilised Indians," asserted Shad. "I would stay if it were not for college."

"'Twould be fine t' have you, now!" exclaimed Bob enthusiastically. "But," he added doubtfully, "I'm fearin' you'd find th' winter wonderful cold, an' th' tilts lonesome places t' stop in, not bein' used to un."

"An' your mother would be worryin' about you; now, wouldn't she?" suggested Mrs. Gray.

"My mother died when I was a little boy, and Father died two years ago," said Shad. "I have one sister, but she learned long ago that I could take care of myself."

"Is she a little sister?" asked Emily.

"Oh, no," said Shad, "she's a big, married sister, and has a little girl of her own nearly as old as you are."

"'Twould be grand t' have you stay," Bob again suggested.

"Thank you, and it would be grand to stay, I'm sure, but," said Shad regretfully, "I can't do it. I must go back to college."

At length Bob announced one day that his outfit was completed and that all was in readiness, save a few incidentals to be purchased at the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post, fifteen miles across the bay. Shad, too, found it necessary to make some purchases preparatory to his journey to the interior, and the following morning the two sailed away in Bob's dory.

Tom Black, the post servant, welcomed them as they stepped ashore on the sandy beach below the post, and with him was Bob's old friend, Douglas Campbell, who stated that he had arrived at the post an hour earlier.

"I'm glad you come over, Bob," said he, as the four walked up toward Black's cabin. "When I comes t' th' post this mornin', I were thinkin' t' go back t' Kenemish by way of Wolf Bight t' have a talk with you, but your comin' saves me th' cruise. Set down here, now, a bit, till dinner's ready. I wants t' hear your plans for th' trails."

And while Shad was carried off by Tom to meet Mr. McDonald, the factor, Douglas and Bob seated themselves upon a bench before the cabin and discussed the proposed new trails.

"Now, Bob, 'tis this I were wantin' t' say to you, an' I weren't wantin' t' say it when your mother'd hear, an' set her worryn'," said Douglas finally. "Don't forget you're goin' where no white trapper was ever goin' before. You'll have to be a wonderful sight more careful than on th' Big Hill trail. Last year when I goes on th' Big Hill trail some Mingen Injuns come t' th' last tilt an' made some trouble, an' told me they'd never let a white trapper hunt th' country beyond th' Big Hill trail, an' you plans t' go, Bob. Now, if you works west'ard of a line from th' last tilt o' th' Big Hill trail an' th' river, be wonderful careful o' th' Mingsen. They's a bad lot of Injuns."

"I'll be careful, sir," promised Bob, adding, however, "I'm not fearin' th' Injuns, though."

"You never knows what an Injun's goin' t' do," cautioned Douglas. "You was findin' th' Nascaupes friendly, but th' Mingens is different."

Presently Tom joined them and invited them to dinner in the crudely furnished but spotlessly clean living-room of the cabin. Mrs. Black, a stout, motherly woman, had countless questions to ask of Douglas and Bob as to how "th' folks t' home" fared, while she and her daughter Bessie served the meal.

Shad dined with Mr. McDonald, but directly after dinner joined Bob while they made their purchases in the shop, and prepared for immediate departure to Wolf Bight. When all was ready, Bob left Shad waiting at the boat while he returned to the cabin to say goodbye to Mrs. Black and Bessie.

Bessie followed him to the door, and when they were outside where none could see she drew from beneath her apron a buckskin cartridge pouch, upon which she had neatly worked in silk the word "BOB" in the centre of a floral design, doubtless the result of many days' labour.

"Here, Bob," said she, "I were makin' it for you, an' when you carries it on th' trail remember we're all thinkin' of you down here, an' wishin' you luck in th' furrin', an' hopin' you're safe."

"Oh!--Bessie--'tis--'tis wonderful kind of you--I'll always be rememberin'," Bob stammered in acceptance, for a moment quite overcome with surprise and embarrassment.

"Now take care of yourself, Bob. We'll be missin' you th' winter--good-bye, Bob."

"Good-bye, Bessie."

Bob and Shad quickly hoisted sail, and as they drew away from shore Bob looked back to see Bessie still standing in the cabin door, waving her handkerchief to him, and he regretted that he had not shown more plainly his appreciation of her gift and her thoughtfulness.

The following Monday was the day set for the departure of the adventurers, and in accordance with a previous arrangement, late on Sunday afternoon Dick Blake, Ed Matheson, and Bill Campbell, Ungava Bob's trapping companions, joined him and Shad at Wolf Bight, where they were to spend the night. Bill Campbell was a tall, awkward, bashful young man of twenty-one, whose chief physical characteristic was a great shock of curly red hair.

Monday morning came all too soon. Breakfast was eaten by candle light, and with the first grey hints of coming dawn the boat and Shad's canoe were loaded for the start.

Shad's tent and camping equipment, less heavy and cumbersome than Bob's, together with a limited supply of provisions for daily use upon the journey to the plateau, were carried in the canoe. The bulk of the provisions and the heavier outfit for the trails, made up into easily portaged packs, were stowed in the boat. This arrangement of the outfit was made to avoid the necessity of unpacking and repacking at night camp, and with packs thus always ready for the carry, much time could be saved.

The family gathered at the shore to bid the travellers farewell. First, the boat with Dick Blake, Ed Matheson, and Bill Campbell at the oars pulled off into the curtain of heavy morning mist that lay upon the waters. Then Bob kissed his mother and Emily, pressed his father's hand, took his place in the canoe with Shad, and a moment later they, too, were swallowed up by the fog.

The long journey, to be followed by a winter of hardship and adventure, was begun, and with heavy hearts the little family upon the shore turned back to their lowly cabin and weary months of misgiving and uncertainty.

IN THE FAR WILDERNESS

Beyond the sheltered bight a good breeze was blowing and presently, as the sun arose and the mist lifted from the water, Shad and Bob, keeping close to shore, discovered the boat a half-mile away with sails hoisted, bowling along at good speed.

"We'll be makin' rare time, now," said Bob. "We'll be passin' Rabbit Island in an hour, an' makin' the Traverspine t' boil th' kettle for dinner."

"No rapids to-day?" asked Shad.

"No, th' portage at Muskrat Falls is th' first," answered Bob, adding uncertainly: "I'm 'feared you'll find th' work on th' river wearisome, not bein' used t' un--th' portagin' an' trackin'. I finds un hard."

"That's a part of the game," said Shad. "I expect to do my share of the work, old man, and I don't think you'll find me a quitter."

"I were knowin', now, you were that kind, ever since I picks you out o' th' Bay," exclaimed Bob. "You weren't losin' your head, an' by th' time I h'ists sail you was wringin' th' water outen your shirt, just as if 'tweren't nothin'. An', Mr. Trowbridge, I likes you ever since."

"Thank you, Bob, but if you want me to be your friend drop the handle from my name and call me 'Shad.' We're on an equal footing from this on."

"'Twill be wonderful hard, Mr. Trow--"

"Shad!"

"'Twill be wonderful hard t' call you 'Shad '--it sounds kind of disrespectful, now."

"Not in the least," laughed Shad. "All the fellows call me Shad."

"I'll try t' think now t' do it, Mr.--I means Shad. But 'tis a rare queer name."

"Shadrach is the full name. It is pretty awful, isn't it? But doting parents cast it upon me, and I'll have to hold my head up under it."

"'Tis a Bible name, now. I remembers readin' about Shadrach somewheres in th' Book o' Daniel."

The canoe and boat had been gradually drawing together and now, within speaking distance, Bob called out:

"I'm thinkin' me an' Shad'll go on t' th' Traverspine or handy t' un, an' have th' kettle boiled when you comes up. We ought t' make clost t' th' Traverspine by noon."

"You an' who?" bawled Dick.

"Me an' Shad--Mr. Trowbridge."

"Oh, aye," answered Dick, "'twill save time."

"Bob's gettin' wonderful unrespectful, callin' Mr. Toobridge 'Shad!'" remarked Ed.

"'Tain't 'Toobridge,' Ed!" exclaimed Dick, in disgust. "Can't you remember, now? 'Tis Towbreg--T-o-w-b-r-e-g. You'll be callin' he wrong t' his face again."

"I'm thinkin' you be right this time, Dick," Ed reluctantly admitted.

The lighter and swifter canoe had already shot ahead and was out of hearing. Bob's mind filled with plans for the future, Shad enjoying the wide vista of water and wilderness, they paddled in silence.

The brilliant sunshine, the low, rocky shores, the spruce-clad hills rising above, with now and again a breath of the perfumed forest wafted to them upon the breeze, inspired and exhilarated the young voyageurs. Shad was conscious of a new sense of freedom and power taking possession of him. The romance of the situation appealed to his imagination. Was he not one of an adventurous band of pioneers going into a vast wilderness, an untamed and unexplored land, to battle with nature and the elements?

For several hours they paddled, finally entering the wide river mouth. Here the first indication of a current was encountered, and the northern bank was followed closely that they might take advantage of counter eddies, and thus overcome the retarding effect of the midstream current.

"'Twill be noon when th' boat comes, an' we'll stop now t' boil th' kettle," Bob finally suggested. "Th' Traverspine River is handy by. She comes into this river just above here a bit."

"Good!" exclaimed Shad. "I'm nearly famished, and I've been hoping for the last hour to hear you say that."

"Paddlin' do make for hunger," admitted Bob, as he stepped ashore on a sandy beach near the mouth of a rushing brook. "I'm a bit hungry myself. I'll be puttin' a fire on now, an' you brings up th' things from th' canoe."

In an incredibly short time the fire was lighted, and when Shad brought up a kettle of water from the river Bob had already cut a stiff pole about five feet in length. The butt end of this he sharpened, and, jamming it into the ground, inclined it in such manner that the kettle, which he took from Shad and hung by its bail upon the other end of the pole, was suspended directly over the blaze.

Bob, who installed himself as cook, now sliced some fat pork to fry, while Shad gathered a quantity of large dry sticks which lay plentifully about and began piling them upon the fire.

"Oh, don't make such a big fire, now!" exclaimed Bob, when he discovered what Shad was about. "'Twill be too hot t' cook by. A small bit o' fire's enough;" and he proceeded to pull out of the blaze the large wood which Shad had placed upon it.



"Don't make such a big fire"

"If there's nothing else for me to do, I'll see if there are any trout in that brook," said Shad.

Shad made his first cast in a promising pool a little way from the fire, and the moment the fly touched the water, "zip!" went the reel. The result was a fine big trout. Within twenty minutes he had landed eighteen, and when presently the boat drew up a delicious odour of frying fish welcomed the three hungry men as they sprang ashore and made the painter fast.

"Shad got un," explained Bob, in response to an exclamation of pleasure from Ed.

"You means Mr. Towbridge, Bob," corrected Dick, with dignity.

"No," broke in Shad, "Bob's right. Shad is my front name and I want you fellows to call me Shad; leave the handle off."

"An' you wants, sir," agreed Dick. "'Tis a bit more friendly soundin'."

"Them trout makes me think," said Ed, as he cut some tobacco from a plug and filled his pipe after dinner, "of onct I were out huntin' pa'tridges. I gets plenty o' pa'tridges, but I finds myself wonderful hungry for trout, when I comes to a pool in a brook where I stops t' cook my dinner an' sees a big un jump.

"'Now,' says I, t' myself, 'Ed,' says I, 'you got t' get un somehow,' an' I goes through my pocket lookin' for tackle. All I finds is a piece o' salmon twine an' one fishhook. 'I'll try un, whatever,' says I, an' I cuts a pole an' ties th' salmon twine t' un, an' th' hook t' th' salmon twine, an,' baitin' th' hook with a bit o' pa'tridge skin, throws in.

"Quicker'n a steel trap a trout takes un, but he's a little un, an' I'm so disgusted-like I don't pull he right in. Then before I knows it a big trout takes an' swallows th' little un."

Ed paused to lend effect to the climax, while he lighted his pipe and began puffing vigorously.

"Well?" asked Shad. "Did you land him?"

"Not very prompt," continued Ed. "I was so frustrated I just looks at un for a bit, skiddin' around in th' water. Then, while I lets un play, quicker'n I can say 'boo' an old whopper up an' grabs th' big un an' swallows he. Then I yanks, an' I lands th' three of un.

"Th' outside un were two foot and a half long an' a fraction over. I measures he. Th' next one were nineteen an' three-quarters inches long, an' th' little un were ten inches long. Th' little un an' th' next weren't hurt much, an' not wantin' they I throws un back, an' th' big un does me for dinner an' supper an' breakfast th' next mornin', an' then I throws a big hunk that were left over away, because I don't want t' pack un any longer."

"Ed," said Dick solemnly, "you'll be struck dead some day for lyin' so."

"Who? Me lyin'?" asked Ed, with assumed indignation.

"Yes, you. You'm always yarnin', Ed. You never seen a trout more'n two foot long, no more'n I have," declared Dick.

"Oh, well," sighed Ed, while the others laughed, "they's no use tellin' you of happenin's, Dick, you always were a doubtin' o' me."

The following day at noon the Muskrat Falls were reached, and here the real work and hardship of the journey began. Day after day the men were driven to toil with tracking lines up swift currents, more often than not immersed to their waists in the icy waters of the river, or for weary miles they staggered over portages with heavy loads upon their backs. To add to their difficulties a season of rain set in, and hardly a day passed without its hours of drizzle or downpour. But they could not permit rain or weather to retard their progress.

Always between sunrise and sunset they were tormented, too, by myriads of black flies and mosquitoes, the pests of the North. There was no protection against the attacks of the insects. The black flies were particularly vicious; not only was their bite poisonous, but a drop of blood appeared wherever one of them made a wound, and in consequence the faces, hands, and wrists of the toiling voyageurs were not alone constantly swollen, but were coated with a mixture of blood and sweat.

Shad, less toughened than his companions, suffered more than they. He was actually made ill for a day or two by the poison thus inoculated into his system, though with his characteristic determination, he still insisted, against the protests of the others, upon doing his full share of the work. Dick advised him, finally, to carry a fat pork rind in his pocket and to occasionally apply the greasy side of the rind to his face and hands. This he discovered offered some relief, though, as he remarked, grease, added to blood and sweat, gave him the appearance of a painted savage.

With the evening camp-fire, however, came a respite to the weary travellers, and recompense for all the hardship and toil of the day. Here they would relax after supper, and with vast enjoyment smoke and chat or tell stories of wild adventure.

Shad contributed tales of college pranks, which never failed to bring forth uproarious laughter, while his vivid descriptions of battles on the gridiron or on the diamond, illustrated with diagrams drawn with a stick upon the ground, and minutely explained, held his hearers in suspense until the final goal was kicked or the last inning played.

Dick and Ed described many stirring personal adventures, the latter embellishing his stories with so many fantastic flights of imagination that Shad would scarcely have known where fact ended and fiction began had Dick not made it a point to interject his warnings of the eternal vengeance that awaited Ed if he did not "have a care of his yamin'."

One morning during the third week after leaving Wolf Bight, a beautiful sheet of placid water opened before them in a far-reaching vista to the northwest. On either side of the narrow lake rose towering cliffs of granite, their dark faces lighted at intervals by brooklets tumbling in cascades from the heights above. A loon laughed weirdly in the distance, and from the hills above a wolf sounded a dismal howl. It was a scene of rugged, primeval grandeur, and Shad, taken completely by surprise, caught his breath.

"'Tis Lake Wanakapow," explained Ed. "There'll be no more trackin' or portagin'. 'Twill be straight sailin' an' paddlin' from this on. Th' first tilt o' th' Big Hill trail's handy, an' if th' wind holds fair we'll reach un by th' end o' th' week, whatever."

For the first time since their departure the voyageurs were enabled to don dry clothing, with the assurance that they could remain dry and comfortable throughout the day. The evenings were becoming frosty and exhilarating. The black flies and mosquitoes had ceased to annoy. Wild geese and ducks upon the waters, and flocks of ptarmigans along the shores, gave promise of an abundance and variety of food.

With the changed conditions, in marked contrast to the toil and hardships of the preceding weeks, Shad's desire to remain throughout the winter grew. The lure of the wilderness had its power upon him.

The first tilt of the Big Hill trail was reached on Saturday, as Ed had predicted. Here camp was pitched, the boat finally unloaded, and preparation made for Dick and Bill to begin their return voyage on Monday morning.

When supper was eaten and they were gathered about the evening camp-fire in blissful relaxation, silently watching the aurora borealis work its wild wonders in the sky, Shad suddenly asked:

"Are you certain, Bob, I'd not be a burden to you if I remained here all winter, You know, I'm a tenderfoot in the woods."

"Oh, no!" Bob assured enthusiastically. "You'd be no burden! An' when your feet gets tender you can bide in th' tilt an' rest un."

"I don't mean that my feet are tender in that way," laughed Shad, "but I'm a novice in woodcraft and I've never done any trapping. You'd have to teach me a great deal about these things, and I don't want to stay if I'll hinder your work in the least."

"Oh, you'd never be hinderin' th' work! An' you'd be a wonderful lot o' company, whatever! I hopes you'll stay, Shad!"

"Thank you, Bob. I'll stay. It will put me back a whole year in college, but I'll stay anyhow. My experience with you will be worth the sacrifice of a year in college, I'm sure."

"Now that be grand!" exclaimed Bob, his face beaming pleasure.

"An' Shad stays, Ed, he'll give Bob a hand with th' tilts," suggested Dick. "Can't you go back, now, with me an' Bill, t' help us up with our outfits? 'Twill be a wonderful hard an' slow pull for just th' two of us."

"Be you thinkin', now, you can manage th' tilts?" asked Ed, turning to Bob.

"O' course me an' Shad can manage un," assured Bob.

"I'll go back, then, Dick," consented Ed. "'Twould be hard t' manage with just two on th' boat."

Arrangements were made for the three trappers to bring Shad some adequate winter clothing upon their return, letters were written home, and at daylight on Monday morning adieus were said. Bob and Shad stood upon the shore watching the boat bearing their friends away, until it turned a bend in the river below and was lost to view.

"We'll not see un again for five weeks," said Bob regretfully, as they retraced their steps to the embers of the camp-fire over which breakfast had been cooked.

"And in the meantime," began Shad gaily, with a sweep of his arm, "we are monarch, of all--" Suddenly he stopped. His eyes, following the sweep of his arm, had fallen upon two Indians watching them from the shadow of the spruce trees beyond their camp.

VI

OLD FRIENDS

"Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn!" exclaimed Bob.

The moment they were recognised the two Indians strode forward, laughing, and grasped Bob's hand in a manner that left no doubt of their pleasure at meeting him, while both voiced their feeling in a torrent of tumultuous words.

They were tall, lithe, sinewy fellows, clad in buckskin shirt, tight-fitting buckskin leggings, and moccasins. They wore no hats, but a band of buckskin, decorated in colours, passing around the forehead, held in subjection the long black hair, which fell nearly to their shoulders. In the hollow of his left arm each carried a long, muzzle-loading trade gun, and Mookoomahn, the younger of the two, also carried at his back a bow and a quiver of arrows.

"These be th' Injuns I were tellin' you of," Bob finally introduced, when an opportunity offered. "Shake hands with un, Shad. This un is Sishetakushin, an' this un is his son, Mookoomahn. I've been tellin' they you're my friend."

In their attitude toward Shad they were dignified and reserved. Neither could speak English, and Bob, who had a fair mastery of the Indian tongue, interpreted.

"We are glad to meet the friend of White Brother of the Snow," said Sishetakushin, acting as spokesman. "We welcome him to our country. White Brother of the Snow tells us he will remain for many moons. He will visit our lodge with White Brother of the Snow and eat our meat. He will be welcome."

"I thank you," responded Shad. "'White Brother of the Snow has told me how kind you were to him when he was in trouble, and it is a great pleasure to meet you. I will certainly visit your lodge with him and eat your meat."

The ceremony of introduction completed, Bob renewed the fire and brewed a kettle of tea for his visitors. They drank it greedily, and at a temperature that would have scalded a white man's throat.

"They's wonderful fond o' tea, and tobacco, too," explained Bob, "an' they only gets un when they goes t' Ungava onct or twict a year."

Upon Bob's suggestion that, should they meet Indians, it would prove an acceptable gift, Shad had purchased at the post and brought with him a bountiful supply of black plug tobacco, such as the natives used, and with this hint from Bob he gave each of the Indians a half-dozen plugs. The swarthy faces and black eyes of the visitors lighted with pleasure, and from that moment much of the reserve that they had hitherto maintained toward him vanished.

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow is generous," said Sishetakushin, in accepting the tobacco. "For four moons we have had nothing to smoke but dried leaves and the bark of the red willow."

Each Indian carried at his belt a pipe, the bowl fashioned from soft, red pipe stone, the stem a hollow spruce stick. Squatting upon their haunches before the fire, they at once filled their pipes with tobacco, lighted them with coals from the fire, and blissfully puffed in silence for several minutes.

"How are Manikawan and her mother?" Bob presently inquired.

"The mother is well, but the maiden has grieved long because White Brother of the Snow never returns," answered Sishetakushin. "She watches for him when the Spirit of the Wind speaks in the tree-tops. She watches when the moon is bright and the shadow spirits are abroad. She watches when the evil spirits of the storm are raging in fury through the forest. She watches always, and is sad. Young men have sought her hand to wife, but she has denied them. White Brother of the Snow will return. He will come again to our lodge, and the maiden will be joyful."

Shad was unable to understand a word of this, but Bob's face told him plainly that something not altogether pleasant to the lad had been said.

"I cannot go now," said Bob, speaking in the Indian tongue. "We must build our lodges and lay our trails. Winter will soon be upon us and we must have the lodges built before the Frost Spirit freezes the earth."

"Sishetakushin's lodge is always open to White Brother of the Snow. It is pitched upon the shores of the Great Lake,* two-days' journey to the northward. The trail is plain. It lies through two lakes and along water running to the Great Lake. The maiden is waiting for White Brother of the Snow. He was made one of our people. He is welcome."

The Indians had risen to go, and Bob presented them with a package of tea, as a parting gift, which they accepted.

"White Brother of the Snow will come to our lodge soon and bring with him his friend," said Sishetakushin, in accepting the tea, and he and Mookoomahn, like shadows, disappeared into the forest.

"Injuns be queer folk, but they were good friends t' me when I were needin' friends," said Bob, when the Indians were gone.

* Lake Michikamau, the Great Lake of the Indians, situated on the Labrador plateau.

VII

WHERE THE EVIL SPIRITS DWELL

From the river tilt, as they called it, where their camp was pitched, the Big Hill trail led to the northwest for fifteen miles, then fifteen miles to the westward, where it took a sharp turn to the northward, in which direction it continued for nearly thirty miles, then again swung to the westward for fifteen miles, where it terminated on the shores of a small lake. This was the trail previously hunted by Bob.

Douglas Campbell had visited the Big Hill trail the preceding winter, but had not remained to hunt, and it had therefore been unoccupied during the winter. For the season at hand it had been transferred to Dick Blake, while Dick's own trail, farther down the river, was to remain untenanted, and the animals given an opportunity to increase. Directly below the Big Hill trail and adjoining it was Bill Campbell's trail.

Bob had been informed by Mountaineer Indians who camped during a portion of each summer near the Eskimo Bay post, that by following a stream flowing into the river a short distance above the river tilt of the Big Hill trail, and taking a west-northwesterly direction, he would find a series of lakes running almost parallel with the river, and lying between the river and the Big Hill trail.

Tradition said that this stream and series of lakes had at one time been an Indian portage route around the Great Falls of the Grand River, but for many years it had been generally avoided by Indians because of its proximity to the falls, which were supposed to be the abode of evil spirits, a superstition doubtless arising from the fact that Indian canoes may have been caught in the current above the falls and carried to destruction below; and because of the impression and awful aspect of the falls themselves, whose thunderous roar may be heard for many miles, echoing through the solitudes.

From the fact that this region had but rarely been traversed, and had certainly not been hunted by Indians for many generations, and that the animals within the considerable territory which it embraced had therefore been permitted to increase undisturbed by man, Bob argued that it must of necessity prove a rich trapping ground for the first who ventured to invade it. It was here, then, that he purposed establishing his first trapping trail.

The first step to be taken was to make a survey of the region, and with a quantity of steel traps, a limited supply of provisions, and Shad's light tent, the two young adventurers set forward in the canoe upon their scouting journey within the hour after Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn had left them.

A long portage and the ascent of a stream for several miles carried them that evening to the first of the series of lakes, where Bob's trained eye soon discovered unquestionable signs of an abundance of fur-bearing animals, sustaining his hope that the ground would be found virgin and profitable territory.

Their camp was pitched by the lake shore. At their back lay the dark forest, before them spread the shimmering lake, and to the westward a high hill lifted its barren peak of weather-beaten, storm-scoured rocks.

The atmosphere became cool as evening approached, and when supper was disposed of the fire was renewed, and, weary with their day's work, they reclined before its genial blaze to watch the sun go down in an effulgence of glory and colour.

Neither spoke until the colours were well-nigh faded, and the first stars twinkled faintly above.

"The most glorious sunset I ever beheld," remarked Shad finally, breaking the silence.

"'Twere fine!" admitted Bob. "We sees un often in here, this time o' year. They makes me think o' what the Bible says th' holy place in th' temple was t' be like--'A veil o' blue an' purple an' scarlet.' I'm wonderin', now, if th' Lard weren't makin' these sunsets just t' show what th' holy place be like, an' t' keep us from forgettin' un. I'm wonderin' if 't isn't a bit o' th' holy place in th' temple o' Heaven, th' Lard's showin' us in them sunsets."

"I don't know," said Shad; "I don't remember it. I must confess I never read my Bible very much."

"I'll read un to you from my Bible when day comes," promised Bob.

Presently the aurora borealis flashed up upon the sky with the effect of a thousand powerful searchlights, the long fingers of light rising from the northern horizon to the zenith and flashing from east to west in a maze of every-changing colour--now white--now red--now yellow. It was a scene not only beautiful, but weird and awe-inspiring.

"I'm thinkin', now, o' th' northern lights," remarked Bob, when they had watched them for some time, "that they's flashes o' light from heaven. I'm thinkin' th' Lard sends un t' give us promise o' th' glories we'll have when we dies."

"That is a cheerful thought, at least," admitted Shad.

"Yes, 'tis cheerin'. Leastways, they always cheers me when I see un," declared Bob.

"Whenever I see them after this," said Shad, "I shall remember your suggestion--that they are the reflected glory of heaven, sent to inspire the dwellers upon earth."

