

The Wilderness Castaways

by Dillon Wallace, 1863-1939

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Published: 1913
Fifth Edition: 1922
A.C. McClurg & Co.



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Chapter I

Getting Acquainted.

Illustration:

He waited, his axe grasped in both hands

“Dan Rudd,” roared Captain Zachariah Bluntt, “if I has to tell you again to keep that mouth organ below decks, I’ll wring your neck! Yes, wring your neck! By the imps of the sea, I will!”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered Dan Rudd, a robust, sunny-faced sailor lad of sixteen, quickly slipping the offending harmonica, upon which he had been playing a lively air, into his pocket.

Captain Bluntt, impatiently pacing the deck, was plainly in ill humor. His great red beard, standing out like a lion’s mane, bristled ominously, and his shaggy eyebrows were drawn down in an unpleasant scowl.

It was two o’clock on a mid-July afternoon, the last case of provisions had been lowered into the hold, the last lighter-load of coal stowed into the bunkers, steam was up, and the staunch little Newfoundland steamer North Star, riding at anchor in Sydney harbor, had been ready to sail for three hours, and for three hours Captain Bluntt had been impatiently awaiting orders to get under way.

Two clean-cut, smooth-shaven, alert young men of thirty or thereabouts were standing at the port rail aft. Their sun-tanned faces marked them as men accustomed to out-of-door life, and their sinewy, muscular frames and keen but good-humored eyes proclaimed health and genial dispositions. They were intently, and with visible impatience, watching a wharf from which a boat was putting off. As the little craft shot out into the open one of them raised a pair of binoculars to his eyes, studied it for a moment, and announced:

“There he is at last! Here, take a look through the glass, Ainsworth,” and he passed the binoculars to his friend.

“Yes, that’s he,” said Ainsworth, after a moment’s observation, “and, Remington, he’s sitting back smoking a cigarette as unconcernedly as if he hadn’t kept us waiting half a day for him.”

“I’ll tell the skipper, and ease his mind,” suggested Remington, and striding forward he called out cheerily:

“All right, Captain Bluntt, Master Densmore is coming. You may put out as soon as you please when he’s aboard.”

“Very vexing! Very vexing, Mr. Remington!” exclaimed Captain Bluntt. “Fair wind, fair tide, and losing advantage of it, sir! All right, sir, all right. We’ll weigh anchor at once, sir.”

In a moment sailors were working at the windlass, anchor chains were clanking, and the men singing in rhythmic unison as they swung up and down at the crank handles. Then the engines began to pulsate.

The NORTH STAR had been chartered by the two young men—George Remington and Henry Ainsworth—for a summer’s voyage to Hudson Bay. Both were enthusiastic sportsmen, and Remington, who had once before visited the region, had promised Ainsworth some exciting polar bear and walrus hunting, as well as excellent sport fishing the coastal streams for salmon and trout.

Paul Densmore, the only son of John Densmore, a multimillionaire ship owner and a friend of Remington’s, had been invited by Remington to accompany them

as his guest. When Remington and Ainsworth went aboard the NORTH STAR upon the morning our story begins, Paul had remained ashore in Sydney to make some purchases in the town, promising to follow them within the hour. Captain Bluntt had been instructed to make ready for departure accordingly. But Paul had failed to keep his promise, and with hours of idle waiting for the appearance of the delinquent youth Captain Bluntt had worked himself into the high state of ill humor in which we find him.

“The Captain was just at the point of blowing up,” laughed Remington when he rejoined Ainsworth, “but he’ll be all right presently. He’s a very impatient old fellow.”

“He’s had good reason to be impatient,” said Ainsworth. “I can safely prophesy more breakers ahead. Judging from the little I’ve seen of that boy, Remington, you’ll be heartily sorry you brought him before we get back to New York.”

“I’m heartily sorry already,” admitted Remington, “but I couldn’t help it. Densmore is one of the best fellows in the world. He pulled me out of a tight place once when I was caught in the market, and when he asked me the other day if it would be an imposition upon friendship if he asked me to invite Paul, there was nothing to do but invite the youngster to come.”

“Oh, don’t think for a moment I’m finding fault with you, old man,” Ainsworth hastened to explain. “I see your position, and I’d have done the same under the circumstances, but it’s a pity nevertheless that we have to put up with him.”

“Yes, it is a pity,” agreed Remington. “That boy has no sense of responsibility. Never keeps an appointment or a promise. I never saw any one quite so lacking in consideration of others—selfish—selfish—that’s the word.”

“Why did his father ever let him grow into such a cad, anyway? What he needs is a good sound thrashing every day for a month. That would cure him.”

“Fact is, I don’t think Densmore ever knew much about him until recently. Too many irons in the fire to give much thought to his family. This steamship company’s his pet scheme just now, but he’s the head of half a dozen other big things, and even when he’s home his mind is all taken up with business. He left the boy’s training to the mother, and it’s the old story of an only child. She’s coddled and indulged and pampered him till she’s spoiled him. He failed in the final tests at school this year—he attends a select boys’ school uptown somewhere—and the head master wrote Densmore that there was no use sending him back unless he took more interest in the work, adding something to the effect that he seemed strangely void of ambition, never obeyed rules unless convenient, and was a disturbing element in the school. I think that brought Densmore to his senses about his son’s condition.”

“And he shoved the boy off on us for the summer,” said Ainsworth ill-naturedly.

“Oh, no, not for the purpose of getting rid of him,” Remington hastened to explain. “Densmore’s all right. He wouldn’t intentionally cause us inconvenience. He had two reasons for asking me to bring him. He learned Paul was addicted to cigarettes, and he wanted to get him away somewhere where cigarettes aren’t to be had. He thought, too, that good, wholesome exercise in the open, and a complete change of environment, might give him a new view of life and awaken his ambition. The boy’s mother has never permitted him to take part in what she calls rough games—baseball, football and real boys’ sports—and she’d never let him go

camping with other fellows, though he's begged to go. Afraid he'd get hurt. It took a lot of argument on Densmore's part to get her permission to let him come with us."

"One of those young hopefuls, isn't he, that thinks his father is rich and there's no use of his ever doing anything but spend money?" suggested Ainsworth. "From the little I've seen of him, he'll spend it, all right, too."

At that moment the boat hove alongside, and a tall, sallow-faced lad, perhaps seventeen years of age, a cigarette hanging at the corner of his mouth, tossed a bill to the boatman, languidly rose to his feet, caught the rope ladder lying over the ship's side, and with difficulty climbed to the deck.

"Glad to see you, Paul," greeted Remington. "We were getting a bit worried about you. You're late."

"Oh, I didn't think there was any rush," said Paul indifferently. "Stopped for luncheon at the hotel. Horrible stuff they serve there. It really isn't fit to eat."

"I'm afraid your appetite isn't very good, Paul," suggested Remington. "Wait till you get your lungs full of salt air, and rough it a bit; you'll think anything is good then."

"Oh, I don't know," Paul remarked indifferently, as he lounged back upon a chair, drew a fresh cigarette from a silver case, lighted it, flicked some ashes from his white flannel trousers and casually surveyed the deck. "What a rum old ship this is!" he continued. "I thought we were going to have a comfortable yacht."

"The NORTH STAR isn't much to look at," admitted Remington, "but she's the best sort of a ship for our trip. No ordinary yacht would do. We're going to rough it good and plenty, you know."

"That so? What kind of roughing it?"

"Hunting, fishing, camping, and that sort of thing. I hope we'll have some good bear hunting before we get back."

"Bear hunting!" Paul was interested at once. "What kind of bears shall we run across? Grizzlies?"

"No," laughed Remington, "Polar bears."

"Polar bear hunting! Cricky, but that'll be great!" Paul sat up excitedly. "Where're we going, Mr. Remington? I didn't pay much attention to what Father said about it. I thought it was just an ordinary yachting trip."

"You didn't seem to have much interest in it, coming over on the train," said Remington, and as he explained the region, the prospective hunting and fishing, and the adventure, Paul forgot his cigarette.

"That's just the kind of trip I've wanted to take all my life," he exclaimed. "May I shoot too?"

"Yes, I've a rifle and a shotgun among my things for you."

"May I see them? I've always been just crazy for a gun!"

"Wait a moment."

Remington went below and presently returned with a modern high-power rifle and a beautiful double-barreled shotgun. Paul's eyes sparkled with delight and he listened with close attention while Remington explained their manipulation, with due caution as to their handling. Then he exclaimed:

"Good old Dad! He is a good scout to let me come with you! Ever so many thanks, Mr. Remington. Where are the cartridges?"

"They're with mine. I'll get them for you when you need them. You may as well take the guns down to your stateroom, though, when you go."

"I guess I'll go now, and unpack my things."

"Very well. The steward will show you your room. You'll find everything there. Abner," turning to a bareheaded young sailor clad in blue flannel shirt, with sleeves rolled up, and trousers tucked into the tops of high sealskin boots, who was standing near the companionway, "this is Master Densmore. Will you show him to his room? Abner is the steward, Paul."

"Yes, sir; this way, sir," answered Abner, respectfully.

"He seems interested," remarked Ainsworth when Paul had gone below. "I'm inclined to think he's a pretty good fellow at heart after all. Just spoiled."

"That's so," agreed Remington.

A moment later Paul reappeared from the companionway, and asked:

"Where are my trunks, Mr. Remington? The steward took me to a room he insists is mine, but my trunks aren't there; just some canvas bags. Guess he's trying to put me in the wrong room."

"I left your trunks ashore, Paul."

"Ashore! Why, all my things are in them! I can't go without them! I've no clothes with me!"

"The canvas bags contain all the clothes you'll need. Look through them and see what you think of the outfit. Your father selected them."

"But my cigarettes! I packed them in one of the trunks!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to do without them. You'll find you can shoot straighter if you don't smoke. Cigarettes knock a fellow's nerves all out, you know."

"This is rum!" exclaimed the angry lad. "No cigarettes! Well, I'll go down and see the stuff."

"You'd better put on one of the warm suits you'll find in your bags, Paul," suggested Remington. "We're getting out to sea, and it'll be chilly on deck."

Paul vouchsafed no reply, but he profited by the advice, and donned a complete new outfit of clothing suited to his surroundings.

"Look like a dago laborer, don't I?" he asked Remington, whom he met at his stateroom door half an hour later.

"You look comfortably dressed," was the reply. "You see I've adopted similar clothes."

"You do look funny," laughed Paul, "and that's the way I feel. Mother would have a fit if she saw me now," glancing down at his flannel shirt and heavy trousers and shoes. "Mr. Remington," he continued, hesitatingly, "I—I want to apologize for what I said about the trunks and cigarettes. I can get on without cigarettes if they'd spoil my shooting."

"That's all right, Paul. They certainly would spoil your shooting."

Captain Bluntt was in excellent humor when he took his place at the head of the supper table.

"So you're the young rascal," he said to Paul, "who kept us waiting at Sydney."

"Oh, I guess there wasn't any great rush," answered Paul, somewhat nettled. "We're on a pleasure trip, and not trying to break a record."

Captain Bluntt looked at him curiously for a moment under his shaggy eyebrows.

“Not much of a sailor, I guess, youngster. Well, you’ll learn something before you gets home. Got a wonderful lot to learn, too.”

Paul flushed angrily, and retorted impudently and boastfully:

“Oh, I don’t know. This isn’t my first yachting trip. I know a thing or two about sailing. Captains of yachts don’t usually tell the guests what they’re to do.”

“Yacht, eh?” And Captain Bluntt laughed good-naturedly. “Well, well, don’t get grumpy. No offence meant. No doubt you’re a great sailor; you look it. Yes, you look it!” Turning from Paul as from a child whose presence he had quite forgotten, he remarked:

“She’s off in fine style, Mr. Remington, fine style! And we’ll make a rare fine run, sir, if the weather holds. Yes, sir, if the weather holds!”

“Is there much ice reported off the Labrador coast?”

“We’ll meet some ice, sir; bay ice. No trouble with that, sir. Plenty of bergs! Wonderful crop of bergs, sir!”

They had finished eating, and Captain Bluntt was striking a match to light one of Remington’s cigars which he had accepted, when strains of music floated down to them. He paused with lighted match in mid air, an ear cocked to one side, his red beard bristling.

“By the imps of the sea!” he blurted. “There’s that Dan Rudd with his mouth organ, and I *told* him to keep un below! The rascal! Wring his neck! Yes, sir, I’ll wring his neck!” and he sprang up as though bent upon carrying his threat into immediate execution.

“I rather like it,” remarked Ainsworth. “May he play for us, Captain?”

“If you likes un, sir, if you likes un. But I don’t call un playin’, sir; I calls un just pipin’ a racket!”

“We would like to hear him,” said Remington. “Suppose we go above.”

On deck they found Dan working away with all his will at his harmonica, keeping time with one foot, while a sailor danced a breakdown, and other sailors clapped their hands and encouraged the dancer with:

“Go at un, Bill! Go at un, b’y! You’re a spry un, Bill!”

Then Dan glimpsed Captain Bluntt, slipped the harmonica into his pocket, and the dancing ceased.

“Oh, don’t stop playing—don’t mind us,” encouraged Remington. “We came to listen.”

“The skipper don’t like music, sir,” said Dan, looking regretfully after Captain Bluntt, who was disappearing in the chart house, leaving a cloud of smoke from his fragrant cigar in his wake.

“Captain Bluntt said you might play if you wished, so please do not stop.”

A little encouragement induced the dancer to resume his breakdown, and presently the fun was in full swing again. Another sailor took a turn, and then Dan suggested:

“Now Jack Griggs sing us ‘Th’ Minnie Dart.’”

“An’ you plays th’ tune,” assented Jack.

Dan struck up a lively tune and Jack began to bellow the song, which began:

*“Th’ Minnie Dart were as fine a craft
As ever sailed th’ sea;*

*She were eighty ton, an' a fore an' aft,
An' as smart as she could be,"*

and closed with a weird description of the going down of the Minnie Dart with all her crew.

The music at an end, Remington and Ainsworth lounged aft to smoke and chat, while they enjoyed a perfect evening. A full moon had risen, transforming the gentle swell of the sea into molten silver, and to the right, in hazy distance, lay in faint outline the Newfoundland coast.

Paul strolled forward and soon became interested in watching the compass and the man at the wheel.

"What course are you sailing?" he asked.

The man made no reply.

"Let me try it. I can handle the wheel all right," he continued, attempting to take the spokes.

At that moment Captain Bluntt observed him.

"By the imps of the sea!" he roared, striding forward and grasping Paul's arm with a steel-like grip that made the youth wince as he vainly struggled to free himself. "Keep away from that wheelhouse or I'll heave you overboard. By the imps of the sea I will! Heave you overboard! Heave you overboard!"

"I guess I can go where I want to," answered Paul impudently, but none the less frightened.

Without releasing his grasp, or deigning to reply, the Captain half led, half dragged, Paul to Remington.

"This youngster must keep aft of the wheelhouse, sir! He was talking to the steersman, sir! Talking to him! I'll not permit it, sir!"

"I'm sorry," apologized Remington. "I'm sure he didn't understand that he was doing wrong, and he won't do it again."

Captain Bluntt, mollified but still ruffled, returned to his duties, and Paul, almost in tears, lounged alone, amidships, sulking.

Dan had witnessed the disciplining of Paul, and in the hope of smoothing matters presently wandered over to the lad, who was still sulking and nursing his injured dignity.

"Th' skipper's wonderful gruff sometimes," ventured Dan, "but he don't mean nothin'. 'Tis sort o' his way."

"Mr. Remington hired this old tub, and I'm his guest, and I guess I can go where I want to on it."

"'Tis an able craft, an' no old tub," resented Dan. "Th' skipper is master at sea. 'Tis a rule of the sea."

"He isn't my master."

"No, not that way. He's just master o' th' ship. Your folks is payin' th' owners for th' voyage, an' they is payin' th' skipper t' run th' ship safe, an' he has t' make rules t' run un safe or we'd be foulun' reefs or gettin' off our course."

Paul deigned no reply, and after an awkward pause Dan inquired:

"What's your name?"

"Paul Densmore."

"Mine's Dan Rudd. Dan's short for Dan'l. It's after Dan'l that was in th' lion's den, Dad says. Yours is from th' Bible, too. I reckon you was named after th' apostle Paul."

"No, after my grandfather."

"Tis th' same name, anyway. Dad reads out o' th' Bible nights when he's home. We live in Ragged Cove, but Dad's fishin' down on th' Labrador now with th' READY HAND."

"The 'READY HAND?' What's that?"

"She's a spry little schooner. Dad's part owner. I been down with her twice."

Dan told of fishing adventures on the Labrador. Paul described his home in New York, the great buildings, the subway and elevated railroads, the great transatlantic steamships—a thousand wonders in which Dan was intensely interested.

In the recital Paul soon forgot his injured dignity. He was glad of the companionship of a boy of his own age. No one, indeed, could long resist Dan's good nature, and when the sailor lad finally said it was time to "turn in," and they parted for the night, each was pleased with his new acquaintance—an acquaintanceship that was to ripen into life-long friendship. They little guessed that they were destined to be companions in many adventures, to share many hardships, to face dangers and even death together.

The NORTH STAR rounded Cape Charles the following evening, passed into the open Atlantic, and turned her prow northward. Innumerable icebergs, many of fantastic form and stupendous proportions, were visible from the deck, their blue-green pinnacles reflecting the rays of the setting sun in a glory of prismatic colors. On their port lay the low, storm-scoured rocks of Labrador's dreary coast, its broken line marked by many stranded icebergs. Now and again a distant whale spouted great columns of water. The white sail of a fishing schooner, laboring northward, was visible upon the horizon. The scene, grim, rugged, but beautiful, appealed to Paul's imagination as the most wonderful and entrancing he had ever beheld.

That night Paul was suddenly awakened from sound slumber by a tremendous shock. He sprang from his berth with the thought that the ship had struck a reef or iceberg and might be sinking. Terrified, he rushed to the companionway, where he was nearly thrown off his feet by another shock. At length he reached the deck. Spread everywhere around the ship he could see, in the shimmering moonlight, nothing but ice. From the crow's nest, on the mizzenmast, came the call of the ice pilot: "Port! Starboard! Port! Starboard!"

The lad's terror increased as he witnessed the changed condition of the sea. It seemed to him that the great mass of heavy ice which closed upon the ship on every side must inevitably crush the little vessel and send her to the bottom. As he ran forward, another and heavier shock than any that had preceded sent him sprawling upon the deck.

Chapter II

The First Bear.

Paul had scarcely regained his feet when the gruff voice of Captain Bluntt exclaimed:

"Well! Well, lad! And what brings you out o' your snug berth at this time o' night?"

"What's—what's happened? Are we wrecked?" asked the frightened Paul.

"Wrecked? No, no, lad! Just a bit of ice—just a bit of ice. 'Tis all right, b'y. Go below and sleep. 'Tis wonderful raw above decks for them thin clothes you're wearin'."

Paul, dressed only in pajamas, his feet bare, was indeed shivering. Much relieved, he turned down the companionway, glad to tuck himself in his warm berth, presently to fall asleep to the distant, monotonous call of the ice pilot, "Port! Starboard! Port! Starboard!" and in spite of repeated shocks, as the vessel charged the ice, alternately backing and forging ahead at full speed in her attack upon the pack.

The ice was left behind them during the night, and when morning dawned a stiff northeast breeze, cold and damp, had sprung up, and a sea was rising. The ship began to roll disagreeably, and at midday Remington encountered Paul, deathly pale, unsteadily groping his way to his stateroom.

"What's the matter, Paul?" he asked.

"I—I feel sick," Paul answered.

The call had come for dinner, but Paul was not interested, and retired to his berth. The fog mist thickened, and all that afternoon and night the fog horn sounded at regular intervals, a warning to fishing craft of the vessel's proximity.

For three days Paul, in the throes of seasickness, was unable to leave his berth, but on the morning of the fourth day he reappeared on deck, where his friends greeted him with good-natured jokes.

They were entering Hudson Straits. On their port, near at hand, lay the rocky, verdureless Button Islands, and far to the southward rose the rugged, barren peaks of the Torngaek Mountains in northeastern Labrador. To the northward in hazy outline Resolution Island marked the southern extremity of Baffin Land.

Here and there, spread over the sea, were small vagrant ice pans, messengers from the far Arctic, which gave evidence of the high latitude the ship had attained.

Now and again seals showed their heads above the water for a moment, quickly to disappear again. Sea gulls, their white wings gleaming in the sunlight, circled about, but nowhere was a sail or any indication of human life visible upon the wide horizon.

It was a new world to Paul, and different from anything he had ever imagined. The utter absence of vessels, the apparently uninhabited and uninhabitable land, the awful primitive grandeur of it all gave him a vague, indescribable sense of fear—such a feeling as one ascending for the first time in a balloon must experience upon peering over the rim of the basket at the receding earth. This sensation quickly gave place to one of exultation—the exultation of a wild animal loosed in its native haunts after long confinement. Paul became possessed of a desire to shout. His blood tingled through his veins. He drank the pure

atmosphere in great draughts, and it stimulated him like wine. He felt almost that he could do anything—fly if he wished.

This was the first awakening in Paul of the primitive instinct which every human has inherited from prehistoric ancestors—an inborn love of the glorious freedom of the great wide wilderness where individual man stands supreme in his own right and where he may roam at will without restraint; where he feels that he is a person and not an atom; where he may meet nature face to face, and fearlessly match his human skill against her forces.

Too often this instinct to retreat for a time to the wild places of the earth, to stand with bared head under the open sky, to breathe great lungfuls of pure atmosphere undefiled by the smoke of chimneys, to make the acquaintance of rocks and trees, of mountains and sea—to renew one's faith in God—is smothered by the luxuries and pamperings of civilization. So it had been with Paul.

Standing on the deck of the NORTH STAR that bright July morning, in the midst of nature's most rugged abode, that primordial instinct slumbering in his breast had then its first awakening. He seemed to expand. He felt himself grow. He longed to set foot upon those mysterious shores—to wrest from them their secrets. Presently he was to do so. Perhaps, had he known how close to the condition of his prehistoric ancestors he was to drift, he would have shrunk from his destiny. It is well for our peace of mind that an all-wise God hides from us today the happenings of tomorrow.

At length the North Star passed out into the wider waters of Ungava Bay, and directly after dinner Remington suggested:

"Suppose you bring your rifle, Paul, and I'll get a box of cartridges. We'll try it out and see how you can shoot."

Paul had been looking forward to this opportunity, and a moment later he appeared with the rifle.

"Now draw a bead on that bit of ice out there," said his instructor, "and we'll see how you hold. Run your left hand farther forward on the stock—can't hold steady with it away back like that—a little farther out—that's better. Now you can stand straight and not have to bend backward like a woman does when she tries to shoot. Do you get the ice? Look through the notch on the rear sight, and bring the bead on the front sight in contact with the bottom of your object. Got it? Try it again. Now we'll load. Now try it."

Paul, a loaded rifle in his hands for the first time, took aim, and pulled the trigger. The shot went wild.

"You closed your eyes at the last moment, and wobbled the gun," said Remington.

"Guess I did," admitted Paul. "I was afraid to be so near the explosion."

"Well, throw in another cartridge. That's right. Throw the lever forward; now back. Be careful! It leaves it cocked, you see. Always remember, when you're not going to shoot again immediately, to put the hammer down, and never carry a cocked gun. That's a bad habit some sportsmen have, but a man that isn't quick enough to cock his gun after he sees his game should practice until he can do it, and never go out with his gun until he can. With a rifle it's never well to carry a cartridge in the chamber. You can throw one in as quickly as you need it. Now try again."

Bang! The shot struck just beneath the bit of ice.

“Bully! Bully!” exclaimed Remington and Ainsworth together.

Paul flushed with pleasure and excitement. With the next shot he took more careful aim, and simultaneously with the crack of the rifle bits of splintered ice flew from the floating cake. This was indeed a good shot, for by this time the vessel had left the ice well behind.

“How was that?” asked Paul, with conscious pride.

“Good work!” Remington encouraged.

Several more practice shots were fired with varying success, the rifle cleaned, and Remington and Ainsworth went below to overhaul their fishing outfit.

Paul, with just pride in his initial achievement with the rifle, strolled forward to exhibit his gun to Dan, who was splicing a rope near the foremast, and had been an interested spectator of the target practice.

“Hello, Dan,” he greeted.

“Hello, Paul. Been ailing?”

“Ailing! I was awfully sick for two days.”

“We were havin’ a bit of nasty sea. ’Tis bad for the seasickness.”

“You bet it got me, all right. Would you like to see my rifle?”

“Yes, I were wantin’ t’ see un.” Dan took the rifle, looked it over, threw it up to his shoulder and sighted it, like one accustomed to the use of firearms.

“She’s a wonderful fine gun!” he exclaimed. “A rare fine gun! An’ she’s pretty, too. I never seen such a fine gun—and such a pretty un.”

“Can you shoot?”

“I does some shootin’. I hunts with Dad in winter. He traps furs in winter, and he’s took me with him two winters.”

“Did you ever shoot anything?”

“Oh, yes; lots of partridges and rabbits. Last fall I kills a deer and gets a crack at a bear, but misses; and last winter I shoots two foxes.”

“You must be a dandy hunter. I’ve never hunted any yet, but I expect to. Never went before where there was anything to hunt. This is my first gun. I’ve got a shotgun too.”

“That’s the gun for partridges, unless you shoots their heads off with the rifle. Mostly I shoots their heads off with a rifle, but sometimes I misses. Mine’s a 44—Dad’s old one. He got a new 30-30 and gave me his old one.”

“I’d like to see it. You got it with you?”

“Yes, it’s down in the fo’c’sl.”

“Here! Bring your gun, youngster! Bring your gun! Here’s a shot for you!” called Captain Bluntt. “Here now!”

Paul ran forward.

“Where? What is it?” he asked excitedly.

“There, on that pan! That yellow spot. See un? See un? That’s a water bear, and he’s asleep. Get ready now and shoot un!”

Paul’s excitement was intense. He nervously slipped some cartridges in the magazine and raised the rifle to his shoulder.

“Set up your sights, lad! Set up your sights! And cock your piece! Cock your piece! You can’t shoot till she’s cocked. Dan, look sharp now, an’ tell the

gentlemen there's a bear sighted! Now, youngster! Now! Don't hurry. Take your time. Why you're shakin'! Steady down! Steady down! That's right. Careful!"

With tremendous effort Paul steadied his nerves, and bang! The yellow spot rose. Sure enough, it was a bear, and it began to bite at its side.

"You hit un! You hit un, lad! Fine! Fine! Give un another!"

Paul fired again, but his nerves had got the better of him, and the shot went wide, as did several other shots. Captain Bluntt rang the engines to "stop," as Remington and Ainsworth, rifles in hand, reached the deck. The bear had slipped off the ice pan and taken to the water; at which Remington called—

"Launch the power boat!"

In a jiffy Captain Bluntt had men at the ropes.

"Come, Paul, we're going after him," said Remington.

"Take the tiller, Dan! Take the tiller of that boat!" commanded the Captain.

In less time than it requires to relate, the boat was off and in pursuit, Dan steering with skill, Remington, Ainsworth, and Paul ready with their rifles.

Chapter III

A Husky Camp.

The boat gained upon the bear rapidly, and had nearly overtaken it when suddenly it turned to the left, interposing a small pan of ice between it and its pursuers, effectually hiding it from their view.

Dan made a short cut around the opposite side of the pan, and as the boat shot out behind the ice its bow nearly struck the bear. The pursuers were no less surprised than the pursued, and as the boat darted past, the bear made a vicious lunge with its powerful paw, caught it amidships and nearly capsized it.

Dan made a graceful swing, and brought the hunters almost too close to the animal to permit the use of guns. It charged them again, but Dan, on the lookout for this maneuver, neatly avoided it.

"Now, Paul," advised Remington, "shoot!"

The bear was less than twenty feet from the boat, but Paul was still in so high a state of excitement that he missed two shots, and it was only at the third attempt that he struck the animal in the head, and it collapsed.

"It's a stunning big fellow!" Remington declared, while he slipped a rope over the animal's neck to tow it to the ship.

"That was a splendid shot from the ship—I doubt if I could have made it," said Ainsworth. "And you've got the first game of the trip, Paul."

"'Twere a rare fine shot," put in Dan. "I were standin' by, an' I've missed many a better."

When the bear was at length hoisted on deck it proved indeed to be a monster polar bear, and Captain Bluntt declared it one of the largest he had ever seen.

Paul's pleasure was beyond bounds. His face, which was already losing its sallow, yellow appearance, glowed with delight. He was in a fair way to have his head turned by the unstinted praise of his companions.

The fine smoking roast which came on the supper table that evening certainly had an appetizing appearance, but when Paul received a helping he fancied he detected a fishy odor, and when he tasted the meat he made a wry face and exclaimed:

"Ugh! Why, it's strong with fish!"

"A bit fishy in flavor, lad. A bit fishy," agreed Captain Bluntt. "But a man o' the sea *and* a sportsman shouldn't mind that."

"Well I don't like it," asserted Paul, "but I killed it and I'm going to eat some of it anyway."

"That's the right spirit," said Remington, "but I think I'll pass it by. I never could bring myself to eat polar bear or seal. Perhaps because I never had to."

"I can't say that I care for it," admitted Ainsworth.

"'Tis fine meat, I thinks," declared Captain Bluntt, helping himself liberally. "I finds it fine. Bear's meat is rare strong meat."

"I don't think I can go it," said Paul, who had tried another mouthful. "It's strong, all right—too strong of fish for me."

"I weren't meanin' that kind o' strong. No, no! 'Tis good, wholesome, strengthenin' meat. 'Tis not so high flavored of fish, either, as old swile, an' swile is good."

"Swile? What's that?" asked Paul.

"Seal, lad, seal. We calls un swile in Newfoundland and down on the Labrador. Swile an' ice bears live on fish, lad, and 'tis but natural they should carry a bit of the flavor of fish. That rascal the cook should have given un an extra parboil."

"I didn't suppose any one but Eskimos ate seal."

"Only Eskimos eat seal! No, no, lad! We all eats un an' likes un. Old seal is a bit high flavored, but white coats I finds as sweet an' fine as mutton or fowl."

"What are white coats?"

"Never heard of white coats? Well! Well! You sure has some things to learn of the North. White coats is young seals—very young uns."

"I never heard them called that." Paul felt some resentment at the implication that he was not well informed.

The sun went down that night in a blaze of wondrous glory. No human artist would dare be so prodigal with his colors or resort to such marvelous blendings of shades as the Almighty Artist paints into His sunsets upon the sky of the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. The sunset on this occasion was unusually gorgeous. Brilliant reds shaded up into opalescent purples, deep orange into lighter yellow, reaching to the very dome of heaven. The water reflected the red, and the North Star seemed steaming through a mighty heaving, throbbing sea of blood. It was as though the earth's very heart had been laid bare.

For a long time it lasted. Paul and his friends stood enthralled. It made them breathe deeply. They felt that they were in the presence of some mighty power, that very near them was the Master Himself, He who guides the world in its eternal journey, and holds in their places the innumerable millions of stars and untold other worlds that reach out into infinite space.

"Isn't this wonderful—wonderful!" exclaimed Paul, at the end of a period of breathless awe.

"I never saw anything to compare with it!" declared Ainsworth. "It's beyond the dreams of my wildest imagination!"

"It's nowhere but in the North that such sunsets are ever seen," said Remington.

"Fine sunset, sir. Fine sunset," remarked Captain Bluntt, as he passed them on his way to the chart house.

"It promises a good day tomorrow, doesn't it?" asked Remington

"Not so sure of that, sir. Not so sure of that."

Captain Bluntt's pessimistic prophecy of the morrow's weather was well founded. When day broke the sea was enveloped in a blanket of fog—thick, stifling, impenetrable. The rigging dripped moisture, the decks were wet and slippery, the atmosphere was heavy, clammy, difficult to breathe.

For two days the fog lay over the sea like a pall. The NORTH STAR, her engines working at slow speed, felt her way cautiously, for she was in uncharted waters. The tremendous tides of Ungava Bay render navigation here dangerous, even under the most favorable conditions, and Captain Bluntt was not the man to take undue risks, though he was a fearless seaman, and in his time had done many dashing and daring deeds, when circumstances had demanded.

Following the fog came several hours of cold dismal rain, accompanied by sleet. Then the clouds broke, and as though some fairy hand had brushed them away, the sky cleared and the sun shone warm and beautiful to cheer the depressed world.

"And there lies Cape Wolstenholm, sir," said Captain Bluntt, pointing toward a low-lying coast off their port bow. "We'll soon be in Hudson Bay now, sir, and what's your pleasure?"

"While the fine weather holds I think we'd better do some fishing," answered Remington. "Besides, I think we all want to get ashore to stretch our legs."

