

Dick Kent *with the* Eskimos



MILTON RICHARDS

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(Page 169)

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Dick Kent With the Eskimos

By MILTON RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF

“Dick Kent with the Mounted Police”

“Dick Kent in the Far North”

“Dick Kent, Fur Trader”

“Dick Kent and the Malemute Mail”

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DICK KENT WITH THE ESKIMOS

CHAPTER I

THE WHALEBONE SPEAR

Muffled from head to foot in hooded caribou shirts and bearskin trousers, five persons slowly plodded across a vast tundra within the Arctic Circle. Many days, by land and by boat from the Canadian coast, had brought them to a point where they must go on with dogs only. And now as they drove twelve big huskies to a long sledge filled with supplies, all armed with rifles and two with revolvers, the fur-clad figures presented a grim appearance upon the snowy bosom of that frozen wasteland.

A hood rimmed with blue fox fur almost completely hid the face of the athletic figure breaking through the snow at the head of the dog team. But one who knew him would have had little trouble in identifying that graceful, swinging step as belonging to Dick Kent. He it was—again on the adventure trail, his dark, clear eyes shining and eager behind the smoked glasses he wore to protect his sight from the glare of the snow-reflected sun, which, though it was midday, hung low on the southern horizon, a ball of baleful red.

Bringing up the rear were Sandy McClaren, Dick's chum, and the Canadian Indian boy, Toma, an inseparable of the two American lads since they first had entered the north on a visit with Sandy's Uncle Walter, a Hudson's Bay Company factor. The remaining two of the travelers were big men, alert and vigorous, whose very appearance showed that they represented the authority of law and justice. They were officers of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and under their furs reposed important orders bearing the King's seal.

"Hey, Dick!" Sandy McClaren's shout sounded startlingly loud and high in the icy air.

"Better take a rest while I break trail," called the young Scotchman.

“I’m not tired,” declared Dick, but nevertheless he dropped back behind the dog team, whose lolling, red tongues revealed how difficult was the going.

Sandy started forward to take Dick’s place, but before he could pass the huge Eskimo dog in the lead, one of the policemen had overtaken him.

“You young fellows have been doing too much of this trail breaking,” sang out Corporal Lake McCarthy.

Sandy was only too glad to give way to the big officer, and he quickly dropped back with Dick, where the heavy sledge, loaded with supplies, packed the snow and made snowshoeing comparatively easy.

For a time the chums trudged on without speaking, then, while they were passing a ridge of ice, which had been carved by wind and sun into queer patterns, Dick gave voice to a conviction:

“Sandy, this looks as if it was going to be a dull trip. Here we’ve been mushing north for a month and we haven’t seen anything more dangerous than caribou, ptarmigans and snowshoe rabbits.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure just yet,” said Sandy. “Uncle Walter was half a mind not to let us go on this trip. You know there was something dangerous in the wind or he wouldn’t have felt that way about it. I asked him why the policemen were being sent up here, but he just kind of laughed and said, ‘Oh, nothing,’ like he meant it was a whole lot.”

While they talked, the boys were bent over their snowshoes, and did not instantly notice a shirring sound followed by the muffled plunk of an object striking the packs on the sledge with considerable force. The first either knew anything unusual had occurred was when Dick chanced to glance up and caught sight of something protruding from the packs and the rear of the sledge.

“Stop the team!” cried Dick excitedly.

Corporal McCarthy’s booming command was followed by a brief tangle of snarling dogs, then the sledge came to a dead stop. All the members of the party gathered about Dick Kent, who was pulling something from the packs.

What he at last succeeded in extracting was a short, barbed spear, the head made

of whalebone lashed to a smooth spruce handle with reindeer sinews. The weapon evidently had been thrown from the top of the ice ridge alongside which they had been sledging, and what was even clearer, the spear arm of the hidden enemy had been exceedingly powerful and well-trained. Instinctively, almost, all eyes were lifted to the brow of the ridge, and the policemen drew their pistols. But nothing was to be seen save the barren crest of the icy hill.

“I’ll go up and take a look around,” Corporal McCarthy spoke briskly. “Jim!” he turned to the other officer, “you stay here. It’s possible this fellow was an Eskimo, but again it may be one of the renegade Taku Indians that were reported as far north as this. I’ll be back pretty quick.”

With that the big policeman drew a 30.30 rifle from the sledge lashing and started up the icy slope of the ridge. The others silently watched him disappear over the summit. At any moment they expected to hear the report of a rifle. But the minutes ticked by and all remained silent. At first they were relieved, then their fears mounted. It was possible that whoever had thrown the spear had other deadly weapons at his disposal. If Corporal McCarthy were ambushed——

“Well, it looks like I might be right about what I said a while ago,” Sandy finally turned and said to Dick.

“That spear *did* take the words out of my mouth,” admitted Dick, “but we can’t be sure yet. Anyway, this is the first bit of excitement we’ve had on this freezing trip.” He shivered a little as he looked at the spear. “Whew! That thing didn’t miss me more than four feet!” he exclaimed. “His aim must have been for you and me, Sandy.”

“Looks like him Eskimo spear.” The low, throaty voice was that of Toma, who had so faithfully stood by Dick and Sandy on their previous adventures in the north. The boys turned to find the young Indian examining the weapon carefully.

“Eskimos!” The magic word leaped to the lips of Dick and Sandy almost simultaneously.

Dick called to the policeman, who was repairing a trace on the dog harness. “Mr. Sloan, when are we going to see some Eskimos?”

“Can’t be long, lad, but——” Constable Jim Sloan’s statement was cut off by a loud shout from the top of the ridge. All eyes were turned upward, and Dick and

Sandy whistled. Bearing down upon them was Corporal McCarthy accompanied by a strange figure.

“It looks like you boys’ll see an Eskimo sooner than I thought,” resumed Constable Sloan, as he watched the Corporal draw nearer with a small man, swathed in furs, walking a little ahead at the point of the officer’s rifle. It was apparent that a captive had been taken.

“Got him easy,” called the Corporal as he came up. “He was hiding behind a lump of ice and thought I’d pass him by. He’s an Innuite alright.”

“A what?” Sandy turned to Dick.

“Innuits is what the Eskimos call themselves,” replied Dick, eyeing the captive curiously. “It means ‘the people.’ I read a lot about the Eskimos in school. Look, he has another spear.”

All now gathered about the policeman, listening to his story of how he had captured the Eskimo. Dick and Sandy were principally interested in the appearance of this native of the polar regions. They found him to be about Sandy’s height, with light brown skin, and Chinese-like eyes. The hood of his caribou shirt had been pushed back and a heavy thatch of straight black hair was revealed. The Eskimo’s cheekbones were high like an Indian’s and his skin was very oily looking. Constable Sloan, who had been detailed on the expedition principally because of his special knowledge of the Eskimos in their native haunts, was endeavoring to carry on a conversation with the sullen fellow.

“He won’t talk much,” the Constable turned to Corporal McCarthy. “Says his name is Mukwa and that four families of Eskimos are about a day’s march from here, on the shores of a bay somewhere near Cape Richards. Swears he hasn’t seen any white men, and claims he’s an outcast of his tribe. I don’t believe all he says. I believe he could speak English if he wanted to.”

“Well, we’ll have to hold him anyway,” declared the Corporal. “The fellow seems to be hostile, and maybe he’ll talk after a while. If everything’s ship-shape we’ll mush on before it gets too late.”

Constable Sloan’s thirty-foot dog whip cracked out over the team and the dogs set off, yelping eagerly. Corporal McCarthy took up the rear with the Eskimo captive. There was little talking, since every member of the expedition realized

he must save his wind for the gruelling miles that must be covered before they made camp.

Though at that time of year there was no darkness at night, Dick and Sandy felt that it was long past evening before Corporal McCarthy called a halt. There was not enough vegetation for a campfire to be built, but the policemen were forearmed with small oil stoves, for heat and cooking. It was not long before the dogs were secured for the night, and the boys were hovering in the doorway of their tent over a bubbling pot of tea.

“Tomorrow we ought to see an Eskimo village,” Dick said, trying to keep his teeth from chattering.

“It’ll be a great experience,” Sandy rejoined, “but the farther we go the more I wonder just why we are up here. Uncle Walter tried to cover up everything under that sham about him thinking we ought to see the Eskimos, but they don’t send the King’s men up here for sight seeing.”

Dick studied a moment, then replied: “I haven’t wanted to say anything until I was sure, but I believe now that I have it figured out right. You know Corporal Thalman was sent up here a year ago to bring in a murderer. The fellow was reported to be part Eskimo. Fred Mistak by name. I think the two officers with us are looking for Corporal Thalman and Mistak. They intend to leave us in some winter camp with plenty of meat and fuel, while they do the dangerous business.”

Sandy sniffed. “I’d like to see them keep me out of the fun.”

“I feel that way too,” agreed Dick, blowing on a cup of hot tea, “but we mustn’t be stubborn about it. It’s best that we mind our own business.”

Constable Sloan had finished preparing the evening meal of beans, pemmican and biscuit, and the boys joined the rest of the party, conversation giving way, for the time, to other exercises of the jaws.

Immediately after the meal was over everyone retired in their sleeping bags, except Toma, who was left to guard Mukwa, the Eskimo captive, for the first part of the night. The wind had been steadily rising and now was howling at terrific speed across the frail tents, carrying a burden of fine snow along with it.

Dick Kent dozed to the droning rattle of the icy particles upon the tent walls. Sandy already was fast asleep. It was frightfully cold, and Dick dared not peep out of his sleeping bag without something over his ears. Uncovered, they would have been frozen in a few seconds. As he lay thinking over the events of the day, he could hear faintly the voice of Toma as he endeavored to quiet some whimpering dogs. Finally those sounds, too, died away and nothing remained except the whistle of the driving gale, which soon lulled Dick to sleep.

It seemed to Dick he had been asleep only a moment when he awakened suddenly, all senses alert, an unmistakable scream of anguish echoing in his ears. Holding his breath, he listened, but the sound was not repeated. He tried to recollect if he had been dreaming and was sure he had not. No, from a sound slumber something had awakened him—something whose peril he sensed subconsciously, and which set his heart pounding faster. An instant longer he listened, then, drawing his hood about his head, he wriggled part way out of his sleeping bag.

The wind was blowing almost as hard as before he had gone to sleep, but now and again it died down. During one of these lulls, Dick heard a groan. With a start, he jumped up. He must find out that it was not merely his imagination before he awakened the others. They needed sleep. Cautiously, he grasped his rifle and crawled to the opening of the tent. He drew back the tent flap and looked out. Toma's tent was the point that attracted his attention first. Everything plainly visible under the midnight sun, Dick could see that the tent's flap was closed. Then, out of the corner of one eye he detected a movement. A dark blotch appeared on the snow in front of Toma's tent where the Eskimo captive had been left, well tied with thongs. The dark blotch moved again. With a cry of consternation, Dick suddenly galvanized into action and sprang forward. He found Toma lying in the snow, a spear protruding from one of his thighs, and a red stain in the snow under the young Indian's head.

"What's wrong?" came Corporal McCarthy's call, as he awakened and hurried out upon hearing the sound of Dick's voice.

"Toma has been wounded!" cried Dick.

"Is the Eskimo gone—the captive?" McCarthy answered his own question by snatching back the flap of Toma's tupik. Yes, Mukwa was gone!

A little later, a cup of tea having completely revived him, Toma told his anxious listeners what had happened.

“I can hear nothing but wind,” he said in his quaint throaty dialect. “I am sit in tent—Eskimo back inside. I think about my home, my mother. I dream. Think no harm come out of storm. Then I jump to see face looking at me. That fella throw spear. Hit me in leg. Somebody hit me on head same time. All get black like night. Me think Mukwa’s friends come git him.”

A careful examination showed that the spear wound in Toma’s leg was slight, the bearskin trousers having protected him, and aside from a lump on his head, the hardy young aborigine would soon be well again.

But there was no sleep after that. Dick and Sandy sat up with Toma, drinking hot tea and listening to the mutter of voices from the policemen’s tent. Evidently, action could not be long off, since a council of war was underway.

CHAPTER II

THE FACE IN THE ICE WINDOW

It was four o'clock next morning when Constable McCarthy ordered the tents struck, the sledges packed and the dogs harnessed. The wind, during the sunlit night, had covered up all the tracks made by the men who had freed the Eskimo captive, and little time was spent trying to trace them.

"Only Eskimos could have done anything in that blizzard," Dick remarked to Sandy, while he tightened sledge lashing.

Sandy did not reply, for at the moment Constable McCarthy gave orders to mush on, and across the icy drifts the dogs scampered northward.

All day the dog team labored on, stopped only now and then to breathe. Dick and Sandy were thankful for these short halts, for hardy as they were, the slippery going was exhausting. Toma was not troubled, however. The young Indian probably could have out-traveled even the veteran northman, Jim Sloan, who had once trekked the ice floes of the frozen Polar Sea, six hundred miles from the north pole.

Toward evening the deep blue of the open sea could be seen far ahead, marking the fiord or bay that was their destination. Sloan did a lot of reconnoitering from various high hills, but they had reached the ragged coastline before the Eskimo village was sighted.

Constable Sloan, who was to act as interpreter, advised them to make a halt while he went forward alone and talked with the heads of the families.

Dick and Sandy watched the big policeman make off toward the strange dwellings upon the shore of the fiord.

"Those snow houses must be igloos," said Dick, pointing. "How queer they are

—just the shape of bee-hives, with the little round holes at the bottom, too.”

“I wonder where the people are,” Sandy spoke up, “and what is that queer smell that seems to come from the igloos?”

Dick could not answer the question. Corporal McCarthy laughed. “You’ll smell worse smells than that before we get away from these Eskimos,” said the officer. “But what you smell just now is probably fresh walrus meat, or seal blubber. The natives have been hunting all day, I suppose, and are almost all asleep now inside their houses.”

A moment after Constable Sloan had stopped before one of the igloos, a figure crawled out of the tiny entrance. There seemed no sign whatever of hostility in the greetings exchanged by the policeman and the native.

“That fellow doesn’t seem to have the spear-throwing habit,” observed Sandy.

“No, as a rule the Eskimos are a peaceful people,” said Corporal McCarthy.

Constable Sloan, at this moment, turned and signalled them to come on, and when they reached the igloos, several other Eskimos had come out of their houses to satisfy their native curiosity. There were women and children among them.

“Why, the older men and women look almost alike!” exclaimed Sandy.

“I’ve heard there’s little difference in the appearance of Eskimo men and women,” Dick replied, “but they say you can tell by the sizes of their hoods—the women have extra big ones so they can carry their babies in them during mild weather.”

“Well, boys,” Constable Sloan turned to Dick and Sandy, “I guess we can camp here for the night anyway. Sipsa, the man I’ve been talking to, gives us a hearty welcome, especially after I told him we had some shiny, new knives and hatchets in our packs.”

“What I’d like to do first is look around inside one of those snow houses,” said Dick. “Do you suppose Sandy and I might go into one?”

“I think I can fix that alright,” agreed Constable Sloan, and turned to Sipsa.

Followed a few words in the Eskimo tongue. Sipsa seemed delighted at the opportunity to show the boys the inside of his strange home, and soon Dick and Sandy were on their hands and knees, crawling through the door of a most unusual residence.

They found the interior of the igloo to be much larger than it appeared from an outside estimation, due to the fact that it was cut down several feet into a solid snowdrift. A small, soapstone lamp, shaped like a clam shell, was burning, having a wick of moss which absorbed the seal oil fuel. The boys were surprised at the amount of heat the lamp radiated. The furniture consisted of a long bench-like lounge, covered with caribou and musk-ox hides. Here and there lay harpoons, knives, whalebone dishes and spoons, and crude implements, the use of which the boys did not know. There were two windows with panes made of opaque ice. The atmosphere was heavy with the strong smell of fresh blubber, and Dick and Sandy did not care to remain inside very long.

“Phew!” snorted Dick, as he reached the open air. “I couldn’t stand to live in a smell like that.”

“Nor I,” agreed Sandy, “but just the same I think one of those snow houses would be just the thing for us to live in while in this cold country. The camp stoves would make plenty of heat, and we ought to be cozy as anything in an igloo that was minus that awful stink.”

“Unless a skunk happened to slip into bed with us,” added Dick drolly.

“Like to see the skunk that was fool enough to migrate north of the Arctic Circle,” laughed Sandy.

“Well, I haven’t seen any that cared for icicles on their whiskers,” admitted Dick, still grinning.

“I don’t like to change such a sweet smelling subject,” Sandy rejoined, “but what do you say we start building ourselves one of those igloos before bedtime? I’ll go ask Corporal McCarthy for help.”

The Corporal thought the idea a practical one, and had Constable Sloan show them how it was done.

At some distance from the Eskimo igloos, a huge, solid snowdrift was located. A

number of blocks were cut out of this, leaving a hollow hole, perfectly round. The blocks that had been removed were then shaped and fitted with knives and built up over the cavity in the drift, formulating part of the walls and the roof. Spaces were left for a small entrance and for two windows, whose panes were formed by pouring melted snow water over the open spaces. In the intensely cold temperature the water froze as it dripped, the icicles finally joining to make an opaque windowpane, crude but serviceable.

It was time to retire when Dick and Sandy finally moved into the igloo, and, crawling into their warm sleeping bags, prepared to pass their first night under the roof of one of the finest residences known to the people of the great polar ice cap.

But sleep was slow in coming to them in their unusual surroundings, and presently they crawled out again and, to put in the time, tried broiling musk-ox and walrus steaks over the oil heater. The musk-ox was quite tasty, if a bit strong from improper handling, but they scarcely could stomach the bitter, greasy walrus meat. Had the boys known what was in store for them—that some day soon they would think walrus almost as delicious as roast chicken, they might not have looked upon their future adventures in the polar region with such eagerness. But, as the saying goes, “What they did not know did not hurt them.”

The two policemen, together with Toma, whose leg wound was troubling him only a little, came in to inspect the finished igloo before they again rolled into their sleeping bags and one and all pronounced it an ideal abode for cold weather. Before the visitors went out again, they vowed that the next time they camped for any length of time they should live Eskimo style.

Dick asked several pointed questions regarding what the policemen intended doing now that they had reached the northern coast, but both the Corporal and the Constable were evasive. Dick was not the sort of lad who became meddlesome or troublesomely inquisitive, so he went no further. When Sandy and he were again alone, they discussed the approach of the polar winter, wondering how they would weather it and admiring that heroic explorer of the past who had gone so far as to reach the north pole, making the name of Robert Peary famous for all time.

A little later, when they had turned out their stove, preparatory to crawling into their sleeping bags, they became aware how difficult it was to sleep with the

yellow radiance of the sun still pervading the inside of the igloo. The windows were not clear enough for the light to be bright, but, nevertheless, the absence of darkness made them so restless, they decided to get up and go outside.

They found the sun hanging low over the horizon, a pale ball of yellow, pouring its rays over the bleak and desolate northland.

“How strange it seems!” cried Dick. “Just think—at Fort Good Faith it’s nice and dark and maybe the moon is up. I wonder what the folks at home would say if they knew we were at this very minute seeing the midnight sun.”

“It hardly seems possible we’re a thousand miles farther north than we’ve ever been,” Sandy spoke awedly.

But tired muscles and the intense cold soon made their eyes heavy, and in spite of the sun they went back to their sleeping bags.

Dick could not sleep, however. The sunlight, the excessive amount of black tea he had drunk, and the exhaustive efforts of the day combined to keep him awake. He tossed in his warm bag wishing he had the ability to sleep as soundly and quickly as Sandy, whose snores he could plainly hear.

The oil stove had warmed the igloo quite thoroughly—enough so that Dick felt slightly uncomfortable, though it was more than forty below zero outside. He wriggled restlessly and looked out of his sleeping bag, gazing up at the white dome of the igloo ceiling. He was about ready to turn over and try harder to sleep, when he thought he heard something brush against the igloo roof at a level with the snow outside. At first he believed it was only a prowling dog, and was determined to ignore it, when there came plainly to his ears the crunch of a footfall in the snow.

One of the ice windows was directly over the spot where Sandy was sleeping, and toward this Dick’s attention was suddenly attracted as through a sixth sense. A shadow had loomed up in the tiny square—the shadow of a face peering in!

Dick sat up with a start and grasped his rifle. Evidently, whoever was looking in could see nothing, since it was darker inside the igloo than outside. Taking advantage of the prowler’s inability to see, Dick picked up his rifle and pushed back the huge cake of snow which plugged up the small round door. Softly, then, he stole outside and commenced the crawl around the igloo toward the window

through which he had seen the face. Yet he must have made more noise than he thought, for at the moment he reached a point from which he could see the spying person, there sounded a guttural outcry, and the crunch of running feet across the snow.

“Halt!” cried Dick, leaping up and firing his rifle into the air.

But the fleeing culprit had a good start and he proved not slow on his feet. Dick watched the dark form vanish in the dim sunlight, while the aroused camp scrambled out to see what was wrong.

Corporal McCarthy listened intently to Dick’s story of what had happened. The officer said little at the time, but presently he entered the boys’ igloo, calling in the Constable and Toma.

When they all were comfortably seated, Corporal McCarthy addressed the boys:

“What has just happened, on top of the capture we made yesterday, makes me feel as if I ought to explain the real motive of this long trip. Your Uncle Walter McClaren wanted me to keep you fellows out of trouble, provided there was no real need of your services, but now that we seem to be right in the territory of the fellow we are after, it looks like I’ll have to enlist you in the service of the mounted.”

Dick and Sandy exchanged glances and became all ears, as the Corporal went on:

“Corporal Thalman, an officer sent out ahead of us, has been either killed or lost somewhere in this region, while trailing a half-breed Eskimo murderer, called Fred Mistak. Sloan and I are after Corporal Thalman, or what’s left of him, and of course we intend to get Mistak.”

“What did I tell you?” Dick whispered aside to Sandy.

“We will probably be up here for several months,” continued the Corporal, “and about all I’ll expect of you fellows is to keep your eyes open for a white Eskimo. Just a hunch of mine, and while you’re doing that, Sloan and I will look around for traces of Thalman. We’ll all have to hunt, more or less, in the meantime, because we haven’t enough meat in our supplies to last. Ought to be plenty of musk-ox further inland. For the present we’ll make this Eskimo village our

headquarters. I guess that's about all."

"We understand," said Dick, and Sandy nodded importantly. Toma's inscrutable face did not express the excitement he must have shared with his two young white friends.

When the policemen departed a few moments later, they left behind them two sleepless boys, who could scarcely wait for the real beginning of the man hunt.

CHAPTER III

BIG GAME

“Look! Polar bear tracks!” Dick’s exclamation brought Sandy to his side in an instant and together they bent over a human-like footprint in the snow, their rifles clutched tightly in mittened hands that already had begun to perspire with the excitement of promised big game.

It was three days since the boys had arrived at the Eskimo camp with the policemen, and the present found them hunting musk-oxen several miles from camp. Corporal McCarthy and Constable Sloan had gone to a neighboring Eskimo village, seeking information regarding the lost Corporal Thalman, and Toma had been left at headquarters to take care of the dogs and keep a lookout for the “white Eskimo,” whose presence in the vicinity had been suspected due to the incident of the whalebone spear, and to the spy who had looked in at the igloo window.

The policemen had not exercised bad judgment in leaving the boys alone. Dick Kent and Sandy McClaren had proved to the mounted police how capable they were of taking care of themselves in the savage northland, and the self-control they evidenced upon sighting the polar bear tracks was ample proof that the dangers they already had coped with had strengthened them for even more daring deeds.

“It can’t be very old,” Sandy commented, in a whisper, after inspecting the bear tracks a few moments.

“Not more than an hour, I’ll bet,” said Dick.

Both boys looked up and scanned the surrounding vicinity. They were on a long, ice-caked slope strewn with boulders, which led down to shore ice. In the distance was open sea water, appearing almost black due to the dim sunlight.

There was no sign of life in evidence.

“Let’s try to track him,” Dick suggested.

“Do you think these rifles are of big enough caliber to kill a polar bear?” Sandy asked, as they began searching for more tracks.

“Yes, that .32 Special of yours and my 45.20 ought to do the trick easily enough. Remember, try to hit him in the soft spot under his ears, or right behind the shoulders.”

The bear tracks were hard to follow since at times they led over hard ice, or boulders, but now and again the huge animal had stepped in soft snow or loose soil and left signs of his passage.

For nearly a quarter of an hour they followed the trail along the slope. It finally led them to shore ice, which had been heaped up in huge mounds by the ocean waves during some Arctic storm.

“We’ve got to go slow here,” cautioned Dick. “The bear may pop out from behind any of these piles of ice. He’s probably hunting seals or fish out at the edge of the water.”

Scarcely had Dick spoken when there sounded a faint dog-like bark, and a puppyish whine.

“Did you hear that, Sandy!” exclaimed Dick. “Those sounds were made by seals. There must be a small herd of them near here.”

They moved on cautiously toward the open water, rifles held in readiness for instant use.

A hundred yards from the water they heard the loud bellow of a bull seal, a number of frightened barks, a blood-curdling growl, and then the sound of bodies striking the water.

“It’s the bear!” whispered Dick hoarsely. “He’s attacked the seals.”

A moment later an arresting scene met their eyes, as they reached level ice and saw open water a few yards away. A huge polar bear, his shaggy, grayish fur

dripping wet, was struggling out of the sea, holding in his jaws a young seal which still was faintly crying. Further out in the water a dozen seals were swiftly swimming toward an ice floe.

“Get back! He hasn’t seen us,” Dick said quickly, and the boys darted behind a large ice cake.

Together they peered cautiously around the edge of their barricade. The ferocious animal was out of the water now, shaking the water from his fur like a big dog. The young seal had ceased to struggle, and lay very still at the bear’s feet. In comparison with the tiny animal the polar bear seemed as large as a horse. Dick and Sandy quailed a little and pressed more closely together.

When the bear bent his head to nose over his kill, the boys quietly placed their rifles to their shoulders and took aim. Then followed a tense moment while they waited for a movement that would expose the bear’s most vulnerable points. At seventy-five yards they could not miss.

Slowly the bear picked up the seal in his jaws and paused an instant, seeming undecided as to what was the most comfortable place in which to enjoy his meal. Then two rifles cracked almost as one, and the great beast dropped to his belly, the seal falling from his jaws. Dick fired again swiftly, but Sandy jerked ineffectually at the reloading lever of his rifle. His gun had jammed in his haste.

A rattling growl came from the throat of the stricken polar bear, and with an angry lunge, the great brute started for the point from which the bullets had come. Dick fired three more times in quick succession, and a hundred feet from them the bear at last dropped and began to struggle.

“We got him!” whooped Sandy.

Dick was about to echo his chum’s triumphant cry, when an ominous growl from behind them froze the very blood in their veins with terror. As one they whirled about. Down the slope to the shore ice charged another polar bear, almost a replica of the one they had just shot. The beast was roaring its rage and was headed straight for the two young hunters.

“Run for your life!” cried Dick, “it’s the bear’s mate!”

As fast as they could run Dick and Sandy set off along the shore ice, exceeding

all previous records. They could hear the rattle of the bear's claws on the ice as it came on in pursuit, and with each second the angry growls sounded nearer.

Presently, Sandy began to fall behind in the race. Frantically, Dick urged him on, slackening his own pace to equal that of his slower chum, and while he ran like a frightened deer, all Dick's narrow escapes ran through his mind in swift succession, for he believed that he and Sandy were doomed at last.

In a last desperate effort to save himself and Sandy, Dick determined to make a stand with the last two cartridges in his rifle. It was a plan born of despair, he knew, for two shots at a running target hardly could stop a beast of such massive strength and vitality and in such a ferocious mood.

It was then that the boys noticed a change in the sounds of pursuit. The bear seemed to have fallen behind, his growls gurgling strangely in his throat.

With renewed hope they ran on until a loud, familiar shout pierced the icy air from a point behind them. They looked back over their shoulders and came to a staggering halt. A hundred yards behind, the bear lay struggling his last, the shaft of a harpoon protruding from its side, while above on the slope stood an Eskimo beckoning to them.

The gratitude of Dick and Sandy could not be expressed as they hurried toward the Eskimo who had doubtless saved their lives.

Coming closer to the native, they recognized him as Sipsa, who had proved so exceptionally friendly at the village. He seemed to understand when the boys tried to thank him, and conveyed by means of many signs how he had been scouting for walrus and seal when he had discovered the danger Dick and Sandy had fallen into.

