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By William MacMillan

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NORTHLAND STORIES

TALES OF TRAPPING LIFE IN THE
CANADIAN WILDERNESS

By WILLIAM MacMILLAN

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CONTENTS

NEKIK, THE WANDERING OTTER.....	3
THE DEVIL BIRD	10
TRACKLESS TRAILS	22
MACCRAE OF ST. FELICIAN	31
THE MIDNIGHT WATERLOO	46
YELLOW COAT	53
CALL OF THE WILD ANSWERED	62
THE CROWN SABLES	68
A TRAGEDY OF THE NORTH	79

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327
NORWEGIAN WOODS
Nekik -

the Wandering Otter

By William MacMillan



ALL through the long dreary day Nekik, the otter, couched in the shelter of his temporary stump-home, cunningly concealed under the spreading arms of a great pine. These branches kept his shelter from being buried under the clouds of snow that were being whirled and drifted across the face of the land. The crystallized moisture was the kind that froze into ice as soon as it fell. The great ashes and pines rocked and creaked in their stiff jackets of ice and groaned under the burden of heavy snow. Sweeping over the lately fallen snow the cold solidified into a smooth intense hardness that reflected the shadows of every bush, every tree and every queer shaped stump.

Nekik knew that the same storm that was holding him back, was preventing his foes from venturing from their hidden lairs, and dozed at the very mouth of his den with unwonted security. With the coming of darkness the storm, as is so often the case in the northern country, died gradually away into nothing and the cold deepened in fearful bitterness. The storm-cast

skies of the day gave way to a marvelously vivid display of northern lights. The wilderness became a blaze of startling points of light that tore across the sky and came together with a soundless crash. The world had changed on the instant from a place of storm and moaning trees to a place of fairy wonderland, a forest of shining silver as amazing as it was beautiful.

Into this world of beautiful silence crept Nekik from his place of protection, and despite the lightness of his approach, the brittle twigs creaked about him. It seemed as if his very breath had its effect on them. The disconcerting noises made him incautiously place his feet on an insecure place; for a frantic second he struggled to maintain his equilibrium, then slipped and sprawled his length on the ice-coated surface. With the cunning of his kind, he lay motionless as he fell, his twitching ears straining for signs of danger. None came, however, and in a few minutes he was safe in the shadows of the trees. With preconceived deliberateness he headed for a large open patch that in summer marked a dangerous morass, but now the iron hand of winter held impotent its dangers in ice-manacled fingers that relaxed not their hold. Suddenly the long, black body was petrified into the semblance of a stump; his wonderfully acute senses had warned him of a movement ahead; that it was not an enemy he apparently seemed sure. Not for long did he remain thus; one minute he was a stump, the next the stump had vanished and no movement marked his going. The blackness of the undisturbed night thickened, and the cold increased to a stinging intensity, and except for the ghostly swish of a passing owl on murder bent, the

world was steeped in silence. Then things began to happen.

The snowy white form of a scared rabbit sailed through the air and landed with a jarring thud on the frozen snow. Barely had he touched when he was off to the accompaniment of a shower of tinkling icicles that swept down the little slope like a miniature avalanche. The dark form of Nekik followed at a ridiculously slow pace. Never in the world would he overtake the panic-stricken rabbit at that rate. But could the otter's face be analyzed, no trace of worry or doubt would be found there, for he knew his quarry and could discount every move he would make. Even so, we must not get the idea that he was slow. Anything but that. His short, stubby legs carried him over the hard snow in awkward jerks that were most deceiving, and soon he, too, vanished in the shadows of the forest.

Once again a pall of silence enveloped the wilderness, while not far away Nekik was contentedly gnawing the bones of the late rabbit. Slowly Nekik retraced his steps to the little stream that now lay buried many feet under the snow and ice. Pausing for a moment on the top of the bank he searched the inky darkness for hidden dangers. Satisfied that nothing menaced his safety, he squatted on his haunches and slid down the well-worn incline and dropped down a great crack in the ice out of sight. For many minutes afterward the air was full of the ringing clatter of thousands of tiny icicles that rattled after the vanished otter. The sounds carried far over the endless reaches of the great forest and came to the sharp ears of a skulking wolf on the trail of some luckless victim. The sounds

seemed more inviting to him than the trail he was following and he swung around in that direction. A past master in the art, he soon picked up Nekik's trail, but when a half hour later he peered cautiously over the rim of the cliff, an unresponsive stillness caused him to give a snarl of disgust that was most pleasing to many a little hidden listener. Meanwhile, what of Nekik?

With an entire abandon of his former caution, Nekik slipped clumsily along the hard bottom, crossed once, and at length reached the real home of his people. In the queer unnatural light that filtered through the thick ceiling of ice, den after den could be seen where they had been cleverly dug above the water level in the bank. Dark forms of other otters flitted here and there along the many runways. Suddenly, as if by some tacit agreement, Nekik and two others detached themselves from the group, darted through a hole in the ice and emerged in the pale grey light of a dawning day. This was not the same hole that had let our friend into the stream, but another one farther up the winding course of the stream. A well-beaten trail led up the rather steep bank. Following this trail with a strange gait, half run, half hop and a jump, they reached the top, and with their big heavy tails dragging clumsily behind them, they melted into the shadows.

Unlike most other trails of the wild folk, this one curved and swung in acres designed in order to follow the line of least resistance and to avoid stumps and windfalls that lay thick in their path. The finish of this wide, curving trail was the top of the bank lately vacated by Nekik, and here the hard, crusty snow was

beaten down by the weight of many bodies. Each otter, as he came to the lip of the bank, settled himself firmly on the base of his tail, gave a little screeching whistle and whirled down the incline with great speed. Again and again the boisterous creatures repeated their childish performance, and they weren't all young otters, either.

It came Nekik's turn. He was settling himself comfortably for the descent when the awful sound of a great wing swish cut through the grunts of the up-bank climbing otters. A huge black shadow of fearful proportions dropped like a plummet from the sky, and in an instant the terrified Nekik was hidden from sight under great flapping wings that sought to batter him to pieces, while claws of fearful strength and sharpness searched for a definite hold, and failing that to tear into ribbons the very heart of its victim. The strength of the gigantic eagle was stupendous and Nekik felt himself partially lifted off his feet. Up to now, paralyzed with fear of the unknown, he had remained silent, but recovering his shattered wits to some extent, he snarled and growled with some show of defiance, but the eagle was silent. The cruel claws bore into his very vitals, and only his heavy and ill-balanced weight saved him from being lifted bodily into the air. Once off the snow he well knew that he would be at the mercy of the murderer, who would carry him to a great height and then dash him to pieces on the earth below, whence he would follow to devour his prey at leisure.

Desperation gave him strength. A lucky shove of his powerful tail and somehow he managed to secure a precarious hold in the fluffy feathers under one flap-

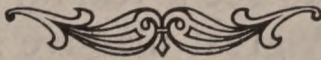
ping wing. Heedless of the death-dealing blows in his head and back, he dug his claws in the breast of the bird and mouthed for a vital hold in the only weak part of the eagle's great armour. Now it was the aggressor's turn to attempt escape, and with a hoarse cry the eagle strove to break away from the terrible teeth of its antagonist. But the hold of Nekik was unbreakable, and now to its dismay the eagle found, despite his size and the suddenness of his attack, he was at a sore disadvantage. The bird's panic increased as it felt the pain of those ripping, tearing teeth searching for a fatal hold. Except for the deep nose breathing of the otter and the whistling breath of the bird, the battle was fought in silence. While Nekik's companions had sped to safety at the first sign of danger, still they were close enough to hear now and then the rasp of ripping claws as the otter sought to get a firm hold on the hard crust, and the crash and flap of the tremendous wings as they whirred in great circles against the ice-hung trees.

Far away to the northward a wandering fisher, the outlaw of the woods, caught the sound of the combat as it was carried to his ears on the wings of the night breezes, and he carefully scented his way toward the sound with the hope of an easily earned meal. But for some reason or other, when he did catch a glimpse of the crimson battle-ground, he displayed good judgment in not interfering, for unbeknown to him, on a branch above his head, crouched a big lynx. Drawn to the scene by the same anticipations, he would wish little interference from another party. With burning eyes of living fire the savage lynx bided his time for

an opportunity at the proper moment to pounce on the winner. In dire straits though he was, the eagle, through his lidless eyes, caught the glitter of the baleful eyes on the tree, and with added terror, he beat his wings and clawed with his spurs, but the teeth of Nekik were doing deadly work and the monarch of the air was becoming weaker and weaker. At last, with a convulsive heave, Nekik sank his teeth into the very heart of the eagle. With a great shuddering and fluttering of wing the bird crumpled in the snow and after a few twiches lay still. Jaws dripping and mouth open, the weary Nekik dragged himself from under the body of his antagonist. With thumping heart and exhausted sigh unto death he spread his short legs far apart and stared stupidly at the mass of feathers.

Now was the fisher's opportunity; likewise the lynx's turn. But strange to say, no brown form slipped out to attack; no grey thunderbolt shot from the tree. The wild folk must surely love a winner, for the fisher turned slowly away from an easy meal, while the bloodthirsty cat clawed his way down from the tree and sped to other places on his big, silent pads.

With great gashes in his chest and back, Nekik turned to the top of the slide, and with a weary flip of his tail tumbled down and out of sight.



THE DEVIL BIRD

IT was Father Pouliot's annual trip. Through many a mile of fly-infested, pine scented timberland he had trudged to call upon the tiny Eskimo village that lay on the very outskirts of his thousand-mile parish. It perched itself uncertainly on the extreme edge of a rocky precipice, whose foot was laved by the restless Arctic Sea. Here some thirty or more little unkempt huts housed as savage and unbroken a tribe of Eskimos as ever hunted bear or tossed a spear.

The big-hearted man of God went among them and the brown people respected him in their own placid, grudging fashion.

The priest hurried, for soon the hard, cruel hand of the north would bind and crush the world in manacles of steel, and he had other work to do. True to the spirit of their kind, the people of the village watched the coming of the priest with an apparent lack of interest.

With kindly beaming face, the good man loosened the straps of his pack as he drew near. Suddenly there was a flash of golden curls and a tiny little white girl of some three or four years darted from the chief's door and with squeals of delight and mock fear disappeared into the nearest hut. An instant later the priest was startled to see a fearful figure come bouncing in her wake. A great massive shape it was, on all fours, while upon its back and head was the skin of a great blue wolf. To emphasize its frightful aspect,

pieces of bright red flannel had been thrust into the eye sockets of the skin.

With awkward jumps this amazing apparition sought to follow the flying girl, but by this time the holy man stood in its way, whereupon the thing stood upon its hind feet, disclosing to the father's astonished gaze the red and perspiring face of Ka-Yaka, the old chief. Very sheepishly the old man dropped the wolf skin from his shoulders and signed to the other to enter his hut.

"You have a little white girl," came from the priest, and he drew from the lips of the Eskimo the halting story of how in the early spring a mighty storm broke over the world and on the next day there drifted to the foot of their cliffs a small ship's boat with the bodies of a sailor and a little girl. The man was dead, but under the tender ministrations of the women the little girl was coaxed back to life and here she was, adopted into the chief's own home. Judging from what he had just seen, there seemed but little doubt that the child was happy. Even as they spoke there was a rush in the door and the golden-haired child was in the chief's waiting arms.

* * * *

The years slipped by even in that far-off portion of the world and the Eskimo village changed as little in outward respects as did the boundless, restless sea that lapped its gigantic cliffs. But on the brown men and women time, of course, had laid its inexorable hand. True, Chief Ka-Yaka still held autocratic sway over the lives and destinies of his people, but he was of many years and the murmurings from his young

men warned him that the autumn of his life was upon him.

The young men had grown up, taken wives who were once the little brown girls that played about in the streets, and they lived now with their children in the village. South Wind was one, however, who had not yet pleased to choose her mate. Like her name, she meant everything that was gentle and pleasing. The cruel winds of the north and the treacherous winds of the west all brought cruel, biting cold, but the south wind, like the little storm and spray-lashed waif who now bore its name, brought in its train the gentle things of life.

Short summer had come to the north and the world was bright and sunny as only, an Arctic summer can make it. Clad in the long jacket and short skirt of smoked caribou, affected by the maidens of the village, South Wind had bound into the strands of her golden hair wisps of trade flannel of brilliant hue. Sitting on the edge of a flat rock she idly swung her long graceful limbs in the free abandon of youth. At her side stood Kadack, the beau of the village. He was tall and graceful, and even the boxy cut of the garments of his people failed to hide the powerful lines of his figure.

“Come, South Wind, you shall be the ruler of my people. You shall command and all the others shall obey. Ka-Yaka, my father, must soon be upon his journey, and it is the desire that I, Kadack, rule in his place.”

This was spoken slowly and awkwardly, after the manner of his people.

That Kadack was justified in feeling a bit uncertain

of the object of his affections was apparent the next minute.

"You are a big talker, Kadack, but I don't want a hunter for my man. I want one who can talk like Father Pouliot, has a watch and lives in a house with an upstairs to it."

"Bah, that old priest fills your pretty head with too much nonsense."

South Wind tossed her golden head, slipped from the rock and left the exasperated young fellow alone with his throbbing heart and whirling head.

* * * *

The great war had come to a close, the mighty armies of the new world were streaming back to their everyday life. In that army were many bright, clean-cut young men who bore on the left breast the golden wings of the air service. Having tasted of swift death amidst the whirling skies of Europe, they returned unsatiated and unsatisfied, yearning in their young hearts for more excitement.

Yearnings and dreams crystallized into action, so that in a very few months there found their way into the offices of many public men certain bulky envelopes which proved to be the nucleus of an idea that none but an airman would have dreamed of, namely, the organizing of a seaplane expedition to the wilds of far-off Labrador Ungava for the purpose of bringing to the use of man untold wealth of fur and mineral that lay in the rocks and forests of that little known wilderness.

Some of these harried business men tossed the typed pages into the waste basket with a laugh, while others,

knowing perhaps of the valuable data carefully pigeon-holed in the Nation's archives of what early explorers had found, lent their weight to the project.

