The Wanderer of the North

THE **SLEDS** TRAVELED ACROSS THE SNOW. The only noises heard were made by the **harnesses** and the bells of the leader dogs. The men and dogs were tired and made no sound. The trail was heavy with new-fallen snow, and they had come far. Darkness was approaching, but there was no camp to make that night. The snow fell gently through the quiet air in tiny shapes of delicate design. It was warmer than usual, and the men were comfortable. Meyers and Bettles had raised their ear coverings, and Malemute Kid had removed his **mittens**.

The dogs had been tired early in the afternoon, but they now began to show new life. Among the more lively ones there was some restlessness. These were not patient with their more tired brothers and urged them on by biting their legs. Finally, the leader of the first sled

barked quickly and threw himself against the harness. The others followed. The sleds leaped forward and the men held tightly to their guide poles. They had forgotten how tired they were and now shouted with delight at the new effort of the dogs. The dogs replied with joyful barks. Now they were speeding through the gathering darkness.

"Go! Go!" the men cried, each in turn, as their sleds suddenly left the main path.

Then came a short race to the lighted window, which told its own story of the home cabin, the roaring stove, and the steaming pots of tea. But the home cabin had already been entered. The whole team of sled-dogs resting in the yard barked in anger at the approach of the newcomer. The cabin door was thrown open and a man appeared, dressed in the red uniform of the Northwest Police. He stepped outside, knee-deep among the angry beasts, and calmed them with light blows from his dog whip. After that, the men shook hands. And in this way was Malemute Kid welcomed to his own cabin by a stranger.

Stanley Prince, who should have welcomed him, and who was responsible for the warmth of the stove, was busy with his guests. There were nearly a dozen of them. They served the British Queen in this faraway land in the enforcement of her law and the delivery of her mail. They were from many races and tribes, but their common life had made them all a special type—a lean type, with travel-hardened muscles, and sun-browned faces, and untroubled souls. They had seen life, and done deeds, and experienced adventure; but they did not know it.

And they were enjoying the comforts. Two of them were lying on Malemute Kid's bed, singing songs which their French **ancestors** sang in the days when they first entered the Northwest land and married its **Indian** women. Bettles' bed had also been occupied by three or four of them who were listening to the story of a companion. In a corner two men of mixed blood repaired harnesses and talked of the old days in the Northwest.

Jokes were told and the great difficulties of **trail** and river were spoken of lightly and with lack of concern. Prince was delighted with these uncrowned heroes who thought of great and exciting happenings

as the ordinary manner of life. He passed his precious tobacco freely among them. They, in turn, recalled story after story for his special interest.

When the talk ended and the travelers unrolled their packs of furs for sleeping, Prince questioned his companion for further information. Malemute Kid told of the probable origin of each of the guests. Prince was satisfied. Then he added, "And that fellow near the stove? I am sure he can't talk English. He has not opened his mouth all night."

"You are wrong. He knows English well. Did you look at his eyes when he listened? I did. But he's a different type from the others. When they talked their own languages you could see that he did not understand. I have been wondering myself what he is. We will test him!"

"Throw a couple of sticks into the stove!" Malemute Kid commanded, speaking loudly and looking directly at the man in question.

He obeyed immediately.

"He learned to obey somewhere," Prince said in a low tone.

Malemute Kid nodded in agreement. He removed his **socks** and hung them on the stove to dry.

"When do you expect to get to Dawson?" he asked the stranger.

The man looked at him a moment before replying. "They say it is almost one hundred miles. Maybe two days."

His manner of speech was somewhat strange, but he had no difficulty in finding the right words.

"Have you been in the country before?"

"No."

"Northwest Territory?"

"Yes."

"Were you born there?"

"No."

"Well, where were you born then? You are none of these." Malemute Kid swept his hand over the dog drivers and the two policemen who were sleeping in Prince's bed. "Where did you come from? I have seen faces like yours before, although I can't remember exactly where."

"I know you," he replied, not answering Malemute Kid's questions.

"Where? Ever see me?"

"No. I knew your friend. It was at Pastilik, a long time ago. He gave me food. He asked me if I had seen you, Malemute Kid. Did you hear him mention me?"

"Oh, you are the fellow who exchanged the animal skins for the dogs?"

The man nodded in agreement. He emptied the tobacco from his pipe and indicated that he did not want to continue talking by rolling himself in his furs.

Malemute Kid darkened the room and moved under the blankets with Prince.

"Well, what is he?"

"I don't know. He avoided my questions. But he is a fellow who makes you curious. Everyone was discussing him eight years ago. He came down from the North, in the middle of winter, many thousand miles from here. He was traveling as though the devil were following him. No one ever learned where he came from, but he must have come far. He was badly travel-worn when he got food from the Swedish **missionary** on Golovin Bay and asked the way south. We heard of this afterward. Then he left the shore line. He met with bad weather, snowstorms and strong winds, but he succeeded where a thousand other men would have died. He landed at Pastilik. He had lost all of his dogs except two and was nearly starved.

"He was so anxious to travel further that your friend Pastilik gave him the food he needed. However, he could not let him have any dogs because he was waiting to start a journey himself. This stranger from the North was too wise to travel without animals and he waited in Pastilik several days. On his sled he had some animal skins, the skins of sea **otters**, which were worth their weight in gold. There was also at Pastilik a Russian trader who had plenty of dogs. Well, they did not talk very long, but when the stranger started south again, he had a dog team. The trader had the otter skins. I saw them, and they were mag-

nificent. Those dogs cost the stranger plenty. And he knew the value of sea otter. He was an Indian of some sort, and the little he talked showed he had been among white men.

"After the ice left the sea, word came from Nunivak Island that he had gone there for food. Then he dropped from sight, and this is the first heard of him in eight years. Now where did he come from? And what was he doing there? And why did he come from there? He is Indian and where he has been nobody knows. There is another mystery of the North for you, Prince."

"Thanks, but I have too many now," he replied.

Malemute Kid was already asleep. But the younger man gazed straight up through the thick darkness. And when he did sleep, his brain continued to work. Throughout that night he, too, wandered through the white unknown, struggled with the dogs on endless trails, and saw men live, and work, and die like men.

The next morning, hours before daylight, the dog drivers and policemen started for Dawson. But they reappeared a week later, burdened with letters. However, their dogs had been replaced by fresh ones; but they were dogs.

The men had expected some sort of a pause in which to rest. But, nevertheless, they dried their socks and smoked their evening pipes with as much good spirit as on their former visit. As might be expected, one or two of them talked about deserting the Queen's service. They talked about the possibility of crossing the untraveled Rocky Mountains to the east, thus returning to their homes.

He of the Otter Skins seemed very restless and showed little interest in the discussion. Finally, he drew Malemute Kid aside and talked for some time in low tones. Prince watched them curiously and the mystery deepened when he saw them put on caps and mittens and go outside. When they returned, Malemute Kid placed his gold scales on the table, weighed 60 **ounces** of gold, and put them in the Indian's bag. Then the chief of the dog drivers joined them and further business was completed with him. The next day the entire group went up the river,

but he of the Otter Skins took some food and turned his steps back toward Dawson.

"I didn't know what to think of it," said Malemute Kid in answer to Prince's questions. "The poor fellow wanted to get out of the service for some reason or other. It seemed a most important one to him, although he would not tell me what it was. You understand, it is like the army: He signed for two years, and the only way to be free was to buy himself out. He could not desert and then stay here, and he was determined to remain in the country. He had decided when he arrived in Dawson, he said; but no one knew him and he had no money. I was the only person he had spoken two words with. He discussed his problem with an official and arranged for his release from service if he could get the money from me as a loan. He said he would repay me within the year, and, if I wanted, he would tell me something that would make me rich.

"And could he talk! When he got me outside he was ready to weep. He got down on his knees in the snow and begged until I pulled him up. He says he has worked to accomplish something special for years and years and could not endure having his hopes destroyed now. I asked him what he had been working for, but he would not say. I never saw a man act like that in my life. And when I said I would let him have the money, I had to pull him up out of the snow again. I told him to consider it as a **grubstake**. But no, he did not want that. He said he would give me all he found when he finished what he wanted to do. Now, a man who puts his life and time against a grubstake ordinarily finds it difficult enough to share half of what he finds. There is something more to this, Prince. We will hear of him if he stays in the country."

"And if he does not?"

"Then my judgment gets a shock and I have lost 60 ounces of gold."

The cold weather had come with its long nights before anything was heard of Malemute Kid's grubstake. And then, one cold morning in early January, a heavily loaded dog train pulled into the yard of his

cabin. He of the Otter Skins was there and with him walked a man such as the gods have almost forgotten how to create. It was Axel Gunderson. Men never talked of luck without mentioning his name. Tales of strength and daring were never told around the campfire without recalling him. And when talk seemed finished, it was begun anew with mention of the woman who shared his fortunes.

As has been noted, in the making of Axel Gunderson the gods had remembered their old-time skill. They created him from the pattern of men who were born when the world was young. He towered all of seven feet tall. His neck and arms were those of a giant. To carry his three hundred pounds of bone and muscle, his **snowshoes** were almost twice as big as those of other men. His large face and sharp eyes of palest blue had the look of a man who lived by the law of strength. His snow-covered yellow hair fell far down his coat made from the skin of a **bear**. As he walked down the narrow trail, in advance of the dogs, there seemed to be something of the seaman in his manner; and he brought the end of his dog whip against Malemute Kid's door as one who knew how to command.

Prince was making bread. As he did so, he cast many a glance at the three guests—three guests of a sort which might never come under the roof of a man in a lifetime. The Indian, whom Malemute Kid now called **Ulysses**, still interested him. But his attention was mainly divided between Axel Gunderson and Axel Gunderson's wife. The day of traveling had tired her, because she had lived in comfortable cabins during the many days since her husband had mastered the wealth of the frozen North. She rested against his great breast like a delicate flower against a wall. She replied occasionally to Malemute Kid's friendly talk and she stirred Prince's blood strangely with her deep, dark eyes. For Prince was a man, and healthy, and had seen few women in many months. And she was older than he, and an Indian besides. But she was different from all native wives he had met. She had traveled and she knew most of the things the women of his own race knew. And she knew much more than most women of the business of men. She could make a meal of sun-dried fish, or make a bed in the snow. She also spoke

in detail of dinners where many different foods were served. She knew the habits of the **moose**, the bear, and the fish of the Northern seas. She was skilled in the manner of living among the forests and the streams. Prince saw her laughing eyes as she read the Rules of the Camp. These rules had been listed by Bettles and were remarkable for their simple, direct humor. Prince always turned them toward the wall before the arrival of ladies. However, it was too late now.

This, then, was the wife of Axel Gunderson, a woman whose name and fame had traveled with her husband's, hand in hand, through all the Northland. At table, she was their equal in talking with the men. Her husband, slower in wit, did not join the discussion. He sat looking at her. He was very proud of her. His every look and action revealed the important place she occupied in his life. He of the Otter Skins ate silently, forgotten in all the gay talk. Long before the others had finished eating he pushed his chair away from the table and went outside among the dogs. Soon, his traveling companions drew on their mittens and fur clothing and followed him.

There had been no snow for many days, and the sleds slipped along the hard-packed **Yukon** trail as easily as if it had been ice. Ulysses led the first sled. With the second came Prince and Axel Gunderson's wife. Malemute Kid and the yellow-haired giant rode in the third.

"It is only a guess, Kid," said Axel Gunderson. "But I think we may find something on this trip. That Indian has never been there, but he tells a good story. He shows a map I heard of years ago. I would like to have you go with us; but he is a strange one and said no one else was to be brought in. But when I come back you will hear about it first, and I will **stake your claim** beside mine. And I will give you a half-share in the town which will be built, besides."

"No! No!" he cried, as Malemute Kid tried to interrupt. "I am the leader here and before I have finished I will need someone else to help me. This is a big thing, man. It will be the same as the building of the town of Cripple **Creek**. I have heard of this place before and so have you. We will build a town. There will be good waterways, steamship lines, a big trade, and perhaps a railroad. Listen, now! You keep

quiet about this until I return!"

The sleds stopped where the trail crossed the mouth of Stuart River. An unbroken sea of snow stretched away into the unknown east. The snowshoes were taken from the sleds. Axel Gunderson shook hands and stepped to the front, his great shoes sinking deep into the surface of the snow. His wife joined the line behind the last sled, showing long practice in the art of handling snowshoes. The stillness was broken with cheerful good-byes. The dogs barked. He of the Otter Skins brought a difficult dog under control with his whip.

An hour later the sleds had assumed the appearance of a black pencil moving in a long, straight light line across a great sheet of paper.

Chapter 2

ONE NIGHT, MANY WEEKS LATER, MALEMUTE KID AND PRINCE WERE working on some puzzles from the torn page of an ancient magazine. The Kid had returned from a visit to his properties and was resting before starting on a long moose hunt. Prince, too, had been traveling nearly all winter and was eager for a week of cabin life.

Somebody knocked at the door twice before Malemute Kid could say, "Come in." The door opened slowly. Something fell into the room. Prince looked once and jumped to his feet. The look of terror in his eyes caused Malemute Kid to turn quickly. He, too, was shocked, although he had seen bad things before. The thing moved blindly toward them. Prince edged away until he came to the nail from which hung his gun.

"My God! What is it?" he whispered to Malemute Kid.

"I don't know. It seems to be a case of freezing and starvation," replied the Kid, moving away.

"Be careful! It may be mad," he warned, after closing the door.

The thing advanced to the table. The flame of the lamp caught the attention of its eyes. It was delighted and began to laugh. Then, suddenly, he—for it was a man—leaned back and began to sing a song such as men of the sea sing. "Ship come down the river. Pull, my boys, pull..."

He stopped as quickly as he had begun. Then with a wolfish sound, he started toward the shelf where meat was stored and before they could stop him he was tearing with his teeth at some uncooked pieces hung to dry. The struggle was fierce between him and Malemute Kid. But his mad strength left him as suddenly as it had come, and he weakly dropped the meat. They seated him on a small chair, where he lay with half his body across the table. A little drink of liquor strength-

ened him so that he could take a spoonful of sugar from the bowl that Malemute Kid placed before him. After he appeared somewhat satisfied, Prince gave him a cup of weak tea.

The creature had eyes that were bright with a strange light. There was very little skin on the face. The face had little likeness to the human form. **Frost** after frost had bitten deeply into the skin. Its surface was of a bloody-black color, with lines where the red flesh showed through. Its clothes of animal skins were dirty and torn, and the fur on one side was burned away, showing where he had fallen upon his fire.

Malemute Kid pointed to where the animal skins had been cut away, strip by strip—a sure sign of **famine**, because life could be maintained for many days by boiling and eating the skins when all other food was gone. "Who—are—you?" said Malemute Kid, slowly and clearly.

The man did not appear to hear.

"Where do you come from?"

"Ship come down the river," he sang in answer.

"No doubt he did come down the river," the Kid said, shaking him in an attempt to start a flow of talk.

But the man screamed when touched, pressing a hand to his side in pain. He rose slowly to his feet, half leaning on the table.

"She—laughed at me—with the hate in her eye; and she—would—not—come."

His voice weakened, and he was falling when Malemute Kid grasped him by the arm and shouted, "Who? Who would not come?"

"She, Unga. She laughed, and struck me once, and then again. And then—"

"Yes?"

"And then—"

"And then what?"

"And then she lay very quietly in the snow for a long time. She is still in—the—snow."

The two men looked at each other helplessly.

"Who is in the snow?"

"She, Unga. She looked at me with the hate in her eye, and then—"

"Yes. Yes."

"And then she took the knife, thus; and once, twice—she was weak. I traveled very slowly. And there is much gold in that place, very much gold."

"Where is Unga?" Malemute Kid feared that she might be dying not far from the cabin. He shook the man fiercely, repeating again and again, "Where is Unga? Who is Unga?"

"She—is—in—the snow."

"Tell us more!" The Kid was pressing his arm cruelly.

"I—too—would—be—in—the—snow—but—I—had—a debt—to—pay. It—was—heavy. I—had—a debt—to pay. A—debt—to pay, I—had." The words ceased as he reached into his pocket and drew out a small bag. "A—debt—to—pay—of gold—grub—stake—Malemute Kid. I—" The tired head dropped upon the table; and Malemute Kid could not wake it again.

"It is Ulysses," he said quietly, throwing the bag of gold dust on the table. "Come, we must get him between the blankets. He is Indian; he will recover and will live to tell his story besides."

Chapter 3

"I WILL TELL YOU MY STORY. I WILL BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING, AND TELL of myself and the woman, and, after that, of the man."

He of the Otter Skins drew near to the stove as do men who have been without fire and are afraid it may disappear again at any moment. Malemute Kid raised the lamp so its light might fall upon the face of the storyteller. Prince climbed out of his bed and joined them.

"I am Naass, a chief, and the son of a chief, born between a lowering of the sun and its rising again, on the dark sea, in my father's boat. All night the men fought with the storm and the women cast out the waves which were coming in upon us. The salt sea became ice on my mother's breast until the breath of her life passed with the passing of the tide. But I raised my voice with the wind and the storm, and lived.

"Our home was in Akatan—"

"Where?" asked Malemute Kid.

"Akatan, which is in the Aleutian Islands, above the tip of Alaska. As I say, we lived in Akatan, which lies in the middle of the sea on the edge of the world. We fished in the salt seas for the fish and the otter. Our homes lay side by side on the rocky strip between the edge of the forest and the yellow beach where our boats lay. We were not many, and the world was very small. There were strange lands to the east—islands like Akatan. We thought all the world was islands like ours and did not wonder what lay beyond.

"I was different from my people and I will tell you why. In the sands of the beach were the boards from a boat of a sort my people never built. Two men came from out of the sea in the boat which lay in pieces on the beach. And they were white like you, and weak as little children. I know of these things from the old men and the old

women, who heard them from their fathers and mothers before them. These strange white men did not understand our ways at first, but they grew strong eating the fish and the oil. And each built his own house and chose from among our women, and in time, children came. Thus was born he who was to become the father of my father's father.

"As I said, I was different from my people, because I carried the strong, strange blood of this white man who came out of the sea. It is said that we had our own laws in the days before these men; but the white men were fierce and quick to quarrel. They fought with our men until there were no more who dared to fight. Then they made themselves chiefs, and took away our old laws and gave us new ones. They said that the man was the son of his father, and not his mother, as our law had been. They also ruled that the firstborn son should have all things which were his father's before him and that the other brothers and sisters should make their own lives. And they gave us other laws, too. They also showed us new ways of catching and killing bear. They taught us to put aside bigger supplies of food for the time of famine. And these things were good.

"But when they had become chiefs, and there were no more of our men to face their anger, they fought, each with the other. And the one whose blood I carry drove his **spear** the length of an arm through another man's body. Their children continued the fight and their children's children. There was a great hate between them which existed until my time. And it happened that in each family only one lived to pass down the blood of those who went before. Of my blood I was alone; of the other man's family there was only a girl. Her name was Unga and she lived with her mother. Her father and my father did not return from fishing one night; but afterward their bodies were carried onto the beach by the big tides and they were holding each other very close.