The boys followed Sipsa to the dead polar bear, and watched him draw out the harpoon. So forcibly had the weapon been driven that it had passed almost entirely through the bear's thick body. Dick and Sandy shivered as they examined the mighty jaws and terrible claws that but for Sipsa's timely intervention might have crushed and torn them to shreds.

"Angekok, Angekok," Sipsa began repeating, while pointing at the dead bear.

Sandy looked blankly at Dick, who was searching his mind for the meaning of

the word. At last he recalled it.

“He means ‘devil.’ Angekok is the Eskimo word for ‘almighty devil.’ They believe in evil spirits, and he’s trying to tell us there was a devil in this bear.”

“I guess he’s not far from right,” Sandy declared with genuine sincerity.

Presently the Eskimo managed to convey to the boys that they must return to the village and get sledges with which to haul in the meat of the two bears.

Feeling they had had plenty of hunting for that day, the boys were glad to consent to this, and all three started back toward camp, led by Sipsa, who had gained the great respect of Dick and Sandy.

Tired, hungry and cold, the chums at last reached the Eskimo village, only to find all in a state of confusion and uproar. Toma met them with an explanation of the excitement tumbling from his ordinarily reticent lips.

“Somebody steal um dog team an’ sledge,” said Toma. “I in igloo, get um meat cooked for supper. All Eskimo down by big water, ketch um seal. When I come out I see not so many dogs, an’ one sledge not there. I hurry up, tell um Eskimos. They take dog team an’ go after this fella who steal dog team.”

“And you didn’t see the thief at all?” asked Dick, gravely concerned.

Toma shook his head vigorously. “Him come an’ go like bad spirit. No hear, no see. I no like that kind thief.”

Dick was puzzled at first, then spoke: “Sandy, I have an idea this is more of the white Eskimo’s work. He could have got away pretty quietly if he was a good hand with dogs, as I suppose he is. I’m certain now that Fred Mistak and the ‘white Eskimo’ are the same person. We’ll find out.”

“In the meantime, let’s eat,” said Sandy.

Dick discovered that he had as keen an appetite as Sandy when in their cozy igloo he found a tasty meal prepared by Toma. Both boys were too tired to join the Eskimos, who in spite of the theft of the dog team, set out to skin and cut up the polar bears, leaving the camp deserted except for the three boys. Dick and Sandy were later to learn that not even a funeral could stand between an Eskimo

and his hunting. When there was meat to be had the natives dropped everything until the last bit of it was safely stored away. For wild meat was their only staple diet—all that kept them from starving to death, and during the real winter they could hunt but little.

The boys had finished their supper and were relating to Toma, in detail, their narrow escape from the mad polar bear, when the barking dogs and the sound of familiar voices interrupted them. They tumbled out of the igloo to find Corporal McCarthy and Constable Sloan. The policemen had just returned from a long, fruitless trek eastward, and the Corporal had frosted his feet.

What the boys had to say about the stolen dog team was of especial interest to the officers.

“Without a doubt Fred Mistak is hiding near here,” commented Corporal McCarthy, when comfortably seated in the boys’ igloo, with his bare feet in a pan of snow to draw out the frost. “So far, I’ll have to admit we’ve done little better than nothing, but we’ll hope for better luck tomorrow——” Corporal McCarthy did not finish his sentence.

A hoarse cry at the entrance of the igloo was the interruption, and into their midst tumbled an Eskimo, gibbering in a frightful manner, and groveling on the floor as if he had lost his mind.

In the jumble of native words was audible the frequent ejaculation: “Angekok! Angekok!”

“Him one them three go after fella what steal dog team!” Toma suddenly exclaimed.

“What!” cried Corporal McCarthy. “Sloan,” he wheeled toward the Constable, “go out and see if the other two have returned alright.”

Constable Sloan was out and back in a few moments. “Not a sign of anyone around—no dog team either,” the Constable reported quietly.

McCarthy’s face took on a grave expression, and his jaws hardened. “Ask the Eskimo what scared him?” he directed Constable Sloan.

By this time the Eskimo had somewhat recovered his natural calm, yet he

frequently looked fearfully toward the igloo entrance, as if he feared something was coming in to get him.

The Constable's questions were brief and the Eskimo's answers prompt, though his voice trembled from fright.

"The Eskimo says it was the 'white Eskimo' that attacked them," Constable Sloan reported presently. "He says his two companions were killed and the dogs taken."

A deep silence fell upon all who had heard Constable Sloan's words. It was several seconds before Corporal McCarthy spoke rapidly:

"Get ready for the trail. We leave here just as soon as we get a few hours' sleep. I'm going to enlist Sipsa as a guide, and I'll get my man if I have to trail him clear to the North Pole!"

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE ESKIMO

It was thirty below zero the following morning when two teams of twelve dogs, each drawing sledges, loaded with supplies, departed from the little village of igloos. The warm breath from man and dog turned to vapor in the freezing air, and all were enveloped in a cloud of steam as they trekked eastward along the coastline.

Corporal McCarthy had found Sipsa willing to lead the party and had also enlisted the aid of two Eskimo dog drivers, Okewah and Ootanega. The policeman had promised all of them large rewards in tools, rifles, and tents, provided they served him faithfully in pursuit of the “white Eskimo.”

“I wonder how soon we’ll pick up the trail,” Sandy spoke from the depths of his frost-rimmed parka.

“No telling,” replied Dick through a cloud of steam, “we’re now following the tracks made by the Eskimo who came in last half scared to death. Corporal McCarthy believes these tracks will lead to the place where the white Eskimo and his men attacked those three Eskimos who went after the stolen dog team.”

The boys said no more then for the fast pace at which they were traveling took all their breath. For two hours they drove eastward across the snowfields under a gray cloud filmed sky. At the end of this time they came to a narrow defile between huge blocks of ice that had been thrown up by the waves at high tide. They threaded their way among the ice cakes for about a hundred yards when they came upon the scene of a terrible tragedy.

“It’s the two Eskimos that failed to come back last night!” Dick’s horrified exclamation was echoed by Sandy while the two policemen and the Eskimos bent over the two huddled forms in the snow.

The Eskimos had been killed, and all about them were signs of a deadly struggle. One sledge had been crushed, and its packing torn up and rifled of supplies. Two dogs lay dead, and prowling foxes had torn them to bits.

“If this isn’t the work of Fred Mistak, then I don’t know my name!” Corporal McCarthy cried, shaking his fist at the white silent hills. “But we’ll get him, we’ll get him, and he’ll pay a big price!”

Dick and Sandy thrilled at the words, and hastened to lend a hand to the burial of the bodies.

Two typical Eskimo graves were made by heaping small boulders upon the dead natives in a cairn-like mound, which would keep away the foxes, which had as yet scarcely harmed them, probably because the dogs had satisfied them for the present. To agree with the superstitions of the Eskimos the sledges, weapons and other paraphernalia of the deceased were buried with the dead.

“Now that sorry business is over,” Corporal McCarthy addressed the somber company, “we’ll pick up Mistak’s trail and see how fast we can mush. Every man of you keep watch for an ambush. This fellow is about as desperate as they make them, and we’ve already had a taste of his treachery. It’s our hide or his and let’s be careful it’s his. Mush on!”

Once more the dogs buckled into the harness and the long Eskimo whips lashed and crackled over many bobbing, white tails.

But it was a weary, half-frozen company that camped late that night without sighting the mysterious person they pursued. Dick and Sandy were almost too tired to be hungry once they had thrown up their tupik, or Eskimo tent made of sealskins. Not until they had drunk several cups of hot tea, an indispensable drink in the far north, did they feel anywhere near themselves, and could discuss the doings of the day while munching hard biscuit and pemmican.

“I wonder where this trail will end?” Sandy ventured dubiously.

“Wish I knew,” rejoined Dick, “but I think the ‘white Eskimo’ will lead us on a real old wild goose chase. He knows more about this country than any of us, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he knew the lay of the land better than any of these Eskimo guides. Anyway the Eskimos can’t be of much use in tracking that fellow because they believe the ‘white Eskimo’ is an Angekok, or devil. They’re

so superstitious that if we once got very close to the fellow we're chasing, they'd probably lead us astray or run off and leave us alone."

"I guess they believe in ghosts alright," agreed Sandy, pouring another cup of tea.

Dick was about to continue the discussion, when he chanced to look through the opening of their tupik.

"Look at that!" he grasped Sandy's arm tensely.

What Dick saw was their three Eskimo hands gathered before their tupik in a private council of some secret purpose. The native drivers were gesturing excitedly with their hands and heads, evidently arguing with Sipsa, the guide.

"The drivers seem to be ready to quit right now, the way they act," observed Sandy.

"Well, we can't go far without them, at least, without a guide. I ought to tell Corporal McCarthy about this."

However, no more were the words out of Dick's mouth than the police Corporal approached the three Eskimos and scattered them to various tasks.

Presently the Corporal joined the boys in their tent and confirmed their fears. "I'm afraid these Eskimos will desert us if we don't keep close watch of them," said the policeman. "We'll all have to take turns on watch tonight, tired as we are. I think Sipsa still is loyal, but the other two are doing their best to make him desert. The 'white Eskimo' certainly has them scared."

It was twelve o'clock when Dick Kent's turn came to stand watch, and it was with some difficulty that he shook the sleep out of his eyes when Constable Sloan spoke to him.

"Don't think we'll have any trouble tonight after all," the Constable reassured him. "The Eskimos seem pretty quiet, but be ready for anything and don't hesitate to call McCarthy and me if anything unusual turns up. Good night."

Dick shivered as he took his post at the entrance of the tupik with rifle in his mittened hands. The dogs were quarreling among themselves where they were

leashed to the sledges, and from the Eskimos' tupik came the muffled sound of voices. They did not seem as quiet now as Constable Sloan had reported them. They were speaking in their native tongue and Dick could not understand what they were talking about.

"I'll just keep close watch of their tent," he murmured to himself. "If any of them try to sneak away I'll call the policemen."

An hour passed, the Eskimos quieting down and apparently falling asleep. The vast silence of the far north brooded over the little encampment, when Dick detected, out of the corner of his eye, a movement beyond the huddled dogs. It was like a small animal that had moved across the top of a snowdrift. Dick's heart skipped a beat as he strained his eyes to catch sight of whatever had appeared.

A dog growled, and Dick spoke quietly to the big huskies, getting up and going to them. The leader of the team, a giant malemute, was sitting up, his ears alert, and his nose wriggling as he sniffed the air uneasily.

"What is it, old boy?" whispered Dick. "What do you see?"

The malemute growled ominously in answer, his hair rising along his back as he scented some sort of danger.

Dick looked carefully about camp again, seeking the cause for the dog's uneasiness, but all seemed peaceful enough. Impulsively, he decided to walk out to the drift where he had seen the suspicious movement, thinking he would find there the tracks of some animal.

The drift was only about fifty yards from the sledges where the dogs were tied, and Dick soon reached it. About to go around the drift and investigate, a weird, low call from behind him brought him to an abrupt halt, the blood congealing in his veins at the strangeness of the sound. He turned and looked back at camp. There came a soft swishing sound from the snowdrift he had been about to inspect, and he whirled to see a dark form bearing down upon him. His startled cry was cut off sharply as something hard descended forcefully upon his head and he went down in the snow, thousands of stars blazing before his eyes.

But Dick had not been knocked entirely unconscious. He lay still a moment until his senses came back to him, feeling the person who had attacked him leap over

him and toward camp. Then came the cries of the aroused camp, mingled with the barking dogs, and above all the shriek of a frightened Eskimo, followed by a wail of fear.

Struggling to his feet, Dick saw Corporal McCarthy taking aim at two fleeing figures, and heard his rifle crack. But the policeman was firing into the air, merely to frighten the attackers.

Sipsa was struggling in the strong arms of Constable Sloan, and from the mouthings of the frightened native Dick could make out that Sipsa had seen the “white Eskimo.”

“Where are the drivers?” Dick shouted to Sandy who was standing as if stunned, his rifle held in his hands.

Sandy seemed to regain his wits at that and dived for the Eskimos’ tupik along with Dick. They almost collided with Toma coming out of the tent.

“Um gone,” said Toma, “Um run away when seen um ‘white Eskimo.’”

The truth of Toma’s statement was soon revealed when a search of the camp and the vicinity revealed no sign of the two drivers, other than their tracks in the snow.

“Well,” said Corporal McCarthy, “I guess the ‘white Eskimo’ knows how to scare the wits out of the natives. I don’t suppose there’s any use for us to chase our guides. They’d be of no further use anyway. I hope Sipsa doesn’t take it into his head to follow them when he gets a chance to break away.”

“We’re lucky to have whole skins,” Constable Sloan remarked.

“My head feels as if it was too big for my parka,” said Dick, manfully fighting off a dizzy spell.

“Hurry into your tent and I’ll get the medicine kit,” said Corporal McCarthy. “I want to get going again in an hour anyway. We ought to locate some more drivers tomorrow, and if possible, overtake Mistak, the ‘white Eskimo,’ before he gets another lead on us.”

Dick’s head wound proved not serious. His heavy parka had protected his scalp

from the blow, which had probably been made with a spear butt. There was, however, a large lump about the size of an egg over his left temple, and it was rather sore. But the young northman would not think of delaying the pursuit, and speedily forgot his slight wound as he hustled about making tea, while Sandy and Toma lent willing hands with the packs and dog harnesses.

Within an hour dog and man had partaken of an early breakfast and were mushing grimly along a fresh trail under the midnight sun.

“This was a wise move on our part,” Dick told Sandy as they waddled along on their snowshoes. “Mistak won’t expect us to start out so soon and we’ve a good chance to overtake him.”

“I get the creeps whenever I think of that Eskimo stealing into camp that way,” rejoined Sandy. “Suppose he is a kind of a devil.”

“Nonsense,” replied Dick, “just because these poor, superstitious Eskimos are frightened is no sign you should be. I’ll admit he’s a dangerous character, but he’s no more than a human being, and the mounted will get him in the end.”

Sandy was about to reply when an exclamation from one of the policemen silenced him.

They had come out on the rim of an ice-bound ridge and below them stretched a vast valley bounded by the sea on the north and filled with age-old ice formations.

Directly below them were two dog teams, the drivers of which had apparently not yet detected the mounted police.

Dick and Sandy could not forbear a cheer as Corporal McCarthy called for full speed ahead and they drove the dogs yelping down the slope toward the fugitives from justice. At that moment it looked very much as if Fred Mistak’s career of outlawry were doomed already, and the boys prepared themselves for a battle.

CHAPTER V

AT SEA IN KAYACKS

When Dick and Sandy sighted the dog team of what they believed to be the “white Eskimo,” it could not have been more than a half a mile away, though distances in the north are deceptive.

“We ought to catch up with them in twenty minutes,” Constable Sloan had said.

But they were not so fortunate. Either the “white Eskimo” had seen his pursuers and was therefore driving faster, or his dogs were faster at a normal pace of travel than the police dogs. At any rate, after thirty minutes, fast driving they were bumping along over a rough ice floor, the team ahead nowhere in sight.

“It can’t be far to the sea shore now, can it?” panted Sandy.

“No,” Dick replied, “we are probably traveling across a frozen bay now. The ice may be hundreds of feet thick here, you know, and the sun never gets warm enough to melt that much ice.”

“It takes awfully cold weather to freeze salt water,” Sandy opined.

“I should say it does!” agreed Dick emphatically, “but you know most of the ice around here is from old glaciers, and is fresh water ice. The glaciers slide down to the sea shore and break off, making ice-bergs and huge ice floes.”

“Hey! Look out!” Sandy’s cry of warning came too late. Dick had been so interested in his explanation of the ice formations that he had not noticed how close he was to a treacherous slope of glassy ice. He slipped, and before he could catch himself he had whizzed down, flat on his back, to come up with a bump in a hard snowdrift at the bottom of the slope.

“Are you hurt?” called Sandy anxiously, as Dick crawled out of the snow, sat up

and began shaking himself.

“No, but I’ve got my parka full of snow,” Dick called back, “and it’s not a very pleasant feeling with melted snow trickling down your chest.”

The policemen had stopped upon seeing Dick’s accident, and they now waited until he had climbed back up the slippery slope before they went on.

Dick was not much the worse for the spill in the snow, since the heat of his body under the warm clothing soon dried up the snow that had seeped in. He forgot the accident in anticipation of the excitement ahead, for at any moment all hands expected to sight the dog team of Fred Mistak.

A breeze had sprung up, blowing in their faces, and they all could feel the nearness of the sea by the dampness in the air. Then, suddenly, they rounded a huge heap of snow-covered ice to come upon a vast bay of open water and a most discouraging sight. A mile out to sea, in native boats, they could see their quarry vanishing toward a snow-capped, rocky island.

Even as they watched they saw one tiny figure raise up and wave a defiant hand at them.

“Well, he’s flown the coop this time,” said Corporal McCarthy through his teeth, “but we’re not beaten yet—not by a long shot. Sloan, bring Sipsa here.”

Dick and Sandy followed the Constable and the Eskimo guide to Corporal McCarthy’s side.

“Tell Sipsa we must get Eskimo boats immediately,” was the policeman’s command. “Enough boats to carry all of us along with our provisions, dogs, and sledges.”

When Sloan had explained this to Sipsa, the Eskimo shook his head at first, but finally seemed to offer some encouragement.

“He says he’s not sure he can find any Eskimos very near here,” Sloan turned to Corporal McCarthy. “But he’ll try. He says we’ll have to take a chance following the coast line.”

“Alright, then, we’ll take the chance. We’ve got to have boats.”

But luck was with them, for they had not gone on a mile when they came upon a dozen igloos in a sheltered nook. The tribesmen were at sea, hunting seals, and the women were scattered along the shore skinning and cutting up the meat.

“We are in luck in some ways,” called Constable Sloan, cheerfully, as they drew up at the igloos. “Now if we can only trade these fellows out of a few native boats, we’ll be luckier still. Here comes a couple of men.”

The two Eskimos approaching from the beach, were evidently not at all afraid of the white men, for they came up smiling, perfectly unconscious that they put forth a bad appearance with their clothing covered with seal blubber, grease and blood.

Sipsa immediately began talking with them, Sloan permitting him to do the dickering for the boats.

When the policemen had opened one of the packs and revealed some fine, shiney knives, kettles, and axes, the Eskimos became greatly interested, and one of them ran off to call the rest of the tribe.

Presently they were all down at the sea shore looking over the native boats, or kayacks. Corporal McCarthy picked out one serviceable looking kayack, and two umiacks, or large boats, for the dogs and supplies. The kayack was about twenty feet long and twenty inches wide, covered with water proofed skins, and made to seat one person in a hole in the center, over which was a flap that could be buttoned around the chin, making the boat almost water tight, even though it were capsized. The umiacks were, however, flat-bottomed, hollow, and were ordinarily used in transporting women, children, and household goods by water. Corporal McCarthy gave the Eskimo owners a large collection of knives, pots and hatchets for the boats and they seemed very well pleased with the trade.

“I’ll take the kayack,” instructed Corporal McCarthy. “Sloan, you and the Indian lad take one of the umiacks and Dick, Sandy, and Sipsa the other. If we get a move on we can get our equipment loaded before Mistak gets too much of a start. He took his dogs so we’ll have to take ours.”

Not more than a half hour later Dick and Sandy and the Eskimo guide put to sea in their umiack, a crude sail of caribou hide stiffening in the breeze, while they plied a paddle to add to their speed. Constable Sloan and Toma followed immediately in the other umiack, while the Corporal settled himself in the

kayack, the last of the three.

Corporal McCarthy soon passed the heavily loaded umiacks in his faster and lighter boat and signaled them to follow him.

“Watch out for the ice bergs and floes,” called the corporal. “If you see a walrus, don’t shoot unless you’re attacked.”

The three boats strung out in a line headed toward the glacial island where they believed Mistak would land. In Dick and Sandy’s boat were half the dogs and the two sledges, along with the stoves and liquid fuel. It was a heavy load for the unwieldy umiack, and Dick was not long in discovering that the dangers in arctic navigation were not to be scoffed at. Though from a distance the water seemed free from ice, close at hand the bergs could be seen rolling along, either submerged, or just above the water. Sipsa took a position in the prow of the umiack, where, with a long pole, he fended off the larger ice blocks. In the stern Dick plied a paddle, while in the center Sandy took care of the dogs and saw that the cargo did not slip to one side and capsize the craft.

All went well until they reached rougher water a quarter mile from the shore. Here an ocean current carried them eastward in spite of all they could do. Sandy fashioned himself a paddle from a snow shoe covered with a piece of seal skin, and did all he could to help Dick in the uneven struggle, but they moved steadily eastward toward a low headland that marked that boundary of the bay. The island that was their destination now lay several miles northwest of them, and a floe separated the two umiacks. Corporal McCarthy was having all he could do to manage his kayak, which was being considerably buffeted about by the waves and ice.

“Maybe we’ll strike another current when we get close to that headland east of us,” called Dick from the stern.

“I hope so,” replied Sandy dubiously. “This sail isn’t doing us much good now though. The wind seems to have gone down suddenly.”

At that moment Sipsa, the Eskimo guide, rammed his pole at a submerged ice berg, and the pole slipped down into the water, forcing Sipsa to lose his balance.

Dick’s cry of warning did no good. The Eskimo did the best he could to keep his balance, then toppled head foremost into the chilly water.

“Quick, help him in, Sandy!” cried Dick, “while I hold the boat as steady as I can.”

Sandy dropped his paddle and hurried to the prow where Sipsa was struggling about in the water. The Eskimo still retained a tight grip on his pole, which had been the cause of his fall, and Sandy got a grip on this. Soon Sipsa crawled, gasping and gurgling, into the umiack.

“Whew, close shave that!” exclaimed Sandy.

“And maybe he’ll freeze to death from that wetting,” Dick added. “Sandy, you’d better get one of the heaters started so he can dry off.”

But Sipsa, hardy Eskimo that he was, made it known, by various signs, that he needed no heater, and took up his former position as if nothing had happened. While the ducking might have been fatal for Dick or Sandy, it meant little to the guide since the season was what he called summer.

Once off the headland the current swept them northward as they had hoped, and also a breeze sprang up from the open sea. The sail filled and they began to make time toward the island. The floe which had separated the umiacks had passed on and Dick and Sandy could see Toma and Constable Sloan coming along safely a quarter mile behind. Corporal McCarthy was within speaking distance again and his voice boomed out over the water.

“Watch out for walrus! There’s a big bull in here somewhere. Steer clear of him if you can.”

The moment was a tense one for Dick and Sandy. Many a story they had heard of these giant inhabitants of the Polar Sea, and to meet one in his native haunts was something they feared, yet hoped to experience.

Dick’s eyes were fixed upon the water near at hand when something dark welled up out of the clear blue depths and shot past the boat.

“There he is!” he cried.

“Sure it was a walrus?” Sandy hazarded breathlessly.

“It must have been. It had big flippers and I think I saw tusks like an elephant’s.”

“Maybe it was your imagination.”

But what happened next assured Sandy that Dick had not been using his imagination. A dark form heaved up out of the water almost under Sipsa’s ice pole. The umiack rocked dangerously and nearly upset the Eskimo. The boys got a clear look at the walrus this time for just a moment as the huge creature reared out of the water and looked at them before it sunk out of sight in a whirlpool of bubbles.

Sandy snatched up his rifle, but Dick warned him to hold fire until it was absolutely necessary.

“Was that the walrus?” called Corporal McCarthy backing water with his paddle.

“You bet it was,” Dick shouted, “and if he’d been two feet nearer he’d have turned us over—hey!”

Dick said no more for at that instant the umiack, with its heavy load, was hoisted upward out of the water from the impact of a powerful body underneath. Sipsa tumbled backward from the prow, falling in among the whimpering dogs. Sandy and Dick clung to their seats while the boat dropped back to the water with a heave and splash. Fortunately, the umiack settled to an even keel without taking in too much water. But scarcely had they recovered from the nearly disastrous effects of the walrus’s first attack, when Sipsa shouted a warning from the stern.

“There he is again—coming at us from the front!” shouted Sandy, throwing up his rifle as Dick snatched up his own.

As Dick took aim at the rushing mass of fur, tusks, and flippers, he saw Corporal McCarthy level his rifle from the kayak. The three rifles boomed almost as one. The walrus, hit hard, swerved and rolled in his mad attack, and in a whirl of water sank out of sight, leaving a red blot in the water behind him.

“He’s been wounded badly, if not killed,” said Sandy pointing at the blood in the water.

“I hope he’ll leave us alone anyway, but if he don’t——” Dick tightened his grip on his rifle.

For several minutes they watched, guns ready, for a renewal of the bull walrus’s

attack, but the water disclosed no angry monster.

“I guess he’s had enough,” called Corporal McCarthy, “let’s get going. Do you see what’s coming up from the east?”

Dick and Sandy looked as the policeman directed, and their hearts jumped as if a hundred walruses were bearing down upon them, for, not a mile distant, a dense Arctic fog was floating swiftly toward them, like a wall of gray smoke.

“A fog!” cried Dick. “Get that paddle, Sandy! If we ever get caught in that fog we’ll be lost sure!”

CHAPTER VI

LOST IN AN ARCTIC FOG

After they had first sighted the fog it did not seem more than five minutes before they were enveloped in it. They could not see ten feet ahead of them, and the only way they had of knowing they were near one another was by shouting. The wind lulled almost immediately and the umiack began to drift straight north. In a few moments all hands were wet to the skin. All around them the icebergs and floes ground together with growling, grating noises, like so many fierce animals.

“Ahoy, there!” came the muffled bellow of Corporal McCarthy through the heavy mist.

“Here!” shouted Dick at the top of his lungs, the fog seeming to throw the sound of his voice back into his face.

“Keep paddling to the right—against the current,” came the Corporal’s command. “Sing out every few minutes so we can keep track of each other.”

“Alright,” shouted Dick, and behind came the fainter sound of Constable Sloan’s voice from the other umiack.

Progress now became dangerous indeed. The boats seemed to have floated into a patch of broken ice that threatened every minute to crush the frail umiacks like so much match wood. Then, too, Corporal McCarthy’s shouts were growing fainter at every repetition.

“We’re losing ground,” called Dick to Sandy. “Work harder. Keep moving to the right!”

“That’s what I’m trying to do,” called back Sandy from the center of the boat, “but there’s a big floe pushing us to the left. We can’t seem to get around it. Sipsa is doing all he can to keep us from getting smashed up from the left. Look

out!”

Sandy’s warning shout was accompanied by a violent jar that shook the umiack from bow to stern.

“We’ve hit solid ice on the left!” cried Sandy. “We’ll be smashed between two floes.”

Dick leaped up and, leaning over the side of the umiack, pushed on the ice that was threatening to crush them against the floating ice on their right.

But his efforts were of no avail. The umiack shuddered as if about to collapse under the pressure, then seemed to rise out of the water.

“The ice has shoved under us!” cried Dick, much relieved.

Dick was right. Luckily, the flat bottomed umiack had grounded on the flat ice pushing against her starboard side, and the higher ice on the lee was pushing her farther over. Presently they were almost entirely out of the water, the umiack half on the ice floe and floating along with it.

“We can’t stay on this ice,” called Sandy. “It will carry us out to sea and we’ll be lost.”

Dick thought rapidly. It was a moment for quick decision and daring action.

“Sandy,” he cried, his mind made up, “stick by the boat. I’m going out on this floe and shove us off as soon as we get to open water on one side!”

“You’ll be drowned!” wailed Sandy.

“Got to take a chance,” was Dick’s exclamation as he leaped over the gunwale of the umiack to the slippery surface of the fragment of floe upon which they had been lifted.

“Tell me as soon as you see open water on the left,” shouted Dick to Sandy. “That’s the only way we can get off this floe. I can’t move the umiack to the other side.”

“Alright—wait,” Sandy replied tensely.

There followed many moments of suspense when each heart beat seemed painful. Little that Dick knew of the northern seas, it was enough to make the truth clear to him. If the floe they had grounded upon joined with the ice on the left, and the entire mass continued to move, they would be carried out to sea and lost on an ocean where few ships had ever navigated. It had been several minutes since they had heard the voice of Corporal McCarthy, and Constable Sloan's shouts were barely audible behind and far to the east. Proof enough that the ice was carrying them out beyond the headland that marked the end of the bay. Tensely Dick waited, digging his boots into little chinks of ice, ready to push off at a word from Sandy.

"Watch out!" Sandy's low exclamation steeled Dick's muscles. "We're breaking loose from the other ice. The crack is getting wider. Wait a minute! Alright, let her go!"

