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# MISSION OF REVENGE

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**EDISON MARSHALL**



**A HARLEQUIN BOOK**

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**MISSION**  
**OF**  
**REVENGE**

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By  
**EDISON MARSHALL**



HARLEQUIN BOOKS  
TORONTO - WINNIPEG

# **MISSION OF REVENGE**

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## CHAPTER I

THE thing was occurring in the very next room, yet Angus Mackenzie could not believe it. The solid fact stunned and bewildered him. It seemed impossible that his father, Red Mackenzie of the North, could so softly steal away from life. His heart, his old Scotch heart, was failing at last—so the nurse had reported. Still his son would not give up hope. Surely the old fighter would arise, scatter the gathering shadows, and wrench free from the hands that were pulling him down.

But Angus Mackenzie was building in vain. The old man's journey was almost done. The medical diagnosis was correct, and in a few hours, perhaps a few minutes, a certain valve in his heart would give way under a steadily growing strain. Red Mackenzie would not return, as he had intended, to lie under Scottish skies. The end was here and now, in the western city of his adoption, the native city of his sons. He lay with boots off, in bed. His far outposts of adventure, Saigon and Mombassa and Point Barrow, would behold him no more.

Still he seemed unconquered. His tide was going out, but it still ran strong. If Fear had him now, in this last hour, there was no trace of it in his face or his voice. Physically he was sinking rapidly, but his old-time fighting spirit never faltered. Except for their tears, his sons might have smiled at the Scotch stubbornness which abode with him even on his death-bed. Once the master of stout ships, he was still master of his own house. He obeyed his doctor and his nurse only when their orders did not conflict with his own iron will.

When the doctor had forbidden his talking, on the ground that it would shorten his life, the old man had roared from his bed: "Shorten my life! Am I to lie here like a corpse already just so I can ha' three hours more to breathe? Dinna play cat-and-mouse wi' me, man. I weel ken I shanna arise from this bed, and I ha' business to attend to before I go. Now I want to see my two older sons. Tell 'em to come in."

To each of these big hulking men—so like him in body frame, he had given parting admonitions. To James, the oldest and the most prosperous of the hard-pressed family, was entrusted the payment of certain money debts. To Bruce, the middle son, was bequeathed his father's small ship chandlery business, and with it the future care of certain dependent relatives. As yet no call had come to Angus, the youngest of the three brothers. He was waiting,

gray of face, in his chair, wondering if he were to be left out entirely in this farewell meeting.

Such was entirely possible. Red Mackenzie and his youngest son had never understood each other. While James and Bruce were literally chips off the old block, Angus seemed to recall his mother, Ellen Boswell of Dundee. Certainly he would never have been a minister except for her. She had sensed his need and his passion; she had helped him find the only possible outlet for that fervor of soul which Red Mackenzie expressed in violence and adventure. It was hard for the old fighter to acknowledge a clergyman son. He could not realize that the boy differed from him not in substance, but only in form. Meanwhile he was poignantly aware of their physical and emotional differences, which seemed to hold them apart. In physique Angus did not follow his father's pattern. He was well over middle size, but because he was wiry and lean he looked smaller. Red Mackenzie was of choleric temperament, easily moved to violence; his son seemed slow and stolid. Indeed, their only apparent physical resemblance was their uncommon homeliness. Both had reddish hands and faces, covered with small freckles—rugged, uneven features—sandy-red, unruly hair. And even this seeming likeness was shattered by the aspect of Angus's eyes. These were his mother's eyes—less brilliant than Red's, but deeper; less hard but more steadfast.

Perhaps Red Mackenzie was ashamed to have a minister son. If so, he might forget to include the youth in the last family gathering. That he might, on the other hand, be secretly proud of him Angus could not perceive.

At that instant the sick-room door quietly opened. James Mackenzie emerged first, followed by Bruce, the doctor, and the nurse. Old Red Mackenzie had been left alone, for what cause Angus dared not think.

He got slowly to his feet. Only the doctor saw the heavy pain darkening his eyes. But his voice was quite low and steady.

“Dead?”

“No!” The doctor spoke with a harsh impatience. “I don't know why he's still alive, but he is. By all medical authority, he should have gone out an hour ago. He's a tough old man, if I ever saw one. However, don't wait too long. At the rate he's using up his last strength talking, he'll go in a few minutes. No earthly power can keep him alive 'till sunup.”

“Why ha' you left him?”

“Because he ordered me out of the room. He ordered out the nurse too, and your two brothers. He wants to talk to you—alone.”

Angus’s heart bounded. His chilled, deadened tissue seemed to grow warm. Yet he gave no outward sign of his unspeakable relief. The spectators would never know that this was somehow the answer to a son’s deep love for his sire—a love which would move mountains in Angus Mackenzie’s life, and which had colored his childhood and mature thoughts. Indeed, the doctor thought him absolutely unmoved. The nurse, white-faced in the doorway, condemned what she thought was his dour Scotch coldness. He nodded quietly, and moved into his father’s room.

Drawn shades dimmed the dawn-light flooding the casements. At first the dying man’s outline was no more than a dim shadow on the white bed. But soon Angus saw again the big gaunt jaw, the broad sullen brow, the shock of reddish hair that had grayed but little in over seventy years. He seemed little changed, Angus thought. It was still hard to believe he was dying. Save for his bleached skin against which his freckles stood, one and one, like specks of pollen, and for the position of his huge arms, crossed over his abdomen in an attitude of death, he seemed merely resting, gathering strength for some violent fray to come. Here and now, as the shadows grew about him, he was still a figure of power.

“Weel, Angus?” he began quietly. His voice had its old harshness.

“Weel, father,” Angus answered. He was not aware that he echoed the old man’s Scotch pronunciation. He supposed that he spoke like any other American-born youth. But because he had been nurtured in a Scottish household, the dialect had been well-learned, hard to forget, and it was especially noticeable when he talked with his parent.

“Ye wonder that I hanna sent for you before now. Ye will wonder more when I tell you the facts. Ye ken, Angus lad, that I am on my last legs. There is something inside o’ me that is hanging by a hair, and when that slips awa’, I slip awa’ too. Dinna call the doctor again. He canna help me. It is a minister, not a doctor, that I need.”

“It is high time ye sent for me. Ye would never let grace into your heart. I will quote from the scriptures, and ye will repeat the words after me.”

“Not now, Angus lad. I ha’ said my prayers to mysel’, and ha’ asked forgi’ness for my sins. But that is not enough, Angus, just to ask forgi’ness. I must try to undo the wrong I ha’ done.”



“That is right. Man canna pay his debts to God ’till he ha’ paid his debts to man. What ha’ ye done, father, that ye would wish undone.”

“I would do more than wish, I would take steps, ye ken, to make the wrong right. But, Angus lad, I dinna know what steps to take. I canna see the way to go, to ha’ justice done. But, Angus, I canna go to my grave while this sin is on my head. Ye heard the doctor wonder why I am still alive?”

“Yes. He said he dinna understand it.”

“He would understand it weel enough, if he knew what was in my mind. Angus, I darena die while this hangs over me. I darena let my heart stop, while this weight is on it. Angus lad, do ye want your father to lie quiet in his grave?”

“Ye needna waste words asking me that. Tell me quickly what’s troubling you. Ye hanna much time left.”

This was true. If Red Mackenzie did not speak soon, he would not speak at all. It seemed to Angus that the Death Angel was already in the room.

When the old man spoke again, it was in a curious, dry, harsh whisper. “It is a sin I committed long ago,” he explained. “Long ago, when I was young, and reckless as a wild horse, and strong as a bear. I gi’ no thought to consequences, Angus lad. There was fire in my blood in those days, and even the long, cold dark couldna put it out. Ye ken?”

“I dinna ken. What do ye mean by the ‘long cold dark.’ Ye mean the darkness o’ sin?”

But the old man swept on as if he had not heard. “Times makes most things right, but not this thing,” he whispered darkly. “In China they say, ‘Time is a gentleman.’ I remember, on the Shanghai Bund—” His dying eyes suddenly blazed up. “Awa’, awa’! I must not think o’ Shanghai now. I ha’ naught to do wi’ the sin amid the snow. Hark ye, now, Angus—is it the Deil standin’ by my bed?”

“The Deil?” Angus echoed breathlessly. Presbyterian fundamentalist to the last hair of his head, and heir to the tortured imagination of the Scot, it was no wonder that he shrank a little in his chair.

“It must be him,” Red Mackenzie observed simply. “It is the Deil that sends all these wanderin’ memories—o’ China, and the Gold Coast, and the frost-gleam on the heather—to keep me from tellin’ what I must tell ye, before I go. No man or woman ha’ I ever told before. The Deil locked my lips. And he would lock my lips now, and make my mind wander, so that I

would die wi' my sins on my head, and he take my soul awa'. Ye alone ha' a chance to save my soul, Angus lad. It is only a chance, and I ha' but little confidence that ye may succeed, but certain there is no one else that ha' any chance at all. Ye alone, o' my three sons, could even try."

"I will try. Now keep your mind on your words and tell me what ye ha' done."

"Then hark ye. Thirty and more years ago I committed a sin. It dinna seem so great a sin then, but its evil consequences ha' grown through the years. Time hasna made it right. Time has only made it worse, much worse. I hanna forgotten it; instead I think of it more and more. Clear and more clear I see how great the sin was, how hard it is to atone for. Now I canna atone for it at all. In an hour from now I will be gone awa'. So I must bequeath that sin to you."

"I dinna ken."

"To you, Angus man. Ye are the only one, o' my three heirs, to whom I can entrust it. Ye are the only one strong enough, and wise enough, to handle it. Not Bruce. He would bungle it. Not Jamie. Even great Jamie, wi' his muscles wouldna know how to begin. It is my youngest son, my Benjamin, wi' his mother's eyes, and his weight but twelve stone, who I ha' decided to trust in my hour o' trouble."

Angus's heart burned. "Tell me, man, what ye want me to do."

"I want you to take this sin on your head. It is all I ha' to leave you—an evil heritage. I want you to atone for this sin, as far as the good Lord will let you. I want to see justice done, to make wrong right."

"I hear you, father."

"Do you promise?"

"I promise, father."

"Then shake hands on it, Angus lad. Ye swear to me, by the Lord God ye worship and the Presbyterian Church, that ye winna stop nor rest until ye ha' kept this promise to the best o' your ability?"

"I swear it."

"Then I can die content."

"But tell me what the sin was, so I may know how to begin. And be quick, father."

“Then hark ye. Something is slipping awa’ inside of me, and I hanna long to dally. Ye know I ha’ traveled up and down the seas. Ye know I ha’ been a violent, impetuous man, and walked not in the ways of the Lord.”

“That I know.”

“Perhaps ye ha’ forgotten how I was once a whaler, in the days when whalebone brought two dollars a pound . . . two dollars a pound. We chased the bowhead whale in the Arctic Sea. And one year—’95 it was—the ice closed in before its time, and locked Bering Strait tight as an iron door, and crushed our ship. We had to get out on the floe, and strike for land, and some o’ us, the strongest o’ us, made it through, and some died on the ice. I reached at last an Eskimo village, Narwhale Cape, on the north coast o’ Alaska. Ye know where Point Barrow is?”

“Ye ha’ pointed it out to me on the map.”

“It is the northernmost point o’ Alaska, near four hundred miles beyond the Arctic Circle. East o’ Point Barrow, four hundred miles or more, lies Narwhale Cape, where I spent the winter. It was there that the sin was committed, and it is there ye must go to atone.”

The old man’s word died away. A faint shudder ran down his body. Breathless and sweating, Angus leaned over him. “Quick, father. What is it?”

He waited what seemed an endless time. His tortured imagination told him there was a rushing sound, as of wings, in the room. At last the blue lips began to move again. Angus strained to hear.

“I—I ha’ forgotten.”

“But the sin? What was the sin?”

“I dinna know. . . . It ha’ slipped awa’ . . . I am slipping awa’ too, Angus lad. . . . I go in peace.”

This was no doubt true. Red Mackenzie had walked wide of the road, but he had come back into it at last. His rugged countenance was composed. Plainly, he had shifted a grievous burden to younger, stronger shoulders. No need for him to confess the nature and details of his sin. Angus could learn these easily enough, in a lost, lonely village beside the eternal ice. It was enough that he had acknowledged the debt and arranged for its payment. The cruel leash that held him to life was serving. Again the lips moved . . .

“Postoffice Point, letters from home at Postoffice Point . . . I dinna love her, Ellen—I never loved any lass but you . . . The long dark, and the God-

Fire flickerin' in the sky. . . . The God-Fire and the big white stars . . .”

Angus stared in awe. He knew well that this was the end: the curtain was ringing down. The hand he held grew chill in his. He started to pull free, with the idea of summoning his two brothers to the death-bed, but a light tug of the cold fingers arrested him.

“Dinna leave me, Angus lad, even for a second. . . . I’m sailing now. . . . The ice is going out, and the ships are coming in, and soon I’ll be sailing.” The whisper strengthened and became a voice. “I hear the rumble o’ the breaking floes. . . . I see the sun, peeping over the Endicott Range. . . . *Arre gah, arre gah!*”

With this last incomprehensible cry, Red Mackenzie embarked. Angus was alone in the room.

## CHAPTER TWO

THERE were many obstacles in the way of Angus's mission. The first of these was particularly disheartening—a lack of money. The young minister had but scant funds of his own; he had just started in a profession not too well paid at best. Yet a substantial sum of money was necessary to his success. Unlike a fellow devotee on the long highways of Asia, he could not beg his way to Mecca. Steamship rates are high in the North, and the distance from Seattle to Point Barrow—beyond which he must go to find Narwhale Cape—was over three thousand miles.

His first hope lay in his brother James, the most prosperous of the family. But James heard the story coldly. "I reckon that the old man was wanderin' in delirium, and the whole thing never happened," he answered in his dour way. "At the best, it would be a wild goose chase. Besides, why not let sleeping dogs lie? Why bring to light an old scandal—a murder, mayhap—that would ruin the reputation of the family, and keep you from ever getting another pulpit? Angus lad, ye ha' better put this out of your mind."

But James knew he was wasting breath. What use to argue with a block of granite hewn from the Scotch hills? His brother's soul he did not know, but he could remember certain significant incidents of their childhood.

Angus did not press the matter. Instead he looked for—and found—another way out. It was a simple problem, after all—easy for a man of simple heart. He would work his way to Point Barrow!

This did not mean he would swab decks upon some wandering trader. If he were a zealot, he was the kind that keeps his feet upon the ground even though his head is in the clouds. He was skilled in but one trade, which must pay his passage and buy his bread to Barrow and return. He went to the Board of Missions of his own church, and applied for the position of missionary at Narwhale Cape.

The president of the board was delighted—not often would young ministers of Angus's promise work in the Arctic. There was no missionary at Narwhale Cape at present—indeed, this had been one of the hardest posts to keep filled. Why this was so, the official could not explain. Of course Eskimo missions are always discouraging, but in this case there seemed to be certain unusual difficulties. The appointment was easily arranged. Angus would be given a meager salary, with certain travel and expense money, in exchange for a year's work at Narwhale Cape.

“I think it only fair to explain to you that I ha’ some work of my own to attend to, while up there,” Angus said, at the bidding of his queer Scotch conscience. “However, I winna permit it to interfere wi’ the faithful performance of my duties as missionary. If it does so interfere, I shall resign at once.”

“Whatever you do, don’t resign,” the official replied wearily. “Stick it out, no matter what happens. The church has had too many resignations, in that part of the globe, and not nearly enough applications.”

It was fitting and proper that Angus should try to save money out of his travel allowances. So he called at the Seattle office of the Lomen Brothers, the heads of a great reindeer corporation in the Arctic, and foremost in all enterprises that benefit Alaska. (Holding still to their faith in Alaska’s future, these three brothers operate small ships on the Arctic coast—a coast so lonely and bleak that most of the bigger steamship companies have forsaken it long ago.)

Carl Lomen, who never failed to assist all church work in the Arctic, received the young minister.

“Our little vessels are merely reindeer carriers, but they’re at your disposal if you want to ride on them,” Lomen told him. “Fortunately, you won’t have to depend on them. If you can arrive in Nome by the middle of July, you can no doubt get permission to go to Barrow on the U.S. Cutter Northland. She is a fine new ship, built to replace the old Bear, and her main work is to serve the scattered people of the Arctic. And if you want to save a little money, and don’t demand luxurious accommodations, you can go as far as Nome on our freighter, the Sierra.”

Angus accepted this offer, and sailed from Seattle in the last week of June. Certainly his accommodations aboard the Sierra were in no way luxurious, but they were entirely comfortable, and he appreciated the courage and enterprise of the Lomens in operating such a considerable ship into such a thinly settled territory. He proved to be a good sailor, and enjoyed the cruise from the first.

He loved the long days, the unimaginable fiery sunsets, the starry brief nights. He found religious inspiration in the vastness of these seas, in the solemn sweep of their currents, and in the eternal winds that cried over their depths. These seemed to bear witness to his Presbyterian conception of the vast, solemn, and eternal God.

It was a long journey even to Nome. He had not realized the expanse of Alaska. To encircle the long, outstretching Alaskan Peninsula, the ship had to go farther west than the Hawaiian Islands. Then she headed straight north into the fog-curtained mystery of Bering Sea.

She steamed past the Pribilofs, the home of the great American fur-seal herd. These were green and lovely islands, but the low, gray coasts beyond were bleak and lonely beyond all belief, all hope. Not one tree cast shade upon their wind-swept beaches. To Angus, it seemed a God-forsaken land. Surely He had created it in an angry mood—or else it was a reflection of some aspect of His mind which was beyond mortal imagination. And surely only a God-forsaken people would here be exiled.

Angus did not trouble himself about the white men who came there. They had their work to do—the raising of great reindeer herds to relieve the food shortage in distant, teeming cities, or else the winnowing of gold from the ancient beaches. These were but visitors. Even their gold camps and villages were but abodes of rest after a day's toil, and in time they would return to their own place, under more genial skies. Even in crowded Europe the all-conquering white man has made but scanty settlements north of the Arctic Circle. But what of the Eskimo? He had been given no choice. Apparently he was exiled here by the hand of God. He was not a visitor; he must live and die, and raise his darkened brood, at the edge of the polar ice.

Was this predestination? As a Presbyterian, Angus could not believe otherwise. But for what high purpose were these people sacrificed? In what way did their hopeless lives declare, as all things must declare, the Glory of the Lord? Angus knew that he must seek the answer to this question. Otherwise he would not know how to approach his year's work as a missionary.

The ship anchored off Nome, the northernmost white settlement of any considerable size on the American continent. Perhaps five hundred people lived in its long rows of dilapidated buildings. At anchor near by lay the Northland, the United States' splendid emissary to its most remote peoples.

This was the Queen of the Arctic. A generous government had built her especially to serve the Eskimo villages of the far Alaskan coast. Graceful as a gull, yet she was sheathed in steel, and she could batter her way through ice-filled seas where a navel dreadnaught would flounder. Now she was making ready for her annual dash to Point Barrow, the northernmost cape of the American continent. She was biding her time until the heavy pack-ice should break away from the shore, then she would slip in, transact her

business, and depart before the remorseless floes came crowding in again. Into this outcast land she carried the white man's law.

Her captain was a United States commissioner: he was empowered to try Eskimo offenders for minor crimes, or to carry them away to higher courts. His uniform, with its four gold stripes denoting captain's rank, meant to the Alaskan Eskimo what the red coat of the Royal Northwest Mounted Policeman means to the Athabaskan Indian. Her ship's doctor healed the sick and distributed medical supplies. To wistful, lonely white folk, missionaries, board-of-health men, and school teachers, she brought the mail—and the assurance that the far-off government had not forgotten them, and that they were still guarded by the Yankee flag. No wonder the lone trader blessed her, when she sailed into his glassy bay!

Captain J. H. Hottel, the coast-guard officer who commanded the Northland, received Angus cordially. "Surely you can go to Barrow with us. With any luck at all, we'll take you clear to your destination. Narwhale Cape is pretty well out of the world, and not included in our regular cruise, but if ice permits we intend to go to Demarcation Point this year—four hundred miles east of Barrow—and if so, we'll go right by your village."

Considerably to his surprise, Angus learned that he was to have a number of distinguished fellow passengers. Nor was this mere chance: the captain's cabin of the Northland is naturally the center and the rallying place of all the leaders of Arctic activities. Seated next to him at luncheon was a red-faced burly man whom the host introduced as Captain Bartlett. Angus learned presently that this was no other than Robert ("Bob") Bartlett, the famous Arctic explorer who had been Peary's chief aide in the conquest of the Pole. Bartlett had sailed north this year with a scientific expedition, bound for the northern coast of Siberia. He had come down to Nome to repair a broken propeller shaft, and now was on the way to join his ship.

Across from Angus sat a fellow churchman, a mild-mannered Englishman of unmistakable bearing. This was Archdeacon Frederic Goodman, formerly of Trinity Church, New York, and now a missionary at the Eskimo village of Point Hope, nearly a hundred and fifty miles on the cold side of the Arctic Circle. The very look of the man encouraged Angus to his task. Surely, if this type of clergyman was willing to devote his life to the welfare of the Eskimo, the cause was a noble one. Goodman had been to Nome on church business, and was now returning to his mission.

Captain Hottel himself completed the group. Long associated with the coast guard's Arctic activities, his was a name to conjure with at any Eskimo



village for a thousand miles up the bleak coast. He directed the talk at the luncheon table—talk as rich and good as the food itself.

The ship headed around Seward Peninsula into Bering Straits. This is the meeting place of the East and West—where Siberia and Alaska all but touch hands. Beyond are the blue, mystic waters of the Arctic Ocean.

The Northland made a brief stop at Little Diomedé, a bird island midway in the strait, and here Angus got his first glimpse of typical Eskimos. Beating out from the village came a strange, bastard craft. It was a skin-boat—a light frame covered by split walrus skin—propelled by a gas engine, the *oomiac-put-put* of the lower Arctic, and in itself the symbol of the baffling semicivilization of the Eskimo. Packed like keged herring in the boat were a score of islanders—men, women, and children.

These people came aboard, offering fossil and walrus ivory for sale to the crew. When Angus studied them, his spirits fell. They were not enlightened folk, neither were they clean, respectable heathens. They seemed to be in a shadowy half-way stage, somehow disheartening and ominous. They were wretchedly unhealthy; some were lame and deformed. There was no physical beauty apparent in the women. Only those with a mixture of white blood were even passably good-looking; mostly they were squat, swart, heavy-featured, coarse-haired, oily-skinned. It was significant that they wore, outside their beautiful and effective parkas of deerskin and fur, a sacklike garment of cheapest calico. This was stained with grease and dirt, yet they wore it with pride. Plainly it was a tribute to their white masters—the flattery of imitation.

Angus eyed them darkly. He wondered if they would improve on acquaintance. So far, he saw but one quality that he might admire—their obvious good nature. Of sober disposition himself, he found pleasure in their constant grins, their loud laughter. Between their grinning lips gleamed big, strong teeth.

A number of them gathered about him, holding out open palms. “*Kow-kow*,” they begged, in their flat, guttural voices. The word was repeated over and over again. One of them, a starved-looking specimen, whined, “*Kow-kow pechuk*.”

“What do these people want?” Angus asked Jack Robertson.

The big adventurer laughed softly. “*Kow-kow* means grub. It’s a word you’ll hear plenty, if you stay in the ‘Friendly Arctic.’ The scrawny old fellow has just informed you that ‘the grub is all gone.’”

“What do they take me for, a trader?”

“Not much. If they thought you were a trader, they wouldn’t be begging. They’d be offering you at least half-price for your grub, with the intention of going up the other half if necessary. They take you for what you are, a *chechaquo* (newcomer). Besides, you are a white man, the source of all wealth, an unfailing supply of grub, and fair pickings at all times.”

The ship whistled for departure, but still the visitors lingered. At last they had to be herded over the rail into their own boat. The ship’s electric-driven motors began to throb, and the Northland sped on.

After dinner, Angus lingered with the other passengers in the captain’s cabin. The talk flowed back and forth, a revelation and a delight to the young minister. Captain Bartlett described in detail Peary’s discovery of the North Pole. He spoke of his great leader as Angus imagined some of Napoleon’s officers might have spoken of their Little Corporal, after Waterloo. Once his eyes filled with tears at some splendid memory. Once, recalling how an armchair explorer had questioned Peary’s achievement, Bartlett turned livid with fury, and hurled out an anathema upon the doubter which Angus would never forget. It would not be healthy to assail Peary’s memory in the presence of this officer. The fact that he had served the great explorer—the greatest of all explorers—was the mainspring of Bartlett’s life; all his other considerable deeds and human relationships were but incidents.

Presently eight bells sounded through the ship. By the time-reckonings of man it was midnight. Yet when Angus looked up, startled, he saw that no artificial light had been turned on in the room. Indeed, a thin golden wine of radiance was still pouring through the porthole. He got up and looked out. Low on the horizon hung the midnight sun.

Angus had been told he would see this thing. He had anticipated it throughout the lengthening days of his northern cruise. Yet he was deeply awed. It was baffling to think that he had come to a land where, for a period of months, there was actually no night. The daily alteration of light and dark is one of man’s verities. He counts on it and reckons by it, one changeless fact in a world of change. But here, on this strange bleak coast, it did not hold.

It seemed to knock out the props of man’s security. Nor was there any comfort in the accepted physical explanation—the tilt of the globe on its axis in relation to its orbital revolution. Angus felt that this was merely flying from one mystery to another. He felt as if he had passed the borders of

his familiar earth, and had entered the frontier of some occult world, midway between here and hereafter.

The scene opening before his eyes seemed to enhance this impression. The ocean was deathly calm. It trembled no more than a glacier lake, set like a sapphire in a ring of silver mountains. Above it and imaged in it, were strange-shaped violet and lavender clouds. Beyond lay the low coast—gray, desolate, unpeopled, dreary beyond description. Still farther off the pale bergs glittered in the water, beyond which a green radiance overhung the horizon—the ice-blink from the floes. Over it all hung an uncanny silence. On land and sea there was no sound or suggestion of sound. The ship cruised on like a shadow in a dream.

Wide-eyed, the Scotchman turned to his companions. “Ye know, this makes me think of Keats,” he said simply.

“Keats?” Goodman echoed with interest.

“It’s a pity he never saw this. But maybe he did see it, in his wondrous fancy. I refer to those three lines which ye ha’ all heard quoted—which I think are as beautiful as many of the lines in the Scriptures. Aye, just as beautiful—supernatural, I may call them, such as the Scotch believe in.”

“‘Charmed magic casements,’” Goodman began quietly.

“‘Opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn,’” Angus finished solemnly. “Yonder are the ‘faery lands, forlorn,’ just as he imagined them. And surely these are the perilous seas, for body and soul alike.”

Yet he did not know why he had said this last—“for body and soul alike.” He would have to think it over, in solitude. Goodman stared at him, wondering what might be waiting for this young minister at the edge of the ice.

“I understand what you mean,” Captain Hottel said. “I’ve been coming up here for years, and I’ll never get over wondering at the Arctic. But reverend, your quotation doesn’t quite fit about the ‘foam.’ There’s no foam on that sea tonight. It’s still as a millpond.”

“Aye, and that adds to the wonder o’ it. Why is it so still, captain?”

“That’s the way of the Arctic Ocean. It can kick up a frightful uproar any time it likes, but as soon as the wind dies down the waves smooth out. You see, there’s no swell. The great ice-pack prevents one from forming.”

Angus looked a long time out to sea. “Captain, ye mentioned the mystery o’ the Arctic. What *is* the mystery o’ the Arctic?”

Hottel shook his head. "You'll have to ask someone else—someone with a better grasp on metaphysics. I can sense it, but I can't describe it. Maybe Captain Bartlett can tell you. He's been closer to it than any of us."