"As you say—as you say, sir! But we'll have to locate some huskies, sir, and get a native pilot."

Upon rounding Cape Wolstenholm, which occupies the northwestern extremity of the Labrador peninsula, the ship swung in close to the coast, and, proceeding with great care, the leadsman calling his fathoms, felt its way between several small islands, until, the following morning, a safe anchorage was found outside a large island near the head of Mosquito Bay.

"We'll be sure to find huskies up this bay, sir," assured Captain Bluntt. "We can't risk the ship any farther, sir. It won't do, sir. But it's a short run for the power boat to the head of that bay, and unless I'm mistaken there'll be plenty of huskies there, sir. Yes, sir, plenty of 'em. I'll send Tom Hand. Tom Hand speaks their lingo. Tom! Tom Hand!" he called.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Go ashore, Tom. We want a husky pilot; a good one. A good husky, now! Dan! Here, you rascal! Go ashore with Tom, and help him look after things!"

"Come, fellows, we'll go along," suggested Remington to Ainsworth and Paul. "We'll not be in the way, will we, Captain."

"No, no! Go ashore if you likes. Better take some grub with you. Dan, tell the cook to put up some grub! Look sharp, now!"

Presently they were off, pointing toward the head of the inner bay. Paul took three or four shots at harbor seals which raised their heads now and again above the water, but always missed them.

"'Tis wonderful hard t' hit un from a boat," said Tom.

Soon they discovered a column of smoke rising from the north shore.

"There un is! Turn she int' th' smoke, Dan," directed Tom. "Th' huskies is camped in there. Th' smoke is a signal t' call us t' un. They's seen us."

Dan swung the boat in, and upon rounding a point and entering a cove two skin tents or wigwams were discovered, and several people gathered upon the shore as if expecting them.

"There's th' huskies, an' their families; leastways they has two tupeks," commented Tom.

"Tupeks?" asked Paul.

"Aye—skin tents. In summer they lives in skin tents, an' in winter in snow igloos."

"They seem to be all men and boys," said Paul.

"No, they's women too, but husky women wears trousers. You'll see th' difference when we comes closter."

"Well, they are a rocky looking crowd!" exclaimed Paul.

There were two men, three women and four children, one a half-grown girl. All wore skin garments and were bareheaded, their long black hair, coarse and straight, reaching to the shoulders. One of the women carried an infant in her hood, and its round, bright eyes peered wonderingly over the mother's shoulders at the intruders.

"Oksunae," greeted Tom upon stepping ashore.

"Oksunae," answered the Eskimos, who came forward laughing to shake hands with their visitors, their round, greasy faces beaming good nature and welcome.

Tom began his negotiations at once, conversing with the Eskimos in their native tongue, for they could understand no English.

"Ainsworth and I are going up this stream a little way to try the salmon. Want to go along, Paul?" asked Remington.

"No, I'll get fishing enough later. Guess I'll stay and look this crowd over."

"All right. Don't make eyes at that young Eskimo girl."

"No fear!"

Skulking about were several big, vicious looking dogs, which reminded Paul of timber wolves he had seen at the Zoo.

"I don't like the looks of those beasts," said he. "Are they dangerous?"

"They're cowards so long as you keeps on your feet an' has somethin' handy to beat un with," reassured Dan. "Your gun'll do for that. But let un get th' best o' you once, an' they'll just rip you up like wolves. They is wolves."

"They look it," agreed Paul.

The lads wandered about the encampment, examining the kayaks and crude hunting implements and paraphernalia of the Eskimos. Upon approaching the tupeks a stench met their nostrils, which they found came from half putrid seal meat and fish within.

"They eats wonderful bad meat," remarked Dan.

"Why, they don't eat that stuff!" exclaimed Paul.

"Yes they does," said Dan.

"What pigs they must be!"

"No, 'tis just th' way they always been used to doin'. They has wonderful hard times t' get things t' eat sometimes."

At the end of an hour Remington and Ainsworth returned.

"Not a strike," said Remington, "though I'm certain there are plenty of salmon in the stream. We're a little far north for them to take the fly. But Ainsworth got our dinner. That's something."

"Ran into a bunch of ptarmigans," said Ainsworth, holding up a half dozen birds.

"How are you making out with the huskies, Tom?" asked Remington of Tom, who had joined them.

"Kuglutuk, th' old un, sir, will go with us. He's ready to start any time, sir. We has t' land him at Cape Smith or Cape Wolstenholm, sir, when we comes back."

"All right, Tom. Can't we get brush enough around here to broil these grouse and make some coffee? I'm famished."

"Yes, sir. Dan, get th' axe, b'y, an' put on a fire, whilst I dresses th' birds."

When Tom drew the birds, to Paul's amazement the Eskimos gathered up the entrails, placed them on the end of a stick, broiled them slightly over the fire Dan had lighted, and ate them as they might a delicacy.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Paul. "I'd starve before I'd do that!"

"Maybe," said Tom, "but I'm thinkin' you'd eat un an' like un if you was hungry enough. They's no tellin' what a man'll eat. Th' huskies eats un because they likes un, an' entrails ain't so bad, an' you gets used t' un, though I'm hopin' you'll never have t' eat un, lad."

"I never would," positively asserted Paul. "I'd die first."

Luncheon eaten, they bade adieu to the Eskimos, shaking hands again all around. Kuglutuk, his kayak in tow, took his place in the power boat, "Oksunae" was shouted by those afloat and those on land, and the little settlement was quickly lost sight of around the point at the entrance of the cove.

On board the NORTH STAR again, a conference was held as to the most probable point at which salmon and trout could be found, Tom acting as interpreter. It was at length decided, upon Kuglutuk's recommendation, to visit the rivers flowing into Richmond Gulf, which, considerably farther south, offered greater promise that salmon would take the fly, though Kuglutuk assured them that both varieties of fish abounded in all the streams of the coast.

Three days later found the NORTH STAR in the latitude of Richmond Gulf, and with much careful maneuvering under the guidance of Kuglutuk, and with frequent heaving of the lead, a safe anchorage was found in Nastapoka Sound, behind the islands which shut out the wider sea beyond.

The entrance to Richmond Gulf is an exceedingly narrow, treacherous channel, through which Kuglutuk declared no vessel so large as the NORTH STAR could pass in safety. Through this channel he said the rising and ebbing tide poured with so terrific a rush of the waters that dangerous whirlpools were formed, which rendered its safe passage for kayaks and small craft impossible save at the time of the turning of the tide.

It was late afternoon when the ship made her anchorage, and it was decided to prepare for the passage of the dangerous strait in the power boat when the tide should reach flood at ten o'clock the next morning.

Kuglutuk, Tom Hand and Dan Rudd were to accompany the three sportsmen, and it was planned that the party should carry a full camping equipment, and remain at the head of Richmond Gulf one week.

The weather was propitious—mild, clear, delightful. This was to be Paul's first experience in camp. Before him lay a rugged, unpeopled, unknown wilderness. He was to enter it and be a part of it. The romance of it thrilled him, and he lay awake that night a long while, feasting anticipation and imagination, too restless to sleep.

Chapter IV

The Wilderness Primeval.

The passage of the channel leading into Richmond Gulf was accomplished without adventure, and within the gulf the power boat took a northeasterly direction, passing several small islands. Many wild ducks, gulls and other water fowl and birds flew about the islands, hovered over the water or rested upon the waves.

Presently Kuglutuk turned the boat into the mouth of a river, and ascending the stream for a little distance, against a strong current, made a landing near the foot of a rushing, tumultuous rapid.

"Tom," declared Remington, when they were ashore, "I'm as hungry as seven bears. Fry some bacon and make some coffee, won't you, before you pitch the tents?"

"Aye, aye, sir. We'll put on a fire an' have un ready in a jiffy. Dan, b'y, bring up the things from the boat."

"Come fellows, we'll get our rods up while Tom's getting dinner," suggested Remington. "I'm aching to try my luck."

"Which of these rods shall I use?" asked Paul. "I never used a rod in my life, and I guess you'll have to show me."

"Try this one," selecting a good weight steel fly rod. "That's got strength, and if you strike a big one you're not so likely to break it as that lighter one. You'll be able to handle the lighter one after some practice."

In the meantime Tom cut a pole about eight feet in length, sharpened the butt, which he jabbed firmly into the earth, inclined it at an angle over a fire which Kuglutuk had kindled with moss and dead sticks, and in such a position that the upper end of the stick came directly over the blaze. On this he hung a kettle of water. Then he sliced bacon. In ten minutes the water had boiled, coffee was made, the kettle removed from the stick, placed close to the fire on the ground, and the bacon sizzling in the pan.

"Oh, cracky!" said Paul, sniffing the air, "that's the best thing I ever smelled."

“Doesn’t it smell bully!” exclaimed Remington. “I thought I’d have time to make a cast or two before Tom was ready for us, but he’s been too quick for me.”

“Now,” said Remington, when they were through eating, “we’ll see if there are any hungry fish in that pool.”

Paul looked on while the older sportsmen made one or two casts. Then he attempted it, at first very clumsily, but gradually improving. He was not very enthusiastic, however.

“I don’t see any fun in this,” he said finally.

“Keep at it, and you’ll learn,” encouraged Remington.

At that moment “whiz-z-z” and Ainsworth’s reel fairly hummed, with forty yards of line run out before he could check it—a flash of spray—a great silver bar in the air! The leap was full two feet! Splash! It doubled, demanded more line, fought as only a salmon can fight, the supple steel rod bent and curved, but the angler, his face tense with excitement, held his advantage.

“Good! Bully!” shouted Remington with each play. “Look out! That’s the way! Easy! That’s it!”

Again and again the fish fought for the head of the rapid, but at length, conquered, it was drawn in, and with Remington’s assistance landed—a fine big salmon.

“That was great!” exclaimed Paul. “Guess there is some fun in it after all.”

“Fun! Just strike one, and you’ll say it’s the best ever!” Ainsworth was justly proud.

A few minutes later, “Whiz-z-z” again, and “Whiz-z-z!” Two silver flashes! Two fountains of spray! Two mighty splashes! Paul and Remington had each hooked a salmon at nearly the same instant! And then there was fun! Ainsworth could hardly contain himself as he watched the play, shouting directions and cautions to one and the other. There was danger of getting their lines tangled when both fish darted up stream at once, or made dives for the bank at the same time, in efforts to free themselves. Finally Paul’s fish rushed in upon him, gained slack line, shook loose the hook and was free.

Paul could have cried with disappointment and vexation.

“Just my luck!” he exclaimed, as he saw Remington land a fine salmon.

“Oh, no, don’t get discouraged. You did mighty well for the first time,” encouraged Remington.

“I notice you landed yours, all right,” said Paul pettishly.

“But I may lose the next one. The uncertainty of whether you’ll land them or not after you’ve hooked them is half the fun.”

“I can’t see that—”

“Whiz-z-z”—away went his line again before he could finish. For half an hour, directed by Remington, he played the fish, and was at length rewarded with as fine a salmon as Ainsworth’s—considerably larger than Remington’s.

“What fun! Oh, but it’s great!” he exclaimed as, all a-tremble with excitement, he examined his catch.

“They’re here all right, and they’re taking flies. We’ve got all the fish Tom can take care of today, and we’ve had a week’s fun in two hours. What do you fellows say to climbing that barren hill?” suggested Remington. “I’m anxious to see what the country is like behind those cliffs.”

Paul was loath to go. The sport had set his blood a-tingling with excitement and he would much have preferred to remain behind and fish, but Ainsworth agreed with Remington, and his sense of courtesy to his host bade him join them.

“We’ll stretch our lines to dry before we go, Paul. Never put your line up wet or it will rot, and some day you’ll lose a fine fish,” advised Remington, who had noticed Paul lean his rod against a tree.

Their lines stretched, they wandered up the defile down which the river plunged in its mad impatience to reach the sea. Here they were in a dark forest of stunted spruce, but very quickly, as they began the ascent of the hill, trees gave way to straggling brush, and brush at length to bare rocks.

“There’s a view for you,” said Remington when the summit was reached.

“Magnificent!” exclaimed Ainsworth.

“Pretty rough country.”

“But grand! Stupendously grand!”

To the west, a shimmering vista, lay Hudson Bay; to the east, to the north, to the south, stretched a tumbled, boundless mass of rocky ridges, interspersed with starved forests of spruce. Here and there a lake sparkled in the distance. Below them the river, a twisting, winding thread of silver, coursed down to the sea.

The sensations that had come to Paul in Hudson Strait when he first beheld the distant wilderness and the sailless sea, thrilled him again—first fear and shrinking, then an inward, inexplicable sense of power and freedom.

“And no one lives there,” he said, more to himself than to his companions.

“No one but Indians,” said Remington. “Eskimos on the coast. They all live as close to nature as man can live, and they fight that wilderness pretty constantly for existence. It’s a land of the survival of the fittest.”

Later, on other occasions during their stay in Richmond Gulf, Paul visited the barren hill. He would steal away alone, and for an hour at a time sit upon its rocky summit, and revel in the rugged beauties of the landscape. Here he felt a something well up within him, a desire to do something—an indescribable longing he could not define.

The lure and the power of the wilderness were exerting their influence. This was the world just as God had made it, untouched by the hand of man. Rugged mountains, patches of green forests, sparkling lakes, the distant sea, the blue sky, and silence. There were no brick walls to limit the vision, no tall chimneys belching out smudges of black smoke to defile the atmosphere, no rushing crowd to distract. Nowhere does one get so close to God as in the wilderness. The wilderness is the temple of pure thoughts, of high ambitions. Here man’s soul expands as nowhere else on earth.

When the three returned to camp they found the tents set up and everything snug and in order. A fragrant and cozy seat of spruce boughs had been arranged by Dan and Kuglutuk before a roaring log fire, and, by no means the least attractive of the preparations, a delicious supper of salmon awaited them, which they attacked with a will, for the exercise had given them an unusual appetite.

“I never ate such fish before,” Paul declared, between mouthfuls.

When supper was finished the two men lighted cigars, and chatted, while Paul reclined upon the boughs and gazed into the blaze. Presently Tom and Dan joined them, and Dan, producing his harmonica, began to play a soft, low air, while Tom

cut some tobacco from a plug, rolled it between the palms of his hands, stuffed it into a pipe, lighted it with a brand from the fire and handing the plug to Kuglutuk who followed his example, contentedly settled back to smoke and enjoy the warmth, for the evening was chilly.

"Them was fine salmon you gets this evenin'," Tom remarked.

"Yes," said Remington, "fine ones, and I hope we'll have more tomorrow."

"Dandies!" broke in Paul, "and dandy fun landing them!"

"Yes, 'tis rare sport landin' un. And does you like troutin'?"

"Yes, to be sure. We expected to get trout here," answered Remington.

"Th' husky's tellin' me they's plenty to be had a bit up the streams, sir, and big uns—wonderful big uns, by his tell, sir."

"We'll have to try them tomorrow."

"Where did you learn to speak Eskimo, Tom?" asked Ainsworth.

"Where'd I learn un, sir? I never learned un. I allus knew un. I were born, sir, on the Labrador. My mother were a woman of Zoar, sir, an' a half-breed. They talks mostly husky thereabouts. The first words she ever says to me, sir, was husky, an' when I were a wee lad she talks all her baby talk to me in husky."

"But your father was a white man?"

"Oh, aye, sir, he were from Conception Bay. He were down on the Labrador fishin', an' he meets my mother, an' likes she, an' th' missionary marries un. Then he stays at Zoar an' traps in winter, an' there I were born, sir."

"Are your parents still living, then?"

"Oh, no, sir. They both dies when I were a bit of a lad, sir—seven year old or thereabouts. 'Twere in winter, an' my father is out to his traps. My mother expects him home in th' evenin', an' when it gets dark an' he never comes she's much worried, for he's always before comin' when he's promisin', sir. He were a wonderful true man t' keep his word, sir, even t' wallopin' me when I does things he's denied me to do, an' is deservin' th' wallopin'."

"Well, as th' evenin' gets on an' he's not comin', my mother cries a bit an' says somethin's been befallin' he, sir, out in the bush, an' when she rouses me from sleep before the break of day th' next mornin', she's in a wonderful bad state worryin'. She tells me she's goin' t' look for he, an' I'm t' watch th' baby."

"She goes, sir, an' she don't come back that day or that night or th' next day. Snow comes fallin' thick an' th' weather grows dreadful nasty. Th' baby cries most o' th' time, an' I carries un some. I knows th' baby's hungry, but I has no way t' feed un. After awhile it stops cryin' when I lays un on th' bed."

"That were a wonderful cold night, sir. When mornin' comes th' baby's still quiet, an' I says to myself, 'I'll let un sleep.'"

"Th' bread's all gone, an' I only has a bit of salt fish t' eat, an' th' fire I puts on in th' stove burns slow. But th' snow's stopped in th' night."

"Th' baby don't cry no more, but I does, for I don't know why my father an' mother don't come, an' I'm cryin' when I hears dogs outside. I wipes away th' tears quick, for I'm wantin' no one t' catch me cryin'."

"Then in comes th' Moravian missionary from Nain, a wonderful kind man. He asks where my mother is. I tells he how my mother goes away to look for my father an' never comes back, an' th' hard time I has. That th' baby were hungry, but she's sleepin' now."

“He goes an’ looks at un, an’ then very quiet he covers un over with th’ blanket, an’ puttin’ his hand on my head an’ lookin’ in my eyes, he says: ‘Is you brave, lad? We all has troubles, lad, an’ you must be brave to meet yours.’

“Then he calls old Muklutuk, his driver, to bring in some grub. They puts on a good fire, an’ gives me a plenty t’ eat, an’ goes away sayin’ they’ll be back by night.

“When they comes back the missionary holds me up to him, and he says, very kind: ‘Lad, I’m goin’ to take you to a new home, for your father and mother has been called away to heaven by th’ Lord. He’ll be needin’ ’em there, an’ they can’t come back t’ you, but th’ Lord wants me t’ take you with me.’

“I were wonderful lonesome when he says that, at not seein’ mother an’ father again, but I holds back th’ tears, for mother has often been tellin’ me that some day th’ Lord might be callin’ she or father away t’ live in heaven, an’ not t’ cry or feel bad about un, for ’t would be right, as everything th’ Lord done were right.

“Well, th’ missionary takes me on his komatik t’ th’ station where he lives, an’ th’ women there cries over me an’ makes a wonderful lot o’ me, an’ every one there is wonderful kind.”

“What had happened to your father and mother?” asked Ainsworth, after a pause.

“I were comin’ t’ that. He’d been meetin’ with an accident, his gun goin’ off an’ shootin’ his foot off. She finds him in th’ snow, an’ tries t’ carry him home, but ’t were too much for she, an’ when it comes on t’ snow again she sticks to him, an’ they both freezes t’ death. Leastwise that’s what th’ missionary thinks, for he finds un froze stone dead. Mother has her arms around father, holdin’ he close to her bosom, as though tryin’ to keep he warm.

“So you sees, sir, how I come t’ speak th’ Eskimo lingo. My mother were a half-breed of th’ Labrador.”

“The baby?” asked Paul, much moved by the story. “What became of that?”

“The baby were dead for a long while ere th’ missionary comes.”

Tom rose and threw some fresh wood on the fire, cut some fresh tobacco from his plug, refilled his pipe, and sat down again.

“But you live in Newfoundland now, Tom?” Remington asked.

“Oh, aye, sir. My father’s brother comes down t’ the Labrador fishing the next summer, and takes me home with he. I’d like wonderful well for you t’ meet my woman, and my little lad and lass, sir. There’s no likelier lad and lass on the coast, sir. They’re wonderful likely, sir.”

Dan resumed his soft music on the harmonica. Twilight gave way to darkness. Beyond the campfire’s circle of light the forest lay black. Below them the rapid roared. In the North the aurora flashed up its gorgeous glory.

“Well,” said Remington at length, rising, “I reckon it’s time to turn in for we want to be out early and make the most of our time.”

His warm sleeping bag seemed very cozy to Paul when he crawled into it, this first night he had ever spent in camp, the perfume of his spruce bough bed very sweet, and quickly he fell into deep and restful slumber, to be suddenly awakened by the sharp report of a rifle.

Chapter V

Wrecked.

It was broad daylight. Remington and Ainsworth were gone. Bang! Bang! Bang! The shots came in quick succession, and not far above the camp. Paul was frightened for a moment, then highly excited. He disentangled himself from his sleeping bag, sprang to the front of the tent and shouted to Tom, who was unconcernedly cooking breakfast:

“What is it? What’s up?”

“Bears.”

He drew on his clothes as quickly as possible, grabbed his rifle and ran in the direction of the shooting. A little way up the ravine he came upon Remington, Ainsworth, Dan and Kuglutuk, surveying the carcasses of two polar bears.

“Hello, Paul, you’re a little late for the fun,” greeted Remington.

“Got two,” said Ainsworth.

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“No time for that. Dan was poking around up here and saw them coming, and we had to hustle as it was.”

“It would only have taken a minute to call me.”

“Yes, but that would have been a minute too long, if they had happened to get a sniff of camp, and only for the north breeze they would have anyway, and been off before Dan saw them.”

“Did they put up any fight?”

“Didn’t have a chance. We got them quick. Close shot and no trick at all. Nothing like your shot.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t up earlier. What were they doing on land? I thought they kept to the ice.”

“No, we’re liable to see them anywhere on these shores. Guess they were going down to catch a salmon breakfast in our pool at the foot of the rapid.”

They saw no more bears while encamped on Richmond Gulf, though they caught plenty of salmon and trout, and now and again took excursions back into the hills and along the streams where ptarmigans were found, or took advantage of excellent duck and goose shooting on near-by lakes. Mallards and black ducks were plentiful, great flocks of waxies flew overhead and the Canada gray goose was fairly numerous.

The sport was so good, in fact, that the week which they had originally planned to remain ashore lengthened into two, and it was a fortnight after their arrival when reluctantly they broke camp one morning and returned to the NORTH STAR, carrying with them enough salmon and trout to supply both cabin and fore-castle for several days.

“Glad to see you! Glad to see you!” greeted Captain Bluntt as they drew alongside the ship. “Good sport? Have a good time?”

“Bully!” answered Remington. “Never better. Salmon and trout hungry for flies, and we got two bears in the bargain.”

“Good! Good, sir! And how did you find it, youngster?”

“Fine and dandy,” answered Paul. “Best time I ever had in my life.”

“Good! Good! Glad you’re aboard, Mr. Remington—glad you’re aboard. Barometer falling rapidly—outlook for bad weather—northeast blow, I’m thinkin’. Bad anchorage here. We’ll make for open sea. Get right away. Growing a bit nervous about it, sir—just a bit nervous.”

“All right, Captain,” said Remington. “We’re ready to go.”

Anchor was weighed, and slowly the NORTH STAR felt her way out of the uncertain waters toward the wide bosom of Hudson Bay.

“Now,” asked Captain Bluntt, when they had gained “elbow room,” as he expressed it, “what’s your pleasure, sir?”

“Well,” said Remington, “we want to have a little walrus hunting, we’d like to pick up another bear or two, and I’m mighty anxious to get a crack at caribou before we leave the country. Kuglutuk says, though, that all the caribou on this side are far inland on the highlands, and out of reach. I’ve been thinking that we might cross to the other side somewhat south of Chesterfield Inlet, and perhaps find caribou there, then cruise back along the islands looking for bear, and stop up toward Mosquito Bay a few days for our walrus hunt before we strike for home. Kuglutuk says the Eskimos up there will help us.”

“Good plan! Good plan, sir! But we must try to be through the straits by middle of September. Taking chances, sir—taking chances with ice if we’re any later, sir.”

“All right, Captain. That’ll give us over three weeks. We won’t spend much time with walrus, but we’d like to get two or three heads for trophies.”

The blow that was predicted came. It began with driving rain and sleet, which swept the sea in blinding sheets, and a rising northeast wind pounded Hudson Bay into a fury of wild white-crested waves that tossed and buffeted the North Star. But Captain Bluntt was an able master. He kept well offshore, faced the storm, and lay to, using only enough power to permit him to hold his position, and making no attempt to proceed upon the voyage.

Thus a week was consumed, and September was near at hand, when at length the clouds wearied of their task, and the sun again shone out of a clear sky through a glorious, transparent atmosphere.

But the northeast gale had reaped a harvest of ice from the Arctic waters, sweeping it down into Hudson Bay, where the packs broke into fragments, and vagrant pans were distributed far and wide, steadily working their way southward. This was not bay ice such as had been encountered off the eastern coast of Labrador, but the adamantine product of the Arctic. There was little difficulty, however, in avoiding the larger and widely distributed pans, and the smaller fragments bobbing here and there in the swell were quite harmless to the strongly built little steamship.

“Looks bad for the straits, sir, bad,” remarked Captain Bluntt, descending from the barrel in the foremast. “I’m thinkin’ th’ straits has plenty of ice now, plenty, sir. Bad place to meet ice, sir! Bad place! But if the weather holds calm for a week most of it’ll work out.”

“Are we likely to have trouble getting through the straits, Captain?”

"No! No! We'll get through all right, sir, we'll get through, with no more nor'easters or northers. A bit of a westerly breeze would clean the straits, sir, sweep the ice right out. Yes, sir, sweep it out!"

They turned northward, cruised close in along the Ottawa Islands, where Remington shot another bear, and then turned westward, where at length anchorage was made at 60° north latitude opposite Egg River and nearly a mile from its mouth.

"Not safe to run too close in," explained Captain Bluntt. "Never like to anchor too close inshore when I've no cover, sir. Not safe, not safe. Always afraid of the rocks, sir, if a squall should strike me."

"This is near enough," said Remington. "It's a short pull to the river mouth."

"Now what's the plan, sir? Going ashore to hunt caribou, you say? Well, you may find them in there around the lakes, sir. Must be lakes back there. Yes, sir, and caribou."

"That's the way we figure it. This is Sunday. Tomorrow morning as soon as we can see, Ainsworth and I will start, and take Kuglutuk with us, and I'd like to have Tom if you can spare him, Captain."

"Spare him? Yes! Yes! To be sure I can spare him."

"We're not going to take Paul, for we'll have some hard tramping to do, and I'm afraid he wouldn't be able to keep the pace."

"No, no, don't take him. Too soft; couldn't stand it. 'Twould kill him in a day. Yes, sir, in a day."

"We'll take one light shelter tent, a blanket each, a couple of axes, and besides our rifles only four days' provisions. We can carry them easily, and we'll be back to the place where the boat leaves us on Thursday afternoon, no later than two o'clock. So a boat may come over for us then, and will surely find us waiting."

"All right, sir, all right. But suppose you gets your deer the first day? What then, sir?"

"Why then we'll come down to the shore and shoot. If you hear us shooting, why, send for us."

"Very good, sir, very good. All very good."

"I suppose Paul will set up a kick against our leaving him, but it's out of the question to take him. Can't you let Dan and him have a small boat to go ashore every day and hunt ptarmigans, or fish in the river? Dan is perfectly reliable, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes, sir. Dan reliable? True and sure, sir. Good as a man. Good head, sir. Good head. Only a lad, sir, but good as a man. Be a skipper himself, sir, some day. Yes, yes; Dan can take the youngster over."

Paul, who had been standing aft, examining the coast through binoculars, came forward at this juncture to join Remington and Captain Bluntt.

"Pretty rough looking country over there," said he. "What have you planned to do? Are we going to hunt caribou?"

"Yes, Ainsworth and I have planned to go ashore tomorrow and hike back into the hills for three or four days, to see if we can't run on some caribou. I'm afraid, though, you are not hardened up enough for it yet. We've got to travel fast and there'll be no sleeping bags. You'll stay here and Dan will take you ashore to hunt and fish, and you can amuse yourself that way until we get back on Thursday."

"Oh, now, that's pretty tough! I'm sure I can walk as fast as you can."

"And carry a back load of stuff?"

"Of course I never tried that, and I don't see why I should. There are men enough to do the work."

"The more men there are the less ground can be covered, and this is a hunting trip where we've got to do fast work, and every one must do a man's work. No, Paul, it's too hard for you. You and Dan can have a good time here till we come back."

"There won't be anything to do here but hang around the old ship. I think you might let me go with you fellows."

"As I said, you won't have to hang around the ship. You and Dan go ashore. Take one of the tents if you'd like, and camp over there. Dan knows how to handle things. He'll give you a good time."

"Well, I suppose if you don't want me I can't go, but I think it's a pretty rough deal just the same," and he went off sulking.

Paul had not yet learned that he could not have or do anything his fancy craved. But he held his host in high esteem. He was thoroughly grateful for the opportunity to take part in the expedition, and at the end of half an hour, when he had had time to consider his actions, he became quite ashamed of his childishness and his lack of courtesy to his host, and, naturally of a frank and open disposition, he approached Remington, put out his hand and said:

"Mr. Remington, I want to apologize for the way I acted and what I said awhile ago. I'm sorry for it. You've given me the greatest time of my life and I appreciate it."

"That's all right, Paul," and Remington shook his hand warmly. "It's given me a lot of pleasure to have you along. I knew you'd look at this thing right. I'd like to take you with us, but you can see it would be too hard work for you. You haven't been at the game long enough yet."

"I guess that's right."

Remington and Ainsworth did not appear at breakfast in the morning, and when Paul took his seat he asked:

"Where are the others, Captain?"

"Gone. Gone these two hours. Away up country by this time. For my part I can't see the fun in it. No, by the imps of the sea! Cruising over rocks and mountains just for deer. Just for deer! Fun, though, maybe, for them that likes it. Yes, maybe 'tis. Give me th' sea, an' a good deck under my feet. Good enough for me! Yes, good enough for me, or any sensible man."

"Mr. Remington said Dan could go ashore with me and camp."

"Yes, yes, of course. Dan knows. I told him. Ready any time. Told him to get ready. Hope you'll have a good time."

"We'll have a good time all right."

"Comin' back tonight? Going to camp? Oh, yes, you said you would camp."

"Yes, we'll camp. No need of coming back till Thursday. The other fellows won't be back till then."

"Very well, very well; stay till Thursday. Two o'clock. Remember be aboard at two sharp. Got to get away, get through the straits. No being late, now! Remember

Sydney! Felt like wringing your neck that day. I did, by the imps of the sea. Heave you overboard or wring your neck if you're late!"

Paul glanced up at Captain Bluntt and discovered a good-humored twinkle in the Captain's eye, though there was no doubt that he was quite in earnest as to the admonition to return on time.

"All right, Captain; we'll be on time," Paul laughed.

"That's right. That's right. Always be on time. When you says you'll do a thing, do it."

But Paul had not yet learned his lesson.

Dan stowed sufficient provisions in a light punt to meet the needs of a few days' camping excursion, a light axe, a small sheet-iron tent stove—for Dan was uncertain of finding sufficient wood for an open camp-fire to keep them comfortable during the cold evenings—evenings—a small tent, a tarpaulin, cooking utensils and two sleeping bags. Each carried his rifle—Dan's a light 44-40 carbine—and Paul did not forget his favorite steel fly rod.

"Two o'clock Thursday. No later! No later than two, now!" Captain Bluntt admonished as they drew away from the ship.

The mile to the mouth of Egg River was a short pull for Dan, and he found that with a little maneuvering he was able to work the boat a considerable distance up the river itself, to the first clump of straggling spruce trees.

Here it was decided to make camp, and while Dan pitched the tent and put things in order Paul wandered up the stream and soon had a fine trout on his hook.

Fishing was good, many delightful tramps were taken over the rolling hills, and only too quickly Thursday rolled around.

"What's the hour?" inquired Dan as they finished their dinner.

Paul looked at his watch.

"Half past twelve."

"We'll have to be gettin' back t' th' ship."

"All right. Pack things up. While you're doing it, guess I'll have one more try at the fish."

"Now don't be goin' too far," cautioned Dan, who had learned Paul's failing. "Th' skipper's wonderful keen on bein' on time."

"Oh, I won't go far."

Half an hour later, when Dan had the camp things stowed neatly in the boat, and all was ready for departure, he called:

"Hello-o, Paul!"

No answer.

He followed up the river bank, calling again and again, but had gone nearly a mile before he received an answering "Hello!"

Paul had a big trout hooked, and was playing him.

"Great sport. Didn't get a strike till I hit this pool just now and this is the second, already."

"T is time t' be off," said Dan, "and late."

"Oh, there's no such rush as that. I want to take some trout back with me."

"Th' skipper's wonderful keen on bein' on time."

“Oh, he didn’t mean just two o’clock, but around that time. Besides, they weren’t going after the other fellows till two.”

“T was two o’clock.”

Dan was patient for fifteen minutes longer, while Paul fished.

“We can’t tarry, Paul. We *must* be goin’.”

“Now don’t nag.”

“T is no naggin’. Th’ skipper’ll be wonderful angry.”