Dick drew a deep breath and bent all his strength upon the heavy umiack. There came a slight grating sound, a lurch and the umiack, with its heavy load, slid from the floe into the sea, as Dick leaped into the stern with a cry of relief.

But his relief was short lived, for when he lifted his voice to shout to the other boats, there was no reply. Again and again he shouted, until his voice was hoarse, listening intently in the intervals. Not even Sloan's voice was audible now.

"We must be way out of the course," Sandy said, discouraged.

Dick's spirits fell also, then when he was about to give up shouting, he caught the sound of a voice again.

"There—that's Constable Sloan," Dick said tensely.

"But it's funny—he seems to be on the left of us," Sandy came back.

They listened again, often shouting together. This time they were amazed to hear the faint call from slightly to the right and ahead.

"That must be Corporal McCarthy," Dick hazarded.

"No, I think it sounded like Constable Sloan," Sandy disagreed. "But how could he get over on the right so soon?"

“It’s the fog, I guess,” Dick returned. “The sounds are deceiving. Anyway, we’re certain this floe on our right is between us and the island. We’ll have to keep on working ahead until we can get around it.”

“You know what I think, Dick?” Sandy’s voice was exceedingly sober.

“Well, what do you think? I’m at my wit’s end myself.”

“This floe has caught on a larger block of ice somewhere on the other side and it has been turning slowly. Dick, we don’t know where we’re at now.”

“I hope you’re wrong,” Dick hastily rejoined, renewing his efforts at the paddle.

The boys now proceeded to bury their misgivings in hard work on the paddles. Sipsa continued his work at the prow of the craft, his expert handling of the pole avoiding many a dangerous ice jam. Yet as the minutes passed and they failed again and again to raise even a faint shout from the balance of the company, they became certain that they were floating out to sea.

“Oh, if this fog would only lift!” Dick prayed.

They worked on for what seemed to them an hour longer, but which actually could not have been more than fifteen minutes, when it seemed that Dick’s prayer was about to be answered.

“It’s getting lighter, isn’t it?” Sandy said hoarsely, almost afraid to believe his eyes.

“I believe you’re right,” Dick answered, cheering up.

Slowly the fog thinned until they could see almost a hundred feet around them, then, as swiftly as it had enveloped them, the fog bank passed over, leaving them half blinded by the sudden glare of sunlight. Dick and Sandy cried out with joy, and rose up in the umiack to look about.

“Thank heaven!” Dick ejaculated as he feasted his eyes on a welcome scene.

Sandy had been right. The floe which they had been following had touched upon some solider object. It had been the island!

There was but a few yards of open water between them and the barren, snow-piled shore, and the floe on their right made a strong bridge to land. Half a mile out to sea was the umiack of Constable Sloan and Toma, making good time toward land. Corporal McCarthy was waving his paddle to them a quarter mile to the left, and, now that the fog no longer deadened sound, his shout was borne to the ears of the happy boys.

Dick and Sandy immediately bent to the paddles and worked the umiack into the beach, where they pulled it upon dry land and commenced unloading it.

A half hour later the company was reunited, and Corporal McCarthy gave orders to make camp, and to stow the native boats high and dry on the shore for future use.

“We’ll have to take a rest after that hard pull across the bay,” the policeman explained. “But while you fellows fix something to eat, I’ll take a run along the shore and see if I can’t find where Mistak landed. I’d like to know more about this island we’ve landed on, too.”

When Corporal McCarthy was gone, Dick, Sandy and Toma set to work with alacrity to help Constable Sloan make camp. They were so hungry that their mouths watered when they fed the ravenous dogs their allotment of frozen fish.

“I could eat whalebone and like it,” Dick said to Sandy as he watched Constable Sloan pouring beans into the melted snow water, and listened to the simmering of the tea pot.

“That’s nothing,” Sandy retorted. “I know now why a goat can eat tin cans.”

Constable Sloan did not wait for Corporal McCarthy’s return before he called all hands to the food he had prepared. Perhaps he sympathized with the boys, but it was true he ate as hungrily as they did, all the while telling them stories of his experiences in the land of the long day and the long night.

“It hardly seems possible we’re actually seeing the midnight sun,” Dick said, when the edge was off his appetite.

“The way my eyes feel, I sure feel it’s a fact. Do your eyes feel strained and tired, Dick?”

“You bet they do. But how would it feel if we had as strong sunlight as they do in the south?”

“We’d probably go blind,” Sandy opined.

“There’s hardly a doubt about that,” said Constable Sloan. “But wait till you experience the long night, and see the moon go around and around in the sky, for day after day, not seeing anything but the stars, and then only when the sky is clear.”

“Do you think we’ll be up here that long?” asked Dick.

“Well, you never can tell,” Constable Sloan replied evasively, as if he had said more than he intended.

After the meal the boys immediately crawled into their sleeping bags and fell into a sound slumber. They did not awaken when Corporal McCarthy returned, several hours later, and did not know he had returned until they were awakened to find the dogs harnessed to the sledges and breakfast awaiting them.

“Why didn’t you wake us up so we could help get ready to start?” Dick asked the policemen.

“We’ve got a long hard trip ahead of us,” returned the Corporal, “and you fellows needed your rest. I found Mistak’s trail two miles east of here. He’s started inland and not only that, but it looks like he’s crossed a glacier which seems to cover part of the interior of the island.”

“Did you hear that?” Dick turned to Sandy. “We may have to cross a glacier.”

“That suits me better than floating around among these icebergs in a caribou hide boat,” Sandy replied with spirit. “I like to have my feet under me, and dry land under my feet.”

“In other words you’re a land lubber,” laughed Dick.

“I guess I am,” admitted Sandy, strapping on his snowshoes.

A little later the little company pulled out of camp, and set off at a good pace, Corporal McCarthy in the lead. After following the seashore a little way they cut

inland at an angle, and after about an hour's sledging struck the trail made by a dog team and three men.

At this point they made a halt while Corporal McCarthy went ahead to look over the land before they advanced. The reason for this move was quickly evident, for towering over them, at a distance of less than half a mile, was a mass of ice that marked the beginning of a glacier, probably miles and miles in extent.

Dick and Sandy were awed by the very immensity of the towering ice. The fact that they might find it necessary to brave those treacherous heights on the trail of the "white Eskimo" tested their courage to the utmost. But the boys were not the sort that back down when danger is close at hand. Truth to tell, they loved action and danger more than was good for their own safety.

"There comes the Corporal," Dick called out presently, his sharp eyes having caught sight of a fur parka behind an ice hummock.

Presently the policeman came fully into view and waved for them to come on.

"The trail leads over the glacier," called the Corporal when they were within hearing distance.

Dick and Sandy hurried forward after the dogs, their hearts hammering at the promise of the excitement ahead.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE GLACIER

Immediately upon approaching the foot of the glacier Dick and Sandy could see what a dangerous struggle was to be theirs in attempting to scale the mountain of ice. For hundreds of years the ice had frozen there, layer upon layer, filled with great holes and cracks, its own great weight forcing it to move toward sea level.

“I don’t see how we’re ever going to climb it,” Sandy gasped.

“Well, I don’t either,” admitted Dick, “but Mistak must have got to the top, and anything he can do, the King’s policemen can do.”

“Heap big mountain ice,” commented Toma. “Ketchum sore head if slide down to bottom.”

“You’re right,” Dick could not help but laugh at Toma’s remark in spite of the seriousness of the task ahead of them.

“Well, boys,” Constable Sloan came forward, interrupting them, “we’ll have to use man power now. Here’s a good chance for you fellows to test your biceps. There are six of us, so that leaves three to a sled. Sipsa, Toma and myself will take the first sledge—that leaves you boys and the Corporal for the second. It won’t take much head work, but lots of backbone. Let’s go!”

Dick and Sandy watched, with interest, the starting of the first sledge up the steep incline, men and dogs straining with every ounce of strength in them. When at last they disappeared around a huge knob of ice and snow, they sent a lusty cheer after them, and set to work themselves to push their sledge up.

It took a half hour of pushing and hauling before they reached a point that was level enough for them to rest comfortably.

“Much more of this and I’ll turn to water,” panted Sandy, throwing back his parka and revealing the perspiration standing out in huge drops that froze almost as soon as they came in contact with the air.

“Better keep that parka over your head,” cautioned Corporal McCarthy. “A little too much of this air when you’re overheated will frost your lungs, and you know what that means.”

Sandy remembered that frost bitten lungs often brought on more serious ailments, and hurriedly bundled up his face.

An hour more of strenuous climbing brought them to a point half way up the wall of the glacier. They could see the first sledge going up far above them, like a caterpillar tank, the dogs and men pushing and pulling it appearing like so many ants hauling a gram of wheat to their home hill.

Dick took a deep breath and looked down, grasping Sandy’s arm to call his attention to the vast scene that lay below them. Far away they could see the mainland which they had left the day before. The open water glittered like diamonds where the floating ice lay, and the beach of the island seemed more like a ribbon than a piece of land.

“It makes me dizzy,” said Sandy.

“Yes, but there’s something inspiring about it,” returned Dick. “It’s desolate and frozen and lonely, but just the same it’s beautiful because it’s so clean and white and still.”

“I guess you just about hit the nail on the head that time,” spoke up Corporal McCarthy, who was standing just behind them. “But there’s death in that beauty. I hope you boys never have to see all of what I mean. Now let’s get to work on this sledge.”

Refreshed by their rest, the boys buckled down to the job with a will, and for considerable distance all went well as before. Then, when they were just reaching a point where they might breathe again, the rope which the policeman was pulling on broke loose from the sledge, and with the shock of the freed weight, Dick slipped, the sledge sliding back upon Sandy who was pushing from behind. For an instant the sturdy Scotch lad held the full weight of the heavy sledge, then with a faint cry of dismay, he started down, the sledge on top of

him.

“Oh, Sandy!” Dick gave a shout of anguish, as, slipping and sliding, he held on to the rope he had been pulling on.

Corporal McCarthy leaped down to Dick’s aid, but the sledge had gained momentum and, white faced, they could only hang on hoping the sledge would catch on the rough ice before it began to turn over.

Faster and faster the sledge began to slide, pushing Sandy before it, his shirt pinched under the runners, and dragging the frantically struggling two after it.

“We’ve got to stop it before it reaches the edge of that shelf!” cried Corporal McCarthy. “If it ever goes over the edge, Sandy is gone!”

But they had started a miniature avalanche of ice and snow by their struggles and this rolling along underfoot made firm footing impossible to find.

One last heave they gave backward on the remaining rope as the sledge struck the edge of the ice shelf. They heard a heavy crash, then silence.

Dick looked up from where he clung to the steep incline, the sledge rope clutched in his hands. Stunned by fear for what had happened to Sandy, who had disappeared, he watched Corporal McCarthy pick his way cautiously down to the sledge. The rear end of the runners had stuck in a fissure, bringing the sledge to a stop not more than a foot from the edge of the shelf below which they knew not how far the drop was.

As if it were all a bad dream, Dick watched the policeman look over the sledge, under it, and all about, then lie down on his stomach and peer over the shelf. The significance of that move and what it might mean in regard to Sandy’s fate, brought Dick to his feet, and in two agile leaps he was at the policeman’s side.

The drop under the shelf was only about twenty feet, provided an object falling from it caught on a second projection of ice and snow. Beyond that there was a frightful depth to a small plateau.

“Sandy! Sandy!” Dick called at the top of his voice.

Corporal McCarthy’s somber expression showed that he thought there was little

use in shouting, but he presently uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

The snow on the lower shelf directly below the point where the sledge had lodged, had moved!

“Look!” cried Dick, in a glad shout.

From the snow on the shelf protruded one arm, then another, and a moment later the snow plastered figure of Sandy rose up, hip deep in soft snow.

“Hold on while I get a rope!” shouted the Corporal.

“We’ll haul you back up,” seconded Dick. “Are you hurt much?”

“I’m alright,” came Sandy’s shout, a bit faint, but welcomingly spirited. “Got a few bruises is all.”

Then Corporal McCarthy was back with a rope, and was paying it out over the shelf. Sandy quickly got hold of his end and fastened it about his waist. In a moment the combined strength of the two on the ledge had hauled Sandy to the safety of the shelf where the sledge had lodged.

“Gee, I was never so glad to see anybody in my life!” exclaimed Dick, banging his chum on the back with a lusty hand.

“Hey, watch out where you are hitting me,” complained Sandy. “That sledge made me sore all over when it shoved me down that bank. And, say, I thought I was gone when I rolled over that shelf.”

“Lad, you’re one of the luckiest fellows that ever lived,” Corporal McCarthy put in, “but now let’s tie into this sledge again and not let those fellows ahead of us beat us to the top too far.”

An hour more of back-bending toil and they joined Constable Sloan and the others, who already had reached the top of the glacier.

While they all rested, Dick and Sandy looked curiously about them. Level ice, covered with snow, stretched for considerable distance on either hand. Long, zigzag cracks, or fissures, formed curious designs on the glacier’s summit; while now and again they could hear a deep rumble, like distant thunder, which,

Constable Sloan said, was due to new cracks forming in the ice, and sometimes caused by a fragment of the glacier breaking off and falling into a fissure or into the sea far away across the island.

Corporal McCarthy was not long in locating the trail made by Fred Mistak's dog team. They had taken virtually the same path up the wall of the glacier that the fugitive had taken, and so were not far off the trail.

Soon they were hurrying onward, carefully avoiding the deep, dangerous chasms in the ice whenever possible, and when necessary, bridging the narrow cracks with their sledges.

"I'd hate to fall into one of those cracks," Dick said in a low voice to Sandy.

"Me, too," Sandy agreed. "I wonder what's at the bottom of them."

"I've heard there are rivers of running water under these glaciers," replied Dick, "and that scientists have found the fossils of ancient animals in the huge caves which the water forms."

"Gee, just think! The land under this glacier must be just like it was a hundred years ago. Makes me feel creepy to think of those giant reptiles that used to wander around right under where we're walking."

Dick was about to reply when Corporal McCarthy stopped the teams at the edge of an expanse of ice that had been swept clear of soft snow by water and wind.

The boys quickly saw that Mistak's trail vanished here, as if it had gone up in smoke. The ice was as hard as flint, and sledge, dogs, and men had passed over it without leaving a mark.

"Toma, you stay with the dog team," ordered Corporal McCarthy, "the rest of us will scatter out and circle this expanse of smooth ice. We can pick up Mistak's trail where he strikes soft snow or brittle ice."

The plan was carried out but after an hour's fruitless search the Corporal called them all back to the sledge.

"It looks as if we've lost Mistak's trail for the present. He must have made directly for this spot knowing he could throw off the scent."

“The hard ice ends up in a lot of fissures and ice caverns,” spoke up Constable Sloan. “It’s possible the Eskimo may be hiding out in one of the caves, waiting for us to go on.”

“Well, if he is we’ll fix that. I’ll go on a little way with you and when we get in among the ice hummocks on the other side of this level stretch, I’ll drop out and watch for him to come out. The rest of you go on across the glacier, and make camp at some convenient spot. If I have any luck, I’ll overtake you and let you know.”

After Corporal McCarthy had left them Dick and Sandy found themselves following the sledge along a ridge of snow covered stones and gravel which ran along the ice cap farther than they could see. Following this, they found the ice sloping steadily downward, while the ridge, or moraine, rose steadily higher. Presently they could see on the distant horizon the blackish blue of the open sea, broken by the massive crests of floating bergs.

The sky had become overcast in the last hour and the temperature had fallen considerably.

“We’re in for a bad storm,” Constable Sloan announced, his voice betraying some anxiety. “As soon as we get down to the seashore we’ll build some tight igloos. Tents won’t stand the wind that’s coming.”

A little later they eased the sledge down a last steep incline and found easier going at the foot of the long ridge of glacial drift that had now grown to massive proportions. The glacier proper was now behind and on their left, beyond the ridge. They had crossed only a fragment of it in reaching what they believed to be the northern shore of a large island.

“Look, Sandy, over there on that big floe to the northeast!” exclaimed Dick, pointing.

Sandy’s eyes followed Dick’s directing finger and widened at what he saw. A large herd of seals dotted the ice and adjacent water. Now and again the animals dived into the water, throwing up a shower of spray. Faintly, as they drew nearer, they could hear the grunting barks of the adult seals.

Sipsa seemed excited at the proximity of the seal herd, and began jabbering to himself.

“What is he saying?” Dick asked Constable Sloan.

“He means that here is good hunting, and that he ought to tell his people about it. The Eskimos depend altogether for their food upon hunting, and when there’s game and good weather they consider it the same as sacrilege to procrastinate. They can’t figure out why a white man wastes his time doing anything else.”

The first signs of the coming storm interrupted Constable Sloan. A fine hard sleet came sifting down out of the leaden sky, cutting their faces like hundreds of tiny knives.

Reaching a large drift that appeared ideal for making igloo blocks, Constable Sloan called a halt, and everyone set to work cutting snow blocks with the long knives brought along for that purpose.

By the time they had completed two igloos, a wind had sprung up and the sleet had thickened. Though the huge glacial ridge shielded them from the full force of the wind, still it shipped and whirled with such force that they had to seek the shelter of their lately built snow houses.

“I hope McCarthy doesn’t get caught out in this blizzard,” said Constable Sloan when they were squatted about a camp stove, crowded into one igloo for added warmth. “He ought to be coming in any time now.”

They were in considerable suspense for several minutes, until, outside, above the howling of the wind, they heard Corporal McCarthy’s booming shout. Constable Sloan hurried out and helped into the igloo an almost unrecognizable figure. The Corporal was covered with clinging ice from head to foot and resembled some gigantic snow man.

“Well, Mistak didn’t show himself if he really was in hiding on the glacier,” reported the Corporal. “The storm drove me in or I’d have waited longer. Tomorrow, if the storm lulls, we’ll look again. The trouble is all traces of his sledge will be covered up by this storm.”

“We’d better establish a base of supplies here,” advised Constable Sloan. “The boys can do some hunting to help out on the meat problem, while we comb the island for Mistak.”

Sandy’s face took on a disappointed expression at this announcement, and he

looked at Dick as if he wanted him to do something. But Dick shook his head, and presently whispered mysteriously:

“I have a hunch we’re not going to lose out on the man hunt.”

Sandy had to be satisfied with that until he got Dick alone and pumped him for details.

That night the boys slept the sleep of utter weariness, while the storm beat and buffeted futilely at the dome of their warm igloo.

CHAPTER VIII

SIPSA VANISHES

It was two days before the blizzard died down and the little snowbound company were permitted to leave their Eskimo houses for any length of time. Dick and Sandy found almost a new world awaiting them when they burrowed like two badgers out of their snug retreat into the polar sunlight.

“Where are the sledges and dogs?” Sandy wanted to know.

“Can’t you see everything has been buried?” Dick retorted. “We’ve got some tall snow shoveling to do before we can get at our supplies.”

Constable Sloan soon found the dogs. Each of the faithful creatures was deep in a nest of snow, with only a tiny hole to breathe through. The beasts were gaunt with hunger, and whined and slavered at the mouth while the policeman began digging out the supplies.

It took several hours of hard work to dig out the camp, and when everything was in good shape, Corporal McCarthy drew the boys aside:

“Constable Sloan and myself are going back on the glacier with ten days’ supplies to see if we can’t pick up Mistak’s trail again. We’ll leave you with Sipsa to take care of the camp and do some hunting. Sipsa will show you how to kill and cut up seals and walruses, which we’ll need for dog meat if we don’t have to eat them ourselves before we finish our job up here. Don’t overlook the musk-oxen. We saw signs of them on the island and they’re about the best eating a white man can find up here.”

“Suppose we see Mistak. What do you want us to do?”

“Lay low and keep out of trouble,” cautioned the policeman. “We’ll be back in ten days at least and whatever you’ve discovered about Mistak’s whereabouts

we'll put to good use."

The policemen soon had a sledge of supplies and one dog team ready for the trail. Waving farewell to the boys they started out, disappearing up the long slope that led to the glacier. In one way Dick and Sandy were glad to be free to command their own movements, yet again, with the experienced policemen gone, the vast frozen land presented an even more sinister appearance. A hundred forebodings surged up in the breasts of Dick and Sandy, but they manfully fought them down, preparing immediately to go seal hunting.

Sipsa had brought along several harpoons, and he began working on these diligently. He made the boys understand by signs that he was not yet ready to go seal hunting, and they left him alone after growing tired of watching the Eskimo's deft fingers manipulating a whetting stone.

Dick suggested that they go down to the sea shore, and all three of the boys set off in that direction. They found the tide rising, and for half an hour amused themselves by skipping stones across the shallow water, and throwing at the small ice cakes floating farther out. Dick and Toma were about tied at hitting their mark, but Sandy was far the more expert at skipping stones. The Scotch lad could skip a choice flat stone as far again as he could throw it, and though Dick and Toma tried again and again to equal Sandy's prowess, they finally were forced to give up, so tired were their arms.

"Let's walk along the shore a ways," said Dick. "We may find something interesting."

A hundred yards farther on they passed out of sight of the camp, and ran into a flock of eider ducks who took to the water upon their approach with the prettiest nose dives they had ever seen. Toma's sharp eyes located some nests on the shore, and they procured a few fresh eggs and a good many old ones.

"Leave the old eggs where they are," Dick said, as Sandy was about to see how far he could throw one. "We don't want to destroy what will be little eider ducks some day."

"You're right, Dick," Sandy agreed. "I just didn't think."

"Him nice an' soft—make um warm nest," Toma spoke up, running his fingers around in one of the duck nests.

Dick picked up some of the fine, white feathers with which the nest was lined. “Yes, these are about as soft feathers as are known. The Eskimos gather and trade them to the white men for tools and things. In the United States we call it eiderdown.”

They wandered on down the shore to the point where the great glacial ridge west of their camp extended into the sea. The ridge sloped off into the water in a long slope at the foot of which the waves rumbled and thundered, dashing the huge icebergs this way and that as if they were toys. Occasionally they could hear the distant noises of the glacier as fragments of it fell into the sea, or when its slow movements caused huge cracks to form in its depths.

Dick led the way a short distance up the slope toward a dark knob that was sticking up through the snow and ice.

“I wonder if that isn’t one of the meteors they say are in the polar regions,” he said. “Robert Peary, the great explorer, brought back some fine specimens to American museums. This does look like it might be a very small one.”

They stopped at the protuberance and inspected it curiously.

“It looks like melted iron to me,” Sandy declared. “Is that what meteors are made of?”

“Yes, a form of iron,” Dick replied. “It’s called meteoric iron. Scientists claim it is about the hardest iron which has been found in a natural state. In the sky it is heated to a liquid state by the friction of falling through the air, then when it strikes the earth’s atmosphere it cools suddenly and explodes with a loud report, lighting up the country for miles and miles.”

“Why do more meteors fall in the polar regions than in the other zones?” inquired Sandy, meditatively fingering the meteoric rock.

“I don’t remember having read the exact reason, and I’m not sure that more do fall up here, but if there are more it must be because the atmosphere is so much colder. The meteors explode much higher in the sky, then lose their velocity and so fall to the earth’s surface near the pole.”

“Well, the glacier seems to have pushed this meteor up here,” said Sandy, “so there’s no telling where it actually fell.”

“That’s true,” replied Dick, “but say, this big stone gives me an idea. Let’s gather some big rocks and build a monument here, leaving some kind of record inside of it. That’s the way all the Arctic explorers did. They called them cairns.”

Sandy and Toma quickly showed how enthusiastic they were by starting to gather stones of a good size. These they built up in a solid circle near the meteor until they had an erection about a foot high.

“Now for the record,” said Dick, and drew from his pocket a small calendar with which he had been keeping track of the days. Sandy dug down in the ample pockets of his caribou hide shirt and found a soft-nosed rifle cartridge. With a hunting knife they trimmed this to a point, improvising a crude lead pencil. Then on the back of the card board that had supported the calendar leaves, Dick wrote under the day and year:

“We are on an uncharted island, a few hundred miles west of Greenland, near the Arctic Circle. This is the farthest north we have ever been in the service of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, or the Hudson’s Bay Company. If something happens and we never return, anyone who reads this will know just about where we were when we disappeared.”

Under this, all three of the boys proudly signed their names, Toma painfully inscribing his to the accompaniment of a twisting tongue, which he chewed industriously at every move of the pencil.

When the record was finished Dick folded it carefully and stowed it in the center of the cairn, placing a heavy stone upon it. Then they gathered more stones and built up the cairn to a height of about five feet, rounding it off nicely at the top, forming a receptacle for the record that would stand for years and years.

“It’s about time we were getting back to camp the way my stomach feels,” Dick said when they had finished, and were standing off at a distance appraising their handiwork.

Sandy’s and Toma’s stomachs seemed to agree perfectly with Dick’s and so they started off on the back trail, glancing over their shoulders every now and then at the cairn.

By the time they reached camp their appetites had grown immensely, and they voiced the hope that Sipsa would have something prepared to eat. But there was no smell of hot tea or frying meat. In fact, as they approached they could see no sign whatever of the Eskimo guide.

“He must be in one of the igloos,” Dick hazarded.

But a search of the igloos disclosed no Sipsa. The boys shouted his name, but only a faint echo from the wall of the ridge answered them.

“Here are the harpoons he was working on when we left,” Sandy announced presently, after they had looked more carefully about the camp.

“Yes, he must not be far away, but still——” Dick’s mind turned to the trouble they had had with Okewah and Ootanega. “I wonder if he found some sign of the white Eskimo and was frightened away like the others.”

“But Sipsa didn’t seem so superstitious as those two,” Sandy contended.

“I thought so, too, until now. Anyway, we’ll not worry about it until we get something under our belts to worry on.”

Sandy volunteered to act as cook and with the addition of the fresh eider duck eggs he had gathered, a very satisfying meal was prepared.

Sipsa had not yet put in an appearance when the boys finished the last scrap of food, and Dick suggested they search farther for him.

“Maybe um white Eskimo git him,” Toma suggested gruesomely.

“You might be right,” Dick replied. “It would be just like that villain to ambush our guide. But I believe Sipsa was pretty well able to take care of himself. He seemed much smarter than the average native, and I believe he’s more civilized.”

Sandy chose to stay behind when Dick announced that someone must watch the camp while they sought the whereabouts of Sipsa, and Dick and Toma started off with their rifles. At first they circled the entire camp, looking for the prints of Eskimo sealskin boots or his snowshoes. They found no signs, however, and came to a halt on the sledge trail made by the policemen hours before.

“Maybe Sipsa followed the sledge path,” Dick said, as Toma and he stood there contemplating the next move. “You’re good at trailing, Toma; see if you can’t find out whether three instead of two pairs of snowshoes followed this sledge.”

Toma bent over, his keen eyes glancing hither and thither along the packed snow. Only a moment he studied, then he straightened up. “Three pair snowshoes go long here,” he declared positively.

Dick had perfect confidence in Toma’s judgment, and was sure they had found just the direction taken by Sipsa when he left the camp. As the policemen had departed over the same path over which they had crossed the island, Dick believed it possible that Sipsa might have taken it into his head to return to his people.

“We’ll follow his tracks for a ways,” he voiced his decision at last. “I want to make sure that Sipsa stuck to the back trail. If he hasn’t turned off half way up the glacier, then I’m pretty certain he’s decided to go back to his people. In that case he has such a start on us that about all we can do is let him go.”

With this purpose in mind Dick and Toma started out along the sledge trail. An hour’s steady travel without mishap failed to discover any deviation in Sipsa’s progress.

“He may run into the policemen,” Dick finally spoke. “If he does, they’ll send him back in a hurry.”

“I think him go home alright,” was Toma’s brief reply. “Mebbe him no like work for white man.”

“Well, that was a good one, Toma,” Dick grinned. “I suppose you’ll be quitting us next.”

The young Indian turned a pair of black inscrutable eyes upon the white lad, for whom he had risked his life so often. Dick could feel that he was rebuked without hearing Toma say a word. He stretched out his hand and placed it on the Indian boy’s shoulder. “I didn’t mean it, Toma, honest I didn’t. I was only joking. I know you’d never desert Sandy and me.”

The ghost of a smile traced the young Indian’s dark face and Dick knew that Toma had forgiven.

“I don’t think there’s much use going any further,” Dick resumed after an interval of silence. “I don’t want to leave Sandy alone too long.”

They were just about to turn back when something attracted Toma’s keen eyes.

“Stop heap quick!” ejaculated Toma under his breath.

“What is it?”

“Think um fox. Him watch us from top big rock up there.”

“Oh, I see him now,” Dick replied eagerly. “He’s only about a hundred yards off, too. We need that pelt. Let’s both get a bead on him.”