"I've been close to it, often and often, but I've never grasped it," Bartlett said, with his pleasant Newfoundland accent. "If you ask me to put my finger on one phase of it, I'd say it was the devilish—you'll excuse me, gentlemen—the devilish uncertainty of the country. You can never plan a day ahead. If you figure on leaving some place tomorrow, the ice may come heaving in, and shut you up for the winter. If you strike out for some place, you can never tell when you'll be back. You can't trust it. Too many of my good friends have died up here for me to trust it even for a minute. Today you'll be well-fed and fat, in your snug little igloo. Tomorrow you'll be missing out on the ice, and when the search-party goes to look for you, you're nowhere to be found."

Angus turned quietly to the young motion-picture producer. "Meester Robertson, ye ha' had dealings with the Arctic. What ha' ye to say about it?"

"I say that it's not only uncertain—it's unconquerable," Robertson answered vigorously. "To me, that is the source of most of its mystery. By the way, that's something I find hard to explain to my employers in Hollywood. They can't understand why I can't come up here, get the stuff I want in a certain number of days, and come out."

"Up here, a man is the plaything of Nature," Bartlett agreed. "He's got to wait for wind and tide."

"In our organization we have one of the greatest living directors," Robertson went on. "His favorite expression is, 'It must be so!' By Jove, it usually *is* so, too. If he wants to spend a million dollars on a set, the million dollars is spent. If he wants to buy a hill and move it half a mile, the hill is moved. But suppose he were here, in this Arctic. Suppose the ice had closed in, and he wanted to send a ship out. Then it wouldn't do him any good to cry, 'It must be so!' It is the ice and the snow and the sea and the mystery that is 'so'—that is always and eternally 'so.' Man can like it or lump it."

"What do ye think, Goodman?" Angus asked.

"I think none of you have looked far enough. The mystery of the Arctic is the thing, the force, behind all those lesser mysteries you name."

"Ye mean that the ice and the midnight sun and the great cold—the unreliability and the unconquerability that these men talk of—are just

expressions and manifestations o' some world-wide mystery too great for men to grasp or even to see?" Angus asked.

"Perhaps. Look there at the sun, rolling along the horizon. It will start up presently, without ever dropping out of sight. I believe that thing is somehow deeply significant, unspeakably portentous. You may say it's just physical phenomena. I say it is a manifestation of some tremendous mystery, greater than any law of physics. You call it a world-wide mystery. So it is. It is not confined here—it just happens to be more apparent in this great silent North than anywhere else. And that is one of the reasons I can find happiness in my exile."

"But ye say—the mystery is too great to grasp?"

"I didn't say that. That was your impression. I think that if a man will open his eyes he can behold a gleam of the vast truth, the only truth."

The scotch minister gazed wistfully out of the porthole. Would he ever behold the gleam that inspired Goodman? Was he predestined to pierce the veil of the Arctic, or to fail? Would he even solve the mystery of his father's sin, the evil fruit of which might be waiting for him, bitter to his lips, on some ice-locked coast under the polar star? Time alone would tell.

## CHAPTER THREE

THE NORTHLAND ventured on. At Kotzebue she dropped Captain Bartlett; Archdeacon Goodman left her at Point Hope. At Barrow, the metropolis of the Arctic, where no less than eight white people had spent the long dark of winter, Jack Robertson took his cameras and departed. Still there was no night. When Angus tried to sleep, the unflagging day poured through the ports against his eyelids. This was the real Arctic.

Far beyond Barrow, in the mysterious East, and between the yawning mouths of two unmapped rivers, the Northland dropped anchor. On the bleak coast beyond were half a dozen frame buildings—of lumber shipped all the way from Puget Sound—and a duster of green mounds. This was Narwhale Cape, Angus's destination.

It seemed unwise to attempt an immediate landing. A white line against the gray beach indicated a surf too strong for the Northland's dories. But as Angus stood by the rail he saw a boat put out from the village. It rose and fell in the breakers; then came beating like a winged thing toward the ship.

It was a fragile-looking craft, no larger than a canoe. To all appearances, the first fair-sized wave would topple it over. That it still lived, free and unafraid in the heavy chop of the sea, made Angus feel like cheering. It seemed to ride the very crest of the waves.

As it drew nearer, his wonder grew. The boat was shaped like a fish, long and narrow, and decked over. Its single occupant sat in a hole cut in the deck, filling it so snugly that the craft was practically water-tight. Since only the upper part of the paddler's body was visible, the effect was that of some queer sea-creature, half-human, half-keel.

"What is it?" he asked an officer beside him.

"A kaiak—the native sealing boat. It's a mighty strong little rig, but that Eskimo is trusting it a bit too far. I wouldn't be surprised to see him keel over at any minute."

"I pray to the Lord that he doesn't." Angus spoke simply and sincerely. "He's such a brave fellow, that Eskimo. No doubt he wants to be the first on the ship, wi' some ivory to sell."

"I don't know about that. I do know he can sure handle that kaiak. I think he's the best I ever saw."

Still the little cruise progressed. The white-capped waves, hissing with anger that such a flimsy craft should defy their might, flung it about in vain. Angus watched beside the rail, thrilled by the conflict, and eager for the first close view of such a skilled and intrepid voyageur. The parka-clad figure was quite plain now, But the parka hood was raised, so that the face was in shadow.

The sea-light was growing upon the face, and Angus was about to see it plain, when the paddler changed course. The boat swung around the stern of the ship and came up on the opposite side. Angus at once crossed the deck and leaned over the rail.

He would remember forever the sight that met his eyes. Just below him was the kaiak, its paddler standing up, preparatory to climbing the ladder onto the deck. This was not an Eskimo brave. It was a girl, but not the broad-cheeked dusky type that the old whalers knew so well. Her skin was as white as the fawn fur of her parka, or the foam-flakes trembling on the deck of her little ship.

She had thrown back her parka hood. The indescribable yellow gold of the Arctic sunlight was on her face. And this face was one that he would not have forgotten had he seen it even on the streets of Seattle, a city of lovely women, much less on the cold side of the Arctic Circle.

She had unusual coloring. Her hair was a lustrous blue-black: this was parted and done in a knot at the back of her neck. But her eyes, under the jet-black arches of her brows, had not the soft darkness that usually goes with such hair, but were an extraordinary deep blue. This fact, and her startling whiteness of skin, untinted by the wind's rough kiss, and her red, sober mouth gave her an exotic look that was altogether foreign to this bleak, cold North. Her beauty went with flower-beds, with the shaded walks of some campus with lantern-hung lawns, where youth is fair, not with the foam of perilous seas. Her type might have been expected in New Orleans, whose slim, soft-voiced daughters still show the Gallic darkness, or even in San Francisco, where there abides a brunette heritage from the conquistadors, but here, in the white Arctic, it was incredible.

Physically she was fit. He ceased to wonder at her skill with the kaiak. On one side of her family, at least, there was Nordic stature and stamina. She was rather tall for her sex—only an inch or two less than Angus, who was over middle height—and athletically proportioned. In another environment she would play a savage set of tennis, a deadly round of golf. No doubt she

could have ridden a horse as ably as this sea-steed that had borne her through the surf.

She swung up the ladder onto the deck. Apparently she did not see Angus, but she paused and spoke to the officer standing near by. “Where’s Captain Hottel?”

“In his cabin.”

“Would you please tell him that my father wants him to come to dinner at our house tonight?”

The officer sent the message, and presently Captain Hottel came out to greet the girl. He explained that he could not accept the invitation. He was pressed for time, and meant to cruise on to Demarcation Point. He would call in on his way back, when landing in an open boat would be easier and more pleasant.

He turned, caught sight of Angus, and beckoned him to his side. “Gretchen, I want you to meet Reverend Mackenzie, the new missionary for your village. Reverend, this is Miss Gretchen Konrad, the daughter of the trader here. You’ll get well acquainted with her and her family before the ice goes out again.”

“I am vera pleased to meet you,” Angus told her. And he was—she was the loveliest being that had ever touched his life.

“So you are the new missionary.” She eyed him with frank curiosity. But at once her interest seemed to flag. A rather grim look stole across her red mouth. “I suppose you’ll be going ashore when the ship returns from Demarcation Point.”

“Aye—unless I can go ashore now.”

Something that looked like mischief—perhaps a reckless, dangerous mischief—suddenly sparkled in the startling azure of the girl’s eyes. “If you’re really in a hurry to see your new congregation, I think I can manage it. I could take you in in my kaiak.”

He glanced overside at the frail craft. She expected him to offer some glib excuse for refusing. Yet it might be that she had judged him too soon. She was startled by the quiet humor in his face.

“I dinna see but one hole,” he objected mildly.

“Don’t let that trouble you. I can stow you below deck.”



“It wouldna be vera digneeified, I fear, but perhaps my parishioners wouldna hold it against me. Do ye think it is safe?”

“I know it isn’t. But if you’re in a hurry—”

“Ye mean, my weight in the boat would make the danger greater for you?”

She was astonished by the question. “I don’t mean that at all. The boat might even be steadier, with a little extra weight. But it’s pretty rough out there for a kaiak.”

“But ye are going back in it whether I go or not?”

“Certainly. I’ve got to go home and help cook dinner.”

“Then I shall go wi’ you. But if ye hanna been baptized, I advise you to let me perform the ceremony before we start.”

He spoke quietly and simply. Yet she seemed too astonished to answer. “I was baptized long ago, in my mother’s faith,” she told him at last. “However, I’ll say right now I don’t think it will help my chances in the least of getting to shore.”

“No, but it might help your chances o’ getting to the other Shore, in case ye are drowned. I am ready when ye are. My main baggage can be sent in when the ship comes back on her way south.”

Angus shook hands with his host, collected a small bundle of clothes, and climbed down into the unstable kaiak. At the girl’s direction, he crawled into the deckhold and lay prone. Gretchen took her seat, and without another word, headed toward shore.

It was a wild ride for a clergyman. The little craft bounced about like a cork. Often the waves broke over the light deck, splashing the girl and shooting cold jets down upon her passenger. This part of the trip was rough enough, but it was even worse when they tried to beat in through the surf. They rose and fell, struck the sand with a jar, and all but capsized. Still Gretchen plied her paddle with sure, powerful strokes. Still Angus huddled in the darkened, cramped space, without one word of protest or cry of alarm.

At last a big wave caught them and hurled them onto the beach. Half a dozen Eskimos seized the craft and drew it up on high ground. They gazed stolidly while their new missionary crawled out into the light.

He had suffered no loss of dignity. The joke that Gretchen had thought to play had fallen flat. She eyed him a moment in intense curiosity, then

impulsively extended her hand.

“We’ll shake on that parson,” she told him. “I really didn’t think you’d come through it so well. I—I’m a little ashamed of myself.”

“Ye needn’t be.” He smiled at her dripping cheeks and hair, and took her hand. “Ye gave me a threeling ride, and ye got all the worst o’ it. But ye should learn not to judge a man before ye make his acquaintance.”

“I won’t again. You see, we haven’t much faith in missionaries, up to the present time, but perhaps we’ve been mistaken. Now come with me and meet my folks.”

She led him to the big trading building, the back of which was her living quarters, and introduced him to her parents. Now he could understand where she got her exquisite coloring. Her father was an immense blond Prussian, with light blue eyes and tawny beard. Her mother, a gentle-faced woman of American birth, had a quiet dark beauty that the years in the Arctic had but lightly marred.

As Angus shook hands with Konrad, he was instantly on guard. Beneath the trader’s easy greeting, there was an unmistakable antagonism, perhaps contempt. Angus studied the man carefully. Physically he was a marvel—sixty years old, robust, muscular, and full-blooded. He had a typically Prussian countenance, and, if Angus was not mistaken, a Prussian outlook on life. The blue of his eyes was hard and cold as the deep-water ice of the Arctic. His hand-clasp was so strong that it seemed deliberately cruel.

“Welcome to Narwhale Cape,” he said in his deep, rumbling voice. “I hope we will be friends—of white people here there are But few, and it will be a pity if you cannot see eye to eye with me.”

Gretchen, listening at one side, thought she could anticipate the reply. Angus might be secretly indignant, but he would not risk antagonizing the chief figure of the settlement. But again the little Scotchman surprised her. “I canna promise to see eye to eye wi’ you,” he said simply. “I ha’ my own way o’ looking upon things, and it mayna agree wi’ your way. But I hope, wi’ you, that we can be good friends.”

Konrad opened his eyes. His daughter saw angry blood mounting to his cheek. “I do not like the sound of that, altogether. It could be interpreted that you feel free to come into my village and interfere with any of my projects which you do not like. I speak of it because other missionaries have so, interfered, and made trouble for me and themselves too. If this is the case, I would advise you not to stay here. I would advise that you board the

Northland on her return trip from Demarcation Point, and find some other field for your mission.”

Angus reddened too. His freckles faded from sight; his hazel eyes had an odd shine. “I didna know it was your village,” he said simply. “I thought it was an Eskimo village, and it is they I came to work for, not you. I mean you no ill will, Meester Konrad. But perhaps we should understand each other from the first.”

“Yes, and we will understand each other. You say it is not my village. You may find out later that you are mistaken. I have directed its affairs for thirty years, and I do not propose to stop now. Let us put it this way, Reverend Mackenzie. You are the church. I am the state—the only state that exists in this Arctic village. It is well that the church and state should be separate, and interfere not with each other. If you remember that, you will no doubt get along well.”

At this point, Mrs. Konrad came up and laid her hand on her husband’s shoulder. “You and the parson discuss this matter later,” she suggested. “Now we must make him welcome—heaven knows we don’t have many visitors here. Reverend Mackenzie, can you come to dinner with us tonight?”

Angus relaxed, smiling. Like most Scotch, he was a peace-loving man, and so appreciated the woman’s quick tact. “I accept wi’ pleasure.”

This point agreed, Gretchen took the young minister for a first inspection of the native village. As she walked at his side, her brow was troubled, her strange eyes cloudy with thought. She was puzzled by her own reactions to the scene just past. For once in her life she had failed to champion her father. Instead of admiring his Prussian ruthlessness, for once she had felt a little sorry for him. True, she held no brief for missionaries. Her father had turned her against them long ago. Moreover, she believed devoutly in her father’s Nietzschean philosophy; she could see it upheld and vindicated everywhere in this ruthless North. But somehow it had fallen flat today. For one fleet moment she wondered if the old Tsar of Narwhale Cape had met his match. Yet when she glanced up at the clergyman beside her, so mild of speech and homely of face, she decided that her imagination was running away with her. How could Angus Mackenzie, or any of his ilk, prevail against Emil Konrad?

As they passed a frame building half-way to the native village, a tall blond, mustached young man waved knowingly at her from the doorway.

Gaily she returned the gesture. She knew what would be on his lips—a sardonic, clever jest at the new missionary’s expense.

“I didna know that Narwhale Cape had such a large white population,” Angus ventured.

“You’ve seen almost all of it. In addition there are two old miners that have a hut at the other side of the village, but they are out prospecting most of the time. The man in the doorway is Frank Jannison, the government doctor. We feel mighty lucky to have such a brilliant man here. You’ll get well acquainted with him later. There is no outside school teacher—only an Eskimo woman who has been outside to school.”

Before them, on the green tundra, straggled the native village. This consisted of a group of turf huts, low-roofed, and half underground. Angus could hardly believe that this was the permanent abode of a human tribe. The igloos seemed more like lairs than homes. Staked out in long lines were the dog-teams—gray, narrow-eyed, savage wolf-brutes that menaced him as he passed. Stretching overhead were walrus skins, drying in the warm August sun.

The people seemed friendly and cheerful. They smiled, holding out open palms. “They don’t know you are Scotch,” Gretchen told him slyly. Later he noticed a group of them talking with great animation and eagerness outside one of the igloos.

“I wonder what those people can be talking about, so lively,” Angus observed. “There is so little happens here, outside their regular life, and surely they don’t hear much o’things that happen in the outside world. Do many o’ them know how to read?”

“Quite a few, considering the length of time the school has been established here. But they might as well read Greek. They pronounce the words without the slightest idea of what they mean. You see, the people have never seen the things that are so common to us—the thousands of objects and actions that fill our books. The natives here talk and chatter all the time, but not about the outside world. They have no interest in the outside world—it is beyond their imagination. If you want to know what those people by the igloo are talking about, I can tell you.”

“How can ye? Ye’re out o’ hearing?”

“I know from experience. They are talking about one thing—grub.”

“Grub?” Angus echoed in amazement. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say. Grub. *Kow-kow*. Beans and flour, not to mention blubber and blood and pemmican. They are discussing with great relish and infinite detail some tremendous meal that they recently had, or some equally great meal they hope to have in the future. Or perhaps one of them is describing, in the most minute degree, a big stock of grub he saw in some distant trading-post or ship. So many sacks of beans. So many hams, and how they were stacked. And particularly how he was permitted to go right in and eat his fill. The rest ask questions, while their mouths water. It is an inexhaustible topic.”

Angus sighed, and looked out on wild, cold seas. “I suppose it’s natural. They ha’ nothing else to live for.”

“They haven’t time and strength to live for anything else.” The girl’s eyes were bright with compassion. “If they can get enough to eat, that’s the most they can hope for. They are wretchedly poor, you know. They are only one jump ahead of famine. In the old days, when communication was more difficult than now, whole villages were wiped out. It’s no wonder they worship grub—even such grub as theirs. Now we’ll go into one of their houses.”

She entered what appeared to be the black maw of a cave, and led her companion through a long, dark turf-walled passage, hung with all manner of hunting equipment. There were bird-darts and seal-spears, whalebone fishlines for catching tom-cod, pokes of miscellaneous small articles, bladders for buoying up a speared seal, snow-dusters, nets, and snowshoes. The tunnel was not only a storehouse, but the outer barricade against the winter’s cold.

The daylight faded; the air grew foul and damp. The pungent wild smell which hung over the entire village thickened at the passage end, and almost overpowered the visitors. What was its source Angus did not know; it suggested the rank den of some carnivorous animal. “Not so good,” Gretchen whispered. “But you’ll get used to it, in time.”

At the end of the passage there was a wooden wall, with a round hole cut in it. Covering this hole was a curtain of some animal fur. “Can we come in?” the girl called.

Voices clamored within. At once Gretchen drew aside the curtain and crawled through the aperture. Angus followed on his hands and knees.

He found himself in the living quarters of an Eskimo family. In a breathless room not much larger than an ordinary bathroom, seven people

ate their food, lived, and slept. They had been stripped to the waist a moment before, but now they were hastily drawing on their parkas. There were two old people, both as wrinkled as the ribbed sands on the beach, a young woman with a baby in her arms, and two small children. The young woman's husband, the bread-winner of the family, was at present out hunting.

A seal-oil lamp was ablaze, so that the room was unbearably hot. On the floor were skins, showing how the family slept. In one corner were a few dishes, apparently bought at Konrad's trading store, and several pots full of what seemed to be raw meat and portions of the viscera of wild animals. Poisoning the air was a smell of blood, fish, decayed meat, and human dirt that Angus would never forget.

Still the people smiled, and held out their hands for him to shake. Plainly they were good-natured, hospitable, kindly folk. The younger woman knew a little English, which she showed off for Angus's benefit. However, he could understand her only with the greatest difficulty, and the talk soon lagged.

"How old are ye?" Angus asked the old crone. Gretchen at once repeated the question in the Eskimo tongue.

But the old squaw shook her head. "She means she does not know?" Angus asked in amazement.

"Of course she does not know. These people have a very vague sense of numbers over ten. But she's very old, for an Eskimo. She's almost ready to go to Sednah—the Eskimo underworld that she believed in before the missionaries came."

"She must be ninety."

"Nothing like it. She's no more than fifty. If she were a white woman, she'd be in her prime. Her husband may be five years older. These people live a hard life, you know, and die young."

Moved to pity, Angus tried to be pleasant to the old man. He pointed to the young mother. "Is she your daughter?"

Again Gretchen translated the question, and the old man's answer. "He says—literally—'I do not know, but she was caught in my trap.' He acts as if he were rather pleased about it too—as if he were one daughter ahead of the game."

"What does he mean by 'caught in my trap.'"

“He means his wife is the mother of the girl. He is doubtful if he is the father. You see, these people trade their wives around, in winter-time when things get dull. We don’t think anything of it. But we do oppose some of their other customs, as you’ll see later.”

Gretchen now led the way back through the passage, and Angus was quick to follow. When they gained the open air and the sea breeze, which mercifully swept away the worst of the village smells, she turned to him with intense curiosity. She smiled faintly—grimly and rather bitterly—at the shocked look on his face.

“Are you going to resign?”

“Resign? I wish I had ten years to gi’ ’em, instead o’ one. That there should still be such darkness on the planet, on this continent! Miss Konrad, how can your father bring himself to oppose the coming of missionaries here?”

“He’s never opposed their coming. Sometimes he has opposed their teachings—when the teachings interfered with his enterprises. But if you think any church can help this situation, you’ve got more faith in it than I have.”

“Tell me one thing. Ye noticed the little girl. Her face was all covered wi’ something red, that looked like blood. Had they been abusing her?”

“It was blood, all right. But they hadn’t been abusing her. She’d simply been eating her dinner. These people are fond of warmed raw meat—particularly parts of animals that white people don’t eat at all.”

“Of course they dinna understand the use of water.”

“They don’t wash, if that’s what you mean.”

“How do they live at all? How do any o’ them manage to survive?”

“They don’t live, in any sense that we understand the word. They barely exist. You don’t know the half of it, yet. But it isn’t just dirt that kills them. It’s the white man, and the white man’s ills.” Now the cynical smile had left her red mouth, and her eyes were wide and bright. “There is only one remedy, as far as we are concerned. It is—to quit thinking about them as animals. If you can do that, you’ll be able to live beside them without pitying them too much—without worrying yourself half-crazy. It’s logical too. You see how cheerful they are.”

“Of course that’s the easiest way,” Angus answered somberly. “But I doubt if the good Lord meant us to take the easiest way.”

“I don’t know what He means. I’m all at sea. I only know that I’m going to get out of this hell up here, and go back where there is a little light, a little hope. . . . Now let’s talk of something else. There’s a man standing over by the next hut I want you to meet. He’s the strongest character in the village—the only Eskimo that father hasn’t got under his thumb.”

This was a powerful and rather ominous figure. His skin was dark as any of his tribe, yet it was apparent, as is common in the North, he was not a full-blooded Eskimo. In the first place, the pure Inuit rarely attains such physical proportions. This man was as large as Emil Konrad. Besides, there was a slight red tinge to his scanty mustache. Lastly, in his face was a look foreign to the happy-natured, easy-going Eskimo. It was a queer intensity, almost a sensitiveness, an undefined but poignant sadness. His eyes, sunken in typical Eskimo slits, were vivid and commanding. His head was nobly shaped.

“This is Ugruk (Bearded Seal), the best hunter in the village,” Gretchen said. “Ugruk, this is the Reverend Mackenzie, the new missionary.”

“Ugruk, him glad see you,” the man said in painstaking English. He smiled wide, and offered his hand. But there was no real warmth in the greeting; plainly he was indifferent to the white man. Instead, he was gazing, with a peculiar, rapt intensity, into the girl’s face.

“Why does he look at you that way?” Angus asked after they had moved on.

“I don’t just know. . . . I’m some way mixed up with his illusions. . . . Now we’d better go to dinner.”

The Konrads and their guest dined pleasantly in a warm, well-furnished room overlooking the sea. The meal was excellent—reindeer roast, tom-cod, vegetables out of tins, and, as a special treat, a few fresh radishes grown carefully under glass during the present summer. Apparently the Konrads lived with the greatest possible comfort. An Eskimo boy waited on the table; the silver and glass of the board compared favorably with any home Angus had ever visited. As a host, Emil Konrad was affability itself.

The talk soon got around to Eskimo customs and character. Gretchen told her parents of Angus’s first visit to an igloo, and his distress. “He thinks their lot is hard now,” the girl added. “Wait till he sees them in winter.”

“When will winter come?” Angus asked.

“It’s on the way now. It frosted last night—when the sun was low on the horizon. It only spares us for a few weeks. I don’t mind the cold so much—it



doesn't often get to forty—and fifty—and sixty below; but I do hate the long dark. And there are so many native funerals.”

The devil of arrogance that lived in Emil Konrad's ego, now saw fit to arise. “Let us not waste too many tears on the natives,” he said coldly. “It is true that they have a high death rate. It is always such with inferior peoples. After all, what does it matter? When they are all gone, they will be gone, and the world will not be so much worse off. They are like animals. They have no—what may I say?—superconsciousness, to feel and know. What does life mean to them? Not this.” He snapped his finger. “It is only we, the conquerors, who can really live.”

Angus looked thoughtfully at his plate. “Isn't it strange, then, that the Lord God ever let them be born!”

“Oh, they serve their purpose. They bring in furs, beautiful furs, for our white women to adorn themselves. They bring them out of the great cold, the long dark, which is not too pleasant to face. Still they do not suffer much. They have not the brain to suffer. You see yourself how they always laugh, always chatter, always talk about eating! They have never known anything better, and they never will know anything better. Why should we be sorry for them? Tush! They are animals!”

“They ha' no ideals?” Angus asked.

“None. That is the truth.”

“Yes, that is the truth,” Mrs. Konrad echoed sadly. “Life is too hard for them to be anything but absolute materialists. You will find that out later.”

“But that fact doesna make their condition less sad,” Angus replied slowly. “When a man has an ideal, he usually has hope for its fulfilment. It is death to be wi'out hope.”

“But it's living hell to have no hope and still hold an ideal—an ideal that one knows can never come true.” Mrs. Konrad's voice held a hushed fervor. “And there is at least one man in the village who bears that cross.”

“The half-breed Ugruk?”

“Yes. How did you guess?”

“I saw it in his eyes, when I met him today. How does he differ from the rest?”

“He differs because of his mind. Many half-breeds do not feel their white blood—perhaps because it is usually inferior white blood to start with.

But Ugruk is an Eskimo with the white man's power to dream."

To lighten the talk, Konrad began to tell tales of old days in the Arctic. Angus himself welcomed the topic, because of what it might reveal. Not for one moment had he forgotten his main purpose at Narwhale Cape. As he had trod the village paths, Red Mackenzie's ghost had stalked before him. He had watched for his father's footprints; he had tried to read the shadows cast by the long-dead past. His heart leaped as he realized that here, tonight, he might learn the full truth regarding his heritage—that heritage of sin which Red Mackenzie had laid upon his soul. The stories Konrad told were of violence and sudden death; any one of them might give the clue to the truth.

Revelation was in store. In the course of his tales Konrad mentioned Postoffice Point. Angus's eyes lit. His father had spoken of this place, almost with his last breath. "Where *is* Postoffice Point?" he asked. "I've heard of it before."

"It has no set location," Konrad explained. "Every summer it comes close to Point Barrow. It is the southernmost point of the polar ice-pack, where the whaling ships used to gather, to exchange news and mail."

Angus smiled with a singular tenderness. He wondered if his father's spirit, wandering world-wide just before he died, had seen again the whaling ships at anchor beside the floes, while the hushed seas dreamed in the midnight sun. "*Letters from home at Postoffice Point!*" Well, he was home now, and had no more need for letters!

Gretchen had been watching her guest's face, and saw his lips curve. At that moment she liked him greatly. Plainly he was not the cold and heartless bigot she had anticipated. But her father paused in his recital and eyed him suspiciously. Like most domineering and high-handed men, he objected to secret smiles. "What is it?" he demanded. "Whom did you hear mention Postoffice Point?"

"A man named Wallace Mackenzie, who died a few months ago."

A deep silence fell over the board. The three Konrads grew rigid in their chairs. "Was he called 'Red' Mackenzie?" the host asked.

"He was."

"You favor him a little. Was he any relation to you?"

"A close relation. He was my father."

Emil Konrad's big mouth slowly opened. Then it closed with a snap, and a look indescribably grim stole into his hard, Prussian eyes. Angus was

amazed. He looked up to find both Gretchen and Mrs. Konrad regarding him with breathless intensity. Gretchen's face showed a conflict of emotions. Her mouth had a sardonic twist, as if she were amused, but her eyes looked tender. Her mother's expression was of surprise and simple compassion.