“Oh, I don’t think he’ll mind if we’re not there exactly at two.”

It was half past two when Dan finally said:

“An’ now we’re goin’,” with a tone of finality that angered Paul.

“Oh, are we?” Paul was unhooking a trout.

“Th’ sky looks nasty to me, an’ th’ wind’s breezin’ up, an’ there’s a fog settlin’ below.”

“I don’t see any fog, and the sky looks all right to me.”

“Comin’?”

“No.”

“But you is.”

“You ain’t my master. I guess I’ll do as I please.”

“You is *comin’*.”

Dan had stepped close to Paul, who was preparing to make another cast.

“When I get ready.”

“You is comin’ *now*,” and Dan took Paul forcibly by the arm.

“Let go of me!”

“You is comin’,” and he tightened his grip.

“Take that!” Paul slapped Dan square in the face with open palm.

Then a whirlwind seemed to strike Paul, and before he knew what had taken place he found himself on the ground, and Dan on top of him.

“Is you comin’?”

“Yes! Let me up!” Paul was half crying with anger.

“You’ll be sorry for this!” he exclaimed when he was free, but he followed Dan sulkily down to the boat.

Dan was right. A fog was settling below. Even then it was pushing its way up the river, and before they reached the open sea it had swallowed up the river bank, which had become quite invisible beyond the river’s mouth. The boys could scarcely see two boat’s lengths ahead. The murky cloud enveloped sea, land, everything. Ice pans seemed much more numerous than when they went ashore. Now and again a pan would loom up in the fog, ominously near, rising and sinking with the swell. It was uncanny, and Paul became frightened. Dan pulled steadily at the oars for some time. At length he paused.

“We should have been comin’ on she,” said he. “I’m fearin’ we’re a bit too far t’ th’ s’uthard.”

He shifted his course somewhat. A moment later a huge bulk of ice appeared directly in front of them. Dan swerved the boat to port, but he was too late, and almost before they realized their danger the pan struck them with the rising swell, and nearly capsized the boat. Water at once poured in through a great rent in the starboard bow, and immediately it became apparent they were sinking.

Like a flash, painter in hand, Dan sprang upon the ice pan.

“Jump! Quick!” he shouted to Paul, who, without knowing how he did it, sprang to the pan, slipped, gained his feet, and was safe upon the ice.

“Take this! Hold on tight!” commanded Dan, passing the painter to Paul. Working like mad, while Paul steadied the boat, Dan transferred their belongings from boat to pan, save one sleeping bag and one oar, which were washed away in spite of him. The boat lightened of its burdens, he baled the water out, and drew its bow around to the ice.

“Now pull!” He had grabbed the bow of the boat. “Pull! Pull!” he encouraged, and their united strength drew the boat upon the pan.

Paul had not, until then, had an opportunity to appreciate their position. Now he looked about him, and with one glance took in the critical situation in which they were placed. The pan of ice was not over sixty feet in diameter, waves were breaking over its edges, they were out of reach of land, the boat was quite useless. Then came a flash of the imagination—lost in the dark water—struggling—drowning. All this he saw in an instant. Panic seized him—a wild, awful fear of impending death—and he screamed:

“Help! Help! Save us! Save us! We’re lost! Help! Help! Help!”

“That’s right,” said Dan, “holler. If the ship ain’t too far off they’ll hear,” and he joined his voice to Paul’s. But no answering call came out of the fog. At length Dan said:

“Tide’s risin’, wind’s n’uthard, an’ our drift’s strong t’ th’ s’uthard. They ain’t hearin’. Get your rifle, an’ I finds cartridges. We’ll be shootin’ signals.”

The outfit hastily thrown in a heap was pulled over by Dan. Paul was too excited and nervous to remember in which of his two bags the ammunition was packed, and Dan could not find the cartridges for his own carbine. Finally, after unpacking both bags, Dan discovered not only Paul’s cartridges but his own, which Paul had inadvertently thrown in one of his bags the previous day.

Paul’s rifle was quickly loaded, Dan fired, and they listened intently. No response came, and he fired again and again, until presently the welcome sound of a distant rifle shot came faintly out of the fog. Their hopes rose, but the distant shots in response to their own grew fainter and fainter, and at length could no longer be heard.

Dan finally laid down the rifle, with the remark:

“They ain’t no use shootin’ any more. Th’ wind’s comin’ down from th’ ship, an’ if we can’t hear they, sure no one will be hearin’ us. Th’ skipper’s not knowin’ we been wrecked, an’ he’ll not be sendin’ a boat. He’ll be thinkin’ we’ll pull for th’ ship with the shootin’ t’ guide us. T ain’t no use.”

Paul’s hope of rescue, which had become a certainty when he heard the shots, now gave place to despair, and he threw himself upon the ice, moaning:

“We’re lost! Oh, we’re lost! We’re lost!”

“Keep un nerve,” soothed Dan. “They ain’t no knowin’ what’ll happen. Dad tells un, ‘When you gets in a bad place, Dan, keep un nerve. More folks,’ says he, ‘dies from losin’ they nerve than dies from most anything else. Whilst they’s life they’s a chanst,’ says he.”

Illustration:

„Keep un nerve,” soothed Dan

Finally Dan's philosophy quieted Paul to some extent. Black darkness settled upon the sea. The fog, if possible, grew denser. It obscured the stars—everything, even the lapping waves which were steadily but surely eating away the edges of the ice pan.

Chapter VI

The Castaways Abandoned.

"Glad to see you! Glad to see you! What luck?" greeted Captain Bluntt as the boat with the returned caribou hunters pulled alongside the NORTH STAR, shortly after two o'clock.

"Hello, Captain!" Remington and Ainsworth called out in unison. "Got three," said Remington in response to the Captain's question. "What do you think of those heads?" straightening up three pairs of antlers for inspection.

"Fine! Fine! Where'd you get 'em? Have to go far? Get 'em far up country?"

"No, tramped over a lot of country but never got a shot till this morning, half a mile in," explained Remington, mounting the ladder to the deck. "Came on a bunch of four just above here, and got three of them."

"Good! Good! And you brought all the meat! Great treat! Caribou meat's fine venison."

"Yes, we had plenty of time to pack it down before the boat came. Where's Paul?"

"Ashore. Went ashore with Dan Rudd the day you leaves. Told 'em to be back at two o'clock today. Two o'clock. No later! The rascals! It's two-thirty an' a fog's settlin'! The rascals!"

"Why what can be keeping them? I hope they won't get caught ashore in the fog."

"Went up the river. Must have camped along the river. Didn't you see 'em? Couldn't have missed 'em if you came down the river."

"We didn't come down the river. We made a circuit and came down from the north. But that fog is settling fast! It looks bad!"

"Looks bad! Looks bad!" agreed Captain Bluntt. "Nasty weather ahead. Ice working up too. Lot of ice worked up from the north since you left. Want to get out of here. Told those rascals to be prompt. Never can depend on youngsters. Can't depend on 'em."

"They won't miss the ship in the fog, will they, Captain?"

"No, no, they won't miss us. Dan'll find us. Yes, Dan'll find us. Shoot to signal us. Can't miss us."

Before three o'clock the fog had settled into a heavy black pall, so intense that, standing at the companionway aft, Remington could scarcely make out the foremast. A strong breeze had also sprung up from the north, portending increased drift of ice southward.

"I wonder if Paul will ever learn to keep his appointments and be on time," Remington remarked to Ainsworth.

"He seems to have no sense of responsibility," said Ainsworth.

"I wish he were aboard. I'm worried at this delay. I hope nothing has happened to the boys."

"Oh, I think there's no cause to worry. Dan will take care that nothing goes wrong. Paul wasn't ready to return when he was told, and thought an hour or two wouldn't matter. It's characteristic of him. They'll be along pretty soon."

Captain Bluntt was growing impatient and ill-humored. He had ordered steam up, and prepared for instant departure to the open sea the moment Paul and Dan came aboard. They were now an hour past due, an unheard of delinquency on Dan's part.

"By the imps of the sea! I'll wring those youngsters' necks when I gets hold of 'em!" he exclaimed. "By the imps of the sea I will!"

"Could anything have happened to them?" asked Remington anxiously.

"No, just taking their time. Just taking their time, th' rascals! Dan Rudd can take care of himself. Take care of the other youngster too. Yes, yes, they're all right. Dan Rudd'll see to that!"

Nevertheless Remington's anxiety grew, and at the end of another half hour, when he approached Captain Bluntt again, he found the Captain's face serious.

"Can't fathom this! Can't fathom it!" the Captain exclaimed. "Dan Rudd always sharp to the minute before! Never behind! Thought first the other youngster delayed him. Couldn't delay him like this. Dan Rudd wouldn't let him, with a fog settlin', an' a norther threatenin'. No, sir! No! Somethin' 's wrong. Somethin' 's gone wrong."

"Do you think—"

"Listen! What's that?" Captain Bluntt held up his hand.

Faintly they heard a rifle shot in the fog, and in a moment another, fainter and hardly distinguishable.

"Tom Hand! Jake Griggs! Here, you fellows! Man a boat! Be smart now!"

With quick, gruff commands Captain Bluntt had a boat in the water, with four seamen at the oars and another at the tiller, as quickly as man could do it.

"Pull for your lives now! Pull for your lives! Save those lads! Pull, pull, you men!"

"Get your gun, sir! Get your gun, and shoot signals!" he commanded Remington, and in a moment Remington had his rifle on deck, shooting at regular intervals.

Two or three shots were heard far away, and very faint, and then came silence. Remington, Ainsworth and Captain Bluntt, in a state of intense suspense, listened between the shots that Remington fired, and waited.

An hour passed, and another hour before they heard the clank of oarlocks, and presently the boat loomed up in the fog and gathering dusk.

"Did you find them? Did you find them, Tom Hand?" shouted Captain Bluntt.

"No, sir, they's no findin' un," reported Tom. "They's lost, sir. We picks up an oar an' a sleepin' bag, but we's not seein' th' boat, sir."

"Lost! Lost!" exclaimed Remington in consternation.

Captain Bluntt stood speechless and overcome. When Tom Hand reached deck, with the sleeping bag and oar, he examined the things critically, and asked:

“Where did you find these? Where’d you find ’em?”

“Full two miles t’ th’ s’uthard, sir. We hears shots an’ pulls for un, and then th’ shots stop. We keep pullin’ t’ the’ s’uthard till we most loses th’ sound o’ your shootin’, an’ here we picks up th’ oar, an’ a bit farther th’ sleepin’ bag. We hollers an’ hollers, but gets no answer, an’ we pulls around through th’ fog, but finds no more, an’ we comes back. ’Twere growin’ dusk, sir, an’ no use lookin’ farther sir.”

“No, ’twere no use lookin’ further. No use.” Turning to Remington, “They’s lost, sir. They’s lost,” and Captain Bluntt blew his nose on his handkerchief and gave an order to Tom Hand in as gruff a voice as he could assume, that he might hide his emotion.

“My God! Is it possible!” said Remington, quite stunned.

“This is awful! Awful!” Ainsworth exclaimed.

“I can never go back home without Paul—never! Never! How could I face his father?” Remington half moaned.

Ainsworth could offer no consolation. There was nothing to be done. No tragedy ever came more unexpectedly, and the young men were made sick with the realization of it.

“There’s nasty weather comin’, an’ we’ll move out into the open and lay to for th’ fog to clear,” explained Captain Bluntt a little later, to the two sportsmen whom he found sitting dejectedly in the cabin. “Barometer falling. Blow comin’. Hard blow comin’, I fears. Cruise to th’ s’uthard when fog clears and look for wrecked boat. No use though. No use!”

That night they drew out into deep water, and the next day lay to in the fog. Then the gradually rising wind increased in velocity, the fog was blown away, and a terrific northeast gale broke upon them. For two days and two nights it swept Hudson Bay with its fury, and when it ceased a jam of Arctic ice blocked the western coast of the bay, rendering any search for the wreckage of the boat quite useless.

A conference was held, and upon Captain Bluntt’s advice Remington, against his desires, however, finally agreed to turn homeward.

The passage of Ungava Bay and Hudson Straits, now blocked with a shifting ice pack, was accomplished without accident, and once in the open Atlantic the NORTH STAR steamed for St. Johns, putting in at a Newfoundland outport, en route, to permit Remington to cable Mr. Densmore in New York, to meet him at Sydney to receive bad news. This he did that the shock of Paul’s supposed death might not come to the parents too suddenly.

The two young sportsmen proceeded at once by train from St. Johns to Port a Basque, and when their steamer from that place reached Sydney, they found Mr. Densmore awaiting their arrival at the dock.

They boarded the train, and in a stateroom in the parlor car Remington gave the grief-stricken father a detailed account of what had occurred.

“It is a terrible blow to me, and his mother will be prostrated,” said Mr. Densmore. “But, Remington,” placing his hand on the young man’s shoulder, “rest assured I am satisfied everything possible was done to save my boy. You were guilty of no negligence, and I shall always have a kindly remembrance of the interest you took in Paul’s welfare.”

Chapter VII

Adrift on an Ice Pan.

A steady and gradually strengthening breeze was blowing from the North. The boys, wet to the skin, huddled close together on the center of the drifting ice pan and in the lee of the boat. Presently Paul, less inured to cold and exposure than Dan, began to shiver, and Dan suggested:

"Get in your sleepin' bag. 'Tis rare cold, an' you shakes like un had th' ague."

"No, I'd be afraid to lie down," objected Paul, "but maybe we could wrap a pair of the blankets around us. There are three pairs in my bag."

"Now maybe we could be doin' that," said Dan. "I'll get un."

He felt in the dark among the things which had been piled together, and presently drew the inner pair of blankets from the bag. This they wrapped around their shoulders, drawing it close about them, with a camp bag for their seat and the boat at their back.

"Is there no help for us—no hope that the ship's boat will pick us up in the morning?" asked Paul.

"I'm not sayin' that," comforted Dan. "Th' ship'll sure cruise t' th' s'uthard with daylight, an' if th' fog clears she'll be findin' us, an' th' ice holds together."

"Do you think the ice will hold together until morning?"

"I'm hopin' so. An' with light I'll be tryin' my hand at fixin' th' boat, an' I'm thinkin' we may fix un."

They were quiet for a long while, when Dan asked, softly:

"Sleepin'?"

"No."

"Cold?"

"Freezing."

"Snuggle closter."

Paul drew very close to Dan, who drew the blanket tighter.

"Warmer?"

"Yes, that's better."

"Ain't so scairt?"

"No—I don't know—I'm getting used to it, I guess."

"Yes, we'll be gettin' used to un before day, an' then we'll be doin' somethin'. Dad says always keep un nerve an' be plucky, an' th' worst fixes can be got out of someway."

"This is a pretty bad fix, though. Guess your dad was never in a fix like this."

"Oh, yes, he were. Dad were on th' old Narwhal when she were nipped, an' twelve of her crew were lost. He were adrift on th' ice for a week before he were picked up. An' he's been on four vessels as were wrecked. Dad's been in some wonderful bad places, but he always gets out of un for he always keeps his nerve—an' when they ain't nothin' he can do for hisself, he prays. Dad's a wonderful religious man."

"Can you pray?"

"Oh, yes; I been prayin' quiet to myself, settin' here. Can you?"

"I know the Lord's Prayer. Mother taught me to say it when I was little."

"Say un to yourself. 'Twill do good."

Another long silence, and Dan asked:

"Been prayin'?"

"It won't do any good; I'm sure it won't. I said it once but it don't seem to belong to this fix."

"'Twill help us if we prays the best we can. Dad says: 'Do everything you sets your hand to the best un knows how; if 'tis workin', work the best un can; if 'tis prayin', pray the best un can.'"

"Oh, Dan, if I'd only stopped fishing when you called me! If I'd only gone back to the ship then, we'd have been all right! Oh, why didn't I go! Why didn't I go!"

"Maybe the Lord were plannin' to have us go adrift, and He were keepin' you fishin'. Dad says sometimes th' Lord does such things to try folks out an' see what they'll be doin' for theirselves."

"No, Dan, it was my fault. Oh, why didn't I go when you called me! Now we'll both be drowned, and it's all my fault."

"Don't be feelin' so bad about un, Paul," Dan soothed. "While they's life they's a chanst. Dad's always sayin' that, an' he says, 'If you ever gets in a tight fix, lad, do all you can to get out of un, an' when they ain't nothin' more you can do, an' you're sartin' they ain't, then pray to th' Lord, an' leave un to He. But,' says Dad, 'don't waste no time prayin' an' askin' th' Lord's help when they's anythin' you can do yourself. He won't pull you out of no scrape when you ain't doin' th' things He's laid out for you to do first.'"

"But what can we do?"

"Nothin' but pray now. We hollered an' fired th' guns. I been tryin' to think of everythin', an' they ain't nothin' else I can think of till 'tis light enough to see, an' then maybe we'll be findin' a way to fix th' boat; an' maybe if we prays th' Lord'll show us a way to do un."

The lads again lapsed into silence, to be broken finally by Paul.

"Dan?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it most morning?"

"'Tis a long while till mornin' yet. I'm thinkin' 'tis about two bells."

"One o'clock?"

"Yes. I'll strike a match, an' you looks at your watch."

The flash of the match disclosed the hour as ten minutes past twelve.

"Time goes wonderful slow."

"Yes. I thought it was almost morning."

"Were you sleepin'?"

"No."

Another silence, and Dan remarked:

"You got a wonderful lot o' ca'tridges in your bag. What you bringin' so many for?"

"They're what Mr. Remington gave me."

"Wonderful lot of un. More 'n you'll need in a year."

They settled down again, and when Dan looked up a faint light was showing through the fog blanket. He stirred and Paul awoke.

“We been sleepin’, Paul, an’ day’ll soon be breakin’.”

“Where are we?” asked Paul, rubbing his eyes.

“Cruisin’ to th’ s’uthard on a bit of ice in Hudson Bay,” answered Dan, adding facetiously: “We ain’t got no log, an’ I’ve lost th’ reckonin’.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Paul, sitting up and looking around him. “I remember now! I was dreaming of home, and when I woke up I thought we were in camp. My, but I’m stiff and cold.”

“Tis a kind of camp, but not a shore camp.”

As daylight grew the outlook appeared more dismal than ever. The fog if possible was more dense than the evening before, and while the boys slept a corner of the pan had broken off.

“Do you think we can mend the boat?” asked Paul.

“Tis too dark yet,” answered Dan, “but we’ll be tryin’ soon as we can see.”

“I’m hungry. I haven’t eaten a thing since twelve o’clock yesterday.”

“So is I hungry, an’ we’ll be eatin’ while we can’t do nothin’ else.”

An investigation of the provision box disclosed a can of corned beef, three cans of baked beans, a small piece of bacon, a dozen ship’s biscuits, a few pounds of flour and some tea, left over from their fishing trip.

“We’ll open one of the cans of beans, and each have a biscuit,” suggested Dan, “but they ain’t nothin’ to drink.”

“That’s so; we can’t make tea without a fire.”

“No, an’ the water’s salt.”

“We’re up against it good and hard. Now you speak of water, I’m famishing for a drink,” said Paul as he ate.

“Th’ ice is sweet, an’ after you eats I’ll chip a cupful of un, an’ if you holds un under your jacket she’ll melt.”

“I never would have thought of that. These beans are mighty good. Let’s have another can. I’m not half satisfied.”

“No, we got to be careful of un. They’s no tellin’ how long ’t will be before we gets picked up, an’ we got to be careful of the grub.”

“I’m fearfully hungry, but I guess you’re right.”

“Yes, I knows I is. Dad’s often sayin’ to me, ‘Dan, if you ever gets in a tight place, an’ not much grub in sight, be wonderful careful of what you has, and make un last.’”

It was full light now. Dan chipped some ice with the axe, filled a cup, and Paul held it carefully beneath his jacket.

An examination of the boat was not reassuring. The forward planks on the port side were stove far in, and an attempt to repair the damage, even temporarily, appeared at first a hopeless task.

“I’m not seein’ just how to mend un,” remarked Dan, contemplating the damaged planks, “but Dad, he says to me, ‘Always try. Do un best. What looks like a hard job is very like to be an easy one in the end.’ He says to me, ‘Do all un can, anyhow, howsoever hard the job looks. The Lord may have you marked up to live to sixty or seventy year,’ says he, ‘and to die in bed, but if you gets in a tight place, and they’s somethin’ you might be doin’ to get out of un if you tries, and you lets

un go without tryin' because you're not seein' how to do un at first, the Lord'll be sayin' to the recordin' angel, just change that feller's markin', and put he down to die now, and make un drownin'. Dad says the Lord'll just be thinkin' 'tain't no use keepin' a feller around the world what don't care enough about livin' to do what he can to save hisself, but leaves it all to the Lord to do."

Encouraged by this philosophy of his father's, Dan worked with a will, and at the end of an hour succeeded in forcing the stove-in planking back into place.

In the meantime Paul's ice had melted, and, refreshed by a half cup of slightly brackish water, he turned his attention to Dan's success with the boat.

"Won't that go all right without leaking much?" he asked.

"No, 'twill leak like a sieve," answered Dan, surveying the boat. "I were seein' that much to do from the first, but I weren't seein' how to make the planks hold where I put un, or how to make un tight, and I'm not seein' 't yet. Now if we had some bits of board and some nails, I'm thinkin' we might make un tight."

"There's the grub box. Couldn't we knock that to pieces, and use the boards and nails in it?"

"The grub box! Well there! And I never were thinkin' of un!"

Dan soon had the box in pieces and the nails removed.

"I'm wonderful slow to think of things sometimes," remarked he as he worked. "Now why weren't I thinkin' of this box first off?"

Cleats were fashioned by Dan from the pieces of box, with the axe as his one working tool, and he was finally ready to nail them in position, where they would hold the broken planks in place. Nails were few, and it was necessary that great economy be practiced in their use and that each be driven where it would do the most good.

The swell was increasing, the north wind was rising, and with every hour the position of the boys was becoming more dangerous. The first cleat had scarcely been nailed down when a wave broke over the pan, washing its whole surface, not deep enough to carry the things away, but suggesting the possibility that another one might presently do so. Dan had fortunately put his cleats in the boat as he made them, or the wave would certainly have carried off the light pieces of wood.

"Paul, you be loadin' the things in the boat," said Dan, "while I does th' mendin'. Th' next swell breakin' over th' pan may carry th' bags overboard. Load th' light bags first."

Paul obeyed, and when the next wave, a little heavier than the first, broke over the pan the outfit was out of its reach.

It was well past noon when the last cleat was placed, and Dan began to caulk with strips torn from a shirt, using as his tool a wedge made from a piece of the box.

The caulking was not yet half done when the boys were startled by a loud report, like that of a gun.

"There she goes!" exclaimed Dan. "I were lookin' for un! Th' pan's busted!"

And sure enough, fully a third of their pan had broken loose from the main body of ice which held them.

Heavier swells, now and again moving the boat slightly, swept the pan. Dan worked desperately at his caulking; Paul, sitting in the boat clinging to his seat, was expecting every moment to be washed from the ice. As he looked out into the

fog and beheld the growing anger of the sea his apprehension grew. He realized fully their imminent peril, and he began to doubt the ability of the frail boat, even had it been free from damage, to weather the high piling waves.

All at once he thought he saw something in the distance, a faint splotch in the fog, and he called out:

“Dan! Dan! See there! What is that?”

Dan raised his eyes from his work and looked.

“Land! ’Tis th’ land!” he exclaimed. “’Tis th’ land and we’ll soon be ashore.”

The tide was carrying them in, and more and more distinct a rocky outline of coast loomed up. Dan did not stop his repairs, however, and presently the task of caulking was finished.

“There,” said he, “she’s caulked, an’ she’ll do to take us ashore.”

“Can’t we float her now and land?” asked Paul, in feverish excitement.

“That’s a p’int of land,” said Dan, “We’re driftin’ in around un, and I’m thinkin’ th’ tide’ll carry us to the lee, an’ we’ll have less sea to launch in, if we waits a bit.”

“Oh, but I want to get ashore!” exclaimed Paul. “Couldn’t we launch off here?”

“We might and we mightn’t,” answered Dan cautiously. “We can’t move th’ boat without unloadin’ she. If we launches on the lee, th’ ice’ll be likely to ram in, an’ smash un ag’in, before we gets free, an’ if we tries to launch on ary other side th’ waves’ll be smashin’ un ag’in’ th’ ice before we gets th’ outfit aboard. And anyway, if we unloads th’ outfit on th’ ice th’ sea’s like to work un overboard before we gets th’ boat launched. I’m thinkin’ we’d better tarry a bit.”

Dan’s surmise proved correct. The ice slowly swept past the point, and, carried upon the bosom of a rising tide, they gradually passed into a bay, and calmer water.

“Now,” announced Dan, who had been watching his opportunity, “we’ll try un.”

The things were taken out of the boat, the boat pushed off and alongside the pan and easily reloaded in the now gentle swell, and the boys with their outfit aboard shoved out into the bay.

The one remaining oar Dan took astern, dropped it between two pegs placed there for the purpose, and working the oar adeptly back and forth both propelled and steered the boat shoreward. The damaged bow was found to be so well repaired that it leaked very little, and in a few minutes a safe landing was made upon a sloping, gravelly bit of beach.

For several minutes the boys stood silent, looking toward the fog-enshrouded sea from which they had just been delivered. Dan at length broke silence:

“Thank the Lord, we’re safe ashore,” said he reverently.

“Yes, it’s almost too good to believe.” Tears of joy stood in Paul’s eyes as he spoke. “When the ship finds us and picks us up, Dan, I’m going to tell Captain Bluntt that it was all my fault we didn’t go aboard when he told us to, and I’m going to tell everybody how you saved our lives by mending the boat. We never could have got off the ice if you hadn’t mended the boat.”

“’Twere nothin’ to mend th’ boat,” deprecated Dan.

“Oh, yes, it was,” insisted Paul. “There aren’t many could have done it, and when the ship picks us up I’ll tell them all about it.”

But they were not to see the NORTH STAR again, and they were not to be picked up. They were destined to face the rigors of a sub-Arctic winter in the unknown wilderness upon whose shores they had drifted.

Chapter VIII

Facing Starvation.

Paul and Dan surveyed their surroundings. So far as they could discover, in the dense fog, which enshrouded land as well as sea, they were stranded upon a desolate, verdureless coast. Behind them rose a ledge of storm-scoured rocks which reached out into the sea in a rugged cliff to the eastward, and formed the point they had rounded to enter the bight. And out on the rocky point they could hear the breakers in dismal, rhythmic succession, pounding upon the rocks.

The sounding breakers made Paul shudder as he realized how narrowly he and Dan had escaped a fate of which he scarcely dared think. He was profoundly thankful for their deliverance, and rugged as their coast was he had no thought of complaint against the fate that had placed him upon it.

Nowhere was there a tree or even a bush to be seen. Even the moss that here and there found lodgment in crevasses of the rocks seemed to struggle for an uncertain existence. Some driftwood, however, strewn along the beach, offered fuel for their tent stove.

"'Tis a wonderful bleak place," said Dan, "but I'm thinkin' 'tis better inside, with timber growin' an' maybe a river comin' in, t' bring this drift down."

"But it's too late to go up there tonight," protested Paul, dreading to venture upon the fog-covered water again, even in the boat.

"Aye, 'tis too late to go t'night. 'Tis already growin' dusk, an' I'm not thinkin' t' cruise around in th' fog, on land or on water. 'Twould be temptin' th' Lord t' send us adrift ag'in, after settin' us safe ashore."

"We're both wet to the skin, and I'm freezing. Can't we make a fire?" suggested Paul, his teeth chattering.

"We'll be settin' up th' tent in th' lee o' this rock. 'Tis lucky we has th' jointed tent poles, with nary a tree about."

"Can't I help?" asked Paul, as Dan jointed the poles and unrolled the tent.

"You might be carryin' up th' outfit, an' we gets th' tent up, we'll put un inside. 'Twill warm you up t' be carryin' un."

In fifteen minutes the tent was up, the tent stove in place, and Dan was cutting driftwood for a fire while Paul stowed away their belongings, and in another fifteen minutes a fire was roaring in the stove.

"Oh, but this is cozy," exclaimed Paul, reclining close to the stove, "and now I'm ravenously hungry again."

"'Tis wonderful cozy in th' tent," agreed Dan. "I'll take th' kettle an' look for water, an' when I comes back we'll boil th' kettle an' have a snack."

Almost immediately Dan was back with his kettle of water.

"They's a spring just up here, an' we're lucky t' have un so clost," he remarked, setting the kettle on the stove. "I'm thinkin' we're in for a blow, an' we'll not be gettin' away from here till she's over."

"Don't you think the ship will come tomorrow if the fog clears?" asked Paul anxiously.

"No," replied Dan discouragingly, searching for the bacon. "Let's put on a light; they's some candles left." He found the candles, lighted one, and discovered the bacon. "I'm not expectin' th' ship in th' blow that's comin'. 'Tis a dangerous coast," he continued, as he sliced the bacon, "an' th' skipper'll be takin' no chances cruisin' inshore in a gale."

"Well, we're safe enough, and the tent is as cozy a place as I ever struck," said Paul, now thoroughly warm, and basking in the stove's genial heat, his wet clothes sending forth a cloud of steam.

"Twill be fine so long as th' grub lasts. But they's no tellin' how long we'll be held up, an' they ain't much grub. But maybe we can kill somethin'. I'll take a look at th' country, an' th' fog clears tomorrow."

"I should think we'd find plenty of game. We've seen ducks and ptarmigans everywhere we've been. Oh," sniffing, "but that bacon smells dandy."

"Yes, I'm thinkin' we'll find ducks an' pa'tridges, but they's no knowin', an' we'll be wonderful careful o' th' grub we's got till we finds out. Dad says always be careful of what you has till you sees more comin'."

The kettle had boiled and Dan threw some tea into it and set it on the ground close to the stove, then he put half of the bacon he had fried on Paul's aluminum plate, the other half on his own plate, carefully dividing the bacon grease between them, gave Paul two ship's biscuits, took two for himself, and filled their aluminum cups with tea.

"Now we can fall to," he said. "They's plenty o' tea, but we can't be eatin' more'n this much grub to onct, an' we'll not be havin' more'n one biscuit apiece at a meal after this. I'm givin' us two now for we been a rare long time without eatin'."

"It looks like a mighty little, with my appetite, but I guess you're right about it," admitted Paul.

"Hear that!"

"What?"

"Th' wind. I knew she'd be comin' up. Th' fog'll be blowin' away by midnight."

"That'll be good."

"If she don't blow too strong an' too long."

"But this bacon grease is great!" exclaimed Paul, taking a spoonful of the warm grease. "Funny I like it, though. When I'm home I can't bear to eat fat."

"Grease is fine grub for cruisin', an' when th' weather's cold. When Dad an' me goes trappin' winters we just takes fat pork an' flour an' tea an' molasses."

"It does make a difference, I guess. I was just thinking that I'd never in my life eaten anything so good as this bacon and hardtack. If I was home I wouldn't look at them. I'll never find fault again if my meat's a little too rare or too done, or not just what I happen to like best."

"Dad says anythin's good when a feller's hungry."

It was a meager supper, indeed. A bit of bacon, two ship's biscuits and tea could hardly satisfy the appetite of a boy who had eaten but once in thirty hours, and then but lightly.

"I'm hungrier than ever!" declared Paul, when he had eaten the last morsel of his portion.

"So am I. 'Tweren't much," admitted Dan, as he drew his harmonica from his pocket, wiped it on his coat sleeve, and struck up a tune.

Illustration:

Dan struck up a tune

But with relaxation from the long hours of anxiety and exposure which had preceded Dan soon found himself too drowsy to play. Paul was nodding in a brave attempt to keep awake. Dan put the harmonica aside, they made their bed and were soon in heavy slumber, not to awaken until broad daylight.

The wind had risen to almost the force of a hurricane, and upon looking out of the tent they beheld the waters of Hudson Bay beaten into a wild fury. Mighty foam-crested waves were rolling in upon the rocky point below, breaking with a continuous thunderous roar. The fog had passed, and black, broken clouds scudded the sky.

"She's wonderful mad because she didn't get us," remarked Dan.

"My! But weren't we lucky to drift in last night!" said Paul, shuddering at the scene.

"'Tweren't luck," corrected Dan. "Th' Lord were sendin' us in ahead o' th' blow. Dad says 'tain't luck, but th' Lord, as helps folks out o' bad places."

After an unsatisfactory breakfast of beans, Dan shouldered his rifle, cautioned Paul not to go out of sight of the tent, and started out to explore and hunt. Late in the afternoon he returned with a big gray goose and a rabbit. Paul, who was in the tent, sprang up when Dan pulled back the flap and looked in.

"Oh, but I'm glad to see you, Dan!" he exclaimed. "I never was so dead lonesome in my life!"