As they arose to retire to their tent the dead silence of the wilderness was startled by the uncanny cry of a loon. Bob stood for a moment and listened. Then, turning to the tent, he remarked:

"'Tis a bad sign, when a loon laughs at night like that!"

"In what way?" asked Shad.

"'Tis said t' be a warnin' o' danger an' trouble."

In a series of portages from lake to lake they passed the next day through six lakes of varying size, caching traps now and again at convenient points for future use.

All the afternoon a low, rumbling sound was to be heard. Time and again they halted to listen. It was a changeless, sullen, muffled roar. Finally, when they reached the sixth lake, later in the afternoon, their curiosity got the better of them and they climbed a barren eminence to investigate. As they neared the summit the roar increased in volume, and when they reached the top and looked to the southward they beheld a cloud of vapour.

"'Tis th' Great Falls o' th' Injuns!" exclaimed Bob.

"Where the evil spirits dwell?" asked Shad.

"Aye, where th' evil spirits dwell." Around them lay a rugged scene of sub-Arctic grandeur. To the eastward the country was dotted with a network of small lakes similar to those through which they had been travelling, while to the northward a much larger lake appeared. The shores of these lakes supported a forest of black spruce, but every rise of ground was destitute of other growth than the gray caribou lichen which everywhere carpets the Labrador forest.

"There's a grand chance t' lay th' trails," said Bob. "We'll be makin' our trails along th' s'uth'ard lakes an' up t' that big lake, an' Ed's among th' lakes t' th' n'uth'ard."

"I'd like to see those falls," suggested Shad. "Can't we take the morning off to visit them?"

"An' you wants," agreed Bob. "We'll be buildin' a tilt down where th' canoe is, an' another on th' first lake, an' I'm thinkin' another on th' big lake above."

Accordingly the following morning, leaving their camp pitched and their canoe on the lake shore, they turned southward upon an exploring expedition. Their tramp carried them across a series of ridges and bogs and finally into a forest. With every step the roar increased, and at length they could plainly feel the earth tremble beneath their feet.

Suddenly they emerged from the forest to behold a scene of wild and sublime grandeur. They stood at the very brink of a mighty chasm. From far above them the river rushed down, a stupendous torrent of foam-crested billows and swirling whirlpools, impatient to make its leap into the depths at their feet where it was presently to be swallowed up in a bank of mist, which shimmered beneath the two adventurers like a giant opal lighted by all the colours of the rainbow.* Below the rainbow-coloured mist the river again appeared, rushing in fearful power past beetling, frowning cliffs, which directly hid it from view. The very rocks upon which they stood trembled, and a reverberating roar rose from the canyon at their feet, so loud that conversation was well-nigh impossible.

*These are the Grand Falls of Labrador. The river falls three hundred and sixteen feet with a single leap.

For half an hour they stood enthralled by the scene, then they turned up the river, walking along its bank.

"'Tis an awful place down there," remarked Bob. "I'm not wonderin', now, th' Injuns thinks 'tis possessed by evil spirits."

"It is the most sublime scene I ever beheld," declared Shad. "One glimpse of it is worth all the trouble we've had in getting here."

The river gradually widened, but always with a strong current, even above the heavy white rapids, until some five miles above the falls it expanded into a large island-dotted lake. At the extreme lower end of this lake the old Indian portage trail was discovered, and following it the explorers late in the day reached their camp.

The following weeks were devoted to the erection of tilts--small log cabins to be used in winter as shelter. One was established well up the shores of the large lake expansion above the falls, another upon the shores of the lake from which they had made their excursion to the falls, and still another upon the first lake above the river tilt of the Big Hill trail, while to the northward near other lakes four other tilts were erected, at convenient distances apart, for Ed's use.

These tilts were all constructed upon the same general plan. They were on an average about eight by ten feet in size, with a slightly sloping roof so low in the rear Bob could scarcely stand erect.

The chinks between the logs were filled with caribou moss. The roof logs were covered with boughs, over which was spread first a blanket of moss and then a coating of six inches of earth. Each was provided with a doorway about four feet in height and two and a half feet wide, which was fitted with a door constructed of lashed saplings covered with bark.

Within, a platform of flat stones was arranged to accommodate the sheet-iron stove, with a stove-pipe hole through the roof directly over it.

Long, springy saplings were utilised in erecting bunks at the rear and along the side of the tilt opposite the stove. These were later to be covered with spruce boughs, and would serve both as beds and seats, and were elevated some eighteen inches above the earth floor.

"They'll be warm an' snug," said Bob. "When frosty weather an' winter comes th' snow soon banks un up an' covers un up, roof and all, and makes un good an' tight."

"But how do you get air enough to breathe?" asked Shad.

"Th' stove-pipe hole is made plenty big," explained Bob, "an' that lets th' bad air out, an' we mostly has a snow tunnel leadin' t' th' door so th' wind won't strike in, an' leavin' th' door off, th' good air comes in."

Nearly four weeks had been consumed in this work, and without waiting for the reappearance of their friends they began at once the distribution of supplies among the tilts, for September was nearly spent and winter would be upon them by mid-October, when ice in the lakes would render the canoe useless.

Therefore, with all haste they proceeded with their first canoe-load of provisions to the farthest tilt, built upon the shores of the lake expansion above the falls.

It was mid-forenoon of a beautiful, transparent September day when they reached the tilt. The supplies were quickly stowed beneath the bunks, the tent stove erected, and, halting only long enough to make tea, they launched their canoe for the return.

"We'll be makin' th' river tilt before we sleeps," said Bob. "They's a moon, an' we'll finish by moonlight, an' to-morrow we'll be gettin' out with th' next load. If we travels fast we can make th' river tilt before midnight, whatever!"

The portage trail left the river at a point some ten miles below the tilt, and as previously stated, at the lower end of the lake, where the current began to gather strength for its final tumultuous rush toward the falls.

They had paddled the distance in two hours, and were congratulating themselves upon their good progress as they turned the canoe toward the portage landing, when suddenly they were startled by a burst of wild, bloodcurdling whoops, and a half-dozen strange Indians, guns levelled, rose upon the shore.

"Mingens!" exclaimed Bob.

A warning in the Indian tongue was shouted at them that they must not attempt to land. A shot was fired over their heads to emphasise the fact that the savages were in earnest, and with no alternative, and taken wholly by surprise, Shad at the steersman's paddle astern, swung the canoe out into the stream, still continuing down the river.



"Upstream! Upstream! Turn about!" shouted Bob.

In the excitement and confusion that followed the first few moments after the attack, much valuable time had been lost in ineffectual manoeuvres, and when the canoe was finally turned about they were far out into the stream, and it was found that the insidious current had caught them. Bob was the first to recognise the danger, and in a sharp, tense voice he commanded:

"Quick! Work for your life! If th' rapid gets us, 'twill carry us over th' falls!"

Then they paddled--paddled as none had ever paddled before. But already the powerful current had them in its grip. Slowly--slowly--but with increasing speed they were drifting toward the awful cataract.

They would have braved the Indians now, and attempted a landing, but from a point directly below the portage trail, and extending to the white water of the heavy rapids the river bank rose in a perpendicular rampart of smooth-scoured rock, a full ten feet in height, offering no possible foothold.

For a little while they hoped, as they worked like madmen. Then the full import of their position dawned upon them--that they were hopelessly drifting toward the brink of the awful cataract.

Beads of cold perspiration broke out upon their foreheads. A sickening numbness came into their hearts, and as in a dream they heard the derisive, exultant yells of the savages upon the shore.

VIII

AFTER THE INDIAN ATTACK

Below them rose the appalling roar of the hungry rapids and the dull, thunderous, monotonous undertone of the falls themselves.

Before their vision a vivid picture passed of the scene they had so recently beheld--the onrushing, white piled billows above the cataract, gathering strength for their mighty leap--the final plunge of the resistless torrent--the bank of rainbow-coloured mist hovering in space over a dark abyss--and far below and beyond the mist-bank the murky chasm, where a white seething flood was beating its wild anger out against jagged rocks in its mad endeavour to fight its way to freedom between narrow canyon walls rising in frowning cliffs on either side.

Impotent to resist the power that was drawing them down, Shad Trowbridge and Ungava Bob were certain beyond a doubt that presently they were to be hurled into this awful chasm, and that in all human probability but a few minutes more of life remained to them.

Then suddenly there flashed upon Bob's memory the recollection of an island which he had observed when walking along the river bank from the falls to the portage trail.

He remembered that this island was of curious formation, with high polished cliffs rising on its upper end and on either side, like bulwarks to guard it from the rushing tide.

At its lower end a long, low, gravelly point reached downward, like a pencil point, among the swirling eddies. The gravel which formed this point, he had remarked at the time, had been deposited by the eddies created by the meeting of the waters where they rushed together from either side below the island.

With the recollection of the island came also a realisation that here possibly lay a means of escape. A quick estimate of the distance they had already drifted below the portage trail satisfied him that they were still perhaps half a mile above the island, and probably not too far amidstream to enable them to swing in upon it before it was passed, in which case a landing might be made with comparative ease upon the gravelly point.

The canoe, as previously stated, was heading upstream, with Bob in the bow, Shad in the stern. It was necessary that they turn around and secure a view of the river in order to avoid possible reefs near the island shore, and to properly pick an available landing place.

But to attempt to turn the canoe itself in the swift current would in all probability result in fatal delay. Therefore, acting upon the moment's instinct, Bob ceased paddling, arose, and himself quickly turned, seating himself face to the stern, shouting to Shad as he did so:

"Turn! I'll steer!"

Shad had no doubt Bob had become demented, but without question obeyed the command. In this position what had previously been the stern of the canoe now became the bow, Shad Trowbridge the bowman and Ungava Bob the steersman.

The moment paddling ceased the canoe shot forward in the current, heading toward the white waters of the rapids. The manoeuvre had not been made a moment too soon, for directly before them, a little to the left, lay the island.

With a quick, dexterous turn of the paddle Bob swung the canoe toward the island shore farthest from the mainland and, close under the cliffs, caught the retarding shore current. A few seconds later the bow of the little craft ground upon the gravelly point, Shad sprang ashore, Bob at his heels, and the canoe was drawn after them to safety.

For a moment Bob and Shad looked at each other in silence, then Shad exclaimed simply: "Thank God!"

"Aye," said Bob reverently, "thank th' Lard. He were watchin' an' guardin' us when we were thinkin' we was lost. 'Tis th' Lard's way, Shad."

"My God, Bob! Look at that!" exclaimed Shad, pointing toward the mad white waters below them. "If you hadn't thought of this island, Bob, we'd be in there now--in there--dead! My God, what an escape! And such a death!"

Shad sank upon a bowlder, white and trembling. He was no coward, but he was highly imaginative at times. During the trying period in the canoe he was cool and brave. He had done his part at the paddle equally as well as Bob. He would have gone to his death without a visible tremor. But now the reaction had come, and his imagination ran riot with his reason.

"Why, Shad, what's th' matter now?" asked Bob solicitously. "Were th' strain at th' paddle too much? You looks sick."

"No--I'm all right--just foolish. I'm afraid you'll think I'm not game, Bob."

"Oh, but I knows you is, Shad. I seen you turned over in th' Bay, Shad--an' I knows you'm wonderful brave."

"Thank you, Bob. I hope I deserve your opinion."

"I were terrible scairt first, when I finds th' canoe's slippin' back toward th' rapid an' I'm seein' no way t' land," said Bob. "Then I stops bein' scairt an' has a feelin' that I don't care--"

"Just as I felt," broke in Shad. "A sort of hopeless speculation on what was going to happen, but not much caring."

"Aye," continued Bob. "Then I thinks 'twill be sore hard on Mother--my never goin' home--an' I prays th' Lard t' help us, an' soon's I says 'Amen' I thinks o' this island. 'Twere th' Lard puts un in my head, Shad."

"I think," said Shad, "it was your quick wit and resourcefulness, Bob."

"No," Bob insisted positively, "'twere th' Lard. An', Shad, we must be thankin' th' Lard now."

Then Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge knelt by the side of the boulder, the former reverently, the latter courteously, while Bob prayed aloud:

"Dear Lard, Shad and me is wonderful thankful that you p'inted out t' us th' landin' place on this island, an', Lard, we wants t' thank you. We knows, Lard, if you hadn't been p'intin' she out t' us, we'd be dead in th' rapids now, or handy t' un. We'll never be forgettin'. An', Lard, keep clost t' Shad an' me always. Amen."

"That," said Shad, when they rose to their feet, "was the most honest, simple, straightforward prayer I ever heard offered. Thank you, Bob, for including me. If the Lord hears prayers, Bob, He heard yours, for it was honest and from the heart and to the point."

"He hears un, Shad, an' He answers un." There was a note of conviction in Bob's tone that left no room for doubt.

"We're here, because we're here, because we're here--" Shad began to sing. "Bob, I'm feeling all right now, and I guess I've got my nerve back again. Foolish, wasn't it, to get frightened after it was all over? Let's see, now, what the prospects are of getting away."

From an eminence in the centre of the island they surveyed their surroundings. The mainland lay not more than a short stone's throwaway, but between it and the island the water ran as swift as a mill race. Some two hundred yards below the point on which they had landed the heavy white rapids began, and with but one exception the perpendicular wall of rock that formed the mainland shore extended to and beyond the white water.

This exception occurred about half-way between the island and the heavy rapids, where for a distance of some six or eight yards frost action had caused disintegration of the rock, and the wall sloped down toward the river at an angle of forty-five degrees.

At the foot of this slope, and on a level with the water, a narrow platform had been formed by the dislodged portion of the rock. Under the most favourable conditions exceedingly expert canoemen might succeed in making a landing here, but it was plain that the foothold offered was so narrow and so unstable that any attempt to make a landing upon it would prove perilous and more than likely fatal.

The island itself was oblong in shape and contained an area of three or four acres. Its rocky surface sustained a scant growth of gnarled black spruce and stunted white birch, with here and there patches of brush.

From their vantage point no sign of the Indians who had caused their trouble could be seen, and it was evident they had not descended the river bank below the portage trail.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bob?" Shad asked.

"I'm thinkin' now, th' Injuns are headin' for th' tilt up th' river, an' that they'll be cleanin' un out an' burnin' un. Th' Injuns t' th' post tells me they never comes below th' portage. They's afraid o' th' evil spirits o' th' falls. But they goes back in th' country sometimes an' circles around by th' Big Hill trail."

"But what do you think of trying to cross, and make a landing down there where the rock slopes?" inquired Shad.

"We'd never make un, Shad," decided Bob. "I knows th' handlin' o' boats. I'm too uncertain in a canoe, an' so be you, Shad."

"What are we to do, then? We can't stay here," insisted Shad.

"I'm not knowin' yet. They'll be some way showin'," promised Bob, "but we'll have t' think un out first."

"What was the matter with those Indians, anyway? I thought all the Indians were friendly to white men," Shad asked, as they turned down again to the canoe.

"They's Mingen Injuns," explained Bob. "I were forgettin' t' tell you, Shad. When we was t' th' post, Douglas Campbell tells me that last fall some Mingen comes t' th' last tilt o' th' Big Hill trail an' tells he they'd not let any white trapper hunt above th' Big Hill trail. They's likely seen our tilt up th' river, an' laid for us. I'm sorry, now, I were bringin' you here an' not tellin' you, Shad."

"Oh, don't worry about that, Bob. I'd have come just the same," assured Shad. "In fact, I'd have been all the more ready to come, with the prospect of a scrap with Indians in view. If I'd known, though, I'd have had my eyes open and my rifle ready, and dropped a bullet or two among them before we got caught in the current."

"Injuns were never givin' me trouble before, an' I weren't takin' their threatenin' t' Douglas in earnest, so I forgets all about un till I sees th' Injuns at th' portage trail," Bob explained.

"'Twouldn't have done t' kill any of un, Shad. If you had, th' rest would have laid in th' bushes an' killed us, for they's no knowin' how many they is of un. Then they'd gone back an' laid for Ed an' Dick an' Bill an' killed they before they'd be knowin' they was any trouble.

"Now 'tis more 'n likely th' Injuns is thinkin' we be th' only white men about, an' when we thinks up a way o' gettin' out o' here we'll give warnin' t' Ed an' th' others, an' being on th' lookout one of us can hold off a hull passel o' Injuns, for we has Winchesters, an' all they has is muzzle-loadin' trade guns."

"But suppose we don't get off this island before the others come to look for us? What then?" asked Shad.

"If they misses us an' goes lookin' for us, they'll be knowin' we're missin' for some cause. Bill Campbell's been hearin' from his father what th' Mingens were sayin' last year, an' they'll suspicion 'tis th' Mingens an' be watchin' for un."

"But I don't understand yet what objection the Mingens have to our trapping here. I supposed this was the country of your Nascaupee friends."

"'Tis this way," Bob explained. "Th' Nascaupees hunts t' th' n'uth'ard, th' Bay Mountaineers t' th' east'ard, an' th' Mingens t' th' s'uth'ard, an' all of un comes in hereabouts t' get deer's meat, mostly th' Mingens, when deer's scarce t' th' s'uth'ard, an' they thinks if white trappers is about th' deer'll be drove out."

"Well, Bob, let's boil the kettle and try to figure out a plan of escape," suggested Shad. "With the reaction from the morning's excitement, I'm developing a vast hunger."

"They's not a mouthful o' grub in th' bag, Shad," Bob announced sorrowfully, "only a bit o' tea with th' kettle an' our cups. I leaves un all in th' tilt, thinkin' we'd get back t' th' next tilt an' use th' grub that's there, an' I just leaves th' bit o' tea in th' bag."

"No grub!" exclaimed Shad. "Then we've got to try to make a landing down on that wall. We can't stay here and starve!"

"An' we can't make th' landin'. 'Twould be sure drownin' t' try."

"Then it is just a choice between drowning and starving? For my part, I'd rather drown and have it over with, than starve to death!"

"Th' Lard weren't showin' us here just t' have us die right off," said Bob quietly. "He were savin' us because He's wantin us t' live, an' He'll be thinkin' if we tries t' make th' landin' knowin' we can't make un, that we're not wantin' t' live. If we takes time now t' plan un out, th' Lard'll show us how."

"I wish I had your faith, Bob, but I haven't, and I'm still in favour of making a try for the shore," insisted Shad. "However, let us make some tea and argue the matter out later."

"Aye, we'll boil th' kettle an' talk un over, whatever," agreed Bob, rising from the rock upon which they had seated themselves, and turning into the scant growth to collect dry sticks for a fire.

But instead of collecting the sticks he returned to the canoe, secured Shad's double-barrelled shotgun, and a moment later Shad, who was dipping a kettle of water for their tea and had not noticed the movement, was startled by the report of the gun. Looking up, he saw Bob stoop, reach into a clump of bushes, and bring forth a rabbit.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Shad, as Bob held his game aloft for inspection. "I didn't suppose there was hide or hair or feather on this wind-blasted, forsaken island of desolation!"

"I sees th' signs," said Bob, "an' then I looks about an' sees th' rabbit. Where they's one they's like t' be quite a passel of un. They likely crosses over last winter on th' ice an' th' break-up catches un here an' they can't get off."

"That's some relief to the situation. But we've only about a dozen shells in the canoe," announced Shad, "and when they are gone we'll be as badly off as ever."

"We'll not be wastin' shells, now, on rabbits," said Bob. "They's other ways t' catch un. I uses that shell t' get our dinner. I'll get th' rabbit ready now whilst you puts a fire on."

"Very well," agreed Shad, collecting wood for a fire, "and when we've eaten I hope we can think of some way of escape."

IX

THE INDIAN MAIDEN AT THE RIVER TILT

"Well," said Ed Matheson, as the boat rounded a bend in the river, "there's the river tilt, an' she looks good."

"That she do," agreed Dick Blake. "I hopes, now, Bob's there an' has a fire on. I'm wet t' th' last rag."

"So be I. This snow an' rain comin' mixed always 'pears t' make a wetter wet 'n just rain alone," observed Ed.

"Bob's there now," broke in Bill Campbell. "I sees smoke comin' from th' tilt pipe."

The voyageurs were returning from Eskimo Bay with their second cargo of winter supplies for the trails. Five weeks had elapsed since the morning Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge had watched them disappear around the river bend, and returning to camp had found Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn awaiting them at the edge of the forest.

Since early morning there had been a steady drizzle of snow and rain, accompanied by a raw, searching, easterly wind, a condition of weather that renders wilderness travel most disheartening and disagreeable.

This was, however, the first break in a long series of delightfully cool, transparent days, characteristic of Labrador during the month of September, when Nature pauses to take breath and assemble her forces preparatory to casting upon the land the smothering snows and withering blasts of a sub-Arctic winter.

Despite the pleasant weather, the whole journey from Eskimo Bay had been one of tremendous effort. With but three, instead of five, as on the previous journey, to transport the boat and carry the loads over portages, the labour had been proportionately increased.

It was, then, with a feeling of intense satisfaction and relief that the voyageurs hailed the end of their journey, with its promised rest, when they finally ran their boat to the landing below the river tilt of the Big Hill trail.

"I'll be tellin' Bob an' Shad we're here now, an' have un help us up with th' outfit," said Ed Matheson cheerily, stepping ashore and striding up the trail leading to the clearing a few yards above, in the centre of which stood the trail.

But at the edge of the clearing he stopped in open-mouthed amazement. Before the open door of the tilt stood a tall, comely Indian maiden, perhaps seventeen years of age. She was clad in fringed buckskin garments, decorated in coloured designs. Her hair hung in two long black braids, while around her forehead she wore a band of dark-red cloth ornamented with intricate beadwork. From her shoulder hung a quiver of arrows, and resting against the tilt at her side was a long bow.

She stood motionless as a statue, striking, picturesque and graceful, and for a full minute the usually collected and loquacious Ed gazed at her in speechless surprise.

"Good evenin'," said he finally, regaining his composure and his power of speech at the same time. "I weren't expectin' t' find any one here but Ungava Bob an' Shad Toobridge. Be they in th' tilt?"

With Ed's words she took a step forward, and in evident excitement launched upon him a torrent of Indian sentences spoken so rapidly and with such vehemence that, though he boasted a smattering of the language, he was unable to comprehend in the least what she was saying. It was evident, however, she was addressing him upon some subject of import.

"There now," he interrupted finally, forgetting even his smattering of Indian and addressing her in English, "just 'bide there a bit, lass, whilst I gets Dick Blake. He knows your lingo better'n me. I'll send he up."

And, hurrying down the trail, he called:

"Dick, come up here. They's a Injun lass at th' tilt, firin' a lot o' lingo at me I can't fathom."

"A Injun lass!" exclaimed Dick. "What's she doin' there, now? An' where's Bob an' Shad?"

"Yes, a Injun lass," said Ed impatiently, "an' what she's doin' you'll have t' find out. It seems like she's achin' t' tell somethin'. I'm not seein' Bob an' Shad."

"They must be somethin' wrong, Ed. Come down an' help Bill get th' cargo ashore, an' I'll find out what 'tis;" and Dick hurried up the trail past Ed, to meet Manikawan, for she it was.

She was still standing where Ed had left her, and Dick asked kindly in Indian:

"What message does the maiden bring to her white brothers?"

"Listen!" she commanded, in a clear, musical voice. "I am Manikawan, the daughter of Sishetakushin, whose lodge is pitched on the shores of the Great Lake, to the north. Yesterday some men of the South visited the lodge of my father."

"Mingens!" exclaimed Dick.

"They told him," she continued, not heeding the interruption, "that five suns back they had found a lodge built where the big river broadens. The lodge was newly made. It was a white man's lodge, for it was built of trees. The men of the South waited in hiding at the end of the portage that was once used by my people. It is above the place where evil spirits dwell."

"How many of the men of the South were there?" asked Dick, again interrupting.

"Six," she answered promptly. "While they waited two white men passed with a painted canoe and much provisions. Then, while they still waited, the white men returned with the canoe empty.

"They fired their guns at the white men. Then the evil spirits that dwell where the river falls reached up for the canoe and dragged it down to the place of thunder.

"I have come to tell you this, and to ask if White Brother of the Snow and his friend are here. All night and all day have I travelled, for I am afraid for White Brother of the Snow. He has lived in the lodge of Sishetakushin, my father. He is one of my people, and I am afraid for him."

Her rapid speech, her dramatic pose and gestures, and her intensely earnest manner left no doubt in Dick Blake's mind that she spoke the truth. Neither had he any doubt that she referred to Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge as the two white men, for no other white men were in the region, or, he was sure, within several hundred miles of the place, at the time to which she referred.

"No," said he, after a moment's pause, "White Brother of the Snow and his friend are not with us."

"They are not here!" she wailed, lifting her arms in a gesture of despair. "Where is he? Tell me! It was not White Brother of the Snow sent to the torment of evil spirits?"

"I'm afraid, Manikawan, it was. There were no other white men here than White Brother of the Snow and his friend."

Manikawan's hands dropped at her side, and for an instant she stood, a picture of mingled horror and grief. But it was for only an instant. Then her face grew hard and vengeful, and in low, even tones she said:

"These men of the South killed White Brother of the Snow. They are no longer of my people. They must die."

"They must die," echoed Dick.

"Come!" she said laconically, reaching for her bow and slinging it on her back.

"No, we will rest to-night, and to-morrow at dawn we will go. Rest to-night and be strong for the chase to-morrow," Dick counselled, kindly, as she turned toward the portage trail leading around the rapids.

"I cannot rest," she answered. "I go now;" and like a shadow, and as silently, she melted into the darkening forest.

Big Dick Blake's heart was full of vengeance, as he strode down the trail to rejoin his companions.

"What speech were th' Injun maid tryin' t' get rid of, now?" asked Ed Matheson, pausing in his work of unloading the canoe as Dick appeared.

"Bob an' Shad's dead!" announced Dick bluntly.

"Dead! Dead!" echoed Ed and Bill together.

"Aye, dead. Drove over th' falls by Mingen Injuns," continued Dick. "Five or six days ago, she's sayin'. They's six o' them Injuns down north o' here, huntin' deer, an' their camp's up th' river somewheres. I'm not knowin' rightly where, but we'll find un, an' we'll shoot them Injuns just like a passel o' wolves. If we don't, they'll sure be layin' for us an' shoot us."

"Be you sure, now, th' lads is dead?" insisted Ed.

"They's no doubtin' it. She tells th' story straight an' clean as a rifle shot;" and Dick went on to repeat in detail the story he had heard from Manikawan.