"So he was your father, eh?" Emil Konrad repeated in a metallic tone. "In that case, I've got a surprise for you."

He turned and spoke in an inaudible tone to his Eskimo servant. His wife, guessing his intention, leaped from her seat, hastened around the table, and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Not now!" she protested in a low voice. "Emil, it's a breach of hospitality. Wait till some other time."

But her ruthless mate would not heed. At his gesture, the servant hurried out of the room. "Don't worry about it, mother," came Gretchen's cool tones. "It's just life, that's all. Of course it's not the right time, but it doesn't really matter, and you know you can't stay father when he sees a chance to trample down someone. He thinks he's going to see a show—but I bet he doesn't."

Angus heard her as in a dream. His heart was thumping and hammering against his ribs. That this was the dawn of revelation he did not doubt, but what form it would take he dared not question. There followed three long minutes of waiting. All of them watched the door through which Konrad's servant would return.

Presently they heard him in the hall. The door opened, and he came through. Following him, dull-faced as an idol, was Ugruk, the Eskimo.

Konrad's big body heaved up out of his chair. The triumph on his face was almost malice. He seized Ugruk by the arm and led him to Angus's chair. Slowly the young minister got to his feet.

"When you two gentlemen met today, you didn't make your last names clear to each other," Konrad began. He paused for tire sake of suspense, and the room was silent as a windless Arctic night. "Ugruk, this is Reverend Angus Mackenzie, of Seattle. Parson, this is Ugruk Mackenzie, of Narwhale Cape. Brothers—shake hands."

## CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN ANGUS looked upon his brother, he knew shame. There stood the testament to his father's sin. As he studied, wide-eyed, the dark face, a wave of rebellion rose in his heart, and he almost hated his father's memory. His being cried out against the vast injustice of the thing—that he, the son of a betrayed wife, must face the humiliation and bear the burden of a traitor father's evil.

Would this shame conquer him? Would his repugnance at the whole ignoble affair overrule any sense of duty he might cherish? Emil Konrad thought so. He believed he was witnessing the downfall, in humiliation and dishonor, of one who held himself a man of God. Konrad hated missionaries, in general. Often they had stood between him and the spoliation of weak peoples. This particular missionary, this red Scotchman of homely face and mild ways, had practically defied him in his own village. To feed his malice Konrad had forgotten all sense of hospitality, and in his own house had staged the exposé—whereby Angus was shown as the brother of a brutish Eskimo, the son of a squaw man.

First, Konrad thought, Angus would bluster denials. Perhaps he would lose his head, fly into a futile rage, and make a scene not to be lived down for the rest of his stay in the Arctic. Perhaps he would charge fraud, and be forced to apologize. At the least he would refuse to acknowledge his brother, thereby showing himself a hypocrite, false to the Christian doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man.

Meanwhile Gretchen knew what was going through her father's mind. Disillusioned child of the North, she knew Konrad's strength and weakness, his power to control others and his own lack of self-control, the magnitude of his will and the pettiness of his envy; and her face burned with shame for him. "He thinks he's going to see a show, but I bet he doesn't," she had said just before Ugruk's entrance. How ardently she hoped she might win that bet! She herself could not save the situation. It was all in Angus's hands.

In silence she watched him. She sat leaning forward in her chair, her elbows on the table, her eyes like brilliant sapphires under her black brows. For long seconds the wager hung in the balance. Angus did not speak, and not one of the spectators could read his face. His eyes looked dim, as if he were gazing far.

He was not only shamed, but baffled and confused. But soon he began to rally his powers of will. He struggled for that self-discipline and order of mind on which his denomination lays so much stress. At last his confused thoughts began to untangle.

The facts themselves were plain. In the dark, sullen countenance before him he could see his father's image. It was dim as the sun-dogs in Arctic mist, but unmistakable. The jaw was prognathous, like an ape's, yet it had a lean and muscular look that was only too familiar. The hair had a reddish cast, and the dark pigment could not quite conceal a hint of freckles. Ugruk was an Eskimo of the Eskimos, yet there was a gleam of Scotch zeal in his sunken, brutish eyes.

Himself and Ugruk, the missionary and the barbarian, had sprung from the same loins. His practical mind would not let him doubt this fact. It fitted in all too well with Red Mackenzie's death-bed confession, and it accounted for everything. It was plain, now, why the old Scotchman had wanted to be shriven—he had exiled his own son to the most hopeless environment on the known earth; he had laid on a curse he could not lift; he had damned a human soul for a lifetime at least, and possibly for eternity. And this was the sin for which, with his poor mortal powers, Angus Mackenzie had promised to atone!

True, he could still cover his eyes and steal away. He could admit that Ugruk was his father's son, and yet deny that Ugruk was his brother. He could claim that their relationship was purely physical, the result of a gross sin on his father's part, and therefore it had no spiritual meaning and imposed no obligations. If there was a streak of cowardice across his soul, this was his chance.

But he was a Scotch Presbyterian. He was supposed to believe that all men, himself included, are the sons of God—the foreordained instruments of God's high purposes. True, he could not count himself in this exalted circle and exclude Ugruk. Such would be against the basic tenets of his faith. But why not reject the faith that could lead him into so much confusion and trouble? Why not take a page from Konrad's notebook, deny the dignity of manhood to this darkened Eskimo, and think of him as an animal outside the pale? If he could do this, Ugruk would have no claim on him. There can be no question of blood-brother-hood between a man and a brute. But if he were a Christian, not a hypocrite, if he believed in John Calvin and did not mock him, he must acknowledge Ugruk. It was a stern trial of his faith.

He looked closer. He saw in Ugruk's face not only his father's image, but his own. Therefore if he denied Ugruk, he must deny himself, and all that he had stood by until now—the grace and the dignity and the nobility of the human station. By the same token, he must break the vow he had made at his father's bedside.

Well, this price was more than Angus would pay. Some men might be too proud to accept Ugruk; Angus was too proud to disown him. Events might arise, in this North, that would force him to another course, but they were still in the distance. He would not barter away his ideals for snobbery's sake.

He came to his decision. For the moment his red face ceased to be homely—at least so Gretchen thought. When Ugruk smiled a pleased and oily smile, his own lips flashed a response. When Ugruk's hand crept timidly forward, Angus grasped it strongly with his own.

"Weel, brother," he said kindly, "it has taken us a long time to find out about each other."

From the other side of the table came a faint little sigh, as of relief. Gretchen had won her bet. Mrs. Konrad gasped, and wondered at the tears that suddenly filled her eyes. Konrad himself gazed stupidly, as if this were something he could not believe.

"You mean—we—brothers—in—church?" Ugruk asked with painful slowness. He wagged his free hand up and down—palm down and fingers relaxed—in a typical Eskimo gesture. It was as if he were grasping for the strange English words he found so hard to remember. "Or you mean—we—brothers—with same blood."

"I mean we're brothers in the blood. Your name is Mackenzie, and so is mine. We had the same father."

The grin widened; the hand-clasp strengthened. "You—white man—brother to Eskimo, eh? Ugruk, him mighty glad. *Arre gah, arre gah!*"

Angus jumped as if he had been shot. He remembered this last expression—his father had spoken it at the moment of his death. "What does *arre gah* mean?" he asked.

Gretchen answered in a singularly gentle voice. "It means 'good,' or 'it is well,' or even 'yes.' The natives say it when they are pleased."

"I'm a white man, but we're brothers just the same," Angus said in answer to Ugruk's question. "My father acknowledged you as his son. He

sent me here to find you.”

“Then you—look after—Ugruk,” the native said, complacently, nodding his head. “You rich, I poor. You—give Ugruk—plenty grub.”

Emil Konrad, who was listening with reddened ears, burst forth with a roar of laughter. Partly it was forced, yet it saved him from an embarrassment that was becoming too great to bear. He realized that he had cut a sorry figure, and he welcomed the comic relief. Gretchen laughed too, softly and richly.

“Dinna count on that,” the Scotchman answered hastily. “But maybe I will gi’ you something better than grub.”

“There isn’t any such animal, from an Eskimo’s point of view,” Gretchen said. “This applies to Ugruk, the same as any other native.”

“Mayhap. I want to talk to him, though. Meester Konrad—ye and your family will excuse me if I leave now and walk hom wi’ my brother.”

“Of course we will,” Mrs. Konrad cried. She hurried to Angus and took his hand in hers. “This has been a shock to you, of course, and you don’t want to have to be polite to strangers. And I want to tell you—you’ve proved yourself in my sight. From now on you can count on me as your ally.”

Angus pressed her hand in gratitude, but his throat muscles seemed to fail him when he tried to answer. Instinctively he turned to Gretchen, as if he hoped for an encouraging word from her too, but though she looked at him with bright eyes, her straight lips gave no sign. A moment later he was trudging down the village path beside his brother.

The wind had strengthened since he had entered Konrad’s home. Now it was a demoniacal power—raging down from the Pole, shrilling over the village, and inciting the sea to its own crazed violence. It chilled Angus to the marrow of his bones. It bullied him with the threat of blizzards to come. It swept like a mad thing across the tundra, where not one tree raised a brave head in defiance. Under the lowering wind-clouds, the village seemed more than ever desolate and forlorn. Life therein seemed particularly hopeless—futile and sad. And now these darkened beings in the dark huts were no longer strangers, without claim on him save for the fact of their common humanity, but were his own people. He was not sworn to them merely for a year, after which he could go to his own place with the satisfaction that he had done his utmost; in some degree not yet estimated he was bound to them for life. One of them, the darkest of all in that he walked in the heavy

shadow close to the light, Angus must transfigure utterly, and thus wipe away the shame of his birth.

How far-reaching was Red Mackenzie's careless sin! He had condemned his own son to a life of squalor, misery, and despair. Nor was it any help to say that Ugruk, an Eskimo, could not feel sharply and therefore could not suffer sharply. This was not true even of pure-blooded Eskimos, much less of half-breeds. Ugruk had never known anything different, true; but he knew dreams. He could see the light, but never reach it; he could aspire, but his aspirations were ever at conflict with the gross materialism that was his Eskimo heritage.

Did not Red Mackenzie's betrayal of his wife cancel Angus's filial obligations? The missionary could have argued so, had he chosen. What did he owe to a squaw man? Well, he owed his word, if that were good for anything. Angus sighed and went to his task.

"We will go somewhere and talk. Where do ye live, Ugruk?"

"Ugruk, him live with seven Eskimo. They lie on floor now, go sleep."

Angus could imagine the scene. Even on this wind-swept beach, there was still a hint of the pungent Eskimo smells. . . . "Are ye married?"

"Ugruk, him not married. He live with Tweegock's family. Him never marry, maybe."

Angus looked up, startled. His brother had spoken with a strange finality. But his face gave no key to his deeper meaning; it was expressionless as the wooden masks which his people wore in the *kashga* (men's council house). Now both men sat down behind an overturned boat, out of the wind.

"What was your mother's name?" Angus asked.

"Her name—Coonee."

"Is she—still alive?"

"Oh, she grow old, fat, die long time."

"What did she look like, Ugruk?" Angus knew this was not a sensible question, but he could not withhold it.

Ugruk gestured futilely. "Oh, she look like other Eskimo woman. She dark, like me."

Angus could imagine her—her little eyes laughing in their deep slits, her dark unlovely skin, her big teeth gleaming. And now he remembered, and



fitted into its rightful place, another of his father's death-bed sayings. "*I never loved her, Ellen. I never loved any lass but you.*" No wonder, then, that the fruits of that mating were evil! No wonder the price of atonement would be high!

What could he do with Ugruk? In what way could he justify the half-breed's existence—make up to him for the sin of his having been born? The more Angus studied the problem, the more unsolvable it seemed.

Could he transplant Ugruk to another environment? The idea was absurd on the face of it. In a sense he was a stranger among his own people—wifeless, childless, cursed by his white blood, dully staring at a faint, distant gleam that his tribesmen could never behold—but in civilization he would be actually an outcast. There was no hope for him save in the Arctic. Here in his mother's country, in the blast of the north wind and under the polar star, his destiny must be fulfilled.

Naturally, Angus's first thoughts were toward his brother's spiritual welfare. "Ugruk, are ye a Christian?"

The Eskimo shook his head sullenly. "Ugruk, him no Christian."

"Ye ha' never been baptized?"

"No."

"Is it because ye never had a chance? Because no one ever told you that ye should be?"

"Ugruk, he had plenty chance. Other missionary come here, long time ago, put water on plenty Eskimo head. He talk to Ugruk. Ugruk say no."

"But if the other Eskimos thought it was a good thing and were baptized, why didn't ye think so too?"

"Other Eskimos, they *fools!*" Ugruk's tone boomed like the surf—and Angus thought of Red Mackenzie. "Ugruk, him fool too, but no so big fool. Other Eskimo, they just like tom-cod—bite once, twice, plenty times on same hook. Ugruk, him only bite once." Once more the dark hand began to waggle, as the words came with painful slowness. "Ugruk, he know about white man. He white man's son—sometime he feel like white man, be strong like white man, grab everything like white man. He know water on head just fish-hook so Eskimo bite one time more—so white man catch Eskimo again."

"Do you think that's the only reason the white man comes up here—so he can grab everything, and cheat the Eskimo?"

Ugruk's placid face took on a look startlingly grim. "Parson—you my brother?"

"I ha' told you I am. That's why I want you to trust me."

"Then why you no treat Ugruk like man, instead like child? Why you try fool Ugruk? Ugruk, him Eskimo, but he no blind. White man, he heap smart. He no work for anybody but himself. Ugruk know this, so he no bite on white man's hook again."

Not only the words, but the tone in which they were spoken saddened Angus. He felt that he might as well preach to the rocks of the sea. "But what profit can I make from you, Ugruk?" he asked quietly.

"Ugruk he not know. But white man, he always figure out some way make Eskimo pay. Long time ago, Eskimo live on meat he catch himself. He no eat beans, sweet crackers, tea, sugar—he eat nothing but blubber, whale meat, fish, deer. You savvy?"

"Aye. Ye mean before the white man started up trading-posts."

Ugruk nodded. "Eskimo never see white man, long time ago, but he get along pretty good. He stay *ook sook* (literally, "much grease," but in Ugruk's meaning, "very fat"). He make friends with spirit, no get sick, get cough, die. He live plenty long, plenty wrinkles."

"But what about the famines ye used to ha' in those old days?" Angus asked.

"Famine, he come sometime. When he do, people stay in hut, grow thin, lie down, die. Sometime whole village die. But famine no come often. Plenty game in those days. White man, he no yet come in boat, kill sea cow, kill whale, kill walrus just for ivory. Walrus, him plenty thick, Whale, he everywhere. *Arre gah, arre gah!*"

Angus nodded. He knew how the white man's greed had decimated the walrus herds. "Aye, I suppose life was some easier in those days."

"Plenty easy. Eskimo, he no work very hard in winter. When storm come, he stay in igloo. By'm'by white man he come. He have plenty *kow-kow*. He have beans, sugar, sweet crackers, tea, *oomiak-sook* him full, store him full, shelf piled high. *Arre gah, arre gah, arre gah!*"

Ugruk's mouth was watering. At the very thought of such richness, his little deep-set eyes glistened with excitement. "What does *oomiak-sook* mean?"

“Big ship. Ship, she full of grub. And white man he say, come eat plenty. No cost nothing. So Eskimo he come eat, fill up all inside. Eskimo think white man heap fine, heap good to Eskimo. Sometime he feel so good he let white man take wife out on ship, no bring her back till he dam’ good and ready.”

“I’ve heard about that. It was common up here. What happened after that?”

“By’m’by stomach him empty, Eskimo get hungry again. He eat blubber, whale meat, but he want white man’s *kow-kow* too. He think about white man’s good, sweet *kow-kow*, his mouth water. So he go to white man, beg for more. White man he say, sure, eat plenty, take plenty home, and when winter come you catch skins for white man, pay for *kow-kow*. Eskimo he promise, sure, he catch plenty skins.”

“And from then on he was in debt to the white man?”

“*Ab*. In winter he no stay in igloo, he trap, trap, trap all time. He go out in blizzard—sometime he get lost, die. But he never catch enough fox to pay white man. He owe white man for *kow-kow*, tobacco, ribbon for women, looking-glass, phonograph. He no have time make good boats, good tents. He white man’s dog!”

“But does the white man always make you pay?” Angus asked. “Surely, he has done you some good.”

“*Nah gah! Nah gah!* (No good.) Eskimo him better off before he know how white man’s grub taste. By’m’by white man bring bottles full of red water, give Eskimo drink. Eskimo, he like that red water heap plenty fine. Make him feel heap plenty good. By’m’by, Eskimo he sell dog-team, sell wife, sell anything for one bottle red water. White man make him bring in more skins.”

“How about the medicines the government furnishes you? And the doctor to cure you when ye’re sick?”

“Before white man come, Eskimo he never sick. He no need medicine. White man no give Eskimo anything free. He always take plenty pay, maybe this year, maybe next year. So when white missionary come with water to put on head, Ugruk say no. He no want to get something he pay heap for next year. Fish-hook covered up with bait so Ugruk no see him, but he know hook there somewhere. Ugruk, he know about white man!”

Angus was silent for a long time. He saw the folly of pursuing the subject further, for the present, at least. Yet by what other means might he

rescue Ugruk from Egyptian night?

“Ugruk, do ye ken how to read?”

“Ugruk him go to native school long time ago. Read fine.”

“I’m going to get you some books . . . some books ye’ll understand. They’ll tell you things that will make your life easier and happier.”

“How many foxskins?”

“I dinna understand—”

“How many foxskins you make Ugruk catch, pay for books?”

“None, Ugruk, and may the good Lord ha’ mercy on you! Don’t ye understand, man, that I’m your brother? I’m going to gi’ you the books. I’m going to do everything I can for you, to make your life better and happier. I don’t want any pay.”

“You—no—want—pay?” Ugruk asked in amazement. Plainly he was jarred out of his Innuite calm.

“Not one cent. I only want your trust, so I can help you. No matter what your experience wi’ the white man has been, ye can count on me. I don’t mean to gi’ you grub. Grub costs money, which is scarce. But I’ll try to lead you to your heart’s desire and make your dreams come true.”

Ugruk was skeptical but interested. “You help Ugruk—get what he want?”

“Yes, if it’s something noble and good.”

Ugruk shrugged. “White brother plenty careful. He keep string fastened to meat, so he draw him back when he want to. Ugruk, him want something mighty lot. Something good—fine—heap good for Ugruk, make him like new man, make him glad he was born. But you no help me get it. You say, ‘Eskimo, him black fellow, no get what white man get.’ So you turn Ugruk down.”

“But I won’t say that, Ugruk. I’ve already told you we’re brothers. Besides, ye are a man the same as I—the fact that I’m white and ye are brown doesn’t make any difference.”

“Eskimo just as good as white man?”

“No two men are alike in goodness, but all men are brothers, just the same. An Eskimo is entitled to the same blessings as a white man, provided he wins them fairly. If ye have an ideal—I mean, a longing for something

better than what ye have now—I'm vera glad. That vera longing makes you a better man."

"Ugruk, he no understand. . . . You tell Ugruk will you help him get something good, fine, make Ugruk heap happy."

"I'll help you if I can. At least I won't deny it to you because ye're an Eskimo. What is it ye want?"

"I want"—and the sunken eyes grew luminous and strange—"Gretchen!"

Angus leaped up from his seat and whirled on the half-breed. "What d' mean?"

"Brother, him heap mad now. Maybe he like kill Ugruk. He forget quick what he say just now. . . . But Ugruk tell you true. He want something good, fine, heap pretty, make Ugruk glad he be born. He want marry Gretchen, have her for his wife."

## CHAPTER FIVE

JUST before midnight, Angus went to his living quarters in the mission building. His freckled face reddened with pleasure as he glanced about him; someone had been busy here while he had talked with Ugruk. Snowy pillows and sheets made his cot inviting. The room had been cleanly swept, the old furniture dusted, and clean but well-patched curtains hung at the windows. Of course his benefactor was Mrs. Konrad. Perhaps Gretchen had helped her; at least, he would like to think so. He could imagine her capable hands busy with the duster, her exotic face flushed, her blue eyes now brilliant, now shadowed.

He lay a long time looking out the window. The midnight sun hung like an immense red lantern just above the horizon. Meanwhile he thought about his brother, and his brother's dream of happiness. Was this an evil dream? No, it was the high point of Ugruk's life. Instead of a base lust, it was the crystallization of all the vague desires and aspirations that his white blood prompted. Ugruk was an Eskimo, body and soul, yet he harbored an image of beauty. All the beauty he could imagine was embodied in the trader's fair-skinned daughter. It was a gleam from afar—a torch handed down to him through the generations of his white sires—a longing for better things, which has inspired the white race to world-conquest.

Yet the dream could not come true. Angus had told Ugruk so. White girls do not marry half-breeds—in all the history of Alaska it has happened only once or twice. Ugruk's Eskimo blood put him beyond the pale. Moreover, it denied him even spiritual fulfilment, which is the white man's compensation for unrequited love. Ugruk would never be content to worship Gretchen from afar. He knew nothing of, and could not imagine, the heaven-sent rewards of idealism—the growth of the soul, the ennobling of the heart. He was a materialist to the last coarse hair of his head. Thus, to fulfil his dream, he must possess Gretchen physically—his own to have and to hold.

Angus had urged him to give up the idea, and aspire to some other end. Now he wondered if he had wasted his breath. He remembered, uneasily, the set of Ugruk's jaw, the low red fire in his eyes. At that moment he had seemed to recall Red Mackenzie. It might be that he had inherited not only Red Mackenzie's violence of desire, but also his iron will. If so, the problem of his salvation was the more difficult, practically insuperable. Because he could never—by no far stretch of Angus's imagination—win Gretchen Konrad for his own.

Yet even in this, the sin went back to Red Mackenzie. No pure-blooded Eskimo would ever be tortured with a dream like Ugruk's. Truly, it is no little thing for a white man to beget a black-skinned son! And this was the sin Angus must atone for, no matter what the cost.

In vain Angus wrestled with the problem. Tired out, his mind began to wander, and to refuse to obey the commands of his will. And always it seemed to stray in but one direction. Gretchen Konrad haunted him tonight—a warmer, nearer, more insistent ghost than Red Mackenzie's. . . . Yes, she had been in this room. Her warm, strong capable hands had smoothed the sheets on which he lay. He pictured her hanging the curtains, her body revealing its exquisite curves as she reached and measured. Busy at her task, her full red lips would be pouted, her strange eyes serene. . . .

But there was no profit here. He had come to the North to carry out a sacred trust, not to seek adventure. Until he had fulfilled his mission, he was not free. Loveliness was not for him; it would only divert him from his sworn duty. All his strength and thought and the creative power of his dreams must be directed toward the atonement of Red Mackenzie's sin, and nothing must come between. Unless he could hold to this, he might as well give up now, and catch the Northland on her return trip.

Meanwhile, Gretchen herself had waking dreams. She was recalling all the events of this memorable day, and some of them she lived over and over again, with a singular pleasure. Yesterday she would not have believed this possible. She would have denied that any imaginable happening in this outcast village could interest her in the least. She hated the place—she told herself she would always hate it. And the mainspring, the central figure of today's unforgettable episode was a Presbyterian missionary!

A puritan, and no doubt a bigot! How could the doings of such a person be anything but an irritation to her? But she was an honest-hearted girl of good standards, and she knew that Angus's acknowledgment of his brother, in the presence of the Konrad family, was one of the finest things she had ever seen. It was true blue, and even Frank Jannison's clever, sardonic comments could not make it otherwise.

She was eager to see Jannison, and tell him about the affair. Now her heart warmed to think of him, and the little red-faced missionary sped swiftly from her mind. Her young doctor was so boyishly gay! He drove a shaft of wit into even the most solemn subject. Yet he seemed far more mature than Angus. Surely, life with him would be one long laugh—at the follies and the frailties of men.

When she rose in the morning, Narwhale Cape had been swept clean and washed by wind and rain. Gaily she went forth to look for Jannison, to find him paying his sick-calls in the native village. She rejoiced at the sight of him. His tall figure was straight as a lance; his aquiline face just missed being handsome. Together they made the rounds, then took a tramp out on the tundra.

“So you were quite impressed with your little psalm-singer,” Jannison observed humorously, when the girl had finished her story. “You would be, Gretchen—you’ve got a little of your mother’s Victorianism in you yet. But my attitude is somewhat different. I can’t say I’d have admired the preacher for acknowledging Ugruk. I’d have been a little bit sorry for him.”

This was just the kind of comment Gretchen had expected, yet she felt vaguely annoyed. At the same time she was self-angry for feeling so. “Why should she champion Angus against Frank Jannison?”

“I felt sorry for him too, until he came through so well.”

“That isn’t my point. The young minister—you say his name is Mackenzie?”

“Angus Mackenzie.”

“Scotch, eh? A Scotchman would acknowledge a grizzly bear, if there was a contribution in sight. . . . But I’m trying to be funny. Seriously I haven’t any doubt that he meant well—very well indeed. But it was all a pose, just the same—partly for your benefit, partly for the benefit of his own throttled, pathetic ego. He wanted to make a gesture of doing something generous, noble, and high-minded. At the same time, in his heart, he is probably stingy, ignoble, and petty-minded—like most Puritans. It is the same thing that makes a coward volunteer to die in battle.”

“I didn’t know it was possible for a man to volunteer to die in battle, and still be a coward.”

“Perfectly possible. There’s no limit to what length an inferiority complex can drive a man. Yes, I would have felt especially sorry for poor Mackenzie. He was not only posing—in the deeper sense of the word, I mean—but also he was striving for a result in itself pathetic and foolish. Where is the nobility in so-called brotherly love? It’s sheer sentimentality. If a man happens to be your brother, it is no reason why you should give him any more, or take any more off him, than if he is someone else’s brother. If you happen to like him, all right. If not, give him the gate. That’s realism, in opposition to romanticism.”



Gretchen was unaccountably pale save for a splash of vivid red, high in each cheek. “Anyway, I think he’s a pretty good type of missionary,” she said at last, lamely.

Jannison laughed loud. “Talk about damning a man with faint praise! Well, suppose he is a good type. Is that any reason he should come up here and afflict us?”

“He’s not going to afflict us. His work is with the natives.”

“We are spared, but the natives aren’t. Is that what you mean? And they, poor devils, can’t defend themselves. It is all so silly, Gretchen—so futile. Why should any people try to impose their religion on any other people?”

“I suppose the old Saxons said that, when Christian missionaries first came to England. . . . But I’m rather glad they did come, aren’t you?”

“Times have changed since then. You know that the Eskimos were better off before the white man ever came here.”

“Yes, and the white man damned ’em, body and soul. And now we’ve got to do what we can to save them. I don’t hold any brief for missionaries, Frank. Often they are bigoted and mean. But we shouldn’t condemn the work they are trying to do.”

“I condemn it. I wish they’d stay at home, and not get in the way. They are a gang of parasites who cannot make an honest living in the States. The Eskimos don’t want to have to swallow their sermons.”

The girl’s eyes had a metallic glitter. “Maybe they don’t want to have to swallow your medicines, either. But you think it’s right to prescribe them, just the same.”

At once she was sorry. She should not have given this personal turn to the argument. Although she did not look up, she knew that Jannison had flushed scarlet. The point she had made was innocent enough. If civilization sent its doctors, why not its ministers? One cured sick bodies, the other ailing souls. But her remark might imply more than she had intended.

It is never good form, in the far places of the earth, to question a man’s past. This is true in the Argentine, on the sunlit deserts of Africa, and particularly true in the empty wastes of the North. When a man comes to Alaska, his past is behind him, and he can start fair. It is a matter of mutual protection and comfort. But Jannison had broken this rule. He had inferred that Angus was a failure in the States—a parasite “who cannot make an honest living.” Thereby he had laid himself open to similar question.

However, in her remark Gretchen had meant to compare only the present activities of the two men, one medical, the other clerical, and was not thinking of their past lives.

