

Dick Kent *with the* Mounted Police



MILTON RICHARDS

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Dick Kent with the Mounted Police

By MILTON RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF
“Dick Kent in the Far North”
“Dick Kent with the Eskimos”
“Dick Kent, Fur Trader”
“Dick Kent and the Malemute Mail”

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DICK KENT WITH THE MOUNTED POLICE

CHAPTER I

THE SCAR FACED INDIAN

Dick Kent tossed aside the wolf trap he had been trying to repair, and turned to his chum, Sandy McClaren.

“Let’s go back to your Uncle Walter’s at Fort Good Faith,” said Dick restlessly. “It’s getting too quiet around here.”

Sandy McClaren’s big blue eyes turned from the marten pelt he had been scraping. “I’m with you, Dick. Uncle Walt needs us, too. He’s still having a lot of trouble with that outlaw, Bear Henderson.”

For a year after finishing school in the United States, Dick Kent and Sandy McClaren had been pursuing adventure two hundred miles north of Hay River Landing, Canada, where they had gone to visit Sandy’s uncle. Lately they had come to Fort du Lac at the invitation of Martin MacLean, the factor there. The savage northland already had woven its spell of dangerous adventure about them, but Fort du Lac had proved dull after the excitement of the more lawless trading post supervised by Sandy’s uncle on the northern fringe of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s territory.

Dick and Sandy had turned toward the big log store building where Martin MacLean bartered for furs, when they stopped dead, looking northeast along the trail that curved about a high headland of pine forest.

“What’s that?” cried Dick suddenly.

“Looks like an Indian runner!” Sandy exclaimed.

“I’ll tell Mr. MacLean,” Dick stretched his athletic legs toward the store.

The fur trader came out on Dick’s heels a moment later, his broad, bony frame

and bearded face tense at the hint of trouble.

“It’s a runner all right,” confirmed the trader, watching the distant figure, which was rapidly approaching.

Presently a swarthy faced Indian, his coarse black hair streaming about his haggard features, fell almost exhausted into their arms.

“Help me carry him in,” Martin MacLean commanded. “He’s tuckered out. We’ve got to get him to talk. There’s trouble somewhere.”

They tugged the limp body of the runner into the store and lay him on several bales of fur. The trader hurried for stimulant, which he forced between the Indian’s teeth. The runner soon opened his eyes. All three bent over him as he spoke:

“Him Bear Henderson take um post—from Mister McClaren,” gasped the runner. “Tie um up. Kill all good Injuns!”

Dick Kent’s face paled as he turned to Sandy. “Henderson has captured your Uncle Walter!”

“Well, he’ll get his when the mounted police get there,” flared Sandy, his Scotch temper showing itself.

The factor of the post turned to them. They fell silent. “Boys, I can’t leave the post,” he said, “and I don’t trust any of the Indians around the store. Can I depend on you to go down the river and get Malcolm Mackenzie?”

“Can you!” Dick and Sandy chorused, “I should smile.”

“You know what this means,” the trader went on sternly. “Bear Henderson is a powerful man. There isn’t a doubt this runner was followed here. There may be men right here at Fort du Lac who are in sympathy with the outlaw. Henderson is plotting against the whole northern frontier held by Hudson’s Bay Company. It’s life or death.”

“We’ll do it!” Dick cried eagerly. “Tell us what to do.”

“All right then. You go by canoe down the river to Mackenzie’s Landing. Tell

Mackenzie I asked him to go with you to the mounted police post at Fort Dunwoody. You know the trail that far. Malcolm knows it from the landing on. There's a grub cache he might have forgotten. In case he has——" the boys followed MacLean behind the counter. From the strong box the trader drew a map. "Now here is our post," the trader continued, indicating a dot on the rough map with a match end, while Dick and Sandy followed him attentively; "There's Little Moose Portage, and further down Mackenzie's Landing, the free trader's post. Twenty miles further the river swings north and you leave the water and go by land. Then here's where you strike the cache of food——"

Dick's sudden, startled cry interrupted. "What was that at the window!"

"I didn't see anything," whispered Sandy.

"Sure you weren't imagining something?" said the trader.

"I know I saw a face right there a moment ago," Dick insisted, pointing to a window in the rear of the long store. "It seemed to be an Indian's face which was covered with hideous scars."

MacLean walked back and pulled the curtains shut over the window. He returned and went on explaining the location of the cache and the route to be taken to Fort Dunwoody.

Once started, Dick and Sandy were not long in preparing for the trip down the river to Mackenzie's Landing. They cleaned and oiled their 30.30 Ross rifles, packed a canoe with flour, beans, bacon, coffee, salt, sugar and camp utensils, and saw that they were well supplied with ammunition.

On their last trip to the canoe from the storehouse, Sandy, too, had a singular surprise. But he did not cry out. Instead, he called softly to Dick, who was a little ahead of him.

"I saw the same face you saw behind those boxes over there on the landing," Sandy said tensely. "Make believe we didn't notice anything. Then we'll pick up our rifles and walk down the river till we get where we can see behind the boxes."

"All right," Dick replied coolly, his dark eyes gleaming as they always did at the promise of excitement.

“Don’t shoot. Capture him,” Dick added, as they deposited their packs into the canoe, picked up their rifles and started off down the river bank, their eyes bent to the left.

When they had advanced far enough to see behind the boxes, they turned and looked. The face was gone! There was no one behind the packing boxes.

Sandy scratched his head. “Blame it, I know I saw somebody watching us.”

“Come on, we’ll look closer.” Dick led the way forward and they examined all the boxes, but found each one empty.

“Looks queer,” Dick admitted.

“Those Indians can disappear mighty suddenly,” Sandy said. “Let’s tell Mr. MacLean.”

They hurried back to the store. The trader plainly was deeply concerned over what they had to tell. “I tell you, boys, I hadn’t ought to let you make this trip,” he said, pacing back and forth. “Henderson has men here that I know nothing about. They say he has secret operatives all over the northern frontier. Sandy’s uncle never would forgive me if anything happened to you fellows. But I don’t see what else I can do. The mounted police must be notified.”

“Well, Sandy and I aren’t men,” Dick replied modestly, “but you know we’ve been in the north country for a year now and so far we’ve taken pretty good care of ourselves. Sandy’s Uncle Walter will tell you that.”

The trader surveyed Dick Kent’s stalwart figure and Sandy’s more stocky frame with a renewal of confidence. “Yes,” he concluded, “I believe you fellows will come out all right. Shake.”

Dick and Sandy gripped Martin MacLean’s hard hand. They felt a glow of admiration for the big “sourdough” who had so complimented two “chechakos,” or tenderfeet. The trader drew from his pocket a wallet of money and thrust it into Dick’s hand, with the remark it might come in handy for expenses.

An hour later the boys were gliding down the river, Dick in the stern steering, Sandy in front on the lookout for snags. The dark walls of spruce forest on either side closed in on them with a mysterious silence. They seemed to feel

malevolent eyes watching them as they sheered the oily surface of the stream. The strange face both had seen at Fort du Lac remained in their memory and made them silent as they forged along with the current. It was the last warm days of fall; already a hint of winter was in the air, and with the threat of danger hovering about was combined another feeling of dread, as if the very atmosphere of the vast, lonely land heralded the approach of mercilessly cold weather.

“You watch the south bank, and I’ll watch the north,” Dick broke the silence when the landing at Fort du Lac had faded from view around a bend. “I think we’ll be followed by land if our suspicions are correct and there’s really some one on our trail.”

“They’ll have to follow by land for a ways anyway,” rejoined Sandy. “Mr. MacLean will see them if they use one of the canoes at the landing. But I suppose they have a canoe hidden somewhere along the river.”

“That’s about it,” Dick agreed. “We’ll keep sharp watch and be ready to duck if there’s any shooting.”

They paddled on silently for a quarter of an hour, making good time and keeping to the center of the stream. They were just passing a large heap of driftwood, lodged in an eddy near the north shore, when Sandy called Dick’s attention to something under the brush.

“What do you make of that light brown object just the other side of the little sand point sticking out into the river?” asked Sandy.

“I was looking at it myself,” responded Dick. “I thought it was a log with the bark off it at first, but it might be a canoe.”

“It looks a lot like a canoe—as if they tried to hide it under some brush but the brush sprung up after they left and exposed it.”

“We’ll turn in and see,” Dick plied his paddle lustily, and the light craft swerved toward the shore.

“Aren’t we taking an awful risk?” Sandy was cautious. “Suppose they’re close to us.”

“We’ll take a chance,” Dick returned. “Better take a chance now than have them

catch up with us in that canoe. It's plain they're not here yet."

Nerves keyed high at thought of the peril they might be floating into, Dick and Sandy bore swiftly into the sand point, and presently the bottom of the canoe grated on the gravel. Dick leaped out into the shallow water and beached the canoe, Sandy following closely.

"It's a canoe sure enough!" Dick exclaimed when they reached the spot where they had seen the suspicious object.

"And they tried to hide it," Sandy came back, as they drew nearer. "See the tracks in the mud? Say! That canoe hasn't been there a day, if that!"

"You're right!" Dick cried, "and right here and now we're going to see that nobody chases us in this canoe."

"Be careful," Sandy cautioned.

"We'll set her adrift," Dick went on, unheeding Sandy's precautions. "Here, Sandy, you grab the bow and I'll get around behind and push. Soon as we get it out in the current it'll float down where they can't find it. We might sink it, but we'd have to tow it into the river and we haven't time."

Sandy fell to work with a will. The canoe was lodged in the mud rather securely and they strained for some minutes before it at last came loose with a suck and splash that nearly tumbled Sandy over. An instant later they had shoved the canoe out into the stream, where the current caught it and carried it past the sand point.

The young adventurers paused to gaze with satisfaction upon this blow they felt they had dealt the enemy, when a sound from the shore drew their startled attention.

"Listen," whispered Dick.

They could hear a crashing among the trees. Looking toward the forest they could see nothing at first. Then suddenly, into a small clearing that led down to the river bank, burst three men, running and waving their rifles menacingly.

"Quick! The canoe!" cried Dick hoarsely. "Don't stop to shoot. We've got to get

away. They're after that canoe. It's the Indian with the scarred face!"

Sandy tumbled into the stern of the canoe in one flying leap, and as Dick shoved on the prow, he picked up his paddle and stroked backward. The canoe left the beach with a lunge, and Dick was nearly precipitated into the water as he leaped into his position in the bow. As they crouched to paddle, three shots sounded and bullets cut the water about them.

"Downstream fast," shouted Dick. "Stay low, Sandy."

Rifle balls were flying thick and fast as they rounded the sand point, paddling frantically after the canoe they had set adrift.

"Diable!" they could hear an enraged cry in French, as their pursuers found the canoe gone and the boys escaping.

Dick turned and looked back. All three of the men were kneeling with rifles leveled. "Duck!" he shouted to Sandy just in time.

The rifles cracked almost as one and two bullets ripped through the bottom of the canoe, plowing up splinters in their wake.

"We've sprung a leak," called Sandy almost immediately. "Those shots have put the canoe out of commission!"

Dick glanced about at the bottom of the canoe. Sandy was right. The bullets had struck below the waterline and the river was gurgling in around the packs and blankets.

CHAPTER II

AT LITTLE MOOSE PORTAGE

Dick Kent thought swiftly. There was no time to lose. The canoe was filling fast. Already it was growing perceptibly heavier. Ahead he could see the canoe they had set adrift. It was a long chance, but it was the only thing to be done, aside from swimming to the other shore and abandoning all their packs and camp equipment.

“Sandy!”

“What?” panted his chum.

“We’ve got to switch our packs into that empty canoe.”

“Catch it first, I’ll say!” cried Sandy.

They redoubled their efforts on the paddles. The drifting canoe was spinning slowly in the stream. Waterlogged as they were, they yet were slowly gaining on the empty craft. Out of rifle range from the sand point, the bullets of their pursuers no longer endangered them as they skipped across the water yards short of their mark.

Slowly they overhauled the empty canoe, and at last Dick reached out and grasped the prow, hauling it to the side of their own sinking craft. Dropping their paddles then, they straddled the two gunwales and with their legs held the canoes together while with all haste they transferred their dunnage. Working grimly and silently they had almost finished when the canoes began to whirl slowly in the current. Sandy lost his balance and toppled into the water, his hoarse shout of surprise muffled as the river closed over his head.

Sandy came up from the cold bath. Dick shouted encouragement, extending a paddle to his chum while he alone held the canoes together. In a moment,

spluttering and shivering, Sandy crawled back into the loaded canoe.

The leaking canoe was rolling on its side when the last blanket was taken from it. The young men picked up their paddles and struck out with all speed. They feared their pursuers, since they no longer appeared on the sand point, had run back into the forest and were coming along the river bank into rifle range.

“B-r-r-r, that sure was no warm bath,” chattered Sandy.

“Keep paddling, and warm up,” Dick called over his shoulder. “We’ll go ashore and dry your clothes when we’re sure we’ve got away from them.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when a rifle shot sounded from the shore some distance behind them. A bullet whined over their heads and plunked into the river.

“There they go again!” cried Dick. “Let’s bear toward the other shore and see if we can’t get out of range.”

Crouching over their paddles they swerved to the right and gradually paddled out of range once more.

Until late in the afternoon the boys kept up a killing pace with the paddles. Sandy, warmed by the stiff exercise, would not permit Dick to go in shore on his account, and so they drew into the swift current above Little Moose Portage.

The canoe was beached on the shore opposite the one where the enemy had put in an appearance miles behind. It was an excellent camp site. They were only about three hundred yards above the rapids, whose swift current, filled with sharp stones, made it necessary to go on by land to a point where the river was less dangerous. They could hear the sound of the rushing water.

“We’ll keep sharp watch while we make camp,” said Dick. “Those fellows may have found another canoe and caught up with us.”

“Even if they come on by land they can’t be so very far behind,” Sandy added, shivering a little now that the warming work on the paddle was discontinued.

Dick and Sandy had paddled many miles that day and they were very tired. A year before they could not have kept on that far. But the north country had

hardened their already healthy bodies, until they laughed at the exertion that would have put a southland boy flat on his back.

A campfire of pine cones and dead wood soon was crackling cheerily. Dick set on the coffee pot and mixed up some flapjacks while Sandy took off his moccasins and sox by the fire. By the time Sandy was fairly dry the meal was ready, and the boys fell to ravenously. Now and again they were startled by some sound from the forest, but each time the noise proved to be only that made by a wild animal investigating their campfire.

“We’ll take turns on watch tonight,” Dick said, sipping his last cup of coffee.

“Let’s draw straws for the first trick,” Sandy suggested.

“No,” Dick objected, “that ducking you had gave you the hardest day. I’ll take the first watch.”

Sandy wanted it otherwise, but Dick insisted.

“Well, if you’ll be sure to wake me up when my turn comes,” Sandy was already yawning, “it’s all right with me.”

Soon Sandy was rolled in his blankets, close by the fire, which was welcome indeed in the chill of the autumn evening.

Dick took a position in the shadow of a clump of willows where the firelight would not reveal him to any prowlers of the night that might investigate too closely. Here he squatted Indian fashion, his rifle across his knees. Many thoughts passed through his mind as the time slowly passed. That Sandy and he were on the most perilous mission of their lives he knew. But contrary to being frightened by impending danger, he was overjoyed. It was what he and Sandy had come north for—adventure. And they were getting it.

“We ought to get to Mackenzie’s Landing day after tomorrow,” he mused, talking low to himself to keep from going to sleep. It was too dangerous to walk about. “That means three or four more camps before we get a guide. Gee, I wish we could go on by ourselves. If Sandy or I only knew the country around Fort Dunwoody—but we’d get lost, and we can’t afford to lose any time with Sandy’s uncle in Bear Henderson’s hands. Wonder——”

Dick sat up suddenly, listening. It seemed to him that above the ripple of the river water and the low rumble of the distant rapids he heard the scrape of a canoe bottom on the gravel. His heart leaped and beat on painfully. What if some one stole their canoe, or crept up and attacked them! The thought galvanized him into action.

He dropped to his hands and knees, his rifle clutched in his right fingers. It was only a short distance to that part of the beach where they had dragged the canoe up out of the water. Dick crawled quietly along among the shadows to the fringe of undergrowth bordering the beach. At first the glare of the firelight in his eyes made all appear very dark by contrast, but gradually his vision was adjusted, and he could make out the vague form of the canoe.

“Wonder if it was only my imagination,” he mumbled, not seeing anything amiss. “But——” he caught his breath. The canoe had moved!

Sure enough, difficult as it was to see distinctly, he knew the canoe had rocked from side to side.

“What could it be?” he whispered, straining his eyes.

It seemed now that he could see a darker blot of darkness moving above the rim of the canoe, but he was not sure. There was but one thing to do—crawl out of the sheltering bushes and across the sand to a point from which he could ascertain just what was moving the canoe.

The decision made, Dick did not hesitate a moment. Half way to the canoe, he stopped and lay prone on his stomach, listening and watching. What little breeze there was blew from the canoe toward him, so that an animal would not easily detect his approach unless it heard him. Faintly, Dick could hear a scratching sound, as if some sharp instrument agitated the sand and gravel. He was more puzzled than ever.

He moved on again, drawing one knee cautiously after the other, careful that his rifle was ready for instant firing. Ten feet further and the scratching sound ceased suddenly. Dick was now within a few feet of the prow of the canoe. He stopped dead still, and, resting on his knees, raised his rifle.

“Who’s there?” he called sternly.

A sudden commotion followed. Around the prow of the canoe flashed two round glowing eyes, and a bearded, tuft-eared cat face. Dick's rifle crashed. There was an inhuman squall of pain; a ball of fur and fury bounded high into the air and fell writhing, spitting and snarling within three feet of Dick, who leaped to one side.

"Hi! Hi! Dick, where are you?" It was Sandy calling from the campfire. He had been awakened by the gun shot.

"It's all right, Sandy," Dick called back, stooping over the animal he had killed. "Only a lynx scratching around the canoe. Come and take a look. Gosh! I must have hit him right between the eyes."

Sandy came running up, and bent over the dead lynx. When the cat's last struggles ceased, the boys hauled it into the firelight.

"I was scared half to death," Sandy grinned sheepishly. "I was dreaming we were in Fort Good Faith with Uncle Walter and about a million wild Indians were whooping and shooting at the stockade."

"You can bet your bottom dollar I didn't feel so calm about the time that lynx came around the canoe and looked me in the eye," Dick confessed. "I never took aim at all—just blazed away. Lucky shot I call it. I thought it was some one trying to steal our canoe."

"What time is it?" Sandy inquired, getting up and stretching.

Dick drew out a fine watch which had been a graduation present. "Only ten o'clock," he reported. "You can go back to bed, Sandy. My watch isn't half done."

The young adventurers talked a few minutes after Sandy was back in his blankets. But Sandy soon fell asleep. In spite of the excitement brought on by the killing of the lynx, Sandy was so tired that he went back to sleep almost immediately.

Dick looked down at the lynx. "He's sure a beauty," he whispered proudly. "I kind of wish I hadn't killed him now. It's a shame to kill animals when a fellow can't use their fur or meat."

He returned to his position in the shadow of the willows and sat there patiently until midnight, when it was time to awaken Sandy. The fire had died down and he heaped more wood on it. He never felt more wide awake in his life. Sandy was sleeping soundly.

“Sandy, you’re pretty tired,” Dick murmured, looking down at his chum, “and I feel just about as fresh as when we pitched camp. Guess I won’t wake you up—just let you sleep until morning.”

There was an affection like brotherhood between the two boys, who had been neighbors and chums from infancy up. And since Dick was two years older than Sandy, he often felt somewhat like an older brother would feel toward a younger. Perhaps this induced Dick to resume his watch without awakening Sandy.

When Dick sat down again he was sure he could stay awake all night, but the flicker of the firelight, the whispering silence of the forest, and the ripple of the river were like a pleasant lullaby. Before he knew it he was nodding, and presently he fell sound asleep. Head drooping over his knees, Dick slept unknowing, while the fire died down and the deep blackness of the northland night crept over the silent camp.

Sandy awakened with a start at four o’clock. It still was dark, as the days were shortening with the approach of winter. He did not know why Dick had not awakened him, and he was at first fearful that something had happened to his chum.

“Dick, Dick,” he called softly, sitting up in his blankets, trying to pierce the gloom with his eyes.

There came no answer. Quietly Sandy reached out and one hand closed on his rifle. The feel of the cold steel comforted him. He had begun to learn what an encouraging companion a firearm can be in those lonely climes where they are necessary if one would live long.

Arising, Sandy began a search of the camp and quickly came upon Dick, sound asleep a little way off.

“Ho, ho,” laughed Sandy mischievously, “I’ve got one on you now, old boy. Asleep on watch, huh. I’ll fix you.”

His fears relieved, Sandy's sense of humor cropped out. He could not resist playing a good joke on his chum.

Sandy thought a moment, then hit upon an idea, which he quickly put into execution. The fire had gone out, and Sandy's scheme was no other than to rebuild it so close to Dick that it would sizzle the sleeping lad's chin.

Soon Sandy had the fire crackling and snapping within two feet of Dick's face, as he lay on the pine needles where he had fallen over during the night.

Setting about breakfast, Sandy chuckled as he watched Dick begin to squirm and mutter in his sleep as the heat reached him.

At last Dick turned over, and flinging out one hand, almost plunged it into the fire. Sandy cried out sharply, and jumped forward to keep Dick's hand out of the fire, when his chum leaped up wide awake.

"What! How——" Dick stammered, blinking his eyes.

Sandy doubled up with laughter. Dick soon saw the joke and joined Sandy in a hearty laugh. Then he quickly grew serious.

"That's the worst thing I could have done," Dick accused himself. "Suppose Henderson's men had crept up on us while I was asleep. Sandy, I'll never forgive myself for this. I can't blame them for shooting soldiers that sleep on guard duty—after tonight."

"Oh, never mind," Sandy's optimism came to the front. "What's the difference. We're safe and sound, aren't we?"

"That doesn't excuse me for neglecting my duty," Dick insisted. But as he reached for the tin plate of bacon and camp bread that Sandy handed him, Dick cheered up. "What beats me," he concluded, "is that I was going to let you sleep till morning, Sandy. Guess I wasn't as tough as I thought I was."

"That's just like you," Sandy retorted. "Just because you're a couple of years older than I you think you ought to do all the heavy work."

"Well, I'll see that you do your night watching after this," Dick promised. "And now we'd better get started. If those fellows kept on after us they've had just

about time enough to catch up.”

It did not take the boys long to break camp. The trail that led along the bank past the dangerous Little Moose Rapids to safe water was on the other bank of the river, and Dick and Sandy prepared to paddle across. Once on the trail, they planned to shoulder their packs and the canoe for the jaunt over the portage. They shoved out the canoe without mishap and were cutting across the swift current of the Big Smokey river above the rapids, when on the other shore, at the point where they intended landing, Dick thought he saw a wisp of smoke ascending, as from a campfire recently extinguished.

“Sandy, do you see any one over there?” Dick called.

“I see a kind of smoke haze among those little spruce trees,” Sandy replied.

“You know what I think?” Dick went on, sturdily plying his paddle, “that gang is waiting for us over there. They’re in ambush. As soon as we get close in they’ll open fire. I’ll bet I’m right. If I am we don’t dare try to land.”

“Well, there’s no trail around the rapids on the side we camped,” Sandy returned. “We’d have to detour about twelve miles that way to get back to the Big Smokey.”

They were slowly drawing closer to the opposite bank, the swift current pulling them downstream a little in spite of their efforts. The boys were silent as they drew closer, undecided which way to turn, almost certain now that a warm reception awaited them on the portage trail landing. Suddenly Dick spoke coolly, but tensely:

“Backwater, Sandy. Don’t act excited. We don’t dare go on. I just saw two rifle barrels thrust over a hump of moss on a fallen tree.”

Sandy did not falter at the warning. He reversed his paddle, as Dick was doing, and the canoe came almost to a standstill.

“We’ll have to shoot the rapids!” Dick’s voice was like the snap of a whip as he made known his daring resolve.

CHAPTER III

DICK SHOOTS THE RAPIDS

At Little Moose Rapids the Big Smokey river plunged through a gorge nearly a half mile long before it finally came once more to a gentler incline where canoeing was safe. Only the most daring of canoeists ever risked piloting a frail craft through this treacherous stretch of water, and many who had dared had been drowned. Dick's last minute resolution was one of desperation. Though he and Sandy were experts with the paddle, yet they never would have considered attempting to shoot any rapids had death or capture not threatened them.

"We'll never make it!" the optimistic Sandy was shaken from his cheeriness by Dick's desperate resolve.

"We've got to!" shouted Dick, as with one strong stroke of his paddle he swerved the canoe head on with the current, and they sped straight toward the gorge.

At the maneuver they heard an angry shout from the shore that had been their destination. Even at that distance they could detect the menace in that cry, and with added zeal they bent to their paddles.

Then a rifle cracked and a ball whistled across the water behind them. Another and another shot was fired while they sped on swifter and swifter.

"We're getting out of range!" Dick cried.

"I hope so," panted Sandy.

"They're poor marksmen, anyhow," Dick returned.

They both fell silent as they left one danger behind, only to face one almost as threatening.

The river swiftly narrowed and deepened as they swept down between the high walls of the gorge. A sullen roar of the water against the numerous rocks and against the solid walls could be heard. The canoe seemed to shoot ahead like a leaf on the wind. Louder and louder grew the sound of rushing water. Then the boys saw the first wave of foam and spray where the water whirled among several huge boulders.

Sandy was in the bow, Dick in the stern when they struck the first angry whirlpool.

“Use your paddle to push off the rocks,” shouted Dick above the rumble of the water.

They scudded past a huge, wet boulder, seemed almost flung against another, only to be whisked into a deep pool where it was all Dick and Sandy could do to keep the canoe from turning clear around. Out of the pool, they danced on once more. The rapids were clear of rocks for a space, but they were moving so fast that it seemed no time before they reached a giant buttress of stone that seemed to bar the way.

“Push off,” cried Dick. “I’ll backwater. Heave now. Here we go!”

They shaved the bluff so closely that the grind of the canoe upon the rock could be heard. The dash of water against the cliff showered down upon them, and the canoe took in a bucketful.

“Dip the water out!” shouted Dick, while they spun into another deep pool, the cliff behind them.

Sandy began frantically bailing out the water with his hat, while Dick desperately held the canoe bow against the current.

The gorge was deeper now, almost shutting out the early morning sunlight. All about spray flew in the air, like driving mist, and the roar of rushing water was almost deafening. The canoe was holding up well, yet its two occupants realized its frail shell would be shattered to atoms if but once it was thrown upon one of the countless rocks they seemed to miss by inches.

“I hope we don’t hit a waterfall,” shouted Sandy as he ceased bailing water and drew a long breath.