"It looks bad, now, whatever," commented Ed. "But they's a chanct they gets a ashore. I were caught onct in th' rapids above Muskrat Falls, an' thinks it all up with me--right in th' middle o' th' rapids, too--an'--"

"Ed," broke in Dick, with vast impatience, "this be no time for yamin'. You knows you never could be gettin' out o' them rapids an' not goin' over th' falls. An' these rapids is a wonderful sight worse."

"Maybe they be," admitted Ed. "Th' poor lad, now, bein' killed in that way. Dick," he continued, raising his tall, awkward figure to its full height and placing his hand on Dick's shoulder, "me an' you's stood by one 'nother for a good many years, an' in all sorts o' hard places, an' if it's fight Injuns with you now, Dick, it's fight un, an' Bill's with us."

"Aye," said Bill, "that I am."

The boat was unloaded, and with heavy hearts the men prepared and ate their evening meal. Then while they smoked their pipes, light packs were put up and all was made snug for an early start the following morning.

With the first blink of dawn the three determined men, armed with their rifles, swung out into the forest, and rapidly but cautiously filed up the old portage trail in the direction Manikawan had taken.

THE VOICES OF THE SPIRITS

Heedless of drizzling rain and snow, of driving wind and gathering darkness, Manikawan ran forward on the trail. Hatred was in her heart. Vengeance was crying to her. Every subtle, cunning instinct of her savage race was aroused in her bosom.

She was determined that those who had sent her beloved White Brother of the Snow to destruction in the deadly place of evil spirits must die. How she should compass their death she did not yet know; this was a detail for circumstance to decide, but it must be done. White Brother of the Snow was of her tribe; the law of her savage nature told her his death must be avenged.

At the end of a mile or so she left the trail and turned sharply to the northward, winding her way deftly through moisture-laden underbrush which scarcely seemed to lessen her pace. Presently she broke out upon the shores of a lake and behind some willow bushes uncovered a small birch-bark canoe, which she had carefully concealed there on her journey to the river tilt.

Turning the canoe over her head, with the middle thwart resting upon her shoulders, she took a southwesterly direction until the old portage trail was again encountered, and resuming the trail she at length came upon the first lake of the chain through which the portage route passed.

The storm had ceased, and the stars were breaking through the clouds as Manikawan launched her canoe. It was a long, narrow lake, and paddling its length she had no difficulty in locating the place where the stream entered; and not far away a blazed tree, now plainly visible in the light of the rising moon, told her where the trail led out.

Here, as she stepped ashore, she discovered the first of the series of tilts which Bob and Shad had built, and, immediately pushing aside the flimsy bark door, entered the tilt and struck a match. Its flare disclosed a half-burned candle on a shelf near the door, and lighting it she held it aloft for a survey of the interior of the tilt.

On the bunk at the side were two or three bags evidently containing clothing and other supplies, while on the bunk in the rear were some odds and ends of clothing, a folded tent, a coil of rope, doubtless used by the young adventurers as a tracking line, to assist them in hauling their canoe up the swift stream which connected the lake with the river below, and a rifle in a sealskin case.

On beholding this last object, Manikawan gave a low exclamation of pleasure. Taking a chip from the floor she bent the candle over it, permitting some of the hot grease to flow upon it, and setting the candle firmly in the grease placed the improvised candlestick upon the tent stove.

Then, reaching for the rifle, she drew it from the case and examined it critically. The magazine proved to be fully charged. Returning the rifle to its case, she now examined the other contents of the tilt, and presently came upon a quantity of cartridges in one of the bags.

Several of these she appropriated, and dropping them into a leathern pouch at her belt, restored the remaining contents of the tilt to the position in which she had found them. Then taking the rifle in its case, she blew out the candle, and passed out of the tilt, carefully closing the door behind her.

The moon was now sufficiently risen to light the trail, and the blazes which Ungava Bob had made were so clear that Manikawan's progress was rapid.

Spectral shadows lay all about her, flitting here and there across her trail as she sped onward and onward through the dark forests that intervened between the lakes. In the distance she heard the voices of the evil spirits so dreaded by her people, speaking in dull, monotonous undertones, like ceaseless, rolling thunder far away, threatening destruction and death to all who fell within their reach. Even to her, whose home was the wilderness, the situation was weird and uncanny.

At length she passed another tilt near the end of a lake, but she did not pause to enter it. A little beyond the tilt the trail crossed a rise of ground, and upon reaching the summit she beheld in the distance a long, wide, silvery streak glistening in the moonlight. It was the river, and with a sense of relief she lowered the canoe from her shoulders and concealed it carefully amongst the underbrush.

She glanced at the stars and calculated the time until dawn. The region into which she had come was wholly unfamiliar to her, and she must have daylight to reconnoitre and locate the camp of her enemies.

There was still ample time for rest, for this was the season of lengthening nights and shortening days, and Manikawan was in much need of rest and food. For nearly thirty-six hours she had been exerting herself to the utmost of her strength. At the river tilt she had made a fire in the stove and brewed herself some tea, but she had eaten nothing. Now, with the moment's relaxation, a feeling of great fatigue came upon her, and for the first time she realised the length of her fast and the extent of her weariness.

Slowly she retraced her steps to the tilt which she had passed on the lake shore a little way back. Entering it she struck a match and lighted a candle, as she had done at the other tilt, and with its assistance found the flour, pork, and tea, together with a frying pan and kettle which Ungava Bob had left there the day that he and Shad Trowbridge were attacked by the Indians.

She went to the lake for a kettle of water, and returning gathered a handful of birch bark. Using the bark for tinder and appropriating wood which she found split and neatly piled near the stove for ready use, she lighted a fire in the stove, and set the kettle on to heat for tea. This done she cut several thick slices of fat pork, which she fried in the pan, and mixing a quantity of flour and water into dough, browned the dough in the pork grease.

It was with a keen appetite that she sat down to her long-deferred banquet; and with vast relief she drank the tea and ate the pork and dough cake. Then, wearied to the last degree, she fell back upon one of the bunks, the rifle by her side; and with the distant rumble of the falls in her ears, fell immediately asleep.

It was broad day when Manikawan opened her eyes. She seized the kettle, and hastening to the lake laved her face and head in the cooling water. Then, from a buckskin pouch at her belt, she drew a neat birch-bark case, decorated with porcupine quills, and from the case a rudely fashioned comb, from which dangled by a buckskin thong a tuft of porcupine tail. The lake was her mirror, as she smoothed and rebraided her hair. This done, she ran the comb several times through the tuft of porcupine tail before returning it to its case.

Her simple toilet completed, Manikawan mounted a high pinnacle of rock and for several minutes stood silently contemplating the rising sun. The eastern sky was ablaze with red and purple and orange, and she beheld the glory of the scene with deep reverence.

Upon her pinnacle of rock she felt herself in the presence of the Mysterious Power which governed her destiny and the world in which she lived, and after the manner of her fathers she besought that Mysterious Presence in unspoken words, to make her pure and noble and generous; to make her worthy to stand in its Presence--worthy to live in the beautiful world which surrounded her.

But Manikawan was not a Christian. She knew nothing of the white man's God or of Christ's lessons of forgiveness, and she descended from the rock morally strengthened, perhaps, in her savage way, but no less determined to wreak vengeance upon those whom she deemed her enemies.

While she slept she had heard constantly the voice of the evil spirits of the falls, and the spirits themselves had come to her in a dream, and whispering in her ear had urged her on to vengeance, and promised her immunity from their wrath. Manikawan, like all her people, was superstitious in the extreme. She believed absolutely in the supernatural, and her faith in dreams was unwavering.

The sun was hour high when she set forth again upon her mission. Mounting the semi-barren ridge where she had hidden her canoe, she crouched low behind the bushes, and catlike and noiselessly descended to the forest on the other side. Here under cover of the trees she proceeded more rapidly to the end of the portage trail.

Peering out from her cover, she first studied every foot of the river and surrounding country that lay within the range of her vision; then moving silently forward she removed the rifle, which she still carried, from its sealskin case and laid the case on the ground behind a boulder and the weapon upon it, where it would be completely hidden from view, but still available for instant use.

This arranged to her satisfaction, she crossed the trail, and gliding as noiselessly as a shadow through the trees, ascended the river bank to reconnoitre for the Mingen camp. The Indians that visited her father's lodge had said that they were encamped near the river, and not far above the portage trail.

XI

MANIKAWAN'S VENGEANCE

Therefore, Manikawan in her quest advanced cautiously, at the same time making, as she advanced, a thorough study of the ground.

She had travelled perhaps two miles, when she discovered a thin curl of smoke rising over the trees a short distance in advance, and dropping upon her hands and knees she crawled stealthily forward until from behind a clump of willow bushes she was afforded a clear view of the fire and its surroundings.

A deerskin wigwam stood in a clearing, and near the smouldered embers of a fire two Indians were engaged in making snowshoe frames; but, so far as she could see, they were the only inhabitants of the camp. It was evident that the remainder of the party were absent, probably hunting caribou in the North.

As noiselessly as she had approached, Manikawan now retreated to a safe distance. With a full understanding of the conditions, she had quickly and cunningly formulated her plans, and when well out of view she arose to her feet and boldly approached the camp.

The Indians, with no sign of alarm or surprise, and not deigning either recognition or greeting, continued at their task, quite ignoring her presence as she approached. For a moment Manikawan stood before them in silence; then she spoke:

"I am Manikawan, the daughter of Sishetakushin, whose lodge the men of the South have visited. Manikawan has come to do honour to the men of the South. While they talked with Sishetakushin, her father, she heard how bravely they have guarded the hunting grounds of her people and theirs. They are brave men and she has come to do them honour.

"She heard how they drove the two white invaders of our country into the arms of the evil spirits, whose thunderous voices she hears even now. It was well. White men have come into our land and have made the spirits angry. When the spirits are made angry they drive away the caribou. Then the people of the South and Sishetakushin's people are hungry. The white men have built lodges of trees near the potagan (portage) of our fathers. They stored these lodges with much tea and tobacco, flour and pork. Without these things the white man cannot live, for he is not like our people.

"Other white men are coming to our country. If these stores are left in the lodges near the potagan of our fathers, the white men will stay. If they do not have these things, they will go away, for without them they will be hungry.

"The men of Sishetakushin's people and the men of the South cannot remove them, for the evil spirits dwell there, and would do them harm.

"But Manikawan is a maiden. The evil spirits will not harm her. She is too humble for their notice. Manikawan has gone to the lodges of the white men and has removed the things from the lodges, so that the white men will not find them when they come.

"The men of the South are brave. They have sent two of the white men into the arms of the evil spirits. They must be rewarded.

"Manikawan has carried much tobacco and tea and other stores to the place where the potagan reaches up from the river. These things are for the men of the South. Let them bring their canoe. Manikawan will show them the things and they will take them."

The Indians did not deign to reply at once, but presently one of them said:

"Let Manikawan bring the things to the lodge of the men of the South. She is a maiden, and it is a maiden's work. It is not the work of a hunter."

"Manikawan is not of the lodge of the men of the South, and she will not do this. She will wait at the place where the potagan rises from the river until the sun is there;" and Manikawan pointed to the zenith. "If the men of the South do not come, she will go, for she will believe the men of the South do not need tea and tobacco."

"Let the maiden return to the place where the potagan rises from the river. Let her wait there. The men of the South will come," said the spokesman.

Manikawan turned away, down the river bank, by the route she had ascended. Her progress was dignified and unhurried so long as she might still be seen by the Indians, but was quickly changed to a run the moment she was beyond their view.

Glibly she had lied to them and her conscience was not troubled. She was not a Christian. The savage teaching upheld subterfuge in dealing with the enemy, and she deemed these Indians her enemies, for had they not destroyed White Brother of the Snow? And was he not of her people by adoption.

Immediately Manikawan arrived at the portage trail she looked sharply about to make certain she was not observed. Then she examined the rifle behind the boulder, and, quite satisfied with her inspection, returned it to its resting place and waited.

She knew that the two Indians, with due attention to their dignity, would make no haste in their coming, and would doubtless keep her waiting until the noonday hour which she had designated, but nevertheless her lookout up the river was never for a moment relinquished. She watched as a cat watches a hole--from which it expects the mouse to emerge--ready to pounce upon the unwary prey.

At last she was rewarded. A birch-bark canoe containing the two Indians came leisurely gliding down the river some hundred yards from shore. Manikawan, like a beautiful statue, stood tall and straight at the end of the portage trail. Two paces from her the rifle lay behind the bowlder.

The Indians, unsuspecting, turned the prow of the canoe toward the shore where she stood. Still she did not move. The cat waits for its victim until the victim beyond peradventure is within reach of its spring. Nearer and nearer drew the canoe. Still Manikawan stood, a graven image. She was looking out and beyond her intended victims. The roar of the distant rapids, and the monotonous, thunderous undertone of the falls were in her ears, and they came to her as beautiful music. The canoe was now but a hundred feet from shore.

Suddenly, Manikawan sprang, and the astonished Indians beheld the statue with a menacing rifle at its shoulder. Then came a flash and a report. The Indians ducked, and the blade of the steersman's paddle, poised in mid-air, was shattered by a bullet.

Manikawan spoke, her voice ringing out in clear, even tones:

"The men of the South sent White Brother of the Snow and his friend into the arms of the evil spirits. White Brother of the Snow was of Manikawan's people. The men of the South are the enemies of Manikawan's people. They are cowards and they must die."

The Indian at the bow paddled desperately away from shore and the menacing rifle. The Indian at the stern made equally desperate but ineffectual attempts with his broken paddle.

Another shot rang out, and the bowman ducked, and ceased paddling as a bullet sang past his head. Immediately the canoe began drifting, and a moment later the strengthening current caught it.

Then the Indians, alive to this new danger, disregarding bullets, rose to their feet and paddled desperately, the one in the stern seeming not to know that the broken stick he held was useless. They knew that the evil spirits had reached up for their canoe and were drawing them down--down--to something worse than death. Their faces became drawn and terror-stricken.

Faintly, and as a voice far away and unreal, they heard Manikawan's taunts as she ran down the high banks of the river, keeping pace with the doomed canoe and its occupants going headlong to destruction:

"The men of the South are cowards. They are afraid to die. The evil spirits are hungry, and soon they will be fed. Their voices are loud. They are crying with hunger. The men of the South will feed them."

XII

THE TRAGEDY OF THE RAPIDS

The two adventurers marooned on the island ate their first meal of rabbit, grilled over the coals, with keen relish, though they had neither salt to season it nor bread to accompany it.

"It might be worse," remarked Shad, when the meal was finished. "Rabbit is good, and," he continued, lolling back lazily and contentedly before the fire, "there's always some bright spot to light the darkest cloud--we've no dishes to wash. A rinse of the tea pail, a rinse of our cups, and, presto! the thing's done. I detest dish-washing."

"Aye," admitted Bob, "dish-washin' is a putterin' job."

"Yes, that's it; a puttering job," resumed Shad. "But now let's come to the important question of the day. Continued banqueting upon rabbit, I've been told, becomes monotonous, and under any conditions imprisonment is sure to become monotonous sooner or later. I have a hunch it will be sooner in our case. I'm beginning to chafe under bonds already. What are we going to do about it?"

"I'm not knowin' so soon," confessed Bob, "but I'm thinkin' before this day week Dick an' Ed an' Bill will be huntin' around for us, an' they's like t' find us, an' when they does they'll be findin' a way t' help us. They might build up th' place down there with stones, so's t' make a footin' t' land on, an' then 'twill be easy goin' ashore."

"But suppose they don't come around this way and don't find us?"

"Then I'm thinkin' we'll be bidin' here till ice forms."

"Till ice forms! And when will that be?"

"An' she comes on frosty, ice'll begin formin' th' middle of October on th' banks. But th' current's wonderful strong, an' I'll not be expectin' ice t' cross on till New Year, whatever."

"January first! October! November! December! Three months on this god-forsaken bit of rock! Great Jehoshaphat, man! That'll be an eternity! We can't endure it!"

"I'm not thinkin' we'll have to. I'm thinkin' they'll find us in a fortni't, whatever," reassured Bob, rising and picking up the axe. "We'll be needin' a shelter, an' I'm thinkin' I'll build un now."

"And we have no blankets with us!" exclaimed Shad. "Oh, we're going to have a swell time!"

"We'll be fair snug with a shelter, now. I'll be cuttin' th' sticks, an' you breaks boughs."

"All right, Bob, I'll get the boughs," agreed Shad, languidly rising, and as he went to his task singing:

"Old Noah, he did build an ark,
He made it out of hick'ry bark.

"If you belong to Gideon's band,
Why here's my heart, and here's my hand,
Looking for a home.

"He drove the animiles in two by two,
The elephant and the kangaroo.

"And then he nailed the hatches down,
And told outsiders they might drown.

"And when he found he had no sail,
He just ran up his own coat tail.

"If you belong to Gideon's band,
Why here's my heart, and here's my hand,
Looking for a home."

A full stomach sometimes wholly changes one's outlook upon the world. Shad was beginning now to view his adventure from a whimsical standpoint, a result induced partially by his dinner, largely by Bob's philosophical attitude.

It was not anticipated the shelter would be required for long, and a comfortable lean-to under the lee of the hill, with back and ends enclosed, and closely thatched with boughs and moss, was considered sufficient. A thick, springy bed of spruce boughs was then arranged, and the temporary home was completed.

Then Bob proceeded to set deadfalls, utilising flat stones and raising them on a figure 4, which he baited with tender birch boughs. Several rabbits were started in the course of the afternoon, giving assurance that the deadfalls would yield sufficient food for their needs, though no results could be expected from them until the following morning.

"Now for supper, Shad, we'll have t' be usin' some shells," he announced. "Supposin' you tries un. I were goin' t' make a bow an' arrows t' save th' shells, but they's nothin' t' feather th' arrows with, an' no string that'd be strong enough for th' bow."

"All right," agreed Shad. "I'll get them;" and within half an hour he returned with a bag of two fat young rabbits.

Their fire was built before the lean-to, and a very small blaze was found sufficient to heat it to a cosy warmth. Here they sat and ate their grilled rabbit and drank their tea, quite as comfortably as they would have done in their tent or tilt, though during the night one or the other found it necessary to rise several times to renew the fire.

Bivouacking in this manner was more or less of an ordinary circumstance in Ungava Bob's life. He looked upon it as the sort of thing to be expected, and as a matter of course. He felt indeed that they were very fortunately situated, and for the present he had small doubt that their imprisonment would prove but a temporary inconvenience.

The deadfalls yielded them the first night three rabbits; another was shot. They had quite enough to eat the next day, and Shad took a brighter view of the matter.

"By Jove!" he laughed, after breakfast, "I wonder what the fellows at home would say if they should see me now, playing the part of Robinson Crusoe?" and then he began to sing:

"Fare thee well, for I must leave thee.
Do not let the parting grieve thee,
And remember that the best of friends must part,
 must part.
Adieu, adieu, kind friends, adieu, adieu, adieu,
I can no longer stay with you, stay with you,
I'll hang my harp on a weeping-willow tree,
And may the world go well with thee."

But when another morning came, with no sugar remaining for the tea, and no other food than the now monotonous unsalted rabbit, Shad rebelled.

"See here, Bob!" he exclaimed irritably, "I can't eat any more rabbit! It nauseates me to even think of it! We've got to do something."

"We can't help un, now, Shad," answered Bob soothingly. "Rabbit ain't so bad."

"Not once or twice, or even three times in succession--but eternally and forever, I can't go it."

"It does get a bit wearisome, but 'tis a wonderful lot better'n no rabbit, when rabbit's all there is."

"Wearisome! Wearisome! Confound it, Bob, it's disgusting! Now we've got to do something to get ourselves out of here, and that quick."

"I'm not knowin', now, what t' do till th' others comes, an' I'm knowin' they will."

"Come, Bob, let's make a try for that wall down there. Even if the canoe does get away from us, we can make the wall--I know we can."

"No," and Bob shook his head ominously, "I'm ready t' take any fair chanct, Shad, but they wouldn't be even a fair chanct t' make un."

"Oh, bosh!" exclaimed Shad angrily. "I thought you had some nerve."

"'Tisn't a matter o' nerve, Shad; 'tis a matter o' what can be done an' what can't."

"Oh, yes, it can! Anyone with two legs and two hands and two eyes and just a grain of grit can do it."

Bob, quiet and unruffled, grilled his rabbit, refusing to take offence or to be moved at Shad's remarks, evidently intended to goad him into what his experience told him would certainly prove a hopeless and foolhardy venture.

It is a psychological phenomenon that men, denied action and confined to limited and solitary surroundings, become highly irascible. They find cause for offence in every word and every action of their companions, and it is not unusual for men situated as Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge were to lapse into such a state of antagonism toward one another that they cease to converse.

This was the condition into which Shad Trowbridge quickly lapsed. He soon came to ascribe to timidity and cowardice Bob's opposition to his wish to attempt a crossing to the mainland. He was one who chafed under restraint, and one who, when he had once decided upon a course of action, could not brook opposition from another; and though at heart he knew that Bob was fearless and brave, and that his arguments were sound, yet he would not now admit this, even to himself.

Normally Shad was a good fellow, and he would endure hardships cheerfully if the hardships were accompanied by physical activity; but the condition of monotonous existence, accompanied by idleness and inactivity, which they were now experiencing, was too great for him to withstand, and he was prepared to take the most desperate chance to escape from it. When at length the tea and his tobacco were gone, and nothing but the daily ration of unseasoned rabbit remained, the thought of thus continuing indefinitely became unendurable to him.

Ungava Bob, on the contrary, had been accustomed to wilderness solitude all his life. This, and a naturally even disposition, coupled with a philosophical temperament, rendered him capable of overlooking Shad's slurs, and when finally Shad ceased to speak to him, or when spoken to by Bob ceased to acknowledge that he heard, Bob permitted the slight to pass unnoticed.

At length, one day, when Shad had nursed his supposed grievance to a point where he could no longer endure it, he blurted out brutally:

"See here, I've stood this devilish cowardice of yours as long as I'm going to. Do you see where the sun is! It's noon. Now I'll give you until that sun drops half-way to the horizon to decide whether or not you're going across with me. If you say 'No,' I'm going without you, that's all, and you can stay here and eat rabbit, and rot, if you choose."

"Now, Shad," Bob placated, "I knows how you feels, an' it's your judgment ag'in mine. But I'm havin' experience with places like that, an' I knows we can't make th' crossin' an' land. Now don't try un, Shad."

"Don't 'Shad' me--My God, Bob! Look there!" he suddenly broke off.

Shooting past them, half standing in their birch canoe, paddling with the desperation of men facing doom, one with his sound paddle, the other with his broken one, were the Indians that Manikawan had sent adrift.

They were very near the island--so near that every outline of their drawn, terror-stricken faces was visible--but too far away to reach the gravelly point upon which Bob and Shad had found refuge. Indeed, they seemed not to see it, or to see anything but the horrible spectral phantom of the evil spirit that they believed had them in its control.

On--on--on-they sped, ever faster--faster toward the pounding rapids--impotently, though still desperately, wielding their paddles. Bob and Shad stood spellbound and horror-stricken. The Indians were nearing the first white foam! In a moment their canoe would strike it! It was in the foam! It rose for an instant upon a white crest, the Indians' paddles still working--then was swallowed up in the swirling tumult of waves and whirlpools, never to reappear.

Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge stood for a moment in awe-stricken horror. Then they sat down upon the rock on which Shad had sunk when overcome with shock on the day of their escape upon the island.

"Bob," said Shad, at last, "that was the most terrible thing I ever beheld!"

"'Twere awful!" assented Bob.

"It shows us, Bob, what you and I escaped. Bob, I've been very disagreeable lately. Take my hand and forgive me, won't you?"

"'Twere th' rabbit meat, Shad," said Bob, taking Shad's hand. "Rabbit meat be wonderful tryin' t' eat steady. I were knowin', now, you'd be all right again, Shad."

"I think I've been demented, Bob--I'm sure I have--anyway, believe it, and don't hold it against me."

"I'll not be holdin' un ag'in you, Shad. 'Twere natural, and--" Bob ceased speaking and sat staring at the high bank of the mainland. "Manikawan!" he exclaimed, springing up and crossing the island point at a bound.

There she stood, joy, wonder, incredulity, written upon her face. She had believed White Brother of the Snow dead, but here she saw him in flesh and alive, and he had spoken her name.

"White Brother of the Snow! Oh, White Brother of the Snow! The evil spirits did not devour you, but like hungry wolves they have devoured your enemies."

Very quickly Bob explained their predicament, and she listened silently. Then she went to the sloping rock, descended its dangerous angle to the water's edge, and returned.

"White Brother of the Snow and his friend would find no lodgment there," said she. "It is a place of deceit. But White Brother of the Snow knows how to be patient. Let him and his friend wait. The evil spirits cannot reach up for them where they are. When the sun returns again to the high point in the heavens Manikawan will stand here. Wait."

The next instant she was gone.

"What did she say?" asked Shad.

"She were sayin'," explained Bob, "that if we has patience an' waits she'll be back by noon to-morrow, or thereabouts. An' she says if we waits here we'll be safe, but we couldn't be makin' a footin' on th' rock. She's thinkin' o' some way o' gettin' us off, but I'm not knowin' what 'tis, now."

XIII

ON THE TRAIL OF THE INDIANS

None of the three trappers had ever penetrated the region lying between the Big Hill trail and the river. They knew that here, somewhere, Ungava Bob was to lay his new trails, but as to the route the trails were to take they had no information, for this was a circumstance that the local evidences of the existence of fur-bearing animals was to have decided for Bob when he entered the country to make his initial survey of conditions.

Among the Indians who traded at the Eskimo Bay post there was but one, an old man, who had any personal knowledge of the region. When a small boy this Indian had once traversed with his father the now long disused portage trail; and one day when Ungava Bob and Dick Blake met him at the post he had, at their earnest solicitation, described to them the country as he had seen it with the distorted vision of extreme youth, and as his memory, alloyed with the superstitious tales of nearly threescore years, recalled it.

It was, he said, a region of many lakes, over which flitted the phantom canoes of those who had perished in the nearby dwelling place of evil spirits. In the canoes were the ghostly forms of the victims, for ever paddling their phantom crafts around the lakes, vainly striving to escape the torment of mocking, ghoulish spirits which pursued them. Surrounding the lakes were wild marshes and deep black forests, which were peopled by innumerable evil spirits for ever searching for new victims to destroy. Their thunder voices were always to be heard, low and deep, in a terrible frenzy of unceasing anger, ever hungry for men to devour.