True, she did not know why Frank Jannison had come to the Arctic. He seemed brilliant enough to have succeeded, or he would have stayed in the States, rather than work for small pay in a lonely land. On the other hand, he might have been driven here by an enemy.

If so, she could guess who the enemy was. When Jannison had first come to Narwhale Cape, two years before, he had been a different man from what he was now. Pale, nervous, and unkempt, he had not attracted this fresh-faced girl just home from college. Plainly his enemy had pursued him into the North, and seemed about to seize him and destroy him. That he would ever sober up and amount to anything, neither she nor her father had the least hope.

But he had accomplished this. No more did they see him reeling across the tundra, slave to the worst evil that ever cursed the North. The bottles of government alcohol, part of his medical supplies, remained sealed for months at a time. He had got his nerve back. He was tanned, muscular, and clean. And certainly the cure seemed permanent—otherwise the loneliness and the monotony of the long winters would have done for him before now.

He did his work well enough. He prescribed medicines, set broken bones, and cared for wounds. He had yet to prove his skill at surgery. He had lost a few patients, but in each case he had explained that surgery would not have saved them, and indeed would have hastened their end. And Gretchen believed in him wholly. He had told her of many successful operations he had performed before ever the Arctic silence had closed around him.

Whatever his past might be, Gretchen did not hold it against him. If he had failed as a practicing physician in the States, and had taken the government position in order to save money, he was still eligible to be her mate. He was still young, with plenty of time to win the success she wished for him. On the other hand, if he had fallen into evil ways and had come North to reform, the fact made him all the more interesting—especially since his desire to make good with her had been a factor in his reformation. She would not have him think that to defend Angus she had thrown up at him his own doubtful past. She was too good an Alaskan for that! So, to make amends, her hand stole into his and pressed his fingers.

He turned to her with a radiant smile. “You’re wonderful, Gretchen!” His tone thrilled with enthusiasm. Could Angus, the slow Scotchman, speak

half so well? She knew he could not. “Now let’s forget about the sky pilot, and just enjoy each other,” Jannison went on. “I’ve got some good news to tell you.”

“I hope it’s good news for me, too.”

“It is, if you’ll let it be.” He sought her eyes, but she looked away. “It’s just this—I’m on my home stretch. My contract with the government has only six months more to go.”

“But you’ve been here only two years. I thought yours was a three-year contract.”

“It is, but I signed it three years ago next February. There was some red tape involved, and it took six months to ratify my appointment and get me up here. Six months from now I’m through—free—bound for the outside!”

“But that would put you out in midwinter.”

“Yes, but by the end of March the days will be long enough for comfortable travel. Then I’ll go by dog-team to Barrow, and wireless a plane to come after me from Fairbanks. Gretchen, think what that means!”

Yes, think what it did mean! The girl’s eyes grew wistful. Throngs of people, instead of the thronging bergs. Bright streets, instead of wind-swept beaches. Hope and life and laughter and beauty, instead of despair and frozen death and futile tears and desolation!

“I’m going into private practice, again,” Jannison went on. “I want to do some big things in surgery. But I want someone to go with me, Gretchen—someone to encourage me, and bring out the best that’s in me. Do you know who that someone might be?”

Gretchen’s lips curved dimly. “I *might* know.”

“She would be wonderfully happy. She would really live, not just exist. While I am getting a start, and making my reputation, she could work as a student nurse in the big hospital I shall be with. She could help me with my big surgical cases, and I could help her find the popularity and pleasures she deserves. . . . At night there would be plenty of opportunity for good times. Theatres, and parties, and cafés. Hundreds of beautiful girls, but not one more beautiful than mine, all the way from Alaska. Gretchen—doesn’t that appeal to you at all?”

The girl paused, and turned and looked into Jannison’s eyes. “It appeals to me—a great deal.”

He grasped her hands. “You mean—you’ll do it?”

“I can’t promise yet, Frank. I’m more fond of you every day, but I’ve got to wait awhile to know for sure. One thing I do know that I’m not going to be here at this time next year. I’m not going to grow old like an Eskimo squaw, and never know what life means. And I think mother will go with me, at least for one winter.”

Jannison was content. He felt sure he would have her promise before the sun came back again, after the Long Dark. And Gretchen herself was of the same mind. Surely she would overcome her last troubling doubt, and find happiness and fulfilment in Jannison’s arms.

She was called from her musings by the sight of a man’s form, standing on the beach. He seemed to be leaning forward from the hips, in a typical Eskimo posture, watching her. Even at this distance she could recognize Ugruk—and she could imagine his somber, passionless eyes, the look of deathless patience on his face. The low sun made his shadow enormous. It seemed to reach out and menace her.

## CHAPTER SIX

WHEN the Northland returned from Demarcation Point she brought exciting news. True, it did not deal with wars or rumors of wars, or any other epochal event that might flash in headlines from a thousand city papers, yet it thrilled Narwhale Cape to the last man. It was of greater moment here than almost any imaginable happening in the outside world. At the edge of the ice, only a few miles from shore, the Northland's watch had sighted a herd of walrus.

No wonder the villagers *ki-kied* and *hi-hied*. *Ivak* (walrus) was almost the richest gift that the sea could give them. In the first place, he was *ook sook*—plenty fat. His huge body was one great hogshead of blubber—white, tasty, and filling. The half-digested clams in his stomach were eaten raw and considered a special delicacy. His skin, carefully split, was useful for tents and for the covering of oomiaks and kaiaks. His intestines were made into waterproof garments. And as a final prize, his tusks were beautiful, fine-grained ivory. They could be carved into beads and cribbage-boards which the traders would buy; even in the green state a pair of them was worth a ten-pound sack of sugar. *Arre gah!*

Because the expedition would break the monotony of village life, Gretchen planned to go. Indeed, she never missed any of the more exciting community affairs, joining in them with a cold recklessness which was her mother's despair. To danger she was honestly indifferent. She loved life, no one better, but she would rather risk losing it than to pass a jellyfish existence on the beach. Besides, her lonely brooding had induced a strange fatalism in her, not uncommon in the Arctic.

She was a good paddler, unafraid of the sea. Moreover, she had not the least fear of her companions, the Eskimo men. Not that she trusted to their chivalry: as far as she knew, such a thing did not exist. The Eskimo is a realist, too intent on satisfying his appetites to concern himself with abstract sentiments. Chivalry and honor and moral ideas in general are well enough for the white man, who has time and leisure for such luxuries, but they are *nah gah* for the Eskimo. Neither did she rely on her ability to protect herself, although she did usually carry a rifle or a pistol. She was safe because of one curious trait in the native make-up.

The Eskimo will not steal. This is not because he is naturally honest, or has any moral scruples against stealing; it is simply a fact. It is a lesson

taught by the cruel North, in uncounted generations of a hand-to-mouth existence at the edge of the ice. He knows that if he steals from a fellow's cache, others will steal from his own cache. There will come a day, in darkness and blizzard, when he will trust his life to a poke of seal-oil left in the howling wind—and that poke will be missing. He is in some ways a communist, yet he has a sharp sense of mine and thine. This was Gretchen's protection. Women are chattels in the tribes, and until they marry they are the absolute property of their fathers. Gretchen belonged to Emil Konrad, and therefore was taboo.

On the present hunt she would have a stalwart companion. Frank Jannison also desired ivory, to take out with him after his period of exile. The girl was delighted; she could count on this tall, bronzed adventurer in any crisis that might arise. They would have a happy day among the floes.

"But promise me you won't invite your missionary," Jannison said. "All he'll do is fall out of the boat, and someone will have to dive in after him."

Gretchen promised, rather against her will. She did not especially want Angus's company, but it hardly seemed sporting to leave him out. She was thoroughly relieved when the freckled sky pilot invited himself.

"I ha' prayed for a good catch," he explained, "but the good Lord wouldna think much of my prayer if I didna go out and share the danger wi' the rest."

The girl smiled secretly, then suddenly sobered. "Parson, you've forgotten something. I'd forgotten it too, until this minute. You won't be able to go—and I'm afraid you'll try to keep the hunters from going too."

"I dinna ken."

"Today is Sunday."

Angus smiled gravely. "Did ye think I ha' forgotten the Holy Sabbath, wi' my first sermon written and ready? But we must go, just the same. The walrus are here today. Tomorrow they may be fifty miles off shore. And the people need them, more than they need my sermon."

"How do you reconcile that with your religion?"

"It doesna conflict. The God I worship is a sensible God, not a wee petty half-god thing who would see his people starve rather than miss an hour o' service. The Sabbath is an institution, and no institution is as important as the people it serves. The Lord God would ha' no more to do wi' me if I insisted on preaching when there was life-saving work to do."

“I think you’re the best missionary I ever met.”

“Ye do not know me well, I fear. I ha’ plenty o’ temptations, and some o’ them lead me into much evil.”

The three white people embarked in Konrad’s launch, a comfortable craft with a hooded bow for rough-weather shelter, and a powerful motor astern. Behind her they towed Gretchen’s little kaiak and a fair-sized fleet of oomiaks and kaiaks belonging to the villagers. Soon the clear icy waters were streaming beneath them.

For Angus, the cruise was a glorious one. Again he was reminded of the unfathomable mystery of the Arctic. The same dim clouds he had seen his first day in the Far North—utterly indescribable except in terms that are themselves occult and unearthly—hung at the sea’s edge. Between the pastel mists and the etched line of the horizon was the ice-blink—the greenish ribbon of light beating up from the eternal floes. Behind him in the oomiaks were dark-browed, impassive Eskimos, children of the ice, a people whose age-long history is lost in darkness. Beside him in the launch was the transplanted flower of civilization, the incarnation of beauty and hope and happiness—and the contrast was so striking that Angus felt confused and appalled. A lone star shining in a dark sea! A tower seen through the mist! A wondrous temple lost in a pagan land!

Suddenly a cry went up from the boat behind. On the broken floes beyond were a number of black dots. These were the walrus—and Angus must forget his dreams in the tumult of the hunt.

At once the boats were uncoupled. Gretchen boarded her kaiak and paddled away. What a picture she made! Today she wore her hair in two plaits, glossy black as sin, one over each shoulder. Her eyes, glittering with excitement, were an incredible concentration of the blue of the sea; her mouth was red as the wild-beast blood she meant to shed. Her white arms flashing in the water-gleam made Angus glow with a warmth that was far from the cold austerity of these seas.

The other hunters struck off in kaiaks and oomiaks. Each party headed for a different herd of walrus, all lying on the broken floes over a space of a mile or more. Two of the Eskimos, Ugruk and Konrad’s house servant, got into the launch with the white men and made ready to attack a number of walrus at the extreme end of the herd.

“You never hunt ivak before?” Ugruk asked his brother.

“No. I’ve never seen ’em before.”

“You *chechaquo* (newcomer). Guess maybe you better not shoot, let Ugruk shoot alone. Then ivak he no get away.”

“If you’re addressing me as well as your brother, you’ve got another guess coming, Ugruk,” Jannison broke in cheerfully. “I’m going to shoot my own game.”

“If you shoot, then parson he shoot too. You *chechaquo*, same as him. You *chechaquo*-not know-it.”

Jannison smiled secretly. Ugruk talked quietly to Angus. “I tell you how get ivak. First we run up in power-boat till ivak look heap big. You say, ‘I hit him easy now.’ Ugruk say, ‘No shoot yet.’ Then we shut off engine, paddle soft, soft. Pretty soon ivak lift up head, look. You say, ‘I hit him sure now.’ Ugruk say, ‘No shoot yet.’ Then we paddle soft, soft some more. Ivak, he look big as oomiak. You say, ‘I no can miss him now.’ Ugruk say, ‘Shoot, then, but kill him dead first shot.’ If he make one kick, tremble even, he slip off ice. Then we no get him. He go to bottom like dead man, Eskimo he go hungry, and only big devil who live on bottom eat blubber, get new tent, carve ivory! *Nah gah!*”

The hunt followed just about as Ugruk had foretold. Paddled silently, the boat was brought up almost to the edge of the big ice-cake where the walrus lay. At least a score of them were in this band—huge barrel-shaped brutes, with ivory gleaming whiter than the ice itself.

Until now they had paid no attention to the boat. Many of them seemed asleep, others were grunting drowsily. But when the hunters approached within twenty feet of the nearest bulls they began to raise their heads. One or two who were sleeping soundly were wakened by a blow from a comrade’s tusks. Soon they were all gaping like prodigious imbeciles, huge bodies raised on their fore flippers, their ludicrous, ugly faces seemingly blank with amazement. No doubt they wondered what manner of sea-beast this was. For long years they had roamed the Arctic Sea, following its mysterious current, yet probably not one of this immediate band had ever laid eyes on a man or a boat before. But what other marvels had they seen and known! Calm and storm. The winter vigil of unfading stars, the summer’s unflinching sun. The ebb and flow of the eternal ice. The divine festival of the Northern Lights, in the silence of the white waste!

For a few seconds they grunted ominously. Plainly they were angry at this intrusion upon their age-old privacy. But they soon lost interest. One after another sleepily dropped his head. Soon they were snoring in utter indifference to the boatload of enemies not thirty feet away.



Each hunter picked out a trophy, aiming for the back of the neck. There was a crash of gunfire. It is never easy to kill an animal instantly—to destroy with one bullet the switch-key of its being so that not one muscular quiver remains—yet two of the four hunters achieved just this. One of the two was Ugruk, as was to be expected. A good shot from the Eskimo standpoint, he could take a long, deliberate aim at a sleeping trophy and place his bullet exactly where he wished, although he was likely to fly off in bad light and under bad conditions of hunting. The other successful hunter was Jannison.

The young doctor was simply deadly. He shot three times while Ugruk was shooting once, and three walrus lay still. The life went out of them, under that withering fire, like a match-flame in the wind. Ugruk glanced at him in amazement.

“You no *chechaquo*,” he muttered. “You sourdough sure.”

The other Eskimo, Konrad’s servant, had come through well enough. Excited by the proximity of the animals, he had fired his first shot without aiming, and had somehow managed to miss the huge target entirely. But he had rallied at the second shot, and killed his animal before it could haul off the ice. The only complete failure was Angus. Now that the survivors had taken to the water, only five dead walrus remained on the floe.

“Where’s your trophy?” Jannison asked dryly.

“He ha’ gone.”

“I should say he is gone. Did you miss him, or just wound him?”

“I didna fire my piece. My gun was cocked, but somehow I couldna pull the trigger.”

“A case of buck ague, eh? Buck ague at a sleeping walrus!”

Even Jannison had expected him to do better than this. Although he was a rank amateur at big-game hunting, the chase was absurdly easy, and the sport as tame as could be imagined. If he failed now, how would he fare in any real test, such as a fight on the ice with a polar bear? Jannison decided that the Scotch missionary was no longer a factor in Narwhale Cape affairs. To all appearances, there was a serious flaw in his nerve.

Angus himself was puzzled. He had taken deadly aim, and he had felt sure that, had he touched the trigger, the trophy would never have stirred. He was a beginner, but his particular physical and mental formula made him a natural marksman. He had not been excited, neither had he flinched from the

kick and roar of the piece. The simple truth seemed to be that his heart had failed him, rather than his nerve. Instead of too exciting, the sport was too tame; he could not bring himself to kill the huge, stupid beast sleeping in fancied security on his lonely floe.

It was an illogical attitude, and Angus knew it. His villagers needed the meat. But someone else would have to procure it; it was out of Angus's line.

Meanwhile the other Eskimos were hunting with guns and spears. Some were successful, others not; often ivak hauled off the ice into his sheltering depths before the boats could approach in range. Gretchen, who was here for sport more than for slaughter, had not yet put her rifle to her shoulder. But she had bearded the big beasts in their icy lairs, and had photographed them roaring into her camera.

Once her darting kaiak passed close to the white men's boat. Three of its occupants followed her with their gaze—and their thoughts might have appalled her, and thrilled her too, more than any of the hazards she had faced today. Her voice rang over the glassy water. "What luck?"

"I've got three, and the two boys have killed one apiece," Jannison answered. "The parson let the walrus bluff him out, and didn't fire his piece."

Gretchen could not understand why her high spirits took such a sudden fall. She had not championed Angus—at the most she had only wished him a meager triumph to help his standing with the Eskimos. And Jannison's I-told-you-so tone annoyed her deeply. She went to her sport with added recklessness.

It did not occur to her that she was taking needless chances. Indeed, in her reckoning, no chance was needless provided it quickened for one moment the young red stream in her veins. She did not know, as Captain Bartlett knew, the Devil of the Unexpected that laired on these floes. Nor had she learned the fact which Jack Robertson had told Angus—that when all is said and done, when the explorers have come and gone, when the airplanes have hummed through the silence and returned from whence they came, and when the ice-pack has driven the frail ships back through Bering Straits, the Far North is unconquerable.

But now she must face the truth. She had made too bold with the old gods of the ice; she must be taught a lesson. And the price of that lesson might be the most she could pay.

She had just skirted an unusually large and heavy floe. It was like an immense slab of white marble, several acres in extent, and moving with resistless force in the slow current. The top of it was five feet above sea-level, on the average, and this meant that the bottom was at least twenty-five feet below. It shelved off at one point, and crowding every available foot of the shelf was a herd of sixty or more bull walrus. These she came out on suddenly, not dreaming that they lay hidden behind the high table of the floe. She knew at once that here was the picture of a lifetime.

Drawing in, she held her camera ready. She snapped the herd asleep, and then went still nearer to photograph a huge old patriarch, who lay at the extreme point of the shelf. In her excitement, she gave no thought to danger. She had taken familiarities with the herd bulls every since she could paddle a kaiak. And this was the biggest bull she had ever seen. It was entirely possible that he weighed two tons. His tusks, cracked and yellow, looked three feet long.

He wakened, gazing at her sleepily. She laughed in his face, meanwhile setting her camera to catch him as he hauled down off the ice. But he did not at once take refuge in his deeps. Instead, he heaved his vast bulk upon his fore flippers and emitted a roar that carried over the water like thunder.

The girl was startled. She had never seen such a warlike walrus. Often the big animals are hard to drive off their floes, but usually it is through sheer stupidity rather than defiance of danger. But this was the monarch of the herd. He had fought his way to leadership at the breeding rocks, far and far beyond the Midway Islands, where a thousand rival bulls had roared him acclaim. He had battled the killer whale in the starlit deep, and once his tusks had been red with even fiercer blood when he had met and fought Nanook the bear, on a lonely floe in a lonely sea, beneath the glory of the Northern Lights. It is a fact that animal monarchs know strong pride. It was not for Ivak, the victor of a thousand frays, to leave his rest and take to water like a year-old calf at the first glimpse of a foe.

At once the other bulls felt the contagion of his anger. They also raised their heads and roared. The still surface of the sea seemed to throw back the sound like a metal disc, and the air trembled.

Wisely, Gretchen decided to withdraw. She had observed that the low shelf on which the herd lay was largely enclosed by a five-foot wall of ice, and if she did succeed in stampeding the herd, they would come in a resistless rush in her direction. She started to back-paddle.

A sudden roar behind her made her whirl. Just at the stern of her kaiak were the upraised head and shoulders of a swimming bull. Approaching her in the water beyond were at least a score of other walrus, all of them angered and excited by the uproar from the ice.

They were not charging her yet. Some of them swimming low, had not even seen her, except, perhaps, as a long shadow on the water. Driven from a distant floe by the Eskimo hunters, they were seeking a place to haul out. Presently they were all around her, monstrous figures wallowing in the water. Gleaming tusks! Ugly, half-human faces! Grotesque flippers, beating the sea to froth!

Still she did not raise her rifle. She could kill one walrus, perhaps, or two, or three, but not three score. She knew that the crashing report would excite the animals all the more, increasing her danger. Her best chance was to try to withdraw into open water, as quietly and as quickly as she could.

Pale, but still steady and strong, she started to steal away. And no doubt she would soon have reached safety had she not driven her kaiak between an old cow walrus and her calf.

Ordinarily, the cow would have avoided the boat. To her it was a strange sea-beast, long as a young orca, and waving a curious flipper that caught the sunlight. But it had separated her from her beloved. Beyond its dark hull wallowed her calf, weighing full four hundred pounds itself, but still the chief concern of his prodigious dam. She made one frantic rush.

As a rule, walrus are slow swimmers. But when impelled by fear or anger they cut the water like a shark. This two-thousand-pound cow charged with crazy violence. She was a living torpedo, and the water swirled as if itself were alive and raging and bent on destruction. Still she was not deliberately attacking the boat. She was merely trying to reach her baby, and woe to anything that got in her way.

If she had struck the kaiak amidships, Gretchen might have been instantly killed. It is hard to perceive how she could have lived under the full impact of that irresistible force. As it happened, the brute struck two feet ahead of the paddler's seat, just grazing Gretchen's knees. The boat was cut cleanly in two, as by the thrust of a swordfish, and the whole frame demolished. There was not enough of it left in one piece to build a toy for a child. The water rushed in and over it, and almost instantly it sank from sight.

In the first second of the disaster, Death came nigh and touched Gretchen on the hand.

Could she fight for her life? The violence of the smash-up had stunned her, mentally and physically. The ice-water into which she was hurled did not revive her, but only bludgeoned her the more. The cold current seemed to administer a thousand-volt shock.

Every nerve of her body leaped and shuddered. The breath was knocked out of her, her heart seemed paralyzed. If her mettle had a single flaw, this test would find it.

Many would have given up, in her place. It would be the easiest way—perhaps the most merciful way. Almost any Eskimo would have thrown his arms into the air and sunk. But the will to live was a strong force in Gretchen Konrad. She was a creature of immense vitality, like the strong Arctic animals she lived among. So she kicked free from the wreck and fought her way to the surface.

She sobbed for breath. It came, at last, full in her lungs, and she began to swim. Her gaze leaped to the right and to the left, but she saw only her comrades of the deep—the walrus gazing at her with strange, half-human faces. They seemed less afraid of her now. Some of them stood upright in the water, vast shoulders looming and tusks agleam, as they watched her. If she lived, she would never forget this scene. Every detail of it was etched in her memory.

Turning over, she gazed behind her. There lay the great ice-slab, drifting like an enormous scow in the current. It lay between her and the other boats, cutting her off from rescue, but if she could climb upon it, she was safe. She started swimming toward it.

But as she neared its upright sides, it seemed to grow in height. Now it was towering over her, full five feet; her snatching hands could not reach the top; and the sides had been washed cruel smooth. There was not one projection that she could seize and cling to, while help came.

Still her passionate love of life made her fight for life. She began to move along the ice-wall, seeking a place she might climb. But now the barrier was not only steep but scoured out and overhanging. Beneath the water-line were weird caverns, blue as her eyes, blue as summer heaven, beautifully and unimaginably blue, for all that they were carved out of solid ice.

How much farther could she go? How much longer could she keep up? The melted ice she swam in was sucking out her life-heat. Only the walrus and his kin—the very children of the ice—could live and lave in seas of this temperature. Her parka, belted tight and helping to sustain her until now, was seeping water and would soon sink her like a leaden weight. Already there was a roaring in her ears. Whether this was delirium, the prelude to her collapse, or whether it was an actual sound she did not know.

But she found out presently. She reached a corner of the floe and swam around it. A sob of sheer heartbreak broke from her lips.

If those who loved her had heard this sound, it would have haunted them always. It was the utmost of childlike grief. Luck had dealt so meanly with her! The trap had been set with such cunning, malice, and hatred! Her valiant spirit was broken.

Just beyond her the ice sloped and shelved off to the water's edge. If the shelf had been unoccupied, she could have climbed it with ease. But Ivak and his comrades, whom she had forgotten for the moment, held this gate to safety, and they would not let her pass.

The roaring in her ears was now explained. The bulls stood on their fore flippers bellowing in unison. What had aroused them to this extreme of fury she did not know, and she was too far gone to think. After all, it would have been only a theory. Man has never fathomed the mind and soul of any animal, least of all the Titans of the far-off Arctic seas. Gretchen was dressed in a white parka, and her face and arms flashed white as snow itself. Perhaps the walrus mistook her for a polar bear, their ancient enemy of the floes. Often did Nanook swim this same way, skirting the ice and raiding their barricades.

Gretchen was between the devil and the deep sea—an ivory-fanged devil that now, as her sense slipped away, seemed a figment of nightmare—and a sea that was deep and cold as death. Yet she made one last trial. She splashed nearer the ledge, sobbing and trying to shout, on the faint hope that she could drive the brutes into the water. But Ivak held his ground. He was monarch of the herd, and he would show fight if this queer white being invaded his icy throne.

From the far side of the floe, two hundred yards distant, Angus and his companions had seen Gretchen's disaster. Each man responded in word and action according to his lights. For the Eskimo boy, Konrad's servant, there

was no light at all. He merely stood in the boat, leaned forward from his hips, and gazed. His eyes were sunken and dull, his face expressionless as the face of an iceberg. Calmly he concluded that Gretchen was gone. When old Tahgaynoo (the sea) gets his cold hands on a human being, he almost never lets go. Well, it was an old story among the Eskimos. It was hard and sad, but so is life. He grieved, because he was fond of the girl who spoke so kindly to him at the trader's table.

When Ugruk saw what had happened, he gave a queer coughing grunt. A blue look as of death spread over his face. And indeed there was a part of Ugruk, an inner life beyond his tribesmen's sight, that was dying in his body. Somehow it was a reflection from the lamp that was Gretchen's being, Gretchen's beauty, and if that lamp went out, the shadow overcasting Ugruk might never lift. Yet he made no move to aid her. She was too far, and, besides, who can prevail over the sea and the ice? Like the other native, he took her fate for granted. This was the North.

"*Nah gah,*" he whispered. "*Nah gah.*"

In direct contrast to these men, Jannison sprang instantly to action. He leaped for the stern of the boat and tried to start the engine. His face was gray, but his hand steady. Only when the motor resisted his efforts, sullenly coughing but not starting as he turned the fly-wheel, did he seem to lose force. He grew frantic, then, and howled an oath that went cracking over the ice.

Angus's behavior was perhaps the most singular of all. His face got red instead of white, and for five long seconds that seemed fifty he gazed in silence. But he was not watching Gretchen's struggles. His glance rested but briefly on her, then darted about over the ice, among the roaring walrus beyond, and even to near-by floes. At last, his voice cut through Jannison's oaths.

"Put me on the ice, quick!"

"You fool, you can't cross the ice," Jannison said. "There's a lead half-way over. Our only chance is the boat."

"I'll cross it, wi' the good Lord's help." As he spoke, he snatched up a paddle and began to work the boat toward the edge of the floe. "Ye ha' no time to get around wi' the boat. Help me, all o' you! Hear me. Jannison—*put me on the ice!*"

For one moment Jannison yielded to the minister's will. Impelled as by a physical force and without stopping to question he leaped up, seized an oar,

and helped the others push the boat to the edge of the great floe. Not until its keel ground on a submerged ledge of ice, six feet from the up-lifted rim, did he realize what he had done. Why had he obeyed this impractical idiot? He had wasted ten seconds unspeakably precious. And now six feet of water, through which the ice-ledge gleamed like an immense blue jewel, separated Angus from the floe and blocked his silly plan. Cursing, Jannison started to push off again, into open water where he could start his engine.

But Angus pushed him aside. “Look out for yourself!” he shouted. “I’m going to jump—”

“You fool, you can’t make it—”

But Angus had jumped upon the thwart. To prevent the boat from capsizing the three other men had to swing their weight to the opposite side. Angus leaped with all his might—with a vigor and agility which these spectators would later recall—landed precariously on the ice-rim, balanced, slipped, and held on. The next instant he was running at top speed across the floe.

“He’ll break his damned neck, and drown besides,” Jannison howled. Meanwhile he whirled at the fly-wheel. The motor started at the first turn, and the boat kicked out into the lead. Ten seconds later he was running at full speed along the edge of the ice, taking reckless chances on any projecting ledge that might tear the bottom from his craft, and praying that he might reach Gretchen’s side in time.

Meanwhile Angus was racing across the floe. The frozen snow on the surface was grainy and rough enough to give him good foothold. But now it seemed his way was surely blocked. What looked like a lead of deep water lay between him and the further ice.