“Let ’er come,” responded Dick daringly, swerving the canoe this way and that with a lusty stroke of his paddle.

“Look out, another rock!”

Sandy turned from his bailing and grasped his paddle just in time. In a crouch he met the boulder with the end of the paddle and pushed. The canoe forged off to the left, dodged in between two other rocks, and once more they reached a space comparatively straight and free from obstructions. Like an arrow they shot onward.

The noise of the foaming water was fast increasing in volume. Dick feared a waterfall, and silently he nerved himself for it, and none too soon. Dashing down a narrow channel and bobbing around a curve like a cork on ocean waves, he saw ahead a mist of spray and the rumble of falling water burst upon his ears.

Sandy could not suppress a cry of terror, but white-lipped Dick managed to hold his breath for what was to come. “Hold tight!” he shouted to his chum. “I’ll hold her straight, and we’ll dive over. We’ve a chance. It’s not high.”

Straight toward the edge of the waterfall the canoe shot with terrific speed. The rumble of the water was frightful. Then they went over. One glimpse they had of the whirlpools boiling below the falls as the prow of the canoe swept over and the light craft leaped into the misty air, like a ski jumper.

It was only a short drop of about five feet, but when the canoe struck the churning water, it spun and spun about, wallowing in the foam. Dick and Sandy were drenched to the skin in a moment. All they could do was cling to the canoe, hoping against hope.

“Hang to that rock ahead, if we go under!” Dick cried, above the thunder of the falls.

“I can’t see!” Sandy shouted back, rubbing the water from his eyes and coughing.

Then the canoe struck something submerged, and turned over on its side, tipping Dick and Sandy into the boiling whirlpools.

Dick clung to the side of the canoe as the water washed over him. For an instant

Sandy disappeared, then Dick saw him come up, also clinging to the canoe, which had not entirely turned over, but had shipped so much water that it was sinking.

Presently, canoe and swimmers were whipped into a deep pool below the falls, and Dick and Sandy began desperately flinging water out of their craft. A little later they crawled back into their canoe, wet as half drowned rats, and Dick pushed off into the center of the stream.

The worst was over. Below the falls the gorge widened out slowly and the current grew more sluggish. For a quarter of an hour they glided on silently without need of their paddles, except to keep the craft in the center of the stream.

“Whew! I hope we don’t run into any more rapids,” Sandy breathed more freely.

Dick emphatically agreed. “Next time,” said he, “I’ll prefer facing the bullets, I think. Gee, if the fellows back in the U. S. A. knew what we’d just gone through they’d have a fit.”

“They’ll never believe it,” Sandy opined.

“We’ll make ’em believe it if we live to tell it,” vowed Dick, pulling extra hard on his paddle and making the canoe leap forward like a live thing. “But, to change the subject, I guess we left the enemy behind this time.”

“I’ll say so,” Sandy came back, “but two duckings in two days isn’t fair. Where can I stop off and get dry?”

“I think we’d better keep moving till noon,” Dick advised. “Then we can kill two birds with one stone—eat and dry off too.”

Sandy saw the wisdom of this and fell silent, bending his energies to the paddle. They made good time until about noon, when they espied a sandy shoal ahead of them that promised plenty of dry firewood for a campfire. They drew in, beached the canoe and made camp. An hour later, dry again and in good spirits, they pushed off and went on down the river.

“Seems as if I smell burning wood in the air,” Dick remarked a couple of miles further on.

“I do too,” Sandy replied, “——must be a forest fire somewhere near.”

“Hope it’s not too near,” said Dick, “a forest fire would hold us up a while even if we are on the river. I’ve heard my father tell about the fires they used to have in Oregon. They’re no joke.”

Sandy was about to add what he knew of forest fires when they both sighted another canoe toiling upstream. At that distance they could not at first distinguish whether there was more than one in the canoe. However, they held any stranger they might meet a possible enemy, since Martin MacLean had told them how far-reaching was the hand of Bear Henderson, and so they prepared for hostility.

Slowly the two canoes drew together. Sandy quietly picked up his rifle, while Dick continued paddling. They could now see there was but one man in the canoe.

“Hello there,” Dick hailed.

The stranger waved a hand, ceased paddling, except to hold his canoe against the current, and waited for the boys to glide up. He was a tall man, with long, dark hair and a leathery face.

“Where you goin’?” he asked as the canoe prows touched.

“Mackenzie’s Landing,” Dick replied, seeing nothing hostile in the other’s demeanor, and seeing no reason why he should not reveal his destination, if not his errand.

“I got my grub stole back river a piece,” the stranger said, pointing over his shoulder with one thumb. “Have you fellers got plenty of grub?”

“Sure,” Dick answered. “Want to eat with us? Our grub’s a little wet, but it swallows all right.”

“I’d be obliged,” the stranger returned, “but mebbe you wasn’t figgerin’ to stop jest now.”

“We just had a snack,” Dick admitted, “but if you’re hungry we’ll split what we have.”

“I jest need enough to get me to Fort du Lac.”

“Fort du Lac!” Dick and Sandy chorused. “We just came from there!”

“So? Wal, it’ll be nigh three days canoein’ up river, an’ I’ll need grub. No time to hunt. You fellers didn’t happen to run across an Injun with a heap of scars on his face?” the man asked, searching their faces.

“A scar faced Indian!” Sandy exclaimed. “Why——”

“Well, yes,” Dick broke in with a warning look at his chum. “We noticed a fellow of that description at the fort. Didn’t think much about him,” Dick was cautious.

“You fellers needn’t be afraid to tell me all you know,” the stranger had noticed Dick’s reserve and his interruption of Sandy. “I ain’t publishin’ my business but my name’s Slade.”

“Not Malemute Slade, the scout for the mounted!” Dick exclaimed, for the man’s reputation as a scout was a fable in the north country, and many times he had heard it spoken with awe and admiration.

“There’s them call me Malemute Slade,” admitted the tall man coolly, “but what was that about this here scar faced Indian?”

Dick then related the queer experiences at the fort.

The canoes were permitted to drift on down the river while they talked. Malemute Slade listened attentively.

“His name’s Many-Scar Jackson,” Slade told them when they had finished with their story. “He’s wanted for murder down the river a piece. But that’s nothin’ to this Henderson breakin’ loose. That’s news to me, an’ it’ll be news for the mounted maybe. I’ve heard rumors f’r a long time, but didn’t think much of it. A tough customer, Henderson. You fellers wants to watch y’r step. If I seen any of the gang that was foller’n you I’ll square up with ’em.”

In the keen eyes and the lean jaw of the far-famed Malemute Slade the boys saw that which made them confident that Slade could “square up” with most any one or any number.

“Tell the factor you saw us and that we’re all right—only got a ducking when we shot Little Moose Rapids,” Dick said.

Malemute Slade’s eyes lighted up. He looked with new respect at Dick’s wiry figure. “So you fellers shot the Little Moose an’ come through alive—wal, I swan. You must have toted a dozen rabbit’s feet.”

“Not a one,” Dick replied modestly, while Sandy grinned with pride.

“Y’r apt to have somethin’ worse on your hands afore you get to Mackenzie’s,” Malemute surprised them. “There’s a forest fire whoopin’ it up back a piece, an’ it’ll maybe hit the river afore you pass it. There’s a bit of smoke in the air now. Hey!”

Dick and Sandy started up and looked where Slade pointed.

Nearly four hundred yards down the river a stag had come down to drink and was standing half in and half out of the water. The canoes were slowly drifting down upon it.

“You fellers want a fresh haunch o’ venison f’r tonight?” queried Malemute.

“You bet!” Dick and Sandy chimed, “but the deer’s seen us and we can’t get close enough for a shot.”

“Reckon I can drop him from here,” Malemute Slade replied coolly.

“What!” Dick exclaimed incredulously.

Malemute’s only reply was slowly to raise his 45.70 lever action rifle to his shoulder. Dick and Sandy watched breathlessly. Motionless as a statue, the big man took aim before his rifle crashed. As the echo of the shot sounded in the silent forest, the stag leaped upward and fell into the river with a soundless splash.

“Now you fellers split your grub with me, an’ I’ll be goin’ on. If I had time I’d paddle down an’ cut a hunk off that deer. But I’ll have to be moochin’.”

Malemute Slade thought nothing of the wonderful exhibition of markmanship he had just made, and Dick and Sandy were awed to silence as they undid their

packs and transferred half their food into the scout's canoe.

Malemute Slade paid them in king's coin for the provisions.

"You'll probably see me again afore this Henderson business is over, but it's hard tellin'," was Malemute's parting prophecy. "Au revoir."

"Au revoir," the boys sang out the French "so long," and started on to where the stag had fallen.

Late that evening, making camp at a point they judged somewhere within fifty miles of Mackenzie's Landing, the smoke of the forest fire was so strong it made them cough. They had paddled a little way up a small creek for the night, thinking to make themselves more secure from a possible night attack from Henderson's men, who seemed so determined they should not get to the mounted police.

"I'm afraid we're in for it," Dick shook his head concernedly.

"It sure feels as if we were close to a fire," Sandy agreed dubiously.

"Well, we'll need all the sleep we can get at any rate," Dick concluded, as he rolled into his blankets, and Sandy prepared for the first watch.

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE FLAMES

That night Dick slept fitfully. The place where they had camped was in a deep coulee, unwooded except for a few clumps of red willow. Straight above them, at the top of an almost perpendicular wall of red shale and crumbling sandstone, was a dark fringe, which marked the beginning of a mighty forest of spruce and jack pine. Moaning in his sleep, Dick sat up and commenced rubbing his eyes. Then he paused to stare in open-mouthed wonder.

The coulee was full of smoke. It floated around them in a ever thickening cloud, while above, plainly visible in the glare of the conflagration, sweeping down from the north, he beheld a thick, dense column of smoke, which seemed to span the coulee like a black bridge.

Ten feet away, Sandy, on sentinel duty, coughed and dug at his eyes. In alarm, Dick threw aside his blankets and crawled hurriedly forward to consult with his chum.

“Sandy!” he shouted, “the fire is all around us. We’ll die like rats in a trap if we stay here. Why didn’t you awaken me before? Let’s hurry back to the river and our canoe.”

“Can’t,” said Sandy laconically, “I’ve been watching that. There’s a belt of fire between us and the river. We should never have camped so far away from it.”

“Well, you know we thought we’d be safer from Henderson’s men up here,” Dick replied.

The boys could hear plainly the howling of the wind and the distant, thunderous roar of the fire. Accustomed as he had become to danger since his sojourn in the north, Dick could not overcome a sudden feeling of fear and apprehension.

“Where will we go?” shivered Sandy. “It seems to be all around us.”

“We’ve got to go through it somehow,” Dick answered, not altogether sure, himself, what ought to be done. “It’s dangerous to remain here any longer. What do you think is best?”

Sandy, eyes running water, scratched his head in perplexity.

“If we could get to the river,” he said, “we’d be safe. I don’t see any other way.”

A few moments later, two disconsolate figures clambered up the side of the coulee and struck off hurriedly at right angles with the fire. With a catch in his throat, Dick perceived the huge walls of flames bearing down upon them. For several miles, at least, they were cut off from the river. Even the sky glowed dully like a large orange disk through a thick blanket of smoke.

“What’s that!” exclaimed Sandy, suddenly starting back.

Something had shot past them through the underbrush—a heavy body, hurtling along in mute terror. Almost immediately came other bodies, small and large—rabbits scurrying almost between their legs; deer, jumping past in a wild stampede; bear and moose, crashing their way forward in a cumbersome, heart-stirring panic, as they ran from the fire.

“If they’re afraid, it’s about time we were,” Sandy declared grimly, through set teeth. “If this smoke gets any worse we’ll be suffocated in another ten minutes. My throat feels as if I had been drinking liquid fire for a week.”

Twenty feet away a flying ember settled down on the dry grass and immediately burst into flames. With the ever increasing velocity of the wind, similar patches of fire sprang up around them on every side.

“I’m afraid,” said Dick, fighting bravely against mounting despair, “that we’ll never make it. I never saw such a wind.”

Sandy did not reply. With handkerchiefs pressed to their noses and mouths, the boys struggled forward for another quarter of a mile.

By this time the heat had become terrific. Dick’s face felt as if it had been washed in a bucket of lye. Sandy’s cheeks were streaked with tears, not tears of

grief, but tears of misery from smoke-tortured, bloodshot eyes.

“No use,” choked Sandy, plunging down a short embankment with Dick at his heels. “I’m about ready to quit. You see,” he explained, struggling with the lump in his throat, “I’m getting dizzy and dizzy every minute. This heat and smoke is getting me.”

Dick put out his hand with an assurance he did not feel, and patted his chum on the shoulder.

“Buck up,” Dick encouraged, “we’ll get out of this somehow. I tell you, Sandy, we’ve got to do it. Maybe this——”

Dick never finished what he was about to say. His foot slipped, and with a startled exclamation, he pitched forward, completely upsetting Sandy. In a moment both boys had rolled and slid down a steep bank. It seemed there was no end to the fall, and Dick’s heart almost failed him as he thought of what fate might meet them below. Perhaps they were rolling toward the brink of a cliff hundreds of feet high, perhaps they would fall into some rock cluttered canyon, or again, they might be drowned in some deep lake at the bottom of the bank.

Then they reached the bottom with a jarring impact that shook the breath from their bodies. When they recovered enough to look each other over, Dick was sitting upright, astride of Sandy, who lay in a crumpled, groaning heap under him. Dick heard, or thought he heard, the trickle of running water. His right foot felt pleasantly cool. When he put out his hand to investigate his fingers encountered water.

Sandy was half submerged in a tiny pool, and was sinking fast, before Dick could pull him back to safety. Dazed from the fall, Sandy sputtered a moment, then inquired excitedly:

“Have we got to the bottom?”

“I guess so,” replied Dick. “At any rate there seems to be a sort of creek running along here. Are you all right, Sandy?”

“Well, if I’m not, I soon will be,” answered Sandy, more cheerfully. “Wait till I get a drink of this water. Boy, I’m dry. Do you think we’ll be safe here?”

By way of answer, Dick pointed up to the wide belt of fire. "It's closer than it was before. We're protected down here from the heat and smoke, but that won't last long. In two hours this place will be as hot as a stove. Our only chance is to keep on moving."

"I hate to leave this water," said Sandy, gulping large mouthfuls of it.

"I don't intend leaving the water," Dick assured him. "It's just occurred to me that our best plan will be to follow this little creek. It's probably fed from a spring and will eventually run either into a lake or river. Once we get into more water we'll be pretty safe."

Sandy thought Dick was right, and a few minutes later, greatly refreshed, they set out again, following the creek downstream.

Two miles further on the creek ran into a larger stream, and a little later as they hurried around a curve, Sandy, who was in the lead, gave vent to an exclamation of despair.

"Look at that!" he shouted. "The fire has cut in ahead of us."

Sandy was right. Not more than a quarter mile downstream, the fire was raging on both sides of the creek, and even as they looked, a large jack pine, flaming to the top of its highest branches, swayed suddenly in the wind and went crashing forward in a shower of sparks and burning embers.

Sick at heart, the two young adventurers stood for a short time, scarcely daring to think of their predicament. Apparently there was little chance of escape, the main body of the fire behind them, another fire sweeping ahead.

"We've got to get through," Dick muttered. "We'll have to take a chance, Sandy. The fire ahead hasn't been burning long and it's not as far through it—maybe not more than a hundred yards. Somehow, I feel certain that this creek will take us straight on to the Big Smokey where we left the canoe."

Sandy's face brightened a little. "I believe you're right, Dick. If a burning tree or branch doesn't fall on us, we can make it. We'll have to wade right down through the center of the stream. If it gets too hot we can dive under the water. I'm going to take off my shirt, soak it in water and breathe with it around my head."

“A good idea,” approved Dick. “I’ll do it too.”

A half hour later, two boys emerged, wet and blackened, from a cloud of smoke and flame and advanced painfully along the creek to a point where it emptied into the Big Smokey river. Behind them thundered the terrible conflagration, getting closer every moment. Moose, deer and caribou stood trembling at the river’s edge, or struck boldly out into the stream. The boys turned north and followed the river for a mile before they discovered the object they sought. It was daylight now, though the smoke made it difficult to see far. Yet the light, graceful Peterboro canoe, loaded with supplies, did not miss their searching eyes. As they pushed it into the river and climbed in, Dick Kent gave voice to a fervent exclamation.

“We made it, Sandy!” he exulted, as he dipped his paddle once more into the bosom of the Big Smokey.

Sandy was about to share Dick’s rejoicing, when the movements of a huge brown bear, which had splashed into the water behind them, attracted his attention. The bear was swimming straight for the canoe.

“Shove out quick!” cried Sandy suddenly, but too late.

The brown bear, blinded by smoke, and thinking the canoe some log to cling to, clawed at the rim of the frail craft and pulled down. The canoe went over, spilling its contents into the river, while the bear, finding the craft unstable, swam on out into the river.

CHAPTER V

MACKENZIE'S LANDING

The plunge into the river revived both Dick and Sandy. Gasping, they came up for air, only to breathe the choking smoke and gases of the burning forest. They knew that the canoe was upside down and that their packs were in the bottom of the river. The bear was nowhere to be seen.

“Are you all right, Sandy?” called Dick, hoarsely.

“You bet,” Sandy replied, a bit faintly.

Among the burning brands sizzling in the water, and the flying sparks, they struggled with the canoe. In a few minutes they had righted it, though it was half full of water. The paddles, they could see, had gone with the packs.

“Look for a paddle!” shouted Dick. “They must be floating around somewhere.”

“There! I see one,” Sandy dived off as he spoke, and swam back quickly with a paddle in one hand.

But look as they did they could not locate the other paddle.

“We can’t look any longer. We’ll have to change off with one paddle,” Dick called a little later.

Dick paddling, they started on. The heat still was stifling, but they felt that the air was growing cooler. The wind seemed in their faces, which would tend to bear the fire back along the river. Wild animals of all kinds still could be seen in the water, wallowing along the shore or swimming the stream. But they had no more dangerous encounters with the frightened beasts.

Two hours of paddling, shifting the paddle back and forth between them as soon

as one grew tired, and they came to a comparatively clear stretch of water. Here the fire was deeper in the forest, and had not eaten out to the bank yet. In greedy gasps, Dick and Sandy drew in the gusts of cool, pure air that were wafted over them.

“Look back, Sandy,” Dick called.

The whole sky was a mass of red flames behind them, and an ocean of smoke was rolling ceaselessly upward.

“Mackenzie’s Landing can’t be much further,” Sandy said when they had looked their last upon the great fire.

“No, we ought to make it by night. We’ll have to make it or camp without grub or blankets. I prefer going on,” Dick stated.

“So do I,” Sandy rejoined.

Some distance further on, as they rounded a huge bend in the stream, they could not suppress a cheer. In the distance they could see the shoulder of a high, barren bluff which was the ten-mile landmark on the trip to Mackenzie’s Landing.

It was late in the afternoon when in the distance they at last viewed the stockade and roofs of Malcolm Mackenzie’s trading post. Blackened and disheveled, nearly exhausted, they guided their canoe to the pier, where three half-breeds were watching them curiously. The half-breeds helped them secure their canoe, and listened without comment to some of their story of the eventful journey.

“Malcolm Mackenzie, he sick,” one of the half-breeds told them. “No can go. Him burned bad when fight with fire.”

“Did you hear that?” Dick turned to Sandy.

“Yes—just our luck. Now what?” Sandy returned, a little disheartened, as the half-breeds led the way into the stockade.

“We can talk to Mr. Mackenzie, can’t we?” Dick asked one of the men, as they entered the post.

“Yah, I guess.”

Presently, they were ushered into a room smelling of liniment and arnica. On a bunk lay Malcolm Mackenzie, his head and one arm swathed in bandages. Evidently he was suffering considerably from serious burns. He turned his head as the boys came in.

“Bear Henderson has captured Fort Good Faith,” Dick blurted out. “My friend’s uncle has been imprisoned. Mr. MacLean sent us to you. He said you would lead us to the mounted police post at Fort Dunwoody.”

“I’ve feared this,” Malcolm Mackenzie’s eyes narrowed, “but you see how it is with me, boys. I can’t travel. Got some bad burns while fighting that forest fire. But I can send an Indian who knows the trail.” He turned to one of the half-breeds, who was standing behind Dick and Sandy. “Send in Little John Toma,” he commanded.

A little later Dick and Sandy saw a young Indian enter. He was handsome in a dark, inscrutable way, and though not very tall, was powerfully built. He stood respectfully at attention, seeming more intelligent than many of his kind.

“Toma,” Mackenzie spoke, “I want you to lead these young men to Fort Dunwoody as fast as you can. Travel light. You ought to make it in four days if everything goes right.” He turned back to the boys. “Did MacLean say anything about a cache of grub along the way?”

“Yes,” Dick reached into his pocket and drew out the map the trader had drawn indicating the position of the cache of food on the trail to Fort Dunwoody.

Mackenzie took the map, glanced at it and handed it to Toma. “It’s on Limping Dog Creek,” said Mackenzie, “just where that gorge you follow intersects the stream. You know the place.” To Dick and Sandy: “Introduce yourselves and get acquainted. Toma will get everything ready for you to go on. Take a rest as soon as you eat. Oh, Calico, Calico!” he called to some one.

As the boys and Little John Toma passed out, a large, waddling Indian woman came in. They heard Mackenzie instructing her to get a meal ready for his visitors before the bear-skin curtain dropped behind them and they found themselves in the spacious living room of the post.

Dick and Sandy awkwardly introduced themselves to the young Indian who was to be their guide.

“Glad to meet,” Toma surprised them by saying, his teeth flashing whitely in a smile.

Dick and Sandy quickly felt that they were going to like Toma.

“I’ll bet he’s the son of a chief,” Sandy said to Dick, when the young Indian had gone, and they were busy at the wash bench, scrubbing off some of the smoke and ashes of the forest fire.

The boys ate heartily of the food the Indian woman placed before them on the rough board table. As soon as they were through they were shown to a comfortable bunk behind moose-hide curtains. Scarcely had they lay down when they fell into sound slumber.

It seemed to Dick Kent that he had only been asleep a moment when a hand, gently shaking his shoulder, awakened him. He looked up into the smiling face of Toma, the young guide.

“Time to go,” said Toma. “You wake up other fella.”

As the curtains fell, and Toma disappeared, Dick turned and shook Sandy.

An hour later they bid goodbye to Malcolm Mackenzie and wished him speedy recovery from his burns. The canoe lay ready packed with provisions at the landing when they arrived there. Toma was starting to push off. Dick and Sandy hopped in, and Toma sprang lightly into the bow.

“Now for Fort Dunwoody,” Dick breathed a sigh of relief.

“If I wasn’t an optimist,” Sandy added, “I’d say we aren’t there yet by a long shot.”

Toma silently sculled the craft into the center of the river, and they were once more floating down the stream. The boys marveled at Toma’s deftness with the paddle, though they themselves were experts. The young Indian seemed able to make the canoe fly with his quick, powerful strokes.

A half hour of paddling and the roofs of Mackenzie’s Landing had disappeared in the haze of the morning, and once more the walls of the silent spruce forest closed in on either side of them.

Late that night they camped some twenty miles from the trading post, in a little clearing at the river's edge. Toma mentioned "bear sign," and so they hung up their flour and bacon on a tree bough for fear a bear might get it.

Sandy kept first watch while Toma and Dick slept.

It was a dark night. Only the stars were out, and when the fire died down Sandy scarcely could see a dozen paces from the camp. Occasionally he glanced into the shadows, listening to the mysterious sounds of the forest, and starting up at each crackle of a twig or rustle of undergrowth.

Sandy wondered if the men on their trail had been thrown off, and imagined what he would do if they would suddenly attack. As he thought of the dangers threatening Dick and him, his hand tightened on his rifle.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, the time he was to call Toma for the second watch, when Sandy became conscious of some sinister presence. Before he really saw or heard anything, he shivered and looked fearfully about into the gloom of the forest.

A scratching and grunting noise attracted his attention to the tree where they had hung up the flour and bacon. It seemed he could hear the shuffle of heavy feet and the wheeze of giant lungs as he listened intently.

"I won't call Dick and Toma," thought Sandy. "It may be only my imagination. I'll go see what it is."

Heart beating wildly, Sandy commenced to creep toward the point he had heard the noises. He could see nothing in the dark, yet as he strained his eyes it seemed to him that one portion of the blackness was blacker than the rest.

Suddenly, he heard the crashing of a splintered tree bough. A low, vibrating growl followed, and Sandy dropped upon his stomach. There came a slapping, thumping sound, then an angry growling and tussling. The dark blot lurched downward. Sandy raised his rifle and blazed away at the shape. A rambling roar rose in the night.

"Dick! Toma!" cried Sandy, as he turned about and fled, hearing behind him the rush of a heavy body pursuing him.

CHAPTER VI

A GRIZZLY SHOWS FIGHT

Toma and Dick were already on their feet when Sandy rushed toward them out of the gloom.

“It’s a bear, a giant bear!” cried Sandy. “Run! I’ve wounded him!”

The angry roar behind Sandy was all that was needed for Dick and Toma to take to their heels with alacrity.

“Get up tree, get up tree!” Toma called to them.

Faster than they ever before had climbed a tree, Dick and Sandy shinned up one in the dark. The bear charged beneath them in the underbrush. The huge beast wheeled on finding his prey had taken to the trees and circled the trunk which supported Dick and Sandy. Toma’s calm voice came through the gloom from a near-by tree:

“Him grizzly all right,” Toma told them. “You stay in tree. I get down to rifle pretty quick.”

“You surely must have wounded the bear,” Dick whispered to Sandy. “I’ve heard they won’t attack unless they’re wounded.”

“I don’t know what I did,” Sandy came back breathlessly. “I just blazed away and ran. Believe me, I don’t want to go down there again while that monster is wandering around looking for me. He’d chew us up in about two bites and a half.”

Dick knew that Sandy’s caution bump was working again, and he smiled in the dark. He did not intend to let Toma go down after the bear alone. Yet he believed the young Indian would protest if he revealed his intentions.

“Got your rifle?” Dick called to Toma, not intimating his resolution.

“I got gun,” Toma called back.

“I wish I’d thought to bring mine along,” Dick muttered, “but then it takes an Indian to shin up a tree with a heavy rifle in his hand I suppose. Anyway I have my knife.”

“Don’t go down, Dick,” whispered Sandy, as the bear crashed about in the brush below them.

“Nonsense, Sandy, I’ve got as much chance as Toma. We can’t let that bear wreck our camp. That’s what he’s up to.”

“Then I’ll go down too,” Sandy stubbornly decided.

They could not hear Toma’s movements with the bear making so much noise, but Dick suspected the guide already had slipped down from his tree and was stalking the wounded grizzly, perhaps close enough to get in a fatal shot.