"The people wondered—because of the hate between the houses. The old men shook their heads and said the fight would continue when children were born to her and children to me. They told me this as a boy, until I thought of Unga as an enemy. I believed that she would be the mother of children which were to fight with mine. I

thought of these things day by day, and when I grew a little older, I asked why this should be so. And they answered, 'We do not know, but this was the manner of your fathers.' I was surprised that those who were to come must fight the battles of those who were gone. In this I could see no right. But the people said it must be, and I was only a young lad.

"And they said I must marry soon so that my children might be the older and grow strong before hers. This was an easy thing for me to do, because I was the chief. The people respected me because of the deeds and the laws of my fathers, and the wealth which was mine. Any girl would marry me, but I found none that pleased me. And the old men and the mothers of young girls told me to hurry, because already the hunters were asking to marry Unga. If her children grew strong before mine, mine would surely die.

"Nor did I find a girl who stirred my emotions until one night when I was returning back from fishing. The sunlight was lying low and full in my eyes and the wind was free. The boats were racing with the white seas. Suddenly, the boat of Unga came rushing past me, and she looked at me with her black hair lying like a cloud of night. As I said, the sunlight was full in my eyes, and I was very young. But somehow it was all clear. I knew it to be the call of kind to kind. As she sailed ahead she looked back—as only the woman Unga could look—and again I knew there was understanding between us. The people shouted as we sailed past and left them far behind. She was skilled in sailing her boat and I did not lessen the distance she had gained. The wind grew stronger, the sea whitened, and we flew down the golden pathway of the sun."

Naass half-stood out of his chair, in the manner of one handling a boat, as he lived the race anew. Somewhere across the stove he could behold the speeding boat and the flying hair of Unga. The voice of the wind was in his ears, and the taste of the salt sea was in his mouth.

"She came to the shore and ran across the sand, laughing, to the house of her mother. And a great thought came to me that night—a thought worthy of him that was chief of all the people of Akatan. When

the moon rose, I went to the house of her mother and looked at the goods of Yash-Noosh which were piled beside the door. Yash-Noosh was a strong hunter who had the desire to be the father of the children of Unga. Other young men had piled their goods here and taken them away again; and each young man had made a pile greater than the one before.

"And I laughed to the moon and the stars, and went to my own house where my wealth was stored. And many trips I made, until my pile was greater by the fingers of one hand than the pile of Yash-Noosh. There were fish, dried in the sun and smoked; and forty skins of one sort of **seal**, half as many of another; and ten sorts of bear which I killed in the woods in the spring. And there were blankets and clothes which I got from trading with the people who lived to the east, who had traded with the people who lived farther beyond in the east. And I looked upon the pile of Yash-Noosh and laughed, because I was the chief in Akatan. My wealth was greater than the wealth of all my young men, and my fathers had done deeds and given laws, and put their names for all time into the mouths of the people.

"When the morning dawned, I went down to the beach, looking out of the comer of my eye at the house of the mother of Unga. My offer stood untouched. And the women smiled, and whispered things one to the other. I wondered, because never had such a price been offered. And that night I added more to the pile, and put beside it a newly-made boat. But in the morning the pile was again there, open to the laughter of all men. The mother of Unga was clever, and I grew angry at the shame in which I stood before my people. So that night I added until it became a great pile, and I brought up my big boat, which had the value of twenty smaller ones. And in the morning there was no pile.

"Then I prepared for the wedding, and the people that lived far to the east came to eat the food of the feast. Unga was older than I by the age of four suns, according to our manner of counting the years. I was only a young lad; but then, I was a chief, and the son of a chief, and it was not important.

"As we prepared for the feast, a ship with large sails came into sight. It appeared that she was having trouble, because the men were working with all their strength to keep the water from flooding her. On the deck stood a mighty man, watching the water deepen and giving commands with a voice like thunder. His eyes were as blue as the waters and his hair was yellow like the grain of a southern harvest.

"In these years we had seen ships from afar, but this was the first to come to the beach of Akatan. The feast was broken, and the women and children hid in the houses. We men waited with spears in hand. But when the ship touched the beach the strange men did not notice us, because they were busy with their own work. With the falling of the tide they were able to repair the great hole in the ship's bottom. The women returned and the feast continued.

"When the tide rose, the strangers pushed the ship into deep water and then joined us. They brought gifts and were friendly. I welcomed them; and gave them small gifts, as I gave to all the guests, because it was my wedding day. And he with the yellow hair was there, so tall and strong that one expected to see the earth shake with the fall of his feet. He looked much at Unga and stayed until the sun went away and the stars came out. Then he returned to his ship. After that I took Unga by the hand and led her to my own house. And there was singing and much laughing. Then the people left us alone and went home.

"The last noise had not died when the chief of the sea wanderers came in the door. And he had with him black bottles, from which we drank and became merry. You see, I was only a young lad, and had lived all my days on the edge of the world. My blood became as fire, and my heart as light as a cloud. Unga sat silent among the furs piled in the corner. Her eyes were widely opened, and she seemed afraid. And he with the yellow hair looked upon her straight and long. Then his men came in carrying boxes and he piled before me more wealth than there was in all Akatan. There were guns, both large and small, and bright axes, and tools of steel, and strange things which I had never seen. When he showed me by signs that it was all mine, I thought him a great man to be so generous. But he showed me also that Unga was to go away with

him in his ship. Do you understand?—that Unga was to go away with him in his ship. The blood of my fathers flamed hot in me and I tried to attack him with my knife. But the spirit in the bottles had stolen the life from my arm. He took me by the neck, and knocked my head against the wall of the house. And I became as weak as a newborn child, and my legs would not stand under me. Unga screamed. She grasped the heavy furniture in the house with her hands, until it fell to the floor as he dragged her to the door. Then he took her in his great arms, and when she tore at his yellow hair, he laughed.

"Somehow I found my way to the beach and called to my people to help me but they were afraid. Only Yash-Noosh was man enough to act. But they struck him on the head until he lay with his face in the sand and did not move. And they raised the sails to the sound of their songs, and the ship sailed away on the wind.

"The people said it was good, because there would be no more war between the two bloods in Akatan. But I did not say a word, waiting until the time of the full moon. Then I put fish and oil in my boat and went away to the east. I saw many islands and many people, and I, who had lived on its edge, saw that the world was very large. I talked to people by signs, but no one had seen a large ship nor a man with yellow hair. They pointed always to the east. And I slept in queer places, and ate unfamiliar things, and met strange faces. Many laughed, because they thought me crazy. But sometimes old men turned my face to the light and blessed me. And the eyes of the young women grew soft as they asked me of the strange ship, and Unga, and the men of the sea.

"I had thought it would be an easy task to find the man as soon as I was among his own people. One day when we entered a port, I expected to find no more large ships than there were fingers on my hands. Instead, I saw large ships lying side by side for miles. And when I went among them to ask for a man with yellow hair, everyone laughed, and answered me in strange languages.

"Then, I went into the city to look upon the face of every man there. But there were many men. They were like fish when they run thick in the river, and I could not count them. And the noise was so

great that I could not hear, and my head was spinning with so much movement. I went on and on, through the lands which lay in the warm sunshine where the harvests were rich. And I went into great cities where men lived like women, with false words in their mouths and their hearts black with the desire for gold. And all the time, my people of Akatan hunted and fished, and were happy in the thought that the world was small.

"But the look in the eyes of Unga when she came home from fishing was with me always, and I knew I would find her when the time was right. There was a promise in her eyes such as only the woman Unga could give.

"I wandered through a thousand towns. Some people were gentle and gave me food. Others laughed at me, and some others cursed. But I kept silent and went to strange places and saw strange sights. Sometimes I, who was a chief and the son of a chief, worked for other men. However, no word did I hear of him until I came back to the sea. But this was at another port, in another country which lay to the north. And there I heard stories of the yellow-haired sea wanderer, and I learned that he was a hunter of seals and that at that time he was far out on the sea.

"I found work on a large ship and followed his trackless trail to the north. And we were gone many months and heard much of the wild actions of him whom I searched for. But not once did we see him. We went further north and killed the seals in great numbers on the beach, and brought their warm bodies to our ship. The oil and blood flowed over the decks until no man could stand there. Then we were chased by a ship which shot at us with great guns. But we added more sails until we moved with such speed that the sea washed our decks clean, and we left our enemy far behind.

"It is said that at the time we were running away with fear the yellow-haired sea wanderer stole skins from another company. It is said that he sailed directly to the factory and, while some of his men held off the servants of the company, the others loaded ten thousand skins from the houses where they were stored. I say, it is said. But I believe

it to be true. During the voyages I made in the Northern Seas I heard many stories of his wildness and daring. Three nations which hold lands there were seeking him with their ships. And I heard, too, of Unga, because the sea captains sang loud in her praise, and she was always with him. She had learned the customs of his people, they said, and was happy. But I knew better. I knew that her heart longed for her own people by the yellow beach of Akatan.

"After a long time, I went back to the port which opens like a gate-way to the sea. There I learned that he had gone to hunt for the seal to the east of the warm land which runs south from the Russian Seas. And I, who had become a seaman, joined a ship with men of his own race and followed him in the hunt of the seal. There were few ships off the coast of that new land. But we stayed near the seals and chased them north during the spring of the year. And when the females were ready to bear their young and crossed the Russian line, our men were afraid. The weather was bad and every day men were lost in the boats. The men would not work, and consequently, the captain turned the ship back toward the place it had come from. But I knew the yellow-haired sea wanderer was not afraid and would sail even to the Russian Isles. So I took a boat, in the black of night, and went alone to the warm, long land. And I journeyed south to meet the men by Yeddo Bay, who are wild and unafraid. And the Yoshiwara girls were small and bright like steel and good to look upon. But I could not stop, because I knew that Unga was still beyond me to the north.

"The men by Yeddo Bay had come from the ends of the earth and had neither gods nor homes. And I went with them to the rich beaches of Copper Island where our piles became high with skins. And in that silent sea we saw no man until we were ready to come away. Then one day, a large boat approached us. Close behind her was a Russian warship. We sailed away on the wind with the large ship pushing ahead of us. And upon her deck was the yellow-haired sea wanderer, laughing in his strength of life. And Unga was there—I knew her at once. But he sent her below the decks when the guns began to fire across the sea. His ship moved ahead of us, while I was holding our wheel and

cursing, with my back to the Russian shots. We knew that he intended to run before us, taking the wind from our sails so he might escape while we were caught. And the guns knocked our sails down until we dragged into the wind like a wounded bird. But he went on over the edge of the sky line—he and Unga—leaving us to the Russians.

"What could we say? The fresh hides spoke for themselves. So they took us to Russian port and after that to a lonely country. There they made us work in deep holes, digging salt. And some died, and—and some did not die."

Naass swept the blanket from his shoulders, revealing the unmistakable marks of the whip on his flesh. Prince covered him quickly, for it was not nice to look upon.

"We were there a long time and sometimes men escaped to the south, but they always came back. So, when we who had come from Yeddo Bay rose in the night and took the guns from the guards, we went to the north. And the land was very large, with plains covered with water and great forests. And the cold came, with much snow on the ground, and no man knew the way. For months we journeyed through the endless forest. There was little food and often we lay down to die. But finally we came to the cold sea, and only three of us were alive to look upon it. One had sailed a ship from Yeddo as its captain. He knew in his head the map of the great lands and of the place where one may cross from one land to the other on the ice. And he led us until we were only two. When we came to the crossing place we found five of the strange people who live in that country. They had dogs and skins, and we were very poor. We fought in the snow until they died, and the captain died and the dogs and skins were mine. Then I crossed on the ice which was broken. And after that I came to Golovin Bay, and your friend at Pastilik. The south, south, to the warm sunlands I returned.

"But the sea was no longer profitable and men no longer went to hunt the seal. The ships had scattered, and the captains and the men had no word of those I searched for. I turned away from the ocean and went among the lands. I journeyed far, and I learned many things, even how to read and write from books. It was well I should do this. I real-

ized that Unga would know these things, and that someday, when the time had come...

"I moved from place to place. My eyes and my ears were open always, and I went among men who traveled much. I knew that they had only to see those I was seeking to remember them. I finally met a man who had come recently from the mountains. He carried pieces of rock in which the gold could be seen. And he had heard, he had met, and he knew them. They were rich, he said, and lived in the place where they drew the gold from the ground.

"It was a wild country, and very far away. But after much traveling I came to the camp, hidden between the mountains. There men worked, searching for gold night and day, out of the sight of the sun. However, the time I was waiting for had not come. I heard what people were saying. He had gone away—and Unga with him—to England. It was said they were looking for men with much money to form companies. I saw the house they had lived in. It was like a palace, such as one sees in the old countries. In the night I entered the place through a window to see in what manner he treated her. I went from room to room. I thought that kings and queens must live as they did; it was all so very good. And they all said he treated her like a queen. Many wondered what sort of woman she was because she was different from the women of Akatan. No one knew her past life. Yes, she was a queen; but I was a chief, and the son of a chief, and I had paid for her an unusual price.

"But why so many words? I was a seaman, and I knew how to find my way on the seas. I followed them to England, and from there to other countries. Sometimes I heard of them from talk and sometimes I read of them in the newspapers. Yet never could I meet them, because they had much money and traveled fast, while I was a poor man. Then their good luck changed. And one day their wealth disappeared like a curl of smoke. The newspapers printed much of the story at the time. But after that, nothing was said. However, I knew they had returned to where more gold could be taken from the ground.

"The world was no longer interested in them, now that they were poor. So I wandered from camp to camp until I heard of them. They

had come and gone. Some said they had gone to one place; others said another. Still others said that they had gone to the country of the Yukon. And I went to each place they had mentioned, until it seemed I would tire of the world which was so large. But then I traveled a long and hard trail with one of the men of the Northwest who died when a time of famine came. He had been to the Yukon by an unknown way over the mountains. When he knew his time to die had come, he gave me a map and told me the secret of a place where he promised there was much gold.

"After that all the world began to go north. I was a poor man; I sold myself to be a driver of dogs. I met him and her in Dawson. She did not know me, because I was only a lad when last she had seen me and her life had been full. She had no time to remember the one who had paid for her an unusual price.

"So? You bought me from my term of service. I went back to let things happen in my own way, because I had waited long. Now that I had my hand upon him I was in no hurry. As I say, I intended to do it my own way, because I remembered my life—through all I had seen and suffered. As you know, I led him into the east—him and Unga. We went into the east where many have gone and few returned. I led them to the spot where the bones and the curses of men lie with the gold which they cannot have.

"The way was long and the snow on the trail not firm. Our dogs were many and ate much; nor could our sleds carry all we needed until winter passed. We had to return before the ice melted and the river ran free. We stored food along the way so that our sleds might be lightened and there would be no danger of famine when we returned. At the McQuestion there were three men, and near them we built a **cache**. We did this at the Mayo River also, where there was a hunting camp. After that, as we went on into the east; we saw no men. All we saw was the frozen river, the unmoving forest, and the white and silent North. As I say, the way was long and the trail not firm. Sometimes, in one day, we traveled no more than eight miles, and at night we slept like dead men. And not once did they dream that I was Naass, chief of Akatan.

"We now set aside smaller piles of food. During the night it was not difficult for me to retrace our trail and change the piles so that one might think they had been taken by a wolf. Again, there are places where the river drops suddenly, and the ice that covers them is thin. In such a spot the sled I drove broke through and the dogs with it. To him and Unga it was bad luck, but no more. And there was much food on that sled, and the dogs were the strongest. But he laughed, for he was full of life. He gave the remaining dogs very little food until we cut them from the harnesses one by one and fed them to their brothers. We would go home with no burden, he said, traveling and eating from one cache to another, with neither dogs nor sleds. This was true, because our food supply was low and the last dog died the night we came to the place of the gold and the bones and the curses of men.

"To arrive at that place—and the map was correct—we cut steps in the ice against the wall in the great mountains. One looked for a valley beyond, but there was no valley. The snow spread away, level as the great harvest plains, and here and there about us mighty mountains pushed their white heads among the stars. And in the middle of that strange plain which should have been a valley, the earth and the snow fell away, straight down toward the heart of the world. Had we not been seamen, familiar with the deep places between the waves, our heads would have been turned at the sight. But we stood on the edge so we might see a way to get down. And on one side, and one side only, the wall had fallen away to offer a route to the bottom. I do not know why this thing should be so, but it was so. 'It is the mouth of hell,' he said, 'let us go down.' And we went down.

"And on the bottom there was a cabin, built by some man. He had thrown down the logs from above. It was a very old cabin, because men had died there alone at different times. On pieces of bark from a tree we read their last words and their curses. One had died of disease; the companion of another had taken his last food and stolen away. A third had been attacked by a bear; a fourth had hunted for food and starved. And so it went. They had not wanted to leave the gold and had died by its side. And the worthless gold they had gathered yel-

lowed the floor of the cabin like in a dream.

"But the man I had led here had a clear head. 'We have nothing to eat,' he said, 'and we will only look upon this gold and see how much there is of it. Then we will go away quickly, before it gets into our eyes and steals away our judgment. In this way we will return later with more food, and possess it all.' We looked at the wall of the mountain which was cut by a great band of gold. We measured it and traced it from above and below. We drove the poles to mark our property and cut the bark of the trees to show that this place belonged to us. Then, our knees shaking from lack of food and a sickness in our stomachs, we climbed the mighty wall for the last time and turned our faces to the return journey.

"Toward the end we pulled Unga between us, and we fell often. But finally we reached the place where we had stored the food. And behold, there was no food. It was well done, because he thought a wolf had stolen it. He cursed the wolf and his gods in one breath. But Unga was brave, and smiled, and put her hand in his, until I turned away so I might control myself. 'We will rest by the fire,' she said, 'until morning, and we will gather strength from our **moccasins**.' We cut the tops of our moccasins in strips and boiled them during half of the night, so that we could eat them. And in the morning we talked about our future. The next cache was five days distant; we could not wait that long. We must find something to eat.

" 'We will go forth and hunt,' he said.

"And he commanded that Unga stay by the fire and save her strength. And we went forth. He went to find a moose and I went to the cache of food I had changed to another place. But I ate little, so they might not see new strength in me. And in the night he fell many times as he came into camp. And I, too, acted as if I were very weak, falling over my snowshoes as though each step might be my last. And again we ate pieces of our moccasins.

"He was a great man. His soul supported his body to the last, nor did he cry aloud. On the second day I followed him, so I might not miss the end. And he lay down to rest often. That night he was almost gone,

but in the morning he went forth again. I looked many times for him to yield, but his was the strength of the strong, and his soul the soul of a giant. And he shot two small birds, but would not eat them. His thought was for Unga, and he turned toward camp. He no longer walked, but moved forward on his hands and knees through the snow. I came to him, and saw death in his eyes. Even then it was not too late to eat the birds. He threw away his gun and carried the birds in his mouth like a dog. I walked by his side. And he looked at me during the moments he rested, and wondered that I was so strong. I could see it, although he no longer spoke. As I say, he was a great man, and my heart was moved to pity. But I thought back on my life, and remembered the cold and the hunger of the endless forest by the Russian Seas. Besides, Unga was mine, and I had paid for her a very high price in skins and boats.

