

# *Portage Bay*

Paul Iselin Wellman

drawings by  
Ray Houlihan

## **\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* Portage Bay

*Date of first publication:* 1957

*Author:* Paul Iselin Wellman (1895-1966)

*Date first posted:* Aug. 23, 2021

*Date last updated:* Aug. 23, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210850

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# PORTAGE BAY

*By the same author*

JUBAL TROOP  
WALLS OF JERICHO  
THE IRON MISTRESS  
THE CAMANCHEROS  
THE FEMALE CITY  
DEATH IN THE PRAIRIE  
ETC., ETC.

# PORTAGE BAY

Paul I. Wellman

LONDON  
MUSEUM PRESS LIMITED

*First published in Great Britain in 1957 by  
Museum Press Limited of 26 Old Brompton Road, London, S.W.7*

*Printed in Great Britain by  
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton*

To all  
“Brothers of the Angle,”  
and especially to  
those three great friends who through the years  
have shared with me laughter, fishing, and adventure,  
CLAYTON C. MOORE, G. W. BLAIR, and  
DR. J. ROBERT TOLLE,  
and to  
PAUL I. WELLMAN, JR. (BUD),  
who with me discovered Portage Bay,  
and finally to  
JOE AND AILEEN MCKEEVER,  
incomparable hosts and friends.

I wish the Reader . . . to take notice, that in writing . . . I have made myself a recreation of a recreation. And that it might prove so to him, and not read dull and tediously, I have in several places mixed . . . some innocent, harmless mirth: of which, if thou be a severe, sour-complexioned man, then I here disallow thee to a competent Judge.

IZAACK WALTON, *The Compleat Angler*.



## CONTENTS

[A Word about the Scene](#)

[The Day the Lake Went Mad](#)

[Over the Portage and Back](#)

[How to Catch a Muskie](#)

[The McKeever](#)

[Cabin Fever](#)

[Miss Cricket's Wall-eye](#)

["Longfellow Doesn't Scan"](#)

[A Historical Digression](#)

[Wall-eyes, Unlimited](#)

[Fishermen are not \(necessarily\) Liars](#)

## A Word about the Scene

There is a lake as beautiful as a dream, which laps the border of the state of Minnesota and extends northward sixty-five miles into the forested wilderness of Ontario. It is the Lake of the Woods, a body of water as charming as its charming name—which, by the way, was given it by a sheer inspirational mistake.

The early French, who first discovered it, called it Lac du Bois, but they did so in error, because they were trying to translate into their language the Indian name for it—*Min-es-tic*—"Lake of Islands." Since *Min-es-tic* sounds very much like *mis-tic*, a word meaning "wood," it is no matter for surprise that those first Frenchmen, whose knowledge of the native tongue could only be acquired conversationally, made a rather natural mistake.

The very first white man to see the beautiful body of water, young Jacques de Noyon, in 1688, actually wrote of it as Lac aux Iles. But the name Lac du Bois, probably given it by the great soldier and explorer, La Vérendrye, stuck.

It was a fortunate error. Lake of Islands, while descriptive enough—there are known to be, by actual count, more than fourteen thousand islands, big and little, in the lake—is somehow far less evocative than Lake of the Woods. The latter name at once gives one a mental image of blue waters framed in shores covered with rich and lovely green forests, of tree-crowned emerald islands, of idyllic little bays and sylvan glens—the exact picture, in truth, of this most charming of all the large lakes.

So delightful is the name, indeed, that there are Lakes of the Woods all over the United States. I have run across them in at least half a dozen states, ranging from a mere park pond in Kansas City, Missouri, to a respectably large mountain tarn in the Cascade Range of Oregon.

But Ontario's Lake of the Woods is the first and most famous of the name. Looking at it on the map it seems to be divided roughly into halves. The southern half, a great stretch of open water known as the Big Traverse, is often a stormy waste of waves and wind. But above this the lake is almost cut in two by the Aulneau Peninsula. From there northwards it is a tangle of islands, big and little, of channels, and straits, and bays, and shoals, and rocks. And it is in this half of the lake that there exists some of the finest fishing in all America.

You find there at their best the lordly muskellunge, the brilliant small-mouth bass, the vicious northern pike, the rewarding wall-eye, in some areas

lake trout, and many lesser fishes.

And in this area, far scattered from each other, you occasionally find picturesque little collections of cabins almost hidden in the woods—fishing camps. It is of one of these I sing.

Portage Bay Camp is not the largest, certainly not the most luxurious, of these havens for fishermen. But it has a flavour peculiarly and charmingly its own.

Some thirty-five miles from Kenora, by a tortuous route which takes your boat through picturesque Devil's Gap and the Tangle, past many islands, including Treaty, Wolf, Whiskey, and Crow Rock, to name only a few of the largest, and through the Big Narrows, you at last reach Picture Rock and turn aside into a wide, island-filled bay. This is Portage Bay, but not yet are you at your destination.

The boat continues, its pilot pointing its nose at what seems to be a solid cliff of rock. At the last minute this suddenly opens into a narrow, fiord-like water passage, perhaps half a mile long and a hundred feet wide—the Estuary. And at the very end of this secret little finger of navigation, thrusting through the forested rocks, is Portage Bay Camp.

In my mind's eye it is before me now: the brown log lodge, the white cabins scattered among the trees, the water dimpling with rising fish, the songs of the birds in the clear air. And I see just beyond the camp across a small bay the opening to the Portage, which takes one over to Shoal Lake, lying just on the other side of a narrow neck of forested land, a smaller sister of the great Lake of the Woods.

It is this situation which gives Portage Bay Camp its most quickly manifest advantage to the fish-minded angler. You choose your lake: the Lake of the Woods is before you, a brief boat ride up the Estuary, for peerless bass and muskie fishing, with plentiful northern pike and wall-eyes also; or you can go to lovely, indescribably blue Shoal Lake, where wall-eye fishing is unparalleled, with northerns and muskies also in profusion.

The camp is not widely advertised. It has room only for a relatively limited number of guests, for the McKeeveres, Joe and Aileen, with their boundless northland hospitality, believe in giving those who come to them the benefit of personal friendliness and attention to their comfort and happiness.

Naturally, such a camp has its long-time devotees. It is of a few of these, and the camp itself, and the two lakes, and above all the sport of which old

Izaak Walton wrote, “You will find angling to be like the virtue of humility, which has a calmness of spirit and a world of other blessings attending upon it,” that I invite you to share with me here a few memories.

PAUL I. WELLMAN

## The Day the Lake Went Mad

Joe McKeever, shock-haired and sardonic, looked us over as we started from camp.

"I wrote you," he said, "that the ice broke up late. But you hardheads would come anyway. Serves you right. You won't get anything."

It was the morning of June 7, 1954—admittedly early for Ontario's lake country—and we were going out for wall-eyes in the teeth of McKeever's ridicule. But we were accustomed to his ridicule and returned it in kind.

"As soon as we show your guides where the fishing places are, we'll get 'em," said Doc.

"We ought to charge McKeever a fee for educating his guides every summer," jeered Moore.

"Yeh," agreed Gyp. "We always have to feed his camp. He ought to be paying us, instead of the other way around."

McKeever gave us his customary glance of derision.

"If I let you four go out alone beyond that Portage, we'd never find you again," he said witheringly, "and that's such a good idea I've just got a notion to do it." Now this was a gratuitous slur, since we all are old hands at the Lake of the Woods and its smaller sister, Shoal Lake. But we took no offence, any more than he took offence at our gibes. And though a stranger listening might have imagined us bitter enemies, actually the five of us are closest friends.

McKeever, owner and boss of Portage Bay Camp, situated at the narrow peninsula between the Lake of the Woods and Shoal Lake, knows everything about fish and game and people, and is the kind of human porcupine that invents a special new insult for each of his favourite guests every morning. That, in fact, is the one way of knowing how you progress in his esteem. So long as he speaks to you with studied politeness, you are just one of the transients at camp. But if, some morning, he greets you with a barbed blackguardism, you know that you're in—the camp boss has admitted you to his acknowledgedly restricted circle of intimates.

The four of us—Doc, Moore, Gyp, and myself—have been on insulting terms with McKeever for years, and we consider Portage Bay the finest fishing camp in the entire Lake of the Woods country, though no price could induce us to admit it to him.

“What’s the radio weather forecast?” I asked.

It is not in McKeever to give an answer directly or without a few gibes. “Blizzards. Tornadoes. Hurricanes,” he jeered. “What difference does it make to you? You’re not going to catch any fish.”

But Aileen, Joe’s wife, a slim, pretty, and sunny Irish lass, was on the path. “Winnipeg says fifteen-mile winds and scattered showers,” she called smilingly.

We thanked her and started across the Portage to Shoal Lake, where our two boats and motors waited. It was a favourable forecast. Nobody minds a healthy chop on the water, or a little rain. The fish bite rather better than worse for it. Yet none of us knew, least of all McKeever, that he was that day ominously much closer to the truth than either Aileen or the Winnipeg radio weatherman.

Leading the way across the Portage—and fighting mosquitoes furiously as usual—went Moore. His full name is Clayton C. Moore, and he is a humorous, slow-talking Kentuckian, who owns the Golden Maxim thoroughbred racing stables at Louisville, has one of the honoured boxes at Churchill Downs, and makes fishing his life avocation.

He was followed along the execrable crooked path through the woods by his boat partner, Gyp Blair, also of Louisville, a genial, smiling man who runs a sporting-goods business, is celebrated for being able to snore in four parts at once—bass, tenor, alto, and coloratura soprano—and has never an enemy in the world.

My own boat partner was Dr. J. Robert Tolle, a wiry sun-burned cowman with a trim moustache and bow legs, who calmly chucked a lucrative medical practice in a swank section of Los Angeles a few years ago in order to enjoy life owning and running a cattle ranch in the Siskiyou Mountains of Oregon, with a little hunting and fishing on the side.

As for myself, bringing up the rear of this little procession, I am rotund, on the wrong side of fifty, and make a living writing books at my home in Los Angeles. The four of us travel more than thirteen thousand man-miles each year, just to spend two weeks together in the magical Canadian lake country. And we fish—unashamedly and by preference—for wall-eyes, usually.

Now we are aware that Sportsmen (with the capital S) affect to look with contempt upon the wall-eye as a sporting fish, although why this is so we do not understand. We con the sporting journals each month for accounts of the

wall-eye as a fishing target, but all we ever see are short references to it, heavily fraught with contumely, by those Sportsmen who fish for muskellunge, bass, and the like—at least in the published accounts of their deeds of derring-do.

Yet the wall-eye is a noble fish, a soul-satisfying fish when he comes into the boat, with enough fight if he has size to satisfy any honest angler, and unsurpassed in the pan afterwards. As for the Sportsman, I have observed that when he comes to our camp ostentatiously seeking the wily muskellunge, after casting for a couple of days with vainglorious boastings at reefs and islands with little result, he will often sneak out furtively the third morning and relax with the rabble—such as ourselves—in the comfortable and happy pursuit of the rewarding wall-eye.

Doc, Moore, Gyp, and I do not claim to be Sportsmen. That is, not in the romantic conception of the word. We observe the rules of sportsmanship as it is given to us in our poor light to do so. We are not fish hogs, and we use artificial lures, and we do not crowd close to another boat if we happen to see it is having good luck. But we are mere humble citizens, and we troll by preference, and though we gaze with awe upon the Sportsman, we would not trade places with him, for we are too comfortable and happy. Furthermore, we hug to ourselves the belief that we know more about the wall-eye, which is our speciality, than he does; and usually, when he turns to our fish after failing with his, we manage to bring in the heavier stringers to prove it.

That morning we had decided to fish the extreme north-west part of Shoal Lake, a dozen miles from camp, since in that area streams enter from which the wall-eyes might be returning after spawning. As we raced across the water, Doc, who was in the bow of our boat leaned back to me.

“Feel that warm and cold air?” he asked.

I nodded. It was as if we passed through alternate bands of heated and chilled atmosphere, something I had not before experienced. Had we known it, that was an augury of the awesome thing to come.

Beyond Cash Island, with its rocky promontories and pine-clad slopes, we began to troll. I should say here that our remarks to McKeever about “educating his guides” were persiflage. We had two of the best. The guide who ran the boat in which Doc and I fished was Ken Penasse, and performing a similar service for Moore and Gyp was Jimmie Mandamin—full-blooded Ojibwa Indians, both, knowing the lake intimately, and expert boatmen and woodsmen.

Penasse throttled down the new Johnson ten-horse motor, which my lovely wife had given me for a Christmas present, to a sweet, purring steadiness through the water—the slow lure is best for wall-eyes as the fast one is good for northern pike and muskellunge—and our lines went out.

Suddenly Doc let out a yell—a cowboy whoop, shrill and joyful—and it meant fish. Net in hand, Penasse stood up in the boat, looking down into the clear water as Doc fought his fish.

“Wall-eye!” he announced.

A few dashes by the well-hooked fish, the net dipped, and up came the beautiful, gleaming thing, flashing golden lights, and into the boat.

Doc stood up and yowled his sheer delight for Moore and Gyp to hear. We saw their lines come in and their boat turned towards the reef we were fishing, for wall-eyes run in schools and the first strike might mean more.

I will not describe the fishing that followed. It was gorgeous. Beautiful fish after beautiful fish, we caught them. Each time we chortled at how we would confound McKeever when we displayed our catch that night.

About ten o'clock there was big excitement in the other boat, and a huge fish, hooked by Moore, was netted. A little later Gyp got its mate. Then, just before noon, after a hot battle, Doc landed a mighty fish.

Both boats went to a little island and we disembarked for lunch, and to look over the catch. Already we had almost our limits, many in the six-and seven-pound class. Those three biggest ones weighed around ten pounds apiece by my pocket scales—lordly fish, with dark backs and beautiful golden sides, very much worth rejoicing over.

We did rejoice as we ate lunch—bacon, sliced onions, baked beans, coffee, bread and butter, and wonderful slabs of golden-brown fried fish—and listened to Moore tell one of his inimitable stories. Yet I remember an odd thing about that luncheon camp. Usually on the lake the air is full of bird sounds—the veery thrush spiralling his beautiful song, loons calling across the water, song sparrows and warblers spattering out brilliant arias, wild cries from gulls, and so on. But this nooning the birds were strangely silent.

Once Penasse glanced anxiously at the horizon. “Might blow,” he said.

It did not look it. The sky was almost cloudless.

Our boats returned to the reef to get the few fish to complete our limits, but whereas before lunch the wall-eyes hit viciously, not a strike did we get



after lunch. It was as if the whole show had ended on a silent noonday signal. Penasse shook his head.

Now clouds began scudding across the sky. In an hour businesslike waves were building up. Still no strikes.

“We better get out of here,” Penasse said suddenly and seriously.

Doc and I began to reel in, and in that instant I got the heavy strike I had been awaiting.

“Good boy!” yelled Doc, who always roots for his fishing partner.

The fish hung back like a bulldog, shaking his head and arching the rod, but not breaking water. I felt the boat begin to pitch crazily. Moore and Gyp were under full speed for a distant island. Penasse, sitting erect at our tiller, was gazing out toward the open lake, every attitude advertising haste to be gone.

I glanced back and saw that which made my heart jump. The day had grown suddenly dark and a squall was sweeping toward us. I could see the approaching ominous white line of foam under the blast of wind, and the rain black behind it.

No time now to play my fish. We were right under a sheer cliff of jagged rock, up which the breaking waves already were dashing madly as if to climb it, and the squall was bearing down on us with racehorse speed. Desperately I “horsed” in my fish, actually hoping that the line or leader would break. Still Penasse held the boat against the oncoming waves by increasing the motor speed.

I brought the fish to the side, reached down in the water for a good hold on the line, and heaved it in by main force. Awkward, but necessary. The squall was upon us.

To my surprise the fish was not a wall-eye. It was a northern pike and not even a very large one. Somehow it had snared itself with the leader after being hooked, which accounted for its hard pull and its actions so resembling a deep-fighting wall-eye.

As the pike, thrashing and spattering, hit the bottom of the boat, the squall struck us, with a screaming wind. Frothing white, the churning waves roared around us as if to engulf us.

Suddenly we were hoisted on the crest of a huge billow and carried backward. The blinding spate of rain almost obscured the deadly rock-toothed cliff and the furious smother of water and foam at its base, but I

peered in fascination through the lacing downpour at the disaster toward which we were being hurled.

Not thirty feet from the cliff, the motor, which Penasse had given its fullest wide-open throttle, at last took hold. The boat seemed to catch itself, held its own, gradually fought its way across the back of the wave and down into the trough beyond. Another wave flung buckets of water into the boat, but we gained headway and clawed off the rocks.

On the shore, dimmed by level sheets of rain, trees heaved and bent in the gale. I saw a forty-foot jack pine snap off short. Then another went. Spray beat stingingly in our faces. But Penasse, with wonderful boatmanship, evaded one racing comber after another, and ran behind a small cape that offered shelter in its lee.

There we caught our breath and, though we were wet through, donned our rain garments. The squall roared past. Briefly the sun shone, though the waves still hurled angrily on the shore.

“We better go,” said Penasse presently.

We were on the windward shore, and we could not stay where we were if the storm grew worse. If we were to run for shelter it must be between squalls. Even as he spoke, the sky darkened again with heavy clouds, and the three-quarters of a mile of billowing lake between us and the little archipelago of islands that was our first safety looked menacing.

It became infinitely more so. Hardly halfway across were we, when the air filled with the rush of a mighty wind. So viciously did it strike that spray, hitting my cheek, felt like the slap of a hand. Instantly the waves rose ragingly. It was worse than I had imagined; worse, I believe, than even Penasse had imagined.

“Ho, ho, ho!” I heard him say.

It is one of his few expressions, and can mean amusement, or satisfaction, or awareness of a crisis, or even awe.

I saw what he meant. So great already were the billows that our fourteen-foot boat, when it was in the troughs between them, seemed cut off from the world, hedged in by mountainous waters. But now a series of fearsomely gigantic combers was roaring toward us—seas mightier than any before.

Huge waves come in series—threes, fives, or even sevens, so I have been told. I do not know how many there were in this series, but they were

immense.

We rose on the first, cutting the crest cleanly with the thrust of the motor but getting a sheet of water over the side, and slid down its foaming watery hill to the trough. The second broke on our bow, hurling water blindly over us, but again we coasted dizzily over into the trough beyond.

The third sea was the greatest. We did not rise rapidly enough and the angle of the boat was not right for it. I saw the huge wave tower over us, white-fanged and malignant, and the sharp nose of the boat seemed about to plunge into it midway below the crest. I said to myself that it would breach us from stem to stern; and an aluminium boat, filled to the gunwales by such a wave while carrying three men, a motor, and other heavy gear, would founder instantly.

In the moment before the wave broke, although intellectually I accepted the imminence of death—for no swimmer could live in such a storm—I found, and felt some satisfaction in it, that I was not particularly frightened.

I glanced at Doc, on the thwart ahead. His hawk face turned in profile to me. It was alert—intensely alert—and watchful. But I do not believe it is in him to be afraid. He was only profoundly interested.

Then Penasse, that genius in boat-handling, made his move. He met the crest of the wave not head on, but at a last-second angle. So cunningly timed and aimed was the angle that it did a hairline thing—somehow, at the last possible instant, it offered the bulge of the side to the final toppling crest, yet did not turn sufficiently broadside to be overwhelmed, either by the billow or by the now unbelievable wind that screamed over us.

We shipped water—barrels of it, it seemed. But in some manner we staggered over the crest without foundering, and while we bailed madly, Doc and I, Penasse brought the boat into the lee of the island toward which we had been fighting our way.

Already there, in a tiny cove, were Moore, Gyp, and Mandamin, bailing also, their rubber coats gleaming wet. They had experienced a very rough time, too, but, being ahead of us, had missed the worst of the second squall.

“Good job,” I said to Penasse.

He gave a wintry grin.

The wind, already far beyond gale force, did not decrease this time as it had done before. Instead it rose to a still mightier drumming sound—hurricane fury. Like matchsticks, trees began to crack on the island behind

which we huddled for shelter in our tossing boats. Three tall poplars snapped off and fell in the water quite close to us as we stared at the white waves roaring past on either side of our little island.

“Look at that!” cried Moore suddenly.

I glanced up and saw the hurricane wind take forty feet right out of the top of a sixty-foot pine on the ridge above. Weighing tons, it did not fall—it sailed through the air like a tumbleweed, directly towards us. For one breathless instant the great trunk with its threshing branches seemed to loom over us. Then, with a foaming crash, it plunged into our little cove, just beside our boats. Had it struck fairly it would have obliterated all of us. The miss was by a few feet only—but it still was a miss, and we were alive.

We looked at each other. Clearly we could not remain where we were. Trees continued to rive and crash, and the only safe place from them on that island was the bare, exposed *windward* side. Beaching and securing our boats as best we could, we began to struggle up the steep hill to the crest, leaning against the wind at impossible angles and clawing for every foot of the way.

About us trees toppled deafeningly, a confusion of imminent danger. One great birch almost got Moore and Gyp; but the Kentuckians, cool and alert even in this immense hurly-burly, watched it, judged the direction of its crashing fall, and stepped aside just in time to evade it. Mandamin barely escaped a cedar that was uprooted and blown flat. A particularly fierce blast caught Doc and hurled him several feet to the ground. Now, Doc is an athletic man, weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, and no light breeze could fell him.

He scrambled up, unhurt, and a moment later we reached the exposed top of the rocky cliff which overhung the churning lake to the windward. There we lay flat, hugging the earth, forced flat by the impossibility of finding any shelter to gaze at the incredibly awesome spectacle of this, the greatest storm the lake had ever experienced.

I have known Shoal Lake many years. Its moods are varied, but it is a notably friendly lake, a lake of a thousand charms and beauties. Now I watched that lake go stark, raving mad.

Shielding our faces with our rubber-clad arms, for the spray, blown across the top of our thirty-foot cliff, stung until it brought tears to the eyes, we beheld our familiar body of pleasant waters become a white anarchy of surging foam. Watery mountains, furious with froth, charged at breakneck

speed and hurled their thousands of tons of weight on the shores with a sound like many thunders. As high as the tops of tall pines spray flew, and over and over we, lying on our cliff, were drenched by waves which broke against it and threw their spume skyward.

And still the awesome wind increased, and yet increased, until out of my life's experience I could not have believed such violence possible. Now we saw it actually blow huge billows *flat*. In great blasts it would come, causing the insane waters to smoke in driven windrows as it cut the tops off those enormous waves and converted them into hurtling spume and mist that cut off all visibility.

Sometimes rain beat upon us, driven level and sharp as sleet. And once, strangely, the sun shone pallidly and fitfully through a momentary break in the clouds.

That produced another sensation. The sun, gleaming on the madness of the hurricane-driven spindrift, created in it a huge misshapen spectrum of colours, adding, with its ghastly crooked travesty of the serene beauty of the true rainbow, the last touch of crazed ferocity to the scene.

Breakers, wind, and crashing trees together made a tumult so vast that we, even though we lay close to each other, had to shout when we spoke to one another.

Then, all at once, I felt the island *move under me*.

I said so. The others stared as if they thought my reason had left me. But a moment later they felt it too. It moved again.

This transcended all natural laws. No wind, however mighty, should move a rocky five-acre island. On the backs of our necks we felt the hair rise.

But very quickly the natural cause revealed itself. To our lee was a great pine. Many of its larger branches had been stripped from it, but though the stout trunk was curved in a rigid arc by the hurricane, it thus far had resisted the fury of the wind. That pine, now, was being literally torn up by its roots. And its roots extended out twenty or thirty feet—beneath the very ground on which we lay!

Just in time we rolled and scrambled to safety as a giant blast sent the pine roaring over, its root system lifting starkly twenty feet or more in the air, taking with it tons of stone and grass, including the very spot of earth on which we had been lying a minute before.

That seemed to be the climax.

It became, after that, a simple matter of endurance. The weather bureau later recorded that the wind blew more than one hundred miles an hour—a super-hurricane, for hurricane force is rated at seventy-five miles—and continued with unabated fury for six hours, with only slightly less heavy winds twelve hours longer. Throughout those endless hours we clung to the ground, beaten, chilled to the bone, enduring the ceaseless pounding of that storm.

Damage in untold millions of dollars was wreaked that day on forests, crops, and property. Some islands in the lake were completely denuded of trees. At least three men, two Indians and a white man, were lost and drowned in different places on the lake. The only miracle was that the number was so small.

We, on our battered island, at least lived it out. Not that night did we get back to Portage Bay. Beaten and drenched and clinging like lizards to our wet rocks, we abided the tempest until very late in the day it had abated enough to risk running our boats around the lee of the island archipelago, so that finally we reached Helldiver Bay. Thence we portaged three-quarters of a mile—in spite of trees still crashing about us—to Machin's Camp, where Barbara Machin, chatelaine of that wilderness hostelry, two of whose own buildings had been smashed by falling pines, gave us a true northland welcome, fed us sumptuously, and sheltered us for the night.

Next day, though the seas still were perilous, we made our way back to Portage Bay about noon. Our magnificent fish, of course, were spoiled and had to be jettisoned. This we regretted as, haggard and weary, we staggered into camp and encountered McKeever.

If there was a faint gleam of joy in his eye when he saw us safe, nothing else in his manner showed it.

"I don't see any wall-eyes," was all he said.

How could we reply to this sardonicism? It is, as I have intimated, hard to deal with McKeever, especially if you are a friend of his.

## Over the Portage and Back

It is dawn. Already the songbirds are trilling their bright madrigals in all the trees. The waters of the Estuary lie like an unflawed mirror, the reflection of the pine-clad banks unmarred by the slightest ripple. Here and there a few wisps of mist, like soft silken veiling, still can be seen, though soon the sun will dispel them.

Portage Bay Camp lies asleep. Not yet is there any stir of activity down at the lodge. From the cabins, scattered picturesquely among the trees, the only sound to be heard is an occasional snore from some sleeper enjoying the last precious slumber of morning.

Overlooking the Estuary, on a small rocky eminence farthest away from the lodge, stands a white cabin surrounded by pines and birches. Above its door is a sign: *Snoddy-Tolle-Wellman Buryin' Ground*.

That sign was put there years before, when Doc Tolle and I first began occupying the cabin. It is our cabin when we are in camp. Others may use it when we are not there, but we own rights of priority, seniority, custom, usage, and the high justice, the middle, and the low when we are there.

The singular name arises from an equally singular fact. Back in the Kentucky mountains, from which Doc's family originally hailed, there is a little burying ground with the names Snoddy and Tolle on it. The place, Doc says, is where the Tolles buried the Snoddys during the feuding days. We perpetuated the title, adding my name, but we inter here no defunct feudists. We do, however, each year as a final act before leaving camp bury before that cabin the "dead soldiers" of the summer's consumption.

In the Snoddy-Tolle-Wellman Buryin' Ground, Doc is asleep. So am I. It is the sleep of the just, the free of conscience, the good and pure.

Suddenly there is a crash. Doc and I start out of our slumber. A rock has landed on the roof of our cabin.

Giving sleepy glances of resignation across at each other, we shout that we are awake, to prevent the landing of another rock. It is Gyp Blair, and it is his method of arousing us each morning.

There really is no reason for our getting up for another hour and a half at least. Breakfast will not be until seven. But Gyp has always felt that for us to lie down for five minutes after five o'clock in the morning would be death to us. He is our alarm clock—for the four of us, himself, Clayton Moore, Doc, and me.

We rise and dress, for Gyp is inexorable. The morning is chill, but not actually cold. Doc, who is of the lean, racehorse type, shivers as he hustles into his clothes. I, being better insulated, dress more slowly and without shivering.

We wash our teeth, and our faces, and comb our hair. From the point of view of one who is exacting in plumbing requirements, we are primitively provided in that respect. There is a washbasin, and a bucket of water for ablutions. Back of the cabin, nestled inconspicuously among the trees, is a small structure of a familiar architectural design, which serves for toilet facilities. It is called the "Capital of Manitoba." Back of Moore's Inn, where abide Moore and Gyp, is another, known as the "Capital of Ontario." There are other "capitals" scattered about the camp in discreet positions where they are handy but do not attract unnecessary attention. I might say that when one uses any of them, he is not inclined to dally there. The mosquitoes and deer-flies provide an atmosphere of excitement, risk, and celerity to the whole operation. You never knew when one of them will light and sink his fangs into an exposed portion of the anatomy. . . .

Moore and Gyp already are ahead of us, going down the path among the birches and pines, for the morning sport of "devilling Joe," when Doc and I step out of our cabin and hasten after them.

Devilling Joe McKeever has the zest of danger. It resembles devilling a wasp, because you are pretty sure you will be stung before you finish with it. Nevertheless, each morning, the four of us go down to the lodge, long before any of the other guests in the camp are stirring, warm up the leftover coffee in the kitchen, and await McKeever's arrival.

We do not have long to wait. McKeever relishes these passages at arms. He comes from his cabin, which is near the lodge, with a combative gleam in his eye, makes us some fresh coffee, and genially insults us, individually and collectively; impugning our veracity, morals, characters, and ability to do any useful thing; telling us unpalatable truths about our personal appearances; and applying to us various vividly descriptive titles, in no case complimentary. Though there are four of us to his one, we always come off second best in this exchange, but we enjoy it and so does McKeever.

This high wrangling becomes more discreet when Aileen arrives, perhaps thirty minutes later. We all hold Aileen in affection. She is a lady, and we treat her as such. Our language becomes refined (for us) and we lower our voices. Presently, after listening on the radio to the weather



broadcast from Winnipeg, we troop into the dining-room to consult the barometer.

The weather forecast, like all weather forecasts, is not to be relied upon. If it predicts fine weather, you are sure to have a storm, with rain-water the chief article of diet at lunchtime, the sandwiches soaked with it, the fried fish diluted with it, the coffee, salt, and bacon all combined by it into a ghastly kind of soup. On the other hand, if rain is predicted the lake is likely to shine like a burnished blue shield, set about with emerald bosses of islands and beamed upon by a benignant sun from a cloudless sky.

But if the weather forecast be misleading, McKeever's barometer is worse. For years he possessed an ancient barometer that hung just inside the front door of the lodge. It had a cracked glass and a dyspeptic expression, and everyone consulted it each morning, not to see what its forecast might be, but to see *if it had moved*. It did not move, it never moved, it had no intention of moving. Winter or summer, storm or shine, hot or cold, it remained exactly at the same reading. McKeever was very proud of that barometer. He said he bought it at an auction, and he would tap it with his finger in a professional manner when he consulted it, and he resented our carping at it, as if it were a near and dear member of his family.

At last I, personally, brought him a new instrument—a barometer that I made sure was in working order before I gave it to him. No sooner did I deliver it into McKeever's hands than it, too, began to behave strangely. It did not stand still; it did worse. When it rains, the hand shows "fair." When it is fair, it predicts "stormy." I do not attempt to explain this: I merely state it as a fact. Moore, however, makes an effort to explain it. He thinks that it is a conspiracy between McKeever and the barometer to frustrate us.

By the time the barometric readings are over the other guests begin to arrive and breakfast is served. Breakfast is delicious, as are all of Aileen's meals, featuring bacon and eggs and wonderful griddle-cakes and other viands, which are consumed in unbelievable quantities. McKeever sits at our table, and we accuse him of counting each mouthful we eat, and resenting it, and estimating how much it reduces his profits, and begrudging it to us. This, of course, is sheerest libel, for he is the soul of hospitality and is (secretly) happiest when he sees a guest enjoying himself.

The champion griddle-cake-destroyer at camp is Art Land, one of the veteran guests. He escapes from his family to this haven each year by means of a doctor's prescription which he obtains from a friend in the medical profession. The prescription takes note of "loss of appetite," "debility," and

“possible nervous breakdown” (imaginary), for which it enjoins “rest,” “fresh air,” “relaxation,” and “a change of scenery, getting away from family and business cares.” By this wily means Art, who is a truly wonderful fisherman and jovial companion, makes it safely to Portage Bay. If he had had any loss of appetite previously, he regains it immediately upon arriving in camp. Though he is a small man, his usual ration of griddle-cakes in the morning is about a dozen, and he has no mercy on the other victuals either.

Someone once asked Art if he was not fearful that he might be “digging his grave with his teeth.” He instantly replied that those were not his teeth: they were store teeth, bought from a dentist. And speared a couple more griddle-cakes for his plate.

Our huge breakfast finished, we get our rods and tackle boxes and other impedimenta, and are ferried, together with our guides, across the small bay to the Portage, for we are this day to fish Shoal Lake.

The Portage is one of the features of the camp, and gave the bay and the camp itself their names. For centuries it was the most important route for the Indians and later the white *voyageurs*, in the great canoe road from the Great Lakes, by way of Rainy River and the Lake of the Woods, through Shoal Lake and on to the regions beyond. This is because it is the shortest carry between the two lakes.

Its full name is Deadman’s Portage. Many decades ago a famous chief of the Ojibwas, while on his way to a tribal council, died and was buried upon it. The bones of the chief long since have been taken elsewhere for burial by his people, but the Indians, when they pass the flat boulder at the water’s edge on which he lay when he died, still leave offerings, such as bits of cloth, small dishes, amulets, and painted sticks upon it. You can see these offerings from the boat as you come to the landing at the head of the Portage.

All portages are bad walking, but we fondly consider our Portage one of the worst. It is about half a mile long. The first few hundred feet are deceptive: a pleasant path through the woods, with the shade of the pines and birches upon it, the rich verdancy of bushes and shrubs on either side, bird voices overhead, and footing quite easy and secure.