Presently, they could hear the bear make off into the gloom toward the campfire. When Dick and Sandy dropped down out of the tree, the bear seemed to be on the other side of the campfire, clawing and mouthing over their dunnage.

“You better stay up in the tree,” Dick said.

“Not on your tintype,” Sandy snapped. “If you go, I go.”

“Well, then, we’ve got to get our guns,” said Dick. “Mine’s right where I got out of my blankets.”

“Seems to me I dropped mine just before I started climbing the tree,” Sandy was feeling around in the dark. “Yes, here it is,” was his triumphant call.

Toma seemingly had vanished. Since his last words, they had heard nothing more from him. Dick judged the guide was stalking the bear from some other direction. At any moment he expected to hear the report of the Indian’s rifle, and see the flash of it in the gloom.

Sandy alone armed, save for Dick’s hunting knife, the boys began a stealthy

advance toward the camp where they could hear the bear slashing and groveling about, evidently in some pain, for they were sure now that Sandy's shot had taken effect.

The coals of the campfire shed a faint glow. As the boys drew nearer, on hands and knees, they could see the bulk of the grizzly outlined. He seemed a mammoth of his kind, and indeed was a fearful beast to meet in the forest.

"I'll bet he's wrecked our camp outfit," Dick muttered. "Careful, Sandy, don't get too close. Let's wait till he gets away from the fire a little further, then I can get my rifle."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when Toma's rifle crashed in the dark on the left, and Dick and Sandy saw a streak of flame, and heard the roar of the bear, plainly hard hit. The grizzly rose upon his hind legs and turned toward the spot he believed his enemy was hidden. Then Sandy leveled his rifle and fired, drawing bead as best he could just under the huge beast's forelegs.

At this second shot, the bear seemed undecided just which way to charge. He stopped, his head turning from side to side, growling horribly, not hit hard enough to fall.

Toma shot again, then Sandy. The grizzly dropped to all fours, and began clawing at his breast. Toma shot again from another position. The bear rose up again with a roar of pain and rage and started for Dick and Sandy, who turned to flee. Then the big beast, without any apparent reason whatsoever, wheeled about and made off into the forest in the opposite direction.

"He's hit hard!" cried Dick, hurrying forward.

Toma came out of the gloom like a shadow. "He go off die," said the Indian. "Be careful he no come back. I go see where he go." Toma disappeared after cautioning the boys to stay where they were until he returned.

The minutes passed slowly while Dick and Sandy waited the return of Toma. Finally Dick grew impatient and was about to go on to the campfire for his rifle, when Toma appeared again, as if he had risen out of the earth.

"She all right," Toma reported. "Him keep going. Him die somewhere."

Relieved, Dick and Sandy approached the campfire. Toma already was heaping on more wood. As the flames leaped upward, and the light chased away some of the surrounding shadows, Dick and Sandy breathed freely once more. However, sleep was far from them after the narrow escape from being clawed by the wounded bear. They ventured about to see what damage the big grizzly had effected.

They found Dick's and Toma's blankets torn to shreds. The coffee pot was crushed flat and the sugar sack broken open, its contents scattered.

Dick hurried to the bough where they had hung the flour and bacon. "Hey, look here—Sandy, Toma!"

They joined Dick. The bough had been broken down; the flour was scattered about as if the sack had exploded; the bacon was gone. Searching about in the gloom they found hunks of chewed rind among the pine needles. Only one small chunk of bacon was left, and this they preserved in one of their knapsacks.

"Him no hungry," Toma grunted, "him play. Him chew bacon up, spit him out."

"Well, he did us plenty of damage all right," Dick said ruefully.

"Looks like we were in for a hungry spell," Sandy added, resignedly.

"Humph! We have bear steak for breakfast," Toma exclaimed significantly.

"That's what I call justice," Dick laughed.

All three went back to the campfire then and squatted around the crackling flames. The excitement had loosened Toma's tongue, it seemed, and he began telling stories of other bears he had known, and whom his father had known. Dick and Sandy listened with rapt interest to the simple tales of the young Indian.

Almost the balance of the night passed with Toma's droning voice relating thrilling adventures among the tribes in the far north. Toward dawn Sandy turned in for an hour or so of rest, but Toma and Dick remained awake.

The sun had scarcely topped the distant forest skyline when Dick and Toma awakened Sandy, and all three gathered up what they could of the wreckage

remaining of their provisions.

“Now we gettum bear steak,” Toma said.

In single file they followed the gliding figure of the guide, as he set off on the trail of the grizzly.

“See that track!” Dick exclaimed presently, pointing with his rifle at a spot of soft leaf-mold.

“It’s a bear track, all right,” conceded Sandy, “—and look! There’s blood on that bush.”

“We sure hit him a lot of times—I mean you and Toma,” Dick corrected. He felt disappointed that he had not actually been in on the killing of the bear, since he had had no rifle. But the thrill of trailing a wounded grizzly made him forget.

Toma seemed to follow the trail as if by instinct. Where Sandy and Dick could see no sign whatever, Toma went unerringly forward, always with that gliding, noiseless, pigeon-toed pace, that seemed tireless, though it was kept up with an ease and speed that made Dick and Sandy run.

For a half mile they wound among the trees, beginning to come upon spots where the bear had dropped down to rest. At these points the blood was drying in large clots. Finally, approaching a fallen tree, they came upon the grizzly, stone dead!

Dick and Sandy were about to cheer, yet the actual sight of the bear made them a little sad. The great monarch of the forest never again would proudly tread the forest aisles. Yet the boys felt a certain satisfaction in having won in a battle with such a powerful foe.

Toma immediately began skinning one haunch of the great bear. “Him old and tough,” grunted Toma, “but we cook um long time. That make um tender.”

Dick laughed. “The old boy will make stringy eating.”

“I wish we could take his hide,” Sandy sighed.

“It sure would knock the eyes out of the fellows back home,” Dick said.

“No time to skin,” Toma interrupted. “Hide too heavy carry. Mister Mackenzie say mus’ travel light.”

“Yes, it’s impossible for us to have the old fellow’s hide, but that’s no reason why we can’t have his scalp.” Suiting his action to his words, Dick drew his sharp hunting knife and stooped over the head of the wilderness king. With Sandy’s help they took the old grizzly’s scalp, ears and all, as a trophy.

“It’s yours and Toma’s,” Dick smiled, when they had finished. He held the scalp out to Sandy.

Sandy’s eyes lightened. “Let Toma have the scalp. I’ll take the claws.”

Dick’s hunting knife once more came into play. The bear’s claws measured as long as five inches, and Sandy was exceedingly proud as he at last pushed them into a side pocket of his leather coat.

Toma was waiting when they had finished. The guide had his knapsack filled with the tenderest steaks he could cut.

At a jog trot they set out for the river and their campsite, and soon they were grilling bear steaks over the fire.

When they broke camp they had provisions for two scanty meals, including some of the bear steaks which they saved from breakfast. The canoe packed, they once more set out down the river.

“We make um grub cache tomorrow,” Toma encouraged them. “Get um plenty grub there.”

Late that afternoon, without mishap they reached a point where Toma said they must abandon their canoe and go on by land, since the river swung off in another direction. They carefully hid their canoe in some underbrush along with two others left by a party that had recently gone on ahead of them, and started out on foot.

Dick and Sandy were very tired long before Toma showed signs of slowing up, but they gamely stuck to the pace without complaint.

They were angling down the side of a long ravine, toward a spring, which Toma

muttered would be a good place to camp, when of a sudden, the guide stopped dead.

“Hide quick!” Toma whispered, with a significant gesture of one sinewy brown hand.

Dick and Sandy crouched.

“Think um bad fellas ahead,” Toma explained. “You stay here. I go ahead; look um over.”

Dick and Sandy were glad to sink down and rest their weary legs. But the warning in Toma’s voice did not escape them. They were keyed to sharp watchfulness as Toma dropped to his hands and knees and disappeared silently among the bushes.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIFLED CACHE

Dick and Sandy had crouched in hiding for upwards of a half hour before Toma returned. He came as he had gone, silently, like a ghost almost, so stealthy were his movements, so clever his woodcraft.

“What did you find?” whispered Dick, anxiously.

“Two, t’ree—five bad fellas,” Toma counted on his fingers. “One Pierre Govereau lead um. They got um spring for tonight. We go round um. Got to. Them fellas friends Bear Henderson. They watch um trail for police. ’Fraid police go to Fort Good Faith.”

Dick and Sandy exchanged glances. Their weariness was temporarily forgotten in this new peril. They began to understand the far-reaching power of the man who had captured Sandy’s uncle and had taken possession of Fort Good Faith on the edge of the northern wilderness.

“We go,” Toma urged, his only excitement revealed by the swift movements of his eyes as they roved this way and that.

Silently the Indian guide melted into the underbrush, Dick immediately behind him, Sandy in the rear. For nearly two hundred yards they went onward, almost at snail’s pace. It was twilight now. Long shadows of tree and bush stretched everywhere.

At last Toma signaled for them to stop. Dick and Sandy dropped flat. Not more than three hundred feet ahead a campfire twinkled through the trees, and, motionless, between them and the fire, stood a silent figure, with rifle on his shoulder. It was a guard. Dick divined the figure, so like the tree trunk against which it stood, had even escaped the sharp eyes of Toma at first.

Four men were sitting around the campfire, and they could hear the mutter of gruff voices. Once or twice a louder than usual exclamation in French arose above the other sounds. It seemed the leader of the party was haranguing his men, or disciplining one of them.

Suddenly Dick started and clutched Sandy's arm.

"That guard!" he exclaimed under his breath. "It's the scar faced Indian!"

Sandy paled a little. It seemed almost impossible that the Indian could have gotten ahead of them. His appearance was as mysterious as had been their glimpses of him at Fort du Lac and along the Big Smokey river.

Toma was motioning for them to bear to the right. They crawled off after the guide in that direction.

Neither Dick nor Sandy knew which of them made too much noise, or revealed some part of his body, yet they had crawled no further than a dozen paces when the guard moved, turned and looked straight at them. Toma, watching over his shoulder, fell flat, Dick and Sandy following his example. Had they been seen?

The guard, his rifle ready for use, started slowly toward them. Tensely, Dick and Sandy watched Toma for a sign as to what course to take. They saw Toma slowly turn to his side. The guide swung his rifle to his shoulder as he lay.

Just as the guard cried out, Toma fired.

The scar faced Indian whirled, dropped his rifle and fell to his knees, clutching at one shoulder. Dick and Sandy got a glimpse of the men at the fire leaping up and snatching their rifles, as they took to their heels after Toma.

For several minutes they sprinted in the wake of the young Indian's flying heels, hearing behind the crash of their pursuers through the underbrush, and their cries to one another.

Then, before a hollow tree, half covered by the dead branches of a lightning-blasted pine tree, Toma halted suddenly. He motioned to them to follow and disappeared into the half-obscured hole in the tree. Dick and Sandy slipped in after him. There was barely enough room in the tree for three to stand upright, but they managed to crowd in, while Toma quickly arranged the dead branches

over the hole until their hiding place was entirely covered from view.

The distant shouts grew louder, as the men beat the brush looking for them. Two came closer and closer, until at last they stopped before the hollow tree, so near that the three hidden feared their heavy breathing might be heard.

“I thought I saw ’em go this way,” one said, in a harsh voice.

“Mebbe so,” the other, apparently an Indian, answered. “It look like they jump in air an’ fly away.”

“Pierre sure will give us the devil if we let ’em get away,” said the first. “Can’t blame him. Henderson will skin him alive if these trails aren’t kept clean of Hudson’s Bay men and mounties.”

“I see bush move over d’er!” the Indian ejaculated.

The two men moved off in another direction, and the boys in the hollow tree breathed easier.

“No go yet,” Toma advised. “Wait till all quiet.”

The minutes passed slowly while they waited in their cramped position. The shouts of the searchers grew fainter as they apparently abandoned the chase. Presently all was still. Toma peeped out through the branches covering the entrance to the hollow tree. After looking carefully about, the guide pushed back the branches and stepped out. Dick and Sandy followed. They were learning lessons in woodcraft every hour from this child of the forest.

“I think we ought to go back to the camp, steal up close and see if we can’t learn something of your Uncle Walter, Sandy,” Dick announced.

“Is it worth the risk?” Sandy came back. “Can’t we do better by hurrying on to Fort Dunwoody?”

“It’s true we can’t do much without the aid of the mounted police,” Dick studied. “Yet I’d like to know, if it’s possible, just what has been done with your uncle—how they’re treating him.”

Dick asked Toma what he thought of trying to learn something by

eavesdropping. "If you think um best thing do," Toma replied. "That scar face got best ears of all. He wounded now. Not much good; what say I try?"

"No, you've done plenty of this already, Toma," Dick was firm. "I'll go this time. You wait here where you can cover me with your guns if I am detected."

Toma, assured Dick was determined to go, grunted his assent, and a moment later Dick disappeared into the bushes on his perilous venture. Sandy and Toma crawled back to within gunshot of the camp, where the men had gathered again, gesticulating to one another, plainly undecided what to do.

When Dick left his chum and the guide he realized the danger he faced. Yet he knew any information he might gain would be more than valuable to the police when once he got in touch with them. Govereau's men were talking so loudly that he had little trouble in overhearing them. The leader's heavy voice broke out in French, which disappointed Dick, for he knew very little French. Then Govereau changed to broken English, evidently for the benefit of a member of his band who did not understand French.

"We go on queeck, ketch them," Govereau was saying. "Sure t'ing them fella are zee ver' ones come from Fort du Lac. That devil Many-Scar an' them others—they let zem get through Little Moose, I bat. We go."

The four began breaking camp hurriedly. The scar faced Indian was reclining with one arm in a crude sling. He arose with the others and rolled up his blanket with one hand, as if nothing were wrong with him.

Dick was disappointed in not hearing anything regarding the situation at Fort Good Faith. But, as he could think of nothing to do about it, he edged about and crept back to Sandy and Toma.

"They're breaking camp," he told his companions. "They think we've gone on ahead. Suppose we fool them and camp right here after they leave."

Toma's face lighted up and Sandy was jubilant at the chance to rest his weary legs. A few minutes later, hidden in the bushes, they watched Govereau and his four men string out on the trail and quietly disappear into the forest. They got a close look at the leader of the band as he passed, and Dick and Sandy could not suppress a shiver of dread. The man had an exceedingly evil and cruel face.

Dick hid his disappointment in learning nothing of Henderson's movements and of Sandy's uncle in his elation at this opportunity to camp where Toma had planned. They would be fresh for a long hike next day, which would take them to the hidden cache of provisions.

Toma said little while they prepared their scanty meal, which was for the most part, bear steak. Every now and then the guide looked up at the sky and sniffed the air.

"Storm pretty soon. Winter come. Heap big blizzard few days," he finally confided to Dick and Sandy.

"That means we've got to make a raise of a dog team," Dick said, tearing off a huge hunk of cold bear meat.

"Good thing Mr. MacLean gave you that money," Sandy observed.

Dick agreed with his chum, stifling a yawn. Already his eyes were closing. Toma consented to take the first watch, and in a few moments Dick and Sandy were sound asleep in their blankets.

The night passed without incident, Dick and Sandy taking their turns on watch. At dawn they were on the trail again, leaving camp hungry. They hesitated to shoot at any small game for fear Govereau's men might be near. Toward noon, however, Dick's gnawing stomach got the better of his caution, and he knocked over a partridge. They made a short stop, broiled the partridge and divided it.

Appetites a little appeased, they were off again, hoping to make the cache of provisions on Limping Dog Creek by nightfall. Late in the afternoon they trudged down into the canyon designated by MacLean on the map.

It was twilight when the canyon walls widened and grew less precipitous. Toma said they were nearing Limping Dog Creek. Sandy was hobbling from a slight sprain received when he tripped over a root, and Dick was far from fresh.

"Flapjacks will sure taste good," Dick murmured.

"Amen," Sandy groaned in answer.

When at last they came in sight of the creek, Toma stopped to compare

landmarks with the map.

“There um three trees,” Toma pointed to some huge balmagiliad trees that stood out from the smaller jack pines like giants.

They hurried forward. Martin MacLean had said the cache was in the third of the three big trees nearest the creek. They speedily reached the tree and Toma climbed it. He was gone for some time, Dick and Sandy straining their eyes upward through the dark foliage.

Toma came down much slower than he had gone up. As he dropped to the turf, Dick and Sandy awaited anxiously his report.

“Him gone,” said Toma briefly. “Cache not there!”

Dick’s eyes narrowed, and Sandy’s countenance grew glum indeed.

“Maybe this isn’t the tree,” Dick ventured.

“Him right tree,” Toma was certain.

“It must have been Govereau’s men,” Dick spoke, after a short silence.

“Mebbe so,” Toma grunted.

CHAPTER VIII

DICK DROPS A MOOSE

The loss of the cache, more than anything else, had cast its shadow of gloom over the spirits of Dick and Sandy. Toma, however, who had made the discovery, seemed not so deeply concerned.

“We catch um meat,” Toma attempted to cheer the boys. “Mebbe bye an’ bye we eat.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” declared Sandy, thinking of the lonely strip of bacon and the one handful of flour, which were all that remained of the provisions the grizzly had destroyed. “To tell you the truth, I haven’t seen very much game lately. Have you, Dick?”

Dick shook his head, forced to acknowledge the truth of Sandy’s statement.

“When a fellow’s hungry,” Sandy complained, rubbing his lame ankle, “he’s hungry, that’s all, and a mouthful of bacon is about as much good to him as a drop of fresh water in the ocean.”

“Me no eat one time for whole week.” Toma reminded them.

Both boys looked up in astonishment.

“A whole week!” gasped Dick, “great guns! I hope we don’t come to that.”

“Mebbe set snare for rabbit tonight,” encouraged Toma. “Toma good ketch um rabbit.”

“I could eat two or three rabbits,” Sandy grumbled, taking up the slack in his belt.

As they made their way onward, Dick seriously considered their plight. Thoughts of the ruthless, cold-hearted rifling of the cache by Bear Henderson's men filled him with an anger that was difficult to suppress. But anger or resentment could not help them now. The thing to do was to abandon any attempt at further progress that day and put in a few good hours hunting while it was yet daylight.

"Boys," he decided, "we'd better pitch camp here for a while, until we can bag some game. My suggestion is that each of us start off in a different direction. We must keep track of the time and be sure to get back to camp by dark. The chances are that at least one of us will be successful."

"It's hunt or starve," agreed Sandy. "Which way do you want me to go?"

"Toma had better try his luck here in the creek valley," said Dick, "because game is apt to be more plentiful here and he's the best hunter. You and I can make our way into the hills, keeping about half a mile apart. Shoot anything at all that has meat on its bones," and he winked slyly at Toma.

"I could eat a skunk and like it," groaned Sandy. "By the way, before we start don't you think we'd better divide that bacon?"

With a queer, inexplicable feeling, Dick produced the last morsels of food from their packs and divided them carefully. If he gave Sandy a little more than an equal portion, no one, with the possible exception of a tiny sparrow perched on a branch overhead, could have noticed it. They ate in silence, and in silence they arose immediately after their inadequate meal and started off for the hunt.

"I don't think I'll ever see anything," Dick muttered to himself, "or if I do the chances are that the pesky thing will get away. Hang it all, why did Govereau, or whoever it was, have to find that cache?"

Dick's mood brightened a few minutes later as he came up through the autumn sunshine to the foot of a slope, thickly covered with stunted pine. It looked like a very good hiding place for ptarmigan, or possibly even deer. He unslung his rifle and went forward as cautiously as he could, one finger hovering close to the trigger of his gun.

But, after an hour's slow progress, Dick had begun to lose hope. He had seen nothing. Apparently the forest was as devoid of all animal life as a city street.

Except for a hawk, circling lazily about high overhead, there was neither bird nor beast anywhere in that lonely stretch of wilderness.

Mopping his perspiring brow, the young hunter finally sat down for a moment's rest, before continuing his course to the top of a high ridge.

Then an abrupt, totally unexpected crackling in the heavy Saskatoon thicket ahead caused him to start—almost in wonderment. His breath came quickly. He half rose, then fearing, that even his slightest sound might spoil everything, he sank down again, his left hand nursing the cold, blue barrel of his Ross rifle.

More crackling, a sudden parting of the bushes, and Dick's heart almost stood still. A large bull moose, majestic in his stature, crashed into view.

By this time Dick was fairly trembling with excitement. Twice he endeavored to raise his rifle to his shoulder. His arm shook so much that he knew it would be worse than useless to attempt a shot while his nerves were in such a condition.

"I can't do it," thought Dick, then across his mind flashed the mental picture of a cache, broken into and robbed, and the sneering face of Pierre Govereau mocking him. Then his rifle went to his shoulder, and two loud reports rang out in quick succession. The moose stumbled, but did not fall. Dick heard quite plainly its sudden snort of alarm and the crash of underbrush as it struck off at terrific speed directly down the slope in the direction from which he had but recently come.

The moose was wounded, he knew, but he also was well aware from previous experience that a wounded moose will often travel for miles before it falls. Galvanized into action, Dick was off, following the blood-stained trail, hoping against hope that either Sandy or Toma might intercept the animal before it had become lost in the intricate tangle of brush and woodland that lay to the south.

Sliding down a particularly treacherous part of the trail, Dick's foot caught in an exposed root and he fell heavily. As he bounded to his feet again, he thought he heard a distant shout—but he was not entirely sure.

For twenty minutes more, he pushed forward rapidly, sometimes almost losing the trail of the moose. Then finally he did lose it altogether. Search as he would, the telltale tracks had disappeared as magically and as unaccountably as if the animal had leaped into the air and flown away to a place of safety.

“It’s the most unusual thing I ever heard of,” Dick commented aloud, racing about in a vain effort to discover some sign that would point out again the trail that had so suddenly vanished.

In despair his eyes fell upon a level formation of rock not more than thirty feet away. Could it be that the moose had passed that way—scrambled over the level rock floor in its mad race with death? If so, it would explain the mysterious disappearance of the tracks; but there must be blood-stains somewhere.

“Whoop-ee!” he shouted as his quick eyes made out the signs he sought—small splotches of red scattered across the smooth surface of sandstone. And shortly thereafter, he hurried on again, like a young bloodhound finding fresh scent along the path ahead.

“I’ll be more careful next time,” he assured himself. “It would be a pity if this moose got away. I’d have been ashamed to show my face in camp.”

Two miles further on he almost forgot about the moose. Through a screen of willows, skirting a small creek, he caught the faint movement of some living thing—something that stood concealed and which watched him furtively as he made his way along through the dead and matted grass of the little valley.

Dick felt instinctively that some danger threatened. What this was he had no way of finding out, yet the feeling persisted that he was being watched, spied upon by an enemy more terrible than any wild denizen of the forest. As he advanced swiftly on his way, he was conscious of a strange tingling of nerves, as if he half expected at any moment to be pounced upon and overcome by an unknown assailant.

“I’ve never felt so queer about anything in my life,” he confided to the silent trees, as he hurried quickly along. “I’m sure that I saw something move there in the bushes, and I’m positive that it wasn’t an animal that walks on four legs.”

Just then, an object lying on the ground, immediately ahead, drove every other thought from his mind. With a glad cry he sprang forward, and, a short time later, stood looking down at the prostrate body of the bull moose, majestic even in death.

A lump arose in Dick’s throat as he stood there silently regarding it. “Poor old fellow,” he breathed, “it was a shame to do this. But perhaps you saved us from

starving. Maybe——”

A shout close at hand roused Dick from his musings. Wheeling about his eyes lighted with pride and happiness, as he espied the approaching figures of Sandy and Toma.

“Good for you!” Sandy exclaimed, as he strode up to where his chum was standing. “I just knew you’d do it. Say, I believe it’s the biggest moose I ever saw.”

“You ketch um big fella,” complimented Toma. “It is good.”

Together the three young adventurers stood admiring the moose. So interested had they become that not one of them caught the sound of stealthy footsteps until a heavy, threatening form, followed by three others, pushed its way within the circle of admiring eyes.

With a cry of warning, Dick sprang back, clutching his rifle tightly. Then he looked at the man.

It was Pierre Govereau!

CHAPTER IX

PIERRE GOVEREAU

Govereau advanced menacingly. Backed by the rifles of the three villainous looking men with him, the three boys could do nothing.

“What you do wiz my moose?” Govereau snarled.

“Do you mean to say you shot that moose!” Dick exclaimed angrily.

“It iss so,” Govereau avowed brazenly.

“You lie!” Dick exclaimed hotly. “I shot that moose. I can prove it. What do you mean by holding us up this way. We have done you no harm.”

“It iss Henderson bizness—zat.” Govereau turned and signaled his men to bind the three young men.

“You’ll sweat for this,” Dick gritted.

“Not so much as you,” Govereau taunted. “Young fellas like you should stay home wiz zee mamma.”

Dick gritted his teeth again, but resolved to keep his mouth shut. He must save his breath to get Sandy and Toma out of the mess. It must have been Govereau’s men watching him when he had felt so queer on the trail of the wounded moose.

Dick did not resist the moose-hide thongs as they were bound mercilessly tight about his wrists. Sandy and Toma followed his example. There were other ways of getting the better of Govereau, and it might be easier if they submitted, or seemed to submit, mildly to capture.

They could see one of the men slicing steaks from the moose haunch before, at a

guttural command, they were started off into the woods, northward along Limping Dog Creek.

An hour's tramping brought them to Govereau's camp, four miles up the creek. The scar faced Indian was there to greet them. He leered at the captives hatefully. Dick felt that the Indian knew one of them had shot him at the camp forty miles away, and that the savage would do anything in his power to wreak vengeance.

Govereau had made his headquarters in an old cabin, deserted by some trapper. There were two rooms, and the three young captives were shoved into the smaller of them, their hands still bound behind them. Probably their captors realized they would soon untie themselves, but since with the huge oaken bolt shot on the door, there was no way of getting out of the room, they did not bother themselves about it.

"Well?" Dick turned to Toma and Sandy, when at last they were left alone.

Toma's face was as stolid as ever. Sandy had nothing to say. He sat down on the bunk at one side of the room.

"I guess we're in a pickle, all right," Sandy said at last.

Dick paced back and forth twice, then stopped before the door, which he carefully inspected. The door seemed heavy enough to repel the attack of a battering ram, say nothing of three boys. Dick turned back to Sandy and Toma. "Govereau will question us now, I suppose," Dick spoke rapidly. "And he'll probably take us out separately to see if our stories are the same. He'll want to know just how much we know of Henderson's movements and what we are trying to do against him."

"What shall we say?" Sandy scratched his head. Toma said nothing. The young Indian seemed to feel that the situation was beyond his ability to handle.

"We'll tell Govereau that we have been visiting the factor at Fort du Lac—spending our vacation there, and that we were on our way south—to return home. How's that?"