* * * *

Kicking the rock in a most unchieflike manner, the disappointed Kadack leaned on his elbows and looked towards the sea. With the unconsciously trained sight of his people, the young fellow glimpsed in the hazy distance a flock of frightened sea gulls. That in itself meant little, for sea gulls are stupid birds at best. Even the slap of a wave would disturb their peace. He interestedly watched their panic grow as with wild whistles of consternation they wheeled and swooped above the long swells of the heaving sea. An odd sound smote his ear and out of the sweeping clouds soared a roaring bird of monstrous size. Straight in from the sea it flew and with incredible swiftness swooped over the little village, roaring all the while with a noise that drew every Eskimo from his hut.

Impressed with the frightful realness of the terrible thing, Kadack dug his nails into the rock and with beating heart followed the flight of this flaming Devil Bird. It seemed as if the creature had the ominous intent of sweeping down on the trembling villagee. As the deafening roar increased in volume, the amazed Eskimo caught sight of a tiny man on the back of the bird. Suddenly the roaring ceased and the great bird, pointing its nose to the ground, dived to earth behind the nearby cliffs.

Instantly the village was in a turmoil. With dismayed cries the women marshalled the children into the questionable shelter of the huts, while the hunters

drew their spears and looked towards the old chief, who for the moment seemed undecided. At length, apparently coming to a decision, the old fellow shook his tousled locks and led his silent hunters over the rocks in the direction where this new and fearful bird had taken to earth. They slipped noiselessly and with cunning from shelter to shelter.

Having shut off his engine, Sturgess, the van of the invading seaplanes, gritted his teeth and pancaked to an uncertain landing on the rocky floor of the gully. Barely had he climbed stiffly from his seat when a mass of husky brown figures appeared from nowhere and closed silently around him, each uplifted hand holding a wicked looking spear. In great astonishment Sturgess mechanically raised his hands above his head, whereupon a bandy-legged little Eskimo promptly pressed his spear point against the air belt that the airman wore around his waist. At the loud report every man dropped in his tracks like a shot. The Irish in Sturgess burst to the surface and he gave way to a hearty laugh. Amusement is the same in every tongue, and a laugh, particularly an Irish one, can be understood in all the languages of the earth except the Eskimo one. The hunters regained their feet and their composure and proceeded very gingerly to tie Sturgess' hands behind his back, taking great pains at the same time to steer clear of the great bird that stood so innocently nearby. Without a word of explanation the airman was led back to the village and quietly pushed into the darkness of a hut near the chief's, while two uncompromising looking hunters took up their positions at the only outlet.

Swiftly the news swept through the village that the evil man who had come in from the sea on the Devil Bird had been captured by the hunters and was now in the chief's dog hut. Stolid women and fat, pudgy children crowded near to catch a glimpse of the captive, but the guards, swelled with their own importance, scowled forbiddingly at them. Though the luckless Sturgess did not know it, a cordon was thrown around the machine, the men taking care not to venture too near.

With urgent haste the councilmen were called together to parley on this great and evil thing that had come into their lives. Some were for casting the stranger from the cliffs. Others were for tying him to the back of his flaming Devil Bird and bidding him go the way he came. But others counseled more wisely.

"He looks to be of the good priest's people. Let us wait till he comes and he will advise us."

In the end this advice prevailed, though there was a great outcry when it came to the ears of the hotter spirits among the young hunters.

Days rolled into weeks, which in turn measured themselves into months, and still the airman remained in the darkness of his dog house prison.

One day Sturgess was allowed to wander in the little clearing around the hut within sight of his guards, and thus, South Wind, passing by, saw the lonely prisoner as he looked with wistful eyes towards the sea.

The white girl felt unconsciously drawn towards him and soon she contrived to wander close enough to speak. To tell how those visits grew in length and

frequency would fill pages. Suffice it to say that before long South Wind lay on her soft couch of skins at night and dreamed of the handsome, white-faced stranger. The meager teachings of the good priest stood her in good stead, for this man spoke the same tongue and not any more fluently than she. As for Sturgess, cast in a strange land, among strange people, this white girl, who used his own tongue, was as one of his own people. He came to watch for the visits of the beautiful village girl with a desperation that was true to his ardent Irish nature.

One day Sturgess found his liberty shut off and he was roughly thrown again into the blackness of the dog house, and not until a week later did he learn from the lips of South Wind the reason for it. Familiarity breeding contempt of the great bird, silent now for so long, the children began to play around it, and one, more bold than the others, climbed into the hole in the creature's back. The various sticks and levers appealed to the simple mind of the boy and he pulled some of them. There was a burst of flame and an awful roar. Terror stricken, the youngsters tumbled pell-mell to the village. With quaking hearts the hunters hid in the bushes and watched the evil thing gradually grow less defiant and finally roar itself into silence. They returned to throw the instigator of it all back into his prison, for it seemed to them that there must be a diabolical connection between the two.

The incident reassured the aviator, for he had feared that the long weeks of idleness in the rain and weather might have seriously rusted the engines. He was relieved that it would turn, and unless some super-

stitious hunter was impulsive enough to pierce the gas tank, Sturgess figured that he had plenty of gasoline.

In the fullness of time Father Pouliot dropped his pack from his broad, aching shoulders and plunged immediately in the lives and troubles of his simple flock. All through the day he argued with the obstinate old chief till the word went around that at the break of the following day every man and woman was to meet at the council rock to try the Devil Man. South Wind heard the summons and her heart sank.

Long before the ghostly dawn broke every man, woman and child in the village was squatting in a circle around the flat-topped council rock. On a great white bear skin, spread over the surface, sat old Ka-Yaka. Among the old men at the foot was good Father Pouliot, and South Wind was not at all reassured by the anxious look on the seamed old face. Such a silence hung over the crowd that the whistling sea gulls swept almost over their heads. At length, when the slowly breaking day allowed him to distinguish the features of those who sat at the council rock, the old chief rose slowly and impressively to his feet. There was an expectant craning of necks.

"My children, we are come together for the purpose of finding out something about this great thing that has come to us. Is it for evil or good? We cannot think that it is for good, else the Devil Man would have brought gifts of bright things, and we surely think his coming bodes evil, because of the monstrous thing that bore him straight from the sea."

The old man's voice wavered for a moment and then went on:

"We all know that no living things are in that direction of the sea from whence he came, only the souls of the dead. Counsels our friend the White Father," here the chief glanced down at the priest, "to set the evil man free? Others may come from the same place and utterly destroy our village. Bring on the Devil Man that all may see for themselves that he is of the devil."

The crowd parted to admit the entrance of the guard with the hapless airman. In the bulky suit in which he had been captured, Sturgess looked a veritable giant of a man, and the angry looks that he cast around him made the old men shake their greasy heads in approval of the chief's words. Glancing over the heads of the Eskimos, the American caught sight of the tearful face of South Wind and he smiled. A young hunter from the rear of the circle rose to his feet and in a deep voice called on the chief:

"Have done with this trial," he cried, suggesting that Sturgess be fastened to the back of his wicked bird and that both be thrown into the sea.

A murmur of approval greeted this, but a wrinkled old man from the base of the rock got to his feet and rumbled:

"Our friend, the priest, what has he to say?"

The father rose slowly to his feet and spoke in the Gulf of Noises' tongue:

"You are my people and I love you as only a father can love the children of his heart. What I advise you to do is for your own good and for the good of the little children at your knees. This man you have bound like an enemy is no Devil Man, nor is the thing yonder

anything to fear. This man's council circle has sent him to trade with your people, and because he comes on the back of a ship that sails not only on the sea, but also in the air, you fear he is of evil intentions. No, my people, this is a good man and I would strongly counsel that you let him go free. He will return to his own country and soon there will come to our village great warm blankets that will keep our little ones warm, knives and mirrors that show our faces, and we shall barter to the white men our skins and oil. If we harm him, others will take his place, and I say their coming will never end. They are as the young seal in numbers and they shall utterly destroy our homes."

As he finished speaking, the tall, powerful figure of Kadack shouldered his way through the throng and stood belligerently before the chief.

"Father, let this man die. If he is good, his spirit will be happy in the hunting grounds of the white man. Since he is evil, command Kadack to spit his heart on the end of his spear or else let me toss him from the cliff."

Not waiting for the chief's assent, the young warrior swung toward the prisoner with spear raised over his head. There was a moment's silence, and then with wild shouts the young hunters crowded around the white man. South Wind offered breathless prayers to Father Pouliot's God. Before the suspense broke, there was a cry from a woman, "The sea, the sea, look to the sea."

Sweeping from the scudding clouds of the early morning came a score of the same terrible birds that

had borne the prisoner to the northland. As the monstrous creatures drew near their fearful roarings beat the brown people into panic stricken silence. With mathematical precision the giant birds circled over their heads, and an instant later settled down in a circle around the council rock. With tense faces the brown people watched a group of muffled figures scramble from the backs of their chargers and advance towards them, each man armed with an iron weapon such as they had taken from the prisoner. Kadack looked on for a moment, and then with a loud whoop he raised his spear and pointed it towards the breast of the bound man. Before he had time to complete his aim, flames burst forth from a dozen revolvers. Kadack stood for a moment, a queer, dazed look on his face, then he spun around and dropped to the ground. Quickly the stern-faced strangers closed in around the group and disarmed the hunters, while one cut the thongs that bound Sturgess. At the same moment South Wind found her way to his side, and to the amazement of his newly arrived friends, Sturgess took the fair-haired Eskimo girl in his arms. A few excited explanations and Sturgess and South Wind, followed by Father Pouliot, led the party to the village.

It was a few days later that Sturgess and South Wind, now his bride, accompanied by the squadron of airmen, began the homeward journey. After fastening the happy South Wind securely in the tiny seat in the rear, Sturgess had snapped over a lever, there was a roar and a purr as the Devil Bird shot up into the blue skies to join its friends, and together they turned southward towards the new world.

TRACKLESS TRAILS

THE black, fluffy clouds scurried quickly across the heavens. Forest, lakes and stream lay still in silent blackness. Suddenly, with a flash of light, the autumn moon burst from its mask of driving cloud and shone out with a clear, cold brilliance. It picked out with amazing distinctness the whole great forest, every bush, every tree and every twig. It clothed the ravines and hollows with a deep, impressive shadow, and it flashed and shone on the bark of the silver birches with crystal shafts of living fire.

The myriad points of light passed on, and deep in the dense blackness of the Great Hills softly rested on the quiet waters of a calm, glassy lake. Its sparkling surface gave back the clear rays as from a mirror. A shadow cut the beam of light and there was outlined for an instant every curve of a great screech owl as he lumbered clumsily through the air on some sinister hunt. He passed and only the faint swish of his wide-spread wings marked his going. The blackness of the forest swallowed him and hid the story of his preying from the light.

From that section of the low-lying bank that lay deepest in the shadow, an invisible body plunged from its lip and the clear waters were broken by a swiftly vanishing body. The little waves rippled and sparkled with scintillating light in ever widening circles and again everything was as before.

Far out toward the center a dainty little snout poked itself to the surface and turned in a curious half circle

as it inquiringly sniffed the air. Suddenly, without even the suspicion of a ripple, the snout disappeared and almost immediately the silver flash of a spotted belly marked the lazy roll of a wandering gray back in the identical spot.

Again the nose appeared upon the surface, this time many yards nearer the shore. In a thoroughly decided way the little black spot surged towards the bank, parting the waves in the manner peculiar to water animals. Reaching the shore, the nose lengthened into a short, fat body covered with thick brown fur, with a long, flat tail of odd construction. A great muskrat crawled up on the heavily tree-fringed bank, great showers of glittering diamonds falling from his glistening coat as he shook himself under the friendly glare of the unblinking moon. Not for long did the little brown animal work over his toilet with a marvelous furtiveness that marked every movement. The brown form melted into the surrounding shadow. The traveling clouds rushed across the heavens, broke, separated and came together again with a soundless crash over the blank face of the cold moon.

Lake and forest blended into a mass of shadow and only the slight moaning in the treetops of that slowly gathering little breeze that precedes the breaking of the dawn broke upon the stillness.

With premeditated purpose the muskrat slipped through the dense bracken, now under a fallen log, anon clawing along a moss-covered ancient of the forest or breasting the waters of a rippling stream that gurgled and splashed from the rocky breast of the mountain. He had often traveled that road before

and he knew every stone and twig that beset his path. Pausing for an instant at the stagnant evil-smelling water of a sunken pond, he nipped the sweet root of a gorgeous lily that grew upon its banks. The one taste of his favorite food gave him a longing for more and he plunged into the dead water and quickly brought to their death a score or more of the beautiful flowers. The tasty root of the water lily is ever the piece de resistance of a muskrat's existence. Much as he relished his meal, he scurried quickly on his way. At last he came to his objective. Following the tortuous course of a tumbling stream, it brought him to a small lake. Smaller and shallower than the other one, it was surrounded on all sides by a vast morass that almost overlapped the low, muddy banks. A great quantity of slimy branches, from which hung and fluttered masses of rotten weed, floated on the surface.

The black water looked thick and sluggish, and most uninviting. The muskrat slipped through the foul marsh and crawled up the bald face of a round grey rock that stood sentinel-like at the dividing line between lake and swamp. Settling his feet for a dive, he was preparing himself for the spring, when in some strange manner one foot slipped on the hard, smooth surface and his usual well-timed, perfect leap was spoiled. He landed on his side with a splash that echoed and reëchoed through the silence like a clap of thunder.

Far up the inlet of the lake a large fisher lifted his head at the sound, and thinking discretion the better part of valor, disappeared into the shadows at his feet. Way back in the black depths of the forest the sharp

ears of a dainty weasel twitched as the sound faintly drummed against his sensitive ears. The sound was not repeated and he bent down to his partridge meal.

Quickly righting himself, the muskrat went down, down until he swiftly slipped to the inviting maw of his wonderfully constructed winter home. Quickly he reached the elevated floor, where he was affectionately greeted by his family. The little home was a marvel in architecture. Safe from the heaving and shifting of the winter ice, the under-water entrance was also a safe exit in time of danger. Free above the water line, the floor of the store and living room was as snug and dry as a bone. The dome-shaped roof was thick and strong and defined the most persistent attempts of their fiercest enemies.