In analysing this description Dick Blake eliminated the phantom canoes as the wild creation of imagination, and the thunder voices of evil spirits he set down as nothing more nor less than the roar of the great falls of whose existence the Indians had told.

With this elimination he accepted as fact the statement that the region was sprinkled with many lakes, and that without the assistance of a canoe these lakes and perhaps some wide marshes would have to be circumvented by him and his companions before they came upon the river above the falls, where it was expected the Mingen Indians would be encountered.

While Dick Blake was the first to declare that the Indians must be punished for causing the supposed death of Bob and Shad, he was no more thoroughly in earnest than were his companions.

Normally these trappers were quiet, peace-loving men, who would have shuddered at the thought of causing human bloodshed; but now, moved doubtless to a large extent by a natural desire to avenge an outrage committed upon their friends, they also felt it their plain duty to mete out punishment to the guilty ones, in order to insure themselves and other white trappers against further molestation. Unless this were done there was no guarantee against continued raids upon their tilts, and there would always be the danger, and even probability, that sooner or later they would themselves be attacked and shot from ambush by the emboldened savages.

The trail that Bob had made, leading up from the river tilt and along the creek which flowed from the first lake, was plainly marked; and they proceeded with the long, swinging stride characteristic of the woodsman, rapidly and without a halt, to the point where the trail entered the lake. Here a wide circuit around the lake shore was necessary, and it was nearly noon when they fell again into the trail at the farther end and came upon the first tilt.

"We may's well stop an' boil th' kettle," said Dick, throwing down the light pack of provisions he carried and mopping the perspiration from his forehead, for the mid-day sun was warm. "If we were only havin' a canoe, now, we'd be a rare piece farther. 'Twere a long cruise around the lake."

"Aye," agreed Ed, "a canoe'd ha' saved us a good two hours. We may's well put th' fire on outside; 'twill be warm in th' tilt."

"Now I'm wonderin' what th' Injun lass is up to," said Dick, as they sat down to their simple meal of fried pork and camp bread.

"She's got a canoe. There's her footin' by th' lake, where she makes her landin'."

"They's no tellin' what an Injun's goin' t' do, but I'm not thinkin' 'twill be much harm, t' th' Mingsens with just a bow an' arrer, an' that's all she has in th' way o' weapons, so far's I makes out," declared Ed, adding: "She were a wonderful fine-lookin' lass; now, weren't she?"

"That she were," agreed Dick, "wonderful handsome--an' wonderful wild-lookin', too."

"Th' poor lad!" said Ed, after a pause. "He were buildin' th' tilt yonder, thinkin' o' th' good furrin' he were t' have th' winter, an' now he's gone. I'm not knowin', Dick, how t' tell his mother. You'll have t' tell she, Dick; I couldn't stand t' tell she."

"No," objected Dick, "you were goin' an' tellin' she th' time we thinks th' wolves gets Bob, an' you knows how. You'm a wonderful sight better breakin' bad news than me, Ed. I'd just be bawlin' with she, an' she cries; an' she sure will, for 'twill break her heart this time, an' Bob sure gone."

"Maybe none of us'll be havin' th' chanct," broke in Bill. "They may be a big passel o' Mingens, and whilst we catches some of un, th' others won't be sittin' quiet."

"Ed an' me's keepin' a watch for signs," assured Dick, as they arose to continue their journey. "They ain't been no signs so far, exceptin' signs o' th' poor lads an' th' Injun lass, an' she were passin' in th' night, by th' oldness o' her footin'."

"They ain't no danger o' findin' Injuns here, Bill," added Ed. "This is what they calls th' ha'nted country, an' they'd be too scairt o' ghosts an' th' devils they thinks is runnin' round loose here t' risk theirselves."

The long detours made necessary without the assistance of a canoe so far delayed their progress that, though they had not slackened the rapid pace set in the morning, night found them upon the shores of one of the intermediate lakes, with little more than half the distance to the end of the portage trail behind them.

Here they erected a lean-to at the edge of the forest, as a reflector for their camp-fire, and as a protection against a light but chilling breeze that had sprung up with the setting sun; and, all made snug for the night, they cooked and ate their supper.

Then they lighted their pipes and lounged back upon the bed of spruce boughs under the lean-to, speculating upon the morrow, and the probability of an encounter with the Indians.

"What's that, now?" exclaimed Ed suddenly, and cautiously rising and taking a position beyond the glow of the fire, he stood for several minutes gazing intently out upon the waters of the wide lake not yet lighted by the belated moon.

"There 'tis again! Did you make un out, Dick?" he asked, as Dick and Bill, following Ed's example of cautious exit from the range of the fire's glow, joined him.

"No, I weren't makin' nothin' out," answered Dick.

"There were somethin' there on th' water," Ed stated positively, when they presently returned to the lean-to.

"What were it, now? What were it like?" asked Dick.

"I seen un twict, an' 'twere lookin' t' me like a canoe, though I'm not sayin' so for sure," explained Ed.

"I seen un," corroborated Bill, "but whether 'twere a canoe or no, I'm noways sure--'twere so far out."

"If 'twere a canoe, 'twere Injuns," declared Ed, "an' if 'twere Injuns they was seein' our fire, an' they'll be up t' some devilment, now, before day."

"Be you sartin', now, you seen something?" asked Dick, a note of scepticism in his voice.

"Sure an' sartin'," insisted Ed. "'Twere movin', an' I'm thinkin' 'twere a canoe, though I'm noways sure."

"'Twere just a loon or maybe a bunch o' geese," said Dick, still unwilling to believe.

"'Twere movin', an' 'twere lookin' like a canoe t' me," said Bill. "'Twere certain no loon nor geese either. 'Twere too big."

"An' we better be gettin' out o' here, too," advised Ed. "If 'twere Injuns--an' I'm noways sure 'twere or 'tweren't--they seen th' fire, an' th' dirty devils'll be droppin' us off an' we stays here."

"Aye," agreed Dick, "we'll be movin' on. You an' Bill both seein' somethin', they must ha' been somethin' there, though I weren't seein' un."

Weary as they were, the three men hastily shouldered their light packs, and with rifles resting in the hollow of their arms, Ed in the lead, they stole noiselessly away into the forest.

Two hours of rapid travelling, in the light of the now rising moon, brought them to the end of the lake. Here they paused to fall upon their knees and make a critical examination of the shore.

"Here's fresh footin'," Ed finally announced. "A canoe were launched here since sundown. Th' gravel's wet where th' water splashed up. They's one track o' a Injun moccasin, an' from th' smallness of un 'twere a woman."

"'Twere sure a woman," both Bill and Dick agreed.

"An' there's th' same footin' goin' t'other way, but 'tis an older track," Ed continued. "'Twere th' Injun lass we sees to-night goin' back."

"Now I'm wonderin'," said Dick, as they arose, "what she's goin' back for? Maybe now, she's lookin' t' meet us t' help her?"

"Maybe," Ed suggested, laughing, "she's finding a hull passel o' Injuns more'n she wants t' tackle wi' just her bow an' arrer. I were thinkin', now, a bow an' arrer weren't much t' run up ag'in a band o' Injuns with, seein' they has guns."

"Whatever 'tis she's up to," suggested Bill, "'t isn't lookin' for us. She couldn't ha' missed seein' our fire back here on th' shore, an' she'd ha' known who 'twere an' come over if she's wantin' t' see us."

"You're right," agreed Dick. "She must have seen our fire, and if she'd wanted t' see us she'd ha' come over. Now I'm wonderin' why she didn't."

At mid-forenoon the following day the tilt on the last lake, where Manikawan had snatched a few hours' sleep, was reached, and mounting the ridge above, the river was discovered beyond.

At the end of the portage trail the three trappers held a hurried consultation. At length, carefully concealing their packs among the bushes, and with rifles held in position for instant use, they turned noiselessly up along the river bank, following the water closely, and taking almost exactly the course followed the previous morning by Manikawan.

They were aware that they were now beyond the bounds of the region avoided by the Indians, and they also had no doubt that the Indian camp was situated farther up the river, probably at some convenient landing-place for canoes.

Finally Ed Matheson, who had the lead, halted and held up his hand.

"Smoke," he whispered, sniffing the air. "Aye," whispered Dick, also sniffing.

Ed now sank to his hands and knees, pausing frequently in his advance to reconnoitre. Presently he ceased to move, his rifle extended before him, until Dick and Bill drew along side.

"There's th' fire," he whispered, "an' there's where they was camped, but it's lookin' t' me as if they's gone."

The smouldering embers of a camp-fire in the centre of the open spot where the wigwam had stood the previous day, lay directly in front of them. On a tree hung some unfinished snow-shoe frames, and there were many signs of a hurried departure.

"What you think?" Dick whispered.

"Th' devils may be hidin' back here," answered Ed. "You an' Bill stay now, an' watch, whilst I looks."

Very cautiously Ed stole away, and Dick Blake and Bill Campbell waited patiently for an hour, when they discovered him walking boldly down toward them.

"They's gone," he announced. "I seen their canoe makin' a landin' on th' other side where th' river widens, away up above here."

An examination of the camping ground confirmed their conclusion that the Indians had in some manner learned of their danger and had fled, evidently in great haste, leaving behind them the snowshoe frames and some other trifles.

"That's explainin', now, what that sneakin' Injun lass was up to," declared Ed.

"What were she up to, now?" asked Dick.

"She were up to this," said Ed: "she were watchin' at th' river tilt for our comin', an' when we comes she up an' tells th' Injuns we're on their trail, an' they gets out quick. That's why she weren't stoppin' when she sees our fire last night, an' we'll never be seein' her again. She's a Nascaupée, an' it's lookin' now as if th' Nascaupes an' Mingens'll be workin' t'gether, an' if they be, they'll be layin' for us, now, an' we got t' look out."

"Aye," agreed Dick, "that's what they'll be doin', now, an' we got t' look out."

"Well," sighed Ed, as they turned to retrace their steps to the portage trail, "we may's well get back an' lay our plans. Them Injun females is worse'n wolverines; they's no trustin' any of un."

XIV

THE MATCHI MANITU IS CHEATED

"Well," said Shad, at length, "there's the sun about as high as it will get to-day, and where's your pretty Indian girl?"

"I been thinkin', now," Bob explained, "she's sure havin' a canoe, an' could make un t' th' river tilt an' back, by travellin' all night. But Dick an' Ed an' Bill ain't havin' a canoe, an' if they comes they has t' walk, an' walkin' they can't make un before some time t'morrer, whatever. 'Tis like, now, she'll wait t' show un th' way t' where we be, an' doin' that she won't be comin' till they does t 'morrer."

"Your logic is sound," Shad admitted, "but it's mighty disappointing."

"There she be!" exclaimed Bob, a moment later, as Manikawan, quite alone, emerged from the forest hastening toward them, carrying on her arm two coils of rope--one the coil Bob had left in the first tilt of the new trail, and which she had observed at the time she found and carried away Bob's rifle; the other a tracking line which the trappers had used on their last trip up the river, and which she had discovered in the river tilt.

"Is it well with White Brother of the Snow and his friend?" she asked, stepping eagerly forward to the river bank.

"It is, and they are glad to see Manikawan," answered Bob.

"They will do now as Manikawan directs, and they will soon again be free to hunt the atuk (caribou), the amishku (beaver), and the neejuk (otter)," she promised.

With this she tied the ropes securely together, end to end, and then producing a quantity of salmon twine, which she had appropriated for the purpose from one of the tilts, tied an end of this to one end of the connected ropes. She now proceeded to coil the twine carefully upon a smooth flat rock at her feet, after which she drew from her quiver a long, blunt-nosed arrow, and directly above the feathered end of the arrow attached the loose end of the twine.

These preliminary arrangements completed, and her plan of rescue ready for the test, Manikawan stood erect, bow and arrow in position, and a moment later the arrow flew out across the water and fell upon the gravelly point.

Ungava Bob sprang forward, seized the twine, still fast tied to the arrow, and rapidly drew it and the end of the rope attached to the twine to him, while Manikawan played out the coil.

"Now," said she, "let White Brother of the Snow make the line which he has received fast and tight to the bow thwart of his canoe.

"White Brother of the Snow and his friend will then place their canoe into the water with its bow facing the river as it comes down to meet them. They will paddle hard against the river, for the Matchi Manitu (bad spirit) beneath the waves will draw them backward toward the place where the water is white and angry.

"They need not fear. Manikawan holds one end of the rope in her hand. The other end will be fast to the canoe. Manikawan is strong and she will not let the Matchi Manitu draw White Brother of the Snow and his friend down.

"While White Brother of the Snow and his friend paddle, their canoe will move toward the place where Manikawan stands. Near the shore the spirits are weaker than where the water is deep.

"When their canoe is near the shore, Manikawan will let it go backward very slowly to the place where the bank slopes."

Bob ran the end of rope under and around the bow thwart, as Manikawan directed, knotting it securely, leaving sufficient length to extend back to the centre thwart, around which he again wrapped it and finally tied the end. This he did in order that the strain upon the canoe might be more evenly distributed.

With Shad's rifle and shotgun and their few other possessions in the canoe, they immediately placed it in the water. Bob held it while Shad took a kneeling position in the stern, then himself stepped lightly to his place in the bow, and in an instant they were afloat in the rushing water, paddling fast and hard in order to relieve the stress upon the long line, and to keep the canoe head on to the current.

A few moments later they found themselves close under the mainland bank, with Manikawan letting them slip slowly down to the sloping rock.

Though the treacherous footing on the steep, slippery incline rendered it a hazardous undertaking, the landing was safely accomplished, and the canoe brought ashore.

When Manikawan saw the young adventurers standing before her, her work of rescue completed and the excitement and uncertainty of the preceding days and nights at an end, she sank upon the ground, weak, dazed, and overcome with fatigue.

During sixty hours her only sleep or refreshment had been that snatched the preceding morning in the tilt, and throughout the entire period she had been bending herself to almost superhuman effort.

After all, she was but a girl. Human emotions are pretty much the same the world over, irrespective of race, and Manikawan, the Indian maiden, was very human indeed in her emotions and the limit of her physical endurance.

She looked faint and weary, indeed, as Shad and Bob bent over her solicitously, but presently she indicated her desire to rise; and slowly, for Manikawan's exhaustion was still apparent, Bob led the way while the three took a direct course to the tilt on the first lake.

It was not far, and in the course of an hour, mounting a ridge, they saw the lake shimmering below them and the little tilt nestling among the trees on the shore.

"How good it looks! Almost homelike!" said Shad.

"Aye, almost homelike," echoed Bob.

At the tilt they made a fire under the trees, and Bob quickly brewed a kettle of strong tea, and prepared food; and when Manikawan had taken nourishment, she was sent into the tilt for the rest she so much needed.

Bob and Shad were still lingering over their meal when they looked up to find Dick Blake, Ed Matheson, and Bill Campbell staring at them from the edge of the woods.

"Hello!" cried Shad, jumping up in pleasure to greet their friends.

"Evenin'," said Bob; "set in an' have a drop o' tea an' a bite."

"Well, now, I wern't sure I see straight!" exclaimed Ed, and the three strode forward. "Here we was thinkin' never t' see you lads ag'in, an' arguin' who were goin' t' break th' news o' your death t' your folks, an' there you be, eatin'! Bob, I'm never goin' t' break th' news o' your death ag'in till I sees you dead. I were doin' it once, an' now I comes pretty nigh havin' to ag'in;" and Ed nearly shook Bob's arm off in his delight.

"Aye," Dick explained, while he and Bill followed Ed in the greeting, "th' Injun lass Manikawan comes an' tells us you lads was drove over th' falls by Mingsens."

"An' we goes out huntin' Mingsens," went on Bill, "tryin' t' kill un, an' would ha' killed un if we'd found un."

"Now, what devilment were she up to? That's what I wants t' know, tellin' us that. They's no knowin' what a Injun'll do, leastways a female," declared Ed.

"She was about right, now," said Bob, and he proceeded to relate the experiences of the preceding days, while Shad now and again interjected dramatic colour.

"Th' lass were doin' rare fine! Rare fine!" said Ed. "An' we was thinkin' she's up t' some devilment. But why wern't you shootin' at th' Injuns from th' canoe when they opens on you? Your repeatin' rifle would ha' scattered un, Bob."

"I left un in th' tilt by th' first lake above th' river. Shad were steerin', an' he weren't thinkin' t' use his'n," Bob explained.

"In th' first tilt above th' river?" Ed repeated. "We were in th' tilt, now, Dick, when we comes through, an' there weren't any rifle there. Rope an' tent an' other outfit, but no rifle."

"No, there weren't none there," corroborated Dick and Bill.

"Now, 'tis strange," said Bob. "I left un there, didn't I, Shad?"

"Yes, you certainly left it there, on the rear bunk," Shad affirmed positively.

This puzzled them long, and they were never to learn the truth, for Manikawan, on her return journey for the ropes, had replaced the rifle exactly as she had found it, and none but herself ever knew the part she had played in the river tragedy.

While Manikawan rested in the tilt, and Bill Campbell set out to hunt ptarmigans for supper, Dick Blake and Ed Matheson in Manikawan's canoe, and Bob and Shad in Shad's canoe, left upon a reconnoitering expedition to the tilt from which the two latter were returning on the day of the Indian attack.

They had no fear now of an Indian surprise, since Ed Matheson had observed the retreat of the savages to the southern shore, and they proceeded boldly to their destination.

As anticipated, the tilt had been rifled of its contents, chiefly flour and pork. The tilt itself, however, had not been burned, and was otherwise undisturbed.

"They was thinkin', now, t' have un an' t' use un theirselves when they comes here t' hunt, th' winter," declared Ed. "They thinks Bob an' Shad's done for. Unless they gets scairt out by th' ha'n'ts in th' water--"

"The what?" asked Shad.

"Th' ghosts or spirits they thinks is there. They's wonderful easy scairt, Injuns is. Oh, I knows th' Injuns; I been havin' trouble with un before."

"When was you havin' trouble with Injuns, now?" asked Dick sceptically.

"More'n once," said Ed. "There were th' time, now, I comes t' my tilt an' finds a hull passel o' Mountaineers--they wan't friendly in them days, th' Bay Mountaineers wan 't--so many they eats up a hull barrel o' my flour t' one meal--"

"Now, Ed," broke in Dick, in evident disgust, "you been tellin' that yarn so many times you believes un yourself. Now, don't tell un ag'in."

"'Tis gospel truth--" Ed began.

"'Tis no kind o' truth."

"Well, an' you don't want t' hear un, I won't tell un," said Ed, with an air of injured innocence.

"What was it, Ed, that happened you?" asked Shad, laughing, for he had learned to know the peculiarities of these two friends.

"Dick's not wantin' t' hear un, Shad. He gets all ruffled up when I tells o' some happenin' I been havin' that's bigger'n any he ever has. I won't tell un now; 'twould make he feel bad, an' I don't want t' make he feel bad, nohow," said Ed, with mock magnanimity. "But there were another time--I'll tell you o' this, Shad, an' Dick don't mind?"

"Oh, go ahead an' yarn, if you wants to! But th' Lard'll strike you dead some day, Ed, for lyin';" and Dick turned toward the canoes in disgust.

"Now Dick's mad," Ed laughed, "but don't mind he, Shad; he'll get over un."

"As I was sayin', now, 'twas when I was layin' my trail t' th' nu'th'ard o' Wanokapow. I gets my tilt built an' all in shape an' stocked up, an' I goes out one mornin' lookin' t' kill a bit o' fresh meat. 'Tis early, an' too soon t' set up th' traps, for th' fur ain't prime.

"I gets a porcupine, which is all I wants, an' comin' down t' my second tilt about th' middle o' th' forenoon, finds un all afire an' a band o' twelve Injuns--I counts un, an' they's just a dozen--lookin' on, an' dividin' up my things, which they takes out o' th' tilt before they fires un.

"Now I were mad--too mad t' be scairt--an' I steps right down among th' Injuns, an' when they sees me lookin' fierce an' ready t' kill un all, they's too scairt t' do a thing or t' run, an' they just stands lookin' at me.

"Well, I keeps on lookin' wonderful fierce, an' jumps about a bit an' hollers. It makes me laugh now t' think how that passel o' Injuns stared! One of un tells me a couple o' years after that they thinks I gone crazy.

"Tisn't long till I gets un all so scairt they thinks I'm goin' t' shoot un all up, an' they's afeared t' run, thinkin' if they does I'll start right in quick.

"Then I thinks it's time t' break th' news t' un, an' I tells un if they builds th' tilt up new for me I'll let un off. An' they starts right in t' build un, an' has un all done before th' sun sets. Th' same tilt's standin' there yet--'

"Ed!" called Dick, from the canoe, "if you're through yarnin', come on now an' get started back. It'll be dark now before we gets t' th' tilt."

It was dark when they reached the tilt. Bill, sitting alone by the camp-fire, had seen nothing of Manikawan while they were gone, and none of them ventured to enter the tilt or to disturb her.

But, when they arose from their bed of boughs in the lee of the tent the following morning, they found that the fire at their feet had been renewed while they slept. Manikawan was not in the tilt, but presently they discovered her, standing upon the pinnacle of rock near the lake shore, looking toward the glowing East, immovable as a statue, picturesque and beautiful in her primitive Indian costume.

As the rim of the sun appeared above the horizon and the marvellous colourings of the morning melted into the fuller light of day, Manikawan extended her arms before her for a moment, then descended from her rock, and, observing that her friends were astir, she approached them, her face glowing with the health and freshness of youth, and bearing no trace of the ordeal through which she had passed.

"White Brother of the Snow, the matchi manitu has been cheated. You have escaped from his power, and you will live long in the beautiful world," said she, for the first time adopting a more personal and affectionate form of address. "Manikawan's heart is as the rising sun, bright and full of light. It is as the earth, when the sun shines in summer, warm and happy. It soars like the gulls, no longer weighted with trouble."

"Manikawan is my good sister, and I am glad she is happy," responded Bob. "White Brother of the Snow and his friend will never forget that she outwitted the Matchi Manitu. They will never forget what she did."

Ungava Bob and Bill Campbell, sharing the canoe with Manikawan, Dick Blake and Ed Matheson the canoe with Shad Trowbridge, they reached the river tilt that evening. Manikawan was radiantly happy, but Bob, uncertain as to what course she might decide upon, and well aware that any attempt to send her back to her people would prove quite fruitless if she chose to remain with them, was much disturbed in mind. He sat long by the campfire that night, before he joined his companions in the tent, still undetermined what he should do to rid himself of her.

When morning came Manikawan gave no hint of going until breakfast was eaten. Then with her customary promptness of action, standing before Ungava Bob, she announced:

"Manikawan will now return to the lodge of Sishetakushin, her father, and wait for White Brother of the Snow. He is safe from the Matchi Manitu. She will wait and be contented. She will know that he is in the country of her people. She will wait for him till the sun grows timid and afraid, till the Spirit of the Frost grows bold and strong. Then White Brother of the Snow will come to the lodge of Sishetakushin, and there he will rest. Manikawan will prepare for him his nabwe (stew) and make for him warm garments from the skin of the atuk."

Without further preliminary or adieu, she lifted her canoe upon her head and disappeared as unexpectedly as she had appeared.

THE PASSING OF THE WILD THINGS

It was already too late in the season to attempt further distribution of supplies with the canoe. Therefore, the boat and canoe were carried to a safe distance above the river, and a shelter of logs erected over them, that they might not be crushed under the weight of snow presently to come.

Two days later the lakes were clogged with ice, and a week later the first fall of snow that was to remain throughout the winter fell to a depth of several inches.

Then came an interval of waiting, but not of idleness, for Ungava Bob or Ed Matheson. Their new tilts were unsupplied with stretching boards for furs and many other necessities, in the preparation of which they occupied themselves at the river tilt, while the others lent a hand; though nearly every day Dick Blake or Bill Campbell accompanied Shad on hunting expeditions which resulted in keeping the larder well supplied with geese, ducks--now in their southward flight--ptarmigans, and an occasional porcupine.

The birds were all fat and in splendid condition. The ptarmigans, now changing their mottled brown-and-white coat for the pure white plumage of winter, were gathered into large flocks, and easily had. A considerable number were killed with the first blast of frosty weather, and, together with a few ducks and geese, stored where they would freeze and keep sweet for future use.

With the last week of October active trapping began, when fur, though not yet at its best, was in excellent condition.

With November winter fell upon the land in all its sub-Arctic rigour. For a day and a night a blizzard raged, so blinding, so terrific, and with the temperature so low that none dared venture out; and when the weather cleared, the snow, grown so deep that snowshoes were essential in travel, no longer melted under the mid-day sun.

Socks of heavy woollen duffel were now necessary to protect the feet, and buckskin moccasins, with knee-high leggings, took the place of sealskin boots.

In the final distribution of supplies among the tilts, long, narrow Indian toboggans were brought into service, and the loads hauled upon the toboggans.

Martens and foxes were the animals chiefly sought at this season. There were two methods followed in setting the marten traps. Where a tree of sufficient diameter was available, it was cut off as high as the trapper could wield his axe above the snow, and a notch about four inches deep and fourteen inches high cut some distance below the top of the stump and several feet above the snow. The bottom of this notch was given a level surface with the axe, the trap set upon it, and the bait hung in the side of the notch a foot above the trap. At other times an enclosure was made with spruce boughs, and in a narrow opening the trap was set, with the bait within the enclosure.

Fox traps were set upon the marshes, and baited with rabbits which had been hung in the tilt until they began to smell badly, or with other scraps of flesh. The trap securely fastened by its chain to a block of wood or the base of willow brush, was carefully concealed under a thin crust of snow.

The usual routine followed by Ungava Bob, after his trail was once in order and his traps set, was to leave the river tilt on Monday morning, and by a wide circuit around lake shores and marshes, embracing a distance of some fifteen miles, reach his tilt at the far end of the first lake at night. On Tuesday another wide circle of traps around contiguous lakes brought him back again at night to the same tilt. On Wednesday his trail led him to the tilt on the last lake of the old portage trail.

His original intention had been to continue from this tilt to the tilt which the Indians had robbed, and thence to the last tilt on Ed Matheson's trail, some fifteen miles to the northeast. But after the appearance of the Indians it had been deemed unsafe and inadvisable to do this, and the tilt on the river above the portage trail was, therefore, temporarily abandoned.

With this modification, his Thursday circuit of traps was so arranged that it brought him back at night to the tilt on the last lake, and on Friday he proceeded to Ed Matheson's last tilt. This arrangement carried him during the five days over seventy-five miles of trail along which his traps were distributed.