"That sounds all right," Sandy responded, a little dubiously.

“No go so far east if go south from Fort du Lac,” Toma’s dark eyes blinked rapidly.

Dick thought a minute. “Then suppose we have some one at Fort Dunwoody that we want to see before we leave for home—a cousin.”

“That’s the trick,” Sandy agreed enthusiastically.

“Then we all understand what we’re to tell,” Dick resumed. “Toma, how about it?”

“I tell um,” was the taciturn reply.

“If Govereau believes our story he may let us go,” Dick concluded. “If he learns the truth he may do something worse than just hold us behind a locked door.”

All three were silent for a time while Dick paced back and forth. Upon his shoulders he realized was now the bulk of responsibility. Toma might excel him on the trail, where native woodcraft and instinctive stealth was the chief requirement, but in the present situation Toma was at best only a willing servant. And it was Sandy’s nature to depend upon his chum, himself only offering what suggestions occurred to his lower mind.

“I’ve a plan to escape, if this first scheme fails!” Dick suddenly stopped his pacing and looked about him.

Sandy jumped as if shot, so sudden was Dick’s exclamation. “Let’s hear it,” the young Scotch lad cried eagerly. Toma brightened.

Dick turned to Toma. “Sandy or I would be glad to do this,” he addressed the young guide, “but it’s just about impossible for us. Can I depend on your support, Toma?”

“I do my best; what you say I do?” Toma promised sincerely.

“My plan is this: when Govereau questions you, Toma, you are to express a desire to join him—to turn against us. See? With you on the outside there’s much more chance of escaping than with all three of us in here. Can you do it, Toma?”

“I try.”

“Then I’ll leave everything to you once you get outside. Of course, Govereau may get wise to what you are up to. But, again, he’s no doubt pretty anxious to get more men in his band.”

As Dick concluded his instructions, there came a noise at the door, and the bolt was shot back. A sharp, rat-like face, that of a half-breed, was pushed in. “You come,” said the man, indicating Dick.

Dick and Sandy both realized that a crisis was at hand. If they revealed their real mission to Govereau they would without doubt never reach the mounted police. Perhaps they would not reach them anyway, yet there was a good chance that Govereau might let them go if they convinced him of their ignorance of any of Henderson’s business.

“Good luck, Dick,” Sandy’s voice was a little husky.

“Never mind, old boy, I’ll make out,” Dick cheered him.

Toma was visibly affected, and Dick reassured him also. Short as the time had been that Toma had been with them, there seemed already a strong bond of friendship between the young Indian and the two young adventurers.

Dick squared his shoulders and followed the rat-faced half-breed into the other room. Dick now faced Pierre Govereau. The Frenchman was seated at a board table across from the door which just had been closed after Dick. At one side of the room a huge fireplace roared and crackled. The rat-faced half-breed went over and squatted before the fire, picking up a red-hot iron in a pair of tongs. Dick Kent shivered as he saw what the man was doing. But he met Govereau’s eyes unflinchingly.

“What iss zee bizness you bean on when you make for zee Fort Dunwoody?” Govereau came straight to the point.

“My friend and I are visiting in Canada,” replied Dick coolly. “The factor at Fort du Lac was an old friend of my chum’s father. I have a cousin in Fort Dunwoody that we wanted to call on before we went home.”

“I zink you lie,” growled Govereau. He sat silent for a moment, glaring at Dick as if he would hypnotize the young man with his snake-like eyes. But Dick’s gaze did not falter.

“Why you fear my men?” Govereau’s voice cracked like a whip.

Dick hesitated a moment. Sandy’s uncle’s welfare might depend upon his misleading the villainous Govereau. “We had been told there were bandits along the trail to the fort,” Dick replied in a clear voice.

“Haw!” scoffed Henderson’s lieutenant, and wheeled to the half-breed at the fireplace. “Napio, zee iron now. We make zee young upstart talk right.”

Dick recoiled slightly as the Indian arose and came forward with a short piece of iron, red hot and smoking in the tongs. Govereau came out from behind the table. Dick’s hands were still tied behind him. The Frenchman seized Dick in an iron grasp and tore away his shirt front.

“You tell zee truth now,” Govereau hissed. “Queeck, Napio!”

The iron was pushed close to Dick’s naked breast. He could feel the heat of it already searing his skin.

Then the door opened and the half-breed hesitated. Govereau turned, snarling at the interruption. An Indian stood in the door.

“Men all go way,” said the intruder. “They drink firewater. M’sieu Govereau, you come bring them back.”

“Throw him back in. We finish wiz him tonight,” Govereau ordered the half-breed. “Bring zee young white one. I come soon,” he waved away the Indian at the door.

Dick reeled into Sandy’s arms a minute later as he was roughly pushed into the back room. “He’ll call you next, Sandy,” Dick gasped a little weakly. “If he asks you why you feared his men, say you thought they were bandits.”

Sandy pressed Dick’s arm to signify he understood and followed the rat-faced half-breed out into the front room. Dick and Toma waited only a few minutes before the door opened and Sandy was pushed in once more. Govereau had not attempted to torture Sandy. He seemed in a hurry to go after his men. They could hear him cursing through even those thick, log walls, for Sandy’s story had tallied with Dick’s.

It was Toma's turn next, and Dick talked earnestly with the guide as to the method he was to use in convincing Govereau of his desires to be a traitor to his white friends. Dick was now certain that Govereau would not believe their story. Toma was their last chance.

They waited for some time before Toma was called. Then the half-breed came again, and beckoned to the guide. In high suspense Dick and Sandy watched him disappear through the door.

In a half hour they took courage. Toma had not come back. They waited an hour and still Toma was not thrown back among them. Their spirits rose. Toma had then convinced Govereau of his sincerity.

It was growing dark now, and at any moment Dick expected Govereau to call for him again. The Frenchman seemed to have a personal enmity for Dick, perhaps because of the young man's refusal to be cowed by browbeating.

"What if Toma really does turn traitor?" Sandy broke a long silence. "I heard Uncle Walter say these Indians couldn't be trusted too far."

"I don't know why, but I trust Toma absolutely," Dick replied confidently, "that Indian is smarter than we think. If Govereau really is convinced that Toma is going in with him we'll soon be out of here. When I think what your uncle may be going through up there, I can't sit still."

"Well, he couldn't get much worse than we have already," Sandy returned grimly. "Gee, I never thought we'd come to this when we left Fort du Lac."

"I could stand it better if I wasn't so hungry and thirsty," Dick declared.

"You said it," Sandy heartily sanctioned. "I guess they're going to starve us too."

"Do you notice it's growing colder?" Dick asked presently.

"I thought maybe it was because we didn't have any fire."

"I remember Toma said we were due for a blizzard," Dick recalled.

"Funny why Govereau doesn't call one of us out again," Sandy mused.

“He’s after his men I expect. An Indian reported they were drinking while I was being questioned. The fellow saved me from being tortured.”

Engaging in a wandering conversation, Dick and Sandy whiled away two more long hours, in which they managed to untie each other’s wrists, and kept warm by walking back and forth and swinging their arms. They were almost certain now that Govereau had gone. If so, then if Toma hadn’t been forced to go with the Frenchman, he would be more able to help them.

It was along toward morning when Dick started up out of a doze to hear the sound of a blow and the muffled fall of a body in the front room. There was a sharp stifled cry. Then Dick shook Sandy to wakefulness.

“What is it?” whispered Sandy, leaping to his feet.

“S-s-sh,” Dick cautioned.

Through the darkness in the room they could hear the heavy wooden bolt on the door of their prison sliding backward.

CHAPTER X

TOMA AND A COLD SNAP

With bated breath Dick and Sandy awaited some sign of the identity of the person who was entering so stealthily. Was it the scar faced Indian coming for vengeance, or was it—the warmth from the other room was rushing in. It was Toma's voice that came to them.

“Quick! Come! Govereau gone long way.”

Hearts leaping with joy, Dick and Sandy joined the young guide in the darkness. He led them out into the larger room, picking his way with a certainty that revealed he could see in the dark.

“Watch for one fella on floor. I hit him on head with rifle,” Toma whispered. “Govereau's men all go to post ten miles south where they drink fire-water. Govereau heap mad. Him after them. They come back anytime. He take me long with um. I run away. He know what I do now. You bet he know.”

Toma swung open the cabin door, and Dick and Sandy followed him out. It was so cold their teeth commenced chattering almost immediately. They buttoned up their jackets and hurried off into the night.

“We'll make Fort Dunwoody yet,” Dick shivered, almost gladly.

“I'll say we will,” Sandy came back.

Then they fell silent as they took Toma's tireless, jogging pace, beneath a cloudy sky. Again the Indian's trail wisdom came in like a God-send. Dick and Sandy did not know where they were going, but they had a feeling that Toma certainly did.

How long they ran they did not know when they began to feel damp spots on

their cheeks and hands.

“It’s snowing,” Dick panted over his shoulder.

“I know it,” wheezed Sandy.

“Ought to cover our trail,” Dick came back.

“I guess so, but I can’t talk. I’ve got to save my wind. You must be made of iron.”

Dick said no more, and presently Toma slowed down. It was snowing heavily now, and with the going getting harder underfoot, Dick and Sandy were grateful for the slackening of the pace. Yet they sensed something unusual ahead had been the cause of it, and were not perfectly at ease by any means.

Finally Toma came to a dead stop at the edge of a clearing. Peering ahead through the gloom and the falling snow, they could see the lights of a cabin twinkling.

“You stay here; I go on,” Toma instructed in a low voice. “My brother live here. Him give us warm clothes. I see if all right first. Wait for me.”

Dick and Sandy hovered in the undergrowth and watched Toma’s figure melt away into the gloom in the direction of the cabin.

“I hope he gets some clothes for us,” Sandy chattered.

“And I’m glad Govereau didn’t take my wallet,” said Dick. “We can pay for what we get now.”

“The Frenchman didn’t think we had any money, I suppose,” Sandy opined.

They fell silent then, for against the lighted window they could see a head silhouetted through the falling snow. Toma was peering in at the window. For an instant the guide’s head was outlined there, then it disappeared. Presently a shaft of light shot out over the snow as the door opened and closed. A moment later the door opened again, though the boys could not see who entered.

Dick and Sandy expected Toma to come back for them almost immediately, or at

least signal that all was right. But the minutes passed and the guide did not return nor make a sign. The boys began to worry.

“What do you suppose is keeping him?” Dick wondered.

“I don’t know,” Sandy replied, “but I do know I can’t stand still in this cold much longer.”

“We’ll circle around the cabin and come in closer,” Dick directed. “If something has happened we want to be sure we don’t get into trouble, too. Toma’s brother may have been killed by Henderson’s men. The country seems to be alive with the villains.”

Silently they started around the cabin. Half way around, Dick stumbled and fell over something in the snow. Sandy stopped dead and a gasp of horror came from his lips.

“Dick!” he exclaimed. “You’ve fallen over a dead man!”

Dick got up, more shaken by the identity of the thing he had fallen over than by the fall.

Covered by the light film of snow that had fallen, and which was steadily growing heavier, was the body of a man. In the gloom they could not distinguish his features, but they were put on their guard. Armed only with their hunting knives, they felt that the utmost caution must be exercised in further advances.

“Toma’s in trouble. I know it now!” Dick ejaculated.

“Well, it’s up to us to get him out,” Sandy retorted.

Drawing their knives they started stealthily for the cabin. They could hear no sound of life, and the knowledge of what was lying behind them under the snow made the atmosphere doubly fearsome.

At last they reached the single window through which they had seen Toma look into the cabin. Dick cautiously raised his eyes over the sill. He looked only an instant, then he quickly ducked downward.

“It’s the scar faced Indian!” he made the astounding disclosure to Sandy. “And

there's another with him. They have Toma bound. He's lying on the bunk. I could see his eyes. They're playing cards and talking. How in the world did they ever catch Toma?"

"That Indian again," muttered Sandy. "How the deuce did he get here anyway. We saw him last at Govereau's camp. It's ghostly the way that fellow shows up everywhere."

"Govereau must have sent him here on some dirty business," Dick decided. "Perhaps Toma's brother had valuable furs stored here."

With mutual consent they crawled away from the cabin and hid in the trees at the edge of the clearing, where they tried to decide on a plan by which to rescue Toma. That they had a good chance of success they were sure. The scar-faced Indian had the use of but one arm since the wound Toma had given him, so they had but one real man to deal with. Still they were as well as unarmed. What could they do?

"I'll tell you what," Dick was speaking fast. "You go out into the woods and begin calling for help, anything to get one of them out of the cabin. Then I'll slip in and see if I can't take care of the other one and get hold of a rifle. The Indian will probably stay inside, and wounded as he is I'm sure I can handle him."

"Gee! That's a ghostly job you have for me to do," Sandy whispered ruefully.

"We've got to do it, Sandy," urged Dick. "It won't hurt to try. You keep hidden, and when one of them comes out to see what's wrong, keep quiet. I'll do the rest."

Dick and Sandy gripped hands, then parted. Dick crept around to a point opposite the door of the cabin, waiting tensely until Sandy began his part of the ruse. He did not have to wait long. Presently, from afar in the forest, a shriek as of some one in mortal agony, arose. Sandy was doing well.

"H-e-l-p, oh, h-e-l-p," his voice rang out, high and shrill.

Sandy repeated his call several times, then the cabin door opened, and as Dick had hoped, the scar faced Indian's companion came out. He had a rifle in his hands.

Again Sandy's cry rang out from a little further off. The man hesitated no longer, but stepped from the cabin door and walked across the clearing into the trees to investigate. He disappeared in the direction of Sandy's unearthly wailing.

Dick ran forward across the clearing, his moccasins making no noise in the snow. He remembered that the scar faced Indian had been sitting at the table facing the window. Therefore, if he had not changed his position, his back would be to the door.

Pausing before the door, Dick found it open a crack. Cautiously he pushed it open a little more and peered in. The Indian still was sitting with his back to the door. He was idly shuffling the cards. Against the bunk where Toma lay bound, Dick could see a rifle leaning. One leap across the floor and he would have this rifle. It was a desperate chance, but he must make the best of it.

Swift as a panther, Dick threw open the door and leaped in. The astonished Indian was scarcely half out of his chair when Dick had the rifle in his hands.

“Hands up!” he cried.

Whether the Indian understood English or not, Dick did not know, but his words had the required effect. Slowly the scar-faced Indian turned his ugly face upon his captor, his mouth twisted into an evil, smirking grin. Dick stepped forward and drew the revolver from his captive’s belt and tossed it into a corner. Then he backed toward the bunk with the rifle still trained on the Indian. Quickly, he drew his knife and slashed Toma’s bonds.

“Ha! Now we got um!” Toma tore the gag from his mouth, leaned up and picked up the revolver Dick had thrown away. In a trice, then, Toma had lashed the scar-faced Indian to his chair.

Dick already was expecting the return of the Indian’s companion. With the Indian secured, both Toma and he turned their attention to the door. With bated breath they waited and listened for approaching footfalls.

CHAPTER XI

SLUSH ICE

Toma and Dick no longer could hear Sandy hallooing, and Dick judged that his chum was safely in hiding. Yet, as they waited, guns trained on the door, a rifle shot shattered the silence. It came from the direction taken by the man who had gone to investigate the calls for help. Dick's face paled. What did it mean? Had poor Sandy fallen? Had the man found him?

"I'm going out," Dick said tensely to Toma a moment later.

Whatever Toma's reply was Dick did not hear it, for with an impatient leap he flung open the door and disappeared. Toma remained behind, not sure that his young white friend's move had been wise, yet believing he could do more to help if he stayed in the cabin.

When Dick left the cabin he made straight for the point from which he thought the rifle shot had come. It was growing lighter. In the east a faint gray fan of light showed over the forest—dawn. He ran on for a little way, then he came upon tracks. Pursuing these at a run, he came in sight of the man who had left the cabin an hour before. The meeting was a surprise for both.

Dick dodged behind a tree as the other fired from his hip. The ball whizzed harmlessly over Dick's head, and he shot hastily. His shot also went wild, but the other took to his heels. Dick did not pursue him, but began calling for Sandy. Presently he was rewarded by a distant shout and in a few minutes the chums were reunited.

"Did he shoot at you?" Dick queried anxiously.

"No, I don't know what he shot at. Maybe he thought it was me," Sandy replied. "I'm half frozen. Gosh, it seemed hours out here."

“Let’s hurry back to the cabin,” Dick hastened. “Toma is there, and we’ve captured the scar faced Indian.”

Sandy was too cold to care how many Indians had been captured, and he hobbled along after Dick like a stiff, old man.

“I hope Toma is all right,” Dick said anxiously as they neared the cabin.

On the threshold of the cabin they stood a moment later in stark amazement. Toma lay bleeding and silent on the floor, and the scar faced Indian was gone!

“Well, if that doesn’t beat anything!” Dick ejaculated, rushing to Toma.

The young guide came to at the application of a little water. His head had been struck with something; an overturned chair revealed what the escaped Indian had probably used.

“He slip out ropes some way,” Toma explained when he could sit up once more. “I watch door when him jump on me. That all I know.”

“I’m glad you’re alive—that’s all I can say,” Dick said thankfully.

“Hello, what’s this?” Sandy hurried from the fireplace where he had been warming himself to the crude wooden table. A slip of paper with writing on it lay among the scattered playing cards. Dick also hastened forward and read the roughly scrawled words:

Pierre Govereau:

Send Many-Scar Jackson and Swede to Big John Toma’s cabin. We want the black fox fur he has hidden there.

BEAR HENDERSON.

Dick and Sandy read it aloud to Toma.

“This my big brother’s cabin,” Toma explained simply. “Last night I see no one when look in window. I go in. That Many-Scar and other fella come in, ketch me. I not know where Big John is. They not find um black fox. Big John sell um

black fox t'ree weeks go by."

Dick and Sandy dropped their eyes. They now felt sure who the man was that Dick had fallen over—the dead man. How could they tell Toma? At last Dick took the guide's arm. Silently they went out, Sandy following.

Toma showed no emotion as they showed him the body partly covered with snow. He might have been a wooden image as he said quietly:

"Him Big John Toma; I know before I see. I feel he dead. That Many-Scar——" something choked off his voice. His dark eyes suddenly flashed and glowed like coals of fire.

"I wouldn't give ten cents for Many-Scar's life, slick as that Indian is," Sandy whispered.

Dick nodded.

Though all felt they had no time to lose, since Govereau's men might be expected to follow them, they could not leave Toma's brother without burial.

All three set to work under the spruce trees, hacking through the frozen soil with axes. In a half hour they had dug a shallow grave. Wrapped in blankets, they gently lowered the body of Big John Toma to its last resting place.

Dick fashioned a rude cross from two saplings, which he showed to Toma. The young Indian nodded. "Good; him Christian—me too," said the guide.

When they had placed the last sod on the mound, Dick and Sandy left their friend alone by the grave and went to the cabin to prepare for continuing their journey. They found much pemmican and dried fish, upon which Big John Toma had existed, but nowhere any flour or coffee. By the time they had arranged shoulder packs and had donned whatever warm clothes they had found, Toma had joined them. He seemed his old self once more, though Dick and Sandy knew that behind his mask of indifference was deep sorrow and a mighty resolve for the redskin's revenge upon the murderer of his brother. The guide refused to take the money Dick offered him for the food and clothing they had taken from Big John's cabin.

"We three days from Fort Dunwoody now," Toma told them when they were

ready for the trail. "Not sure we make um three days. Big blizzard come pretty soon now. Mebbe tomorrow. We get um dog sled then. Need um bad."

All that day Toma led them due southeast, across higher ground, where vegetation was sparse. They crossed one shallow valley where there were no trees at all, and upon a ridge at the other side made camp. It was an advantageous spot from which to watch the back trail, and before they started on they were disturbed by the sight of three tiny figures. The men were undoubtedly on their trail. Straight across the valley they toiled and they were coming fast.

"I'll bet it's Govereau!" Dick exclaimed in alarm.

"Yes, and it looks as if we were only about three miles ahead of him," Sandy declared. "Let's get a move on. I don't want to get mixed up with him again."

"Neither do I," Dick heartily agreed.

Toma was of the same mind, and they all set off at a fast pace when once more they took to the trail. They felt confident they could lengthen the lead on their pursuers, but two hours after noon, when they paused to rest on a high ridge, they looked back and were astounded to see the three men not more than a mile behind them.

"Them best trail men Govereau got," Toma protected his own prowess on finding that he had been outpaced.

They started on again, doubling their former speed. A half hour more brought them to the banks of a river.

"Him Saskatoon River," Toma told them. "Him full slush ice. We make um raft in hurry; get over, then we safe from Govereau."

Dick and Sandy looked off across the sullen expanse of the Saskatoon. As Toma had said, it was filled with a slow-moving mass of slush, formed by night freezes and day thaws.

They fell to work like Trojans on a raft, lashing dead logs together with tiny saplings and tough vines. It was a cumbersome raft that they at last shoved out into the icy stream. With poles to propel the unwieldy craft, they began the perilous trip across the river. The delay caused by the building of the raft had

given their pursuers time to overtake them, and at any moment they expected to hear a shout or rifle shots from the shore they were slowly leaving behind.

One side of the raft was heavier than the other, and out in the current they came near being spilled off, before they followed Toma's example and balanced the logs by shifting their weight from side to side.

Pushing on desperately, they reached midstream, when their pursuers reached the river. But the few shots that were fired fell short. The boys had poled the raft out of range. Waving their hands to the chagrined men they reached the other shore and, abandoning their raft, hastened on.

Once more snow was spitting out of the gray heavens, and it was growing steadily colder. They hiked for three miles, then Toma advised a halt. The guide began immediately throwing up a shelter of boughs. Dick and Sandy helped with a will, and they finished none too soon. With the fall of night the blizzard Toma had prophesied swept down upon them like a thousand, shrieking demons.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLIZZARD

When the boys awoke on the following morning, numb and stiff from cold in spite of the protection of their crudely constructed shelter, a full six inches of snow covered the surface of their blankets.

“Snow make um much warmer to sleep,” Toma explained to them, as he crawled out of his bed, very much as a husky gets out of a snowdrift.

Dick turned his eyes towards the open door of the shelter and shivered. Contrary to his expectations the storm had not abated during the night. A shining, white wall of snow almost shut out any view of their camp surroundings, while the wind continued to howl furiously.

To all appearances, the boys were shut in by the high, white walls of a snow prison. Snow sifted in the door of their shelter and through the numerous cracks in the walls.

“I’m not crazy about getting up,” Sandy observed, with a seriousness that brought a laugh from Dick and Toma. “Anyhow, nobody can get anywhere in a storm like this.”

“The wind, she blow from northwest,” Toma cut in. “No get lost when wind blow hard like that. Keep wind on left side. No like—but better than stay here.”

The young guide counted slowly on his fingers, and went on:

“Me know place where young Indian live. Him called Raoul Testawich. Got um cabin nice and warm, an’ mebbe we ketch um good dog team there.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Dick, “we’ll make a try for it. Sure you won’t get lost?”

Toma shook his head.

“No,” said the guide, with assurance. “I find way all right. Best thing we go.”

Somewhere in the back of Dick’s mind there was some doubt as to the advisability of facing such a storm, yet he had implicit faith in the prowess of Toma, and he did not question the young Indian’s ability.

“It’ll be great to get near a warm fireplace again,” said Dick. “What do you say, Sandy?”

Sandy’s answer was to spring up out of his blankets and commence immediate preparations for breakfast. A fire was started with considerable difficulty, and less than an hour later the three boys were on the trail again, walking Indian file with Toma in the lead.

But the storm was worse even than they had anticipated. It was fury unleashed, it sucked the very breath out of their mouths and blew through their mackinaws as if they had been cheesecloth. Dick imagined that the weight of the snow-laden air alone was sufficient to prevent any long continued trek across that blinding field of white.

Taking turns breaking trail, they proceeded at a slow pace, puffing with exertion. And always they kept the wind on their left, Toma calling out encouragement from time to time to keep up the spirits of his less-hardened and less-experienced comrades.

Moisture froze on their coat collars, formed by the warmth of their breath against the freezing wind. Breathing became more and more difficult, and Sandy, the weaker physically of the three, began to complain of aching muscles and finally stopped short, panting heavily.

“I’m tired out,” he gasped, “——all in. Dick, I don’t believe I can go a step further. Can’t we sit down and rest?”

Dick was on the point of acceding to Sandy’s request, when Toma, several paces in the lead, came back, crying out his disapproval.

“No! No!” shouted the guide above the howling of the wind. “No do that; get um legs all stiffened up. Bye an’ bye can’t move. Mebbe we better go slower, but no

sit down.”

“I’ll try to go on,” declared Sandy bravely, “but you fellows better stop now and then to give me a chance to breathe. I tell you I’m all in.”

And so they went on, bracing themselves against the fury of the wind, shuffling forward through mounting drifts, in places piled waist high, as if to block their progress. On several occasions, so violent was the storm that it was impossible to see anything. Once, fighting their way through a smothering fog of white, Toma shouted out a warning.

They were traveling down a sharp incline at the time, attempting to reach a river bottom, where towering cliffs would protect them somewhat from the force of the wind. Toma shouted to them. His keen ears had detected a sound other than that made by the blizzard. It was a different sound, and he had heard it before—a queer rumbling, followed by a mighty roar.

With a quickness born of desperation, the guide seized Dick and Sandy by the arms and pulled them out of the path of an almost certain death.

As the boys stood trembling and appalled at the deafening tumult about them, what seemed at first a vast mountain of snow, went shooting past, carrying everything before it. The snowslide left in its wake nothing but a wide belt of barren ground—even huge rocks had been torn away from the earth and hurtled on into the storm.

“That was close enough to suit me,” declared Sandy in a tragic whisper, as the boys continued their descent. “I’ve never seen a snowslide before, and I don’t wish to see another one. Do you feel shaky, Dick?”

“Yes, I do,” admitted Dick, his cheeks slightly pale. “I thought the entire upper part of the valley wall was falling in on us.” He turned to Toma. “Do you suppose,” he inquired, “that it’ll be safe to go down?”

The Indian lad shook his head thoughtfully.

“Me no can tell. Mebbe more snowslide after while. We take chance—that’s all.”

Dick and Sandy hesitated.

“Perhaps we’d better not go down to the river,” said Dick. “It may be a wiser plan to keep up above, where there isn’t the danger from these avalanches. No use to risk our lives needlessly,” he pointed out.

Their guide grunted something under his breath, then looked up, his sober, dark eyes twinkling.

“Snowslide catch us in the valley,” he pronounced. “Big blizzard catch us on top. Which way you like die best?”

At any other time the two boys would have seen the humor in the situation, but at that particular moment neither Sandy nor Dick felt that there was anything funny about it. For a brief interval they stood, deep in thought, their two youthful faces clouded with apprehension.