But when it reaches the swamp on the other side of the narrow neck of land it makes a sharp turn to the left and becomes a delusion, a snare, and a threat to life and limb. On your right hand, as you enter this execrably

crooked stretch, is the marsh of muskeg, cattails, and water-lilies, into which you may mire yourself knee deep or deeper if you make a misstep. On your left hand the bank rises steeply, too steeply to climb in most places. You must stay on what is referred to speciously as “the trail.”

I have never seen that trail when it was not muddy, set with treacherous traps of tree roots and stones projecting from the ground to stumble over and sprain your ankle, varied with equally treacherous bog holes, and large boulders and slippery banks across which you must scramble at the imminent peril of plunging into the swamp just below. When you are encumbered with tackle boxes and rods and lunch boxes and seat cushions and raincoats and landing nets and other such gear, so that you cannot steady yourself or clutch at a nearby tree trunk if you skid, the Portage becomes something of a hazard.

We have at times suggested (gently) to McKeever that it would require no great expenditure of effort or treasure to improve this path for the greater convenience of his guests.

McKeever has invariably retorted that if the trail was good enough for the Indians for three thousand years it ought to be good enough for us.

Actually, we secretly enjoy the Portage, although we would never admit it to McKeever. It is picturesque and it gives you a sense of adventure. Sometimes you are diverted by the antics of a mother grouse, giving her whining little cries, so much like those of a puppy and pretending to flutter along with a broken wing before you. By this you know she has a brood of tiny, bright-eyed chicks hiding nearby, and you go along with her act and do not stop to investigate, allowing her to believe she had led you away from harming them by the age-old trick.

Frequently you see in the muddy places on the trail the tracks of wild animals—moose, deer, bear, mink, porcupine, even wolf. And once in a long while you encounter a maker of those tracks in person. I have seen on the Portage moose, and deer, and once a bear.

We enjoy the Portage, as I said, but with a reservation. That reservation is the mosquito.

Mosquitoes may be successfully contended with elsewhere. With care they do not annoy your sleep, because the cabins at Portage Bay are all screened, and every experienced fisherman sprays the interior of his sleeping place with some insect-destroying mist before going to bed.

On the lake itself, the mosquitoes do not bother you, as the breeze keeps them away.

But there is one place you cannot avoid them: the Portage. As soon as you plunge into the forest they are with you in blinding swarms. I once tried to estimate the numbers in a cloud which hung above Moore, who was on the trail just ahead of me. My guess, and I believe I erred on the side of conservatism, was that not less than a thousand of them were fighting each other to see which could get to him first. At least as many more surrounded each other member of our party.

It is, however, when you get across the neck of land and are on that last awful quarter of a mile that they really get to you. The swamp covers a considerable area which seems to exist for, and be entirely devoted to, the propagation of mosquitoes in ever-increasing hordes. Every one of those mosquitoes, at the joyous word that fresh meat is coming, leaves whatever business he is engaged in at the minute and throngs to the feast. They are mad for your blood, they fear nothing, they are discouraged by nothing. When you knock them down, the cripples stagger along on maimed legs and sprained wings, and if one of them can reach you, he will get his proboscis into you as fiercely as ever.

There are different ways of dealing with the mosquitoes. Some men put an insect-repellent on their faces and hands, just for the brief walk across the Portage, although they know they will be free of the pests as soon as they are out on the lake on the other side. Others wear head nets, although we joke with them about looking like brides going to their nuptials. These expedients show how unhappy is the ordeal.

Moore is utterly exasperated by the mosquitoes every time he crosses the Portage. It is a sight to see him suddenly lose all patience, set down his burdens, and execute a sort of combination war dance and contortionist ballet, interspersed with wild swipes of his hat, and a bloodcurdling stream of invective so sulphuric in content that it should sear the insects to cinders if they were not so tough and mean. But all this does not discourage them; and he knows it. So presently, having thus given vent to his feelings, he replaces his hat on his head, picks up his load, and struggles along in his cloud of misery.

The Indians seem to pay little attention to them, and indeed I detect a certain sense of choice in the mosquitoes. For example, I am full-blooded and somewhat rotund, and the insects look upon me as a particularly succulent and nutritious dish. They swarm to me. Wherever they land on

me, they strike it rich. I am such an improvement over the smoke-dried Indians that as soon as I appear in the vicinity most of them will leave whatever Indian they happen to be attending at the moment and head straight for me.

It is not an evidence of favouritism that I enjoy, but I try to take it philosophically. As a matter of fact, their stings do not create on me such great welts as they do on some men. The only time they really bother me beyond bearing is when they get so thick that I *breathe* mosquitoes. This is no exaggeration. I have, more than once, actually inhaled mosquitoes, and the ferocity of the insects is such that I verily believe they go to boring without a moment's delay, even when so engulfed. As for Doc, Moore, and Gyp, they all assure me that they are thankful that my superior food quality gives them a corresponding measure of relief.

Once we reach the end of the Portage and enter our boats, this annoyance is forgotten. We leave the mosquitoes behind, to fatten on other fishermen coming across the Portage, and our two boats, with motors at full throttle, head out into the most beautiful lake I know for that day's fishing. We are, as usual, after wall-eyes this morning, and we generally know where the wall-eyes can be found.

Perhaps we have located them near at hand, in Carl Bay. Perhaps they are as far out as Garden Island, ten miles south-west, or Cash Island, equally far north-west. Wherever it is, we head for that place, and when we reach it our guides slow the motors to trolling speed, our lines go out, and we are fishing.

I can think of nothing more pleasant than this kind of fishing. The boat dances on the blue waves as we round an island or a reef or skirt a bit of shore line. Doc and I discuss matters of mutual interest, or tell each other stories, or ask the guide questions. Every few minutes we pass close to the boat of Moore and Gyp, for the unwritten law which forbids one boat to crowd another when fishing, in the interests of good sportsmanship and friendly feeling, does not apply in our group. We always fish in company and exchange badinage with each other, and when one boat finds fish, it instantly beckons the other to come over and participate in the sport.

There comes, as we troll, the frequent excitement of the strike of a fish, the hooking of it, and the landing of it, especially if it be a wall-eye of good size. And now and then we hear loud yells and imprecations from the other boat.

Doc laughs. "Moore's caught another snake," he says.

Moore is a man with violent prejudices. If he likes you, he is beyond question the most loyal and devoted friend any man can be fortunate enough to have. He will sit up nights trying to think up more things he can do for you, and in his eyes you can do no wrong. But anything he dislikes, human or otherwise, he detests with equal fervour.

One of his pet detestations is the northern pike. He refers to these fish as "snakes" and he appears to believe they have in truth something reptilian about them. They are slimy, and he objects to slime; and they have a peculiar odour, familiar to all pike fishermen; and they are, to his eye, unnecessarily long and serpentine for an honest fish.

To me the northern pike is a fine fish to catch, often an exciting fish, and a good one of five pounds and over will give you a tussle before you land him. Furthermore, when filleted and fried fresh, he is delicious to eat. As for Gyp, he loves northerns. He collects them and sends them home in boxes to his friends, and they receive them with delight and praise him for his generosity. So when Gyp hooks a northern, he gives a cry of joy—the cry of the stern warrior at the foeman delivered into his hand—and devotes himself to landing that northern and getting him on a stringer.

This sentiment is not shared by Moore, who implores him to get rid of the stinking thing before he gets it into the boat. Yet even if you are going to throw a fish back into the water, you generally have to boat him to unhook him; and this is especially true of northerns, which, being greedy, usually get the hooks of the lures well embedded in their jaws.

But if Moore does not like northerns, it appears that the northerns have some sort of a fixation on Moore. They bite on his lures more often than upon those of anyone else. And when they are brought into the boat they gaze upon him with love-light in their eyes. They pay scant attention to Gyp or the guide, but they wind themselves about Moore's legs, and try to get in his lap, and wipe their noses on his shirt front, and tickle him under the chin with their tails, and get slime and corruption all over him. And all this to the accompaniment of his yells of dismay and protest, and enough bad language to last an economical man for a lifetime; while the rest of us simply injure ourselves with laughter.

Sometimes, as we round an island, we see what appears to be a dark post thrusting itself a couple of feet out of the water. It is the top of a crude buoy,

a marker for some commercial fisherman's net, and we glance around instinctively and automatically for the other marker, which will appear in some direction perhaps two or three hundred feet away, indicating the other end of the net. It is murderous to drag your hooks across a net—murderous for the lure, and for the net, and for your temper.

Shoal Lake, to our minds, has far too much commercial fishing on it, and there is a continual feud between sports fishermen and commercial fishermen. This is based on the fact that where the sports fishermen bring millions of dollars each year into Canada, they are allowed to have in possession (to take home) no more than one day's limit of fish—in the case of wall-eyes, or northerns, or bass, six fish of each kind. Meantime the commercial fisherman can ship fish out by the ton, and his licence costs little more than the sports fisherman's. The sportsman does not care about his limit being small, if it is in the interest of conservation. But why should he be called upon to conserve rigorously when the commercial fisherman takes all he wants and more?

All anglers detest commercial fishermen and their nets, but Moore and Gyp have especial malevolence towards them. This arises from an incident of last summer. You frequently see the big commercial boats—in every case followed by clouds of gulls seeking the dead fish and offal they throw overboard—cruising about from net to net for the day's catch. One of these boats overhauled and drew up alongside the boat of Moore and Gyp while they were trolling. It contained a Swede, who seemed to be the worse for drink, and an Indian helper. The Swede said:

“We used to get a lot of fish here before you Yankees come up!”

Of course, if the lake is being fished out—which, incidentally, it shows no signs of being—the commercial fisherman have only themselves to blame. But this was not what caused the Kentuckians to breathe fire.

Calling a Kentuckian a Yankee is about the last stage of insult. The Swede did not know he was talking to Kentuckians. “Yankee” was his generic term for all people from the States. But Moore and Gyp almost had apoplexy.

They feel now that the mere smug expression of a commercial fisherman in his big boat is enough to create a breach of the peace in itself, and that anything violent that might happen to one of them would come under the heading of justifiable homicide.

But we pass the net and are on our way. We catch fish—beautiful fish—in spite of the commercial fishermen. We gaze at the shores, and listen to the birds in the trees, and see interesting creatures of the wild like deer or porcupines, or frequently a mother duck with her brood of ducklings, all swimming in a line behind her. And we feel the sweet coolness of the breeze, and the motion of the waves, and are immeasurably content.

Occasionally in this cruising we encounter islands that differ from the other islands of the lake as death differs from life.

On these islands stand the bare skeletons of what once were lovely trees, and the grass and most of the underbrush that once made them charming has been killed off and replaced by a horrid, whitish defilement.

This is guano, the excrement of the cormorant, the stinking acids of which kill every living thing they touch. It is the same substance, deposited also by cormorants, which created the famous nitrate beds three hundred feet thick over which wars were fought between Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, so important were they as an article of world commerce for fertilizer and the making of explosives.

The cormorant is just the bird to build up such deposits. He is the ugliest and most unattractive of all the lake's creatures—awkward and ungainly, a dead lustreless black in colour, with a snakelike neck and a labouring, uninspired flight. The Indians call him “crow-duck.” That designation is a libel both on the ducks and the crows.

Yet the cormorant is a skilful underwater swimmer and a prodigious fish-eater. He has another quality: he seems to have a perpetual case of loose bowels. Constantly he gorges himself, whether he is hungry or not, so that “an appetite like a cormorant” is a term of reproach among all peoples. And constantly his ill-smelling body rids itself of the food he gulps in such quantities in the form of the acid, whitish ordure with which he bespatters and covers everything.

When a colony of his kind takes possession of an island, trees and all other vegetation die, and except perhaps for some small clump of bushes at a far end, never visited by this obscene bird, it presents the aspect of death that I have mentioned.

Nevertheless, in spite of the repulsiveness of the “crow-duck islands” and their bad smell when you are to the leeward, it sometimes pays to fish around them. Last year we caught some of our finest fish on a reel off one of



the crow-duck islands, returning there day after day to be rewarded each time.

On this day as we troll well to the windward of a crow-duck island, Doc and I witness a little wilderness tragedy which seems strangely in keeping with the place of death.

In the branches of the few dead trees still standing are the loosely constructed nests of sticks and twigs, as slovenly as the cormorants that built them. And in those nests are eggs and also fledgling cormorants, as ugly as their parents. On some of the dead branches sit adult cormorants, with their wings held out in the odd, spread-eagle attitude the birds seem habitually to assume. Doc says it is because they cannot stand their own bad smell and are trying to air themselves out. Other cormorants fly desultorily back and forth, in black flocks, eyeing us.

All at once we hear a familiar voice, "Caw, caw, caw!"

"Look at the crow," says Doc.

There he sits at the very tip of one of the dead trees, appearing almost graceful and trim, with his glossy back, among the dull black cormorants about him, which set up a harsh, discordant clatter. They are all much bigger than the crow, and they know what the old pirate is about to do, but they are too pusillanimous to lift a feather to prevent him.

The crow leisurely inspects the various nests, selects one to his liking, hops down upon it, and seizes a fledgling cormorant by the wing. The older cormorants redouble their clatter, and the young bird screeches and struggles. But the crow drags him to the edge of the nest and coldly drops him over the side. Twenty or thirty feet below the fledgling hits with a sickening thump on hard rock, dead or dying. After a moment the crow follows him to the rocky floor, pecks him a few times if life still is in him, and then calmly proceeds to make a meal of him. Throughout all this the adult cormorants, scores in number, and each one individually bigger and stronger than the crow, make no effort to prevent the slaughter, other than to keep up their raucous croaking protests.

Doc looks at me and shakes his head. "Pretty revolting," he says.

And then comes a contrasting touch of beauty.

At the tip of the island a small clump of saskatoon and chokecherry bushes has escaped the general ruin, and in this clump is a song sparrow's nest. Why it is so I do not know, but on almost every crow-duck island you

will find a nesting pair of song sparrows in the sparse little bit of greenery left.

Suddenly, from this clump of bushes, after the crow's deed is done and while the cormorants still croak and swoop, there rises the sweet brilliant carolling of a song sparrow. As pure, as brave, as clean it is as all around it is foul and craven and ugly.

Doc smiles. "Like a little angel singing in hell, isn't it?" he says, with one of his sometimes surprising poetic insights.

Noon finds us seeking some island far more beautiful than that of the cormorant colony, for lunch. There is a favourite spot we choose when we are in that part of the lake. It is called Bourbon Island, and it is in Inebriate Bay, sheltered by Whiskey Point, that we disembark.

We named that island ourselves, in honour of an occasion that happened several years ago. The occasion was so appropriate that the name has stuck and the Indians know it by that, and almost everybody does.

I do not want anyone to think that we drink to excess on our annual fishing trips, and particularly I do not want anyone to think that Moore drinks to excess. I promised Mrs. Moore, one of the most delightful ladies in this world, that I would watch over him; and I do.

But what *is* drinking to excess, when a man like Moore is concerned? What might be excessive to a lesser being is a mere appetizer to Moore. Since I have never been able to decide that any amount of liquor he took was excessive, I have carried out my pledge to Mrs. Moore merely by watching.

There have been, of course, occasions we celebrated rather exuberantly. The first day we see each other after a year's absence is such a one.

I remember the first time I took Doc to Portage Bay. I had told him about Moore and Gyp, and our friendship, and promised him a very hearty welcome.

It happened that the Kentuckians had arrived the day before we did and had been out fishing that day. But much as they love fishing, they cut it short and returned to camp early, to be sure and meet the boat when it brought us down from Kenora.

As we neared the dock, I heard wild, Indian-like whoops from Moore's Inn, and Moore and Gyp came bounding down the path like a pair of

overjoyed moose.

Doc looked on with pleased astonishment as we hugged each other, and danced about each other, and slapped each other's backs, and uttered affectionate blackguardisms for the next few minutes. Then I introduced him and they shook hands with him and greeted him with their courtly Kentucky grace.

At this point Gyp produced a bottle from his hip pocket. It contained his favourite brand of Kentucky dew.

"Confusion to the Mounted Police," he said.

We all drank rather eagerly from the bottle to that toast, although none of us has anything against the Mounted Police, except perhaps McKeever.

Then they conducted us up the path toward our cabin which is just beyond their own. As we passed the first tree Moore said, "Why, look here!"

He stooped and picked up from behind the tree a glass, containing a full-fledged Kentucky highball: bourbon, water, and ice—go easy on the water, go easy on the ice. We all drank from it.

A little further along, Gyp found a similar highball behind another tree. I will not bore you with further details, but behind every tree along that path, all the way up to our cabins, was a waiting highball, left there by the Kentuckians, and we drank them all.

That night, when we went down to the lodge for supper, we were bothered a little by bumping into people, and corners of buildings, and trees, and other objects that could not get out of the way in time. Some of us may not have remembered too clearly what took place in the lodge that night when we awoke next morning.

As for Doc, it was his initiation, and it made a lifetime convert of him to the fraternity of Portage Bay,

But to get back to Bourbon Island.

There is a broad, inviting stretch of flat glaciated rock almost like a floor beside the small narrow inlet where the boats are moored. Behind, the trees and grass and bushes are lovely with the dainty green of early summer, and bright flowers gladden the eye—wild roses, fairy harebells, columbines, and bunchberries.

The lunch boxes are brought ashore, and the frying-pans. The guides select some of the wall-eyes from the stringers and take themselves to the water's edge to fillet the fish which are to be fried.

There is protocol to be followed in these lunches, and each has his appointed task. First there is the fire to be built. We collect dry sticks and wood, and arrange it to Moore's liking—Moore invariably superintends the building of the fire, although Gyp actually lights it.

Under our protocol, mine is the task of cutting the Coffee Stick. This tradition arose out of sheer vainglory on my part. Some years ago I wrote a novel called *The Iron Mistress*, in which I made something of the bowie knife and its genesis. A cutlery company sent me, as a compliment, a hunting knife in the bowie style, complete with sheath.

I wear that knife on my hip, in the foolish fancy that it gives me a swashbuckling, reckless appearance. Such an appearance really is impossible in one who, like myself, is very wide between the hip pockets and perhaps a little larger around the middle than he is anywhere else. There is, furthermore, no need for a hunting knife in our fishing party, since the camp provides all needed cutlery—except for this one thing, the cutting of the Coffee Stick.

I make great pretence of giving thought and bringing special skills and knowledge to the selection of the Coffee Stick, but it really is the simplest of matters. You select a straight shoot of alder, chokecherry, or willow with a small branch near its base. The shoot is cut off below this branch, trimmed to a convenient length, say four feet, and all subsidiary twigs and leaves sliced from it, except for about three inches of that lowest branch. It thus forms a sort of hook, whereby the wire handles of the gallon tin cans provided for making coffee can be taken, and the cans lifted on or off the fire, or even held over the blaze without burning the fingers.

In the matter of coffee Moore again has his decided opinions. He thinks that ashes, and cinders, and occasional small insects which become involved in coffee brewed up over an open fire detract from it. One year he brought along a patented coffee-maker. It consisted of a percolating coffee-pot and a gasoline heater which you had to generate by pumping it up, and nurse gently to keep it from blowing out. In order for it to burn at all, Moore was forced to build up breastworks against the wind, consisting of rocks and logs and raincoats and branches. The relics of these engineering operations of Moore's are still to be seen on various islands in Shoal Lake.

We called his device the Atomic Wonder, and Moore spent most of his noonings lying behind his windbreaks, coaxing the Atomic Wonder to produce coffee. It did produce coffee, of impeccable purity, but it was so much trouble that next year Moore left it at home. He did not want to admit he left it on purpose. He said he forgot it, but *we* know.

Having cut the Coffee Stick, I turn the making of coffee over to Gyp. It is Doc's task to slice the onions, which he does with surgical precision. To Moore and me falls the exalted office now of frying the bacon. We burn ourselves, and get smoke in our eyes, and sometimes stop everything to dance around flicking our fingers and swearing, while the others indulge in paroxysms of absolute crack-jawed laughter. The humour does not appeal to us. Small things please small minds, we assure each other.

Eventually the bacon is fried, the onions sliced, and we make bacon and onion sandwiches, which we devour while the guides fry the fillets of wall-eye to the most wonderful golden brown a famished man ever saw.

Now we fall to in earnest. For a time not a sound is heard save the clank of cutlery and tinware, and the steady grinding of molars. At the end of perhaps twenty minutes, some of us begin to relax a bit. In thirty minutes the relaxation is complete, utter.

We lounge about in various restful attitudes on the soft grass in the shade of the trees, gazing out over the lake, which never fails to amaze with its blueness. No feeling of greater satisfaction exists than having the belly full. In my youth it was enjoined upon me that a clear conscience would bring content and happiness. Never having quite been able to achieve a completely clear conscience, I cannot state of my own experience whether this is true or not. But I can personally testify to the effects of a hearty meal, and I believe the sense of well-being is at least equal to a clear conscience, besides being easier to achieve, and cheaper, and much more fun.

A sense of kindness to all of God's creatures, even persons who have despitefully used you, comes over you. Generosity, forgiveness, all the noble virtues are yours while digestion holds sway. You may have been inclined to short temper and snappiness before eating. But after eating you beam like the effulgent sun on those about you.

Moore and Gyp can even speak with moderation about commercial fishermen and admit that—hard as it might be to establish—there *may* be some extenuation for their continued existence. Moore even goes further. He beams a little upon a large and vicious-looking northern pike which Gyp has caught during the morning and which lies sulkily in the water under the

boat, held by a stringer. When Moore beams on a northern, you *know* he is in harmony with the music of the spheres.

Moore, who is the senior and most honoured member, not only of our group, but of the entire camp by every rule of personality, wisdom, and worth, is a peerless storyteller. When he is feeling good he can entertain you for hours, and you can gain a lot of information from him, too. He is a keen businessman and has in his life made much money, but, unlike most money-makers, the making of money in itself is not the paramount consideration with him. Enjoyment of life is.

“I have no wish to be the richest man in the graveyard,” is one of his sayings.

He does not talk business; but though he is a breeder and owner of fine thoroughbred horses on his beautiful place near Louisville, and a track devotee, he does not and never will consider horses as business. He loves horses, is devoted to them, and his knowledge of the subject is encyclopedic. This lunchtime our conversation turns upon horses; and it is worth the time spent.

You learn, for instance, in the course of the desultory conversation, that such attributes as cat hams, calf knees, mutton withers, parrot mouths, Roman noses, pig’s eyes, turkey necks, coon feet, and thirty or forty other designations you would naturally ascribe to other creatures all refer to horses—to defects in horses. Ewe necks—I forgot that. And rat tails.

A fine horse has none of these defects. And when Moore discourses on splendid horses, it is a pleasant thing to watch him as his eyes light, his tongue grows eloquent and you feel and share his great love for the beautiful creatures as he waxes lyrical on the subject.

The lake is calm and inviting, and once or twice more venturesome members of our group have taken a dip during noonday rests. This, of course, is *au naturel*, but it is quite safe, for the likelihood that a feminine angler will appear at the distances we usually go is mathematically very small.

I have taken such a dip—once. I found the water of Shoal Lake both wet and of a singularly penetrating cold. Though the idea of springing into its pellucid depths with a joyous shout sounds attractive in prospect, it seems less so when you actually confront it.

Doc once sprang into the pellucid depths. He was fishing that day with Bud, my son, and they decided to take a swim, the weather being hot. Doc had stripped off his clothes and was barely dabbling (most hesitantly) the tip of one toe in the water, already convinced it was too cold and about to call the whole thing off, when Bud gave him a shove. His scream of anguish as he hit the icy water could be heard a mile, and he swam back for the island with so vengeful a light in his eye that Bud took to the water, too, for self-protection. Both of them declare they have not got over the shock of that icy plunge to this day.

But there is also another reason why taking a swim lacks popularity—the deer-fly. The deer-fly, like the mosquito, is a pest at certain seasons in the Lake of the Woods country. It is different from the deer-fly of other parts of the world. *That* deer-fly is really a small horse-fly. It stings sharply, but its size makes it relatively easy to detect and defend against.

The Lake of the Woods deer-fly is much smaller, compactly built, with a cold grey eye and a bite that can raise you six inches off your boat seat. He does not swarm like the mosquito, but comes solitarily, malevolently, and ferociously by himself to do his evil work. Unlike the mosquito, he does not desert your boat when you are away from shore. He merely crouches under the gunwale, protected from the wind, watching for an opportunity to sink his fangs into you. It is a must that you wear boots and tuck your trousers in them when fishing in the deer-fly season, because a bare stretch of ankle is a favourite attacking point, and every bite not only hurts fiercely but itches so that you cannot help scratching it madly until you lacerate your own skin.

Judge then what a target is the expanse of a bare human torso for these demons of insects. It is tempting Fate to go swimming, I declare, and I wait for the shower at night.

Not even the shower is always safe. I sometimes think that the deer-flies post scouts at the cracks in the shower-room to signal to their friends when someone is in there, alone and unprotected.

One day this last summer Gyp Blair repaired to the shower-room for a bath. He disrobed, turned on the shower, and stepped under it.

He was just thoroughly wet all over when the shower suddenly stopped running. Somebody had left the plug in the tank open and it had run dry.

Gyp's dilemma was one to touch the wellsprings of sympathy. He had not had his bath and he hoped the water would be turned on again. Meantime he was wet, and he did not want to dress and then undress again,

for that would mean drying himself all over. So he waited in the shower-room, a large, pink, plumpish, figure, who, had he known it, must have presented a toothsome sight to any deer-fly that saw him.

All at once we heard him howl with anguish.

“Hey! Ouch! Get me out of here!”

The deer-flies had arrived.

In the next few minutes we heard, rather than saw, frenzied activity in the shower-room while Gyp attempted to beat them off, winced as they nipped delicate portions of his anatomy, partially dried himself, and hustled into his clothes, trying to do all these things at one and the same time.

We, outside, shouted unsympathetic advice through the window, which he answered with imprecations and sharp ejaculations of pain.

He retreated finally into the shower cabinet, where fewer of the enemy could attack his rear. There, as he had just about finished getting all his clothes on, the water suddenly returned with full force. Gyp had neglected to turn off the shower when it ceased running, and McKeever had found the open plug and turned on the pump.

The water was not warm. It was ice cold and it flooded Gyp, who was standing directly under the shower nozzle while he adjusted his trousers.

A moment later he came plunging out of the shower-room with welts on his hide, soaked to the skin, and ready to kill somebody, if he could find out who was at fault. He would have done it, too. If, under ordinary circumstances, there is no creature better-natured, jovial, and friendly than Gyp, when he is mad he can give a very good impression of a grizzly bear out after blood.

For these various reasons—the coldness of the water, the deer-flies, and our own indolence—we do not take a swim, contenting ourselves with merely discussing it lazily.

It is time we went fishing again, anyway.

The frying-pans, lunch boxes, and other articles are replaced in the boats. The fire is thoroughly quenched. We shove off.

There are to be more pleasure-filled, often exciting, successful hours of catching our finny quarry, with forever the prospect of getting a truly Big



One. A big wall-eye is thoroughly thrilling to catch, not only because the fish is desirable, but because he is very strong and unpredictable.

I caught my biggest wall-eye of all time last summer—thirteen pounds, two ounces, he weighed. I had, earlier that day, lost another big fish, and when I finally got this one to a place about four feet under the boat, where we could see his bulk, my young Indian guide, Clifford Kezhik, exclaimed, “If we lose this one, I’ll faint!”

It was an un-Indian remark, but it was exactly how I felt, too. We did eventually land him, with some very clever work with the net by Kezhik, after a pretty tough struggle in which the fish made many sudden soundings and I thought several times I had lost him. When we finally got him in the boat, the lure and the fish lay inches apart in the net. He had pulled the tail hooks, literally by the roots, out of a T-4 flatfish. If we had netted him one split second later—we would not have netted him. He would have been gone.

I am so proud of that fish, though he is by no means a record, that I have him mounted in my study, where I can gaze upon him now and again during the long months when I cannot be at Portage Bay.

We fish, as I say. As the afternoon grows late, we experience one of those thrills that come not infrequently in this wonderful abode of wild things.

Our boat is trolling off a rather large and heavily wooded island, which rises to a small hill covered with pines. As we come around a cape of this island, we see that its farther end runs out into a narrow triangle of bare glaciated rock, almost flat on top, perhaps thirty feet long, shaped like a flatiron extending from the main island, and about ten feet above water.

On that rocky outthrust, as if he has deliberately selected it as a stage, stands a magnificent bull moose.

In awe we gaze upon him as our boat slowly approaches him. Seven feet high at his great humped withers he stands, weighing not less than a thousand pounds, and his wide palmated antlers and massive head give him an air of indescribable grandeur and nobility. Scant attention does he pay to our trolling boat, swinging his head rather negligently to gaze at us, as if he knows that at this season he is inviolate as far as man and his hunting are concerned.

Closer and closer our guide brings the boat, until the giant seems to tower over us. How long will he stay? Will he bolt? We wait almost

breathless.

He swings his lordly head to brush away the deer-flies buzzing about him. Then, and only then, does he move; and not in any panic even now. As if, having deliberately given us a chance to admire his magnificence, he now feels that he has afforded us sufficient time, with leisurely dignity he turns, strides back into the shelter of the trees, and is gone.

“Whe-e-ew!” I hear Doc whistle.

The great moose has given us a lift of spirits, a sense of the imminence of mighty nature, a feeling of the wilds that is almost sublime and remains with us, not only for the day, but for ever.

The sun is slanting toward the west. It is approaching five o’clock, and at length we begin to think about supper. Presently we see the other boat coming toward us. In the prow sits Moore, and over his shoulder I see Gyp’s broad grin.

When they slow up beside us, Moore says, “What good is a lake if a man dies of thirst on it?”

Doc says, “Ever try drinking water?”

Moore says, “No; don’t intend to at this late date.”

Gyp says, “Let’s head in to camp and find Elmer.”

Moore says, “Suits me.”

The boats turn at full speed for Portage Bay, while we give cries of “Where’s Elmer?”—Elmer being the name and sign in our quartet for bourbon.

Before we can reach Elmer, of course, there is the Portage to tackle again. We will encounter mosquitoes, but at least we are early enough this afternoon so that we can see where we are going.

I have, on a few occasions, come across the Portage by night, and never without some kind of unhappiness. Once I fell embarrassingly into the lake at the landing. On another occasion I sprained an ankle in one of the bog holes. The worst, however, was a night when Doc and I, with Moore and Gyp, had gone out for some night fishing on Shoal Lake. Wall-eyes are supposed to bite better at night, but I have never found it so. On this particular night the fishing was disappointing, so we returned to camp about nine o’clock.

Doc and I started in first, and we reached the Portage about half a mile ahead of the other boat. Then, and not until then, did we realize that we had made the unpardonable mistake of forgetting to bring a flashlight. Gyp never forgets anything, so we knew he and Moore had a flashlight. All we had to do was wait for them to have at least partial illumination over the Portage. But Doc and I could not do anything as simple as that. We decided we would forge ahead, because we did not wish to admit to our friends the inexcusable idiocy of which we were guilty.

That year we were guided by a young Indian named Alfred Red Sky. Some time earlier, during a nooning, Doc had played a practical joke on Alfred. Doc likes Tabasco sauce. In fact he dotes on that fiery concoction, puts it on everything he eats—even ice-cream, I believe—and he takes it in doses that would burn the roof out of the mouth of an ordinary man.

Young Red Sky, who was unacquainted with the properties of Tabasco sauce, watched him sprinkle it profusely from the bottle on his fish, but he was too polite to ask for a taste of it, although he supposed it must be very good from Doc's evident relish. Noticing his look, Doc offered him the bottle and urged him to try it. He said the sauce should be put on quite thickly, "to get the real flavour."

Alfred complied, and we watched to see his reaction. It was a very satisfactory reaction. He took a big bite of fried fish, heavily laden with Tabasco sauce. Thereafter he could not have shown a wilder, livelier, more sudden interest if we had ladled a shovelful of live coals into his mouth.

With a strangled squawk of pain and consternation, he sprang with a kind of leap-frog haste to the edge of the lake, tears streaming from his eyes, plunged his head under water like a horse, and nearly went in all over, trying to ease that liquid fire in his mouth.

Doc and I wept with laughter, and Alfred grinned in a sort of sickly manner after the effects of the Tabasco sauce had been dissipated. Then we forgot it, and we thought he had forgotten it, since he never again mentioned it.

But we were mistaken. An Indian is proverbially long of memory when it comes to getting even, and this night on the Portage was Alfred's night for revenge.

Taking his load, he started through the woods along that execrable trail, at a pace with which we could not possibly keep up. The night had turned dismal, coldish, with a thin rain falling, and so dark we could hardly see five

feet in any direction. Within two minutes we had lost Alfred in the wet gloom, and we were so occupied in feeling our way, slipping, falling over roots, and trying to keep on that horrible trail that we did not think to call him back.

To Doc and me it seemed forever before we finally negotiated the first section of the Portage. Now and then we would collide with unfriendly trees, or bark our shins on sharp rocks. At other times we found ourselves almost in the quagmire of the marsh, from which we would clamber in haste. During long periods we were not sure we were on the trail at all, and had gloomy thoughts of perhaps having to stay out in those wet woods all night with only unfriendly mosquitoes for company.

I said I was tired of it all. This seemed a poor place in which to die, but I thought I would rather die here than in some place even less hospitable, and at every step I seemed to encounter less hospitality on this dreary way.

Doc wondered where that dratted Indian was.

Suddenly I gave a start. In the darkness ahead all at once loomed a blacker darkness.

A stump? A dark bush, perhaps?

The shadow moved.

I moved also—backward, stepping squarely on Doc's corns. Doc was too intent on that shadow to say "Ouch," but he jabbed me in the ribs with the handle of a landing net.

Some vagrant lines from Milton flitted across my mind:

*The other shape,  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either—black it stood as night,  
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell. . . .*

Milton called it Death. But I thought it might also be a pretty fair description of a bear on this night path.