Ed Matheson's trail was so arranged that he also arrived at his last tilt on Friday evening, and he and Bob thus shared the tilt each fortnight from Friday until Monday.

Saturdays were occupied in making repairs and in doing the thousand and one odd jobs always at hand, Sunday in rest, and on Monday the return journey began which brought them to the river tilt on the following Friday, unless by chance they were delayed by storms.

This was the point of fortnightly rendezvous for the four trappers--the junction point of all their trails. Dick Blake's and Bill Campbell's trails took them in opposite directions, and during their period of absence from the river tilt neither saw any of his companions.

The fortnightly reunion at the river tilt was naturally an occasion they all looked forward to. It gave an opportunity to compare notes upon their success, to recount experiences, and to satisfy for a time the human craving for companionship.

Shad made the first outward journey with Bob, and returned with Ed Matheson. Then he made a round with Dick Blake, and finally a round with Bill Campbell.

Every feature of the work was new and interesting to Shad Trowbridge, and for a time he enjoyed it hugely. But presently it dropped into a dreary, monotonous routine. The vast, unbroken solitude, the endless tramping over endless snow, day after day, and the lack of adventure to which he had looked forward, served presently to make him moody and irritable.

Shad had hoped for sport with his rifle, but no big game had been seen--not so much as the track of a caribou. Long before this the last goose and duck had passed southward. Not a bird save the ever-present jay had been encountered in upward of three weeks. Even the rabbits, whose tracks had criss-crossed the early snow in every direction and packed it down along the willow brush, had unaccountably disappeared. The stock of fresh meat, save a pair of geese and three pairs of ptarmigans reserved for a Christmas feast, was exhausted.

These were extraordinary conditions. The men declared that never before in their experience had they observed so complete a disappearance of game. Caribou were usually rather numerous in November. In previous years ptarmigans and spruce grouse had been so plentiful that they were easily killed when needed. One year in every nine rabbits were said to vanish, but otherwise the total absence of game was inexplicable.

It was a condition, too, that caused uneasiness. The flour and pork brought into the country by the trappers was far from adequate to supply their needs. Sufficient wild game to at least double their provision supply was an absolute essential if they were to continue on the trails. Thus far the early game had supplied their requirements, but the prospects for the future were disquieting.

At the end of the first week in December, Bill Campbell and Shad returned from their fortnight on the trail to find their friends already at the river tilt and discussing the situation.

"What you havin', this cruise, Bill?" asked Dick, when the greetings were over.

"Th' worst cruise I ever has," Bill replied, as he drew off his adicky. "One white fox--nothin' else, an' no footin' now t' speak of. Shad an' me never see a hair or feather barrin' th' fox I catches, an' he were a poor un."

"I gets one marten an' a red, up an' back," said Dick. "Ed gets nothin', an' Bob gets one marten. 'Tis a wonderful bad showin'."

"Aye, a wonderful bad showin', gettin' never a hair, an' that's what I gets," declared Ed, in disgust. "If th' next cruise don't show a wonderful lot better, I starts for th' Bay th' mornin' after Christmas, an' I'll not be comin' back till th' middle o' February, whatever."

The dough bread, fried pork, and tea, which Ed and Bob had been preparing, were ready, and, the meal disposed of, pipes were lighted and the discussion of the all-important question was resumed.

"'Tisn't th' havin' a poor cruise now an' again's what's botherin' me," began Ed, "but they ain't no footin'; and where they ain't no footin', they ain't nothin'; an' where they ain't nothin', they ain't no use huntin' it."

"They ain't even a pa'tridge t' be killed for th' pot," complained Bill.

"No, an' we'll be seein' th' end of our grub, with nothin' t' help out, by th' end o' February, whatever," Ed dolefully prophesied.

"Isn't there danger of scurvy if we have nothing but salt pork to eat?" asked Shad.

"That they is, sure as shootin'," agreed Ed.

"If you'd like to go along with me, Shad," suggested Bob, who up to this time had said little, "we'll take a flat-sled with your tent an' a tent stove, an' a couple weeks' grub, an' go down t' th' nu'th'ard an' see if we can't run onto some deer. Th' deer's somewheres, an' if they ain't here they must be t' th' nu'th'ard."

"Of course I'll go with you, Bob," said Shad, delighted with the prospect of individual action and new experiences.

"An' you may be runnin' into some o' th' Mountaineers an' Nascaupes down north, an' let un know about th' tradin' next year," suggested Dick. "If you tells one Injun, th' hull passel o' both tribes'll know about un. Things travels wonderful fast among th' Injuns."

The following day two toboggans were packed with the provisions and equipment sufficient for a two weeks' absence, together with a considerable quantity of tea in addition to their probable requirements, and some plug tobacco, designed as gifts for the Indians.

Long before daylight on Monday morning adieus were said and the two young adventurers turned into the frozen, silent wastes to the northward, Bob in the lead making a rapid pace, Shad following, and each hauling his toboggan.

XVI

ALONE WITH THE INDIANS

At the edge of every frozen marsh and lake Ungava Bob paused to reconnoitre for caribou, but always to be disappointed, and when he and Shad halted at sundown to pitch their night camp, no living thing had they seen.

Shad's small wedge tent was stretched between two trees, snow was banked around it on the outside, and a thick bed of boughs spread upon the snow within. Two short butts of logs were placed at proper distance apart near the entrance and inside the tent, the tent stove set upon them, and with an ample supply of wood cut and split, their night shelter, with a roaring fire in the stove, was warm and cosy.

The days that followed were equally as disappointing. The smooth white surface of the snow was unmarred by track of beast or bird. No living creature stirred. No sound broke the silence. The frozen world was dead, and the silence was the silence of the sepulchre.

"It's so quiet you can hear it," Shad remarked once when they halted to make tea.

"Aye," said Bob, "'tis that, and they's no footin' of even rabbits. I can't make un out."

On the afternoon of the third day after leaving the river tilt, they came upon the southern shore of the Great Lake of the Indians, and turning westward presently discovered Sishetakushin's wigwam.

The travellers received a warm welcome from the Indians. Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn were indeed noisy and effusive in their greeting. Manikawan radiated pleasure, but she and her mother, a large, fat woman, as became their status as women, remained in the background.

The Indians had killed some caribou early in the season, and jerked the meat. They had just killed a bear whose winter den they had discovered, and over the fire was a kettle of stewing beaver meat, upon which they feasted their visitors.

At the proper time Bob presented them with tea, Shad gave them each some tobacco, and then Bob told them of his proposed trading project.

"My people will be glad," said Sishetakushin, "and you will have much trade."

It developed in the course of conversation that the Indians were preparing to move at once to the Lake of Willows (Petitsikapau), to the northwest, in the hope of meeting caribou, for none had been seen by them since those they had killed in early fall.

They were to cache some of their provisions near the Great Lake; and when they had made a sufficient kill in the North to supply them with food, were to return to their cache near the Great Lake to trap martens, for in the more northerly country, where wide barrens take the place of forests, martens are rarely to be found.

"Bob, here's a chance I've been hoping for," said Shad, when Bob interpreted to him the Indians' plan. "Do you think they would be willing to let me go with them until their return here, if I gave them some tobacco?"

"They's no tellin', Shad, how long they'll be away," suggested Bob.

"But I want to go if they'll let me go. Please ask them," insisted Shad.

"But they may not be findin' deer, an' if they don't find un they won't be comin' back here till th' end o' winter. You don't want t' be with un th' rest o' th' winter, Shad; 'twill be rougher cruisin' than with us," Bob warned.

"Ask them. I'm going if they'll have me along;" and Shad displayed in his tone a suggestion of resentment that Bob should question the advisability of anything upon which he had determined.

The Indians discussed the matter at some length before finally giving Bob an affirmative decision.

"They says you can go, Shad, but they'll not promise t' be back here for two months, whatever, an' when they does they'll come t' th' river tilt with you," said Bob.

"Good! It'll give me some change of experience, and the chance to study their life and customs that I've wanted;" and Shad was elated with the prospect.

Partly because of the earnest solicitation of his Indian friends, but chiefly in the hope of dissuading Shad from his determination, Bob remained in the Indian camp the remainder of the week. While they still maintained a degree of reserve toward Shad, Bob was treated in every respect as one of them.

Manikawan made him the object of her particular attention. She waited upon him as the Indian women wait upon their lords, anticipating his needs.

In expectation of his coming she had, after her return from the river tilt, made for him a beautiful coat of caribou skins. The hair, left on the skins, made a warm lining, while the outside of the coat, tanned as soft and white as chamois, was decorated with designs painted in colours. Attached to it was a hood of wolfskin.

Accompanying the coat was a pair of long, close-fitting buckskin leggings, and a pair of buckskin moccasins, both decorated, and the whole comprising the typical winter suit of a Nascaupee hunter.

Manikawan's attentions were extremely irritating to Bob, but he could not well avoid them, and to have declined to accept the gift which she had made especially for him in anticipation of his coming, would have caused her keen disappointment. So he accepted them and donned them, to her evident delight.

"Shad," said Bob, on the Sunday evening after their arrival "I has t' start back in th' mornin', an' you better be goin' with me."

"No," insisted Shad, "I'll stick to the Indians for a while."

The following morning Bob bade them adieu.

"Take care of yourself, old man," said Shad. "I'll see you in a month or so."

"I hopes so, Shad, an' you take care o' yourself, now. I'm fearin' t' leave you, Shad."

"Oh, I know how to look out for myself," declared Shad. "Don't worry about me."

Turning to Manikawan, who stood mutely waiting for the word of farewell that she hoped Bob would bestow upon her, he said, in the Indian tongue:

"White Brother of the Snow must go to his hunting grounds. He is leaving behind him his friend. Will Manikawan minister to his friend as she would to him? Will she see that no harm comes to him?"

"Manikawan will do as White Brother of the Snow directs," she answered. "She will minister to his friend's needs. She will make for his friend the nabwe. His friend will not be hungry. Manikawan will care for him until White Brother of the Snow is weary of hunting and comes again to Sishetakushin's lodge. She will do this because he is the friend of White Brother of the Snow."

Then Bob turned into the white, frigid waste to the southward, and Shad was alone with the Indians.

XVII

CHRISTMAS AT THE RIVER TILT

Christmas fell on Thursday that year, and it had been arranged that the trappers, by turning back on their trails the preceding Saturday instead of waiting as was their custom until Monday, and by slighting some of the less important sections of the trails on their return trip, should gather at the river tilt on Wednesday evening, in order to celebrate the holiday with a feast.

It was late on Christmas eve when Ungava Bob, returning from the Indian camp, drew his toboggan into the clearing in the centre of which stood the river tilt. Its roof was scarcely visible in the moonlight above the high drifted snow. He had hoped that some of the others might have arrived before him, but no smoke issued from the pipe, and fresh drifted, untrodden snow around the door told him that he was the first.

It was fearfully cold. Rime filled the air. The deerskin coat which Manikawan had given him, and which he wore, was thick coated with frost.

He paused before the door and stood for a moment to painfully pick away the ice that had accumulated upon his eyelashes, partially closing his eyelids, and discovered that his nose and cheeks were frost-bitten. He drew his right hand from its mitten, and holding his nose in the bare palm, covered the exposed hand with the mittened palm of the other, quickly rubbing the frosted parts with the warm palm to restore circulation.

Presently, satisfied that the frost had been removed from nose and cheeks, he kicked off his snowshoes, shovelled the accumulated snow from the doorway with one of them, set the snowshoes on end in the snow at one side, and entering the tilt lighted a candle and kindled a fire in the stove.

Taking the kettle from the stove and an axe from a corner, he passed out of the tilt and down to the river, chopped open the water hole, filled the kettle, and returning set it over to heat.

Unpacking his toboggan and stowing the things away, he leaned it end up against the tilt, brought a bucket of water from the river for culinary use, removed his deerskin coat, and settled down in the now comfortable tilt to prepare supper and await his friends.

Presently he heard a movement outside, and a moment later Dick Blake poked his head in at the door.

"Evenin', Bob," he greeted. "Glad t' see you. Th' tilt smells fine an' warm! Where's Shad?" he asked, entering and rubbing his hands over the stove.

"Stoppin' wi' th' Injuns. I were tryin' t' get he t' come back, but he thinks he wants t' go huntin' deer with un, an' stays," explained Bob. "Any fur?"

"Only one marten an' one otter, but they's good uns. No sign o' foxes. But foxes won't stay when th' rabbits goes;" and Dick went out to unpack.

Presently Bill Campbell arrived, and a little later Ed Matheson drew his long form through the low doorway, his red beard laden with ice.

"Where's Shad?" he asked, after greetings were exchanged.

Bob explained Shad's absence.

"Well, now!" he exclaimed. "Shad must ha' been gettin' light-headed t' do that. Well, he's welcome t' 'bide 'long with Injuns if he wants to, but I'm thinkin' by about now he's wishin' he was where he ain't. An' by t'morrer he'll have boiled goose an' fried pa'tridges on his mind, an' wishin' harder 'n ever he were back here in th' river tilt."

"He were wantin' th' hunt, an' now he may not find un so bad," said Bob.

"He won't be havin' no feather-bed time cruisin' about with Injuns," insisted Ed. "Shad's gettin' wonderful peevish an' sot in his way lately. He's thinkin' o' th' fine grub an' good times he's been havin' t' that college place he talks about, instead o' thinkin' o' how he likes rabbit meat three times a day an' betwixt meals when you an' him was 'bidin' a time on th' island over here because you wasn't havin' wings t' fly off, an' they wa'n't no other way t' get off till th' Injun lass takes you off."

"Shad weren't gettin' peeved," objected Bob, ready to defend his absent friend. "He were just disappointed at findin' no huntin', an' he 'bides with th' Injuns t' get some deer."

"Maybe so, but Shad'll be glad enough t' get back t' th' river tilt, an' when he is gettin' back he'll be findin' it fine. He'll be thinkin' o' th' tough cruisin' with th' Injuns instead o' th' grub at his college place, an' that'll make he think 'tis fine in th' tilts. That's the way it mostly is with folks. They always wants somethin' they ain't got, an' when they gets un they wants somethin' else. An' like's not then they wants what they was havin' first, because they can't have un now."

Ed paused to pour a cup of tea and help himself to pork.

"Shad's a good mate, though," he continued magnanimously. "He ain't gettin' used t' th' bush yet. That's all's th' matter with he. He'll get used t' un after a bit, an' then he won't be gettin' peeved like he is now."

"I'm wishin' he weren't stayin' back with th' Injuns now. I'm fearin' he'll be havin' a hard time of un--an' I'm fearin' he may be gettin' in trouble not knowin' how t' take un," Bob remarked solicitously.

"I'm wonderful sorry, now, he stays wi' th' Injuns. 'Twould be fine t' have he here for Christmas," agreed Ed, as he drew a plug of black tobacco from his pocket and began to shave some of it into the hollow of his hand, preparatory to filling his pipe.

"Any fur this trip?" asked Bob.

"Two martens--both fine uns. Not so bad. How'd you make un, Dick?"

"I gets one marten an' shoots an otter," answered Dick.

"You gettin' any, Bill?" asked Ed, turning to Bill, who was reclining in one of the bunks and smoking in luxurious contentment.

"Aye, one marten, an' I shoots a wolf last evenin'--a wonderful poor wolf, an' his skin ain't much account. Three of un were after me on th' trail all day, but I only gets one."

"Three wolves, now--an' poor uns," commented Dick. "Wolves ain't follerin' a man all day unless they's hungry, an' they ain't like t' be hungry where they's deer."

"No," agreed Ed, who had lighted his pipe, one moccasined heel drawn up on the edge of the bunk upon which he lounged, the other long leg stretched out. "Wolves follers th' deer, but when they ain't no deer t' faller they don't faller un. Which means they ain't no deer in this part o' th' country, an' so they just naturally fallers Bill as th' next best meat."

"An' bein' poor means they's hungry, an' bein' hungry means they's lickin' their chops for Bill," continued Dick.

"Were it night, now?" asked Ed.

"No, 'twere broad day," answered Bill, undisturbed.

"Now if 'twere night, I'd say they was follerin' you because your red hair lights th' trail up for un."

"'Tain't no redder 'n your'n," retorted Bill.

"Never mind un, Bill," said Bob sympathetically. "Ed's jealous because your hair's curly an' his 'n ain't."

"Now, how about gettin' grub?" suggested Ed, when the laugh had subsided. "They ain't nothin' t' kill, an' we got t' haul grub in from th' Bay. I'm thinkin' t' start down Friday, an' if one o' you wants t' go along, we'll both haul up a load on our flatsleds. How'd you like t' go, Bill? They's a moon, an' by travellin' some at night we'll make th' Bay for th' New Year, goin' light, an' be back by th' first o' February, whatever, with our loads."

"I'd like wonderful well t' go!" answered Bill, elated at the prospect of a visit to the Bay, brief as it would be.

"What you think of un?" asked Ed, addressing Dick and Bob jointly.

"We got t' have grub if we stays on th' trails," agreed Dick, "an' they's no sign o' killin' any meat."

"Aye, we'll all have t' leave th' trails by th' first o' March, whatever, unless some of us goes for grub," said Bob.

"Bill an' me bein' away'll stretch th' grub we has, for Bill be a wonderful eater--" Bill interjected a protest, but Ed, ignoring it, continued: "An' what we hauls back on th' flatsleds'll carry us over th' spring trappin'. We'll be startin' early on Friday. We'll go down your trail an' spring your traps up on th' way out, Bill."

A late breakfast of fried ptarmigans, and a late afternoon dinner of boiled goose, with an evening "snack" of ptarmigan before retiring--the last of the game reserved from the fall shooting--together with camp bread and tea, comprised the Christmas menu.

Directly after breakfast Ed and Bill made ready for packing on their toboggans the light outfit which they were to use on their outward trip; and this done, the four held a service of song in which all joined heartily, and spent the remainder of the day luxuriously lounging in the tilt and telling stories.

Shad was sincerely missed. He had looked forward keenly to the Christmas feast, and many hearty good wishes were expressed for him--that even among the Indians he might pass a pleasant day--that he would not find the hardships so great as his friends had feared--and that he would soon return to them in safety and none the worse for his experiences.

Then the thoughts turned to home, and speculations as to what the far-off loved ones were doing at the moment.

"I'm thinkin' a wonderful lot of home now," said Bob. "Tell Mother an' Father, Ed, I'm safe an' thinkin' of un every day, an' of Emily, away off somewheres in St. Johns t' school. It's makin' me rare lonesome t' think o' home without Emily there. An'--an'--tell Mother, Ed--I never forgets my prayers."

"That I will, lad!" promised Ed heartily. "An' what you wantin' me t' say t' Bessie, now? Tell she about th' Injun lass an' th' fine deerskin coat she's givin' you?"

"Tell Bessie I always carries th' ca'tridge bag she gives me--an' I'm thinkin' how 'tis she that makes un--an' I'll be glad t'--get home t' th' Bay," directed Bob hesitatingly.

"Oh, aye. Glad t' get back t' see th' Bay, I'm thinkin'," laughed Ed.

As Bob and Dick returned to the tilt an hour before daybreak, after watching Ed and Bill disappear down the trail in the still, bitter cold of the starlit morning, Bob remarked:

"I'm feelin' wonderful strange--I'm not knowin' how. 'Tis a lonesomeness--but different--like as if somethin' were goin' t' happen."

"An' I has th' same sort o' feelin'," confessed Dick. "'Tis like th' stillness before a big storm breaks at sea--'tis like as if some one was dyin' clost by."

XVIII

THE SPIRIT OF DEATH GROWS BOLD

When Ungava Bob was gone, Shad Trowbridge returned to the deerskin lodge to think. Now that he was alone with the Indians, he was not at all sure that he did not regret his decision to remain with them and share their uncertain fortunes.

For a moment the thought occurred to him that he might even yet follow Bob's trail and overtake him in his night camp. But he thrust the impulse aside at once as unworthy consideration. He had come to his decision, and he was determined to remain and play the game to a finish.

He craved action and excitement, and the glamour of romance that surrounded the Indians and their nomadic life had attracted him. It was this, together with the human instinct to play at games of chance, and the primordial instinct slumbering in every strong man's breast to throw off restraint and, untrammelled, match his brains and strength against the forces of untamed nature, that had led Shad to adopt the red man's life for a period which he believed would not exceed three or four weeks at most.

In preparation for departure the following day, the Indians erected upon an elevated flat rock, which winds had swept bare of snow, a log shelter some five feet square and five feet high. After lining the bottom and sides of this shelter with spruce boughs, a quantity of jerked venison and dried fish was deposited in it, the top covered with boughs, and the roof, consisting of logs laid closely side by side and weighted with stones, was placed in position. This precaution was taken to protect the cache from marauding animals.

In the dim light of the cold December morning the deerskin covering of the wigwam was stripped from the poles, folded and packed upon the toboggans, together with the simple housekeeping equipment of the Indians, and a sufficient quantity of fresh bear's meat and jerked venison to sustain them for a fortnight.

Immediately the march was begun toward the Lake of Willows, Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn in turn taking the lead and breaking the trail, the others following, single file.

Day after day they pushed on and still on through scattered forests, across wide barrens and over frozen lakes, always on the alert for caribou but always disappointed.

Once a small flock of ptarmigans was seen along the willow brush that lined a stream. Shad drew his shotgun from his toboggan, but the Indians would not permit him to use it, and in disgust he returned it to its place while he watched Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn kill the birds with bows and arrows. He marvelled at their skill. Indeed, he did not observe a single arrow go astray of its mark.

Eleven birds were secured in this way--the first game they had seen, and the last they were to see for several days.

A dead, awful cold settled upon the earth. The very atmosphere was frozen. Rime in shimmering, glittering particles hung suspended in space, and covered bushes, trees, and rocks--scintillating in the sunlight and seeming to intensify the cold.

The few brief hours of sunshine were disregarded. The sun rose only to tantalise. For three or four hours each day it hung close to the horizon, then dropped again below the southwestern hills; and its rays gave out no warmth.

No sign of game was seen near the Lake of Willows, and no halt was made. The life of the Indians depended upon the killing of caribou. The little cache of jerked venison and fish left near the Great Lake would scarcely have sustained them a month. The few ptarmigans killed now and again were of small assistance. The food they hauled was nearly exhausted.

Then came a period of storm. For a week snow fell and gales blew with such terrific fury that no living thing could have existed in the open, and during this period a halt was unavoidable.

Once a day a small ration was doled out--pitifully small--enough to tantalise appetite, but not to still hunger. Shad was consumed with a craving for food. He could think of nothing but food. His days on the trails and in the tilts with the trappers were remembered as days of luxury and feasting. He wondered if Bob and the others had thought of him when they ate their Christmas dinner of geese and ptarmigans. "Oh, for one delicious meal of pork and camp bread. Oh, for one night of the luxurious warmth of the river tilt!"

When the storm abated sufficiently to permit them to continue their journey, he moved his legs mechanically, even forgetting at last that the effort was painful. An insidious weakness was taking possession of him. It was an effort to draw his lightly-laden toboggan. It made him dizzy to swing an axe when he assisted Manikawan to cut wood for the fire. His knees gave way under him when he sat down.

Manikawan's plump cheeks were sunken. Her eyes were growing big and staring. Her mother had lost half her bulk, and Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn were also noticeably affected. They no longer laughed and seldom spoke.

As one performing a duty that must not under any circumstance or condition be neglected, Manikawan conscientiously looked after Shad's welfare; but still she treated him with the same degree of dignity and reserve, if not aloofness, that she had always maintained toward him. He realised that what she did for him she did because he was the friend of her beloved White Brother of the Snow, and not for his own sake--as a dog will guard the thing which its master directs it to guard, faithfully and untiringly, for the master's sake, but with no other attachment for the thing itself.

He wondered why they did not return to their cache on the Great Lake after the long storm, and then it occurred to him that probably their destination was the trading post at Ungava, of which Bob had told him.

On the afternoon of the second day after the storm, they came upon a single wigwam. Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn looked into it and passed on. Shad raised the flap, and peering in saw the emaciated figure of an old Indian. He was quite stark and dead, his wide-open eyes staring vacantly into space. He had been abandoned to die.

That evening Shad stumbled over an object in the snow. He stooped to examine it in the starlight, and was horrified to discover the dead body of a woman.

The following morning, as they plodded wearily forward under the faint light of the stars, they came suddenly upon a group of wigwams. Men, women, and children came out to meet them--an emaciated, starved, unkempt horde that had more the appearance of ghouls and skeletons than human beings. Some of them tottered as they walked, some fell in the snow and with difficulty regained their feet.

"Atuk! Atuk! Have you found the atuk?" was the cry from all--a hopeless cry of desperation, as they crowded around the travellers.

"We have not found the atuk," answered Sishetakushin.

Some heard him stoically, others staggered hopelessly away to their wigwams, others wailed:

"The Great Spirit of the Sky is angry. He has sent all the spirits to destroy us. The Spirit of Hunger--the Gaunt Gray Wolf--is at our back. The raven, the Black Spirit of Death, is ready to attack us. The Spirit of the Tempest torments us. The Spirits of the Forest and of the Barrens mock us. The Great Spirit of the Sky has driven away the atuk, and our people are starving. Many of our people are dead. Four of our hunters now lie dead in their lodges."

Shad Trowbridge could not understand what was said, but he could not fail to understand the situation.

For some inexplicable reason the caribou, upon which the Indians depended for food, had disappeared from the land. All living things save these starving wretches had vanished.

For twenty-four hours not a mouthful of food had passed Shad's own lips, and a sickening dread engulfed his soul.*

* This was the winter of 1890-1891, known as "the year of starvation," when for some unknown reason the caribou failed to appear in their accustomed haunts, and as a result one out of every three of the Indians of northern Labrador perished of starvation.

XIX

THE CACHE ON THE LAKE

Shad Trowbridge stood dazed, as one in a dream--a horrid, awful dream. He looked through a haze, and what he saw was distorted, unreal, terrible. The suffering creatures about him were spectral phantoms of the nether world, the shimmering rime, a symbol of death, the endless snow the white robe of the grave quickly to cover them all.

A sudden stillness fell upon the camp, to be presently broken by the agonised scream of a woman, shrill and startling, followed by wailings and melancholy moans. The Spirit of Death had snatched away her favourite son.

A sickening nausea overtook Shad, and he sank upon his toboggan, faint and dizzy with an overpowering weakness. His imagination was getting the better of him.

It is always dangerous and sometimes fatal for one to permit the imagination to assert itself in seasons of peril. Will power to put away thoughts of to-morrow, to think only of to-day, to do to-day the thing which necessity requires, coupled with a determination never to abandon hope, is a paramount essential for the successful explorer to possess.