“It makes no difference to me which way I die,” declared Sandy at length, kicking disconsolately at the trunk of a small tree, which had been uprooted by the force of the snowslide. “We’re more than half way down to the river now, so what’s the use of turning back. My choice is the valley. At least, we can travel faster down there, with more protection from the storm.”

“You’re right,” agreed Dick, “I choose the valley, too. Do you think we can reach your friend Raoul’s place before dark?”

“Best we can do it take three hours from here,” replied Toma, “an’ night come early. One hour more mebbe an’ then we no see at all. Dark all ’round. Travel very slow then. Raoul him live on top of river bank ten, fifteen miles from here.”

Without further word, the three boys made their way quickly down to the floor of the valley and proceeded on their way. Beneath their feet was the frozen course of the Bad Heart River, winding forth through a white world of weird, irregular cliffs, now deeply mantled with snow.

“This is better,” Sandy growled, looking up to where the storm broke above their heads. “I never would have thought it would make so much difference being down here. You can actually see a little and hardly feel the wind at all.”

“Fine!” answered Dick. “But save your breath, Sandy. You’ll need it.”

Monotonously, heavily, the moccasined feet of the three snow-covered figures

crunched along the unbroken trail. In the lead, Toma glided ahead with an untiring energy that filled Dick with admiration. He wondered what the young half-breed was thinking about. Was he, too, secretly fearful of some new impending danger lurking in their path?

He noticed presently that the shadows, flung across the floor of the valley, were gradually becoming darker and darker, a heavy dusk had settled around them. Toma, barely four feet away, was a vague, indistinct blur, completely shutting off his view of the trail in front of him.

That the fury of the blizzard had not abated, was easily apparent. He could still hear the wind howling above their heads, and feel the snow as it sifted quietly down. At every step his feet sunk into the soft, yielding surface, and his heart pounded like a trip-hammer from the continuous, never-ending exertion.

“How much farther?” Sandy demanded, a note of despair in his voice. “How much farther, Toma?”

“No can tell.”

Sandy mumbled and complained to himself. He came stumbling and panting behind Dick, keeping up an incessant babbling or muttering that filled his friend with alarm.

“How much farther?” he asked again.

Toma grunted.

“No can tell.”

A snort of fury seized upon Sandy. With a strangled, despairing cry, he sprang forward past Dick and seized Toma by the shoulder.

“Listen to me you, you—Indian. I’ve got a right to know how far we’ve gone. Come on, now—out with it!”

Toma turned as if to brush off the detaining hand, when Sandy struck out with all the force of his right arm. It was an unexpected blow which sent the young Indian guide staggering to his knees. Aghast, scarcely believing his senses, Dick stood in bewilderment for a moment unable to move. With incredible speed, his

companion had sprung forward again, his fumbling, eager hands encircling Toma's throat.

"Stop it!" shrieked Dick.

A shrill, unearthly shout, terrible in that utter desolation, seemed to freeze Dick's blood. Toma and Sandy were at grips, struggling, rolling—a dark, almost indistinguishable ball against the gray background of billowing drifts.

"Stop it!" roared Dick again, and, jumping in, endeavored to separate them. He was still somewhat dazed over the sudden, unexpected turn events had taken. What had happened to Sandy? What was the meaning of that unwarranted attack upon the kindly young Indian guide? Had the hardship and severe nervous strain of the past few days, proved too much for his friend? Desperately he tugged and pulled at the two combatants, finally breathing a sigh of thankfulness as Toma rolled on top, successfully pinning the arms of his assailant.

"Fight all gone," declared the victor between gasps of exhaustion, raising one hand to wipe away the blood trickling from a cut over his left eye. "Hm, poor fellow go sleep bye an bye. Trail too much. Worry too much. All make him mad like grizzly caught in trap, an' fight like grizzly till strength all gone."

Toma arose, brushing the snow from his clothing, then placed a still trembling hand on Dick's arm.

"Him lay there all night—huh?" he inquired. "What you think we do next? What you think?"

Disconsolately, Dick gazed out into the black pall of darkness which had gathered around them.

"Toma," he inquired presently, "do you believe Sandy will feel better after a while? Will he be able to get up and walk again?"

"Him walk no more tonight," stated Toma with conviction.

"In that case, there's only one thing to do. I'll camp here with Sandy while you go on to your friend's house for help. Do you think you can make it, Toma?"

"You start 'em fire here," instructed the Indian. "Me make it all right. Get back

two, three hours, mebbe, with dog team and take poor Sandy to warm bed. Please no worry if I be little late.”

“No,” answered Dick, gulping down a hard substance in his throat. “Good-bye and good luck to you, Toma. I’ll be here when you return.”

Not a suspicious moisture, but real tears were standing in Dick’s eyes a few minutes later as he and the young half-breed separated over the recumbent body of Sandy. A single, warm hand-clasp, then Toma was away, his footfalls sounding faintly through the dark.

CHAPTER XIII

DICK SEES A GHOST

Several hours had passed since Toma's departure, and the fire Dick had kindled had burned down to a mass of glowing, red embers. The still falling snow hissed and sputtered over the coals. Off in the distance a few wolves howled. Sandy lay stretched out at Dick's feet and the owner of the feet himself drowsed and nodded in a futile effort to keep awake.

He recovered consciousness a few moments later, however, when a half-burned stick, lying on the outer edge of the fire, crackled forth suddenly like a cap in a toy pistol. In an instant he was wide-eyed and alert, his eyes straining towards the outer rim of darkness. He could see nothing.

"Dreaming again," he grumbled to himself, looking down at Sandy, and wondering how much time had elapsed since the young Indian guide had set out on his perilous journey through the storm. Then his thoughts turned to the happenings of the day.

One thing that bothered Dick, and which he had not yet explained entirely to his own satisfaction, was Sandy's strange behavior a few hours previous. The young Scotchman's violent and unwarranted attack upon Toma was not in the least like the usual happy-go-lucky conduct that Dick had ascribed to his friend. Of course, he had heard many times before, of similar cases where men, driven to the limit of physical exertion, had acted queerly. It was a sort of temporary mental breakdown preceding physical collapse. What Sandy needed was a good sleep, followed by a day or two of complete rest. He'd probably feel better in the morning.

For the next few minutes Dick busied himself in gathering more wood for the fire. His first duty was to keep himself and Sandy warm, as warm as possible in their hastily improvised camp there in the inadequate shelter of the river bottom.

“Toma will be back in an hour or two,” he thought to himself, “and then everything will be all right.”

He looked down at Sandy, whom he had bundled up in their two blankets and hoped devoutly that nothing had happened which might delay the young Indian’s safe return. Although not in the least doubting the guide’s prowess, Dick had learned to his sorrow that Govereau’s opposition was not the only factor to be considered in the successful carrying out of their plans.

“There is always this blamed wilderness to contend with,” ruminated Dick. “Treacherous rivers, forest fires, wild beasts, the danger of freezing to death in the extreme cold or getting lost in a blizzard. Sometimes I think——”

Exactly what Dick thought will probably never be recorded. He woke suddenly from his preoccupation, a look of fear in his eyes, every nerve tingling as if tiny electric wires ran close to the surface of his skin. A slight sound somewhere out there in the enveloping darkness had caught his attention. In addition, there had quickly come over him a vague feeling that he and Sandy were not alone, that an actual presence, either an animal of some sort or a human being, had intruded within the circle of their campfire and was ready to pounce down upon them.

For a brief second Dick could scarcely suppress the cry of terror that had sprung to his lips. He wanted to turn his head to look at the thing he knew to be immediately behind him, but, for some unknown reason, his body seemed incapable of action. Instead he sat there, weak and trembling, the blood pounding in his throat with a force almost suffocating.

With a truly mighty effort he contrived finally to twist and squirm around so that his gaze could discern the thing that menaced him, and in that instant he caught wildly at the trunk of the up-rooted tree upon which he sat, so frozen with horror, that the person who stood immediately opposite—probably no more than ten or twelve feet away—might easily have advanced and overpowered him without encountering even the slightest resistance.

In all his life, Dick had never seen so strange an apparition. His first sickening impression was that he was confronted not by a man at all but by a real ghost, fashioned out of a substance as hard and unyielding as a block of ice. In the glare of the campfire, the person’s body gave forth a peculiar gleam or sparkle that so amazed and confounded Dick that he found himself putting up his hands to his

eyes in an effort to shut out the unusual sight.

“Toma, he tell me come,” issued a friendly voice from the ghost-like figure, standing there in front of him. “You no ’fraid me.”

Dick came to with a start.

“No,” he mumbled weakly.

“Toma one mile down river,” continued the voice. “Him stuck in ice with huskies. Mebbe no get sled out.”

“What’s that!” demanded Dick. “I don’t think I understand you.”

“Ice thin where river runs quick. Toma, me, drive on river too close to rapids. Hurry up get back here for sick fella. We go fast. Toma, me, sit in sled. All at once ice break. Toma, huskies, me, sled—everybody fall in river.”

Dick sat and stared incredulously at the speaker. He understood now. This was Raoul Testawich, Toma’s friend, who, in his broken English, was trying to describe what had taken place that night farther up the river. Dick shivered at the thought of that unexpected, icy-cold plunge when the sled with its two occupants had broken through into the river. No wonder that young Testawich looked like a ghost, his clothing a glistening ice and snow-covered mantle of white.

“Is Toma safe?” he questioned eagerly.

“Yes,” nodded the half-breed, “Toma all right, but sled gone. Cut harness away from sled to save huskies. Toma stay back there now and watch dogs. What you think; you, me take sick fella along that far?”

“We can try,” answered Dick in an awed voice. “How far did you say it was?”

“About one mile,” said Raoul.

“We can do it!” Dick stated with conviction. “I know we can—even if we are compelled to drag and carry him all the way.”

There was admiration and wonder in Dick’s eyes now as he looked at the ice-clad form of the half-breed. What tremendous endurance Toma and this man

must have. It seemed almost incredible.

He rose quickly, fired with new determination, walked over to the spot where Sandy lay and, as gently as possible, attempted to arouse him.

“Wake up! Wake up, Sandy!” he called.

Several minutes elapsed before Dick succeeded in dragging his friend to an upright position. Sandy swayed on his feet, mumbling incoherently, glaring about him with blood-shot, unseeing eyes. Supported by a friendly arm on either side, he moved forward, almost a dead weight between them.

“We get there sooner you think,” encouraged Raoul. “Bye an’ bye we turn bend in river an’ then you see Toma’s campfire. Little fella pretty sick.”

They mushed on in silence. Step by step, slowly, at what seemed to Dick a snail’s pace, they plodded through the darkness towards the place where the courageous young half-breed guide awaited them. The snow had ceased to fall. The roar of the storm above their heads had died down to a faint murmuring. Presently Raoul spoke:

“I see light now. Pretty soon we get to campfire. Then dogs pull sick fella rest of way to my home.”

“But we haven’t any sled,” interposed Dick.

“Toma tie poles together for sled by time we get there. Make ’em pole sled for sick fella.”

Again they went on in silence. The light of Toma’s campfire gradually grew brighter as they advanced. Presently Dick discerned the lonely figure of the Indian guide and after a time, five blotches in the snow, five furry forms that snarled and howled as they waited impatiently for the return of their master.

“We’ve made it!” howled Dick, unable to suppress his exultation. “We’ve made it, Toma, old boy. Yip! Yip!”

Toma’s answering shout was drowned out by a deafening chorus from the huskies.

CHAPTER XIV

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

The cabin of Raoul Testawich, which stood in a sheltering grove of spruce a few miles back from Bad Heart river, loomed up through the darkness several hours later as Toma, Raoul and Dick, with the team of huskies in the lead, crossed a narrow coulee about thirty yards away from the house and plunged on through heavy drifts to the narrow, cleared space immediately in front of the door.

Wrapped in blankets, Sandy still lay on the hastily improvised sled. As his three comrades gathered about him, a heavy door squeaked open and a sleepy voice, in Cree, called out a welcome. In an incredibly short time they had lifted Sandy from the sled and had carried him within, gently placing him in a bunk at one end of the room.

A young Indian girl, whom Dick judged to be Raoul's wife or sister, closed the door after them and advanced swiftly to the mud fireplace where, over crackling spruce logs, a heavy iron pot sent forth the pleasant aroma of steaming moose meat. Close by, with growing interest and enthusiasm, Dick beheld a small table laden with food.

"We eat this time for sure," grinned Toma, nudging Dick's arm. "Mebbe you no want eat now."

"Like fun, I don't," laughed the other. "There are two things I want—food and sleep. I'm so blamed tired that Raoul will have to wait until sometime tomorrow before I buy his dog team. I believe I could sleep for three days."

"You sleep long you like," conceded Toma, as Raoul left the room to look after the dogs. "Him, Raoul, my very good friend. Fine fella. Like 'em sister, too. Mebbe some day marry girl."

The far away expression in the young half-breed's eyes drew a laugh from Dick.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said, "and I want to congratulate you. When do you expect to get married?"

"Four—five—six years," he answered, counting laboriously on his fingers. "Father Girard he tell 'em me at mission too young yet. No marry till get older. Get older very slow," he concluded, casting woebegone eyes in the direction of the young lady of his choice.

The re-entrance of Raoul cut short any further reference to the subject of Toma's tender affair of the heart. It was well, too, for the face of the owner of the huskies wore a look of concern as he strode forward and commenced to remove his outer garments, still thickly encrusted with ice and snow. As he fumbled with the buttons of his moose-hide coat, he broke forth excitedly in Cree, pausing now and again to make quick, explanatory gestures with his hands.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Dick, who though not understanding one word that had been spoken, could tell from the Indian's expression that something out of the ordinary had taken place. "What did he say, Toma?"

"He say," interrupted the guide, "that he no like way huskies act. Huskies tired but no want to lie down and make bed in snowdrift. Huskies afraid of something, very much afraid."

"That not all," Toma continued as a relieved expression brightened Dick's eyes. "Raoul him not sure, but see track mebbe made by snowshoe. Look like snowshoe track only wind blow snow over it. Raoul think Govereau's men come here tonight and look for us. What you think? Mebbe camped not far away."

For a brief moment, a look of apprehension, of fear, swept through Dick. The supposition was not entirely impossible. Experience had taught him that Govereau was both an experienced woodsman and an implacable enemy, a man who had the disconcerting habit of putting in an appearance at times when one least expected him. On the other hand, Dick could not help but believe that the hated French half-breed had not yet succeeded in catching up with them. The incident at the river when he, Sandy and Toma had crossed through the ice floe successfully, must have delayed him considerably.

"I don't think he has had time to overtake us yet," said Dick. "If any one has

been here today, it must be someone else.”

Toma shook his head.

“Mebbe you right. I like think so. All same Govereau make you surprise once in a while. Fool ever’body.”

“That’s true,” rejoined Dick, “but if Govereau really is here, he’s here and that’s an end to it. There’s nothing that we can do except to fight him and take our own risks. I think that you and Raoul had better get into some dry clothes as quickly as possible. A good supper and a sound sleep afterwards are the first things to be considered. I wonder if I’d better wake Sandy?”

“Him better sleep long time an’ wake up himself. Him be all right then.”

Dick heeded this advice from Toma and a few minutes later sat down to one of the most enjoyable meals he had eaten in weeks. Then he and the young Indian guide tumbled into the bunk above Sandy and were almost instantly fast asleep, their weary limbs stretching out in the luxurious softness of a white rabbit sleeping-bag.

They woke on the following afternoon and clambered down from their perch. To his amazement, Dick beheld Sandy, somewhat pale but otherwise quite his usual self, sitting at the table, opposite their host. He was eating gruel from a bowl and conversing in low tones to Raoul.

“Why, Sandy!” exclaimed Dick, unable to conceal his delight. “What has happened?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re up.”

“Sure I’m up,” the voice of the young Scotchman rose in jovial good humor as he glanced across at his two friends, who were dressing hurriedly. “Didn’t expect me to lie in bed all night and all day too, did you?”

“Yes, but how do you feel?”

Sandy put down his spoon and swung round to meet Dick’s inquiring gaze.

“A little shaky, I guess, but otherwise about the same as usual. By the way, Dick, what happened yesterday? When I woke up this morning, I couldn’t imagine where I was. And funny thing—I can’t remember very much of what took place on the trail. Did I get hurt?”

“Didn’t Raoul tell you?”

“Not yet.”

Dick picked up his moccasins and began absently to turn them in his hands. For Sandy’s benefit, it had occurred to him to gloss over the events of the previous day, to give his friend as little information as possible. It was not that Sandy’s breakdown was anything to be ashamed of, considering what he had been through. It was not that, Dick told himself. It was the possible effect the news might have on him. For Sandy was proud, and the knowledge of even a temporary weakness on his part would be sure to cause him a good deal of humiliation.

“You played out on the trail, Sandy,” Dick stated evenly. “I was all in myself. I hope we never again have so many obstacles and difficulties to contend with. I can’t imagine what would have happened to us if Toma hadn’t gone for help. We have Toma and Raoul to thank for getting through safely yesterday.”

“Toma is always doing remarkable things,” said Sandy. “I can’t help but admire the way he broke trail through that storm. Wish I had half his endurance.”

“You no talk about me so much,” Toma broke forth, pretending to be angry, but grinning in spite of himself. “Me no like ’em all big words. Mebbe make fun of me.”

“You hurry up dress,” interposed Raoul. “My sister wait in next room to bring something to eat. Pretty soon we have breakfast middle of the night.”

“All right,” laughed Dick, “we’ll hurry. I’ll be ready as soon as I put on these moccasins.”

He was looking at Raoul as he spoke, but was hardly prepared for what suddenly ensued. The young Indian was abruptly on his feet and had dashed forward to one side of the room, where he caught up a rifle, which had been leaning there against the wall. Amazed at first, Dick quickly caught the significance of Raoul’s

actions, as there came to his ears the dull tromping of feet outside, followed quickly by a loud thumping at the door. A moment later, a towering, heavy form broke into the room and stood blinking across at them.

“What you want!” demanded Raoul, flourishing his rifle.

The intruder closed the door behind him, his shifting eyes regarding each of them in turn. He was a big man, clothed almost entirely in fur, a parka concealing the lower part of his face. As the four other occupants of the room stood or sat watching him, he shook off his heavy mitts, kicked the snow from his feet and removed his parka. His general appearance, Dick observed, was far from prepossessing.

“What you want!” repeated Raoul.

“You don’t need to be afeered o’ me,” finally grumbled their unexpected guest, rubbing one burly hand against his bearded cheek. “Put down yer gun, brother, I ain’t gonna hurt nobody. I jes’ came in to get warm an’ ask fer something to eat. Been hoofing it all the way from Twin Brothers Creek, near the Big Smokey. Left there this morning. Stranger in these parts. My name’s Bill Watson. Guess you don’t know me.”

Dick was conscious of a feeling of relief to learn something of the intruder’s identity. At least, he was not one of Govereau’s men. Then Dick felt Toma’s face brushing close to his own.

“No like him,” breathed the guide in a scarcely audible whisper. “Ever’body watch out. See him one time before with Govereau. He come to find out if you and Sandy here.”

Toma drew back quickly as the stranger’s gaze turned again in their direction.

CHAPTER XV

OUTWITTING THE ENEMY

Dick Kent had no reason to doubt that Toma's stealthily imparted information concerning the true identity of Bill Watson was correct. The man had been sent by Govereau. His story of the long trek from Twin Brothers Creek was a deliberate falsehood intended to deceive Dick and his friends. He was here as a spy to carry out certain instructions from Govereau, the accomplishment of which would probably result disastrously to their expedition.

In a few minutes following Toma's whispered warning, Dick thought swiftly. Their safety and the success of their plans depended upon immediate action. Something had to be done before Watson became aware that anyone suspected him.

The first step, of course, was to discover some way to acquaint Sandy and Raoul with the stranger's duplicity. This, of course, must be accomplished secretly, and in a manner that would not arouse Watson's slightest suspicion.

"If only on some pretext I could get the two of them outside," thought Dick, "the rest would be easy. Four of us would have no difficulty in taking him prisoner. We would bind him hand and foot and then Raoul could keep him here several days while Sandy, Toma and I continued our journey with the dog team."

Annette entered from the adjoining room at Raoul's summons and began removing the dishes from the table, in preparation for the meal for Watson, Toma and Dick. Watson now occupied a chair at one side of the room, and sat directly facing Sandy. Raoul had moved forward and was assisting his sister with her task, while Toma, like a restless spirit, remained unseated, occasionally changing his position from sheer nervousness.

"I ain't had very much to eat today," Watson informed them, producing an evil-

smelling pipe and lighting it with the stub of a match. "Been too busy mushing to think about it. Trail heavy all the way, too."

A strained silence followed. It was evident that Watson intended to make himself perfectly at home, for, a moment later, he stretched out his burly legs, and, to Dick's disgust, spat on the floor.

"Where you fellows bound for?" he demanded suddenly of Sandy.

"Nowhere in particular," replied the young Scotchman non-committally. "Where are you going?"

Watson's face darkened with a scowl.

"I ain't a goin' to tell neither if that's the way you feel about it. Guess you never was taught no manners, young man."

Sandy turned his head slightly and winked covertly at Dick.

"No offense intended, I'm sure."

The man from Gouvernau's camp grunted something under his breath.

"Little boys ain't got no business on the trail anyway," he began again, this time in a scoffing tone that caused an angry red to mount suddenly in Sandy's cheeks.

In his restless moving about, changing positions often, Toma had presently come to a pause close to Sandy and now stood absently tossing a small object in his hand, his gaze directed toward Annette and Raoul, who were completing preparations for supper. Looking at him, no one would have suspected that any thought, out of the ordinary, lay at the back of the young half-breed's mind. His face was expressionless, yet as Dick watched him, there flashed from them unexpectedly a look that could not be mistaken.

It was as if Toma had sent him some sort of a signal. What was its meaning Dick could not possibly imagine until, apparently by accident, the small object, which looked like a brass buckle, fell from the guide's hand and rolled under Sandy's chair. As he stepped forward and stooped to get it, Dick knew from the expression on Sandy's face that he, too, had been warned.

“Supper all ready,” Raoul announced.

Watson bounded to his feet and was the first to reach the table. Without waiting for further permission he pulled out a chair and slumped into it. Dick followed more leisurely, with Toma bringing up the rear. As they approached directly behind Watson’s chair, Toma’s hand shot out, poking Dick in the ribs. Half-turning, the recipient of the blow emitted a startled gasp as he perceived Toma’s long arms steal out and encircle the unsuspecting guest.

Watson and the chair swayed backward, then toppled over, striking the floor with a resounding crash. The heavy, powerful form rolled to one side, endeavoring to break the iron grip of the young half-breed. For a tense second Dick stood inactive, then leaped to his friend’s assistance. Attempting to pinion Watson’s arms, to his horror Dick saw their opponent had actually succeeded in pulling a dangerous looking automatic from his pocket and was grimly endeavoring to use it.

Dick seized Watson’s wrist in his two hands, putting forth his last ounce of strength in an effort to force the gun from the man’s grasp. In quick succession three ear-splitting reports rang out. Annette screamed. After that Dick was not quite sure what was taking place during that confused wild scramble on the floor until he felt the heavy body under him relax and a voice triumphantly proclaim:

“Well, I guess that ought to settle him for a while.”

With perspiration trickling down into his eyes, Dick looked up. Raoul stood with a small stick of wood in his hands and close beside him Sandy, a look of triumph on his face, each surveying their now helpless foe.

“You didn’t hit him half hard enough, Raoul,” Sandy protested. “It was a good thing for him that I didn’t have that club, myself. I might have killed him.”

“Hit ’em plenty hard,” Raoul confessed, tossing the stick back toward the fireplace. “Tie him up easy now. I go get rope.”

Dick and Toma rose to their feet and a moment later Raoul returned with a rope. Bound hand and foot, Watson was lifted bodily and carried across the room, where he was deposited not unkindly in the selfsame bunk occupied by Sandy on the previous night. Dick breathed a sigh of relief.

“I’m glad that’s over with,” he declared thankfully. “All things considered, we’ve been pretty lucky so far. We’ve beaten Govereau at every turn.”

“Beaten but not licked,” Sandy reminded him. “I’ll have to admit right here that he’s a mighty tough customer. It’s a good thing Toma saw this man, Watson, before. Otherwise things might have turned out differently.”

“We must get an early start in the morning,” said Dick, as he moved back toward the supper table. “I’d hate to meet any more visitors from Govereau’s camp. If Raoul is willing, I’ll pay him tonight for the team of huskies. What do you think would be a fair price for them, Toma?”

“Raoul say he willing to sell for two hundred dollars,” answered the guide. “That very cheap for good team like that.”

“I’ll make it two hundred and fifty. The additional amount wouldn’t begin to pay him for all the kindness he has shown us.”

As he spoke, Dick reached in his pocket and pulled out the roll of bills Factor MacLean had given him on the day of their departure from Fort du Lac, and, counting out the sum mentioned, passed it over to Raoul.

“I hope I’m not cheating you.”

“You buy best dog team in the country,” Toma stated enthusiastically. “Mounted police use ’em last winter to carry mail. Govereau go fast to catch us now.”

“How long will it take us to reach mounted police headquarters?” inquired Sandy.

“Three, four day if nothing happen,” their guide answered. “First day snow too heavy to make trail good. After that mebbe get better.”

A short time later, a low groan from Watson attested to the fact that that gentleman was slowly regaining consciousness. After considerable tossing and rolling about, their captive finally opened his eyes and presently called for a drink of water.

“Feeling better now?” Dick inquired solicitously, when he complied with the request.

“Yeah, I’m feeling better,” came Watson’s smothered retort as he glared up angrily at his questioner. “I’m feelin’ a blamed sight better than you’ll be feelin’ in another day or two, I can tell you that.”

“You brought it all on yourself,” Dick reminded him. “You had no business coming here to play the part of a spy, in the first place. If you got hurt, it’s your own fault. All I’m sorry about is that the unpleasant little blow you received on top of your head wasn’t given to the man who sent you.”

“What do you mean?” bluffed Watson.

“I guess you know what I mean,” Dick spoke coldly, “and please get the idea out of your mind that we don’t know who you are, and where you came from.”

“Where did I come from?” their prisoner blustered.

“From Govereau.”

“Well, what are you gonna do about it?”

There was defiance in Watson’s voice.

“If you mean, what are we going to do with you,” Dick answered, “I might as well tell you that we haven’t decided yet. A good deal depends upon the way you behave yourself.”

“We’re thinking seriously of taking you outside and putting a bullet in you,” chimed in Sandy.

“Yuh better not, if you know what’s best for you,” stormed Watson. “If yuh try that, Govereau’ll come down here and make mince-meat out of yuh.”

“He might walk into the same kind of trap you did,” grinned Sandy.

“Where is Govereau now?” asked Dick, shaking his head at Sandy in an effort to check the useless controversy. “If you answer my questions truthfully, we’ll let you off a whole lot easier than we would otherwise. We might even be induced to give you something to eat.”