Do not laugh. I am aware that hundreds of thousands of motorists who have thronged the highways in Yellowstone Park and fed the bears out of their motor car windows, have the cosy feeling that all bears are kindly, comical beggars who wouldn't hurt a fly. And this, in spite of warnings by

the park rangers that large numbers of trusting souls are more or less severely injured by going too far with bears.

The Lake of the Woods country is not Yellowstone Park. The bears have not learned to be comical beggars, nor do they appear to have any inclination to do so. In fact, they have resentments, and they sometimes take them out on people by scalping them alive, or chewing on some of the more prominent portions of their physiques. A bear with a grouch is not a laughing matter, especially at night and when you have in your hand nothing more lethal than a five-and-a-half-foot medium casting rod, slightly weakened at some of the guides by not having been wrapped and varnished recently enough. The Indians are frankly afraid of the bears of the lake region, and I am not going to yield to any Indian in my capacity to be terrorized.

But all at once the shadow spoke. It was Alfred.

He had come back looking for us, and we were relieved to see him, and glad. But we did not know for what fiendish purpose he had come.

He said, "I don't think they've left a boat for us at the landing. We'll have to walk around by the back trail."

We did not have brains enough to make inquiry as to how he had arrived at this conclusion. So tired were we that we accepted it without question. Far back we heard the sound of a motor as Moore and Gyp came in.

Once more we could have waited for them and the flashlight. But did we do it? No, such a thing was far too logical and sensible for us. Instead, we dumbly followed that perfidious young Indian (who knew all along that a boat was waiting at the landing) and began the wearisome hike up the dripping, crooked, and pitch-dark back trail.

The reason why people are ferried across from the camp to the Portage is because even by day the back trail is worse by far, as well as longer, more circuitous, and more treacherous than the Portage itself. In this almost opaque rainy night, soaked to the skin, we climbed and we slid down, getting mud all over ourselves; we fell over logs and we slipped into marshy places; we scratched our faces on low-hanging branches and on bramble bushes into which we blundered; and we got fresh bruises on various new places in our corporosities from colliding with unseen objects.

Always Alfred, the deceitful and vengeful, went on ahead, chortling to himself, just far enough beyond so that we could not reach him, but close enough to lead us over the *worst* places in that night-beset, rain-soaked,

obstacle-ridden trail. At long last, exhausted, we climbed a steep and slippery rise of rock practically on our hands and knees, and saw before us the camp clearing and the welcome lights of the cabins.

Mud-smeared, scratched, and torn, as well as tired out, Doc and I staggered to the lodge. What made our plight seem worse was that Moore and Gyp were there before us, unmuddied, fresh, and maddeningly complacent. Their flashlight had obviated all difficulties for them, and they had gone to the landing as any sensible person should have done—and found a boat waiting there for them as *we* should have known there would be, if we had used an ounce of sense or guessed at our guide's motives.

Alfred had his revenge. It does not pay to put an Indian in your debt in this respect.

This afternoon, however, we cross the Portage in the full late sunlight, and without mishap. We signal the dock on the other side of the little bay, and the boat comes and brings us over. Our fish, some of which are of good size, are gazed at and admired by various loafers on the dock. Moore, Gyp, Doc, and I head for our cabins, there to open a new bottle of mountain dew.

But Doc has still another duty before he can think of relaxing fully. On the steps of the Snoddy-Tolle-Wellman Buryin' Ground, three or four figures are solemnly sitting. Word that Doc is a medicine-man has gone out over the lake, and Indians who have, or fancy themselves to have, maladies of one kind or another have come to be doctored.

Usually Doc employs one of two kinds of therapy, because all Indians are inclined to be hypochondriacs and want to be treated just for the sake of being treated. Of course, he never accepts a fee for his treatments.

If it is a minor wound, he cleanses it and applies a Band-Aid. Band-Aids are precious, and the red-skinned proprietor of one exhibits it with childish pride.

If the complaint is a vague "belly-ache," he gives a pill. The pills are powerful, and his reputation as a medicine-man has been enormously enhanced by their power. Sometimes he even gives two pills. When he does this, that particular Indian does not show up again for a couple of days, and when he does he is visibly sadder, wanner, and weaker than when he went.

But when something really is wrong, Doc does what he can on an emergency basis, and gives a note to the patient to be carried to a Government doctor for further and more complete treatment. One Indian,

who received such a note giving a diagnosis, emergency treatment rendered, and suggestions, swallowed the note itself, in the belief that it had therapeutic powers—and proceeded at once to get better.

What with all this, and getting cleaned up, we are occupied until the bell at the lodge—incidentally, an old Californian ranch bell, which one year Doc and I presented to the camp as a gift—rings its invitation to dinner.

In the dining-room friends greet each other, we listen to accounts of piscatorial exploits, exchange a few harmless lies and then sit down. Aileen McKeever's cookery magic is matchless, and our appetites are razor keen. We know without fail that the dinner Aileen's girl helpers set before us will be an event. Again relative silence descends as we all devote ourselves to sheer gustatorial bliss.

The meal finished, cigarettes are lit, more stories told, and on this evening we four with a pack of cards embark on a game of Kentucky rum.

Kentucky rum is a game with some superficial resemblances to other rummy games, including gin rummy. But these resemblances are superficial only. Moore and Gyp, the Kentuckians, are the camp's unquestioned authorities on it. To play Kentucky rum with Moore and Gyp is to embark on a vast uncharted sea of unexpected and seemingly contradictory rules, which, however, are as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. There is no reason in this recital to describe it fully. Suffice it to say that it is slightly more complicated than a Chinese acrostic translated into a Sanskrit code, and nobody save a native Kentuckian ever has fully mastered it.

Ordinarily we play a game in which the winner of the hand gets half a dollar from the big loser, a quarter from the next, and the remaining hand, closest to the winner, gets a "free ride." This is a nice, friendly game, and I usually return to my cabin at the end of an evening's play no more than four or five dollars' loser, since the Kentuckians proverbially take mercy on us and do not push us to the limit.

Once, however, I saw them become quite remorseless.

One of the guests, a comparative stranger, invited himself into our game.

"What's the chance to sit in?" he asked. "I'm the champion rum player of the world."

It was a mistake on his part, an error that can only be attributed to inexperience. The "world's champion" was a fine, up-standing athletic young man, but he did not know the Kentuckians.

Moore looked at Gyp, Gyp looked at Moore.

Then they nodded.

That year Doc Tolle had not accompanied me to the lake, and I had as my partner instead Dr. Richard O. Tollefsrud, a dentist, an excellent angler, and a good friend of mine. Kentucky rum is really a four-handed game, but we made room for the "Champion," and five hands were dealt, which meant there must be three losers for every draw.

Right away the Champion wanted action, and suggested that we raise the stakes. "Let's make it a dollar, two bucks, and three," he said.

It is not very polite to ask to sit in on a game other people are playing and at once seek to make its terms stiffer. But, as I say, the Champion lacked experience.

"Suits me," said Moore.

It is an expression of his that can have many meanings, and from his voice I knew that this had ceased being a friendly game.

In the next two hours I saw the Champion lose his money in a manner amazing. He hardly, in point of fact, won a hand. Equally amazing was the fact that both Dick Tollefsrud and I were winning. I did not understand it, and I can only attribute this phenomenon to the fact that the Kentuckians had taken the game under complete control and were favouring us—not underhandedly, be it understood, but strictly within the rigid rules of the game. When the evening was over. Dick and I each were about seventy-five dollars ahead. What the Kentuckians won I do not know.

As he bade us good night the young man still could grin, which made you like him.

"I just want to make this statement to you gentlemen," he said in parting. "I'm not the champion rum player of the world. I am not even the champion of the state of Illinois. I am not even sure that I am the champion of the second house, in the third block, on the west side of the street on which I live, in my own home town."

Next season Moore and Gyp devoted themselves to getting that seventy-five dollars from me, and did, before the trip was over.

But this evening we play only until the clock says nine. Then there is a yawn. Another. Idly we put away the cards and go over to look at the



barometer. Knowing less than before we looked at it, we lounge back into the kitchen.

There McKeever serves us coffee and some cookies from the “hell box”—where cookies are kept which dieting guests did not eat, but left in their lunch boxes. And also some new epithets he has thought up in his leisure time during the day.

At last we tramp along the path beside the Estuary to our cabins, our flashlights illuminating the way before us.

“Good night,” we say to Moore and Gyp, as we pause for a moment at Moore’s Inn.

“Good night, fellows,” says Moore, smiling at us,

“I feel a big one coming on tomorrow,” says Gyp, the ever-hopeful.

Doc and I continue on to our own cabin.

Within is peace and silence. We undress and roll into our beds. For a few minutes we talk sleepily, going over the events of the day. It has been a peaceful day, an uneventful day, a beautiful day, a wonderful day, and it leaves us with a peculiar sensation of well-being and content.

Then speech ceases and we lie for a little time and listen to the night sounds. From the swamp across the Portage comes a distant chorus of frogs. In the woods back of the camp a great horned owl hoots his deep five-noted challenge. Afar comes the long *O-hooo* of a night-calling loon. In the lake just a few yards away there is a splash as a big fish breaks the surface of the water in his night-foraging.

Then suddenly we hear no more, know no more. The Snoddy-Tolle-Wellman Buryin’ Ground looks down upon the Estuary, peaceful in the moonlight.

Within it lie two fishermen asleep. The sleep of the just, the free of conscience, the good and pure—at least for this present blessed hour.

## How to Catch a Muskie

On the slope just above the landing dock at Portage Bay Camp, shaded by some friendly trees, is a bench. In the evening, after the day's fishing is over, it is a delightful place to sit, particularly for one with a philosophical temperament and an eye to human nature.

Before you is the Estuary, that narrow fiord-like finger of water; at once a pleasant boatway leading from the great Lake of the Woods to this haven in the forest and a protection from the storms that sometimes howl across the lake country. At your right is a small bay, formed by the end of the Estuary, which in the late evening dimples continually with rising bass and crappie and sometimes reveals the sleek shadow of a cruising great fish—a muskie or a giant northern pike.

About you are the songs of birds, the white-throated sparrow, the purple finch, the grosbeak, the veery thrush, and others, forming a sweet choir of nature. Behind you is the lodge, where supper is in the process of preparation, with perhaps a pleasant hint of aroma occasionally twisting about your eager nostrils, for appetite is enhanced and enjoyment sharpened by the wilderness air.

And before you is the landing dock itself, the centre of a pageant ever varied, and presenting in miniature a picture of life itself, with human aspirations, triumphs, hopes, and discouragements all clearly limned.

Over yonder, at the far end of the little bay, is the opening in the woods which is the beginning of the Portage. Each evening the parties from Shoal Lake appear there and are ferried across to the dock by Pat, the alert and capable young son of the McKeever's.

Mark that first party, its air of cheery accomplishment, as the guide swings a well-loaded stringer of beautiful fish into the boat. It has gone, and seen, and conquered. Its members are ready for rest, and perhaps a beaker of the finest, and one of Aileen's marvellous dinners, and some boastings and mutual disparagements delivered in high good humour, and the pleasure of looking forward to rest, well-earned, in the wonderful cool night of the lake.

The second party, which appears at the Portage entrance soon after the first, is less cheery. Its fishing has not been as productive, it has perhaps found the fish scornful of its particular lures, or has not found them in any numbers. It is morose, lacking joviality, but at least determined and eager for the morrow's fray, when it hopes to retrieve its fortunes.

But see yon fisherman just coming across. He sits alone, silent and lost to the world. His fishing companion and his guide converse in the low tones one hears elsewhere only in the subdued reception parlours of funeral homes, soon after the dear departed has arrived in the embalming room at the back. The man seems careworn, hopeless. He gazes at the scene of beautiful trees and beautiful waters as if it were an arid desert and he the only one in it, wrapped in a self-created tomb of gloom. You sympathize with him as he lands at the dock and totters in an irresolute yet dogged fashion towards his cabin, like a wounded beast crawling to its lair to die alone. He has this day hooked, and lost, a truly Big One, and the memory of it will live and rankle within him.

Anon, up the Estuary from the big lake itself, you hear the drone of a powerful motor. A boat is coming at high speed. Only two men are in this boat as it roars towards the dock, white spray curving from its bows. One is the guide, running the boat. This guide has earned his wages, for all day long he has rowed about reefs, and sedge islands, and bays, while his guest cast.

The guest sits with Olympian dignity. When he steps upon the dock, he gives a curt nod to those lingering upon it, as the lord of the manor might nod at a collection of serfs, and betakes himself at once to his abode. He has no fish in his boat. He never has any fish. He is not expected to have any fish. He is a Muskie Fisherman.

Muskie fishermen are a race alone. When, at night, a muskie fisherman returns to camp after a hard day on the lake, you do not inquire how many fish he has caught. You do not even ask him if he hooked any fish. You say to him, "Did you get any boils?"

Now to the ordinary man, getting a boil is no matter for elation. The biblical Job, exemplification of superhuman patience under every other calamity, at last broke down and cursed the day he was born, when he got boils.

But when you put this question to a muskie fisherman, you may see his eye light with a lambent gleam as he replies in the affirmative. And he will probably elaborate to you upon just where the boil appeared, and its dimensions, as well as other details germane to the subject of boils.

Before going further, I must hasten to point out that a boil, to a muskie fisherman, does not mean a swelling inflammation of the skin. The word in his lexicon refers to that disturbance of the water, similar to a sudden boiling up of a geyser from below, when a huge fish rises near the surface to a lure.

A big muskellunge, coming up in this manner from the depths is, I confess, an exciting experience: even when he merely looks over your lure and does not take it. For undoubtedly the muskie is the king of freshwater fishes in the Ontario wilds, the largest, the fiercest, the hardest to hook and, if hooked, to land.

Most persons, unaccustomed to muskies, are smitten with something like stage fright, or perhaps more nearly akin to what hunters term “buck fever,” when first confronted with one of these mighty fish, so that they behave like the mythical zombie, deprived of power to act or do anything but stare open-mouthed and bug-eyed until the fish is gone.

This happened to me once, when I was plug-casting for a small-mouth bass in outer Portage Bay. I dropped my lure, a small one of the artificial minnow type, known as a bass-master, in a narrow rock-bound inlet. As I began to retrieve, there was a sudden startling rush in the water, a mighty torpedo shape broke the surface, arched above it, and struck *down* on the lure, exactly like a snake.

So astonished was I by the ferocity and suddenness of the attack that I froze, and sat in the boat with what must have been an expression of sheer, settled idiocy on my face. I did not even try to set the hooks, but I do not think I could have done so had I tried, because the fish struck the lure from above, while the hooks hung below. And even had I hooked him, I am certain I could never have landed him, for I was using a light six-foot casting rod and a four-pound test line, which would have offered him no more real opposition than a cobweb.

Before I could come out of my temporary coma, he spat the bait from his mouth and was gone into the depths. Still in my self-induced hypnosis, although the veriest fool should have known my tackle was inadequate, I cast the same lure again to the same place up the small inlet.

Again the sinister shadow rose from below. Slowly I retrieved and saw the huge fish follow my bait, his snout not a foot from it, but never striking it, until he was no more than ten feet from the boat. There he stopped and lay, just below the surface, appearing as long as a cedar fence post, red fins and tiger-striped body in perfect visibility, looking me over with a sort of surly glare which gave me an unpleasant feeling. After a moment of this he turned with leisurely contempt and swam down into his depths to appear no more—though I belatedly came to myself, changed tackle, and spent an hour trying every kind of lure to tempt him again.

My Indian guide estimated the fish at not less than fifty pounds. If I had hooked him I am not sure if I would have been playing the muskie, or the muskie would have been playing me.

The tendency of the inexperienced fisherman to become demoralized in the presence of a big muskie was strikingly illustrated one day at Portage Bay. Two men went out from camp for muskies, one being something of an expert, the other entirely new to the game. They ran their own motor and did not take a guide.

It is customary to carry in the boat some kind of lethal weapon to deal with so strong and vicious a fish. Usually the weapon is a club of convenient size called a “priest”—for what reason I do not know, unless because it administers the last rites to the fish. Sometimes men go so far as to carry a pistol with them, to drill the muskie through the head if they happen to get him alongside the boat, and this was the case with the two men I am discussing on that particular day.

Usually muskie fishermen are notable only by their lack of success, but that day the expert did manage to hook a good-sized fish. The ensuing battle, with the furious leaps and swirls of the muskie, the bending rod, and the screeching reel, had the greenhorn’s eyes almost popping out with excitement. At last, after a lengthy battle, the angler managed to bring the fish alongside the boat.

“Grab that pistol,” he yelled, “and shoot him through the head!”

His companion groped for the automatic and tried to follow orders. But he was in such excited confusion that he forgot to release the safety catch. Before he could get this done and pull the trigger, the muskie sounded for the bottom again.

Swearing, the angler managed after another struggle to get the fish back. This time the muskie turned over, showing the white undersides, an indication that he was well tired out. In some manner the fisherman got a net over his head and managed to bring him into the boat.

But as soon as the fish landed in the bottom of the boat, his indignation returned, and with it his energy. He did not like that net over his head, and he did not like the people who put it there. He gave a tremendous leap, upsetting a tackle box and almost upsetting the greenhorn into the water.

But now at last the greenhorn had released the safety catch on the automatic pistol. He was gasping with excitement, but he knew what to do,

or thought he did. One after another he fired five bullets through that muskie.

The bullets subdued the fish all right. But they also made a colander of the bottom of the boat. Hours later the fishermen were rescued from an island which they had barely managed to reach with their now completely unseaworthy craft, and on which they had waited disconsolately until somebody chanced to find them.

Muskies are great, but they are few in number and very cunning. As a result, not many are caught in any given year.

Muskie fishermen, on the other hand, are many, and not so cunning. They are of two kinds: the Self-dedicated, and the Elect.

The Self-dedicated may fish for a year, or several years, without getting a muskie. Father Emmett Shanahan, a Catholic priest of Warroad, Minnesota, and an engaging friend of mine, belongs to this class.

“Believe it or not,” he said to me recently, “for more than seven years I beat almost every bay into a froth and never saw a muskie. Then in 1948 Destiny and I had a rendezvous at a certain rock about a mile and a half from Oak Island. When it was all over a thirty-three-pounder capitulated. How many muskies have I taken since? Well, I did catch another one. Weight, twelve pounds. I blush when I think about it. The heck of it is, I kept it. The large one I had mounted.”

I do not blame Father Shanahan for keeping the twelve-pound muskie. After all, that was only two fish in some fifteen years of fishing, and he was entitled to it. So much for the Self-dedicated muskie fishermen.

We now turn to the Elect, who are those who have caught a muskie, no matter how—the election being by the fish itself.

I myself may make a humble claim to being a muskie fisherman, belonging to the class of the Elect, and it is my purpose here to give, in the interests of science, a brief account of my feat and the manner of accomplishing it.

There are those, including Joe McKeever, who assert that nobody, except a guy with a special talent for lousing things up, could have caught a muskie the way I did it. Nevertheless, I have my muskie, and I have the scars to show for it.

(In considering that last statement, I should amend it to say that I have the scars to show to any competent examining physician *in private*. They are

not situated in such a place as to permit of public exhibition, but they are there.)

It was towards the end of my fishing trip that year, and the weather for three days had been beastly. I remember, one of those days, passing Moore and Gyp in their boat, and to their query of how I was doing, replying, "I'm thoroughly enjoying the discomforts of life."

My boat partner that season was Tom Tully, the gifted motion-picture actor, who had to leave early to complete a role in a picture. Moore and Gyp also left before me, so that I remained alone in my cabin, wishing I had gone with them, and facing bad weather in the bargain.

Some new guests were in camp that day. I knew them—the Winchesters, father and son, and Charlie Kaiser, all from Springfield, Illinois. Both the elder Winchester and Charlie Kaiser are since dead, and it has saddened me, because both were notable fishermen and storytellers. But there was no hint of this gloom then, and I greeted them gladly, since we had been in camp together before.

We had lunch that noon at the lodge, looking out of the windows at the bleak bay, with gale winds howling and ugly, tossing waves wherever there was open water. All of us agreed it was too rough to venture out on the main lake, but the Springfield men were eager to wet a line and decided to try fishing Lost Bay, just on the other side of the Portage, which is well protected from westerly winds.

When they expressed this determination I decided to go also, and invited Charlie Kaiser to share my boat. Our guide that day was Alex Kelly, a full-blooded Ojibwa.

Destiny, perhaps because of my more than two hundred pounds of bulk, seems perpetually to cast me in the role of ballast. Since I always seem to outweigh anybody else in the boat, I occupy the middle thwart, because the craft balances best in that manner. When I have a fishing companion, he perforce takes the bow seat, since the guide must be in the stern.

Customarily I place my tackle box just forward of the middle thwart, where it is out of the way of the guide and his net and paddle and lunch box and extra fuel and the stringers in the rear compartment. This means that when I am trolling—since then I face the stern—my tackle box is directly behind me. It is a capacious tackle box, with yawning jaws and shelves filled with many-hued and viciously hooked lures, in which I take great pride, although I confess I use most of them hardly at all. Formerly I was

accustomed to leave the tackle box wide open behind me. I do not do so now because of the circumstances I am about to recite.

With Alex, the guide, at the tiller, we trolled for a time about Lost Bay. I was using a silver-gold flatfish, Charlie a pikie minnow. But the fishing was far from good. Although we were not exposed to the direct force of the gale, heavy waves kept our boat pitching even in the inner bay, and the weather appeared to be worsening.

After about an hour of this sort of unpleasantness, I was about to suggest to Charlie that we return to camp and refresh ourselves where it was warm when I got a heavy strike.

“I believe I’ve hooked a good one,” I said.

The guide shut off the motor and took up his paddle.

“Might be a real fish,” I said a moment later.

My rod was arching, and the drag on my reel was sliding as I began the first part of the battle with a bulldogging fish. Then all at once I felt a series of quick jerks.

With disappointment I said, “It’s probably a northern, not a wall-eye.”

“Too bad,” said Charlie sympathetically.

At that moment the fish broached like a porpoise, and we caught a glimpse of red fins and a striped side.

“Muskie!” exclaimed the guide.

My breathing almost stopped.

It was the first time I had ever been fast to a muskie. All at once I began realizing how little chance I stood of landing this one. The lure I had on carried light hooks, whereas heavy hooks are needful for landing a muskie. The water was so choppy and rough that it imposed additional difficulties, since it was hard to keep balance. We were in an inward bay where there were numerous snags and weedy areas for a fighting fish to foul the line.

I say I realized all this, but it was with only a part of my mind. I was too confused, actually, by the mere idea of having a muskie on, to do much consecutive thinking.

From my reel the line still ran out, and the rod still arched, and behind me Charlie excitedly coached me in the manner of all fishermen watching another play a big fish.



“Keep your line tight! Don’t horse him! Bring him in! Let him run! Watch him, watch him! He’s heading for those weeds. Stop him! That’s it! No, don’t snub him too hard! Keep your rod up! Don’t let him roll that line around him! He’s a big one. Play him!”

I strove to do all these things. Though our boat was pitching crazily, since the motor was off and the waves a bit rough, I half stood up, bracing myself as best I could, to give myself better height as the fish raced about the boat at some distance, always beneath the surface after that first looping appearance.

All at once my line went slack.

“I’ve lost him!” I cried, sick with disappointment.

“Oh no,” wailed Charlie.

Rapidly I began reeling in line. There was no contact. I was sure the fish was off. But I was vastly mistaken. The muskie at that moment was charging the boat.

Suddenly it happened.

Right under my elbow, at the side of the boat, the water seemed to explode, and straight up into the air, clear out of the water for the full length of his twisting, gleaming body, came the furious muskie.

I had a momentary, almost cheek by jowl, glimpse of a long, savage mouth filled with sharklike teeth, a glaring and wrathful eye, and flaring red gills. Then a cascade of water splashed all over us.

The fact that, at the sight of this apparition, I fell unexpectedly backward over my seat and into my open tackle box did nothing to alleviate the confusion.

The events of the next few minutes are somewhat disorganized in my memory. Chief among my impressions was a sharp twinge of pain in one of the broader portions of my anatomy. I had sat squarely upon one of the lures in the open tackle box—a flatfish, as it happened.

If that muskie was hooked, so was I.

For some reason which I cannot explain, perhaps the instinct of the drowning man who keeps a despairing grip on anything, even to a straw, I did not let go of my rod. The fish had gone sounding off as I scrambled to my feet, the overturned tackle box and the scattered lures all over the bottom of the boat.

“He’s still on!” cried Charlie exultantly.

“The hell with that! Ouch! Get this thing out of me!” I yelped.

A flatfish is described as a wobbling lure equipped with offset hooks. On this particular lure there happened to be four gangs of those hooks, of three hooks each. I had the impression, though I am sure it was wrong, that every one of those twelve hooks had me—excruciatingly, maddeningly.

“Hold still!” said Charlie. In spite of the pitching of the boat, he came forward and began trying to disengage the hooks which were embedded in me and embedded ever more strongly in the tough whipcord fishing pants I was wearing.

I gave a new yelp of combined pain and consternation.

The muskie had charged again, this time going right under the boat, taking the line with him and coming up out of the water on the other side, almost carrying my bending rod down under by the manœuvre.

It was only the cool action of the guide that saved the situation then. With a sweep of his paddle he swung the stern of the boat around. The sudden swirl, combined with the wild pitching of the waves, almost upset both Charlie and me, but it also cleared, so that the muskie found that, instead of fouling it, as he hoped, on the bottom of the boat or in the propellers, he was in open water.

Meanwhile, Charlie still was working on the hooks in my posterior.

There was one bit of luck. The toughness of the seat of my pants had prevented any of the hooks from going into me past the barbs, except for perhaps one, and it was in barely beneath the skin, so shallowly that it came loose at a rather sharp pull by Charlie and a howl from me. Actually only four of the hooks left marks in me.

As I felt Charlie draw the last of the hooks out of my quivering flesh, the muskie charged again under the boat. Once more the guide foiled him with the paddle’s swirl.

“I’ve got ’em out of your meat,” I heard Charlie say behind me, “but the barbs are caught in the fabric of your pants.”

“For God’s sake, cut them out and get me loose!” I implored. And as the guide, with his paddle, swept the stern again to keep the fish from fouling the line, I almost sat down once more in the boat bottom—which would have been disastrous.

It must have been a picture that our boat presented then: I, half standing, half squatting, holding my rod with one hand and the gunwale with the other; Charlie in a somewhat similar position, earnestly seeking to extricate the hooks from the seat of my pants. The racket of our trampling as we steadied ourselves, the rattle of the tackle box and all the spilled lures, the yowls and imprecations undoubtedly created a strange cacophony of sound to the muskie in the water below.

I can only conclude that the fish's curiosity got the better of him. It was aroused to the point where he could not stand it any longer. He simply had to see what all that scrabbling was about.

All at once there he was, on the surface, right by the boat, by no means subdued, but looking at us with an expression of amazement as complete as a fish can possibly display.

In that moment Alex, the guide, who never for one second had lost his head, reached far out and whacked him a terrific blow over the head with a monkey wrench.

That is how I got my muskie.

He went under when Alex hit him, with a foaming dive, but a moment later was floating on top, belly up. Alex got him in the boat and finished dispatching him, for he was only stunned.

Meantime Charlie, with a knife, succeeded in cutting a considerable patch out of the seat of my trousers thus at last detaching the lure from me.

When all this was accomplished he sat back in his seat and said, "Well, I can always say I was in a boat and saw it done!"

At the moment I took this as a compliment, referring to my capture of the muskie. But at times since then I have often wondered just what he really *did* mean. Could he have been thinking of the completely idiotic nature of the entire performance? Then I reassure myself that Charlie was too kindly of nature for such a thought. Still . . . But I will never know. Charlie Kaiser is gone now, as fine a man as ever cast a lure.

The rest of the story is brief. We returned to camp with the muskie, my raincoat covering my discomfiture wrought in the seat of my pants. It was a good muskie, not a record, but satisfyingly good. I guessed its weight at fifty pounds. McKeever guessed it at ten. Let us say it was somewhere between these two estimates.

With court plaster and a new pair of pants I was able to sit with fair comfort at supper that evening, and later Charlie and I held wassail in my cabin.

That night, by a boat leaving late for Kenora, McKeever sent a telegram to Moore;

*“The weather has not improved any, and to make matters worse Wellman caught a muskie. I have just put him to bed.”*

Next morning he sent a second message:

*“He’s still talking about that damn’ fish.”*

## The McKeever

When you sit down to dinner in the lodge and Joe McKeever honours you with his presence at your table, he does not take the head. He usually places at the head someone who needs a lot of room for elbow play—as, for instance, myself.

But be under no misapprehension. To paraphrase Emerson, “Wherever The McKeever sits, *there* is the head of the table.”

In nobody’s mind is any question of this. He dominates—not by conversation, for he is inclined to be reticent and courteously watchful that his guests have their wants supplied—but by sheer force of personality, so that he is the centre of attention at that table.

I have never known anyone else like McKeever, and I doubt that there is anyone else like him. He is by accident of birth Irish, being born in Belfast—although he was brought to this north-woods country of America while very young and has spent almost all his life in it, so that he seems as much a part of it as one of its own tough pines. But he is by blood Scottish, his name originally having been spelled MacIver, until the family got tired of fighting American notions of spelling it with the pronunciation they gave it and adopted the present form. And because of this Caledonian streak in him, he makes great play of parsimoniousness and penny-pinching. But actually he is almost too generous for his own good, and honest to the point of fanaticism.

His word is rock-founded in its dependability. Yet if you wish to embark, for amusement, on a bout of tall stories with him, he will trump you every time, it being understood in the beginning that they *are* tall stories. And his yarns are so deftly constructed that it is like the pricking of a bubble when he slyly introduces the nub of an impossibility which makes his whole elaborate structure, in which you have come to believe, suddenly ridiculous.

But McKeever’s most exceptional trait is his treatment of people. To new guests, or even guests he has known for some time but with whom he has not reached a basis of friendship, he is distantly polite. But when he comes to like you he makes life miserable for you with disparagements—for he has a razor edge to his tongue—and with slights and carefully concocted practical jokes. And he cannot do enough for you, although he would not allow wild horses to drag out of him the admission that he has gone out of his way to perform for you a kindness.

The first time I saw Portage Bay, many years ago, my fishing companion was Bud.

Bud is my son, then just out of the wartime Navy, where he was a junior officer, a magnificent swimmer, cheerful and humorous, wonderful company, and good to be with in the woods. He has since acquired a wife and children and a position of responsibility, so that fishing trips of this kind are ended, for a time at least, by circumstances. But on this first summer he was with me, and it is a fine thing to have a fine son with you when you go fishing, and our anticipations were high.

McKeever greeted us, on arrival, with a Guards-on-Parade formality that sent a chill like an early frost through our bones. Very shortly thereafter I had the opportunity of seeing him set the bar of his icy and perfect civility between himself and a visitor of some wealth and importance, who sought to be jocularly patronizing toward him. I thereupon resolved to refrain from attempting any familiarity with him, mind my own business, and court no rebuffs of the same kind. Yet I liked his company and wished he would like me.

As it happened, I did better than I knew. My silence and strict attention to my own affairs made me appear to better advantage in his eyes than I dreamed.

It was on the second day—or maybe it was the third—when suddenly, out of a clear sky, he made an opprobrious remark about me. I was practising at casting from the bank near my cabin, and McKeever, passing on the path above, halted to watch me.

All at once I heard him speak.

“You handle a rod like a man trying to kill hogs,” he said.

His voice was even and expressionless.

I confess that my casting—in that day—left something to be desired, but still this seemed hardly called for. When I glanced up, however, I detected a barely perceptible twinkle in his eye, and realized all at once that this was his strange way of making a friendly overture.

So I made another cast, and this time being somewhat flustered, I failed to thumb my reel properly, with a resulting snarling of the line into a dreadful “bird’s nest.”

Without looking up at him or changing my expression, as I began trying to unravel this tangle, I said, “More like a man trying to knit a rug, don’t you

think?”

And for the first time I saw McKeever grin.

Thereafter he familiarized himself with me by frequent aspersions, and one day he said, “There’s a man you ought to meet. His name is Moore and he comes here every summer. You and he would have a lot in common. He’s no fisherman either.”

It was the first time I heard of Moore, and I sensed immediately that he must be a very fine fisherman, and also a personality of some rare and unusual vintage, to win this kind of backhanded regard from McKeever.

But meantime McKeever still had no insult for Bud. And Bud, who agreed with me on my analysis of the ambiguity of the McKeever character, felt a little hurt at being left out of this fellowship of genial acrimony.

He soon earned his spurs. That summer Aileen’s kitchen staff consisted of three Indian girls, all young and two of them passably pretty. Like youthful females of any race, they giggled much to each other and had eyes for a likely male; and Bud, who was the youngest and most personable male at camp, had perhaps received some glances from dark eyes gazing out of the kitchen into the dining-hall and had perhaps also been the subject of some of those girlish titters. Of this he was unconscious, his thoughts being in a different direction—toward a girl back home, whom he later married.

One morning he was standing on the dock with his rod, casting into the small bay for a possible bass or northern pike, when McKeever saw him. For a moment McKeever watched, then said, “Mr. Wellman, you’re putting too much arm into it. You ought to let your wrist do the work.”

It was a friendly, perfectly courteous piece of advice, and Bud offered him the rod.

“Here, won’t you show me?” he asked.

McKeever took the rod. And there and then occurred something that would not happen again in perhaps a thousand years, if he lived that long. He is a wonderfully skilled fisherman and a peerless caster, but in some manner inexplicable, as he prepared to cast, he managed to hook himself in the seat of the trousers.