As the new day broke over the lake there was a stillness as of death. The little folk were at rest. The first cold wind of the night brought the muskrat out on his daily or rather nightly hunt. Making his way across the lake, he rummaged contentedly around the damp, slimy weeds. Splashing carelessly through glistening pools and nosing inquiringly under partly submerged roots and trees, he was thoroughly at home in this hunting ground and he enjoyed it to the full. Many hours later, gorged to the eyes, he made his way to the widening pools that marked the beginning of the lake, making perhaps a little more noise than he should. He surveyed the quiet waters from the inadequate protection of a stranded log. Nothing moved along its mirrored surface and danger seemed very far away. He plunged gracefully to the bottom. Barely had he swam a few yards in the cool depths when a long,

black sinister shape darted at him with open mouth, too paralyzed with fear to move. Fortunately the otter misjudged his thrust, and the muskrat came too, and tore frantically to the shelter of a sunken tree. The terrible shape of the otter darted here and there in vain search, stirring the muddy bottom with powerful claws. He then shot away in a swirl of silver foam. For a long time the frightened muskrat clung to his shelter. Pressed against its slimy sides, he hardly dared to breathe.

The moon was high in the heavens when he plucked up courage enough to come to the surface, very cautiously, and peered through the darkness. Suddenly from down the lake came the rubbery crack of a tail hitting the water. Crack, crack, the danger signals answered from all sides. A big red rat munching a floating root paused for a moment, then pounded the water with a terrific splash as he dived out of sight. A dainty little brown fellow slipping along the mouth of a little feeding stream caught the signal that meant but one thing. He, too, answered with a saucy flip of his horny tail, but he, too, disappeared. In fact, every rat that caught the signal disappeared from sight in a splash of foam. Even a great beaver nosing along the sluggish outlet mechanically boomed his reply with a flap of his flail-like tail.

Minutes passed. By and by inquisitive little brown snouts cut the water in an uncertain way, gaining courage, however, with the apparent absence of all danger. Suddenly there was a rush of water, a struggle and a little screech rent the air, as a poor little fellow was dragged to his death by an unseen enemy. It marked

but a single instant in the eternal life and death struggle constantly waged among the little wild folk of the North Woods. While no moving object disturbed the smoothness of the lake, masses of bubbles rising here and there marked the hurrying and scurrying of little bodies bent on reaching safety.

Hours passed. A long, dark body drew itself from the water and stretched its shining length in the deep shadow of an overhanging alder. The long, slender body rippled in sinuous curves as he comfortably settled himself for a nap. A few twitches and soon the gentle rise and fall of the furry sides marked the dreamless sleep of the big otter.

The muskrats dreaded few animals as they feared the otter. Wily and as swift as they are in the water, he levied a heavy toll upon the little people. All through the cold, short day the frightened rats kept to their burrows. Even those that had made their homes in the wet, soggy banks of the many little streams that flowed into the lake received the warning in some inexplicable way and they, too, hugged the shelter of their comfortable homes. Thus it was that the otter found the hunting poor and unprofitable, and he soon betook himself to other hunting grounds.

Here and there sharp snouts broke the surface in shadowy spots, only to disappear like a flash at some real or imagined danger. Our muskrat proved more venturesome than his brothers and he was the first to brave the dangers of the upper air. With a great splutter of breath, he came up under a sweeping branch of a big alder that spread its friendly limbs low over the water. It seemed for just such a purpose as this.

His example was soon followed and the wonderful little animals resumed the daily excitement of their busy lives. At this season, the storing of winter food being in full swing, little time was wasted on other things. The low-lying shores and muddy pools were combed and forced to give up their good things. Our hero toiled mightily with the others, and did his share in adding to the goodly pile on the floor of the snug storeroom in their subterranean home.

The coming winter saw the thin ice gradually thicken and push its jagged edges towards the center until one bright, cold morning the way to the surface was blocked by a clear crystal sheet of transparent ice. Inquiringly, the muskrat bumped his nose along the length and breadth of it in a vain effort to find an opening. Nature, however, had provided them against such an emergency as this and since they could not hunt upon the surface, they simply nosed along the bottom many feet below or else stopped at home and slept.

According to the reckoning of both man and animal, such a terribly hard winter had seldom been seen. The winter's stores sank rapidly and some of the families were sore beset. Just in time the warm rays of the March sun, after days of increasing strength, cracked the frozen bands of ice along the shores, and the muskrat spent many happy hours foraging along the many strange cracks and fissures that ran in a thousand directions.

The new arrivals, and there were many, each household boasting of from two to five, quickly learned to follow their elders along the many unchartered lanes

of the muddy bottom. The sun, with tireless persistency, worked and dug its way into the very heart of the thick ice until by the middle of April the ceilings of their crystal prison rotted and sank beneath the surface, and the sturdy muskrats were free once more. Alas, danger and death stalked daily through their ranks in this bright spring season. The beaver and the otter, the marten and the owls, wise to the recklessness and inexperience of the younger rats, exacted a heart-breaking toll that wiped out many a happy little family.

The inexorable law of the wild held sway and every living animal, from the giant moose to the tiny mole, came under its dominion. It is the rule of the north to take all and give little. The gaunt hand of death was forever stretched out to snatch the unwary. Not the least of the many dangers the little people had to face was the periodical visits of the trappers. These men went about their work in a knowing way, and only the exceedingly clever escaped the grim traps. The victims were numbered from among those who lived deep in the black depths of the lakes, as well as countless little fur-coated animals that trod the silent trails of the woods. That spring the hunters swept clear many a beaver hut, more than one otter home and scores of the rats.

It so chanced one cold, stormy night that our muskrat, wandering along the innocent-looking debris of the shore, trod ever so lightly on a small object. Bing! His right forefoot was fast in the hunter's trap. In vain he tugged and strained, jumping here and there in a vain effort to free himself, but the cruel iron clung

to him. All through the long night, through the bright hours of the day, he panted, screeched and struggled till at last, in a frenzy of despair, he gnawed the long dead foot with his chisel-like teeth, a last bite, a tug, and he limped free on three legs and a bleeding stump.

Weeks came and went while he lay in the safe protection of his underwater home, and not until the autumn sun turned the forest into all the gorgeous hues of the rainbow did he assay once more the danger of the silent trails.



MacCRAE OF ST. FELICIAN

A STORY OF HUDSON BAY POST LIFE AND THE GRIM
FATE OF A MURDERER

“IT isn’t wise, my friends, to judge too hastily. If Gros Louis has stolen the skin it must be found, but to condemn him just because he was the last seen near it is not enough. Talk it over amongst yourselves and Gros Louis here will help you find the dishonest man,” and with friendly hands MacCrae, the Scotch factor at St. Felician, pushed the angry trappers from the room.

“What’s all the trouble about, MacCrae?” came from a slim young fellow perched on the edge of the red cloth-covered table. “Had the guy with the squint euchered the bunch?”

With a distasteful look the factor dropped into a chair beside the other.

“I love these people, Lambert; simple as children, their hearts are as big as the great forests they are born in. Truthful and religious to a fault, they loathe robbery. Lacroix, the fellow with the beard, missed a mooseskin robe last night and he seems to be positive that Gros Louis has taken it.”

The old man grew silent and seemed lost in thought, while the young fellow wondered if the old Scotchman ever grew lonely for his old people, the people that thought and talked as he did.

There was a soft thud of moccasined feet and a young girl fairly flew down the steps and drew up before her father with a low bow.

"Here I am, dad; is Mr. Lambert ready?"

On his feet the minute the girl came in, the young fellow made an attempt to draw on an elegant coat of city fur.

"Hold on a bit, my boy; you'll get that pretty thing all torn. Take this," and the old man unhooked an old mackinaw from a peg and held it out.

"Show Mr. Lambert all the sights, Kitty; the chutes, the old stockades, the River a Pierre and Old John's Camp; we want our guest to know what a fine place we have here."

The girl laughed.

"I warn Mr. Lambert before he starts that he will find his guide a fearfully prejudiced one, because I love this place," and a moment later the door closed behind the laughing voices.

Slipping quietly into the outer trading room, MacCrae busied himself with a huge pile of Hudson Bay blankets that an unspeaking Indian had mauled over for a couple of hours. His hands busy, he mused on the reasons for the young Frenchman's visit. The blankets again in an orderly array, he drew from his pocket the letter the stranger had handed him. It bore the familiar crouching Indian of his own literature and it was signed by one of the vice-presidents of the very company that owned this post at St. Felician.

"This will serve to introduce my friend, Adrien Lambert, who is traveling for his health. Please extend to him the courtesies of your charge," then the familiar scrawling signature.

Stray barterers came in and MacCrae was kept busy for the rest of the morning.

The days that followed threw Lambert and Kitty MacCrae much together. Entirely shut off from intercourse with girls of her own kind, this tall, dark, handsome Frenchman was opening up a new world to her, and her father, absorbed in the daily routine of the trade, failed to notice.

The close of the first week of the young fellow's stay marked the long expected home-coming of Sandy, Kitty's brother, who had taken the month's trade of furs down the river, and who was likely to arrive that day with a return load of provisions.

To the girl the day dawned bright and lonely, for she loved Sandy with all the fire of an impetuous nature; but with Lambert things were otherwise, the past week had passed as a dream and he peevishly reckoned that the coming of her brother would divide her time with him.

With great shouts and much cracking of whips the long expected team drew up at the post and everybody crowded around. From the window in the living room, Lambert caught a glimpse of a tall, blanketed figure pushing his way through the throng. Suddenly the door was banged open and Kitty MacCrae was in the arms of her brother. The old man greeted his son with less excitement, but no less affection.

"Well, how did you make out, Sandy? But first shake hands with Mr. Lambert, who is here for a few days looking over the country."

Sandy advanced towards the other in his impulsive way and shot out his hand with a boyish laugh.

"I heard from the Indians at Les Fourchettes that there was a stranger up this way."

Conversation soon drifted into the usual small talk till Sandy suddenly discovered that he had to help unload his toboggan and he dashed precipitately from the room.

"Will he never grow up?" came from the girl affectionately.

As if boosted by the bubbling spirits of young MacCrae, things at the post moved rapidly. Long toboggan excursions were made into the surrounding country and exciting times were had visiting the three different Indian encampments. Sandy, logically being the guide, Lambert and Kitty were again thrown together, and, indeed, the entertaining was not all on the part of the two young MacCreas. Clever, good looking and particularly sophisticated, Lambert was a breath from the world of men, and Sandy, with big eyes, drank in the tales of city life that fell so glibly from the lips of the Frenchman, and Kitty, that golden-hearted girl, the pride of her manly brother and the light of her father's life, was drawn by a powerful fascination towards him.

Three weeks had passed since Lambert had handed the factor his letter and his "short visit" showed no signs of termination. Came again the time for the monthly visit to Lac Menikek, and one fine, bright morning Sandy MacCrae, with all the sparkling enthusiasm of healthy youth, shouted a good-bye to those in the door, cracked his long whip and tore out of sight on the down trail.

The old factor plodded about his business while Kitty and their guest moved about at will. There was a morning that Lambert asked a team of dogs from

MacCrae "just to speed over to big John's camp—that old Indian fascinates me."

Two days later MacCrae was leisurely going through his stock in the trade house when the door opened to admit an Indian.

Without pausing in his work the factor greeted him: "How goes it, Gros Louis?"

A grunt was the only reply.

"Going to trade me that beaver skin?"

The thrust and parry of Indian barter followed and the upshot of it was the wily Indian returned to his toboggan and staggered back laden down with great skins which he dropped on the floor.

"Gros Louis want that gun," and he gravely pointed to a long-barreled antiquated Mauser rifle of some by-gone day.

As grave as the other, MacCrae stood the butt of the piece on the floor while the Indian slowly and carefully piled the beavers around it. They reached the odd breech, now they hid it from view, and soon the rear sight would be buried under the greasy pelts.

"Whiskey in big John's camp?" MacCrae started, then calmly, "Yes?"

Gros Louis grunted, as he feared that he lacked pelts to reach the top, but only ten inches or so of the rusty barrel remained uncovered and he still had a respectable pile of beavers at his feet. His face looked relieved.

"Every Indian drunk; white man, too. He crazy," and calmly he reached out a grimy paw and lifted out his prize.

With a whoop of delight he held the weapon aloft

and darted to the door. Schooled in masking his feelings, the factor felt the anger flaming into his cheeks. Barely did the door close on the Indian than he was on his way to the dog house. Not many minutes later his team was racing over the trail towards big John's camp on the Jacques Cartier.

Well was MacCrae called "The Hurricane" by the Indians, for he burst upon the old Indian's camp with all the fury of a storm. From the tattered teepee he yanked out the chief with little regard for his feelings and dumped the sodden rascal in the snow.

"Where did you get that whiskey?"

But the old villain was too far gone and looked at his questioner with a foolish grin on his unwashed face. From home to home the raging factor strode and each was but a replica of the first; even the women were in the stupor that comes from vile, cheap whiskey.

To his demand: "Where is the white man?" they oogled at him and gave the same answer, which was silence.

Hot with anger at the scoundrel who had dared to smuggle in whiskey to the ignorant Indians, the factor caught the sound of quavery singing from a clump of trees to his right. Here he was amazed to see his guest astride a fallen tree, bareheaded and in stocking feet. He was hanging on with both hands and mouthing the words of a popular jazz song, "I don't want to get up. I don't want to get up."

For nigh twenty years MacCrae had sought to impress upon the Indians the fact that white men were not as they, that he was a man of wisdom and power, and here this drunken fool had shattered to pieces all

the life teachings of the factor. MacCrae sensed the laugh that would go up from crawly teepees throughout the North when it became known that one of MacCrae's whites from the post had gone crazy on Indian whiskey. Blind with anger he pulled the maudlin white from his perch and propelled him to his toboggan.

"No white man can drink with these Indians and still be a guest in St. Felician," blazed from Sandy MacCrae a couple of mornings later. "God knows how you got the rotten stuff into big John's camp. Your vileness has set these hunters back and it will be a long time before they get their bearings again. God, had I my way"—and the old man trembled with the excess of his emotion. "Prepare to leave within an hour. You will set your face to the wilderness and pray your God that you will find repentance on the long trail."

The few spectators in the room pattered to the door without comment, turning curious glances to the dishevelled stranger as they disappeared. Like wildfire the news spread through the post and surrounding villages that the stranger from the city had been condemned by the factor to "Le Grand Voyage."

Slow to anger, the wrath of MacCrae boiled and seethed, and an hour later to the dot his big hands clenched and unclenched as he stood at the wide gate of the post and watched the flying team that bore the culprit away. The short day so peculiar to the northern country hastened to merge into a moonless night. Through the early hours of darkness MacCrae sat with knitted brows, pondering on the events of the day.