"And in this manner we came through the white forest with the stillness heavy upon us like wet sea air. And the past was all about us. I saw the yellow beach of Akatan, and the boats racing home from fishing, and the houses on the edge of the forest. And the men who had made themselves chiefs were there, the lawgivers whose blood I bore and whose blood I had married in Unga. And I knew the time had come, and I saw in the eyes of Unga the promise.

"As I say, we came thus through the forest, until we could smell the camp smoke. And I bent above him, and tore the birds from his teeth. He turned on his side and rested, the wonder growing in his eyes. His hand moved toward his knife at his side. But I took it from him, smiling close to his face. Even then he did not understand. So I acted as if I were drinking from black bottles, and lived again the things which happened on the night I was married. I spoke no word, but he understood. Yet he was unafraid. There was an ugly smile on his lips and cold anger on his face. He gathered new strength from what he now knew. It was not far, but the snow was deep and he pulled himself along very slowly. Once he lay so long I turned him over and looked into his eyes. And sometimes he looked forth, and sometimes it was death that I saw in his eyes. And when I set him free he struggled on

again. In this way we came to the fire. Unga was at his side in an instant. His lips moved without sound. Then he pointed at me, so Unga might understand. And after that he lay in the snow, very still, for a long while. Even now is he there in the snow.

"I said nothing until I had cooked the birds. Then I spoke to her, in her own language, which she had not heard in many years. She straightened herself and looked at me in wonder. She asked who I was and where I had learned that speech.

" 'I am Naass,' I said.

" 'You?' she said. 'You?' And she came closer so she might look upon me.

" 'Yes,' I answered. 'I am Naass, chief of Akatan, the last of the blood, as you are the last of the blood.'

"And she laughed. Among all the things I have seen and done, may I never hear such a laugh again. It made my soul freeze, sitting there in the white stillness, alone with death and this woman who laughed.

" 'Come!' I said, because I thought her mind had wandered. 'Eat of the food and let us be gone. It is a long way to Akatan.'

"But she buried her face in his yellow hair and laughed until it seemed the heavens would fall. I had thought she would be full of joy at the sight of me, but this seemed a strange manner in which to show it.

" 'Come!' I cried, taking her strongly by the hand. 'The way is long and dark. Let us hurry!'

" 'Where?' she asked, sitting up, and ceasing her strange laughing.

" 'To Akatan,' I answered, waiting to see the light grow on her face at the thought. But it became like his, with an ugly smile on the lips and cold anger.

" 'Yes,' she said, 'we will go, hand in hand, to Akatan, you and I. And we will live in the dirty houses, and eat fish and oil. And we will bring forth a child—a child to be proud of all the days of our life. We will forget the world and be happy, very happy. It is good, most good. Come! Let us hurry. Let us return to Akatan.'

"And she stroked his yellow hair gently, and smiled in a manner which was not good. And there was no promise in her eyes.

"I sat silent, and wondered at the strangeness of woman. I thought again of the night when he pulled her from me and she screamed and tore at his hair—at his hair which now she played with and would not leave. Then I remembered the price and the long years of waiting. And I held her close and pulled her away as he had done. And she held back, even as on that night, and fought like a she-cat for its young. And when the fire was between us and the man, I let her loose. She sat and listened. And I told her of all that lay between, of all that had happened to me on strange seas and of all that I had done in strange lands. Yes, I told all, even to what had passed that day between the man and me. And as I spoke I saw the promise grow in her eyes. And I read pity there, and the tenderness of woman and the love, the heart and the soul of Unga. And I was a lad again, because the look was the look of Unga as she ran along the beach, laughing, to the home of her mother. The unrest was gone, the hunger, and the long waiting. The time had come. I felt the call of her breast, and it seemed there I must pillow my head and forget. She opened her arms to me, and I came against her. Then suddenly, the hate flamed in her eyes. Her hand was at my side. And once, twice, she struck with the knife.

" 'Dog!' she cried, as she threw me into the snow. 'Pig!' And then she laughed until the stillness broke, and then returned to her dead.

"As I say, she struck with the knife twice. But she was weak with hunger, and it was not meant that I should die. Yet I wanted to stay in that place, and to shut my eyes in the last long sleep with those whose lives had crossed with mine. But there lay a debt upon me which would not let me rest.

"And the way was long and the cold bitter. There was little food. What I had hidden in my caches had been stolen. I do not remember much until I came here, and found food and fire—much fire."

As he finished, he moved even closer to the stove. For a long while we watched the lamp shadows play upon the wall.

"But Unga!" cried Prince.

"Unga? She would not eat the birds. She lay with her arms about his neck, her face deep in his yellow hair. I drew the fire close, that she

might not feel the frost. But she moved to the other side. And I built a fire there. Yet it was of little good, because she would not eat. And in this manner they still lie up there in the snow."

"And you?" asked Malemute Kid.

"I do not know. Akatan is small, and I have little wish to return and live on the edge of the world. However, there is small use in living. I can go to the chief of police and he will put me in prison. Then one day they will tie a piece of rope around my neck and I will sleep. Yet—no; I do not know."

"But, Kid," protested Prince, "this is murder!"

"Quiet!" commanded Malemute Kid. "There are things greater than our wisdom and beyond our justice. The right and wrong of this we cannot say, and it is not for us to judge."

Naass drew even closer to the fire. There was a great stillness, and in the eyes of each man many pictures came and went.

The Law of Life

OLD KOSKOOSH LISTENED GREEDILY. Although his sight had failed, his hearing remained good. The slightest sound was recognized by a mind yet active behind the aged forehead. Ah! That was Sit-cum-ha shouting curses at the dogs as she beat them into the harnesses. Sit-cum-ha was his daughter's daughter, but she was too busy to waste a thought upon her old grandfather, sitting alone there in the snow. Camp must be broken. The long trail waited while the short day refused to delay. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now.

The thought frightened the old man for the moment. He stretched forth a shaking hand which wandered over the small pile of dry wood beside him. Reassured that it was indeed there, his hand returned to the shelter of his old, worn furs. He again began to listen. He heard

the noise of half-frozen animal skins being moved. He knew that even then the chief's moose-skin tent was being packed. The chief was his son, leader of the tribesmen, and a mighty hunter. As the women worked, his voice rose, exclaiming at their slowness. Old Koskoosh strained his ears. It was the last time he would hear that voice. There went Geehow's tent! And Tusken's! Seven, eight, nine; only the medicine man's could yet be standing. There! They were at work upon it now. He could hear the medicine man struggling loudly as he piled it on the sled. A child cried and a woman calmed it with gentle singing. Little Koo-tee, the old man thought. That child was always weeping, and it was sickly. It would die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen ground and pile rocks above to keep the wolves away. And what difference would it make? A few years at best, and as many an empty stomach as a full one. And in the end, death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all.

What was that? Oh, the men binding the sleds together and drawing tight the ropes. He listened, he who would listen no more. The whips whistled among the dogs. Hear them **howl**! How they hated the work and the trail through the snow! They had started! Sled after sled moved slowly away into the silent forest. They were gone. They had passed out of his life, and he faced the last bitter hour alone. No. The step of a moccasin broke the snow's surface. A man stood beside him; upon his head a hand rested gently. His son was good to do this thing. He remembered other old men whose sons had not waited after the tribe had gone. But his son had. The old man's thoughts wandered away into the past, until the young man's voice returned him to the present.

"It is well with you?" he asked.

And the old man answered, "It is well."

"There is wood beside you," the younger man continued, "and the fire burns bright. The morning is gray, and the cold has lessened. It will snow presently. Even now it is snowing."

"Yes, even now is it snowing."

"The tribesmen hurry. Their loads are heavy and their stomachs empty with lack of feasting. The trail ahead is long and they travel fast.

I go now. It is well?"

"It is well. I am as a last year's leaf, hanging lightly on a branch. When the first wind blows, I fall. My voice has become like an old woman's. My eyes no longer show me the way of my feet, and my feet are heavy, and I am tired. It is well."

He bowed his head in contentment until the last noise of the moccasin on the snow died away. He knew his son was beyond recall. Then his hand moved out from the furs to touch the wood. It alone stood between him and what lay beyond the death that opened before him. Now the measure of his life was a handful of sticks. One by one they would go to feed the fire, and just so, step by step, death would come closer to him. When the last stick had given all of its heat, the frost would begin to gather strength. First his feet would yield, then his hands; and the lack of feeling would travel, slowly, to his body. His head would fall forward upon his knees, and he would rest. It was easy. All men must die.

He did not murmur. It was the law of life, and it was just. He had been born close to the earth and close to the earth had he lived. Its law was not new to him. It was the law of all flesh. Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that single thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the race of man as a whole. This was the deepest thought that old Koskoosh's uneducated mind could master. But he grasped this idea firmly. He saw its truth displayed everywhere. The awakening of life in a tree, the bursting greenness of its branches, the fall of the yellow leaf—in this alone was told the whole history. But one task nature did give the individual. Did he not perform it, he died. Did he perform it, it was all the same—he died. Nature did not care; there were plenty who would obey. It was only the need that this duty be obeyed, not the man who obeyed it, which lived and lived always. The tribe of Koskoosh was very old. The old men he had known when he was a boy had known old men before them. Therefore, it was true that the tribe lived, that it represented the obeying of all its members, whose final resting places were unremembered. They were not important; they were chapters in life's story. They had passed away like

clouds from a summer sky. He also would pass away. Nature did not care. To life she gave one task and one law. To continue the race was the task of life; its law was death. A young girl was a good creature to look upon, full-breasted and strong, with a lightness to her step and a shine in her eyes. But her task was yet before her. The light in her eyes brightened and her step quickened. She laughed with the young men, then she turned away. She passed on to them her own unrest. And she grew fairer and yet fairer to look upon. Finally, some hunter took her to his tent to cook and work for him and to become the mother of his children. And with the coming of her children her beauty left her. She dragged her legs and arms when she walked. Her eyes lost their brightness. Then only the little ones found joy in the old, lined face. Her task was done. In a little while, in the first famine or in the first long trail, she would be left, as he had been left, in the snow, with a little pile of wood. Such was the law.

He placed a stick carefully upon the fire and returned to his thoughts. It was the same everywhere, with all things. The insects disappeared with the first frost. When age settled upon the rabbit it became slow and heavy and could no longer run faster than its enemies. Even the big bear grew old and blind, to be dragged down at last by a small group of barking sled dogs. He remembered how he had left his own father along the Klondike River one winter. It was the winter before the missionary came with his books and his box of medicines. Many times Koskoosh had recalled with pleasure the taste of those medicines. The one called "painkiller" was especially good. But now his mouth refused to moisten. He remembered that the missionary had become a worry to them. He brought no meat into the camp, and he ate much. The hunters did not like this. Then when they were near the Mayo, he became ill. And afterward, the dogs pushed the stones away and fought for his bones.

Koskoosh placed another stick on the fire and let his thoughts travel deeper into the past. There was the time of the great famine. He had lost his mother in that famine. In the summer the usual plentiful catch of fish had failed, and the tribe looked forward to the winter and

the coming of the **caribou**. Then the winter came, but with it there were no caribou. Never had the like been known, not even in the lives of the old men. The rabbits had not produced any young and the dogs were skin and bone. And through the long darkness the children wept and died. So did the women and the old men. Not one in ten lived to meet the sun when it returned in the spring. That was a famine!

But he had seen times of plenty, too, when the meat spoiled before it could be eaten. Even the dogs grew fat and were worth nothing from eating too much. In these times they let the animals and birds go unkilled and the tents were filled with newly born children. Then it was that the men remembered old quarrels and crossed to the south and to the west to kill ancient enemies. He remembered, when a boy, during a time of plenty, when he saw a moose pulled down by the wolves. Zing-ha lay with him in the snow and watched. Zing-ha was his friend who later became the best of hunters. One day he fell through an air hole on the frozen Yukon River. They found him a month later, frozen to the ice where he had attempted to climb out.

Zing-ha and he had gone out that day to play at hunting, in the manner of their fathers. Near a creek they discovered the fresh track of a moose and with it the tracks of many wolves. "An old one," Zing-ha said. "It is an old one who cannot travel as fast as the others. The wolves have separated him from his brothers, and they will never leave him." And it was so. It was their way. By day and by night, never resting, biting at his heels, they would stay with him to the end. How Zing-ha and he had felt the desire to see blood! The finish would be a sight to remember!

Eagerly, they started up the trail. Even he, Koskoosh, who was not a good tracker, could have followed it blind, it was so wide. They were not far behind the hunt, reading its awful story at every step. Now they saw where the moose had stopped to face his attackers. On every side the snow had been stamped heavily. In the middle were the deep footprints of the moose. All about, everywhere, were the lighter footmarks of the wolves. Some had moved to one side and rested while their brothers tried to seize the moose. The full-stretched impressions

of their bodies in the snow were as perfect as though they had been made the moment before. One wolf had been caught in a wild dash at the moose and had died under its heavy stamping. A few bones remained as witness.

The two boys stopped again at a second stand. Here the great animal had fought with despair. As the snow indicated, he had been dragged down twice. And twice he shook off his enemies and gained his footing once more. He had finished his task long before, but nevertheless, life was dear to him. Zing-ha said it was a strange thing for a moose once down to struggle free again. But this one certainly had done so. The medicine man would see signs and wonders in this when they told him.

Then they came to the place where the moose had tried to climb the riverbank and go into the woods. But his enemies had attacked from behind, until he leaped high and then fell back upon them, crushing two deep into the snow. It was clear that the kill was near, because the two dead wolves had been left untouched by their brothers. The trail was red with blood now, and the distance between tracks of the great beast had become shorter and shorter. Then they heard the first sounds of the battle—the quick bark of the wolves which spoke of teeth tearing flesh. On hands and knees Zing-ha and Koskoosh made their way through the snow. Together they pushed aside the low branches of a young pine tree and looked forth. It was the end that they saw.

The picture, like all of youth's memories, was still strong with him. His eyes now watched the end acted again as clearly as in that earlier time. Koskoosh was surprised at this, because in the days which followed, he had done many great deeds. He had been a leader of men and his name had become a curse in the mouths of his enemies.

For a long time he recalled the days of his youth, until the fire grew cold and the frost bit deeper. He placed two sticks in the fire this time. Then he figured how much life was left by the amount of wood that remained in the pile. If Sit-cum-ha had remembered her grandfather, and gathered a larger armful, his hours would have been longer. It would have been easy. But she was always a selfish child. She had

not honored her ancestors from the time the Beaver, son of the son of Zing-ha, first looked at her. Well, what did it matter? Had he not done the same in his own quick youth? For a while he listened to the silent forest. Perhaps the heart of his son might soften. Then he would return with the dogs to take his old father with the tribe to where the caribou ran thick and the fat hung heavy upon them.

He strained his ears. There was not a sound to be heard. Nothing. He alone took breath in the middle of the great stillness. It was very lonely. Wait! What was that? His body suddenly felt cold. A familiar cry broke the silent air, and it was close to him. Then his darkened eyes again saw the old moose—the bloody sides, the torn legs, the great branching horns, fighting to the last. He saw the flashing forms of gray, the bright eyes, the dripping tongues and the sharp teeth. And he saw the circle move closer until it became a dark point in the middle of the stamped snow.

A cold nose pushed against his face and at its touch his soul leaped back to the present. His hand shot into the fire and dragged out a burning stick. Overcome for the moment by his fear of man, the beast drew back, raising a call to his brothers. Greedily they answered, until a ring of gray was stretched around him. The old man listened to the steady breathing of this circle. He waved his flaming stick wildly, but the beasts refused to scatter. Now one moved slowly forward, dragging his legs behind. Now a second, now a third. But now, not one moved back from his flaming stick. Why should he so desire life? He asked, and dropped the burning stick into the snow. It made a slight noise and then there was no more fire. The circle murmured uncertainly but held its place. Again he saw the last stand of the old moose, and Koskoosh dropped his head hopelessly on his knees. What did it matter? Was it not the law of life?

To the Man on Trail

"GO AHEAD AND PUT IT ALL IN."

"But I say, Kid, won't that make the drink too strong? That is a lot of liquor!"

"Put it in. Who is making this drink?" And Malemute Kid smiled kindly through the clouds of steam. "When you have been in the country as long as I have, you will learn that the holidays come only once a year. And without some strong drinks they are like digging for gold and hitting rock."

"And that is the truth," approved Big Jim Belden, who had traveled from his mining camp to observe the holidays in Malemute Kid's cabin. "Have you forgotten the stuff we gave the Tananas to drink?"

"I guess I did," replied Malemute Kid. "Boys, that was something

to see. The whole tribe was ready to fight because of the drinks we gave them."

"That was before your time," Malemute Kid continued, as he turned toward Stanley Prince, a young mining engineer who had been in the country two years. "There were no white women in the country then and Mason wanted to get married. Ruth's father was chief of the Tananas and he objected. The rest of the tribe did, too. But we gave them some really strong drinks! And you should have seen them try to catch us when we ran away with Ruth."

"What happened to the girl?" asked Louis Savoy, the tall French Canadian, becoming interested.

Malemute Kid, who was a good storyteller, proceeded with the rest of the tale. "We reached the Yukon at the right moment. The tribe was only a quarter of an hour behind us. But that saved us. When they arrived, the ice on the river had started to break up and move and they could not cross. When they finally got into the town, everyone was ready for them. Ask Father Roubeau here. He married the couple."

The missionary took the pipe he was smoking from his lips and smiled to see that the whole company approved the story.

Then, as the first cups of the drink were passed around, Bettles leaped to his feet and began to sing a well-known song.

Malemute Kid's drink did its work; the men of the camps and trails felt its warmth. Soon jokes and songs and tales of past adventure were told around the table. They were strangers from a dozen lands, but they drank to the good health and fortune of each and all.

Then Malemute Kid arose, cup in hand, and glanced at the window where the frost stood three inches thick. "A health to the man on trail this night; may his food be enough; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire."

Suddenly they heard the familiar music of the dog whip and the sound of a sled as it stopped in front of the cabin. Conversation ceased while they waited to see what would happen next.

"It is someone who knows life on the trail. Hear how he cares for his dogs first and then himself," whispered Malemute Kid to Prince.

They listened to the harks of pain which told their practiced ears that the stranger was beating back their dogs while he fed his own.

Then came the expected knock, sharp and confident. The stranger entered. Blinded for a moment by the light, he hesitated at the door. He made a handsome picture in his warm clothing of wool and fur. He stood six feet two or three inches tall; his face was pink from the cold, and his hair was frosted with ice. On a belt outside his jacket he wore two guns and a hunting knife. In addition, he carried a dog whip and another gun. As he came forward into the room, they could see that he was very tired.

There was a moment when no one spoke. Then his greeting, "What cheer, my lads?", put them at ease. In the next instant, Malemute Kid and he had grasped hands. Although the two men had never met, each had heard of the other and recognized the other at once. The stranger was introduced all around and a cup of liquor was forced upon him before he could explain his presence.

"How long since that sled with three men and eight dogs passed?" he asked.

"About two days ahead. Are you trying to catch them?"