Quietly the two knelt on their snowshoes and leveled their rifles. Crack! Crack! the rifle shots echoed in the hills.

The fox leaped high in the air, and ran like a streak toward the top of the slope where he had been sighted.

“Let him have it again!” cried Dick, firing rapidly.

Toma’s reloading lever was working as fast as Dick’s and a veritable hail of lead was kicking up the snow about the fleeing fox.

Just when the young hunters felt they had failed to bring down the fox, the animal whirled and began to bite himself, as if something had stung him.

“We got um,” grunted Toma.

Sure enough, the fox dropped to his side and after kicking spasmodically for a few seconds remained still. One or more of their bullets had reached the mark and together the boys hastened up the slope to examine their kill.

They found the animal to be a fine specimen of the northern blue fox, with whose skin the Eskimos trimmed many of their warmest fur garments.

Toma drew his hunting knife from its sheath and began methodically to skin the fox, while Dick stood by admiring the beauty of the fur.

“I wish I could take that pelt home to mother,” he said half to himself.

Toma looked up and sniffed. “Huh, why you take um blue fox for your mother? Wait till you ketch um seal. Him worth heap more. I give my sister black fox skin robe one time. She use um for wipe feet on by door. She like um red wool blanket best.”

Dick had a hearty laugh at Toma’s expense, but the young Indian could not see anything funny in what he had said.

However, the lads started back to camp on the best of terms, carrying the blue fox pelt with them.

When they came in sight of the igloos they were wholly unprepared for what met their eyes. Speechless and terror stricken they stood and stared.

Two huge polar bears were mauling and crushing the igloos and camp paraphernalia, and Sandy was nowhere to be seen!

Even the dogs had run away before the attack of the ferocious brutes, now apparently enjoying their game of destruction.

CHAPTER IX

AN INDIAN BEDTIME STORY

Several moments passed before Dick could recover his presence of mind, so great was the shock he had received upon discovering the savage marauders that were destroying their camp. A vision of Sandy's mangled form sprang up in his mind, and he covered his eyes and groaned. But he was not one to let mere imagination long affect him when action was needed.

"Take the bear on the right, Toma," his voice came clear and steady. "They'll probably attack us as soon as we fire. Ready, aim, fire!"

The report of the rifles and the sting of the well placed bullets brought the polar bears back on their haunches, and they whirled to face whatever enemy had attacked them. But Dick and Toma had fallen on their stomachs in the snow immediately after firing, and the bears could not see them. The great beasts turned and renewed their wrecking of the camp dunnage, whereupon Dick gave the order to fire again.

Now badly wounded, and puzzled because they could not see where the burning missiles came from, the bears began lumbering around in a circle, growling savagely.

Dick and Toma fired once more from their prone and hidden position and the bears decided the territory was too hot for them. Leaving a trail of blood drops behind them, they trotted off up the slope of the glacial ridge, disappearing among the numerous boulders strewn upon the slope.

No more were the bears gone than Dick and Toma rushed to the torn up camp, calling Sandy's name. At first there was no reply and in the death-like stillness Dick felt an icy chill of horror steal over him as once more he imagined what had befallen Sandy. Then, very faintly, there came an answering shout, seeming

to come out of the snow-smothered earth itself.

“Sandy, where are you!” Dick cried gladly, looking everywhere but failing to see any sign of his chum.

“Just a minute, and I’ll be with you,” came the voice again, unmistakably Sandy’s but for some reason half-choked and indistinct.

Then, out of a big snowdrift a hundred yards from camp, popped Sandy, covered from head to foot with snow. Dick and Toma ran to meet him, overjoyed at his safety.

“I thought those bears had finished you sure,” Dick said, much relieved.

“Well, they weren’t far from doing just that,” Sandy retorted drily. “I was looking through the packs for a tin of tea, a little while ago, when I felt that something was behind me. I looked around and there were those two bears looking at me as if they were hungry. They weren’t more than thirty feet from me, and I’d left my rifle in the igloo. You can bet I didn’t stand in that spot very long. I made a flying start right straight ahead, and when I reached those holes in the snow where the dogs have been sleeping, I dived head first right into a big one, and dug myself further in. Maybe I wasn’t scared. I expected every minute to hear those bears digging in after me. About when I was pretty near smothered in the snow I heard you start shooting. Say, you came just in time. I’d have suffocated in that burrow in about two minutes more. And I believe I’d have passed out right there rather than show myself to those bears.”

“Don’t forget to keep your rifle close to you after this,” Dick cautioned, though now that the danger was over he was amused at Sandy’s excited relating of his unique escape from the bears.

“Bear meat heap good eat,” Toma spoke up. “Maybe one them bear die somewhere in rocks. We go see, huh?”

“Not on your life,” Sandy declared emphatically. “I’ve seen all the bears I want to for to-day. I’ll be dreaming about bears chewing on me for a month.”

Dick laughed. “I don’t blame you, Sandy, but I think Toma’s idea about following the bears is a good one. We need meat, you know, and you can see by the blood on the snow around here that one of them at least might have been

wounded bad enough so that he'll die later."

"All right, you fellows go ahead. I think I've had about all the trouble I'm going to have today, so you needn't worry about me."

"I guess you have, alright," Dick called over his shoulder as he set out after the bears. "We won't be gone long."

Toma and Dick followed the plain trail left by the bears clear up the ridge to the east of the camp. But they did not catch sight of their quarry until they were some distance out on the flank of the glacier on the other side of the ridge.

The young Indian then called Dick's attention to a movement ahead of them. They saw one of the bears climbing to the top of a heap of ice, and crouched in hiding until the great beast had passed out of sight. Though they waited several minutes, a second bear did not appear, and so they thought it safe to go on.

Not far from where they had sighted the one bear they discovered why the other had not appeared. He lay stone dead in a little hollow in the ice. An examination showed that two of their bullets had pierced the animal's lungs. Only an animal of iron stamina could have traveled so far with such serious wounds.

Cutting a huge haunch of steak from the bear's hindquarters, the young hunters started back, their mouths already watering in anticipation of fresh bear steak.

It was nearly eight o'clock by Dick's watch when they reached the igloos once more, to find that Sandy had been busy in their absence and had repaired much of the damage done by the polar bears.

Two hours later, snug in a warm igloo, Sandy requested Toma to tell them a bedtime story from his stock of Indian lore. Toma acquiesced willingly, and began in his broken, yet simple expressive English:

"Long, long time ago, young Indian brave, by name Swift Foot, live by big water, by name Great Slave Lake. He very handsome brave. Him mother love him very much. His father great hunter. He have all food he can eat, warm wigwam in winter. No have to work. Him play all day, and when him tired he sleep. But him no happy. He look at stars and want know why the stars twinkle; him look at sun, want know why sun warm; him look at moon, want know why cannot reach it; him look at rainbow, want know why cannot catch him no matter

how fast he run.

“Swift Foot ask mother questions. She say, ‘Big Eagle, your father, great hunter and very wise. He tell you, my son.’ Swift Foot ask father questions. Father say, ‘Your grandfather old and wise, maybe he can tell you.’ Swift Foot ask his grandfather questions, but old man say he not know these things.

“Bye an’ bye Swift Foot visit all old men in tribe, but none knew why stars twinkle, why sun shine, why he no can catch rainbow.

“Swift Foot, him get very unhappy. Him no eat, no sleep. His mother think him going die. One day she tell him, ‘Swift Foot, you follow big water north till you come to great river. There you find old, old medicine man. He tell you why stars twinkle, why sun shine, why no catch rainbow.’

“Swift Foot him very glad then. Him jump in birch canoe an’ paddle fast. Many days him paddle along lake shore till he come to great river. When he come to shore old, old man, all dried up, waiting there to meet him.

“When Indian boy ask old medicine man what he want know, old man ask him what he give to know all things. Swift Foot, he say he give everything he have. Medicine man ask him if he sure. Swift Foot say yes, he give everything to know, for he no want live longer if he can no catch rainbow.

“Then medicine man build big fire and boil something in pot, while he dance round and round Swift Foot. After while Swift Foot feel strange. He feel like he getting smaller; he cannot see far with his eyes; him hands shake like leaves.

“Pretty soon fire make big smoke—puff, puff. Smoke disappear, and old man, he gone. Swift Foot all alone on shore of big water, and he know all things. He know why stars twinkle, why sun shines, why he can no catch rainbow. He know so much he much afraid. He jump up, try to run to canoe. But he fall down hard. He get up, try to run again, but he no can run—he have to walk very slow.

“When he get down to big water it is like mirror. He bend over and look down. Old, old man look back at him from water, oldest an’ ugliest man he ever see. He know then him give youth for great wisdom. No more him run an’ jump, no more him eat deer meat, for he have no teeth. He begin weep, an’ say he no want know all things, him want be young again. All day, all night he cry, but he not grow young again.

“Then he paddle his canoe back to his mother, but she not know him. She laugh when he say he Swift Foot, her son. ‘My son beautiful young boy, you ugly, old man,’ she say. ‘Go ’way.’

“Swift Foot leave village then. Him go far away in forest where no man see him. One moon he no eat anything, but pray much to Great Spirit. Then him fall asleep. When wake up him feel strong again. He go down to pool of water and look in. Him jump up and make big, glad noise with mouth. Great Spirit answer prayer. Him young again. But he not remember why stars twinkle, why sun shines, why no can catch rainbow.

“Swift Foot go back to his mother. She very glad to see him. He say to his mother he very happy now; him no want know why stars twinkle, why sun shines, why no can catch rainbow. He say he love them just the same. Many years him live happy. Make big hunter like him father, but him never wish for what he no can get.”

“Gee, that was a great story!” Dick exclaimed. “Who told you that one?”

“My mother,” Toma replied briefly, and for an instant the boys thought they detected the sparkle of tears in the dark eyes of the stoical young Indian.

“That story had a moral to it just like one of Aesop’s Fables,” Dick said sleepily, as he crawled into his sleeping bag. “Guess we can’t have our cake and eat it too. Right, Sandy?”

But a long, tuneful snore was the only reply Dick heard from Sandy.

The boys slept soundly for nearly ten hours, and when they awakened they felt equal to any task that might present itself. First, they visited the bear Dick and Toma had killed the day before, and brought back all the meat they could carry on their backs. Since this left them well supplied with meat for themselves, Dick decided they had better make an effort to procure some seal or walrus meat for the dogs.

Toma once more was elected to remain behind while Dick and Sandy went hunting. The boys found that the seal herd had moved a considerable distance eastward along the coast since they first had seen it. It took them an hour of climbing over rough shore ice before they reached a point opposite the seal herd. Even then, to their disappointment, they found that several large ice floes,

jammed together, separated them from the seals.

After some minutes of deliberation, they decided to venture out upon the ice, and get nearer the seals by jumping from one cake of ice to another. Thus they began a dangerous adventure, destined from the beginning to end in ill fortune, for they had not gone a hundred yards across the treacherous ice before both Dick and Sandy had slipped and narrowly saved themselves from a bad ducking, if not drowning, by clutching the edge of the floe which had been their objective when they leaped the open water.

Resting on a large, secure floe, they noticed that the tide was going out and that frequently, from the outer edge of the ice-jam, a large fragment detached itself and floated out to sea.

“I think we ought to go back,” Dick said once, but they did not want to turn back empty handed after having gone so far, so they kept on until they were within fifty feet of the nearest seals.

“How tame they are!” exclaimed Sandy.

“They seem just like dogs,” Dick added. “Probably no one has killed any of this herd for a long time. It seems a shame to shoot such innocent looking creatures.”

“Well, you know we have to have food for the dogs,” Sandy argued with his tender heart. “In this country it’s eat or be eaten, and we need the dogs and not the seals.”

“All right, then, suppose you shoot the first one,” Dick said a little sarcastically.

Sandy tightened his lips, raised his rifle and took aim at the head of a fine young seal. Just then a baby seal flopped away from its mother’s side, directly on a line with Sandy’s sights. The baby seal stood up on its flippers and looked at the boys as cute as could be.

Sandy expelled his breath in a disgusted gasp, and let his rifle fall to his hip.

“Brave boy,” taunted Dick in fun. “If I wanted turkey for Thanksgiving I wouldn’t send you out to chop off its head.”

“I can’t help it,” admitted Sandy. “I’ve felt this way before, but not so much as

now. I don't see how anyone can slaughter these animals by the hundreds even if their skins are so valuable."

Just then a big bull seal crawled up on the ice out of the water, making an angry noise in his throat. This old fellow was quite fierce looking and did not apparently take kindly to the presence of the boys. He reared up and fixed baleful eyes upon them, opening his huge, whiskered mouth to show his tusks.

Neither of the boys felt the same sympathy for this new and hostile arrival, and Dick quickly raised his rifle and brought down the bull with one shot.

At the sound of the rifle almost all of the seals took to the water hastily, swimming about and watching the man creatures from a distance. But the old bull did not move from where he had fallen.

"The next problem is how are we going to get this big brute ashore."

"Gee, I never thought of that. I wonder how much he weighs," said Sandy, going forward and trying to lift the dead animal.

But the combined strength of both Dick and Sandy was only sufficient to drag the heavy body slowly across the ice.

"He must weigh several hundred pounds," Dick eyed their kill appraisingly. "I don't think we'll ever get him ashore, unless we cut him up and carry him in pieces."

So intent were the boys on the problem at hand that they had for several minutes lost all thought of their rather dangerous situation. It was Sandy who first discovered something wrong. It seemed to him the ice on which they stood was moving.

"Dick, quick!" his voice was hoarse with fear. "This floe has broken away from the shore ice. What shall we do!"

Dick wheeled toward the shore, taking in their predicament at a glance. "Run for it, Sandy. We may reach the gap before it's too wide to jump!"

CHAPTER X

ADrift ON A FLOE

When Dick and Sandy ran for the edge of the moving floe which was nearest the shore, they realized what might happen to them should they fail to jump the widening stretch of water between them and safety. With the tide going out, they would be carried out into a sea where no ships sailed, and where they could expect no help from any friendly, inhabited shores.

The floe which was carrying them off was fully three hundred yards across, and since they had been tardy in discovering their peril, they found fate against them. Coming to a sudden stop at the edge of the floe, they saw, with sinking hearts, that more than a hundred yards of icy salt water separated them from the floes that still were clinging to the shore.

“Can’t we swim it?” cried Sandy desperately.

“Never!” Dick returned grimly. “Not with these heavy clothes on. We’d drown or freeze before we’d gone a third of the distance. Sandy, we’re trapped!”

It did not take Sandy long to see that Dick was right. Alone, with a dead seal, upon a large ice floe, each second increased their peril as they floated farther away from shore. Death by freezing might be their lot, for without shelter they could not hope to weather a polar storm. Even if they were fortunate in experiencing mild weather, they would eventually starve.

In a dejected mood the two boys stood watching the bleak shore line that now seemed so warm and friendly since they had been cut off from it.

“Do you notice the current is carrying us westward as well as north?” Dick spoke up presently.

“No, but I can see you’re right,” rejoined Sandy. “But what’s the difference?”

“If we keep drifting at this angle, we’ll sight our camp and maybe we can signal Toma.”

Sandy’s face brightened for an instant, then he gave in again to his former forebodings. “Toma can’t do anything for us,” he said.

“Maybe not right away. At least he’ll know what has happened to us, and can notify the policemen when they return.”

Sandy realized the wisdom in Dick’s words, and sat down to watch for the first sign of their camp.

The floe slowly turned as it was carried along with the ocean current, and the boys were forced to change their position frequently in order to stay on the side nearest the shore. And since their huge raft was floating out to sea as well as westward past the camp site, it became a problem as to whether they would not be too far away to signal Toma when that moment came.

Tensely they waited. For twenty minutes the floe forged along with its human cargo before Dick suddenly gave a glad shout. At a distance of about half a mile, the igloos of their camp appeared, surrounded by the tiny dark dots which represented the sledges and other dunnage. But there was no sign of life.

Dick and Sandy pointed their rifles into the air and emptied the magazines. But the shots brought no figure tumbling out of one of the far away igloos.

“He’s inside and can’t hear us. If he does he’ll probably think we’re shooting seals.”

“Let’s fire more shots,” Sandy suggested.

They reloaded and repeated their first salvo, with no better results. Slowly the igloos grew smaller and smaller as they floated farther out to sea, and at last they sat down and gave up.

“Well, Toma couldn’t have helped us anyway,” Dick said, trying to make the best of their misfortune.

“No, but it would make me feel a lot better if I knew someone knew what had happened to us.”

Dick agreed and fell silent, wracking his brain for a way out. But the more he thought it over, the more certain he became that they were in the hands of fate. Nothing but a miracle could save them.

They had not been at sea an hour until a new peril presented itself. The ice floe upon which they had been marooned was breaking up. Large segments began cracking away from the main body and floating off by themselves.

“We must stay together, Sandy,” Dick said, “Suppose one of those cracks came between us.”

Sandy shivered at the thought and eyed the ice under his feet. Holding hands, the boys walked to the center of the floe where the ice seemed the thickest.

The shore was now only a dim line to the south, while around rose and fell the icy waves of the desolate polar sea. Here and there a berg wallowed along and occasionally they collided with a slower moving body of ice. Dick thought of jumping off the floe to one of the bergs, but changed his mind since the faster moving floe might possibly run into land while the loggy iceberg would float in almost the same place for days.

Adding to the danger of their situation, the sky was becoming overcast by a film of gray clouds and a freezing wind was springing up, heightening the waves and throwing icy cold spray across the floe.

“We’re in for a storm, Sandy,” Dick said, beating his arms against his body to keep warm. “It’s up to us to fix up some sort of wind break or else we can’t stand the cold. Think we can chop some cakes of ice out of this floe?”

“We sure can try,” responded Sandy, drawing out his sheath knife with alacrity.

Both boys then set to work industriously and after considerable hard labor, succeeded in chipping out some good sized chunks of ice. These they built up in a half circle, rounded against the wind. Against the wall they flung water with their mittens. The water quickly froze, cementing the blocks together and forming an effective wind break. Behind this they hovered while the wind increased in velocity and a heavy snow began to fall.

They dared not sleep for fear they would freeze before they awoke, and though the dread drowsiness that is the first symptom of freezing stole over them again

and again, they fought it off grimly. Once both fell asleep at the same time in spite of all they could do, but the fast moving floe struck a large berg with a grinding, rending crash and startled them to the temporary safety of wakefulness. Had it not been for the wind break they had erected they would undoubtedly have frozen to death. As it was, they were forced to watch each other, to prevent sleep coming to both at the same time. Sometimes Dick pounded Sandy until his eyes opened, and again Sandy beat and shouted at Dick above the roar of the storm, and the crashing and grinding of ice.

Neither had the least idea where they were being driven to, they had even lost all sense of direction, every effort bent on keeping a spark of life burning in their numb bodies.

It seemed to the boys that the battle with the cold would never end, that they had floated in the storm for hours, when suddenly the floe came to a jarring stop, and a deluge of ice water rolled across it, almost washing Dick and Sandy from their position under the wind break.

“I wonder what we’ve hit!” Dick shouted hoarsely.

“It must be a berg,” Sandy cried in reply.

“But we aren’t moving at all,” Dick shouted back.

Believing they might have been washed ashore on some island, the boys braved the full force of the storm and staggered out of their wind break to investigate. The snow and spray almost blinded them, but at last they made out a huge mass of ice upon which the floe had lodged. It rose up for nearly fifty feet and withstood every charge of the gigantic waves that crashed against it.

Yet, in the brief period when the wind cleared the air of flying snow, they could see the swell of waves beyond the ice which was holding them.

“It’s a grounded berg!” Dick shouted at last, and Sandy and he fought their way back to the welcome shelter of their wind break.

“We must be pretty close to land,” Sandy opined.

“Yes, but there’s no telling how deep the water is here. The berg we’ve lodged on may extend down into the water for a hundred feet. There’s always more of a

berg under water than there is above. We've got to stick it out until this storm blows over."

And so they renewed their struggle to fight off the gnawing cold, cheered somewhat by the probabilities that when the storm blew over they would see land.

It was two hours later when the wind slackened perceptibly and the snow ceased to fall. With shouts of joy the boys then saw, about a mile away, across the dashing waves, a line of black cliffs, streaked with snow.

"Now if we could only find some way to float in on those breakers. But I don't see how we could take a chance on a cake of ice. We couldn't stick to it a second before we got washed off into the sea."

"We'll have to wait till the waves die down," Sandy said. "If I wasn't so weak, maybe we could paddle a chunk of ice then."

Dick shook his head. "That might do in a story book, but even if we weren't just about ready to drop, we couldn't do that."

Glumly, they began the wait for the waves to go down, tightening their belts upon flat and gnawing stomachs. With the ceasing of the storm their hunger became three times as noticeable. Had the dead seal, which had first accompanied them on the floe, still been with them, they might have tackled raw blubber, but the waves had washed the seal into the sea long before.

Though the wind had fallen, the boys found themselves little more comfortable, for the temperature began to fall alarmingly. With the passing of every hour the still air grew colder while the waves quieted under the iron hand of Jack Frost.

The boys chewed ice to cool their thirsting mouths and partially allay the great hunger that was swiftly weakening them. They could not judge the passage of time rationally now, and when Dick awakened from a stupor that had come upon him in spite of all he could do, he found the water around them almost as smooth as glass.

Staggering to his feet Dick pulled Sandy to his feet and together they gazed on a phenomenon of the north that was like a miracle in their eyes.

The open water, or lead, between the land and the berg on which they had lodged, was frozen over, and a level walk of thin ice bridged a way to safety.

“Can we walk on it?” Sandy asked in a hoarse, thick voice.

“I don’t know,” Dick replied through blue lips. “I’ll test it.”

Guiding his weakened legs by force of will alone, Dick cautiously approached the edge of the floe and placed one foot down on the ice. He bore his weight, by degrees, on the one foot. The ice cracked a little and gave downward, then as he placed the last of his weight upon the ice, it broke through. Dick saved himself from a cold bath that might, at that time, have meant the finish of him, by falling face downward on the floe and drawing himself back to safety. He would have given up then, had not a heart-rending groan from Sandy aroused in him a new determination. For he could not bear to see his chum lying there, slowly freezing, when there was an ounce of strength left in him.

Into Dick’s numb senses crept an idea. The snowshoes strapped upon their backs! If the ice would not hold weight upon the narrow surface of a boot sole, might it not support them if their weight were distributed upon the broad rim of snowshoes?

In frantic haste Dick aroused Sandy and shouted his plan into his dazed chum’s ears. Fumbling fingers then began the slow process of attaching snowshoes to tingling feet. At last the task was accomplished, and the boys began shuffling toward the thin ice.

Dick went first, skating as lightly as possible out on the ice. His heart was in his mouth. Would the ice hold?

The ice sprang downward slightly and tiny cracks spread out all around Dick, but the ice held.

“Don’t follow my track,” he cried to Sandy, about to leave the floe. “Start somewhere where the ice hasn’t been strained. We’ve got to hurry. This salt water may melt at any moment.”

Sandy did as he was told and there began a more perilous half mile of snowshoeing than the boys ever before had experienced or ever hoped to experience again.

Faster and faster they skated over the rubbery ice, praying they would strike no weaker spot, every nerve strained to the utmost in their fear-driven flight.

Under any other circumstances the boys would surely have fallen completely exhausted before they finished that terrible half mile of snowshoeing. But it was life or death, and all the reserve energy in their strong, young bodies came to the front to carry them through.

One last spurt of speed and they tumbled onto the heaps of solid ice marking the beach and solid land. Scarcely had they landed when the water broke through the rapidly melting ice.

Sandy could not raise himself and Dick had just enough strength left to drag himself to a standing position. His roving eyes fell upon a flock of eider ducks a little distance away. His stomach crying out for food, Dick reeled toward the wild fowl, scattering them to right and left. He found quickly what he was looking for. Eggs!

Pawing into a nest he rolled out three eggs, and without testing them to see whether they were fresh or not, he cracked the shells and drank down the life-giving nourishment. Hastily picking up two more eggs, he stumbled back to Sandy and forced him to suck the raw whites.

Both boys revived by the duck eggs, they waited for the ducks to settle back to their nests, and shot two of them.

Dick and Sandy ordinarily would have been repelled at the idea of eating raw flesh, but now nothing seemed sweeter than the warm white meat of the eider ducks. They ate their fill, like young savages, and found warmth and strength returning to their half-frozen bodies.

Spirits rising through the effect of the food and their recent deliverance from the drifting ice floe, the boys were about to start further inland, when Sandy pointed to a boulder only a hundred feet away.

“I thought I saw something move over there,” he whispered.

Dick opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. From behind the boulder arose the head and upper body of an Eskimo—and yet, was it an Eskimo?

“His skin is white!” Sandy exclaimed.

“It’s the white Eskimo!” Dick echoed.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAMP OF FROZEN MEN

So amazed were Dick and Sandy by this sudden and inexplicable reappearance of the white Eskimo that they could not move from their tracks for fully a minute. The half-breed did not move. He stared at them as if he, too, had been surprised, then one of his arms raised in a sort of signal.

Dick and Sandy aroused to their danger too late. From a dozen hiding places as many uncouth brown figures appeared, with spears and rifles leveled at them. Hemmed in and outnumbered, there was but one thing for them to do—surrender.

Sandy's rifle clattered to the ice, and Dick's followed quickly, while both raised their hands. The white Eskimo then came forward and picked up their rifles. He addressed them in broken English, which had a French accent mingled with the Eskimo tang:

"I ees pleased ver' much, boys. While zee poleece chase zee wild goose, I git zere little helpers. Zat not so?"

"You may have the drop on us now," retorted Dick with more spirit than was really in his half-famished, half-frozen body, "but we have friends nearby and you will wish you never had troubled us."

The white Eskimo laughed scoffingly. "You think you make zee fool of me. Ha! Zose mounted police long way from here. They look, look everywhere for Fred Mistak, but Mistak like the ghost. He disappear like nossing—quick!"

Dick remained silent at this, thinking it best not to arouse the ill-humor of their savage captor. He was interested, if disappointed to learn that their friends, the policemen, were so far away. He had half-hoped the storm had thrown them back

upon land somewhere near the other members of the expedition.

Mistak seemed to have no desire to loiter in the vicinity of the capture and speedily forced the boys to fall in line and start off inland. Tired as they were, the two prisoners assumed a calmness they did not feel as they began the long climb up a steep trail that led to the summit of the cliffs which formed that portion of the coast.

Dick studied the evil faces of his captors and saw that only few of them were Eskimos. The greater number of the gang included renegade Indians, half-breeds, and one who seemed a full blooded white man. Dick did not doubt that every man of them either carried a price on his head or was at least a fugitive from the courts of justice. The white man and two of the Indians had rifles, and Mistak wore a revolver on a belt about his waist.

The sinister company climbed to the top of the cliffs, forcing the boys along at the point of spears, and marched on for about a mile across the snow and ice to what seemed to be a temporary encampment. Six igloos had been built in the shelter of a ridge, and two sledges loaded with frozen seal blubber lay under the watch of an Eskimo.

Mistak gruffly ordered Dick and Sandy into an igloo. As soon as the boys had reached the crude bedding inside the snow house, they gave over to the great weariness that possessed them. Lost to everything but the need of sleep, they fell into a deep unconsciousness regardless of the fact that they were in the hands of enemies from whom they might expect no mercy.

Dick knew not how long he had slept when he aroused to hear someone at the entrance of the igloo. One of the Eskimos crawled half way in with two chunks of seal blubber in his arms. These he tossed at the two recumbent forms with a few guttural and unintelligible words in his native tongue, and crawled out again.

Dick was terribly hungry, and though the seal blubber did not exactly appeal to his appetite, he found, upon tasting the greasy meat, that it was better than nothing. He awakened Sandy, and together they made their first meal upon raw seal blubber, finding that the more they ate of it the better it tasted.

“It’s not bad when a fellow’s half starved,” Sandy remarked as they finished the last of the blubber.

Dick was about to answer when the sound of voices outside interrupted him. He signaled Sandy to remain quiet and together they listened. But they could not distinguish the words through the thick walls of the igloo, though they recognized the voice of Fred Mistak.

Hoping to learn something of what Mistak intended to do with Sandy and him, Dick motioned to his chum to remain where he was and crawled in the hole that served as the entrance of the igloo. A huge cake of snow had been carelessly pushed up against the outside of the hole and placing one ear against this, Dick could hear Mistak's voice quite plainly. He seemed to be speaking to the white man in the outfit.

"I tell you zat we cannot bozzer wis zee two young ones. It ees best we put them where zay cannot talk. You see?" Mistak was saying.