It was not a true lead, but merely a great crevice in the floe into which the salt water had broken. Nevertheless, it could defeat Angus utterly. He had no spare seconds in which to work his way around it. If once he got into it, he might find it impossible to climb out.

He turned cold with fear. The fissure looked like a man-trap—limpid, luminous, ineffably beautiful. But there was no other way. With a gasp, Angus plunged in.

The result was almost anticlimax. The water proved shallow. He waded hip-deep and clambered out on the other side. From the lofty plateau of ice beyond, he looked down on a tragic scene.



On the shelving ice at the extremity of the floe were assembled the Arctic kings. Three score huge beasts, tusked like young elephants, stood high on their flippers and roared in chorus. In the lead beyond swam other of their fellows, sea-monsters whose wallowings made the water slap and smack the ice. Amid this pageant of wilderness might a white form—so small, so fragile, in this vast, violent picture—gleamed in the water.

The sea-light showed a small white face. The sunlight leaped along flashing arms. Black hair rose and fell like floating seaweed. And the sight gave Angus the strength of ten. He knew that his comrade had not yet surrendered, that she was fighting the bravest fight he had ever seen, and that if he could help to save her it would be the greatest happiness he had ever known.

He could not reach her over the steep sides of the floe. She had no strength left to swim far, and he no time to make a life-line. The only point she could land was held by the walrus. Unless he could drive them from their white rampart, her life was forfeit.

All this he read as he ran. He had not paused one instant. As he plunged on, his lungs gulped air, and he raised a shout even above the roar of the herd.

It was a warlike cry. Perhaps it harked back to sanguinary battles on the Scottish heath, when the fierce Mackenzies fought their rival clans. Angus had forgotten his peaceful vocation. He had almost forgotten his deep fear of those mighty sea-brutes roaring on the ice. His face was red. His red hair stood on end. In his frenzy he was at once an absurd and an appalling figure—and the girl drowning in the icy water took new heart at the sight of him.

At first it looked as if the walrus would show fight. When they heard his shout, many of them pivoted in his direction, and now were baying at him like enormous hounds. Still he plunged on toward them, yelling. If they did not turn now, he would be on top of them, unarmed and without the slightest idea how to deal with them.

But his dark figure bearing down over the ice over-awed their timid spirits. Walrus are not natural fighters. They would have fled from Gretchen, had they identified her as a human being. The only reason they had withstood Angus so long was because he had come so fast. Slow beasts ashore, their vast bulk was hard to put in motion. If he had checked his rush and approached them slowly, he could have herded them easily enough, with far less danger to Gretchen, swimming beyond. As it was, they broke into a frantic stampede. In one rush, like a box-car on a grade, they plunged down

the shelving ice. The danger was from the rear now, not the front, and the brave old bull at the point of the shelf could no longer hold his rampart. The pressure behind knocked him headlong into the water, a dozen terrified bulls on top of him. It was a living avalanche of walrus.

Why Gretchen was not borne down by the stampeding brutes neither she nor Angus ever knew. She was nearly drowned by their splashing, and she felt their smooth sides as they tore by her, but not one of them collided with her. Possibly they looked out for this themselves. These blue depths were their own element, and they could weave in and out like seals.

The backlash from the wave threw her toward the ice. Angus was kneeling, reaching down toward her, and his hands grasped hers. When the boat swung in, a moment later, he was holding her in his arms, trying to warm her cold face against his own.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

IF ANGUS had held Gretchen against his breast for one minute more, his Narwhale Cape affair might have become even more involved. Her cheek was dangerously cold, but he felt her young blood leaping within. Exhausted she lay in his arms, dripping wet, marble white, the flame of her life burning low, yet the embrace thrilled him, and later he would remember the exquisite curves of her form that her clinging garments revealed. He was close to a great discovery. . . . But now the power-launch was sweeping toward the floe, and he must yield her up.

At once Jannison took charge. He seemed cool, efficient, equal to the situation. He took the girl from Angus's arms and carried her to the covered bow of the launch, there to give her the treatment that was within his doctor's province. An hour later she lay warm in the boat robes, her blood leaping from the effects of a stimulant, her wrists and ankles glowing from the chafing by the doctor's lean, thin hands, and her heart singing with joy that she was safe. The icy water had held her only a few minutes, not long enough to ravish her life-heat, and although she had been cruelly shocked her wonderful vitality burned in her still.

"I didn't dream that Mackenzie could get across the floe," Jannison told her when she was well enough to talk. "No one but a *chechaquo* would have attempted it, the way it looked. I was going to take the safe and sane way to save your life—with a boat. I believe I would have saved it too, although I might have had to roll you around a little, and give you artificial respiration. As it happened, I arrived just in time to see him kissing you, on the ice."

"He didn't kiss me, did he?" Gretchen's tone brightened. "I didn't feel him."

"Well, if he didn't, he was mighty close to it. I must say I envied him. But you know I'm not the kind to try to play the hero when it might have meant the loss of your life."

"Be fair, Frank. I don't think the parson tried to play the hero either. He's not the heroic type—he's too red and freckled—and probably saved me from his Presbyterian sense of duty. He probably thought I wasn't fit to die."

"Be fair, Gretchen. It wasn't any Presbyterian Puritanism that made him stand there squeezing you on the ice. I admit he succeeded where I failed, and that he did a dangerous thing. Whether he knew it was dangerous is another matter."

“Perhaps. But one thing you said isn’t true.” A trace of her old spirit shone in the girl’s tired eyes. “He certainly didn’t let the walrus ‘bluff him out!’”

Meanwhile Angus was feeling anything but heroic. He sat in the stern of the boat, his boots and trousers drying on the thwart, and his thin legs wrapped in an evil-smelling Eskimo parka. His thoughts were confused and troubled.

Why had he risked so much to save Gretchen? He might have fallen and cracked his head open on the ice, or drowned in the crevice, or he might have been impaled on a walrus tusk. Had he forgotten his duty to Ugruk? If he had been killed, who would carry on in his place, and take over the atonement of Red Mackenzie’s sin? Was Gretchen’s life worth more than Ugruk’s soul?

Yes, if he loved Gretchen. No theology could stand against this. But he must not love Gretchen. He was not free, until the debt was paid. The oath he had sworn at Red Mackenzie’s death-bed was a solemn one, bound by his love for his father and his own honor. No wordy twist or self-excuse could free him from it.

Yet if he did not love Gretchen, how could he explain his action today? It was more than cool-headed daring. He had leaped from the boat, splashed through the crevice, raced over the floe, and attacked the walrus herd with a passion and a power beyond his ordinary physical limitations. If he did not love Gretchen passionately and jealously, why did he feel so cheated when Jannison took her—and the fruits of his victory—from his arms? Why did his eyes wander, full of envy, to the closed bow of the launch, where Jannison and his sweetheart whispered and laughed together, and sometimes grew so silent?

Well, he must not love Gretchen! If it were so, he must deny it until it ceased to be so. He must starve it to death by giving all his substance to his cause. Anyway, it would be a hopeless love. Jannison would get her, not he. Possibly she was promised to him already. For himself there would be not only failure of his duty, betrayal of his vow, but disaster and sorrow.

So when Gretchen came to him, after their return to the village, and turned the blue lamps of her eyes on his, and gave him a smile with her full lips that set his blood on fire, he tried to harden his heart. “I want to try to thank you,” she told him soberly. “I know I can’t thank you—thanks can’t be anything but a convention in a situation like this—yet I don’t want you to think that I took it as a matter of course . . . I’m not getting very far am I?”

“It is a hard task, to thank someone for one’s vera life, and ye ha’ done vera good,” he told her, smiling. “But ye do not owe me any thanks. I was predestined from the vera beginning o’ things to save your life yesterday. And think how grateful I am, too—not to lose my first assistant and interpreter in dealing wi’ the natives.”

So this was what it meant to him! A smile lingered on Gretchen’s lips, but its meaning had been inscrutably changed. She laughed and chattered with the utmost gaiety as she went with him to pay his first call on the two miners who had a cabin on the far side of the village.

These two old men were typical prospectors—charter members of the sourdough brotherhood. Their comings and goings were as hard to chart as the sea-journeyings of the seal. When their days were done, it would be a tight-walled heaven that would ever hold them, especially if they heard of a new gold strike on the Stygian shore. Lately they had been working some kind of claim on an island half-way to Nigaluk, and had made the long trip to Narwhale Cape ostensibly for their mail, but really to see Gretchen, whom they had known since childhood.

“Don’t be surprised at what you see,” Gretchen warned Angus, as they approached the cabin threshold. “These are old-time sourdoughs, which means that they have ways all their own. And Bill and Charlie are a surprising pair even for Alaska.”

Angus opened the door and stood gaping. The cabin contained two complete sets of furniture, one on each side of a heavy black line painted across the floor. There were two stoves, two lamps, two eating-tables. Each on his own side of the dead-line, warmed by his own stove, which was fed from its own woodbox, two grizzled old men had been sitting back to back. Still keeping their distance, with an air of haughty indifference to each other’s presence, they got up to welcome their visitors.

“Haven’t you two old loons made up yet?” Gretchen asked slyly. Evidently she knew just how to get them started.

“Do you mean, hev I made up with that feller thar?” one of them asked, beckoning over his shoulder with his thumb. He spoke with solemn dignity. “Are you askin’ me, may I inquire, if I hev come to terms with that pestilent, pizenous old galoot on t’other side of this ’ere dead-line? No, ma’am, I hev not, and furthermore I hev no intention of any sich maneuver. He has made overtures to me, plenty of ’em, but I hev refused to associate with the old cuss, and hev rejected his advances with haughty scorn.”

“Gretchen, listen to me!” the other shouted. “If you ever see me overturin’, or advancin’ to him with so much as a white chip you will know I has shore missed too many boats, and ought to be shet up in the tower o’ Bedlam. I declines to reccanize him, much less to accept him in the portals o’ my regard.”

“See here, you wood-stealin’, flap-jack burnin’, claim-jumpin’ old reprobate—” broke in the other.

“Listen to him, thar!” his neighbor went on. “Hear him tryin’ to seduce me into conversation? But his oily effusions gits him nowhere. Furthermore, Gretchen, I advises you to treat him with the same chill hautoor what I do. Never waste no time nor no smiles on that thar moral leopard. You confines your attentions to me, who’s worthy of ’em, and who’ll appreciate ’em to the utmost.”

But if Angus stared, Gretchen took the situation calmly enough. Evidently it was an old story to her. “If you’ll both shut up a minute, I’ll introduce you to the new missionary. Reverend Mackenzie, shake hands with Flapjack Bill. . . . Now, parson, if you’ll step over on the other side of the line, you’ll find Skookum Charlie, formerly of Dawson. Now try to be polite to each other, while we’re here.”

Flapjack Bill—the thinner, peaked-faced member of the queer pair—shook hands dolefully. “Gretchen, you don’t know what you ask. A self-respectin’ gent like me can no more be polite to that ramblin’ wreck o’ immorality on t’other side of the line than he can to a pizen sarpian’t.”

“Gretchen, I been tryin’ to be polite to that varmint over thar even since the Kobuck Stampede, and I’ll keep on tryin’ for your sake,” said Skookum Charlie. “But you’ll understand it is the proud an’ haughty politeness which them to the manner born displays to the ranks and files. Reverend, I’m mighty glad you’ve come. I hope you makes yourself welcome. And I must say you never had a tougher case to salivate and reform than that thar moral viper across the way. He jest grovels in sin, he do.”

Seeing that Angus was dismayed, Gretchen tried to change the subject. “How are things going up the claim?” she asked.

“Pretty good, thank ’ee,” Bill told her. “If a gent could jest get some privacy, it would be heavenly, simply heavenly. But every time I washes out a fair-sized nugget, and am feeling jocund and jovial, who should I see but that scan’lous—”

But Gretchen cut him off before his eloquence could expand itself. “How much have you made, this season?”

“I’ve washed out close to a thousand. My neighbor, whom I shuns, has a sim’lar amount or maybe a little more.”

The girl now crossed the dead-line. “Charlie, what are you going to do with all that money?” she asked curiously.

“Miss Gretchen, I means to wait till I hev collared a couple o’ thousand more, and then we—I mean I—is mushin’ for Gay Paree!” was the startling answer. “I means to take in that wicked city from the Evil Tower to the Place dee Madeline, and not go home till I’ve plumed its deep-most depths.”

With twinkling eyes, Gretchen now turned to Flapjack Bill. “What are you going to do while he’s in Paris?”

“Curious as it may seem, I’m headin’ toward Paris myself. I’m goin’ thar to elevate my mind, not to revel in the sinfulness of my feller human critters like that thar dissolitious Don Jooan who you hev jest addressed. I mean to take in specially the Follies Burglar and the Moilin’ Row. Jest why he should pick the same time to go to Paris what I’m goin’ I can’t say, unless he knows in his sinful heart he ain’t to be trusted in no metrop’lis unless he’s got me to tag after.”

Gretchen continued to lead them on with her questions. Seeing that she was amused, the two old men reviled each other with an eloquence and enthusiasm wonderful to hear. Angus listened with unbelieving ears until at last Gretchen rose to go.

“There’s one thing I dinna understand,” he ventured as he stood in the doorway. “Perhaps I hadn’t ought to mention it.”

“Mention anything you like,” Bill told him cordially. “You can’t hurt Charlie’s feelin’s. He ain’t got no more sensitiveness than a army mule.”

“If you two men think so ill of each other, why do you stay together?”

“Why do we—what?” Charlie asked, bewildered.

“Why don’t you dissolve partnership, and one of you go to the South Pole while the other stays here?”

“You don’t understand,” Bill told him, in a confidential tone. “Not for no considerations whatsoever would I lose sight o’ Charlie. I’ve put up with him, somehow or ’nother, for more’n twenty years, and though he’s been a pain and a sorrer to me from the sad beginnin’ to the melancholy end, I

s'pose I can put up with him for a few years more, considerin' what I'm goin' to get out of it."

"And what are you going to get out of it?"

"A whole heap o' satisfaction. Look at him thar, parson. He's gettin' old fast. Time has scarred and marred him a-plenty, though he wasn't much to look at even at first. One of these here times he's goin' to cash in his checks. *And then I'm goin' to plant pizen ivy on his grave!*"



## CHAPTER EIGHT

To uplift Ugruk, Angus must first uplift Ugruk's people. Therefore his two obligations, one to his dead father and one to the church which bought his bread, did not conflict. So with a good will he began his duties as missionary of Narwhale Cape.

These were vigorous, positive duties. He was not a passive Hindu, but a militant Puritan. Like Cromwell and Calvin he believed he was his brother's keeper. For petty questions of dogma and ritual he felt little concern, but the every-day decency, well-being, and spiritual welfare of the people was his hourly thought. He wanted to meet the Deil in the open and fight him to the finish.

The Deil took many forms. He was lust and incest and abortion and dirt. Long ago he had lived in the big black bottles that the traders brought across the sea, whereby he was death to body and soul. The Eskimo cannot combat strong drink. It makes him an idler, a liar, and a beggar—often it drives him to murder. It leagues with the winter cold to destroy the musher on the trail; it is the companion of famine and disease; and it fills the lonely Arctic graveyards faster than consumption. If given free rein, it would wipe out the Eskimo race as surely as the wind wipes out a human footprint in the snow. Many and many a thriving village is now but a cluster of broken mounds, voiceless save for the voices of gale and sea, and the whole dark tale is told by a broken bottle, glistening on the sand.

In these days, decent governments forbid the sale of liquor to Eskimos. In American waters the law is enforced by Captain Hottel and his men. However, there are ways of getting around this law. Many traders of good standing in the North keep its letter but openly violate its spirit. There is still famine and death in the igloos because of strong drink—and this fact brought Angus and Konrad to their first clash.

One whole end of Konrad's trading store was filled with bottles of patent medicine, a nostrum famous more for its high alcoholic content than for its curative properties. Konrad sold it by the bottle and the case—it was included in almost every purchase, and was his most profitable line. It ranked second only to *kow-kow* in the Eskimo's reckonings, and indeed, when famine seemed far off, they stinted their larders to buy it. That it was debauching the tribe Angus knew well, and no doubt Emil Konrad knew it too.

“I ha’ come to ask you to stop selling that medicine to the natives,” Angus told him one day.

The calm voice infuriated Konrad. It raised the devil of arrogance in his Prussian soul. “You’re outside your province, Reverend Mackenzie,” he answered grimly. “There is no law that keeps me from selling that medicine.”

“Your own law, perhaps, Konrad.”

“My own law is—that might is right. It stands when all other laws fall. You’ll discover it for yourself, if you stay long enough in this tough North Country.”

Angus still spoke mildly. “Ye do not care for the welfare of the people?”

“I care more for myself. The people will last longer than I will, no matter how much medicine I sell them. I’m not living in this devilish country for my health, or for charity either.”

“In other words, ye take all ye can get—the last penny o’ profit.”

“I keep all my contracts. I never break my word to a native. When I tell a native something, he can bank on it—and if I make a hundred per cent profit, it’s my right.”

“It seems to me ye are sailing pretty close to the wind, at that. I am vera interested in what ye say about the hundred per cent profit. At that rate, I ought to be able to sell my goods for just half what ye sell yours.”

Konrad’s big body grew rigid; his jaw fell. “What do you mean—‘sell your goods’?”

“I mean that ye are driving me into trade, myself. The Eskimos must ha’ a place to trade where they are not led into temptation, and if ye won’t supply it, I’ll have to. The last trading vessel of the year will be here in a few days, and I mean to buy up all its stock. Then I shall open up a trading store where the villagers can buy their goods just at cost, and not be tempted by a deil in a bottle.”

“You’re trying to bluff me. Your church would never back you in a deal like that.”

“Dinna fool yourself, Konrad. Hundreds o’ missions all over the earth operate trading stores. There is even one at Point Hope. I admit I ha’ no desire to become a trader, but a trader I will be unless the natives can get fair treatment from you.”

Konrad could not compete against such a trading-post. Eskimos are good traders—they will bring in their furs where they can get the most *kow-kow* in exchange. And he could not bear to think of the shimmering pelts passing through any hands but his. Nor was this mere greed—he loved furs as some jewel collectors love precious stones.

Suddenly Konrad believed him. Whatever the difficulties of the scheme, this mild-speaking Scotchman would get around them. There was a force here that the big Prussian could not quite grasp or fathom.

Fully a fourth of his profits came from his medicine shelves. However, he might recoup on his other lines—luxuries, household comforts and furnishings, better food, modern hunting and trapping equipment—on all of which he could make an exorbitant profit. Indeed, the natives might have greater buying power than ever before. The whole village might be more prosperous.

“I’ll think it over,” he told Angus at last. “I don’t approve of your interfering with my business, but the fact remains that these people might bring me in more furs if they’d stay decently sober.”

“Ye will not wait until the last trading ship ha’ left port, and I canna get my supplies?”

“No, I’ll let you know tomorrow.”

On the morrow, Angus came back for his answer. He received it, without embarrassment either to himself or the trader, the instant he opened the door. The long rows of bottles were gone from the shelves. In their place was *kow-kow* of the finest—canned goods, ham, tea, sweet crackers, chocolate bars. *Arre gah, arre gah!*

“Have you ever thought of giving up this missionary business?” Konrad asked Angus dryly.

“I ha’ gi’en no thought to it yet.”

“If you do, you might let me know. I think I can give you a job here. I believe you’d make a fairly passable trader.”

Winter was on the way. The sun that had not hid his face for three months, dropped a little lower than usual, and disappeared behind the horizon. He rose shortly, but in his absence a cold gray shadow shot out over land and sea. On the wet moss of the tundra frost twinkled and glittered.

Every day the sun vanished for a considerably longer period. The brief shadow at midnight lengthened by leaps and bounds, deepening from gray to velvet black, and the stars began to show themselves wanly, glimmer awhile and disappear. With the lengthening nights, came the Great Cold.

The fresh-water pools no longer winked in the sun, but were gray ice, and the curlews that nested on their shores shrieked and flew southward. The salt sea ice came surging heavily, and pounding in to shore. Soon the visible sea was one great ice-field. Not until next August could ships come beating in again. And now the wild winter locked down in earnest.

Dry, dusty snow sifted out of the sky and covered land and sea. The chill wind of summer sharpened to an icy blast, hissing over the snow, shrieking and howling at the doors of the igloos, whirling the snow-dust in eerie clouds. The spirit in Konrad's thermometer fell and fell until it seemed it would drop through the bottom of the bulb. Twenty—thirty—forty below zero—till one morning it touched fifty, and the whole land lay in a ghostly haze of cold.

Fortunately, this deadly temperature did not hold long. The red line slid back to twenty below zero, where it hung without varying a point for six weeks. And on the heels of that Great Cold came the Long Dark.

Unearthly night swallowed land and sea. The stars burned undimmed, week after week in the velvet vault of heaven; the moon waxed and waned with all her mystic changes bared to the sight of man. The Long Dark began early in November. By mid-December it was reaching its mysterious midnight, when not a single gleam of day rose up over the Endicott Range. Angus had been told that the Arctic night was dusky rather than deep dark. Instead, it was the blackest night he had ever seen or imagined, save when the moon shone on the wastes of snow. Then the whole world was a hard steel-gray, baffling to the senses and appalling to the mind.

It was a haunted and enchanted world. Even Angus's best church-members, those who knew the hymns and sat on the front benches at the mission house, forgot what they had heard of the Living God and returned to the spirit worship of their fathers. They whispered again of the Torno, the one-eyed witchlike beings who lived in the big boulders on the beach, of Nahgoo-Nanook, the Ghost Bear, and the Keyukut, the slave-spirits of the medicine man. Who could blame them? Their village was a cluster of insignificant snow-mounds in this infinite white North. The wind shrieked and threatened in their ears when they went abroad. The water muttered and

talked under the ice, and even great boulders moved, whispering, as they passed nigh.

As they stumbled down the dark trails, the fear-gods walked behind them. Only in their warm, well-lighted igloos could they shut them out. And now they knew that Mackenzie had lied to them, and flattered them with his mouth. They were not the high-born sons of the Love God, who dwelt in the warm heavens, but only the Devil's sledge-dogs. They were few, despised, and ignoble, black of skin and lowly of heart, and the North made sport of their lives.

Their fear and helplessness had an unhappy psychological effect. It was not surprising that honor, pride, loyalty, and gratitude were almost unknown among them. They must take what was given them, and be content. To fill their bellies with good *kow-kow*, to drink when drink was to be had, to steal a brutish pleasure between one trouble and another—this was all they could hope for and therefore all that they lived for.

Nor were these beliefs confined wholly to the Eskimos. There was one pale-face in the village who had spent too many hours alone, watching the sea for ships that never came, and she had begun to share the Eskimos' materialism. This was Gretchen. She too was a child of the Arctic. Although she had been to school outside, her earliest childhood memories were of the ice, the cold, and the long dark. Throughout her formative years she had been in daily contact with native children. She did not believe in Nahgook-Nanook, nor yet in Quiquern, the Spirit Dog, but she had lost some of her faith in mankind and his destiny.

"I think you're sincere enough," she told Angus, one Sunday after service. "But it's all bunk, just the same. Might is right. Everywhere you look you see that law upheld. The strongest come out on top."

"Aye, the strongest," Angus said. "But maybe ye don't know what the word 'strong' really means."

"I mean material strength. Materialism always wins out against idealism. Why? Because it's good sense. What's the use of sacrificing and denying ourselves and working like dogs for something that probably doesn't exist? Why not take what comes along, like the Eskimos do, and get what material pleasures we can out of life, and to the devil with the rest? That's what I'm going to do, as soon as I can get Frank Jannison to take me away."

Angus shut his ears to these last words. Even though they fell like leaden weights on his heart, he must try to ignore them. They had nothing to do

with his sky-piloting. “Did ye say that materialism always wins out against idealism?”

“Always. I wish it wasn’t so, but it is so. So I’m through with having ideals.”

“The vera wish ye just made is itself an ideal. Ye canna stop having ideals if ye try.”

“Perhaps not, but I don’t intend to let them cheat me out of life.” Her blue eyes flashed under their fine black brows. “From now on I’m going to live for my five senses, and believe only what my five senses tell me.”

“Hark ye, Gretchen! I tell you that ye will not only hold to your ideals, but that in the end they will lead you to your happiness. They are the most precious things ye possess. They are the heritage o’ the white race, and ye canna gainsay them. And in the long run idealism does conquer materialism—the spirit does conquer the flesh—and the soul does live after the body dies!”

His voice rang over the snow. She thought she could see his eyes glowing in the dark. For one moment she was almost carried away with him. He seemed a prodigious figure, greater than Emil Konrad, greater than Frank Jannison, he of the agile mind and the clever hands, even as great as some of the grizzled Arctic explorers who had passed that way, following their dreams to the secret places of the uttermost ice. But at once the fancy passed. He was only Angus Mackenzie, brother to an Eskimo, an ill-paid missionary to a graceless people.

“Give me a sign!” she told him, almost with contempt.

Thrilled, he lifted his face. The moon was behind the horizon, and the galaxy of stars scintillated in the sky, like diamonds set in jet. There were no trees or near-by hills to block off even a portion of that heavenly pageant. He stood on level ground, a geometric point in the center of the great inverted bowl of the universe. This in itself was sign enough for him, but for Gretchen’s sake, he must look farther. As he gazed, a streamer of light flashed from up the west, flickered, and died away.

A second streamer followed the first, fluttering in the sky like a wind-blown pennant. Soon the splendid beams were bursting up faster than he could count them, from all points of the compass. Sometimes they appeared to collide in the roof of the sky, and the vestiges of their radiance spattered like liquid fire.

Clouds of light floated from one horizon to another. Misty auras of light hung and pulsed overhead. Once the whole heavens lit on one great jubilee, an incredible tapestry of light from one horizon to another, waving, flickering, fluttering, furling and leaping forth again, almost dying away only to glimmer with new beauty. Great yellow bands arched the world. Green and blue and yellow lanterns exploded in the sky, pouring out their flaming spirit and glimmering on the dead gray snow. Strange glamorous tints mocked the fire-dance in the sky, and threw an uncanny gleam on Gretchen's face.

"It is a sign," came Angus's hushed voice.

"You know it is only the Northern Lights," the girl answered uneasily. She tried in vain to speak casually. "They're always at their best about this time."

"It's a sign, just the same." His voice trailed away, and he was silent a long time. "Gretchen, ye say that ye will deny everything in the world that is not material and physical. Will ye deny the Northern Lights?"

"I admit they exist, but I deny there's anything sublime about them. They are just an electrical storm of some kind."

"An electrical storm! What is an electrical storm? What is electricity itself—can ye tell me? In the first place, there is something sublime in every clod of earth. Ye ha' not forgotten the first law—that everything is the shadow of God's thought, and that all creation declares his glory? Ye admit the existence of the Northern Lights, because ye can see them, but ye can not weigh them, or explain them, or tell from what lamp they shine. Then why can ye not admit the existence of a lamp shining from the being o' man, what we call the soul? True, ye canna see the lamp itself, but ye can see the light it gives, just as ye see the Northern Lights."

"Why not go a step farther." Gretchen's tone had lost its bitterness; she spoke with warm humor. "Why not say the earth itself has a soul, the same as man, and the Northern Lights are its sign?"

He peered at her, startled. Had she given him a clue to help him solve the mystery of the Arctic? Yet when he tried to grasp the idea, it became intangible and slipped away, and he did not know the answer. He knew only that in her sudden earnestness and hope, her hand had seized his; and that just the mystery in her eyes was more than any mortal man would ever fathom.

## CHAPTER NINE

LATE in December, in the very middle of the three months' night, an unlooked-for disaster came upon the village. It smote the people not directly, but a coward's blow from ambush; it took the form of a deadly contagion among the dog teams.