The situation was absolutely ridiculous. From most people it would have brought a howl of laughter.

But Bud’s expression did not alter by so much as a flicker.

McKeever's eye was upon him, as if it would bore through him, waiting for one sign of merriment. Instead, Bud walked over, unhooked the lure and handed it to him, then went back and took his watching position, all without a single word.

McKeever sent a long, beautiful cast arching out across the water. Then, as he reeled in the lure, he said:

"Bud, stay out of the kitchen. You're causing trouble among the help. You're getting bushed."

So Bud received the McKeever brand of approval.

"Bushed," incidentally, is a word with two meanings when applied to a man. If, after struggling across the Portage with a heavy load, you sit down to catch your breath, you can say you are bushed, and the word in this sense, exhaustion, can run the gamut to complete weariness from over-exertion.

But a man who has been long in the woods, so that he begins to have an overweening craving for the fleshpots of civilization and particularly to long for feminine society, is spoken of also as being bushed. This applies usually to trappers and loggers who are sometimes months out in the forest.

Moore, however, tells a story of his earliest days at Portage Bay, when there was an ancient Ojibwa squaw, who found her way to the camp and hung about it for some time. She was, he says, a sight to make a man shiver with repugnance, being not only very old, seamed, wrinkled, and black, with two yellow tusks only in her mouth, the one in the upper jaw and the other in the lower, but she was foul and dirty in the bargain and chewed tobacco constantly, mumbling it with her all but toothless gums and expectorating it so that the brown juice ran down over her chin. A thoroughly revolting sight.

One day Moore said to McKeever, "Why do you keep that old squaw sitting around here?"

McKeever answered, "I keep her there for you. When she begins looking good to you it's time for you to go home. You're bushed."

The opposite side of the medal from her husband is Aileen McKeever. Charming, always pleasant, with a ready wit which however has no sting in it and a warm, friendly heart, we all give her fullest fealty as the queen of the camp.



Aileen is always a little apprehensive that McKeever is being too harsh with that rasp tongue of his, and frequently seeks to alleviate his sarcasms. But in this she really need have no fear. By the time one has passed the McKeever test he must have developed a hide of rhinoceroslike toughness against caustic remarks.

They are devoted to each other, and do not care who knows it, and have been since they first met, when Aileen was a youthful and very pretty schoolteacher and McKeever was a young man with as yet no thoughts of becoming proprietor of a camp.

He had grown up on the lake, hunted and fished, trapped, logged, and guided, until he knew almost every secret it held. But when Miss Aileen Hoard came to teach the school on Oak Island, just across the strait from Flag Island—the McKeever family holding—he took prompt interest of a different nature. That winter, while he was courting Aileen, he had business at a point forty miles away across the frozen lake. A dance was to be held, and McKeever, in order to have that one evening with her, drove a dog team across the snow-covered ice, running behind the sled for that forty miles, danced all night with Aileen, and then trotted back the forty miles behind the dog sled next morning, without taking out time for an hour's sleep.

Eighty miles on foot, in temperatures below zero, is a rather convincing evidence of high admiration, and a girl like Aileen would know it. They were married later that year.

They have one young son, Pat, a bright, capable lad who is looking forward to guiding as the first step in learning camp management, and who already handles a boat like a veteran.

And also a dog—always the McKeevers have a dog.

Formerly they possessed a small animal named Squilly, so rough as to his hair that it was a standing saying that he was half Scotty and half porcupine. Yet he could not have been related to the porcupines, for with them he carried on a constant feud.

Never could Squilly learn that porcupines should be left alone. Regardless of previous sad experiences, each time he saw a porcupine he would assail it with joyous barks. The porcupine would thereupon swipe him across the nose with its quill-bristling tail, Squilly would break into bloodcurdling yelps, do a constitutional three or four times around the camp as fast as his short legs could move; and there was nothing to do but catch

him and hold him down while McKeever with a pair of pliers, pulled out one by one the tormenting poisonous quills that festooned his tender snout.

Squilly died a couple of years ago, a matter of general regret, for he was—between his porcupines—a jovial little dog. His place was taken by an affectionate and playful police dog, Shaitan. Shaitan, who is a girl dog, has wisdom where Squilly had folly. One experience with a porcupine was enough to teach her the lesson. She wants, and gets, no bristles in her graceful nose.

Aileen and McKeever make an ideal team for running the kind of camp they do: when you come down to it, perhaps it is she who is the real authority in the final analysis, although she never makes it apparent.

Occasionally the fire is permitted to go out under the water-heater in the bathhouse, so that if you try to take a shower you feel something like a human icicle, since the unheated lake water is very cold. At such times McKeever may—providing you are one of his better friends—decide out of sheer perversity that it is too much trouble just then to build a fire in the water-heater. If, he indicates, you want a bath, behold the water is there, and a cold shower is proverbially “bracing and healthful.”

Here is where, if you are wise, you do not debate with McKeever. Instead, you use indirect tactics to get warm water for your shower. You drop a hint into the ear of Aileen. A firm word is spoken by her to McKeever, and your troubles are over. He marches right off and gets things going.

I would not call “The McKeever” cantankerous, although some have so described him. I would rather say that he is, in some respects, set in his ways. When he decides on a course of action, not even so awe-inspiring a force as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police can change him.

There is the celebrated “Case of the Name on the Boat.” McKeever has a cabin cruiser that makes periodic journeys to Kenora to pick up passengers and supplies for the camp. Years ago, when he first began to operate this boat, the Mounted Police notified him that he must put the name of his camp on it.

He was willing to comply, and offered the name Portage Bay Camp. But the authorities turned it down on the ground that it was similar to the name of another camp which also had the word “portage” in it. This was undoubtedly one of the worst blunders ever made by the Royal Canadian

Mounted Police. They should have waived that similarity in names, which after all was by no means exact.

McKeever simply set out to establish his rights to the name, and meantime he refused to put any name at all on his boat. Time after time the boat was stopped by police launches, with stern inquiries by immaculate Mountie officers as to why no name, as provided by regulations, was carried by the boat and warnings that the name had better be there the next time the boat came to Kenora. Each time McKeever coldly answered that whenever they got around to recognizing his camp's legitimate name, he *might* begin to consider putting some sort of a designation on the boat.

For once the Mounted Police were baffled. They recognized that he had grounds for his intransigent attitude, but they felt there should be a name on the boat, if only a temporary one, for identification. In this McKeever dissented, and a vast impasse occurred: the whole might and prestige and authority of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on the one side; on the other side—McKeever.

As in all government activities, even in Canada, there is considerable red tape involved in a matter of this kind, and it was two or three years before McKeever received official permission to use the name Portage Bay Camp on the boat.

But by that time the matter had become with him one of principle. At odds with everyone involved in it, McKeever had done some reading of the laws himself. He discovered that, lacking a name, if a boat had a number on it the requirements were fulfilled.

He bought some metal numbers and tacked them on the prow of the cruiser.

But he had discovered something else in his perusal of the statutes: the law said nothing which forbade painting over those numbers. So McKeever painted his over—the same red hue as the boat.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are considerably frustrated, but by now they have enough experience with McKeever to leave him alone. His boat remains the only one of its class on the Lake of the Woods without some visible designation.

Doc Tolle and I rather put one over on McKeever once. We had written telling him we would be in on a certain day, but we were driving and made

much better time than we expected, so that we arrived at Kenora about noon of the day before we were due.

To our delight, when we went down to the North Star Dock, where the boat from the camp always ties up, we found it there. We did not know that McKeever had sent it in that day piloted by George McPherson, an Indian, for some freight, and with orders to bring back no passengers. The reason for this was that the people have the habit of presenting themselves suddenly at Portage Bay, without reservations, demanding accommodation when he has none to give.

When Doc and I arrived, George was uptown on some errand, so we simply set our baggage aboard and took seats in the cabin, congratulating ourselves that we would not have to spend the night in a hotel.

In a few minutes George put in his appearance. When he saw us he seemed surprised. He did not know us, and he was under orders. Presently he came over and told us that we weren't supposed to be on the boat.

We replied that regardless of where we were supposed to be, the realities were that we *were* on the boat.

He seemed discontented about it. Presently he said that McKeever had told him not to bring any passengers down.

We thanked him for the information, but kept on sitting.

After a time he said that he felt it was his duty to put us off the boat.

Doc said that he believed in a man's doing his duty, and if it was a duty, it ought to be done. He then asked George what ideas he had, if any, about the best way of performing this particular duty.

George looked us over. Doc is wiry and sun-bitten, and looks competent and hard. I am—well, bulky. After some cogitation with himself George decided to make the best of it, and took us down to camp.

McKeever, who had not expected us, received us gladly. But he made the utmost of the circumstance that we had appeared ahead of our scheduled time, and was even more bristly than usual that evening.

Doc wears a moustache—a very well-groomed moustache it is, and he is quite proud of it, and it gives him a distinguished appearance. It happens to be the truth that Indian women admire a moustache, since the adornment is rather rare among their own men. McKeever had made considerable capital of this at Doc's expense the previous summer.

But that evening he discoursed largely upon a libellous piece of fiction. He said—and was willing to back it with statistics, he added—that a “large crop” of Indian babies had been born over on the reserve since Doc’s last visit to the lake; and each of the little cherubs was born “with a moustache already growing and shaped exactly like Doc’s.”

Doc could only grin feebly while McKeever went on at length, because denial would have accomplished nothing except to provided fresh fuel for the heckler.

It should not be supposed from the foregoing that McKeever spends all his time in persiflage. Far from it. During the fishing and hunting seasons he is busy with about one hundred and fifty different tasks for at least twenty of the twenty-four hours in each day. He says that he catches up on his sleep in the wintertime, but even in winter he is working for the camp, on such details, for instance, as cutting ice and storing it for the next summer season.

He is not a jack of all trades. He must be *master* of all trades. He is a fine machinist, and knows motors—outboard, marine, diesel, and all other kinds—inside and out. He has uncanny skill in improvising or even creating new parts out of materials at hand, when the necessity arises. He is a carpenter, even a cabinet-maker; and a glazier, painter, and roofer.

Sometimes a roof in a cabin springs a leak. Guests complain, but usually are rather vague about where the leak occurred. McKeever has a remedy for this. He waits until Tom Hoyne arrives. Tom is a great, roaring, humorous Irishman, well known in Chicago’s financial circles, who would share his last pint of bourbon, his last piece of bread, even his last fishing lure with you. McKeever puts Tom in the leaky cabin, and Tom knows what he is there for. When it rains, he gets out of bed and with a piece of chalk draws a circle on the roof around the leaky spot. Thereafter McKeever knows where to do his repair work. It is hardly necessary to add that in return for this Tom Hoyne receives some of McKeever’s choicest animadversions, and enjoys them.

Yet though continually are arising not only the problems mentioned, but also problems in logistics, and engineering, and personnel, and diplomacy involving guests, McKeever still finds time for practical jokes: like the time he served Moore the tea from a bourbon bottle.

It was a very cold day, rainy and windy, and Bud and I went in early to get warm, leaving Moore and Gyp, those inexorable fishermen, still trying,

out in that miserable weather.

To find our cabin warm, the fire going merrily in the stove, was pleasant. McKeever had done that for us. While we were still thawing out, he appeared at the door and said, "Come down to the kitchen. Aileen's got some hot doughnuts."

Doughnuts made by Aileen, especially when fresh and crisp and hot, are equalled by nothing, save perhaps the fabled ambrosia which the gods of Olympus enjoyed. We went right joyfully.

While we sat in the kitchen to doughnuts and coffee, and McKeever was for the nonce in high good humour and Aileen filled with laughter and pleasantness, I remarked on Moore and Gyp, how uncomfortable it was out on the rain-swept lake, and Bud offered the opinion that they would be glad to get in where it was warm and they could get a good stiff drink.

Instantly I saw a change in McKeever's face: the gleam of inspiration.

Aileen recognized it too. Although he had not said a word, she protested.

"Oh *no*, Joel!" she cried. "It's too cruel, on a day like this!"

But McKeever grinned, and got some tea and brewed it to the colour of a good brand of bourbon. Then he and Bud and I went to Moore's Inn. We filled an empty Old Yellowstone bottle half full of the insipid stuff, and it was almost startling to see how closely McKeever had matched the exact colour of the liquor in one of the full bottles.

Then we built a warm fire and waited. By the time the two wanderers came up the dripping path, the cabin was cosy and welcoming.

"Gee, fellows, this was wonderful of you," said Moore with sincere gratitude.

My heart misgave me a little, but the devil was sporting in McKeever's eye, and Bud said, "How about us all having a drink?"

"Suits me," said Moore.

Bud and I had taken the precaution of pouring ourselves already drinks of genuine bourbon. Now I took the bottle with that concoction of McKeever's in it, and with great ceremony poured out what would have amounted to stiff drinks in two tumblers, added ice and water, and presented them to the Kentuckians.

I then said, "I would like to propose a toast: to the great state of Kentucky, peerless in the gallantry of her sons and the beauty of her

daughters, and in the matchless quality of her horses and whiskey.”

I knew they could not refuse to drink to that, and Gyp at once took an eager gulp from his glass. For just an instant his eyes met mine with a little crinkle of a grin. He knew he had been “sold”—but he was not going to be the only one caught. He downed the rest of that dose like a man.

But it is, for Moore, constitutionally impossible not to return a courtesy with a courtesy. Before drinking, he proposed a toast to the state of California, from which Bud and I hail. It was a beautiful toast, far more eloquent, somewhat longer than mine, and with a triumphal oratorical flourish at the end in true Kentucky style. And with that he smilingly raised his glass to his lips and took a draught.

Next instant he had hurled the tumbler with such enraged violence that it tore a hole through the screen of the porch door, and after it spat the tea.

Then he swore at us: not with any ordinary, pedestrian curse, but with a lengthy, carefully thought out, brilliantly worded, and comprehensive curse that embraced not only ourselves and our characters, but our entire careers and our associates and relatives to the remotest ancestors. It was one of the finest single-handed exhibitions of creative profanity I have ever heard, and scorched the paint off the wall and stunned all the plants within fifty feet around. A high art—a truly high art—and I admired it then as I do now.

But Moore speedily forgave us when I hurriedly poured him a genuine drink, and we were laughing about it when we all thereafter went down to the lodge for more fresh doughnuts and coffee.

McKeever is not himself entirely immune. He does not have many sensitive spots, but there is at least one: Picture Rock.

This is a supposed portrait of an Indian chief, left by erosion and chipping and fungus growth, on the face of an island cliff in the mouth of Portage Bay. McKeever is very proud of it, and he always manages, somehow, to exhibit it to new guests as one of the wonders of the area.

He did so with Bud and me. One afternoon he got us in a boat and took us out to the island to show us Picture Rock. We went peaceably, without resistance. On the way, McKeever forsook his customary taciturnity and discoursed rather eagerly on this, his pet prodigy, and how surprised we would be when we saw the perfection of the picture made by Nature, and how people had come from the far corners of the world to view this wonder, and so on.

We listened, but we said nothing. When we reached the island, McKeever swung the boat around, to get the exact right angle on the spectacle.

“There!” he said triumphantly. “I brought you out just at this time of day, because the sun falls in such a way that it brings out the best points of the picture. There it is! See it? As perfect as if it was painted by an artist, isn’t it?”

Bud and I looked at the picture on the rock. We could make it out all right. It is of about the same level as other “natural wonders” in other places. You have to use a liberal amount of imagination and enthusiasm if you are going to enjoy it.

Eagerly McKeever awaited our verdict, and it was obvious that he expected us to cry out in glad astonishment, as no doubt many others had done when he exhibited Picture Rock to them. But Bud and I only stared at it stupidly.

At last Bud said, “Is *that* it?”

“Yes. Of course that’s it. Picture Rock! Don’t you make it out?”

Bud can look, when he chooses, more owlshly imbecile than anyone I know. He said, “Well—now wait a minute—yes—yes, I think I see what you mean—now what did you say it represented?”

“Why, an Indian chief, of course!”

“Indian chief?—what? Indian *dog*, you mean. I think I can make out a dog, if you want to stretch your imagination—has one leg lifted and no tail \_\_\_\_\_”

“Dog? What are you looking at?” screeched McKeever. “See? See right there? That’s his nose—big Roman nose—his forehead—his mouth—chin—feathers on his head——”

“Feathers?” Bud’s voice and expression had assumed the last stage of idiocy. “Did you say feathers? Let me see—oh, of course! Anybody could see it now. Some kind of a bird you said? Turkey buzzard, maybe?”

“No! An Indian chief!” McKeever was almost shrill in his frustration and exasperation. “Look there—his profile is just as plain——”

“Listen, Joe,” I interrupted. “I’m hungry.”

“But I only wanted to show you——”



“Let’s go back.”

“Don’t you see it—at *all*——?”

Bud and I turned our backs on Picture Rock with expressions as doltish as human countenances ever bore.

McKeever looked as if he had swallowed a gang of treble hooks.

He said nothing all the way back to camp. He has not mentioned the subject in all the years that have intervened since that day.

But he got a certain amount of revenge.

A few days later he sent his brother David to me with a fishing lure. It was a curious-looking thing, a dingus with a tuft of hair on the tail and treble hooks.

“New bait for wall-eyes,” David said.

“How much?” I asked.

“A dollar and a half.”

McKeever, who was looking on, spoke up. “It’s guaranteed.”

“Guaranteed to do what?” I asked suspiciously.

“Guaranteed to catch fish,” McKeever said. “Try it out. If it doesn’t catch fish, I’ll give you your money back.”

It seemed a reasonable offer. I bought the lure. In the next few days I gave it a very complete try-out, under all sorts of conditions. The fish treated it with the scorn it deserved. Never once did I get a strike on it, or even so much as cursory notice. Where the poorest of other lures took fish this furtailed wonder left them cold.

At the end of my stay at camp I took the lure to McKeever.

“I want my money back,” I said.

“Why?”

“You told me that if this lure didn’t catch fish you’d refund the purchase price.”

He grinned satirically. “There was no time-limit set,” he said.

I still have the lure. It still hasn’t caught any fish.

## Cabin Fever

In my years of visiting the Lake of the Woods, I have become acquainted with the people of the lake, and I find them as a class hospitable, hard-working, sober (within reasonable limits), and upright. There is a sprinkling of Scandinavians among them, and these are the chief commercial fishermen. There also is a goodly percentage of Scotch-Irish, French-Canadian, and English blood. And, of course, the Indians. They all get along well together in general, and in their manner of life, their hardihood, and their closeness to Nature they resemble very much the American frontiersmen of a hundred years ago.

But, as with the frontiers of the past, some less savoury characters sometimes appear among them. It is of two such that a story is told on the lake. The story took place some time ago, and the names are supplied and also some of the incidents which have been forgotten, but in its essentials this story is true.

First, there was Auguste Variot. He was an eccentric—a small, old, withered man, so bad-tempered that he got along with none of his neighbours of the French-Canadian countryside where he lived, and miserly to the point of mania.

Perhaps some of his eccentricity is attributable to the fact that he himself was not French-Canadian, although he spoke French exclusively, and lived in a part of Manitoba settled almost entirely by French-Canadians. Old Auguste was an immigrant from France, a peasant direct from the Old Country, and he liked neither the New Country, nor its people, nor its ways.

At the very beginning he was cheated by a sharper who sold him a small farm. The farm was stony, and barren, and brush-grown, and nobody but a French peasant, accustomed to small acres and infinite toil, could have made even a bare living from it. But this Auguste did. From the first grey light of dawn to the full coming of night he could be seen labouring on his few acres, clearing from them the brush foot by foot, hauling away stones and stumps and boulders, fertilizing them, and gradually making them prosper.

The secret of this prospering was his Old Country method of fertilizing. People said that Auguste thought more of the manure pile behind his barn than he did of the house in which he lived. And there was some truth in this, for he regarded the manure as French peasants do. It was a source of wealth

to him, and the larger this heap of it grew, the more acres he could bring into production.

His house, on the other hand, was nothing to take pride in. It was a mere shanty, where he lived alone and cooked his own frugal meals. He disliked and distrusted people, so that he never visited anybody, nor did anybody visit him. His parsimony, however, everyone knew, and also his cantankerousness; and his peasant love for his manure pile was a joke in the countryside.

Then came a day when Auguste Variot was no longer seen clearing and tilling his acres. At first there was little comment about this. He would have said goodbye to nobody if he decided to go away for a time, so his absence was not noted at the beginning. Then somebody, passing his place, saw that the half-dozen cows in his pasture were standing by the barn, lowing in discomfort. They had not been milked for days, and their badly distended udders were caked and needed attention.

At that some of the neighbours ventured to investigate. The place was deserted. Although the door of the shanty was closed, it was not locked. The interior appeared undisturbed, the bed made, and the dishes of the last meal washed. Though it was widely rumoured that the miser had money hidden in his house because he did not trust any bank, no money was found. The barn was empty. A few chickens scratched about, and in the small pasture through which a little creek meandered were two old horses, the cows, and a few sheep.

The authorities at Winnipeg were notified, and an official investigation made. At the end of it the officials said that they had made no progress. Auguste Variot had simply vanished. No evidence of violence were found, and no trace of a body could be discovered, although every conceivable spot where a corpse could be buried or hidden was investigated and the small creek dragged, wherever it was deep enough to cover a man. With no proof of his death there was no reason for further official investigation. The authorities returned to Winnipeg.

It was suggested that in his eccentricity Auguste might have taken his money and gone away somewhere, for a reason known only to himself. But the old man's peasant nature was too well known, and neighbours thought it unlikely that, thrifty as he was, he would ever leave his cows so untended. So many believed that Auguste Variot had been murdered and robbed.

In the neighbourhood, where suspicion remained, it centred on one Pierre Le Garce, a ne'er-do-well with a shady reputation. Le Garce was a

man of herculean strength, but lazy and dissolute. He had inherited a good farm, but was too indolent to work it. Instead, he sold it and squandered the money on liquor and gambling. He was drunk much of the time, and when he was drunk he was offensive and dangerous. People did not love him, but there was no evidence of any kind to link him with the disappearance of the old Frenchman, and indeed no evidence that anything had happened to the Frenchman at all. When, shortly afterwards, Le Garce disappeared from the neighbourhood, the talk died down and the matter at last was practically forgotten.

In the wintertime the Lake of the Woods becomes bitter and hostile, an aspect quite different from the welcoming beauty of its blue waters and green forests in the summer. Then come the great snows, and the wolves howl across the frozen bays, and eerie northern lights swish and crackle over the night skies. Then comes, too, the iron cold, freezing solid the entire surface of the lake.

Just before winter, each fall, when the tourists and fishermen and deer hunters all have departed, the few hardy folk who form the permanent residential population of the lake close their summer guest-camps and other enterprises and retreat to their winter dwellings. This is the time for visiting, and resting, and catching up on sleep lost during the summer, and counting the season's profits, and plotting how to mulct the next year's crop of summer visitors of a few more dollars. It also is the time for merrymaking, and social affairs, and perhaps courtships among the young folks, and the renewing of old friendships.

Because of these things most of the people of the lake live in fair proximity to neighbours in the winter. Thus you find, here and there, permanent little settlements, like the collection of cabins and the lodge on Flag Island, ten miles south of Portage Bay, where gathers the Clan McKeever—twenty-two strong, including wives and children—in the cold months; and that other group of dwellings on Oak Island, across a half-mile wide channel from Flag, where also are a store, a post office, a United States Customs office, and a marine radio station. Such gregariousness is good practice, not only for fellowship in the long winter months, but also in case of emergency, such as sickness or accident.

But there is an even stronger reason for it, and this is known as “cabin fever.”

When only two persons are holed up in a cabin for months, never seeing anyone else, dangerous emotional tensions are apt to build, and it is to these that the term applies. However friendly two men may be at the start, they discover under such pent conditions faults in one another: faults which in the end become magnified until they seem unbearable. These are little things, usually, like small peculiarities or personal habits that would never be noticed ordinarily, but which now are twisted and imagined into causes for detestation out of all proportion to their real importance.

It may be the way the other fellow eats with his knife, showing he is a boor; on the other hand, the way he eats with his fork, eschewing the knife for conveying the food to his mouth, showing he is a prig and above ordinary folks and their practices. The fact that he snores, disturbing your sleep, may grow unbearable; or that he does not snore, depriving you of the companionable sound of a person snoring in the long winter nights. The way he belches after eating may make you hate him, as an indication that he swallowed his food in unmannerly greed and haste; or does not belch, perhaps he did not like the food, probably considering it not good enough for him. Small things like that.

Cabin fever, after a few months, can make deadly enemies out of once sworn friends. It even develops at times into outright madness, and murders have been committed simply because of the monotony of two men who saw each other and nobody else.

This, therefore, is another reason why people in the snow lands seek the vicinity of other dwellings when they erect houses or cabins for the winters, because the best antidote for cabin fever is the seeing of new faces and hearing new voices once in a while.

Nevertheless, there are a few lonely winter cabins, far isolated from other human habitations, in the Lake of the Woods country. These are the living quarters of trappers. Most trappers, particularly on the Canadian side, are Indians, because it is Government policy to give trapping rights to the Indians. But on the States side there are a few white trappers, and they always work in pairs, partnership being necessary in running trap-lines, for obvious reasons.

Some of these white trappers are intelligent, hard-working and law-abiding. But others are "drifters." They have not taken up trapping because it appealed to them, but for various other reasons. Some are half crazy. Some are fugitives from justice, for there is no better way to drop completely out of sight than to disappear into the winter, stormbound forests of the North.

The people of the lake customarily do not press strangers with questions. This is not because they would knowingly abet a law-breaker, but it is frontier tradition to accept a man at face value until proved otherwise, and besides they are somewhat reticent about even themselves from life habit. So unless a stranger volunteers information about himself he is not asked for it, except perhaps for a name—any name—by which he may be called. Yet this tact does not prevent private speculation concerning persons who appear, are oversecretive concerning themselves, and then disappear.

Towards the end of that November, two trappers came to the McKeever lodge on Flag Island. They said they wished to buy any canned goods left over from the tourist season that the McKeevers could spare. In this case it was the elder McKeevers, parents of Joe McKeever of Portage Bay, who then operated and still operate Flag Island lodge, to whom they addressed their request.

Neither of the men talked much. One was big, broad-shouldered, with a brutal face and a great black beard, filthy in both speech and person, who spoke with a French-Canadian accent. When asked what they might call him, he said *Le Noir*, and everyone understood this was not his true name, but a sobriquet he had assumed because of his black beard and dark complexion. He did the bargaining, what there was of it.

The other was of considerably less stature, with a lean frame and thin visage, his eyes of such pale blue that they seemed almost colourless, and sandy whiskers sprouting untidily on his jowl. He said nothing whatever, looked nobody straight in the eye, and stood aside by himself as if anxious that no one should pay any particular attention to him. He, too, was dirty, and he volunteered no name at all.

Flag Island sold them some canned goods, gave them a meal, and was glad to see them go. It was divined they were bad, very likely hiding from the law. Some speculated on which was the worst of the two. The bigger was an overbearing bully; that was clear. But there was something so sinister about the other that not a few persons believed he was the more dangerous of the pair, probably wanted very badly somewhere for some atrocious crime. They were devils, clearly, both of them, and that they might murder somebody, or each other, before the winter was over seemed not unlikely.

*Le Noir* had mentioned vaguely that their cabin was in the North-west Angle. Now, the North-west Angle in itself is a geographical anachronism—more than one hundred square miles of trackless forest and swamp under the

jurisdiction of the United States, though it is far north of the international boundary line. It is a freak, the northernmost bit of land of the United States proper, cut off from Minnesota, to which it technically belongs, by the Lake of the Woods, and entirely surrounded by Canadian territory. An error in surveying a boundary commission early in history, based on a misconception that the headwaters of the Mississippi lay west of the Lake of the Woods, is responsible for the North-west Angle, and because of its isolation almost nobody ever thinks of it or pays any attention to it.

Somewhere in this wilderness Le Noir and his partner had built a wretched hovel of logs chinked with moss and mud, with two bunks, a fireplace, a couple of stools, a rough table, and a lean-to behind for storage. It had no window and its roof of rammed clay was too low for a man to stand erect under it and leaked villainously in wet weather. From the first it stank, and the stench of it grew nastier and more offensive with the months as the men lived in it, what with the fleshing of furs and hides, the musk of animals trapped, the rancid smell of cookery, the unwashed tin dishes and pots from which they ate, the bad tobacco they smoked and their own unbathed bodies in a place never aired out.

Nobody visited their cabin. For one thing, it was remote and none knew its exact location. For another, the people of Flag and Oak Islands wanted nothing to do with men upon whose malignity and depravity all were agreed.

Yet twice that winter, after the first visit to Flag in November, the pair came to the island settlements.

The first time was late in December, after the big freeze-up of the lake, when a deep snow had fallen. With his great black beard whitened with frost and ice from his breathing, Le Noir appeared at Oak, dragging a crude sledge on which half lay, half sat his companion of the sandy whiskers and pale eyes. The latter had a leg badly bruised, lacerated and swollen, and some frostbites, and they sought the services of a doctor.

Their story was that the injured man had stepped into a wolf trap—not a trap set by either of the partners, it was emphasized, but one that must have been set the season before and forgotten by the trapper who set it, being left to lie open, always a very dangerous thing, particularly after the snows have come in the winter woods.

A wolf trap is of heavy steel, with springs of one hundred pounds power. It is set with a clamp which has a single screw mechanism, together with a

small auxiliary clamp for holding down the spring already bent, while the other is being compressed to open the jaws.

The wonder was that when the trapper stepped in this one it did not break his leg. As it was, since he was not trapping for wolves, he had no suitable clamp with him and was forced to drag the heavy trap in anguish for a considerable distance, nearly freezing before he reached the cabin. Because his leg looked so bad, Le Noir brought him to Oak Island.

There he was treated for lacerations and torn ligaments of his leg, and for frostbite. During this treatment he said that his name was Bob Bolt, but gave no other information. He seemed more taciturn than there was any reason for being, and secretive beyond necessity.

Meantime, Le Noir obtained some whiskey and got himself drunk. In this state he made himself a terror in the settlement, kicking and cuffing other persons out his way, bullying and threatening, and talking loudly and profanely.

In his drunkenness he let drop a hint that no great love existed between himself and his partner. And when asked why, if he disliked the man, he took the trouble to bring him to the settlement for help, his reply was remembered:

“To trap ees needed two man. As for heem—he ees a devil, but so am I. Which ees biggest devil? That weel time only show!”

As soon as Bolt could hobble about the two returned to their distant cabin, the injured man as before riding the sled. Back in their quarters, Bolt hung the wolf trap on a peg outside the cabin’s door. He said he put it there to remind him to watch where he stepped next time.

It was in February, on a bright, cold winter day, when the lake lay a level expanse of snow-covered ice and people remained indoors as much as possible, that the two people returned again to Oak Island. This time they came for bacon and flour. And this time their enmity was clearly evident, for they hardly spoke to each other, and when they looked at one another it was as Le Noir said—like two devils.

Yet on this visit a strange thing happened.

Both took to drinking heavily, as if at a challenge, rather than to assuage a long thirst. In this drinking Le Noir speedily became drunk, as he always



did; but his companion, though he matched him drink for drink, seemed of ice, so that the liquor had little visible effect on him.

To lose this contest, if contest it was, appeared to be an affront to Le Noir. The black-bearded giant grew ugly over the fact that he staggered and lurched and babbled, while his smaller partner stood erect, as if coldly contemptuous, and said no more than usual: which was exactly nothing.

Suddenly, in the frosty air on the dock in front of the store, rose loud shouts. Le Noir stood cursing and threatening Bolt, who answered his curses with a vicious glint of the eye and a lift of the lip showing the teeth in a wolf snarl, but did not speak.

The first blow was Le Noir's. Quite a few onlookers had gathered in spite of the cold, drawn by the preliminary shouting and cursing, and they witnessed the fight that followed.

Le Noir was four inches taller than the other man, and fifty pounds heavier, a big, bristling brute. Physically, Bolt was no match for him. On the dock by the store the onlookers watched the giant give the slighter man a terrible beating.

Again and again Le Noir sent his antagonist down with crushing blows of his huge fists. Each time, teeth bared and hate gleaming in his pallid eyes, the other rose and hurled himself at his opponent.

Once, diving under the big man's arms, he threw him heavily on the dock, and the watchers, with a thrill of horror, saw that he seemed to be trying to sink his teeth, like a wild beast, into the other's hairy throat.

But Le Noir threw him off. They struggled to their feet. A moment later with a sickening smash—foul, below the belt—followed by a crashing right to the jaw, he stretched Bolt senseless on the dock.

For a moment the black-bearded brute swung his head around his eyes glittering savagely, as if seeking a club. Finding none, he cursed and kicked his fallen opponent and made as if to jump on him with both feet, to trample him to death.

But at this the bystanders interfered. They pulled Le Noir off, and by sheer numbers bore him, roaring and bellowing, to the floor of the dock. Well weary were they of him, his bullying and his noise, the way he terrorized the settlement, the damage he did, and his evident murderous intent. Their determination was expressed in their cries:

“Get a rope!”

“Lock him up!”

“Go tell the radio station to call Warroad for the authorities!”

“We’ve got plenty on him to send him to jail for assault and destruction of property—and if he isn’t wanted for something worse, there aren’t any trees in the woods!”

Meantime, the sandy-bearded Bolt recovered consciousness. Bruised and sick with the low blow, he staggered to his feet and stood for a moment swaying, as if trying to clear his head.

Then he saw Le Noir held down by half a dozen men while someone ran to the store for a rope to bind him.