The rub of soft, dry sapless branches was the only sound that broke the perfect silence of the black night. Not far from the post and just outside the fringe of little houses a dog team came to a halt and a hoarse voice bade them be still, which command they appeared willing enough to obey, for their hard breathing told of a long run. In the darkness a tall figure detached itself from the dark blotch that was the toboggan and glided furtively to the kitchen entrance of the post. As if sure that he would find it unlocked he quietly and unhesitatingly raised the bar and disappeared within. A stealthy creep up the wide rough hewn stairs and from the top step could be seen the splash of bright light that came from the half-open door of the factor's den. Feeling his way with uncanny sureness to the nearest bedroom he knocked softly on the door. No answer. Placing his ear to the keyhole a sob came to him from the darkness within. A slight pull on the latch thong, the bar slid up and * * * "Jean!" "Kitty," and the two shadows became one.

"Love is blind," say those who are supposed to know. Be that as it may, but not many minutes later the two slipped silently down the way the one had come.

Then as the door closed behind them with a slight thud, "Oh!" gasped the girl, "I have forgotten my purse. I cannot go on without it."

The man wasn't keen on returning, but the girl insisted and with a muttered curse on his lips he disappeared through the door. Cautiously slipping along the lower floor he climbed once more the broad stairs till, as his head drew level with the floor above, he caught again the flash of light from the little office.

Impatient at the carelessness that necessitated this hazardous trip for a second time, Lambert glided into the room and peered around by the half light of the pale, washed-out moon he made out the bulk of the purse on the bureau. Anxious to be gone, he reached out to grasp it. Whether it was that he misjudged the distance due to the deceptive light or what, his fingers missed their object and brushed against a tall vase bearing nothing more important than hat pins. A thud, as it hit the top of the bureau, followed by the crash of an avalanche, as it burst into a thousand pieces on the floor.

With bated breath Lambert stood petrified in his tracks. He could hear the door of the office flung open and the heavy tread of the old man on the stair. With the first thought of the hunted, his hand moved mechanically to his belt and withdrew a long, murderous looking knife. In a minute the bedroom door was crashed back and a black figure towered in the doorway. Without a sound Lambert sprang forward, and with all his strength buried his knife to its hilt in the breast of the old factor. With a surprised grunt MacCrae swayed against the door jam; then slid limply to the floor. Two breaths later a shaking and excited man was tucking Kitty MacCrae in the toboggan and deaf to her surprised pleadings as to the purse he whooped up the dogs and shot out towards the wilderness.

Loaded up to the handles of his toboggan with provisions for the month, young Sandy MacCrae decided on an early start on the morrow and finding the time hanging heavily on his hands before bunking up, he

bethought him to buy a small gift for his sister. Having thought of it, he set about the business with all the excitement of youth. It was a real store, this place at Menekek, and the choice of gifts ranged anywhere between a Quebec heater to hair combs of flashing diamonds and precious stones. With the shy aid of a dark-eyed little French lass, he at length picked upon a comfortable looking scarf of generous size and he bade her wrap it up. Stay! he had forgotten friend Lambert. Now what would he like? He had almost everything the heart could desire; but wait a minute, he recalled one occasion when Lambert had expressed admiration for the knife the young Scotchman wore. Thin, well hacked and worn, it, of course, was too old to think of giving to his friend. He would buy him one like it. So with the earnestness that he had exhibited in the selection of the girl's scarf, he set about the choosing of a knife. None could he find exactly like his own, but at length his decision was made on a beauty. A firm pressed-leather handle balanced to perfection a slender blade of ferocious length. With a pleased smile Sandy paid for his purchases, stuck the knife in his belt, tucked the scarf under his arm and made for the bunkhouse.

When the cold, grey dawn of a new day broke over the metropolis of Lac Menikek, MacCrae cracked his long whip, zoeed to his dogs and he was off on the home trail. Three days of uneventful travel brought him to the last lap of his long journey and as he entered his backyard, as it were, he mused on how Lambert would like the knife, and his hand strayed to its hilt to be sure it was there. Drawing up to the door of the

post with a flourish, he turned over the team to Potvin, the hunchback, and dashed to the trade room, where he felt sure to see his father.

"Hello, dad! Back again!"

No answer.

With a tremor in his voice he repeated the call: "Where are you, father?"

The silence weighed upon his exuberant spirits.

Still, the morning was young yet; perhaps, not expecting him so soon, he might have gone out to big John's camp. He'd see Kitty at any rate. Though, come to think of it, why hadn't she met him at the door? Unable to answer his own question, he cleared the steps two at a time and in the door of Kitty's room almost fell over the body of his father. Crumpled down in an awkward fashion, his right arm lay outstretched and in the rigid fingers of the hand that had so often stroked the curly ringlets of his boy was a piece of cloth.

Stunned by the shock, Sandy's brain was in a whirl and the fact barely seeped through his brain that his father, the only parent he had in the world, lay at his feet done to death by the foul hand of an enemy. Stilled forever was the proud, true heart. The cloth in the hand caught his dull eye and he sought to unloosen the grasp of those iron fingers; in vain they held unbending to their trophy. Where had he seen that bright checked wool before? Painfully he cudgelled his brain. Good God! Now he had it; it was Lambert's. Well Sandy remembered the bright red and blue crosses that had made him so envious of the Frenchman's blanket coat. Surely it wasn't the hand

of his friend that had taken the life of his father. But try as he would, he could not rid himself of the thought and the bright colored bit of wool lay there in hideous insistence. Grief and shock turned to a terrible anger, the clear, cold, reasoning kind that comes only to strong men.

Crossing the hall, Sandy opened the door of Lambert's room. It was free of bags. A great thumping came from the trade room below; stepping to the heat hole in the floor he called to those below: "Come up."

Surprised at the command, they shuffled to the stairs, then led by Whisper Wind, a dirty-looking Indian, they crept uncomfortably up and almost as suddenly as had Sandy they came to the body in the door. Over it stood the factor's son.

"Look, you people, my father is dead; killed by the hand of the Frenchman, Lambert. I vow to God"—here every Indian hastily crossed himself—"that this knife" (and he flashed the one he had purchased for his friend) "shall not be sheathed save in the body of my enemy. I have spoken," and he dashed from the room and down the stairs.

With feverish haste he tore at the lashings of his load. Willing hands came to his help and the provisions were piled in the snow. There were only two trails to take, the one he had just traveled and the open one to the wilderness. With terrible intensity he packed provisions on the toboggan and added his Winchester. With many guttural exclamations of "It is good," the crowd, with impassive faces, watched him flick the backs of his dogs as they nosed the unending trail of the wilderness.

The fourth day out, MacCrae picked up the trail of the fugitives. It snowed hard that night and the dawn broke over a world of white that showed no trail. Rising above the obstacle, the man with unrelenting hate bore on in a general direction, so that two days later he picked up again the unmistakable tracks of his father's toboggan. With no word but the swish and crack of his rawhide whip, he urged his dogs to greater speed and there came to him, borne on the soft winds of the late day, the faint, far-off howl of many wolves. The dogs heard it, too, and they lowered their heads to their galloping legs.

Topping a rise the pursuer picked out a moving blotch far below him. With no exultation save a grim tightening of the lips, he tore down the incline. The clear, cold days that had been his lot now seemed about to change. The cold, grey sky suddenly became shot with scudding clouds of black and the little ridges of snow were whipped into dust by a biting wind that came from the sea freighted with soul-searing cold. Caught up in the roaring embrace of the mighty wind the snow was whirled aloft and dashed against the faces of the dogs and man. Even with their light load the huskies found hard going. The team ahead had long since been lost to sight in the blinding snow, but with unfaltering intensity MacCrae bent his aching shoulders to the storm and plodded on.

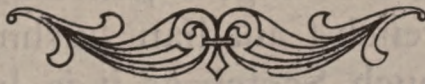
Suddenly he tripped and fell over something at his feet. With eyelids almost glued together by the cold and snow, he could only reach down and feel with mitted hands. His heart gave a jump, his hands, muffled as they were, felt the double strapped form of a pack.

Lambert was throwing away his load in order to move faster; he must be in a bad way. A few yards further he stumbled over a bag of dog meat and soon after a rifle caught in his moccasined foot. As he bent to pick it up there came to his ear, high above the roar of the storm, the fearful cries of a hunting pack of wolves on the scent of prey and in a flash scores of the awful brutes howled for his blood. On every side he could see the blood-red fangs and shadowy shapes, when, as suddenly as they had come, they were gone, and he could hear them in the storm ahead.

Whipping the whining dogs to their lines MacCrae forced them to continue, and just when the blackness of night was about to swoop down on the roaring world of wind and snow, MacCrae fell over a human body. Plucking the knife from his belt he advanced stiffly to plunge it into the heart of his enemy. No move came from the muffled figure in the snow. Alive to the treacherous nature of the Frenchman, he circled slowly around it. Still no movement. Cautiously he reached out and turned him over. "Good God!" the words burst from MacCrae's lips and he stared with bloodshot, ice-encircled eyes at his sister's closed eyes, as she lay huddled up in the snow. The small, white face told of the Arctic sleep that knows no waking. The frightful callousness of Lambert broke through even the hate that was MacCrae's and he gasped. Tenderly he lifted Kitty to his toboggan and sped on. The dogs snarled their objections to the increased pull, but their master whipped them to their task, for MacCrae reasoned blindly that his enemy must be worse off than he.

All through that black, fearful night man and dogs fought their way against impending nature, and in the grey dawn of a bright day MacCrae bore down on a halted train. The toboggan lay on its side and in the traped snow around were great stains of crimson, while bloody bones here and there were all that remained of man and dogs, and in every direction were tracks of monster wolves.

The sight beat into meekness the hardened resolves of MacCrae, and as there burned through his mind the awful fate of his father's murderer, he reverently crossed himself and muttered, "God's will be done." Then plucking the knife from his belt he cast it toward the overturned toboggan, so that it stuck in the crimson-tinted snow, and as he turned away the bright sunlight of God's day sparkled and shone on its untarnished blade.



THE MIDNIGHT WATERLOO

THERE is nothing mean about the far northern wilds of Quebec. The very silence of the great North Woods breathes, as it were, a feeling of bigness. The lofty mountains, rearing their crests on every hand, speak of wonderful distances, of immense valleys and plains, seldom trod by the foot of the white man. None but the native breed knows of the deceptive miles between peak and peak; weary, back-breaking experience has taught them grim lessons. The very trees have a somberness that seems part of the very atmosphere.

The few inhabitants blend their lives with their surroundings, mostly tall, gaunt and hard-looking; little laughter or amusement is to be found in a backwoods settlement; somehow even the children seem to quickly grow old for their years. The very cabins, strong and massively built, crouch low, as if weighed down by the oppressive stillness of the black, snow-encumbered balsams.

Here, in the cold, invigorating grip of a northern climate, where few strangers penetrate, live a strong, hardy lot of French-Canadian bushmen and breeds. With blood as much Scotch as it is Indian, they fight a hard, truceless battle with the great wilderness.

Having to match their wits against the cunning of the little fur-bearers of the bush, many times hunger has knocked at the gaily painted doors of the little homes. This constant battle of wits has developed many good and clever hunters. Some, perhaps, a little

more adept than others. Of all the veteran trappers of the settlement, Jean Dubuc was considered the most successful. His long, lonely trips to the far white slopes meant his return heavily laden with the fruits of the traps. Tall and thin, but powerfully built, Jean's sixty winters rested lightly upon the long towelled locks of gray that had never felt a comb.

In somber solitude he lived in a tumble-down shanty at the far bend of the main trail. To this lonely, humble home there came one sharp, frosty evening a pack-train, led by a young Sioux from Lac au Salmon, thirty-one miles due west. Behind the sleigh, which was piled high with sundry provisions, strode three strangers.

With a word, the young Indian halted the steaming huskies at the door. The weary travelers were welcomed with all the warmth and good cheer peculiar to the French-Canadian bushman. The primitive latch string is always out in this wonderful land of snow.

The city men, for such they were, told Jean of the vain quest for big game. Now, considerably discouraged, they were on the point of returning to their starting point, when they came upon the stray Indian, who told them of the wonderful hunting on the steep slopes of these great hills.

Supper over, boxes were drawn close to the blazing fire of pine knots, pipes were lit and amid the dancing, flickering shadows upon the tumble-down ceilings yarns were told and adventures recounted. Jean listened with open-mouthed incredulity to the tales of boats that carried two thousand people, of men who flew in the air and went under the sea in ships, and of the

great war of which he had but faintly heard, and of millions of men involved.

Poor Jean's simple mind couldn't grasp these tremendous facts at all. The nearest he ever had gotten to civilization was in the spring, when he went down the trail to Lac au Salmon to dispose of his winter's catch. There he sold his furs, got his money and as speedily passed it over to the whiskey runners and came home poorer than when he left, and with but a hazy recollection of what had happened to him.

Slowly, under the warmth and comfort of his pipe, the old hunter's tongue loosened, and slowly, at first, he held his hearers spell-bound with tales of the wilds. Stranger even than many in books. There was no put-on or make-believe about the old fellow; everything he recounted was with the simple talk of a wholly uneducated man. None of his listeners could express any doubt of the truth of his tales; they were hearing of the tragedies of the north from one who had lived and suffered the privations of the pioneer.

Two of the old fellow's listeners sat on upturned biscuit boxes, before the crackling flames; the third, a mere slip of a lad, lay comfortably stretched full length upon a great moose skin. While listening to the deep voice of the narrator, this lad kept poking curious fingers into the long, thick hair of his couch.

Slowly the warmth of the fire in his tingling moccasined free limbs, the tobacco poisoned air, and the drone of the voice had its effect, and after a few vain efforts to keep open his wearied eyes, he gently rolled over in sleep. In the next pause loud snores told of a deep, well-earned sleep.

Swiftly the spirits of the wild free north picked him up in fancy and dropped him in a dense forest miles from the settlement. Few were the trails of the smaller wild folk. Nothing but the great hulking bear and lordly moose roamed the trackless glades.

All day he sped upon a heavy, heart-breaking trail. His pack, fairly heavy at the start, now weighed down on his aching back like an everlasting sin. He had hoped before dark to make camp on the highest of the hills in the distance, but darkness was falling rapidly and he still seemed many miles from his goal. Suddenly, fatigue, hunger and distance were forgotten like a flash. Dropping on one knee, his heart thumping in breathless awe, he beheld an immense print in the soft, powdery snow, the track of a gigantic moose. Nearly as big around as his snowshoes, the prints were sunken deep by the tremendous weight of the animal.