"Yes. They have my team. They stole them from under my nose. But I have gained two days already. I will find them soon."

"Do you think they will give you a fight?" asked Belden, to keep the conversation going. Malemute Kid already had the coffee pot on the stove and was busy cooking some meat.

Answering the question, the stranger pointed to his guns.

"When did you leave Dawson?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Last night?" Belden asked.

"Today."

A murmur of surprise spread around the circle. And it was with good reason. It was then exactly midnight, and traveling over 75 miles of rough river trail was an unusual accomplishment in 12 hours.

But soon they began talking of other things. And the young stranger sat down to eat. As he did so, Malemute Kid studied his face. He

was not long in deciding that it was a fair and honest face and that he liked it. It was still young, but the lines on it had been firmly traced by much work. His blue eyes were calm when resting, but they gave the promise of a hard steel-like shine when called into action. The lower part of his face had a firmness that showed an unyielding character. The qualities of the lion could be seen there. But there was no lack of a kind of softness which indicated that emotions were part of his nature.

"So that is how my wife and I got married," said Belden, concluding the exciting tale of his wedding.

"Are there any children waiting for you at home?" asked the stranger, joining the talk again.

"No. My wife died before any came. That is why I am here." Belden tried to light his pipe, not noticing that he had already done so. He was thinking of the past. Then he turned to the stranger and his face brightened somewhat as he said, "How about you? Are you a married man?"

As a reply, the stranger opened his **watch** and handed it to Belden. He examined the inside of the watch case carefully and admired its contents quietly. Then he handed it to Louis Savoy. Exclaiming softly, he showed it to Prince, too. As he did so, they noticed that his hands trembled and his eyes took on a strange softness. And so it went from hand to hand—the picture of a woman with a baby at the breast. Those who had not yet seen the watch case were most curious. Those who had seen it became silent and thoughtful. They could face famine or quick death. But the picture of a woman and child made women and children of them all.

"I have never seen the child. He is a boy and two years old," said the stranger as his treasure was returned to him. For a moment he gazed upon it. Then he closed the case and turned away, but not quickly enough to hide the tears.

Malemute Kid led him to a bed and told him to get some sleep.

"Call me at four o'clock in the morning. Don't fail me," were his last words. A moment later he was breathing heavily in sleep.

"My God! He is a brave one," Prince remarked. "Three hours of sleep after 75 miles with the dogs. And then he plans to return to the

trail again. Who is he, Kid?"

"Jack Westondale. He has been here almost three years, with nothing to reward him except being known as a good worker. He has had much bad luck, too. I never knew him, but Sitka Charley told me about him."

"It seems unfair that a man with a sweet young wife like his should be wasting his years in this wild place."

"His problem is that he won't accept defeat. He has had a grubstake twice, but lost it both times."

Here the talk was interrupted by Bettles. The effect of the stranger had begun to wear away and soon the merriment had started again. Malemute Kid alone seemed unable to forget the stranger and cast many an anxious look at his watch. Once he put on his mittens and cap and, leaving the cabin, went out to his cache.

Nor could he wait until the hour that had been set by the stranger. He was a quarter of an hour early in waking his guest. The young fellow had become quite stiff because of his long hours on the trail, and it was necessary to rub his body and his legs to bring him to his feet. He walked painfully out of the cabin to find his dogs already harnessed and everything ready for the start. The company wished him good luck and a short hunt for his enemies, while Father Roubeau hurriedly blessed him. Then everyone ran quickly to the cabin, because it is not good to face such cold with naked ears and hands. They became frozen within moments!

Malemute Kid went with him to the main trail, and there, grasping his hand firmly, gave him advice.

"You will find 100 pounds of fish eggs on the sled," he said. "The dogs will go as far on that as with 150 pounds of fish. You can't get dog food at Pelly, as you probably expected." The stranger looked surprised, but he did not interrupt. "You can't get any food for dog or man until you come to the town of Five Fingers, and that is 200 miles away. Be careful to avoid open water on the Thirty Mile River."

"How did you know the truth about me? Surely the news can't have traveled ahead of me already?"

"I don't know it. And what is more, I don't want to know it. But you never owned that team you are following. Sitka Charley sold it to those people last spring. But he told me you were a good man once, and I believe him. I have seen your face; I like it. And I have seen—Oh, hell! Start moving, for the sake of that wife of yours, will you?" Here the Kid took off his mittens and pulled out his money.

"No. I don't need it," and the tears began to freeze on his face as he grasped Malemute Kid's hand.

"Then don't spare the dogs. Cut them out of the harnesses as fast as they drop. Buy dogs, and think they are cheap at ten dollars a pound. You can get them at Five Fingers, Little Salmon, and Hootalinqua. And don't get wet feet," was his parting advice. "Keep traveling until it gets too cold. Then build a fire and change your socks."

No more than a quarter of an hour had passed when the sound of sled bells announced new arrivals. The door opened and a policeman of the Northwest Territory entered. He was followed by two dog drivers. Like Westondale, they carried many guns and were very tired. The drivers had been born to the trail and endured it easily; but the young policeman could go no farther.

"When did Westondale leave?" he asked. "Did he stop here?" The question was unnecessary, because the tracks in the snow told their own tale too well.

Malemute Kid had given Belden a knowing look. Belden began to realize what the true situation was and answered accordingly. "Oh, he left a long time ago."

"Come, my man. Tell me," the policeman ordered.

"You seem to want him very badly. Did he have some trouble down in Dawson?"

"He stole 40 thousand dollars from Harry McFarland's **gambling** house. Who is to stop him from leaving the country if we don't catch him? When did he leave?"

Every eye hid its excitement, because Malemute Kid had shown them how to act. The young officer met with unknowing faces on every side.

Walking toward Prince, he asked him the same question. Prince gave him an indefinite reply concerning the condition of the trail.

Then the policeman saw Father Roubeau, who could not lie. "A quarter of an hour ago," the missionary answered. "But he had four hours of rest for himself and his dogs."

"A quarter of an hour! And he is fresh! My God!" The unhappy fellow sat down, half-fainting because of his own tired state. He murmured that he had come from Dawson in ten hours and the dogs could travel no farther.

Malemute Kid forced him to drink a cup of the liquor. Then the policeman turned toward the door, ordering the dog drivers to follow. But the drivers did not want to leave the warmth and the promise of rest. They objected strongly. The Kid could understand the strange language they spoke and followed their words anxiously.

They insisted that the dogs were too tired and that it would be necessary to shoot two of them before the first mile had been traveled. They said it would be better for everyone to rest.

"Would you lend me five dogs?" the policeman asked, speaking to Malemute Kid.

But the Kid shook his head, meaning "no."

"I will sign a note of payment for you in the name of the chief of police. I have the authority to do so."

Again the Kid refused silently.

"Then I must take your dogs in the name of the law."

Smiling, the Kid glanced at his stock of guns. The policeman, realizing his lack of power, turned toward the door. The dog drivers still objected and he spoke to them fiercely, calling them women and dogs. The older driver rose to his feet. With a curse, he promised that he would travel fast. He would travel so fast, he added, that the policeman's legs would break. Then he threatened that he would happily plant him in the snow.

The young policeman walked steadily to the door, displaying a freshness that he did not possess. But they all knew and admired his proud effort. Covered with frost, the dogs were sleeping in the snow. It

was almost impossible to force them to stand. The tired animals cried as they were whipped, because the dog drivers were angry and cruel. Not until Babette, the leader dog, was cut from the harnesses could they load the sled and start traveling.

"He lied!" "Worse than an Indian!" "He is no good!"

It was easy to see that the men were angry. First, because they had been fooled by Westondale. And, second, they knew the principles by which men lived in the Northland; and honesty was the chief of these.

"And to think that we helped him, after knowing what he had done." All eyes turned toward Malemute Kid, who rose from the corner where he had been comforting Babette. He silently emptied the bowl for a final drink.

"It is a cold night, boys—a very cold night," was what he said as he began to defend himself. "You have all traveled the trail and know how difficult it is. Don't judge a man without knowing his whole story. You have only heard one side. A better man than Jack Westondale never ate from the same pot with you and me. Last year he gave his whole earnings, 40 thousand dollars, to Joe Castrell to buy a share in a mining company for him. Today he would be a rich man. But while he stayed behind at Circle City to help his sick companion, what did Castrell do? He went into McFarland's and lost all the money by gambling. They found him dead in the snow the next day. And Jack had made his plans to leave this winter to join his wife and the boy he had never seen. You will notice that he took exactly what Castrell lost—40 thousand dollars. He will be out of the country soon. And what are you going to do about it?"

The Kid glanced around the circle of his judges. He noted the softening of their faces, then raised his cup high. "So a health to the man on trail this night; may his food be enough; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire. God help him; good fortune go with him; and—"

"Bad luck follow the Northwest Police!" cried Bettles, to the crash of the empty cups.

Love of Life

THE TWO MEN MOVED PAINFULLY DOWN the bank and fell among the rocks that were scattered everywhere. They were tired and weak. Their faces showed the patient appearance that results from difficulty long endured. They were heavily burdened with blanket packs which were tied to their shoulders. Each man carried a gun. They walked in a leaning position, the shoulders forward, the head farther forward, the eyes fixed upon the ground.

"I wish we had a couple of those **cartridges** that are lying in our cache," said the second man.

His voice was completely without expression. And the first man, walking into the milky stream that flowed over the rocks, made no reply.

The other man followed at his heels. They did not remove their shoes, although the water was icy cold. It was so cold that their feet

soon were without feeling. In places, the water dashed against their knees, and both men found it difficult to remain standing.

The man who followed slipped on a smooth rock and nearly fell. He recovered his footing with a great effort, at the same time uttering a sharp cry of pain. He seemed faint and stretched one hand forward, seeking support against the air. When he had steadied himself, he stepped forward. But he slipped again and nearly fell. Then he stood still and looked at the other man, who had never turned his head.

The man stood still for fully a minute, as if he were deciding something. Then he called:

"I say, Bill, I hurt my foot."

Bill struggled ahead through the milky water. He did not look around. The man watched him go, and although his face lacked expression, as before, his eyes had the look of a wounded animal.

The other man climbed the farther bank of the stream and continued straight ahead without looking back. The man in the stream watched him. His lips trembled a little.

"Bill!" he cried.

It was the despairing cry of a strong man in trouble, but Bill's head did not turn. The man watched him go, struggling forward up the hill toward the skyline. He watched him go until he passed over the hilltop and disappeared. Then he turned his gaze and slowly examined the circle of the world that remained to him now that Bill was gone.

The sun was low in the sky, almost hidden by a cover of clouds. The man looked at his watch, while supporting his weight on one leg. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The season was near the end of July or the first of August. He did not know the exact date within a week or two, but that was enough to know that the sun marked the northwest.

He looked to the south and decided that somewhere beyond those hills lay the Great Bear Lake. Also, he knew that behind the same hills the Arctic Circle cut its way across the plains of northern Canada, called the Barrens. This stream in which he stood flowed into the Coppermine River, which in turn flowed north and emptied into the

Arctic Ocean. He had never been there, but he had seen it once on a map.

Again his gaze completed the circle of the world about him. It was not a cheerful sight. Everywhere was soft skyline. The hills were all low-lying. There were no trees, no grasses. There was nothing but a vast emptiness that brought fear into his eyes.

"Bill!" he whispered, once, and twice, "Bill!"

He stood trembling in the milky water, feeling the vastness pressing in upon him with great force. He began to shake as with a disease, until the gun falling from his hand into the stream brought him back to reality. He fought with his fear and regaining his self-control, he recovered the gun from the water. He pushed his pack more toward his left shoulder. This helped to take a portion of its weight off the foot he had hurt. Then he proceeded, slowly and carefully, in great pain, to the bank of the stream.

He did not stop. With a worry that was madness, unmindful of the pain, he hurried up the hill to the top, over which his companion had disappeared. But at the top he saw a valley, empty of life. He fought with his fear again and won. Then once more he moved the pack farther toward his left shoulder and struggled down the hill.

The bottom of the valley was very wet. Thick plant life held the moisture close to the surface and the water flowed from under his feet at every step. He picked his way carefully across the valley and followed the other man's footsteps along the rocks which made small islands in a sea of wet plant life.

Although alone, he was not lost. Farther on, he knew, he would come to where dead pine trees bordered the shore of a little lake. In the language of that country it was called the "land of little sticks." Into that lake flowed a small stream, the water of which was not milky. There was grass along that stream, but no trees. He would follow the stream until it divided. He would cross this place of dividing to another stream, flowing to the west. This he would follow until it emptied into the river Dease. Here he would find a cache under an upturned boat and covered with many rocks. In this cache there would be cartridges for

his empty gun, and fishhooks and lines. Everything he needed for catching food would be there. Also he would find flour, a little meat, and some beans.

Bill would be waiting for him there, and they would find a boat and row south down the Dease to the Great Bear Lake. And south across the lake they would go, ever south, until they came to the Mackenzie River. And south, always south they would go, while the winter raced after them and the ice formed in the streams, and the days grew cold. South they would go, to some warm place where the trees grew tall and full and there was food without end.

These were the thoughts of the man as he struggled forward. But as strongly as he struggled with his body, he struggled equally with his mind. He tried to believe that Bill had not deserted him. Surely Bill would wait for him at the cache. He was forced to think this thought. Otherwise, there would not be any reason to continue, and he would lie down and die.

As the ball of the sun sank slowly into the northwest, he recalled every inch of his and Bill's flight south ahead of the oncoming winter. And he thought again and again of the food in the cache. It had been two days since he had anything to eat. It was a far longer time since he had had enough to eat. Often he picked muskeg berries, put them into his mouth, and ate them. A muskeg berry is a small seed in a drop of water. In the mouth, the water melts away and the seed tastes bitter. The man knew there was no real food value in the berries; but he ate them patiently with a hope greater than his experience.

At nine o'clock that night he hit his toe on a rocky surface, and from weakness and tiredness he fell to the ground. He lay for some time, without movement, on his side. He took his pack from his back and dragged himself into a sitting position. It was not yet dark. While some light remained he felt among the rocks for pieces of dried plants. When he had gathered a pile, he built a fire and put a tin pot of water on it to boil.

He unwrapped his pack. The first thing he did was to count his matches. There were 67. He counted them three times to be sure. He

divided them into several portions, wrapping them in paper. He put one portion in his empty tobacco pack, another in the inside band of his hat, and a third under his shirt against his flesh. This accomplished, he began to worry whether he had counted correctly. He unwrapped them all and counted them again. Yes, there were 67.

He dried his wet shoes and socks by the fire. The moccasins were badly torn. His socks were worn through in places, and his feet were bleeding. The area between his foot and leg, the ankle, was very painful. He examined it. It had swelled until it was as large as his knee. He cut a long strip from one of his two blankets and bound the ankle tightly. He cut other strips and bound them about his feet to serve both for mocassins and socks. Then he drank the pot of hot water, wound his watch, and pulled his blankets around him.

He slept like a dead man. The brief darkness at midnight came and went. Then the sun rose in the northeast. It can better be said that day dawned in that quarter of the sky, because the sun was hidden by gray clouds.

At six o'clock in the morning he waked, quietly lying on his back. He gazed straight up into the gray sky and knew that he was hungry. As he lifted himself on his elbow, he was frightened by a loud noise. There was a caribou looking at him curiously. The animal was not more than 50 feet away, and instantly, into the man's mind came the picture of caribou meat cooking over a fire. From habit, he reached for the empty gun and aimed it. The caribou leaped away and disappeared across the rocks.

The man cursed and threw the empty gun on the ground. He uttered a cry of pain as he started to drag himself to his feet. It was a slow task. When he finally stood on his feet, he needed another minute or two to straighten himself, so that he could stand as a man should stand.

He climbed a small hill and looked about. There were no trees, no bushes. There was nothing but grassy gray plants and some gray rocks and gray streams. The sky was gray. There was no sun or promise of sun. He had no idea of where north was, and he had forgotten how he had

come to this spot the night before. But he was not lost. He knew that. Soon he would come to the land of the little sticks. He felt that it lay to the left somewhere, not far. Possibly it was over the next low hill.

He returned to prepare his pack for traveling. He assured himself of the existence of his three separate portions of matches, although he did not stop to count them. But he did pause, trying to decide what to do about a bag made from moose skin. It was not large. It could be covered by his two hands. But he knew that it weighed 15 pounds—as much as all the rest of the pack. This worried him. He finally set it to one side and proceeded to roll the pack. He paused again to gaze at the moose-skin bag. He picked it up quickly with a quick glance around him. It was as if he thought the cruel wasteland was trying to steal it. When he rose to his feet, the bag was included in the pack on his back.

He started walking to the left, stopping now and again to eat muskeg berries. His ankle had stiffened, but the pain of it was nothing compared with the pain of his stomach. His hunger was so great he could not keep his mind steady on the course he had to follow to arrive at the land of the little sticks.

The berries did not help his hunger. Their bitter taste only made his tongue and mouth sore.

He came to a valley where some birds rose from the rocky places. "Ker-ker-ker" was the sound of their cry. He threw stones at them but could not hit them. He placed his pack on the ground and followed them as a cat advances on a bird. The sharp rocks cut through his trousers until his knees left a trail of blood. But the hurt was lost in the pain of his hunger. He moved his body through the wet plants, becoming wet and cold in the process. But he did not notice this, so great was his desire for food.

Always the birds rose before him. Their cry of "Ker-ker-ker" sounded as if they were laughing at him. He cursed them and cried aloud at them with their own cry.

Once he came upon one that must have been asleep. He did not see it until it flew up in his face from behind some rocks. He grasped the air as suddenly as the rise of the bird, and there remained in his

hand three tail feathers. As he watched its flight he hated it. He felt that it had done him some great wrong. Then he returned to where he had left his pack and lifted it again to his back.

As the day continued, he came into valleys where game was more plentiful. Twenty or more caribou passed by, within easy shooting distance of a gun. He felt a wild desire to run after them, certain that he could catch them. A small black animal came toward him, carrying a bird in its mouth. The man shouted. It was a fearful cry, but the animal, leaping away in fright, did not drop the bird.

Late in the afternoon he followed a stream which flowed through some thick grass. He grasped these grasses firmly near the root and pulled up what looked like a vegetable. It was round and white. Eagerly he sank his teeth into it. It was tender on the outside and gave the promise of food. But its inside was hard and stringy, and, like the berries, it had no food value. Nevertheless, he threw off his pack and went among the grasses on his hands and knees, eating the grass like a cow.

He was very tired and often wished to rest—to lie down and sleep. But he was led on, not so much by his desire to find the land of the little sticks as by his hunger.

He looked into every pool of water, searching without success for things to eat. Then, as the night darkened, he discovered a single small fish in one of these pools. He plunged his whole arm in, but the fish escaped his grasp. He reached for it with both hands and stirred the mud at the bottom of the pool. During his excitement he fell in, getting wet as high as his shoulders. Then the water was too cloudy with mud to allow him to see the fish. He was forced to wait until the mud had again settled to the bottom.