Throughout the brutal fight, though many had looked for knife play, no blade had been drawn. But now, of a sudden, a naked hunting knife glittered in Bolt’s hand, and in his colourless eyes was a look so ominous that it sent a chill down men’s spines.

“Let him up!” he said.

The knife and eyes spoke a message understood by everyone. Courage is not lacking in the lake people, but after all this was really not their quarrel; it was not worth getting hurt over. Nobody interfered as the ill-omened and ill-assorted pair backed away and soon departed across the ice of the lake towards their distant retreat on Angle Inlet. They were not seen again at either Flag or Oak Islands, and men wondered that Bolt, after the beating he had taken, would go to Le Noir’s rescue in so inexplicable a manner.

It was not until after the spring break-up of the ice, the following May, that the sequel became known by word brought down from Kenora.

Cabin fever did its work.

In March, Le Noir and Bolt, who had resumed their trapping partnership after the fight as if each had agreed to forget the incident entirely, took an inventory of their fur catch. When they completed the count it was evident to them that the season’s trapping had results disappointingly small. Beaver were few and had to be tagged and sold on allotment; muskrats and mink, the staples of trapping, were that year surprisingly scarce, at least in the Angle. They did not have furs enough to make their winter’s work worth while as partners.

It was then that Le Noir said they would have to try something else.

“What?” asked Bolt.

“Evair hear of Injun wheesky?”

Bolt did not reply, so Le Noir elaborated. He gave a recipe for “Injun whiskey,” which he said was both cheap and easy to make:

Take a barrel of lake water, add three plugs of chewing tobacco and five bars of soap, stir half a pound of red pepper into the mixture, throw in some dead leaves, and boil it until the liquid turns brown. Then add two gallons of alcohol and two ounces of strychnine, stir it thoroughly, and bottle it.

The strychnine, he explained, gives a stimulating quality which makes up for the small amount of alcohol used. The soap gives “bead” and the red pepper “bite.” The tobacco produces nausea—no Indian, Le Noir said, thought he was really drinking whiskey unless he got as sick as a dog. After a few drinks of the stuff, he went on, you could prop Indians up in the corner as if they were paralysed, unable to close their eyes. He said that in the winter, when they could get nothing else, some Indians would trade a bundle of furs worth fifty dollars for a bottle of that concoction.

“Any of ’em die from it?” Bolt asked indifferently.

“Oh, a few, mebbe. Who knows? Who cares?”

“Where would you sell it?”

“A lot of reserves—Leetle Travairse, an’ Neingoshing, an’ Obabikon, an’ Beeg Islan’—an’ mebbe Injun Bay——”

“They’re all on the Canadian side,” Bolt objected.

“I mak’ the booze—you sell heem.”

“And get the Mounties after me? Why ask *me* to run all the risks?”

“Because I do not set foot een Canada.”

“Bootlegging!” Bolt looked at Le Noir as if it amused him. “So that’s why you’re hiding out—*bootlegging!*” He put a quality of contempt in his voice. “That’s petty larceny, my friend. It wouldn’t bother me a minute, if that was all *I* had to think about.”

The look of amusement angered Le Noir, and his vanity was affronted by the belittling of his own suggested criminality and the other’s hint of greater law-breaking.

“An’ what they want *you* for?” he challenged.

“Never mind.”

“Murder? Ha!”

Bolt looked him in the eye. “A bank job.”

It was Le Noir’s turn to be amused, contemptuous. “An’ you theenk you ’ave done beeg theeng compared with *me*!”

In his scorn he laughed.

But when Bolt flatly refused to run the risks of bootlegging on the Indian reserves unless Le Noir took equal risks, a new quarrel arose between them; and with it an increase of enmity and also of suspicion and distrust.

Yet the real crisis, which came a few days later, might not have come, had it not been for cabin fever. It arose out of a habit of Bolt’s, a habit he had of whistling through his teeth when he was at work on anything, fleshing furs, or cleaning traps, or whatever it was.

Bolt was not a musical whistler. And he had but one tune—or, rather, only part of one tune.

He whistled an old childish song, “Ten Little Indians.” More specifically, he whistled the first few bars of “Ten Little Indians.”

He would begin it, and Le Noir would mentally fit the words to it, with exasperation:

*One little, two little, three little Indians——*

And that was it. At first Le Noir would wait expectantly for Bolt to complete the count of the little Indians. But Bolt never did so. Never four little, five little, six little Indians. Certainly never the full ten little Indians which the song provided.

Bolt would not go on with the tune. He would stop at that point, and in a minute or so he would begin it all over again, at the first little Indian. This he repeated with endless monotony: just the beginning snatch of the song, his attention fixed on what ever he was doing, unconsciously whistling it through his teeth.

As for Le Noir, it became so that he almost winced visibly when he heard that refrain. He grew to feel defrauded by it. An obsession developed in him: he was entitled to ten little Indians if Bolt whistled that song, and it was with secretly growing hatred that he heard the refrain always cut short maddeningly, hatred that built up pressure within him, until at last it erupted.

Bolt had just come in from one of the trap-lines. He had killed a deer, for they were in need of fresh meat, and brought in the hind quarters, which he hung, as they always did, from a high limb of a spruce tree which stood alone in the middle of the small clearing before the cabin. The meat was drawn up by a rope out of reach of predators to cool and keep fresh by freezing, and to make it additionally safe they had cut away all branches below the limb, ten feet above the ground, where they hung their game when they killed it.

Entering the cabin, Bolt saw that Le Noir already was there. He set his rifle in a corner, mentioned the venison he had brought in, and sat down to work on some muskrat skins that were to be stretched.

As he worked he whistled, as usual through his teeth.

*“One little, two little, three little Indians——”*

All at once he ceased whistling. Behind him he had heard a click.

Just a little click, but he recognized it. The click of a rifle hammer being raised.

He did not look around. He sat perfectly still where he was, the limp fur on which he had been working in his hands. He could hear the rustling of flames in the fireplace, and he could hear Le Noir’s heavy breathing, but they were the only sounds. He did not turn his head, but he knew the rifle was levelled at his back.

After a moment he said, “What are you going to do?”

“I am goin’ to keel you,” said Le Noir.

He said it without passion or bluster. So quietly did he say it that it was not a threat; it was evident his mind was made up.

Still Bolt did not stir. “Why?” he asked.

But without asking he knew. Cabin fever had set in.

Le Noir did not reply. Bolt sat rigid, expecting each instant to hear the report, feel the bullet crash into his body.

But his voice was calm when he spoke again:

“What will you do with me when you kill me?”

“In the lake the feesh weel eat you.”

“There’ll be an investigation. You can’t get away with it.”

“Can’t, hah? I weel say you leave—fed-up—I don’t know where you go.”

“You think they’ll believe it that easy? Oh no, Le Noir, They’ll hold you and go to the bottom of your record. That bootlegging charge—there’s extradition to Canada, you know.”

Le Noir considered. His hate had not abated, but Bolt knew from the fact that he had not yet pulled the trigger that his mind was beginning to work. When the mind of a man like Le Noir is working, sudden violence from him grows less likely, though calculated violence may not be. Bolt was still in deadly peril.

“I don’t think either of us want to talk to the law,” he said, in the calm, matter-of-fact tone he had used from the first.

Le Noir, for all his deadly mood, realized that he himself had the most urgent reasons for desiring that no authorities on either side of the border investigate him. But he remained grimly silent.

“I’ll tell you a better way,” said Bolt, still not stirring or glancing back. “You’re sick of me—maybe it works both ways. Killing me would only get you in worse a jam than you’re in. You can get rid of me this way: I’ll just step out—leave.”

He waited for Le Noir to speak, but the man who stood behind him with the levelled gun only grunted. Bolt knew Le Noir. He knew that Le Noir had not yet decided against pulling that trigger and sending the bullet into him. In some manner he must help Le Noir arrive at the decision not to pull the trigger. So he said:

“You can keep the cabin and trap-lines for yourself.” Then he added quickly, “Of course I’ll want my half of the furs and the traps.”

It sounded as if he were overconfident, as if he already were taking it for granted that Le Noir would not kill him. Yet actually Bolt was playing a desperate game, and his seeming anxiety to bargain for his share was a cunning move in it.

He was, without seeming to do so, offering Le Noir a way out of his indecision as to whether or not he should press the trigger of the rifle. He was showing Le Noir a way to save face, to feel triumphant, to justify himself, and at the same time avoid the danger, which was manifest, in which the outright murder of Bolt might involve him.

Again Le Noir grunted. He was considering all sides of the matter. And he came to the conclusion that his mind could be easy on at least one point: if he let Bolt go, assuredly Bolt would be talking to no one connected with the law. Not with that bank job hanging over his head. In so far as Bolt was concerned, Le Noir could feel safe in that respect.

At the same time greed took possession of him, and with it the desire to humiliate Bolt, to show him how powerless and futile he was. So Le Noir rose to the bait which Bolt so cunningly had dangled.

“*Bien*,” he said. “I let you go. Get out! But the furs—they stay weeth me!”

Now, for the first time Bolt looked at him. Le Noir still stood with the levelled rifle in his hands, the hammer raised.

Bolt’s voice took on a note of pleading, as if the furs were precious to him.

“You wouldn’t job me out of my whole winter’s work——”

Hearing the pleading tone, Le Noir knew he had Bolt cowed at last. And at last he could laugh.

“Bah!” he said. “You wan beeg fool, Bolt! You want I should keep the furs—or seenk you in the lake for the feeshes to eat—wheech?” He laughed again, with a growing relish of triumph. “You wan beeg fool—mak’ me theenk of another beeg fool wance I know. *He* like hees manure pile more than hees life!”

Bolt had no choice.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll go. The furs are yours——”

“An’ your gun you weel leave.”

Bolt hesitated, then nodded.

“An’ your traps.”

Bolt bowed his head. He was stripped of all his possessions, set out with nothing to show for his winter’s toil, not even what he had brought into the partnership.

Le Noir chuckled. One thing was sure. They had settled at last the question of which of them was the biggest devil. And he, Le Noir, had emerged the top devil.

As his former partner, weaponless, unless a hunting knife is a weapon, opened the door, stepped out, and closed it after him, Le Noir laughed long and uproariously.

When, a few minutes later, he looked out of the cabin, he saw the footprints of the man he had driven away leading off into the forest in the direction of the island settlements. It was the final proof that Bolt had surrendered unconditionally. Le Noir experienced an agreeable access of self-confidence, for somehow he had not expected Bolt to surrender quite so easily. His good humour returned, what with his laughing at Bolt and his realization that with Bolt gone the store of furs they had gathered would pay him a handsome winter's profit.

That night a light snow fell. When Le Noir awoke in the morning and looked out, a new, pure, soft whiteness lay over everything. He thought to himself that this would be a good day to run the trap-lines, inasmuch as the new snow would reveal fresh tracks and make hunting easy.

With that he considered breakfast. The hindquarters of Bolt's deer hung from the high branch of the spruce. The night had not been cold enough to freeze the venison very hard, so he took his hunting knife and went out to cut off a piece of it for the frying-pan.

He had no thought of danger until, as he reached the place where the lower end of the rope holding the meat was tied to a short stub of the spruce trunk, he stepped on an unsullied surface of new snow.

Then he felt the sudden leap and the numbing pain of steel jaws clamping on his leg.

Gripping his leg and the trap, he fell to the snow. It was a wolf trap. He gave a quick glance, almost fearfully, back toward the cabin and the place where the wolf trap that had caught Bolt the previous February always hung from its peg. The peg was empty.

Now complete comprehension was in Le Noir's face. This time the trap had been lying beneath the new snow, its jaws outspread waiting for him, by no accident. Why had he not noticed that it was gone when he came out of the door? Why had he laughed like a fool, so long and uproariously, at Bolt's departure the previous day that he did not hear the perhaps small clinking sound when the trap chain was lifted from the peg? Why had he slept so soundly that he did not even suspect Bolt's stealthy return after the snow began to fall last night? Why, above all, had he taken Bolt so lightly, assuming the man would leave him alone without any effort at a reprisal?



At the thought of Bolt he suddenly looked all about him, keenly and carefully. No living thing was visible in the forest. Not even an overnight track marred the pure whiteness of the fresh snow.

Le Noir got to his feet, cursing with pain and rage, and examined the fastening of the trap. When he pulled the chain from the snow he discovered that it was looped around the bole of the spruce and fastened with a heavy padlock.

Now the full gravity of his situation came over him. Again he cursed. Why had he not brought his rifle with him from the cabin? A bullet from it would have smashed that padlock.

But how could a man be expected to carry a rifle when he was only going out to cut a piece of venison? Bolt, evidently, had thought of everything.

Not thirty feet away from him was his cabin, with warmth and shelter. But he was chained outside, and unless he could free himself, he would starve to death here, or freeze in the cold, which was more likely.

His knife was all he had, and it could do nothing against the chain or the lock. The tree was too large to be whittled through, and no branches were within reach, all having been shorn off clean to a height of ten feet.

He gazed down at the tormenting trap. Placing his free foot on one spring, he was able to bend it down with his weight, but the other spring remained to hold the jaws inexorably closed, however he wrenched at it with his hands. The trap hung on his leg, heavy, cold, strong, immovable.

A few feet away from the spruce was a birch sapling about three inches through at the base of its smooth bole. He estimated that sapling. If he could get it, perhaps he might in some manner use it as a lever, prying down with it one spring of the trap, while with the weight of his free foot he opened the other.

It was maddening when he found that the chain which shackled him to the tree prevented him from reaching the sapling in a standing position.

But he must get the sapling. It occurred to him that if he stretched himself flat on the snow he could just reach it with his hunting knife, to hack it down.

After looking warily around again, as if he feared his enemy might be near, he lay down and extended himself on the snow at the fullest limit of the trap and chain, and there found that he could reach the sapling only with

the end of his blade, so that the cutting of it presented a further problem because of the lack of cutting edge and pressure he could apply.

Nevertheless he went at it patiently, chip by chip, and after a considerable time he saw the sapling weakening. A push would send it over, but he did not want to push it for it would fall in the wrong direction.

Now he began to realize that this presented a new danger, and again he gave vent to curses of sheer frenzy. Then, lying for a while at full length and panting with his own fury, he grew more calm and studied the three-inch thickness of the sapling.

Belatedly, now, he tried to use his knowledge of tree-cutting to bring the sapling in his direction. An expert axe-man, in felling a tree, chops what is known as a butt-kerf—a deep notch through the trunk, flat on the bottom and angling downwards from the upper side. Weight of the trunk causes it to collapse on this deep butt-kerf, and it comes crashing down in the desired direction.

In miniature Le Noir attempted a butt-kerf on the sapling with his knife. He became obsessed with it, and he alternately cursed and prayed, as he chipped at the small bole, using all his cunning. At last he forgot everything else, turned his full attention to the task on which he was concentrated.

But luck was not with him in spite of his praying and his effort. Already he had weakened the little trunk with his previous unthought-out whittling. It began to bend. Instead of falling toward him, it swung around and fell directly away from him.

For a moment Le Noir lay perfectly still, his head in his arms, an attitude of absolute despair. One thought, like a heavy refrain, beat through his mind. He had called himself the biggest devil. But Bolt, the fiendish all-calculating, merciless Bolt, was the biggest devil after all.

At last he raised his head from his arms. When he did so he gave a start as his heart leaped with surprise and fear.

How long Bolt had been standing there he had no idea. He had not heard him on the soft snow, because of the noise he himself was making with his curses and his prayers, and because of his utter obsession over the problem of felling the sapling, and its failure.

But there stood Bolt looking down at him.

He spoke: "Get up."

After a moment Le Noir thrust himself to a standing position, panting and bristling like a wild beast, the trap still clamped on his leg.

“Throw away your knife,” Bolt said.

He dodged aside just in time. Hurling by Le Noir with all his hate, the knife sang past and struck point first, quivering with the force of its flight, in the cabin logs behind.

Bolt’s face did not change, nor did his colourless eyes. He stepped into the cabin and came out with the rifle he had left there the day before.

“I can wait,” he said. “You can’t. Do you want to freeze to death tonight, or will you be sensible?”

Le Noir’s great bearded head sagged. “What do you want with me?” he asked, his spirit broken at last.

This time it was Bolt who drew the sledge and Le Noir who rode upon it. And this time, surprisingly, it was into Canada that they went, crossing the international line west of Buckete Island, and heading north at a crawling pace across the ice toward Kenora, the nearest Ontario town.

When, next day, they reached Kenora, they went direct to the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. At that place, surprised members of the famed body greeted Bolt as if he had returned from the dead, save they addressed him as Sergeant Robert Bolton and made clear their respect for him as one of the ablest of the force’s investigators.

Le Noir, who had worn handcuffs throughout his ride north on the sledge, was treated by a police surgeon for his injuries, after which he was placed in confinement. But he was booked under his true name, Pierre Le Garce, and the charge against him was the murder of Auguste Variot.

Now a number of questions were answered.

The sudden dropping of the investigation by the authorities after the disappearance of old Variot was not from lack of interest. It was at the request of the Mounted Police, who had entered the case and who desired that the hue and cry die down so that the guilty man would not be unduly alarmed and placed on his guard.

Shortly after that Sergeant Bolton dropped out of sight. The Bob Bolt who turned up in the Angle, dirty, unshaved, shifty-eyed, would have been hard to identify with the spruce sergeant. From the first he had believed Le

Garce was the murderer, and he encountered the giant as if by accident, convinced him he was a “drifter” seeking a hiding-place, and went into the trapping partnership with him.

All that winter Sergeant Bolton lived in filth and squalor terribly repugnant to a man who prided himself on his cleanliness and military neatness. And he gave those months of existence with a human beast for one thing: a missing piece of a puzzle.

That missing piece was supplied at last by Le Noir—or rather Le Garce. It came the day when cabin fever exploded emotions in the trapper’s hut, and the black beard was going to murder him for his whistling. During that deadly colloquy Le Garce referred to a fool who thought more of his manure pile than of his life.

*The manure pile!* Behind Variot’s barn. The one place where nobody had thought to look!

With that missing piece of the puzzle, and with Le Garce in prison, Bolton directed a new search on the Variot farm. Under the manure pile was discovered, as he now fully expected, the grave in which the old French farmer was buried.

But something else was found. Le Garce was not the only one who thought of the manure pile as a place least likely to be searched, and at least one reason for old Auguste’s devotion to it was made clear.

When Le Garce was told that his victim had been discovered he made a full confession. He said he went to Variot’s place to rob the old man. Because Variot resisted, he strangled him. Then, looking around for a place to conceal the body, he hit on the idea of burying it beneath the manure pile, sure that nobody would think to look there.

But in one thing he was disappointed. He found no money in the old man’s house.

“Mebbe that manure pile was all he had after all,” said Le Garce.

Sergeant Bolton had discovered differently. In probing various places in the manure pile, workers excavating for Variot’s body found a heavy metal box, locked and wrapped in an old rubber coat. When opened it was found to contain nearly a thousand dollars in coins and bills—the old man’s life savings—and a will, naming as heirs to his property some relatives living in France. By sheer irony, when Le Garce dug the grave beneath the manure pile, he failed by not more than a few inches to overturn a part of it which concealed the box of money.

Another thing was explained: Bolton's surprising rescue of Le Garce from the crowd on Oak Island, the day of the fight. Though badly beaten, the sergeant recovered his senses in time to see that his trapping partner was about to be locked up in the United States. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have a corps pride and a corps tradition in "always getting their man." Le Garce was Bolton's man, and it was no part of the sergeant's wish or plan that the United States or anyone else have him. Besides, he had not yet got the final elusive piece in the puzzle.

The whistling? Sergeant Bolton knew human psychology, and his "Ten Little Indians," purposely cut short and repeated unmusically and continuously, was a deliberate scheme to bring about an explosion, with disclosures perhaps as a reward. The manner of the explosion, however—the click of a rifle hammer instead of yells and threats and abuse—was hardly planned and certainly perilous in a most undesired manner when it occurred. Only his trained self-control saved him from some unconsidered action that might have been fatal, and his understanding of his man, after a winter of closest study of him, enabled him to talk him out of the murder.

The rest was simple. He knew Le Garce's habits, and once he had the wolf trap it was easy to predict where the black beard's foot would fall when he went to lower the meat from the spruce bough. Of course, the snowfall that night was a break, but snowfalls were frequent at that season and if it had not occurred that night it probably would have happened the next.

Le Garce died on the gallows in Manitoba, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police closed their records on another somewhat unusual case.

## Miss Cricket's Wall-eye

When our two boats pulled up at the dock that night, the first thing we heard was a shrill whinny of female laughter from some cabins over beyond the lodge.

We gave each other one awful glance—Clayton Moore, Gyp Blair, Doc Tolle, and I—then silently hiked with our tackle boxes and rods along the path through the trees to our own diggings, which were at the more remote end of the camp.

“Give me a drink,” said Gyp in the tones of tragedy with which an ancient Greek might have asked the executioner to pass the hemlock.

In perfect silence Doc reached for a bottle of Kentucky mountain dew and poured us all stiff beakers. In the same silence we drank.

It was Moore, the Sage of Portage Bay, who spoke at last.

“I don’t say that woman doesn’t have her place in the world,” he said bitterly and with the air of one who has been following a train of thought. “But I have always felt that place was in the home, and not in a fishing camp.”

“Woman,” added Doc with feeling, “is a civilizing, a refining, even an ennobling influence. But there are times when a man wishes to escape from civilization, refinement, and nobility.”

A light breeze ruffled the pines, the last rays of the westering sun lit the little dancing waves of the Estuary with ten thousand sapphire jewel flashes, white-throated sparrows trilled their evening hymns, we had come in from the lake with stringers well-filled, the bourbon we rolled on our tongues was of the best. Certainly all the ingredients were present for contentment and peace. But we were not contented or peaceful.

Aside from the best strategic location in the whole Lake of the Woods region, Portage Bay Camp has many other things to recommend it. One of these is that usually it is a sort of haven, being sufficiently remote from tiled powder-rooms and beauty parlours, to discourage the fairer, better sex from coming to it. A man can go villainously unshaven and slovenly as to garb for days at a time without encountering a censorious female eye. Now, however, it was evident that our male refuge had been invaded; and though the four of us normally admire womankind, on this evening we all but loathed the sound of those feminine voices coming from the other end of the camp.

Up the trail through the birches presently loafed Joe McKeever. Although we refer to Portage Bay as “our” camp—by virtue of being its earliest residents—it is undoubtedly owned by McKeever and very much bossed by him.

Usually McKeever resembles a disgruntled porcupine, both in the perpetual bristle of his unshaved jaw and in the spiny sarcasms of his tongue, when he is addressing his friends. But now Gyp gave him a startled look.

“Jumping Jiminy!” he cried. “Joe’s shaved!”

“Combed his hair, too!” exclaimed Doc. “Don’t tell me—yes, I *do* smell bay rum!”

McKeever did, indeed, look preternaturally slicked up, which was further proof of the change that had descended on our halcyon boar’s nest.

“A shave,” he retorted acridly, “wouldn’t hurt any of you he-badgers. Or a bath, for that matter,” he added crushingly.

We ignored the personality, in which, to be candid, there may have been some truth.

“How many of them are there?” asked Moore, in the tones of a man who fears the worst.

“Three,” said McKeever. “Southern ladies and their husbands.” He shook his head when the bottle was offered him. “I came up, not to encourage you inebriates in a career of alcoholism, but to tell you something.”

We all felt a chill of unpleasant foreboding.

“Camp’s crowded,” McKeever went on. “We’re short a cabin. I’d double ’em up at the other end, ordinarily, but you can’t do that with ladies. Some guests are leaving tomorrow and then we’ll have plenty of room, but we have to have an extra cabin tonight. So you four are moving into one cabin together.”

Like that. McKeever doesn’t ask favours. He gives out orders.

Well, there was not much we could do about it. We growled plenty, of course. Bad enough having women in camp without being put to all sorts of inconveniences because of them. But after all, McKeever is our pal and he needed help. Moore and Gyp moved their immediate necessities and tackle

boxes to the cabin Doc and I occupied. Two Indian guides brought down cots. We made the best of things.

When later, combed and curried, shaved and garnished, we went to the lodge for supper, the new feminine contingent was very much in evidence. Men, eating together, treat the occasion as a serious one, especially when the food is excellent, as it uniformly is at Portage Bay. Eyes are glued to plates; jaws champ steadily with thoughtful precision, the ears sometimes working in unison with them; voices are low, either politely discussing fishing plans for the morrow or requesting that another plate of provender be passed. But women appear to be unable to dine without talking, and all talking at once; and the decibel rating of the feminine voices chattering in the lodge that evening must have been close to the top of the register.

We ate, retired like four morose bears to our cabin, took another drink, and went early to bed.

But to an uneasy slumber. The cabin was crowded and the night warm. I am accused of snoring, but no man's snoring is to be mentioned in comparison with Gyp Blair's. Moore makes mumbling sounds in his sleep. Doc rose at midnight, in the darkness dashed his bare foot into a misplaced tackle box, upsetting its well-hooked contents all over the floor, and his frantic imprecations lasted for some time as he nursed his injured extremity; while the rest of us, with flashlights, searched for and found (we hoped) all the barbed lures that might have impaled a bare toe. We were unanimously glad when we saw the first wan light of morning, and quite naturally we blamed those invading women for our broken sleep.

Yet nothing is more remarkable in life than the power of the human organism to adjust itself to conditions which at their outset appear to be intolerable. In the succeeding days, back in our respective cabins once more, we grew accustomed to shaving and washing behind our ears and being polite at table. We came habituated to, and even accepted, the feminine contingent at camp.

All three were from the same Southern city, ladies with the typical cornpone accent. To give them full credit, they did not intrude themselves on us. We hardly saw them all day long, the fish were hitting well, and we were measurably happy.

One of the ladies, the littlest one, they called Miss Cricket—after the Southern custom of referring to married women as Miss—and the name seemed wonderfully to suit her. She was small and cute, young enough to be



interesting and old enough to have sense, with big grey eyes, a chirpy voice, and a giggle. You could like her anywhere—even in a men’s fishing camp.

Her husband. Gene Page, was a big, friendly guy with an everlasting grin, who loved above all things to fish. Miss Cricket fished to keep Gene company. She disclaimed all knowledge of the angling art, and if she caught anything—even a ring-tailed perch—she was thrilled. But catching fish definitely was secondary to seeing that her husband had a good time, and keeping him happy, and being a companion to him.

The two of them usually fished off by themselves somewhere, in their boat, staying rather close in, and they generally were back before the rest of us. Miss Cricket would come down to the dock when we arrived. She was interested in everybody, and though she never caught much of anything herself, she would “Oh” and “Ah” over a big fish with as much genuine enthusiasm as if it were her own.

“I just wish I could catch one little old fish half as big as that,” she said once, when Moore held up a nice ten-pound wall-eye he had taken. “But I don’t reckon I ever will,” she added wistfully.

It was the very next day after that when the two new guests arrived. One of them was rather impressive-looking in a big-shotty sort of way. He was strong-jawed, cigar-smoking, loquacious, and very well got up. He was, we gathered, a sort of super-salesman who had made a pot of money and felt important in proportion. His companion was a small, dried-up, greyish man: his secretary, who hardly ever said anything, ran all his boss’s errands, laughed dutifully at his jokes, and otherwise played the role of the grateful henchman.

Ordinarily at Portage Bay everything is clubby and friendly, and newcomers become at once a part of the body politic. But it was fairly evident almost from the first that this pair did not fit into our camp. For one thing, we are ordinary folk at Portage Bay and do not go in for sartorial magnificence. Our hats are battered, our boots stained. But the Big Shot dressed like an advertisement from some expensive sporting-goods house, and did not hesitate to mention, in conversation, the superiority of his equipment and how much it cost him.

“That guy!” growled Gyp one evening. “Why, the Duke of Windsor is a beachcomber, compared to him, when it comes to dressing up!”

From that moment the pair were the Duke and the Henchman to us.

One of the things wrong with the Duke was that he talked too much. Whenever he was in earshot, you heard the steady drone of a baritone voice. He was the Authority on everything. He was, moreover, a name-dropper, who referred to the President by his first name, and would have you believe he was on intimate and chatty terms with most of the world's notable figures, both in government and business.

To us he divulged that he had found his way to our simple camp through the recommendation of an acquaintance, who had deluded him with his enthusiasm; and he made it evident that he considered Portage Bay too crude and unimportant to befit one like himself, who was accustomed only to the most sybaritic of hotels and resorts.

Now, all of us complain at Portage Bay; and McKeever expects it. It is, indeed, part of our duty to complain, so that McKeever can whet up his teeth and cut us to pieces with barbed-wire sarcasms. But none of us, actually, would have the camp changed in one single iota from what it is, neat and clean, beautifully situated, and just primitive enough to be a camp and not a hotel-resort.

The Duke, however, was in ill-natured earnest. He grouched about the accommodation, which was plain but comfortable; and about the food, which was superb. He demanded hot water and ice at odd hours, and it meant special errands by somebody to supply him. His boat did not suit him, and he abused his patient Indian guide, who happened to be one of the best.

All of us resented a rank newcomer's disparagement of our well-loved camp, and we could see that McKeever was getting fed-up. Toward the Duke he began to display a formality as chill as the winter freeze-up of the lake.

Of one thing the Duke could not complain: his luck. It was phenomenal. The very first day out he brought in a nice string, including a wall-eye that weighed close to nine pounds on the dock scales. Now a seven-pound wall-eye is a big one, and a nine-pounder is a lunker. None of the rest of us did nearly as well that day.

At supper we had the first unpleasant realization that among the Duke's other little foibles was a strong inclination to brag about himself. He and the Henchman ate at the same table with the Southerners, but we could not help hearing his monologue, and his autopanegyrics, as he described at length his triumph. The ladies did what women always do—listened respectfully, and tried to look impressed. But we, at our table, writhed; and the more so since, by his own words, he revealed that he was not much of a fisherman.

“You have to know water, and you have to know fish,” the Duke pontificated to the ladies. “The real fisherman always knows exactly what he’s doing. Luck plays very little part in it. Take the place I caught the big one today. It was at the head of that bay on Wall Island, where all those reeds grow. You know the place? My guide didn’t even want to take the boat in there, but I knew at first glance it was a likely spot, and showed him his business quick enough. Well—you saw the one I got. Nine pounds! An *ordinary* angler would have overlooked the spot completely. In fact, I saw two boats pass it up before I came along and fished it and demonstrated what it contained.”

He allowed his eye to wander meaningly over to our table.

Every one of us knew the place he described. Our two boats *had*, in fact passed it up that day. It is a cove with a mud bottom where wall-eyes almost never are found. No wonder the guide was unwilling to try it. Only a fool would have gone after wall-eyes there—and this fool had stumbled into a good one, which was probably in transit between clean sand or rock bottoms, which wall-eyes love.

You cannot, however, argue with success; so we ate silently, though somewhat smoulderingly.

To make matters worse, the Duke’s luck continued, and with it his bragging. Have you ever been out with a seven-year-old boy, who never fished before, but who wiped your eye all day long? It was one of those exasperating periods.

The second day Doc landed a nice seven-pounder, but the Duke came in with one of eight pounds. The third day Moore’s nine-pounder fell short by half a pound of the Duke’s.

As these victories continued the Duke grew, if possible, chestier. None of us begrudges another man good fishing, but the Duke had a peculiarly unpleasant way with him: when he topped us, he liked to rub it in on us, with a kind of superior sneer. He took to referring to himself as the “Camp Champ.” Perhaps he intended it to be in roguish fun, but the humour wasn’t apparent to us.

Worst of all, he now began to give condescending “advice” to us fishing peasants. This was galling to all of us, but particularly to Moore, who knows as much about wall-eyes as any white man living, and most Indians. By the fourth morning a nasty spirit was apparent in all.

“‘You have to know water, and you have to know fish,’ ” quoted Moore disgustedly. “The Duke doesn’t know from nothing, but it kills my soul that he’ll brag all his life about coming down here and showing up the whole camp right on its own lake.”

“‘The real fisherman always knows exactly what he’s doing,’ ” snorted Gyp. “And to think that idiot caught a nine-pounder on a mudbank!”

“‘Luck plays very little part in it,’ ” added Doc. “Give us time and we’ll skunk him, but what can you do against the kind of run he’s having?”

When I tell you that Doc fairly hissed all those words with an “s” in them, it shows, since he is not a normal hisser, to what a pitch of emotion he had been goaded.

Now, to us fishing is the king of sports, but we consider it a sport of companionship, and not a contest. Nevertheless, we set out to show the Duke.

Miss Cricket sensed the situation. She was very much on the camp’s side.

“Good luck today, boys,” she told us. “I hope you-all get a great big old whale—for the honour of Portage Bay, you know!”

We thanked her, and departed for Shoal Lake with the grim faces of men who are out to do or die.

Hours later we were on our way back to camp—dying.

We know that lake like the palms of our hands, and we had that day fished every likely spot in boating distance, offering our lures at each shoal, cape, island, and inlet where we ever had taken a wall-eye before. We had caught fish—but, maddeningly, no very large ones, a seven-pounder by Gyp being our largest. What made it more bitter was that we knew the Duke had a big fish. We had passed his boat and he made his guide hold it up, so he could gloat. A ten-pounder at least, we gloomily estimated.

As our two boats headed in toward camp that evening, we could see the Duke’s boat, a mile ahead, also going in—with its cargo. At the thought of what he would say to us and the smirk he would give us when we got in, the magic seemed to go out of the lake. The setting sun shone, but in a silly feeble way, or so it appeared to us. A cold and depressing breeze blew. We were very unhappy, for we knew what we would be in for that evening.

Approaching the little bay where the Portage landing is, we saw another boat.

“Why, it’s Gene and Miss Cricket,” said Gyp.