In this moment of hopeless surrender Shad felt Manikawan's hand rest lightly upon his shoulder for an instant, and looking up he saw her standing before him, tall, straight, commanding, and as she looked that day on the river bank when she bade him and Bob wait for her return to free them from their island prison.

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow is not a coward. He is not afraid of the Spirit of Hunger. He is not afraid of the Spirit of Death. He is brave. He once outwitted the Matchi Manitu of the River. He will outwit the Spirit of Hunger. He will outwit the Spirit of Death. The friend of White Brother of the Snow is brave. He is not afraid to die."

The words were unintelligible to him, but their import was unmistakable. She, a young Indian maiden, was offering him encouragement, and recalling him to his manhood.

He arose to his feet, ashamed that she had read his mind, ashamed that she had found it necessary to recall him from a lapse into his foolish weakness which must have seemed to her like cowardice.

But he remembered now that he was a man--a white man--and because he was a white man, the physical equal and mental superior of any savage there. Looking into Manikawan's eyes, he made an unspoken vow that she should never again have cause to chide him.

Dawn was breaking, and in the growing light a half-dozen lodges were to be seen. At one side and alone stood a deerskin tent of peculiar form. It was a high tent of exceedingly small circumference, and where the smoke opening was provided and the poles protruded at the top of the ordinary wigwam, this was tightly closed. It was the medicine lodge of the shaman.

Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn had entered one of the lodges immediately after the tumult caused by their arrival had subsided, and Manikawan now followed her mother into another lodge. There were no Indians visible. The moans of the grief-stricken mother, rising above the voices of men in the lodge which Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn had entered, were the only sounds.

The air was bitterly cold, but the tragedy enacting around him had for a time rendered Shad quite insensible to it. When he did finally realise that, standing inactive, he was numbed and chilled, he still lingered a little before joining Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn, dreading to enter the famine-stricken lodges.

At last, however, necessity drove him to do so, and within the lodge he discovered that a council was in progress. In the centre a fire burned, and around it the men, solemn and dignified, sat in a circle. One after another of the Indians spoke in earnest debate. They were considering what action they should take to preserve their lives, and Shad, as deeply interested as any, felt aggrieved that he could not immediately learn the final result of the conference, which came to an end as the sun cast its first feeble rays over the barren ranges that marked the southeastern horizon.

When the council closed the Indians filed out of the lodge, and one, a tall old man, fantastically attired in skins, entered the medicine lodge alone, carefully closing the entrance after him to exclude any ray of light.

Immediately drum beats were heard within the tent, accompanied by a low groaning and moaning, which gradually increased in volume and pitch until presently it became a high, penetrating, blood-curdling screech. This continued for perhaps half an hour, the drum beats never ceasing their monotonous rat-tat-tat.

The shaman, or medicine man, thus working himself into a frenzy, at length believed he saw within the lodge the ghostly form of the particular Matchi Manitu, or evil spirit, responsible for the disappearance of the caribou and the resulting famine.

This spirit's wrath it was believed had for some reason unknown to the Indians been aroused against them. Only the shaman could get into communication with the spirit, and learn from it what course the Indians would be required to pursue to placate its wrath, and remove its curse.

When the appearance of the spirit was announced, the shaman began to supplicate and implore the Matchi Manitu to withdraw from the people the pursuit of Famine; to return the caribou to the land; and to preserve the lives of the dying.

Presently in tones of joy the shaman announced that he had succeeded in enlisting the services of the Matchi Manitu, and with the announcement the din within the lodge ceased, and for several minutes mysterious whisperings were heard.

Suddenly the shaman threw over the lodge, and in a state of exhaustion tottered forward. Still under the influence of the paroxysms into which he had worked himself, he delivered in a wandering, disconnected jumble of meaningless sentences the demands of the Matchi Manitu. These consisted of many unreasonable and impossible feats that the people were required to accomplish before the Spirit of Starvation--the Gaunt Gray Wolf--would cease to follow upon their trail.

The Indians began at once to break camp. Sishetakushin had reported no caribou to the southward. Their only remaining hope was to reach the haven of Ungava post to the northward; and they were to begin the life-and-death struggle northward at once--a struggle in which many were to fall.

A sense of vast relief was experienced by Shad when Sishetakushin resumed the march. Famished and weak as he was, this was inexpressibly preferable to a continuance with the starving crowd, and he turned his back upon the camp, little caring whence their trail led.

For a while they continued northward upon the frozen bed of a stream, which they had been following for several days, then a sharp turn was made to the eastward, and as the sun was setting they came upon the ice of a wide lake.

At the end of a half-hour of slow plodding across an arm of the lake, they entered the edge of sparsely wooded forest and halted. Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn began at once to remove the snow from the top of what appeared to be a high drift, and a little below the surface uncovered the roof of a cache similar to the one they had made on the shores of the Great Lake of the Indians, where Shad and Ungava Bob had found them.

Shad's heart gave a bound when the object of the journey was revealed to him. Here was food and promise of life! And Bob's words, so often repeated when they were stranded on the island, flashed into his mind:

"It's th' Lard's way. He's watchin' you when you thinks He's losin' track o' you. He's takin' care o' you an' you does your best t' take care o' yourself."

Manikawan and her mother stretched the deerskin cover upon wigwam poles used the previous summer and still standing near the lake, and Shad cleared the snow from the interior of the wigwam, while the women broke boughs and laid the bed.

In the meantime, Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn opened the cache and transferred its precious contents to the wigwam. A fire was kindled, and in the cosy warmth of their shelter they broke their fast, which had now extended over a period of thirty-six hours.

The small portion of dried caribou meat doled out to each was far from satisfying. Some of the tea which Ungava Bob had given the Indians still remained. A kettle of this was brewed, and it served to stimulate and warm them. Then they lighted their pipes and for a time smoked in silence.

At length Sishetakushin, turning to Mookoomahn, began:

"On the Lake of the Beaver to the northward we have a small store of atuk weas (deer's meat). We also have there the cover of a lodge. Three suns will pass before we can reach this store of food. On the Great Lake we have another store.

"Sishetakushin and the woman will travel to the Lake of the Beaver. With the store of provisions and the lodge which we find on the Lake of the Beaver we will travel northward to the lodge of the white man, where the water of the river joins the big sea water, and where we shall find food.

"Mookoomahn and the maiden, with the friend of White Brother of the Snow, will travel southward to the Great Lake. Mookoomahn will show the white man the way to the lodge of White Brother of the Snow. Then he will return to the Great Lake and trap the marten and the mink.

"When the sun grows strong, and drives away the Spirit of the Frost, Mookoomahn will travel northward to the Lake of the Beaver. There he will find Sishetakushin and the woman to welcome him. He will take his food from the waters as he travels.

"The maiden will remain in the lodge of White Brother of the Snow. Sishetakushin gives her to White Brother of the Snow. She is his. White Brother of the Snow is of our people. He will be glad, and the maiden will be glad. White Brother of the Snow has white man's food in great store. Mookoomahn will not be hungry."

"Mookoomahn will do as Sishetakushin directs," answered Mookoomahn.

For a time all smoked in silence, then Sishetakushin resumed:

"Of the dried meat on the toboggan Mookoomahn and those who are with him will eat but once during each sun. They will eat little. If they eat much, the meat will soon be gone, and the Spirit of Starvation will overtake them and destroy them."

"Mookoomahn and those that are with him will do as Sishetakushin directs," said Mookoomahn.

A series of signs and pantomime conveyed to Shad the substance of Sishetakushin's remarks. He understood that on the morrow the party was to separate. That he with Mookoomahn and Manikawan were to return to the Great Lake, and that they had been cautioned to husband their provisions.

He surveyed the small bundle of jerked venison with misgivings. Even with one light meal a day he calculated that it could not last them above three weeks. Their journey from the cache on the Great Lake to their present position had consumed a month, including a period of one week when they were stormbound.

Should they be fortunate and encounter no storms, the food, sparingly doled out, might serve to sustain them. If storms delayed them, it certainly would not.

In any case their lives must hang in the balance until the cache was reached, unless game were encountered in the meantime, which seemed highly improbable.

A meagre meal was served at an early hour the following morning. As usual, camp was broken long before day, and then came the farewells.

The parting between Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn was affecting, that between the women more stoical. Shad regretfully shook the hands of the old Indian and his wife. They had been friends to him, and he had no expectation that he should ever see them again.

Then Shad and his companions turned southward into the wide wastes of frozen desolation that lay between him and his friends. It was to be a journey of tragic experiences--a journey that was to try his metal as it had never yet been tried.

THE FOLK AT WOLF BIGHT

The Grays were very lonely and the little cabin at Wolf Bight seemed desolate and deserted indeed during the first days following the departure of the trappers for the interior. Mrs. Gray and Emily cried a little, and often Emily would say:

"I wonders where Bob is now, Mother, an' what he's doin'?"

"He's workin' up th' river, lass, an' th' dirty weather's makin' th' trackin' an' portagin' wonderful hard for un," she would answer, when it stormed; or, when the sun shone, "They's havin' a fine day for travellin' now."

But presently the preparations for Emily's departure for school occupied their attention to the exclusion of all else, and they forgot for a time their loneliness.

Her going was to be an event of vast importance. It was an innovation, not only in their household but in the community, for never before had any of the young people of the Bay attended school; and never before, save on the occasion when Emily had been taken to the St. Johns hospital the previous year, to undergo an operation, had any of the girls--or women, either, for that matter--been farther from home than Fort Pelican.

When Bob came into his little fortune through the salvage of the trading schooner, "Maid of the North," Mrs. Gray had urged that Richard rest from the trail for one season, and at the same time give the animals an opportunity to increase. This he had done, and during the previous winter, when Bob also was at home, he and Bob had occupied their time in the woods with the axe and pit saw, cutting a quantity of timber and planking.

There was no immediate need of this timber, and when Bob was gone Richard determined to utilise it in the construction of a small schooner, in anticipation of the trading operations to begin the following year. Such a vessel would be a necessity in transporting supplies from Fort Pelican to the store at Wolf Bight.

Therefore, he began at once the work of laying the keel. There were nearly three months at his disposal before he would go out upon his trapping trail, and in this time, hoping to accomplish much, he remained at his task from early morning until dusk drove him from it. Thus occupied, Mrs. Gray and Emily seldom saw him, save at meal hours and after candle-light in the evening, and this made them doubly lonesome.

One day late in August, Douglas Campbell sailed his boat over to Wolf Bight to spend the day with his friends and to announce that a week later he would come for Emily to take her to Fort Pelican, where they were to connect with the mail boat for St. Johns.

This recalled the near approach of Emily's departure, and the days that followed passed with amazing rapidity. Emily's new woollen frock--the first woollen frock she had ever possessed--needed still some finishing touches. It was to be her Sunday dress--to be worn at church, where there would be many fine people to see her--and as pretty as the mother's skill and care could make it.

Then there were the print frocks for everyday wear, to be freshly laundered and packed with other clothing into a new wooden chest which her father had made for her; and the innumerable last things to be done, which kept Emily and her mother in a continuous state of flurry and excitement.

Quite too soon Emily's last day at home dawned, and, true to his appointment, Douglas Campbell arrived during the afternoon. He looked very grand and dignified and altogether unlike himself in his suit of grey tweed. He wore this suit only on those rare occasions--usually at intervals of three or four years--when business called him to St. Johns, and Emily had but once before seen him so strangely attired.

He looked so strange and unnatural--so unlike the good old Douglas that she loved, in moleskin trousers and pea-jacket or adicky--that she felt he was somehow different, and that the world was going all topsy-turvy.

And then for the first time there came to her a full realisation of the great change that was to take place in her life--that she was going far from home and into a strange land--that for many, many months she was to see neither her father nor her mother--that she was to live among strangers who cared nothing for her--that she would be separated from those who loved her and all that she held dear in the world. A great ache came into her heart--the first heart-hunger of the homesick--and she slipped away behind the curtain to throw herself upon her little white bed and seek relief in stifled sobs.

Presently as she lay there, weeping quietly to herself, loud exclamations of hearty welcome from her father and mother as some one entered the door caused her to sit up and listen. Then she recognised Tom Black's voice, and heard Bessie asking:

"Where's Emily?"

This was splendid! Bessie had come to spend the night! And, quickly drying her tears and forgetting her heartache, Emily rushed out to greet her friend and to find that the whole Black family were there--Tom, the motherly Mrs. Black, and Bessie.

"Oh, Emily, I just had t' come t' see you off!" exclaimed Bessie, as the two girls rushed together and hugged each other in delight. "I coaxes, an' coaxes, an' coaxes Father t' bring me over, an' he just teases me an' says he's busy, an' Mr. McDonald can't spare he, till this mornin' he says we're comin'. An' all th' time he an' Mother's plannin' t' come!"

"'Twon't do t' tell a maid everything you plans t' do," Tom chuckled.

Bessie pursed up her red lips, and tossing her head at him laughed gaily, showing her dimples.

"Oh, but you just had t' come anyway, for I'd never give you a bit o' peace if you hadn't."

Her cheeks flushed with excitement and her eyes sparkling with pleasure, Tom looked at her proudly, and could not refrain from the remark:

"She ain't a very humbly lass, now be she, Richard?"

"Now, Father, stop teasin' Bessie," cautioned Mrs. Black. "He's always teasin' th' lass."

"I'm just dyin' t' see your things, Emily!" exclaimed Bessie, as Emily took her friend's bonnet and wraps. "An, I couldn't let you go without seein' you. An' I'm goin' t' stay awhile, too, with your mother. She'll be so lonesome without somebody t' talk to when you goes."

"Oh, Bessie! How wonderful glad I am o' that! I were just thinkin' how lonesome Mother were goin' t' be with me an' Bob both gone--an'--an' 'twere makin' me feel bad;" and Emily brushed away a tear.

"We'll not be lettin' your mother, nor father, either, get lonesome," said Douglas, patting her shoulder gently and looking down in his kindly way into her face. "Bessie'll be 'bidin' here till I comes back in October, an' then she'll be comin' again after th' New Year for a long stop. An' I'll be comin' once every week, whatever."

"Oh, I'm hopin' so!" Mrs. Gray exclaimed. "I'm not darin' t' think about how 'twill be when Emily's gone."

"Now I knows, an' Tom knows; an' we was talkin' t' Douglas about un when he were over t' th' post, an' we were sayin', 'Now Bessie'll have t' go over an' 'bide awhile with Mary when Emily's gone,'" said Mrs. Black.

"An' you never tells me, an' just lets me tease t' come!" pouted Bessie.

"We were wantin' t' surprise you, lass. An'," Mrs. Black continued, addressing Mrs. Gray, "I knows what 'tis t' be alone, now, an' th' men folks is all in th' bush. I used t' be alone before Tom takes th' place t' th' post; but now we has plenty o' company."

"'Tis wonderful good an' thoughtful of you!" Mrs. Gray exclaimed heartily. "Now set in an' have a cup o' tea an' a bite. You must need un after th' cruise over."

The evening was spent in chatting and visiting and looking over Emily's new clothes. Neither Emily nor Bessie--both overcome with excitement--slept much, however, that night, for they had a world to talk about as they lay in bed--but most of all the great and wonderful experiences Emily was to have.

Emily and her mother clung to each other, and Bessie to both of them, and cried and cried, when the time for parting came the following morning, until finally Douglas and Richard were compelled to draw Emily gently into the boat. Then motherly Mrs. Black, surreptitiously brushing tears from her own eyes, put her arm around Mrs. Gray and soothingly urged:

"Don't be cryin', Mary. Th' maid's goin' t' be all right, an' they's nothin' to cry for. 'Twon't be so long till you has she back."

Richard had the hull of the little schooner well under way when the mid-October cold forced him to abandon the work until the following summer, and he was preparing to set out upon his trail when Douglas appeared one evening, fresh from St. Johns, to report Emily comfortably settled in the home of a hospitable family near the school she was attending, and that she was immensely interested in her studies and fairly well contented, though a little lonesome at times for home.

Douglas evidently had something on his mind that troubled him. Once Mrs. Gray asked if he were ailing, but he denied anything but the best of health. Finally, however, as a disagreeable duty that he must perform, the kind-hearted old trapper said:

"I'm not knowin' just how t' tell you--'twill be a wonderful hard blow t' th' lad--th' bank where Bob were puttin' his money has broke, an' I'm fearin' th' money's all lost."

"Lost! Lost!" exclaimed Richard and Mrs. Gray together.

"Aye," said Douglas, "lost."

Then he explained fully the failure of the bank, in which he also had a small amount on deposit, and the improbability of any of the depositors recovering more than a nominal percentage of their deposits, and even that doubtful.

"Well," said Mrs. Gray, "'twill be wonderful hard on th' lad, an' he countin' so on th' tradin' business."

"Aye," repeated Richard, "wonderful hard on he. Wonderful hard an' disappointin', After all his plannin' an' hopin' an' thinkin' about un."

"An' Emily's schoolin' charge! How now be we goin' t' pay un?" asked Mrs. Gray.

"Don't worry about that, now," said Douglas. "I were wantin' she t' go, an' I were th' first t' say for she t' go, an' I'll see, now, about un this year, whatever. Don't worry about th' schoolin', now."

"But we can't be havin' you pay un," remonstrated Richard.

"Well, now, don't worry about un," insisted Douglas. "We'll see. We'll see."

They lapsed into silence for a little, when Bessie remarked:

"'Tisn't so bad, now. 'Tis bad t' lose th' money, an' 'twill be hard an' disappointin' t' Bob, but he's a wonderful able lad--they's no other lad in th' Bay so able as Bob. He's a fine lot o' traps on his new trails, an' he'll not be doin' so bad, now."

"Yes," agreed Douglas, "he be, now, a wonderful able lad."

"And," Richard spoke up, beginning to see the brighter side of the situation, "Bob owns un, an' he's havin' no debt, an' he's payin' up all our debts. They's no other folk o' th' Bay as well off as we be."

"I weren't thinkin' of un that way. I were just thinkin' of how hard 'twill be for Bob--givin' up th' tradin'," Mrs. Gray explained. "But we has a lot t' be thankful for, an', as Bessie says, Bob's young an' wonderful able."

But nevertheless it was a hard blow--a disheartening blow--to all of them. Bob had planned so much for the future, he was still planning and dreaming of his career as a trader, and building air castles--away up there in the desolate white wilderness.

This meant, instead of the realisation of those dreams, a tedious, interminable tramping, year after year, of the fur trails, an always uncertain, a never-ending, struggle for the bare necessities of life. A single bad year would throw them again into debt; two bad years in succession would plunge them so hopelessly into debt that the most earnest effort for the remainder of his life would not relieve Bob of its burden.

THE RIFLED CACHE

The cold of February, intense, searching, deadly, tightened its grip upon the wilderness, sapping the life of the three struggling human derelicts--for derelicts Shad Trowbridge felt himself and his two companions to be--as they fought their way, now hopefully, now despondently, but ever with slower pace, as strength ebbed, toward the precious cache on the shores of the Great Lake; and with the slower progress that growing weakness demanded, it was quickly found necessary to reduce by half the already minute portion of dried caribou meat allotted to each.

Everything in the world save only themselves seemed to have been frozen into oblivion. There was no sound, save the monotonous swish, swish of their own snowshoes, to disturb the silence--a silence otherwise as absolute and vast as the uttermost depths of the grave.

Storms overtook them, but they mercifully were storms of short duration, and seldom interfered with hours of travel. Staggering, but ever struggling forward, they forced their way painfully on and on, over pitiless windswept ridges, across life-sapping, desolate barrens, through scarcely less inhospitable forests. Exerting their waning strength to its utmost, they never stopped, save when exhausted nature compelled them to halt for brief intervals of sleep and rest, to recuperate their wasted energies.

Shad Trowbridge came finally to wonder vaguely if he were not dead, this another existence, and be doomed to keep going and going through endless ages over endless reaches of snow. To his numbed intellect it seemed that he had been thus going for months and years.

Like a vague, pleasant dream of something experienced in a previous life, he remembered Bob and the tilts, Wolf Bight farther back, and the dear old college. What would the fellows say *now*, if they were to see him--the fellows who had known him in that former, happier life?

At other times he fancied he heard Ungava Bob and the others hallooing in the distance, and he would answer in glad, expectant shouts. But there never came a reply.

The first time this occurred Manikawan turned and looked inquiringly at him, through eyes sunk deep in their sockets. When it was repeated later--and he came to hear the voices and to shout to the empty snow wastes at least once every day--she would step to his side, solicitously touch his shoulder and say:

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow hears the voices of the Matchi Manitu of Hunger. Let him close his ears and be deaf, for the Matchi Manitu is mocking him."

Mookoomahn's face was not pleasant to see now; it was horrible--the dark skin was drawn tight over the high cheek bones, the lips shrunken to the gums, and the eyes fallen far back into the skull. His face resembled more than anything else the smoked and dried skull of a mummy.

Shad laughed sometimes when he looked at Mookoomahn's ghastly face, framed in a mass of long, straggling black hair; at other times he was overcome with a heart-rending pity for Mookoomahn that brought tears to his eyes. But tears froze, and were annoying and painful.

Manikawan, too, had changed woefully. The lean, gaunt figure stalking along uncomplainingly with Shad and Mookoomahn had small resemblance to the beautiful, commanding Manikawan that bade Bob and Shad be patient in their imprisonment on the island until she returned to relieve them; or the glowing, happy Manikawan that accompanied Shad and the others to the river tilt after she had accomplished the rescue. Though there still burned within her an unquenchable fire of energy, and she never lagged on the trail, she was no longer the Manikawan of old.

In spite of all the hardships and all the pain, and slowly starving as she was, she never ceased her attention to Shad, and she never once lost her patience with him.

When Shad laughed hysterically and derisively at his fate, as he did sometimes, Manikawan would step to his side, touch him lightly with her hand, and say in the same old voice, lower than of old, but even more musical and sweet:

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow is brave. He is not a coward. He is not afraid to die."

This always had a magical, soothing effect upon Shad. Though he never learned to interpret her language, the touch of the hand, the human note of encouragement in her voice, the light in the eyes that looked into his, never failed to recall him to his manhood and to himself, and to the remembrance of his vow that as a white man he must by mere force of will prove his superiority.

All record of time was lost. But the days were visibly lengthening with each sunrise and sunset, and when the wind did not blow to freeze them, and the snow did not drift to blind them, the sunshine gave forth a hint--just a hint--of warmth.

One day the dead silence was suddenly startled by the long-drawn-out howl of a wolf. It was a blood-curdling and almost human cry, and Shad likened it to the agonised cry of a lost soul in the depths of eternal torment. Again and again it sounded, then suddenly ceasing, Shad discovered the animal itself trotting leisurely after them far in the rear, and a feeling of fellowship--of pity--welled up in his bosom.

But when he discovered the creature still following them the next day, now so near that he could see its lolling red tongue, its lean sides, and ugly fangs, he became possessed with a feeling of revulsion toward it. Then he fancied it the embodied Spirit of Starvation stalking them and awaiting an opportunity to destroy them. This fancy gave birth to a consuming, intense hatred of the thing. Finally it attained the proportions of a mocking, tantalising demon.

Cunningly he watched for a moment when it was well within rifle shot, and drawing his rifle from the toboggan he dropped upon a knee, aimed carefully, and pulled the trigger. The frost-clogged firing pin did not respond, and the wolf, seeming to understand its peril, slunk away unharmed.

Shad had seen it plainly--its repulsive gray sides so lank that they seemed almost to meet, its red, hungry tongue lolling from its ugly mouth, its cruel white fangs, and its malevolent, gleaming eyes. His hatred for the creature became an obsession, for it appeared again presently, persistently following, but now keeping at a respectful distance.

On the third day, however, the wolf had forgotten its temporary timidity, and with increased boldness stole steadily upon their heels. With a patience quite foreign to him Shad waited, glancing behind constantly, but making no demonstration until the wolf, apparently satisfied that it had little to fear from the hunger-stricken plodders, trotted boldly up and took a place behind them, so near that if the rifle failed at the first snap there would be opportunity for a second attempt before the beast could pass out of range.

Shad again stopped, and seizing the rifle discovered that the beast had also stopped and stood glaring at him, mocking and unafraid. As though, knowing their weakness, it had lost respect for their power to injure it.

A mighty rage took possession of Shad. He fell to his knee again, aimed carefully, and again pulled the trigger. This time there was a report, and in an insane frenzy of delight he beheld the carcass of the tantalising creature stretched upon the snow.



"He fell to his knee, aimed carefully and pulled the trigger"

Mookomahn and Manikawan had halted, and stood in breathless silence watching the result of Shad's shot. Now with an exclamation of pleasure from Mookomahn the two rushed forward, knives in hand, and in an incredibly short time the carcass of the wolf was quartered, a fire lighted, and some of the meat cooking.

It was a lean, scrawny wolf, and the meat tough and stringy, but to the famished travellers it meant life, and Shad thought the half-cooked piece which Mookoomahn doled to him as his share the sweetest morsel he had ever eaten.

The wolf meat, carefully husbanded, supplied food until one morning Mookoomahn by a series of signs conveyed the information to Shad that they were within one day's march of the cache. Then they ate the last of it, that it might give them strength for the final effort.

It was evening, but not yet dark, when familiar landmarks told Shad that they were nearing the goal, and a little later they halted where the poles of Sishetakushin's lodge stood in the edge of the woods above the lake shore.

With furious haste Shad and Mookoomahn rushed to the cache, but suddenly stopped, aghast and stupefied. The cache had been rifled of its contents, and lying near it, half covered with snow, lay the frozen, emaciated body of an Indian.

XXII

MANIKAWAN'S SACRIFICE

An examination of the surroundings made it plain that a band of eastern Mountaineer or Mingen Indians, in a starving condition, had visited the place; that one of them, already too far exhausted to be revived, had died; that the others, taking the food, had left his body uncared for and fled.

The disappointment was quite beyond expression. Had they been in good physical condition, a short three days' travel would now have carried them to the river tilt and safety. In their present weakened and starved condition at least twice that time would be consumed in the journey, and no food remained to help them on their way.

In deep depression Shad assisted Manikawan to stretch the deerskin covering upon the lodge, while Mookoomahn gathered wood for the fire. Clumsy with weakness, dizzy with disappointment, Shad reached to spread the skin, his snowshoes became entangled, he stumbled and fell. When he attempted to rise he discovered to his dismay that he had wrenched a knee, and when he attempted to walk he was scarcely able to hobble into the lodge.