The other man swore, then replied loudly: "You know we got enough blood on our hands now, Mistak, to send us over the road for life. It'll be hangin' for you an' me if we put these yonkers out of the way right under the noses of the mounted."

"Well, zen, what you say we put zem wiz Thalman?"

Thalman! That was the name of the lost corporal! Dick electrified with eagerness to hear more, but the two walked off a little way out of earshot. He crawled back to Sandy, confiding what he had heard.

"According to that, Corporal Thalman must be alive alright," Sandy observed.

"Yes, but the question is, do we want to go where he is as Mistak hinted. It looks like Thalman is in a pretty tight prison or he'd have gotten out by this time. And we can help him more on the outside than on the inside. Besides I don't trust this Mistak a little bit. He'd cut our throats in a minute if the white man agreed. We'd better see if we can't escape."

"If there was any darkness to do it in, we might get away," Sandy retorted, "but in this never-ending daylight, I don't see how we can do it."

"Listen—I've a plan," Dick drew closer to his chum, and began in a whisper. "When we came up I could see that this igloo was built on a long snowdrift that stretches clear to a ravine on the right. We still have our knives and with these

we can dig a tunnel under the snow.”

“But suppose they come in while we’re working?”

“I thought of that. We’ll work one at a time, while one keeps watch at the entrance of the igloo. At first we can jump up out of the tunnel, which we’ll start in the floor, and lie down over it with our bedding. If they come clear inside they’ll think we’re sleeping.”

“What about the loose snow?” Sandy asked.

“That we can scatter over the floor and pack it down with our boots. The hardest job will be coming out of the drift at the right place. What we must do is tunnel under the igloo and through the drift to the side hidden from the camp.”

Sandy became enthusiastic over Dick’s daring scheme and without delay they commenced the difficult task. Dick started the digging while Sandy watched. The snow was hard, but by keeping at it he soon was far enough down so that he could change the direction of his digging toward the outside of the snowdrift, which was to furnish the cover for their escape.

They had changed places twice and Sandy was again on watch when the crunch of footfalls sounded approaching the igloo.

“Quick. Someone’s coming!” Sandy whispered down the tunnel.

Dick was only a few seconds backing out of the hole and dropping prone over it, the bedding drawn about him. Sandy also feigned sleep nearby and with bated breath they awaited whoever was coming.

But the Indian who looked in at the igloo entrance did not come in. He seemed satisfied that the two prisoners were asleep and departed to other business.

However, the narrow escape from detection put a scare into them that set them to devising some other means of covering up their work when visited by one of the gang. With chunks of snow from the tunnel they fashioned a form to resemble a body and wrapping this in bedding they placed it in as life-like a sleeping position as possible near the tunnel. If they were visited again the one on watch could lie down over the entrance to the tunnel, while the other could lie still under the snow without leaving the tunnel.

After this ruse was ready for use they felt more confident of success and redoubled their efforts.

It was Dick who first poked a hole through the snow to the light of the outside world. His heart leaping at the thought that they had succeeded, he looked out of the hole, only to receive one of the greatest shocks of his life. Not ten feet away sat an Eskimo, one of Mistak's band, chewing on a chunk of seal blubber! As Dick watched with terror-widened eyes, the Eskimo looked directly at him, and paused in his eating. Dick could not force himself to move. Every moment he expected some sign from the Eskimo that he had discovered the attempt to escape, yet the native finally resumed his eating without any alarming actions.

Breathing a sigh of relief Dick plugged up the hole and lay on his stomach in the snow tunnel, wondering if there had been some mistake in their calculations which had brought them out on the wrong side of the snowdrift. But no, they were on the right side of the drift. Nothing could have so confused them as to cause any such disastrous error. The Eskimo must have been there by chance. Dick decided that the native had been hiding from the rest of his band, probably because he had stolen more rations of food than was his allotment.

After waiting a reasonable length of time, Dick cleared the peep hole and looked out. The Eskimo was gone.

Hastily Dick wriggled back through the tunnel and reported to Sandy the welcome news that they had reached the surface of the drift and could now leave the igloo.

Hoping they might delay the discovery of their escape until they had a good start, they fashioned a second dummy from rolled bedding and Sandy, the last one into the snow tunnel, drew this over the hole after him.

A few minutes later they had cautiously broken out of the snowdrift and were crawling along the snow bank away from the encampment.

Once in the ravine, into which the drift led, they strapped on their snowshoes, which Mistak had not thought it necessary to take from them, and made good time away from their captors.

"Just give us as much as an hour's start and I'll bet they'll never catch us," Dick cried exultantly.

“No, you bet they’ll never catch me,” Sandy repeated emphatically. “I think too much of my skin to have it punched full of holes by that gun in Mistak’s belt.”

Settling into a long, swinging, crab-like stride, the boys covered almost four miles on their snowshoes before they felt it necessary to call a halt.

Sandy was about winded, and fell back against a boulder completely relaxed, but Dick still felt fairly spry so he crawled to the top of a nearby hill and looked over the back trail. He was about to call down to Sandy that all was well when, from a narrow defile through which he remembered they had passed, he saw five figures coming fast on snowshoes. Dick felt a chill that was not from the frosty air creep up his spine. He did not doubt that the distant men were Mistak and several of his gang.

“Sandy, they’re after us,” Dick called down in a tense voice.

Sandy got excitedly to his feet and urged Dick to hurry on with him. But the elder lad had something else in mind as he climbed down from the hill.

“Sandy, there are expert snowshoers in that bunch following us,” Dick said coolly. “We don’t stand a show of keeping the lead we have.”

“Well, we can’t stand them off without rifles. All we have left is our hunting knives.”

“But we can still throw them off our track if we use our heads,” said Dick quickly. “Did you notice that long stretch of hard ice and barren rock that we’ve been following for more than half a mile?”

“Yes,” Sandy began to be interested.

“Well, we can go on along the snow until we angle into the ice and rock under that high barren hill in front of us. They’ll think we climbed the hill, and will go on to pick up our tracks in the next patch of snow. There’s where we’ll fool them. We’ll double on our trail where we can’t leave any footprints, and hide somewhere until they give up hunting for us.”

“Sounds pretty good to me,” replied Sandy. “Let’s mush!”

Quickly, then, the boys carried their plan into execution. They ran on to the point

where the snow gave way to barren rock and ice, swept clean by high winds. Here they removed their snowshoes and turned almost squarely about. Running lightly across the stones and ice, they covered about a quarter of a mile on the back trail leaving no tracks to show where they had gone. Then they began looking for a hiding place.

It was Dick who spied a hole under the shelf of a cut bank, which led back under ground. There were no signs that the cavern had been inhabited recently by any wild animals, and after calling Sandy to his side, Dick got on hands and knees and crawled into the dark passage.

The hole grew larger as the boys traversed it, and finally they were able to run along at a crouch.

Presently Dick stopped Sandy. "We'd better not go too far," he cautioned. "Why not go back to a point where the hole is smaller and block it up with stones and ice? Then if they happen to discover the entrance to this cave they'll run into where we've plugged it up and they'll think that is the end of the cave."

Sandy agreed that this was an excellent idea and they hurried back to carry it out. Ten minutes later, feeling much more secure with the barrier thrown up in the small end of the passage, the boys decided to follow the underground corridor to its end or to a point where it branched off into a larger cave.

As they advanced, the passage rapidly grew lighter, until finally they came out into broad daylight. Looking around, they saw they had reached a sort of amphitheater formed by walls of ice-covered stone about fifty feet in height. The floor of the place was about a hundred feet in diameter, but what set the hearts of the boys to pounding frantically, was the fact that a man sat with his back to the wall not fifteen yards away, and a little further on, lying with his face against the side of a broken dog sledge, was another man.

Were they friend or foe? The boys did not know. Something in the very stillness of the two figures boded no good. But they were between two fires, and they must take a chance.

"Hello, there," called Dick, boldly.

There was no answer. Again Dick called out, without getting any reply. His face paled a little at the strange silence of the men and summoning all his courage he

stepped up and grasped the one sitting against the wall by the shoulder. With a cry of horror he staggered back. The body was immovable as stone to the touch, and from the depths of the parka stared a pair of glassy, sightless eyes.

Dick and Sandy turned and looked at each other, swallowing lumps in their throats, and experiencing unpleasant goose-flesh.

For what they had stumbled upon, in that secluded nook, was a camp of frozen men!

CHAPTER XII

TRAPPED!

At the moment Dick and Sandy discovered themselves in the company of men from whom life had long since fled, they would have gladly chosen to face Mistak and his men rather than remain in the strange, canyon-like pit a second longer. But time and the real peril awaiting them, if they were discovered by Mistak, steadied their nerves.

“It’s silly of us to act like a couple of babies when we see two dead men,” Dick found his tongue again.

“Maybe it is,” Sandy rejoined in a shaky voice, “but it was worse than finding a skeleton in a dark clothes closet.”

Dick silently agreed with Sandy, but thought it better not to admit it aloud. Instead, he assumed a calmness he did not feel in order to disperse Sandy’s fears.

“What we must do now,” said Dick, “is try to find out who these men were. They may have been of some importance in the south—engineers, explorers, or scientists.”

“Go ahead if you want to,” Sandy shook his head as he eyed their gruesome find. “I’ll go back into the cave where I can hear any one that may come in on the other side of the barricade.”

Left alone with the dead men, Dick set immediately about what he thought was his duty. Upon closer inspection he found that the men had not really frozen to death as he had at first supposed, but that one, or both, of them had died from injuries received from a bad fall.

The body near the sledge was partially wedged under one of the runners. The sledge itself was crushed and splintered in front beyond repair. Dick gazed up at

the edge of the walls forming the amphitheater, picturing in his mind what he thought had happened. This is what he imagined:

Two men, sledging over an uncharted land in the teeth of a blinding blizzard. An ineffectual struggle of dog and man to avoid slipping into an abyss which they sensed. Then the crash of the sledge and bodies at the foot of the bank. One man had died immediately, crushed by the fall and the sledge. The other had lived to crawl away and lean up against the rock wall which he had never quitted. It was one of the countless tragedies of the north, one of the secrets of the mysterious disappearance of men who had braved the Arctic and never returned.

Dick inspected every foot of ground near the sledge and found the remains of their dogs. But nowhere could he find any record or memoranda as to who the men were and what had been their mission.

He was about to examine the ice-crusted dunnage in the wrecked sledge when Sandy came running in calling to him.

“Someone’s in the cave! I believe Mistak has trailed us after all!”

Dick hastily quitted his work at the sledge and ran back into the cave after Sandy. When they reached the point where they had plugged up the passage, their worst fears were realized. Someone was trying to break in, and the mumble of voices came faintly to their ears. The boys had underestimated the trail-craft of the white Eskimo and his men.

“Mistak has discovered our hiding place in spite of all the pains we took to cover our tracks,” Dick spoke disappointedly. “All we can do now is keep them out by adding to this barricade. We can rebuild it faster than they can break it down, because on the other side only one can work at a time. Let’s get to work, Sandy.”

All the loose boulders and fragments of ice the boys could find they brought to the barricade and piled there as fast as possible. But they soon found that their enemies were gaining on them. This was not noticeable until the boys had used up all the boulders near them and were required to run all the way to the amphitheater for more material. Also, as Mistak’s men worked their way further in, the cave became larger and the outlaws could work more freely. Added to this, Dick’s and Sandy’s job of filling the passage became bigger and bigger the further back they retreated.

“We’ll never keep them out!” Sandy panted at last. “I guess this is our last adventure, Dick.”

“Don’t give up yet, Sandy,” Dick strove to encourage his chum.

Grimly, they stuck to the losing fight, determined not to give up until they had carried the last available stone into the passage to impede the progress of Fred Mistak, whose voice they could now plainly hear urging his men on to greater efforts. Like rats excavated by a clawing dog, Dick and Sandy were determined to sell their lives dearly.

Yet, Providence intervened. Suddenly, the work of Mistak’s men ceased, and the echo of running feet sounded in the icy corridor, accompanied by hoarse shouts of anger and dismay.

“What’s happened?” Sandy turned to Dick, hardly able to believe the good fortune that seemed to be coming to them.

Dick did not answer, but stood very still, listening intently. Finally, the last sounds of retreating footsteps died away.

“We’ll wait a little longer, then open up the passage and find out what or who frightened Mistak away,” said Dick.

For what seemed to the boys about a quarter of an hour, they waited in the dark passage. At the end of this time they began cautiously removing the boulders that blocked the passage. A few minutes later they crawled one at a time from the tiny entrance, finding the vicinity deserted.

“Funny,” Dick looked about puzzledly. “What do you suppose frightened them away?”

Sandy was as much at loss as his chum to account for Mistak’s departure, but presently a distant hail electrified them with attention, and the mystery of their rescue was solved.

About three hundred yards across the snow appeared a dog team and two men, the identity of whom the boys were not long in correctly guessing.

“Hurrah! The police! The police!” shouted Dick, leaping down the rocky slope

joyously, Sandy close on his heels.

It was not long before Dick and Sandy were eagerly gripping the huge, mittened hands of Corporal McCarthy and Constable Sloan. The story of their adventures since the officers had left the base, bubbled from their lips by fits and starts, the policemen hardly succeeding in getting a word in edgewise.

“Mistak pulled up stakes and mushed on when we made it too hot for him on the glacier,” Corporal McCarthy finally managed to explain. “We picked up his trail again three days ago and have been traveling fast ever since.”

“Well, his camp can’t be more than five miles from here,” Dick hastened to say. “But Mistak won’t stay there now, Corporal. He’s a mighty clever criminal, and now he knows you’re this close he’ll work a trick to get you off the trail.”

“Well, we can’t let him get away if there’s half a chance nabbing him,” Corporal McCarthy replied determinedly. “But Sloan and I need a few hours’ rest, and we might as well look over those bodies you boys say you found.”

The dogs were unharnessed outside the cavern entrance, and left in charge of Constable Sloan, while Corporal McCarthy crawled into the cave after Dick and Sandy. The officer was as amazed as the boys had been when he first laid eyes upon the frozen figures. His opinion was that of Dick—that the men had slid or stepped over the precipitous wall of the amphitheater while blinded by a snow storm. Though the policeman searched fully an hour for something by which to identify the bodies, he had no luck, and at last gave up after making a brief entry in a small notebook he carried.

“The best we can do is give them an Eskimo burial,” the Corporal concluded his inspection. “If you fellows will help me gather a few stones we’ll soon have the sad business over with.”

A few minutes later, as gently as possible, they deposited the bodies in their last resting place, and built over each a substantial cairn of stones.

From the wrecked sledge, Corporal McCarthy then tore some strips of wood, and lashing two together with leather thongs, he fashioned a cross for each. On the horizontal cross-pieces he carved this inscription:

“Found Sept. 19, 1925.

Identity Unknown.
Corporal Lake McCarthy, R.N.W.M.P.”

As soon as the crosses were planted and they had bowed their heads in silent prayer for the unknown victims of the north, they quitted the cavern and rejoined Constable Sloan.

A temporary camp was made, tea boiled, and bedding spread out, and while the boys thirstily gulped the hot beverage, the policemen discussed plans for the apprehension of Fred Mistak.

Among many other things the boys learned that they were upward of forty miles from the base of supplies Toma had been left alone to guard. The island upon which they thought they had landed when they left the mainland, seemed to stretch endlessly to the northeast, widening constantly until it disappeared under a solid ice cap.

Fuel oil for the special camp stoves was very low, and the policemen had only about three days' provisions left, which was largely fresh musk-ox which Constable Sloan had shot during the man hunt. Also several of the dogs had died from piblockto, a sort of madness peculiar to the polar regions.

“According to what the policemen say,” Dick confided to Sandy, “we'll have to make quick work of Mistak. With the supplies as low as they say they are, we'll have to start for our base mighty soon or the north will do for us what it did for those two fellows at the end of the cave.”

“We can't get back any too soon to suit me,” said Sandy earnestly.

The policemen rested the dogs and themselves for nearly two hours, when they harnessed up and once more set out upon the trail of Fred Mistak. Half a mile from the white Eskimo's rendezvous the snowshoe tracks led on steadily, then there were signs of a delay in the trampled snow. One man had gone on from there, obviously to warn whoever had been left at the igloos of the proximity of the police. Beside the undeviating snowshoe prints leading toward Mistak's igloos, there was a bewildering maze of tracks leading in all directions.

“They've scattered out, every man for himself,” was Constable Sloan's opinion. “But if we hurry on to the camp we might catch a few of them.”

Corporal McCarthy thought this good counsel, and they set out immediately for the encampment from which Dick and Sandy had so recently escaped. But they found the igloos deserted, their round, white domes crushed and destroyed.

Constable Sloan explained to the boys that the igloos had been broken down by the superstitious Eskimos in Mistak's band, who believed that if they left the igloos intact, evil spirits would come and live in them.

The policemen were considerably disappointed to find that Mistak's band had once more given them the slip. The scattering of the band had made it impossible to tell just which trail was Mistak's, and there was nothing more to do but return to the base of operations for more dogs and supplies.

After a scanty meal at Mistak's deserted camp, they set out upon the forty-mile dash to the home camp, praying for fair weather, and hoping no more of the dogs would contract the dreaded piblockto.

Five days of fair weather and the half-famished company came in sight of their base to find considerable changes in evidence. In place of the three igloos they had built, there were ten of the neat snow houses. A host of dogs hung about the little village, and out at sea they could see two kayacks bobbing about, manned by as many Eskimos.

"What is this!" exclaimed Corporal McCarthy. "Visitors, eh!"

"I'll bet I know how they came here!" Dick exclaimed.

"I think I know, too," Sandy added.

"Well, what do you think accounts for all these uninvited guests?" asked Constable Sloan.

"Sipsa brought them," Dick replied. "Remember, I told you how he left us and that his trail led over the back trail? Well, just as Sandy and I had it figured out, he went after some of his people on account of the good seal hunting here."

Just then the appearance of Toma changed the subject, and the boys hastened forward to greet their young Indian friend. Though Toma must have been filled with great joy upon seeing Dick and Sandy safe and sound, he did not express it except with a broad grin and an added brightness in his black eyes.

Shortly, proof appeared that Dick had been right in his surmise as to the reason for the coming of the Eskimos. It was in the form of Sipsa's moon face, split by a huge smile. The guide showed himself while Toma and the policemen were unharnessing the dogs and unpacking the sledge. Constable Sloan spoke to the native, reprimanding him for deserting the boys, but Sipsa did not quite understand that his offense had been so serious.

"Sipsa says the hunting was good here, and he could not resist carrying the news to his people," Constable Sloan interpreted. "He adds that he had trouble in convincing them that the glacier was not haunted by bad spirits. The drivers who deserted us carried the news back to the village that the 'white Eskimo' had changed all of us to ice."

"It wouldn't take an evil spirit to do that in this country," Dick remarked to Sandy, recalling the frozen bodies they had found so recently.

Having eaten their fill and had a few hours' nap, Dick and Sandy crawled out of their igloo and commenced a detailed inspection of their native visitors. While most of the men and women were out hunting, a few old women and children had remained behind.

The old women were making boots and shirts of sealskin and caribou hide, using an ivory needle and thread of caribou sinews. They did not seem to mind having Dick and Sandy watch them, and so the boys satisfied their curiosity to the utmost.

At one of the igloos a woman was cleaning a fur rug or robe by an interesting method. She poured melted snow water upon the fur, and shook it in the cold air until the tiny drops of moisture clinging to the hairs froze into globules of ice. It seemed that the particles of dirt in the fur were imprisoned in the little balls of ice. When the fur seemed well covered with the ice crust, the women lay it fur-side down in clean snow and beat it for a long time. This done, she hung up the robe and beat the fur side, the ice particles flying to right and left. When the last of the ice balls had disappeared from the fur, the robe seemed as dry and glossy as if it still was on the animal that first had borne it.

The boys were called away from the Eskimos by Corporal McCarthy who wished them to explain to him again just what they had heard regarding Corporal Thalman, the lost officer, while they were prisoners at Mistak's rendezvous.

CHAPTER XIII

A NARWHAL

Certain, now, through the chance discoveries of Dick and Sandy, that Corporal Thalman was alive somewhere in the frozen land, the policemen hastened to prepare for another venture into Mistak's outlaw fastnesses. The nearness of the polar winter, or period of complete darkness, also served to hasten them in their work, for without the sun to light the trail and under the terrible cold that accompanied the long night, they could not hope to accomplish anything.

Two days after pulling into their base of supplies from their first long and unsuccessful man hunt, the policemen once more set out in the direction they had lost Mistak, leaving Dick and Sandy with plenty of good advice and many precautions for them to avoid the dangers which they had fallen into when first left to take care of themselves.

Dick and Sandy put in the first twelve hours following the departure of the officers, in cleaning and oiling extra rifles from the supplies, to replace those taken by Mistak, and in practicing with a harpoon. Sipsa proved a willing teacher in the art of handling this death dealing weapon effectively, and while the boys could not begin to equal the accuracy of the life-time trained natives, they were attentive students and soon became fair marksmen.

After nearly a week of practice with the harpoon the boys decided to commandeer a kayak each and try their luck at sea, along with the Eskimo hunters. Sipsa had begun to pick up some English words, and the boys had managed to master a little Eskimo, so that when the day came for their first try at hunting with a harpoon, there was more of an understanding between them and their Eskimo friend than there had been formerly.

A narwhal had been sighted several times in the vicinity of the seal herd, Sipsa said, and the boys took added interest in the hunt with the promise of such big

game as a whale to lead them on.

“I’ll bet I get my harpoon into that narwhal before you do,” sang out Sandy, as they put off shore in the waterproofed kayacks.

“Well, if you do, it may be my lucky day,” Dick came back. “Those narwhals are mean fellows and if you don’t get them in a vital spot they can smash your kayak with their tail or long spear tusk and drown you.”

“I’ll take a chance on that,” Sandy replied, not quite so enthusiastically as he deftly guided his craft toward the hunters at work in the seal herd.

But the boys did not join in the seal hunt. For a time they amused themselves by running races in the kayacks which handled a good deal like canoes. Gradually they drifted further out to sea and away from the Eskimos, busily dodging icebergs and casting and recasting their harpoons into the water to accustom themselves to throwing from a rocking kayak.

About a quarter of a mile from the seal herd Dick paused to rest and to permit Sandy, whom he had outdistanced, to overtake him. The sea seemed to him particularly clear of floating ice at this point, he having noticed but one small fragment of ice about twenty feet ahead of him.

For probably a minute Dick watched Sandy paddling forward, and then he faced the front again only to receive a distinct shock. The low-lying berg had moved by some power other than the ocean current. Eyes widened, Dick watched what he had thought to be an inanimate piece of ice. His heart hammered against his breast. Again the ice moved, and this time it surged upward, the water seething and foaming about it. One glimpse Dick got of a white belly, a long pointed snout, and a huge slashing tail, and then the whole vision vanished in a whirl of waves that rocked his frail craft crazily.

Dick knew now that what he had thought to be a fragment of mottled ice, was the narwhal Sipsa had told them was haunting the vicinity. His hand tightened on his harpoon as he turned to shout the news of his discovery to Sandy.

“The narwhal! The narwhal!” cried Dick.

Sandy redoubled his efforts at the thrilling words, but Dick suddenly had other business to attract his attention. For the narwhal had again come to the surface

near his canoe.

Holding his breath until the great mammal turned broadside to him, Dick waited heedless of Sandy's repeated cries for him to wait until he had joined him. The right moment came as the huge, grayish body rolled with the waves. Dick cast with all the strength of his right arm. The harpoon darted across the water with a hiss, the coil of thong attaching it securely to the kayak paying out after it. The cast had not missed. Not far back of the head the heavy harpoon imbedded itself in the narwhal and with a swiftness surprising in so cumbersome an animal, the great body went into action.

The harpoon line had been tied securely to the kayak and as the narwhal lunged forward, the stout thong tightened with a snap. Dick and the kayak shot completely out of the water, and when the boat landed it was traveling at the rate of about thirty miles an hour.

Grim and white-faced, Dick hung on. He could have severed the harpoon line with a stroke of his keen hunting knife, yet this he did not intend to do while the kayak still remained afloat.

Spray flying in all directions, the narwhal headed due northeast, toward the open sea. Had it not been for the submarine-like build of the kayak and the waterproofed jacket enclosing its passenger, the craft might have sunk in the first hundred yards of that swift dash. As it was, Dick experienced a sensation much like that felt by a bather riding a surfboard which is being towed by a gasoline speed-boat.

Every minute during the breath-taking ride behind the harpooned narwhal, Dick hoped the monster might either weaken from his wound, or change his course and swim to a point where Sandy or the Eskimo hunters might lend a hand in finishing the battle with their harpoons. If the narwhal took a notion to dive, Dick knew all was lost, and his only means of saving himself that of quickly severing the harpoon line.

Dick had almost lost hope and was about ready to cut the line, when the narwhal changed his course suddenly. The line slackened as the huge gray and black body propelling the kayak swerved in a shower of spray, and doubled on its course. The kayak shot on by its own momentum, until with a powerful jerk the line hauled it about. The sudden turn tipped the kayak over as if it had been a

feather, then the same force righted it again, while Dick blew the water out of his mouth and nose.

Maddened by his wound, the narwhal seemed not to know or care where it went. Like a mighty propeller his fan-like tail lashed the water to a frenzy, as it headed straight toward Sandy's bobbing kayak.

"Let him have your harpoon as he goes by," Dick screamed to Sandy through a cupped palm.

Sandy shook his harpoon in the air in reply, and Dick could see him settle for a cast as he rushed on.

At first the narwhal seemed to be headed at an angle that would bring him past Sandy's kayak across the prow at a distance of about ten yards, close enough for a good cast with the harpoon. But, less than a hundred yards from Sandy's kayak, the big mammal changed course slightly, and with a hoarse shout of dismay, Dick saw that if the narwhal kept on he would ram Sandy's kayak squarely in the middle.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Dick frantically.

But Sandy was already making all haste with his paddle, and so well did he handle his kayak that the rushing sea-giant failed to run him down by several inches. As the big body whizzed by, Sandy made a quick throw with his harpoon, but missed, his line dropping over Dick's taut one, narrowly escaping entanglement as Dick's kayak collided with it.

"Hang on, Dick!" Sandy shouted as his chum shot past him. "You're headed straight toward Sipsa and the other hunters."

Dick had already foreseen this and his hopes were rising when, without any warning whatsoever, the narwhal dived. Had he gone far down Dick would, no doubt, have been dragged under water and drowned before he could slash free the harpoon line. As it was, the narwhal dived up and down alternately, drawing the prow of the kayak under water with a rush and bringing it up again with giddy speed.

Choking and gasping as the icy water trickled into his parka above the waterproof covering on the kayak, Dick had almost given up hope while blindly

slashing at the harpoon line, when the narwhal ceased diving and began darting this way and that over the surface of the water. Desisting in his attempts to sever the line, Dick saw that the Eskimo hunters were paddling fast toward him and that they would soon reach a point where their harpoons could finish the narwhal.

Completely maddened by the pain of his wound, and the constant drag of the kayak, the narwhal seemed to have lost all fear of man, for when his short-sighted eyes caught sight of the Eskimo hunters he made straight toward them, his great mouth wide open and revealing a frightful toothless cavern under the long sword-like tusk.

But the hunters did not give way save to give the narwhal room to pass between them. Seven harpoons impaled the narwhal as he dashed in among the kayacks, and his speed was lessened by half. Soon the monster was floundering about in a welter of blood, growing weaker and weaker.

As soon as the Eskimos had the situation well in hand, Dick cut away his harpoon line and made all haste to paddle to shore. The icy water that had splashed into his shirt through his hood was already numbing him with cold. Before he got to shore his nose lost all sense of feeling, then suffered a burning sensation as if it had come in contact with a hot iron. Dick knew then that he had frozen his nose. Beaching the kayak, he grabbed up his mittens full of snow and buried his face in this frost absorbing application as he ran for the igloo and an oil stove.

A half hour later Sandy burst through the round door of their igloo to find his chum nursing a badly frosted face. Dick's nose and cheeks were as white as tallow and he was writhing with pain as the blood commenced to circulate again in the frozen tissues.

"Gee, you got it bad, didn't you," Sandy sympathized. "But, say, when you see that big narwhal laid out on the shore, you'll think it was worth it. It was sure game of you to hang on to that fellow when you could as easily as not cut loose your line." Dick smiled bravely through his burning pains. "I don't know as I deserve all that flattery, Sandy. When that whale started to dive, I'd have slashed the rope if I could have located it. But the water blinded me."