Our two boats headed over toward them and Miss Cricket smiled and waved at us. She and Gene were on their way in, their motor slow, their guide half drowsing, trolling as they went.

“Any luck?” asked Doc.

“Not much,” Gene replied. “A bass or two, three northerns, and a few wall-eyes. Nothing big.”

“I only got one little old wall-eye,” said Miss Cricket, in the voice of one accustomed to disappointment. Her line was trailing in the water, but she was paying little attention to it. For a few minutes we cruised along slowly with them, saying little, in the spirit of gloom that overhung us all.

It was just then that Miss Cricket hooked into a snag.

“Oh dear,” she wailed. “I knew I ought to reel my line in before.”

She gave her rod a couple of hard yanks, to free the lure, but it was solidly hung.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “You folks go on in. Don’t wait on us.”

That was sensible. We prepared to depart while she and Gene tried to release the tangled bait. All at once she gave a little squeal.

“It’s moving!” she cried. “I—I’ve got something!”

I have seen it before, when trolling. A big fish takes the lure and sets back. It is as solid as if it were a log or a rock, at first sensation. Then, when the boat starts back, your line begins to move away—you are into something important in the fish line.

All desire to leave departed from us. Motors were cut off and our boats floated idly as we tensely watched the drama that ensued. Again and again the fish arched Miss Cricket’s rod as he alternately bulldogged or took long, furious dashes into the depths.

“Wall-eye,” announced Moore, basing his diagnosis on the deep-fighting tactics of the fish. “Big one,” he added.

Miss Cricket was silent as she stood up in her boat, battling the finny warrior.

But we were not silent. Our voices rose, as we gave her advice that was unasked, some of it conflicting, and all of it superfluous.

She fought that wall-eye like a little Spartan, and in her own way. Again and again she brought him toward her boat, only to have the huge fish go sounding off, the reel screaming as he took out line. Once he came near enough to the surface to allow us a brief glimpse.

“Holy cow!” exclaimed Doc.

If the apparition down in the blue water was not a figment of our imaginations, it was the greatest wall-eye any of us ever had beheld.

“Take it easy. Let him have his head,” Gene kept telling her.

“My—my wrist’s giving out,” she gasped once.

Weary, but with eyes blazing, she fought on. The minutes seemed endless and the giant wall-eye appeared to be tireless. Then, gradually, the pressure of the arching rod told. The rushes were less fierce. And at last the fish came right under the boat, sulking, but not whipped yet.

“Careful,” I heard Miss Cricket say, “I don’t know how well he’s hooked \_\_\_\_\_”

I held my breath. Doc held his breath. All around one could see their respective breaths being held by Moore, Gyp, Gene, the guides, even Miss Cricket. If the net missed, the fish would make another supremely ferocious flurry and might be gone for good.

The net dipped deep—very deep. Came up. And fighting and threshing in it was something all golden flashes—and so enormous I could hardly believe it was a wall-eye!

A moment later Gene had it safely in the boat.

Moore stood up in his boat, waved his old felt hat, and yelled. We all stood up and yelled, an ovation to a plucky little lady who had hit the jackpot. Then we started in to camp, motors roaring, a small flotilla of triumph.

Not until we reached the dock at camp did we really know the extent of Miss Cricket’s exploit. The Duke was there, smiling complacently over his anticipated victory. His smile faded as the great wall-eye came out on the dock.

With all the solemnity of a Druid priest offering a sacrifice to the sacred oaks, McKeever hung the fish on the dock scales. He looked, then looked again to make sure, before he announced in an awed voice:

*“Sixteen pounds, four ounces!”*

It was a colossal wall-eye, the biggest wall-eye caught anywhere in the whole lake area that year. Later it would receive one of the major awards in the national fishing contest conducted by one of the great sportsmen's magazines.

At McKeever's announcement of the fish's weight, such bedlam broke out on the dock that a pair of loons a quarter of a mile away up the Estuary took flight with startled cries.

Miss Cricket was happy, but modest, as congratulations were showered on her.

"I—I really don't know how I managed to get him," she said. "I honestly don't know much of anything about fishing."

Only the Duke, who saw himself now completely eclipsed, seemed to begrudge her triumph.

"Pretty lucky, I'd say," he sniffed.

It was ungracious, and Moore overheard it. "Lucky" was the wrong word for the Duke to use just at that moment, and Moore can be mordant when he chooses. He now let the Duke have it.

"Seems to me," he said, "that I remember hearing that 'Luck plays very little part in it.'"

"'A real fisherman always knows exactly what he's doing,' " chipped in Gyp.

"'You have to know water, and you have to know fish,' " finished Doc.

The camp broke into one spontaneous, delighted shout of laughter and applause.

That night Miss Cricket was the heroine of Portage Bay.

As for the Duke, he took up an unimportant position apart, never uttering a boast or even making a complaint. He found, he said, that he and the Henchman had to leave next morning, quite unexpectedly, "because of the pressure of business." When he departed, we all bade him a long, sincere, and hearty farewell.

On the wall of the lodge at Portage Bay, you can see Miss Cricket's wall-eye, where it hangs today, mounted and in a place of high honour.

To McKeever it offers a new springboard for insults, and he can take us down a peg by suggesting that we try to catch one even remotely

approaching that.

None of us has succeeded. Perhaps we never will. But to us Miss Cricket's wall-eye is a camp trophy; and we feel a sense of partial ownership in it, for it is a lasting visual proof that there is, in this imperfect world, some sort of justice after all.



## “Longfellow Doesn’t Scan”

The first time we went to Portage Bay, Bud and I wrote ahead stating that we would like to have a white man to guide us, rather than an Indian. This request was based on advice from an acquaintance who claimed to have experience on the Lake of the Woods (although I have since doubted it), and who said that the Indians of that area were spoiled, lazy, uncleanly, and untrustworthy, besides being given to strong drink in excess.

Had we known McKeever then as we know him now, and desired a white guide, we would have written him a letter demanding in strongest terms an *Indian* guide. For McKeever moves by indirection, and also by perversity. He makes it a policy to start everybody who comes to his camp at the level of no special privileges, and a request such as we made was just the sort of thing he was looking for, to put a couple of froward customers in their places.

In any case it is difficult to get white guides. Indians, all members of the Ojibwa tribe which lives about the lake, have pretty well pre-empted the guiding profession. They know the area better than anyone. And I must say that I have found the good ones both reliable and skilful—I owe my life to one of them, as I have related in “The Day the Lake Went Mad.”

As to liquor, they are like other people: some drink perhaps more than is good for them, when they can get it, and some do not drink at all. In either case McKeever sees that they get no liquor at camp, so they are sober.

Finally, once they receive a short course of training from Aileen, McKeever’s lovely wife, they display an almost fanatical zeal for soap and water. I do not know what Aileen says to them; but whatever it is, it makes so profound an impression on them that I have seen an entire little baylet covered with soapsuds from their ablutions before preparing a noontime lunch on an island.

Getting back to that first year, however: when we arrived in camp, McKeever greeted us aloofly, assigned us to a cabin, and introduced us to our guide. The guide was, undoubtedly, an Indian. And I must confess that our impression of him was far from favourable.

He was dark, rawboned, about thirty, with a deeply-lined, homely visage, small eyes, a few scraggy hairs on his chin, and an expression of unspeakable stupidity. He wore an old dirty cap of a pseudo-yachting type, such as can be bought in ten-cent stores—far from the headgear one would associate with an Indian—and a dark, rather unclean-looking shirt and worn

overalls. No moccasins, gleaming with beadwork, encased his huge feet, but a pair of clumsy, thick-soled shoes, such as farmers wear. He gave each of us a limp handshake and a grunt.

But our greatest disappointment in him was his name. Both Bud and I are sneaking disciples of the J. Fenimore Cooper school of the romantic glorification of the Noble Red Man, and we had hoped our Indian would at least have a name in keeping with the stately imagery of the Child of the Forest. We did not ask for, or expect, anything so magnificent as Bloody-Thundercloud-in-the-Afternoon, or Kills-Seven-Enemies-With-an-Axe, or even Sitting Bull or Almighty Voice. We would have been content with something modestly picturesque, like Bloody Knife or Mad Wolf.

Our guide said his name was Fred Green.

Fred Green! The depth of all that was humdrum, uninspired, and unromantic! We felt dashed and deflated.

Yet we knew that a guide is a necessity for a greenhorn in the Lake of the Woods country, which is full of such sinisterly suggestive place names as The Tangle, Lost Bay, Bag Bay, Cul-de-Sac Bay, Big Storm Bay, Queer Island, Infernal Point, Separation Point, Quandary Bay, Buckete (Starvation) Island, Labyrinth Bay, Witch Bay, Deadman's Portage, and so on—giving you the feeling that if you wander out innocently and alone among its hundreds of miles of uncharted, crooked channels, and its thousands of thickly placed islands, you may never again be seen by mortal man.

Besides, one does not take issue with McKeever: that is, one does not do so if one has discretion. And discretion is a trait I have always cultivated throughout a rather lengthy career unmarred by any particular deed of valour. So I made no protest and neither did Bud. Fred Green it was.

And here let me parenthetically say a word about the Indian names, which are interesting.

After the great peace treaty between the Canadian Government and the Ojibwa Indians in 1873, all Indian heads of families were listed on the Government rolls for distributions and other benefits, and for this purpose they took, or were given, surnames which were passed on to their progeny.

Some took their original Indian names, and of this class three have been borne by some of our guides through the years: Penasse (Thunder Bird), Mandamin (Corn), and Kezhik (Sky).

Some adopted white names, perhaps because of white forebears. I understand that the names McPherson and Gibbons, both well known on the lake, go back to fur-traders who had Indian families.

One oddity I encountered was the name Kelly, borne by the guide who was with me in my somewhat bizarre adventure described in "How to Catch a Muskie." Originally the name was Kiniu (pronounced Kin-yoo), meaning Eagle; but his ancestor grew so tired of having white men call him Canoe that he changed it to the nearest white equivalent he could think of, and came up with Kelly.

A great many of those early Indians, finding their names too difficult for white tongues, translated them into English. Such a name is that of the numerous Sky family, of which three members have guided us. And this also was the case with Fred Green, whose last name is a translation (and shortening) of a completely unpronounceable mouthful of guttural syllables meaning Green Feather, the which, I was told had to do with some honourable decoration his ancestor had worn.

The next morning after our introduction to our guide we crossed the Portage for the first time, had our first experience with the mosquitoes, and found the boat which had been assigned to us at the muddy landing in the swamp on Shoal Lake side.

It was an old boat, decrepit and leaky, with a careworn look about it, the paint chipped off in most places, and a tottery, consumptive motor. Today McKeever has the best of aluminium boats and excellent motors, but that was immediately after World War II and he was just getting the camp started, and we used to complain bitterly to him about his boats having cobweb bottoms, and how the motors would not propel the ancient craft against a two-mile breeze. To which he would reply by merely asking us if we could not swim, and pointing out that there were oars in the boat if we did not like the motors.

Nevertheless, on that first morning we were in high spirits, as the outboard began (for the moment) a throaty purr, the boat gained headway, and we were started. It was a perfect day, a day of dreamlike beauty, a day I will never forget because it provided me with impressions I still remember vividly.

Bright August sunlight flooded everything, the Lake was an incredibly brilliant blue in the warm radiance, the dark forests of the shores were

touched with golden tints, casting perfect reflections on the mirror-smooth waters and working an exquisite mosaic with the reeds and lily pads and muskeg grass of the swamp we were just leaving. Redwing blackbirds teetered on swaying cattails and burbled their songs; two grebes gazed at us with astonishment, then expertly dived beneath the water; a tern, with darting, swallow flight, was vivid white-and-black against the sky.

Our boat made a wide arc in the small bay, passed through a narrow channel between two rocky pine-clad points, and we were in the lake itself—Shoal Lake, the fairest prospect a man might ever see.

A late-drinking deer, in the bright red summer coat, trotted up on a little beach, gazed at us with antlered head gracefully aloft, then faded into the forest, the white flag of his tail flaunting. In the top of a spruce what seemed to a lumpy growth of bristles resolved itself into a feeding porcupine. Out on the lake ahead of us a pair of loons whinnied. Save for ourselves, no human being was in view in all that world of crystal light.

Our pleasant reverie was broken as the outboard slowed to a lazy putter and the guide spoke:

“Fish.”

One word. It was not a command so much as a suggestion, with the implication behind it that if we were interested, we might find fish here.

Bud and I coupled lures to leaders and let out lines to a proper distance behind the boat. Trolling is idle and pleasant, and it now gave us opportunity further to study our guide, who sat facing us at the tiller. Once more we remarked (to ourselves) that his visage was singularly unexpressive, the mouth wide and turned down at the corners, the nose huge, the brow low and retreating. It was not a face from which much could be expected in intelligence, or responsiveness, or companionship.

He had never uttered more than a grunt or a single word at a time, and that morning Bud and I furnished whatever conversation there was. As a matter of fact, before many minutes we were too delighted and interested in catching fish, which were biting well, to do much talking on any subject except fishing.

When the sun reached the zenith we landed on an island for lunch. Bud, who is active and industrious, began at once to gather firewood; and I, who am neither active nor industrious, was put to shame by him, so that I made myself useful also, getting water for the coffee and bringing the lunch box ashore. Our Indian observed this helpful industry without moving a muscle

on his face. But, as we later learned, it created on him a favourable impression.

He assisted Bud, smashing up some rather large dead wood and heaping it somewhat haphazardly. Both Bud and I decided to watch carefully how he would light this fire. We had read of the Red Man's wonderful skill in woodcraft, and we wondered what feat of wilderness legerdemain he would display in starting this blaze.

Perhaps he would demonstrate the mystic art of the rubbing of sticks. Or at least flint and steel, the spark dexterously caught in tinder and fanned into flame. But even if he resorted to the match of effete civilization it still seemed to us that lighting that haphazard pile of lumber, which contained no twigs or birch-bark for kindling, would be an evidence of some skill. Particularly if he used only one match: and if he used more than one match, I was going to be very much disappointed, and so was Bud.

In any case, lighting that fire seemed a challenge to the guide, but we were sure he was equal to it.

He was. And he used only one match, with it setting the blaze to going at once and without hesitation.

He simply went down to the boat, got a petrol can, poured petrol over the wood, stood at a distance, lit the match by scratching it on the seat of his britches and threw it on the pile. There was a puff of flame and our fire was blazing merrily.

I must say that our faith in Indian woodcraft was not a little shaken.

But later we asked ourselves the question: what is woodcraft, anyway? It simply is the art of accomplishing things in the easiest and best way, with whatever materials are at hand. Viewed in this light, the petrol and match were, in their essence, good woodcraft.

Since then I have seen many displays of genuine woodcraft by Indians on the lake, the most amazing of which was the following:

A few summers ago an Indian guide took out a fisherman, and while fishing offshore in the Lake of the Woods, the angler suddenly cried out that he had lost his ring over the side of the boat. How he managed to lose the ring, which had a large diamond on it, he did not explain; but he did explain later in camp that it was insured for three thousand dollars. It fell in at a

place where the water was at least twenty feet deep, and of course could not be seen.

In due time, when he returned home, the fisherman reported his loss and claimed his insurance. But the insurance company, naturally, did not wish to pay the three thousand dollars without at least making an effort to recover the ring. That summer a new bridge was being constructed across one of the arms of the bay at Kenora, and a deep-sea diver was working on the caissons which were being built to permit the piers to be erected from the bottom. The insurance company secured the services of this diver, with his paraphernalia, to try to recover the ring, and also hunted up the Indian guide to show approximately where it had been lost. Bear in mind that by this time several weeks had elapsed since the incident occurred.

Now nearly anyone, with a little practice, can mark the *approximate* location of a place on a lake, by the method of sighting landmarks in opposite directions and crossing them by a line to two landmarks transecting the first imaginary line. You bear in mind the landmarks and bring your boat to where the imaginary lines cross, and you are somewhere near the spot where you found that weed bed, or reef, or place where the fish were schooling the day before. I can do it myself, after a fashion, although, if I can come within a hundred feet of the place I am aiming at, I feel pretty proud of myself, because the variation is usually rather broad.

This particular Indian went out with the boat that took the diver and his equipment, guided it to a certain place, and then said, "This is it. Anchor here."

The people in the boat said to him, "You think this is close to the place?"

He said, "Right here."

He pointed his finger down toward the bottom directly beneath the boat, and said it in the positive manner of a man who *knows exactly*.

The diver got into his underwater helmet and rubber suit and went over the side with his ropes and his air pipes, while his assistant started the air pump. In a few minutes the diver signalled and was drawn back up into the boat. He was holding in his hand the missing ring.

He said that at the point he descended the lake was about twenty feet deep, but within two or three feet it shelved off in an abrupt, almost perpendicular drop, to perhaps a hundred feet in depth. There, on the very edge of this underwater cliff, he found the ring, almost exactly where the Indian had indicated from above.

I have seen Indians, including Fred Green, many times make close locations of places by the cross-sighting method, but this exploit of the guide who located the lost ring was nearly a miracle.

The aftermath of it is interesting. The fisherman recovered his three thousand dollar ring. The deep-sea diver claimed his legal salvage rights, and received several hundred dollars from the insurance company. While the company had to pay this sum, at least it saved itself the major payment of the three thousand dollars for the ring.

The Indian, who was the real hero of the whole affair, got a two-dollar tip.

It was after lunch—into which this digression has somehow inserted itself—when we had eaten, cleansed the utensils, put out the fire, loaded everything back in the boat, and once more were under way, when I heard a voice say:

“In what section of California do you gentlemen reside?”

I gave, I confess, almost a start, for the words had *seemed* to come from that graven-image Indian face of our guide. If they had come from my tackle box I would not have been much more surprised, for not only had the guide uttered no more than a few grunts during our acquaintance, but *this* speech was spoken in cultured tones, and with an articulation almost like that of an Oxford don.

“Did—you say something?” I managed to ask.

Fred nodded, and repeated his question.

“Why—from the southern part—from Los Angeles,” I said.

He considered that gravely. “I would have supposed you were from the area of the south-western states—perhaps Texas.”

“Why?” I still could scarcely believe my ears.

“I am interested in variations of accent,” he said, still in that mellifluous Oxonian manner. “I surmised that I detected a slight flavour of that part of the world in your speech.”

“Oklahoma,” I gulped. “I was born in Oklahoma. And I’ve lived in Texas and Kansas, and also in Missouri—when I was younger.”

Again he nodded. "One's tongue does not easily forget the tricks of pronunciation it acquired in one's youth."

I could no longer conceal my amazement. "But where did you get your—your own excellent English?"

"It is the result of an accident I suffered," he answered calmly. "As a youth I injured my back playing ice hockey. For a time I was paralysed—confined to my bed for two years. My father obtained for me a small radio, and I spent all those long days reading, and listening to the Winnipeg station. Especially did I devote my attention to the commentators, some of whom were British or cultivated Canadians, with the finest of diction. Modelling myself on them, it was from them that I gradually came to learn to speak correctly, at least in a measure."

In a measure! He spoke more "correctly" than I did, and he had spotted my slight south-western cowboy style of diction, going back to days much longer ago than I like to remember when I did a little range riding.

I thought of an Indian boy, bedfast, in a little cabin, listening to a radio and trying to improve himself, and I felt it was one of the most remarkable stories I had ever heard.

Bud was as interested as I. No longer did conversation flag in our boat as we plied him with questions. And in the days that followed we came to know at least this one Indian rather well.

Assuredly his habitual mask of stupidity was as misleading as an ambush. Once we acquired Fred's confidence, he opened up and discoursed freely on many things.

Of wolves, for instance; and bears.

Wolves rarely are seen in the summer, but they are present, rearing their litters of cubs in hidden dens, and living on the plentiful small animals which move about in warm weather. In the winters, he said, when the small creatures go into hibernation, the wolves become evident as the lakes freeze over, and they wreak havoc among the deer. They are, in this season, hunted constantly, one form of pursuit being by aeroplane.

This dangerous sport consists in flying at just a little above treetop level, while the gunner, with rifle or heavy-loaded shotgun, leans out of a window, sometimes with a foot on the wing, to blast at a wolf when one chances to be caught out on the open ice away from the sheltering trees.



It appears somewhat unsporting—the wolf helplessly galloping, the hunter swooping overhead—until you consider that a good many hunters are themselves killed at the sport when their small planes crash into trees or otherwise come to disaster.

Bears, on the other hand, are seen in the summer, but not in the winter, when they hibernate. The Indians of the lake are afraid of them—with good reason, for hardly a year passes without some Indian being mauled severely, or even killed by a bear.

I once asked Andy McPherson, another Ojibwa guide, if he was afraid of bears. Without hesitation he nodded.

“What would you do if you met one?” I asked.

“Run like hell,” he answered.

“What if it had you cornered so there was no way to go except into the lake?” I knew Andy could not swim.

“Jump into lake,” he said instantly.

“And drown?”

“Better than be chewed up.”

“What if you climbed a tree and the bear climbed up after you?” I pursued.

He considered this dire prospect for a moment, and it was clear that his aboriginal imagination was chilled by it.

“Something would sure drop,” he said solemnly.

But Fred had other things beside game to discourse upon.

One day he told us that the Hiawatha story, made celebrated by the poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is not based around Lake Superior, as has been generally accepted. The locality of the legend, which is pure Ojibwa (and incidentally he corrected us on the pronunciation of Ojibwa, which we had been calling Ojibway), is the Lake of the Woods, he said, which has been an Ojibwa lake since time immemorial. He went on to tell us of different places on the lake where episodes recounted in the Hiawatha saga are traditionally supposed to have occurred.

And all at once he said, “Are you aware that Longfellow doesn’t scan?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I refer particularly to his narrative poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*. It is, as you of course know, supposed to read in trochaic dimetre.”

I did not know anything of the kind, but I was not going to reveal my ignorance.

“Longfellow evidently was not conversant with the Ojibwa tongue,” Fred continued in his cultured tones. “Obviously he had seen words written down by somebody who forgot properly to accent them. He assumed that Ojibwa words are accented on the penult, whereas the Ojibwa more frequently accents on the antepenult.”

I was far out of my depth. Some time, back in the dim ages, I had (under considerable compulsion) studied about penults and antepenults, and I knew, vaguely, that they represented syllables in words. But there my immediate knowledge ended, and my face must have looked very blank indeed as this Indian lectured me on the subject of poetry.

“I shall give you an example. It will suffice to show what I mean,” said Fred, politely taking no notice of my bewilderment.

He thereupon recited three lines from *The Song of Hiawatha*, accenting the meter as every high school student is taught to do:

“By the *shores* of *Gitch-e Gum-ee*,  
By the *shin-ing* *Big-Sea-Wa-ter*,  
*Stood* the *wig-wam* of *No-ko-mis*. . . .”

I nodded.

“But the difficulty,” said Fred, “lies in the fact that the words are not accented that way. The word for Big-Sea-Water is pronounced *Gi-chi-gummy*, not *Gitch-e-gum-ee*. Similarly, the word for grandmother is pronounced *No-k’mis*. Do you see what a shambles it makes of Longfellow’s metre? ‘By the shores of *Gi-chi-gummy* . . . stood the wigwam of *No-k’mis*.’ ”

I saw, and listened with increasing astonishment as the Indian with the wooden-idol features discoursed on the poem in general and Longfellow’s misuse of Indian pronunciation in particular. He cited many other words, quoting the lines in which they appeared, and it was evident that correct Ojibwa pronunciation made, as he said, a “shambles” of the poet’s metre.

“One of the greatest errors made by Longfellow, however,” went on Fred, warming to his subject, “was his selection of his name for his hero. The legend is pure Ojibwa, but the name Hiawatha is not Ojibwa at all. The

true name of the hero of our legend is Manabozho. It has always mystified me why Longfellow used an alien name, when the correct name—pronounced according to his standards—would have scanned just as well.”

As an interjection at this point, I went into the matter later, when I returned home, and learned the following interesting facts:

The real Hiawatha was a Mohawk (Iroquois) chief, who lived about 1570 and was one of the founders of the dread Iroquois Confederation. When the scholar, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, published his *Algic* (Algonquin) *Studies* in 1843, he included the Ojibwa legend of Manabozho, but confused him with Hiawatha, the Mohawk. Longfellow read the Schoolcraft book (the Ojibwa words in which were *not* properly accented) and it is to this that the English language owes the charming poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, which “save for its name contains not a single fact or fiction relating to the great Iroquoian reformer and statesman,” to quote no less an authority than the anthropologist, J. N. B. Hewitt, of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Fred Green, it appears, was exactly correct.

Fred, it developed, was a man of some influence among his people, being one of the tribal council. Upon the members of the council devolve such responsibilities as bargaining with dealers for the year’s price on wild rice which the Ojibwa harvest in the fall; the enforcement of certain laws and rules against poaching on trapping and fishing grounds; punishment of some minor infractions on the reservations; agreements with the government on medical, dental, school, and other benefits; the distribution of the small annual money allotments; and similar matters of tribal policy.

As a member of this body, the other Indians listened respectfully to Fred when he spoke. This, however, did not make him sacred, and one day I saw him made the butt of a practical joke that brought tears of laughter to the eyes of the other guides and tears of another sort to his own.

It happened three or four seasons after that first year when Bud and I were together. I had as my fishing partner at this later time Doc Tolle, and we were guided by young Alfred Red Sky, while Fred was guiding another party. As I have stated before, Doc loves with passionate fervour that overheated condiment known as Tabasco sauce. He had, some time previously, induced Alfred to take a good dose of it, whereat Alfred nearly jumped into the lake.

But though he had squared accounts with us, the young Indian still yearned for a chance to play the Tabasco sauce trick on somebody else. Opportunity came one noon when four boats happened to gather at the same island for luncheon. One of the boats was ours, another was that of Moore and Gyp, and I do not remember the fishermen of the other two. One of them, however, was piloted by Fred.

The four Indian guides went about their usual chores, and the guests relaxed and ate their beautifully fried fish luncheons. Doc, as usual, poured a veritable cascade of Tabasco on his portion. (How he can eat it and still retain a sense of taste I do not comprehend; but he likes it that way, and who is going to quarrel with anything Doc likes?)

I noticed Alfred's eyes on the Tabasco. After a while he sidled up to Doc and said something in a low voice. Doc agreed, and Alfred departed with the sinister-looking little red bottle and its contents of liquid fire.

Next thing I knew Alfred was conversing with Fred and offering him the Tabasco bottle. Evidently Fred was convinced of the flavoursomeness of the condiment, having observed the liberality with which Doc used it and the relish with which he consumed it. At Alfred's urging, he poured enough of it on the piece of fish in his tin plate fairly to cover it, and handed the bottle back to Alfred to return to Doc.

By now all of us were covertly watching Fred. Solemnly he cut with his fork a piece of the fish. It had a fine rich brown crust on it from the perfect frying, and as sometimes happens the fork cut the crust and lifted it, so that when he took the bite to his mouth there was little to it but that crust and the Tabasco sauce with which he had loaded and soaked it.

The next moment the entire inside of Fred's mouth must have seemed literally to spring into flame, like the crater of a volcano in fiery eruption; and the other Indians were rolling on the ground in an ecstasy of mirth.

But where, under the same circumstances, young Alfred had leaped to the edge of the lake, plunged his head into it, and acted like a wild person while he washed out his mouth and sought surcease from that awful burning, Fred Green, a man of dignity and circumstance in the tribe, could allow himself no such demonstration of feeling.

Rigid and motionless, he sat on his heels. Every deep-bitten line in his countenance seemed even more deeply incised. All over his face a profuse perspiration broke out. His eyes gazed across the lake and swam with tears of pain.

But save for these involuntary evidences, his Indian stoicism prevented him from showing any sign of the fury raging within. I thought of Indian warriors of old, captured by their enemies and tied to the stake, too proud to show a sign of pain as the flames consumed them. And, looking at Fred, I could believe those stories. Like an image graven from stone he sat there, until at long last by natural assimilation, the anguish was eased. His dignity did not desert him even when the joke was on him.

One more memory remains with me of Fred Green.

It was late of an afternoon, and Bud and I were returning to camp across Shoal Lake, with Fred at the tiller of our boat. The motor had that day behaved badly, and it was operating now on one cylinder. Our boat was old and battered and unclean. Bud and I resembled a couple of disreputable tramps, dishevelled and stained as to clothing and unshaved to the point where Bud addressed me as “General Grant,” and I addressed him as “General Sherman.” The day was hot, the lake oily smooth, the fishing had not been good, and we were weary and silent.

All at once we saw, a quarter of a mile away and crossing the lake in a direction opposite from ours, a vision of beauty and grace—a dainty motor yacht, all white paint, brightwork, teak, and mahogany, with a galley, sleeping cabins, a captain, an engineer, a chef, and a steward in a white jacket. On the afterdeck lounged three men and three women in deck-chairs, sipping tall icy drinks which were brought to them by the immaculate steward. The men were garbed in white yachting caps, blue coats with brass buttons, and white yachting flannels. The women were garbed as women customarily garb themselves on an outing: in little more than nothing—swim suits that moulded their lovely forms, or abbreviated sun garments equally revealing.

It is the only time I have even seen a yacht on Shoal Lake. Later I learned it had come down from Kenora through the Narrows, and was on its way to a goldmining property on Bag Bay, which was shut down when the price of gold was frozen by international agreement, but still has ore that may be mined again some day. The men on the yacht were wealthy and important to weigh mightily, not only in the financial, but the political, world of Canada. The women were charming of face and figure, as the women of rich men often seem to be.

Fred Green, who had been nursing the motor of our boat with that expression of complete, mindless stupidity on his features, glanced over at

the yacht. All at once he raised his arm aloft.

That was all. But immediately the yacht ceased its progress in the direction it was going and turned in all its dignity and beauty toward our little, squalid craft. Fred shut off the motor and waited. He did not go to the yacht. The yacht must come to him.

On the afterdeck I saw sudden angry questions being asked among the tycoons in the yachting clothes. The gentleman who evidently owned the yacht rose and made a vociferous protest. But his protests and orders alike appeared to be ignored.

Like a great white swan the yacht swam toward us. As it neared, I now saw that in the glass and chrome pilot-house stood an Indian at the expensive mahogany wheel. And with that all things became clear to me. Fred, the tribal councillor of that Indian, had summoned him with one negligent lift of his hand, and the Indian, with the five-hundred-thousand-dollar craft, and its multi-millionaire passengers, had not hesitated by so much as a breath in obeying that summons.

And I also understood some other things: that yacht was helplessly dependent on that Indian pilot for navigation in this virtually uncharted lake. He alone, of all aboard, knew the shoals, reefs, and isolated rocks that might take the tender bottom out of the lovely yacht, and also the few tortuous channels through which, with skill, the yacht might be steered in safety. Without him to guide it, the yacht and all its important people could not have proceeded one hundred yards except at serious peril. That Indian was king on that yacht while it was here on his lake. The owner and his guests had nothing to say about what he did.

These thoughts brought joy to Bud and me. Lightsome again became the afternoon, and weariness departed. Care left us and we no longer yearned to get quickly to camp.

This that was about to happen we wanted to see.

Its mighty motors purring, the gorgeous yacht drew up alongside of us, and from its deck above the passengers looked down upon us: as wealth and perfect grooming forever look down upon squalor and slovenliness. All of them, that is, except the owner of the yacht, who appeared to be on the verge of apoplexy with helpless fury.

We, on our part, gazed up at the yacht people: particularly at the charming and shapely women in their scanty garments. It had been some time since Bud and I had seen a pretty figure in a swim suit. . . .

Now the Indian stepped out of the pilot-house, came to the rail, and addressed Fred. He spoke in the incomprehensible jabber of the Ojibwas, but his manner clearly was deferential.

Fred replied with stately dignity, in the same tongue.

The Indian respectfully advanced some inquiry, to judge by his voice and manner.

Fred's reply was brief and yet evidently adequate, for the Indian on the yacht nodded his head, grinned, and lifted his hand with some gesture of salutation.

To this Fred did not deign to answer. He sat while the Indian returned to the pilot-house, and the yacht resumed its way, the passengers still staring back at us as if they could not believe it.

Then Fred addressed himself to getting our motor started.

"Who was that?" I asked him.

The motor was balky, and it was not until he had it going again, although with but its one working cylinder, that he replied.

"Penasse," he said. He named the Indian, although I had meant to inquire the name of the yacht-owner. Fred appeared to think the passengers not worth mentioning.

"What did you say to him?" asked Bud.

"I told him to stop at Dominique Island and say hello to my sister," said Fred.

Just that. And we knew the yacht would do as Fred Green commanded.

However the owner might protest, the glittering craft inevitably would turn in at the stinking commercial-fishing establishment on Dominique where Fred Green's sister was employed that summer. The Indian pilot would take the dinghy and go ashore. He would there, with due formality, extend Fred's greetings to his sister. Then, and only then, would he return to the yacht and permit it to resume its journey.

Bud and I looked at one another, wondering what the yachtsman, who most evidently was accustomed to having his slightest word obeyed instantly and obsequiously, must be thinking of having his yacht and its whole party suddenly become the bearer of a most unimportant message to a simple Indian woman.

And the thought brought laughter to us, so that we beat upon each other and crowed with delight.

Behind us, his face once more a mask of solemn stupidity, his hand on the tiller as he brought us home, sat Fred the guide, Fred the student of poetry and legend, Fred the speaker of Oxonian English, Fred the dispatcher of millionaires on errands at his behest: Fred Green, the amazing.



## A Historical Digression

I never knew a more avid fisherman than Father Emmett A. Shanahan, the brisk and Catholic priest of Warroad, Minnesota, when I first made his acquaintance. A heart attack in recent years forced him to forgo most of the more strenuous aspects of the sport; but to see him then, in dungarees and an old straw hat, his nose peeling with sunburn and Irish quips upon his tongue, as he heaved lures tirelessly all day in his never-ending (though somewhat futile) search for muskies, you would hardly have suspected him to be a man of the cloth.