How it began no one exactly knew. Some of the natives said that a stray malemiut—perhaps a ghost-dog of Quiquern's breed—had brought it from a distant tribe. Certainly there had been some sort of visitation, because even the white people had heard their teams growling and clamoring in the still, cold dark; and an Eskimo who happened to have been up told of a wolf-like form that had skulked through the village, snapped once at Ugruk's great gray leader, howled madly at the moon, and skulked away.

The big leader declined and died. The sickness moved through the village like the north wind. There was no refuge or cure, and the dogs sat in their lines, bewailing their fate with mournful howls. Inside of a month, these howls were silenced, and the leashes hung slack. Although the Eskimos had managed to save a few litters of puppies which had been kept in the huts away from the contagion, they had no draft animals, and indeed the only remaining team in the village belonged to Konrad. Half of his team were his own dogs, saved by his intelligent care. The others were scattered survivors from the Eskimo teams, which he had bought as replacements. Flapjack Bill and Skookum Charlie saved their teams only because they were out of the village at the time.

It was a serious loss to the Eskimos. They had no other means of transport. The winter hunting and fishing, hard work at best, would be greatly impeded. They could not mush out over the rough shoal-water ice to the deep leads where seal might be speared. Unless Konrad gave them credit at the trading store, there would be hunger in the village before the ice went out again.

Konrad did give them considerable credit—more than good business justified—but still living was hard. They gathered no more in happy, laughing groups. When they talked of *kow-kow*, it was with low, wistful voices. They were not starving, or anywhere near it, but they were skating on thin ice. And as the Long Dark held, the old women began to predict even worse disasters.



True, there could not be a general famine. This fact was apparent to the more enlightened Eskimos. If necessary, Dr. Jannison could mush to Point Barrow, wireless for help and airplanes loaded with *kow-kow* could come from Nome and Fairbanks. But sorrow in some form was surely on the way. These were evil days, and the returning sun would find new graves dotting the tundra.

The morale of the people dropped steadily. And finally, inevitably, their despair took tangible form. Angus was projected into one of the darkest and most tragic dramas that had ever touched his life.

One January night a rap sounded on his door. He opened it to find Ugruk on his threshold. At once the big Eskimo stepped in and closed the door, glad to escape from the shocking, numbing, killing cold outside. For a moment he stood yearning to the coal stove, his face like the wooden masks of the medicine-men. The rime on his mustache and eyebrows melted and dripped on the floor.

“Ugruk, him take hand sled and start out for trap-line, one, two hours ago,” he began at last. “But him come back plenty quick.”

“I see you did. Why?”

“Because you my brother. You white man, just like other white man, no care for Eskimo, no work for Eskimo, work only for self—but you Ugruk’s brother just the same. We—Ugruk and you—have same father.”

“Aye. What is it, Ugruk? Is there something you want me to do for you?”

“No. Ugruk, him want to do something for you. Ugruk, him likes you, even though you no like Ugruk.”

“But I do like you, Ugruk. You are my brother.”

“You like Ugruk when him Eskimo. You no like him when he half white man. . . . Ugruk, him come tell you something. If him no tell you, you be plenty mad tomorrow, maybe think Ugruk bad man. You like put water on baby head, say charm?”

“Yes, I would like to baptize every baby in the village.”

“But you no like take baby to graveyard, dig hole, put him in ground, say prayer.”

“Good heavens, Ugruk! What are ye getting at?”

“You like keep baby alive, so him grow big, put plenty money in collection. Ugruk know this. Ugruk, him no care. Too many babies in village

now. But him your brother, so him come tell you what happen, so you save baby.”

“Tell me quick, then, Ugruk.” Angus tried to speak calmly, so as not to excite his brother; otherwise the faltering tongue would never find English words to tell his story. “What baby is it that’s in danger?”

“You know Wunchee?”

“Yes. She’s Amarak’s wife, who lives way out on the point. I didn’t know her baby had been born.”

“She born tonight. She girl baby.”

“Then you want the doctor, not me? Has the doctor come there yet?”

“Wunchee, she no need doctor. Girl baby she born all right, no make trouble; Wunchee she already get up. But baby no last long unless you come. Wunchee, she feel sad—poor—unlucky. When morning come, baby no good. Too late put water on head. Baby only good for carry out to graveyard, put in ground.”

“The baby is sick, then? If it is, I’ll go for the doctor—”

“Baby no sick. Baby good, fat girl baby, eat plenty *kow-kow* some day. But she no eat *kow-kow*, no, never, unless you come quick.”

“Then wait one second till I can get on my parka.”

“Ugruk no wait. Him no care. Him tell you because him your brother. Ugruk take hand sled, go on out trapping, no come back for two moons.”

Angus hardly heard the last words. He was jerking on his deerskin suit, so that he might live out the cold that waited at his threshold. When he emerged, a moment later, the darkness had swallowed Ugruk. Plainly the Eskimo would play no further part in tonight’s drama. He had come into it only through some vague affection for his brother, and now it ceased to concern him. Without ever a backward glance, he was heading for his lonely trap-line, beyond the frozen waters of Barter River. The *crunch-crunch* of his vanishing snowshoes came faintly through the silence.

Angus’s first impulse was to arouse Gretchen. But he rejected the idea at once—it was man’s work tonight. So he hastened across the flat and knocked on Frank Jannison’s door.

But the young doctor did not respond. No doubt he was making a sick-call in one of the score or more of native houses. Angus beat on the door and shouted, and at last had to start on toward Amarak's house alone.

As he hastened by the trading building, he saw a light burning in the window. Evidently Gretchen was still up, possibly reading, more likely entertaining Jannison. His heart sank a brief instant, then hardened to steel. No matter what was occurring within that lighted room, he must cross the threshold and summon help.

He knocked once and called. Gretchen's voice answered, bidding him enter. Jannison was not here; evidently he was to play no part in this night's affair, and the girl had been fated to go with Angus from the first.

She was seated in a big chair, in the golden glow of the lamp, and Angus would never forget the picture. She wore a gay-colored oriental-looking robe, and as she turned, it fell open, revealing the white curve of her breast. Her hair lay in a great black braid against her satin throat. And her drowsy eyes called to him across the shadow.

It came to him in a black flash that here was the symbol of his fate. This glimpse from the doorway was prophetic, he felt, of the whole drama of his life. He could not enter in. The light and warmth and beauty and softness were not for him. His work lay in the cold dark outside. The only beauty that he might know was hard and white as the packed snow—the beauty of renunciation and atonement.

“Get dressed and come to Amarak's igloo, fast as ye can,” he called at first sight of her. “It's a matter o' life and death.”

He shut the door and stumbled on through the snow. He mushed as fast as he could, but he did not know the short cuts as Gretchen knew them, and before he had quite covered the long mile to Amarak's igloo, he heard the swift crunch of her snowshoes behind him. Turning, he saw her flashlight dancing toward him on the snow. Presently she was beside him, cool, calm, not even out of breath.

“What's happening?” she asked, as she walked ahead to light the way. “Is Wunchee having her baby?”

“She's had her baby, Ugruk told me, and both o' them came through all right. It's some danger that has come up since, and I can't imagine what.”

“To the baby—not the mother?”

“So Ugruk said.”

“Then I can imagine what it is! We’d better hurry as fast as we can. This is just the kind of night it usually happens—cold and dark and hopeless. How cold is it, Angus?”

“Forty-two below. What’s that got to do with it?”

“Everything. The colder it is, the less time we have. Thank God, this is the first time it’s happened in two years.”

Now they were in front of Amarak’s igloo. It was all still and dark. Gretchen turned through driftwood doors into the passageway, guided by her flashlight. Angus followed, and presently they stood outside the round aperture leading to the living quarters.

“Wunchee?” the girl called.

A dull voice answered within. At once Gretchen drew aside the fur curtain and crawled through into the warm, close room. Still hoping that his worst fears were groundless, Angus came after.

From the bed of skins Wunchee arose, the upper part of her body unclothed. Gretchen turned the light full on her swarthy face, showing the traces of dried tears; then threw it down across the full breast and the empty listless arms. The baby was not here, so the yellow beam began to search the room.

First it revealed Amarak, Wunchee’s sick mate, lying against the wall. His deep-sunken eyes were aglow with fever, and the gray cast of his skin, drawn tight over his bones, indicated that his malady was in a desperate stage; but this was common among the Eskimos, and it was not whom these two visitors had come to aid. Beside him lay Wunchee’s four children, three tawny little girls and one boy, their oily faces flushed, their naked bodies in a heat-trance, rather than healthy slumber. They needed help themselves. God knew, yet the light hovered over them only an instant, and darted on in its quest.

But Gretchen could not find what she sought. There was no new, tender life concealed under the robes. And now she turned her light again on the squaw’s face.

“Where’s your baby, Wunchee?”

“Wunchee, she got no baby,” was the dull answer.

“Quick. Tell me where it is. If you lie to me, Wunchee, the ship captain will come and take you away.”

“Wunchee, she got no baby,” the woman repeated stubbornly. Angus wondered if this could really be a woman, not a wooden idol charmed to speech. Her eyes hardly flickered.

“What became of it?”

“Wunchee not know. He gone some place. Wunchee lose him, no find him. Think maybe someone steal him.”

Gretchen parleyed no more. The precious seconds were passing. Like a white serpent in the light beam her arm leaped forward and her hand seized Wunchee’s throat. “Tell me!” she threatened, between her teeth. “Do you want me to choke you and make you tell? Which way did you carry it?”

“Baby, him lost.” Then, as the fingers tightened: “Maybe you find him—out on point. Wunchee go look—”

But before the squaw could begin to slip on her parka, Gretchen was out the aperture and hastening down the passage. Angus followed her by the scythe-like sweep of her flashlight on the gray snow. Clear at the extremity of the cape, she saw a small black bundle. Presently she had it in her arms and was racing back to the warm igloo.

Wrapped from head to heels in a deerskin robe was Wunchee’s baby. As Gretchen brought it to the light she had not the dimmest hope that it was still alive. The thermometer stood forty below outside, such cold as would not spare a bear-cub left on the ice, much less a tender human infant. Yet when she put her ear to the naked little breast, she uttered a cry of astonishment.

She heard the faint beat of the tiny heart. Certainly the baby had been exposed only a few minutes, and it was still on its mother’s breast when Ugruk had summoned Angus. Probably he had dropped in at the igloo on his way to the trap-line and had guessed Wunchee’s intentions. The warm reindeer robe in which the baby was wrapped had saved it from the first onslaught of the cold, otherwise it would have died as by a sword.

Had the rescuers come in time? It was barely possible. They began to fight for the failing little life as they would fight for their own.

Angus thanked God he had brought Gretchen. If there was to be a miracle tonight, she alone could perform it. Into the infant’s chilled body she poured her own sweet warmth. She was not only the Nurse, but the Mother: her Madonna spirit was a saving grace in the room. As he looked at her in the weird yellow light of the oil lamp, her beauty seemed to flower into full bloom.

She opened her parka, and pressed the naked infant against her own breast. For a long moment she held it thus, oblivious to everyone in the room. Meanwhile Angus was heating water on the seal-oil lamp.

For three hours the battle waged. They chafed the child's limbs, administered artificial respiration, tossed it into the air to restore its circulation. More than once the tiny heart seemed to stop entirely. To all intents and purposes the child had passed on. But Gretchen still nursed the little half-dead thing, and at last, when Angus was ready to give up, the tide turned.

The blue flesh began to turn pink. The chest heaved once, twice, three times, and a faint cry rose in the silence. It was no louder than the bleat of a fawn, but it meant victory.

From the shadows in the corner of the room, came a curious answer. "*Arre gah,*" Wunchee whispered. Plainly the long fight had aroused her from her native apathy. Gretchen kissed the infant and put it in her arms.

"You'll take good care of it from now on, won't you?" she asked unsteadily.

"*Ab, ab.*"

"You won't let any harm come to it?"

"*Namick, namick.*"

"If any harm *does* come to it, the ship captain will take you away, and you'll never see any of your children again." The girl's voice broke; for the first time Angus realized how tired she was. "Oh, Wunchee, it's your own baby! You ought to be ready to die for it, no matter what sorrow comes. And things will be better from now on. My father will send you some *kow-kow* tomorrow. And I'll hire you to help me make dresses—to wear when I go outside. All of us will help you all we can."

Tears glistened in Gretchen's eyes. She was far more moved than Wunchee herself. At once she turned stumbling out the passage.

Angus caught up with her in the frigid dark. Together they tramped homeward, both preoccupied with doubts and fears. At last they stood together at her threshold regarding each other in startled silence.

"I didna understand it all," Angus began slowly. "How did the little baby get out on the ice? Surely its mother must ha' known it."

"Known it! She put it there herself."

“Merciful Lord! Infanticide!”

“Call it anything you like. I call it the most tragic protest against life that God ever heard.” Gretchen’s blue eyes glittered. “It is an awful rebuke to the whole scheme of things, and all your fine preaching can’t get around it.”

“You mustna question the scheme o’ things,” Angus told her soberly. “We know that everything is for the glory o’ God, but why it is, and how it is, and why it’s all right when it seems all wrong, no human being may ken. Maybe that was the Deil’s work tonight.”

“It was the work of this North. It’s not the first case, by a long way. There was another two years ago right here in this village, and you hear of others all along the Arctic. Always it’s a question of food. Just plain *kow-kow*, such as you and I think of only an hour or two in the day. It is the whole life of the Eskimos. And if there are too many babies to feed, some of them have to be killed. Perhaps it’s a merciful thing, in the end.”

“That isn’t for them—or for you—to say. Life is given. It isn’t theirs to take away.”

“Plenty of our women take it, don’t they? You know that.” Gretchen spoke grimly. “These Eskimos are realists. They face facts. The baby would slip away without pain, and never know what hunger means. What argument can you give them? They haven’t any illusions or sentiment about the value, the dignity, of human life. I don’t know that I have, either. We can threaten them, of course, but they haven’t any ideals we can appeal to. Are we any better?”

The minister’s quiet eyes suddenly flamed up. “We ha’ a few ideals—a vera few, perhaps—that we believe are worth more than life itself.”

“But could we act on that belief? Wouldn’t our bodies get the better of us, in any real test?”

“Not if we believed strongly enough. Faith gives a man an actual physical strength, no matter how weak he is to start with. I think it is our faith in our ideals that has given the white race the strength to conquer the world.”

“People are strong or weak, according to the way they are born. Why should any belief make them stronger than they are?”

“I don’t know. It just does. It is one o’ the mysteries. Perhaps the strength comes from God.”

“Miraculously, you mean? I wish I could believe it. I pray I’m never put to the test, and you’re not either. Why I should worry about you, I don’t know.” She passed her hand across her eyes.

Angus moved toward her, and in some fashion her hand slipped into his. “What are ye afraid of, Gretchen?” he asked gently.

“Of life. Of what life can do to people—cheating them and hurting them. And I’m bitterly afraid—for you.”

“For me? I dinna understand.”

“I’m afraid this North will show you up as a liar—and a fool. I think you’re going to be tested, and I’m afraid you’ll fail . . . and—and—I want you to win.”

She swayed toward him. He met her with a passion far removed from the passion of idealism that had lit his eyes a moment before. His arms gathered her in, holding her so tight against his body that she was aware of exquisite pain. Instantly his lips were on hers. They were devouring hers, fiercely and hungrily. And now, burned by his fire, her arms clutched him, and her lips gave him back his kisses. They began to drift in a warm, drowsy tide.

But suddenly Gretchen forced away his arms, and held her lips from his. Her eyes, smoky-blue before, grew suddenly brilliant. “Come out of it!” she muttered roughly to herself. “You, too, Angus—this won’t do, and you know it. We’re not lovers yet.”

He leaned toward her, checked himself, and then turned away his gray, haggard face. “Are ye sure—”

“I’m sure I don’t love you. You won’t let me, even if I wanted to. . . . *I don’t, I know I don’t.* . . . How could any girl love a man who’s willing to put her aside for the sake of an Eskimo half-breed and a crazy fetish! I want to love a man, not a fanatic.”

“Ye felt a man against your body a minute ago!”

“Yes, but I didn’t feel his heart. Now I want you to go. There’s nothing you can say, anyway—nothing that either one of us can say or do.”

It was true. Their hands were tied, their lips sealed. So Angus turned away, into the bitter night that had claimed him for its own.



## CHAPTER TEN

LATE JANUARY brought the first gray light of the spring dawn. For a few hours at midday one could read a paper by window light, recognize a friend's face at fifty paces, and look out for half a mile across the ribbed ice of the sea. In February a fiery red eye winked over the southern horizon, turned the ice and snow to the loveliest pale gold, and disappeared. The sun was returning.

True, the winter was but half over. The worst blizzards and the most bitter temperatures of the year were yet to come. The snow would blanket the land until June, and sea-ice would lock the shore until July. But the back of the Long Dark was broken, and from now on the days would lengthen rapidly. So the Eskimos sometimes found heart to smile. If they could hold on for four months—just for four months—they could eat their fill again, and revel in their fleet, chill ten-week summer.

The white residents of Narwhale Cape were cheered even more. Frank Jannison, especially, could face the future with a smile. When late March brought days and nights of equal length, he intended to start for the outside. With Konrad's dog team he would mush across the frozen inlets to Point Barrow, wireless for a plane, and be in Fairbanks on the railroad by mid-April. Later he would compete with his fellow doctors in a great eastern city, to take his rightful place in the civilization that had so mysteriously cast him here. And unless all signs failed, he would not go alone.

He wooed Gretchen ardently, telling her of the city where he would take her, where lights were shining, where youth was laughing, where feet were dancing. There she would come into her own. Her beauty would no longer go to waste as on this desolate shore.

He expected to be a successful surgeon. He had the necessary skill, the trained mind, the agile hands. He would show the world that he could come back, and all he needed was the inspiration of her companionship and love. They were made for each other, he said, the blond young doctor and this raven-haired girl of the North. Fate had brought him here to meet her. True, the means were cruel—he had suffered keenly at first—but they had proved a blessing in the long run, and when at last he told her the story, after he had proved himself, she would rejoice with him.

Gretchen was delighted. This seemed her one chance to escape the commonplace and embark upon an exciting and significant life. She loved

Jannison's brilliant mind, his satire, his insight into human frailty. Although she did not like to have him turn his guns on Angus, who was her friend, and under the wing of her stanch, girlish loyalty, Jannison amused her, charmed her, and almost convinced her that he could make her dreams come true.

A more gifted man than Angus, she thought. Indeed, he might be Angus's superior in every way except, perhaps, that vague quality that people call character. And if character, so-called, only served to impoverish its possessor, to keep him from the sweet fruits of life and make him a puritan and a bigot, what did she want of it? Could idealism win out against materialism? She doubted it. Could Angus stand where Jannison fell? When she considered, apart and alone, out of the light of Angus's steadfast eyes, she answered no. Jannison had done well at Narwhale Cape; the brutality of the North might yet prove Angus "a liar and a fool."

Then why did she hesitate? Why did she keep putting Frank off? Well, she would take the bull by the horns and make her decision now.

She went to Angus's mission and got him to talk of his work. He told her of the vow he had made to his father, of his hopes of bringing the Eskimo people to a higher, better life. "But what plans have you made for yourself?" she asked him at last.

"I ha' no plans for myself yet. Until I ha' done my utmost to save Ugruk, and make up to him for the sin o' his being born, I'm not free."

"But suppose you save Ugruk, as you call it—heaven knows how!—then will you feel free to give up your mission work here?"

"I canna say for sure. I dinna think I could leave these people for a long time. They need help so badly."

"And even if you do leave this place, you'll keep on with the ministry?"

"Of course. It's my profession."

"Well, that's all I need to know." A grim smile curled her lips, and she got to her feet. "Good-by, Angus."

"Good-by? I dinna ken—"

"You don't ken very much, Angus, but maybe you will later. You've been a joy to know, just the same."

She went out the door straight to Jannison's quarters. He thought, at the first glance at her, that she was bringing him ill news, instead of the happiest

tidings she could imagine. “I’ve decided to go with you, Frank,” she told him.

He seized her hands and drew her toward him. His eyes were alight with triumph. “Do you mean—”

“I mean just that. I’m going outside with you. Mother will go too, according to our original plan—Dad’s been urging her. You’ll get me a job as an apprentice nurse in the hospital where you are a doctor. And then, later, if we keep on growing more fond of each other—”

She paused, and Jannison drew her to his breast. “My, but you are a careful trader! You are Emil Konrad’s daughter, and no mistake. But that’s only going to make me try harder to be worthy of you. You’ve made me the happiest man in the whole world.”

Warmed by his fervor, she gave him her lips. He kissed her more gently than Angus had, and for five sweet seconds she was sure of her destiny—sure that this was her rightful place, in the arms of this strong, gay youth, her lips against his. She was on the right trail at last.

The five seconds passed. She stood away. “We won’t spend too much time at that,” she said quietly. “We’ll save that for the outside. We’re not engaged, you know, and this lonely North is no country to take liberties in. I’ll continue to be—a careful trader.”

But she could not quench his high spirits. “I’ll wait as long as you like. It’s tough, but I’ll stand it. But do learn to love me as soon as you can!”

“As soon as I can,” she promised. “We leave the end of this month?”

“Yes. We’ll have fairly long days then, for travel. Thank heaven, it’s only two weeks off. And not much can happen in a fortnight.”

This was no doubt true. Fortnight after fortnight, since her early girlhood, affairs at Narwhale Cape had moved in an even stream. The only change was the turning wheel of the seasons—the sun that waxed and waned, the snow that fell and seeped away, the ice that locked the land in September and freed it in July. There was no chance (she almost said hope) of any important happenings between now and the end of March. Apparently her fate was fixed. The explorers on the Northland had said that the Arctic was untrustworthy, unreliable, but to Gretchen it seemed merely deadly monotonous.

For ten days the prediction held. The days lengthened, but the snow, the ice, and the cold endured without a break. Angus continued to preach to the

people. Jannison kept on with his medical duties. But on the twenty-fifth of March, five days before the date set for the trip, an apparently insignificant thing happened. Ugruk returned from his trap-line somewhere back of beyond.

He went at once to Konrad's trading store. He had fought the cold and hungry wastes for two long moons, and all his appetites were keen. First he presented a white fox fur. Konrad appraised it carefully, allowing him twenty dollars' worth of *kow-kow*. Out of this credit, Ugruk bought candy, sweet crackers, and two cans of salmon, which he devoured then and there.

Next he gazed up and down the shelves, his eyes smoldering and eager. But apparently he did not see what he wanted, because he shook his head somberly. "You no got red water?"

"Your brother won't let me sell it."

"Brother, him smart fellow. Eskimos save money, put in collection."

Ugruk walked up and down the store, picking out a few more articles. They were mostly more *kow-kow*, to take to his igloo, but he also bought a bright red sweater and a cheap cigarette-lighter. As this exhausted his immediate credit, he started out the door.

"Wait a minute," Konrad called. "You didn't come in with one measly white foxskin. Where's the rest of your fur?"

"Ugruk got him in poke, take him to Nigaluk, sell him there."

The big veins swelled in Konrad's forehead. It enraged him that he could never get the bulk of Ugruk's furs. Most of these went to a rival trader at the distant village of Nigaluk, on the Colville River, where Ugruk fancied they brought better prices. Thus he struck Konrad in a vulnerable spot, spiting him for the sake of an old antagonism, and at the same time maintaining his own queer, crooked spirit of independence.

But Konrad held in his violent temper. For the sake of the furs, the lustrous, beautiful furs that he so loved, he would make a truce with Ugruk and try to out-trade him. "Bring in the pelts and let me see them," he said, as he offered free cigars. "I'll give you a better proposition than you'll get at Nigaluk."

Ugruk nodded. "I show you furs." Then he shook his head. "But I no sell him to you. I sell him Nigaluk."

But when Ugruk brought in the hair-seal poke that contained his catch, Konrad was disgusted. Had he humbled himself before Ugruk for the sake

of two or three mangy white foxskins? From the size and the heft of the poke it could not possibly contain more.

As a matter of fact, the poke contained only one skin. Yet at the first sight of it, Konrad's eyes lit up like blue lanterns.

The skin was a silver fox, the most costly of all American furs. The silver fox is an uncommon animal as far north as Narwhale Cape, and its capture always creates excitement in the village, and this was such a silver fox as Konrad had never imagined in his wildest dreams. He knew furs, this big Prussian, and he knew that here was one of the half-dozen finest skins that had ever appeared in an Arctic trading-post. It was the kind of pelt that makes history.

It seemed the incarnation of the wonderful silver beauty of the Arctic. The snow that gleams in the dark night. The Northern Lights that ripple and change. . . . As Konrad dropped it on the table, it shimmered like one gorgeous jewel. The skin was of immense size. The tail was as thick as his big arm. Every hair was perfect, pointed with that matchless beauty which only Nature can achieve. This was a gift for an empress.

Konrad touched it as he might the soft flesh of a maid. He made no sound other than a little clucking gasp through his closed teeth. He must have that skin!

He could hardly appraise its pecuniary value. It was in a class by itself, not to be grouped with ordinary silver foxskins, and was worth precisely what some millionaire collector would pay for it. The average buyer would give a thousand dollars for it without question. That it might ultimately sell for five thousand was within the range of possibility. But Konrad did not want to think of figures. The higher they were, the more pressure would be put upon him to sell the skin. He wanted to keep it for his own, to fondle and cherish it, with that queer passion for furs which was his outstanding weakness.

He looked up at last to meet Ugruk's eyes. These were dull, smoky eyes, sunken between the narrow, puffed lids, and Konrad searched them in vain. What was Ugruk thinking? Did he have any accurate idea of the value of the pelt? Suddenly Konrad realized how slight and trivial and full of misconceptions was his understanding of the Eskimo people.

"Ugruk, I'm not going to try to fool you," he said in English. He knew that the use of the white man's tongue, instead of the vernacular, would baffle Ugruk and help put him off guard. "This is a good skin—one of the

best foxes I've seen for a long time—and I want it. I'm not going to haggle with you—begin with a cheap price and go up. I'm going to make you a handsome offer at the start. I'll give you three hundred dollars for that skin."

As a matter of fact, this was a high price, practically the maximum, that buyers were paying for high-grade silver fox. But Ugruk started to put the pelt back in the poke.

Konrad's heart sank. "Isn't that a fair offer?" he demanded.

"Nigaluk trader, him give Ugruk three hunner ten."

This sounded more encouraging than it really was. If Ugruk thought he would get three hundred and ten dollars from the Nigaluk trader, it did not necessarily follow that he would sell the pelt to Konrad for that amount or for twice that amount. Eskimos look upon matters in ways all their own. Konrad knew he must not appear too eager, so he gave the stock argument used by traders the world over, for buying and selling at home.

"Would you spend ten days, mushing across the bays, to get ten dollars more for this skin?"

And Ugruk gave the immemorial answer of the Eskimos. His hand swung up and down, grasping for words, as he talked. "Ten days, they go by just the same. Ugruk spend 'em somehow, maybe here, maybe there. Mush across bays—walk trap-line—stay in village—all same to Ugruk. Life him go on till him stop, then Ugruk die. Him no live ten days longer 'cause him stay in village."

The last of Konrad's anger died away, and he looked at this dark man in slow wonder. As a Prussian and a student of Prussian philosophy, Konrad thought he was a realist. He believed that he faced life without illusions. But what did he know of realism compared to Ugruk? Could he or any other white man so resign himself to things as they are, and accept so simply the eternal realities of life and death? Suddenly he felt old and confused.

"Well, I'll meet the Nigaluk price, and beat it," he said at last. "Hand me over the skin. I'm going to give you three hundred and fifty dollars for it."

But Ugruk shook his head. "No sell skin to you."

"But the Nigaluk trader wouldn't give you that much."

"Ugruk say, him no sell skin to you. Ugruk no lie."

Konrad clenched his hands and held hard. "But why not, Ugruk? I've always treated you fairly. I've never broken a promise to you, and have

given you credit when you needed it. Why won't you do business with me when it's for your own good?"

"Ugruk, him no like you. Ugruk smile when him see you want something you no get. You think Eskimo him dog. Well, dog him no give up bone!"

"Spite, eh? I'll give you four hundred dollars for the skin."