The tracks came from a low, dense clump of alders on the right, crossed the open trail and disappeared in the darkness beyond. All the natural instincts of the hunter were strong upon him; he dashed along the still warm trail of the moose, stumbling over logs in the darkness and tripping over partially buried brush. Two hours of rapid travel, at a good steady pace, brought him closer to his quarry; the prints showed he was quite near to the slow moving moose. Freshly barked twigs and low brush next appeared, as the big fellow had no doubt nibbled his supper. However, no sound broke the silence of the night. Pausing at a great birch, the hunter peeled off a generous piece of the tender bark and proceeded to make himself a call trumpet. Settling himself comfortably behind a large

broken fir stump he placed his rifle across his knees, raised the trumpet to his lips and sent away into the silent reaches of the black forest, the wierd, blood-curdling call of the love-lorn cow. Twice and thrice the call floated upon the soft night winds without response. The fourth brought a faint answer from far up the mountain slope; there was wafted down the deep-throated voice of a bull. Another followed close and in an amazingly short time, rumbling roars from the right of the gully bespoke the rapid approach of a king of the north. Call followed call, each nearer than the last, as he crashed through the bushes.

The waiting mortal in the darkness felt the hair rise under his cap, and cold shivers chased each other up and down his spine. For one panicky moment he almost contemplated flight. Nearer and nearer the crashing came and suddenly there loomed up a few yards above him a vast black hulk, blacker even than the surrounding shadows.

An enormous bull, he seemed to cut off the very air from the shivering man's lungs. His courage was down to zero, and he could no more have raised his gun than he could open his cracked and parched lips. He nearly jumped out of his skin, when the great brute sounded out his hoarse tempting note of passion. Instead of the expected soft low of a cow, a tremendous crashing far down the gully was the only answer. And suddenly a second vast shape reared itself out of the darkness and advanced up the slope.

The first bull caught sight of the invader and came down the mountain to meet him. Too late the hunter realized his frail shelter was fairly between the two angry warriors.

The darkness partly hid what was an awesome and wonderful sight. With deep-throated roars the charging monsters met, not ten yards from the cowering man—a mighty grinding of many-tined antlers was quickly followed by grunting, straining battle. In the darkness the huge bodies appeared vast and unearthly; he could hear the great gasps of mighty lungs. The unwitting author of all this could almost touch the sweating, straining flanks of the frothing demons.

The battle progressed; they were swaying across the open glade; the second moose appeared to be butting and shoving his enemy with telling effect. Suddenly a bright, northern moon sprang from a mass of cloud with a burst of bright yellow light over the blood-stained snow. At the very instant the bigger bull caught sight of the unfortunate human, who in his excitement had leaned too far from his shelter. Quick as a flash the great beast turned and slashed at the stump with his sharp hoofs and horns. Crack! It burst into a thousand pieces and outrolled the man in plain sight of the enraged animals. To turn and lunge at the prostrate kicking figure was but the work of an instant. Luckily the soft snow yielded to the pressure, and the full force of the thrust was lost. Desperately the man flung out his arms and caught the beast about the neck. A sudden jerk of the powerful shoulders flung him full twenty feet away into the thorny embrace of a low mulberry bush. He scrambled to his feet in time to see the huge animal floundering down upon him. The stiff, coarse fur stood up on the arched neck with rage, and the bloodshot eyes rolled in screaming anger.

Taking a long chance, the hunter staggered around the bush and sprinted with shaking knees to his rifle. He turned in time to be hurled over with the fury of the next charge. Staggering to one knee he took hurried aim and pulled the trigger. The heavy bullet stopped the animal for a second; then he came lumbering down upon his victim, fifteen yards, ten yards, five—and with a prayer upon his lips the hunter sent a second messenger of death crashing into the brain of the charging bull. It stopped, spread wide his mighty legs, swayed gently like a stricken tree and sank heavily to the bloody snow. With a sob of thankfulness the nerve-broken human * * * awoke to find the fire burnt to ashes, the old trapper asleep on the table, while he himself lay with sweaty, clammy hand sunk deeply in the thick mane of the moose skin on the floor.



YELLOW COAT

A WILD screech as of one in pain cut through the cold air, and from the gapping black hole in a mass of snow-encrusted rocks there shot out a ball of blazing yellow fur. The long pointed black ears were flattened back and the fangs were bared in a snarl. One look he gave at the silent hole from whence he had come, then like a wraith the brilliant spot of color melted into the bush.

Born in a litter of silver-black foxes, our hero's coat of yellow had unhappily become the source of a great deal of trouble. His mother cuffed and bit at him as if he were not of her blood. His brothers and sisters snapped and snarled at him till he grew short and raw as to temper. The trouble had culminated that day.

The father came home with a fat chicken filched from the hen house of a convenient farm. His mate tore the luscious feast into a thousand pieces and tossed them to her young. Hovering on the edge of things, Yellow Coat snatched at an incautiously exposed fragment. The watchful eye of the mother caught him and he was cuffed, bitten and chased to the outer air.

Once the blackness of the woods closed over him, the little fellow made less speed. The long, sharply-pointed tongue hung low, for, like the wolf, the fox has that peculiar type of tongue through which he perspires. The narrow sides sank and distended as his breath came and went in short gasps.

Unconsciously his feet carried him into the sunken bed of a small stream and he pattered along its wind-

ing course. The cool, damp air from the rotten trees and leaf mould of the forest rose gratefully up to his hot body.

The fox was young and not over rich in experience, for had he been well versed in the ways of his many enemies that infest the woods he would not have so carelessly pattered through the silence. Had he been, for instance, with his parents they would have taught him that to clatter noisily along was but an invitation to the fisher, wolverine or otter. He would most assuredly have been told how to slip not on a beaten track, but along its edge. Their wisdom would have warned him above all to abstain from crossing open spaces. But since he had never found favor in the sight of his elders he was without the very rudiments of self-preservation. He was but a beginner in the bitter, bitter school of experience.

Thus it was that with no thought of danger he sped serenely on his way, treading with heavy foot the trails that wise foxes seldom trod, except at night, and then in fear and trembling.

He daringly nosed along the heavily scented trail of a lynx and showed no fear when he actually stumbled on the grey murderer at his feast. The innocence of youth was his best defense in a world where guile and cunning was matched against even sharper guile and cunning in the never-ending struggle for life.

The lynx looked up from his victim, a once dainty hare, with his coat all soiled and bloody; the fiery eyes widened and blazed out a challenge; the great interlocking teeth were bared and the loosely hanging fangs dripped with blood. Yellow Coat was scared, not so

much by the inspiring spectacle of the lynx as he was by the blood-curdling yell that was hurled at him. He dropped to his belly and slowly backed out of sight. Strange to say, the lynx did not bother pursuing him, but simply bent to his meal. No doubt the delicacy of his repast more than offset the love of battle usually so rampant in the breast of the wild of this kind.

Little did the yellow fox know how near death he was that time, and the chance meeting failed to make any impression on his mind. Snarling, screeching animals he had seen aplenty in his short life and they had to do more than that to worry him.

For many days he wandered through strange, thick woods, whose damp, sweet trails of mould drew him on to strange places. Grubs, insects, beetles and oftentimes fat partridges fell to his lot, but in the case of the more wary grouse the quietness of his approach was not silent enough and the lunge of his teeth and claws not swift enough to number them among his meals.

At night, through no special knowledge of his own, Yellow Coat would seek out a hole in a rotten tree, or a cavity in a mass of rocks, there curling his long, scraggly tail around his legs, he would lie through the night with his sharp little nose resting on his forefeet, while all around the unconscious figure the wild creatures of the forest went about their nightly business.

It is at this hour that a wise fox, versed in the habits of his prey snatches many a tasty meal from the hurrying hares.

Thus it was that one dark night, Yellow Coat, flattened comfortably in the warm, cosy hole of an absent ground hog, was rudely awakened by a sharp bite on

his flank. A second nip made him howl with pain and he turned to meet his unseen aggressor. Even in the pitch darkness the fox could make out the short, squat form of the returned ground hog. Ordinarily a peaceful enough animal, the latter will fight savagely in a case such as this. Smarting from the none too gentle nips of the sharp teeth, Yellow Coat backed his enemy from his home by the sheer fury of his attack, then he quickly turned tail and burst into the bright moonlight of the world above. The other did not follow him, and the fox, not wide awake, pointed his nose to the moon and trotted off into the shadows.

In his wonderings of the last few weeks it had been gradually borne in upon him that death stalked through the forest and narrow escapes from preying enemies taught him some much needed lessons. The white, clear spaces of open wood, through which the clear, cold rays of the moon seldom penetrated, was the bait and hunting ground of the sly lynx, and the black somber shadows were his hiding places, from where he pounced upon the innocent life that was foolish enough to cross the open spaces.

In time, Yellow Coat, too, lurked stealthily in the shadows, and many a fair-coated bunny fell to the swift leap. The shortening days and long, cool nights of autumn marked a change in the forest. The leaves broke from their moorings and fell ever so gently in vast silent clouds that lay as a crisp multi-colored carpet on the uneven floor of the woods. The clean, straight maples and hard woods thrust their bare limbs to the cooling breezes. The thick, green underbrush faded and drooped and then added their burden of dry leaves to the countless mass under foot.

Following the inexorable law of the forest, Yellow Coat gradually changed again into a garment of more pretentious qualities. The brightness of his summer coat was nothing compared to the fur that nature now gave him. Strange ambitions coursed through his veins and he felt particularly strong and full of spirits. He hardly could get used to seeing the different animals in their winter fur. The rabbits, lynx, marten and 'coon all put on pelage that far surpassed the fur of summer wear. The keenness of the hunt increased, and he had all he could do to keep from under the death-dealing claws of his many enemies, who now espied his coming from afar off. No longer could he crouch in the shadow of a clump of alders in wait for the strutting partridge, for they, too, caught sight of his brilliant coat in time to hop to a nearby branch and flap their wings at his discomfiture. It wasn't long, however, before the fox found a way of beating them at their own game. Scenting a covey of plump birds, he sank to his belly and made some funny noises, half bark and half snarl, then the wily fox slunk around to their rear and grabbed the stupid birds as they were craning their necks to seek out the disturbance. This trick was of his own invention and he felt quite proud of himself when he landed a couple of fine birds through this method.

Moving in the day became much too dangerous and he wisely hid away during the bright hours of sunlight and only hunted in the long, cool nights. Soon the crackling carpet of leaves was buried deep under the snow and no animal passed but left a trail plainly marked in the white surface. While the scent of a

passing animal didn't linger long in the cold air, Yellow Coat quickly learned to distinguish between the trail of friend and foe. The deeply imprinted track of the wolverine he learned to fear and hate, while the dog-like track of the prowling wolf he avoided with the same care as he steered clear of the huge pad prints of the sly lynx. He could quickly tell by the tracks of a hare whether a tasty meal lay at the other end or only a long, vain chase without reward.

Yellow Coat met many of his own kind and the magnificence of his coat easily outshone them all. The younger gazed at him with envy, while the old dog foxes were just as much impressed. But the restless spirit of his kind filled his soul and he tarried not over long in one spot. To-night the brilliant form flashed along the overhung trails of the dark swamps. To-morrow night he would scamper along hilly trails of the mountains. Under such living conditions he grew big and heavy of frame. The severe lessons of his primitive training bore fruit and his fame in the hunt waxed great. But fame was not vouchsafed to him alone, for there was one other fox roaming the far-away stretches of forest who bore in his own country just such a reputation as Yellow Coat bore in his. From the moment the yellow fox heard of his rival he longed to meet him in combat.

The looked for opportunity came sooner than he expected. Suddenly the quiet of the forest was broken by hundreds of little hurrying forms. The coming of a band of woodsmen on their mission of stripping the forest had routed these animals from their homes. Among them came Yellow Coat's rival. The instant

the yellow fox set eyes on him he knew that this was he. The big round barrel of a body was long and powerful and he was covered with a gorgeous coat of silver-black fur. They met face to face on the hard beaten track of a lumber road. Without a sound the stranger turned on his heels and sped away, Yellow Coat following. Mile after mile the black fellow led him on. Gradually it was borne in upon the yellow fox that this country was familiar and he suddenly woke to the fact that this was the place of his birth.

At last the black shape ahead stopped, turned and waited his coming. Yellow Coat knew as well as the other that it was to be a fight to the death and his heart did not fail him.

The black fox pranced towards him, the great feet hitting the hard packed snow with firmness and decision. The wide, fuzzy neck ruffle at his throat marked the blueness of his blood, and Yellow Coat was glad that his antagonist would be worthy of his steel. The big, bright eyes shone at him from the black face like beacon lights from the darkness of night. The huge, bushy tail was held in the perfect curve of the fighting fox.

Yellow Coat prepared himself for the charge that he felt was coming. He crouched low on his haunches, belly almost touching the snow, yet the forelegs were stiff and taut.

Fairly matched as to size, the yellow fox had perhaps a shade of the advantage in experience. He had that, as the result of his more plebian career, but the black fellow soon proved that what he lacked in experience he more than made up in red-blooded courage.

With a low growl of warning the black form shot through the air and smothered the other with his weight. The yellow fox expected such a move, however, and the rigid muscles loosed and purposely gave to the impact. He was up in a flash and before his enemy could turn, his teeth met in the soft part of an ear. With a yelp of anguish it was jerked free. Back they pranced from each other, one with shredded ear, the other with aching back.

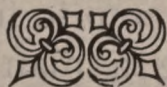
Then Yellow Coat carried the war into enemy territory; he rose on his hind legs and sought with a mighty downward sweep of his forepaw to end the fight there and then. Luckily for himself the black fellow, in an effort to get out of the way, tripped and fell on his back and there he lay presenting all four feet to the onslaught of the other. The descending death-dealing claws missed him by a hair's breadth. Yellow Coat was too old a fighter to run in on the black and he backed away. In the quickness of an eye-flicker, the black shape sprang from an awkward position and the yellow fox, fooled by the very clumsiness of the attack, felt the iron jaws fasten in the loose flesh under his chin. In vain he planted his feet and swung the clinging form clean off his feet. The instant he paused he felt the sharp teeth searching for his windpipe.

Here and there they rolled, snarling and spitting, now disappearing in a cloud of loose snow which bordered the trail, again bringing up with a thud against some tree. His head, pulled down by the weight of his antagonist, Yellow Coat tore great gashes in the unprotected belly of the black.