Then he tried again, until the water was again filled with mud. But he could not wait. He took a tin container from his pack and began to empty the water from the pool. He threw it out wildly at first, and so short a distance that it flowed into the pool again. He worked more carefully, trying to be calm, but his heart was pounding and his hands were trembling. At the end of half an hour the pool was nearly dry. Not a cupful of water remained. And there was no fish.

Then he discovered a narrow opening among the stones through which it had escaped into a larger pool—a pool which he could not empty in a night and a day. If he had known of the opening, he could have closed it with a rock before he began and the fish would have been his.

Thus he thought, and he sank down upon the wet earth. At first he cried softly to himself. Then he cried loudly to the uncaring wasteland around him.

He built a fire and warmed himself by drinking hot water. Then he built a camp on the rocks as he had done the night before. The last things he did were to be certain that his matches were dry and to wind his watch. The blankets were wet. His ankle pained him. But he knew only that he was hungry. Through his restless sleep he dreamed of feasts and of food served in all imaginable manners.

When he awakened he was cold and sick. There was no sun. The gray of earth and sky had become deeper. A cold wind was blowing and snow was whitening the hilltops. The air about him grew white with snow while he made a fire and boiled more water. It was wet snow, half rain. At first it melted as soon as it hit the earth. But it continued falling, covering the ground and destroying his fire.

This was a signal for him to put his pack on his back and struggle forward, he knew not where. He was not concerned with the land of little sticks, nor with Bill and the cache under the upturned boat by the river Dease. He was mad because of hunger. He did not notice the course he followed, except that it led him through the bottoms of the valleys. He felt his way through the wet snow to the watery muskeg berries, and was guided by touch as he pulled up the grass by the roots. But it had no taste and did not satisfy his hunger.

He had no fire that night, nor hot water. He pulled his blanket around him to sleep the broken sleep of hunger. The snow became a cold rain. He awakened many times to feel it falling on his upturned face.

Day came. It was a gray day with no sun. It had ceased raining. The sharpness of his hunger had departed. There was a dull pain in his stomach, but it did not trouble him so much. He was more in control

of himself. And once again he was interested in the land of little sticks and the cache by the river Dease.

He cut the remains of one of his blankets into strips and bound his bleeding feet. He used one of the strips on his swelled ankle and prepared himself for a day of travel. When he was ready to pick up his pack, he paused long before deciding to keep the moose-skin bag, but when he departed, it went with him.

The snow had melted under the rain, and only the hilltops showed white. The sun appeared and he succeeded in locating the way he had been traveling. But now he knew that he was lost. Perhaps he had wandered too far to the left. He now turned to the right to return to his true course.

Although the hunger pains were not as great as they had been, he realized that he was weak. He was forced to pause for frequent rests. At those times he ate the muskeg berries and grasses. His tongue felt dry and large and it tasted bitter in his mouth. His heart troubled him very much. When he had traveled a few minutes, it would begin pounding. Then it would leap in a series of beats that made him feel faint.

In the middle of the day he found two small fish in a large pool. It was impossible to empty it. But he was calmer now and he managed to catch them. They were no bigger than his little finger, but now he was not particularly hungry. The dull pain in his stomach had been growing duller. It almost seemed that his stomach was asleep. He ate the fish with great care. The eating was an act of pure reason. Although he had no desire to eat, he knew that he must eat to live.

In the evening he caught three more small fish, eating two and saving the third for breakfast. The sun had dried the wet plants and he was able to build a fire. He had not traveled more than ten miles that day. The next day, traveling whenever his heart permitted, he went no more than five miles. But his stomach did not give him any pain. It seemed to be sleeping. He was now in a strange country, too, and the caribou were becoming more plentiful. There were wolves also. Their howls could be heard across the land, and once he saw three of them crossing his path.

Another night passed. And in the morning, being more reasonable, he untied the leather string that held the moose-skin bag. From its open mouth poured a yellow stream of gold dust. He divided the gold into two equal parts. One half, wrapped in a piece of a blanket, he hid among a large formation of rocks. The other half he returned to the bag. He also began to use strips of the one remaining blanket for his feet. He still kept his gun, because there were cartridges in that cache by the river Dease.

This was a cloudy day, and this day hunger waked in him again. He was very weak. It was no uncommon thing now for him to fall. Once he fell into a bird's nest. There were four tiny birds, a day or so old, no more than a mouthful. He ate them greedily, putting them alive into his mouth and crushing them like eggshells between his teeth. The mother bird flew about him with cries of anger. He used his gun as a club with which to hit her, but she flew beyond his reach. He threw stones at her and by chance, one broke a wing. Then she ran away, dragging the broken wing, with him following her.

The little birds had not satisfied his hunger. He jumped along on his painful ankle, throwing stones and screaming loudly at times. At other times, he struggled along silently, picking himself up patiently when he fell, or rubbing his eyes with his hand when faintness threatened to overpower him.

The bird led him across some wet ground in the bottom of the valley. He discovered footprints in the wet grasses. They were not his own. He could see that. They must be Bill's. But he could not stop, because the mother bird was running ahead. He would catch her first. Then he would return and examine the footprints.

He tired the mother bird; but he tired himself also. She lay on her side breathing heavily. He lay on his side, a dozen feet away, unable to move toward her. And as he recovered, she recovered. She flew beyond reach as his hungry hand stretched out to catch her. The hunt started again. Night darkened and she escaped. He fell because of weakness, cutting his face. He did not move for a long time; then he rolled on his side. He wound his watch and lay there until morning.

It was another gray day. Half of his last blanket had been used for foot-wrappings. He failed to find Bill's trail again. It was not important. His hunger drove him on. He wondered if Bill, too, were lost. By the middle of the day, the weight of his pack became too great. Again he divided the gold, this time merely pouring half of it on the ground. In the afternoon he threw away the rest of it. There remained now only the half of the blanket, the tin container, and the gun.

A **hallucination** began to trouble him. He felt certain that one cartridge remained. It was in his gun and he had not seen it. However, he knew all the time that the gun was empty. But the hallucination continued. He fought it for hours. Then, he opened his gun eagerly, only to find nothing inside.

He struggled ahead for half an hour, when the hallucination arose again. Again he fought it, and still it continued. To give himself relief, he again opened the gun and found it empty.

At times his mind wandered even further. But these moments away from reality were brief, because always the pains of hunger forced him to return. Once, as his mind was wandering, he was returned to reality by a sight that almost caused him to faint. Before him stood a horse. A horse! He could not believe his eyes. A thick cloud was in his eyes, flashing with points of light. He rubbed his eyes fiercely to clear his sight. Then he saw before him not a horse, but a great brown bear. The animal was studying him with curiosity.

The man had brought his gun half the distance to his shoulder before he realized what he was doing. He lowered it and drew his hunting knife from its cover. Before him was meat and life. He ran his finger along the edge of his knife. It was sharp. The point was sharp. He would throw himself upon the bear and kill it. But his heart began its pounding. Then came its wild leap and he began to feel faint.

His wild courage was replaced by a great fear. In his weakness, what if the animal attacked him? He drew himself up tall, grasping the knife and staring hard at the bear. The bear advanced a couple of steps and stood up. If the man ran, the bear would run after him; but the man did not run. He was alive now with the courage of fear.

The bear moved away to one side with a threatening noise. He, himself, was fearful of this strange creature that appeared unafraid. But the man did not move. He stood still until the danger was past. Then he yielded to a fit of trembling and sank to his knees on the wet grass.

He regained control of himself and then started to move forward, afraid now in a new manner. It was not the fear that he would die from lack of food. He was afraid that he would be destroyed by forces other than starving. There were the wolves. Across the wasteland their howls could be heard, making the air itself a threat most real to him.

Now and again the wolves, in groups of two and three, crossed his path. But they stayed away from him. They were not in sufficient numbers to attack, and besides, they were hunting caribou. Caribou did not battle, while this strange creature that walked on two legs might bite.

In the late afternoon he came upon scattered bones where the wolves had made a kill. What remained had been a young caribou an hour before. He studied the bones, cleaned of any flesh. They were still pink with the life in them which had not yet died. Might he look like that before the day was done? Was this life? A fleeting thing without meaning? It was only life that pained. There was no hurt in death. To die was to sleep. It meant rest. Then why was he not content to die?

But he did not think about these things for very long. He was soon seated in the grass, a bone in his mouth, biting at the bit of life that made it yet pink. The sweet meaty taste drove him mad. He closed his teeth firmly on the bones. Sometimes it was the bone that broke, sometimes his teeth. Then he crushed the bones between the rocks. He pounded them into tiny pieces, and ate them. He was in such a hurry that he pounded his fingers, too. He felt surprised at the fact that his fingers did not hurt much when they were caught under the rock.

Then came frightful days of snow and rain. He did not know when he made camp and when he broke camp. He traveled in the night as much as in the day. He rested whenever he fell, moving ahead whenever the dying life in him started up again. He, as a man, no longer struggled. It was the life in him, unwilling to die, that drove him on.

He did nor suffer, nor feel pain. But his mind was filled with hallucinations and wild dreams.

But he still ate the crushed bones of the young caribou, which he had gathered and carried with him. He crossed no more hills, but followed a large stream which flowed through a wide valley. He did not see this stream nor this valley. He saw nothing except hallucinations.

One morning he awakened with his mind clear, lying on his back on a rocky surface. The sun was shining bright and warm. Far away, he heard the noises made by young caribou. He remembered rain and wind and snow, but whether he had been beaten by the storm for two days or two weeks he did not know.

For some time he lay without movement. The friendly sun poured down upon him and filled his body with its warmth. A fine day, he thought. Perhaps he could succeed in locating himself. By a painful effort he rolled on his side.

Below him flowed a wide river. Its unfamiliarity puzzled him. Slowly he followed it with his eyes, as it curved among the bare hills. They were more bare and lower than any hills he had yet seen. Slowly, without excitement, he followed the course of the strange stream toward the skyline and saw that it emptied into a bright and shining sea. He was still unexcited. Most unusual, he thought. It was probably a trick of his mind. He was certain of this when he also saw a ship floating in the shining sea. He closed his eyes for a while, then opened them. It was strange how the sight continued. Yet it was not strange. He knew there were no seas nor ships in the middle of this land, as he had known there was no cartridge in the empty gun.

He heard a noise behind him. It seemed like the dry sound that comes from the throat when air is forced out in a **cough**. Very slowly, because of his weakness and stiffness, he rolled to his other side. He could see nothing near, but he waited patiently. Again came the cough, and there, between two rocks, he saw the gray head of a wolf. The sharp ears did not stand up as straight as he had seen them on other wolves. The eyes were dull and the head seemed to hang. The animal opened and shut its eyes frequently in the sunshine. It seemed sick. As he

looked, it coughed again.

This was real, he thought. He turned on the other side to see the reality of the world which had been hidden from him before by his hallucination. But the sea still shone and the ship was still there. Was it reality? He closed his eyes for a long while and thought, and then he remembered.

He had been traveling north by east, away from the Dease Divide and into the Coppermine Valley. This wide river was the Coppermine. That shining sea was the Arctic Ocean. That ship was a fishing boat which had wandered east from the mouth of the Mackenzie River. Now it was lying in Coronation Gulf. He remembered the map he had seen long ago, and it was all clear and reasonable to him.

He sat up and turned his attention to immediate affairs. He had worn holes through the blanket wrappings, and his feet were like shapeless pieces of meat. His last blanket was gone. His gun and knife were both lost. He had also lost his hat somewhere, with the matches in the band. The matches against his chest were safe and dry inside the paper. He looked at his watch. It marked eleven o'clock and was still going. This proved that he had kept it wound.

He was calm. Although very weak, he had no feeling of pain. He was not hungry. The thought of food was not even pleasant to him. Whatever he did was done entirely by reasoning. He tore off the legs of his trousers to the knees and bound them about his feet. Somehow he had succeeded in keeping the tin container. He would have some hot water before he began what he knew was to be an awful journey to the ship.

His movements were slow. He shook as if with a disease. When he started to gather dried grasses he found he could not rise to his feet. He tried again and again. Then he contented himself with moving about on his hands and knees. Once he went near the sick wolf. The animal dragged itself out of the way, licking its face with a tongue which seemed hardly to have the strength to curl. The man noticed that the tongue was not the customary healthy red, but was a yellowish brown and covered with a half-dried coating.

After he drank some hot water, the man found he was able to stand. He could even walk as well as a dying man might be supposed to walk. But every minute or two he was forced to rest. His steps were unsteady, as were the steps of the wolf behind him. That night, when the shining sea was hidden in the blackness, he knew he was nearer to it by no more than four miles.

Through the night he heard the cough of the sick wolf and now and then, the noises of the young caribou. There was life all around him. But it was strong life, very much alive and well. He knew the sick wolf was following the sick man's steps in the hope that the man would die first. In the morning, when he opened his eyes, he saw it looking at him with a hungry stare. It stood with its tail between its legs like an unhappy dog.

The sun rose brightly, and all morning the man headed toward the ship on the shining sea. The weather was perfect. It was the brief return of summer which was usual in that country. It might continue for a week. Or, tomorrow or the next day it might be gone.

In the afternoon the man came to a track. It was that of another man, who did not walk, but who dragged himself on his hands and knees. The man thought it might be Bill, but he thought about it without any interest. He had no curiosity. Feeling and emotion had left him. He was no longer able to feel pain. Yet the life that was in him drove him ahead. He was very tired, but it refused to die. It was because it refused to die that he still ate muskeg berries and small fish, drank his hot water, and kept a careful eye on the sick wolf.

He followed the track of the other man who dragged himself along. Soon he came to the end of it. There were a few freshly cleaned bones where the grass was marked by the footprints of many wolves. He saw a moose-skin bag, exactly like his own. It had been torn by sharp teeth. He picked it up, although its weight was almost too much for his weak fingers. Bill had carried it to the end. Now he would have the last laugh. He would live and carry it to the ship in the shining sea. He laughed aloud, making an inhuman sound, and the sick wolf howled with him. The man ceased suddenly. How could he laugh at Bill, if that

were Bill; if those bones, so pinky-white and clean, were Bill?

He turned away. Bill had deserted him. But he would not take the gold, nor would he eat Bill's bones. Bill would have done so, however, had their situations been exchanged.

He came to a pool of water. Bending over it in search of fish, he threw his head back as if he had been struck. He had caught sight of his face in the water. So awful was it that his feelings were stirred long enough to be shocked. There were three fish in the pool, which was too large to empty. After several attempts to catch them in his tin container, he stopped. He was afraid, because of his great weakness, that he might fall and sink into the water. It was for this reason, too, that he did not trust himself to ride down the river atop one of the many logs to be found along its banks.

That day he lessened the distance between him and the ship by three miles. The next day he traveled only two miles, because he was now dragging himself on his hands and knees as Bill had done. At the end of the fifth day the ship was still seven miles away. He was unable to travel as much as a mile a day. However, the summer weather continued, and he continued to move toward the ship. And always the sick wolf coughed at his heels.

His knees had become red meat like his feet. Although he bound them with the shirt from his back, it was a red track he left behind him on the grass and stones. Once, glancing back, he saw the wolf licking his bloody track hungrily. He saw clearly what his own end might be—unless he could kill the wolf. Then began as awful an event as has ever been told: two sick creatures dragging their dying bodies across a wasteland and hunting each other's lives.

Had it been a well wolf, it would not have mattered so much to the man. But the thought of feeding the mouth of that nearly dead thing was hateful. His mind had begun to wander again and he was troubled by hallucinations. His reasonable moments grew shorter.

He was awakened once from a faint sleep by a cough close to his ear. The wolf leaped back, losing its footing and falling in its weakness. It was a funny sight, but he could not laugh. Nor was he afraid. He was

too far gone for that. But his mind was for the moment clear, and he lay and considered.

The ship was no more than four miles away. He could see it quite well when he rubbed his eyes. He could also see the white sail of a small boat cutting the water of the shining sea. But he could never drag himself those four miles. He knew that, and was very calm about the fact. He knew that he could not travel another half a mile. And yet he wanted to live. It was unreasonable that he should die after all he had been through. Fate asked too much of him. And, dying, he could not accept death. It was madness, perhaps, but in the very grasp of death he refused to die.

He closed his eyes and tried to keep himself calm. He struggled against the awful desire for sleep that threatened him. It was much like a sea, this deadly sleepiness. It rose and rose, mastering his entire self, bit by bit. Sometimes he was almost lost, swimming through its waters with a weakening effort. Then, by some strange power of the soul, his will would strike out more strongly against it.

Without movement he lay on his back. He could hear, slowly drawing nearer and nearer, the sound of the sick wolf's breathing. It came closer, always closer, and he did not move. It was beside his ear. The dry tongue moved across his face. His hands struck out. Actually, he had willed them to strike out. The fingers were curved, but they closed on empty air. Quickness requires strength, and the man had not his strength.

The quiet waiting of the wolf was awful. The man's waiting was no less awful. For half a day he lay without motion, fighting off sleep. He waited for the thing that was to feed upon him and upon which he wished to feed. Sometimes the sea of sleep rose over him and he dreamed long dreams. But always, through it all, waking and dreaming, he waited for the noisy breath and the feel of the tongue.

This time he did not hear the breath. He slipped slowly from some dream to feel the tongue along his hand. He waited. The teeth pressed softly, then more firmly. The wolf was using its last strength in an effort to sink its teeth into the food for which it had waited so long. But the

man, too, had waited long. The hand closed on the wolf's mouth. Slowly, while the wolf struggled weakly, the other hand moved across the wolf's body. Five minutes later the whole weight of the man's body was on top of the wolf. The hands had not sufficient strength to grasp the wolf about the throat until it died. But the face of the man was pressed close to the throat of the wolf and the mouth of the man was full of hair. At the end of half an hour the man felt some warm drops of blood in his throat. It was not pleasant. It was like hot, melted metal being forced into his stomach, and it was forced by his will alone. Later the man rolled on his back and slept.

There were some **scientists** traveling on the fishing ship *Bedford*. From where they stood on the ship, they could see a strange object on the shore. It was moving down the beach toward the water. They were unable to decide what it was. Being men of science, they climbed into a smaller boat and went ashore to examine it. And they saw something that was alive but which could hardly be called a man. It was blind and did not know what it was doing. Its movements produced little effect. But still it continued to drag itself across the ground at the rate of about twenty feet an hour.

Three weeks later the man lay in a bed on the fishing boat. With tears streaming down his face, he told who he was and what he had experienced. He also talked without meaning about his mother, and a home in California among the flowers.

The days were not many after that when he sat at table with the scientists and the ship's officers. He delighted in the sight of so much food and watched it carefully as it went into the mouths of others. With the disappearance of each mouthful an expression of sorrow came into his eyes. He was not mad. However, he hated those men at mealtimes. He was afraid that there would not be enough food. He inquired of the cook, the cabin boy, the captain, concerning the food supply. They reassured him numerous times. But he would not believe them and went into the kitchen to see with his own eyes.

It was noticed that the man was getting fat. He grew bigger with

each day. The scientists shook their heads and gave their opinions on the problem. They limited the amount of food given to the man at his meals, but still his weight increased.