The following day Dick's face was well enough for him to go out into the

outside air, so long as he kept bundled up to his eyes. He walked down to the beach with Sandy where the narwhal had been towed in.

Though not nearly so large as the common species of whale inhabiting the seas further south, the narwhal was fully sixteen feet long, not including the six-foot tusk of twisted ivory that extended from his blunt nose, and must have weighed several thousand pounds. The Eskimos had already begun to cut up the enormous masses of blubber and to extract the whalebone from the jaws. Dick procured a small piece of the bone as a keep-sake, though for the present his frosted nose was enough to keep the episode in his memory for several weeks to come.

Dick felt that his face was in no condition for him to stay out long that day, and so after the mid-day meal Sandy ventured out alone with his rifle to see if he could not knock down a few eider ducks and gather more of their eggs.

Sandy wandered along the sea shore in the direction of the cairn they had erected near the meteorite. He shot two eider ducks and located a dozen fresh eggs in the nests, which he collected in a leather bag. This done, he walked down to the shore ice and sat down upon a lump, his feet hanging over the lapping water.

He had sat there idly gazing to sea for about five minutes when he noticed a queer object bobbing about in the water about twenty feet from shore. It was dark and round, attracting Sandy's curiosity immediately. After considerable maneuvering he managed to fish it out with the muzzle of his rifle.

What Sandy picked up in his hands was a large canteen or thermos bottle, used on expeditions in the polar regions. It was covered with sodden leather and evidently had been afloat for a long period of time.

Slowly turning the bottle over in his hands, Sandy found carved in the leather this inscription:

“Look Inside
C. T.
R.N.W.M.P.”

An ejaculation of amazement and of triumph burst from Sandy's lips, and forgetting all about his ducks and eggs, he set out at a run for the camp, the canteen hugged tightly under one arm.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLOATING MANUSCRIPT

When Sandy burst into the igloo with his precious find clutched to his breast he found Dick asleep. He shook his chum out of the sleeping bag in a hurry.

“What’s all the excitement about?” Dick mumbled rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“Something from Corporal Thalman,” Sandy cried, thrusting the canteen under Dick’s eyes.

Dick started forward as he read the words carved in the leather, and uttered a cry of astonishment.

“Where’s an axe? Let’s break the bottle open and see what’s inside! Won’t Corporal McCarthy open his eyes when he sees this!” Dick was even more excited than Sandy.

A moment later they had split the bottle as carefully as they could and from the inside extracted a tightly rolled strip of leather, about the width of an ordinary sheet of writing paper.

The leather apparently had been cut from an old shirt. Unrolled, it presented a mass of words and a crude map, carved in the leather by something in the nature of a sharp stone.

“It’s a message from Corporal Thalman!” exclaimed Dick, deciphering the initials, “C. T.” and the abbreviation for “Royal Northwest Mounted Police.”

“And that map shows where he is!” Sandy cried.

“Right now it looks the same as Greek to me,” Dick admitted, frowning over the

wandering lines, crosses and data. “Let’s read the script and see if that will help.”

The following is what the boys read from the strange manuscript:

“If Fate is kind and this bottle and message fall into friendly hands, I desire the nearest post of the R.N.W. M.P. be notified that the undersigned is now being unlawfully held a prisoner on a glacial island several miles off the northern coast of Grant Land, about half way between Cape Columbia and Cape Richards.

“Detailed to apprehend a half-breed Eskimo murderer, I picked up his trail on the barrens and followed him to this island where a band of outlaws, led by Mistak, surprised and captured me.

“I calculate I have been imprisoned about six months in an ice-sealed pit at the bottom of a glacier, which seems to have been formed by an eruption ages ago. The pit has an outlet above my head into one of the large fissures in the top strata of the glacier, which I have tried to locate by means of the accompanying map. One side of the pit is formed of ice many feet thick. By weeks of work I cut my way through this into a series of grottoes or caverns lined with crystallized ice. However, I have so far been unable to find any outlet to the surface of the glacier and the caverns are so cold that I cannot spend much time in them.

“The pit is warmer due to what I believe to be hot springs miles beneath me. A small underground stream of tepid, fresh water, tasting slightly of sulphur, runs across the floor of the pit, out of one wall into another, and upon this I shall set this canteen afloat, hoping by some miracle of good fortune that it will reach the sea and there be discovered.

“Mistak furnishes me every so often with a supply of seal blubber which he drops down from the top of the pit. I do not know why he keeps me alive, except out of fiendish desire to see me suffer.

“Anyone attempting to locate me may do so in two ways—by means of the fissure into which this pit opens, or from the crystal grottoes. Since I have been unable to find an outlet to the grottoes, that method of reaching the pit seems impractical, and I have directed all my efforts on this map toward guiding a rescuing party to the fissure.

“Provided Mistak does not neglect bringing me food for too long a period, I shall be alive when this is read, though I notice some symptoms of scurvy.

“I now set this canteen adrift with its message, trusting in Providence to guide it into the hands of those who will understand the suffering and peril of my plight, and act accordingly.

“Corporal James E. Thalman,
“R.N.W.M.P.
“August 15 (?) 1925.”

Dick and Sandy finished reading the message at about the same time, yet they did not draw from it quite the same conclusions.

“Then I found the canteen after it had been floating and drifting for nearly two months,” Sandy spoke, still awed by the importance of his discovery.

“Yes, as Corporal Thalman hoped, his message found its way to the sea from some underground stream,” Dick rejoined.

Upon re-examining the map they satisfied themselves that the glacial island drawn there was the one they were now camping upon. They traced the trail by which they had come along the east side of the ridge, and rejoiced to find that the meteor stone indicated by the cross must be identical with the one they had found. Estimating on a basis of the scale of miles drawn by Corporal Thalman, they found they were encamped not more than five miles from the point at which the Corporal had been captured eight months before, and hardly thirty miles, allowing for detours, from the actual prison pit.

“Oh, boy! This is more thrilling than looking for lost mines!” Sandy cried exuberantly.

“It’s even more risky,” Dick returned, “and in this case it’s just as difficult. There must be a lot of inaccuracies in this map. The location here may be pretty near ten miles off. I wish the policemen were here to help. This is really too big a job for us.”

“Wouldn’t it be a feather in our caps if we found Corporal Thalman all by ourselves!” Sandy puffed out his chest.

Dick admitted that it would, though he reprimanded Sandy for his exaggeration of their capabilities.

“Before we get ready to hunt for the Corporal we must draw a copy of this map and leave it for Corporal McCarthy,” Dick directed. “If they don’t return before we leave on a search for the fissure, the copy will give them all the information they need to work on their own accord.”

An hour later the boys had completed a copy of the map and message, detail by detail, and prepared for a few hours rest before they started for the glacier.

Map

The boys awakened after nearly eight hours sleep, to find that the policemen had not yet returned. They immediately set about harnessing a dog team and loading a sledge with a few days’ supplies. They intended to hunt musk-oxen also on their trip inland, and in that way kill two birds with one stone. Provided they failed to locate Corporal Thalman’s prison, they could at least bring back a sledge load of musk-ox meat.

Since Sipsa and his Eskimos could be depended upon to take care of the camp, Dick decided that Toma should go with them if he liked, and found the Indian boy overjoyed at the opportunity to escape the dullness of life at the supply base.

After bidding the grinning, moon-faced Sipsa good-bye, the boys started out, driving their dog team at a gallop. It was not long before they reached a point below the head of the glacial ridge from which they could see the meteor stone near which they had built the cairn.

From there they began to count their strides—approximately 1,760 to a mile, and three miles to the spot where Corporal Thalman had been attacked and captured by Mistak and his band. Dick and Sandy both counted their steps so they might check against each other when the required distance was covered.

At last they reached a mass of boulders sticking up out of the snow which was within a quarter mile of the distance on the map.

“This looks like a likely place for a man to be surprised and captured,” said Dick, signaling them to halt. He referred to the map. “According to the route laid

out here, Mistak bore slightly to the left when he went on with his captive.”

With this in mind they passed the boulders and came out on a broad, snow-covered tundra stretching for several miles inland from the sea and ending abruptly some miles south in towering walls of ice that marked the position of the glacier.

Driving southwest, the three boys began the long trek across the tundra, hoping they might soon sight the abandoned igloos indicated on the map as the next landmark.

But two hours of steady mushing failed to raise anything resembling a habitation. The tundra still stretched monotonously ahead of them, the countless acres of snow glaring in their eyes as it reflected the sun’s rays.

Dick called a halt and the three boys gathered about the sledge, permitting the dogs to lie down and rest their tired legs.

“We’ll have to use our heads now,” said Dick. “Corporal Thalman has either underestimated the distance from the point of his capture to the igloos, or else we’re traveling in the wrong direction.”

“Well, I’d say,” put in Sandy, “that no Eskimo would build an igloo out on this level plain where it would catch the full force of all the storms that blew down from the pole.”

“You’re right, Sandy,” announced Dick. “Those igloos must have been built where there was some sort of wind break. Suppose we swing around due south until we get into the rough country on the outskirts of the glacier.”

“That seems to be about the best plan,” Sandy rejoined. “It’s a cinch there’s nothing north of us as far as the sea.”

“Me no savvy,” Toma muttered, and Dick promised to explain the map more thoroughly when they pitched camp.

The distance to the glacier was deceiving. It was fully an hour after they changed their course before they struck the first break in the tundra and began to climb upward along the ravine down the trough of which the glacier had flung out a finger centuries before.

When they had climbed to a height nearly a hundred feet above the tundra they paused to reconnoiter. Approximating their position on Corporal Thalman's map, they judged themselves to be in a big bend in the formation of the glacier. Far ahead, over the various hills and ridges, they could see where the vast mass of ice broadened and began its slide to the sea.

"You know what I think," Dick broke a long silence, "those igloos are right under the walls of the glacier where it flows down to the sea."

"I wouldn't wonder but what you're right," Sandy replied dubiously, "but why not go on pretty slow so we can examine all the territory between us and where the glacier turns?"

"Better yet," Dick sanctioned. "We can't be too thorough. For all we know, every mistake we make in reading this map may be just like pounding another nail in Corporal Thalman's coffin."

"Ugh!" Sandy shivered at the thought, as they started out again.

With an interval of some hundred yards between them, the boys proceeded, Toma in the center driving the dog team. Almost any of the sheltered spots in the vicinity of the glacier might hide half a dozen igloos, and they were not going to pass up any likely places if they could help it.

The boys were growing weary, indeed, when Sandy, considerably in the lead, stopped dead still upon a mound of ice, and let out a cheer like an Indian war whoop.

"There they are! There they are!" his shout was faintly borne to the ears of Dick and Toma.

The two forced their tired legs into a staggering run, which soon brought them up with Sandy.

Below them, snug on the southern slope of a pyramid of glacial drift, were the abandoned igloos.

They had located the second landmark on the trail to Corporal Thalman's prison!

CHAPTER XV

MUSK OXEN

After locating the six abandoned igloos, the boys were too tired to go on without a rest, and they immediately unharnessed the dogs and pitched their tupiks or tents. They soon were gathered about a tiny camp stove listening to the musical murmurings of a pot of tea.

“Well, so far so good,” said Dick, stretching his legs and lying back comfortably. “If we have no more trouble than this tracing Corporal Thalman’s route the rest of the way, we can pat ourselves on the back.”

“Yes, and we’d better make quick work of it,” Sandy rejoined. “Do you notice how low the sun is getting these days? Pretty soon we’ll begin to have twilight, and that means winter is about with us.”

“You mean the long night,” said Dick. “Well, in a way I hope we get our business done up here before winter sets in, and in a way I don’t.”

“Why?” Sandy asked, puzzled.

“It must be a wonderful experience,” Dick returned, “to live four months without seeing the sun, nothing but the stars and once in a while the moon to give any light. And not even the stars when it’s cloudy. They say it gets so dark during the long night up here that you can pretty near reach out of your igloos and bring in a handful of darkness.”

“That must be awful,” Sandy wagged his head ruefully. “I can’t see what you want to endure all that for. Think of the thermometer going down to 60 degrees below zero, and what if we ran out of food?”

“I guess we could winter up here alright if we had to do it,” Dick returned. “The Eskimos are laying up tons of walrus and seal blubber. Besides, there’s that

narwhal, and we're going to bag a few musk-oxen pretty soon."

"Me no like um blubber," Toma spoke up vehemently. "No eat um blubber all winter."

"Me too," Sandy agreed emphatically.

"I guess you fellows would think blubber was pretty good if there wasn't anything else to chew on except sealskin boots."

The conversation had grown unpleasant in this vein, so the boys changed the subject to the map, which Dick spread out in the snow and explained to Toma, as he had promised. But their eyes soon grew heavy with sleep, and after finishing their scanty rations of frozen bear meat, they retired, Dick standing the first watch.

When each of them had had about five hours' rest, they ate more bear meat, drank a pot of tea and were ready for the trail. The problem now ahead of them was the scaling of the glacier, towering in a low range of mountains about two miles from the abandoned igloos. The map indicated no exact route to the top of the glacier, except that from the abandoned igloos there was a change of course somewhat to the southwest.

They had been on the trail only half an hour when Toma's keen eyes detected signs of musk-oxen. The Indian boy showed Dick and Sandy the marks of the hoofs in the snow.

"We'd better see if we can't shoot a few of the fellows that made these tracks," Dick advised. "We can leave the meat cached in ice and covered with stones. Then when we return we can pick it up on an empty sledge."

Sandy was eager for the hunt and so the boys swung off the course they had been following, and began trailing the musk-oxen. The tracks were quite fresh and they all looked at their rifles to see that they were ready for quick shooting. Since they never before had hunted musk-oxen, they did not know just what to expect.

They had trailed the musk-oxen about half a mile when, climbing out of a ravine, they came suddenly upon them. There were five of the strange creatures huddled in a circle, tail to tail, save for one, who stood out from the rest facing the young

hunters. For several minutes the boys stood still before the shaggy beasts, who seemed not to fear them in the least. Dick was first to shake off his attack of "buck fever." Raising his rifle, he took careful aim at the animal nearest them. He chose a vulnerable spot, and at the crack of his rifle, the musk-ox sank to his knees, tried ineffectually to rise, and at last rolled over and expired.

Dick's shot awakened Sandy and Toma from the trance into which the first sight of the creatures had thrown them, and each of them picked an animal from the band, bringing them down with a shot each. All fired again, and though the last of the five made an awkward attempt to run away, they brought it down together.

"It's a shame to shoot such quiet, peaceful brutes," said Sandy as they hurried up to the brownish forms in the snow.

"That meat means life for us," replied Dick, "and maybe God put them here for just that purpose."

Sandy's feeling of remorse over the shooting of the musk-oxen soon disappeared after they reached the fallen herd. As zoological specimens the musk-oxen were food for thought, and when the boys had finished examining the huge gnarled horns and the broad, rounded backs, there was the cutting up of the meat to be performed. So intent did they become upon the latter task that for a time they forgot entirely their surroundings.

It was Toma whose sharp ears first sensed that they were not alone. He spoke a few guttural words to Dick and Sandy in an undertone, and all three reached for their rifles. When they turned to face the ravine up which they had climbed just before sighting the musk-oxen, they could hear the crunch of snowshoes. Prepared for the worst, they brought their rifles to their hips and cocked them.

A scowling, fur-bordered face appeared over the edge of the ravine, paused a moment, then finished the climb followed by two more unprepossessing individuals clad in worn, soiled furs. The three paused on the brow of the ravine, silently inspecting the boys.

Dick recognized the one who was in advance of the others as the white man he had seen in Mistak's band. He was certain the other two were likewise outlaws.

"What do you want?" called Dick.

“Nothin’ pertic’lar, yonker,” replied the white man. “It just happens we’ve been a-huntin’ these here musk-ox you’ses has shot.”

“It happens we saw them before you did,” returned Dick suspiciously.

“Wal, I guess you wuz luckier than we’ns, but that’s no call f’r us to hold a grudge against each other,” said the man, starting forward.

“That’s far enough!” Dick’s clear voice rang out in the icy air, as the rifle came to his shoulder. He was sure the three outlaws meant no good, and made sure he had some advantage if it came to open hostilities.

The white man paused and scowled. “Think y’r pretty sly, eh! I guess I oughta agreed with Mistak ’bout puttin’ you yonkers out of business while we had the chance.”

“It happens I overheard you talking to Mistak about that when you thought Sandy and I were asleep in the igloo. You suggested we be put with Corporal Thalman,” Dick replied sternly.

The white man started visibly. “Thalman!” his voice came hoarsely from his bearded lips. “What do you yonkers know ’bout Thalman?” There was plain menace in the man’s attitude now.

Dick was almost on the point of blurting out some valuable information, when he caught himself.

“Nothing,” he answered reservedly, “only the Mounted Police are looking for—er—his body.”

“I reckon that’s all they’ll find, an’ it’s pretty doubtful if they find that,” sneered Mistak’s man, seeming relieved that the boys apparently had no specific knowledge of Corporal Thalman’s fate.

Had the man dreamed of the manuscript that had floated into Sandy’s hands, of the map now reposing in Dick’s pocket, he probably would have signaled his companions to attack then and there. But he did not.

“You fellers ain’t goin’ to let us go away empty handed,” the outlaw resumed, wheedlingly, looking hungrily at the five dead musk-oxen.

“Shall we let them have some meat?” Dick asked Sandy, without taking his eyes from the outlaws, who were also covered by the rifles of Sandy and Toma.

“Yes,” Sandy replied. “Let them have one of the musk-oxen. They’ll go away and leave us alone then.”

Toma’s sanction to the gift was given by a mere grunt.

“We’ve decided to let you have one of the musk-oxen since you’re hungry,” Dick told the spokesman of the three. “But it’s not because we fear you or think we owe it to you.”

The white man turned to the half-breed Indians and muttered a few words in a foreign tongue. The boys indicated the musk-oxen farthest away from them as the one the men should take, and, keeping their rifles ready for any trickery that might be enacted, they watched the outlaws hasten forward and attack the meat with their knives.

Soon the men had the animal quartered and had slung the fresh meat to their backs. The two half-breeds turned and climbed back into the ravine with their load, but the white outlaw tarried for a parting word.

“This country ain’t healthy f’r you fellers,” he leered at them. “I’m givin’ y’r a tip on the strength o’ this meat. I ain’t sayin’ I’m in love with Mistak, but I reckon I hate the Mounted more. My moniker is Moonshine Sam, if you fellers want ter know, an’ it’s the Mounted that’s chased me into this God-f’saken land. They ain’t goin’ to git me here. Git that? Not afore I git me two more policemen!”

Dick’s rifle came up quickly at the grim threat in the outlaw’s words, but Moonshine Sam turned abruptly and followed his companions down into the ravine.

When the three were out of sight the boys breathed sighs of relief. It had been a trying ordeal, and they felt themselves fortunate in coming through it without blood-shed.

“I wish we could have captured them,” Sandy expressed something that had been in Dick’s mind also.

“But it was too risky,” Dick replied. “You must remember they were grown men, and among the most desperate characters the Mounted has to deal with. If we’d tried to capture them they’d have finished us before we reached the home camp.”

Sandy saw the logic in Dick’s reasoning and said no more about it, while they set to work completing the skinning and quartering of the remaining four musk-oxen.

“I think we’d better haul the meat away from here before we cache it,” Dick advised, when they were about finished. “Those fellows will probably come back here as soon as we leave, and search for a cache.”

“Maybe it would be a good idea to follow them for a ways to see where they are going. They might lead us right to Corporal Thalman’s prison,” was Sandy’s suggestion.

“That’s possible and it’s a good idea,” said Dick. “But supposing they strike off in some other direction, and lead us right into the rest of Mistak’s band?”

“Well, I don’t know,” Sandy considered.

“Take um meat ’long for way,” Toma spoke up gravely. “When find out bad fella not mean to come back here, cache meat.”

“That’s just the thing to do!” exclaimed Dick. “We won’t lose any time that way and we’ll be pretty sure the meat will not be stolen when we come back after it.”

In a few minutes the fresh meat was loaded onto the long sledge and they were once more on the way.

The outlaws had had time to travel about half a mile before the boys set out on their trail, and even Toma’s keen eyes saw no sign of them as they wound down the ravine. Dick hoped, as Sandy had, that the outlaws might lead them to the vicinity of Corporal Thalman’s prison. Yet, when two miles on the trail, the snowshoe tracks they were following swung toward the sea, Dick knew no such good fortune was destined to be theirs. Half hoping the outlaws might turn toward the glacier again, the boys kept on following them for a short time, but soon gave up, deciding to depend entirely upon the map to guide them.

Tracing the back trail until they reached the point where they had turned north

after the outlaws, the boys halted to cache their meat, since they were now reasonably certain that Mistak's men did not intend to come back looking for it.

They first buried all the meat, except enough for four days' rations, in a deep snow bank. Then, from a nearby patch of boulder strewn slope they carried a great many stones, erecting a sort of monument over the cache to prevent its being torn up by foxes. Over this cairn, they threw snow until it resembled, from a distance, the rest of the snowdrift. About a hundred feet north of the cache a small pile of stones was placed, as a landmark provided a storm came and obliterated all other signs of the cache.

The job of stowing the meat completed, the boys once more set out for the glacier. Driving fast, they reached the towering walls of ice and snow in about an hour. Calling a halt they surveyed with sinking hearts the tremendous task that lay before them.

"I wonder if this is the place where Mistak climbed the glacier with his prisoner," Dick speculated.

"Looks to me like a mountain goat would have a hard time getting to the top from this point," said Sandy.

"Heap big job get um sledge up ice from here. Look 'long wall. Maybe find easy place," suggested Toma.

"I think that's what we'd better do," Sandy agreed with the young Indian.

Dick also thought it best they should look for an easier place to climb, and so they turned to the right under the walls of the glacier and drove the dog team slowly along, their necks craned upward.

The grumbling noises in the bowels of the glacier gave cause for grave concern in the minds of the boys and they fell silent, dreading more and more the peril of ascending that mountain of ice.

Not far from the place where they had first approached the glacier, they found the walls split as by a giant's axe and a great gorge led upward at a slant which promised fairly easy climbing. Turning into this they started upward.

A quarter mile of steady climbing, covered by helping the dogs with the supply

sledge, and they found themselves about a hundred feet above the tundra. Here, they paused for a much needed rest. Probably five minutes they had sat in the snow, gathering strength for the next lap of the climb, when a low rumble fell upon their ears which seemed nearer than any other noises they had heard from the glacier.

With faces paling, the boys listened intently, while the rumble increased to a roar, growing steadily nearer.

Dick leaped up and looked up the gorge, a sudden suspicion leaping in his mind that froze him with consternation.

He was about to speak when the unmistakable sound of crashing, moving ice was borne to his ears. Around a bend in the gorge appeared a gigantic mass of snow, ice and stones which struck the opposite wall of the gorge with a shock that made the earth tremble under foot and sent a shower of fine ice and snow high into the air.

“Run for your lives!” cried Dick hoarsely. “It’s an avalanche, and we’re right in its path!”

CHAPTER XVI

BURIED IN A SNOW SLIDE

Fear lent wings to the three boys as they saw the awful wall of snow and ice bounding down the gorge upon them. With one accord they rushed toward the steep slope on their left, scrambling up it in frantic efforts to gain a height out of reach of the avalanche, before it descended and crushed them under its ponderous plunging weight.

The dog team sensed its peril instinctively and struggled after the boys, dragging the heavy sledge behind them. Toma, slightly in the rear, grasped the sledge and began helping the dogs in their unequal fight for safety.

“Leave the sledge go!” shouted Dick to the young Indian. “Save yourself.”

But the courageous Toma did not heed. Stubbornly, he stayed by the sledge, falling far behind his companions.

Then, with a roar that shook the walls of the gorge as if an earthquake had occurred, the avalanche plunged past on its way to the tundra far below.

Dick and Sandy barely escaped the flying ice and stones and with a cry of despair they saw Toma with the sledge and dog team vanish in a swirl of flying snow.

The avalanche thundered on, sight and sound of it dying away down the gorge as quickly as it had come. Dick and Sandy were left high on the wall of the desolate gorge, gazing with sad eyes at the point where Toma and the dog team had disappeared.

“It happened so suddenly I can hardly realize it,” Sandy spoke in a low voice. “Poor Toma.”

“I won’t give up hope yet,” Dick declared grimly. “Toma was not caught by the full force of the avalanche. You must remember he and the dogs were almost out of the way when they were hit. Let’s look along the slope.”

Sandy followed Dick to the bottom of the gorge, and the two began picking their way along the path of the avalanche. Every now and then huge masses of snow, left adhering to the walls of the gorge, loosened and fell, starting miniature snow slides in their wake, but Dick and Sandy kept their eyes open and managed to avoid these dangers by a wide margin.

They had retraced their upward trail about two hundred yards when there was borne to their ears the faint but unmistakable bark of a dog.

“Listen!” Dick grasped Sandy’s arm, as they stopped dead still.

Again there echoed in the canyon the sharp bark of an excited dog.

“It sounds like one of our Eskimo dogs,” Sandy spoke in a subdued voice, scarcely able to believe his ears. “But for the life of me I can’t tell where it comes from.”

“Let’s walk on a little further,” Dick suggested.

They continued on their way for a few steps, then stopped again. The dog had barked again, and now the sound seemed to come from above and behind them.

“Why not shout Toma’s name?” said Sandy. “If he’s alive he’ll hear us.”

Dick thought this an excellent idea and in unison they raised their voices.

“Toma! Toma!” they shouted at the tops of their lungs, and paused to listen intently.

A second of silence, then the faraway crags of the glacier threw back their cries like mocking laughter.

Drawing deep breaths for another shout, they hesitated. Several dogs had commenced to bark, and were making a veritable bedlam of racket, what with the echoes that were flying about.

“It’s our dogs!” ejaculated the amazed boys.

“Come on. Toma may be alive,” Dick sang out, charging up the slope of the gorge, with Sandy close at his heels.

Half way up the side of the gorge they came suddenly upon the dogs in a snow filled ledge. There were ten of the twelve dogs alive and well, the other two had been crushed to death under a huge boulder deposited there by the avalanche. The sledge of supplies, badly twisted and smashed, lay overturned, half-buried in the snow, but still hitched to the tangled dogs. Eagerly the boys searched the wreckage, but at first there was no sign of Toma. Then one of the dogs, whining plaintively, began pawing into a heap of packed snow. The boys rushed to the dog and found he had uncovered a boot. Silently, the boys attacked the packed snow with mittens and boots, and in five minutes they dragged their young Indian friend free of the lodged snow.

“Pray he’s alive!” Dick implored, as they lay the quiet form upon some sledge packing.

Toma’s dark face was darker still, as if he had smothered, yet as the boys chafed his hands and listened for heart beats, a flicker of eye lashes showed a sign of life. Redoubling their efforts to bring the boy back, they were finally rewarded by a deep sigh from the dusky lips, and presently Toma’s dark eyes were open.

“Humph!” Toma grunted as he sat up uncertainly, and vigorously shook himself like a big dog. “No can breathe under snow. Think um see Happy Hunting Grounds.”

“It’s a miracle you didn’t!” exclaimed Dick fervently.

“Tell us how it all happened,” Sandy urged.

“Not know much,” Toma blinked, “come too quick. Something hit me. I see many stars, an’ whirl, whirl in snow. Feel like fly like bird, then big bump. All still. I can no breathe. All get like night, then I see you fellas.”

Overjoyed at the recovery of Toma, the boys could do little but discuss the narrow escape for some time. Finally they set to work untangling the dogs, and when that was done they started to repair the sledge.

It took more than three hours to fix the sledge so it was worthy of the trail, but they at last had the worst breaks spliced and lashed with leather thongs. By this time they were all so tired that they decided to pitch camp and fix something to eat. This they did as soon as they were on the floor of the gorge.

“We don’t need to be afraid of any more snow slides for some time to come,” Dick relieved their fears in that direction. “All the loose ice and stones was cleared out by that big avalanche.”

After an appetizing meal of broiled musk-ox, the boys slept for several hours. When they awakened they noticed for the first time a change in the sunlight, and were concerned at the approach of winter which this signaled.

“Seems strange to see evening come again,” remarked Sandy. “Wonder how it would feel to go to bed in honest-to-goodness darkness again?”

“If we don’t get a move on we’ll get more darkness than we want,” said Dick, referring to the approach of the Arctic’s long night.

But when the boys started up the gorge again it was no darker. So far, all the night they were to experience for a few weeks was to be several hours of twilight.

Not far up the gorge, beyond the point where the avalanche had narrowly missed destroying them, Dick called the attention of his chum to three tiny figures walking along the rim of the gorge above them.