For a moment the advantage seemed to lie with the

yellow, but an instant later by some twist of his powerful body the black fox seemed his master. But victory at last perched on the arms of Yellow Coat. His teeth searching for a vital spot felt the warm throat of his adversary under his jaws. A snap, a twist and the once glorious black shape lay stiff and stark on the crimson snow.

With panting, heaving sides the victor was licking his bloody wounds when a low growl made him look up. Bearing down upon him was a great black shape. Yellow Coat was puzzled. The oncoming animal seemed much like his late antagonist. Where had he seen that shape before? Suddenly a flood of remembrance came over him and in a flash he recognized the autocrat of his old home, the mother that had driven him with cuffs and bites. Instinctively he braced himself to meet this new danger. Twenty yards, ten yards, five yards, then Yellow Coat could see the whites of her old, bloodshot eyes. The remembrance of the terror of her paws came over him, he fought against it for an instant, then with his tail between his legs and with a yelp of fear, he who had just fought a terrible battle to the death turned and tore into the friendly protection of the deep woods.



CALL OF THE WILD ANSWERED

THE low, squat-looking cedars hung down, overburdened with more than their fair amount of snow. Around each clump of ash and every funny-looking stump the cold north wind had brushed and whisked the fluffy snow into beautiful little ridges and hollows. The bush was still with that awesome silence so great in the Northern Quebec woods. Though it was only early afternoon, no sun was visible; but in January, who needed bright sun? Certainly not the trapper, for sun kept the wily fur-bearers basking in its ever welcome rays.

There was a crunch, crunch, the over-burdened fir in the far corner of the glade was violently shaken and there strode into the clearing a husky, well-built man of fifty or thereabouts. Clean cut and strong, Jean Tremblay, trapper and hunter, cut a splendid figure as he swung on his way over the almost invisible trail, the lift and swing of his snow-covered snowshoes making a dreary, lonesome sound in the wonderful silence.

For five hours Jean had been on his trap line and he was now nearing the finish of his fifteen-mile walk. That his luck was fair was plain to see, for hanging from his ceinture flêché was one dark marten, two fine fishers, one wolf and five splendid minks. - One more trap, then home to the camp to fire, warmth and a meal.

No matter how long a man has been hunting, no true sportsman can approach a set trap without experiencing some degree of excitement. Thus our friend Jean, though he had hunted and trapped for the best

part of his life, drew in his breath and made his way cautiously to his trap. Suddenly a slight sound from that direction made him pause, with one snowshoe in the air. Drawing back a pace, Jean shifted the belt of skins around his waist, tightened his grasp on his gun and softly crept around the intervening low bushes. There, securely caught in the cunningly laid trap, was a huge female wolverine, the "Devil of the North." Ask any trapper of the Far North how many wolverines he has caught and he will probably tell you stories that will make you gasp.

Of tremendous size she was, but caught in the cruel jaws of the powerful trap, her great strength availed her naught. She made an inspiring picture to the delighted Jean as she snarled and growled, and tore at her bonds. By her side crouched a small wolverine, no larger than a large sized cat. It crept close up to its infuriated mother and eyed the man's approach with mild curiosity. Jean made short work of the mother and after some difficulty secured the little fellow.

Resetting the trap the woodsman continued on his way with the large skin swinging at his belt with the others and the young animal tucked under his blanket coat.

Reaching the cabane, Tremblay dropped his belt upon the floor with a sigh of relief, for a spell of mild weather had made snowshoeing difficult. As for the wolverine, he wandered around the small place making himself at home. True to the reputation of his kind, nosing under everything and in every corner. For of all animals, the wolverine is the most marvelously curious.

Weeks went by and Sammy Carcajou (Carcajou being French for wolverine) became a great favorite with the neighboring half-breeds in the nearby settlement. To the lonely living woodsman the wolverine proved himself a good comrade, often following Jean around like a dog.

Night after night, in the long hours, Tremblay would sit with his feet on the top of the little stove, his clay pipe in his mouth and hold conversation with his odd friend.

“Mais, mon cher petit enfant, commé avez vos passez la journey?”

Short summer came and went and wild winter, with its wonderful blanket of white, once more was spread o'er the land. Sammy had now reached his full growth and a great beast he was, too, measuring a full five feet between the tip of his short black tail and the point of his fine cold snout. His thick, stout fur coat was a rich brown in color, with a marvelous saddle of grey-white. Powerful legs supported his weight and he showed teeth of great whiteness and strength.

To the dismay of the hunter, Sammy, as the winter advanced, once gentle, now developed a most vicious and uncertain temper. This rapidly grew worse until even Jean was nervous whenever he bared his great teeth, and the old men of the settlement shook their shaggy heads and muttered that “No good ever came from Le Diable du Nord.”

Les fêtes, or Christmas, went by and the cold January winds blew with more than wonted velocity around the mud caked cabins of the settlements. At the close of one short, dreary day, early in the new year, Jean,

making his way home from his trap line, was surprised upon coming in sight of his cabane to see the small window torn away. With anger in his heart, he strode into the hut, for he at once assumed that a thief had broken into his place and robbed him of his toil. Of all crimes in the North, fur stealing is accounted the most despicable, for the hunter's catch usually represents all he has in the world. But the sight that met Jean's eyes showed him that this was no human marauder. Pots and pans were overturned, furs torn down from the walls and in a mass of straw from the bunk was a fine black fox skin, ripped and torn. The hunter realized that what he had long dreaded had come to pass. The wolverine had heard the call of his native wilds and true to his blood he had gone back to his own, but such was the inherent wantonness of the animal, it had torn and destroyed everything within reach, eventually making his escape through the window which had first attracted the trapper's attention. We must leave Jean on the edge of his bunk with anger and sorrow in heart surveying the littered floor.

Numerous trap stealings soon notified the countryside of the wolverine's escape. Trap after trap was cleaned out by this strange animal and naturally Tremblay, of all trappers, suffered the most. For a short time cessation of hostilities lulled the trappers into fancied security. They supposed that after the manner of his kind, new hunting grounds had called him.

Suddenly, as a bolt from the blue, came tidings of the finding by a trap of the torn and mutilated body of Joseph Perron. Large wolverine footprints in the

surrounding snow showed plainly enough that Sammy Carcajou had taken toll of human life.

Rendered fierce and wild by the intense cold which had kept rabbits to their holes, Sammy had made eventually a big kill. The long rest that followed was when he was supposed to have left the vicinity.

Again being driven out to hunt by hunger, he had stalked the unfortunate hunter Perron and sprang upon his back as he was bending over a trap.

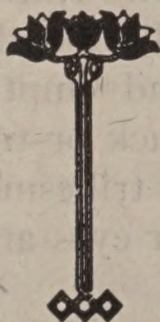
Deep were the imprecations laid upon the name of the savage wolverine and from that hour every man's hand was turned against him.

The winter dragged on its weary way and the wolverine, still at large, worked havoc with the trap lines. No trap could nip him, no hunter shoot him. He seemed to bear a charmed life, but the end was not far off.

No man swore deeper vengeance than did Jean Tremblay. His former love for his pet had now turned to hate and ever was he on the hunt for the wolverine. As he sped on his rounds one cold, clear day, he suddenly heard a crashing through the bushes of some heavy animal. Nearer and nearer it came. Gripping his rifle tightly, Jean bent down under cover, when there suddenly burst into view a large bull caribou. Wild eyed, panting with fright, it dashed here and there, in a vain effort to rid itself of some animal perched on his back. There, with his terrible teeth deep in the heaving shoulder of the caribou, was Sammy Carcajou.

Hardly pausing a moment, Jean raised his rifle and fired. The shot was fatal; but so deep were the wol-

verine's teeth that though the bullet had passed through his brain he remained on the caribou's back. As the shot rang out the caribou paused, spread wide his legs, swayed gently, then sank gracefully to the snow, dead. And Sammy's skin to-day is handled by some furrier in far-off Quebec, who little recks of the tragedy which followed the life of the "Devil of the Northern Wilds."



THE CROWN SABLES

THREE days' journey from Irbit the dusty, travel-stained caravan straggled to a halt for the noon-day rest. Away up in the front the black cart of the hills, with the yellow wheels, ceased to shriek and the bony little beast in the shafts dropped to his belly on the sands with a grunt of relief. In a trice every one of the nondescript horses had done likewise, while the bearded drivers clustered around a cart in the center of the line. Squatting on their haunches, with long coat tails sweeping the ground, they dug from the depths of greasy pockets their dinner of black bread and garlic, which they proceeded to munch with great gusto.

The Cossacks, or White Riders, who seemingly composed an armed guard, rained their wonderful little mounts to one side and emptied their knapsacks of rations. Having no truck or trade with the "dogs" of drivers, the haughty tribesmen jammed their tall Cremer caps over their eyes and scowled at the squatting "pigs."

That this was an unusual cavalcade was evident by the curious glances of the passing wayfarers. Suddenly a tall, gaunt man, who seemed to be the leader, rose from the group and clattered over the dirt strewn highway into the shadow of the dingy, mud built inn. Sullen, almond-shaped eyes followed his actions without comment. Doubtless Cra-Chow knew what he was about and did he not pay them well, even promising more if they stayed with him till Irbit was reached.

"All for a few worthless skins," laughed Shi-Chang, and the others roared in huge delight.

Pushing his way roughly past the inevitable beggars, with their clattering bowls, the tall, dusty traveler strode into the inner room and scowled at the old man cross-legged at the mud table.

"Quick, thou old devil, a horse and a man, for I must be upon my way and my carts are top heavy."

Tiny, piggish eyes flashed from under the shaggy brows of the old man, but at sight of the terrible scar on the other's face, he cringed.

"Yes, master; but where is the end of the way?"

"Irbit, you dog of a shopman," and then, "on the White Father's business," and he spun a handful of coins at the old fellow's feet.

Whether it was the click of the silver, or the magic of the White Father's name, a coated figure stepped out of the darkness and bowed low to the stranger, who without more adieu grasped him by the arm and propelled him to the door.

"Wait, master, I will lead the beasts to the road," and he slipped back into the darkness.

"Bring no vodka with you," roared his employer after him and immediately pushed his way back to the carts.

Inside the garlic-scented courtyard the newly recruited driver, whip in hand, was about to mount to his seat, when something hard descended on his head and he sank to the ground without so much as a grunt. A twin figure to the fallen one yanked the whip from his hand, pulled himself easily to the seat and yayed the crazy, wobbling team through the courtyard gate.

A burst of coarse jest and laughter greeted his arrival and vulgar were the remarks cast at the two beasts tied in the awkward shafts: "Son of the stinking hills, is this your father's ass?"

"And his cow?" roared another. "Surely the master is crazy to hire such, but we need thee badly."

Without reply, the newcomer, collar turned well up over his ears, guided his squeaking cart to the end of the line of other squeaking carts. At an order from Cra-Chow bales of barter were quickly transferred to the fresh cart. In the bustle and excitement of the change, the new driver somehow, or other succeeded in being one of the first to reach the leader's cart and a pair of sharp, most unoriental-looking eyes searched the interior before he was roughly shoved aside and almost trampled on by the horse of a careless rider. Cra-Chow reëntered his vehicle, the weary horses were prodded to their feet, the armed soldiers closed up, their cruel, slender lances resting on the saddle at the hip and the journey was resumed to the frightful squeaks of unoiled wooden wheels, and the new cart sought to outsqueak all the others, so that foul, biting oaths were flung back of the line to meet no reply.

Sunk into the folds of his voluminous driving coat, which, like every other man's, was wrapped tightly around his body, the newly engaged driver kept an exceedingly sharp eye on the wobbling line that stretched out in front of him. Night found them resting by the banks of a muddy stream that gurgled sluggishly through the ooze of its filthy bed. The fire from the scanty coals in the tiny braziers reconstructed into giant shadows on the sands the swathed figures that

squatted around. A small driver near the outer ring of men glanced furtively from under the furry edge of his cap at his neighbor, who happened to be Cra-Chow's own driver.

"The master comes from afar?"

The other, a thin, shriveled little Mongolian, almost lost in the folds of his coat, without glancing up, replied, "Nichni."

"And how many days' journey from Nichni is Irbit?" persisted the stranger.

"Ha, so many I know not," and he snorted in disgust.

"Art cold?" and an earthen flask was pushed into his grasp; instinctively the bony fingers closed upon it and carried it to his lips.

"The master was cruel. God, what fine liquor this stranger carried."

The fiery spirit gurgled down his hairy throat and the flask was handed back, empty, at which the stranger seemed in no whit displeased.

Silence of the desert enfolded the sleeping camp and save for the faint squeak of a wheel as a restless horse shifted his position, or the jingle of a chain as a Cossack's mount champed his bit, no sound rose to the sky of a million stars.

Faintly, a whisper: "I have more in my cart. It is good to wet the lips with the kiss of the God's."

Without comment, the invited one, he of Cra-Chow's cart, slipped cautiously from the light of the dying coals after the whisperer. Reaching the last cart, the host fumbled under the seat.

"Be silent, here it is," and as the lean fellow reached

in the direction of the voice, something hard descended on his head and he slid to the sands with a surprised "uh." For a slow-moving Mongolian, the sharp-eyed one worked with great rapidity, so that not very many minutes later a half-sleeping driver cursed with great fervor the ancestors of him who had walked on him and he opened bleary eyes to see the lean driver of the master's cart lie down beside him.

In the ghostly light of dawn the travelers partook of a hasty breakfast and swung to an early start.

"Pest of a merchant, what ails thee?" and, jumping out of his cart, Cra-Chow strode up to the silent cart in the rear.

Tearing the curtains aside, his angry eyes beheld the huddled figure of what appeared to be the drunken stranger.

"Pig, that you may lie there till the dogs and asses eat your rotting carcass," and the load was again transferred from the cart.

Loud complaints of the weight of his load from the master's driver resulted in the bundles being divided among the others. Sorely out of temper, so that the evil face with the bloody scar drew hasty crosses from the trembling drivers, Cra-Chow climbed to his seat and another start was made.

Keeping entirely to himself, the master's driver calmly ignored the coarse banter that swept up and down the line from driver to driver. Luckily the others knew him of old and thought nothing of it.