The seamen smiled. They knew. And when the scientists decided to observe the man, they learned the reason. They saw him walk about the ship after breakfast. Like a man begging with an outstretched hand, he approached a seaman. The seaman smiled and gave him a piece of bread. He grasped it, and looked at it as a greedy man looks at gold. Then he put it inside his shirt. He received similar gifts from other smiling seamen.

The scientists were careful. They allowed him to continue. But they secretly examined his bed. It was lined with bread; every inch of space was filled with bread. Yet he was not mad. He was preparing for another possible famine—that was all. He would recover from it, the scientists said. And he did, even before the *Bedford* sailed into San Francisco Bay.

To Build a Fire

DAY HAD DAWNED COLD AND GRAY WHEN the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail. He climbed the high earth-bank where a little-traveled trail led east through the pine forest. It was a high bank, and he paused to breathe at the top. He excused the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock in the morning. There was no sun or promise of sun, although there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day. However, there seemed to be an indescribable darkness over the face of things. That was because the sun was absent from the sky. This fact did not worry the man. He was not alarmed by the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun.

The man looked along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white. North and south, as far as

his eye could see, it was unbroken white. The one thing that relieved the whiteness was a thin dark line that curved from the pine-covered island to the south. It curved into the north, where it disappeared behind another pine-covered island. This dark line was the trail—the main trail. It led south 500 miles to the Chilcoot Pass, and salt water. It led north 75 miles to Dawson, and still farther on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael, on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

But all this—the distant trail, no sun in the sky, the great cold, and the strangeness of it all—had no effect on the man. It was not because he was long familiar with it. He was a newcomer in the land, and this was his first winter.

The trouble with him was that he was not able to imagine. He was quick and ready in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in their meanings. Fifty **degrees** below **zero** meant 80 degrees of frost. Such facts told him that it was cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to consider his weaknesses as a creature affected by temperature. Nor did he think about man's general weakness, able to live only within narrow limits of heat and cold. From there, it did not lead him to thoughts of heaven and the meaning of a man's life. 50 degrees below zero meant a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear coverings, warm moccasins, and thick socks. 50 degrees below zero was to him nothing more than 50 degrees below zero. That it should be more important than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go, he forced some water from his mouth as an experiment. There was a sudden noise that surprised him. He tried it again. And again, in the air, before they could fall to the snow, the drops of water became ice that broke with a noise. He knew that at 50 below zero water from the mouth made a noise when it hit the snow. But this had done that in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than 50 below. But exactly how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter.

He was headed for the old camp on Henderson Creek, where the

boys were already. They had come across the mountain from the Indian Creek country. He had taken the long trail to look at the possibility of floating logs from the islands in the Yukon down the river when the ice melted. He would be in camp by six o'clock that evening. It would be a little after dark, but the boys would be there, a fire would be burning, and a hot supper would be ready. As he thought of lunch, he pressed his hand against the package under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped in a handkerchief, and lying for warmth against the naked skin. Otherwise, the bread would freeze. He smiled contentedly to himself as he thought of those pieces of bread, each of which enclosed a generous portion of cooked meat.

He plunged among the big pine trees. The trail was not well marked here. Several inches of snow had fallen since the last sled had passed. He was glad he was without a sled. Actually, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however, at the cold. It certainly was cold, he decided, as he rubbed his nose and face with his mittened hand. He had a good growth of hair on his face, but that did not protect his nose or the upper part of his face from the frosty air.

Following at the man's heels was a big native dog. It was a wolf dog, gray-coated and not noticeably different from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was worried by the great cold. It knew that this was no time for traveling. Its own feeling was closer to the truth than the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than 50 below zero; it was colder than 60 below, than 70 below. It was 75 below zero. Because the freezing point is 32 above zero, it meant that there were 107 degrees of frost.

The dog did not know anything about temperatures. Possibly in its brain there was no understanding of a condition of very cold, such as was in the man's brain. But the animal sensed the danger. Its fear made it question eagerly every movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned about fire, and it wanted fire. Otherwise, it would dig itself into the snow and find shelter from the cold air.

The frozen moistness of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost. The hair on the man's face was similarly frosted, but more solidly. It took the form of ice and increased with every warm, moist breath from his mouth. Also, the man had tobacco in his mouth. The ice held his lips so tightly together that he could not empty the juice from his mouth. The result was a long piece of yellow ice hanging from his lips. If he fell down it would break, like glass, into many pieces. He expected the ice formed by the tobacco juice, having been out twice before when it was very cold. But it had not been as cold as this, he knew.

He continued through the level forest for several miles. Then he went down a bank to the frozen path of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek and he knew he was ten miles from where the stream divided. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was traveling at the rate of four miles an hour. Thus, he figured that he would arrive where the stream divided at half-past twelve. He decided he would eat his lunch when he arrived there.

The dog followed again at his heels, with its tail hanging low, as the man started to walk along the frozen stream. The old sled trail could be seen, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last sleds. In a month no man had traveled up or down that silent creek. The man went steadily ahead. He was not much of a thinker. At that moment he had nothing to think about except that he would eat lunch at the stream's divide and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to; and, had there been, speech would not have been possible because of the ice around his mouth.

Once in a while the thought repeated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his face and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this without thinking, frequently changing hands. But, with all his rubbing, the instant he stopped, his face and nose became **numb**. His face would surely be frozen. He knew that and he was sorry that he had not worn the sort of nose guard Bud wore when it was cold. Such a guard passed across the nose and covered the entire face. But it did not

matter much, he decided. What was a little frost? A bit painful, that was all. It was never serious.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was most observant. He noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and the bends. And always he noted where he placed his feet. Once, coming around a bend, he moved suddenly to the side, like a frightened horse. He curved away from the place where he had been walking and retraced his steps several feet along the trail. He knew the creek was frozen to the bottom. No creek could contain water in that winter. But he knew also that there were streams of water that came out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top of the ice of the creek. He knew that even in the coldest weather these streams were never frozen, and he also knew their danger. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there was both water and thin ice, and when a man broke through he could get very wet.

That was why he had jumped away so suddenly. He had felt the ice move under his feet. He had also heard the noise of the snow-covered ice skin breaking. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, because he would be forced to stop and build a fire. Only under its protection could he bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins.

He stood and studied the creek bottom and its banks. He decided that the flowing stream of water came from the right side. He thought a while, rubbing his nose and face. Then he walked to the left. He stepped carefully and tested the ice at each step. Once away from the danger, he continued at his four-mile pace.

During the next two hours he came to several similar dangers. Usually the snow above the pools had a sunken appearance. However, once again he came near to falling through the ice. Once, sensing danger, he made the dog go ahead. The dog did not want to go. It hesitated until the man pushed it forward. Then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it fell through the ice, but climbed out on

the other side, which was firm. It had wet its feet and legs. Almost immediately the water on them turned to ice. The dog made quick efforts to get the ice off its legs. Then it lay down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. The animal knew enough to do this. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the commands that arose from the deepest part of its being.

But the man knew these things, having learned them from experience. He removed the mitten from his right hand and helped the dog tear out the pieces of ice. He did not bare his fingers more than a minute, and was surprised to find that they were numb. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten quickly and beat the hand across his breast.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun did not appear in the sky. At half-past twelve, on the minute, he arrived at the divide of the creek. He was pleased at his rate of speed. If he continued, he would certainly be with the boys by six o'clock that evening.

He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and pulled forth his lunch. The action took no more than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness touched his bare fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but instead, struck the fingers against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The pain that followed the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was frightened. He had not had time to take a bite of his lunch. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten. Then he bared the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice around his mouth prevented him.

Then he knew what was wrong. He had forgotten to build a fire and warm himself. He laughed at his own foolishness. As he laughed, he noted the numbness in his bare fingers. Also, he noted that the feeling which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or whether they were numb. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numb.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was some-

what frightened. He stamped forcefully until the feeling returned to his feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in this country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it was cold. He walked a few steps, stamping his feet and waving his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he took some matches and proceeded to make a fire. In the bushes, the high water had left a supply of sticks. From here he got wood for his fire. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire.

Bending over the fire, he first melted the ice from his face. With the protection of the fire's warmth he ate his lunch. For the moment, the cold had been forced away. The dog took comfort in the fire, lying at full length close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being burned. When the man had finished eating, he filled his pipe with tobacco and had a comfortable time with a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled his cap firmly about his ears, and started along the creek trail toward the left.

The dog was sorry to leave and looked toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly none of his ancestors had known cold, real cold. But the dog knew and all of its family knew. And it knew that it was not good to walk outside in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie in a hole in the snow and to wait for this awful cold to stop. There was no real bond between the dog and the man. The one was the slave of the other. The dog made no effort to indicate its fears to the man. It was not concerned with the well-being of the man. It was for its own sake that it looked toward the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of the whip in his voice. So the dog started walking close to the man's heels and followed him along the trail.

The man put more tobacco in his mouth and started a new growth of yellow ice on his face. Again his moist breath quickly powdered the hair on his face with white. He looked around him. There did not seem to be so many pools of water under the snow on the left side of Henderson Creek, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any.

And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, the man broke through. It was not deep. He was wet to the knees before he got out of the water to the firm snow.

He was angry and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour. Now he would have to build a fire and dry his moccasins and socks. This was most important at that low temperature. He knew that much.

So he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, under several small pine trees, he found some firewood which had been carried there by the high water of last year. There were some sticks, but also larger branches, and some dry grasses. He threw several large branches on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from dying in the wet snow. He made a flame by touching a match to a small piece of tree bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even better than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with pieces of dry grass and with the smallest dry sticks.

He worked slowly and carefully, realizing his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the sticks with which he fed it. He sat in the snow, pulling the sticks from the bushes under the trees and feeding them directly to the flame. He knew he must not fail. When it is 75 below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire. This is especially true if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile to keep his blood moving. But the blood in wet and freezing feet cannot be kept moving by running when it is 75 degrees below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze even harder.

All this the man knew. The old man on Sulphur Creek had told him about it, and now he was grateful for the advice. Already all feeling had gone from his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly become numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pushing the blood to all parts of his body. But the instant he stopped, the action of the heart slowed down. He now received the full force of the cold. The blood of

his body drew back from it. The blood was alive, like the dog. Like the dog, it wanted to hide and seek cover, away from the fearful cold. As long as he walked four miles an hour, the blood rose to the surface. But now it sank down into the lowest depths of his body. His feet and hands were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze first. His bare fingers were numb, although they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and face were already freezing, while the skin of all his body became cold as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and face would be only touched by the frost, because the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with sticks the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with larger branches. Then he could remove his wet moccasins and socks. While they dried, he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them first with snow. The fire was a success. He was safe.

He remembered the advice of the old man on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The man had been very serious when he said that no man should travel alone in that country after 50 below zero. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old men were rather womanish, he thought. All a man must do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his face and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could lose their feeling in so short a time. Without feeling they were, because he found it very difficult to make them move together to grasp a stick. They seemed far from his body and from him. When he touched a stick, he had to look to see whether or not he was holding it.

All of which mattered little. There was the fire, promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice. The thick socks were like iron almost to the knees. The moccasin's strings were like ropes of steel. For a moment he pulled them with his unfeeling fingers. Then, realizing the foolishness of it, he grasped his knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own

fault, or instead, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the pine tree. He should have built it in an open space. But it had been easier to pull the sticks from the bushes and drop them directly on the fire.

Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its branches. No wind had been blowing for weeks and each branch was heavy with snow. Each time he pulled a stick he shook the tree slightly. There had been just enough movement to cause the awful thing to happen. High up in the tree one branch dropped its load of snow. This fell on the branches beneath. This process continued, spreading through the whole tree. The snow fell without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was dead. Where it had burned was a pile of fresh snow.

The man was shocked. It was like hearing his own judgment of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old man on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had a companion on the trail he would be in no danger now. The companion could have built the fire. Now, he must build the fire again, and this second time he must not fail. Even if he succeeded, he would be likely to lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. He made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open space, where no tree would be above it. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny sticks. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out of the ground, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he also got many pieces that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked carefully, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him. There was an anxious look in its eyes, because it depended upon him as the fire provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for the second piece of tree bark. He knew the bark was there, although he could not feel it with his fingers. He tried again and again, but he could not

grasp it. And all the time, in his mind, he knew that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought alarmed him, but he fought against it and kept calm.

He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and began swinging his arms. Then he beat his hands with all his strength against his sides. He did this while he was sitting down. Then he stood up to do it. All the while the dog sat in the snow, its tail curled warmly over its feet and its sharp wolf ears bent forward as it looked at the man. And the man, as he waved his arms and hands, looked with longing at the creature that was warm and secure in the covering provided by nature.

After a time, he began to notice some feeling in his beaten fingers. The feeling grew stronger until it became very painful, but the man welcomed the pain. He pulled the mitten from his right hand and grasped the tree bark from his pocket. The bare fingers were quickly numb again. Next, he brought out his pack of matches. But the awful cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole pack fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor hold.

Now he was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and face, from his mind. He devoted his whole soul to picking up the matches. He followed the movement of his fingers with his eyes, using his sense of sight instead of that of touch. When he saw his fingers on each side of the pack, he closed them. That is, he willed to close them, because the fingers did not obey. He put the mitten on the right hand again, and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he lifted up the pack of matches, along with much snow, to the front of his jacket. But he had gained nothing.

After some struggling he managed to get the pack between his mittened hands. In this manner he carried it to his mouth. The ice broke as he opened his mouth with a fierce effort. He used his upper teeth to rub across the pack in order to separate a single match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his jacket. His condition was no better. He could not pick up the match. Then he thought how he might

do it. He picked up the match in his teeth and drew it across his leg. Twenty times he did this before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the tree bark. But the burning smell went up his nose, causing him to cough. The match fell into the snow and the flame died.

The old man on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that followed. After 50 below zero, a man should travel with a companion. He beat his hands, but failed to produce any feeling in them. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole pack of matches between his hands. His arm muscles were not frozen and he was able to press the hands tightly against the matches. Then he drew the whole pack along his leg. It burst into flame, 70 matches at once!

There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the burning smell, and held the flaming pack to the tree bark. As he so held it, he noticed some feeling in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. The feeling developed into pain. He continued to endure it. He held the flame of the matches to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were taking most of the flame.

Finally, when he could endure no more, he pulled his hands apart. The flaming matches fell into the snow, but the tree bark was burning. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest sticks on the flame. He could not choose carefully because they must be pieces that could be lifted between his hands. Small pieces of green grass stayed on the sticks, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He treated the flame carefully. It meant life, and it must not cease.

The blood had left the surface of his body and he now began to shake from the cold. A large piece of a wet plant fell on the little fire. He tried to push it out with his fingers. His shaking body made him push it too far and he scattered the little fire over a wide space. He tried to push the burning grasses and sticks together again. Even with the strong effort that he made, his trembling fingers would not obey and the sticks were hopelessly scattered. Each stick smoked a little and died. The fire

provider had failed. As he looked about him, his eyes noticed the dog sitting across the ruins of the fire from him. It was making uneasy movements, slightly lifting one foot and then the other.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the story of the man, caught in a storm, who killed an animal and sheltered himself inside the dead body and thus was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until feeling returned to them. Then he could build another fire.

He spoke to the dog, calling it to him. But in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal. It had never known the man to speak in such a tone before. Something was wrong and it sensed danger. It knew not what danger, but somewhere in its brain arose a fear of the man. It flattened its ears at the sound of the man's voice; its uneasy movements and the liftings of its feet became more noticeable. But it would not come to the man. He got down on his hands and knees and went toward the dog. But this unusual position again excited fear and the animal moved away.

The man sat in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, using his teeth, and then stood on his feet. He glanced down to assure himself that he was really standing, because lack of feeling in his feet gave him no relation to the earth. His position, however, removed the fear from the dog's mind.

When he commanded the dog with his usual voice, the dog obeyed and came to him. As it came within his reach, the man lost control. His arms stretched out to hold the dog and he experienced real surprise when he discovered that his hands could not grasp. There was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly and before the animal could escape, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it barked and struggled.

But it was all he could do: hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his frozen hands he could neither draw nor hold his

knife. Nor could he grasp the dog around the throat. He freed it and it dashed wildly away, still barking. It stopped 40 feet away and observed him curiously, with ears sharply bent forward.

The man looked down at his hands to locate them and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. He thought it curious that it was necessary to use his eyes to discover where his hands were. He began waving his arms, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes. His heart produced enough blood to stop his shaking. But no feeling was created in his hands.

A certain fear of death came upon him. He realized that it was no longer a mere problem of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet. Now it was a problem of life and death with the circumstances against him. The fear made him lose control of himself and he turned and ran along the creek bed on the old trail. The dog joined him and followed closely behind. The man ran blindly in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he struggled through the snow, he began to see things again—the banks of the creek, the bare trees, and the sky.

The running made him feel better. He did not shake any more. Maybe, if he continued to run, his feet would stop freezing. Maybe if he ran far enough, he would find the camp and the boys. Without doubt, he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face. But the boys would take care of him and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time, there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys. It told him that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start and that he would soon be dead. He pushed this thought to the back of his mind and refused to consider it. Sometimes it came forward and demanded to be heard. But he pushed it away and tried to think of other things.

It seemed strange to him that he could run on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to be flying along above the surface and to have no connection with the earth.

His idea of running until he arrived at the camp and the boys pre-

sented one problem: he lacked the endurance. Several times he caught himself as he was falling. Finally, he dropped to the ground, unable to stop his fall. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided. Next time he would merely walk and keep going.

As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling warm and comfortable. He was not shaking, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his body. And yet, when he touched his nose or face, there was no feeling. Running would not bring life to them. Nor would it help his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be increasing. He tried to keep this thought out of his mind and to forget it. He knew that such thoughts caused a feeling of fright in him and he was afraid of such feelings. But the thought returned and continued, until he could picture his body totally frozen. This was too much, and again he ran wildly along the trail. Once he slowed to a walk, but the thought that the freezing of his body was increasing made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell a second time, the dog curled its tail over its feet and sat in front of him, facing him, curiously eager. The warmth and security of the animal angered him. He cursed it until it flattened its ears. This time the shaking because of the cold began more quickly. He was losing his battle with the frost. It was moving into his body from all sides. This thought drove him forward. But he ran no more than 100 feet, when he fell head first.

It was his last moment of fear. When he had recovered his breath and his control, he sat and thought about meeting death with dignity. However, the idea did not come to him in exactly this manner. His idea was that he had been acting like a fool. He had been running around like a chicken with its head cut off. He was certain to freeze in his present circumstances, and he should accept it calmly. With this newfound peace of mind came the first sleepiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep his way to death. Freezing was not as bad as people thought. There were many worse ways to die.

He pictured the boys finding his body the next day. Suddenly he

saw himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more. Even then he was outside of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he returned to the United States he could tell the folks what real cold was.

His mind went from this to the thought of the old man of Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

"You were right, old fellow. You were right," he murmured to the old man of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man dropped into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day ended in a long evening. There were no signs of a fire to be made. Never in the dog's experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the evening grew darker, its eager longing for the fire mastered it. With much lifting of its feet, it cried softly. Then it flattened its ears, expecting the man's curse. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog howled loudly. And still later it moved close to the man and caught the smell of death. This made the animal back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and ran along the trail toward the camp it knew, where there were the other food providers and fire providers.