"'Tis a bit lonesome bidin' alone in camp," admitted Dan, "but see now what I'm gettin'," and he dropped his game at Paul's feet.

"A goose and a rabbit! Oh, Dan, what luck! Now we can have a feast, and I'm so hungry I can hardly move."

"An' I'm wonderful hungry, too, with th' long tramp. Now I'll be dressin' th' goose, an' you puts a kettle o' water on an' cuts some wood."

Paul went at his task with a vim. He wielded the light camp axe very clumsily, for he had never used an axe before; it was, in fact, his first attempt at manual labor. He had, however, a good supply of wood piled up by the time the goose was dressed and in the kettle, and he and Dan sat down to enjoy the appetizing odor of cooking fowl while they chatted.

"Do you know, Dan, we're having such a dandy time here, I'll feel almost sorry when the ship comes. This tent is so cozy," he declared.

"'Tis cozy an' fine, but I'm thinkin' we'll be wantin' t' see th' ship bad enough before we sees her."

"But she'll be along tomorrow, won't she?"

"No, nor th' next day neither. I were lookin' t' th' n'uthard from th' rise back here, an' I sees a wonderful drift o' ice workin' up, an' if th' blow holds tomorrow, as 'tis sure to hold, there'll be a pack o' ice up from th' n'uthard that the ship'll never be gettin' through."

"What! You don't mean the ship won't come at all?"

"I'm not sayin' that for sure, but it's how 'tis lookin' t' me now."

"Oh, but Dan, that can't be! What will we do if we're not picked up?"

"I've been thinkin' un over, an' figurin' un out. Tom were sayin' they's tradin' posts t' th' s'uthard, an' I been figurin' we'll have t' make for un. We'll have t' hunt for our grub, but onct we gets t' th' posts we'll be safe."

"Do you really think we'll have to do that, and stay here all winter? It would just kill my mother, for she won't know where I am."

"I'm just sayin' what's like t' happen, but 'tain't no way sure. A bit inside I finds a river runnin' in th' head o' this bight, an' plenty o' timber. 'Twere near th' river I kills th' goose. 'Tain't such a wonderful bad country."

This was a possibility that had not occurred to Paul. He had harbored no doubt that the NORTH STAR would presently cruise southward along the coast, pick them up, and he would go home in comfort. The bare possibility that they might not be rescued was a shock. All pleasures, all comforts, all hardships and privations are measured by contrast. The tent had seemed very cozy, for unconsciously Paul had compared its warmth and security with the hardships he had experienced on the ice pan. Now the possibility that he might have to spend the winter in a tent in this northern wilderness led him to compare such a condition with the luxurious comforts of his home in New York, and the comparison made him shrink from the hardships that he instinctively attached to tent life in winter in a sub-Arctic wilderness. With the comparison, also, came an overwhelming desire to see his father and mother again.

"Dan, it would kill me to have to spend the winter here. Oh, that would be awful."

"Not so bad if we finds grub. Th' grub's what's troublin' me. An' we'll be needin' more clothes when th' cold weather comes. But we'll not let un worry us till we has to. Dad says it never does no good t' worry, for worryin' don't help things, an' it puts a feller in a fix so he ain't much good t' help hisself."

"But I can't help worrying."

"Maybe they ain't nothin' t' worry about. Dad says most all th' things folks worries about is things they's afeared will happen, but never does happen. Let's ferget t' worry now, an' get at that goose. She must be done, an' I'm wonderful hungry."

The present rose paramount. The boiling goose was done, and soon drove from their minds all thought of the future. The water in which it was boiled, well seasoned with salt, made excellent broth, and with no bread or vegetable—for Dan would not draw upon the few biscuits remaining—the two boys, with ravenous and long unsatisfied appetites, ate the whole bird for their dinner.

Full stomachs put them in a pleasanter frame of mind, the tent again assumed a cozy atmosphere, and Paul declared he was having the "bulliest time" of his life.

During the two days and nights that followed there was no abatement in the wind. Dan spent the daylight hours hunting, while Paul remained in the vicinity of

camp, making frequent tours to the summit of the rocky hill behind the tent, where he had a wide view of Hudson Bay. With sinking heart he looked out of the tent one morning to find the bight jammed with ice, and upon climbing the hill as usual beheld a solid mass of ice reaching westward from the shore as far as he could see.

At length the wind somewhat diminished in force, though it was not until the fourth morning after their arrival that they arose to find the sun shining brilliantly from a clear sky, and dead calm prevailing. Several inches of snow had fallen during the night and the air was sharp with frost. Their world seemed cold and cheerless indeed.

Dan's hunting expeditions had resulted in nothing, after the first day. Once he had started a flock of ptarmigans, but in windy weather ptarmigans are very wild, and this flock flew so far that he was unable to discover them again after they had alighted.

This failure to secure game had forced them to cut down their daily ration to a point that left their appetites far from satisfied. Even then they were alarmed to find that, practicing the utmost economy, but one day's scant provisions remained, when at length the weather cleared.

Chapter IX

The Waters Clear.

Paul went to the spring for water, while Dan kindled the fire. Paul was learning now to do his share of the camp work. He had become fairly adept in the use of the axe, and to pass the hours while Dan was absent on hunting expeditions, he had collected sufficient wood to last them for several days, and had cut the greater part of it into proper lengths for the stove.

When he returned with the kettle of water and placed it on the stove to heat for tea, he sat down in silent dejection. Starvation seemed very near. He was always hungry now—ravenously, fearfully hungry—and he could see no relief. Both he and Dan were visibly thinner than when they left the ship, and Paul was worried beyond expression.

Dan, squatting before the stove, his knees drawn up to his chin and his arms locked around them, gazing intently at nothing, appeared not to notice Paul as he entered. He was evidently in deep thought, and Paul watched him anxiously, for he had learned that when Dan assumed this position he was making plans for the future.

Paul had grown to place great confidence in Dan and his plans. In fact he had come to look upon Dan as quite a wonderful person as well as true friend.

Never once had Dan admitted that he was greatly worried at the turn things had taken. On the contrary, while he had owned that their position was serious, he had always ended by assuring Paul that there was some way to overcome any difficulty which they might meet, and that they could find a way to do it, no matter

how obscure the way might appear, if they but applied themselves earnestly to the task of searching it out.

Presently the kettle boiled, and as Dan arose to make the tea he remarked:

"They's no knowin' how fur 'tis t' th' nearest post, an' I'm not knowin' yet what's best t' do. Th' river's too big t' ford, an' if we goes afoot we'll have t' raft un, for with ice in th' bight we can't launch th' boat.

"If we walks we can't pack th' tent or much of th' outfit, you never done no packin', an' I'd have t' carry most of what we'd be takin'. If't were far, with other rivers we'd be like t' meet an' have t' raft, th' cold weather'd be on before we'd be gettin' anywheres, an' with no tent the things I'd carry wouldn't be enough t' do both of us.

"Th' wind's veered clean around from th' nor'east t' th' s'uthard, an' I'm thinkin' she'll veer t' th' west'ard in a day or so, an' if she freshens up from th' west'ard she'll clear th' ice out. Then we could be usin' th' boat, an' cruise t' th' s'uthard till we finds th' post or th' ship picks us up. 'Tis too early for winter t' be settin' in t' stay, an' we'll sure be findin' ducks along th' coast."

"But we haven't anything to eat. We'll starve before that time."

"I'm wonderful troubled about un," admitted Dan. "They's no danger of th' tent blowin' away, an', with th' ice on th' coast, no chanst of th' ship comin', so I'm thinkin' 'tis best for us both t' go huntin'. They ain't no use you stayin' in camp. I'll be showin' you how to make rabbit snares while I hunts. With a bit of snow on th' ground, an' no wind, they's more chanst of findin' game."

This was very agreeable to Paul. It would take him from the monotonous, lonely hours in camp, and he was eager to get away—to do something.

Their last half can of beans was divided between them for breakfast, and this disposed of, they prepared for a day's hunt.

"Better take your shotgun instead of your rifle," suggested Dan. "I'll be takin' my rifle, but 'tis easier t' get birds on th' wing with a shotgun. I been missin' un most every day with th' rifle."

"You weren't afraid to ask me for the shotgun, were you, Dan?"

"She's so pretty I weren't knowin' as you'd like t' lend un, an' I takes my rifle hopin' t' get a long shot at a goose, or maybe a bear or deer. Don't forget th' shells for un."

"Why, Dan, you could have had the shotgun. Just take any of my things when you need them."

Dan carried the axe as well as his rifle, and set a good pace up the shore of the bight. Presently turning around a bluff they saw the forest reaching down to the ice-choked bight.

"'Tis there th' river comes in," remarked Dan.

"Don't walk so fast, Dan. I'm most winded."

"I weren't walkin' fast," said Dan, slackening his pace, "but you ain't been walkin' none lately, an' 'tis a bit hard until you gets used t' un."

Presently they reached the spruce forest and the river, and a little way up the timbered valley through which the river flowed found rabbit tracks in every direction in the light snow.

"They's plenty of un here," remarked Dan. "Now here's a run—that's a trail they takes reg'lar back and forth. We'll be settin' a snare in un."

Dan cut a spruce sapling and laid it across, and supported a foot above, the run by brush growth on either side, first trimming the branches off the side of the sapling placed downward, that they might not obstruct the run. He then placed an upright stick on either side of the run and about five inches from it, leaving an opening about ten inches wide between the sticks, with the run passing through the center. Then he blocked the space along the sapling on each side of this opening with brush, remarking:

“That’s t’ keep th’ rabbits from leavin’ th’ run.”

He now produced a hank of heavy, smooth twine, cut off a piece and on one end of it made a slip-noose that would work easily. The other end he tied securely to the sapling directly over the run, first spreading the noose wide, until the bottom swung about three inches from the ground, the sides touched the upright sticks on either side, and the top hung just below the sapling. Small twigs, so placed as not to obstruct the opening in the noose, were stuck in the ground at the bottom and on the sides to keep it in position.

“’Tis poor string for snarin’,” he said, contemplating his work, “but ’tis all I has, an’ ’twill have to do. Wire’s better’n string. Rabbits eats string off if ’tain’t set just right t’ choke ’em so’s they can’t.”

“Will that catch rabbits?” Paul asked incredulously.

“Yes, that’ll catch un. You see, they comes along th’ run, an’ when they tries t’ jump through th’ noose she just slips up around their necks and chokes un. Now you can be settin’ snares, an’ I looks for pa’ttridges.”

“Where’ll I set ’em? Anywhere around?”

“Anywheres you finds runs. Work up through th’ timber an’ don’t lose sight o’ th’ river. Mark th’ places where you sets un by blazin’ a tree clost by un, like this,” and as high as he could conveniently reach with the axe, Dan chipped a piece of bark as big as his hand from either side of a tree, where the white bared wood could be readily seen by one following up or down the river.

“I’ll take th’ shotgun an’ leave my rifle with you. ’Twill be easier t’ get pa’ttridges with th’ shotgun, an’ I sees any.”

“Will you come back here for me?”

“Yes, I’ll be lookin’ you up,” and Dan strode away.

Setting snares was a novel occupation for Paul, and he found the work intensely interesting. Upon every new run that he discovered he duplicated as exactly and as carefully as possible the snare that Dan had set, and then blazed a tree to mark its position.

He was thinking now constantly of good things to eat, and feasts that he would have when he reached home. This kept his mind occupied with pleasant thoughts while his hands were at work.

Several hours had passed, several snares had been set, and he was still busily engaged when Dan, right at his elbow, said:

“Feelin’ hungry?”

“Oh!” and Paul jumped. “Dan, I didn’t see you. You frightened me.”

Dan laughed.

“See what I’m gettin’,” and he held up seven fat ptarmigans.

“Oh, Dan, but that’s fine!” exclaimed Paul, handling the birds caressingly.

"Let's put on a fire an' have a snack," said Dan. "Seems like I can't walk no farther till I eats."

Dan collected some small dry twigs and a handful of the dry moss which in northern forests collects beneath the limbs of spruce trees. With his foot he scraped the snow from a small area, baring the ground. In the center of this he placed the moss, arranged the sticks about it with much care, struck a match to the moss, and in an incredibly short time had a cheery fire blazing.

"Break some boughs for a seat, Paul, while I plucks th' pa'tridges," he suggested.

Two of the birds were quickly plucked and drawn, Dan placing the entrails carefully aside on clean snow. Then he cut two dead sticks a couple of feet in length, sharpened them at each end, impaled a ptarmigan on each, and stuck the other sharpened end of the sticks in the ground in such position that the birds were near enough to the fire to broil without burning.

"Tis wonderful extravagant for each of us t' be eatin' a whole pa'tridge," said he, as he sat down upon the seat of boughs Paul had provided, "but we ain't been eatin' much lately, an' I finds myself gettin' weak, an' I'm thinkin' we'll be hungry yet after we eats un, for one pa'tridge with nothin' t' go with un ain't much."

"I feel as though I could eat both of them myself. I wonder if I'll ever get enough to eat again," said Paul. "I've been planning the things I'm going to eat when I get home."

While Dan turned the birds now and again they planned feasts and talked of good things they had eaten and longed to eat again, until Dan finally announced:

"Well, they's done."

"It was just enough to make me hungrier," declared Paul when the last morsel had been eaten, even to the tender bones, and thoroughly enjoyed, though they had no salt for seasoning.

Dan reached over for the entrails, wound one upon the end of each stick, and, handing Paul one of the sticks, began to broil his own over the coals.

"What you going to do with them?" asked Paul.

"Eat 'em," announced Dan. "You remember th' way th' huskies done? I'm thinkin' if they's good for huskies they's good for us."

"I don't know," said Paul, hesitating. Then like one plunging into a cold bath he followed Dan's example, remarking, as he watched the swelling, sputtering things: "It's funny the way people change. When I saw the Eskimos eat them I thought it was a terrible thing to do, but it doesn't seem so bad now."

"Dad says folks can eat most anything if they's hungry enough."

"I guess he's right."

"They're not so bad," said Dan, tasting an end of his.

"They're really pretty good," asserted Paul, gingerly taking a mouthful.

"I was thinkin' we better not waste un. We'll have t' save th' little grub we has in th' tent for a time when we'll need un more, an' be livin' now on what we kills."

It was a day of good fortune. On their return to camp they made a wide detour, exploring a section that Dan had not yet visited, and suddenly, while skirting a marsh in the center of which was a pond, Dan grabbed Paul by the arm.

"Geese!" he exclaimed.

The pond was discovered to be a widening of a brook, flowing to the southward to join their river.

“Now we’ll crawl up along th’ willow brush, an’ don’t be shootin’ till I says to,” directed Dan. “When I says ‘shoot,’ take th’ nighest one with one barrel an’ th’ next nighest with t’ other barrel, an’ be steady, fer ’t means grub. I’ll give ’em bullets with th’ rifle.”

Cautiously and silently they crawled foot by foot along the lee of the willow bushes that lined the brook. Once Paul inadvertently broke a twig and an old gander held up his head in alarm. They threw themselves flat and lay like logs in the snow until the gander assuming that he was mistaken in his premonition of danger, resumed feeding. It was a moment of intense excitement for the young hunters.

“Now,” whispered Dan, when they had at length come abreast of the geese, “an’ be careful.”

Slowly they brought their guns to their shoulders, still lying flat on the ground, and fired.

Instantly there was a great commotion among the geese, which, instead of rising and flying away, half ran on the surface of the water, flapping their wings to help them in their retreat.

The guns rang out again. Before Paul, in his excitement, could reload, the game was quite out of range of his shotgun, but Dan with his rifle fired several more shots after the retreating birds.

Five geese lay upon the water when the fusillade was over, and the boys hugged each other in an ecstasy of delight.

“How’ll we get them? They’re away out in deep water,” asked Paul.

“I’ll get un,” said Dan, beginning to undress, “I’ll go in for un.”

“Let me do it, Dan,” suggested Paul. “You do all the hard and disagreeable work.”

“Oh, I don’t mind goin’ in. ’Tain’t so cold,” declared Dan, who was now stripped, and plunged fearlessly into the icy water.

Illustration:

Fired several more shots after the retreating birds

It was but a moment’s work to secure the geese, and Dan, standing barefooted in the snow, donned his clothes as quickly as possible, declaring the moment he was dressed that he “felt fine and warm.”

“What luck!” exclaimed Paul, lifting goose after goose to test its weight. “We’ve got enough to last us a whole week.”

“’Tis not luck,” remonstrated Dan, who never admitted that anything came by mere luck. “Th’ Lord were skimpin’ our grub so’s we’d be careful of what we gets when we gets un, an’ then He sends along th’ pa’ttridges an’ geese. Dad says ’tis th’ Lord’s way, when a feller’s doin’ all he kin for hisself.”

“Anyhow we got the geese.”

The boys were in position to live very well now. They had no bread, for scarcely enough flour remained for one meal, and this little flour and a small bit of bacon

were all that was left, save tea and salt, of the provisions they had brought from the ship.

The morning after the goose hunt two rabbits were found in Paul's snares and he was greatly elated at his success, and on the same day several ptarmigans and a black duck were killed by Dan, materially increasing their stock of provisions.

Then came a night of rain, and another morning found the land washed clear of snow. The sky had cleared, and a strong, steady breeze sprang up from the westward, as Dan had prophesied it would. Gradually under this influence the ice pack began to loosen and move seaward.

The boys returned early from their hunting trips on succeeding days that Dan might devote the afternoons to repairs on the boat, that it might be made as seaworthy as possible. The repairs completed, he fitted a mast forward, and with the light tarpaulin improvised a sail. He also provided a long stiff oar, which he fashioned with the axe, explaining to Paul that it was to be used in the stern to propel and steer the boat at times when the wind failed them, just as he had used the small oar when they went ashore from the ice pan.

Gradually Paul had learned to cook their simple meals of game. He assumed this responsibility, provided fuel and attended to the general camp duties, not only that Dan might be free during daylight hours to devote his undivided attention to preparations for departure, but because he wished to feel that he, too, was doing his full share of the work.

The weather had settled. By day the sun shone brilliantly, by night the stars and aurora lighted the heavens. The ice continued to move. The bight was soon quite free from it, and at length the sea itself was so little obstructed that one day Dan announced it quite safe to begin their voyage of exploration to the southward.

Preparations for departure had curtailed their hunting hours, but nevertheless they had four full days' provisions when they broke camp and set sail in their frail craft. The wind was fair, and it was a beautiful, perfect morning. Their hearts were full of hope and expectancy, though they knew much less of the surrounding sea and dismal coast than did Henry Hudson, the great explorer, when he was set adrift upon the same waters by a mutinous crew nearly three hundred years before.

Chapter X

A Narrow Escape.

"Hurrah!" shouted Paul, as Dan trimmed the sail and it filled with wind. "Hurrah! We're off!"

"I'm hopin' th' wind'll breeze up a bit; an' she does, we'll be makin' fine time," remarked Dan, pointing the boat for the open sea. "She's a rare good sailin' craft."

"Let me take the tiller, Dan. I can handle it, and I want to do something. You manage the sail."

"An' you wants," said Dan, surrendering the tiller and settling comfortably amidships. "Head her just outside that p'int o' land," he directed.

"Isn't it fine to be moving!" exclaimed Paul. "But the old camping place grew to seem homelike to me. Wasn't it cozy when we first landed there from the ice, after we got our tent up and a fire started?"

"Yes, 'twere wonderful snug an' fine, but I finds it a rare sight better afloat, an' s'uthard bound."

"Do you know, Dan, it gives me a sort of scarey feeling to think we're out here alone in this little boat when there's not another boat in sight, and likely there isn't another within hundreds of miles of us, unless it's the North Star; and we know that no one lives on the land. It's a queer sort of feeling—nothing but a great big wilderness everywhere, and just us in it. But I'm glad to be here. I wonder what there is below that point and over the hill?"

"'Tis a wonderful bleak country, I'm thinkin', an' I'm wishin' we were knowin' where th' fur traders is, an' where we're goin'." Dan produced his harmonica as he spoke, drew it across his sleeve, and putting it to his lips blew a chord or two.

"It's because we don't know, I guess, and the uncertainty about it, that makes it interesting to me. I feel like an explorer. It's simply great to sail along and wonder all the time what we'll see next, and no way of finding out till we get there. That makes it exciting and romantic."

"I don't know as 'tis very exciting," said Dan, removing the harmonica from his lips, "but 'tis a wonderful sight better 'n stayin' around camp, with winter nigh, an' 't would be better yet if th' ship came cruisin' along t' pick us up—which she won't, as th' ice sure drove she out."

With this, and as if to dismiss the subject, he struck up one of his favorite tunes, playing softly, and ceasing only long enough to say to Paul: "A bit t' port. That's it, steady."

The morning air was crisp and frosty. The sun illumined the eastern heavens in a blaze of wondrous colors, and presently raised his face above the glistening sea. Even the bleak coast, austere and rugged, possessed a unique grandeur and compelling beauty. The wind sprang up with the rising sun, and the little boat bowled along at a good speed, upon a gentle swell. Now and again Dan would trim the sail, and give an instruction to Paul, "Port lee a bit," or "Starb'rd a bit," and return to his music.

Paul was thinking of home, of his mother and father, and his homecoming—some time. He had no doubt that he and Dan would extricate themselves from the wilderness, for he had grown to have unbounded faith in Dan's resourcefulness and ingenuity. He wondered what his parents would say, when Mr. Remington returned without him, if Dan's assurance that the ship could never have remained in the face of the ice were correct.

While he realized and regretted the anxiety his absence would cause his parents, it did not occur to him that any one would believe that he and Dan were drowned. He believed that his father would send a vessel for them when the ice passed out of Hudson Bay the following summer, and that in the meantime he and Dan would be quite comfortable at some trading post which they should presently find.

He was thrilled with the delights of adventure, now that any real danger seemed past, and he made for himself pleasant pictures of his return to school and the rôle of hero he would fill in the eyes of the other fellows.

Presently Dan ceased playing, and they chatted intermittently. Once a great sea creature raised its back directly in front of them.

“What’s that?” asked Paul.

“A white whale,” answered Dan, as the thing sank, to appear again much farther out to sea.

At another time they passed several seals, and Paul wished to shoot at them, but Dan advised:

“’Tis rare hard t’ hit un, an’ if you did hit one an’ kill un, she’d sink before we could get un. An’ we’ll be needin’ all th’ cartridges,” so Paul did not shoot.

The sun was close to the western horizon when, ravenously hungry, for they had eaten nothing since breakfast, they ran into a little cove, unloaded their belongings, hauled the boat to a safe position, and made camp. They had kept steadily going all day, for Dan had been unwilling to lose advantage of the fair wind, and had they gone ashore to cook dinner it would have consumed at least an hour of valuable time.

“Th’ days is growin’ wonderful short,” said Dan, “an’ we’ll have t’ be usin’ all of the daylight when th’ wind’s fair an’ good. ’Twill save grub, too, if we eats only twice a day.”

During the four succeeding days they made indifferent progress. The weather was glorious, but the wind for hours at a stretch died to a dead calm, the sail hung slack, and to keep in motion they were compelled to work at their stern oar, and progress by this means was slow and tedious.

They were very sparing of their provisions. A couple of geese were killed and added to their store, but nothing else. Then came another day with a good breeze, but when they went into camp that night they had only a gull to divide between them for supper. It was an unpromising shore for game, and Dan expressed himself of the belief that it would be quite fruitless to hunt.

“If we sees any place tomorrow that looks like a river, or a likely place for huntin’, we’ll land an’ try un,” he commented as, very hungry, they settled for the night.

There was not a scrap to eat for breakfast. Paul declared he could eat his shoes, and Dan facetiously advised that he fill up on water, the one thing that was abundant. They set sail as the first light of dawn appeared in the east. Paul shivered in the frosty atmosphere, and both of the young voyagers sat despondently quiet, until the sun pushed his big glowing face above the eastern waters, and seemed to laugh at them.

“Dad says, ‘Keep a stiff upper lip, do th’ best un can, an’ she’ll work out all right,’” encouraged Dan, at length, breaking the silence. “They ain’t nothin’ we can do but keep goin’ an’ watch out for game. Th’ Lord’s been watchin’ out for us right along, an’ He’s got His eye on us now, I’m thinkin’. We ain’t been lookin’ much for grub. We been thinkin’ too much about gettin’ on. An’ we looks out, we’ll be gettin’ grub before night. They’s been chances t’ kill grub every day, but we been goin’ right on an’ not takin’ un.”

"We'll have to get something pretty soon or we'll starve to death," said Paul. "I wonder how long people can live without eating?"

"I'm not knowin' just how long. Dad's been a week more 'n once without eatin', an' he says 't were just makin' he a bit weak, but not hurtin' he none."

"I'm sure I never could stand it for a week."

"Oh, yes, un could. Dad says 't is bad when folks gives up, an' thinks they's goin' t' die after fastin' for a bit."

"But we can't live unless we eat," insisted Paul.

"No, but we can go a wonderful time without eatin' before we dies, if we only thinks we can."

The wind was rising. White caps were appearing upon the surface of the sea, and presently the boat began now and again to ship water.

"We'll have t' make shore th' first promisin' place," suggested Dan. "We're sure in for a blow. There's a p'int ahead, and we'll make for th' lee of un."

The wind was in the northeast, and it drove the little craft before it at a terrific rate. In an incredibly short time it had developed into a tempest. The angry waters piled about them and tossed the boat about upon the wave crests like a leaf. While Paul held the rudder Dan lowered the sail, and they ran before the gale with bared mast. Dan resumed the rudder and Paul baled out the water, working as he had never worked before.

"We'll never make it, Dan!" he shouted at length. "We'll swamp, sure!"

"Oh, yes; we're gainin' on un," encouraged Dan. "We'll make un."

Dan's face, however, was tense, and it was plain that he was not so confident as his words seemed to indicate.

They had almost passed the point when a great wave broke over them, nearly swamping the boat, and leaving it half full of water, but they made the point, and passed into less tempestuous waters before another wave caught them.

Even here the sea was as rough as the little boat could weather, for the shore was not so well protected as it had seemed, and it was lined with jagged rocks, making a landing impossible, for to have attempted it would have resulted in the boat's smashing to pieces and perhaps their being carried away before they could reach safety.

Dan watched for an opening, as they paralleled the shore a safe distance from it, and at length discovered a bit of gravelly beach reaching down between high boulders.

It was a difficult landing to make, but it was their only hope, and he headed directly for the opening.

"Get t' th' bow an' jump th' minute we strikes!" he shouted to Paul, and Paul obeyed.

For an instant it seemed that in spite of Dan's best effort they must strike upon the rocks, the next instant the danger was past, the boat drove hard upon the gravel, and both boys sprang ashore for their lives, to escape a breaker which swept over the boat.

One on either side they grasped the bow, and as another wave came rolling in, pulled with all their might. Thus, aided by the force of the water, the boat was drawn sufficiently high to permit them to unload, bale out the water, and haul the boat to safety.

"We made un all right," remarked Dan, when everything was beyond danger.

"Yes," said Paul, "but it was a narrow escape."

"T were that," admitted Dan. "T were wonderful close we was t' bein' swamped."

The boys themselves and all their things were drenching wet. Not a stick of driftwood was to be found. The wind was bitterly cold. They had eaten nothing since the previous evening, and then only the unsatisfying gull, and the barren coast was destitute of game. But they had escaped death, and were thankful for their deliverance.

Chapter XI

A Death Struggle.

"We'd better open th' outfit up, an' let th' wind be dryin' un while we hunts grub," suggested Dan, as he unfolded a blanket and proceeded to spread it upon the ground, after they had made a brief survey of their immediate surroundings.

"I'm so dead hungry and empty I can hardly move," said Paul, sitting impotently on a rock. "I feel weak, too. The scare, and pulling on the boat, just about knocked the ginger out of me."

"We'll be findin' timber clost by, an' they's a good chanst t' kill some grub before night. T ain't noon yet. We'll start soon's we get th' things spread, an' I'm thinkin' we'll be good an' snug by night," encouraged Dan.

"It's all my fault that we ever got into this scrape, Dan," Paul remarked dejectedly, as he arose to assist in unpacking the wet things. "If I'd listened to you, and done as I promised, we'd have been safe on the ship now, instead of starving to death out here."

"They's no tellin'," Dan consoled. "I'm thinkin' 'twould have been the same anyhow. Maybe 'twas meant we be goin' adrift. Leastways 'tain't no use botherin' about un now. Dad say what's done is done, an' 'tain't no use botherin' our heads about a thing after she's done an' past. What's past might as well be forgot. Dad says 'tain't what was, but what is, as counts. He says: 'If you weren't doin' things right yesterday, 'tain't goin' t' help none t' bother about un t'day, but just do th' things you has to do t'day right, an' do un th' best un can, an' what you weren't doin' right yesterday won't count ag'in you.'"

"Maybe you're right, Dan, and I may as well quit worrying about it. One thing's certain. When I promise to do anything at a certain time again, I'm going to do it. And I'm going to do the best I can now, and stop complaining. I wish I could do things as well as you do. You know how to do everything."

"They's a wonderful lot o' things I'm not knowin' how t' do. I'm knowin' how t' sail a boat an' do things around camp, because I always had t' do un. Twon't be long till you knows how t' do un too, an' then you'll know a lot more 'n I do. Where you lives you had t' learn t' do other kinds o' things, an' them things you knows how t' do I don't know nothin' about. Dad says learnin' t' do things is like plants growin'. 'If you plants a turnip seed t'day,' says he, 'you can't pull a turnip from un

th' same day. Th' turnip's got t' have time t' grow after th' seed's planted, an' you can't learn t' do things what's worth knowin' how t' do,' says he, 'in one day. You got t' keep learnin' a little about un every day till you learns how t' do un.' You learn about doin' things in camp wonderful quick, Paul."

"Thank you, Dan. You always encourage me. I'd have given up long ago if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. You'd have been findin' out how t' do things. You got a rare lot o' pluck."

By this time the things were spread where wind and sun could dry them, with boulders placed upon them as a precaution against the wind carrying them away.

"Now," said Dan, shouldering his rifle, "we'll be goin'. 'Twill be best t' bring your shotgun an' plenty o' shells, an' I'm thinkin' we'll find grub, an' be feelin' better when we makes camp this evenin'."

Three quarters of a mile inland lay a ridge of low, barren hills. Dan, in the lead, directed their course toward it, and set a good pace, with Paul, who was learning the trick of walking over rough, untrailed country with less effort than formerly, close at his heels.

Paul bore small resemblance now to the sallow, listless youth who in July climbed the ladder to the deck of the NORTH STAR, lying in Sydney harbor. His face was brown and ruddy, his eyes bright, his limbs lithe, his step springy, and he had grown eager and alert. Both he and Dan were, however, now conscious of a growing weakness, the natural result of insufficient food for several days, and particularly due to their unbroken fast of several hours.

At the foot of the ridge they encountered a growth of straggling spruce brush. Above the brush, near the summit, the hills were of a reddish hue, in marked contrast to the surrounding gray. This red coloring, they presently discovered upon ascending the ridge, was given the hills by masses of red berries, half the size of ordinary cranberries but resembling them in flavor and appearance.

The wind swept the ridge with terrific fury, and was very cold, but they fell upon their knees, uncomfortable as it was, and partially satisfied their hunger with the fruit.

"They ain't so bad," remarked Dan, "but they's so sour I'm thinkin' we better not eat too many t' onct."

"They are pretty sour," admitted Paul, reluctantly rising to follow Dan, "but they taste mighty good."

"If we don't kill nothin' we can eat more of un when we comes back. But I'm thinkin' we'll find pa'tridges along here, feedin' on un. Pa'tridges is wonderful fond o' berries, an' they'll not be missin' a feedin' ground like this. Th' kind that takes t' th' hills is bigger'n better'n them that sticks t' th' willers. They both turns white in winter, an' they's both better 'n th' spruce pa'tridges that sticks t' th' spruce timber."

"Maybe you better take the shotgun, Dan. You can shoot quicker than I can, and if we see any partridges we've just got to get them."

"You shoots fine, but I knows better how t' look for th' pa'tridges, an' I'll take un. With th' wind they's like t' be wonderful wild."

Dan passed his light rifle over to Paul, and with Paul's shotgun proceeded to the top of the ridge, keeping a careful lookout, as he walked, while Paul followed a little distance in the rear. On the summit Dan halted until Paul joined him.

"'Tis fine," said Dan; "look now."

Below them lay a wooded valley, the green spruce trees splotted with golden yellow patches, where groves of tamaracks had taken on their autumnal coloring. To the westward a small lake shimmered in the sunlight, and leading to the southward from it could be traced the winding course of a creek which was presently lost among barren hills beyond.

"Isn't it fine!" exclaimed Paul.

"An' 'tis like t' be a game country."

"Oh, I hope so!"