At the noonday meal, while his companions gathered together like the animals they were, he slumped in his seat and bit into his bread and garlic, not failing to

note meanwhile that the Cossack's who had kept closely beside the carts on the march had now wheeled to one side in relaxation. Suddenly one of the leading ponies, the brown and white one from the hills, nipped a chunk from the back of his neighbor. He was not naturally vicious, indeed it was done in a spirit of playfulness, but somehow the victim failed to appreciate the humor of it and gave a loud squeal. That squeal marked the passing of the crown sables of the Czar of all the Russians. Always alert, Cra-Chow had poked his head through his curtains; instantly a white hand, entirely too white for a Mongolian's, slipped down from the driver's seat, yanked a bundle from the pocket in the side of the cart and reappeared a second later with an exactly similar bundle which was deftly jammed from where the first was taken. When Cra-Chow withdrew his head with a curse, his driver was morosely munching his evil-smelling meal.

When the darkness made traveling too difficult that night, they camped in a little cup of the great foot hills. To-morrow at high noon would see them at their journey's end in the swirl of the teeming crowds of Irbit. Rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves; they all would be there with the two latter kinds far outnumbering the others. The soldiers laughed and joked about the time in store for them, while the drivers commented loudly and coarsely on the joys of vodka slopping down their craven throats. In the quietness of his cart Cra-Chow thought deeply and thankfully of the end of his mission. Cruel, clever and of powerful influence, the agent of the Romanoffs, after careful deliberation, had picked on him to carry

to Irbit and there turn over to the Emperor's Chancellor, as forfeit of his life, the bloody tribute exacted from the people of the Amursky district in the form of five-and-twenty marvelous skins of sable. Ten long, bitter years had the agent spent in the collecting of these kingly pelts and they were stained with human blood. None but the little White Father, the Czar of all the Russians, had divine right to such as these. He had guarded them well; bah! even without the aid of these stupid insolent Cossacks, and he confidently fondled the tightly sealed package in the pocket at his hand.

Slowly the mysterious night swept down and enfolded the camp. The coals in the puny braziers sputtered to their death and the low voices of the men faded to silence.

So anxious were the men to be gone, they were astir before the dawn had fairly broken over the ghostly hills. A sleepy Cossack scampered to his captain and reported the loss of his horse; then, strange to say, the master's driver could not be found. Cra-Chow, as impatient as the others, cursed the breed from the first to the last one, so that the ruffians shrank under the lash of his tongue and the baleful gleam of the hideous scar. Truly the master bath truckings with the devil.

"On! what matter if a pig of a driver did steal a horse to sooner reach his pot of liquor, that he may choke on the second bottle?"

The others, who had been considering a request to the master for an advance in their wages, decided it would be far more pleasant to wait, and the Calvalcade, on the last lap of their wearisome journey, descended

on that great city of barter which lay like a filthy, slumbering giantess, restless in her awakening.

* * * *

The glorious sun of a near-Easter day broke through its prison of fairy clouds and streamed down on the bustling crowds of Fifth avenue. Up and down that incomparable street of Eden, the sophisticated men and more sophisticated women of the day scurried about their business and pleasure. Women, those who were painted and those who were not, burdened as to shoulders with furs that were costly and rare. A slight, unpleasant little man, unnoticed in the hurrying crowd, scanned the store fronts from under the rim of a disreputable slouch hat. Suddenly, in a half hesitant manner, he slipped through a broad door that bore on a tiny brass plate of costly design the words: International Furriers, London, Paris and New York.

On the inside a gigantic negro, standing precisely in the center of a pattern of the flowered carpet, eyed the customer with sharp and ill-concealed disfavor.

"De boss, lead me to the boss, bo."

Half in doubt the natty green uniform led the way down a thickly carpeted aisle to the sanctum of "de boss."

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Bernstein," and the unkempt client was ushered in.

The amazed darky stood still for a moment, then: "Can you beat it?" and turned on his majestic heel.

Half an hour later, when Milstock opened the manager's door to inquire whether it would be all right to let Mrs. Swineburn take away the \$5,000 mink coat on the strength of her personal check, he saw and heard

—well, what he saw and heard did not phase him in the least, because you see Milstock was a good salesman, might we say a supersalesman; he had to be in order to sell \$5,000 mink coats to women who did not want their husbands to know about it.

“But, holy mackerel!” came from the lips of the dignified Bernstein, “these are the crown sables, the finest, the most wonderful Russians that have ever come out of the Amurskys. How in the world did you get them? I thought you were one of that bunch drafted into Siberia?”

“Now, my friend, you ask too many questions; I know them skins are all you say they are, so come across with the 10,000 ‘bucks’ and they’re yours.”

And as Milstock, good salesman that he was, discreetly closed the door, he saw Bernstein grasp in his hand a bundle of the most exquisite Russians ever dreamed of. Even to where he stood in the door, the blue-black of the pelts flashed their glory to him, so that he caught his breath.

Early next day, while Milstock was carefully preening himself before the double mirrors in the showroom, a preëmtory summons from the inner office came to him. The pink, glistening face of his employer greeted him with a smile.

“Ah, Milstock, please telephone Mrs. Von Story that we have received on special consignment from our agent in Russia some truly marvelous sables and ask her if it will be convenient for her to call any time to-day?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And, oh, Milstock, I think you might say that these

skins are even better than young Mrs. Powerhills."

As we have said before, Mr. Milstock was a super-salesman, so that he smiled at this last piece of strategy.

"Sure, the old man was a slick one."

Mrs. Von Story came and Mrs. Von Story went, leaving in the pugy fat hand of the International Furriers a tiny check for the handsome amount of \$18,000.60, the sixty cents being an after thought of Mr. Bernstein's and represented the cost of clearing the skins through the customs. And for him the affair was closed when a few weeks later his carefully chosen and expensively gowned messenger delivered to the delighted Mrs. Story, at her home on Park avenue, the Russian sable cape that was even finer than young Mrs. Powerhill's. Months rolled on. New York was at her gayest, when suddenly the morning papers flashed before their jaded readers the tragedy of the year:

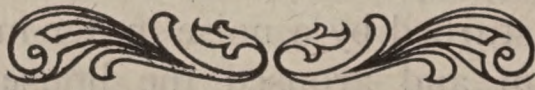
"Terrible murder of Mrs. Von Story. Prominent, wealthy society woman killed in her home last night."

Then the details followed in a couple of columns, closely set in eight-point type:

"A maid, disturbed by a noise in her mistress' room, gave the alarm and aroused the house. Patrolman Nelan, No. 3745, hearing the cries, rushed to the spot in time to see two men scramble out of a window. Refusing to halt at his command the policeman fired. One of the pair, a huge man, staggered, and as he fell, passed some bulky article to his companion, who made good his escape, despite the efforts of the brave officer. On examining the fallen man, it was found that the bullet had pierced a lung and he was dead.

"Mrs. Von Story had been cruelly handled, every bone in her body appeared to have been crushed and around the throat was a thong of greasy leather, apparently part of a whip. While no jewelry or money appeared to have been stolen, Mrs. Von Story's maid affirms that some kind of expensive fur cape had disappeared.

"A reporter, visiting the morgue this morning, found the dead robber to be a Chinaman or Mongolian of huge size. The cruel face was made even more repulsive by a terrible scar across one cheek, while in his clothing was found an envelope addressed to one Cra-Chow."



A TRAGEDY OF THE NORTH

SECURELY built in the curve of rock at the foot of a high mountain which seemed to stand guard over it was a long, low hut. Heavily built and staunch, it presented a stolid and unchanging front to the bleak north winds. The force it represented seemed to radiate from every rough nook and crannie of its walls; even the air around seemed charged with the stern majesty of the force it sheltered. Inhospitable in appearance was this post of the "Royal Northwest Mounted Police" and to the simple, superstitious-minded Indians and trappers it had a dreadful and fearsome aspect. In fact, they peopled it in their imagination with beings huge and terrible, who hunted and pursued those who broke the laws of the great White Mother even to the Happy Hunting Grounds. None of the Indians ever entered the post but had a feeling of dread of the red-coated men, and as they seldom entered, except when under arrest, their terror was more or less natural.

The cold, bleak wind whistled dismally in the darkness and howled around the walls, guttering through the moss-filled cracks until the flame in the brass lamp swinging above the desk flickered and jumped, threatening darkness at every gust. A sigh sounded in the semi-darkness and a man seated at the desk threw down his pen and stretched himself as if he could now honestly relax from a long and tedious job.

The unsteady light flickered and cast dark shadows softly on the face of the man. A strong face it was,

lined and creased with care; a rather large nose and keen blue eyes marked the owner as being a man among men. The straight thin line of lips and heavy chin showed a man of inflexible will, who had seen much of life and who had fought with man and storm many long and hard battles.

The sigh was one of relief as he signed his name to the long, formal report to headquarters.

Leaning back in his chair, feet upon the desk, he produced his clay and gave himself up to quiet enjoyment before turning in.

A loud knock sounded on the door, followed by the entrance of a young uniformed orderly; instantly the man at the desk dropped his feet, straightened up in the chair, and presented to the newcomer his usual stiff and soldierly appearance. Halting the required number of paces, the boy, for he was nothing more, saluted.

"Well?" snapped the lately indolent officer.

"Report just in from the Grand Bois Camp, sir," replied the orderly. "Cree Indian robbed and killed on his arrival with his furs; Frenchman by the name of Baptiste Blais has fled the camp with the stuff. The messenger skipped, sir, before we could collar him."

Having finished, the orderly stood at attention perfectly steady and were it not for the steely glitter of his eyes one might imagine him a statue.

The man at the desk was silent, bending over some papers, making notes.

Suddenly raising his head, he snapped out: "Send for Sergeant Macdonald at once."

Silence reigned in the room when the orderly left; outside the cold wind moaned and howled.

Once more a knock sounded and the door opened to admit a short, thick-set man, with tanned and scarred face. Iron grey hair showing under the edge of his service cap, marked a man in his prime.

He had been wakened with the order: "The chief wants Macdonald!"

He had immediately tumbled into his clothes and had left his comrades sitting on the edge of their bunks, drowsily discussing the murder and offering bets as to who would be sent after Blais.

Carrying himself with the swing which seems to be part of every mounted policeman, he stopped at the desk and saluted.

"Macdonald," spoke the chief, "I suppose you have heard of the murder of this Cree. Now Blais is surely the man. You know him; he stole the three boxes from the schooner and got three years for it. Now, Mac, he had three full days start on you and he knows we will be after him. I don't have to tell you how desperate he is and there is only one place he can hope to escape us. He is bound to try and lose us in the plains."

Many a weary mile had Macdonald covered at different times in pursuit of men; but his face blanched under his tan as he realized what that meant at this particular season of the year. His thoughts wandered to the lost time he had been in the Far North and the fearful time he had had.

He was brought abruptly back to earth by the next words of the superintendent: "Now, Macdonald, the snow is deep and soft after all this heavy weather and

Blais might get across and then again he might not. In any case, I want you to get him."

To the average person this simple order might mean but little; but to the Royal Northwestern Mounted Police it meant short days' of terrible glaring snow; of long, dreary nights; of half rations; of staggering on and on with ever these fatal words ringing in his ears: "Get him!"

"Take Trooper Burr with you to give a hand. It's going to be a long chase, for Blais is desperate and will take every chance, particularly if he imagines we are already on his trail. Moreover, he is three days' journey behind Gros Lone's team, the best huskies this side of the Slave. Now, Mac," and his stern face softened as he spoke, for he knew what it meant to take the northern trail when the stormy season was about due, "you know the slogan, 'dead or alive,' you must get him; if it takes a lifetime, get him! You had better take the team with that new leader and three weeks' provisions. You'll need 'em. Don't lose any more time. Start in the morning now, good-bye."

Rising, the chief stretched out his hand, that of the sergeant met it, and they clasped in a hearty, friendly shake. Saluting the sergeant turned on his heel and strode out.

* * * *

The early morning hours were filled with sounds of bustle and activity. Mingled with the loud orders of men were the savage yelps of excited dogs. In a short time the door of the stable opened and there emerged a team of powerful huskies drawing a heavily-laden toboggan. Following it were two men drawing on

their fur gauntlets as they came. The team was halted at the door of the office. The sergeant went in while Burr remained with the dogs. Despite the early hour the chief was at his desk. No time was lost by either man. A few but necessary words of advise regarding provisions and the best course to take, and Macdonald found himself hitting the trail. All the men of the little post had gathered 'round to wish them Godspeed and give them as hearty a send-off as the bitter cold would allow.

A crack of the whip over the excited dogs, a creaking of leather harness and they were off. The big white leader bounced and strained at his collar as if he alone had the whole task of drawing the load. On one side, whip in hand, strode Burr, dressed in regulation jacket, fur cap, gauntlets and leggins. He made a fine figure as he sped along with the easy lift and swing of the snowshoe, which only comes after years of practice. To the left and rear was the sergeant, clad in the same dress, excepting that the fur trimming on his uniform was of otter in place of the coarser fur of his subordinate.

On they sped, these two soldiers, representing the law of the great white queen on the roof of the world. For them there was no turning back; straight ahead lay their duty and there they had to go. The warm breath congealing in the bitter cold on their collars made them appear huge, red-coated, white-faced goblins. No stop was made till nigh noon and then only for a short time to enable them to swallow a hasty bite and boil a pannikin of tea.

They soon continued on their journey. All that angry warriors.

afternoon the steady crunch, crunch of their shoes and the panting of the dogs were the only sounds which broke the silent whiteness which enveloped the world as far as the eye could see. That night they slept at one of the caches which Macdonald had built on one of his previous trips in this direction. Daylight saw them once more on the trail. No stop was made, not even for dinner, which they ate as they jogged along.

A whole week went by and the ninth day found them according to their calculations fully three hundred miles from their post, and as yet no traces had been found of the fugitive Frenchman. No word was spoken as they covered the faint north trail, mile after mile; each man busy with his own thoughts. Up to this time the weather had been clear and cold; now in this late afternoon the sky was rapidly filling up with dark ominous looking clouds, which chased each other across the vision of the travelers. An unnatural, heavy feeling was in the air, which meant to the men that a big storm was at hand. The dogs, too, seemed to sense the danger. Throwing back their ears, they sniffed the air and broke into a frantic run.

Macdonald, experienced as he was, felt a sinking at his heart as he anxiously scanned the threatening heavens. He had calculated upon reaching the next cache by five that day; but they were still many miles distant from it and the storm might descend at any moment.

Crack! Crack! went his whip, flicking pieces of fur from the back of the straining leader. Faster went the dogs, but faster came the storm and in less time than it takes to tell. It was upon them. The bitter north wind

blew with fearful velocity, gathering up the snow in its mighty embrace and hurling it here and there as if the very heavens themselves had flung all the unchained furies upon the land.