“I wonder if those men could be Moonshine Sam and his two companions,” said Dick. “They’ve had just about time to come this far if they had headed this way shortly after we stopped trailing them.”

“Well, I hope they won’t try any monkeyshines like starting another avalanche,” Sandy shivered. “When I die I don’t want to get that kind of a sendoff for the Happy Hunting Grounds. What do you say, Toma?”

The young Indian grunted his emphatic sanction of Sandy’s preferences, while all three watched the men on the cliff. The men they thought might be Moonshine Sam and the two half-breeds from Mistak’s band, kept abreast of the boys for nearly a half hour, then as the gorge began to grow shallower upon nearing the plateau down from which it led, they disappeared.

“If they ever get wind of the fact that we know Corporal Thalman is still alive, our lives won’t be worth a cent,” Dick expressed his thoughts aloud. “They’ll put an end to Corporal Thalman right away, too, if they think for a minute we have a chance to rescue him—if they haven’t done that already.”

The boys hurried on, and soon came out of the gorge upon what they were quite sure was the top of the glacier. An icy wind, that cut to the very marrow of their bones, blew across the vast, white field of ice. But they struck out bravely across the lonely forbidding desert of the north, hoping soon to locate the first of the three main fissures marked on the map.

They were now traveling southwest with the sun in their eyes, and for the first time since they saw genuine “sun-dogs.” The phenomenon was intensely interesting and for a time attracted almost all their attention. The sun-dogs were in the form of four miniature suns situated one above, one below, and one on either side of the big disc of light that was the source of them. They were not really suns, however, but reflections of the sun upon the countless particles of frost in the air. One of the “dogs” was somewhat like the rainbow, for it seemed to hang just a few feet ahead of the dog team, dancing just out of reach, like a will-o’-the-wisp, as they plodded along.

Then they came upon a deep fissure in the glacier which temporarily crowded the sun-dogs out of their minds. The crack was not an exceptionally large one in comparison to other glacial fissures they had seen, being only about four feet across at the widest points. Several smaller fissures were indicated on the map as preceding the first main fissure, so the boys crossed the gap by jumping, improvising a bridge with the sledge for those dogs to cross over which were too stubborn to make the leap.

“We may be misled after all by these fissures,” Dick spoke when they had resumed their journey “New cracks form pretty often, and it’s possible the main fissures Corporal Thalman observed while Mistak was taking him to the prison pit are not the main ones any longer.”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” Sandy replied. “A lot of small fissures might show up in eight months’ time, but these big fissures are very old and they wouldn’t change much.”

By this time they had reached another small fissure, about the size of the first

one, but much longer. As far as they could see on either side of them the crooked crack stretched away like a huge, black snake, wriggling across the snow-bound glacier roof.

Keeping a rough account of the miles they had traversed since reaching the top of the glacier, they believed the first main fissure could not be far away according to the map. An hour after crossing the first small fissure, they reached what they were almost certain was the first main fissure. In places it yawned to an unestimable depth, and at many points was more than twenty feet in width. After sledging along the rim of it for a half mile they located a natural bridge of ice over which they crossed without mishap.

Excited by their success so far, they increased their pace, again crossing numerous small chasms in the glacier before arriving at the rim of the second main fissure. This they finally contrived to bridge at a point where a jutting ice ledge partly spanned the seemingly bottomless void.

From there on, the top of the glacier ceased to be level. Great holes yawned everywhere amidst heaps of shattered ice many feet in height. Apparently, at some time years ago, two divisions of the glacier had met there in their slow progress, crumbling their giant fronts upon one another.

In the midst of the veritable “bad lands” of ice they came upon what they were reasonably certain was the third main fissure, somewhere at the bottom of which was the pit in which Corporal Thalman had been imprisoned. But the immensity of the task still ahead of them awed the boys. For, though they had reached the fissure, it was miles long and they had no way of judging any nearer than five or ten miles just where the prison pit was located.

“There’s nothing to do but look for a way of climbing down to the bottom of the fissure,” Dick finally spoke. “Mistak must know a way to get down there, and if we look long enough, we can find it.”

“Maybe we ought to wait until the policemen get here,” Sandy expressed his doubts, while gazing down into the black chasm that was the main fissure.

“No, it’s best we keep on trying since we’ve come this far without any fatal accidents. Corporal McCarthy can trail us wherever we go, so there’s no need waiting for him and the Constable.”

The boys set out along the glacier looking for a place that offered possibilities of descent into the fissure. It was slow going over the heaps of shattered ice, and before they had gone a mile they were worn out. They halted to rest in a shallow pit which protected them from the cold wind. As they sat there, Dick noticed that a small fissure about three feet wide and as high as a man's head opened out of a bulwark of ice in front of them. The crack seemed to lead downward at a sharp slant.

"That hole looks like it might lead down to the bottom of the fissure," Dick said to Sandy and Toma. "Let's go into it and investigate."

After resting a few more minutes, they got up and walked into the passage. Advancing cautiously, they reached an underground chamber, about twenty feet long, ten feet wide, and somewhat higher than their heads. The sunlight reached the chamber through its entrance and the dim rays lighted up a very beautiful scene. The walls and roof of the natural cavity were formed of crystallized moisture, shaped in many grotesque and fantastic figures.

"I believe this is part of the crystal grottoes Corporal Thalman mentioned in his message!" Dick exclaimed examining the glittering walls.

"Maybe we just found the outlet that the Corporal failed to find," Sandy brightened.

But upon investigating further they were disappointed. The first chamber led into a second and smaller chamber which had no outlet, and seemed the end of the cavern.

After sounding the walls to make certain they could not break into a larger cavity, the boys made their way back to the narrow passage leading up to the outer air.

Dick went first, and as he stopped into the sunlight a premonition of danger seized him. But before he could act to defend himself, a shadow was flung across his path and a heavy weight descended upon his head and shoulders. Dick went to the ice, stunned and half-blinded.

CHAPTER XVII

A RACE WITH DEATH

Dick was stunned only a moment, but when his head cleared he found himself pinioned by a powerful man, who had just lashed his hands behind him with thongs. Nearby, Sandy and Toma struggled in the clutches of four men. At a little distance away stood Mistak, the half-breed Eskimo, leering with malevolent triumph upon his captives.

When the boys were completely subdued and their arms tied behind them, Mistak came forward and searched them. He found nothing in Sandy's and Toma's clothing which seemed to interest him, but Dick's shirt pocket disclosed the map, and filling the air with French and Eskimo curses, the outlaw saw the handiwork of the imprisoned policeman.

"So you sink to save him!" Mistak glared at Dick. "I get you in time, yes? Ha! By gar, you nevair meddle wiz Fred Mistak's business more."

Mistak's evil intentions were only too evident, and Dick was about to give up hope, when Toma cocked his head to one side in a listening attitude. Dick knew the Indian youth had far keener hearing than the average person, and felt his hopes once more rising. Whatever Toma heard, it was of some favorable significance, for he looked squarely at Dick and solemnly winked one eye.

"How you like find zee lost policeman?" Mistak taunted, stepping squarely in front of Dick. "I take you zere—what you say? Ver' fine, eh?"

"I have nothing to say to that," Dick replied as sternly as possible, "but I do know we have friends near and that you will suffer for any harm that comes to us."

"Ha! Ha!" Mistak laughed coarsely, turning to his companion. "Hear what zee

puppy say? They have frien' in Mistak' country. Not ver' near, eh? Ha! Ha!"

It was at the instant of Mistak's triumph that a rifle shot rang out and one of Mistak's men threw up his hands and fell silently to the ice. The half-breed Eskimo staggered back, his face paling, and his mouth twisted in a hideous smile.

Again the hidden rifle cracked, accompanied by another, whereupon Mistak's men ducked and ran under the deadly bullets raining about them, leaving the boys where they had been captured.

"To zee pit!" the boys heard Mistak shriek to his men. "Kill zee policeman before zey come!"

Mistak and his men disappeared, and almost upon their heels leaped the two fur-clad forms of Corporal McCarthy and Constable Sloan.

In a trice they had slashed the bonds of the boys and had set them free.

"After Mistak all of you!" cried Corporal McCarthy, plunging on across the ice after the fleeing outlaws.

Dick kept pace with the Corporal and shouted into his ear: "Mistak is going to kill Corporal Thalman. He's making for the pit now. You were just in time!"

"We came as fast as we could get here as soon as we got back to camp and found the map and instructions," panted the policeman. "Good work you fellows have done!"

Just then the fleeing outlaws vanished into the yawning mouth of a cavern that led downward at a steep angle. Slipping and sliding most of the way, the policemen and the boys tumbled after them.

"Halt! Halt!" bellowed Corporal McCarthy when they had reached a more level incline. But Mistak's men did not heed. Instead, the report of a rifle sounded like a thunder clap in the underground chamber and a bullet ricocheted with a rattling noise along the walls of the cave.

"They're shooting back at us!" cried Sandy.

In spite of the danger the policemen led the way on at a reckless run. Down, down, they went through the dimly lighted corridors of a subterranean vault. When it seemed to them they had gone down for nearly five hundred feet, the cavern swiftly became level and lighter.

“We’re going to run into the bottom of the fissure now!” panted Dick hoarsely.

Dick was right. The light grew stronger swiftly and a moment later they saw Mistak and his three men silhouetted in an opening as they ran out of the cavern.

Presently they burst out upon the frozen floor of a narrow canyon-like passage that was apparently the bottom of the fissure. Far above the sky showed like a tiny, pale ribbon. They could hear the sound of the running outlaws’ boots on the hard surface of the bottom of the fissure and followed them to the right. The passage was crooked and they could see nothing ahead of them further than ten yards, but at length they came upon the scene of Mistak’s contemplated perfidy.

Two half-breeds were at work over a hole some ten feet in diameter. With their spears they were straining frantically to pry loose a huge lump of ice and send it hurtling into the hole.

“They are going to crush the Corporal with that cake of ice!” cried Dick. “We’ve reached the pit!”

The rifles of the policemen came swiftly to their shoulders, and the great fissure reverberated with two shots. One of the half-breeds staggered and sank upon his side, lying still. The other grasped his shoulder with one hand, as if he had been wounded, turned and ran around a bend in the walls of the fissure.

“Don’t follow them!” was Corporal McCarthy’s command. “Let ’em go this time. We must get Thalman out.”

Soon they were crowded about the dark round opening of the prison pit, and were shouting down into the darkness. In the silence that followed their shouts down into the hole, they could hear their own hearts beating. Was Corporal Thalman alive?

At last, as from another world, there was wafted up out of the dark hole, a faint voice:

“Here—I—am—friends. Pretty—weak—but—still—kicking.”

“It’s Thalman!” whispered Constable Sloan hoarsely. “I can hardly believe it.”

“We’ve got to get a rope!” Corporal McCarthy bellowed down to the prisoner. “Hold on, and we’ll soon get you out.”

A wild laugh echoed up from the depths in answer, as if the prisoner was about to lose his mind.

Constable Sloan was already on the run for the rope. He came back in about twenty minutes, having lost no time in finding his way up the cavern to the surface of the glacier where the sledges were.

Hastily they began lowering the long coil down into the hole. After nearly fifty feet had been payed out, Corporal Thalman jerked on the rope to signal he had it in his hands, then they all waited tensely while he tied it securely under his shoulders. At last came the call from the pit that all was ready. All hands grasped the rope then, and began to heave it upward, hand over hand.

It was a strange caricature of a man that at last appeared dangling in the loop. He was pale as a ghost from his long sojourn underground, and a long beard covered the lower part of his face and chest. So thin was he that his bones seemed on the point of bursting through his skin. The prisoner’s clothing was in tatters and immediately upon striking the upper air he began to shiver from the cold.

“We must get him to the sledges quick!” ordered Corporal McCarthy. “There’s blankets up there, and we’ll make some hot tea for him. Just our luck to have him pass in his checks just after we’ve saved him.”

It was a hard struggle to climb out of the cavern with the almost helpless man, but they finally accomplished the task.

Once Corporal Thalman had been wrapped in blankets and furs and treated to a few cups of piping hot tea, he showed signs of returning strength. However, the policemen were in favor of returning with him immediately to the base of supplies where everything necessary for his complete recovery could be obtained.

“I guess you boys are elected for the job of hauling Corporal Thalman to the

main camp,” Corporal McCarthy told them. “Sloan and I will stay here for another try at trapping that sly fox, Mistak.”

“But with only one sledge, and that loaded with Corporal Thalman, we can’t haul in the cache of meat on the back trail,” Dick explained.

“That’s alright,” retorted the policeman. “Come back after it when you have Thalman safe in a warm igloo with plenty of hot tea and food nearby.”

It was with much regret that the boys bade good-bye to the policemen once more and started out on the back trail, Corporal Thalman snugly tucked in on the sledge.

Two days later, having traveled slow, for the comfort of their passenger, the boys reached the base of supplies. Sipsa and the other natives seemed overjoyed to see their young white friends again, and they held a feast in honor of the occasion, since hunting had been so good and they had more meat than they needed for the winter.

The day after the home-coming, Sandy was left to care for Corporal Thalman, while Dick and Toma returned to haul in the cache of musk-ox meat. They found the meat unmolested, and in fine condition, however, the signs in the snow about the cache showed that numerous foxes had made a vain effort to scratch away the stones and get at the meat.

A high wind was blowing upon their backs when Dick and Toma pulled in at the supply base with their precious load of meat. Two hours later the wind had risen to cyclonic velocity, sweeping tons and tons of snow through the air until the sun was blotted out and the igloos trembled to their strong foundations.

The storm was warning of winter and Dick and Sandy were much concerned over the safety of the policemen. Under warm shelter the men might weather the blizzard for days, provided they did not run out of food and fuel oil. If they did — Dick and Sandy shuddered to think of what such privations would mean for Corporal McCarthy and the Constable.

Three days the wind howled and shrieked and tore at the tiny knot of igloos under the high ridge, while the tormented sea roared and pounded on the beach, heaving great projectiles of ice far up on the land with deafening crashes.

The third day the wind laid, and several hours afterward, two half frozen men staggered into the camp. Dick had just looked out of an igloo upon the new world of white, when he saw the two figures.

“Sandy! A rifle quick!” cried Dick. “It’s two of Mistak’s men.”

But no weapon was needed. The men were about dead on their feet and were unarmed.

The foremost man gave a hoarse shout upon seeing Dick and flung up an arm to cover his eyes as if he had seen a ghost.

“It’s Moonshine Sam!” Dick exclaimed to Sandy, who had joined him at the igloo door.

Moonshine Sam it was who staggered up to the boys and threw himself upon his face in the snow, his companion dropping to his side.

“I’m givin’ up,” moaned Moonshine Sam to the boys as they bent over him. “I’d rather let the law do its worst than stay in this hell-hole any longer.”

Dick and Sandy dragged the two outlaws into their igloo, one by one, putting on some tea for them. They could not bear to see even those hardened criminals suffer.

Inside, they found both the half-breed’s hands frozen as hard as stones. Moonshine Sam’s left foot was frozen just as bad, and both men’s faces were black. The hot tea and warmth of the igloo made the men delirious, and Moonshine Sam especially, babbled ceaselessly.

“It’ll git ye! It’ll git ye!” he repeated many times, writhing with pain.

“What?” Dick asked the outlaw solemnly.

“Har! Har!” the man laughed madly. “Out there, fool!” he cried. “The white things! Mistak an’ the north!”

Both Dick and Sandy did their best to quiet the raving outlaw, but to no avail. One moment he was cursing everything alive, and swearing to kill all the mounted police in Canada; the next moment he became as fearful as a child.

“Ye’ll save me from him,” he clutched at Dick with clawing fingers. “Ye won’t let the ‘white Eskimo’ git me,” he mumbled.

By fragments the story of Moonshine Sam’s experience in the blizzard came out. There had been a division in the band, Mistak and Moonshine Sam quarreling and going their separate ways. Only one half-breed had had the courage to mutiny against Fred Mistak, and follow the white man. The two had been caught out in the storm with no food, dogs, or sleeping bags. Only by chance had they reached the igloos of the policemen’s encampment.

It was hours before Moonshine Sam finally fell into a troubled sleep, and the boys could seek rest themselves.

When they awakened, Toma was bending over them.

“Police come back. They in igloo. Want you come to them,” said the young Indian.

Outside, on the way to the policemen’s igloo, the boys found dusk upon the desolate land. Only a rim of the sun shed its fiery radiance upon an overhang of dull, gray clouds. Winter was overtaking them.

The boys found two gaunt and grim men when they crawled into the snow house of the two officers. Constable Sloan had been wounded in an ambush perpetrated by Mistak, shortly after the boys had started back to camp with Thalman. Mistak had bested them for the present, Corporal McCarthy was forced to admit, but the question was, should they give up and go south before winter, leaving Mistak free in his fastnesses.

“That’s up to you, Corporal McCarthy,” Dick and Sandy replied as one. “You’re the commander of this expedition.”

“Well, then, I’m for staying here,” went on the officer. “I’ll get Mistak if I die in the attempt, and I mean what I say. Sloan swears he’ll stick by me, but that’s no reason why the rest of you should. If you start tomorrow you can go by sledge to the nearest seaport and book passage back to Canada before you get caught in the long night, and travel is made unsafe. What do you say?”

“We won’t quit,” Dick returned, pale but determined. “Sandy and I want to see this to a finish and Corporal Thalman swore only yesterday that he’d never let us take him back until Mistak went with him, or was left behind for the foxes.”

“Shake,” Corporal McCarthy extended a hard hand, and Dick and Sandy grasped it in turn.

“For a couple of kids you’re the nerviest he-men I ever met with,” Sloan spoke up, a courageous grin on his pain drawn face.

“I’ll second that,” hastened Corporal McCarthy.

When Dick and Sandy left the igloo, they walked very straight, and they were silent. The dreaded long night of the northland was close at hand and they must stand up under hardships more terrible than they had either ever endured, for, had Constable Sloan not called them “the nerviest he-men I ever met with?”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LONG NIGHT

The last of the sun was seen October 18th. Corporal McCarthy had been forced to take charge of the camp until Constable Sloan recovered from his wounds, and so the long-thwarted capture of Mistak, the white Eskimo, was due for another long delay under the pitchy blackness of the Arctic night.

Moonshine Sam recovered, and was kept constantly under guard, though he repeated again and again his promises to keep the peace if he were put on parole. The half-breed, who had staggered into camp with the white outlaw, died from exposure, and was buried, under a cairn of stones a few miles from camp.

Corporal Thalman's iron constitution soon rebuilt itself, now that he was among friends, and had almost all he could eat. And so the little garrison was stronger by one more man.

Under the smothering darkness that now had descended upon the land, time passed as if the hours were days, the weeks months, and a month a year. The men and boys contrived games of all kinds to play indoors, yet they had to economize on their fuel oil, and whenever they could, they slept away the hours.

It was with great joy that they greeted the coming of the moon that first month of uninterrupted darkness. Fortunately fair weather came along with the bright disc in the Heavens, and everyone sallied forth to hunt and play in the open air.

The policemen went some distance inland during the period, but due to the liability of the weather to change for the worst at any hour, they dared not go on any protracted search for Mistak. They did, however, bring in three musk-oxen and a polar bear.

Dick, Sandy, and Toma all became proficient, during the moonlight period, in a

game of throw and catch which the Eskimos played. It was great fun and required no little skill. A long stick, perforated with small holes was employed, together with a walrus tusk, sharpened to a point. The stick was thrown into the air and caught in one of the holes upon the ivory point.

There were also foot races and snowshoe races in which the mounted police joined, along with the Eskimos and the boys. Weight lifting, wrestling, and other tests of strength were also favorite pastimes of the Eskimos and were invaluable in counteracting the depressing effects of the moonlight and the eternal darkness.

Constable Sloan told them that the moon would remain in the sky from eight to ten days. A storm fell upon them, however, after seven days and nights of moonlight, and they were all forced to hibernate in their igloos to escape the bitter cold and heavy darkness.

During the second period of utter darkness, the thermometers all froze and burst, except those especially designed for use in the Arctic. Sandy fell sick with a bad cold that threatened to develop into pneumonia, and lay abed two weeks before Dick's continuous nursing brought his chum through safely.

Bundled in furs hour after hour, in their sleeping bags and out, all suffered immeasurably from the close and stifling air of the igloos. The Eskimos rubbed themselves with oil in order to soften their skins and file their pores, but it was some time before the boys could bring themselves to apply the messy stuff in place of their old friend soap and water. But as soon as they did, they felt much better. For their clothing no longer chaffed them and the bite of the low temperature was considerably lessened.

Moonshine Sam became a greater trial with the passing of every hour. He lapsed into strange spells that seemed to be brought on by the oppressive darkness and the terrible hardships he had weathered while with Mistak.

"I'll git him, er he'll git me," he would mumble, starting up out of a stupid trance. Then he would clench and unclench his red hands, and gnash his yellow teeth in a frightful rage.

He finally grew so violent that the policemen no longer would permit the boys to take their turns watching him, doing it all among the three of them.

I'd hate to see him and Mistak come to blows, Corporal Thalman shuddered,

after coming off of a two-hour watch in Moonshine Sam's igloo. "One or both of them would pass in his checks before the fight was over. I guess the white Eskimo is pretty hard on the men that desert him."

The second period of moonlight came at an inopportune time. A dense film of clouds obscured it for four days and the ghostly white snow fields were almost as dark as when there was no moon. But it finally cleared off, only to reveal more trouble. The dogs were dying from attacks of madness. Dick and Sandy counted twenty-two dead in the snow, some their own, some belonging to the Eskimos.

After several hours of observation they discovered a dog in the throes of the polar sickness. The animal began to whine, then suddenly snarled, and frothed at the mouth. After biting himself several times, he ran madly in and out among the igloos, finally circling far out over the snow. When the diseased dog finally rushed panting and red-eyed back to camp, all the other dogs had hidden from him. Dick shot the dog then to prevent its suffering any longer. That was the last case of the madness among the dogs during that phase of the moon.

"It's what the Eskimos call Piblockto," Constable Sloan explained. "The Eskimos get it themselves sometimes, especially the women, though it's not so fatal among human beings as among dogs. So if you fellows hear some unearthly screeching you'll know what it is. Don't bother anyone who gets it. The natives leave them alone unless they start running away where they're apt to freeze to death. The fits only last about half an hour."

The boys did not have to wait long before they saw an actual case of what Constable Sloan had described.

It happened to an Eskimo woman whose month old infant had died of exposure, which was a rare occurrence. Grief stricken, the poor woman was wandering around among the igloos in the moonlight, wailing softly to herself, when the boys chanced to pass her on their way to the policemen's igloo.

Their hair raised under their parkas as suddenly the woman let out a most blood-curdling scream, leaped into the air several times, and finally commenced to tear her clothes off, piece by piece. Dick and Sandy ran behind an igloo and watched from hiding. Several Eskimos appeared from various igloos, and the boys could hear them babbling about piblockto and the angekok. They gathered that the

Eskimos believed the woman was temporarily possessed by one of the bad spirits that haunted the northland.

The Eskimos did not attempt to do anything for the poor woman until she had torn away so much of her warm clothing that she stood in danger of freezing to death. Then three men came out and dragged her, shrieking into an igloo. Presently her screams died away and all was quiet.

Dick and Sandy hurried on their way, their flesh still creeping from the scene they had witnessed. But before the moon had once more dropped down under the horizon, they saw several of these attacks of piblokto and became somewhat accustomed to them.

It was in January, during the dark of the moon, that some mysterious enemy began his depredations. First, two dogs were stumbled upon in the dark, their heads crushed in by an axe, and part of their haunches cut away. Next, an Eskimo youth, out to bring in some snow for melting, crawled back to his igloo, hours later, wounded by a spear. Several other Eskimos were pursued by some animal the nature of which they could not detect in the pitchy blackness. Sandy swore that once, when he was about to venture out of the igloo to see how the weather was, that he had touched a cold face with one hand, and that a darker blot in the darkness had melted out of sight, without making any sound in the snow.

Finally, no one but the policemen dared to venture often into the dark, and they only with a weapon handy.

“I’ve got my own ideas as to what this ghost is,” Dick told Sandy. “The policemen think the same as I do, too. It’s as simple as anything.”

“What is it, then?” Sandy wanted to know, as he cut a new wick for a seal oil lamp.

“Why, Mistak, of course.”

“Then, how is it that he can see in the dark?”

“He can’t, any more than we can,” Dick replied. “He just prowls around, and when he runs into someone he takes the chance to put a scare into all of us.”

“Sounds reasonable,” admitted Sandy. “But, gee, I don’t like the idea of him hanging around. Suppose he should take a notion to attack us. We’d be just about helpless in these igloos.”

Dick realized Sandy was right and he spoke to Corporal McCarthy about it as soon as he came in off a watch at Moonshine Sam’s igloo.

“I don’t think Mistak has the nerve to attack us,” Corporal McCarthy replied. “The fellow is sly as a fox, but he’s afraid of the police, don’t you believe he isn’t?”

The following interminable night seemed to prove Corporal McCarthy right in his opinion that Mistak lacked the daring to perpetrate an open attack. Yet that did not prevent the outlaw from continuing his strike and run tactics. No one could feel safe with these skulking enemies waiting in the pitchy blackness of the Arctic night to kill, maim or steal.

Then, thirty-six hours before they anticipated the return of the moon, Sandy disappeared. He had gone to Moonshine Sam’s igloo with meat for Constable Sloan then on watch, and had neither returned to his igloo nor reported to his destination. A blundering search of the vicinity in the darkness proved futile, and he could not be located in any of the Eskimo igloos.

Alive to the danger which would threaten Sandy if he were lost in the vast land of darkness, Dick appealed to Corporal McCarthy.

“I know how you feel, and I wish we could do something, but it’s useless to hunt blindly for him,” the Corporal replied regretfully. “We must hope he turns up by himself or that some of the Eskimos happen to run onto him.”

“Do you suppose Mistak or some of the other outlaws might have attacked him?” Dick asked falteringly.

“I’d be lying if I said that wasn’t possible. I don’t like to think the worst any more than you do. Anyhow, we know Sandy McClaren is pretty well able to take care of himself. There’s no danger of him laying down and dying while he’s an ounce of strength left to find his way back to us.”

Dick was forced to accept this as his only comfort for the present. But as the hours passed and Sandy did not show up, the suspense became unbearable. A

host of questions thronged and tormented his worried mind. Could Sandy, if lost, hold out until the moon came up to light the way for him and a searching party? Had Mistak captured him and imprisoned him? Or had the outlaws brutally murdered him?

But one thing Dick was thankful for—the weather remained fair, with no wind, and a temperature as high as fifteen degrees below zero, warm for the Arctic winter.

As the time drew near for the reappearance of the moon, Dick did not sleep at all, but paced up and down on the packed snow in front of his igloo. He was there when the first pale, cold, faint light stole over the snow, and with a cry of gladness, he turned to the bleak horizon, where the edge of a yellow disc had just appeared as the moon rose.

Corporal McCarthy was quickly at Dick's side. "We can start a search right away now," said the officer sympathetically. "I'll have two parties of Eskimos start on in different directions, one led by Sipsa, and one by Constable Sloan. Corporal Thalman can take charge of Moonshine Sam while we're gone."

The searching parties were hastily organized, and started off. Corporal McCarthy, Dick and Toma formed a third party. They started out at the beaten path between Dick's igloo and Moonshine Sam's. It was from there they were quite certain Sandy had vanished. But the vicinity of the path and the village of igloos was so criss-crossed with tracks that they could make no headway. So, striking out blindly, they headed southward, while the other divisions of the searchers took the remaining three directions.

Outside the vicinity of the encampment where the snow was unbroken, they began walking back and forth, examining every foot of snow for signs of Sandy's feet.

But the snow was covered by a crust several inches thick, and an ordinary weight made no impression. Despairingly, they kept on, until at last Dick spied something glittering in the rays of the moon. Quickly he ran to the object and picked it up. Renewed hope was expressed in his loud summons of Toma and Corporal McCarthy.

What Dick held in his hand when his two companions arrived, was a hunting knife, in the bone handle of which had been carved two tell-tale initials

—“S.M.”!

CHAPTER XIX

A STRANGE TRAIL

Eagerly, the policeman and Toma examined the knife that Dick had found, which had, without a doubt, once reposed in Sandy McClaren's sheath. Yet, after the first flush of excitement had worn off, they all realized that the clue was a very inadequate one. In itself it could not lead to Sandy. Only it served as an added incentive for them to search more diligently for some more definite trace of the lost boy.