"Now I'll be leadin' ag'in, an' you follows a bit behind."

A little way down the slope Dan stopped again, and when Paul overtook him, pointed to the berries at his feet.

"See th' signs? They's been feedin' right here. Just over there they been wallerin' in th' sand."

He went forward again noiselessly, carefully scanning the receding slope ahead. Presently he began a more cautious advance, halting now and again and then advancing.

All at once, quick as a flash he threw the gun to his shoulder and fired—bang! bang!—both barrels almost as one. Quickly he dropped two fresh shells in the gun, and running forward fired both barrels again. As he did so a great flock of ptarmigans, with a noise like the wind, rose and flew far away, apparently alighting at the edge of the timber below them.

Paul hurried down to Dan, who was gathering up the fruits of his hunt. There were eleven fat birds, now nearly white, in their winter dress.

Paul, in happy thankfulness, could scarcely control his emotion.

"It seems almost too good to be true, Dan!" he said finally.

"I finds un fine too," admitted Dan. "They was wonderful tame for a windy day, an' just runs instead of flyin' after I fires th' first shots. That gives me time t' load an' shoot ag'in."

"But how did you get so many with just four shots? Oh, Dan, I believe it's just as you always say; it was Providence sent us here and let you get so many."

"Twere that. On th' ground I lines 'em up, an' knocks over two or three to a shot, except th' last shots, when they flies away, I only gets one on th' wing. 'Tis hard t' get more 'n one when they's flyin'. Th' Lord just kept 'em on th' ground!"

"And now we can eat again!" exclaimed Paul.

"Yes, an' th' finest kind o' eatin' too. I'll be lookin' for th' flock, where they flies to, an' try for another shot, while you plucks two, an' cooks un," suggested Dan, and when they reached the edge of the timber he directed:

"Go straight in here till you comes t' th' creek, an' put on your fire there, an' I'll be findin' you."

Entering the timber, Paul found himself sheltered from the wind, in pleasant contrast to the open hills. Scarcely two hundred yards from where he parted from Dan he came upon the creek. Though he had no axe he made his fire without difficulty, profiting by the wood lore learned from Dan. He had also learned the

knack of plucking birds quickly, and in a little while had the two ptarmigans, impaled upon sticks, broiling before the blaze, while he basked in the warmth, and filled in his time plucking the remaining birds.

Dan had not yet put in his appearance when Paul decided that the ptarmigans were quite done. He removed them from the fire, and with a strong exercise of self-restraint waited for Dan to join him in the repast. Presently, however, hunger got the better of him.

“There isn’t any use waiting for Dan,” he finally said to himself. “I simply can’t stand it another minute,” and he ate one of the birds with a relish beyond anything, he thought, that he had ever before experienced. The temptation to eat the other was very strong but he turned his back upon it, and, lying down, was presently dozing.

How long he had been asleep he did not know, but at length he opened his eyes, suddenly wide awake, with a consciousness that something was watching him. The fire had died to smouldering coals, and he was cold, but fear of the watcher impelled him to remain motionless and still, while he peered into the shadow of the timber.

Presently he discovered in a clump of bushes on the opposite side of the creek a pair of glowing amber-green eyes. They were malicious, piercing eyes, and Paul’s heart stood still for a moment. Then he remembered what Dan had often told him: “They ain’t nothin’ in this country t’ be scared of unless you comes on a big pack o’ wolves, an’ they’s mostly cowards,” and his courage returned.

Very cautiously he reached for Dan’s rifle, and with exceeding care sighted it upon a spot just between the glistening eyes. Then steadying his nerves, and holding his breath for an instant, he fired.

Simultaneously with the explosion something sprang into the air and then fell back upon the ground. Whatever the thing was, he had hit it. Highly excited, he dropped the rifle, and regardless of the icy waters forded the creek, dashed up the opposite bank, and without doubt that the animal was quite dead, ran directly in, incautiously, toward the clump of bushes where it had fallen.

Suddenly, when less than ten feet from the bushes, a great snarling, malevolent cat-like beast appeared at the edge of the cover, directly before him.

Paul stopped, stupefied at the unexpected appearance. The animal crouched for a spring. It was too late to retreat. Paul’s heart stood still. A cold chill ran up his spine. He had left his rifle at the fire, and was quite defenseless, save for the hunting knife at his belt. He grabbed the knife, and as the beast leaped toward him instinctively threw up his arms to guard his face.

Its fore paws landed squarely upon his shoulders. With one hand he grasped its throat, and with a tremendous, unnatural strength pushed it from him, while with the other hand he slashed blindly with his knife at its body. He could feel its sharp claws tearing his flesh. Then the earth began to reel, darkness came, and he fell unconscious.

Illustration:

He could feel its sharp claws tearing his flesh

Chapter XII

Factor MacTavish of Fort Reliance.

When Paul opened his eyes he felt very damp and uncomfortable. As his vision cleared he beheld Dan standing over him with his hat full of water, which Dan was undoubtedly about to dash into his face.

"Don't Dan! Don't throw that on me!" he plead weakly. "What you wetting me down that way for?"

"You comin' to all right?" asked Dan. "You fainted, an' I were souse you t' bring you to. I'm thinkin' I better souse you this un. 'T will do no harm."

"Oh, Dan—"

But Paul's protest came too late, and he received the contents of the hat full in his face.

"There," said Dan with satisfaction, "I'm thinkin' that'll be enough, an' bring you to, all right. How you feelin'?"

"All right now." His voice was stronger, but still weak. "That thing 'most killed me, didn't it?"

"You're a long way from dyin' yet, but you were havin' a rare fine fight with th' varmint, an' when you kills un you faints. Feelin' stronger? I'm thinkin' a bit more water'll be helpin' you, now."

"No! No, Dan!" plead Paul, trying to rise, but still too weak. "Don't throw any more water on me. I'm soaked and freezing with it now."

"Well, maybe you're havin' enough," said Dan, uncertainly. "Dad says th' best thing t' bring a feller around when he gets done up is plenty o' water."

"What kind of an animal was that? When it came leaping at me I thought my time had come."

"'Twere a lynx, an' a wonderful big un, too, an' nice an' fat. He'll make fine eatin'. How'd he come t' fight? I never heard o' one fightin' before. They always runs."

"Why, I shot him, and thought I'd killed him, and when I came over without the rifle he jumped on me."

Dan examined the bloody carcass of the great lynx lying by Paul's side.

"There's where your bullet comes," said he, pointing at a furrow along the top of the head. "'T were breakin' th' skin an' stunnin' he. He just comes to, like you're doin' now, when you gets over, an' bein' sort o' cornered he jumps on you. That's th' way of all beasts. Anything'll turn on a feller when 'tis cornered."

"I thought I was a goner, and I don't understand how I ever killed it. Do I seem to be hurt much? I feel sore all over."

"Not so bad. Scratched a bit, but 't ain't no account. You sticks your knife in his heart. Feelin' like gettin' up now?"

"I'll try."

With Dan's assistance Paul rose to his feet, but he felt very weak, and uncertain on his legs.

"I never can walk back to the boat, Dan."

"We'll not be goin' back t' th' boat this evenin'. There, keep a good holt of me, an' we'll cross th' creek an' put a fire on. You're shiverin' with th' cold."

Dan piloted the tottering Paul to a comfortable place beside the embers of Paul's former fire, relighted the fire and presently had a cheerful blaze. Then he broke some spruce boughs for a couch, and when Paul said he was quite comfortable and feeling "bully good again, except for the sore spots," Dan spread out before him a porcupine, a big Arctic hare and five more ptarmigans.

"That's what I were gettin' on th' hunt," he announced proudly. "Now what you thinkin' o' un?"

"Dan, that's just fine. Why, we can live like kings now. I suppose that's a porcupine, isn't it? And of course it's good to eat—everything seems to be good to eat in this country."

"Yes, they's rare fine eatin'. I likes un as well as deer's meat. Now I'll have a snack an' then pack th' tent an' beddin' in here. I feels wonderful gaunt."

"Dan, you're a wonder! Here you've been tramping after game all this time, and stopping to help me, without a thing to eat since yesterday."

"If a feller gets game he's got t' keep after un when he sees un," commented Dan, between mouthfuls of the now cold ptarmigan Paul had cooked for him. "An' 'tis tastin' wonderful fine, now I gets un. We'll be havin' a good feed when I gets back, an' we'll find th' tent rare snug in this timber, free from th' gale. She's blowin' wonderful stiff outside."

"I'm strong enough now, I guess, to go along and help carry the things. I don't want you to do it alone, Dan. You do all the hard things," and Paul attempted to rise.

"You'll be stayin' where you is," objected Dan, forcing Paul back upon his couch. "'Tis but a light load for me. I'm used t' packin', an' I'll not be long."

"I do feel pretty weak," admitted Paul, settling on his couch again.

When Dan returned an hour later the sun had set. He brought with him the tent, blankets, cooking utensils and stove, but declared they were not heavy. He declined Paul's assistance in pitching the tent, and working with the skill of a woodsman soon had all in readiness for the night, a fire in the stove, and three ptarmigans stewing in the kettle.

"They's a wonderful rough sea runnin'," he remarked when he finally sat down. "I'm thinkin' we'll not be gettin' out o' here for two days yet. Th' wind's shifted t' th' west'ard an' she's blowin' a gale, an' she's kickin' up a sea as won't settle in a day after th' blow stops."

Dan's weather prophecy proved quite correct, and three days passed before they were permitted by weather and sea to break camp and resume their journey. Paul's wounds were not serious, though the deep scratches he had received were painful and troublesome. However, he was able while they remained ashore to attend to camp duties, while Dan hunted.

Under Dan's direction he roasted the four quarters of lynx and the porcupine, together with another porcupine Dan had secured, as a reserve supply of food. The porcupines were placed upon the coals and the quills and hair thoroughly singed off, after which they were scraped. This done, a big log fire was built. On either side and slightly in front of the fire a stake was driven, and a pole extending from stake to stake was tied in position. From the pole, and directly before the fire, the

porcupines and quarters of lynx were so suspended, each at the end of a string, that they hung just high enough to clear the ground. By occasionally twirling the string upon which each was hung, every portion of the roasting meat was exposed to the heat and thoroughly cooked.

Paul found Dan's estimate of porcupine not at all overdrawn. He declared it not unlike, and even superior to, roasted young pig; and the lynx he insisted was equal to the finest veal.

Dan's hunting during this period brought them, besides the second porcupine, forty more ptarmigans and three snowshoe rabbits. Thus when they broke camp they were not only well fed but were well supplied with provisions for several days.

It was early dawn of a keen, cold morning when they turned toward the boat with the outfit on their backs. The frost crackled under foot, and when the sun broke out, as they were crossing the berry-covered ridge, it set the frost-covered earth sparkling and scintillating, transforming it into a fairy world strewn with diamonds.

From the hilltop they could see the sea stretching far away to the eastward in a silvery, shimmering sheen.

"Isn't it immense!" exclaimed Paul, as they sat beside their packs for a brief rest. "I've learned to love the sea, in spite of the rough way it's knocked us about, and I'll be mighty glad to be afloat again."

"'Tis wonderful fine," admitted Dan, rising to lead the way down.

A gentle swell was running, and with a good sailing breeze from the northwest they made excellent progress. To their astonishment, however, they discovered early in the afternoon a long coast line, just discernible, directly east of them.

"Now this must be a bay we're runnin' into," suggested Dan when this new coast was discovered, "and I'm thinkin' 't will be best to cross un, for if we runs t' th' head of un we'll be losin' a rare lot o' time."

Accordingly they took an easterly course, and with sunset made a comfortable landing and cheerful camp, where driftwood in plenty was to be found for their stove. It was a cozy, snug camp, and a savory supper of hot broth and boiled birds, added to the satisfaction of having accomplished a good day's voyage to the southward, made them very jolly and happy.

When they had eaten Dan produced his harmonica and blew a few notes. Suddenly he ceased the music and listened intently, then springing to his feet left the tent. Paul, aware that something of importance had happened, was close at his heels. Outside Dan listened again, keeping silence for several minutes. Then he asked excitedly:

"Does you hear un? Does you hear un?"

"Yes, what is it?" asked Paul, also excited. "Wolves?"

"Dogs! 'Tis husky dogs! They's huskies clost by t' th' east'ard, an' them's their dogs howlin'! Hear un!"

They were silent again for a moment, to be certain that there was no mistake, and as the distant "How-oo, how-oo, how-oo" came up from the eastward, Paul shouted:

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" and then threw his cap in the air in an ecstasy of delight.

"They's down t' th' east'ard, an' we'll sure see un tomorrow," said Dan. "When I first hears un in th' tent, I were thinkin' 't were wolves howlin', they howls so like wolves. But 't ain't wolves, 'tis sure husky dogs."

"And tomorrow we'll meet people again, even if they are huskies, and our troubles will be ended! Oh, Dan, I'm so thankful I can hardly contain myself!"

They sat and talked about home and the hope of the morrow until late, and even when they did lie down excitement and anticipation kept them still talking and awake until at last they fell into restless sleep.

Long before daybreak Dan arose very quietly for a look at the weather and to light the fire, but quiet as he was Paul heard him. "Is it time to get up, Dan?" he asked.

"'T will soon be time," answered Dan. "I wakes an' gets up, for we're wantin' t' be early, sure, so's t' be fair ready t' start soon's we can see."

"I can hardly wait to get away!" exclaimed Paul.

Breakfast was eaten in darkness, and the boat loaded and ready for the start before the first hint of dawn appeared in the east. In spite of their impatience Dan deemed it unwise, however, to venture upon the unknown waters until it was sufficiently light to avoid submerged reefs and treacherous bars, and for nearly an hour they were compelled to walk up and down the shore to keep warm, for the morning was stinging cold. At length Dan announced:

"We may's well be goin' now. 'T is fair light."

They hugged the shore closely, turning the boat into every cove and bight, that there might be no possibility of missing the Eskimos for whom they were looking.

"There!" said Dan at length. "There they is!"

Deep down in a cove, in a shelter of a towering ledge of rocks, stood a skin tupek of the Eskimos. Two men and some women and children, who had discovered the approaching boat even before Dan had discovered them, were watching them curiously from the beach.

The welcome was most hospitable, as the welcome of Eskimos always is, everyone shaking hands with Paul and Dan, laughing and greeting them with "Oksunae."

Presently they learned that one of the men could speak broken English, and Dan related to him, making him understand with some difficulty, their adventures.

"Kablunok soon," said he, "close."

"No understand. What's 'kablunok?'" Dan asked.

"Kablunok, white man. Very close."

"Where is un?"

"Post; there," pointing south. "Very close. Mr. MacTavish."

The Eskimos indicated a direction apparently inland from their position.

"No water?" asked Dan. "We walk?"

Illustration:

The Eskimos were watching them curiously from the beach

"No; water plenty. Big point," explained the Eskimo, drawing on the sand two parallel lines, rounded together at one end. "Land," he explained. "We here,"

indicating a point on one side of it, "post here," indicating another point almost directly opposite. "Umiak, boat, sail round."

This made the situation clear to Dan. The Eskimo encampment was on one side of a long, narrow peninsula, while on the opposite side of the peninsula was located a trading post, and by sailing around the extreme point of the peninsula they would presently reach the post.

The lads were anxious to proceed at once, but the Eskimos insisted upon their drinking some hot tea which one of the women had prepared. They then said adieu to their friends, and with light hearts and high expectations resumed their journey, which they felt was now, with all its hardships and uncertainties, soon to end.

Early in the forenoon the sun disappeared behind thickening gray clouds, and before midday, when they rounded the point, an early storm was threatening. But the young wanderers gave small thought to this, for presently they were to reach the post, where they would be secure from wintry blast and driving snow. In their impatience the time passed tediously, and dusk was settling when at last Dan exclaimed:

"There she is! There's th' post!"

Lying back from the shore were the low white buildings of Fort Reliance, a famous post of the Hudson Bay Company. Smoke was rising from its chimneys, and as they looked lights began to flicker in the windows. Behind the post rose rugged, barren hills of storm-scoured rocks. On a flat bit of ground to the westward of the buildings Indian campfires lighted the thickening gloom, and in dark silhouette Indian tepees stood out against the sky line. But despite its austere setting and bleak surroundings, old Fort Reliance appealed to the two expectant, weather-beaten youths as the most attractive haven on earth.

It was quite dark when the bow of their boat finally grated upon the gravelly beach below the post. The landing was deserted, save by skulking, sinister-looking wolf dogs which prowled about, snarling at one another, ever ready to attack the unwary man or beast that fell in their way.

The first flakes of the coming snowstorm were falling as the boys sprang ashore and made fast their boat. This secured, they followed a well-beaten path to the door of a long, low building whose cheerfully lighted windows bespoke warmth and comfort within. On the threshold they hesitated for a moment, then Dan knocked boldly upon the door.

"Come in," a voice called.

Paul took the lead, and entering they found themselves in a large square room, lighted by kerosene lamps and heated by a big wood stove which crackled a cheery welcome. Next the walls were several desks, two of them occupied by young men busily engaged with their pens.

"Why, hello," said the one near the door. "I thought it was one of the men. Are you up from York factory?"

"No," answered Paul, "we came from the north. We got lost in the fog, and our ship got away without us." With this introduction he told the story briefly of their experiences. "And," continued he, "we want to put up here until a ship comes for us. I suppose that won't be until next summer, but my father will send it then, and he'll pay your bill."

“You’ll have to talk with Mr. MacTavish, the master of the post, about that. He’ll be in soon. Sit down.”

Presently the door opened, and a tall, broad-shouldered, powerful man, with full gray beard and shrewd eyes, entered. The young man stepped smartly forward.

“These young fellows went adrift from their ship somewhere to the northward, sir,” said he. “They’ve worked their way down here in a small boat, and they want to be put up for the winter.”

Paul and Dan had respectfully risen to their feet. Mr. MacTavish’s appearance as he surveyed them was anything but reassuring. There was a certain hard look about his eyes and mouth that was repelling. His attitude was not cordial, even before he spoke.

“Do you want to buy provisions?”

“No,” answered Paul, “we want to put up here for the winter.”

“This isn’t a hotel; it’s a Hudson Bay trading post. If you want to pitch your tent, one of the men will point you out a good place, and you can buy provisions at the shop.”

“But,” said Paul, his heart sinking, “we haven’t any money,” and he proceeded again to relate with detail the story of their adventures. “My father is rich,” he added, “and he’ll pay all our expenses when the ship comes for us. You must have heard of him. He is John Densmore, president of the Atlantic and Pacific Steamship Company, and the head of a lot of other big companies.”

“I tell you this isn’t a hotel, young man, and even if your father is all you say, it’s no recommendation to me. I don’t like you Americans. But to be plain, I don’t believe your yarn. I know your type. You’ve deserted from a whaler, and you probably stole the boat you have. I can harbor neither thieves nor deserters,” and he turned toward one of the desks in dismissal of them.

For a moment Paul was quite stupefied with the affront. Then his pride and a sense of deep injustice roused his antagonism, and, stepping before the bulky figure of Factor MacTavish, he exclaimed:

“Do you mean to call us deserters and thieves? You’re the head of this place and you can do as you want to about giving us a place to stay, but you can’t call us thieves and deserters. I want you to understand I’m a gentleman, and I won’t be spoken to in this way by one like you.”

With this outbreak Paul’s lips began to tremble, and he was at the point of tears. Factor MacTavish was taken wholly by surprise. He was accustomed to browbeat and insult the natives and people under him, and none ever ventured a retort. Here was a different type of person. He had expected a cringing appeal to follow his cruel charge. But instead this youth, placing honor and good name above any consideration of personal comfort and safety, boldly defied him. Here certainly was a youth of spirit and of courage, and he admired the characteristics. The big man looked down at Paul in silent, amused astonishment. This attitude angered Paul almost beyond restraint. His eyes flashed, he doubled his fists, and swallowing his emotion, blurted out:

“I feel like striking you! You’re a big coward to speak to two boys that way!”

Illustration:

„You’re a big coward”

Dan had until now kept silent. Paul's speech quite dumbfounded him for a moment, but quickly aware that his friend was thoroughly in earnest in the threat, and fearing that he would actually attack the big man, he grabbed Paul's arm and drew him back.

"Don't strike un, Paul! Don't strike un!" Dan exclaimed. "'T will do no good. He knows what he says ain't true, an' we know it ain't true. Dad says when a feller knows he's right, an' he knows th' Lord knows he's right, it don't matter what folks says or thinks."

Factor MacTavish laughed, and in the laugh was a note of good humor. The defiance of these two lads scarcely reaching to his shoulder amused him, and he could not but admire the display of courage in the face of odds.

"Well, you've got some spunk, and I like spunk. You may stay over night. It's snowing, and you'd better go to the men's house for tonight. We always put up travelers one night. James," to one of the clerks, "show them the men's house."

"We won't stay a single night unless you take back what you said about our being thieves and deserters," broke in Paul, his defiant attitude unabated. "We're honest, and we're not beggars crawling after you."

"I don't know whether you're honest or not, or anything about you. You may be what you say you are. Now, if you want to accept a night's lodging, it's open to you, and I'll talk to you tomorrow. James, show these boys to the men's house."

"You say you were wrong in calling us thieves?" insisted Paul.

"Perhaps I was. We won't talk about it now," and he turned to one of the desks to put an end to the discussion.

"We'll take that for an apology," said Paul, somewhat mollified. "Thank you."

James, the clerk, introduced them to the men's house, and presently they had their things under cover, secure from the now heavily falling snow, and ate their supper of cold roast lynx from their own larder, supplemented by a pot of hot tea generously donated by the half-breed Indian cook.

Chapter XIII

Winter Shelter and Hard Work.

"Paul," said Dan, after the half-breed cook who brought them the tea had returned to his preparation of supper, "you're wonderful brave. I'm thinkin' now you would have hit th' master if I hadn't been interferin'."

"I'm afraid I would, and then he'd have pitched us both out," admitted Paul. "It wasn't because I was brave, though, but I was mad all through when he called us thieves. Think of it!"

"'T were brave o' you. I'm thinkin' you'd fight anything if 't were called for. But when we gets on th' ice pan, first off, I were misjudgin' you; you seemed scared and I were thinkin' you timid. You're a rare lot braver 'n me."

"No, I'm not, Dan."

"Yes you is. See th' way you fit th' lynx, an' killed un, too. An' th' way you stands up t' that man is sure wonderful."

"I had to fight the lynx; it made me. And that man's a big coward. What do you suppose he's going to do with us? Turn us out in the snow to starve or freeze to death? I feel as though I'd like to punch him now!" And Paul clenched his fists. "Called us thieves! Why, Dan, I never had any reason to steal, and you wouldn't take a pin that didn't belong to you."

"Neither of us would steal, an' I'm thinkin' he knows un well enough."

"What shall we do if he turns us out?"

"Tis hard t' say. I'm thinkin' we'll be goin' back in th' bush, an' stop t' hunt when we finds a good place."

The wind had risen to a tempest, and it shrieked and howled around the building now in a way that made the boys appreciate the snug warmth of the shelter, and led Dan to remark:

"We needs clothes. We'll be sure freezin' t' death without un, an' th' cold weather comin' on."

Somewhere outside a bell clanged several strokes. Presently the door opened, and three men, shaking snow from their caps and stamping it from their feet, entered.

"Tis a wild nicht," said one, a big, grizzly bearded fellow, after they had formally greeted Paul and Dan. "Ye arrived just in time, laddies. Are ye up from York Factory?"

"No," answered Paul, "we came from the north."

"And how, now, could that be? The ship's away this lang time."

Paul explained briefly how they had gone adrift, and their subsequent adventures, up to the time of meeting Factor MacTavish.

"My name," he added, "is Paul Densmore, and my friend is Dan Rudd."

"I'm glad t' meet ye lads. My name is Tammias Ferguson, and this is Sam'l Hogart, and this Amos Tupper," introducing his companions.

During this conversation and ceremony the men were washing and preparing for supper, and as they sat down Amos invited:

"Set in to the tyble, and 'ave a bite to heat."

"Thank you, we've eaten," answered Paul.

"Coom, laddies, and have a bite mair," urged Tammias. "'T will do ye no harm this cowld nicht."

Chuck, the half-breed cook, at this juncture placed a plate piled high with bread upon the table, and this offered a temptation too great to resist. They were longing for bread above all things in the world, and with a "Thank you" they took the seats assigned them without further objection.

"Ye'll be bidin' wi' us the winter, and ye must no be backward," encouraged Tammias.

They were not in the least backward. They ate a great deal of Chuck's indifferent, soggy bread, sopped in black molasses, and thought it delicious, and each drank at least three cups of strong tea.

"And did ye see the master?" asked Tammias when supper was over and all were seated about the hot stove.

"Yes," answered Paul, "and he told us we could stay only tonight."

“Did he say that now?”

“’E needs men. ’E’s short’anded, and ’e needs more men,” broke in Amos. “Tomorrow ’e’ll be hengaging you.”

“There’s no doot o’ that. So don’t worry, lads, about the morrow,” encouraged Tammas.

The men filled their pipes with tobacco cut from black plugs, and chatted with each other and the boys, whom they drew hospitably into their group. Dan played several airs upon his harmonica, to their great delight, and Paul described the wonders of New York, which Amos always endeavored to discount with descriptions of what he considered the greater wonders of London.

When bedtime finally came, Tammas stepped out of doors for “a look at the weather.”

“’Tis an awfu’ nicht,” he announced upon his return. “’Tis fortunate you lads made post as ye did. Ye’d ha’ perished in the cowld and snow of this nicht.”

Paul and Dan spread their blankets on the floor, and very thankful they were for the shelter. Outside the wind howled dismally, and dashed the snow against the windows.

Morning brought no abatement of the storm. If possible the snow fell more thickly and the wind blew more fiercely. The office building, ten yards from the door of the men’s house, could scarcely be made out, and the boys rejoiced anew at their safety.

Breakfast was eaten by lamplight. Tammas insisted that the lads join in the meal, and when the bell clanged to call the men to work, he admonished:

“If the master is hard, and says ye canna’ remain, coom to me at the smithy. I’ll ne’er be seein’ ye turned out in this awfu’ storm, an’ neither will Sam’l or Amos. If there’s no ither way, we’ll pay for your keep.”

“Aye, that we will,” assented both Amos and Samuel.

“Thank you,” said Paul. “If you do, my father will pay you back.”

“The master’s apt to be ’ard, but stand up to ’im. ’E likes men with grit to stand up and face ’im,” advised Amos, as the three went out to their work.

“Well, those are men with hearts, and true friends, and even if they are rough looking, they’re gentlemen,” remarked Paul, as the door closed.

“’T ain’t clothes or money as makes a man,” said Dan. “Dad says ’tis th’ heart under th’ shirt.”

They dreaded the meeting with David MacTavish, the factor, and for half an hour they hesitated to face the ordeal.

“But they ain’t no use puttin’ un off,” suggested Dan, finally, after they had discussed at some length the probable outcome of the coming interview. “What we has t’ do, we has t’ do, an’ th’ sooner ’tis done th’ sooner ’tis over. An’ you knows wonderful well, Paul, how t’ talk t’ he.”

“I’m not afraid of him,” declared Paul, working up his courage. “Let’s go now and see if he’s in the office.”

Factor MacTavish was in his office, busy with accounts, when they entered, but for full ten minutes he ignored their presence. Finally looking up he said, in a much pleasanter tone than that of the previous evening:

“Come here, boys.”

They stepped up to his desk.

“How did you pass the night?” he asked.

“Very comfortably, thank you,” answered Paul.

“I’ve been thinking about you fellows, and I’ve decided to let you remain at the post and work for your living. We’re shorthanded, and it’s mighty lucky for you that we are, for we can’t keep hangers-on and idlers around here. You—what is your name?”

“Paul Densmore.”

“You go over to the blacksmith’s shop, and help Thomas Ferguson, and do whatever he wants you to do. And you other fellow, what’s your name?”

“Dan’l Rudd, sir.”

“You can help Amos Tupper in the cooper shop.”

“Yes, sir.”

“When they haven’t anything for you to do, there’s plenty of wood to saw and split, and enough to keep you busy. Now get out.”

Then Paul and Dan turned to go.

“Hold on! You’ll stay in the men’s house with the others. Are those the only clothes you have?”

“All except some underclothes,” answered Paul.

“Well, they’ll not be enough for winter. James,” to the chief clerk, “have adikeys made for these fellows, and some duffel socks and deerskin moccasins, and a pair of mittens for each. Now if you fellows prove yourselves useful you can stay here for the winter, and if you don’t I’ll kick you both out of the post. You may go.”

It was an effort for Paul to restrain himself from making a defiant reply, but he realized in time that this might get them into trouble. He felt incensed that his word had not been taken, when he promised that his father would pay his own and Dan’s expenses. He was on the whole very glad, however, that even this arrangement had been made, for the storm had brought him a realization of the fruitlessness of any attempt to live in the open with their insufficient equipment, together with the uncertainty of killing sufficient game to sustain them.

And so Paul Densmore, the only son of a king of finance, a youth who would one day be a multi-millionaire in his own right, was glad enough to earn his living as a common laborer.

Chapter XIV

A Lonely Christmas.

Dan had been accustomed to work and exposure all his life, and he found his new employment, on the whole, not disagreeable. Paul’s experiences after they had gone adrift had to some extent prepared him, also, for the tasks he was now called upon to perform, and at the end of a week he became fairly well reconciled to his position.

Aside from giving them a curt order now and again, Factor MacTavish rarely spoke to either of them. He invariably treated them as ordinary menials—as he

treated the unskilled half-breed servants—useful auxiliaries to the post life, just as the dogs were useful auxiliaries, and save for the fact that he did not kick or beat them, he gave them little more consideration than he gave the dogs.

In accordance with the factor's instructions, James Benton, the chief clerk, or "clerk" as he called himself, supplied each of them with two suits of heavy underwear; a kersey cloth adikey—an Eskimo garment which was pulled over the head like a shirt and was supplied with a hood—an outer adikey made like the other but of smooth cotton cloth, to shed the snow; three pairs of duffel socks made from heavy woolen cloth; a pair of deerskin moccasins made by an Indian woman; a pair of moleskin leggings; and warm mittens; and each was given a pair of bears paw snowshoes, without which it would have been quite impossible to have walked in the deep snow.

Each outfit, the clerk informed them, was valued at eighteen dollars, and each boy was charged with this amount on the company's books. They were each to receive their board and three dollars a month wages, the three dollars not to be paid them in money but to be credited to their account until the debt of eighteen dollars was balanced.

Though they had arrived in mid-October, and had begun work at once, Factor MacTavish argued that until they had become accustomed to the duties required of them they would be of little value, and therefore decreed that the munificent wage of three dollars a month should not begin until November. Therefore, they were told, they were virtually bound to the service of the company, with no freedom to leave the post, until the following May, when, if no other purchases were made in the meantime, their debt would be balanced and they would be free to go where they pleased.

"Now if you want the outfit, and want to stay, you'll have to agree to these terms in writing," said the clerk. "If you don't sign a written agreement you'll have to leave the reservation at once."

Thus they were forced to become the victims of a system of peonage, for they had no choice but to sign the agreement.

The lads felt the injustice of this treatment keenly. They were well aware that the value of their work would be many times greater than the amount of wages allowed them, but they were wholly at the mercy of the factor.

"It's an outrage!" exclaimed Paul when he and Dan were alone. "We earn a lot more than three dollars a month. Why Father used to allow me a hundred dollars a month for spending money."

"Yes," said Dan, "we earns anyway ten dollars a month. He's a wonderful hard man. But we'll have t' put up with un, I'm thinkin'."

"He's got us here," complained Paul, "and he knows we can't get away, and he's going to make all he can out of us. The old skinflint!"

"He's sure a hard un," admitted Dan, "but we'll have t' put up with un. Dad says that kind o' man always gets what's comin' to un some time, an' what's comin' to un ain't what they likes, neither."

"And he pretends he's doing us a great favor! The old pirate!"

"They's no use thinkin' about un. Dad says when th' wind's ag'in ye, don't get worked up about un, an' cross. Take un cheerful, an' be happy anyway, an' she'll shift around fair after awhile."

So they gave no hint of discontent, but went cheerfully about the tasks assigned them, as though they really enjoyed them, though much of the philosophy of Dan's "Dad" had to be evoked at times when their spirits flagged, to drive back rising discontent.

But they had enough to eat, and with their new clothing, supplemented by the things they already had, they were warmly enough clad, even when the short days of December came, with biting, bitter cold.

The storm which overtook them on the evening of their arrival at Fort Reliance, continued intermittently for several days. It was the first real storm of winter. Steadily the weather grew colder. By mid-November the bay was frozen solidly as far as eye could reach.

The Indians, save two or three old men and women who did odd chores around the post, had packed their belongings on toboggans in the first lull in the storm, two days after the arrival of Paul and Dan, and the western wilderness had swallowed them in its mysterious depths.