“He ain’t very far from here.”

“How far?”

“About two miles away. We’re camped in the heavy timber jus’ back from the river.”

“How did he find out that we are stopping here for the present with Raoul?”

“One of our men seen a dog team come up here early yesterday morning. Govereau thought it might be you, so he sent me over to find out.”

“Is that all he told you to do?”

For a few minutes Watson lay, staring about him, apparently quite oblivious of his surroundings. He paid no attention to the last question put to him. Finally he turned his head, his gaze meeting Dick’s squarely.

“You fellows are in a mighty bad position, if you want to know it,” he suddenly blurted out. “There ain’t one chance in ten thousand that you’ll ever get through alive. Your only hope is to go back to the place you come from.”

“I’m not asking you for advice,” said Dick angrily.

“Jes’ the same, I’m tellin’ yuh. I wouldn’t take the whole of upper Canada to be a standin’ in your shoes just now. You’re only a kid an’ don’t realize how bad a mess you’re in.”

Sandy strode forward and put a hand on Dick’s shoulder.

“No use to bother with him, Dick,” he exclaimed in disgust. “We’re just wasting time. He’d keep us talking here all night. Our best plan is to get out of here as quickly as possible. Govereau may be along any time to find out what has happened to him.”

“I think same, too,” Toma cut in. “What you say I hitch up huskies, and we start right away?”

Dick glanced from one to the other.

“I guess you’re right. We can’t any more than lose our way in the dark, and we’ve been lost before.”

“But what are we going to do with him?” Sandy wondered, pointing at their prisoner.

“We’ll have to leave him here with Raoul,” Dick replied. Then he turned to Toma’s friend.

“Do you object?” he asked. “You can release him sometime tomorrow. That will give us a chance to be well on our way before Govereau learns what has become of us.”

Raoul nodded his head, grinning.

“All right, me keep ’em big fellow in bed. Bye an’ bye feed him with spoon like little baby. How you like that?” he asked, turning to Watson.

The only reply from the man in the bunk was a snort of rage as he twisted to one side and glared helplessly about him.

CHAPTER XVI

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NIGHT

The lonely journey through the dark proved to be not nearly as difficult as Dick had expected. An hour after their departure from Toma's cabin, the little party emerged from the shelter of spruce and pine, skirting the river, and drove forth upon a comparatively open prairie, piled high with drifts.

Here the snow had been packed down by the wind and the huskies were able to trot across its surface without breaking through. They went forward at such a brisk pace that Dick, running behind, was forced to admit, breathlessly, to Toma:

"I can't keep this up all night. Can't you slow down once in a while, and give me a chance to catch my breath?"

"We all ride now," the guide answered, motioning Dick to a place on the sled in front of Sandy, who, because of his weakened condition, had been riding most of the time since they had left the cabin.

A moment later, sitting at his friend's feet, Dick was conscious of a new experience. He had never ridden behind a team of huskies before.

"This is wonderful," he remarked as the dogs sprang forward at Toma's sharp word of command. "How easy they pull us, Sandy. If we keep on at this rate, it won't take us long to reach mounted police headquarters."

Toma, who was standing behind, with one hand on the gee-pole, laughed good-naturedly over Dick's enthusiasm.

"They go fast tonight," he admitted, "but mebbe tomorrow we come to soft snow in woods. No go fast then."

Somewhere, close at hand, there broke forth a weird, unearthly noise, a sound

that echoed across the stillness, causing both Dick and Sandy to sit up very straight, hearts thumping excitedly.

“What was that?” they demanded in chorus.

“Wolves,” came the ready response. “We see plenty of wolves from now on. Rabbits very few this year and wolves always hungry.”

“Well, I don’t want ’em to feed on me,” shivered Sandy. “What would we do if they should happen along and suddenly decide to make a meal on us?”

“Shoot,” answered Dick, one hand stealing back in the sled to make sure that in the hurry of their departure they had not forgotten their rifles.

“They not come yet,” Toma reassured them. “Bye ’n’ bye weather get more cold, snow more deep, wolves more hungry. Then we watch out. No travel like this at night then. Me ’fraid wolves too.”

Dick laughed. “I’m glad to hear that there’s something you’re really afraid of, Toma. I’d begun to think that nothing could frighten you.”

Another howl from the wolf pack, and Sandy’s mittened hand was pawing at Dick’s shoulder.

“Honestly, Dick, I don’t like this. Just listen to that! Isn’t it awful? Toma, are you sure they won’t come over here and try to gobble us up?”

“Plenty sure,” answered the guide.

Sandy slouched back in his seat again, not entirely convinced in his own mind that Toma was right.

“I hope so,” he grumbled, “but why in the dickens did the rabbits have to get scarce this year. I suppose they heard we were coming along and just to make our bad luck complete, hopped off to another part of the country. I wonder why the wolves didn’t follow them, Toma?”

“Wolves no follow rabbits ’cause rabbits all dead,” patiently explained the half-breed.

“Who killed ’em?” Sandy wanted to know.

Toma’s whip cracked forth over the boys’ heads, and the huskies sprang forward with redoubled effort.

“Rabbits no get killed—they sick an’ die,” he answered. “When you live in this country long time you find out queer thing. Ever’ six, seven years see many rabbits—like mosquitos in spring. Wolves an’ coyotes all very fat then. Almost step on rabbits when you walk through woods. When rabbits many like that, one fellow him get sick, bye ’n’ bye another rabbit him sick, too. Pretty soon no rabbits left—all dead. No tell you why.”

Following this explanation, Sandy lapsed into silence for many moments. There was no sound at all except that made by the pattering feet of the huskies, and the crunching of the sled under them. A belated moon had risen slowly from the distant horizon, and in its pure, white light, the boys could now discern objects, which a few hours before had remained hidden. Looking about him, Dick saw that the comparatively open space around them extended southward for many miles, a vast, snow-covered field, dotted here and there with small patches of poplar.

They were passing one of these tree clumps a short time later when, plainly discernible, not more than fifty or a hundred yards to their right, Dick perceived the huge body of a wolf gliding quickly along, almost abreast of them. The boy’s startled exclamation drew the attention of Sandy and Toma.

“Follow us like that all night, mebbe,” Toma stated indifferently, “he no come any closer. He ’fraid us like we ’fraid him.”

“He doesn’t appear to be very frightened,” came Sandy’s dry comment, “and if he comes one step nearer, I’m going to teach him a few manners.”

“No,” said Dick, “we’ve got to save our ammunition. We may need it badly a little later on. Besides, I doubt very much whether one wolf would dare to attack us. It’s a full pack that I’d be afraid of.”

“If there were more than one,” rejoined Sandy, peering fearfully across at the subject of their conversation, “I think I’d be inclined to pull this blanket over my head. I simply wouldn’t want to see ’em.”

Dick's amused laugh was broken short by a sudden snarling from the huskies. This continued until Toma cracked his whip and shouted out a sharp word of command.

"No like 'em wolves either," he explained. "You promise no be afraid if I tell you something."

"Certainly," answered Dick. "What is it?"

"You look on other side."

Sandy and Dick, following directions, drew in a quick breath of alarm. Two more wolves, equally as large as the one on their right, trotted along unconcernedly across the drifts, their furry forms plainly distinguishable in the moonlight.

"Lord help us!" exclaimed Sandy, with no thought of irreverence.

"Can you beat that?" Dick wanted to know.

"No see wolves any more when morning comes," Toma attempted to cheer them. "You wait."

After that the hours seemed interminable. Both Dick and Sandy had forgotten about the novelty of their ride. Intermittently Toma's whip cracked; the huskies moved on; there was no sound except the slight noise of their progress across the field of white. On either side trotted the wolves, three dark shapes, moving like ghosts, never once quickening or slackening pace. It was with a sigh of relief that Dick finally perceived the first faint glow of morning across the eastern sky.

"We stop pretty soon and have something to eat," announced Toma, breaking the long silence.

And a few minutes later, when they drew up before a small log cabin, standing at the edge of a narrow sheltering woodland, their companions of the night—the three wolves—were nowhere in sight.

"What I tell you," their guide reminded them.

"Right, as usual," grumblingly admitted Sandy. "But tell me, Toma, whose place

is this?"

"Another friend—him live here," answered Toma. "We have breakfast, sleep two, three hours, then go on some more. No like to travel night."

It took but a few moments to unhitch and feed the huskies. Dick looked on with interest as Toma threw each one of the dogs its ration of frozen fish. Then the three boys strode forward toward the cabin, upon the door of which the young half-breed knocked loudly. But no answer ensued.

"Guess him gone away," Toma stated, and pushed open the door. "He no care if we stay here for little while. Mebbe out on trap line."

After a fire was started in the fireplace, Dick and Toma proceeded to get breakfast, while Sandy carried in armloads of wood from the big pile outside. They ate in front of a crackling flame, joking and laughing amongst themselves.

"With the help of the huskies," exulted Sandy, "we'll soon leave Pierre Govereau so far behind he'll never catch up. Won't he be wild when he hears how we've outwitted him?"

"I wouldn't be too sure about that if I were you," Dick cautioned. "Govereau isn't the only man we'll have to fear either. You know Henderson has accomplices all along the line."

So it proved.

In spite of their good intentions, their determination to sleep only a few hours, it was morning of the following day when Dick and Sandy awoke to find their new team gone and Toma hunting around in the underbrush some distance from camp.

CHAPTER XVII

THE STOLEN HUSKIES

The dogs were gone, and that was all there was to it, Dick decided a moment later, after a shouted conference with Toma. They would have to go on on foot. It was discouraging, but it made Dick more determined than ever.

“We’ll never get to the fort now,” Sandy grumbled.

“Well, we’re a darn sight closer than we were,” Dick tried to be cheerful.

They watched Toma circling the camp, looking for tracks. Presently he came in.

“Some fella steal dogs all right. Mebbe Henderson’s men; mebbe just plain thief. Who know?”

“Well, they’re gone anyway, and it’s up to us to make the best of it,” Dick resigned himself. “It’ll be slow work hauling this sled.”

Toma had nothing more to say. His only answer was to slip the breast band of a dog harness over one shoulder and start the sled. Dick and Sandy followed his lead and presently they were mushing slowly out on the trail.

It was exceedingly tiresome business, and within an hour all were leg weary. The snow had begun to thaw a little, and was soggy underfoot. The sled runners cut down deeply, making it exceedingly hard pulling, even with so light a load as they had.

Long before noon they were resting frequently. And it was with great thankfulness that they at last made camp.

“Phew! That was a stiff jaunt,” Dick panted, lying flat on his back, even his iron endurance tested to the utmost. Sandy was too winded to reply. Toma alone

seemed to make no note of it. Long since the boys had ceased being surprised at any of Toma's feats of muscular endurance.

They were about ready to dine on cold baked beans and coffee, when Toma called their attention to a movement ahead of them from the direction of Fort Dunwoody. It proved to be a man and a dog team.

"Honestly, we're going to meet somebody!" Sandy exclaimed incredulously. For days they had seen few save enemies.

"Well, maybe this isn't a friend," said Dick, dubiously.

Toma studied the man intently as he drew nearer. Finally they could hear the cries of the driver to his dogs and the occasional cracking of his long whip. It was a white man; they could tell even at that distance by the tail to tail hitch of the dogs. Most of the Indians drove in fan formation, each dog attached to separate tugs of varying lengths.

The stranger stopped some distance from them, and came on more slowly. Evidently, he himself was not too certain whether or not he was meeting a hostile party.

They hailed each other.

"I'm Corporal Richardson of the Mounted," called the lone driver of the dog team. "Who are you?"

"Hurrah!" cheered Sandy.

"Dick Kent and Sandy McClaren with a guide from Fort du Lac," Dick called back through cupped palms.

The policeman seemed satisfied. Cracking his whip over the dogs, he speedily joined the young travelers.

Corporal Richardson was dressed in a heavy fur coat and parka. When near the campfire he pulled open his great coat, disclosing the scarlet of his uniform coat. He listened attentively to Dick's story of their adventures, and he seemed favorably impressed with both Dick and Sandy, though at first he was somewhat suspicious of Toma.

“I left Fort Dunwoody a week ago,” the policeman told them, his steely eyes unwavering. “We’ve been hearing rumors of Bear Henderson’s outbreak, and I was sent up here to clear some of these trails. Of course Henderson is rather foolish to think he can whip the Mounted and the Hudson’s Bay Company, but he’s made rather a good try at it already. Last report we had he’d burned two trading posts, and had captured three more. Mackenzie’s Landing has fallen to him, I understand. They say his next move is Fort du Lac.”

Dick and Sandy gasped at the revelations of the policeman.

“Didn’t you know about the capture of Fort Good Faith, and the imprisonment of Walter MacClaren, my friend’s uncle?” Dick asked.

“We did not,” replied Corporal Richardson. “That is news. But of course Henderson has made a lot of moves we know nothing of. I suppose you’re after help. It was nervy of you young fellows to break through Henderson’s lines. You know he isn’t letting any one in or out of the far north. A man’s life isn’t worth a cent who isn’t hand in glove with the outlaw. I’m detailed to scout the trail to Mackenzie’s Landing—clear things up there if possible. I wish I could go with you fellows, but you’ll have to go on alone and talk to the Inspector. I doubt if you get help right away. Every officer is out on the trail now, except the bare few that guard the post. It looks like reserves might be called out in spite of the fact that we don’t like to do it.”

“Then you think we may even have to go on to Fort Good Faith alone?” Dick spoke concernedly.

“Oh, no, but you may have to wait for a constable.”

“But we can’t wait!” Dick cried desperately. “We’ve been delayed a week as it is. Sandy’s uncle must have help.”

Corporal Richardson sympathized with them, but he said he would not build up false hopes. “I suggest you ask the Inspector for a special deputization. In times like these every man will be forced into the service who isn’t an enemy of the crown.”

Dick and Sandy thrilled at this possibility. To think of being for even a brief period a member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police was almost beyond their dreams.

“I’ll have to be mushing,” announced the policeman. “Too bad you lost your dogs. I passed a team about ten miles back. I thought the driver looked rather sneaky. It’s pretty hard to describe ordinary huskies. All I remember unusual about the team was that the leader, an exceptionally big fellow, limped with his left forefoot. Not much, just a little.”

“That’s our team, sure enough!” Dick cried. “Remember, Sandy, how that leader limped?”

“I wish we could catch up with the fellow,” Sandy gritted.

“It’s too late now,” Corporal Richardson shook his head. “I wish I could split my team with you, but you see I’ve only four and with two I’d be slowed up considerably. What you’d better do is leave your sled, and take what you need by shoulder pack. If——”

Corporal Richardson did not finish the sentence. He seemed to start, and his eyes widened. His hand flew to his chest. Across the snow came the ringing crack of a distant rifle. The mounted policeman dropped upon one elbow, as his startled companions hastened to him.

Dick shook his fist at the hills in the direction the shot seemed to have come from.

“I guess I’m hit pretty bad,” the corporal revived and whispered. Toma had thrown up the sled as a sort of barricade, if any more shots were fired, and Dick and Sandy commenced administering first aid to the wounded policeman. The bullet had struck under the shoulder blade at the back, and had come out the right side.

“It’s a nasty wound,” Dick said grimly—“maybe a lung is touched.”

“Rather lucky for you fellows at that,” the corporal smiled gamely. “Now you can use my dog team to tote me back to the fort.”

“Do you have any idea who shot you?” Dick asked.

“One of Henderson’s men without a doubt,” was the faint reply, “the country’s alive with them. But we’ll beat ’em yet.”

Dick grimly agreed with him.

Strangely enough, no more shots were fired. Dick judged the reason for this was that a single man had attacked them and had lost courage after seeing he had drawn blood in a party too strong for him. Yet he could not be sure. At any moment they might expect the sharpshooter lurking in the wooded hills to drop one of them. If they were to move on to the fort they could not remain sheltered from attack.

The limp body of the corporal was speedily transferred to his sled, after some of the packs had been thrown aside. Dick picked up the gee-pole, Toma took the lead, and Sandy cracked the long whip.

“Mush!”

They were off, the dogs yelping eagerly down the back trail, overjoyed at hitting the home trail so soon.

For nearly an hour they advanced at a fast rate of speed, Sandy and Dick changing off advance guard with Toma. Then they entered a long ravine, crested with spruce and jackpine. As yet no sign of the man who had shot the corporal appeared. Then, without warning, from the brow of the ravine, puffed the smoke of a rifle. A bullet fanned Dick’s cheek, and he paused and fired at the distant smoke at the top of the ravine.

“Mush! Mush!” shouted Sandy to the dogs, cracking the long whip.

The dogs responded nobly, drawing the sled, carrying the wounded officer, so fast that the boys could hardly keep up.

Again the hidden rifle cracked from the top of the ravine. This time one dog gave a sharp yelp, leaped into the air and fell kicking his last in a tangle of harness.

“He’s killed a dog!” cried Dick angrily. “Quick, get him out of the harness so we can go on.”

The three remaining huskies were growling and snarling in a mess, and it was some minutes before Sandy and Toma could straighten them out, cut the dead dog from his harness and start on again. Meanwhile Dick emptied his rifle at the

brow of the ravine, taking a chance on hitting whoever was skulking there with such deadly intent.

On their way again, the fast moving sled proved an elusive target for the sharpshooter. He shot three times without effect. Swiftly they neared a point where the ravine widened out into a low walled valley, which was almost barren of vegetation. Once on this clear space they would be safe, for there was no cover within rifle range for the man who was dogging them.

Dick and Sandy were almost on the point of giving a shout of triumph when the hidden rifle cracked again and another dog dropped in the harness. The sled stopped, and once more the excited dogs got themselves in a bad mix-up. At the mercy of the mysterious and deadly rifle, the boys attacked the tangled harness and dogs.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HUNGRY PACK

Scarcely had they cut loose the fallen dog when the rifle sounded again and the lead dog dropped to his haunches, failing to rise again. Dick put the dog out of misery with a shot from his rifle, then turned to Toma and Sandy.

“We’ve got to get that fellow out of his nest. He’s playing with us. As soon as he finishes with the dogs he’ll start in on us. We might as well die fighting. Follow me.” Dick wheeled and started up the hill, firing his rifle as he went, Sandy and Toma not far behind.

The man on the rim of the ravine seemed taken by surprise. His shots went wild. Only one came close, and that tore through Sandy’s mackinaw.

Shouting at the top of their voices, the boys reached the top of the ravine. A running figure was just disappearing over a knoll ahead of them. Dick paused a moment, levelled his rifle and fired quickly. The figure, some hundred yards distant, leaped high, as if hit, and ran on limping. Toma and Sandy also fired, but did not hit. They ran on after the man a little way, then fearing to leave the wounded officer too long alone, they hurried back, certain they had routed the sharpshooter.

“We’re lucky,” Dick said, as they trotted down the slope of the ravine, “—not a scratch and he was sure shooting close.”

“I kind of wish I was in Corporal Richardson’s place when I think of going on with one dog,” Sandy changed the subject, making light of his narrow escape. “Means we’ve got to buckle into the harness again.”

Toma paused as they reached the sled. They could see him looking up at the sky.

“Heap snow come soon,” the imperturbable weather prophet announced. “Make

um wolves hungry.”

Dick and Sandy did not think seriously of Toma’s prophecy, for they were intent on the hard work ahead, and already were stepping into the places vacated by the dead dogs.

Again they toiled out on the trail to Fort Dunwoody, hauling the wounded man, who was muttering to himself now in a delirious state brought on by rising fever.

In an hour it had begun to snow, but the boys kept on. Thicker and thicker fell the soft, white flakes, until they could see no more than twenty feet ahead. It was a wet snow, and made pulling the sled harder than ever. The runners seemed to drag like lead upon the aching shoulders of the three. They were glad when darkness fell and they were forced to camp.

“We’re in for an all-night snow storm, I guess,” Dick observed, as the fire he was trying to start went out for a third time, and he had to enlist the aid of Toma.

“I’d like to sleep for a week,” said Sandy, from where he was trying to make the wounded officer more comfortable. “That falling snow is just like a bedtime story that really does put a fellow to sleep.”

They rolled into their sleeping bags as soon as they had appeased their appetites, not troubling to keep watch. All night the snow fell, and in the morning they awakened almost smothered with the wet drifts. The world was all fresh and white like a new blanket, but they had not taken ten steps before they knew they would make little progress that day.

“If a crust would only freeze over the snow we could get along faster,” Dick bewailed.

Corporal Richardson seemed a little better after the night’s rest. His fever had gone down and an examination of the wound showed it to be coming along as well as could be expected. He was very weak, however, from loss of blood.

“Where are we?” the officer asked Dick.

“About fifty miles north of Fort Dunwoody with only one dog,” Dick replied. “You were unconscious yesterday during the scrap we had with the same fellow who hit you.”

“Yes, I seemed to have had delirium,” replied the corporal. “I imagined I heard shooting.”

“Well, you didn’t need your imagination to hear that yesterday,” Dick assured him.

“It’ll be a wonder if you get through,” the officer said, “better leave me along the trail somewhere. There’s an abandoned cabin a few miles this side of Badge Lake. You’ll strike it if you follow the long ridge. Put me off there with some grub and then have Inspector Dawson send a man out after me.”

“No, we couldn’t do anything like that,” Dick returned firmly. “In your condition you need medical care as soon as you can get it. As long as we can stand you’re going to stay on this sled.”

As if to bear out Dick’s words, the officer fainted dead away.

Alarmed, Dick put a cup of melted snow to the pale lips. The corporal had just aroused enough to drink when a sound from across the snow startled Dick so that he spilled the water.

“Listen to that!” ejaculated Sandy.

“I heard it,” Dick replied.

Long, weird, mournful, the howl of a wolf rose and fell in the distance. It was the hunger cry of the most savage denizen of the northland wilds. Deep snow had made hunting hard for the wolves, and they were beginning to take notice of the man prey of the land.

“Him hungry,” grunted Toma.

They set off on the trail once more. A half mile they struggled along with the sled, when another wolf howled from a different quarter. This time the cry was answered.

“Wolves come together for big hunt,” Toma explained, with his usual absence of emotion.

“Here’s hoping they don’t pick on us,” Sandy remarked.

Dick was silent. His face was haggard. The troubles of the trail were weighing heavily on his sturdy shoulders, and this new danger of the northland taxed his courage to the utmost. Yet he did not falter. Instead, his words were cheerful, though they came from drawn lips.

“I guess we have a few shots left in our rifles,” said Dick meaningly. “Those wolves better not come too close.”

“Few shots is right,” Sandy came back dishearteningly. “Dick, do you know we have only about ten shots left for each of the rifles? And we had the hard luck to unload Corporal Richardson’s ammunition when we put him on the sled. All he has is a belt full of revolver cartridges.”

Dick’s hands clenched on the strap with which he was helping pull the sled. “Makes no difference, Sandy. After we’ve escaped all these human wolves that have been after us, I guess we can handle the animals all right.” But he was not quite so sure as he tried to make Sandy believe.

“Wolves eat um dead dogs back trail,” Toma called from the rear of the sled, where he was following up after a stiff job of breaking trail.

All afternoon the cries of the gathering pack could be heard, now near, now far. Once it seemed they were all around them. Then the boys redoubled their efforts on the heavy sled.

“We ought to pull into that cabin the corporal mentioned before long,” Dick said worriedly, as he changed places with Sandy.

“I don’t know about that,” Sandy replied. “The corporal was probably estimating the distance if we made time with a good dog team—but we haven’t gone more than five miles today.”

They made no stop for a mid-day meal, chewing raw bacon while toiling on the trail. The fear of the wolves had entered their hearts yet they would not let one another feel that fear by any spoken word.

Near nightfall they were certain the wolves were trailing them, and they could not hide it from one another. Far in the rear they could hear the hunting cry of the pack, and it was blood-curdling.

While the sun still shone over the western skyline, the first of the wolf pack appeared behind, and the boys knew that they were in for trouble.

The leader of the wolves was old and wise. For a time he held the pack of nearly thirty gaunt, gray wolves out of rifle range, waiting for dark. But hunger could not be denied. The less wise of the pack forged ahead, and the rifles of the three boys spoke with deadly effect.

Dick's toll was three wolves before he emptied his magazine. Sandy shot one and thought he had killed another, but the animal seemed only stunned, and after a minute leaped up and came on again at a swinging lope, to be dropped by a shot from Dick, who had reloaded.

Toma did not fire, however. Instead, without any orders from Dick or Sandy, he made camp in a patch of scrub pine and spruce, where there was plenty of dead wood. Speedily he made a fire. When Dick and Sandy had exhausted their ammunition, and had gone for Corporal Richardson's revolver, a huge fire was roaring and crackling before the upturned sled, in whose shelter rested the corporal.

The wolves had drawn off out of gunshot now. Some of them were devouring their comrades that had fallen. When darkness crept over the little camp the wolves had completely surrounded it.

"We've got to save our cartridges," Dick said at last. "Toma, how many have you left?"

"Just gun full up," replied Toma, which meant he had the magazine of his repeater full—eight shots.

Dick was fingering Corporal Richardson's revolver. He was unaccustomed to handling a revolver and comprehended he could do little real damage with the small arm, having always used a rifle. Sandy was no better than he, and when Dick asked Toma if he could shoot with a revolver with accuracy, the guide shook his head.

"They're slinking around us in a circle now," Sandy reported fearfully, as the shadows deepened.

As he had said, now and again a dark, sinister form glided across the snow from

shrub to shrub, skirting the firelight. Here and there, one of the pack sat on his haunches, his beady eyes fixed on the camp, while his mouth slavered. Frequently one of the number raised his nose to the sky and sounded the hunger howl.

The wolves feared the campfire, and Toma explained that as long as they could keep the fire going they need not fear any very dangerous attack. And even if the wolves did rush them they could be repelled by fire brands.

“I’m going to see what they do when I throw fire,” Dick said presently. He picked out the nearest shadowy form, and drawing a flaming stick from the fire, threw it at the wolf. His aim was good and the animal snarled horribly as the fire fell within a few feet of its feet.

It was close to midnight when Toma confided to Dick and Sandy what they both feared. The wolves were gaining in number as wanderers joined the pack surrounding them. The places of those they had killed earlier in the day, and the few they had managed to pick off after dark were being filled by other ravenous beasts.

There would be no sleep in the camp that night.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CIRCLE OF DEATH

Toma had cut a huge stack of wood, and it was well he did, for the moment the fire died down the wolves drew closer. In fact they seemed to taunt the boys into using the last of their ammunition in firing at the difficult targets they made.

The one dog was whimpering with fear and cowering under the legs of his masters in abject fear. Sometimes, however, a low whine sounded among the wolves, at which the husky pricked up his ears and did not seem so frightened. Toma tied the dog to the sled with a thong of moose-hide.