He was, to be sure, not given to the wild and strange oaths, such as some fishermen find needful to express their feelings, even when he was most exasperated. Yet he suffered as all fishermen suffer at times. There is a story, probably apocryphal, that one day he was fishing with a dentist friend and parishioner of Warroad, a man with a vivid and unbridled tongue under circumstances of provocation. They hooked a great fish and almost landed him, but he broke the line on a snag and escaped at the last minute. After listening to the smoke-and-brimstone language with which the dentist apostrophized the whole situation, Father Shanahan laid his hand on the other's shoulder and said:

“Stop, my son. I cannot permit you to use such language and you must come to confessional next Sunday. But while we are on the subject, you have expressed my sentiments exactly.”

I am interested in history, so I was glad to come to know Father Shanahan, who is an authority on the history of the Lake of the Woods and who, through his own almost unaided efforts, has built a uniquely beautiful church in Warroad, on the south-west shores of the lake. The church is dedicated to the memory of a missionary priest of the Jesuit order, Father Jean Pierre Aulneau, who was murdered by Indians more than two centuries ago, on a frontier then so remote that his life and works and death were forgotten until a piece of highly interesting detective work was done in this century and a fascinating little history of it, *Minnesota's Forgotten Martyr*, was written by Father Shanahan.

To tell this story, for it deals with the whole background of this northland area (and we writers are enjoined to edify as well as amuse), I must ask you to go back with me to the events leading to the first great tragedy on the Lake of the Woods.

In the year 1731, a man with a considerable military reputation and an even more considerable name set out for Montreal “to discover a route to the western sea”—a rather universal preoccupation of explorers in those days. His name was imposing: Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Vérendrye, a title that marches majestically across the page, so that you can almost see banners and hear music with it. But historians usually cut it down to La Vérendrye only, which is certainly a saving both of time and printer’s ink. His military fame was won on two continents: in the War of the Spanish Succession in Europe, and in the collateral Queen Anne’s War in America.

With him, on this junket, La Vérendrye took fifty men and a Jesuit priest, in canoes laded with arms to slay Indians and trinkets to defraud them, if happy opportunity arose for either of these pursuits. Accompanying him were his three sons, Jean Baptiste, Pierre, and François.

The journey was long. They stopped to build a fort on the way, and it was the summer of 1732 before they reached the Lake of the Woods at the mouth of the Rainy River.

“When Washington was but five months old,” says Father Shanahan, “when the land west of the Alleghenies had yet to hear the tramp of white feet in any number, there stood La Vérendrye, poised on the threshold of the Lake of the Woods.”

He did not poise long. Escorted by friendly Indians, perhaps Ojibwas, he crossed the lake and established on its western shore the first white settlement upon it, a small post of stockaded walls and log huts, which he named Fort St. Charles. Soon after, the expedition’s chaplain, Father Charles Mesaiger, was invalided back to Europe, and a new priest took his place, a thirty-year-old Jesuit, newly arrived from France, Father Aulneau.

The young priest had given up the inheritance of a rich estate to take orders and go as a missionary to America, which speaks well for his fortitude, since already it had become pretty evident that when some of the savages desired to work interesting experiments on the human anatomy, Jesuit priests were their favourite subjects. Names like Jogues, De Noue, Daniel, Brébeuf, Lalemant, Gamier, Chabanel, Buteux—and others—were on the list already lengthy, and growing longer, of martyrs of the Society of Jesus who had suffered torture and death at the hands of the savages. But so well established was the reputation for intrepidity of the Jesuits that no member of the order even thought of refusing a mission, however exposed or dangerous, and Father Aulneau went to this far frontier without hesitation.

Of good family, and accustomed to the pleasant life of his home in France, he was at first not charmed by his close-range view of the savages he was to convert. The uncouth, pagan Indians disgusted him.

“I do not believe, unless it be by a miracle,” he wrote home, “that they [the Indians] can ever be persuaded to embrace the faith; for even not taking into account the fact that they have no fixed abode, and that they wander about the forests in isolated bands, they are superstitious and morally degraded to a degree beyond conception.”

Nevertheless, overcoming his repugnance, he set out to help them. Painstakingly he learned the language of the natives, reduced it for the first time to writing, and even prepared a dictionary in it. He laboured for the souls of the barbarians, although he found them not very receptive. The Indians were polytheistic, believing in good gods and bad gods. The bad gods you propitiated and paid attention to, seeking to bribe them by offerings and prayers not to harm you. The good gods, since they would not hurt you anyway, you ignored. This kind of savage logic Father Aulneau found it difficult to overcome in his presentation of a Supreme Being always good and just and merciful. If this god was beneficent, said the Indians, why bother about him? Find the malignant gods and placate *them*.

His work was discouraging and the missionary seems to have had premonitions of death. One letter of his said:

“After all, what the issues of all these projects will be is known to God alone, and, who can tell, perhaps instead of receiving the announcement of the realization of these plans, you may hear the news of my death. . . . I place all in God’s hands. I am disposed to offer Him with a light heart the sacrifice of my life.”

Such a presentation was not unjustified. The tiny fort on the lake shore was continually under the threat of hostile attack, particularly by the ferocious Sioux, who made incursions northward on the warpath against the Ojibwas and Crees and would just as eagerly pick up white scalps if the opportunity offered.

There was sickness, too, and in the winter of 1737-8 another menace hung over the small garrison—starvation. The wild rice had failed the previous fall, due probably to high water, and supplies of meat were very short. At one time the men were reduced to eating rotten white-fish to keep alive. Today an island just north of the site of the old fort is still known as Buckete, in Ojibwa “I am hungry,” but freely translated Starvation Island,

because of the Indian traditions of the white men's sufferings in that terrible winter.

By early 1738, as soon as the ice broke, La Vérendrye was sending messengers by canoe to the east, begging for supplies and relief for his men. No answer came. As June approached it had to be presumed that the messengers were lost, probably cut off and killed by the Indians.

Meantime the situation became so desperate that the commandant decided to send a stronger detachment, hoping it might fight its way through the cordons of savage warriors. On the morning of June 5 this party set forth in three canoes, bound for Mackinac Island, at the strait between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, fifteen hundred miles away. It was commanded by young Lieutenant Jean Baptiste de la Vérendrye, just twenty-three years old, the commandant's eldest and favourite son. Father Aulneau accompanied it, and there were nineteen other men, soldiers and *voyageurs*.

Taking a route down the present North-west Angle Inlet, they reached by nightfall a high and rocky island, about a mile long and half a mile wide, facing the open part of the lake now known as the Big Traverse. It is called today Massacre Island, and there they camped, and there disaster overtook them.

Exactly what happened will never be known, except that the assailants were Sioux, probably about one hundred and thirty in number, in twenty canoes. The Sioux had a deep-seated grudge against the French for trading guns and ammunition to their enemies, the Ojibwas and Crees.

Either the hostile savages saw the party from the fort land, or saw its campfires after dark. Whether they crept up on the small band of white men, or approached it under pretence of a peaceful council, can never be determined.

All that is known is that they fell upon the Frenchmen and murdered every one of them. One Indian account said that it had been intended to spare the "black-robed medicine man"—Father Aulneau. Perhaps this was only that they might torture him later, at leisure—a favourite pastime, as I have pointed out, with the Indians. But in any case a blood-crazed young brave killed him with a tomahawk.

The bodies were robbed and mutilated, the heads of all being hacked off and arranged in a row, with the exception of those of La Vérendrye and Father Aulneau, which the Sioux carried away as trophies. That the Sioux perpetrated the massacre was established beyond question, not only by

Indian accounts, but also by the discovery among them later of various ornaments and articles, including a seal and chalice belonging to Father Aulneau.

Friendly Indians discovered the bodies of the slaughtered men and reported the matter to the senior La Vérendrye at Fort Charles. Young La Vérendrye was described as “headless and prone, with a sort of iron hoe imbedded in his loins,” Father Aulneau, also headless, was on his knees, propped up by a heavy clump of bushes on which he had fallen, as if in an attitude of prayer.

“With his knees on the bare rock,” says Father Shanahan, “Father Aulneau met violent, horrible death. What he had never ruled out as impossible, what he had steeled himself to accept had happened.”

It was more than three months before La Vérendrye, the commandant, could spare men to go to the island and recover the bodies. In his journal he noted it briefly: “On September 17, I dispatched the Sergeant with six men to raise the bodies of the Reverend Father Aulneau and my son and on the 18th I had them buried in the chapel, together with the heads of all the Frenchmen killed, which they also brought in accordance with my orders.”

The years came and went. Fort St. Charles was abandoned, the French garrison returning to the settlements. Records were lost and the palisades and huts rotted to the ground. Again the forest took sway and no trace of the old fort could be seen. So tiny was the post, so far out from all other white settlements, so engulfed in the wilderness that it never received the attention from history it deserved; and the men who died, of whose fate much probably would have been made had they been slain in some better-known place, passed from memory.

Then a strange series of circumstances and the efforts of a group of amateur historical detectives—members of the Jesuit Order—brought them back into history. From here, I will let Father Shanahan tell the story in his own words, as he wrote them in *Minnesota's Forgotten Martyr*, from which he has graciously given me permission to borrow.

Once more (writes Father Shanahan) for almost two centuries Angle Inlet, and the islands, and the lovely lake became as they had been before that day in July, 1732, when axes first rang, clearing the site for the fort.

Father Aulneau was forgotten also, forgotten with the site of the fort which sheltered his mortal remains. And he would have remained forgotten

even among his fellow Jesuits had it not been for a strange coincidence which took place in the town of his birth, Vendée, France, in the year 1889.

At that time three Jesuit Fathers were giving a mission in Vendée. Among the six hundred men who received Holy Communion was an aged and venerable descendant of the old Aulneau family. This old man had never seen a Jesuit before, but he told them that he had an heirloom that had been handed down from father to son for generations: a packet of letters more than a hundred and fifty years old. From them it appeared that some members of the Aulneau family had been Jesuits, and one of them met his death at the hands of Indians on a lake in the wilds of North America.

In this packet were letters written by Father Aulneau to his mother, to his sister, and to fellow Jesuits; and also letters of contemporary Jesuits to Father Aulneau's mother, telling her of the death of her son, of his piety, and of his zeal. These letters were copied, translated into English, and made their first appearance in *The Canadian Messenger*. In 1896 the Jesuit Fathers of Montreal published them in book form.

No sooner were these letters translated than interest in the forgotten Jesuit was revived. Especially keen was this interest among the Jesuit Fathers who shortly before, in 1885, had taken possession of St. Boniface College in St. Boniface (a suburb of Winnipeg).

Where had the fort been? Where did the massacre take place? Was there any chance of solving these questions? The lake was so large, streams by the hundreds flow into it, the islands can be counted in thousands. There were no reliable maps marking either the island or the fort. Perhaps the Indians had traditions concerning the locations. Could these traditions be trusted? It was agreed that an attempt should be made to discover the sites.

In the summer of 1890 two Jesuits, Fathers Kavanaugh and Blain, got in touch with a Captain Laverdiere, who had navigated the lake for years, had an intimate knowledge of the various islands, and remembered the old Indian traditions he had heard from time to time. Yes, there was a tale about an island on which a "man of prayer" had been murdered long ago. As a matter of fact, the navigators on the Lake of the Woods called it Massacre Island. The Indians called it Manitou Island, thought it haunted, and would never dare to land on its shores. The Jesuit Fathers and Captain Laverdiere went to this island, which is a part of the fringe of islands fronting upon the large open part of the Lake of the Woods. Before leaving it they erected on the lofty rocky summit of the east end a pile of stones surmounted by a cross.

After twelve more years Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface, who took an intense interest in the early history of the Lake of the Woods, headed a gathering of priests and laymen which visited Massacre Island. The Archbishop had various excavations made in a futile attempt to find some relics of the slaughtered Frenchmen. He also had a small memorial chapel erected on a high bluff and dedicated the chapel to Our Lady of Martyrs.

In 1902 Archbishop Langevin organized an expedition for the purpose of finding, if possible, the site of old Fort St. Charles. This group left Kenora on September 2 on the steamer *Catharina S.* At Flag Island they picked up two old and respected chiefs, Powassin and Andagamigowinini, who kindly gave all the information they had concerning the site of the fort.

The chiefs said there were some mounds on both sides of North-west Angle Bay with square stones showing on their surface, which, according to their traditions, were the ruins of fireplaces built long ago by the French. Powassin guided the Archbishop to a mound on the north, or Canadian, side of the bay. Excavations were made and the remains of an old fireplace found with three stone sides, containing ashes eight inches deep, covered with alluvial soil. Although the site was not a fitting place for the fort, the explorers were overcome with enthusiasm. They immediately erected on the spot a cross bearing the very premature inscription: *Fort Saint Charles, built in 1732; discovered in 1902.*

The Archbishop and his companions left for Kenora and home, rejoicing over the comparatively easy accomplishment of a task they had considered well-nigh hopeless.

But the enthusiasm did not prevail for long. Serious thinking about the authenticity of the find was productive of grave doubts. It was really no place for a fort. More likely it had been a sort of cabin used by a trapper or trader long ago. The indefatigable Archbishop Langevin again returned to the spot and directed a more thorough search and excavations in the neighbourhood of the fireplace uncovered five years before.

This search brought to light such objects as a steel file, some nails, and the blade of a knife. However, they found nothing that could lead them with any positive proof to believe it was the fort described by Father Aulneau and La Vérendrye. And so it was that Father Paquin, a Jesuit of St. Boniface, suggested that the Archbishop organize a party of explorers, including some of the professors from St. Boniface College, to resume, during the summer vacation of 1908, the search for the old fort and the relics of Father Aulneau.

This expedition, headed by Father Paquin, set out from Kenora on July 10, in a launch bearing the significant name *La Vérendrye*, for American Point, or Penasse, some forty miles away. Three priests, four scholastics, and two lay brothers, all Jesuits, made up the group. They pitched camp at American Point and operated from there.

While making camp Father Paquin painfully injured his foot with an axe and was forced to remain in camp while the others set out. Once more they took tools to the Canadian side of Angle Inlet, and once more they painstakingly examined the surrounding territory, and once more, too, they agreed they would have to look elsewhere for the site of the fort.

Meanwhile Father Paquin lay in his tent nursing his foot and reviewing the literature containing what old Chief Powassin—who had since died—said about the fort. One sentence attracted his attention. The more he read it, the more he became convinced that Powassin was describing a spot on the *south* shore of the bay, where he in his youth had seen the remains of old chimneys. Powassin had said, “They lay close to the shore in a small cove, amid a bush of poplars a little to the west of the site on the north shore.”

(It turned out that the cove best fitting the description was not even on the mainland. It was on the north side of what is called Magnuson’s Island, a low, wooded area separated from the mainland by a muskeg swamp, and a possession of the United States.)

When the party came back for dinner somewhat discouraged, Father Paquin had little trouble inducing them to try the American side at a point little more than a mile from their camp. Arriving at the little cove described by Powassin and pointed out by Father Paquin (on the island), the men arranged themselves in a line where each man was responsible for five feet of ground on each side of him, and then proceeded to walk in a westerly direction, paralleling the shore line.

It was hard work. In addition to cutting their way through piles of brushwood and clambering over fallen trees and huge rocks, they had to contend with hordes of mosquitoes, which settled upon them in the hot, stuffy woods. Progress was painfully slow.

But within a very short time these discomforts were forgotten. They were electrified by a sharp, excited cry from one of the men. Rushing over to him, the others beheld at their feet a number of flat stones carefully laid upon each other. Another fireplace! A big one this time!



Fatigue and pestering mosquitoes were forgotten and frantically the shovels, spades, and axes were put to work. In a very little time the outlines of a huge fireplace were laid bare. They had truly found something of historical worth, but as darkness was now settling down they went back to camp with high hopes to wait for another day and dig again. There was not much sleep for them that night.

Next morning digging was resumed in a methodical way. Poplar trees measuring eight to twelve inches in diameter had to be felled; the soil was a maze of roots, but within five days two other small fireplaces were discovered, and in the vicinity of the large chimney were found a pair of scissors, knife blades, a lead bullet, and brass handles of a cooking vessel (all very much rusted and corroded).

Unearthed in another spot was a pile of human bones. These, after a subsequent expert examination by physicians, were found to represent parts of twelve different skeletons, which apparently had been gathered somewhere and brought to the fort for burial.

Farther off from the large fireplace were uncovered half-rotted stumps of posts standing upright in the clay close to one another. In a straight line with these to the south, and then at right angles to the east and then north, were more half-rotted stumps and the reddish dust of others which had entirely decayed. There was no trace of the palisades marking the north wall, because the level of the lake had risen during the years to engulf it and wash it away.

The searching party was now confident it had discovered the site of old Fort St. Charles and the bones of part of the badly decomposed bodies La Vérendrye had ordered brought back to the fort for burial. Further exploratory operations had to be discontinued because the Jesuits had to return for their annual eight-day retreat.

At the end of the retreat the Jesuits again set out for Fort St. Charles. This time they took with them Father Beliveau, Chancellor of the Diocese of St. Boniface, and Judge L. A. Prud'homme, a historian long interested in the problem they were trying to solve—official witnesses, ecclesiastical and civil, of what they expected to find.

In his journal La Vérendrye had stated that he had nineteen skulls and the bodies of his son and Father Aulneau buried within the chapel of the fort. Only when these relics were found could they be absolutely sure they had actually discovered the old fort. Consequently these relics were the primary object of the second part of the 1908 expedition.

Within five days the task was completed. First the skulls were found. Nineteen of them, arranged in two double rows, were laying in the clay under about two feet of earth. They were in a good state of preservation. Rootlets had grown through the cavities of the eyes, ears, and noses. In the jawbone of one skull was firmly imbedded an arrowhead.

Certain now that they were within the limits of the chapel, the Jesuits proceeded cautiously, tense expectancy upon all of them. They photographed everything. They took notes and measurements, to reconstruct on paper the ground plan of the fort. Now a spade unearthed a piece of rotten wood. The search was about to end.

The rotted wood proved to be part of a box, and within what was left of the box were the remains of two headless skeletons—young La Vérendrye and Father Aulneau. They had been put in a box two feet wide and four feet long. Disarrangement of the bones and the small size of the box indicated the bodies must have been badly decomposed when buried.

The last bone of the spine (os sacrum) of one of the skeletons was broken slantingly, precisely as the wound of young Vérendrye was described: “He was found with a sort of iron hoe imbedded in his loins.”

Among the bones of the other skeleton were found beads of a rosary, a bunch of keys, and a small metal clasp such as Jesuits use to fasten the collars of their cassocks. Later examinations by physicians identified the bones as belonging to men the ages of La Vérendrye and Father Aulneau (at the time of their deaths).

So the remains of the forgotten Jesuit of 1736 were discovered by his Jesuit confrères of 1908. Reverently the bones were gathered—all the bones—and taken to the College of St. Boniface. Father Aulneau had returned to his own.

In the museum of the college were kept the relics of the courageous priest whom many would call a saint. There they were visited and viewed in reverence. But even with the Jesuits his bones were not secure. On a cold November night in 1921 the college burned to the ground. Lost in its ashes were the remains of the heroic and zealous priest. The twenty years that have passed (Father Shanahan was writing in 1941) have obliterated it from the earth almost as finally as did the hot ashes in 1921 remove from men’s eyes the bones of the lonely and saintly Aulneau.

Thus wrote Father Shanahan on his great hero, the saintly priest whom time almost forgot.

But time will not again erase Father Aulneau from the memories of men. Extending across the Lake of the Woods from the east and dividing its lower waters from its upper half is a great peninsula, the largest in the lake, which today bears the name Aulneau Peninsula. It looks across Little Traverse Bay at Massacre Island, and the story is told over and over by men of how the priest and his comrades there laid down their lives.

The site of old Fort St. Charles has been cleared and restored by the Knights of Columbus. A beautiful altar, housed in a chapel of concrete logs, has been installed. The corners of the fort are marked by concrete palisades, the place where the bodies were found is designated, and the old cross erected in 1908 still stands. A dock has been built at which the largest of the lake boats can be moored. Each year a pilgrimage is made to the place and a Mass said by the Bishop, and it is visited annually by hundreds, not only Catholics, but of every other faith.

Perhaps more pleasing, however, to the long-forgotten martyr himself would be the beautiful church in Warroad which was dedicated in 1954 to the memory of Father Aulneau.

Designed to portray the spirit and time of the pioneers, it is of logs with a roof of hand-split stakes. It has a tower, at the top of which is a cairn of stones and a cross—a replica of that erected on Massacre Island long ago, which bore the words:

*Rev. Pere Aulneau, S.J.  
Massacre ici l'an 1738.*

Before the tower stands a statue of Father Aulneau, with hand lifted in oblation.

I enjoy Father Shanahan, who is never without his Irish humour. His pride in his church is beautiful to see. Though it is called the Father Aulneau Memorial Church, it is officially designated as St. Mary's.

"The church cannot be officially named for Father Aulneau," he explains, "because he never yet has been canonized. It cannot be proved that he died in defence of the Faith. Most likely he was killed because he was a Frenchman—and that is hardly enough for canonization."

But, having smiled at this, he goes on: "Nevertheless his willingness to offer the supreme sacrifice is certain from his letters, and his piety and zeal also are evident. One doesn't have to be a martyr to be a saint."

Meantime, Father Shanahan has his troubles. For his parish in Warroad, the church was a giant project. His efforts for it aroused national interest, but he worked too hard and some time ago suffered a heart attack, so that he must go more slowly. Yet constantly he “begs,” as he puts it—for his church.

“It’s just like fishing,” he said to me, as one angler to another. “You are tired, yet there is that bay that hasn’t been worked. But *no* bay has worked today—so let’s go home. Still . . . this other bay *may* produce. . . . Away we go and give it a few casts. Begging is just like fishing—you’ve got to persevere—cast, and cast, and cast.”

He grinned.

“Our debt is \$84,000 at four per cent. Our whole parish income is about \$6,000 a year. You see we need a miracle—maybe not a first-class miracle like changing water to wine, but say a sort of third-class miracle.”

And then he added, with his irrepressible twinkle, “If something big doesn’t break before long there’ll be another dead priest right here. And his name won’t be Aulneau.”

## Wall-eyes, Unlimited

“This lake may be all right,” said Dick Tollefsrud as we headed in for camp that evening, “but it hasn’t shown me much so far.”

It was Dick’s first trip to Portage Bay. He is a cheery companion and a fine fisherman, and he wasn’t exactly complaining, but he was a little disappointed. I had told him fabulous stories about the Lake of the Woods, and especially of the wall-eye fishing on Shoal Lake. But we had encountered a period of cold, raw weather for several days—from the time of our arrival at camp in fact—during which we were forced to bundle up in the warmest of clothing and almost constantly wear rain garments because of the recurring periods of icy downpour. Under these conditions the fishing has been only fair to quite poor.

“Angling,” wrote old Izaak Walton, “may be said to be so like mathematics that it never can be fully learnt.”

This had been humiliatingly demonstrated to me, as well as to Moore and Gyp that week. We three veterans of the lake believed we knew every trick to get a fish to bite, and we had practised them all, and to no avail. We knew the wall-eyes *must* be there—Shoal Lake could not have lost all its finny population since we left it the year before. But they might as well have been in hell, or some other seaport town, for all the good they did us.

I did not blame Dick for being disappointed. I was disappointed, too, and the more so since I wanted to show the lake off to my friend and make good on all those golden promises. We had only one more day to spend, for we were due to start back home; and I confess it appeared that I had somewhat exaggerated matters to him in the stories I told him when I induced him to go up to the lake with me.

Nevertheless, he took it philosophically, and when we reached camp we found a new excitement. During the day one of the Indian guides had seen two huge snapping turtles fighting out in the little bay in front of the camp. With another guide, he took a boat, and the two of them managed to capture both ugly reptiles. These they now had imprisoned in a pair of washtubs, covered over with weighted boards, the creatures so big that they filled the tubs.

“Maybe we’ll butcher the turtles tonight,” said McKeever at supper, “and have fried turtle meat tomorrow.”

When he said that I noticed that Moore turned a little pale around the gills. Moore has only one weakness that I know of: his stomach. This does not extend to whiskey, where his capacities are as strong as any man I know. But in his eating he is, one might almost say, finicky. He likes what is set before him—as long as he is used to it. What he isn't used to, he can't get used to, and doesn't want to try.

Moore carries this idiosyncrasy to the point that he doesn't like venison. That, to my notion, is carrying things pretty far. But every man to his tastes, and Moore is entitled to his, and whatever his gustatorial prejudices may be he is as near perfect as a companion, sportsman, and citizen as any man can ever be.

Though the mention of eating turtle caused a malaise in Moore, to the rest of us it was a welcome suggestion, because fried turtle, properly cooked, is as good as fried chicken, and nobody can cook anything better than the presiding goddess of our camp, Aileen.

After supper, therefore, with Gyp Blair acting as chief butcher and Dick Tollefsrud as his assistant, the turtles were prepared for the pan. It was an interesting sight, though a somewhat grisly one. Butchering anything always is, and those two huge snappers, with their ugly reptile heads and moss-backed shells, were repulsive just to look at. But Gyp is an expert in this, as he is in many things, and Dick was a willing helper.

The process was as follows: McKeever first shot the turtle through the head with a .22 rifle. This, as everyone who knows turtles will understand, did not immediately kill the reptile. But it put him in enough of a coma so that his head could then be severed with an axe, after which the butchering of the meat out of the horny carapace was a matter of skill and labour.

With the rest of us, Moore watched the beginning of this operation. Dick had volunteered to chop off the turtles' necks after McKeever shot them. He had, that evening, donned a fresh pair of light tan slacks, brand new and of handsome cut, to go to the lodge. When he hit the first snapper's scaly neck with the axe, a great spurt of blood flew up and splashed all over those pretty pants of his.

At the moment my eyes were on Moore. He turned and staggered off, clutched at a tree, and I thought he was going to lose his temper.

Later, when I was returning from my cabin with a hunting knife to help butcher, and Gyp was splitting the sides of the shell with the axe, I found poor Moore sitting fifty feet away, on a stump, with his back to the whole

dreadful scene. As I came up his face was toward me, and in the dim light of early evening it looked forlornly yet picturesquely bile green.

“I’m not going to eat any of that, Paul,” he said to me in doleful and yet dogged tones.

With that he got up and wavered his way to his cabin at the far end of camp, a shaken man.

As an addendum, not only did Moore not eat any of the turtle when it was served next evening, deep fried in breadcrumbs, but he did not eat any meat of any kind during the rest of his stay at camp, for fear McKeever would slip a piece of turtle on his plate and he might eat it without knowing what it was.

Yet that evening one thing looked favourable even to Moore: the weather. At long last the clouds had been driven away, there was no wind for a change, the stars burned brilliantly in the sky, and the barometers (all except McKeever’s) were on the rise.

When I awoke next morning the day looked perfect. I hoped, and said so at breakfast, that perhaps on this last occasion Shoal Lake would live up to its reputation.

“It’s all right to hope, I guess,” said Dick. His voice sounded most sceptical.

After we crossed the Portage that morning, we made plans.

“We’re going to fish Five Sisters,” I told Moore.

He nodded. “We’ll head for the mouth of Snowshoe Bay.”

We fish together, and especially we always lunch together, but in the mornings our two boats often separate to scout. The one that finds the fish stays there, customarily, and the other eventually hunts it up and joins it.

Our Indian guide, Alex—whom Tollefsrud, that unreconstructed Minnesota Norwegian, persisted in calling “Axel”—set the ten-horse outboard at top speed and we soon were slamming across the slight chop of the unbelievably blue waters of Shoal Lake.

The day was gorgeous. Passing Spike Point and Wall Island, which guard each side of the mouth of Carl Bay, we headed south with the white foam splashing back from our bows, toward Pine Island, an often fruitful fishing ground. There Dick and I trolled for a time. But though we caught a couple of small fish, which we returned to the water, we soon desisted and

headed out into the middle of the lake for the Five Sisters, a group of lovely islands covered with trees and surrounded by rock shoals about which sometimes gather schools of wall-eyes.

Everything seemed beautifully alive. Ahead of us erupted a flight of white gulls from a bald rock on which they nested, screaming, swooping, and hovering. To the right was an island once covered with trees and shrubs, but now showing only some stark dead stubs—a cormorant colony. Terns of three kinds darted in the air, across the waves loons whimpered, and when we began to troll about the Five Sisters, the bushes and trees seemed vocal with bird songs of veery thrush, song sparrow, and warbler.

As always I was caught in a kind of trance by all this beauty and wildness. For myself I would have been quite content to go on fishing these islands, the dreamlike ecstasy of it enough for my soul, whether we caught any fish or not.

But I realized this would not do for Dick. He is a girl-watcher rather than a bird-watcher. There were no girls to watch here, so he wanted fish. However poetic the day, it could not compensate him for lack of the sport for which he had come.

So presently, deciding that the wall-eyes had not yet reached the Five Sisters, we reeled in and headed for the far side of the lake where Moore and Gyp had gone to fish near a point off Snowshoe Bay, on which stands a windowless, deserted building that once was a school for Indian children.

Once more we skipped exhilaratingly across the waves, splashing occasionally, enjoying the speed and the undulating motion. The day remained dazzlingly blue and bright, the whitecaps appearing on some of the waves betokened no storm, and when we reached the lee of Twin Point we began looking for Moore and Gyp with growing hope.

My reasoning was as direct and lucid as that of a geometrical theorem:

Moore and Gyp had not come looking for us;

*Ergo*, they must have found something more important—namely, fish;

*Ergo*, if we found Moore and Gyp, we would find fish also.

*Quod erat demonstrandum.*

South and east of Indian School Point is a group of small islands, the largest of which is called Potato Island. The odd name, according to the Indians, came about in the following manner:



An old Ojibwa man, living on Indian Bay, was tremendously fond of potatoes. But potatoes cost money, and unfortunately it was impossible to grow potatoes on the mainland, because the deer were fond of them too—of the succulent tops, that is, which they ate to the ground before they had a chance to grow tubers. This problem was solved by the old man's squaw, who canoed over to this island and there each year planted potatoes, which grew undisturbed by deer because of a quarter of a mile of open water intervening between it and the mainland.

After many years the old Indian died, perhaps from over-indulging his appetite for potatoes. His squaw caused him to be buried on the island, and as a fitting memorial planted potatoes on his grave. But she was of a thrifty nature, so each fall she went over and harvested the potatoes she had thus planted. She said they grew larger and richer on the old man's grave than anywhere else, and expressed the opinion that since the potatoes, during his life, had nourished her man, it was only right that he, in turn, should nurture them.

All this was long ago, and potatoes no longer grow there, but it is still called Potato Island.

As we approached this island, I saw the boat with Moore and Gyp just coming out from beyond its eastward point. They saw us, too, and at once began waving their arms at us, beckoning us with excitement to come over to them.

"They're here!" yelled Moore as soon as we were close enough to hear him.

"We've got twenty already!" shouted Gyp.

"Drop in anywhere around here, and you'll get 'em!" Moore said, and with that he set his hook into a striking fish and began his battle to land it.

This was the kind of news we had been wanting. The guide throttled the motor down to slow trolling pace, and out went our lines. In less than five seconds Dick had a strike.

"Wall-eye!" he yelled.

I reeled in while he brought in and landed his fish, a nice three pounder.

"Put that one on the stringer," I said to the guide. "He'll be just right for lunch."

Meantime, my own line was going out. Before Dick had his lure in the water again I, in turn, felt that ecstatic thrill which comes when a fighting

fish takes and your rod arches as he starts away with the reel whirring.

It was another nice one when the landing net brought it in, almost a perfect match for Dick's.

"Look at the minnows!" Dick suddenly exclaimed.

I saw them, too. Ahead of our boat the water seemed fairly to glint with them. Then and there I knew we were in for some wonderful fishing; for when the day is perfect, the barometer rising, and the minnows shoaling in great numbers, conditions are at their ideal best for wall-eyes.

Yet even then I did not imagine even faintly the true extent of the greatness of the fishing before us. Every angler dreams of a day when the fish are so plentiful and so fiercely striking that he has an era of bliss uninterrupted, in which his sole occupation is the continuous battling of finny adversaries, landing them, and casting out for more. Most fishermen have enjoyed such halcyon periods for a few minutes, or even for a few hours at a time. But this day was unparalleled in my experience.

It was as if the wall-eyes, after their days of fitfulness and sulking, suddenly had determined to make up in one single mad saturnalia for all the frustration and disappointment they had visited on us in the past. Why? I cannot explain it, and neither could Izaak Walton have explained it. As he so truly pointed out, like mathematics, fishing constantly offers new scopes and vistas for solution. Two days may be as alike as it is possible for days to be in temperature, barometric reading, direction of wind, sunlight, everything: yet one day may be barren of fish, the other replete.

This particular day was, of course, brilliant as to sunshine. But no more brilliant than other days I have known on the lake. Yet on this day of all days the fish thronged to our lures, fought each other off to be the first to bite, almost flung themselves into our boat. In all my experience I have never known anything like it.

Within ten minutes we had all the fine fish we could possibly use for noonday lunch. From then on we released anything under seven pounds by the pocket scales, since we wanted only a few large ones to ship home.

But the difficulty was in getting our lures down deep enough to reach the real lunkers which seemed to lie below their smaller brethren. Out would go my bait or Dick's—we were using a silver-gold flatfish with a half-ounce sinker ahead of a three-foot nylon leader—and before that lure was down four feet in the water a fish would have it.