Post life was exceedingly quiet and humdrum, although it possessed something of spice and novelty for the lads, particularly Paul. The dogs always interested him when they were harnessed to the sledge by Jerry, the half-breed Eskimo servant, and he was always glad to be detailed to accompany Jerry and the team when they were engaged in hauling firewood from the near-by forest. The impetuosity and dash of the dogs upon leaving home, and Jerry's management of them and the sledge, filled Paul with admiration. But Paul was especially fascinated by Jerry's dexterity in handling the long walrus hide whip, full thirty feet in length. With it Jerry could reach any lagging dog in the team with unerring aim. He could flick a spot no bigger than a dime with the tip of the lash, and he could crack the whip at will with reports like pistol shots.

Under Jerry's instruction Paul practiced the manipulation of the whip himself, at every opportunity, and he considered it quite an accomplishment when he was able to bring the lash forward and lay it out at full length in front of him. In his early attempts to do this he generally wrapped it around his legs, and occasionally gave himself a stinging blow with the tip end in the back of his neck. But with patient practice he at length found that he could not only strike an object aimed at with considerable skill, but could crack the whip at nearly every attempt.

Jerry was always good natured and indulgent. He taught Paul the knack of managing the dogs and sledge, and at length permitted him to drive the team upon level, easy stretches of trail. On steep down grades, however, where the dogs dashed at top speed and the loaded sledge in its mad rush seemed ever on the point of turning over or smashing against a stump or rock, he had no desire to try his skill and strength.

But these excursions with the dogs were practically the only adventures that came to the boys. Generally they were kept busy at the woodpile, one at either end of a cross-cut saw, cutting the long wood into stove lengths, and splitting it into proper size; or, when the weather was too stormy for out-of-door employment, Paul assisted Tammias in the blacksmith shop while Dan was kept from idleness by Amos in the cooperage.

Paul was always glad to be with Tammias, who had in a sense adopted both lads, and assumed a fatherly interest in their welfare. He was kindness itself,

though he never failed to correct them when he deemed it necessary. Under his instruction Paul soon learned a great deal about the handling of tools and the working of iron. The greatest drudgery, it seemed to the boys, that fell to their lot was the weekly duty of cleaning the offices and scrubbing the unpainted furniture and floors to a whiteness satisfactory to the factor.

The day before Christmas dawned bitterly cold. The snow creaked under foot. Everything was covered with frost rime. The atmospheric moisture hung suspended in the air in minute frozen particles. When the sun reluctantly rose, it shone faintly through the gauzy veil of rime, and gave forth no warmth to the starved and frozen earth.

Paul and Dan were assigned to the woodpile for the day. All forenoon they sawed and split, working for the most part in silence, for they were filled with thoughts of other Christmas eves, and the loved ones at home.

"I wonder if we'll have to work tomorrow?" asked Paul, when they returned to the saw after dinner.

"I'm thinkin' not," answered Dan. "Amos were sayin' they keeps Christmas as a holiday."

"If we don't have to, I want to get out in the bush, away from here, anywhere. I'll be homesick if I spend Christmas in this place. Can't we go for a hunt back in the timber, and have a camp fire and a good time?"

"'Twould be fine!" agreed Dan. "Now I were thinkin' of just that myself. I'm wantin' t' get off somewheres wonderful bad. I've been a bit lonesome all day, thinkin' of home an what they's doin' there, an' whether they misses me."

Dan's voice choked, and for the first time since their acquaintance began Paul saw tears in his eyes. Dan hastily brushed them away with his mittened hand, ashamed of giving way to his feelings, and continued more cheerfully:

"Mother's like t' worry a bit, but Dad won't let she. Dad'll be tellin' she we're all right. Dad'll not be fearin' I can't take care of myself."

"I've been thinking about my father and mother too—and what they're doing, and whether they miss me much. We always have such a jolly time on Christmas. Mother gave me this watch last Christmas," and Paul took his fine gold watch from his pocket, caressed it and returned it to its place again. "It's a nifty one," he continued. "Father gave me my pony—the black pony I told you about—'Pluto' I call him. But Mother was always afraid he'd hurt me, and never let me go riding alone. Old John—he's the groom—went with me, and he just kept me to a walk. There wasn't much fun in that and I soon got tired poking along and didn't go out much. When I get home again, though, I'm going to have fun with Pluto, and Old John can stay at home."

"Your father must be wonderful rich. I never did be a-horseback, but I has one o' the smartest punts in Ragged Cove. Dad made un an' gives un t' me. I'm thinkin' I likes a punt better 'n a horse."

And so they talked on as they worked, until darkness came, and they left the woodpile to fill in the time until the bell called them to supper, giving Tammias and Amos a hand, Paul in the blacksmith shop, Dan in the cooperage.

When at length the clanging bell called them from work, and they sat down to supper, Tammias announced:

"Weel, laddies, ye've earned the holiday ye'll have tomorrow. I'm not given to praisin' mair than is a just due, but I may say fairly ye've weel earned the holiday."

"We'll have the holiday, then?" asked Paul eagerly. "Can we do as we want to?"

"Aye, lad, ye may do as ye wishes. There's t' be na work on Christmas day."

"Dan and I were wondering about it. We'll go hunting, I guess."

"We'll be startin' with daybreak," said Dan.

"Ye must na be missin' the plum duff at dinner, laddies."

"We want to get away. It is too bad to have to miss plum duff, but I guess we'll have to let it slide, unless Chuck saves some for us."

"Have na fear o' that. I'll see he saves ye a full share. Go huntin' if ye've set your hearts on goin', laddies."

They were away at daybreak. The air was still and piercing cold, driving them to a smart trot to keep their blood in circulation. Dan was an old hand on snowshoes and Paul had already become so adept in their use that he jogged along and kept the pace set by Dan with little difficulty.

They took with them their frying pan, their teakettle (a light aluminum pail) and two cups. Their provisions consisted of a small piece of fat pork, some bread, tea, salt and a bottle of black molasses—for here molasses was used to sweeten tea instead of sugar—which Chuck gave them for their dinner. Each carried a share of the equipment slung upon his back in one of their camp bags.

Paul took his shotgun, Dan the axe and Paul's rifle, for the cartridges for his own rifle were nearly gone. They had no intention of making an extended hunting trip. Their chief object was a pleasant bivouac in the forest, where they could enjoy an open fire and freedom from post restraints.

First they made for the willows that lined the river bank two miles above the post. Tammas had told them they were certain to find large flocks of ptarmigans there, feeding upon the tender tops of the bushes. This proved to be the case, and without difficulty Paul secured a half dozen of the birds with his shotgun.

Not far beyond they halted among the thick spruce trees, and made a rousing camp-fire. Then Dan with the axe built a lean-to facing the fire, while Paul broke spruce boughs with which to thatch it, and for their seat.

These preparations completed, and the ptarmigans plucked, they lounged back upon the boughs under the shelter of the lean-to, to chat about their homes, their plans, and their home-going, until time to cook dinner.

Two of the ptarmigans were fried with pork, and the bread was toasted, for variety, and it is safe to say that nowhere in the wide world was a banquet eaten that Christmas day with keener relish or greater enjoyment than this simple meal in that far-away spruce-clad wilderness.

Dinner eaten and dishes washed, Dan piled fresh wood upon the fire, and the boys spread themselves luxuriously upon the boughs to bask in the warmth. Paul lay gazing into the blaze, quite lost in thought, while Dan played his harmonica.

One of Dan's favorite tunes was "Over the Hills and Far Away." Presently he struck up the air, and immediately a melodious tenor voice, singing to the accompaniment of Dan's music, began:

*"Tom he was a piper's son,
He learned to play when he was young;*

*But all the tune that he could play,
Was 'Over the hills and far away.'"*

The boys were startled. They had heard no one approach, and they sprang to their feet.

Standing by the fire opposite them was a tall, lank man of middle age. In the hollow of his left arm a rifle rested. He was dressed as a trapper—a fur cap, buckskin capote, buckskin leggins, and moccasins. Beside him stood an Indian, similarly dressed and nearly as tall and lank as himself.

Illustration:

The boys were startled. They had heard no one approach

Chapter XV

The Trapper from Indian Lake.

The stranger laughed at the startled boys, who gazed at him and the Indian in mute surprise. Wrinkles at the corners of his gray-blue eyes indicated habitual good humor. The eyes themselves seemed always to smile, even when his lips did not.

"You were having such a good time," said he, in a rich, well-modulated voice, "that I disliked to disturb you, but it has been so long since I saw a white face that I had to do it."

"We're mighty glad you did," answered Paul, who instinctively felt that in spite of his rough exterior and dress their visitor was well bred and cultured. "Won't you sit down?" he continued. "We're just out from the post enjoying the holiday."

"Thank you, we will join you, and perhaps return to the post with you, if you don't mind." He kicked off his snowshoes, stuck them upright in the snow at the end of the lean-to, the Indian following his example. Then extending his hand to each of the boys he said, by way of introduction:

"My name is Charles Amesbury. I'm trapping back in the Indian Lake country. My friend here is Ahmik, though you will hear them call him John Buck at the post."

"My name is Paul Densmore."

"Mine's Dan'l Rudd."

"How do?" said the Indian, following his companion's example and shaking hands.

"You seem to be having a cozy time here," remarked Amesbury, picking the ice from his beard as rapidly as the heat from the fire loosened it sufficiently.

"We're having a bully good day. We were getting homesick over at the post, and ran over for the holiday."

Dan had gone to the river for a kettle of water, and returning put it over the fire.

"We'll be boilin' th' kettle, an' you'll have a snack o' pa'tridge along with a cup o' tea," he suggested.

"Thank you. Don't mind if we do, eh Ahmik?" And Amesbury contentedly stretched his long legs, which seemed very much in the way.

"Ugh. Good," remarked Ahmik, who was sitting on his heels.

Four of the ptarmigans, as well as some of the pork and bread, remained, and while the water was heating Dan sliced pork in the frying pan, while Paul dismembered the birds, ready for Dan to arrange them in the pan to fry when the pork grease began to bubble. Amesbury, lazily looking on, began to sing:

*"Their wings are cut and they cannot fly,
Cannot fly, cannot fly;
Their wings are cut and they cannot fly,
On Christmas day in the morning."*

The boys laughed, and Paul remarked:

"They can't fly very far. We clipped their wings on the way out."

"When did you come from New York, Densmore?"

"Left there last July. How did you know I came from New York?"

"You have the accent, and a New Yorker handles his r's pretty much as a Londoner handles his h's; he tacks them on where they don't belong, and leaves them off where they do. I'm a New Yorker myself, though you'd never suspect it. I outgrew the accent long ago. I haven't been there for—let me see—more than twenty years—how time flies!"

"From New York!" Paul's face lighted up with pleasure. "But I thought you said you were a trapper?"

"So I am. I came to this country when I left home, twenty years ago, and I've been here ever since."

"And never been home since! How could you stay away from home for twenty years? And New York too? It seems to me I've been away for ages, and it's only half a year. You bet I'll go back the first chance."

Amesbury's face became grave for an instant.

"It's too long a story—the story of my coming. I'll tell you about it, perhaps, some time when I'm not so hungry," and he smiled. "But how about you? What brought you?"

He listened with manifest interest while Paul related the happenings of the weeks just past, and until Dan finally set the pan of fried ptarmigan between the visitors, interrupting with:

"Tea's ready, sir. Help yourselves t' th' pa'tridges an' bread."

And while Dan poured the tea and the two men stirred in molasses from the bottle, Amesbury hummed irrelevantly:

*"Heigh ding-a-ding, what shall I sing?
How many holes has a skimmer?
Four and twenty. I'm half starving!
Mother, pray give me some dinner."*

Then, as he took a piece of breast from the pan:

“Well, Densmore, the rest of the story. Don’t mind the interruption. It was important. But so is your story. I’m immensely interested.”

The story and dinner were finished together. Amesbury made no comment at once, then while he cut tobacco from a black plug, and stuffed it into his pipe, he repeated:

*“O, that I was where I would be,
Then would I be where I am not!
But where I am I must be,
And where I would be I cannot.”*

“That reference is to you chaps. I wouldn’t be anywhere else if I could, and I wouldn’t have missed this good Christmas dinner and meeting you fellows right here for worlds.”

Reaching for a hot coal he applied it to his pipe, and the pipe lighted he resumed his reclining position, puffing quietly for a moment, when he remarked:

“Old Davy MacTavish is as hard as they make ’em. The company is all there is in the world for him that’s worth while. He’d cut a man’s soul out and throw it to the dogs, if the company would profit by his doing so. Thank God, the factors aren’t all like him.”

“Bad man,” remarked Ahmik, puffing at his pipe.

Amesbury lapsed into silence, while he smoked and gazed at the fire, apparently in deep reflection. Presently, as though a brilliant thought had occurred to him, he exclaimed enthusiastically:

“I have it! How would you chaps like to leave the post and go up Indian Lake way with me trapping for the winter? I go out to Winnipeg in the spring with my catch, and you might go along, if the wolves don’t eat you up in the meantime, or you don’t freeze to death.”

“Could we? Could we go with you?” asked Paul excitedly.

“T would be wonderful fine!” exclaimed Dan.

“No reason why you can’t. I’m up there all alone, and I need a couple of chaps like you to use for dumb-bells, or to kick around when I want exercise, or suffer from *ennui*.”

“We’ll be wonderful glad o’ th’ chance t’ go with you,” said Dan, “and t’ be doin’ things t’ help when you’s sick an’ sufferin’, but I’s not likin’ t’ be kicked, sir. Is ‘ownwe’ a bad ailment, sir?”

“Pretty bad sometimes, but I’ll try and control myself and not kick you *very* hard,” explained Amesbury, looking very grave about his lips but with eyes betraying merriment.

“Oh, Dan,” exclaimed Paul, laughing outright, “ennui isn’t a sickness. Mr. Amesbury is just joking.”

Dan did not understand the joke, but he smiled uncertainly, nevertheless.

“We’ll hit the trail, then, the day after New Year’s. How’ll that suit you?” asked Amesbury.

“Can’t go too soon to suit us,” said Paul.

“Now I’m thinkin’,” suggested Dan, “th’ master’ll not be lettin’ us leave th’ post. I were so glad t’ be goin’ I forgets we has a debt an’ we signed papers t’ work un out, an’ he’ll sure not let us go till we works un out.”

“That’s so,” admitted Paul in a tone of deep disappointment.

“How much did you say the debt amounted to?” asked Amesbury.

“Eighteen dollars for each of us,” answered Paul, “but we’ve been here working two months with wages, and that takes off six dollars from each debt, so the first of the month our debts’ll each be down to twelve dollars.”

“Good arithmetic; worked it out right the first time,” Amesbury nodded in approval. “Now if you each pay the old pirate twelve dollars, how much will you owe him and how long can he hold you at the post?”

“Why the debt would be squared and he couldn’t keep us at all.”

“Right again.”

“But we has no money to pay un,” broke in Dan.

“Just leave all that to me,” counseled Amesbury. “I’ll attend to his case.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Amesbury,” and Paul grasped the trapper’s hand.

“’Tis wonderful kind of you,” said Dan.

“Don’t waste your words thanking me,” cautioned Amesbury. “Wait till I get you out in the bush. I’ll get my money’s worth out of you chaps.”

*“See-saw, Margery Daw,
Johnnie shall have a new master;
He shall have but a penny a day,
Because he can’t work any faster.”*

He stretched his long arms, yawned, untangled his ungainly legs from the knot into which he had twisted them, and rose to his feet, remarking:

“Do you see where the sun is, fellows? It’s time to be going. You can lash these traps of yours on the top of my flat sled. Ahmik and I left our flat sleds just below here.”

“My criky!” exclaimed Paul. “The sun’s setting. I didn’t realize it was so late.”

In accordance with Amesbury’s suggestion all of their things, save their guns, were lashed on one of the long, narrow toboggans upon which he and Ahmik hauled their provisions and camp outfit, and the four turned toward the post, in single file, Paul and Dan highly elated with the prospect of presently turning homeward.

Chapter XVI

Released from Bondage.

Tammas, Samuel, and Amos, who had spent the day caribou hunting, but had killed nothing, were gathered around the stove engaged in a heated argument as to

whether a caribou would or would not charge a man when at close quarters, when Paul and Dan entered with the visitors.

"Weel! Weel!" exclaimed Tammas, rising. "If 'tis no Charley Amesbury and John Buck wi' the laddies!"

Amesbury and Ahmik were old visitors at the post. Every one knew them and gave them a most hearty welcome. Even Chuck, who was mixing biscuit for supper, wiped his dough-debauded right hand upon his trousers, that he might offer it to the visitors, and Jerry, who lived with his family in a little nearby cabin, and had seen them pass, came over to greet them.

Amesbury warned the lads to say nothing of their plan to the post folk. "I'll break the news gently to Davy MacTavish when the time is ripe for it," said he. "You fellows keep right at your work as though you were to stay here forever." And therefore no mention was made of the arrangement to Tammas and the others.

During the days that followed Amesbury and Ahmik made some purchases at the post shop, including the provisions necessary for the return journey to their trapping grounds. They had no debt here, and therefore bartered pelts to pay for their purchases. Their trading completed, Amesbury produced two particularly fine marten skins, and laid them upon the counter. "I've got everything I need," said he, "but I don't want to carry these back with me. How much'll you give?"

"Trade or cash?" asked MacTavish, examining them critically.

"Trade. Give me credit for 'em. I may want something more before I go."

"Ten dollars each."

"Not this time. They're prime, and they're worth forty dollars apiece in Winnipeg."

"This isn't Winnipeg."

"Give them back. They're light to pack, and I guess I'll take them to Winnipeg."

But MacTavish was gloating over them. They were glossy black, remarkably well furred, the flesh side clean and white.

"They are pretty fair martens," he said finally, as though weighing the matter. "I may do a little better; say fifteen dollars."

"I'll take them to Winnipeg."

"You can't get Winnipeg prices here."

"No, but I don't have to sell them here. I thought if you'd give me half what they're worth I'd let you have them. You can keep them for twenty dollars each. Not a cent less."

"Can't do it, but I'll say as a special favor to you eighteen dollars."

"Hand them back. I'm not an Indian."

"You know I'd not give an Indian over five dollars."

"I know that, but I don't ask for a debt. You see I'm pretty free to do as I please. Hand 'em back."

But the pelts were too good for MacTavish to let pass him, and after a show of hesitancy he placed them upon the shelf behind him and said reluctantly:

"They're not worth it, but I'll allow you twenty dollars each for them. But it's a very special favor."

"Needn't if you don't want them. I wouldn't bankrupt the company for the world."

"I'll take them."

The bargain concluded, Amesbury strolled away, humming:

*“A diller, a dollar,
A ten o’clock scholar,
What makes you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o’clock,
But now you come at noon,”*

and MacTavish glared after him.

It was a busy week at the post. Day after day picturesque Indians came in, hauling long, narrow toboggans, pitching their tepees near by, and crowding the shop during daylight hours bartering away their early catch of pelts for necessary and unnecessary things.

Paul and Dan kept steadily at their tasks. Amesbury made no further reference to the arrangement he had made with them until New Year’s eve, when he strolled over to the woodpile toward sundown, where they were hard at work, humming, as he watched them make the last cut in a stick of wood:

*“If I’d as much money as I could spend,
I never would cry ‘old chairs to mend,
Old chairs to mend, old chairs to mend;’
I never would cry ‘old chairs to mend.’”*

When they laid down the saw to place another stick on the buck, he said:

“Never mind that. You chaps come along with me, and we’ll pay our respects to Mr. MacTavish.”

“Oh, have you told him we were going? I was almost afraid you’d forgotten it!” exclaimed Paul exultantly.

“Never a word. Reserved the entertainment for an audience, and you fellows are to be the audience. Come along; he’s in his office now,” and Amesbury strode toward the office, Paul and Dan expectantly following.

MacTavish glanced up from his desk as they entered, and nodding to Amesbury, who had advanced to the center of the room, noticed Paul and Dan near the door.

“What are you fellows knocking off work at this time of day for? Get back to work, and if you want anything, come around after hours.”

“They’ve knocked off for good,” Amesbury answered for them, his eyes reflecting amusement. “They’re going trapping with me up Indian Lake way. I’m sorry to deprive you of them, but I guess I’ll have to.”

“What!” roared MacTavish, jumping to his feet. “Are you inducing those boys to desert? What does this nonsense mean?”

“Yes, they’re going. Sorry you feel so badly at losing their society, but I don’t see any way out of it.”

“Well, they’re not going.” MacTavish spoke more quietly, but with determination, glowering at Amesbury. “They have a debt here and they will stay until it is worked out. They’ve signed articles to remain here until the debt is worked out, and I will hold them under the articles. You fellows go back to your work.”

“We’re not going to work for you any more,” said Paul, his anger rising. “Mr. Amesbury has told you we’re going with him, and we are.”

“Go back to your work, I say, or I’ll have you flogged!” MacTavish was now in a rage, and he made for the lads as though to strike them, only to find the ungainly figure of Amesbury in the way.

“Tut! Tut! Big Jack Blunderbuss trying to strike the little Tiddledewinks! Fine display of courage! But not this time. No pugilistic encounters with any one but me while I’m around, and my hands have an awful itch to get busy.”

“None of your interference in the affairs of this post!” bellowed MacTavish. “You’re breeding mutiny here, and I’ve a mind to run you off the reservation.”

“Hey diddle diddle,” broke in Amesbury, who had not for a moment lost his temper, and who fairly oozed good humor. “This isn’t seemly in a man in your position, MacTavish. Now let’s be reasonable. Sit down and talk the matter over.”

“There’s nothing to talk over with you!” shouted MacTavish, who nevertheless resumed his seat.

“Well, now, we’ll see.” Amesbury drew a chair up, sat down in front of MacTavish, and leaning forward assumed a confidential attitude. “In the first place,” he began, “the lads owe a debt, you say, and you demand that it be paid.”

“They can’t leave here until it is paid! They can’t leave anyhow!” still in a loud voice.

“No, no; of course not. That’s what we’ve got to talk about. I’ll pay the debt. Now, how much is it?”

“That won’t settle it. They both signed on here for at least six months, at three dollars a month, and they’ve got to stay the six months.”

“Now you know, MacTavish, they are both minors and under the law they are not qualified to make such a contract with you. Even were they of age, there isn’t a court within the British Empire but would adjudge such a contract unconscionable, and throw it out upon the ground that it was signed under duress. You couldn’t hire Indians to do the work these lads have done under twelve dollars a month. In all justice you owe them a balance, for they’ve more than worked out their debt.”

“I’m the court here, and I’m the judge, and I’m going to keep these fellows right here.”

“Wrong in this case. There’s no law or court here except the law and the court of the strong arm. Now I’ve unanimously elected myself judge, jury and sheriff to deal with this matter. In these various capacities I’ve decided their debt is paid and they’re going with me. As their friend and your friend, however, I’ve suggested for the sake of good feeling that they pay the balance you claim is due you under the void agreement, and I offer to make settlement in full now. I believe you claim twelve dollars due from each—twenty-four dollars in all?”

It was plain that Amesbury had determined to carry out the plan detailed, with or without the factor’s consent, and finally MacTavish agreed to release Paul and Dan, and charge the twenty-four dollars which he claimed still due on their debt against the forty dollars credited to Amesbury for the two marten skins. He declared, however, that had he known Amesbury’s intention he would not have accepted a pelt from him, nor would he have sold Amesbury the provisions necessary to support him and the lads on their journey to Indian Lake.

“You can never trade another shilling’s worth at this post,” announced MacTavish as the three turned to the door, “not another shilling’s worth.”

“Now, now, MacTavish,” said Amesbury, smiling, “you know better. I’ve a credit here that I’ll come back to trade out, and I’ll have some nice pelts that you’ll be glad enough to take from me.”

“Not a shilling’s worth,” repeated the factor, whose anger was not appeased when he heard Amesbury humming, as he passed out of the door:

*“A diller, a dollar, a ten o’clock scholar,
What made you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o’clock,
But now you come at noon.”*

It was to be expected that MacTavish would refuse them shelter for the night, but he made no reference to it, probably because in his anger he forgot to do so, and the following morning, when his wrath had cooled, he astonished Paul and Dan when he met them with, for him, a very cheery greeting.

On New Year’s morning Amesbury and Ahmik visited the Indian encampment, and with little difficulty secured from their Indian friends two light toboggans for Paul and Dan to use in the transportation of their equipment.

The day was spent in taking part in snowshoe obstacle races, rifle matches, and many contests with the Indian visitors, and the evening in final preparations for departure. In early morning, before the bell called the post folk to their daily task, they passed out of the men’s house for the last time. Tammas, Amos and Samuel were sorry to lose their young friends and assistants, but glad of their good fortune.

“I’ll be missin’ ye, laddies. God bless ye,” said Tammas.

“Aye, God bless ye,” repeated Samuel.

“Hi ’opes you’ll ’ave a pleasant trip. Tyke care of yourselves,” was Amos’s hearty farewell.

They turned their faces toward the vast dark wilderness to the westward, redolent with mystery and fresh adventure. Presently the flickering lights of the post, which a few weeks before they had hailed so joyously, were lost to view.

Chapter XVII

The Snowshoe Journey to Indian Lake.

There was yet no hint of dawn. Moon and stars shone cold and white out of a cold, steel-blue sky. The moisture of the frozen atmosphere, shimmering particles of frost, hung suspended in space. The snow crunched and creaked under their swiftly moving snowshoes.

They traveled in single file, after the fashion of the woods. Amesbury led, then followed Ahmik, after him Paul, with Dan bringing up the rear. Each hauled a

toboggan, and though Paul's and Dan's were much less heavily laden than Amesbury's and Ahmik's, the lads had difficulty in keeping pace with the long, swinging half-trot of the trapper and Indian.

Presently they entered the spruce forest of a river valley, dead and cold, haunted by weird shadows, flitting ghostlike hither and thither across ghastly white patches of moonlit snow. Now and again a sharp report, like a pistol shot, startled them. It was the action of frost upon the trees, a sure indication of extremely low temperature.

Dawn at length began to break—slowly—slowly—dispersing the grotesque and ghostlike shadows. As dawn melted into day, the real took the place of the unreal, and the frigid white wilderness that had engulfed them presented its true face to the adventurous travelers.

Scarce a word was spoken as they trudged on. Amesbury and Ahmik kept the silence born of long life in the wilderness where men exist by pitting human skill against animal instinct, and learn from the wild creatures they stalk the lesson of necessary silence and acute listening. Dan, too, in his hunting experiences with his father, had learned to some degree the same lesson, and Paul had small inclination to talk, for he needed all his breath to hold the rapid pace.

Rime had settled upon their clothing, and dawn revealed them white as the snow over which they passed. The moisture from their eyes froze upon their eyelashes, and now and again it was found necessary to pick it off, painfully, as they walked.

The sun was two hours high when Amesbury and Ahmik suddenly halted, and when Paul and Dan, who had fallen considerably in the rear, overtook them, Ahmik was cutting wood, while Amesbury, lighting a fire, was singing:

*“Polly put the kettle on,
Polly put the kettle on,
Polly put the kettle on,
And let's drink tea.”*

“How are you standing it, fellows?” he asked, looking up.

“Not bad, sir,” answered Dan.

“I'm about tuckered out, and as empty as a drum!” exclaimed Paul.

“Pretty hard pull for raw recruits,” said Amesbury, laughing. “But wait till tomorrow! Cheer up! The worst is yet to come.”

“I hope it won't be any harder than this,” and Paul sat wearily down upon his toboggan.

“No,” encouraged Amesbury, “better snowshoeing, if anything. But there's the wear and tear. You'll have a hint of it tonight, and know all about it tomorrow.”

“I finds th' snowshoein' not so bad today,” said Dan, “but I'm thinkin' now I knows what you means. I had un bad last year when I goes out wi' Dad. 'T were wonderful bad, too. I were findin' it wonderful hard t' walk with th' stiffness all over me when I first starts in th' mornin', but th' stiffness wears off after a bit, an' I'm not mindin' un after.”

“That's it. You're on,” laughed Amesbury, as he chipped some ice from a frozen brook to fill the kettle for tea.

“Very hard, you find him,” broke in Ahmik, joining in Amesbury’s laugh. “You get use to him quick. Walk easy like Mr. Amesbury and me soon. No hard when use to him.”

Ahmik was growing more talkative upon acquaintance, and drawing out of the natural reticence of his race with strangers, as is the way of Indians when they learn to know and like one.

It was a hard afternoon for Paul, and he had to summon all his grit and fortitude to keep going without complaint until the night halt was finally made, but he did his share of the camp work, nevertheless, with a will, and when the tent was pitched and wood cut he sat down more weary than he had ever been in his life.

Amesbury and Ahmik traveled in true Indian fashion when Indians make flying trips without their families. They had neither tent nor tent stove to protect them. The experienced woodsman can protect himself, even in sub-Arctic regions, from the severest storm and cold, so long as he has an axe. Sometimes he resorts to temporary shelters, with fires, sometimes to burrows in snowdrifts, or to such other methods as the particular conditions which he has to face suggest or demand.

Paul and Dan, however, had their tent, tent stove and other paraphernalia. The tent they pitched upon the snow, stretching it, by means of the ridge rope, between two convenient trees. When it was finally in place Dan banked snow well up upon all sides save the opening used for an entrance.

While Dan was thus engaged Paul broke spruce boughs for a floor covering and bed, Ahmik cut wood for the stove, and Amesbury unpacked the outfit and set the stove in place upon two green log butts three feet long and six inches thick. This he did that the stove might not sink into the snow when a fire was lighted and the snow under the stove began to melt.

The telescope pipe in place, Amesbury put a handful of birch bark in the stove, broke some small, dry twigs upon it, lighted the bark, as it blazed filled the stove with some of Ahmik’s neatly split wood, and in five minutes the interior of the tent was comfortably warm.

Paul spread the tarpaulin upon the boughs which he had arranged, stowed their camp things neatly around the edge of the interior, and night camp was ready. Though rather crowded, the tent offered sufficient accommodation for the four.

A candle was lighted, and Amesbury installed himself as cook. A kettle of ice was placed upon the stove to melt and boil for tea. A frying pan filled with thick slices of salt pork was presently sizzling on the stove. Then he added some salt and baking powder to a pan of flour, mixed them thoroughly, and poured enough water from the kettle of melting ice to make a dough.

The pork, which had now cooked sufficiently, was taken from the pan and placed upon a tin dish, and the dough, stretched into thin cakes large enough to fill the circumference of the pan, was fried, one at a time, in the bubbling pork grease that remained. In the meantime tea had been made.

“All ready. Fall to,” announced Amesbury.

“I feels I’m ready for un,” said Dan.

“I can eat two meals,” declared Paul.

"I'm interested to see what the day's work did for you chaps. Now if you can't eat, Ahmik and I will feel that we didn't walk you fast enough today, and we'll have to do better tomorrow, eh, Ahmik?" Amesbury's eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Ugh! Big walk tomorrow. Very far. Very fast," and Ahmik grinned.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Paul. "If we have to walk any farther or faster tomorrow than we did today, I'll just collapse. I'm so stiff now I can hardly move."

"That's always the case for a day or two when a fellow starts out for the first time on snowshoes and does a full day's work. It won't last long, but we'll take it a little slower tomorrow, to let you get hardened to it," Amesbury consoled.

When they stopped to boil the kettle the following day Paul was scarcely able to lift his feet from the snow. Sharp pains in the calves of his legs and in his hips and groins were excruciating, and he sat down upon his toboggan very thankful for the opportunity to rest.

"How is it? Pretty tired?" asked Amesbury, good-naturedly.

"A little stiff—and tired," answered Paul, whose pride would not permit him to admit how hard it was for him to keep up.

"We'll take a little easier gait this afternoon. I didn't realize we were hitting it off so hard as we were this morning."

"Thank you." Paul wished to say "Don't go slow on my account," but he realized how utterly impossible it would be for him to keep the more rapid pace.

When luncheon was disposed of and they again fell into line, the pain was so intense that he could scarcely restrain from crying out. But he kept going, and saying to himself:

"I won't be a quitter. I *won't* be a quitter." He began to lag wofully, however, in spite of his determination and grit, and the slower pace which Amesbury had set. Thus they traveled silently on for nearly an hour, when all at once Amesbury stopped, held up his hand as a signal to the others to halt and remain quiet. Dropping his toboggan rope he stole stealthily forward and was quickly lost to view.

Presently a rifle shot rang out, and immediately another. A moment later Amesbury strode back for his toboggan, where the others were awaiting him, humming as he came:

*"His body will make a nice little stew,
And his giblets will make me a little pie, too."*

"Come along, fellows," he called. "Two caribou the reward of vigilance. We'll skin 'em."