As they circled slowly, getting farther and farther from camp, the snow continued to present a hard crust which had registered no record of the feet that had passed over it under the impenetrable shroud of the polar darkness.

But their patience was rewarded when Toma found a bit of bearskin with the long hair adhering to it. Upon examining the fur closely, they saw that it had been slashed from a larger piece of fur with a knife.

"It might have been cut from Sandy's trousers," ventured Dick.

"That's possible," rejoined Corporal McCarthy, "but we just found what seemed to be Sandy's knife. What did he cut the fur with?"

Neither Dick nor Toma could answer that question, and at the time it did not seem important enough to worry about. Close to a hundred feet from where they had spied the first bit of bearskin, they found another fragment of the same kind of fur. It, too, had been obviously cut with a knife.

"Now I know Sandy has cut off these bits of fur to mark the way he went," Dick cried excitedly. "Let's hurry on and see where the next one is."

After progressing nearly a quarter mile across the crusted snow, they had picked up nearly twenty bits of fur similar to the first one Toma had found, and were

certain something more tangible would soon turn up.

Then the trail of fur fragments disappeared and was replaced by the imprint of several snowshoes, as they at last reached soft snow.

All three bent to examine the tracks. There were three pair of snow-shoe tracks and one pair of small boot tracks.

“The boot tracks are Sandy’s, I’m pretty sure,” was Corporal McCarthy’s confident statement. “The snow-shoe tracks must have been made by those who captured him, unless someone picked up his trail after the moon came up.”

Hastening onward, they followed an unbroken trail for nearly a half hour, when they again were discouraged upon reaching more crusted snow upon which the trail vanished. But not long were they at loss. Running ahead a short distance, Dick stooped and picked up something which he waved triumphantly to Toma and the Corporal. It was another bit of bearskin.

“Sandy’s started marking his trail again!” Dick called.

“I’m getting so I’m not so sure just who has been leaving these markers,” Corporal McCarthy said. “That knife we found back there makes me wonder if it’s really Sandy who has dropped those pieces of fur.”

“Why, who could it be then?” Dick asked incredulously.

“We’ll see, we’ll see,” was the policeman’s enigmatic reply. “But in the meantime you two fellows be ready to obey orders.”

Wondering what the Corporal was hinting at, Dick started out to find more of the trail markers. About every fifty or a hundred feet they found them, so that there was no doubt as to the fact that they were going right.

Corporal McCarthy cautioned them to keep their eyes open now, for they had reached the end of the level snow and were among some large snowdrifts formed by huge boulders that had lodged the snow. Directly over their heads loomed the long upward slant of the high moraine which had so long served them as a landmark. However, they were in a part of the country unfamiliar to them, and so did not know what to expect. Added to this the moonlight deceived the eyes, and made it difficult for them to tell a boulder from a living body.

“Be prepared for an ambush,” the Corporal instructed Dick and Toma. “Mistak hasn’t taken Sandy all this distance for nothing. He knew we would follow.”

But minute after minute passed and there was no sign of Mistak or his band, nor of Sandy, with the exception of the clear prints of the snowshoes leading in and out and around the drifts and boulders. Like so many ghosts the three trailers hurried on in the pale moonlight, their snowshoes making scarcely no sound at all in the feathery drifts.

Suddenly, there broke upon the icy air a mocking laugh. The three stopped dead in their tracks, mouths agape.

“What was that?” whispered Dick.

“Him sounded like bad spirit,” Toma’s voice was subdued from sudden fright.

Corporal McCarthy said nothing, but his hands tightened on his rifle while he searched every black shadow with probing eyes.

Shaken by the eerie sound, they prepared to go on again, when once more the mad laugh pealed out, vindictive, vengeful and subtly mocking.

“It must be a mad man,” quavered Dick.

“Nonsense,” grated the policeman. “It’s some of that devilish Mistak’s work. Anyway the sound came from ahead of us. Unlimber your rifles, lads, we’re going to see some action, I think. If I’m lucky enough to get a bead on Mistak, I’ll never get him to Canada alive, mark my word.”

Crouching, so as to make use of every bit of shelter, they now moved slowly forward, holding their breaths for a repetition of the cackle of laughter. The very boulders themselves now seemed to be moved in the deceptive moonlight under their imaginative eyes.

And again they heard the laugh—ahead of them yet. On and on they crept, a dew of perspiration standing out on their foreheads, and freezing there in tiny drops. But not a sign of any person or thing did they actually see. Only the frequent peals of wild laughter urged them fearfully on, like a will-o’-the-wisp in some frozen swamp.

The boulder strewn snow presently gave way to treacherous gashes in the ground made by the erosion of some age-old glacier. Clambering and sliding in and out of these precipitous gullies, they kept on after the elusive laughter.

Long since they had given up following the snowshoe tracks. The laughter of a man—even a mad man was much more tangible than footprints. But had it not been for the grim, fearless policeman, Dick and Toma would have turned back.

An end to their reckless advance came in a very unexpected manner. Clambering out of a steep gully, they found themselves at the edge of a trackless expanse of soft white snow, apparently as level as a floor and just as solid footing. The laughter had not been repeated for some time before they negotiated the last glacier gash, and they were beginning to wonder if their ghostly guide had deserted them.

It was Toma who saw it first—the form of a human being sitting erect against a snow bank across the white level of snow.

“Look. Somebody there!” Toma whispered.

“It—it must be a dead man,” faltered Dick.

“Not on your life,” gritted Corporal McCarthy. “See him move. That fellow’s tied and that fellow is Sandy McClaren!”

Dick’s eyes suddenly testified as to the accuracy of the policeman’s statement. “Sandy!” he almost shrieked, starting to run toward him.

But the iron hand of Corporal McCarthy dragged him back as if he had been merely a pillowful of feathers.

“Look out there!” cried the Corporal. “This is a trap you can bet and we’ll go slow.”

Sandy apparently was gagged, for though he had begun to wriggle, he made no sound with his mouth except an almost inaudible gurgle.

Corporal McCarthy was pawing in the snow for something. Dick finally saw what he was after—a stone. The policeman finally found one that was quite heavy. He raised this above his head and to Dick and Toma’s amazement, threw

it out upon the snow between them and Sandy.

The boys expected the stone to bound and roll a little way, but to their horror, as the stone struck it disappeared and, following it, more than twenty square feet of snow caved downward with a rustling hiss and disappeared into a fathomless black void.

Dick's gasp of dismay was followed by a piercing voice from the shadows of the boulders behind them. It was the voice that had done the laughing, but this time it did not laugh but cried out in an expression of rage and disappointment.

Corporal McCarthy's rifle was at his shoulder when the sound reached his ears, but there was nothing to shoot at—only the ghastly moonlight of the polar night, and the inky shadows. The policeman raised his rifle and shook it.

“Beat you that time—you half-breed devil!” his big voice pealed out across the desolate wastes. “And I'm praying you'll come down here and fight it out where I can get a bead on you.”

But there was no answer, and a moment later the Corporal turned back to the boys.

“Clever trap,” he explained in an undertone. “But I had my suspicions, and as soon as I saw Sandy out there in plain sight, I knew there was a nigger in the fence. That was a snow bridge we came pretty near busting through. Wind built it up across this gorge. Now we've got to get at the boy.”

Calling across the chasm, they explained to Sandy that they must find some other place to cross over to him. Hurriedly making their way to the left along the treacherous brink, which for many yards was bridged by the frail snow drift, they finally came to a narrow place and one by one leaped over with their snowshoes in their hands. It took them but a few moments to strap on their snowshoes again and run to Sandy. In a trice they had slashed his bonds and yanked the gag from his mouth.

With a joy they could not express, Dick and Sandy embraced, whereupon Sandy's story came tumbling from his lips by fits and starts.

Briefly, it was this: About half way to Moonshine Sam's igloo, following the beaten path, he had heard stealthy footsteps coming toward him. In the gloom he

could see nothing, and so he had stopped, waiting for some sign that the person was a friend or an enemy. Then, without warning, a smothering fur robe had been thrown over him and he was lifted up in strong arms and carried away. At a distance from the igloos far enough so that his cries for help would not bring his friends, Sandy's captors had put him on his feet, and taken off the robe. They then had taken his knife away from him and had thrown it away. Sandy had then been compelled to accompany the men on foot. When his eyes had grown accustomed to the dimly starlit night, he had managed to recognize Mistak among the three, and had found out that they were leaving bits of fur behind them to mark their trail. Sandy had not been able to fathom their purpose in leaving such a plain trail, nor had he been fully aware of the nature of the cunning trap laid by Mistak when the outlaw had left him bound and gagged against a snowdrift, after a long roundabout journey among a network of deep gorges.

"I didn't know what it was all about till I saw you three stop out there in front of me, and throw that stone," Sandy concluded. "I guess I made a pretty good bait for that trap."

"I pretty near went right on after you, too," shivered Dick, recalling their narrow escape, "but Corporal McCarthy was wise enough to see through it."

"Well, let's be getting back to camp," the policeman interrupted them. "We're a lot farther from home than we ought to be. If a storm catches us before we get in there's no telling whether we'll ever get back."

"I'm sure beginning to wish it really was home we were going back to," groaned Sandy. "In two days I've only had one chunk of walrus meat to eat."

"Buck up, Sandy," Dick replied cheerfully, as they set out on the back trail. "We'll be back at camp before you know it."

But Dick was wrong. Before they were on the trail an hour, a bank of clouds that had been hovering in the north, spread out fan-like across the stars and presently the moon was blotted out as if some giant hand had taken it from the sky.

With not even the stars to light their way, the four travelers stumbled blindly along, until Corporal McCarthy ordered them to halt.

"We can't keep on like this," said the Corporal grimly. "We'll get so far off the

back trail that we'll never find our way back. The only thing we can do is build an igloo and wait for the moon to come out again. Let's hope a storm don't come up."

After blundering about in the darkness, which was so thick they could cut it with a knife, they finally located a drift which was solid enough and large enough for the cutting of snow blocks for an igloo. It was a poor snow house they erected largely by their sense of touch, but it served the purpose. Hovering inside their makeshift shelter they waited silently for the clouds to disperse, praying for fair weather to continue.

Yet the supreme power that governed the capricious whims of the mighty ice cap seemed deaf to their supplications for a half hour after the igloo had been completed the temperature began to fall alarmingly. A wind sprang up out of the northeast, just a whisper at first, like the vast, mournful sigh of a melancholy spirit, then rapidly it grew louder, by gusts and fits, until a thirty mile an hour gale was sweeping the snow wastes with the fury of a stampeded lion. The wind sought out every niche and cranny in the hastily erected igloo, and through the heavy garments of the shivering refugees it cut like so many tiny knives. Futilely, they tried to stop up the holes where the wind seeped in while the gale laughed and howled and whistled, as if in mad glee at the discomfiture it was causing the shivering mortals.

In the grip of the terrible cold, the four kept from falling into that dreadful drowsiness which signals death by freezing, by beating themselves and each other with their numbed arms. The fur rims of their parkas became heavy with icicles formed by moisture from their mouth. Their eyelashes froze together from the watering of their eyes. With each breath it seemed red hot irons had been thrust down their throats and liquid fire loosed in their lungs. For extreme cold has much the same sensation of extreme heat.

Two hours they fought a losing fight, then the capricious gods of the north changed their minds and the wind began to lay. Almost imperceptibly at first, each gust a little weaker than the last, until finally, they all crept out of the igloo to find a vast silence pervading the ghostly land. Cold and pale, the Arctic moon now lighted their way, for the clouds had been herded southward by the passing polar wind.

The temperature had risen a little when all four set out on the return trail, now

almost blotted out save where the wind had struck it squarely and had blown the loose snow away around the packed snowshoe tracks.

In his weakened condition Sandy had almost succumbed to the cold, and part of the way they had to carry the gritty young Scotchman.

Thus they stumbled into the village of igloos hours later, lungs burning from the frost, bodies numb and prickling in a dozen places.

No more had they arrived than they found their troubles were not over.

Corporal Thalman met them with disturbing news, as soon as they had stumbled into an igloo and lighted an oil heater.

Moonshine Sam had escaped during the storm!

CHAPTER XX

UNDER AN ARCTIC MOON

“I couldn’t stay awake,” Corporal Thalman said bitterly, in explanation of Moonshine Sam’s escape. “I was the only one to stand the watches, because I couldn’t trust any of the Eskimos to stick to their post. It’s a wonder he didn’t kill me while I was helpless.”

“But I thought he wanted to stay with us for protection from the vengeance of Mistak,” Corporal McCarthy said impatiently. “How was he acting up to the time you fell asleep?”

“He seemed to change his mind,” replied the other officer. “I recall him mumbling about the gallows, and about knowing he’d be hung if he was taken back by the police. I think he intends either to try to rejoin Mistak, or make his way south alone.”

“Well,” Corporal McCarthy’s voice was expressive of an inward, suppressed rage, “we’ll have to bring him back! If we don’t Mistak will kill him.”

Quickly, the Corporal gave his instructions. He and Corporal Thalman were to set out after Moonshine Sam as soon as they had eaten. Dick, Sandy and Toma were to remain in camp, and as soon as Constable Sloan and Sipsa came in with the searching parties, the boys were to report to them the escape of the outlaw and pass on orders for their aid in retaking the prisoner.

A half hour later, the two Corporals departed from the village of igloos with a day’s provisions, and a camp stove, packed on their backs. Not long after they had gone the searching parties straggled in, discouraged and half frozen from the blizzard which they, too, had been caught in.

Alone among the Eskimos, the three boys treated their frost bites with snow and

alcohol rubs, fed themselves on musk-ox steaks, and when again fairly comfortable, became impatient at inaction. It was far worse to sit in idleness than to get out and do something.

“Let’s go hunting,” suggested Dick.

“That’s better than sitting here in this igloo waiting for something to happen,” Sandy rejoined. “I believe I’d go crazy in this awful silence if I had to sit around and wiggle my thumbs.”

Toma seemed willing enough to stay behind and take care of things in the absence of the boys, and so Dick and Sandy started out without him, carrying only their rifles and hunting knives, for they dared not go far away from camp. They knew that, while they had weathered one brief blizzard, they could not expect to be so fortunate next time.

Looking for musk-oxen, the boys climbed the high moraine east of the base camp and followed the top of the ridge southward until they reached an arm of the glacier on the other side.

They had gone upward of two miles when they came suddenly upon the print of a sealskin Arctic boot in the snow. The boys stopped and studied the track.

“This can’t be made by any of the policemen, or Sipsa either,” said Dick with bated breath. “They all had snowshoes.”

“And it can’t be Mistak either,” Sandy observed. “He’d be traveling on snowshoes too.”

The boys looked at each other significantly.

“Then it’s just about got to be Moonshine Sam,” Dick spoke slowly.

Again they bent over the boot track.

“You can see it was made before or during the blizzard,” Dick said. “It’s partly drifted full of snow. Let’s look for other tracks.”

Several feet away from the first, on the other side of a long, low, snowdrift they found the next track. It was raised up out of the snow, the wind having sucked

away the loose flakes all around it. Another and another they found, as the trail grew hotter, but the tracks seemed to have been made by a person wandering aimlessly here and there.

“I’m certain it’s Moonshine Sam now,” Dick breathed. “His tracks show how crazily he was going, blinded by the storm.”

Hastening on, the boys presently came to fresher footprints, made, obviously, after the wind had laid. The tracks were now sunken in deep snow, revealing how, from lack of snowshoes, the man had floundered along.

They had followed the fresher tracks for about half a mile, when to their surprise another trail, made by snowshoes, joined and followed the first.

“I wonder who that could be,” Sandy spoke.

“Well, it’s only one man, so it can’t be the policemen, unless they’ve divided up. I hardly think they’d do that.”

“Maybe it’s Mistak or some of his men,” was Sandy’s conjecture. “Don’t you think we’d better go back?”

“Not on your life we’re not going back!” Dick said determinedly. “We’ve been lucky enough to strike a hot trail, and believe me, we’re going to stick to it. But I do wish we could get in touch with the policemen. Look around, Sandy, and see if you can’t see someone.”

But a careful scanning of the bleak snowfields failed to disclose any sign of life.

“We’ll have to keep on alone I guess,” Dick said finally.

Once more they started out on the double trail, their senses on the alert for a sight or sound of those they followed.

Fresher and fresher became the trail, for the man on snowshoes was rapidly overtaking whoever he pursued, provided that was what he had been doing, and according to signs the man in boots had increased his pace to a floundering run as if he wanted to get away from someone.

The boys came to the brow of a long incline, slanting to a level tundra, and down

the slope saw two men, surprisingly close.

“Sit down, Sandy,” Dick whispered. “Don’t let either of them see us.”

Dropping down in the snow, the boys watched an interesting chase. The man on snowshoes was rapidly overtaking another who plunged along hampered by sinking at every step.

Sandy clutched Dick by the arm and said hoarsely, fearfully: “That man in front is Moonshine Sam—sure enough.”

“And you can bet the fellow on snowshoes is Mistak,” came back Dick confidently.

“They’re going to fight!” exclaimed Sandy. “What if someone’s killed?”

“We can’t help it, Sandy. It’s their fight. We’re risking our lives if we try to stop it, without killing one of them ourselves, and you know we couldn’t kill in cold blood. Oh, if the policemen were only here!”

Tensely the boys watched the two draw nearer together. When a hundred yards separated them, Moonshine Sam turned, shook his fists over his head, and let out a loud yell. Then he started back. The man was going to fight now that he was in a corner.

Mistak carried only a spear as a long distance weapon. The boys divined that he and his band had long since run out of ammunition for the few firearms they possessed.

Dick and Sandy held their breath as they saw the white Eskimo draw back his arm and pose for a throw. An instant Mistak bent backward, still as a statue, then his body and arm snapped forward simultaneously, like a catapult. The spear shot forward in a low arc toward Moonshine Sam, half as swift as an arrow.

Moonshine Sam fell flat in the snow none too soon, and the whizzing weapon buried itself in the snow a few feet beyond him. Like a flash Moonshine Sam leaped to his feet, wheeled and ran for the spear, pawing frantically in the snow, he at last found the buried spear.

Mistak was making for the other outlaw at a spraddling run, as Moonshine Sam

aimed the spear to throw it back. But he had a running target that was purposely bobbing up and down and zig-zagging.

Then the spear flashed through the moonlight, a streak of potent death, but the white outlaw was not an expert spear thrower. The weapon missed Mistak by several feet.

“They’re going to close in,” Dick whispered, burying his fingers into Sandy’s arm in his excitement.

Both outlaws obviously had drawn knives now. Moonshine Sam must have stolen one before he escaped from the igloo. They circled warily. First one then the other advanced, Mistak moving more swiftly on his snowshoes, though his footwork was ponderous enough.

Moonshine Sam finally ceased trying to outmaneuver his opponent, and stood stolidly, knee deep in the snow—waiting.

Then Mistak struck, like a flash. But Moonshine Sam was not so inexperienced with a knife as he was with a spear. The white outlaw parried Mistak’s swift thrust and sent him reeling backward, almost falling when one snowshoe caught on its mate. But the white Eskimo quickly regained his feet, and began to circle again for an opening.

For several minutes Mistak kept Moonshine Sam turning about, then he rushed in again. The knives clashed and held. It was strength against strength now as each outlaw strove to bring his knife downward for a fatal thrust. Weaving and straining, sometimes locked together as still as statues, the outlaws struggled, while the perspiration came out and froze on the faces of the hidden boys.

At last the two men broke away from each other for a brief second, but this time Moonshine Sam didn’t wait for Mistak to attack. He lunged forward out of the snow and caught the white Eskimo by his knife, arm and waist. Three times the attacking outlaw’s knife flashed up and down in the moonlight, and the boys knew Mistak had been wounded. Then the clenched two rolled to the snow, struggling like fiends. Minute after minute they fought, Mistak now handicapped by his snowshoes instead of aided by them. At last the white Eskimo was pinned upon his back and Moonshine Sam’s knife began slowly to descend against the strength of the outlaw leader’s left hand clutching the knife wrist.

With the end almost in sight, the boys heard a distant shout, and looking north of them, saw four men bearing down the slope.

“The police! The police!” cried Dick, as he got to his feet and began shouting and waving to them.

Two of the four men ran toward the struggling outlaws, but they were too late to stop the impending tragedy. Moonshine Sam’s knife found its mark, and he arose, shaking the snow from his clothes, leaving a still form in the snow.

It was not until then that the victorious outlaw discovered the two policemen descending upon him. With a startled shout, he started to run away, then aware that he could never get away alive, he shook his fists defiantly at his pursuers, and with a hoarse yell, plunged his knife into his own breast.

“He’s beaten the law!” exclaimed Dick, horrified by this grim justice of the frozen north. “Come on, Sandy, let’s go down and join the policemen.”

They found Corporals McCarthy and Thalman inspecting the two silent forms on the tundra when they arrived on the scene of the battle. Both outlaws were dead beyond a shadow of doubt.

“Well,” Corporal McCarthy looked up from the silent face of Mistak, “the game is over, and for once, the mounted got licked—but it took death to do it,” he concluded grimly, briefly ordering that two graves should be hollowed out in the snow, and the bodies interred.

Dick and Sandy found a little later, that the two who had accompanied the Corporals were the last of Mistak’s band, an Indian and an Eskimo—both with their hands tied behind them. The corporals explained that they had run across them starving in an igloo, after they had deserted Mistak. The outlaws had given up without a struggle, morosely accepting a fate they considered less terrible than that which the awful northland might have dealt out to them.

Though the shadow of the recent tragedy darkened their spirits, it was an infinitely relieved party that set out on the trail back to the supply base. With every step that carried them further from those still forms in their snow graves, their hearts grew lighter.

On the way back they sighted Constable Sloan and Sipsa, and hailed them with

the tragic news. The two joined them on the return journey, and already the talk was of the trip back to God's country in the spring.

"Lordy, how glad I am it's all over," Sandy grew steadily more cheerful. "My, what I can tell Uncle Walter when I see him again!"

"About all I'm going to be interested in," Dick broke in, "for a few days, after we get back to your uncle's post, is going to be good, roast turkey, with sage dressing—pumpkin pie—apple sauce—nice brown pan gravy—stewed cranberries—coffee with sugar and cow's cream—chocolate pudd——"

"Stop!" Sandy's exclamation expressed how his stomach rebelled against such fruitless tantalization. "If you say another word about food, I'm going to die right here of starvation."

Dick slapped Sandy on the back and laughed, then arm in arm they went on together.

* * * * *

The last of the long night passed slowly but steadily away, and the spring came to gladden the hearts of Dick and Sandy.

March 4th they saw the sun again, and never did they greet the rising of that great orb with such heartfelt joy.

A day later they started southward, Sipsa and the other Eskimos accompanying them to the mainland, which they reached safely in kayacks. Leaving all camp paraphernalia that they did not need, with the Eskimos, they left the children of the north happy and sorry to see their white friends go. Dick and Sandy, too, felt a pang in their hearts as Sipsa's smiling face vanished out of their ken, probably never to be seen again. But as they left the Arctic behind them, under the spring sun, all feelings of regret at parting were replaced by one great and growing joy—they were going home!

CHAPTER XXI

A PROPOSITION

It was a gala day at the trading post of Walter McClaren, Hudson's Bay Factor; a day for feasting and story-telling. For Dick Kent and Sandy McClaren had come back from the far north.

In the big dining room the factor's old Indian housekeeper and cook hovered about a long table loaded with the best products of her culinary art. Her stoic face could scarcely conceal the pleasure she derived from witnessing the seemingly insatiable appetites of her master's nephew and his chum.

Walter McClaren, a big florid Scotchman, sat at the head of the table beaming upon the boys and recalling his own boyhood days. He believed boys should have plenty of excitement and outdoor experience, and as he listened to the ceaseless recounting of their recent adventures with the Eskimos, his smile grew broader and broader, while the roast turkey and dressing vanished along with sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie, stewed cranberries, and chocolate pudding.

"We just caught the boat going south," Dick said between bites. "If we'd been a day later we'd have been held up more than a month before another boat came."

"I think you fellows have been pretty lucky," rejoined Sandy's uncle. "If I'd known for a minute what I was sending you into, I'd never let you go."

"But I'm glad we went," returned Sandy. "I wouldn't go through it again for anything, but just the same after it's all over, I wouldn't trade the experience for—for a commission in the mounted police."

"That just reminds me that from what Inspector Dunbar says, you fellows are slated for some kind of a special medal or something for your services in the Arctic."

“Medals!” Dick was alive in an instant, his half-eaten turkey drum stick forgotten for the moment. “You don’t mean that, Uncle Sandy!”

“Well, it must be a fact, if Inspector Dunbar said so,” replied the factor. “But that’s not just exactly what I want to discuss with you fellows,” continued the old Scotchman, knocking out his pipe on a leg of his chair and refilling it. “I have a proposition for you.”

“A proposition!” exclaimed Dick. “What is it now. A lost mine? Buried treasure? Outlaws? Missing men?”

“Hurry up. Tell us what it really is,” Sandy exclaimed, alive with interest.

“Well, you’ll have to give me a chance to talk then,” Mr. McClaren came back patiently. “And Dick hasn’t guessed what the proposition is. It’s not as profitable as lost mines or buried treasure, nor as dangerous as hunting outlaws, but more entertaining than hunting missing men. There’s money in it, some excitement and a chance to make good with one of the greatest organizations in the world.”

Dick and Sandy were begging now, for their interest certainly had been intrigued. So engrossed had they become in what the proposition was going to be that they even forgot to eat, sitting there with their mouths open and loaded fork half suspended.

“The proposition is this,” the factor stated. “I’m thinking of starting a branch fur-trading post near Great Slave Lake and I need some enterprising ambitious men to help out. There’s some bad competition—a free trader in that region, but I think he’ll be some careful what he does to any of the Hudson’s Bay Company men.”

“Gee, do you want us to be fur-traders?” Sandy interrogated.

“That’s about the size of it, boys,” Sandy’s uncle replied. “I’m sending one man up who is an expert on furs, and there’ll be a mounted police post established there. You boys can help with the trading, and can hunt and fish and trap all you like. It will be a real vacation from the hard job you had in the Arctic.”

“It’s beginning to look good to me already,” Dick spoke eagerly. “What do you say, Sandy?”

“I’m for it if you are,” replied Dick’s chum, “and we can take Toma along.”

The young Indian who had remained impassive during the conversation, brightened at Sandy’s words and his dusky face was split by a huge grin. He had been afraid of being left out of the plans and was now much relieved.

The factor signaled the old Indian housekeeper. “Pour us all some more coffee,” he directed. “I’m going to propose a toast.”

Dick and Sandy exchanged glances. What was the toast going to be, they wondered.

When the coffee cups were all filled and creamed and sugared, the old factor stood up and the boys did likewise. Lifting his cup high over his head, Mr. McClaren said:

“Here’s to the health of Dick Kent, fur trader, and may he never buy a pelt that sheds or trade a rifle for a black cat’s hide thinking it’s a black fox skin.”

The boys burst out laughing, but touched cups with Sandy’s uncle and drank the toast.

“Now let me give a toast,” Dick spoke up.

“Go ahead,” Mr. McClaren agreed.

Assuming a gallant pose, Dick upraised his cup and said solemnly:

“Here’s to Factor McClaren the best sport in the world and the jolliest bachelor.”

It was Walter McClaren’s turn to laugh, and his big voice shook the very log beams of the dining room.

Sandy was about to propose another toast, when there came a knock at the door.

The factor motioned the housekeeper to open the door. All eyes turned to see the visitor. Into the living room of the cabin stamped a tall man, resplendent in the scarlet coat of the mounted.

“Hello there, Corporal McCarthy,” shouted the boys, recognizing the leader of

their recent expedition.

The Corporal paused in the doorway leading into the dining room. He returned the boys' greetings in kind, then drew himself up to attention, proudly displaying the medals on his chest, and saluted:

“Inspector Dunbar requests the presence of Dick Kent and Sandy McClaren,” announced the Corporal solemnly and impressively, “for presentation of special decorations in reward for their Arctic services with the Royal Northwest Mounted Police!”

Dick whistled, Sandy gasped, and both blushed, then Corporal McCarthy came around and shook their hands, slapping them on the back heartily, while Sandy's uncle added his sincere congratulations.

“But what about Toma?” Dick asked the Corporal, when he had recovered from his embarrassment. “Is he left out?”

“S-s-h. The Inspector has a surprise for him,” whispered the Corporal. “A brand new 22 High Power rifle.”

So did the King's policemen make happy hearts of their loyal and daring young servants.

THE END

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