The last bare chance of life fled, the last thread of flickering hope broken, Shad sank down, little caring for the pain, numb with a certainty of quickly impending death. He could not keep the pace of the Indians. He could not travel at all, and he could neither ask nor expect that they do otherwise than proceed as usual after a period of rest, and leave him to his fate.

Very early in the morning Shad heard a movement in the lodge, and realised that Mookoomahn and Manikawan were engaged in low and earnest conversation. This meant, he was sure, that they were going.

He vaguely wondered whether they would take the lodge with them and leave him to die the more quickly in the intense cold of the open, or whether they would leave it behind them as a weight now too great to be hauled farther upon their toboggan.

He did not care much. He was resigned to his fate. He suffered now no pain of body, save an occasional twitch of the knee when he moved. The hunger pain had gone. It would be sweet and restful, after all, to lie there and die peacefully. It would end the struggle for existence. There would be no more weary plodding over boundless snow wastes. The end of hope was the end of trouble and pain.

With his acceptance of the inevitable, and resignation to his fate, a great lassitude fell upon him. He was overcome with a drowsiness, and as the swish, swish of retreating snowshoes fell upon his ears he dropped into a heavy sleep.

It must have been hours later when Shad opened his eyes to behold sitting opposite him, across the fire, Manikawan. She smiled when she saw that he was awake, and he thought how thin and worn she looked, a mere shadow of the Manikawan he had first known.

Then there dawned upon his slowly-waking brain a realisation of the situation. She had resigned her chance of life to remain with him. He could not permit this. It was a useless waste of life. There was still hope that she might reach the tilts and safety. By remaining with him she was deliberately rejecting a possible opportunity to preserve herself. Much perturbed by this discovery, Shad sat up.

"Mookoomahn?" he asked, pointing toward the south.

"Mookoomahn," she answered, pointing in the same direction. "Manikawan," pointing at the fire, to indicate that Mookoomahn had gone but she had remained.

He protested by signs that she should follow Mookoomahn. He passed around the fire to where she sat, and grasped her arm in his bony fingers, in an attempt to compel her to do so; but she stubbornly shook her head, and, forced to submit, he resumed his seat. Both sorry and glad that he should not be left alone, he reached over and pressed her hand as an indication of his appreciation of her self-sacrifice.

Then she dipped from a kettle by the fire a cup of liquid, which she handed him. He sipped it, and, discovering that it was a weak broth, drank it. He looked at her inquiringly.

Turning again to the pail, she drew forth half a boiled ptarmigan, which she passed him.

"Let the friend of White Brother of the Snow eat. It is little, and it will not drive away the Spirit of Hunger, but it will help to keep away the evil Spirit of Starvation until White Brother of the Snow brings food to his friend."

He accepted it and ate, not ravenously, for his hunger now was not consuming, but with delicious relish. Manikawan did not eat, but he presumed that she had already had a like portion.

Shad was able to hobble, though with considerable pain, in and out of the lodge, and to assist in getting wood for the fire, and so far as she would permit him to do so he relieved her of the task.

The following morning and for four successive mornings the cup of broth and the portion of ptarmigan awaited him when he awoke. It was evident Manikawan had killed them with bow and arrow.

He never saw her eat. It was quite natural that she should have done so before he awoke of mornings, for he made no attempt at early rising.

But he noted with alarm that Manikawan was daily growing weaker. She staggered woefully at times when she walked, like one intoxicated. She was weaker than he, but this he ascribed to his stronger mentality.

By sheer force of will he put aside the insistent weakness, which he knew would get the better of him were he to resign himself to it. By the same force of will he injected into his being a degree of physical energy. But he was a white man, she only an Indian, and this could not be expected of her.

Then there came a day when he awoke to find her gone, and no broth or ptarmigan awaiting him. Later she tottered into the lodge, and empty-handed laid her bow and arrow aside.

The next morning she was lying prone, and the fire was nearly out, for the wood was gone.

"Poor girl," he said, "she is tired and has overslept;" and stealthily, that he might not disturb her, he stole out for the needed wood.

She was awake when he returned, and she tried to rise, but fell helplessly back upon her bed of boughs.

"Manikawan is weak like a little child," she said, in a low, uncertain voice. "But White Brother of the Snow will soon come. The suns are rising and setting. He will soon come. Let the friend of White Brother of the Snow have courage."

Shad brewed her some strong tea--a little still remaining. She drank it, and the hot stimulant presently gave her renewed strength.

But Shad was not deceived. Manikawan's words had sounded to him a prophecy of the impending end. Her voice and her rapidly failing strength told him that the Spirit of Hunger--the Gaunt Gray Wolf--was conquering; that the spirit most dreaded of all the spirits, Death, stood at last at the portal of the lodge, waiting to enter.

XXIII

TUMBLED AIR CASTLES

With the strengthening cold that came with January and continued into February, the animals ceased to venture far from their lairs in search of food, and the harvest of the trails was therefore light. With the disappearance of rabbits, the fox and lynx had also disappeared. The rabbit is the chief prey of these animals during the tight midwinter months, and as the wolf follows the caribou, so the fox follows the rabbit.

With the going of the fox the field of operations was not only narrowed, but the work was robbed of much of its zest. When foxes are fairly numerous the trapper is always buoyed with the hope that a black or silver fox, the most valuable of the fur-bearing animals, may wander into his traps; and this hope renders less irksome the weary tramping of the trails at seasons when the returns might otherwise seem too small a recompense for the hardships and isolation suffered.

The two preceding years had yielded rich harvests to Dick Blake, and had more than fulfilled his modest expectations. He was, therefore, though certainly disappointed, far from discouraged with the present outlook, and very cheerfully accepted the few marten and mink pelts that fell to his lot as a half loaf by no means to be despised.

While Ungava Bob had looked forward to a successful winter's trapping, his chief object in coming so far into the wilderness had been the establishment of his new trails as a basis for future trading operations; and more particularly, therefore, with a view to the future than to the immediate present. Neither was he, for this reason, in any wise discouraged. His youthful mind, engaged in planning the castles he was to build tomorrow, had no room for the disappointments of to-day.

Sishetakushin had given Bob the assurance that the Nascaupes would bring him their furs to barter. He was satisfied, also, that he could secure a large share of the trade of the Eastern, or Bay, Mountaineer Indians, for he would pay a fair and reasonable price for their furs, and they would quickly recognise the advantage of trading with him. And he would have another advantage over the coast traders: he would establish a trading station in the very heart of the wilderness, in the midst of the Indian hunting country.

Previous to his coming into his little fortune his father had, as far back as Bob could remember, been struggling under a load of debt. At times the family had been plunged into the very uttermost depths of poverty; and even now a sickening dread stole upon Bob as he recalled some of the winters through which they had passed when the factor at the post had refused them further credit, and the flour barrel at home was empty, and they could scarcely have survived had it not been for the bounty of Douglas Campbell.

This was the condition still with many of the families of the Bay. They were always in debt to the Company for advances of provisions, and there was no hope that they could ever emerge from the deplorable condition. It was the policy of the Company that they should not.

In accepting credit from the Company, the trapper placed himself under obligation to deliver to the Company every product of his labours until the debt was discharged. The Company allowed the trapper in return for his pelts such an amount as it saw fit. He had no word in the matter, and of necessity was compelled to accept the Company's valuation of his furs, which valuation the Company took good care to place so low as to obviate any probability of his release from debt. At a reasonable valuation of their furs, there was seldom a year that most, if not all, the Bay trappers might not have been freed from their serfdom.

Thus when a trapper died his only inheritance to his children was a burden of debt, which sometimes passed down from generation to generation; for the son who refused to assume his father's debt was denied credit or consideration at the Company's stores.

The Grays, as we have stated, had felt the heavy hand of this inquisitional system. Now that they were free, Bob's sympathy was poured out to his neighbours, and he was secretly planning how, when he became a trader, he might also compass their release.

As rapidly as his profits would permit, Bob was determined to advance, first to one family, then to another, sufficient cash to discharge their debts and relieve them from their obligation to the Company.

Then he would advance them the necessary provisions and supplies to sustain them until they returned from their trails with their hunt. He would buy their pelts at as high a price as he could afford with a reasonable profit. This price would always be certainly double, and often four or five times, that which the Company was accustomed to allow.

Bob, thus forming his Utopian plans, forgot the tedium of the trail. No person is so happy as when doing something to make some other person happy. And Bob was happy because he believed he was to be the means of bringing happiness to many. Making a comfortable living himself, he would make it possible for his neighbours to make a comfortable living, also.

It never occurred to him that failure was possible, or that, with the amount of capital which he believed was still at his disposal, the plan was unpractical. Young, highly optimistic, and somewhat visionary, his dreams assumed the status of reality.

Bob's mind was thus pleasantly occupied when at the end of the first week in February he returned to the river tilt to find Ed Matheson and Bill Campbell back from Eskimo Bay, and Dick Blake, just in from his trail, drawing off his frost-encrusted adicky.

"An' there's Bob, now!" exclaimed Ed, as Bob appeared in the doorway.

"'Tis grand, now, t' see you back," said Bob, his face beaming welcome as he shook the hands of the returned travellers. "Dick an' me's been missin' you wonderful."

"'Twere grand, now, t' see th' tilt when Bill an' me comes in last evenin'. 'Twere th' hardest pull up from th' Bay with our loads we ever has, an' we was tired enough t' drop when we gets here. Where's Shad?"

"'Wi' th' Injuns yet, an' I'm worryin' about he not comin' back. They must ha' gone a long ways down north lookin' for deer, or they'd been back before this. How'd you find th' folks at th' Bay, Ed?"

"Fine--all of un fine. Your mother's wantin' wonderful bad t' see you. But when I tells she you'm all right, she stops worryin'. I were forgettin' t' say anything about th' trouble wi' th' Mingens, though;" and Ed grinned.

"Forgettin' a purpose?" asked Bob, smiling.

"Maybe so," admitted Ed. "What's past don't do nobody no good t' know when they's nothin' for un t' make right. 'Twouldn't ha' helped none for she t' know about th' Mingens, so I just naturally forgets un."

"I'm glad o' that. Mother'd 'a' worried an' been thinkin' all sorts o' things happenin' what never would happen;" and, greatly relieved, Bob asked, "An' when'd you make th' Bay?"

"'Twere just New Year. Bill an' me cruises along fast, bein' light, an' takin' short sleeps. 'Twere night when we gets t' Wolf Bight, an' I says t' Bill, says I: "Tis near midnight, an' likewise t' th' New Year. They'll be sleepin', an' le's's wake un up shootin' th' New Year in like all creation.'

"Gettin' alongside th' winder, we lets go till our rifles is empty, and then rushin' in th' door yells, 'Happy New Year!' They was awake, all right, wonderin' what in time an' creation were turned loose on un, we yellin' like a passel o' Injuns. They was glad t' see us.

"Bill goes home t' Kenemish with daylight, an' your father takes me t' th' post wi' dogs an' komatik, your mother goin' along, an' I gets home th' evenin'."

"Were they goin' right back home?"

"No, they 'bides t' th' post with Tom Black's folks till th' end o' th' week, an' Bessie goes back with un t' be company with your mother. Oh, I were forgettin'! Here's somethin' your mother were sendin';" and Ed reached under the bunk and drew forth a package.

Upon opening the package Bob discovered a quantity of sweet cakes, a loaf of plum bread, and a letter. He passed the cakes around, then drawing up to the candle proceeded at once to read hungrily his mother's letter.

It was a message of love and encouragement, closing with the news of the bank failure and consequent loss of the little fortune with which he had planned to do so many things. Presently looking up he said, in a shaking voice:

"Why--Ed--Mother's sayin' th' bank's broke--an' all our money's gone."

"Aye," admitted Ed, his voice sympathetic and sorrowful. "'Tis broke, lad--I were hopin' she wouldn't write you that, an' you wouldn't know till you gets home. But don't worry about un, now, lad. 'Twon't do no good. If you hadn't known about un now, you wouldn't be worryin' about un. An' now you knows, 'twon't help none."

"I suppose you're right, Ed. But 'twill be hard not t' worry. I were plannin' so."

"'Tain't so bad as t' have some o' your folks die, now. An' I been noticin' all my life that sometimes things happens t' me I thinks is 'most more'n I can stand, an' I feels like givin' up. Then somethin' comes along that's better'n anything I ever thought o' gettin'. An' then when I thinks un out, I finds th' good couldn't ha' come without me havin' th' trouble first. So don't get feelin' too bad about un, Bob. This may be just openin' th' way for some wonderful good luck better 'n all th' money you loses," soothed Ed.

There was a postscript which Bob had overlooked. Now in folding the letter his eye caught it and he read it--a brief line added by Bessie, telling him not to think too much about his loss, for she was sure it would all be well in the end, and not to forget it was the Lord's will or it could not have happened, adding, "Remember, Bob, the Lord is always near you."

Nevertheless, Bob was very quiet at supper. He could not forget his tumbled air castles. He could not forget the fact that the returns from the present year's trapping would be insufficient to buy the next year's outfit.

"They was a band o' Injuns comes t' th' post just before I leaves, pretty nigh on their last legs," remarked Ed, when they had finished eating and he had lighted his pipe. "They was about as nigh starved as any passel o' men I ever seen, an' if they'd been starved much more they'd been dead. I hears some o' th' band did die before these gets out."

"Who were they?" asked Bob.

"Mountaineers," answered Ed. "They was back in th' country huntin', but don't find th' deer. They's camped down t' th' post now."

"Did you hear where 'bout's they was huntin'?" inquired Dick. "In th' nu'th'ard or s'uth'ard?"

"They all comes from th' nu'th'ard and west'ard o' th' post," said Ed. "They tells me they finds it th' worst year for fur an' game up that way they ever seen, an' I tells un 'tis th' same here."

"I wonders, now, how Shad an' th' Injuns he's with is makin' out. They'll be wonderful bad off, an' they don't run on th' deer," suggested Dick.

"They'll be likely t' find un up where they finds un when I was with un," reassured Bob, "but 'tis a long cruise there an' back."

Bob's loss was a keen disappointment to him. For several days it robbed him of ambition, and he tramped along the trails and attended to his traps dully and methodically, with a heavy heart. Then he began to say to himself:

"'Tis th' Lard's way. 'Tweren't right for me to go tradin' or t' have th' money, an' th' Lord knowin' it takes th' money away."

This thought, with his natural buoyancy of temperament, restored again to a large extent his interest and ambition in his work; and when he remembered that he was, after all, the owner of two unencumbered trails, with all their traps, he almost forgot his disappointment--but not altogether; that was impossible.

With the end of February ptarmigans began to reappear among the willows along the river bank. They were welcomed by the trappers, for they supplied a much needed variety to the diet. They offered hope, too, that the period of famine was nearing its end.

Ed Matheson's report of the condition of the Indians appearing at the Eskimo Bay post gave the men food for thought. When they gathered again at the river tilt two weeks later, the chief subject of conversation was Shad's continued absence, and many speculations were put forth as to the probable movements of Shad and their Indian friends. Whether or not they were likely to find caribou, where they would go and what they would be likely to do should they fail, were questions which they discussed at length. And they did not conceal from one another the fact that they were deeply concerned for Shad's safety.

When the trappers gathered again at the rendezvous on Friday, the sixth of March, they fully expected that Shad would be there to greet them, but they were disappointed. His failure to appear at this late date excited alarm, but no course of action that would be in the least likely to lead to results presented itself.

They agreed that the Indians had beyond doubt left a cache at the Great Lake, for Sishetakushin had stated to Bob that he would do so; and upon returning to that point it was believed Shad would have sufficient food to proceed to the river tilt. Any search beyond the Great Lake would be fruitless, for none could know in what direction to search.

Still there was no Shad on Friday, the twentieth of March. They ate their supper and resumed their speculations.

"I'm thinkin', now, t' make a cruise t' th' place where th' Injuns was camped when I left un," declared Bob. "If they ain't there, I'll come back, unless I sees signs of un. And, anyway, 'twill make me feel better."

"An' I'll go along," said Ed. "We'll be startin' in th' mornin' early, an' we may's well get our stuff out t'-night, ready t' pack."

They had blown out the candle and were lying in their bunks, discussing still Shad's long absence, when the door of the tilt was pushed quietly open and the figure of a man appeared in the moonlight at the entrance.

They sprang from their bunks, and Ed Matheson, striking a match, applied it to a candle. As the light flared up the man entered, and Mookoomahn stood before them.

XXIV

THE MESSENGER

They looked at the Indian in awed and speechless horror. His tale of suffering was told before he spoke. He had come from a land of Tragedy. He had been stalking side by side with Death.

This was a mere shadowy caricature of the Mookoomahn Bob had known. The face was fleshless as that of a skeleton head, with the skin of the former inhabitant stretched and dried upon the bones; the lips so shrunken that they scarcely served to cover the two white lines of teeth; the eyes deep fallen into gaping cavities below the frontal bone.

Drawing his skeleton hands from their mittens, and raising them in an imploring gesture, Mookoomahn looked, as he stood there in the dim candlelight under the low log ceiling, more a spectre--a ghostly phantom visitor--than a living human being.

Then he spoke in a voice low and broken:

"White Brother of the Snow, Mookoomahn has long been tormented by the Spirit of Hunger. When he slept the Spirit of Starvation sat by his side, never sleeping. When he travelled the Spirit of Starvation stalked at his heels, never tiring. For many suns the Spirit of Death has had his cold fingers on Mookoomahn's shoulder."

Gently Bob removed the caribou-skin coat from the starving and exhausted traveller, and made him comfortable while the others brewed tea and heated some cold boiled ptarmigan in the pan.

"'Twon't do t' give he much at first," cautioned Dick Blake, setting before Mookoomahn a small portion of the meat and a small piece of bread with a cup of the hot tea. "He's like t' be wonderful sick, anyway, th' carefulest we is. We'll let he have a small bit at a time, an' let he have un often."

No questions were asked until after the Indian had eaten. It seemed almost that no questions were necessary. The man had come alone. He was in the last stages of starvation. These facts spoke loudly enough. They told the tale of wasting strength, of hopeless struggle, of tragic death that had taken place in the bleak wild wastes above.

The food revived and the tea stimulated Mookoomahn, and when he spoke again, in answer to Bob's urgent request that he tell them of the fate of Shad and the others, his voice was stronger.

He described the journey to the Lake of Willows, and thence to the camp of starving Indians. He told how the shaman had made medicine to the spirits; how the spirits had revealed to the shaman the things that it was required the Indians do; how the Indians in their starved condition were not able to fulfil the requirements laid upon them by the spirits; and how in consequence the wrath of the spirits was not placated.

He described the journey to the cache on the northern lake; Sishetakushin's instructions, and gift of Manikawan to White Brother of the Snow; of the parting from Sishetakushin.

Vividly he detailed the long and tedious return to the Great Lake; and how the angry spirits reaching up had seized Shad, cast him into the snow, and lamed him.

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow could not walk. The Matchi Manitu had wounded his knee. Manikawan, the sister of Mookoomahn, had promised White Brother of the Snow that she would not leave his friend until he came.

"Mookoomahn told Manikawan White Brother of the Snow would not hold her to her promise. That White Brother of the Snow did not mean that she should die for his friend.

"Manikawan would not listen to Mookoomahn, and she said: 'When White Brother of the Snow comes he will find Manikawan waiting with his friend. She has promised. If the Spirit of Death comes into the lodge, White Brother of the Snow will find Manikawan's body with the body of his friend, and he will know that Manikawan kept her word.'

"Seven suns ago Mookoomahn left the lodge. He travelled slowly, for the spirits clung to his feet and made them heavy. The spirits tripped him and made him fall often. He killed three ptarmigans as he travelled, and the flesh of the ptarmigans made him strong to reach the lodge of White Brother of the Snow.

"For seven suns the friend of White Brother of the Snow and Manikawan have had no food. The Spirit of Death stood very near the lodge when Mookoomahn left it. The Spirit of Death has entered the lodge and destroyed Manikawan and the friend of White Brother of the Snow."

With this sombre prophecy Mookoomahn ceased speaking, and leaned back exhausted. As they looked at him they could appreciate the sufferings of Shad and Manikawan, and no great stretch of the imagination was necessary to picture the gruesome spectacle that they had no doubt awaited them in the lodge on the Great Lake.

XXV

A MISSION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Bob's face had grown pale and tense as he listened. With Mookoomahn's last words he rose from the edge of the bunk where he had seated himself, and turning to Ed Matheson, asked:

"Be you goin' with me, Ed? Th' moon's good for travellin', an' I knows th' way."

"That I be," Ed responded, beginning his preparation at once. "I couldn't be restin' here a minute knowin' them poor souls was dyin' out there."

"I'm goin', too," declared Dick Blake, reaching for his adicky. "Three can travel faster'n two, by changin' off in th' lead."

"What you doin', Bill, with your a dicky, now?" Ed suddenly asked, observing that Bill Campbell was also drawing on his adicky. "Goin'," answered Bill laconically.

"No, Bill, you better stay here with th' Injun," directed Ed. "Somebody'll have t' stay with he. If they don't, by to-morrer he'll get eatin' so much he'll kill hissself if he ain't watched.

"You stay an' keep an eye on he. Give he just a small bit t' a time, till he gets over th' first sickness. He'll be wonderful sick t'-night, an' for a week, but sick's he is, by day after t'-morrer he'll be wonderful hungry, an' want t' eat everything in sight, an' more too, an' if he eats too much 'twill kill he sure. His belly'll be givin' he trouble for a month yet, whatever, two ways--wantin' t' stuff un, an' makin' he sick because he does."

Bill Campbell was plainly disappointed, but there was no doubt Ed was right, and laying aside his adicky he uncomplainingly assumed the role of nurse to which Ed had assigned him.

The men set forth in haste upon their mission of life and death. The moon, a white, cold patch, lay against the steel-blue sky. The snow, thick coated with frost, glittered and scintillated in the moonlight. A silence impressive, complete, tense, lay upon the frozen white world. It spoke of death, as the bated breath of the storm, before it breaks, speaks of calamity.

The three trappers, who had entered the tilt that evening wearied from the day's labour upon the trail, forgot their weariness as they swung forward at a rapid pace toward the camp on the Great Lake.

First one, then another, took the lead, breaking the trail and making it easier for those who followed. To men less inured to hardship and less accustomed to wilderness travel, it would have been a killing pace, continued unabated, unvarying, hour after hour.

At length the moon, falling near the western horizon, threatened quickly to withdraw her light; and then a halt was called, the tent quickly stretched between two convenient trees, the sheet-iron stove set up, a fire lighted, a few boughs spread for a bed, and the men stretched themselves for a two hours' rest.

They were up again before light, a hurried breakfast was eaten, and with daybreak they were away. Seldom was a word spoken. Each was occupied with his own thoughts, and each was stingy of his breath. To have talked would have been to expend energy.

Only once during the day did they halt, early in the evening, to make tea and partake of much-needed refreshment, and then were quickly on their way again, continuing by moonlight.

It was past midnight when, Ungava Bob in the lead, crossing a barren rise, beheld the smooth white surface of the Great Lake stretching far away to the northward. Descending the ridge and plunging into the thin forest below, he turned with a nameless dread at his heart toward the lodge where, three months before, he had said farewell to Shad and Manikawan. Then they were in the full exuberance of health and strength. How should he find them now? He dared not answer the question.

A little farther, and the lodge, a black blot on the snow, loomed up through the trees. Quickening his pace, he peered anxiously ahead for smoke, half hoping, wholly dreading, the result. Yes, there it was! The merest whiff rising above the protruding lodge poles at the top! At least one lived!

Bob broke into a run, the others at his heels, and, scarcely halting to drop the hauling rope of his toboggan from his shoulders, he lifted the flap and entered, calling as he did so:

"Shad! Shad! Manikawan! Does you hear me?"

The place was dark. The smouldering embers of a fire gave out no light, and receiving no answer Bob shouted to the others to bring a candle. Ed Matheson had anticipated the need, and, close at Bob's side, struck a light.

XXVI

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS"

As the candle sputtered for a moment and then flared up, it revealed, lying prone on opposite sides of the lodge, feet to the embers of the dying fire, two human wrecks, whose emaciated features and shrunken forms could never have been recognised as those of Shad and Manikawan.

Bob stooped, and taking Shad gently by the shoulder shook him, saying as he did so:
"Shad! Shad! Shad!"

Slowly Shad, awakening from deep and exhausting slumber, opened his cavernous eyes and stared vacantly at Bob.

"Shad!" Bob repeated. "'Tis Bob an' Ed an' Dick come for you! Shad! We has grub, Shad!"

Still Shad gave no sign of recognition.

"Shad! Shad!" pleaded Bob. "Don 't you know me now, Shad?"

Then light came into Shad's face, and he forced himself to a sitting position.

"Bob! Oh, Bob!" he exclaimed, in a weak voice. "Am I awake or is it just a dream? Oh, Bob! Good old Bob! And Ed! and Dick! I was dreaming of you and the tilts. The dear old tilts! And you've come! You've really come? I heard you calling, Bob--days and days and days I heard you, and I answered. But my voice was too weak, and you couldn't hear.

"We've been in hell, Bob! In hell! The devils chased us, Bob--chased us for months and months and months. They looked like wolves, Bob--hungry, ugly wolves. I shot one! Yes, shot it! We ate it, and it was good! Ate the devil, Bob! and Ed! and Dick! Are you angels from heaven, or really you?"

"A bit o' tea's what he needs first thing," suggested Ed, in a shaky voice, as Shad paused in his ramblings. "Dick, you cut some wood, now, an' I'll be fillin' th' kettle with ice an' get un over. Bob better be stayin' right here."

"Bob!" Shad continued, as Dick and Ed passed out of the lodge. "Is it really you, Bob?"

His voice was now more rational, though very weak.

"Yes, Shad, 'tis me."

"How is Manikawan, Bob? Look after her, won't you? I'm all right now. I've tried to keep her out of the deep sleeps she falls into. I've been afraid she'd die. But I was very tired, and I think I must have been very sound asleep myself--and slept for hours. Leave me, Bob, and wake her up. I'm all right."

Bob obediently passed over to Manikawan, leaving Shad sitting and anxiously watching him.

It seemed for a time that he was not to succeed in rousing Manikawan from the coma-like sleep into which she had passed. But when Dick placed wood upon the fire, and the lodge began to warm, she displayed symptoms of waking; and Bob lifted her head to his shoulder, chafed her temples, and spoke her name over and over again. At last she opened her eyes, and with almost instant recognition smiled:

"White Brother of the Snow--Manikawan is glad you have come. It has--been--long---but Manikawan knew--White Brother of the Snow--would come at last--she did not--leave his friend."