Just within the woods, at the edge of an open, wind-swept marsh, they left their toboggans, and a hundred yards beyond lay the carcasses of the two caribou Amesbury had killed.

"There was a band of a dozen," he explained, as they walked out to the game. "I thought we could use about two of them very nicely."

"Good!" remarked Ahmik, drawing his knife to begin the process of skinning at once.

"I'll tell you what," said Amesbury, "unless you chaps would like to help here, suppose you pitch the tent. We'll not go any farther today."

"That's bully!" exclaimed Paul, who had been at the point of declaring his inability to walk another mile.

"Everything's bully," declared Amesbury, "and fresh meat just now is the bulliest thing could have come our way. All right, fellows; you get camp going. You'd find skinning pretty hard work in this weather, but Ahmik and I don't mind it."

"My, but I'm glad we don't have to go any farther today," said Paul when he and Dan returned to make camp. "I'm just done for. I can hardly move my feet."

"Does un pain much?" asked Dan, sympathetically.

"You bet it does," and Paul winced.

"Where is un hurtin' most now?"

"Here, and here," indicating his hips, groins and calves.

"Lift un feet—higher."

"Oh! Ouch!"

"Why weren't you sayin' so, now? 'Tis sure th' snowshoe ailment, an' not just stiffness. Mr. Amesbury'd not be goin' on, an' you havin' that."

"I thought it was just stiffness, and would wear off if I kept going. Besides, I didn't want to be a baby and complain."

"'Tis no stiffness. 'Tis th' snowshoe ailment, an' 'twould get worse, an' no better, with travelin'. 'Tis wonderful troublesome sometimes. Dad says if you gets un, stop an' camp where you is, an' bide there till she gets better. 'Tis th' only way there is, Dad says, t' cure un."

"I never heard of it before."

"Now I'll be pitchin' th' tent, an' you sits on th' flat-sled an' keeps still."

"Oh, I'd freeze if I sat down. I'd rather help."

They had just got the tent up and a roaring fire in the stove when Amesbury and Ahmik came for toboggans upon which to haul the meat to camp.

"I'm thinkin'," said Dan, "we'll have t' be bidin' here a bit. Paul's havin' th' snowshoe ailment bad."

"What's the trouble, Paul?" asked Amesbury.

Paul explained.

"Why, you're suffering from *mal de raquet*. Dan's right; we must stay here till you're better—a day or two will fix that. Mustn't try to travel with *mal de raquet*. It's a mighty uncomfortable companion."

At the end of two days, however, Paul was in fairly good condition again, and the journey was resumed without further interruption, save twice they were compelled by storms to remain a day in camp.

Two weeks had elapsed since leaving the post when finally, late one afternoon, Amesbury shouted back to the lads:

"Come along, fellows. We're here at last."

Ahmik had stopped and was shoveling snow with one of his snowshoes from the door of a low log cabin, half covered with drifts. It was situated in the center of a small clearing among the fir trees which looked out upon the white frozen expanse of South Indian Lake.

"This is our castle," Amesbury announced as Paul and Dan joined him. "Here we're to live in luxurious comfort. That's the southern extremity of Indian Lake. What do you think of it?"

"'Tis a wonderful fine place t' live in if th' trappin's good," said Dan.

"It looks mighty good to me. What a dandy place it must be in summer!" Paul exclaimed.

Ahmik now had the door cleared and they entered. The cabin contained a single square room. At one side was a flat-topped sheet-iron stove, similar in design to the tent stove commonly in use in the north, but of considerably larger proportions and heavier material. Near it was a rough table, in the end opposite the door stood a rough-hewn bedstead, the bed neatly made up with white spread and pillow cases. A shelf of well-thumbed books—*the Bible, Shakespeare, Thomas à Kempis, Milton's Paradise Lost, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Wordsworth's Poems, Robinson Crusoe, Mother Goose's Melodies, Aesop's Fables, David Copperfield*, and some random novels and volumes of travel and adventure. On one end of a second table, evidently used as a writing desk, were neatly piled old magazines and newspapers, on the other end lay some sheet music and a violin, and in the center were writing materials.

The chairs, like all of the furniture, were doubtless the handiwork of Amesbury himself. Everything in the room was spotlessly clean and in order. The setting sun sent a shaft of sunlight through a window, giving the room an air of brightness, and enhancing its atmosphere of homely comfort.

When the fire which Amesbury lighted in the stove began to crackle, he asked:

"Well, fellows, how do you like my den? Think you can be comfortable here for three or four months?"

"'Tis grand, sir," said Dan.

"Mr. Amesbury, it's splendid!" declared Paul.

Both lads had been long enough from home, and had endured sufficient buffeting of the wilderness to measure by contrast with their recent experiences the attractions of Amesbury's cabin, and it appealed to them as little short of luxurious.

"Not splendid, but good enough for a trapper. Hang up your things; you'll find pegs. Make yourselves at home now. Sit down and rest up. Ahmik will take care of the stuff outside," and as Amesbury went about the preparation of supper he sang:

*"There was an old woman, and what do you think?
She lived upon nothing but victuals and drink:
Victuals and drink were the chief of her diet;
This tiresome old woman could never be quiet."*

Luscious caribou steaks were soon frying, biscuits were baking, and presently the delicious odor of coffee filled the room.

"I always keep coffee here," explained Amesbury. "Rather have it than tea, but it's too bulky to carry when I'm hitting the trail."

"It's the first smell of coffee I've had since we left the ship, and oh, but it smells bully to me!" said Paul.

Candles were lighted, a snowy white cloth spread on the table. When at length they sat down to eat, Amesbury, with bowed head, asked grace.

"Tis good," remarked Dan, accepting a liberal piece of caribou meat, "t' hear un say grace. Dad always says un."

"I neglect it when I'm on the trail," said Amesbury. "My father was a preacher. He always said grace at home, and it's second nature to me to do it when I sit at a table. Part of eating. We mustn't forget, you know, that we owe what we have to a higher Power, and we shouldn't forget to give thanks."

"That's what Dad would be sayin', now." Dan had admired Amesbury before, but this comparison of him with his father was the highest compliment he could have paid him, and indicated the highest regard for his friend.

"I'll tell you, chaps, my theory of the way the Lord gives us our blessings. He gives us eyes and hands and feet, and best of all He gives us brains with which to reason things out. Then He provides the land with all its products, the birds and animals and forests. He gives us the sea with its products, too. He intends that we use our brains in devising methods of applying the products of earth and sea to our needs, and to use our hands and feet and eyes to carry out what our brain tells us how to do. If I hadn't used my eyes and hands and feet the Lord never would have put this venison on the table."

"That's just what Dad says," agreed Dan. "He says they ain't no use prayin' for things when they's a way t' get un yourself."

"Your dad's right. If you chaps had just spent your time praying when you went adrift on that ice pan, you'd be at the bottom of Hudson Bay now. Yes, your dad's right. Thank the Lord for the things that come your way, but get up and hustle first, or they won't come your way. Use your brains and your hands. That's the thing to do."

Supper finished, Amesbury and Ahmik cut tobacco from black plugs, filled their pipes; Amesbury whittled some long shavings from a stick of dry wood, lighted an end of a shaving by pushing it through the stove vent, and applied it to his pipe; Ahmik followed his example, and then turned his attention to washing dishes.

Puffing contentedly at his pipe, Amesbury lifted the violin from its case, settled himself before the stove and began tuning the instrument.

"I likes t' hear fiddlin' wonderful well," remarked Dan.

"That's good, for I'm going to fiddle. Do you like it, too, Densmore?"

"I'm very fond of music."

"Then, no one objecting, I'll begin."

Amesbury began playing very softly. Dan sat in open-mouthed wonder, eyes wide, and scarcely breathing. Paul was enthralled. It was a master hand that held the bow. The player himself seemed quite unconscious of his listeners and surroundings. The wrinkles smoothed out of the corners of his eyes, the alert twinkle left the eyes and a soft, dreamy expression came into them, as though they beheld some beautiful vision. He seemed transfigured as Paul looked at him. Another being had taken the place of the ungainly, rough-clad trapper.

For a full hour he played. Then laying his violin across his knees sat silent for a little. The music had cast a spell upon them. Even Ahmik, who had seated himself near the table, had let his pipe die out.

All at once the humorous wrinkles came again into the corners of Amesbury's eyes, and the eyes began to sparkle and laugh. He arose and returned the violin to its case, humming as he did so:

*“Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle.”*

“I always like a little music after supper,” he remarked, resuming his seat.

“Oh, ’twere more than music!” exclaimed Dan. “’T were—’t were—I’m thinkin’—’t were like in heaven. ’T weren’t fiddlin’, sir. ’T were music of angels in th’ fiddle, sir.”

“That’s the best compliment I ever received,” laughed Amesbury.

“Mr. Amesbury,” asked Paul, “where did you ever learn to play like that? I heard Madagowski, the great Polish violinist that every one raved over last year. I thought it was great then, but after hearing you it seems just common.”

“You chaps will make me vain if you keep this up,” and Amesbury laughed again.

“But where did you learn?” insisted Paul. “And what ever made you turn trapper?”

Amesbury’s face grew suddenly grave, almost agonized.

“Oh, Mr. Amesbury!” Paul exclaimed, feeling instinctively that he had made a mistake in urging the question. “If I shouldn’t ask, don’t tell me! I’m sorry.”

“It’s all right, Paul,” said Amesbury, quietly. “I’ll tell you the story. It may be well for you to hear it.”

Chapter XVIII

Stalked by Wolves.

Amesbury filled his pipe, lighted it from the stove with one of the shavings he had whittled, and sat silently contemplating the streak of light which flashed through the stove vent. He seemed to Paul to have suddenly grown very old. His normally open, genial countenance was drawn and haggard, and Paul noted the streaks of gray in his brown hair and beard.

“It may do you good to hear the story,” Amesbury presently said. “I’ve never told it to any one, but it’s a pretty good warning to young fellows like you. I like you, and I hope you’ll not make the mistakes that I did.” He lapsed into silence again for a few moments, and then began:

“As I told you, my father was a minister—the gentlest, most affectionate, sympathetic man I ever knew. If there ever was a true servant of God he was one. There was never a sweeter or more devoted woman ever lived than my mother. I believe her spirit comes now of nights to kiss my forehead as I fall asleep, just as she did in those long ago days when I was a boy at home.

“She was tireless. Nothing seemed ever too great a task for her. The women of my father’s church looked upon her in a way as their counselor, and they used to come to her with their troubles, as the men came to my father; and men and women were always certain of both sympathetic and practical assistance.

"I had one sister, three years my senior, and we were chums and constant companions. We were both born with a passionate love of music, and when she was twelve and I nine years of age my father, with much stinting and scraping, purchased her a piano and me a violin.

"My violin instructor was an old German, who was to come to the Manse once a week to give me a lesson. He was a very impatient old fellow, but a good teacher, and with my interest in music I made good progress. The pleasantest memories of my life are of evenings when my mother sat sewing, and my father relaxed in his easy chair, while Helen played the piano and I accompanied her on the violin.

"My father designed me, I believe, from my birth, for the ministry. I was a good student, and at sixteen entered college. Here a new world opened to me. I had always lived in an atmosphere of religion. Perhaps I had become satiated with it. At any rate I took only too kindly to the wild life of the crowd I fell in with at college.

"For the most part the students were industrious, but there were a few, as there always are, who indulged themselves in dissipation because they thought it smart, and it was my misfortune to be drawn among these at the beginning. Perhaps the novelty, in strong contrast with my home life, attracted me. I do not know.

"At first our dissipations were of a rather mild sort, and I did pretty well during the freshman year. But during my sophomore year I got in with a still wilder crowd, and took part in several discreditable escapades. Some of my companions drank, and early in the year I for the first time in my life tasted spirituous liquors. Before college closed for the summer vacation I had twice been mildly intoxicated. Of course my parents knew nothing of this, but they did know that I had neglected my studies and was conditioned in Greek, barely passing the test in other subjects.

"The escapades of the sophomore year became orgies in the junior. I drank hard at these times, and the liquor made me wild. I'll not tell you of the carousings I took part in, nor the reprimands I received for class and other delinquencies. It came to a climax in early spring when I entered a class one day in an intoxicated condition, insulted the professor, and did some damage to the furniture.

"This ended in my dismissal from college. A full report of what had occurred preceded me home, and for the first time my parents learned of my debauchery. It was a terrible shock to them. I shall never forget their grief. If they had scolded or meted punishment it would have been different, but they did not. My mother threw her arms around my neck and cried as though her heart would break. My father, tears streaming down his cheeks, placed his hand upon my shoulder and called me his poor erring son. I promised them that I would reform. Helen talked with me and cried with me in private.

"My father's life hope that I should follow his footsteps in the ministry was crushed, and he had forever lost his former habitual cheerfulness. The change in him—I always felt it when in his presence—hurt me terribly. I resolved to atone, so far as possible, for the past.

"I took up my old home life again. I attended meetings regularly, as my father wished, and devoted myself to my violin. My old German instructor was re-engaged, and I made such good progress that in the summer when I was twenty

years of age he suggested that I go to Germany for a year, to continue my musical studies there.

“The prospect of a trip abroad filled me with enthusiasm. At first my parents objected, and particularly my mother, who was now in ill health, the result, I shall always believe, of the shock she received at the time of my expulsion from college. I plead so strongly, however, to be permitted to go, that at length both Father and Mother consented, and late in the summer I sailed.

“It was a mistake. There is much drinking among German students, and almost immediately I was drawn among the wildest drinkers and roysterers.

“During the winter my sister married a prosperous and wealthy young business man. They decided upon a brief wedding trip abroad, and planning a pleasant surprise for me said nothing of it in their letters beyond the particulars of the wedding, for during my absence it was the custom of Father and Helen to write me twice a week minute details of the home life.

“I shall never forget the morning they came. I had been out all the previous night with a party of drinking students and had returned to my apartment in a state of such beastly intoxication that I had thrown myself upon a couch, unable to undress and retire to my bed. Here I was sleeping when a loud knocking aroused me. Blear-eyed, unkempt, and smelling foul with liquor, I opened the door. There stood Helen and her husband.

“Their wedding trip was spoiled, of course. They decided to return home at once and take me with them. Helen made the excuse to our parents that I was in no physical condition to remain abroad longer. I think my father suspected something of the true cause, but he gave no hint of it, and I resumed my old life, but not with the same chastened feeling that I had experienced on the former occasion. I was becoming hardened.

“My father’s church and the manse where we lived were in upper New York, and to satisfy my desire for excitement I used frequently to take a run down town. It was on one of these occasions, a month after my return from abroad, that I met one of my former college companions. He asked me to drink with him and I accepted. One drink led to another, and when the liquor went to our heads we became hilarious and decided to make a night of it.

“In the small hours of morning we were sitting at a table in a low cafe and dance hall. Some others were at the table—people I had never met—and one of them made a remark at which I took offense. What it was I do not know. I only know that before my companion or the others at the table knew what I was about, I was on my feet and smashing a chair over the offender’s head.

“I was arrested and locked up, and the following day committed to the Tombs without bail to await the result of the injuries upon the man whom I had attacked. Then came remorse—awful, sincere remorse—for the life I had led and the hearts I had broken.

“My father, ever loving, ever sympathetic, came to console me. Again he called me his poor, erring boy, as he placed his arm around my shoulders, and tears, in spite of his effort to conceal them, wet his cheeks.

“I’ll not go into detail, or describe the agonizing weeks that followed. The man recovered. I was tried for my offense, and in view of the fact that I had never before

been called before a court of justice, was sentenced to but one year in the penitentiary.

“On the day sentence was pronounced my mother died; killed, of course, by her boy’s disgrace. When my father returned from the funeral he resigned his pastorate. He could no longer stand before his congregation, and the congregation did not wish to retain the services of a minister whose son was a jail bird. Six months later he followed my mother. All that he had loved and lived for had been taken from him.

“Well, I served my sentence, and when I was released I came here. I had but one thought—to hide myself from the world. I could not stay in New York and disgrace my sister and her husband with my presence. I was truly penitent, but I realized that the world would not believe that. My presence would ever bring up the past.

“Here in the open I have been drawn closer and closer to the God my father and mother loved and worshiped. Since that awful night I have never tasted liquor. I have tried to live in rectitude, and so far as I can to atone for the past.

“I have never written my sister, for I wished her to forget the disgrace. She never knew what became of me when I left prison. She probably thinks me dead, and I have had no means of hearing from her.

“My violin has been my constant companion. Every evening when I am here I play to Father and Mother and Helen. I always see them when I play. I always see the dear old living room at home, Father in his easy chair, Mother sewing, and Helen at her piano playing a soft accompaniment.”

No one spoke for a long time. Then Ahmik rose and refilled the stove. Amesbury drew his ungainly frame together, strode to the door and stepped out. Presently he returned singing:

*“Come, let’s to bed,
Says Sleepy-head.”*

“It’s bedtime, fellows, and I know you’re tired. I’d take one of you in with me, but my bed is pretty narrow, and I’m afraid you wouldn’t be comfortable. Sleeping bags are pretty good, though. Paul, you have one already. Here’s one for you, Dan,” and Amesbury drew a warm sleeping bag from a chest. He was his whimsical, good-natured, normal self again.

The following day was Sunday. Amesbury held religious services directly after breakfast. Then he played the violin for an hour, and they all sang some hymns, after which they chatted, cozily gathered around the stove, Paul and Dan luxuriating in the homelike atmosphere that was a part of the cabin.

“Tomorrow,” said Amesbury after dinner, “Ahmik takes to his trapping trail, and we won’t see him again in a month. He goes westward. I’ll be going, too, for awhile. My trail takes me south, along one side of a chain of lakes, and swings back along the other side. I’ll be back in a week if the weather holds good. Takes me that long to make the rounds. You chaps make yourselves at home.”

“Can’t we go along and help you?” asked Paul. “It must be mighty tedious all alone.”

“No, not this trip. Perhaps I’ll take one of you at a time on later trips. I’ll tell you what! You and Dan do a little trapping on your own account. There are a lot of

traps out here in the woodroom. Dan knows how to set them. Put them anywhere it looks good to you. I expect you to earn your board and something more, you know. I told you that before you came. I'll give you a chance to work on shares. You can use my traps and I'll board you for half your hunt. How does that suit you?"

"O, aye, 'twill be fine," said Dan. "I were thinkin', now, I'd like t' do a bit o' trappin'."

"You might get a silver fox, and go home rich. Now think of that!" and Amesbury's eyes twinkled.

"An' is they silvers here?" asked Dan.

"Sometimes. Silvers, reds, cross, whites and blues. You'll find martens in the timber. There are plenty of wolves, too—the big gray kind. You'll hear them howling nights."

"An' is they wolves, now? I'd like wonderful well t' kill some wolves." Dan's eyes sparkled.

"Not afraid of 'em, eh?" Amesbury laughed.

"They mostly keeps too far away. They's cowards, wolves is."

"Sometimes, but look out for packs."

"Are there any bears?" asked Paul.

"Bears? Yes, there are bears, but you won't see any. They're all in their dens and won't come out till spring."

Long before dawn on Monday morning the boys were awakened from sound slumber by Amesbury singing, in full, melodious tones:

*"Awake, arise, pull out your eyes,
And hear what time of day;
And when you have done,
Pull out your tongue,
And see what you can say."*

Amesbury was cooking breakfast by candlelight, and the room was filled with the odor of coffee and frying venison steak. Ahmik was getting his things ready, preparatory to leaving. The boys crawled drowsily from their sleeping bags.

"Good morning, fellows," called Amesbury cheerily. "Too bad to get you out so early, but Ahmik and I'll have to be going. Wash up; breakfast's ready."

"We'll miss you terribly," said Paul. "It's going to be pretty lonely when you're gone."

"It'll be good to know I'm missed," Amesbury laughed. Then more soberly: "I tell you it's good to have you chaps here. I'll look forward every day I'm gone to getting back. When I'm alone I never care much whether I'm here or somewhere else. But now I've the pleasant anticipation before me of coming home to a jolly good day or two each week with you fellows. Your coming here means a lot to me."

"You're mighty good to say so. It was so splendid of you to bring us from the post!" declared Paul.

"You've got to earn your way, you know, and if you work hard you'll earn a little money besides."

With the first hint of gray dawn Amesbury and Ahmik donned their snowshoes, said adieu, and, each hauling his flat-sled, were quickly swallowed by the black shadows of the forest.

It was a marvelously beautiful day. The rising sun set the frost-clad trees and snow sparkling and scintillating, the atmosphere was clear and transparent, and it was altogether too entrancing out of doors for the lads to forego an excursion. They had become well inured to the severe cold, growing more intense with the lengthening January days, and shrank from it not at all.

"Let's begin our trapping today," Paul suggested. "It's just too great to stick inside."

"Now I were thinkin' that," said Dan. "We might be settin' some traps, an' get our trails begun."

"All right; that's bully!" Paul exclaimed enthusiastically. "I never did any trapping, and I'd like to learn how."

They selected a dozen traps each, and cut some bits of venison to bait them with. Dan carried one of Amesbury's axes and Paul's shotgun, explaining: "We might be seein' some birds, now," but Paul, with his own light axe and his share of traps, decided his rifle would be too heavy to carry.

Half a mile from the cabin, in a creek valley, Dan stopped, and pointing to tracks in the snow, explained:

"Them's marten tracks, an' I'm thinkin' we'll set a trap here."

He accordingly selected a spruce tree about four inches in diameter, cut it off four feet above the snow, and in the top of the stump made a V-shaped notch. He then trimmed all the branches, except the brush at the top, from the tree, and with the brush end lying in the snow, laid the butt end firmly in the notch cut in the top of the stump, with the butt projecting, probably, four feet beyond the stump. With his axe he now split the butt of the tree, and prying it open inserted a piece of the venison they had brought for bait. Just back of the bait, and on top of the tree trunk, he fastened and set a trap.

"There," remarked Dan, "I finds that a rare easy way t' set marten traps, an' a good un, too. Th' marten walks up th' tree t' get th' bait, an' right in th' trap."

"I can do that all right," said Paul.

"Oh, yes, you can do un. 'Tis easy, now you knows how. I'm thinkin' you might be workin' up this brook, an' set th' traps you has, an' I cuts over t' th' west'ard an' finds another place t' set mine."

"All right," assented Paul, "and then we'll each have our own traps to look after. It's going to be great sport, Dan."

"T will be fine t' blaze trees high up where you sets traps, t' mark th' traps," cautioned Dan. "When you gets through now, don't be waitin' for me. I'll make back t' th' cabin."

Accordingly they parted. Dan, turning to the right, disappeared, and Paul, passing up the valley, was presently deeply engrossed in his work. Once he fancied he heard something behind him, but there was nothing to be seen when he turned to look, and concluding he had imagined it he dismissed it from his mind and continued his work.

His last trap was set late in the afternoon, and, very hungry, he turned toward the cabin. A little way down the trail he again had the sensation that some

creature was stealthily following him, but still there was nothing visible. This feeling clung to him now, and presently made him so nervous that he increased his pace to a trot.

He was still a full mile from the cabin when, again glancing behind, he discovered two great, skulking animals a hundred yards in his rear. "Husky dogs!" he said aloud, and felt momentary relief from his anxiety. Then like a flash he realized that they were not dogs at all, but big, savage gray wolves. A cold chill ran up Paul's back. He had no arms save his axe. The wolves had stopped. They were sitting upon their haunches, eyeing him hungrily.

Chapter XIX

On the Fur Trails.

Paul and the wolves watched each other for a full minute. When Paul's first terror left him somewhat, and when he remembered what Dan had so often said: "They ain't no beast to be skeered of in this country," and again: "Wolves is big cowards unless they's in packs," he regained his self composure somewhat. Here were two, to be sure, but two could hardly be designated as a pack.

He also remembered that he had heard that a loud scream would sometimes frighten savage animals, and gathering his energies for it, he took a step toward the wolves, at the same instant opening his lungs in one wild, vociferous yell. The wolves, however, were not to be frightened so easily. They sat with their tongues lolling, and if an animal's countenance can display amused wonder, theirs certainly did.

Paul, with a renewal of his fear, resumed his trail home. He wished to run, but Amesbury had told a story of having been followed by three or four once, when he was unarmed, and had stated that the fact that he had not increased his pace, and had given the animals no evidence of fear, had prevented them from attacking him. "An animal knows when you're frightened," explained Amesbury. "Let him feel that you're in fear of him, and he'll attack. If you're ever followed, keep an even, unhurried gait, and they'll be shy of you. But start to run and the beast will do the same, and overtake you every time."

So Paul kept as even a pace as he could maintain under the circumstances. Now and again he glanced back. The wolves were following. For a little way they seemed not to be lessening the distance between him and them. At length, however, he discovered that they were coming closer and closer—very gradually, but still gaining upon him. Once or twice he stopped and they stopped, but when he started forward so did they.

When Paul made the second halt he noted with alarm that the wolves had shortened the distance between him and them, since he had first discovered them, by half. He knew then without a doubt that they had marked him for their prey.

He had not yet reached the point where Dan had parted from him in the morning. It was all he could do to restrain himself from breaking into a run, but this he was satisfied would prove immediately fatal.

At length the wolves were less than a hundred feet from his heels, and when he reached the branching of his own and Dan's trails they were less than fifty feet away. He realized now that they were preparing for the attack. He could not hope to reach the cabin.

He halted before a clump of thick willow brush that grew along the stream, and faced about. The wolves stopped, sat on their haunches as before, their red tongues hanging from their mouths. He could see the fierce gleam of their eyes now.

He resolved to try again to frighten them, and again he gave a wild yell, stepping a pace toward them. They drew in their tongues and snarled, showing their wicked fangs. He who has seen the snarl of a wolf will understand Paul's sensations. There was no doubt now of their intentions.

Paul was afraid to turn his back upon them. He felt the moment he did so they would spring. The cabin was still a half mile away. He waited, his axe grasped in both hands, prepared to strike.

This position was held for ten minutes, though it seemed an hour to Paul. Presently the animals took to their feet, and gradually edged in, snarling now in savage malevolence. One at last made a spring. Paul saw the preparatory move, swung his axe with all his strength, caught the beast square on the head, and it fell lifeless at his feet. At the same instant a rifle shot rang out, and the other wolf rolled over, also dead.

With the severe nervous strain and excitement ended, Paul nearly collapsed, but a shout from Dan brought him to his senses.

"Is you hurt, Paul? Is you hurt?" Dan asked as he came up, intense anxiety in his voice.

"No," answered Paul, putting, on a bold face, "but they did give me a run for it."

"'T was a wonderful close call!" exclaimed Dan. "I were comin' t' meet you when I hears you holler. I were leavin' th' gun in th' cabin, an' I has none, so I runs back an' gets your rifle. 'T weren't no common holler you gives, an' I knows when I hears un things is amiss somehow, so I gets th' rifle, an' 't were well I got un."

"I thought for a minute it was all up with me, Dan. I'll never go out without a gun again."

"No, 't ain't safe. They's wonderful bold, when just two of un comes at you," and Dan turned over with his foot the carcass of the wolf Paul had killed. "I never heard of un doin' that before. Paul, I were sayin' t' you once you was wonderful brave. You got a rare lot more grit than most folks."

"Oh, I don't know," said Paul, exceedingly proud of Dan's praise, but modestly inclined to deprecate his own prowess. "I just had to do what I did, or they'd have got me."

"Were un follerin' far?"

Paul explained in detail, as they returned to the cabin to get their toboggans upon which to haul in the carcasses, his afternoon's adventure. When he had finished Dan said quietly and decisively:

"Twere only th' wonderful grit you has, Paul, as saved your life. If you'd run, now, or showed you was scared, they'd ha' pulled you down quick."

"Won't my father be proud of that skin!" exclaimed Paul when they had the skins stretched for drying. "I'll have it mounted for a rug, and won't it be a beaut!"

"Both o' un," suggested Dan. "They'll make a fine pair together."

"But the other one is yours, Dan."

"No, 't ain't."

"Yes it is. You killed it and you've got to have it."

Dan objected still, but in the end Paul persuaded him it was his.

"Dad'll be wonderful proud t'see un," admitted Dan.

For two days a snowstorm, with high wind, swept the country, and Amesbury did not appear on Saturday, but while the lads were eating a late breakfast on Sunday morning they heard him singing outside:

*"Yeow mustn't sing a' Sunday,
Becaze it is a sin;
But yeow may sing a' Monday,
Till Sunday cums agin."*

A moment later he came stamping in.

"Home again!" he exclaimed breezily, "and just in time for breakfast. How've you made it, fellows? Heigho! What's this I see? Two wolf skins as sure as can be."

He examined them as he listened to the story of the adventure, and his face became grave.

"What would I have done now if I'd come home to find one of you chaps missing? If you want to save me remorse and heartaches, always carry a gun when you go hunting."

The weeks that followed passed pleasantly for Paul and Dan, though there was much hard work and exposure connected with their work. They gradually extended their trails, putting out more traps each day until they had, between them, four hundred and fifty set, leading out in several short trails from the cabin. All of them were visited twice a week.

Amesbury's weekly visit was looked forward to with keen anticipation, and he enjoyed it even more than the boys. Twice Ahmik surprised them. He came, laughing and good-natured, and on each occasion remained three days, a mark of his attachment to the lads.

Each of the boys was once taken by Amesbury over his trail, but as he plainly preferred that they remain to work their trails and to keep each other company, they refrained from suggesting a second trip with him.

"I'm always afraid that the one of you at home may go wolf-baiting again, or something," said he, "and I feel better to know you're both here taking care of each other."

On a day late in March Amesbury came in from his trail with the announcement that he had struck up his traps for the season, and they would presently start for Winnipeg. This meant that at last they were to turn homeward, and as much as they had enjoyed their winter they were overjoyed at the prospect.

By prearrangement, Ahmik arrived simultaneously with Amesbury, and all were together in the cabin during the following week while pelts were made ready to carry to market, and the cabin made snug for Amesbury's extended absence.

Dan had succeeded in capturing thirty-two fine martens and Paul twenty-six. Utilizing the wolf and other carcasses for bait, they had also trapped five red, two cross, three blue and fourteen white foxes, setting the traps for the foxes in common. Dan declared he had caught twice as much fur during these few weeks as his father had ever had in a whole winter. "And Dad's a wonderful fine hunter, too," said he, "but they ain't no such furrin' where we lives as they is here."

One cold, clear morning they said good-by to the little cabin on Indian Lake, and, each hauling his toboggan, turned southward. Day after day they traveled, through forests, over frozen lakes, across wide barren expanses of snow.

All wore amber-colored glasses, which Amesbury provided, to protect their eyes from the glitter, for, he explained, were they to travel with naked eyes they would quickly be attacked by painful snowblindness.

Now and again they were held prisoners in camp for a day or two, when severe storms visited the country. Occasionally they killed ptarmigans, spruce grouse, porcupines, or other small game, sufficient to keep them well supplied with provisions.

They did not hurry, and April was well spent when they reached Moose Lake, where Amesbury had a small hunting cabin, and, under a cover built of logs, two Peterboro canoes and one birch canoe. The cabin itself was small and naked of furniture, save camp cooking utensils, a tent stove and a couple of three-legged stools. Bunks were built around two sides of the room, which also served as seats.

"This was my first camp," explained Amesbury. "I built it twenty years ago. There's a Hudson Bay post down the lake, and in those days I didn't want to wander too far from a base of supplies. I come in here and do a little bear trapping after I leave Indian Lake, and every two or three years take a run down to Winnipeg in a canoe. I take some of my provisions in from here, and get some from your old friend Davy MacTavish."

Here they went into camp, and before the ice in the lake broke up made a snowshoe trip to the post, where flour, sugar, pork and other necessities were purchased and hauled back on toboggans.

This period of waiting was very tedious to the lads. The snow was becoming soft and wet, the woods were sloppy, and had less of attraction than in the crisp cold weather of midwinter.

One night in May a heavy rain set in, and for a week it fell in a steady downpour. The snow became slush, and when the sun came out again, now warm and balmy, much of the ground was bare, and Moose Lake was nearly clear of ice.

"Now for the canoe and the homestretch," announced Amesbury, upon looking out upon the water and clear sky. "Tomorrow we'll start. What do you fellows say to that?"

"Bully!" exclaimed Paul. "I can hardly wait for the time when I'll get home."

"T will be fine t' be afloat ag'in," said Dan, "an' I'm wantin' wonderful bad t' see Mother an' Dad, an' tell 'em about my cruise."

"I thought you'd be ready to go. Big tales you chaps will have to tell of your adventures. I almost wish I were going with you," and Amesbury looked wistfully down over the lake.

"Why you are, aren't you?" asked Paul.

"Yes, as far as Winnipeg, to be sure. I want to see you chaps safe aboard the train. Couldn't take chances on your getting mixed up in any more trouble," he laughed.