As the night wore away, Dick and Sandy risked shot after shot at the wolves, and now and again they dropped a skulking shadow. But usually they missed, since Toma objected to giving up his rifle, and they were forced to use the corporal's revolver.

"How long do you suppose we can hold out?" Sandy asked in a strained voice.

"I see no reason why we can't hold out until they leave," Dick replied with more confidence than he felt. "We've plenty of firewood. As long as we have fire to fight with we're safe."

"How do we know they'll leave?" Sandy wanted to know.

Dick shuddered a little, and did not answer. He saw a gray shape loom up at the edge of the firelight, and raising the revolver, fired quickly. He gave a cry of satisfaction as he saw the gaunt beast leap into the air and fall, kicking its last.

There followed a rush of hungry wolves for their fallen companion. Horrified, the boys watched the dead wolf torn to pieces by the pack. Dick emptied his revolver into the writhing mass. He could not help but hit, and he killed another wolf, wounding two others, which the pack finished.

Sandy began throwing burning brands at the wolves, and they drew off once more into the darkness, where they paced nervously back and forth, growling and snarling.

The boys decided that one of them should try to sleep while the other two watched. Dick arranged three twigs in one hand for Sandy and Toma to draw from. The one with the shortest twig, after the draw, was to be the lucky one. Sandy drew the shortest. But after a half hour of futile tossing about, he gave it up.

“No use,” Sandy joined the haggard watchers at the fire. “One of you fellows try it. I couldn’t sleep in a million years with those devils out there waiting to gobble me up.”

“I don’t think I can either,” said Dick. “Toma, you’d better try it. One of us had better get some rest.”

The guide grunted assent, and rolled into his sleeping bag, which once had been his brother’s. In a few minutes Toma was breathing steadily in sound slumber. His calmness gave the boys courage.

“If he can sleep I guess we hadn’t ought to feel so nervous,” Sandy observed.

“I’ve heard old sourdoughs say an Indian never lets the nearness of death trouble him when he can’t get away from it,” Dick related, trying to get his own mind and Sandy’s off their perilous predicament.

“Well, I wish I was an Indian then,” Sandy sighed, “—for the present anyway.”

The renewed and increased restlessness of their dog attracted their attention then, and they watched him straining at the moosehide leash.

Dick caught the dog trying to chew through the thong and spoke sharply.

“Funny why he wants to get away,” Dick mused aloud. “One would think the dog would realize his danger and want to stay near the fire.”

Corporal Richardson’s voice sounded from his blankets. The officer had awakened and had overheard Dick’s remark.

“There’s a female wolf out there—several of them,” the veteran northerner answered Dick. “She’s calling to the dog. It’s the mate call of the wolf and the dog understands it. But only the wisest of she-wolves understand how to use the call to lure meat for their stomachs. That dog wouldn’t last three minutes once he left the fire.”

“How do you feel now?” Dick asked, going to the wounded man’s side.

“Much better,” answered the officer, “but my side is stiff and mighty sore. I’ll be flat on my back for a couple of weeks yet. Couldn’t be worse luck now that the Inspector needs every man of us.”

“Then you really think we have a good chance escaping from the wolf pack?” Dick eagerly seized at a grain of encouragement.

The corporal did not answer immediately. “You’d have a lot bigger chance if you left me here in the morning,” said the corporal steadily.

“Leave you here!” Dick exclaimed. “What do you think we are—cowards?”

“I should say not, Dick Kent,” replied the policeman. “But that doesn’t make me any less a burden. With this wolf pack surrounding you you’ll do well to get away from camp at all, say nothing of hauling me along.”

“But we’re with you anyway,” Dick concluded decisively.

“Oh, well,” the officer turned a little, stifling a groan at the movement, “the wolves may scare up moose or caribou before morning. If they do they’ll soon leave us alone.”

The conversation had weakened the corporal, and Dick soon left him to rest, joining Sandy. The boys discussed the situation, listening to the fearful howls of the wolves, hoping against hope that as Corporal Richardson had said, they might find other game before morning.

After two hours of sound slumber, Toma quietly arose and joined the two at the fireside. He said little, but set to work cutting down more wood, and breaking it up into firewood lengths.

Morning dawned, cold and gray. Dick and Sandy were worn from loss of sleep.

Silently they waited for the wolves to depart. But with the sun an hour high the pack still circled the camp, tongues lolling, jaws salivating.

“Will they never leave!” Sandy’s voice faltered.

“Wolf much hungry!” Toma grunted. “Maybe um leave, we start. Sometime they do.” He looked at Dick to see what he thought.

Dick surveyed the menacing circle of wolves. They had grown bolder as their hunger increased. Could they hitch up the dog and break out of that circle of death?

“If you think we have a chance to get out of here, Toma, we’ll try it,” Dick grimly returned a moment later. “Anything but this suspense suits me.”

As the boys packed up the wolves grew more uneasy and shifted closer. Toma scarcely could manage the husky as he hitched it to the sled. The young guide held his rifle in one hand, working at a disadvantage so that he might be prepared to shoot at a moment’s notice. Toma’s was the only rifle left in which there was ammunition, and Dick had shot away all the revolver cartridges during the night.

It was with many misgivings that a few minutes later they took their places for the dash through the wolves.

Toma took the lead, with the rifle, Sandy held the dog, while Dick took up the rear, swinging the camp axe.

Slowly, in grim silence, they pulled away from the fire.

A hundred feet away they discovered they never would get through the circle. For, instead of retreating, the wolves dashed this way and that, then rushed them in a body. Sandy’s cry of terror was drowned by the crack of Toma’s rifle and Dick’s hoarse shout:

“Back to the fire! We can’t make it!”

Then Toma’s rifle was empty, and with clubbed rifle and axe they were left to fight their way back to the campfire. Slashing with razor fangs, the wolves leaped in and out. Dick wrought havoc with the axe, and Toma ploughed his way

through the snarling, writhing mass like a Hercules. When the guide broke through he ran to the fire and commenced throwing coals and burning sticks with his mittens, until the air was filled with flying embers. Howls of pain followed as the hot coals burned the wolves. The scent of singed hair and burning flesh arose.

At last the wolves drew off reluctantly, leaving behind them a trail of wounded and dying. In the repulsion of the attack the boys had slain nine wolves and wounded seven. They could see the hairy bodies of the dead lying scattered all the way from where the fight had begun.

“Wood not last much longer,” Toma’s voice startled Dick.

Dick hastily inspected the patch of wood in which they had camped. As Toma had said, they soon would be out of firewood. And the nearest wood was three hundred yards away—outside the circle of death.

Dick and Sandy shuddered; Corporal Richardson stirred and moaned; Toma began quietly gathering the chips and twigs; half buried in the snow.

CHAPTER XX

SANDY DISAPPEARS

Sitting by the fire, conscious presently of a light step at his side and a friendly hand on his shoulder, Dick turned and looked up into Sandy's face, as his chum spoke in a voice husky with emotion.

"I guess we've about played our last card," said Sandy. "Right now it doesn't look as if Fort Dunwoody was very close, does it?"

"No, not very close," Dick was obliged to answer, as his tired eyes swept the narrowing circle of timber wolves.

"We've done the best we could anyway," Sandy went on dejectedly. "I guess my Uncle Walter won't receive a whole lot of help from us."

"Sandy, I used to think you were an optimist," declared Dick, "but now I know you're a born pessimist. Why don't you try to cheer up?"

Sandy glanced about at the wolves. A scowl puckered his usually placid brow. "Can't be very cheerful with those fellows waiting for us," he said shortly. "Do you know I sometimes think that big one with the shaggy head actually grins at me? If he thinks he's going to pick a whole lot of meat off my bones he's badly mistaken."

Dick grinned in spite of himself. "Exactly what do you mean, Sandy?"

"Well, I'm a whole lot thinner than I was. Toma would make better eating."

At this juncture, Toma, who had been cutting what little wood remained, strode forward with an almost excited look on his face. "I know what do now," he announced. "We no got firewood; plenty over by trees."

“We know that,” Sandy responded impatiently, “but we’re a long ways from being over there.”

“Me ketch um good idea. No can go to wood with wolves there. We move fire to wood; move um little at time, one feet, two feet—bye and bye we get there—mebbe by night we travel fast.”

Toma was right. At nightfall they had accomplished the unusual feat of moving the fire to another patch of wood. And with the first snarling approach of the ravenous wolves a replenished fire sprang up to beat them back. The boys, in exuberance, piled more and more wood on the fire until it leaped five feet into the still, frosty air, and grew so hot it melted a circle of snow about it.

Dick breathed a sigh of satisfaction as he crawled into his blankets hours later. It had been decided that Sandy was to stand first watch with Toma. Tonight, Dick decided grimly, he would make the most of the hours allotted him for sleep. He intended to follow Toma’s example and forget everything in the complete relaxation of weary mind and muscles.

“Got to fight this thing through,” he reminded himself, stretching his long legs out before the campfire and composing himself for sleep. A few minutes later, while watching Sandy nervously pacing to and fro, he forgot all his troubles in a happy loss of consciousness that carried him away to a land where wolves, blizzards and scar faced Indians did not once trouble him.

He was awakened by Toma shaking him by the shoulder. “Big wolf eat you up if sleep like that,” declared the young guide goodnaturedly.

Dick jumped up, once more mentally alert, and shortly piled more wood on the fire, commencing his lonely vigil. He scanned the fringe of the firelight for the skulking shapes, which had become so dreadfully familiar, but he could see none—not a single prowling form anywhere. He decided that the wolves had moved further back from the fire. Several times he believed he heard a deep-throated snarl, but he was not sure.

“I hope they’re gone,” he breathed fervently, “so that we can continue on our way to Fort Dunwoody. We’ve lost too much time already.”

Off to his right a faint glow suffused the east. In another hour, if the wolves really were gone, they might continue their slow progress, and, barring

emergencies, might reasonably expect to arrive at the mounted police barracks in about three days.

With the first grin in hours brightening his face, Dick set about preparing breakfast. He had a frying pan over the fire and was melting snow for coffee. It was so quiet around him that he imagined he could hear the low, irregular breathing of Corporal Richardson. Then, presently Toma stirred, stretched out one arm and yawned:

“Guess I get up,” the guide announced.

“When you do,” Dick replied, “I wish you’d go over and wake Sandy. I’ve kept his watch for him, and if I wasn’t so busy getting breakfast I’d go over myself.”

Dick was adding coffee to the boiling water when Toma returned.

“Well, did you wake him?”

The half breed endeavored to speak, but no sound came from his trembling lips.

“What’s wrong?” Dick inquired, trying to be calm.

“Sandy, him gone!”

“Gone!” Dick’s heart took a sickening plunge.

The light was strong enough now so that they could see that the wolves were gone, but this happy discovery was not so encouraging with the disappearance of Sandy.

Horried at first, at the thought that Sandy must have been eaten by the wolves, Dick and Toma began a minute search of the vicinity. They found tracks, but no sign of Sandy. If the departed wolves had slain Dick’s chum there would have been traces left, at least bits of clothing.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAN FROM CROOKED STICK RIVER

If, as Dick suspected possible, Pierre Govereau had overtaken them again and somehow made off with Sandy, what then could they do? Corporal Richardson must go on to the post at all hazards. The infection in the officer's wound would kill him unless medical aid were procured soon. Yet Dick could not leave without knowing what had happened to Sandy, and making a sincere effort to find his chum. And in that strange country he could not find his way without the aid of Toma.

"I've a good idea what might have happened to Sandy," Dick mused aloud a little later.

"What you say?" Toma eagerly asked.

"He's walked in his sleep two or three times in his life that I know about, and last night he must have done it again. Now I'm sure he left the fire after the wolves were gone. If he did then he might have fallen into Govereau's hands." Dick strode back and forth in the snow, almost beside himself.

"Oh! if some friend would only come along on the way to Fort Dunwoody," Dick exclaimed aloud.

"We take um sick fella to cabin," Toma suggested. "We leave um there when go look for Sandy."

At his wit's end Toma's suggestion seemed the only way out. Dick felt his duty to Sandy even greater than that to the minion of the northland law, and he would not exactly be deserting the policeman if he left him with food and firewood.

"That's the thing to do," Corporal Richardson spoke up from his blankets. "The Indian has it right. The cabin is between six and eight miles from here. You can

take me there and come back and take up young McClaren's trail."

Dick was glad to hear the officer's voice, and to learn that he was once more rational, with abated fever.

"If it's all right with you, corporal, that's what we'll do. Toma, let's hurry."

In a few minutes the camp where they had been held up a day and two nights had been deserted and out across the vast, endless expanse of snow, Toma and Dick toiled in the dog traces, dragging the wounded policeman.

They had gone some two miles and were resting when suddenly they were startled by the sound of a dog driver's voice from over the knoll they had just coasted down. Was it friend or enemy? Dick prayed it was a friend as he hurried to the top of the little hill and looked.

A team of eight dogs, followed by a lone man, swinging a long whip, was coming along the trail they had made in the snow. Dick waited till the man had come a little nearer. Then he revealed himself. The man saw him almost immediately, and drew his dog team to a slower pace. The stranger seemed suspicious as to Dick's identity, but the evident distress of the young man on the hill reassured him. He came on to within hailing distance, and stopped his team, raising his rifle.

"If you're one of that Henderson gang," called the man threateningly, "I'll plug you where you stand."

Dick breathed a sigh of relief. "We're bound for Fort Dunwoody," he replied. "We've got a wounded policeman on our sled and have only one dog."

Satisfied that Dick was telling the truth, the shouted to his dogs and came on. A moment later he joined Dick and Toma alongside the sled.

"By gar, I tink I never get out of dat country," the newcomer, appearing to be a French-Indian, mopped his brow. "That Pierre Govereau one tough customer. Yah!"

"You came in a nick of time," Dick returned.

"One of our party has disappeared, we think he's been captured. Now we're

trying to get a wounded policeman to a place of safety while I and my guide take a look for my chum. My name's Dick Kent," he held out his hand.

"Me, I'm Gaston Leroi," announced the stranger, shaking with French warmth, "that Henderson's man Govereau kill my partner up on Crooked Stick River. I get away pretty lucky."

"And it's lucky for us you got away," Dick replied with spirit. He stepped to the sled and stopped over the wounded officer. "Corporal Richardson, here's a man who can help us out," Dick told the officer.

"Thank God," murmured the policeman. "What's his name?"

"Gaston Leroi."

"Gaston Leroi!" exclaimed the corporal with more strength in his voice than had been there for hours. "Not the trapper Leroi. Hey! Bring him around where I can see him."

At the sound of the wounded man's voice the French trapper had leaped forward where he could see the officer's face.

"By gar!" exclaimed Leroi. "George Richardson! What them fellers do to you, George?"

Dick was overjoyed to discover the men were old friends.

"Gaston, you won't mind doing something for me?" he heard the corporal saying.

"Sacre diable! Do I mind!" Gaston exclaimed.

"It's like this," the corporal went on, "these young fellows want to go back and look for their partner, but they won't leave me. Could you haul me to the fort?"

The trapper vociferously expressed his willingness to do this for his friend, Constable Richardson.

"They're out of ammunition too," revealed the corporal. "Just had a long fight with a pack of hungry wolves. Can you spare some ammunition, Gaston?"

“What kind of gun you got?” the trapper turned to Dick.

“Ross 30.30,” Dick replied anxiously.

Leroi’s face fell. He turned to Toma.

“I got um 45.70 Winchester,” Toma anticipated the trapper’s question.

“Me, I use 45.70!” Gaston Leroi exclaimed with pleasure and turned back to Dick, saying: “I use revolver. Like heem better dan rifle. I take your gun. You take mine. Huh?”

“Suits me,” replied Dick gratefully.

Leroi dived into his packs and soon brought out several boxes of ammunition, with which Dick and Toma filled their pockets.

A half hour later Dick and Toma bid goodbye to Gaston Leroi, and watched his dog team, hauling the wounded corporal, disappear over a long hill. Then the two boys set out over the back trail at a jog trot. They were determined not to rest their heads until they had discovered what had become of Sandy.

“Do you think it was Govereau?” Dick asked Toma as they hurried along.

“I not know,” replied Toma, who was slightly in the lead. “Tracks show only two fella keetch Sandy. Hope snow no more; if not we trail um easy.”

They did not speak again until they had reached the scene of their battle with the wolves, where they picked up the trail.

“They’re going north,” Dick spoke, after studying the tracks. “It must be some of Henderson’s men, though it seems queer Govereau would come this far south.”

“That Govereau, he bad fella; he go everywhere. No ’fraid anybody. Mebbe I see that Many Scar.”

Dick fell silent at the mention of the scar faced Indian. He knew Toma was thinking of his dead brother, and was planning revenge if he met the murderer, who he believed to be the scar faced Indian. Dick knew nothing to say which would change Toma’s mind in this respect, so he said nothing as they forged

onward at a mile-eating pace.

They had traveled nearly ten miles into a deeply wooded vicinity, when the tracks began to grow fresher, and they slowed their pace. Presently they rounded a bend, and in a tiny valley, drained by a winding, frozen creek, they came upon an Indian village of a dozen tepees.

Toma seemed as surprised as Dick at the discovery.

“Um war party,” Toma replied immediately. “No good Injun if um fight White Father.”

“How can you tell they’re a war party?” inquired Dick.

“No squaws, no papooses,” replied Toma abruptly.

As Toma had said there were no women or children to be seen in the camp. And at different points along the fringe of trees around the clearing, Dick made out dusky sentinels, armed with long rifles, with feathers in their beaver bonnets.

“The tracks lead down into the village, so Sandy must be there somewhere,” Dick mused aloud.

The larger portion of the party of Indians who had thrown up their caribou hide tepees in the valley, seemed to be absent. Here and there a warrior squatted before a cooking fire, his rifle leaning close beside him.

“Look!” Dick suddenly pointed.

A white man had come out of one of the tepees and was walking slowly toward the creek.

“I see um,” said Toma. “Guess him one Govereau’s men. Huh? Him Henderson got plenty bad Indian work for him.”

“Then Govereau has joined forces with these Indians,” Dick’s spirits fell. “It will be one big job getting Sandy away from him now. I wonder which tepee he is in—er—” he was about to wonder if Sandy was alive, but dared not trust the words on his tongue. It was too horrible to speak of—that Pierre Govereau had murdered his chum.

“We wait till dark,” Toma voiced the resolve of both.

At twilight the boys saw a large party come in from the north, in which there were a number of whites. They were loaded down with furs, which they probably had stolen. Dick thought he recognized the figure of the half-breed Pierre Govereau, but could not be certain at that distance.

Slowly darkness fell and the campfires flung out flickering shadows on the sloping walls of tepees and over the figures of the warriors squatted around them.

“I make believe I one of them,” Toma whispered presently. “I go down—find out where Sandy is.”

“It’s an awful risk,” Dick tried to object, “and you aren’t dressed like they are.”

“I fix that. You wait here—no, you come down closer. Be ready to shoot, you hear trouble. Jump ’round when you shoot. Make um think you whole army. I ketch um Sandy.”

Though Dick feared Toma would come to grief, he could do nothing but let the courageous young guide take the chance, hoping, if worst came to worst, and Toma was discovered, that he might draw the attention of the Indians long enough for his red friend to escape.

Toma crawled off down the slope toward the camp, Dick followed him for a little way, until he reached a heavy copse of brush where he felt he was within good rifle range of the camp. Toma went on and disappeared, Dick’s whispered wish of “good luck” following him.

As Dick lay there waiting he could see on the side of the camp nearest him, the shadowy figure of a warrior sentinel, standing motionless by a tree, silhouetted by the light of one of the fires. Dick raised his rifle and drew bead on the guard. It was this warrior who would discover Toma, if any did, and Dick watched intently for a motion that would indicate the guard had seen something unusual.

He watched for possibly five minutes, when of a sudden another figure arose between him and the shadowy guard. There was a swift movement of the two shadows; they swayed violently, then the guard fell and the other stooped over him. Then both disappeared in the dark underbrush.

Dick held his breath. Toma had attacked the guard and knocked him down. In a flash Dick saw Toma's plan—the young Indian would change clothes with the warrior and creep into the camp, casually joining the others.

Gripping his rifle, Dick awaited developments. What would happen in the next hour he did not know, but he hoped for the best.

CHAPTER XXII

A SKIRMISH IN THE NIGHT

Dick waited what seemed to him several hours, though it could not have been more than thirty minutes, before he saw a sign of Toma. Then, in almost the exact position the guard had held, he saw a figure rise up which he was almost certain was Toma, though the firelight revealed that the young guide now wore the clothes and head-dress of the sentinel.

“Good for you, Toma,” Dick whispered. “Now if you can only get in among them without them recognizing that you’re not really a member of their band.”

Toma did not enter the camp from that side, however. Once more he disappeared.

A patch of brush to the left caught Dick’s roving eyes, and this he watched, believing Toma would take this means of getting into the camp without attracting attention, since the bushes led up to a point very near one of the tepees.

Dick was right. A few minutes later the bush tops waved a little at the passage of a creeping body. Presently in the shadow of the tepee nearest the bushes, Toma rose and walked slowly toward one of the campfires, where he joined a group. Dick feared Toma might see the scar faced Indian, and that the guide’s desire for revenge might cause him to destroy all his chances for the rescue of Sandy. But as time passed and all went well, Dick felt that Toma must be making good progress in the dangerous mission he had set out on.

A little later Dick saw a figure, which he took to be Toma, break away from a group of natives and saunter toward one of the tepees. Evidently the guide now was either looking for Sandy, or had learned the captive’s exact position from the conversation of the warriors.

Toma stooped into the opening of the tepee and disappeared. Holding his breath, Dick watched. Toma was gone some time, then in the flickering light he appeared again. Would Sandy follow? Dick's heart beat painfully.

Then he could not suppress a low cry of exultation as Sandy's bare head came out next and the two slipped into the deep shadows of another tepee. For minutes they did not move, then they suddenly dashed for the patch of brush that had covered Toma's entrance into the camp. Dick's finger tightened on the trigger.

There was a commotion among one of the groups about the campfires. A shout sounded, then a rifle shot. The Indians began to run; they had seen Toma and Sandy!

Dick took quick aim and fired. The crack of his rifle in the silent forest startled the camp. Dick shot again, hurrying to another position as Toma had advised. He could see that Toma and Sandy had reached cover, and that the guide was firing on his pursuers.

The whole camp was in a turmoil now; Indians and whites hurrying hither and thither, shooting at the flashes of Dick's rifle. He could not hear what they were shouting to each other, but he divined they thought he was quite a number of men, so fast was he firing and from so many positions.

"I'll hurry along toward Toma and Sandy," Dick muttered to himself, "they'll know where I am by the sound of my rifle."

Twenty yards further on Toma and Sandy reached him.

"Thank God you're safe at last!" Dick embraced Sandy, while Toma kept up rifle fire on the Indians and whites, who were now charging after them.

With a parting salvo at their pursuers, the three made off into the night toward Fort Dunwoody. All night they hurried on, hungry and tired, yet determined to elude Govereau if they dropped in their tracks.

"Him Govereau with Indians," Toma revealed to Dick. "No see um Many-Scar Jackson. I hear um talk much. Bear Henderson, him make north country big nation all his own. Give Indians back their land. Humph! Bear Henderson crazy—him thief, outlaw. That Govereau bad fella too; keep um police from come up from south."

It did not take Sandy long to tell Dick and Toma how he had been captured by two scouts of Govereau's band, who had lain in hiding, looking for a chance to attack. It had been their approach and the appearance of a herd of caribou going south that had frightened away the wolves. Dick had been right in suspecting that Sandy had walked in his sleep. It was almost funny to hear him tell how he had awakened, struggling in the hands of his captors, dreaming they were wolves devouring him.

At dawn the travelers reached the shores of a large lake, whose snow covered ice stretched for leagues and leagues ahead.

"Him Badge Lake," Toma told them. "We cross um ice, make journey shorter."

They stopped long enough to steep coffee and make some flapjacks. Dick and Toma had taken very few provisions with them when they left Gaston Leroi, and they now could see that they would have barely enough for another meal.

Still hungry, they set off across the frozen lake with many a backward glance to see if they were followed. But if they were, they saw no sign of Govereau's band. The silent forest, fading from view as they forged out farther and farther over the ice, disclosed no running figures on their trail.

"We cross um lake when sun set," Toma said. "Maybe see moose when other side. We eat then."

It was a long jaunt across the lake. At noon they could see the other shore, dim and hazy to the south. With hunger gnawing at their vitals they trudged the last miles across the ice, hearing now and again, a low rumbling roar as the lake ice cracked open for hundreds and hundreds of yards. Once they were held up by one of these cracks, wider than the rest, which they could not leap over. They had to follow this until it grew narrower. Sandy slipped when they finally jumped the crack, and fell into the niche. At the bottom the fissure came together, and was partly filled with slivers of ice. Dick and Toma pulled Sandy out on the end of a rifle.

Darkness was just falling when they reached the other shore of the lake. It was with groans of thankfulness that they built a fire and dropped down to rest for the night.

"I'm all in," Sandy sank upon his back by the fire.

“I couldn’t have gone much further,” Dick admitted.

Even Toma seemed tired. They did not bother to get supper, but rolled into their sleeping bags, and fell into heavy slumber, not even keeping watch.

Dawn found them awake. They finished their provisions for breakfast, and again took to the trail on the last lap to Fort Dunwoody. They had no time to hunt, but kept watch among the trees for a ptarmigan or partridge, or bigger game if they ran across it. But they had bad luck and the entire day passed with no more than two ptarmigan to show for their pains.

The birds made a slender meal for the three hungry young men. Toma chopped out some roots that proved succulent when stewed, and they managed to fill their stomachs with this, though within an hour afterwards they were as hungry as ever.

Twenty miles from Fort Dunwoody, at noon of the third day since the rescue of Sandy, they came abruptly upon a friendly Indian village at the edge of a tiny lake.

“Now we’ll eat!” cried the haggard Sandy.

And eat they did, in preparation for the last lap of their eventful journey, for they felt it would be a hard day on the trail.

CHAPTER XXIII

GRAY GOOSE LAKE

“The fort! The fort!” cheered Dick, as the following evening they came to the edge of a vast plain.

Sandy was overjoyed, so much so that he could not speak.

Sure enough, a half mile ahead frowned the stockade of Fort Dunwoody, under the rippling flag of the king. Toma did not express himself in words, but hastened his tireless pace.

Dick and Sandy hurried after the guide, curiously gazing at the fort. Along the top of the stockade they could see a red-coated policeman pacing slowly back and forth.

“Who goes there?” the sentry above the gate called when the worn travelers appeared.

“Friends,” cried Dick. “We’re from Fort du Lac—looking for help at Fort Good Faith.”

“You the lads that helped bring in Corporal Richardson?” the sentry gruffly asked.

“Yes.”