The Wit of Porportuk

EL-SOO HAD BEEN A **MISSION** GIRL. Her mother died when she was very small and one of the **Sisters**, Sister Alberta, had taken her to live with them at Holy Cross Mission. El-Soo's Indian blood was not mixed with any other race. Never had the Sisters found a girl so easy to teach and at the same time so full of life.

El-Soo was quick to learn what the Sisters taught her. She had a good mind. But it was her character which was so unusual; she was like fire, a living flame of life. Her personality combined will, sweetness, and daring. Her father was a chief, and his blood was in her. The act of obeying others, in the mind of El-Soo, was a weighing of what was just or unjust. She had a passion for justice in her actions toward others. Perhaps for this reason she did very well in her study of numbers.

But she was excellent in other studies, too. She learned to read and write English as no girl in the mission had ever learned to do. She led the girls in singing and she was a fine artist. Had she been born into more favorable circumstances, she would have found her life's work in literature or music.

Instead, she was El-Soo, daughter of Klakee-Nah, a chief. And she lived in the Holy Cross Mission where there were no artists, but only Sisters who were interested in the life of the soul and the heaven that lay beyond the skies.

The years passed. She was eight years old when she entered the mission. When she was 16, and the Sisters were planning to send her to the United States to complete her education, a man of her own tribe arrived at Holy Cross and talked with her. El-Soo found it difficult to like him. He was dirty. He was rough in his manners and his hair had never been combed. He looked at her unfavorably and refused to sit down.

"Your brother is dead," he said.

El-Soo was not particularly shocked. She remembered little of her brother. "Your father is an old man, and alone," the messenger continued. "His house is large and empty. He would like to hear your voice and to look at you."

She remembered her father Klakee-Nah. He was the chief of the village, the friend of the missionaries and the traders, a large man like a giant, with kindly eyes and a masterful manner.

"Tell him that I will come," El-Soo answered.

Although the Sisters were saddened, El-Soo made plans to return. All talking with her was without effect. There was much arguing and weeping. Sister Alberta even revealed to her the plan to send her to the United States. El-Soo understood the promise of such a plan but she shook her head. She was thinking of other things. In her mind she saw the curve of the Yukon River at Tanana Station, with the St. George Mission on one side and the store on the other. Between them was the Indian village and a large log house where lived an old man cared for by slaves.

All who lived on the Yukon banks for two thousand miles knew the large log house, the old man, and the slaves. The Sisters also knew about the house with its unending feasting and its fun. So there was weeping at Holy Cross when El-Soo departed.

There was a great cleaning of the large house when El-Soo arrived. Klakee-Nah objected to the changes made by his young daughter. But finally, he **borrowed** a thousand dollars from old Porportuk, the richest Indian on the Yukon. El-Soo re-created the large house. She gave it a new magnificence, while Klakee-Nah continued to welcome his guests with much feasting and merrymaking.

All of this was unusual for a Yukon Indian, but Klakee-Nah was an unusual Indian. Because he was a chief and had a lot of money, he was able to do all this. In the early days, he had held a power over his people and he had profitable business with the white trading companies. Later, with Porportuk, he had found gold on the Koyukuk River. Klakee-Nah was by training and nature a chief. Porportuk was a business man, and Porportuk bought the chief's share of the gold mine. Porportuk was content to work and increase his wealth. Klakee-Nah returned to his large house and proceeded to spend. Porportuk was known as the richest Indian in Alaska. Klakee-Nah was known as the one most like the white man. Porportuk was a moneylender. Klakee-Nah was a fighter and a feaster, happy with wine and song.

El-Soo learned about the large house and its manner of life as easily as she had learned about Holy Cross Mission and its manner of life. She did not try to change her father and lead him toward God. It is true, she tried to prevent him from drinking too much liquor, but that was to guard his health.

The door of the large house was always open in welcome. People came and went. The house was never quiet. The great main room was always ringing with song. At tables sat men from around the world and chiefs from distant tribes. There were Englishmen, traders, officers of the great companies, sailing men from the sea, and hunters and miners from many nations.

El-Soo enjoyed this varied companionship. She could speak

English as well as she could her native language, and she sang English songs. She knew the Indian customs as well. She knew how to wear the customary Indian dress of the daughter of a chief for special occasions. But usually, she dressed as white women dress. She had learned to sew at the mission and combined this skill with her own art. She wore her clothes like a white woman and she made clothes that could be thus worn.

In her manner, she was as unusual as her father, and the rank she occupied was as special as his. She was the one Indian woman who was socially equal with the several white women at Tanana Station. She was the one Indian woman white men asked to marry.

El-Soo was beautiful, not as white women are beautiful, and not as Indian women are beautiful. It was the flame of her, that did not depend upon the features of her face, that was her beauty. In figure and feature, she was an Indian type. She had black hair and golden brown skin; her eyes were black and bright. The bones of her face were high, but not too broad; her lips were thin. But over all and through all poured the flame of her. There was something that was fire and that was the soul of her. It lay warm in her eyes; it colored her cheeks; it curled in her lips.

And El-Soo had wit. She never used it to hurt others, yet it was quick to search out forgivable weakness. The joy in her mind played like a flame over all near her, and from all near her arose answering joy. Yet she was never the center of attention. This she would not permit. The large house was her father's; and through it, to the end, moved his figure. He was the master of the feast and the giver of the law. It is true, as strength left him, that she accepted his responsibilities. But in appearance he still ruled.

And always through the large house moved the worried figure of Porportuk who was paying for it all. It was not that he really paid. He figured how much was due him and year by year he took control of the properties of Klakee-Nah. Porportuk once decided to speak to El-Soo of the wasteful way of life in the large house. It was after he had taken the last of Klakee-Nah's wealth. But he never spoke of it again. El-Soo,

like her father, was proud and was not concerned with money.

Porportuk continued to lend them money and they continued to spend it. El-Soo had decided upon one thing: her father should die as he had lived. For him there should be no passing from high to low, no lessening of the feast. When there was famine in the old times, the Indians came in hunger to the large house and went away content. When there was famine and no money, money was borrowed from Porportuk and the Indians again went away content. During this time, old Porportuk watched and waited. With every loan of money, he looked at El-Soo as if he were possessing her. He felt old desires arising again within him.

But El-Soo was not interested in old Porportuk. Nor was she interested in the white men who wanted to marry her. Because at Tanana Station was a young man, Akoon, of her own blood and tribe and village. He was strong and handsome to her eyes, and a great hunter. Because he had wandered far and much, he was also very poor. He had been to all the unknown places. He had journeyed to the United States; he had crossed the land to Hudson Bay and returned; and as a seal hunter he had sailed on a ship to Siberia.

When he returned from seeking gold in Klondike, he came to the large house to report to old Klakee-Nah on all of the world that he had seen. There he first saw El-Soo, who had returned three years before from the mission. After that, Akoon wandered no more. He refused wages of 20 dollars a day on the big steamboats. He hunted some and fished some, but never far from Tanana Station. He was at the large house often and for long times. And El-Soo measured him against many men and found him good. He sang songs to her and was full of joy. Soon all Tanana Station knew he loved her. And Porportuk just smiled and arranged loans of more money to continue the manner of life at the large house.

Then came the death table of Klakee-Nah. He sat at a feast with death in his throat that could not be washed away with wine. And there was laughing and joking and singing. There were no tears or sighs at that table. It was proper that Klakee-Nah should die as he had lived and

none knew this better than El-Soo. The old crowd was there. As in the old days three sailing men were there, recently returned from a long journey in the Arctic. At Klakee-Nah's back were four old men, all that remained of the slaves of his youth. With tear-filled eyes they attended to his needs. With shaking hands they filled his glass or struck him on the back when he coughed.

It was a wild night. As the hours passed and the fun laughed and roared louder, death moved more strongly in Klakee-Nah's throat.

Then it was that he sent for Porportuk. And Porportuk came in from the frost outside to look unfavorably upon the meat and wine on the table for which he had paid. But as he looked down the length of faces to the far end and saw the face of El-Soo, a light could be seen glowing in his eyes.

Place was made for him at Klakee-Nah's side, and a glass was put before him. Klakee-Nah, with his own hands, filled the glass.

"Drink!" he cried. "It is not good?"

And Porportuk's eyes watered as he nodded his head and enjoyed his drink.

"When, in your own house, have you had such drink?" Klakee-Nah demanded.

"I will not deny that the drink is good to this old throat of mine," Porportuk answered. Then he hesitated to find the words to complete the thought.

"But it costs too much!" Klakee-Nah roared, completing it for him.

Porportuk was angered by the laughing voices around the table. His eyes assumed an evil look. "We were boys together, of the same age," he said. "In your throat is death. I am still alive and strong."

A threatening murmur arose from the company. Klakee-Nah coughed and the old slaves hit him between the shoulders. He struggled for breath and waved his hand to quiet the threatening murmur.

"You have hated even the fire in your house because the wood cost too much!" he cried. "You have hated life. To live cost too much, and you have refused to pay the price. Your life has been like a cabin where the fire is dead and there are no blankets on the floor." He sig-

naled a slave to fill his glass, which he held high. "But I have lived. And I have been warm with life as you have never been warm. It is true, you shall live long. But the longest nights are the cold nights when a man trembles and lies without sleep. My nights have been short, but I have slept warm."

He emptied the glass. The shaking hand of a slave failed to catch it as it fell to the floor. Klakee-Nah sank back, watching the upturned glasses at the lips of the drinkers. His own lips were smiling slightly as the company expressed its pleasure at his words. At a sign, two slaves attempted to help him sit straight again. But they were weak, and the four old men shook as they helped him to move forward in his chair.

"But manner of life is not important tonight," he continued. "We have other business, Porportuk, you and I. I owe you money. How much is it?"

Porportuk searched in his pocket and brought forth a note. He drank from his glass and began. "There is a note of August 1889 for 300 dollars. The note of the next year is for 500 dollars. This note was included in the note of two months later for a thousand dollars. Then there is the note—"

"Don't speak of the many notes!" Klakee-Nah cried. "They make my head turn around. The whole thing! How much is it?"

Porportuk glanced at his papers. "15,967 dollars and 75 cents," he read carefully.

"Make it 16,000 dollars. Make it 16,000 dollars," Klakee-Nah said grandly. "Odd numbers were always a worry. And now—and it is for this that I have sent for you—write a new note for 16,000, which I shall sign. I have not thought about your price for lending me the money. Make it as large as you wish, and make it payable in the next world, when I shall meet you by the fire of the Great Father of all Indians. Then the note will be paid. This I promise you. It is the word of Klakee-Nah."

Porportuk looked puzzled. Loud laughing began and continued until it shook the room. Klakee-Nah raised his hands. "No," he cried. "It is not a joke. I speak honestly. It was for this purpose that I sent for you, Porportuk. Write the note."

"I have no business with the next world," Porportuk answered slowly.

"Do you not plan to meet me before the Great Father?" Klakee-Nah demanded. Then he added, "I shall surely be there."

"I have no business with the next world," Porportuk repeated.

The man who was near death looked at him with surprise.

"I know nothing of the next world," Porportuk explained. "I do business in this world."

Klakee-Nah understood immediately. "This is a result of sleeping in the cold at night," he laughed. He thought for a moment. Then he said, "It is in this world that you must be paid. There remains to me this house. Take it and the debt will be settled."

"It is an old house and not worth the money you owe me," Porportuk answered.

"There are my gold mines."

"They have never paid well," was the reply.

"There is my share in the steamboat *Koyukuk*. I own half of it."

"She is at the bottom of the Yukon River."

Klakee-Nah seemed surprised. "Oh, that is true. I forgot. It happened last spring when the ice melted." He thought for a while. The glasses went untasted, and all the company waited for his next words.

"Then it would seem I owe you a sum of money which I cannot pay...in this world?" Porportuk nodded and glanced toward the end of the table.

"Then it would seem that you, Porportuk, are not a good business man," Klakee-Nah said cleverly.

Porportuk answered in a firm voice. "No. There is something yet unmentioned."

"What!" cried Klakee-Nah. "Do I still have property? Name it, and it is yours, and the debt is no more."

"There it is." Porportuk pointed at El-Soo.

Klakee-Nah could not understand. He looked down the length of the table and wiped his eyes. Then he looked again.

"Your daughter, El-Soo. Her will I take and the debt is no more.

I will burn the note there in the fire."

Klakee-Nah began to shake from laughing. "Ho! Ho! Ho! That is really a joke! And with your cold bed and daughters old enough to be the mother of El-Soo. Ho! Ho!" He began to cough and the old slaves struck him on the back. "Ho! Ho'" he began again, and started coughing.

Porportuk waited patiently, drinking from his glass and studying the double row of faces along the table. "It is no joke," he said finally. "My speech is well meant."

Klakee-Nah became quiet and looked at him. Then he reached for his glass, but could not touch it. A slave passed it to him. He threw the glass and the liquor into the face of Porportuk.

"Put him outside!" Klakee-Nah shouted to the waiting guests at the table who were straining like dogs in harness. "And roll him in the snow!"

The crowd rushed past him out the doors. He signaled to the slaves, and the four old men supported him on his feet as he met the returning company and greeted them for the last time with raised glass.

It did not take long to settle the affairs of Klakee-Nah. Tommy, the little Englishman who worked at the store, was asked by El-Soo to help. Nothing remained but debts. All the notes were held by Porportuk. All the properties had been given to Porportuk in return for borrowed money.

The winter passed. The debt owed to Porportuk remained unpaid. He saw El-Soo often and explained to her, as he had explained to her father, the manner in which the debt could be settled. Also, he brought with him old men of the tribe who told her that her father would not rest if the debt were not paid. One day, after such a discussion, El-Soo made a final announcement to Porportuk.

"I shall tell you two things," she said. "First, I shall not be your wife. Will you remember that? Second, you shall be paid the last cent of the 16,000 dollars."

"15,967 dollars and 75 cents," Porportuk corrected.

"My father said 16,000 dollars," was her reply. "You shall be paid."

"How?"

"I know not how, but I shall discover how to do it. Now go, and trouble me no more. If you do," she hesitated to find a proper threat. "If you do, I shall have you rolled in the snow again as soon as the first snow falls."

This was still early in April. And a little later El-Soo announced a plan that surprised the country. News of the plan traveled up and down the Yukon and was carried from camp to camp. It was said that in June, when the fish began to swim up the river, El-Soo, daughter of Klakee-Nah, would sell herself to pay the debt owed to Porportuk. The attempts made to stop her were without success. The missionaries at St. George Mission argued with her, but she replied:

"Only the debts to God are settled in the next world. The debts of men are of this world, and in this world are they settled."

Akoon talked with her, but she replied: "I do love you, Akoon. But honor is greater than love."

Sister Alberta journeyed the many miles from Holy Cross Mission, on the first steamboat to sail after the ice had gone, but she had no better luck in changing El-Soo's mind.

"My father wanders after death," said El-Soo. "And he will continue to wander, with no peace, until the debt is paid. Then, and not until then, may he go to the house of the Great Father."

"Do you believe this?" Sister Alberta asked.

"I do not know," El-Soo answered. "It was my father's belief."

Sister Alberta shook her head in despair.

"Who knows if the things we believe are true?" El-Soo continued. "Why not? The next world to you may be heaven because you have believed in heaven. To my father the next world may be a large house where he will sit always at tables feasting with God."

"And you?" Sister Alberta asked. "What is your next world?"

El-Soo hesitated for a moment. "I should like a little of both," she said. "I should like to seek your face as well as the face of my father."

The day of the sale arrived. Tanana Station was crowded with people. As was their custom, the tribes had gathered to await the com-

ing of the fish. During the time they were waiting, they danced and traded and talked. Then there was the ordinary gathering of white adventurers, traders and miners. In addition, a large number of white men had come because they were curious, or interested in the affair.

The fish were late coming up the river that year. This delay increased the interest. Then, on the day of the sale, the situation was made worse by Akoon. He made a public announcement that the man who bought El-Soo would immediately die. He held a gun in his hand to indicate the manner of death. El-Soo was angered by his action, but he refused to speak with her.

The first fish was caught at ten o'clock in the evening, and at midnight the sale began. It occurred on the top of the high bank beside the Yukon. A great crowd gathered around the table and the two chairs that stood near the edge of the bank. At the front of the crowd were many white men and several chiefs. There, too, stood Akoon. Tommy, at El-Soo's request, managed the sale, but she made the opening speech and described what was to be sold. She was wearing her native dress, the dress of a chief's daughter. She stood on a chair so that she might be seen by everyone.

"Who will buy a wife?" she asked. "Look at me. I am twenty years old and a maid. I will be a good wife to the man who buys me. If he is a white man, I shall dress in the fashion of white women. If he is an Indian, I shall dress as an Indian. I can make my own clothes, and sew, and wash. I was taught for eight years to do these things at Holy Cross Mission. I can read and write English, and I know music. I shall be sold to the one who offers the most money, and for him I will prepare a paper saying that he has bought me. I forgot to say that I can sing very well, and that I have never been sick in my life. I weigh 132 pounds. My father is dead and I have no other family. Who wants me?"

She looked over the crowd and stepped down. At Tommy's request she stood upon the chair again, while he mounted the second chair and started the bidding.

Surrounding El-Soo stood the four old slaves of her father. In the front of the crowd were several Indian kings from the upper Yukon.

Beside them, sick and weak, were two old miners. Beyond, a half-dozen French-Canadian travelers stood in a group. An Indian from the lands near the coast stood alone. From afar came the cries of the wild birds on their nesting grounds. Other small birds flew overhead singing.

The bidding began slowly. A stranger from Sitka, who had arrived only half an hour before, offered one hundred dollars in a confident voice. He looked surprised when Akoon turned threateningly toward him with the gun. The bidding was slow. An Indian bid 150 dollars, and after some time a gambler raised the bid to 200. El-Soo was saddened; her pride was hurt.

There was a murmur from the crowd as Porportuk forced his way to the front. "Five hundred dollars!" he bid in a loud voice, then looked about him proudly to see the effect.

He hoped to use his great wealth to stop all bidding. But one of the travelers, looking at El-Soo with shining eyes, raised the bid a hundred.

"700!" Porportuk replied immediately.

And equally fast came the reply of "800" from the traveler.

Porportuk tried again. "1,200!" he shouted.

With a look of sadness, the traveler said no more. There was no further bidding. Tommy tried to excite the crowd, but could not raise the bid.

El-Soo spoke to Porportuk. "It would be wise, Porportuk, for you to consider your bid. Have you forgotten what I told you: that I would never marry you!"

"It is a public sale," he answered. "I shall buy you and have a paper to show that you belong to me. I have offered 1,200 dollars. Your price is cheap."

"Too cheap!" Tommy cried. "Even if I am managing the sale that does not prevent me from bidding. I will pay 1,300 dollars."

"1,400," was Porportuk's reply.

"I will buy you to be my—my cousin," Tommy whispered to El-Soo. Then he called aloud, "1,500!"

At 2,000 one of the Indian kings started bidding and Tommy stopped.