"Can't you come on to New York with us?" asked Paul eagerly. "Oh, I wish you could."

"New York is a long way off, and a rough old trapper like me wouldn't know what to do in a big city like that."

"Yes, you would! I do wish you'd go home with me!"

Amesbury shook his head.

"No, I'm better off here, and I wouldn't do New York any good."

"Now I'm wonderin' how I'll be gettin' home," suggested Dan. "I've been wonderin' an' wonderin'. I'm all out o' my reckonin', goin' different from th' way I comes, an' cruisin' around."

"Why," explained Amesbury, "you'll travel with Paul until he gets off and leaves you, and then you'll keep going on the train until the conductor puts you off, and you take another train. I'll tag you so you can't go astray," he added, laughing.

"No," protested Paul, "Dan's going right through to New York with me, and my father'll see that he gets home all right."

"That's a good plan," assented Amesbury. "Then I won't have to tag you, and you won't get lost."

"But I'm thinkin'," said Dan, "I'll be stoppin' off t' St. Johns, an' not be goin' on t' New York. I'm wantin' wonderful bad t' get home."

"You're going home with me first," Paul insisted. "My father and mother have just got to see you. I want to tell them how you saved my life."

"Yes," Amesbury laughed, "I'm inclined to agree with Paul, and New York won't take you so much out of your way. St. Johns is farther off than New York, and you can go on from New York by steamer, and perhaps get there just as soon."

"I'm losin' my bearin's altogether," declared Dan, looking much puzzled.

Ahmik was to accompany them. A nineteen-foot broad-beamed Peterboro canoe, with good carrying capacity, was selected for the journey. It was of ample size to accommodate the four voyageurs, together with their traveling equipment, provisions for the journey, and the furs which they were taking to market to barter.

The canoe was loaded at daybreak, and, Ahmik in the bow, Amesbury in the stern, with Paul and Dan between, they turned down the lake. A light mist lay over the waters, quickly to be dissolved by the rising sun. The weather was perfect, the air heavy with the pungent odor of damp fir trees, the lake placid, beautiful, glorious.

Through picturesque lakes, rushing rapids and gently flowing streams the expert canoe-men dexterously guided the frail craft. Now and again portages were made, but the outfit was light and these occasioned small delay.

At length Lake Winnipeg was entered. Here they were forced to lose a day or two because of wind and rough water, but for the most part they were favored with

pleasant weather. Twice they stopped at trading posts to renew their supplies, but with no other delays at length turned into Red River, and on a beautiful June morning beheld the spires of the city of Winnipeg rising before them.

Chapter XX

Winnipeg at Last.

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” shouted Paul.

“We’re most home now. A hot bath in a real bath tub, and a real bed tonight, Dan! Think of it! A few days and we’ll be home!”

“’Tis grand!” exclaimed Dan, “and oh! ’t will be grand t’ get home!”

“I’ll wager,” broke in Amesbury, laughing, “that both you fellows will be pulling blankets off your beds and rolling upon the floor before morning, and I’ll wager, too, that you’ll be wishing you could get out to the back yard of the hotel to sleep on the ground.”

Ahmik waved his hand toward the town.

“Good sell fur; no good to stay. No good place to live. Bush good place to live. We like have you come back to trap.”

“You’ve been mighty good to us, Ahmik, and we thank you,” said Paul.

They stored their things in a shop whose proprietor Amesbury knew, each carrying a back-load up from the river.

“Now,” suggested Amesbury, “we’ll go to the hotel and wash up. What do you say?”

“I’d like to telegraph home first,” answered Paul.

“All right. Glad you spoke of that. We’ll wire from the hotel.”

Ahmik had no interest in the proposed bath or in hotel accommodations, and with promises to see him later, the three turned toward the center of town.

“You chaps got any cash?” asked Amesbury.

“Dead broke, both of us,” confessed Paul. “Haven’t seen a cent of money since we left the ship.”

“I suspected it,” laughed Amesbury.

“Well, I happen to have a little. You’ll be rich tonight when you get your share of the fur money.”

At the telegraph office in the hotel the three put their heads together, and formulated the following telegram to Paul’s father:

“Dan Rudd and I reached Winnipeg safely today. Leave tomorrow for home. Wire Captain Zachariah Bluntt, St. Johns. Love to you and Mother. Crazy to see you. Hope both are well.

Paul Densmore.”

Illustration:

The three put their heads together

“Your father’ll say that’s the best piece of literature he’s read this year,” remarked Amesbury. “Here, operator, rush this off. Make it a ‘rush’ now.”

“What time’ll he get it?” asked Paul, as they turned from the telegraph desk.

“Let’s see. It’s eleven-thirty now. Oh, he ought to get it before he leaves his office this afternoon.”

“I’m so excited I can hardly keep from yelling!” Paul exclaimed.

“Well, you’d better hold in. They think you’re an Indian now, from your looks, and they’ll be sure of it if you yell, and fire us all. See how every one is eyeing us?”

“When’ll Skipper Bluntt be hearin’, now?” asked Dan.

“Tonight. Paul’s father will wire him right away, I’m sure.”

“’Tis wonderful fine t’ be lettin’ un know so quick. Now I’m thinkin’ th’ skipper’ll get word t’ mother soon’s he can. Dad’s off t’ th’ Labrador by this, though, fishin’, an’ he won’t be hearin’ for a month.”

The clerk at the desk greeted Amesbury as an old acquaintance, shook his hand, and handed him a pen to register.

Following a luxurious wash came a thick, rare, juicy steak smothered in onions, an array of vegetables, a delicious salad, double portions of pudding and coffee, to which the party brought trapper appetites.

“Now for business,” said Amesbury, lighting a fragrant cigar. “We’ll get a carriage and bring up our furs and see what they’ll bring us. Then you chaps had better get some civilized toggerly.”

The afternoon was a busy one. Furs were commanding a good figure, and when the sales were made Paul found himself in possession of \$470, and Dan received \$560, as their share of the fur money.

Amesbury then guided them to a clothing store where complete outfits, from hats to shoes, were purchased for both. Paul insisted upon paying Dan’s bill for everything as well as his own.

“We’ll fix that later,” he said. “I’ll pay the bills now, and when we get to New York, and find out how much the trip costs, we can have our settlement.”

“An’ you keeps th’ account,” assented Dan. Then they purchased their railway and sleeping car tickets for the following day, and returned to the hotel to bathe and don their new clothing.

“A telegram for one of the young gentlemen,” announced the clerk, as they entered the hotel and stopped at the desk for their keys. It was for Paul. He refrained from opening it until they reached their rooms. Then with trembling hand he broke the seal and read:

“Thank God, my boy, you’re safe. Mother and I leave at once to meet you in Toronto when your train arrives. Have wired Captain Bluntt. Bring Dan Rudd with you.

“Father.”

Paul burst into tears, weeping from sheer joy. Dan, too, wiped his eyes.

“Good old Dad!” Paul exclaimed at last. “I can hardly wait to see them!”

Dan felt exceedingly uncomfortable in his new clothes. Even though he and Paul had selected suits at very moderate cost, and they were far from perfect in fit, he

had never been so well dressed in his life. As he surveyed himself in the mirror, he confided to Paul:

"I feels wonderful fine dressed, an' when I gets home an' wears these clothes the folks at Ragged Cove'll sure be sayin' I'm puttin' on airs."

"Oh, you'll soon get used to them," laughed Paul. "I feel kind of stuck up myself, getting into civilized clothes again."

"And, Paul," continued Dan, "I feels wonderful rich with all th' money I'm gettin'. Dad and me hunted all of last winter, an' all Dad gets for his catch is a hundred an' twenty dollars in trade, an' he thinks he does rare well. Now I been gettin' five hundred an' sixty in cash!"

"We did do pretty well, didn't we, Dan? And do you know, it's the first money I ever earned in my life. I've always just loafed and let my father give me everything. It makes me ashamed now to think of the way I've wasted money I never earned. I'll never do so again."

Paul and Dan occupied a large room, with two beds, Amesbury a single room, and between the two rooms was a bath room which they used in common, doors from the sleeping rooms opening into the bath room from opposite sides. These doors were left open when they retired at night. All seemed unreal after the long camp life.

The boys, weary with the day's excitement, fell asleep the moment their heads touched the pillows. When they awoke the sun was streaming through the windows. Amesbury, taking his morning ablutions, was splashing in the bath-tub, and singing:

*"There was a fat man of Bombay,
Who was smoking one sunshiny day;
When a bird called a snipe,
Flew away with his pipe,
Which vex'd the fat man of Bombay."*

The lads sprang out of bed. "My, but it's late," exclaimed Paul. "The sun's up."

"'Tis that," said Dan. "I weren't knowin' just where I were when I wakes."

"Good morning, fellows," called Amesbury from the bath room. "Come along one of you; I'm through."

"Good morning!" they both called back.

"Hurrah!" shouted Paul. "Today we start for home!"

"And you're going to leave a mighty lonely fellow behind," said Amesbury. "I'll have to break myself in all over again. I've a notion I'll kidnap you both and take you back to the bush with me."

"Can't you come with us?" plead Paul. "Change your mind about it, and come. Your sister would give the world to see you again, I'm sure. We do want you. It will be a jolly trip if you come."

A shadow passed over Amesbury's face, and left it again—as on the evening when he told them his life story—haggard, old, and as one suffering inexpressible pain. He was dressing now. He made no answer for several minutes, and seemed to be struggling with himself. Finally he spoke:

“Thank you ever and ever so much, fellows. It’s better that I do not go. The world forgets good deeds quickly. It never forgets bad ones. Mine were bad. I was a jailbird once. No one who ever knew it will ever forget it. My appearance in New York would bring shame to my sister and her children, if she has any. God alone knows how I long to see them! The news of who and what I was would spread among their friends—even their new friends—and they would be shunned and made miserable because of me. No, it’s my punishment. I must not go.”

Amesbury had again assumed his good-natured, whimsical attitude when they went below to breakfast, and chaffed and joked the boys as usual.

Presently Ahmik appeared, to accompany them to the railway station.

“Come back hunt some more,” Ahmik invited, as the train rolled into the station. “Miss you very much.”

“We owe you so much,” said Paul, as he shook Amesbury’s hand. “I don’t know what we’d have done if you hadn’t picked us up.”

“I’ll never be forgettin’ you, an’ how rare kind you were,” declared Dan.

“You chaps owe me nothing,” insisted Amesbury. “The debt’s all the other way. You earned your keep, made some money for me, and made a few weeks of my life very pleasant.”

Paul and Dan ran to the platform of the rear car as the train drew out of the station, and had a last fleeting glimpse of Amesbury standing there gazing after them, a look of wistful longing in his eyes.

Chapter XXI

Bad News and Good.

When John Densmore returned home after meeting Remington, he broke the news of Paul’s supposed death to the boy’s mother as gently as he could. She sat dry-eyed and mute, staring at him during the recital as though not fully comprehending the purport of his words. Densmore drew her to him and kissed her forehead.

“Mother! Mother!” he soothed, “bear up! It’s a dreadful calamity, but we shall have to bear it!”

She fainted in his arms, and for several weeks was very ill. Even when she was again able to be about she was constantly under the care of a physician, and trained nurses remained with her night and day. The shock had left her in a state of nervous melancholia.

She had always deprecated Remington’s proclivities for hunting and out-of-door sports. Now she felt very bitterly toward him, repeatedly asserting that he was directly responsible for Paul’s loss, at the same time upbraiding herself unceasingly for having permitted Paul to take part in the expedition.

Hour after hour she would sit, her hands folded in her lap, indulging her sorrow in silent brooding. She would picture Paul as he looked when he said his last farewell; her imagination would carry her to the desolate shores of Hudson Bay;

she would see him struggling in icy waters; she would hear his last agonizing cry to her as he sank finally beneath the waves; and always his face cold in death, and his body unburied and uncared for, perhaps the prey of savage animals, rose up before her to reprove her for permitting him to leave her. These were the things she dreamed of, asleep and awake, and they were the only subjects of her conversation.

Densmore was most devoted to his wife. He gave much of his time to her, and as the months passed more and more of the conduct of his vast business affairs was left in the hands of trained subordinates.

During these months he had grown visibly older. Life had lost its charm. Much as he loved his son, he could have borne Paul's loss with some degree of fortitude had his wife taken it less to heart, but the double sorrow of Paul's loss and her condition of melancholia took from him at length the old vim and vigor that had won for him his high place in the business world, and he was forced to admit that he had "lost his grip."

He was sitting in his sumptuously furnished office one June afternoon, his chin on his breast, deep in thought. A pile of important papers lay before him quite forgotten, though his secretary had placed them there an hour before, stating that they required his immediate personal attention.

"What is the use?" he asked himself. "Paul is gone. I've got a good deal more than we need. Mother [he always called Mrs. Densmore 'Mother'] must have a change, or she'll never recover from the shock. Why not give it all up? Why not retire? Mother and I will take our yacht and float around the world and try to forget."

He looked at his watch at length. It was half past three. He pressed a button, and a boy appeared.

"Tell Mr. Hadden I wish to see him," he directed.

At that moment Mr. Hadden, the secretary, evidently in a state of high excitement, entered briskly.

"Here's a telegram——" he began.

"Attend to it, Hadden, I'm going——"

"Read it! Read it!" exclaimed the secretary, holding the open telegram before Densmore's eyes.

Densmore, who had risen to his feet, read it, and leaned back heavily against the desk. Then he caught the telegram eagerly from Hadden's hand and read it again.

"Is it possible, Hadden? Is it possible?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes," answered the secretary with assurance. "I've studied the maps of that country ever since the boy's disappearance. He's worked his way down with natives to Winnipeg. I'm sure it's straight!"

Densmore was quite alive now. His face was beaming, and his old-time energy had returned as by magic.

"Call Dr. Philpot on the telephone at once," he commanded. "Take this wire and rush it off," and he dictated the telegram which made Paul so happy. "And this:

"Captain Zachariah Bluntt, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

“My son and Dan Rudd are safe in Winnipeg. They are coming direct to New York. Advise Rudd’s parents.

“John Densmore.’

“Call a taxi. ’Phone Remington!”

The telephone bell on his desk tinkled and he grabbed the instrument.

“Hello! Dr. Philpot? This is Densmore. I’ve just received a wire from Paul. He’s safe in Winnipeg. Is it safe to tell Mrs. Densmore?”

A pause.

“Safe, you say? Just the sort of shock she needs to restore her? Good! Good! I’m going right home. Be there when I arrive. All right. Good-by.

“Attend to these things on my desk, Hadden! I’m off to Toronto tonight! King Edward Hotel. Good-by.”

And he rushed to the elevator, and from the elevator to the waiting taxicab, thrust a bill in the chauffeur’s hand and ordered:

“The fastest you ever ran.”

All speed laws were broken in the flight that followed to the Densmore mansion on Riverside Drive. Policemen waved their arms and shouted warnings, pedestrians dodged, many narrow escapes from collisions were made by a hair’s breadth, but the chauffeur knew his business, and Densmore could not ride fast enough.

Dr. Philpot was waiting.

“Go right up, Densmore, and tell her. I’ll follow presently,” he suggested.

When Densmore entered his wife’s apartment a moment later, his face reflecting joy and excitement, she sprang to him, crying:

“Oh, John! John! What is it?”

“Paul’s safe,” said he, wrapping her in his arms. “He’s safe in Winnipeg, and on his way to us, Mother!”

“Oh, is it true? Is it true?” she almost screamed, and began to weep and laugh hysterically as he repeated the telegram to her.

Then with her head on his shoulder she wept quietly, deliciously, joyously, and the tears washed away the grief of months.

“Oh, Father,” she said at length, lifting a tear-stained but happy face to his, as she dried her eyes, “it’s a miracle. But I can’t wait to see him—I just can’t!”

“Well, get ready, dear, to leave on the eight o’clock train this evening. We’re to go to Toronto to meet him—if Dr. Philpot says you may.”

Dr. Philpot, who had joined them to observe his patient, said she might if one of the trained nurses went too.

“And,” added the doctor, “I think I’ll go with you.”

An hour later Remington was announced. A load of anxiety and self-condemnation lifted from his shoulders, he, too, was in a state of happy excitement.

“Come along, Remington,” invited Densmore. “We’re off to Toronto to meet Paul. You’re one of the party,” and Remington accepted.

The NORTH STAR was in dry dock in St. Johns, undergoing repairs, and Captain Zachariah Bluntt was enjoying a month ashore. He spent his days superintending repairs, and regularly at six o’clock each evening went home, ate

supper, donned a pair of big carpet slippers, lighted his pipe, and settled himself for a comfortable hour reading the shipping news in *The Chronicle*. Mrs. Bluntt as regularly joined him, with a lapful of things to mend, while the two Misses Bluntt cleared away the supper things and retired to the kitchen to wash the dishes before joining the sitting-room circle.

The household was thus engaged one evening when the doorbell rang. One of the Misses Bluntt answered the ring, and a moment later burst into the living room to disturb Captain Bluntt's reading with the announcement:

"A telegram, Father."

"Now I wonders what's happened!" exclaimed Mrs. Bluntt, for the receipt of a telegram was no ordinary occurrence in the routine life of the household.

"We'll see! We'll see!" said Captain Bluntt, and placing a finger under the flap of the envelope he tore it open, withdrew the telegram, carefully unfolded it and held it up at arm's length to read.

"By the imps of the sea! By the imps of the sea!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"The two youngsters, Dan Rudd and the Densmore youngster! They're safe! Here it is! It says they're safe! Safe, I say!"

The family were in a state of high excitement at once. Mrs. Bluntt and the two Misses Bluntt surrounded the Captain, asking all together, "Where are they? Let me see it. How did they get there?" and a flood of other questions and exclamations. At length, the full meaning of the telegram digested, Captain Bluntt announced:

"I'm goin' t' New York! The rascals! I' goin' t' New York on the first train! On the first train!" and grabbing his hat he started for the door.

"But, Father, the train don't go till tomorrow evenin'," informed one of his daughters.

"I know! I know! But I wants t' get Tom Hand. I'll send Tom Hand t' Ragged Cove on th' mail boat. Sails in th' morning! Want Tom t' take word t' Dan's folks!"

"Well for goodness' sake, Skipper, take off those slippers first and put on your shoes," suggested Mrs. Bluntt.

"Yes, yes, to be sure! To be sure! And I'll write a letter for Tom to take. Yes, yes, he better have a letter!" and Captain Bluntt impatiently donned his shoes, wrote the letter and hurried away on his mission.

Half an hour later the Captain returned.

"Now that's fixed. That's all right. Tom goes on the mail boat. Wanted to let 'em know. Make 'em feel good! Yes, make 'em feel good! Those rascals! Saved all this if they'd come back t' the ship according t' orders. Have t' wring their necks! Yes, have t' wring their necks when I gets hold of 'em. Pair of young rascals!"

The following evening Captain Bluntt, dressed in his Sunday clothes, his bushy red beard bristling importantly, boarded the train, bade good-by to Mrs. Bluntt and his two daughters, who had gone to see him off, and at six o'clock began an impatient flight to New York, and, in spite of his always-expressed disapproval of railway travel, was undoubtedly the happiest passenger on the train.

Chapter XXII

How Paul and Dan Made Good.

What a journey of joyous anticipation, of wondrous realization, that was for the two lads! There was the home-coming in view, with all its plans; there was the present, a wholly novel experience for Dan, who had never before ridden upon a railway train, and it was little less enjoyed by Paul, who assumed the position of a traveler of experience, and directed their affairs between sleeper and dining car—they never failed to respond to the first call to meals, and they invariably astonished the waiters with the quantities of good things they consumed.

Between meals they reclined luxuriously in their seats in the sleeping car, while they talked and planned, and enjoyed the fleeting vista of landscape.

“A train’s sure a strange craft,” remarked Dan one morning. “She can beat a vessel for goin’, but for steady cruisin’, now, I’m thinkin’ I likes a vessel most. I’d like wonderful well t’ have a bit of a walk, but they ain’t no deck.”

“You’ll have a chance to walk when we reach Toronto, and we’ll be there pretty soon,” promised Paul. “Father’ll meet us there, and I do hope Mother will too. I’m crazy to see them. Don’t it give you a dandy feeling to know how near home we are and getting nearer every minute!”

“I’m wantin’ wonderful bad t’ get home too,” admitted Dan. “How long’ll it be takin’ me, now, from New York?”

“I don’t know exactly, but three or four days, I guess. Why, Dan, this must be Toronto now,” said Paul. “The porter’s coming with his brush to clean us up.”

It was Toronto, and the lads, in a state of suppressed excitement, were the first to leave the train. Densmore and Remington were in the front line of those awaiting arriving friends. They had left Mrs. Densmore in the motor car that had brought them from the hotel, but her impatience got the better of her, and she came rushing down to join them and was the first to see Paul.

“Oh, my boy!” she cried, as he ran to her open arms, and, laughing and crying, she hugged him to her quite unconscious of the gaping crowd. Then Densmore and Remington greeted him and he introduced Dan to his father and mother.

The motor car carried them to the King Edward Hotel, and in the privacy of their apartment Mrs. Densmore had to cry some more over Paul.

“How brown you are,” she said finally, holding him at arm’s length and looking at him admiringly, “and how big and strong and healthy you look! I actually believe it’s done you good.”

“It has,” admitted Paul. “I’m a lot stronger than I used to be, and I’ve learned to do things, too. But I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Dan,” and he proceeded to tell briefly the story of their adventures, heaping upon Dan so much credit that the latter’s modesty forced him to interject stammering objections now and again. Mrs. Densmore was highly incensed at Factor MacTavish’s treatment of them, and the fact that Paul had actually been forced to work at manual labor for his living shocked her terribly, but brought a twinkle of downright satisfaction to Densmore’s eyes.

It was a happy party that boarded the train that evening for New York. Dan was exceedingly shy at first, but he was soon made to feel that he was one of them and presently felt quite at ease. Remington, entirely forgiven by Mrs. Densmore, was jolly as he could be, and declared that Paul had far outstripped him as a sportsman, and when Paul and he went together again on an expedition, as they surely must, Paul would be the teacher and he the pupil.

Densmore's big touring car was waiting for them when the train drew into the Grand Central Station at eight o'clock in the morning. Here Dr. Philpot bade them adieu as they sped away toward Riverside Drive.

"It's great to be back in New York!" declared Paul. "Lots of times I wondered if I'd ever get home again."

His mother pressed his hand but did not trust herself to speak.

"Here we are! That's our house, Dan!" said Paul gaily, as the car drew in behind a cab standing at the curb. A man, his back turned toward them, stood on the sidewalk engaged in a heated controversy with the cabman. When the car stopped they heard him saying, in loud, gruff tones:

"You're a pirate, sir! Yes, sir, a pirate! You deserve to have your neck wrung! By the imps of the sea! You deserve to have your neck wrung! But here's your money! Take it! Take it! Take it! Four times what the cruise were worth! Yes, four times! Get away with your old craft! Get away!"

"'Tis the skipper! 'Tis the skipper, sure!" exclaimed Dan, highly excited.

The two boys sprang from the car without ceremony and ran to Captain Bluntt, who, indeed, it was, as he turned to survey his surroundings, his bushy red beard bristling in indignation.

"By the imps of the sea!" he exclaimed. "'Tis the youngsters!" He grasped a hand of each, the look of indignation in his face giving place to one of high pleasure. "You rascals! You rascals! Is this two o'clock? Weren't I telling you scamps t' be aboard at two o'clock? Yes, two o'clock sharp! Two o'clock!"

"How's Mother an' Dad?" asked Dan anxiously.

"Well. Very well, last I heard from un. Gone in mournin' for you. Yes, you rascal! Gone in mournin' for you! Hard blow, your death was to un! Hard blow! Yes, you rascal! How do, Mr. Remington? How do? Glad to see you! Happier times than when we sees each other last!"

"Captain Bluntt, this is my mother and this is my father," broke in Paul, introducing them.

"Glad to know you, Madam," and the Captain bowed low. "Glad to know you, sir. Had to come on when I got your telegram! Had to see the young rascals! Had to see 'em, and take Dan to his folks myself!"

"It's a very great pleasure to meet you, Captain Bluntt," said Mrs. Densmore, extending her hand to him. "Paul has been telling me a great deal of you since yesterday."

Densmore shook the Captain's hand cordially.

"You'll have to remain with us a few days, Captain. Paul won't part from Dan, you know, until he shows him something of the city!"

And as Captain Bluntt would not think of enduring a return journey by train, and he was compelled to wait three days for the St. Johns steamer, he accepted

their hospitality. Every day during their stay was filled with sightseeing, with evenings at the theater, and a new world was opened for Dan.

Paul declined to permit Dan to bear any part of the expense incurred after their arrival in Winnipeg, and Densmore supplied both Dan and Captain Bluntt with their transportation home, and upon Paul's suggestion presented Dan with a new rifle and shotgun just like Paul's.

Finally, when sailing day arrived, Densmore, Paul and Remington saw them off, and the lads parted regretfully.

"You're the best fellow I ever knew," declared Paul, as they shook hands, "and we'll always be chums."

"An' I hopes," said Dan, "we may be takin' a cruise together again sometime."

The lines were thrown off, the active little tugs began puffing and sputtering, and slowly the steamer drew away from her wharf, Paul and Dan waving their caps as long as they could see each other.

Paul and his father were together a good deal in the days that followed. Densmore would frequently take an afternoon off, and together they would go to the Polo grounds, and father and son would yell and cheer together. Densmore had suddenly developed into a full-fledged baseball fan, and taught Paul his first appreciation of the game. They had long walks in the park these summer evenings, and discussed many things dear to a boy's heart. They became, in fact, inseparable chums.

"Father," said Paul one evening, as they strolled up Riverside Drive toward Grant's Tomb. "I wish I had something to do. I've spent about all the money I got for my furs, and I hate to have to call on you for money that I don't earn. It makes me feel—well, just useless—a sissy."

"What do you want to do?"

"Oh, I don't know—but something. It made me feel so independent to earn my own living while I was away, and to know I earned the money I had when I came back, and I'd like to feel that way all the time. I'm ashamed when I remember how I used to waste money I never earned. Dan always earned his own way."

"You'd better keep at school for awhile, my son. You can't invest your time to better advantage than in obtaining an education."

"Do you think so? It seems to me I'm just wasting time. I might be working the way Dan is and making my own way. I'm sure I could do something."

"What do you think you could do?"

"Oh, I don't know. If it wasn't so far from you and Mother I'd like to spend the winters trapping with Mr. Amesbury. Of course, though, I can't do that. Couldn't I have a job in your office, or get a berth on one of the ships?"

"You might. You could start in at five or six dollars a week. That's the usual thing. In a few years you'd probably be advanced to twenty or twenty-five dollars, and if you were very attentive to business, even more, say fifteen hundred or two thousand a year—and that's a pretty high estimate, for the supply of untrained men is larger than the demand. You'd better keep at school, my son. The college-bred man has a much better chance of success in life than the man who has never been to college. What your future is to be, however, depends upon your own efforts and yourself."

They walked in silence for a while before Paul spoke.

“Of course you’re right, Father. If you wish I’ll keep at school and go through college. But I’ve been ashamed of myself a good many times. I’ve been so selfish. I never thought of anybody but myself and my own pleasure before I went away. Being with Dan and Mr. Amesbury, and working, myself, has made me want to be more like them and do something worth while. Life would be pretty tiresome without anything to do but just loaf around.”

Densmore placed his hand on Paul’s shoulder.

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Paul. That’s the spirit that makes a real man. I’m afraid we coddled and indulged you until you were becoming spoiled.”

“I failed in my examinations at school, too,” continued Paul, “but I won’t fail again. I’ll study now.”

“That’s the way to talk, my son. Stick to it, and when you’re graduated from college you’ll be prepared, with a little training and experience, to take my place. That’s what I’m looking forward to.”

“All right, Father. You’ve got my promise to do my best, and here’s my hand on it. It’s my chance and I’m going to make the most of it. But I wish—I wish Dan had a chance too.”

“What kind of a chance do you want him to have?”

“I—I don’t just know. Dan’s pretty independent. He wouldn’t take money from you unless he worked for it, and he has to work to help his folks. He wants to be a skipper some day.”

“Do you think he’d like a berth on one of our steamers?”

“Yes, I guess so—if he could go home sometimes to see his folks.”

“That can be arranged.”

And it was arranged. Dan was given a berth on a steamer plying between New York and South American ports, which he gratefully accepted.

Paul was graduated from Princeton six years later, and after a year’s apprenticeship in his father’s office was appointed General Superintendent of the Atlantic and Pacific Steamship Company.

It was arranged to celebrate the occasion with a dinner at Mr. Densmore’s club. Dan’s ship was in port, and he, too, was to share in the honors. Paul insisted that the dinner would be incomplete without Captain Bluntt, and after many persuasive letters and cablegrams the Captain was prevailed upon to journey again to New York, and to bring with him Skipper Rudd o’ the READY HAND, Dan’s “Dad,” ostensibly to pay Dan a brief visit.

It was a jolly dinner, free from formality. Remington, Ainsworth and a half dozen of Paul’s college friends were there. Densmore at the head of the table acted as toastmaster, with Dan at his right and Paul at his left, which was in accordance with Paul’s wish.

When coffee was served, Densmore, after extending a welcome to the guests, announced that they had been asked to join not simply in the celebration of Paul’s advancement to the superintendency of the Atlantic and Pacific Steamship Company, but also in the celebration of his first official act as an officer of the company. Of this, he said, Paul would speak for himself.

Paul began with a humorous description of his introduction to Captain Bluntt and the NORTH STAR, which pleased the Captain wondrously, and created much merriment. Then he passed on to the days when he and Dan were cast away, of

how Dan's resourcefulness and optimism, leavened with the philosophy of Skipper Rudd, had kept up his spirits; of Dan's courage and high ability; of the strong and enduring friendship between him and Dan, a friendship akin to brotherly affection.

"Not alone the high esteem in which I hold Dan Rudd, but his marked efficiency as a navigator, as shown by his record while in the employ of our company, has induced me, as my first act as an official, to appoint him first officer of the steamship AMAZONIAN, and to announce that he is also first in line for advancement to a captaincy."

Dan was quite overcome. He had received no hint of the proposed appointment, and when he arose to express his thanks, emotion choked his voice.

"I can't get words to thank you, Paul," said he. Then after a pause, lapsing, under emotion, into the old vernacular, he continued: "I were not expectin' this. I hopes I'll prove worthy. You're wonderful good, Paul—sayin' all those things. But I want t' say, Paul, you're th' grittiest mate I ever cruised with, an' you were doin' more than I did t' work us out of the bush when we were cast away. I'm just a sailor, not used to talkin', an' I can't get th' words t' say what I wants to—but—but—I'm wonderful thankful."

The moment Dan sat down Captain Bluntt was on his feet.

"That's it! That's it!" he blurted. "Told you so, Mr. Remington! Yes, sir! Told you Dan Rudd would be a skipper some day! Had the makin' of a skipper! Yes, sir, he had! Lad of his parts sure to come to it! I'm proud! Proud!"

Then Dan's "Dad" was called upon for a word. The rough, kindly old sailor-trapper, tanned and weather-beaten, was plainly laboring under embarrassment.

"I'm a wonderful proud man this night—wonderful proud an' wonderful thankful," he began. "An' I'm thinkin' I has fair reason t' be proud an' thankful. On my knees before I sleeps I'll thank th' Lard for His blessin's. Standin' here before you all I has too few words t' thank th' gentlemen as I wants to for their kindness t' Dan."

"But Dan's deservin' o' un. He were always a rare true lad. He were never shirkin' duty as he seen it. When he were just a wee lad I says t' he, 'Dan,' says I, 'when you has work t' do, do un th' best you knows how, an' you'll always be findin' th' Lard standin' back o' ye' t' help, but don't go askin' th' Lard t' do things for ye what ye can do yourself. I'm thinkin' 't is always Dan's way t' foller them precepts, an' t' do things he has t' do th' best he knows how. Dan's been a rare good son t' me an' his mother—a rare good son—always."

"Dan," suggested Paul, when Remington and Ainsworth had each said a word of congratulation, "before we go let's have some music. I'm sure you have a harmonica somewhere in your pockets."

"That mouth organ!" exploded Captain Bluntt. "Don't blow that mouth organ, you rascal, or I'll wring your neck! By the imps of the sea I will!"

"Captain Bluntt let you play it once at our request," said Remington, when the laugh that followed the Captain's outburst had subsided, "and I'm sure he will again."

"And you wants! And you wants!" consented Captain Bluntt, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"What shall it be, Paul?" asked Dan, producing the harmonica.

“You remember what you were playing that Christmas day when poor old Amesbury surprised us at our campfire above Fort Reliance? Play that.”

And Dan struck up,

“Over the hills and far away.”