Then she paused, exhausted, but presently continued:

"Manikawan told--White Brother of the Snow--she would--stay until he came--for his friend."

"Manikawan has done well. She has been very brave. She is a Ne-ne-not (Nascaupee), and brave." Bob could trust himself to say no more, for his voice was thick.

Manikawan's eyes lighted at these words of praise, and, never taking them from Bob's face, she lay silent upon his shoulder until the food was ready.

Ed Matheson gave some tea and a small portion of broiled ptarmigan and bread to Shad, while Bob held the cup for Manikawan, then fed her some morsels of the meat as one would have fed a child. It was difficult for her to eat, though the tea stimulated her temporarily, and she began presently to speak again, in a scarcely audible voice:

"The Spirit--of Hunger--followed us. The Gaunt Gray--Wolf--was--always--behind--us. The--Spirit--of--Death--stood--at--the--door--of the--lodge. The spirits--were--strong--and cunning--like--the wolverine--Manikawan--was--weak--like a rabbit."

She was out of breath again and had to rest, and Bob held the cup of tea to her lips. With renewed strength she continued:

"Manikawan--killed--two ptarmigans--with--her--arrow. She--ate--the--entrails--but she--gave--the meat--to the friend--of White Brother of--the Snow. She was--not afraid--to die. She--could--not say to--White Brother--of the Snow--when he came--'The Spirit--of Death--has--entered--the lodge--and--taken--your--friend.'"

There was another pause. Bob could see, and Ed and Dick could see that the Spirit of Death was even then in the lodge, and that his cold hand was upon Manikawan's brow. Tears trickled down Bob's cheeks. He could not check them.

"White--Brother--of--the--Snow--must--not--feel--bad. He--must--be--strong. Manikawan--is--happy. She--is--warm--as--when--the--sun--grows--brave--in--summer--and--comes--to--warm--the--earth."

A smile played upon her lips.

"Manikawan--is--very--happy. She--sees--a--light--like--the--rising--sun. White--Brother--of--the--Snow--"

That was the end. Bob's cheeks were wet as he laid the lifeless form upon its couch of boughs, and gently covered it with a deerskin robe; and tears streamed down the weather-beaten cheeks of the two rough trappers standing at his side.

Manikawan was not a Christian. She had never heard of Christ and His saving grace. But dare any say He did not welcome her to His Father's house?

She had renounced her own hope of life by remaining behind in the lodge when Mookoomahn left them. In the name of love and duty she had made the supreme sacrifice--she had laid down her life for another--and Christ hath said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And, after all, did Manikawan not worship the same God that you and I worship? Standing upon the high pinnacle of rock, looking toward the rising sun, she offered a silent prayer to the Great Mystery, that she might be made nobler, braver, and more generous--worthy to stand in the presence of the Great Mystery--the Maker of heaven and earth and all things.

We call Him God. Manikawan called Him the Great Mystery.

XXVII

SHAD'S TRIBUTE TO THE INDIAN MAIDEN

Though Shad's weakness caused him to wobble woefully when he walked, his knee had much improved since the day of his injury.

The food, given him in small portions at frequent intervals, and the assurance of continued life that the appearance of the rescuers brought, stimulated his body to new strength and restored to him his mental equilibrium. Hope is life, and one possessed of a large degree of hope, coupled with a good physique, may withstand a tremendous amount of hardship and privation.

The very presence of Manikawan during the long period of enforced inactivity and waiting, had kept alive in Shad Trowbridge the hope that Mookoomahn might after all reach the river tilt and send his friends to the rescue before it was too late. Had it not been for this, it is scarcely probable he would have survived until they came.

The few Indian words which Shad had acquired had not been sufficient to permit him to carry on connected conversation with Manikawan or the other Indians. Denied this privilege for so long, he talked almost incessantly to the three trappers, while the four sat through the hours until daybreak, keeping vigil with Death. He talked of the prospect of continued life, and what a blessed thing it was to know that he was still to be in and of the great and glorious world; of his trying experiences since he had joined the Indians.

With dawn the tent was pitched among the trees, not far from the lodge. Then they removed to its more comfortable shelter, with Bob walking at Shad's side to steady his uncertain footsteps.

Shad was sick, and suffered severely from nausea that day--and at intervals, indeed, for several days thereafter--a result that always follows the introduction of food into the contracted stomach after a long period of starvation, particularly when the food is of coarse quality and unsuitably prepared.

Almost immediately, too, his legs began to swell. But this disturbed him little. It was merely an incident and another result of his long period of starvation, quite to be expected.

"Don't worry about un none," advised Ed Matheson, when Shad called attention to the phenomenon. "Injuns as starves always gets swelled legs, an' they stays swelled for quite a bit, too. Just forget un now. You'll be all right so long's you don't get too rapid wi' th' grub, an' set you'm belly swellin' too fast."

"Ed," said Shad, "after what I've been through, I think there's nothing would alarm me much. It doesn't disturb me in the least to have my legs swell. I'm rather proud of them. They contrast beautifully with the rest of me, and give me a certain sense of stability that otherwise I should not have, for they're the only part of me that looks in the least natural. Do you hear my bones rattle when I move? I have a presentment that, unless I'm pretty careful, my skeleton will fall apart before I get flesh enough to hold it together."

"Now that's th' way I likes t' see folk!" exclaimed Ed. "Not growlin' like a bear because they looks summat like a dead man, an' because they has a bit o' ache in their insides every time they eats. You'm do look as though you'm just rize from th' grave. But you'm a wonderful live corpse yet, Shad. A man may's well be happy even if he do feel like all creation turned inside out, 'specially when he knows he ain't goin' t' keep feelin' that way. A man is just as happy as he's thinkin' he is, an' no happier, an' as miserable as he's thinkin' he is an' no miserabler. I finds bein' happy an' content wi' things is just a matter o' th' way o' lookin' at un."

"Yes, Ed, I think you're right," agreed Shad. "I'm finding no fault. I'm thankful to be alive and in the beautiful world, and I'm very much contented with my lot. I would be very happy, too, but for the thought of that poor little Indian girl."

The earth, frozen to adamantine hardness, precluded the possibility of digging a grave during the winter season. Therefore, after the manner of her people, a platform of poles, high raised above the snow, was built among the spruce trees to receive Manikawan's body.

It was late in the afternoon when the platform was completed and the four weather-beaten men again entered the silent lodge, where they were to conduct a simple, primitive funeral service, and give Manikawan the rites of Christian burial before raising her body to the platform.

Bob, who never was separated from the little Testament his mother had given him years before, drew the book from his pocket when they had seated themselves in the lodge, and opening to John xv, passed it to Shad, who, accepting it, read the chapter aloud in a low but clear voice, while the others reverently listened.

[Transcriber's note: John XV:12-13--"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."]

"Bob," said Shad at length, closing the Testament, "you knew her first. Tell us about her."

Responding, Bob described how Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn, finding him unconscious in the snow, had carried him to their lodge--the very lodge in which they were now sitting; and how upon first opening his eyes to consciousness he had seen her, weaving the web of a snowshoe, opposite him, across the fire--just where she was lying now; and she had looked up and smiled when she discovered he was awake. And then, ever gentle, ever considerate, she had nursed him to health, and ministered to him until he had left them.

When Bob had finished, Shad spoke of her never-failing thoughtfulness and consideration. Of the encouragement of her example as, uncomplaining, she followed the weary, endless trail day after day. Of her hand lightly laid upon his shoulder as she looked into his eyes and spoke words of encouragement he could not understand, but which never failed to call him back to himself and his manhood and to banish an impulse which frequently assailed him to give up the fight for life, lie down in the snow and accept the release from suffering which Death offered.

"But her crowning sacrifice," said Shad, "came when she refused to leave me alone to die; and I certainly could not have survived had I been left in this lodge without human companionship.

"Manikawan could have gone on with Mookoomahn and saved herself. He went to you and told you of our need. He did well, but he did it mainly to save himself. It was the instinct of self-preservation that gave him inspiration to accomplish it. But she remained, and remaining she gave me the only food that fell to her arrow, while she starved. That was divine unselfishness--divine sacrifice."

Stepping to the side of Manikawan's lifeless body, he lifted and laid aside the skin robe which covered her face, then kneeling at her side, with tears upon his cheeks, he continued:

"Manikawan, your skin was red, but your soul was as white as the driven snow that covers the desolate land of your people. Your features are shrunken with starvation and suffering, but still they are beautiful, for they reflect the beautiful, unselfish soul which they once sheltered.

"Your lips smile. Did you see the glory of heaven as you passed from us--a thousand times more beautiful than the brilliant aurora or the gorgeous sunsets that glorify the skies of this land of awful desolation where you existed? Did you see the light of the Eternal City shining through its gates when they were opened to receive you?"

As though in answer to Shad's question the last rays of the setting sun dropped through the open top of the lodge and rested upon the upturned face of the dead Indian maiden in a bright, illuminating glow.

"Manikawan, you sacrificed your life to duty and to human sympathy. You died a Christ-like death, and your sacrifice shall not be wasted. Your body is dead, but your spirit still lives.

"So long as the breath of life is in me, Manikawan, I shall never forget your example of patience and encouragement and self-effacement. It has built for me new ideals. It has taught me that there are other things to live for than the mere attainment of pleasure and the gratification of selfish desires.

"You were an Indian, Manikawan, and the world would have called you a pagan and a savage. But you have pointed out to me the way to a nobler and better life."

Shad arose and resumed his seat. He had spoken in a voice of tense earnestness, and for a little while all sat in awed silence. Then Ed Matheson began to sing, and the others joined him:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee."

With the last notes of the grand old hymn they all knelt, while big Dick Blake, in a voice shaken with emotion, offered a short but fervent prayer.

Manikawan's body was wrapped tightly in deerskin robes, and in the darkening twilight of the cold winter evening it was reverently borne to the newly erected platform among the spruce trees. Here it was to lie exposed to winds and storms, but beyond the reach of marauding animals, until the next summer's sun should warm and soften the earth sufficiently to permit Mookoomahn and the trappers to dig a grave and lay it in its final resting-place.

XXVIII

TROWBRIDGE AND GRAY, TRADERS

At the end of a week, when the supply of provisions which the trappers had brought with them was running low, Shad suggested that he was quite able to make the journey to the river tilt. His knee was now so far improved that it caused him but slight inconvenience to walk, and he was rapidly regaining strength.

He was anxious indeed to return to the tilt. He thought of it much as one thinks of home; and the thought carried with it visions of rest and comfort. The others could ill afford a longer absence from their trails, and it was therefore with a sense of deep satisfaction to all that the camp on the shore of the Great Lake was broken.

Travelling slowly, with Shad following in the well-packed trail which the others made, they arrived at their destination on an afternoon five days later, and were welcomed by Bill Campbell and Mookoomahn.

How deeply or how lightly Mookoomahn felt when he learned of Manikawan's death, none knew. He listened in stoical silence while Bob related to him in detail the circumstances of her going and the subsequent happenings in the lodge and in the camp at the Great Lake; but throughout the recital Mookoomahn made no comments, and his countenance betrayed nothing of his sensations.

Mookoomahn was recovering rapidly. He was passing, indeed, quite beyond Bill Campbell's control; and not satisfied now with the limited portions of food which Bill, religiously adhering to the advice he had received from Dick Blake and Ed Matheson, doled out to him, he had the day before the return of the travellers stolen away to the willows along the river bank below the tilt, killed some ptarmigans on his own account, and gorged himself upon the flesh to his temporary satisfaction; but nature balanced her account with him in the hours of subsequent agony which he suffered for his indiscretion.

Fully a month elapsed after their return before Shad could eat a meal with any assurance that it would not be followed by distress. His normal appetite, however, had begun to return before they broke camp on the Great Lake, and had quickly developed into a highly abnormal appetite.

No sooner was one meal finished than his mind was centred upon the next. At night his last thought was his next morning's breakfast, and when he awoke breakfast was still on his mind. Eating during this period of recuperation was to him the all-important object in life.

It was nearly a month after his return to the river tilt that Shad first learned of Bob's loss of fortune. It was upon the occasion of the fortnightly rendezvous, when Ed Matheson remarked:

"Th' next round's about th' last we can make. Th' fur's 'most too poor t' take, now, an' when I comes back I'll strike up my traps. An' it's been a wonderful poor hunt."

"Aye, wonderful poor, an' wonderful disappointin'," sighed Bob.

"Th' worst I ever see," continued Ed. "If 'tweren't for you, Bob, clearin' Dick's an' my old debts, we'd be in a bad way gettin' next fall's debt from th' Company. An' now your losin' all your money, th' bad furrin' comes hard on you--wonderful hard. I'm fearin' th' new debt we'll all have t' start off next season with'll be a big un."

"What money did you lose, Bob? I hadn't heard of it," asked Shad, as Ed passed out of the tilt to join Dick and Bill, who were cleaning the snow from the roof of the tilt in anticipation of an early thaw.

"Th' money I has in th' bank t' St. Johns," explained Bob. "When Ed comes back from th' Bay he brings me a letter from Mother sayin' th' bank broke an' th' money's gone."

"That's bad!" Shad sympathised. "How much was there?"

"About twelve thousand dollars. But 'tain't so bad. We has th' traps, an' th' new trails laid."

"But that was the capital you were to begin trading on?"

"Aye, but we'll have t' give th' tradin' up now. I'm thinkin' th' Lard weren't wantin' us t' go tradin' or t' have th' money, an' I'm not complainin', though I were wonderful disappointed when I hears of un first."

Shad asked many questions, in the course of which he drew from Bob a description of the air castles which Bob had been building, and which had been so unceremoniously knocked down about his ears by his mother's letter; of the poverty-stricken condition of the Bay folk, which Bob in his big-hearted and youthful enthusiasm had hoped to relieve; and of many other things which he had planned to do with his fortune.

Though all this was of the past, and of little importance now, he had intended to keep it a secret. But he and Shad had grown very close together, and somehow Shad had a way of drawing from him even his most sacred thoughts--and before Bob realised it he had bared his heart to his friend.

"An' I were thinkin'," said Bob, after the sum-total of his shattered plans had been disclosed, "when we was up on th' Great Lake, what a rare fine thing 'twould ha' been for th' Injuns, if I hadn't ha' lost th' money, t' make a tradin' station an' a cache o' grub up th' other end o' th' Great Lake--seventy or eighty miles in from where Manikawan dies--so when another bad year comes th' Injuns down that way could get grub t' carry un out t' th' Ungava post. If they'd been a cache there this winter, Manikawan wouldn't ha' died, an' a lot o' th' other poor Injuns as must ha' died would ha' got out."

"That's so," agreed Shad. "What an amount of suffering it would have saved! And the poor little Indian girl wouldn't have been sacrificed."

The others returned at this point, and conversation drifted into other channels--the striking up of the traps--the probability of an early break-up--the hard times that the present season's failure was certain to cause among the people of the Bay.

"Bob, if you're going to strike up and make this next trip your last one of the season, I'm going over the trail with you," said Shad, the following day. "I want to see again the trail I helped you lay, and the tilts we built together. It seems a long while ago, and the memory of it is already a pleasant one."

So on Monday morning they started on the last round of traps for the season. The days were long now, and the sun was still high when they reached the tilt on the first lake--the tilt where Manikawan had found Bob's rifle, and the first of the series of tilts Bob and Shad had built.

They cooked and ate their supper, and then lounged back upon their bunks to chat of their first exploration of the trail, their visit to the falls, and of Manikawan's unexpected appearance when they were on the island.

Finally they lapsed into silence, Shad sitting on the edge of his bunk, his elbows on his knees, and his chin in his palms; Bob lying back, his hands folded under his head, his eyes studying the ceiling, but his thoughts far away with the loved ones at home and with Emily at school.

Suddenly Shad broke the silence and Bob's thoughts with the question:

"How would you like me for a partner, Bob?"

"A trappin' partner, Shad? 'Twould be fine, now!" exclaimed Bob, coming back to himself and his surroundings. "But I was thinkin' you'd be weary o' th' trails, Shad, after what you've been through."

"No, Bob, a trading partner;" and Shad sat up. "You were going into business, Bob, but your loss, you tell me, has made it impossible, because you have no capital. I'd like to be let in on your plans, for they appeal to me. Such a trading operation as you outlined to me should prove not only profitable, but at the same time would be a practical method of relieving a vast amount of suffering. It would give the Bay people independence and bring them a good many comforts of life they've never enjoyed.

"And if your suggestion were carried out to establish two or three trading stations with provision caches attached, up here in the Indian hunting country, there could be no repetition of this year's horrible experience.

"Now, Bob, you know the people and their needs, and you're an expert in judging furs, but you haven't the funds to carry out your plan. I don't know much about these things, but I have the funds. Let's come together--your experience and knowledge against my cash--and form a partnership. What do you say?"

"Oh, Shad! 'Twould be--'twould be th' grandest thing in th' world, Shad!" and Bob's face flushed with excitement; and then, suddenly, he continued: "But I couldn't do it, Shad. 'Twouldn't be fair for me t' be partners, for I hasn't any money t' put in for a share."

"Don't be foolish, now, Bob. Don't talk nonsense. Money without a knowledge of the people and their needs isn't enough. I haven't the knowledge, and I'd make a failure of it alone. But with your knowledge and my money we'd be successful.

"You've said a good many times that things don't happen by chance, but are brought about by the direction of the Lord; haven't you, Bob?" asked Shad.

"Aye, 'tis th' Lard brings things t' happen," admitted Bob.

"Now, Bob, listen to me. I came here in the first place just to enjoy a pleasant summer's outing. Pleasure and good times were all I ever thought of, and I knew nothing of life or life's higher motives. I doubt if I could have earned my own bread if I had been turned loose in the world empty-handed, because I hadn't the power or patience to stick to a thing or to face discouraging conditions for any length of time.

"I did not know the meaning of the word toil; I did not know what privation meant, or the suffering that comes through privation. I had always had whatsoever my fancy craved, and had never known want or disappointment.

"Here in your country, Bob, I have experienced toil. I have been tried out in the furnace fire of physical suffering and mental agony, and I have learned what sympathy means.

"I am living to-day only because Manikawan, an Indian girl, made it possible by the sacrifice of her own life for me to live. I'd have given up and thrown myself down in the snow to die a hundred times but for the encouragement she gave me to keep going, for I was constantly possessed of a desire to seek the rest and peace of death. And those poor Indians shared with me, Bob, the little they had, when they might easily have left me to perish.

"Do you know, Bob, there has not been a night since she died that I have not dreamed of Manikawan? She seems to say to me: 'I gave my life for yours. Go forth and make your life useful--offer a helping hand to others. It is in your power to guard my people from starvation.' So, Bob, I've got to do it if I am ever to have peace of mind, and you've got to help me.

"Do you think that these things just happened, Bob? Or were they brought about by Divine direction? Don't you think that this combination of incidents points out to us our life work? Don't you think they suggest that we are to unite our talents and so use them that we shall not only help ourselves but help others? Come, Bob, what do you say?"

For a moment Bob did not speak, and when he did his voice betrayed deep emotion.

"Th' way you puts un, Shad, I'm thinkin', now, you'm right. 'Tis th' Lard's way o' bringin' things about. You'm wonderful good, Shad, t' think o' me for a partner, an' I'll be wonderful proud t' be partners with you, Shad."

"That's the way to talk, old man!" exclaimed Shad, grasping Bob's hand.

"I'm not knowin' how t' thank you, Shad," replied Bob, his heart overflowing.

"That feeling is reciprocated, Bob, so we won't either of us thank the other. Now we've agreed to our partnership, we'll have plenty of time to arrange the details of our business before we go to the Bay, and then I think you'll have to make a trip to St. Johns or Boston with me to have the co-partnership agreement drawn and executed in proper legal form."

Shad explained to Bob that at the time of his birth his grandfather set aside one hundred thousand dollars to be held in trust for his benefit. It was provided that the income of this trust fund was to be paid to his guardian annually, upon his birthday, to be applied to his immediate needs, or to constitute an annual allowance of spending money, until he attained his majority, when he was to receive the principal.

"But I've never spent any of Grandfather's allowance," said Shad. "Father got me everything I needed and kept me supplied with spending money, and every year when the income from the trust fund came in Father bought government bonds with it and placed the bonds in a safety deposit vault for me.

"These bonds amount to more than the principal of the trust fund now--I don't know just how much, but I know there's considerably more than one hundred thousand dollars, for they have been earning interest all these years.

"This money is mine to use as I see fit, and I'm going to invest one hundred thousand dollars of it in our partnership and hold the balance as a reserve. Of course my sister will have to act for me until I'm of age. She's ten years older than I am, and has been my guardian since Father died. She'll not object, for she has a great deal of confidence in my judgment.

"When Father died, nearly three years ago, he left me a snug fortune, and I have plenty to live on even if our trading venture doesn't prove a money-making business at first."

"'Tis a wonderful lot o' money!" declared Bob. "More'n I can think!"

"We'll need a pretty fair capital to succeed," said Shad. "We'll have to purchase a vessel of some sort to carry on trade along the outer coast, and bring our supplies to the Bay, and carry to market our furs, fish, and oil. You'll look after the native trade, with the men you employ to help you, but I'll have to engage expert assistance in purchasing the trading goods and disposing of the products to the best advantage until I finish college and learn my end of the business. All will cost money, though I hope when we once get started we'll build up a trade that will warrant it."

Bob went to his bunk that night with his head all awlirl. The amount of capital which Shad proposed to put into their partnership, and the extensive business which he proposed to build up, were too big and too wonderful for Bob to comprehend all at once.

A substantial structure had indeed taken the place of his tumbled air castles, though it was long before he could bring himself to realise that this structure was not, after all, another and greater air castle than those which had been destroyed.

XXIX

THE FRUIT OF MANIKAWAN'S SACRIFICE

At length the break-up came, much as it always comes in that country. The sun, grown strong and bold, vanquished the Spirit of Frost. The snow became a sea of slush, and water covered the ice of lakes and river. Finally the clouds opened, and for a week rain fell in a deluge.

A thousand new streams sprang into being, rushing in white torrents to join the swollen river. Cascades fell from every ledge and parapet. Now and again a great boulder was loosened and went crashing down a hillside with terrifying roar. The river, freed from its ice shackles, overflowed its banks, and in the wild, unrestrained ardour of its new power uprooted trees and washed them away upon its turbulent bosom as it dashed madly seaward.

One day, when the rain had ceased and the waters had somewhat subsided, Ungava Bob and Shad Trowbridge, accompanied by Mookoomahn, turned northward in Shad's canoe to the Great Lake, following the route which Manikawan had taken several months before in her journey to the river tilt.

Manikawan's body was found as they had left it, and undisturbed. It was lowered from its rude platform, and they laid it in its final resting-place in a grave among the spruce trees not far from her father's lodge. Over the grave a cairn of boulders was raised, and surmounted by a tablet of wood upon which was carved simply the word "MANI-KAWAN."

Then they parted, Mookoomahn to turn northward in his long and lonely journey to join his people, Bob and Shad to return to the river tilt, and homeward.

It was on an afternoon late in June when the browned and weather-beaten voyageurs turned their boat into Wolf Bight. What a long, long time had elapsed, it seemed to Shad, since that foggy morning in August when they had left the little cabin and said farewell to the tearful group upon the shore; and how homelike and restful the cabin looked now! What an age of experience had passed since that night when Bob pulled him out of the Bay, and introduced him, shivering and wet, to its hospitable shelter and warmth.

As they approached the shore a glad shout was heard, and a moment later Emily--who had that very day reached home from St. Johns--and Bessie, who was there to meet her, came running to the landing, with Mrs. Gray and Richard and Douglas Campbell at their heels.

Emily laughed and cried with delight, quite smothering Bob with kisses, and when she relinquished him to her mother she kissed each of the other brown faces. Bob was quite impartial, and when his mother released him Bessie was not forgotten in his greeting.

The most important, and therefore the first piece of news to be imparted, was the partnership agreement between Shad and Bob. Douglas at once prophesied success, and when, a fortnight later, Bob and Richard took passage with Shad to St. Johns, Douglas accompanied them as expert adviser in the selection of a trading vessel and the necessary supplies for their posts.

* * * * *

The firm of Trowbridge and Gray began operations with the establishment of stations in the interior, as originally designed. Dick Blake was engaged to take charge of the post at the northerly end of the Great Lake, where he quickly built up a large and lucrative trade with both Nascaupee and Mountaineer Indians.

The river tilt was enlarged, and became a trading station and supply base for the interior, over which Ed Matheson presided.

Bill Campbell, during the open season of navigation, had command of the brigades of Indians employed to transport goods from Wolf Bight to the interior posts, and during the midwinter months conducted a sub-post and storehouse situated at the southerly end of the Great Lake, not far from Manikawan's grave.

With the interior trade in such able hands, Ungava Bob devoted his attention to the Bay trade, and it is needless to say that the trappers of the region prospered.

Richard, in command of the trim schooner "Manikawan," also opened a profitable trade with liveryes and Eskimos of the coast.

Shad Trowbridge, after graduation from college, quickly developed into an able business man, and personally attended to the purchase of supplies and the sale of products.

Trowbridge and Gray made mistakes, as was to be expected, and had their ups and downs, but in the end they succeeded, and the firm is known to-day from Boston to Hudson's Straits as one of the most honourable and substantial concerns in the North.

At the very beginning of their career Shad and Bob adopted as their trademark the picture of an Indian maiden with bow raised and arrow poised ready for its flight, and beneath it the word "Manikawan." With this constantly before them Shad declared they could never stray from the original object of their enterprise, and could never forget the lesson taught by Manikawan's heroic sacrifice. And never since the firm began business have Manikawan's people failed to receive relief in times of need, and never has there been a repetition of the awful year of starvation.

"'Tis wonderfully strange, Bessie, how things come about," Bob sometimes says to his wife, in their cosy home at St. Johns. "I used to think the Lord had forgotten me sometimes, but I always found later that those were the times He was nearest to me."

"The Lord has always been very close to you, Bob," Bessie invariably replies.

Emily, at the earnest solicitation of Shad, was permitted to finish her education in Boston under the chaperonage of Shad's sister, and developed into a charming and accomplished woman, though she never lost her love for the little cabin at Wolf Bight.

But the failures and successes of Trowbridge and Gray, and the experiences of Emily in the new and greater world which she entered, are stories by themselves, and each would require a volume to relate.

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