In vain they attempted to overturn the toboggan, so as to afford them some slight shelter, but the winds, as if in devilish mockery of their puny efforts, caught it up and tumbled it over and over, scattering part of their precious provisions in the snow.

Faint and weary and almost suffocated, Macdonald, realizing they were in the middle of a "Norther," managed to shout, or rather gasp, in Burr's ears, "Dig!" and at the same time motioned with his hands. Burr at once caught on and helped by the sergeant, dug feverishly with his hands in the soft blinding snow. In a short time a trench large enough to protect them was dug. Collecting as much of their belongings as possible and leaving the dogs to shift for themselves, they tumbled in, rolling themselves in their sleeping bags as they did so.

Swiftly the dense clouds of snow covered them until the light, warm stuff was piled high above them. Darkness quickly fell and still the wind blew and the snow drifted. To the men cowering in their trench all things seemed at an end. They realized their possible fate, but neither thought of the return journey. If they succeeded in weathering the storm, somehow or other they must pick up the trail again and strain on to their journey's end, which might mean Baptiste, or death, or both. Through the long hours of bitter cold they lay covered with nature's white blanket.

Fifty-five hours later Macdonald wearily dug his

way clear of his snowy couch. A dismal scene met his bloodshot eyes; away on all sides rolled endless miles of white covered wastes. Pure white in their awful yet beautiful majesty, not a breath of wind was there to remind him of the awful storm. As he rose weakly to his feet his benumbed brain gradually cleared and he became alive to the predicament in which they found themselves; directly his strength returned. He dug hastily in the snow for the trooper. Soon a leg, then both arms appeared, and in a few minutes the sergeant dragged clear the blanket-enfolded form of his companion. A few minutes examination convinced him that his comrade was no more. Life no longer glowed in that stiffened body; the brave, loyal heart was stilled forever. He had lain down and slowly drifted into that soft, sweet sleep which is the kindest gift the cruel north has to offer.

Broken and almost discouraged, Macdonald sat limply on his snowshoes. Death had no terrors for him; but here he seemed to have reached the parting of the ways. Should he give up the chase and return, or should he obey the dictates of his conscience and duty and keep ahead?

Long he sat thus engrossed in his thoughts till the rising wind nipped his fingers and ears and bade him move. With a heavy heart he rolled the body back into the trench which would now be his grave and covered it with snow. Then lashing his late comrade's snowshoes tail to head, he planted them in the snow at the head of the grave. Thus with his sleeping blanket as his winding sheet in the cold, cold snow was

buried a noble man; humble, but brave, he saw naught but what his duty bade him.

Nothing but a pair of snowshoes marked his lonely grave in that silent, unfriendly wilderness till the melting snows perchance would reveal his red coated form to the eyes of the heavens. But roughly had he lived and no more would he ask than to be buried by some comrade's hand.

* * * *

Macdonald was suddenly startled by low growls from the direction of the toboggan. At once his mind flew back to the dogs. Wading knee deep toward the sounds, he made the welcome discovery that in overturning and landing on its edge, the toboggan had formed a fairly good shelter and crouched behind it were all nine dogs, apparently none the worse for their experience. Upon his approach they yelped and growled and jumped frantically at him with open mouths. Seizing the long walrus whips, he soon had them beaten into submission. Then unfastening the provisions from the back of the toboggan, where the greater part were still secure, he fed the famished dogs. Untangling the frozen harness was no mean job, even to an old hand; at length it was done and the dogs stood or lay once more in line before the righted toboggan. Gathering up such articles as he could find, he was soon ready to push on. He raised his whip; but even as the cruel, stinging lash curled through the air, the awful truth burst upon him. His mind had been so occupied with different things he had failed to reckon with most fearful of all calamities which could befall him. The trail—where was the trail? Mock-

ingly the huge crests of snow flung the unanswered question back at him. Serenely the vast white silent places stretched out before his eyes into nothingness, indifferent to all his peril and questionings.

Truly he was in a desperate position. His compass was lost, the storm had changed the face of the whole country, and the trail, faint before, was now covered many inches deep. Unable to make up his mind which direction to take he shook up the dogs, cracked his whip and decided to go wherever they led.

Slowly the now cowed brutes struggled belly deep in the soft yielding snow. Without a backward look Macdonald plodded in the rear of the slowly moving train, his chin on his breast. All that day and the next they floundered till near noon, when one of the smallest of the dogs sank down utterly exhausted. The sergeant saw it was time to call a halt if he wished to save his team for the unknown dangers which lay ahead. Unharnessing the poor brute, he laid it on the toboggan. Lighting a fire, after some difficulty, he cooked his lonely meal. Next he filled the ever hungry dogs, limiting the quantity, as he well knew hungry dogs travel best.

The exhausted husky it was apparent would be of no further use, so the sergeant dispatched the poor creature to save weight. Through the long hours they slowly journeyed in the great stillness. The next day and the next and the next found them still making slow progress in a crazy, zig-zag fashion.

Macdonald broke trail continually now, the dogs following the feebly beaten track. Fresh snow had fallen nearly every day, so not once did they have a

crust upon which they might have traveled in comparative comfort.

With hanging tongues and bloodshot eyes the brave dogs struggled gamely on. Their ranks were sadly thinned now; only four remained. No longer did the leader bounce and strain at his collar; wearily he led the team, listless and weak. The weaker dogs, as they fell, were cut away, Macdonald not having the strength to unbuckle the frozen buckles. As he lurched on his weary way he realized that when he had visited the north before he had merely touched the fringe of her huge garment.

To his tired brain came strange fancies; from the beginning of time had he been tramping, tramping and for all time through all eternity must he brave the snows. Gradually his mind was giving way under the dreadful monotony. His shoes seemed to grow heavier at every step. To his fevered brain each shoe weighed hundreds of pounds. Fantastic ideas played upon his mind; shadows beckoned to him, urged him on; his brain was on fire and the fearful pain in his now sightless eyes seemed boring into his very soul.

"Mal-de-racquette" cramped his feet and almost brought a cry of pain to his cracked lips. Blindly he staggered on, his trail stretching out behind him like the path of a drunken man. Slowly, but surely, the inevitable lethargy was creeping over his limbs. Why fight and struggle when one could simply lie down and sleep? Solemnly the soft white arms of the north closed about him; sweet dreaming music filled the air and he sank slowly to the snow.

PART II.

Coming into camp with money in his pocket, though where he had obtained it none knew, Baptiste Blais called at every bar and drank till they refused to give him more. Staggering drunk his brain was on fire with the bad whiskey of the camp. He neither knew nor cared what he did. Obeying the sudden natural impulses of his half savage nature, he stumbled into a cabin and stabbed the protesting occupant to the heart.

Apparently somewhat sobered by his act, his thoughts turned at once to flight. Hitching the murdered man's dogs, which were famous the camp over, he hastily threw on some necessary provisions and the victim's rifle, not forgetting a huge "flacon de whisky blanc," which he found in the bunk, and struck the trail. For days he traveled at the steady and unswerving pace which is typical of the northerner. Not for one hour was Baptiste in his proper senses. Every few miles he would take a sip of the horrible stuff. Finally he flung the bottle away with a gluttural curse. That night he cursed and raved for more whiskey. Towards morning he slipped into an unnatural and troubled sleep, in which red-coated policemen surrounded him on all sides. They poured along from every direction; came at him with terrible swiftness; tall men, short men, inspectors, sergeants and troopers, all with fingers pointed at him.

In the crowd Baptiste recognized the faces of many; he had good reason to do so. Looming head and shoulders above the rest towered the figure of Sergeant Macdonald. Something in the sergeant's face held him; then drew him on till the officer put out his gauntleted

hand with the fateful words: "In the name of the King" on his lips; when he awoke with a cry of fear.

Slowly his senses came back to him and he realized it was all a dream. Try as he would he could not all that day remove from his thoughts the memory of the stern-faced sergeant of police. Gradually, as the utter silence worked upon his drink-befogged brain, he became obsessed with the idea that he was being followed. Ever was he looking over his shoulder to catch sight of his pursuers. He feared even the creak of his own shoes. At times his reason deserted him and he would furiously lash the dogs and force the wearied brutes into a run till they would stop exhausted with rolling eyes and heaving flanks; then Baptiste would throw himself full length on the toboggan, weak and unsteady, both in mind and body. Thus for many days he traveled, sparing neither the dogs nor himself.

When the fearful, death-dealing blizzard which had overtaken the policemen swept across the plain, Baptiste afforded in his weakened condition an apparently helpless victim to the clutches of the storm. But, strange, to say, the abatement of the storm saw him still making his painful way in the deep snow. Somehow, by the strange workings of Providence, he had weathered the most fearful "norther" in the history of the terrible North.

Not unscathed had he emerged, however. The fingers of his left hand were useless, frozen white. His face was cracked and blackened and icicles hung from eye lashes and beard.

Painfully he raised one foot after the other. A pitiful wreck of a man he was, as he tramped by the side

of the sadly depleted team. For two more days he struggled on, becoming weaker and weaker, ever possessed with the horrible fear of the red coats, till at last, in the afternoon of the third day proceeding the storm, he sank to the toboggan unable to move another step.

Gratefully the wornout dogs lay down and licked their cracked and swollen paws. As Mother Night drew her mantle of darkness over the white bed of the world, Baptiste struggled to his knees and succeeded in building a small fire, over which he warmed himself and cooked a meagre supper. Soon he covered himself with his blankets and dropped into a troubled sleep. Far into the next morning he lay muffled over the head till the bright, glowing light of the sun awoke him. Starting upright, Baptiste mechanically scanned the distant line where snowy plain met the blue vault of the heavens.

No! It could not be! Again he looked; did his eyes deceive him? Or was it merely one of the shadowy figures which lately had seemed ever present. No! Slowly the truth dawned upon him. Here at last was what he had long dreaded. Nearer crept the dots on the horizon, ever increasing in size, until the Frenchman distinguished the dirty, fur-fringed red coat, the tall cap and outfit of a policeman. What little courage he had Baptiste felt oozing out of his boots at the sight of the officer. There was no use in resisting. He might as well surrender himself to fate and the law.

As the distance between the two men lessened Baptiste was somehow not surprised to recognize the face and form of the man of his dreams. Nearer he came and the waiting Frenchman could see the weary hunch

of the shoulder and the hopeless-looking face of a man broken by the hand of the wild North. He was almost within ten yards of Baptiste now, and to the Frenchman's surprise he made no motion, nor in any way showed that he was aware of the presence of another man. Straight ahead he slowly limped and he had passed Baptiste quite a few yards before the dumb-founded Frenchman could collect his wits. Then his senses awoke and he knew at once the reason of the seeming indifference. Macdonald was snowblind. As the knowledge of the man's condition forced itself upon Baptiste, he stood face to face with a great temptation. Would he raise his rifle and end the chase there and then. Why shouldn't he? The government never gave him anything, excepting jail, so why should he spare the bloodhound of the government? But on the other hand he knew enough of the police to know that he might escape for a while, but caught he would be sooner or later.

Lowering his half uplifted rifle, he shifted it to his crippled hand and raised his right hand to his mouth of a hail; even as he did so, the limping figure paused, threw up its hands and slowly sank to the snow. The surprised Frenchman made his way to the fallen man and after some difficulty, because of his own weakened condition, succeeded in raising him to the toboggan and covering him with blankets. Not having brandy, he simply chafed the hands and feet of the unconscious man; then building a fire, he made some tea, pouring it down Macdonald's throat. Its warmth did him good and he slowly opened his inflamed eyes. No light of reason was there, however, and he raved and sang

a weak, crazy fashion. For many days Macdonald lay delirious for the greater part of the time. Only the careful ministrations of the Frenchman kept the small spark of life alive in the frail wornout body. At length there came a day when the Sergeant awoke in his proper reason. Slowly the different events of the fearful journey came back to him. He hadn't the faintest idea where he was; all he could see from his couch where he lay were the hide walls and roof of a hastily constructed "lean-to." He dozed for a while and when next he opened his eyes there stood or rather knelt before him in the low shelter, a short, dark Frenchman. Instantly the sergeant knew him as the man he was after. His natural impulse was to put his hand to his belt for his revolver, but his weakness forced a groan from him. Baptiste, reading his thoughts burst into a low laugh.

"Now, sergeant, you lie still; you not strong; you wait."

"Where am I? How did I get here?" burst from the lips of the policeman.

Slowly in his twisted patois Baptiste told him of how he found him, snowblind and unconscious on the plain; how he picked him up and nursed him through many days of fever; how he had pitched camp on the spot, afraid to travel in his weakness.

"Why did you do this? You knew I was after you?"

"Ah! La Bonne St. Anne told me in my heart to help you, Voila!" and he dismissed the question with a shrug of his shoulders.

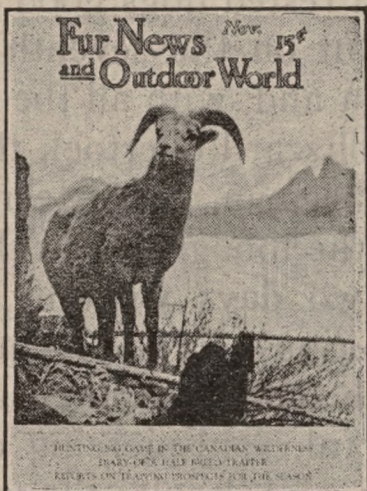
Camp was broken a few days later. The Frenchman tumbled Macdonald into the one toboggan and they set

off on the return journey. With rested dogs good time was made for over a week. But on the seventh day the sky became dark and overcast and, with all the suddenness of a northern storm, a blizzard overtook them. With the feeble help of the policeman, Baptiste managed to form a fair shelter with the toboggan and skins. Behind this they crouched. Two days went by and their condition was becoming serious. The storm did not show signs of abating and the cold was intense.

Unable to withstand the fearful, soul-piercing cold, Macdonald was growing weaker, and despite the piling of all the blankets and furs that could be spared around him, he could not keep warm.

On the morning of the third day, what Baptiste had long tried to prevent had overtaken the sergeant. In the cold and darkness of the storm Macdonald had fallen into the soft arms of sleep and from sleep death had claimed him for her own. Stoically, Baptiste pulled a blanket over the face of the dead man and threw himself over the body.

Silently the everfalling snow piled itself above the spot and once again the cruel North had claimed her own.



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