They were insatiable, innumerable, terrific. We tried heavier weights for more rapid sinking, and once in a while we managed to get deep enough to hook a really important fish before a smaller one struck. And when I use that word “smaller,” I am referring to fish sometimes of four, five, and even six pounds—the kind that ordinarily would make an angler’s heart sing with pride if he landed them.

But also, with these heavier sinkers, we hooked snags on the bottom more frequently, which made it difficult.

Once Dick hung up on a rocky bottom. As the boat returned with the motor reversed, in an effort to release the lure, the guide, looking over the side, exclaimed “There’s a fish on!”

We all looked. Sure enough, in the moments between waves when there was sufficient clarity, we could just make out the dark shape, struggling against the restraint of the leader. In this case it was the sinker which was wedged between two teeth of rock, and the wall-eye had three feet of leader on which to struggle down there.

All at once the sinker came loose—the fish had pulled it out the way it went in. With a crow of delight, Dick shortened line, and had the satisfaction a few minutes later of boating a fish which had done him the favour of freeing his line when he was snagged.

“Let him go,” he said. “He deserves his freedom. It isn’t every fisherman who has a trained fish to pull his lure loose for him, like this one did for me.”

I laughed. “Trained fish! That fellow weighs two pounds at the most. Would you let him go if he weighed ten?”

Dick gave me his grin. “That would be overtrained,” he said.

At noon both boats headed for a small island south of Potato, a perfect lunch site, and we were as happy at that lunch camp as I’ve ever seen us be.

Moore and Gyp, who like ourselves had released all fish they did not need, had three beauties on their stringers. The biggest of these weighed eleven pounds, the others nine or better. Dick had a whopper—also around eleven. I had a nice one of eight pounds, and mine was the smallest in the group.

Besides these, both boats had caught a perfect raft of lesser fishes, some ranging up to better than six pounds, which would have rejoiced our hearts on an ordinary day, but which we released unhurt save for the sting of the

hook pricks in their mouths, to grow bigger for another day—or another fisherman.

“We’re fishing only for the big ones,” Moore said.

I nodded. “But it’s tough getting down to them without hitting a smaller one first.”

“Tough?” Dick snorted. “If this is tough, man, just let it keep getting tougher!”

We took a full hour for lunch, luxuriating in the warmth of the sun and drinking in the beauty of the lake. In a small bay off an islet toward the shore a couple of snowy pelicans were fishing. I saw a great blue heron standing like a slender statue in the shallows, his head spearing down again and again for minnows. Above and about us circled gulls and terns, and a sooty flight of cormorants winged low over the water toward their home island. A chattering kingfisher blazed blue and white as he dived and fluttered up with a tiny fish in his bill. In the undergrowth and trees of our island birds carolled arias of joy.

But Dick wanted more action. “Time’s a-wasting, men,” he said. “Let’s get back to work.”

Back to work. But what work!

It sometimes happens that when fishing is good in the morning it falls off or ceases entirely after lunch. It sometimes happens, also, that when fishing is good for short periods, it is spotty, with intervening periods of dearth.

Neither of these happenings took place that day. When we returned to the little archipelago of which Potato Island is chief, with the eyeless clapboard structure of the old Indian schoolhouse looking at us from the point half a mile away, the wall-eyes seemed if anything more eager than they had been before we left them.

Time after time, trolling on opposite sides of the boat, Dick and I hooked fish at the same instant and had the excitement of landing them under circumstances that required extra alertness and manœuvring to keep them from entangling our lines.

Other species beside wall-eyes co-operated also. Five times that afternoon I had a small-mouth bass go skipping across the waves, frantically trying to throw the hook, although we were not fishing for bass, were trolling rather than casting, and were using lures not supposed to be

particularly fascinating to them. Each time I landed my fish. The largest weighed about three pounds. All were returned unharmed to the water, since the bass season was not yet open.

Dick had about equal luck with bass, and the northerns intervened at times with fury on both our lines. We saved a big twelve-pounder Dick caught, for Gyp, but otherwise we released them all.

And then Dick's line sang suddenly with such a refrain, as the reel whizzed, that I knew it could only be a very good fish.

"Muskie?" I asked Alex.

The Indian watched the line for a moment. Then he nodded.

Expertly Dick fought him, standing up in the boat. But he was fishing with relatively light tackle for wall-eyes, and this muskie was a mighty one, as we saw a few minutes later when he broke water, giving us a glimpse that put our hearts in our mouths.

The muskie headed for some reeds and there seemed no way to check him. At the last moment, however, he veered and took off at an angle, the reel whirring and the rod curving in an arch. Again and again Dick turned him from disaster, and I am sure that, with all the disadvantages against him, he might have landed that muskie, but for an accident.

Dick is in the record books twice for large fish, having won a national magazine's fishing contest one year for the greatest brook trout taken on fly, and a second year for the greatest brookie in the open classification. He also has captured mighty northerns, salmon, steel-head, and other magnificent fish in numbers.

But this day Fate was against him. All at once the muskie sounded. There was a terrific jerk and the line went limp.

Ruefully Dick reeled in. Leader and lure were gone. The muskie had fouled the line on a sharp-edged rock and sheared it off.

We stood looking at the severed line, shaking our heads, when suddenly the Indian gave an exclamation.

"Look at that!" he cried.

A hundred feet from the boat, a great fish broke the water in a series of astounding jumps, flailing the air with his tail. Each leap increased the distance from us and each leap seemed higher and wilder. It was Dick's muskie, now that he had broken the line, still madly trying to shake the

stinging lure from his mouth. Never have I seen a fish in such an exhibition of insane fury. But in a few moments he disappeared deep in the lake. We knew he would soon rid himself of the lure, if he had not done so already, and be none the worse for it in a few days.

With that dramatic episode concluded, we returned to our wall-eyes. About three in the afternoon I heard a shout from the other boat, and Moore and Gyp headed over toward us. On the middle thwart sat Gyp with a grin clear across his face. He was holding up for us something I never saw before or since.

Two wall-eyes had hooked themselves on the *same lure*, a flatfish. He and Moore wanted us to see it, as witnesses. To make it more sure, Dick took a photograph of the truly unusual “double” on a single lure. It was a good illustration of the ferocity with which the fish were striking that day—so fiercely that two of them hit and hooked themselves on the same lure at the same instant.

About four o’clock Dick landed a wall-eye weighing over eight pounds. When the fish was on the stringer, he looked at me.

“What do you say?” he asked with a grin.

I knew what he meant.

In all my life I had never expected the day to come when I would be so tired of catching wonderful fish that I would want to quit—and quit right when they were striking most fiercely.

I nodded.

Both of us felt the same way at the same moment. The stringers were brought in: twelve magnificent fish, none under seven pounds. We had, between us, in the hours from ten o’clock in the morning when we began fishing off Potato Island Archipelago, until four o’clock in the afternoon, with an hour off for lunch—five actual hours of fishing—caught and landed one hundred and twenty-five fish. Of these perhaps twenty were northern pike, nine were bass, and two or three were perch. There was also the muskie, which, however, got away, though he made up for that by the thrills he gave us while doing it. All the rest were wall-eyes, and of all these fish we kept only three or four for lunch, the big northern for Gyp, and the few we took in to be shipped home.

It was the most incredible fishing I ever knew. Surfeited with it, we turned our boat’s stern to Potato Island and started back across the lake for camp. Within a few minutes I looked back and saw the other boat following

us. Moore and Gyp had their fill, too. Their report later showed they did even better than we did, although of course they found the fish earlier than did we. They had that day caught one hundred and eighty-one fish—a total for the two boats of three hundred and eleven fish, an average for each of the four of us of almost eighty fish apiece.

Dick turned in the boat and grinned back at me.

Then he nodded and held up his hand with the thumb and forefinger forming a circle, the other fingers outspread, and gave it a little tossing gesture, the old, old sign of “*Okay!*”

## Fishermen are not (necessarily) Liars

It is evening. The day's fishing is over, and the faithful of Portage Bay have wreaked havoc on the wonderful dinner Aileen has prepared for them, and her hand-maidens have set before them—a dinner, to use the words of Izaak Walton, “too good for any but anglers, or very honest men.” Now, replete and happy, they step forth from the lodge and gaze about them with the bland faces of men at peace with the world and their own digestions.

Before the lodge is a grassy slope which invites one, if he desires, to sprawl on the soft sod; and this we do, for there are still some hours of light in these northern latitudes of long summer days. We gaze at the Estuary, dimpling here and there with evening rising fish; and at the rocky, tree-clad escarpment beyond; and they seem to be bathed in a quiet, translucent light as pure as that of creation's first morning.

To add to our content, the birds are holding evensong. I mark the hymns of a rose-breasted grosbeak and several white-throated sparrows, the oft-repeated *teacher-teacher-teacher* of an oven bird, the brilliantly warbled aria of a wren, and high in the trees a vireo, such as the Indians call the “leaf-counter,” repeating endlessly his robin-like phrases, separated by deliberate pauses.

It is the smiling story of the Indians that the little leaf-counter, having disobeyed the great Manitou, for punishment was commanded to count all the leaves of the forest. And on this endless task the poor bird labours every day, throughout the day. You can hear him and his brethren, continuously and everywhere, so that you sometimes wonder how they have time to find food, so everlastingly do they keep at it. At times they repeat their chirruping calls as often as forty a minute throughout the daylight hours. And indeed they do sound very like the Ojibwa words for “one, two, three, four”—*be-zhik'*—*neesh*—*né-sui*—*ne-win'*——

Among us, of course, are always some eager beavers: persons who rush about, perhaps for a little extra casting in the bay after dinner, or even for late night trolling on Shoal Lake, as if all the fishing might be used up in the next twenty-four hours, and they would be cheated of their share of it if they do not get it now.

For most of us, however, this is the hour for leisure and contemplation and reminiscence. We gather on the sward, a few of us, sitting or



outstretched, and cigarettes and pipes are lighted, or succulent grass stems chewed, and tales are told.

In some manner a belief has grown up (among non-fishermen) that all fishermen are liars. The ancient chestnut of “the big one that got away” is trotted out by such, and dusted off, and put through its tired paces—a joke hoary of age, and compounded and preserved by people who know nothing about fishing and have the firm conviction that when a man speaks of a mighty fish he failed to land he is invariably fracturing the truth.

But take note of this, as we exchange experiences on the grass before the lodge this evening: when real fishermen hear such an account, they listen to it with respect, and are interested in it, and believe it. For they *know* it is true. The big fish *are* the ones that get away—and no angler worth the name exists who has not lost his big fish, and more than once.

A true fisherman, if he gets a glimpse of a fish, is a pretty good judge of its size, even though he loses it; and he will describe it to his fellow experts as accurately as he can, when later recounting the episode. And to those who listen, the details of his battle, and the tackle used, and the tactics of the fish, and the manner in which it escaped all are matters of absorbing interest. For his mistakes, if he made any, can thus be better avoided; and the lost quarry’s behaviour is remembered so that if such a fish be hooked by the listener tomorrow, or next week, or even years from now—whenever the moment fraught with fate may come—pitfalls can be better avoided, and perhaps better success achieved than has just been recited.

Lying is therefore no inseparable part of the fabric of the lives of fishermen. In thinking over my fishing friends, I never knew one who would tell the mean, the treacherous, or the cheating lie, because they are men of honour and high character to whom such a thing is despicable.

It is the *intent* to deceive that makes the lie; and this fact is what releases my friends from culpability when they foregather and enlarge on matters sometimes that stretch the capacity of belief. For these yams are to them merely an invigorating and healthful exercise of the imagination, the purpose being to entertain. The fact that they are told with great gravity of expression and much circumstantial detail is part of the telling of them.

One form of lie, told to amuse, not deceive, is the Progressive Lie. And this, as it has been practised at Portage Bay, I now describe. It is not a new form of falsification, and perhaps has been described before, but this is the

manner in which it was erected, and upper stories built upon it, and finally its roof garnished with a tower of mendacity, one evening some time ago.

Hanging on a wall of the lodge is a mounted crappie, a giant of its species. Also on the walls are mounted a muskie and a mounted wall-eye. The latter is Miss Cricket's celebrated fish, and the muskie has its story also, into which I will not now go. Invariably a newcomer to the camp will learn the story of these last two fish, and invariably he will get around to asking about the crappie.

I was sitting one evening by the window with Clayton Moore when a young man fresh from the wilds of Chicago gazed upon the mounted crappie. He had fished for crappie, and he knew something about them, or thought he did, and he realized that this crappie on the wall was close to a record, if not *the* record, and must have a thrilling story connected with it.

"I wonder who caught that one," he said to nobody in particular.

Moore answered him quietly. "It happens that I did."

"You?" said the young man with sudden interest.

Moore can assume an expression of such childlike innocence, and at the same time such nobility and gentle candour, that you would swear he was a saint who might be caught up to heaven at any minute.

"Yes," he said, as if modestly deprecating the whole matter. "I picked that fellow up right here—off the end of the dock. Two years ago this summer. That little bay's full of 'em—you can see 'em breaking water out there right now if you look through the window. Nobody fishes for them much, because there are more important fish. I just happened to have a fly rod up here, and went down for a few minutes—maybe five or ten—to feel it out. Well, I tied into *him*. Joe thought enough of him to get him mounted. Three pounds, two ounces, as I remember."

With that, Moore got up and went out. The young man stared after him goggle-eyed as the crappie on the wall. A two-pound crappie is a big one, and to "pick up" a fish of three pounds, two ounces, with a fly, off the end of the dock right down there—it was astounding! He had forgotten to ask what fly Moore used, and a number of other important things. . . .

While he was again regarding the mounted fish and thinking of the questions he had omitted, Gyp Blair strolled into the room. He observed the direction of the young man's gaze and said, "Nice one, isn't he?"

The young man nodded. "Yes—yes, he sure is."

“He weighed three pounds, eight ounces,” said Gyp. “I remember it exactly, because I weighed him at the dock right after I caught him——”

“*You* caught him?”

“Sure. Four years ago. Up the Estuary about a quarter of a mile, where it widens. There’s a weed bed there. I was plug-casting for bass——”

“*Plugs?* It wasn’t a fly rod, then?”

“Oh no. What are you talking about? Nobody ever uses a fly rod up here. As I was saying, this crappie came up, and he was so big and mean that he actually fought off a fair-sized bass before he struck my lure. Joe begged me for him, and had him mounted.”

Gyp went to the front door, gazed out, saw somebody he wanted to speak to, and left the dining-room. The young man was still gazing after him, open mouthed, when Doc Tolle entered.

“Hi, gentlemen,” said Doc, nodding in his pleasant manner.

“Hello, Doctor,” said the young man. “We—we’ve just been talking about that crappie on the wall, and—well, do you know anything about how he was caught?”

“Why, sure.” Doc chuckled. “Remember the day I got him?” he said, appealing to me. Then, to the young man, “It was over on Shoal Lake. We were trolling. For wall-eyes——”

“You mean to say *you* caught that fish?” gasped the young man. “And *trolling?*”

“Of course. Everybody knows it. Let’s see—what did he weigh? Oh, yes. Three pounds, thirteen ounces. Joe wanted to enter him in the national fishing contest—it was five years ago. But I didn’t want to go to all that trouble—measuring, making affidavits, taking photos, the correspondence, and so on. So he asked me for the fish, and there it is.”

As Doc went out of the front door, McKeever came in from the kitchen.

He sat down with us, a benignant expression of lofty virtue and morality on his face. The young man gazed at the crappie, and then at the camp boss.

Presently he cleared his throat. “Mr. McKeever,” he said, “I’m a little confused. We’ve been talking about the big crappie there. Three different gentlemen assured me that they caught it——”

“Who were they?” asked McKeever.

“Well—Mr. Moore—and Mr. Blair—and Dr. Tolle——”

McKeever chortled indulgently. “Haven’t you learned yet not to believe anything those characters tell you? They’d lie when they could save money by telling the truth. If you really want to know who caught the fish *I* did. Think I’d go to the expense of mounting it and putting it up there if anybody else had caught it?”

“And—and—where did *you* catch it?” gulped the young man.

“Up by the ice-house. Last fall, right at the end of the season. I was trying out a spinning rod one of the guests had brought——”

“A *spinning* rod?”

“Yes. Tubular glass, with a four-pound test monofilament line and one of those patent French spinners. The fish put up a nice little battle. He weighed exactly four pounds—right on the nose.”

This time it was the young man who got up. He appeared to be suffering as he staggered out.

Next day he discovered—as all of us knew all the time—that the crappie on the wall was of papier-mâché, a lifelike job of moulding, and artistically coloured to represent the real thing, put out by some sporting-goods house.

He privately confided to Art Land that we might not be the biggest liars in the world, but we would be if we kept on practising at it.

All that, however, happened some time ago, and this evening we are out on the greensward before the lodge and the talk slides back and forth. And presently something reminds Moore of a story.

Moore has the true epic style, and it is a treat to hear him embark on a yarn, with his fine face, and his dark eyes sparkling, and his humorous mouth. He assures us beforehand that the story he is about to tell is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and I, for one, am prepared to believe his words, as he tells us:

#### THE STORY OF THE OLD WHITE HORSE

This happened (says Moore) to a friend of mine—Charlie Kaiser, who died a year or so ago, as grand a guy as you could wish to meet.

Charlie belonged to a duck-shooting club, near his home city, Springfield, Illinois. One fall the shooting was great. He got his limit every

time he went out. He also did a little bragging about his luck, until finally three friends of his began badgering him to take them out; so much so that he finally agreed.

They got up not long after midnight, to be in the blind before dawn, and Charlie drove them out twenty or thirty miles in the country to the club in his own car. There was, of course, a little good-natured grouching—you know how it is—about the earliness of the rising and the trouble connected with it. But this was only natural, and in anticipation of the shooting, everybody was in good humour.

But that day—did you ever see it fail?—when Charlie wanted to show off his club, the ducks decided differently. When before there had been perfect swarms of mallards, sprig, canvasback, and teal, the four hunters sat all morning and saw only one solitary mud hen, too far away to shoot even if they had wanted it.

As the hours lengthened, I regret to say, Charlie's guests began to needle him. Their sarcasms and personalities became progressively more painful, and by the time they gave up and started back to the city, they were really burning Charlie about his "false alarm club," and his boasting, and his failure to produce, and other matters, until even to Charlie, who was the personification of good humour and patience, it became unpleasant, and then tiresome, and finally irritating.

This was especially so since he was their host, and they were free-loading, and had come by their own self-invitation, and he hadn't guaranteed them any ducks in the first place. By the time they were halfway back to town, Charlie was glum and silent. His guests figured perhaps they had gone a little too far, but that didn't cause them to let up. They only poured it on the more.

About that time a little cottontail rabbit scurried across the road ahead of the car.

"Too bad we can't stop and go rabbit hunting," one of Charlie's companions said. "At least we'd get a chance to shoot at *something*."

"If you really want to hunt rabbits," replied Charlie, "I happen to know the farmer who owns the next place. I'll stop and ask him if he'll let us do a little gunning there."

The three all agreed that this might be a good idea.

So Charlie drove into the next farmyard, and got out of the car, and hunted up his friend, the farmer, who was down at the barn, and made his

pitch.

“Why, sure,” said the farmer. “Go ahead and hunt. There are a few rabbits down in the trees and brush along the creek in the lower pasture. You’re welcome to them.”

Charlie thanked him, and started back to the car.

“By the way,” said the farmer, “would you do me a favour?”

“Of course, be glad to,” said Charlie.

“We’ve got an old white horse down in the pasture somewhere,” the farmer said. “He’s about thirty years old, and he hasn’t worked for years—been a sort of a pensioner. But lately he’s gone blind, and he’s starving to death because he can’t see to find food. Someone ought to put him out of his misery, but he’s been in the family so long that none of us has the heart to shoot him. If you see him, would you do it for me?”

Charlie promised. But when he went back to his guests, he did not mention it to them.

They started out across the wooded pasture, and shot a cottontail or two. And then Charlie saw the old white horse.

It was standing by itself near the creek, its poor old ribs showing, its head held back like a blind horse holds its head, and clearly it would be a mercy to end its existence.

“Look there, fellows,” said Charlie, “There’s a horse. Let’s go over and take a look at him.”

The four of them went over, and the horse stood still as they gathered around it.

“He looks awful thin,” one of the hunters said.

“Wonder what’s the matter with him?” said another.

Charlie spoke up suddenly.

“I don’t know what’s the matter with him,” he said “but he’s too bony and ugly to stay alive!”

With that he upped his gun and blasted a hole through the poor old nag’s head.

Down came the horse, legs flying and kicking, thumping the ground, and raising an awful cloud of dust.

Charlie's three guests stood staring at him with their eyes bugging out and their mouths wide open, as if they couldn't believe what they had just seen. Their expressions said that they thought he had gone suddenly mad.

"You know something?" Charlie said. "I never shot a horse before." And then, as if suddenly thinking of something he'd overlooked, "Why—I've never shot a man, either!"

He turned to his companions.

Not one of them was in sight.

As a man they had dived head first into the brush and were cowering in it like frightened quail, scared to death that he would spot them.

Now they remembered the bad time they had been giving him all morning. And to their minds there could be but one explanation of his sudden shooting of the farmer's horse. He had become demented—a dangerous homicidal maniac, on the loose and armed with a gun—to *add a man to the list of game he had killed*.

Meantime, Charlie had his joke, and now he called to them. They did not reply. He tried to find them, hunting through the bushes, and laughing to show it was all in fun.

But to his terror-stricken friends his laughter only added the final touch of horror to the situation. There was Charlie, a crazed killer, stalking them and laughing insanely as he did so!

Deeper they fled into the bush, almost burrowing into the ground in abject and trembling dread.

To make a long story short (Moore concludes) it took Charlie most of the rest of the day to get those cowering refugees out of their bushes in the creek bottom. He tried driving about the farm in his car, calling to them. They only quaked and kept more closely to their coverts. A bird dog couldn't have flushed them.

At last Charlie induced the farmer and his wife to go down into the pasture and hunt for them. It was, I believe, the assurances of the lady that eventually convinced the fugitives it really was a joke, and Charlie's reason hadn't left him after all.

One by one, slowly and hesitantly, and looking as if any false move would send them bounding back into their bushes once more, they came out. Charlie finally had them all in his car and he drove them back to their homes in time for late dinner.

For a long time afterward they regarded him with an uneasy eye whenever they met. And neither during the trip home nor at any time later did it ever occur to any of them again to aim needling remarks in Charlie Kaiser's direction.

That is the story as Moore tells it, and we believe it fully.

Then Gyp speaks.

"I call to mind something you may find it hard to believe," he begins. "Clayton and I were fishing for yellow perch on a lake a few years back, and Clayton's father was fishing with us. The old gentleman hooked a big perch, and somehow, in his excitement, he dropped his rod over the side of the boat.

"We were anchored at the time in about twenty feet of water, and of course we couldn't see the rod. But Clayton said 'Just a minute, Dad. I'll make a cast and get that rod for you.'

"Just like that! As sublime and sure as if he didn't have a doubt in the world about it.

"Well, he made the cast. Just *one* cast, mind you. He felt something and reeled in.

"Believe it or not, the end of his lure was in the tip guide of his father's rod!

"Not only that, but when he handed the rod over to his father and the old gentleman reeled in, that big perch was still on, and they landed him too."

I have heard that story before. I believe it, have always believed it, and urge you to believe it too, even if the odds of hooking the tip guide of a rod, in twenty feet of water, with a single cast, are not less than ten thousand to one.

Now McKeever clears his throat. "Speaking of believable stories," he says, "something happened a winter or so ago down near Oak Island that might interest you."

McKeever has that look of bland, dovelike innocence which is supposed to be the hallmark of probity and integrity. The very sun wrinkles at the corners of his eyes radiate gentle candour and tenderness of conscience. Yet as I repeat his remarks, I warn you that I will not take any responsibility for them, because I have my own integrity to uphold. After all, in my home



community I am held in reasonably good repute, and I have a wife whose repute is naturally higher than mine, and a family including young and trusting grandchildren. I must, therefore, be reasonably careful with the truth at least in the printed word.

Nevertheless—having thus washed my hands of it—I set forth, as McKeever tells it:

### THE STORY OF JIM SITDOWN'S ODD DEMISE

Winters here on the Lake of the Woods (begins McKeever) are somewhat cold. Temperatures often drop to more than sixty degrees below zero, and even seventy. To a stranger who has never experienced it, cold like that may be hard to imagine. For instance, if you spit, the saliva crackles in mid-air, frozen to solid ice before it hits the snowy ground. Furthermore, whiskey when exposed freezes to a rocklike consistency, so that you can use it, if you wish for a paper-weight.

One night, a winter or two ago, the thermometer fell to a new record, so low that nobody really could tell how cold it was, because the mercury went entirely down into the bulb and could not be read. Maybe it was seventy-five, maybe eighty degrees, below zero, for all I know.

In that spell of record cold an Indian named Jim Sitdown met his death in an odd manner. The day before, Sitdown had been at the store on Oak Island. He there came into a windfall. The windfall consisted of a case of beer, and he came into it by the simple expedient of lifting it from the counter while nobody was looking and lugging it off.

Some persons would have shared such a windfall with friends; but Sitdown was no philanthropist. So, instead of sharing it, he carried the case of beer across the frozen channel to Squaw Island, on which was his cabin.

It was a very small cabin, about large enough for one man to sit down in, or perhaps lie down in; if he didn't have more than one case of beer to contend with for room. There, after building an all-night fire in the crude fireplace, he drank up the entire case of beer himself, solitary and alone.

Jim Sitdown had an enormous capacity for beer, but even a capacity like that has its limits. He fell into a drunken slumber, like that of a man who has been drugged. When he awakened the fire had burned out in the fireplace and the cabin was getting cold. But outside the sun was shining brightly and it was broad day.

Sitdown rose. He did not know how cold it was outside. His head ached too greatly to permit him to think of anything much, let alone remember that sometimes when the sun is shining, the mercury can make additional record descents into the bulb of the thermometer.

But he did know one thing. A case of beer consumed into one human alimentary canal imposes certain imperative physical demands sooner or later. Sitdown opened his cabin door and staggered out, to a place a little distance off, behind a clump of small spruce trees, to attend to his necessity.

Hours later they found him.

He was stone dead, still standing there by the little clump of small spruces, frozen rigidly in a sort of meditative attitude.

The people who found him (says McKeever solemnly) swear that the cause of his death was that he stood too long motionless in one spot—always a dangerous thing to do on a real cold day in this locality. His shadow, cast behind him on an area of glare ice, had frozen fast there. Because his shadow could not move, Jim Sitdown could not; and since there was nobody to help him, the poor fellow just stood there and froze to death.

They took an ice-pick and a crowbar, and pried up his shadow from the ice before they could move him; and they just folded his shadow over his body, like a piece of black paper, and put him on a shelf in a warehouse for the time being, since the ground was frozen too hard to dig a grave. By the time they got around to burying him in the spring, it had warmed up enough to thaw out the shadow, and it was pliable again, and he was thereupon interred.

If any of you doubt this true account (McKeever concludes) I will be glad to take you down to Squaw Island and point out Jim Sitdown's grave to prove it. There is a stick planted at the head of the grave, with, as a fitting memorial, an empty beer can hung on it.

After this there is silence for the space of a few minutes. The capacity for swallowing statements of even this audience has been strained to its limits.

Presently, however, having like the anaconda been temporarily numbed by what we have engorged, we recover a little, and I urge Doc to give us a truthful experience.

But Doc, the real man of action of us all, proverbially prefers listening to talking. He could tell of adventures riding his high, wild cattle range in the Siskiyou Mountains of Oregon; of leading a posse after rustlers in the true old Western style; of shooting killer bears; of fighting forest fires when the flames threatened to engulf the fighting crews until a change of wind and weather saved them; of a manhunt for two armed outlaws who swore they would kill rather than be taken, and who at last shot it out before they were wounded and captured; of any number of other things.

But he rarely tells stories. His account of the great hurricane, to which I have given some attention in “The Day the Lake Went Mad,” is a classic example of his economy of words. When his wife, who had heard about the storm, asked him to tell her about it, he gave her what he considered the gist of it in three words:

“It blew some.”

So Doc smiles, and pulls at his cigarette, and shakes his head.

For lack of any other volunteers, I now tell them:

#### THE STORY OF HANK BREWER AND THE SNAKE

Hank Brewer was a man I knew back in Missouri, when I was living there. He was a puny infant when he was born, and all the old ladies of the neighbourhood cheered up his parents by predicting that he would never live.

But no such luck was in store for them. Hank Brewer lived and grew up to be celebrated for his flowery and picturesque mendacity, his devotion to the juice of the corn as distilled and placed in a jug, his love of fishing, and his complete lack of interest in any form of honest toil.

He liked to fish because there was no work connected with it, and he would take his cane pole—he never used the word “rod”—and his jug of white mule, and go down the Missouri River, looking for a likely spot. When he found a place to his liking, he would stay there all day, taking precautionary anti-snake bite dosages from the jug at frequent intervals and watching his bobber.

After such a day he would come home at night with a string of catfish, an empty jug, and a jag on—and this in spite of the fact that he hadn’t seen a snake.

But one time he did see a snake, and he came back cold sober and did what nobody ever expected: he took the teetotaler’s pledge.

That day Brewer had found on the banks of the wide Missouri a fishing spot that looked simply ideal—a deep hole close to the shore, trees spreading their branches above for shade, and a log lying parallel to the river, of just the right thickness and at just the right distance from the water for a perfect seat.

Brewer set his jug in a convenient place on the ground where it would be in easy reach. Then he stepped over the log, cast his line into the water, and sat.

It was at this moment that he first looked down. The sight he saw occasioned him considerable embarrassment.

Right between his two feet, all coiled and ready to strike, was a three-foot cotton-mouth water moccasin, the bite of which was death.

Brewer later told me that it was turning its ugly head from one of his legs to the other, as if it were trying to make up its mind as to which one it wanted to bite first.

Of course, Brewer froze still. He knew that if he moved either foot, he would make up the snake's mind—it would bite the leg that moved. So he sat motionless, quaking inwardly, and thinking doleful thoughts.

Brewer did not know how long that serpent would go on saying “Eenie-meenie-minie-moe” over his shanks. Even a woman will make up her mind eventually, and he was sure the water moccasin would.

But something occurred to him. In his pocket was a knife with a spring blade. Taking the utmost care not to move his legs by so much as a hair's breadth, he reached out. When he pressed the button, out sprang the blade.

Brewer now had an open knife in his hand, but he still had a problem of delicate complications to figure out. If he could spear the snake's head just right, he might save his own life. But the feat was more difficult than it might appear, for the reptile was continually shifting the position of its head, being evidently under the impression it had all afternoon to decide and not yet quite sure which of Brewer's legs would be the most toothsome. Meantime, Brewer had one stab—just one. If he missed the first stab, the second stab would be the snake's.

So he made long and careful calculations, trying to aim his thrust exactly, waiting for exactly the right instant, and schooling himself to combine care and accuracy with a blow of sufficient force to effect his object.

It was at this moment that surplusage took place in Hank Brewer's life.

Just as he poised, ready for his stab, nicely calculated and with his life depending on it, a two-pound yellow catfish took his hook—which all the time had been dangling, baited, in the river—and began fighting and swirling to get away as a catfish will.

There was Brewer—the fishing pole in his hand jerking violently up and down—and he did not dare let go of it, or allow that yanking to so much as stir his feet. And there was the snake—he had to get in his crucial stab at the snake.

He held the rod in spite of its bending, threshing tip. And he held his breath.

Now he saw the moccasin cease weaving its head back and forth and fix its sinister beady eyes on his left shank. Evidently it had at last selected that leg to bite, choosing the meatier and juicier part of the calf in which to sink its fangs.

The critical moment had come. For an instant the serpent's head was still as it drew back a little for the strike.

In that instant Brewer made his stab!

Luck, immense luck, was with him. Fair in the middle the knife point caught the ugly flat head. Through it went the blade, pinning it to the ground. He was saved!

But that, as Brewer explained to me afterwards, was not what made him take the pledge.

When he speared the reptile's head to the ground, its writhing body flashed up suddenly and coiled itself right around one of his legs.

Brewer told me that he jumped backward off that log so quick that he left his pants sitting on it.

I have always had my reservations concerning that last statement, but give it for what it is worth. At any rate, Brewer's reformation began from that day. It lasted for three months before he fell once more into the congenial slough of drunkenness.

The sun has sunk behind the pines on the other side of the Estuary. From the dimming woods on either bank the grey shadows creep to erase the last lingering twilight. Above, stars begin to burn, all at once, as if someone has

switched them on. A majestic shadow passes overhead, with slow measured beat of heavy wings—a great blue heron, belated on his way to his island rookery.

McKeever departs for one of his countless tasks about the camp. One by one the cigarettes wink out. One by one the men rise from the soft grass, stretch, yawn, say a pleasant good night, and in leisurely manner go to their various cabins.

The four of us still lie, heads propped on hands; unwilling to break the spell of the evening, strangely full of thoughts, half sweet, half sad; lulled by the lapping of wavelets of the lake, and the rustling trees; the frets and cares of life for the moment distant and faint.

Gyp draws a deep breath at last. “Great, isn’t it?” he says. “Simply great.”

“The best days of our lives,” says Moore. “Why do we sweat and worry all the rest of the year, I wonder? Life’s a whole lot like a horse-race, when you come to think of it—you do an awful lot of straining and running, just to wind up where you began.”

And Doc, the silent, lying face up to the stars, draws a last puff from his cigarette, tosses it away, and says softly, “If Heaven is anything like this, I’m going to reform—and try to get there.”

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by Ray Houlihan (1923-1991) have been omitted from this etext.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Portage Bay* by Paul Iselin Wellman]