"*Namick.*"

"Five hundred. Think of it, Ugruk. You can buy a motorboat—an *oomiak-put-put*—and fill it with *kow-kow*."

"*Namick, namick.*" And again Ugruk started to put away the pelt.

Konrad was desperate. Sweat drops beaded his broad forehead. "What if I said I'd give you a thousand for it? That's two motorboats filled with grub. I guess you'd sell it then."

But Ugruk's eyes did not even change expression. "Ugruk, him no want *oomiak-put-put*, got plenty *kow-kow*. Him go now."

But Konrad's big hands held onto the fur. "Then name your own price," he said, as calmly as he could. "What will you take for it?"

And now, for the first time, a flicker of expression came into the seamed leather of Ugruk's face. He turned squarely toward Konrad, and leaned forward a little from his hips. And this was a joy to Konrad's sight. The fish was tasting the bait.

"You say—you want Ugruk tell you what he take for skin?"

"That's right." Still Konrad tried to appear calm. "What do you want for it?"

"You no get mad, kick Ugruk out of store?"

"No, I won't get mad." Then, impatient with excitement: "Out with it, man."

Ugruk leaned still nearer, and looked him in the eyes. "If Ugruk—give—you—skin"—and his hand made futile little gestures—"you—give—Ugruk—Gretchen?"

Konrad stared. "What do you mean, Ugruk? I don't understand."

"If I—let—you—take skin, you—let—me—marry Gretchen?"

Konrad slowly flushed, but not wholly with rage. "You mean, will I give her to you to be your wife, your squaw?" he asked slowly.

"*Ab.*"

Konrad was not greatly startled. He knew that Ugruk was in some fashion in love with Gretchen, and he knew native psychology and customs. The Eskimo does not feel himself intrinsically inferior to the white man, only less fortunate. Lacking ideals, he cannot idealize the white people to his own abasement. He would not consider it improper to marry a white woman, provided he could get her. And naturally, Ugruk had come to Konrad rather than to Gretchen herself. According to the Innuite idea, a daughter is her father's property, to dispose of as he likes. Konrad turned away to deliberate, but curiously enough, he was not thinking of the price Ugruk had asked. He was merely recalling an announcement that Gretchen had made to him a few days before.

Today was the twenty-fifth of March. Five days from today, Gretchen was leaving for the outside, with her mother and Frank Jannison. The problem was an absurdly simple one, requiring nothing more than a minor breach of Konrad's business ethics, and a few days' careful maneuvering. The pelt was the most beautiful he had ever seen.

"Sure you can have her," Konrad cried heartily. "I'll have the parson marry her to you as soon as she can get her housekeeping outfit ready—that'll be about ten days. And to show you I'm your friend, I'm going to give you three hundred dollars' worth of credit besides."

Ugruk nodded stolidly, laid the pelt on the counter, and started out the door. "*Arre gah,*" he whispered softly.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

EMIL KONRAD ordered Gretchen to keep secret her intention of leaving the village with Jannison. Why she must do so, the trader did not explain; and she obeyed without argument and with but mild curiosity. Quite often his imperious nature made him take a dictatorial attitude regarding her affairs, and at such times, he behaved like a Prussian Junker, impatient of interference or question. Of course his real purpose was to avoid trouble with Ugruk. The Eskimo half-breed was not to know of his betrayal until the travelers were well on their way to Point Barrow.

Ugruk was completely deceived. It never occurred to him that Konrad would break his contract. It is not in Eskimo psychology to conceive of such a thing. Gretchen was now his property, bought and paid for. Konrad could steal her from him no more than he himself could steal from a fellow's food-cache in the howling wild. This was the law of the Arctic, where life itself depends upon men's mutual trust. Besides, he knew Konrad of old; his word was as good as his bond.

In ten days, Ugruk supposed, Gretchen would be delivered to him. He looked forward to that time with a wonder and a happiness beyond his wildest dreams. Actually he was lifted out of himself; for these few days he could hardly feel the burden of the base clay that enhanced his spirit. His feet walked on the bleak shore of the Arctic Sea, but his head was with the stars.

He ached to express his joy, but in vain. He knew but few English words, and his own language was too dull and poor properly to clothe his thoughts. There is no Eskimo word for beauty, transfiguration, fulfilment. The truth was that Ugruk, in this hour of hope, was bigger than his whole race. He could see, where they were darkened, feel, where they were insensible, and dream, where they were dead.

He was denied even the primitive joy-rites of his people. The kettle-drums, which he would have beaten into thunder, had rotted away long ago; and the tribe had almost forgotten the laugh-songs they used to sing. Since the white men came, the Eskimos were ashamed of their old customs, and they met no more in the Kashga, at the wedding-eve of a brave, to dance the love dance. However, he tried to celebrate in every way he knew. He stuffed himself with *kow-kow*—the best from Konrad's shelves—until he could stuff no more. In the evenings he sat in the igloos of his friends, gorging meat,

boasting of his victory, and talking excitedly, with many gestures, in the high-pitched singsong tone which the Eskimos employ in moments of exultation. In the daytime he walked about the village with his teeth gleaming between his smiling lips. “*Arre gah*,” he whispered a thousand times. “*Arre gah*.”

Would Gretchen be pleased to be his squaw? This question never entered his head. Her pleasure or displeasure was not his concern, but was for Konrad to look to, before he ever made the contract. An Eskimo is, beyond all things, a realist. He does not care how other people feel, but only how he feels himself; he has no sentimental ideas. Gretchen would be Ugruk’s own, to live with, to keep, to look at, and to love. She would belong to him as thoroughly as his now-vanished sledge dogs; if necessary, he could master her physically. He could not, if he had tried, have put himself in her place and imagined her feelings. Even an imaginative white man can hardly guess how a squaw feels; much less can any Eskimo fathom the thoughts of a white girl.

True, he planned to honor her as her beauty and worth deserved. He would build a new igloo—better than any in the village. He would hunt and trap for her from the Buckland Mountains to the Shaviovik River, and win for her all the treasures of the North—*kow-kow* in abundance, reindeer skins and wolverine fur for her parkas, ivory beads for her white throat.

He made no effort to see Gretchen, but waited patiently for the marriage day. Once, however, he happened to meet her outside the trading-post, so he stopped her, grinning.

He pointed to a bolt of cloth in her arms. “You make’*m* clothes?” he asked, nodding vigorously.

“Yes, Ugruk. I want to make myself look as pretty as possible.”

“Ugruk think you heap pretty now. Pretty as silver fox—pretty as eider duck. You make’*m* dress, get married in?”

“Ultimately, I hope.” She smiled and walked on, leaving him greatly puzzled, vaguely uneasy.

This incident occurred on the twenty-ninth day of March. At dawn of the next day, Gretchen, Jannison, and Mrs. Konrad intended to start for Point Barrow. Apparently the trader’s plot had worked perfectly. Ugruk would not learn of his promised bride’s departure until she was well on her way, and then he could likely be put off with some plausible story. Even if he tried to follow the party, he could never overtake them. He must travel slowly on

foot, while they sped the white miles with Konrad's powerful dog team. Konrad could eat his cake and have it too. The wonderful silver foxskin gleamed in the candle-light, caressing his cheek like a sweetheart's fingers. It seemed there was no penalty for double dealing.

But suddenly the secret was out. No one knew how; Konrad had taken great pains to conceal all preparations for the trip. It is a fact that there is a curious underground telegraphy among primitive people. The news sped through the village like the wind, and in the early dusk reached Ugruk's ears.

"Konrad has lied to you," his fellows told him. "The girl starts tomorrow to Point Barrow, never to return. She will become the wife of a white man, not an Eskimo. She will marry the Giver-of-Medicine."

But Ugruk shook his head, unbelieving. Had Konrad ever broken a promise to one of them? It was the tale-bearers, not Konrad, who lied, and they would see the truth with their own eyes in a few days more. When he led Gretchen to his igloo, they would repent of their foolish tongues.

Yet the seed of doubt was sown, and Ugruk lost no time in hunting up Konrad. "You always keep promise to Eskimo?" Ugruk began, when they met in the trading store. "When you make deal, you stand by it?"

"Sure I do," the trader blustered. "Have you ever known me to go back on a deal! What's troubling you, Ugruk?"

"Eskimos, they say you cheat Ugruk. They say, Gretchen she take dog team tomorrow, start to Point Barrow, no come back, maybe marry doctor. But she no go to Barrow! She mine. You sell her to me."

Ugruk spoke in a voice restrained and low. His face was devoid of expression save, perhaps, a curious dull glow far back in his eyes. Konrad studied it intently. He was at the point of defying the Eskimo, beating and bluffing him down with the sheer power of his arrogance and will, but he changed his mind. Somehow he was reluctant to face the issue now. It seemed wiser to put Ugruk off with a plausible lie. Konrad felt that he was the other's master in all ways, but particularly he could outmatch him in cunning.

"Those fellows are teasing you," he said. "They're jealous of you, for marrying a white girl. If Gretchen goes anywhere tomorrow, it is just to Charlie's and Bill's claim, to ask them over to the wedding."

"They no be back in five days."

“Yes, by traveling fast. They won’t have to take much grub—there’s plenty where they’re going—and they can drive fast. The ice is so smooth on the bays that they can go straight across and save more than a hundred miles.”

Ugruk nodded solemnly. Konrad’s story upheld his own deep convictions. Yet a haunting doubt remained, and when he saw Gretchen standing on her doorstep, he trudged over to her. For long seconds he gazed into her face, baffled, and almost overwhelmed by the rising tide of his love for her; and her glance grew sharp and questioning. “What is it, Ugruk?”

“You—no—run—away—from Ugruk?”

“I don’t understand—”

“Where you go tomorrow? You go to cabin where old men talk-talk, come back five days? Or maybe you go to Barrow, never come back? You no lie.”

“No, I won’t lie to you, since you know that I’m leaving. I’m going to Barrow. I don’t know when I’ll be back. Maybe not until the ice comes and goes many times.”

Ugruk was thunderstruck. His hand waggled futilely as if he were trying to grasp words. His eyes seemed to sink and darken under the frost-rime of his brows. The truth was that the light of Ugruk’s life was going out.

“What is it?” the girl asked gently.

Then the words came in a volcanic rush. “You mine, you mine!” Ugruk shook his open hands in her face. “You no run away! You stay here, marry Ugruk like Konrad promise. Ugruk, he buy you, pay for you. Konrad, he sell you to Ugruk for silver fox. Now I got you, no let you go, keep you for squaw.” Then, with brightening hope: “You play joke on Ugruk?”

“A joke? Merciful heavens! No, not even Gretchen would joke about a thing like this.” She paused, trying to steady herself. “Did my father promise you I’d be your squaw?”

“Him no just promise—him make trade, over counter. Ugruk buy you, all same dog. If you try run away, Ugruk catch you, kill you maybe. No, Ugruk no kill you. Him want you, treat you fine, catch you plenty fox, buy you plenty *kow-kow*, give you plenty baby. . . . But him no let you run away.”

“But I don’t belong to you. Father had no right to sell me.”

“You him daughter, eh? *Ab, ab*. Then you him girl, sell you when him dam’ please. You no make talk, try twist Ugruk up. Ugruk buy you, pay fair price. Him no let you leave village. If doctor him try steal you I kill him.”

“The doctor isn’t trying to steal me. I’m leaving of my own free will, and he is just going along. And I couldn’t marry you, Ugruk. You see—you’re an Eskimo—and I’m a white girl.”

These last words baffled Ugruk. He stood like a man of wood, his arms hanging in front of his body, his face like dried brown mud. Gretchen took the opportunity to turn away, enter the house, and close the door behind her.

But the sound of the closing latch seemed to waken Ugruk to new force. His hand reached the door-knob, then drew strongly back. He would bide his time. The girl could not escape him tonight. He retained his sure grasp of reality; no words she might say could lessen the fact that he had bought and paid for Gretchen, and that she was his to have and to hold.

He went straight to Angus’s quarters, and sat with his brother in the lamp-light. For a long moment neither man spoke. Angus studied the dark, impassive face, wondering what manner of spiritual problem was to come before him tonight. “You my brother?” Ugruk asked at last.

“Aye.”

“You fight for Ugruk? You help Ugruk get square deal?”

“As much as I can. Not only you, but every Eskimo in the village.”

“If Konrad take Ugruk’s fur, then no pay him, you raise hell?”

“A little hell anyway, Ugruk.” Angus smiled gravely. “But Meester Konrad hasna done that, has he? I’ve observed that he usually keeps his word to the letter. Tell me about it.”

Ugruk told him, in his flat guttural voice. At the end of the recital, Angus sat a long time silent. At last he sighed heavily, and laid his hand on his brother’s knee. “What do ye want me to do?”

“I want you come tonight, marry Gretchen to Ugruk?”

“But what if Gretchen says no?”

“You no care what she say. You marry her to Ugruk because Ugruk say so, not because she say no or she say yes. She belong to Ugruk. Konrad, him sell her to me.”

“Ye dinna understand, Ugruk. I ha’ no right to marry her against her will. I couldna do that even for my brother.”

“If Konrad say yes, you do it?”

“No not unless Gretchen said yes too, and even then—but we needna go into that. Konrad has no right to sell his daughter, ye ken. If a man wants to marry a girl, he must deal wi’ her, not wi’ her father.”

“You mean—give furs to her, not her father?”

“If ye want to put it that way. And ye see, Ugruk, Gretchen doesna want your furs. Ye ha’ nothing to pay for her that she wants—and I hanna either.” Angus’s homely face looked singularly dark in the yellow lamp-light. “Ye’re ineligible, and I am too. We’re both in the same boat.”

“Ugruk, him no understand—”

“No matter. I hadna ought to mention it. Just put this out o’ your head, brother. The girl is going outside tomorrow, and ye must forget her. I’ll try to make Konrad gi’ you back your silver foxskin.”

“I no want foxskin back. I no forget her—I never forget her, no more than I forget the sun, the moon.” Ugruk suddenly stood up, a stalwart, powerful figure. “*I no let her go.*”

“But ye must.” Angus spoke quietly.

“She mine. I tell you—*I no let her go.* If you no marry her to Ugruk, Ugruk no care. Him no care about prayer, ring, join hand, talk-talk. Him do that so Gretchen feel good, get married like other white people. Gretchen, she mine anyway. Konrad him sell her, no go back on that. So Ugruk—him just *take* Gretchen.”

Angus stood up, and looked his brother in the eyes. Ugruk returned the gaze with a strange, compelling calm. “Don’t ye know Konrad will kill you?”

“Maybe so.” The Eskimo shook his head somberly. “Maybe him kill Ugruk, keep girl, keep fur too. But Ugruk no back down. Him no let white man talk-talk him no more, scare him no more. Him do what Eskimo think right, not what white man think right. Him try white man’s ways, find out white man’s ways no good. So him go back to Eskimo ways. Him offer make white man marriage, brother say no. So him make Eskimo marriage.”

“But ye canna make a go o’ it, Ugruk. Even if ye’d run away wi’ Gretchen, the white men would follow you. The ship captain’s law would

get you in the end.”

“The law him no come for four moons. Then, Ugruk be gone, hide in mountains. Ugruk have white girl for four months anyway, be heap happy for four months. So you tell Konrad get out pistol, you get out pistol too if you dam’ please. If you no want Ugruk take girl, you plenty kill him first.”

In the meantime, there was a wild scene in Konrad’s living quarters. His usually self-contained and cool-headed daughter had burst into weeping, and was now nearer hysteria than her parents had ever seen her. It was as if she had been under some great nervous strain for many days, and this was the breaking-point. When she told what she had learned from Ugruk, her mother hastened to her side; and Konrad had to stand to his guns against them both.

“If you hadn’t told that half-breed where you were going, there’d been no trouble,” Konrad shouted. “Now I’ll probably have to give him back his skin, and lose the finest pelt that has been brought into an Arctic post for twenty years.”

“I think that will be a very cheap price to clear yourself,” Mrs. Konrad told him. “I only pray you won’t have to pay any more.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll take care of Ugruk. I haven’t handled natives for thirty years to let a half-breed bluff me out. I admit I hadn’t ought to have deceived him, but I threw in three hundred dollars in credit for the pelt, and now I stand to lose *that*, too. If you two had just slipped away, without saying anything about it, I could have worked him along and satisfied him.”

“All the silver foxes in the North can’t pay you for deserting the code you’ve stood by for so many years,” Mrs. Konrad went on gravely. “True, it wasn’t much of a code. It was cruel and selfish and high-handed. Yet it was better than no code at all.”

“It was the devilish beauty of that skin, that got me,” Konrad admitted frankly. “You know I can’t resist fine furs. Well, I’ll see what can be done about it.”

Mrs. Konrad went straightway to her room. She needed all the rest possible before starting the long mush to the outside. Gretchen, who hardly knew what it meant to be tired, stole away to a big chair before the low fire in her father’s library. She did not weep now; her eyes were dry, brilliant, and hard. It seemed to her that Fate had somehow made a jest of her life. The taste in her mouth was bitter; her heart was rebellious and angry.

Konrad walked the floor for a space, then went to his private cabinet where he kept his finest furs. As he opened the drawers, the lamp-light danced in and rippled back with breath-taking beauty. Here was a complete collection of the finer Alaskan pelts, each a perfect example of its species. There was a white fox, the king of all white foxes, which was caught on Chandler Lake, on the slope of the Endicott Range. There was a blue fox which an Aleut Indian had stolen from the government catch at the Pribilof Islands, and had sold to him for one bottle of rum; and a red fox, with flame in its hair, from the volcanoes of Unimak Pass. There was a gorgeous land otter from the Inoko country, a pair of minks dark as a Spaniard's eyes, a martin, a magnificent lynx, and a string of ermine like white velvet ribbons on a bride's bouquet. The tapestries of a rajah could not compare with these. And crowning the collection, a specimen for which he had waited years, was the matchless silver fox for which he had traded his honor.

Well, it was worth it! As he fondled it, it shimmered with magical life. Could he let it go, passing it back into those dark hands too blunt to feel its softness? Not unless his daughter's safety depended on it.

At this unpropitious moment, Angus knocked on the door. The Eskimo servant let him in. The very look of the visitor, freckled and homely of face, infuriated Konrad. He knew what this visit meant. He could hardly be civil.

"I know what you've come to say," he began sourly.

"If ye know that, maybe it wasna necessary for me to come at all. Maybe ye've already made up your mind to do what's right."

"You want me to give Ugruk back the foxskin, I suppose."

"Yes, to save trouble. I dinna think we need go into the right and wrong o' the thing. That is self-evident."

"Self-evident from your standpoint." Konrad spoke grimly. "But I needed the skin, and Ugruk didn't—and I'm Ugruk's master. However, we won't argue about it. Yours is the conventional idea, I know. I don't know, though, what right you have to interfere in the matter."

"I am a minister, and duty-bound to try to save you from sin—how great a sin only time can tell. Besides, I ha' the right to see that Ugruk gets justice. Above all, I ha' come to warn you. Ye canna slip out on Ugruk, nor can ye bully him into yielding. He means to stand up for his rights. If ye try to take the girl away wi'out giving him back his pelt, he will lay hands on her and try to hold her."



Angus regretted this wording at once. He should have been more tactful in stating his case.

“Lay hands on my daughter?” Konrad’s voice had a low rumble. “That yellow half-breed dog?”

“That yellow half-breed dog,” Angus answered quietly, “is my brother.”

“Then I defy you both.” Konrad was working himself into a dangerous fury. “He’s your brother, and if you care for his well-being, you’d better warn him instead of warning me. I won’t take a word off him. This is my village, and I’ll do what I want to in it, and you can go to the devil. If he makes one move against Gretchen, I’ll kill him.”

Angus’s expression hardly changed. Perhaps he was slightly redder, a little more homely. But he stood his ground, and looked his antagonist in the face. “I hear you, Konrad,” he answered at last. “Maybe ye will kill Ugruk, as ye say—I dinna know how far your evil passions may carry you. But harken to me. If he does try to hold Gretchen, it will be in defense o’ his rights, according to Eskimo customs. What ye do in return winna be in defense o’ your rights, but only to escape the retribution o’ an evil deed. Ugruk is my brother, and I will stand up for him short o’ violence to you and your daughter. And if ye kill him, I will see that ye are brought to justice, and hanged for the murderer ye are.”

Angus turned and strode out. As he passed by the open door of the library, Gretchen saw him, and sprang to follow him. She slipped on her heavy parka as she ran, and caught up with him on the hard-packed snow outside the mission. The new-risen moon performed authentic magic on this snow, on the frozen sea, and on the girl’s face. The world and the night and the firmament was one pale blue. The girl, clad in white, with eyes faintly luminous in the moonbeams seemed to Angus the wandering spirit of the Arctic—mysterious, illusory, unattainable.

“You left without telling me good-by.” She spoke simply, without embarrassment, without reproach. Because she felt no loss of dignity in having pursued him, there was no loss of dignity.

“I dinna know ye were still up,” Angus answered. “I thought to tell you good-by—and wish you good luck—in the morn when ye started out. Anyway, I wasna fit to speak to you when I left your door. My heart was inflamed wi’ anger.”

“I know it. I could just hear your voice, as you and father talked. But you are not angry with me, are you?”

“Never. Why should I be, when ye are the loveliest woman I ha’ ever known? And I am not angry wi’ your father, now. The bitter night ha’ cooled me off. He did only what he was predestined to do, from the first beginning o’ things, and the same wi’ all he will do in the future.”

“And you—and I—were predestined to say good-by to each other, here in the moonlight?”

“It seems so. . . . I wish there was some other way.”

They stood silent a long time. There was almost nothing to say except stupid, conventional things that neither had heart for. “I want you to be happy,” Gretchen murmured at last.

“I pray to the Lord God that ye will be happy too.”

“And I want you to win—to hold to your faith—no matter how vain it may be.” The girl’s voice almost broke; she was close to tears.

Suddenly Angus was overpowered. He took her hands, and gently drew her into his arms. Just once their lips met, a kiss so sweet that it was only a little removed from pain. For a space he held her, in silence, her heart beating against his. Such poignant silence! Even when their lips parted, thrilling, they dared not speak.

Not one word of love passed between them. If such a word rose to the lips of either, it was forced back. They denied it in their hearts, even, lest the armor of their pride be pierced. Angus felt too poor for Gretchen. Like Ugruk, he had nothing to give her that she needed or wanted—only a share in the bitter, hopeless task to which he was consecrated. Could he ask her to accept this? Her youth was too fair, her beauty too bright. Nor could he disavow the task, so solemnly imposed, to devote his drab life wholly to her. Gretchen, on the other hand, was not ready to take what Angus could give. If once she admitted that she loved him, she could never go forth from him to find the richer, brighter life which she dreamed. He would not go with her—this she knew—and she would not stay. So she hushed the clamoring voices in her heart.

“Good-by, Angus,” she whispered.

“Good-by, and God bless you—sweetest girl in the world!”

So she pushed away his arms and turned and left him to the night, the cold, the mocking moon, the unutterable solitude.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

BEFORE dawn the next day, Konrad and his Eskimo servant were up and at work. The dogs were fed, the sled packed for the first lap of the long journey to Barrow. There were stores of pemmican and oil, a tiny oil-stove to warm the snug snow-huts they would build en route, robes, and a few personal supplies. The two women took just enough clothes to be presentable while they were waiting for their airplane at Barrow, as they planned to buy a complete outfit when they reached Fairbanks, in Central Alaska.

Neither Gretchen nor her mother feared the hardships of the trip. They were mushers aforetime; and the frozen waste was their home. Not even Mrs. Konrad would ride the sled, but would tramp behind at the gee-pole. Both women were dressed for the terrible Arctic temperatures—mukluks, fur mittens, reindeer-skin jackets, breeches, and parkas, fawn-lined under-clothing. Dr. Jannison, lean and brown, not only would carry a pack, but would break trail through the drifts.

When the first dawn was glimmering on the skyline, and the little group of silent people cast monstrous moon-shadows on the snow, the dogs were hitched to the loaded sled. As yet there had been no sound from the sleeping native village, and Konrad dared to hope that the party would get away without trouble of any kind. It would be such an easy way out of his difficulty. Later he would make some kind of settlement for the fox fur, and ease his troubled conscience. There was a time, in his adventurous youth, that he would have relished an open clash with almost any kind of foe, but his blood had cooled in his three-score years, and his muscles had lost some of their steel. Besides, he was somehow vaguely depressed. He had not slept well the preceding night. Although he had no intention of humbling himself before Ugruk, he wished that the whole affair had never occurred.

But as the travelers were taking their places, they heard footsteps in the half-dark. Two shadows came leaping toward them across the snow. Ugruk swung up to them, running, with Angus hastening behind him. The moon and the dawn showed their faces haggard and strained.

“I tried to keep him from coming, but I couldna,” Angus told Konrad. “From now on it’s in your hands.”

Well, these hands were strong enough. Gretchen saw them clench, and was quietly curious to what lengths of violence and bloodshed this thing

might go. The very sight of Ugruk had emboldened Konrad. He was ashamed of his fears of a moment before. His eyes began to shine, his face flushed, the big veins on his forehead leaped and throbbed.

Ugruk carried no rifle, and he was never known to shoot a pistol. If he was armed at all, it was only with his long snow-knife. So Konrad did not take up the loaded rifle that lay ready on the sled. He could handle this matter without recourse to firearms.

“What do you want, Ugruk?”

The Eskimo stood inert, his arms limp, leaning forward from his hips. “I want—Gretchen,” came the heavy answer.

At this unpropitious time, Dr. Jannison saw fit to be gay. “He doesn’t want much, does he?” he asked. “Why not give him a lash with the dog-whip, instead?”

Angus turned angrily toward him. “Ye winna help matters by that! Ye had better mind your tongue.”

Gretchen’s heart leaped, yet her mind stayed cool, and she was ready for almost any emergency. She knew just how many steps she must take to reach the rifle on the sled. Yet she prayed it would not come to this. To be obliged to kill Ugruk, to save her father from the consequences of his own sin, would be as evil a trick as Fate could play her. Meanwhile she was furious at Jannison for his ill-timed remark. It seemed to portray a side of his nature which she had always tried not to see—a lack of human kindness, perhaps even a native cruelty of disposition, at least a weakness when strength was needed.

“You can’t have Gretchen,” Konrad answered. His voice trembled with repressed anger. “She is going to Barrow.”

Ugruk shook his head heavily. His eyes burned in their deep sockets. “She no go to Barrow. She mine. You sell her to me.”

Gretchen whirled to her father, her face white as the snow at her feet. “Give him back his foxskin,” she demanded. “You’re going to get us in trouble here, in about ten seconds.”

“Trouble? I’m not afraid of trouble! Ugruk, I’ll take this up with you later. Perhaps I’ll make some kind of adjustment about the fur. But now stand out of the way. These people are going to Barrow.”

“I no stand out of the way.” Ugruk planted himself like a rock beside the team. “I tell you—she mine. She no go.”

“Get out of the way, I say!” Konrad was shouting, the words ringing over the snow with shocking violence. “Damn your breed soul—I tell you get out of the way.”

Mrs. Konrad now hurried to her husband’s side and tried to lay a hand on his arm. But he pushed her away, and he did not even hear Gretchen’s entreaties. Both women were terrified now. Yet they were not half so afraid of Ugruk as of Konrad himself; they knew of old his berserk rage and the trouble it might bring. This rage was now reaching its climax. It would take a strong man to control him, and he could not control himself. The dawn-light showed his livid face, his drawn lips.

Angus walked straight up to him and looked into his face. “Come out of it, Konrad,” he said roughly. “Ye are making a fool o’ yourself. This way leads to murder.”

Konrad, in his fury, did not hear Angus’s words, but the low voice eased its way through his throbbing ear-drums and gave him a second’s pause. Angus might have calmed him, just as a quiet tone will sometimes calm a plunging horse. But Jannison took it upon himself to interfere again. The devil of the perverse seemed to be in him today or else the crisis was bringing out certain weaknesses in his make-up. He seemed unable to grasp the essentials of the situation, or to cope in any helpful way with its realities. Instead of helping to quiet Konrad, he rushed up from behind and seized Angus. The minister struggled to break free, and in the next few seconds events rushed on with an increased momentum too strong to arrest.