For the third time Porportuk tried to win by using his wealth. He raised the price by 500 dollars. But the Indian king's pride was affected. And he answered with a raise of another 500 dollars.

The price for El-Soo was now three thousand dollars. Porportuk made it 3,500 and was surprised when the Indian king raised it a thousand dollars. Porportuk again raised it five hundred and again showed surprise when the king raised the price a thousand more.

Porportuk was angered. His pride was hurt. His strength had been questioned, because to him, strength was wealth. He could not appear to be weak before the eyes of the crowd. El-Soo was not important to him now. The savings gained from the cold nights of all his years were ready to be spent, if necessary. El-Soo's price was now six thousand. He made it seven thousand. And then, in thousand-dollar bids, as fast as they could be uttered, her price increased. At 14,000 dollars the two men stopped to breathe.

Then the unexpected happened. In the brief pause that followed, the **gambler**, who had added his money to that of several of his friends, bid 16,000 dollars.

"17,000 dollars," Porportuk said weakly.

"18,000," said the king.

Porportuk gathered his strength. "20,000."

The gambler stopped bidding. The Indian king raised the price a thousand, and Porportuk answered with another raise. As they bid, Akoon turned from one to the other, half threateningly, half curiously. He seemed to be wondering what manner of man it was that it would be necessary to kill. When the king prepared to make his next bid, Akoon moved closer toward him. The king first took his gun in his hand, then said:

"23,000 dollars."

"24,000," said Porportuk. He smiled proudly, for he was certain that he had finally defeated the king. The latter moved close to El-Soo. He studied her carefully for a long time.

"And five hundred," he said.

"25,000," came Porportuk's raise.

The king looked once more and shook his head. He looked again and then said, "And five hundred."

"26,000," Porportuk shouted.

The king shook his head and refused to look at Tommy who was urging him to bid more. At the same time Akoon had moved close to Porportuk. El-Soo's quick eye noted this. While Tommy begged the Indian king for another bid, she bent and spoke in a low voice in the ear of a slave. The slave went to Akoon and spoke in a low voice in his ear. Akoon made no sign that he had heard, although El-Soo looked at him anxiously.

"Sold!" Tommy's voice could be heard saying. "To Porportuk, for 26,000 dollars."

Porportuk glanced nervously at Akoon. All eyes were upon Akoon, but he did nothing.

"Let the scales be brought," said El-Soo.

"I shall make payment at my house," said Porportuk.

"Let the scales be brought," El-Soo repeated. "Payment shall be made here where all can see."

So the gold scales were brought, while Porportuk went away. He returned with a man at his heels, on whose shoulders was a weight of gold dust in moose-skin bags. Also, at Porportuk's back walked another man with a gun, who looked only at Akoon.

"Here are the notes for the debt of 15,967 dollars and 75 cents," said Porportuk.

El-Soo received the notes in her hands and said to Tommy, "Let the debt be figured as 16,000 dollars."

"There remains 10,000 dollars to be paid in gold," Tommy said.

Porportuk nodded and opened the mouths of the bags. El-Soo, standing on the bank of the river, threw the pieces of paper into the Yukon. The weighing began, but then stopped.

"The scales must be set at 17 dollars an ounce," Porportuk had said to Tommy.

"At 16 dollars," El-Soo said quickly.

"It is the custom to figure gold at 17 dollars for each ounce,"

Porportuk replied. "And this is a business affair."

El-Soo laughed. "That is a new custom," she said. "It began in April. Last year, and the years before, it was 16 dollars an ounce. When my father's debt was made it was 16 dollars for each ounce of gold. Therefore, you shall pay for me at 16 and not at 17." Porportuk agreed and allowed the weighing to proceed.

"Weigh it in three piles, Tommy" she said. "A thousand dollars here, three thousand here, and here six thousand."

It was slow work and while the weighing proceeded, everyone wondered what Akoon would do.

"He is waiting until the money is paid," one said. And this opinion was repeated and was accepted. They waited for what Akoon would do when the money was paid. And Porportuk's man with the gun waited and looked at Akoon.

The weighing was finished, and the gold dust lay on the table in three dark yellow piles. "There is a debt of my father to the company for three thousand dollars," said El-Soo. "Take it, Tommy, for the company. And here are four old men, Tommy. You know them. And here is one thousand dollars. Take it, and see that the old men are never hungry and never without tobacco."

Tommy put the gold into separate bags. Six thousand dollars remained on the table. El-Soo pushed her hand into the pile. With a sudden turn, she threw the dust into the Yukon in a golden shower. Porportuk's seized her hand as she reached a second time into the pile.

"It is mine," she said calmly. Porportuk let her go, but he bit his lip in anger as she continued to throw the gold into the river until none remained.

The crowd looked only at Akoon. The gun held by Porportuk's man pointed directly at him. But Akoon did nothing.

"Prepare a paper for the sale," Porportuk demanded.

And Tommy wrote a paper saying that the woman El-Soo belonged to the man Porportuk. El-Soo signed the paper, and Porportuk folded it and put it in his pocket. Suddenly his eyes flamed and in sudden speech he said to El-Soo.

"But it was not your father's debt," he said. "What I paid was the price for you. Your sale is business of today and not of last year and the years before. The ounces I paid for you will buy flour worth 17 dollars today, and not 16. I have lost a dollar on each ounce. I have lost 625 dollars."

El-Soo thought for a moment, and saw the error she had made. She smiled, and then she laughed.

"You are right," she laughed. "I made a mistake. But it is too late. You have paid, and the gold is gone. You did not think quickly. It is your loss. Your wit is slow these days, Porportuk. You are getting old."

He did not answer. He glanced anxiously at Akoon and was reassured. His lips tightened and his face had a cruel look. "Come," he said, "we will go to my house."

"Do you remember the two things I told you before?" El-Soo asked, making no movement to accompany him.

"My head would be full of the things women say, if I remember them," he answered.

"I told you that you would be paid," El-Soo said carefully. "And I told you that I would never be your wife."

"But that was before the paper was written." Porportuk fingered the paper inside his pocket. "I have bought you before all the world. You belong to me. You will not deny that you belong to me."

"I belong to you," El-Soo said steadily.

"I own you."

"You own me."

Porportuk's voice rose slightly. "As a dog, I own you."

"As a dog, you own me," El-Soo continued calmly. "But, Porportuk, you forget the thing I told you. Had any other man bought me, I should have been a good wife to that man. Such was my will. But my will with you was that I should never be your wife. Therefore, I am your dog."

Porportuk knew that he must be careful and he decided to act in a firm manner. "Then I speak to you not as El-Soo but as a dog," he said, "and I tell you to come with me." He reached for her arm, but she held him away from her.

"Not so fast, Porportuk. You buy a dog. The dog runs away. It is your loss. I am your dog. What if I run away?"

"As the owner of the dog, I shall beat you—"

"When you catch me?"

"When I catch you."

"Then catch me."

Quickly he reached for her, but she ran from him. She laughed as she circled around the table. "Catch her!" Porportuk commanded the Indian with the gun, who stood near her. But as the Indian stretched forth his arm to her the king struck him under the ear. The gun fell to the ground. Then was Akoon's opportunity. His eyes shone, but he did nothing.

Porportuk was an old man, but his cold nights had kept him in possession of his activity. He did not circle the table. He leaped across suddenly, over the top of the table. El-Soo was surprised. She jumped back with a cry of alarm. Porportuk would have caught her had it not been for Tommy. Tommy's leg went out. Porportuk fell forward on the ground. El-Soo got her start.

"Then catch me," she laughed over her shoulder as she ran away.

She ran lightly and easily, but Porportuk ran like a wild man. He ran faster than she did. In his youth he had been the quickest of all the young men. But El-Soo ran from side to side to escape his grasp.

With noise and laughing the great crowd scattered to see the hunt. It led through the Indian camp. Always circling, El-Soo and Porportuk appeared and disappeared among the tents. El-Soo seemed to balance herself against the air with her arms, now on one side, now on the other. And Porportuk, always a leap behind, or a leap to this side or to that, struggled after her.

They crossed the open ground beyond the camp and disappeared in the forest. Tanana Station waited for their reappearance. Long and without success they waited.

During this time Akoon ate and slept. He waited much of the time where the steamboat landed, not hearing the words which were said about him because he did nothing. A day later Porportuk returned. He

was tired and bad-tempered. He spoke to no one but Akoon, and tried to quarrel with him. But Akoon walked away. Porportuk did not waste time. He hired a half a dozen young men and went into the forest with them.

The next day the steamboat *Seattle* stopped at the shore. When she departed again Akoon was employed on the boat. Not many hours afterward, when it was his duty to guide the steamboat, he saw a small boat coming from the shore. There was only one person in it. He studied it carefully and slowed the big boat's speed.

The captain came in.

"What is the trouble?" he demanded. "The water is good here."

Akoon made no answer. He saw a larger boat leaving the bank and in it were several persons. He turned the wheel of the steamboat toward the smaller boat.

The captain was angered. "It is only a woman," he protested.

Akoon did not reply. He looked only at the woman and the boat following her.

"You will drive the steamboat on the shore," the captain protested, seizing the wheel.

But Akoon applied his strength to the wheel and looked directly into the captain's eyes. The captain slowly released the wheel.

Akoon held the *Seattle* steady until he saw the woman's fingers grasp the forward rail. Then he signaled for full speed ahead. The large boat was very near, but the space between it and the steamboat was widening.

The woman laughed and leaned over the rail. "Then catch me, Porportuk!" she cried.

Akoon left the steamboat at Fort Yukon. He purchased a small boat and went up the Porcupine River. And with him went El-Soo. It was a difficult journey, but Akoon had traveled it before. When they came to the head waters of the Porcupine they left the boat and went on foot across the Rocky Mountains.

Akoon greatly liked to walk behind El-Soo and watch her movement. There was a music in it that he loved. And especially he loved

the well-rounded legs and the small moccasined feet that never tired.

"You are light as air," he said, looking up at her. "It is no labor for you to walk. You almost float, so lightly do your feet rise and fall."

And El-Soo bent and kissed Akoon.

"When we reach the Mackenzie River we will not delay," Akoon said later. "We will go south before the winter catches us. We will go to the sun lands where there is no snow. But we will return. I have seen much of the world, and there is no land like Alaska. There is no sun like our sun, and the snow is good after the long summer."

"And you will learn to read," said El-Soo.

And Akoon said, "I will surely learn to read."

But there was a delay when they reached the Mackenzie. They joined a group of Mackenzie Indians. When they were hunting, there was an accident in which Akoon was shot. His right arm was broken and his shoulder was hurt. Akoon knew something about medicine, as did El-Soo. Akoon lay by the fire to rest so the bones would become strong again.

It was then that Porportuk, with his six young men, arrived. Akoon was still weak and he appealed to the Mackenzies. But Porportuk made his demands and the Mackenzies did not know how to settle the problem.

Porportuk wanted to seize El-Soo, but this they would not permit. Judgment must be given. Because it was an affair of man and woman, the council of the old men was gathered. They had been selected so that judgment might not be given by the young men, who were warm of heart.

The old men sat in a circle about the fire. Their faces were lean and old and they breathed heavily. The smoke was not good for them. Occasionally they struck at the insects that flew into the warmth of the fire. After such effort they coughed painfully. Some of them coughed blood. One of them sat a little apart, with head bent forward, and blood flowed slowly from his mouth. They were like dead men; their time was short. It was a judgment of the dead.

"And I paid for her a heavy price," Porportuk concluded. "Such

a price you have never seen. Sell all that is yours. Sell your spears and guns, sell your furs, sell your tents and boars and dogs, sell everything, and you will not have a thousand dollars. Yet I gave for the woman, El-Soo, 26 times the price of all your spears and guns, your furs and your tents and boats and dogs. It was a heavy price."

The old men nodded, although they wondered that any woman should be worth such a price.

The one from whose mouth blood flowed wiped his lips. "Is it true?" he asked each of Porportuk's six young men. And each answered that it was true.

"Is it true?" he asked El-Soo, and she answered, "It is true."

"But Porportuk has not told that he is an old man," Akoon said, "and that he has daughters older than El-Soo."

"It is true, Porportuk is an old man," said El-Soo.

"It is for Porportuk to measure the strength of his age," said he on whose mouth were drops of blood. "We are old men. Behold! Age is never so old as youth would measure it."

And the circle of old men nodded their agreement, and coughed.

"I told him that I would never be his wife," said El-Soo.

"Yet you took from him 26 times the value of all that we possess?" asked a one-eyed old man.

El-Soo was silent.

"Is it true?" His one eye stared at her.

"It is true," she said.

"But I will run away again," she cried a moment later. "Always will I run away."

"That is for Porportuk to consider," said another of the old men. "It is for us to consider the judgment."

"What price did you pay for her?" was demanded of Akoon.

"No price did I pay for her," he answered. "She was above price. I did not measure her in gold dust, nor in dogs, and tents and furs."

The old men talked together. "These old men are like ice," Akoon said in English. "I will not listen to their judgment, Porportuk. If you take El-Soo, I will surely kill you."

The old men stopped talking and looked at him uneasily. "We do not know the language you speak," one said.

"He said that he would kill me," Porportuk told them. "So it would be well to take his gun from him, and to have some of your young men sit by him, so he may not harm me. He is a young man, and what are broken bones to youth!"

Akoon, lying helpless, had gun and knife taken from him and beside each of his shoulders sat young men of the Mackenzies. The one-eyed old man stood up. "We are surprised at the price paid for one mere woman," he began, "but the price is no concern of ours. We are here to give judgment and judgment we give. We have no doubt. It is known to all that Porportuk paid a heavy price for the woman El-Soo. Therefore does the woman El-Soo belong to Porportuk and none other." He sat down heavily and coughed. The old men nodded and coughed.

"I will kill you," Akoon cried in English.

Porportuk smiled and stood up. "You have given true judgment," he said to the council, "and my young men will give you much tobacco. Now let the woman be brought to me."

Akoon bit his lip. The young men took El-Soo by the arms. She did not struggle and was led to Porportuk.

"Sit there at my feet until I have spoken," he commanded. He paused a moment. "It is true," he said, "I am an old man. Yet can I understand the ways of youth. The fire has not all gone out of me. Yet I am no longer young, nor am I about to run on these old legs of mine through all the years that remain to me. El-Soo can run fast and well. This I know, for I have seen and run after her. It is not good that a wife should run so fast. I paid for her a heavy price, yet she runs away from me. Akoon paid no price at all, yet she runs to him.

"When I came among you people of the Mackenzie, I was of one opinion. As I listened in the council and thought of the speed of the legs of El-Soo, I had many different opinions. Now I am of one opinion again, but it is a different one from the one I brought to the council. Let me tell you my opinion. When a dog runs away once from a master, it will run away again. It does not matter how many times it is

brought home, each time it will run away again. When we have such dogs we sell them. El-Soo is like a dog that runs away. I will sell her. Is there any man of the council that will buy?"

The old men coughed and remained silent.

"Akoon would buy," Porportuk continued, "but he has no money. So I give El-Soo to him, as he said, without price. Even now will I give her to him."

Reaching down, he took El-Soo by the hand and led her across the space to where Akoon lay on his back.

"She has a bad habit, Akoon," he said, seating her at Akoon's feet. "As she has run away from me in the past, in the days to come she may run away from you. But there is no need to fear that she will ever run away, Akoon. I shall see to that. Never will she run away from you. You have the promise of Porportuk. She has great wit. I know, for often I have felt its bite. Yet I will show my wit for once. And by my wit I will secure her to you, Akoon."

Bending over, Porportuk crossed El-Soo's feet. Then, before his purpose could be guessed, he raised his gun and shot her through both feet. As Akoon struggled to rise against the weight of the young men, there was heard the sound of his broken bone, rebroken.

"It is just," said the old men, one to another.

El-Soo made no sound. She sat and looked at her destroyed feet, on which she would never walk again.

"My legs are strong, El-Soo," Akoon said. "But never will they carry me away from you."

El-Soo looked at him, and for the first time in all the time he had known her, Akoon saw tears in her eyes.

"Is it just?" Porportuk asked and stood laughing as he prepared to depart.

"It is just," the old men said. And they continued sitting silently.

GLOSSARY

(Meanings explained here are only for the use of the words in this book.)

ancestors: persons who came before you in a family line, such as a grandfather, or someone earlier

bear: a large, heavy animal with thick fur and a very short tail

borrow: to be allowed to use something—such as money—for a period of time, with the promise to return it

cache: a place for hiding or storing something, such as food or other things that are needed

caribou: a North American animal having horns; of the same family as a *moose*, but smaller

cartridge: the case, usually metal, which holds the powder in a shot from a gun

cough: to clear the throat by forcing out air with a sudden loud noise

creek: a small river or stream

degree: a measurement for temperature. Example: 20 degrees below *zero*

famine: a great lack of food that causes starving in a large region

frost: moisture which freezes and gives a white appearance to the things it covers

gambling: the playing of games in which the winner gains something of value, usually an amount of money

gambler: a person who plays such games

grubstake: money loaned to a man starting on a journey seeking gold, to allow him to buy food and other things he needs. The person lending the money receives a share of what is found.

hallucination: the seeing or hearing of things around you that are not really there. This often happens to people who are very ill or weak.

harness: the strips of leather by which the dogs pulling a *sled* are bound together. These strips are arranged so the driver of the sled can control the movements of the dogs.

howl: the long, sad cry of *wolves*, dogs and some other animals

Indian: a member of one of the many tribes of native people who were already living in North America before people arrived from Europe

missionary: a person sent by a church to teach its religion

missionaries: more than one missionary

mission: the building where the missionaries lived and taught, and also where some of the pupils lived

mitten: a glove with one large covering for four fingers, and another smaller one for the thumb

moccasin: a shoe made of soft leather, without a heel

moose: a large North American animal, having large horns with many points. Of the same family as the *caribou*, but larger

numb: loss of all, or part of, the sense of feeling

otter: an animal having soft, thick fur, which is able to swim. It has a long tail and eats small animals and fish.

ounce: a measurement of weight

scientist: a person who works to learn more about a science

seal: a sea animal with short fur that lives in cold waters and eats fish

sisters: female members of a church group; frequently *missionaries* and teachers

sled: a low wagon on metal rods, used for riding or for carrying things across snow and ice. They are pulled by several strong dogs taught to do this work.

snowshoes: wood frames with leather strips arranged to support a person's weight on top of snow. They are worn on the shoes, to permit walking without sinking into deep snow.

sock: a short stocking

spear: a long metal or wood stick, with a sharply pointed head, which can be thrown by hand to kill an animal

stake a claim: to mark a piece of land on which you believe there is gold. When land is thus marked, it becomes yours and another person cannot honorably search for gold in that place.

trail: the path followed by sleds when they travel from one place to another. The passing of the sleds presses down the snow so the trail can be seen easily.

Ulysses: a Greek king of ancient times who was famous for his wandering

watch: a device for telling time that is small enough to be carried in a pocket

Yukon: a territory of northwest Canada, east of Alaska. Also, a river flowing through this territory and Alaska into the Bering Sea

zero: the amount of cold that is 32 *degrees* below freezing, according to one system of measuring temperature