The huge gate swung back immediately, and the young adventurers passed through. The police guard met them as the gate was closed.

“You’ll want to see Inspector Dawson?” asked the guard.

“I think he’s the man we should see,” Dick replied.

Presently they were ushered into the presence of Inspector Dawson, whose grim face, under a thatch of iron gray hair, broke into a smile, meant to be kind.

Dick and Sandy gave the scout salute.

“Ah, ha!” said the Inspector, “I see you’ve been members of the Boy Scouts.”

“Yes sir, first class, both of us,” replied Dick, a little abashed in the presence of so distinguished a man as Inspector Dawson.

“Corporal Richardson told me about you,” went on the Inspector.

“Then the corporal got in all right,” Dick exulted.

“Yes, thanks to you boys and Gaston Leroi,” Inspector Dawson said. “He’ll be up and around in a few days now. I’ve already sent relief to Fort Good Faith,” he concluded.

“Oh!” Dick was both glad and disappointed at once. He had hoped to join the expedition.

“However, an Indian runner came in today saying that Sergeant Brewster and Constable Marden, the two I detailed for Fort Good Faith, were held up at Gray Goose Lake by one of Henderson’s lieutenants and about thirty renegade Indians. I believe the man’s name is Pierre Govereau. He has a criminal record here.”

“Govereau!” ejaculated Dick and Sandy in one voice.

“You seem to have met him before,” the Inspector continued briskly. “But the point I’m getting at is this; I have no men to send on as relief to Gray Goose Lake. I expect one of my scouts, Malemute Slade, in tomorrow morning from Fort du Lac where he has cleared things up.”

At mention of Malemute Slade, Dick and Sandy exchanged significant glances.

“Yes,” the inspector continued. “And I suppose you fellows want to go on to Fort Good Faith. You seem to be able to take care of yourselves. Would you like to be special deputies?”

“Would we!” Dick exclaimed.

“Hurrah!” shouted Sandy.

Inspector Dawson could not forbear a smile at the boys’ exuberance. “All right, step forward,” he commanded, arising from his desk.

Dick and Sandy lined up like soldiers while they repeated the oath of allegiance to the law on specials duty for the duration of the Henderson outbreak.

The Inspector made Toma an official scout.

“Now good day, boys,” the Inspector said dismissing them. “Report to me tomorrow morning early. I expect Slade in then.”

Dick and Sandy followed Toma out of headquarters seething with excitement. They felt themselves full-fledged mounted policemen now, and, too, they were to take the trail with Malemute Slade, the famous scout they had met on the Big Smokey. Their only regret was that they could not don the beautiful uniforms they saw everywhere about the post.

They inquired as to the quarters of Corporal Richardson, and had a long chat with the convalescent officer. They secured arrangements to pass the night in the barracks, and once more toasted their shins before a genuine stove.

Bright and early next morning, Dick and Sandy rolled out of their bunks and pulled on their clothes.

“It hardly seems possible we’re at Fort Dunwoody,” Dick declared when they attacked the ample breakfast set before them by the post cook.

Sandy shivered in recalling the narrow escapes they had had and agreed with Dick.

Toma, who had slept before the fire on a bearskin rug, was as silent as he always was when off the trail, but his moon face was split by a continuous smile.

Malemute Slade was waiting at headquarters when the boys reported as instructed. His dog team of six huge huskies stood in front of the Inspector’s office, harnessed to the sled, ready for the trail.

Dick and Sandy were pleased to find that Malemute Slade remembered them. His dark, wind-hardened face lighted up pleasantly, as he shook hands with his future trail mates.

“Wal, I swan,” he exclaimed, “I guess we’ll do some tall fightin’ now.”

Dick and Sandy assured him they were with him with all they had to offer, and after Inspector Dawson had wished them good luck, they mushed across the parade square to the stockade gate, which swung slowly open for them.

Hour after hour the relief detachment from the post traveled northward. Malemute Slade would not permit the boys to sleep longer than five hours. Long before dawn they were up, had eaten a hasty breakfast, while the dogs wolfed their daily frozen fish, and had hit the trail again. Dick and Sandy had grown almost as trail hardened as Toma on their long trip from Fort du Lac to Fort Dunwoody, and they did not complain at the terrific pace set by Malemute Slade.

On the afternoon of the third day, more than a hundred miles north of Fort Dunwoody, they saw from the top of a ridge the white, level expanse of Gray Goose Lake. They had not been molested along the way and they decided that Govereau was doing all his fighting at Gray Goose Lake.

Around the lake they broke into rough and serrated country, through which they proceeded cautiously. Soon they heard the faint report of rifles, by which they located the scene of combat.

Malemute Slade led the way up a long ravine where they left the dog team in charge of Toma and went on under cover of whatever they found.

“Follow me, lads, an’ don’t fire till I give the word,” Malemute Slade ordered.

“Look! There they are!” whispered Dick a moment later as they reached the top of the ravine.

On a rocky knoll, overlooking Gray Goose Lake, they could see the occasional puff of two rifles. All around the bottom of the little hill were hidden Govereau’s men, flanked by a deep gorge on their left.

“Now, lads, we’ll take ’em on the run. Shoot an’ holler all you can,” Malemute Slade’s drawling voice calmed them.

Dick and Sandy tensed for the coming skirmish, tightening their grips of their rifles.

“Ready,” called Malemute Slade. “Here we go.”

They broke from cover and ran yelling like an army across the space that separated them from Govereau’s party. The Indians turned and shouted, seeming paralyzed with surprise. The besieged policemen, on the hill, seeing reinforcements, also charged, leaping from their hiding place and firing as they came.

Attacked from two sides, Govereau’s band broke and fled.

“There’s Govereau!” cried Dick.

“An’ here’s where one dirty skunk cashes in,” shouted Malemute Slade, raising his high-powered rifle. At the report of the rifle, Govereau fell, Dick and Sandy rushing past his body in pursuit of the others.

Dick barely had witnessed the fall of Govereau before he caught sight of Toma stalking an Indian, who was trying to crawl away among the bushes.

“Halt, in the king’s name!” commanded Dick, as he recognized the skulker to be no other than Many-Scar Jackson.

But the scar faced Indian did not halt. He broke into a run toward the deep gorge on the left, Toma in hot pursuit, and Dick and Sandy close behind.

Suddenly Dick stopped dead in his tracks, Sandy almost falling over him. “Toma!” he called, but the guide did not seem to hear.

“He’s going to avenge his brother’s death,” Sandy exclaimed, pushing ahead.

“Stop!” Dick hauled his chum back. “Toma doesn’t want us to interfere. It’s his fight. If we see he’s getting the worst of it, then we’ll help.”

Sandy drew back and with pale faces they watched the two Indians come together and draw their knives in a duel to the death.

Around and around they circled before Toma darted in like a flash and drew blood. But Many-Scar made a stab in return, and they saw Toma reel a little. Then the two clinched, staggered this way, then that, their knife blades locked.

“Many-Scar has him!” Sandy suddenly exclaimed, raising his rifle.

“Wait!” Dick cried.

For a moment it had seemed as if the scar faced Indian would plunge his knife into Toma’s breast, but the agile young guide twisted suddenly, like a snake, and Many-Scar was tripped to his knees.

Then as Toma leaped in to follow up his advantage, Many-Scar whirled away, leaped to his feet and once more they circled.

“Many-Scar is getting the worst of it,” Dick breathed a few moments later.

“He sure is,” agreed Sandy exultingly.

Toma’s enemy plainly was weakening. Dick and Sandy prepared to see the final thrust, when of a sudden the scar faced Indian broke away and ran like the wind straight toward the gorge.

“They’ll fall into the gorge!” Dick cried, starting to run toward them.

But Many-Scar Jackson and Toma, too, seemed uncognizant of any immediate danger from a fall. Many-Scar ran like a deer, and as he reached the edge, he leaped into the air. Like a bird he soared across the space between the two cliffs, landing safely on the other side, where he vanished into the bushes.

“What a jump!” exclaimed Dick.

“I can’t believe it,” Sandy said amazedly. “Why, it was a broad jump record. It’s nearly thirty feet between the cliffs.”

Toma had halted on the brink of the cliff and the boys saw him raise clinched fists to the sky. Toma had failed this time, but, somehow, the boys felt sure there was another time coming.

Behind them Malemute Slade was calling. They rejoined the victorious mounted police, Toma tardily returning.

Presently they were behind the dogs on the trail to Fort Good Faith, their party now increased to five with Sergeant Brewster and Constable Marden.

“I hope Uncle Walter has been able to hold out this long,” Sandy whispered to himself as he ran after the waving tails of the huskies.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHIEF BLACK DOG'S SCHEME

"We're coming into an Indian village," Dick called to Sandy, when the party reached the top of a long ridge.

Sandy, who was some distance in the rear, hurried up and joined Dick. A village of nearly a score of tepees lay ahead, the smoke of a number of campfires rising here and there.

Sergeant Brewster, who had taken command, explained that he was about to enlist the tribe's aid in an effort at retaking Fort Good Faith.

"Chief Black Dog is a good friend of the mounted," said Sergeant Brewster, "and he'll let us have a few warriors. I suppose Henderson has tried to get the old fellow on his side, but chief is loyal."

They entered the village, and had some trouble with the numberless Indian dogs that rushed out savagely from behind the tepees and attacked the huskies. Presently several Indians came and called off the dogs, throwing stones and sticks at them.

Sergeant Brewster addressed one of the braves: "Tell Chief Black Dog a man from the Great White Father has come to see him."

The buck hurried away, and soon returned, saying the chief would be glad to see him, in fact had invited them all to his council tepee.

Leaving Toma to look after the dogs, Dick and Sandy followed Malemute Slade and the policemen to a tepee much larger than the rest. The entrance was so high that even Malemute Slade entered erect.

"Gosh, it's dark," whispered Sandy, when the tepee flap closed behind them.

The only light in the tepee was a tiny fire glowing in the center. Before this Dick and Sandy could make out three shadowy figures. The one in the center was an aged Indian with snow white hair. He was Chief Black Dog.

“The white brother comes from the Great White Father. It is good. Peace with white brother,” the old chief spoke.

“We bring presents from the great chief to the big chief,” Sergeant Brewster announced, drawing from his mackinaw pockets a fine pocket knife and a shining tobacco box.

Dick and Sandy could see the old chief’s eyes glitter as they fell upon the gifts.

“It is good,” said Chief Black Dog, accepting the presents.

The sergeant also gave something to each of the two chiefs seated on either side of Chief Black Dog, for which they muttered thanks.

“What will the white brother have?” the chief spoke again.

“We wish help to fight the bad outlaw, Bear Henderson,” answered the sergeant. “He has taken Fort Good Faith from the good factor Walter MacClaren.”

“It is good. My warriors are brave. They go with you.”

Sergeant Brewster thanked the old chief, then waited for dismissal. Chief Black Dog sat looking into the fire for a time, his deep eyes meditative. The boys watched curiously. The chief seemed to be thinking. At length he spoke:

“The red man would know how many braves the bad chief Henderson fights with. Some my warriors, young and foolish, with Henderson. I send warrior in night. He go make believe join Henderson. He find his brothers there. He find out how many braves hold fort. Come tell me. He find where big chief MacClaren in prison. We know how to fight better then.”

“The red man’s words are wise,” replied the sergeant.

“It is good,” the chief said, turning to the chief on his left and speaking swiftly in his native tongue.

The other chief rose and quietly left the tepee.

“White brother’s men stay, wait for spy, when he come back. One night maybe. Then we know all.” He waved a withered hand in dismissal.

Dick and Sandy welcomed the open air, when once again they stepped into the sunlight. At the sergeant’s orders they helped Toma unharness the dogs.

Chief Black Dog assigned two tepees to the party from Fort Dunwoody. Dick, Sandy and Toma took one, the mounted policemen the other. An hour later the boys watched the spy leave for Fort Good Faith, while the war drums of the tribe summoned the braves to battle.

It was an exciting evening the boys passed, watching the warriors in their fantastic dances. When at last they went to their tepee to rest, they were tired, but could not sleep. The wait for news from Fort Good Faith was proving to be a trying one. So near Sandy’s uncle, yet under orders to remain idle, the boys chafed and worried.

“I can’t stand it,” Sandy cried. “I want to get there and have it over with.”

“I know just how you feel,” sympathized Dick. “I want to smell powder too. But I believe the chief made a wise move, at that. What do you think, Toma?”

Toma’s dark face, lighted by the fire, brightened. “Him wise chief,” said Toma. “My father know him long ago when they hunt on Saskatchewan River.”

“Tell us a story about the old days, Toma,” Dick pleaded, as he squatted by the fire, “—an Indian story.”

“Yes, do,” Sandy chimed in.

The young guide seemed to be looking far away as he stared into the glowing coals. Outside, the war drums and the cries of the dancing warriors echoed in the forest aisles.

“I tell story my father tell me long ago, when I little boy,” Toma began. “Big medicine man tell my father. It is story of Saskatchewan River and Great Bear, mighty hunter of the Crees.

“Long ago, by Saskatchewan live big tribe. One hunter, one Great Bear, he mightier than all big hunters. Him not like Saskatchewan country. Him want travel far, far—where sun goes down.

“Big medicine man, one Two-Horns-in-the-Bone not want lose Great Bear, great hunter. Him try keep Great Bear home. But Great Bear don’t care. He go anyway, he say.

“Then Great Bear get ready go far away. When start, Two-Horns-in-the-Bone go ’long little way with Great Bear, so Great Spirit be with him in far lands. They stop on bank of Saskatchewan, mighty river. Great Bear, lie thirsty. He kneel down, fill up with water. Two-Horns-in-the-Bone make sign over him, big medicine sign. When Great Bear get up, medicine man say:

“‘They who drink waters of Saskatchewan shall return before they die.’

“Great Bear, him laugh. Him think Two-Horns-in-the-Bone make fun. Great Bear young, strong; he laugh at Great Spirit, like him laugh at grizzly. Him leap in Saskatchewan an’ swim across. Him wave spear goodbye to medicine man, an’ turn back on Saskatchewan.

“Two-Horns-in-the-Bone go back to tepee. Say nothing. Him very wise.

“Many moons pass. Great Bear go far, far away—to Big Sea, to desert, to other side of sunset. He fight many battles, always win.

“Medicine man by Saskatchewan, him wait an’ smoke long pipe. Twenty winters gone by, then spring come. Two-Horns-in-the-Bone walk down to Saskatchewan. He wait all day. When sunset come he see old man walking. Old man all bent over, white hair, hobble on stick. Two-Horns-in-the-Bone watch. Old man come down to edge of water. Him kneel down and drink. Then he go back and lay down.

“Two-Horns-in-the-Bone go to old man. Him speak, him look in face. Old Indian, him Great Bear. Old medicine man raise face to sky. ‘The Great Spirit has spoken,’ say Two-Horns-in-the-Bone. ‘They who drink waters of Saskatchewan shall return before they die.’”

Toma’s voice died out. The young Indian seemed to be in another land, as he thought of his father’s people. Dick and Sandy sat spell-bound.

“It is the Legend of the Saskatchewan,” Dick said in a hushed voice.

“It sure was a good story,” said Sandy. “Tell us another one, Toma.”

But Toma shook his head. Dick and Sandy saw a certain sadness in his face, that the legend had aroused, and they did not urge him. Presently they rolled into their blankets. Once asleep, they did not awaken until summoned by Sergeant Brewster.

As they hurried from the tepee on the morning of that day which was to mean so much, an inspiring sight greeted their eyes.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ATTACK ON THE FORT

The tepees of the Indian village were arranged in a hollow square, and in the midst of this were gathered more than fifty warriors, arrayed for battle.

“Isn’t it a fearful sight!” exclaimed Sandy.

“I’d hate to have them catch me alone in the forest,” Dick responded.

“They’ll help us do for Henderson,” Sergeant Brewster remarked at their elbow. “The spy came in an hour ago. He reports that Henderson has about ten half-breeds and thirty Indians holding the fort. They don’t dream of an attack. Henderson thinks Govereau is taking care of the police.”

“Did the spy find out anything about Uncle Walter?” Sandy queried anxiously.

“I was coming to that,” continued the sergeant. “It seems that Henderson has imprisoned him in a cave about a mile from the fort. The spy believes he can find the cave from what he overheard while inside the stockade. I’ll detail you fellows to go after the factor. But don’t leave until we’re sure we’ve taken the fort—that comes first. Toma and Malemute Slade will accompany, with the spy as a guide.”

They were interrupted by Malemute Slade and Constable Marden driving up with the dog team.

“Wal, boys,” grinned Malemute Slade, “we’re off for another tussle. As f’r me I can’t get to it too soon.”

Dick and Sandy laughed and fell into line. The band of Indians already had started out. They left the village amid the lamentations of Indian women and the loud barking of the dogs.

They traveled slowly, Sergeant Brewster explaining that they must not reach Fort Good Faith until nightfall, if they were to surprise Henderson. Scouts were sent on ahead to report any appearance of Henderson's men.

Just before dark the war party came to a halt on the slope of a hill, from the top of which they could see Fort Good Faith not far away. Dick and Sandy gazed upon the stockade in awe. They had traveled more than six hundred miles since leaving Fort du Lac, and at last within sight of the post, they felt rewarded for all the hardships they had gone through in an effort to rescue Sandy's uncle.

"We'll have to keep out of sight till after dark—that's all that bothers me," chafed Sandy. "I wish we were climbing the stockade right now."

Sergeant Brewster called to them just then. "Here's the spy," he presented a somber Indian. "He'll stay close by you until it's time for you to go after your uncle. Take your orders from Malemute Slade."

Worked up to a frenzy by their war dances, the warriors were eager to attack, and it was all the policemen and the chiefs could do to hold them back until nightfall.

The minutes seemed like hours. But darkness slowly fell, and the hour of the attack approached. The Indians grew quieter then. At a word from the sergeant the war party started on toward the fort.

All was silent until they were under the very walls of the stockade, then the Indians gave vent to a horrible war cry, and like so many chipmunks clambered over the stockade. The first inside rushed the guard at the gate and swung it open for the rest of the party. Rifles and revolvers flashed in the darkness everywhere, and combined with the cries of the Indians, made a deafening racket.

Dick dropped down from the top of the palisades on the heels of Malemute Slade, Sandy and Toma following him. Suddenly he heard Sandy cry out:

"Help, Dick!"

Dick turned and ran toward the sound, his rifle clubbed in his hands. In the gloom he could see Sandy struggling in the grip of a brawny half-breed, Dick's gun stock swept down, and Sandy's adversary rolled over and lay still.

"Come on, Sandy. Let's not lose Malemute," Dick called.

They could see the policemen concentrating their attack on the door of the post residence, which had been hastily barricaded.

“Up an’ at ’em,” Malemute bellowed as he rushed to join the mounted police. Three half-breeds leaped out of the shadows and barred the big scout’s way. Malemute fired once, swung his fists twice, and the half-breeds were trampled underfoot.

The surprise attack was over as quickly as it had begun. Dick and Sandy saw a huge, long-haired man come to the door in answer to the sergeant’s demand for surrender, and watched the handcuffs snapped upon the outlaw’s wrists. It was the first look at the man behind all the trouble. Henderson’s name fitted him, they decided. He looked much like a grizzly in man’s clothing.

“That wasn’t half a fight,” Malemute Slade complained. “Now if that pesky spy would show up we’d skip out for the prisoner.”

“There he is!” Dick exclaimed.

The Indian spy and Toma both were approaching at a run.

“Lead on there,” Malemute sang out to the spy. “We’ll be a’ter the factor now—double quick.”

Led by the spy, the five left the stockade in the hands of the mounted police, and hurried off into the night.

It was hard going through the deep snow, but the spy seemed to be sure of the way. Only once did the Indian seem confused. Then he paused while the rest waited impatiently. Then they were off again.

Presently they came to a narrow canyon. Dick, Sandy and Toma were running close together. Malemute Slade and the Indian spy were slightly in the lead.

Suddenly the spy stopped dead, emitting a guttural exclamation.

“Down!” cried Malemute.

Scarcely had all five dropped flat when a hoarse voice sounded, seemingly out of the wall of the canyon:

“Who’s there?”

“You’ll shore find out in a minute,” retorted Malemute boldly. “Jest come out where we can see the color o’ y’r whiskers.”

“If you think much of y’r hide you better skidaddle,” replied the voice, threateningly.

“Haw, haw,” called Malemute. “You’ll be the one to do the skidaddlin’ when we finish with yuh.”

Silence followed, while Dick strained his eyes to see from whence the voice came.

“It’s from the cave,” Sandy whispered.

Nerves at snapping pitch, the young adventurers awaited the orders of the scout, who was mumbling to himself. Malemute was about to order a blind advance, when four dark forms leaped out of the rocks behind them. Dick Kent had a momentary vision of Malemute Slade pinned under two men, then something crashed down upon his head and all went black.

CHAPTER XXVI

LOST UNDERGROUND

Dick Kent regained consciousness slowly. His head pained severely, and as he passed his hand through his hair his fingers encountered something warm and sticky. All was silent in the canyon. He sat up with a start, all coming back to him—the mysterious voice from the canyon wall, the surprise attack, the blow that had felled him.

“Sandy! Sandy!” he shouted hoarsely. But the dark canyon gave back his voice in a hollow echo. There was no answer.

“Where have they gone?” Dick wondered. “Have they been killed or captured?”

He got dizzily to his feet and stumbled along the canyon, feeling his way. Almost immediately, he felt a depression in the rock. In the starlight a dark hole yawned in the wall.

“The cave!” he exulted.

Just then he stumbled over something solid, yet yielding. Groping about his feet, he recoiled in horror. It was the face of a man! In the starlight he finally made out the body, and saw that it was not one of his party.

Again Dick called out Sandy’s name, but only the echo of his voice from the yawning cavern answered him.

Dick’s head was clearing now. He thought swiftly and concluded his companions must have gone into the cavern in search of Walter MacClaren. He turned in and groped his way along, calling every now and then. Once he thought he heard a shout and stopped, but all was silent.

He had a few matches in his pocket and he drew one out and lighted it. He found

himself in a large cave, evidently formed by the erosion of water. The roof of the cavern was some six feet higher than his head. Where he was standing there seemed but one passage.

“Well, I can’t get lost if there’s only the main passage,” Dick decided, and started on boldly, feeling his way in the blackness.

The cavern slanted downward slightly, and leading forward fairly straight, Dick made good time, though he tested every bit of footing to make certain he did not step off into a hole, or run into an obstruction.

Presently he could hear running water, and as the sound grew louder, he lighted another match. There was no disturbance of air and the flame burned steadily. Dick could see that the cavern branched at this point. Down one passage a swift stream of dark water flowed; the other was dry.

About to take to the cavern that was dry underfoot, Dick heard a shout somewhere in the cave before him. He thrilled as he recognized Sandy’s voice.

“Sandy, Sandy, here I am!” he answered at the top of his lungs, hurrying down the cavern from which he believed the voice had come. Once more he heard Sandy’s shout, but this time it was fainter. Then he heard it no longer.

“There must be tracks if anyone has passed here,” Dick thought, and striking a match, stooped down. Plainly, in the moist floor of the cavern, were the tracks of moccasins. But they were directed both forward and back, and meant very little.

Thinking to catch Sandy before he was too far away, Dick hastened forward with less caution. He had advanced some fifty yards, when of a sudden the earth gave way under him. His cry of terror was drowned by the sound of falling stones and gravel, as he pitched downward. His clutching hands encountered a rim of solid rock. With a painful jerk he stopped his fall, dangling there by his fingers over a chasm he knew not how deep.

Once he regained his breath and sense, he endeavored to pull himself up. But he could not quite make it. The hole bulged outward under his feet and, kick and thresh as he would, he could not get a foothold anywhere. The rim he was clinging to was so narrow that it was impossible for him to hold his body up on it even if he pulled himself up by the hands. He realized that he was part way down the hole, hanging to the conical wall.

Dick's struggles slowly weakened. His head was paining him severely. He realized that he could not hang on much longer, yet gritting his teeth, he clung on while his muscles burned and his fingers grew numb.

With his last remaining strength, he shouted. But it seemed that his voice was deadened by the formation of the hole, as if he had shouted into a barrel. But again and again he raised his voice, though it grew weaker and weaker.

He did not know whether he imagined it or not, but he thought his last outcry received an answer. Slowly he was losing consciousness. It seemed that he could hear the pad, pad of moccasins and more voices. A hand grasped his wrists, then he gave out.

When once more Dick awakened he found himself in a dimly lighted underground room. Some one was pouring something hot between his teeth.

"Sandy!" he started up, looking into his chum's happy face.

"Greetin's, lad," called Malemute Slade, smiling down from the other side of him, "you've had a tough time of it."

"I thought it was all over with as far as I was concerned," replied Dick.

"Uncle Walter is here, but he's pretty sick," Sandy was telling him. "We found him in this room, almost dead from starvation. He seems to be a little better since we fed him some hot broth."

Dick raised up, his aching head swimming. Across the room, watched over by Toma, on a heap of balsam boughs, he saw a bearded man, haggard of face. It was Walter MacClaren.

"I guess I can stand on my pins now," declared Dick. "But where did you all go right after I was knocked out?"

"The devils drove us right into the cave," volunteered Malemute Slade. "It was a running fight till I climbed on a shelf of rock an' dropped down on the beans of a couple of 'em. I cracked their pates, then we choked the other one till he told us where the lad's uncle was. Me—I guess I've got about all I want of fightin' for today."

“I heard you shouting,” Sandy explained, “but you were in the wrong branch of the cavern. I had to go clear down to the fork before I found where you were. You had just about let go of the rock. I was scared to death when I had pulled you out. I struck a match—and say!—that hole didn’t seem to have any bottom.”

Dick shuddered, but smiled grimly. He had had a close shave—they had all had a close shave—but things had come out right in the end.

Malemute Slade had located the store of food kept by MacClaren’s guards, and they sat down and had a bite to eat. Then, they all gathered anxiously around Walter MacClaren. With eyes shining, Sandy stooped forward and patted his uncle’s hand.

“Everything is all right now,” the youth muttered happily. “I’m sure that Uncle Walt will get better.”

For several minutes they stood there in the half-light, looking down at the recumbent figure of the man, whose life they had saved barely in the nick of time. Except for their quiet breathing and the low trickle of water in an alcove close at hand, the deep hush remained unbroken. Then, unexpectedly, MacClaren stirred, muttering in his sleep. His eyes blinked open.

His gaze wavered from one to the other of the little company gathered around him, and slowly a smile played across his lips.

“Up in a few days,” he managed to articulate weakly. “Thanks—everyone of you! I’ll be feeling fine in the morning.”

Then, with another smile, he rolled over on his side and went back to sleep. In a surge of new-found happiness, Dick nodded significantly at Sandy, and, arm-in-arm, they turned quietly and tip-toed out of the room.

THE END

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