“Get out of the way, or I’ll kill you!” Konrad howled at the Eskimo. Then, to the excited dogs: “*Mush!*”

“She mine, she mine,” Ugruk answered. “She stay here, be Ugruk’s squaw.” Then, with a rising volume of sound: “I tell you—she no go!”

But the dogs were breaking out the frozen runners now, and in an instant more would be flying across the snow, so Ugruk’s inert form leaped to action. Excited beyond all bounds, he hastened to Gretchen’s side and grasped her shoulders with his big hands.

Her mother gazed in speechless terror. Still she was not afraid for Gretchen; she knew her daughter would take no immediate harm. But she did fear, to the extreme, the effect of that sight upon her husband. There was murder in the air now; she felt it before Konrad made a move; she saw its shadow in her inner mind. She abandoned hope of preventing bloodshed. A scream started in her throat.

Gretchen still prayed for the best, and with an instinctive effort to quiet Konrad, she herself stood quiet in Ugruk's grasp. Angus, knowing that only physical force could possibly stop Konrad now, struggled to get free from Jannison's grasp. He too howled in anger, and struck with his free arm into the doctor's face. But, excited beyond all sense, Jannison clung to him.

When Konrad saw the half-breed lay hands on his daughter, the last threads of his self-restraint broke away, and with a yell he reached for his knife. The blade zigzagged in the air like a miniature flash of lightning as he lunged toward his foe.

Ugruk let go of Gretchen's shoulders. Konrad supposed that the Eskimo too was reaching for a knife, to fight him steel to steel. But Ugruk's hand did not leap toward his thigh, but turned palm out, empty. This was the most tragic thing of all. Blinded by his rage, Konrad was attacking an unarmed man.

Why Ugruk did not draw his snow-knife he himself did not know. It was not a weapon, merely a tool. He did not crave Konrad's life; he only wanted Konrad's daughter. His Eskimo blood was a factor also: seldom can one of his race find heart to attack a white man. But Konrad had forgotten this, and leaped on with a howl.

If anyone could have stopped the madman even for a second, he would have seen the truth. Then, though he might have struck Ugruk, certainly he would not have tried to kill him. Konrad was not a coward. But though Angus smote the doctor as hard as he could, he could not free himself in time.

The scene was instinct with violence. The dogs yelled and strained in their harness; Mrs. Konrad shrieked and sprang toward Ugruk as if she would shield his body with her own; Gretchen, free now, tried to seize her father's arm. Angus and Jannison fought crazily in the snow at one side. And as Konrad bore down upon his foe, Ugruk leaped to meet him.

Still he meant only to turn the blow, not to deal one of his own. And now his great strength, his sure eye, stood him in good stead. His big hand caught Konrad's wrist. He could not hold that mighty descending arm, but he did wrench it to one side. The point of the blade slashed his parka, but did not find his heart.

Their bodies collided with overwhelming force, and both men reeled and pitched to the ground. Ugruk sprang up instantly, ducking as if to avoid a blow, and with arms guarding his breast, flung himself back a few paces.

Konrad got up a second later, but his hand no longer held the knife, and indeed the long blade was nowhere to be seen. Angus had broken free by now, and was rushing forward; but what he saw in Konrad's face stopped him in his tracks.

The big trader seemed dazed. An expression of incredible astonishment was on his gray visage. Everyone looked at him, the central figure of this strange snow-swept scene.

“What have you done, Emil?” his wife cried in horror.

“What have I done?” Konrad's tones were so low and calm after the storm that his hearers were stunned. “I've killed my fool self, that's what I've done. Look there!”

He pointed. Grotesquely thrusting from his abdomen was his own knife, buried to the hilt.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN the silence enfolding that horror-stricken group, the only voice raised was Ugruk's. "I no kill him," he said flatly. "Him fell on knife."

He told them nothing that they did not already know, yet the remark tended to bring back a sense of reality to a scene illusory and incredible, and to call them to themselves. At once their frozen postures melted, and they began to function according to what was in them. Seeing that Konrad was reeling on his feet, both Angus and Dr. Jannison ran to him. His legs gave way under him, now that help had come, and the two men laid him gently on the snow. Jannison at once kneeled over him, and drew forth the crimson-bladed knife.

It was evident that Konrad must not lie here long. Without waiting for the doctor's instructions, Angus told Ugruk to run to the hospital and bring the stretcher that he knew was kept there. And Ugruk must make a quick trip, otherwise the wounded man must be carried to shelter on his friend's shoulders, in spite of the danger of thereby aggravating the wound. The thirty-below-zero temperature of this March day was not to be trifled with. Ugruk sped away, plunging through the snow like a bear. Konrad's wife and daughter crouched quietly beside the wounded man, opposite Jannison.

"Is there any hope?" Mrs. Konrad asked the doctor.

"I don't know."

This answer startled Gretchen. She thought it queer that the doctor would not say yes or no to this simple question. And the voice hardly sounded like Jannison's, but was thick and flat. She glanced up sharply. His face was gray, his lips blue. His hands stained with Konrad's blood, looked stiff and unwieldy.

"But you're going to operate?" Gretchen whispered.

"I don't know yet. . . . I think it would make matters worse. . . . Yes, I'm sure it would. It would only hasten his death."

Konrad had been lying with closed eyes, far gone, but now he revived with a force and energy that startled the onlookers. Jannison's words had penetrated the half-sleep into which outraged nature had despatched him. His eyes opened vividly, and the sagging muscles in his gray face snapped back into position. He was not now a half-dead nonentity, but Emil Konrad, the Tsar of Narwhale Cape.



“What do you mean, Jannison?” he demanded. “Of course you’ve got to operate, and sew me up the best you can. Man, it’s an intestinal perforation, and even a fool knows that means the knife! You’re not going to let me die without a fight.”

Jannison seemed dazed. “You mustn’t try to talk. What I said was just snap judgment—I haven’t examined the wound yet. If there’s an intestinal perforation, of course I’ll have to operate.”

“*If?* What do you mean, ‘if’? There are several perforations, and you know it. My God, send me a doctor!”

By now Ugruk had brought the stretcher. The three men lifted Konrad onto it, and started for the hospital. Torn by doubts, desperate with fear, yet still hoping for the best, Gretchen followed. Mrs. Konrad walked at her husband’s side, holding his chilled hand between her own.

Jannison continued to mutter, apparently oblivious to those about him. “We’ll get him on the table right away. . . . No use waiting with an intestinal perforation case. . . . Like as not those cans of ether won’t be any good. If they’re not, I just can’t operate, and that’s all there is to it. . . . God, he’s got more blood in him than a pig! Oh, why in the devil’s hell did this have to happen?”

Now they had reached the little two-room hospital, and Konrad had been stretched out on the operating table. He was perfectly conscious, and he raised his head and watched Jannison during the examination of the wound. Under this quiet scrutiny, the doctor flushed purple, and his hands shook.

“Good Lord, what’s the matter with you?” Konrad demanded at last.

“What do you mean?” Jannison straightened gamely, but Gretchen saw his fingers twitch. “This is a very serious case. I can’t rush into it till I know what I want to do. Don’t worry; I’ll save you if it’s possible.”

Angus noted the peculiar thickness of the tone, and his heart sank. At the same time he realized that Konrad’s obvious lack of confidence in Jannison was only making matters worse. “Of course he will,” he agreed heartily. “Dr. Jannison hasna had a major operation for a long time, but I can see already that he knows his business. Doctor, can I be boiling your instruments while ye are getting ready?”

“Good idea—good idea. Mrs. Konrad—you and Gretchen cut away his clothes so that I can work. Then you two had better get out, and Mackenzie can help me administer the anesthetic. I’ll go get it now.”

Jannison hastened out of the room. After collecting the surgical instruments, Angus put them to boil over the spirit lamp, also laid out packages of gauze, sponges, et cetera, from Jannison's cabinets. Busy with their patient, neither Gretchen nor her mother noticed how long Jannison stayed away. When at last he did enter, the girl looked at him with speechless dread.

When he had left the room, his face was gray. Now it was flushed dark red. His eyes, dull and sunken a moment ago, were now prominent and luridly bright. And entering the room with him were sharp fumes the meaning of which not one of them could possibly mistake.

Yet he was no doubt steadier. He walked quickly to the lamp, noted the progress of Angus's work, then assorted his sponges and bandages. With hands that fumbled but slightly he opened one of the cans of ether, and got it ready for use. He seemed reluctant to speak, and did not so much as glance at the three people in the room. "I—I'm almost ready to begin," he said at last.

"You want the two women to get out?" Angus asked.

"Presently. No use to send 'em out until the last minute. They want to spend as much time as possible with their dear husband and father."

The tone, and the words too, sounded mockish. Gretchen was not gratified by this sentimentality, but only depressed and terrified. Jannison busied himself with boiling the instruments; she and her mother drew nearer, to Konrad's side for what might easily be a farewell word.

The old trader clasped his wife's hand. "Don't take it too hard," he told her, with an unfamiliar gentleness. "I think the jig is up—I have a hunch that I'll never survive this so-called operation—but you must make the best of it. I've had a full life. I'm leaving enough to take care of you, mother"—this to his wife—"for the rest of your days. Gretchen is young and strong, and she'll make out."

Gretchen leaned over and kissed his cheek. "You mustn't give up."

"I'm just facing the facts. Unless he can operate successfully I'm done for—just as sure as if there was a bullet in my brain. You can't get away from an intestinal perforation. Now, listen and remember. Mother, when spring comes again, I want you to go outside, and spend your life where there's more sunlight, more warmth. I'm sorry I kept you here, all these years."

"I don't regret them," his wife answered quietly. "They were with you."

“They were wonderful years, and I could have made them even better, if I had only tried. But this is no place for you alone. Gretchen, you’d better go outside too, for a while—at once, and as quick as you can. Mackenzie can take you to the old men’s island, and they’ll take you the rest of the way. I don’t trust Ugruk.”

“Angus can handle him, I think,” Gretchen said.

“Not without killing him, and there’s been enough killing around here. Of course if he’ll take back his pelt and call the deal off, all right.”

He paused, gasping for breath, and his wife wept softly. “You’d better not try to talk any more,” Gretchen said.

“Why not? I’m in no great pain, and a few minutes one way or the other make no difference. . . . You understand there is no charge against Ugruk. The whole thing was my fault. And I got just what was coming to me for breaking the code I’ve stood by all these years.”

“But you broke it only once,” his wife cried.

“Once was enough. As Mackenzie said, I was sailing close to the wind all the time. You can’t beat the game—it always gets you. Fate has been laying for me all these years, and cornered me at last.”

He paused and closed his eyes. The onlookers were afraid he was gone already, but when Gretchen bowed over his breast, she could feel his heart strongly beating. She looked up to speak to Jannison, only to find that he had left the room. All the time that Konrad was talking, he had been making trips back and forth to his storeroom.

He came in a moment later, walking briskly. And at the first sight of his flushed face, Gretchen’s hand went to her mouth as if she feared she would scream.

This was a tragic, evil thing. As Jannison headed toward the operating table, he did not keep a straight course. His eyes were glazed, his lips loose, his jaw sagging. He had found courage at last to begin the operation, but only too well she knew from what mocking and treacherous source that courage had come. It was a shock to her, hardly less than her father’s accident. She felt broken, hopeless, impotent.

“I’m going to begin right now,” he told them desperately. “Get out of the room, all of you who don’t want to stay and see it. I’m going to aneth—  
anesthetize him myself, if the sky pilot hasn’t got the nerve to stay and help me. Where’s my instruments? Gi’ me my instruments.”

He poured the boiling water into the sink, picked up the instruments, and carried them to the operating table. At first Gretchen followed his movements with wide, horrified eyes. But as the seconds passed, and the revolting truth became more plain, her eyes began to narrow and grow steely bright. Still she did not cry out or attempt to interfere with him. A sinister calm was upon her. Across the room Angus was calm too; likewise his hazel eyes had a hard shine. They waited to make sure . . .

He reached for a can of ether. Gretchen noticed his hand—the hand that was to plunge to the wrist into her father’s mutilated body. It was covered with red stains, a grisly residue from his first examination of Konrad’s wound.

“Frank, you haven’t washed your hands!” she burst out desperately.

Jannison jerked toward her, dropping the can of ether. “Who’s doing this?” he demanded. “Are you the surgeon, or am I? What difference does it make on a hopeless case like this?”

Mrs. Konrad heard him and gazed in bewildered horror. Until now the merciful tears had blinded her eyes, but suddenly she perceived the whole, ugly truth. Breaking down, she bowed her head on her husband’s breast, sobbing. But Gretchen did not follow her into futile collapse. Perhaps her grief was not so sharp, and her indignation greater. She stepped to her father’s side and seized one of the doctor’s scalpels.

“If you touch him, I’ll kill you,” she told him.

She meant exactly what she said. Jannison’s brain was fogged with the fumes of drink, but he did not misunderstand her. Nor did he make the disastrous mistake of taking her lightly. Instead, he went into a raving frenzy sickening to hear.

It was the most complete breakdown of a man’s nerve that any of them had ever seen. Angus was not only sickened, but ashamed; he felt that excruciating embarrassment which a white man’s cowardice always gives to white onlookers. He was glad that Ugruk was not here to see. Gretchen looked at the watering eyes and sagging face-muscles with actual loathing. The thought that she had been in this man’s arms and had known his kisses made her shudder.

“It’s the blood that got me,” he raved. “I can’t stand the sight of it, since that mess three years ago. And why did I have to draw an abdominal operation, of all things? It brings it all back—the dead girl lying on the table,

and her dead brat beside her. God, it was like a slaughter-house! And then to threaten me, Gretchen! You, the girl I intended to marry!”

“Go away.” This was all she could say. “Go away.”

“Why haven’t you a little human sympathy?” His voice got shrill. “You’re more heartless than the board, when they had me up and took away my license. I thought you loved me, Gretchen, and trusted me.” Then, with eyes reddening with fury: “To the devil with you then. To the devil with you all.”

At this last outburst, Angus lost his head. He forgot that Jannison was temporarily insane and therefore unaccountable. He knew only that the drunken tongue had cursed Gretchen. His face got fiery red, his freckled fist clenched. He forgot his peaceful calling, and began to work around the long operating table to get to Jannison. A confused craving for violence was in his brain.

But it came about that events reached their astounding climax without his participation. With a roar of fury, Emil Konrad leaped down from his operating table. Rallying the last of his strength, he swung his big fist and smote the false doctor full in the face.

It was the last gust of a passing cyclone, the seventh billow of a dead typhoon. Jannison staggered back against the wall, stunned, but Konrad himself, heart-stricken, pitched insensible to the floor. Somehow it was a satisfactory finish for him. He died as he lived, in passion and violence, high-handed, warlike, and domineering—a Prussian to the last.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ON the tundra back of the village, the hip-deep snow was cleared away from a space ten feet square, and a driftwood fire built on the frozen earth. As the gray ice-veins melted away, the Eskimos dug up the thawed ground, until at last the pit was deep enough to take Konrad's clay. Then one bitter afternoon the villagers gathered for the burial rites.

Angus would never forget this picture. On one side of the rude grave the natives stood in a dark, silent group. Their oppressor was gone from them, but they seemed to feel neither joy nor sorrow, only a dull wonderment. After all, it meant little to them. Some other white man would come to take their furs and sell them *kow-kow*. A man lived so long, then died. They could do nothing about it. It was not in their hands. They stood watching with lightless eyes, their faces like old parchment, their arms hanging limp, their bodies leaning forward, slightly, from their hips.

On the other side of the grave were Konrad's widow and daughter. They watched quietly, without visible tears; and they wondered too at the immutable ways of life and death. Dr. Jannison was not with them, nor had he come to the service. Since his collapse, three days before, he had not emerged from his quarters. Gretchen knew that he still lived, because of the smoke which at times rose from his chimney, but beyond this no one knew how he fared, and no one really cared. He was no longer a factor in Narwhale Cape affairs. Angus alone had tried to gain admittance to his room, but Jannison had not answered his knock. It seemed probable that he was deep in a debauch such as he had practiced during his first weeks in the village.

On all sides of the grave stretched the limitless white. To the north was the sea ice, unbroken, except for deep leads, from Bering Strait to Spitsbergen. To the south was the tundra, glistening white, forlorn, open as the sea, trackless save for the faint prints of animals, which the wind almost instantly cut away, and for the long wandering track of the wind itself. This was the Arctic. It was the borderland between here and hereafter. This was a dream that God had dreamed between sleep and waking.

“Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!”

The words, so merciful to the dead and so hopeful to the living, did not hold here. Konrad's earth did not now revert to earth, but would become part of the eternal ice. Century after century would roll by while the moss

thickened above his head; and, save for some accident of flood or earthquake, his form would endure, unchanged.

After the service, Angus walked home with Gretchen and her mother. Bravely they talked of the future. Mrs. Konrad would not leave Narwhale Cape at once, but would stay to close up her husband's affairs. She wanted to live over the dead years that she and Emil had shared, and to move about the rooms full of his shadow. Besides, she had no heart for the long trek across the snow. She would wait till the ice went out, and the ships came in.

She would miss her daughter's company in the lonely weeks to come; but her daughter's need came first. She herself could make out; she had always made out, one way or another, no matter what happened. It was best that Gretchen leave these scenes for a time. She must go where there was nothing to remind her of Frank Jannison: otherwise the pride-canker might take too long to heal, and leave a permanent scar. Whether she mused at leisure, or ran in flight, depended on the events of the next few days.

Gretchen herself did not know what she wanted to do. She was embittered, baffled, and shaken. Yet even as her tears flowed, there was a feeling in her heart which was not sorrow, but akin to satisfaction. At least she was lucky to have found Jannison out before it was too late. Perhaps she was secretly glad, in some roundabout way she could not trace, that her doubts of him had proved sound, and that she was free.

"What will happen next, no one knows," Angus told her, as he wished her good night. "But I think there's going to be a truce."

"You mean, you'll be able to satisfy Ugruk?"

"I dinna mean that. I ha' no idea, yet, how to handle Ugruk. The truce willna be my doing, or any man's, but will be imposed on us from wi'out. The truce o' the storm. Look there."

He pointed to the tattered clouds racing across the sky. There was a queer feel to the air, a whisper and a stir as might move over a sleeping army just before the zero hour. The elemental powers were in array. Once more they would sweep down upon the frozen land, to show their eternal sovereignty, and to make afraid all living things.

Angus had hardly reached his quarters when the gale broke. The wind shrieked like an express train, and rocked the frame mission building on its foundations. It banged on the windows and howled in the chimney; it swept up the dry snow in eery clouds, blotting out the village as if it had never been.

The last two days had been unusually warm. Now the red column in the thermometer fell in one sweep, as if the bottom had dropped out of it, and did not stop falling till it registered thirty-five below zero. Such cold is deadly. It is usually far harder to endure than sixty below, because the latter temperature is almost never accompanied by wind. Human beings cannot go abroad in it, no matter how warmly they are dressed. Angus was thankful for his full scuttles of coal.

For four nights and four days the wind held without varying a point. It was one great shapeless roar that seemed part of the landscape. There was no fresh snow, but the snow-dust swept by in unending, blinding clouds. The Eskimos sat inert in their igloos, while the soot from the oil-lamps gathered on the ceiling. On the fifth day the wind slackened a little, and the temperature rose twenty degrees. Angus took advantage of this apparent lull in the storm to grope his way to Ugruk's igloo.

Before he had gone fifty feet he regretted starting. He could hardly keep on his feet, so wild was the wind, and his body seemed to be blowing out of him like smoke from a flue. No amount of exertion could keep him warm. The snow-dust stung his face and almost blinded him; he wandered in a white nightmare of sound and violence. Fortunately he had only a little way to go. Otherwise he would have been forced to turn back, with the possibility of losing his way and perishing within a quarter of a mile of shelter.

He crawled through the round aperture of Ugruk's igloo, and for once in his life was grateful for the stifling heat of the oil-lamps. He found his brother and all seven members of Tweegock's family lying in their sleeping robes, but Ugruk got up, slipped on his parka, and sat with Angus before the yellow flame.

The intense silence of the room startled Angus. Not a gust of wind penetrated this underground lair, and the roar of the gale was only a low murmur beyond the thick walls. But it would be waiting for him outside. He had better come to business and depart as soon as possible to his own more comfortable quarters.

"Ugruk, I told you long ago to put Gretchen out of your mind. It was wrong for an Eskimo to try to marry a white girl, and trouble was bound to come from it. Well, that trouble did come, as ye know."

Ugruk nodded, but without change of expression. "I see'm."

"Konrad is dead. Ye dinna like Konrad, yet ye dinna want him to die."



“Ugruk no care.” The Eskimo shook his head somberly. “Konrad live, Konrad die, no matter to Ugruk.”

“It would have mattered to you, plenty, if he hadn’t fallen on his knife. That knife was aimed at you. He meant to kill you.”

“But him no kill me. I catch his arm. No man move his arm when Ugruk catch it—Ugruk, him strong as white bear.” Suddenly the Eskimo stood up and raised his big arms high into the air, a dramatic gesture that made Angus catch his breath. “Ugruk, him strongest man in Narwhale Cape.”

Angus stared in amazement. He had never seen such an emotional outburst in an Eskimo. How had Ugruk gained this sudden confidence? What ferment had been working in his alien soul? It might mean trouble.

“Ye had a narrow escape, just the same,” Angus said, without getting up. “Ye might ha’ been killed—all because ye tried to get something not meant for you to ha’. Ye see, Ugruk, ye canna ha’ Gretchen. She is a white girl, and canna marry an Eskimo. The more ye try to get her, the more trouble ye’ll get into, and the more lives will be lost.”

The Eskimo stared a long time into the flame. “If Ugruk lose his life, him not know it,” he answered at last. “Eyes, they shut so him no see; fingers stiff, so him no feel. Him dead like whale cast up by sea. But if him lose Gretchen, he know that, plenty well. Him see empty ground where him plan to build igloo. Him see empty robe where him want her plenty. Him feel Eskimo skin—dark, ugly, not soft white skin. So you no scare Ugruk out. Him keep on try to get Gretchen.”

“But ye canna ha’ her. Ye’re batting your head against a stone wall. Don’t ye believe me?”

“I no believe you. You think you tell truth, but Ugruk think you tell lie. Ugruk, him buy Gretchen. Him pay fair price. She mine, and Ugruk take her.”

“I’ve come to talk to you about that deal ye made wi’ Konrad. Before he died, he said to gi’ you back your foxskin. So ye can have it any time ye come to the trading store after it, or else I’ll get it and bring it to you, when the storm’s over. And ye can have the credit Konrad allowed you besides.”

Ugruk continued to gaze into the flame. “*Namick.*”

“Ye mean ye winna take the skin back?”

“*Namick, namick.* I no want skin. I want Gretchen.”

“But ye can sell it again.”

“Ugruk sell it once, him no go back on deal. Him keep what him buy, no take back.”

Angus got up and put his hand on his brother’s arm. “Then what do ye mean to do? Take the girl by force?”

“She mine, she mine!” The strange eyes glowed. “When storm she blow out, Ugruk go to Konrad’s house, take home what him buy. If girl she fight, Ugruk hold her tight like she new dog, take her home anyway, keep her for squaw. Job plenty easy now. Konrad he dead, talk-talk old men they gone to island, doctor him go bad, lie drunk in house. No white men left to say, ‘No, Ugruk, you can’t have Gretchen.’”

Angus’s hand closed tighter on Ugruk’s big forearm. “There’s one white man in the village whom ye hanna mentioned,” he said quietly.

“You?”

“Yes. I’m still here, and able to stand between you and the girl. And I tell you, ‘No, Ugruk.’ I tell you, ‘You canna ha’ Gretchen.’”

The Eskimo turned his head and met the white man’s eyes. “You say no all you dam’ please. Ugruk take girl just the same, no get in trouble. You no try to kill *me*. You my brother.”

A sinister voice that Angus hardly recognized as his own spoke through his lips. “Ye ha’ better not count too much on that.”

“So you try to kill Ugruk too, eh? Then Ugruk, him die, no can think about Gretchen any more. But if Ugruk live, he take Gretchen!” Then, with a solemnity that caught Angus up, the words falling like waves on a rocky coast: “When—storm—blow by, Ugruk—take—Gretchen—be—Ugruk’s squaw. She—mine. She—mine.”

As Angus crept through the dark passage of Ugruk’s igloo, he was reminded of the storm outside. He heard it roaring, ready to pounce on him in insensate fury, and he dreaded to face it. This hour with Ugruk had depressed and disheartened him. Yet when he passed through the outer door, he looked up with kindling eyes.

The sky was considerably lighter than when he entered. The wind still blew violently, but in long gusts rather than in one resistless surge. If the air in his nostrils told him true, the temperature had risen several degrees. This

was apparently the tail of the storm—and the situation offered exciting possibilities. He did not head toward his own quarters, but struck off across the village to see Gretchen.

He paused in the outer hall, and looked at Konrad's barometer. It was rising rapidly. When he faced Gretchen, she sprang up from her chair. His face was flushed, not with cold, and his eyes were shining with excitement.

“What has happened?” the girl asked.

“Nothing yet. And nothing must be allowed to happen, until we know just how we stand. We ha' got to approach this thing wi' care. Gretchen, ha' ye noticed that the storm is blowing out?”

“It seems to me it isn't making quite so much noise.”

“The clouds are breaking away. I think it will be a clear night, moderately cold. What time does the moon rise?”

“I don't know exactly. I think just after midnight. What are you getting at?”

“If the wind dies down a little more, and the moon comes out, do ye think it would be safe to travel?”

“It depends on where you want to go. I think I'd chance it, if it were important. Likely there'll be fine weather tomorrow—we always count on it, after a storm like this—and the snow will have a wonderful wind-crust.” She approached him, and peered intently into his luminous eyes. “Angus, do you mean that we might slip away from Ugruk tonight?”

“It's a chance.” He paced up and down the room. “Maybe it's our best chance. But we mustna take too great risk. I can protect you from Ugruk, ye ken, if worst comes to worst.”

“By force, you mean?” She spoke grimly.

“Force would be the last resort. I dinna want to think o' that. Ugruk is my brother—I canna get away from it, no matter how hard I try.”

“Then face the facts, Angus. Has Ugruk refused to take back the skin?”

“Aye.”

“He says he's going ahead with his bargain?”

“Aye.”

“Then how is anyone going to stop him except with force? You can’t argue with him, and you know it. It’s like arguing with the ice-pack. If we stay here, one of us will have to kill him, and that’s all there is to it. Do you want to face a proposition like that?”

“My God, Gretchen!” Angus stopped his pacing and confronted her. “I ha’ lived wi’ that prospect for four days and four nights. Just now I heard it on his own lips. And that’s why I ha’ come to you.”

“I don’t want to kill him, any more than you do,” the girl said. “I’d take almost any kind of risk to avoid trouble.” She listened a moment to the long gusts of the wind. “He’d never dream that we’d try to steal away tonight.”

“I dinna think so, either. We could steal a march on him easily.”

“And he couldn’t overtake us, without dogs.”

“Not if we rode the sled and let the team run. By cutting straight across the bays we’d be in the old men’s cabin in forty-eight hours.”

“So soon? Well, it’s possible.” Gretchen’s face brightened. “Why, it’s the way out! There’s nothing to it. The storm is moderating. We wouldn’t have to weigh down the sled with supplies, but just take enough to last us through to the cabin. Bill and Charlie have plenty of stores, and can stake me for the rest of the trip.”

“We’d want an extra supply, just the same,” Angus cautioned. “We dinna want to figure too close. We might get held up for a couple o’ days on the trail.”

“We can take plenty, and still not weigh down the sled. Angus, it’s a wonderful plan. If you won’t attempt it, I’ll go alone.”

“I think I ha’ better go wi’ you. If something should happen, and Ugruk overtake you on the trail, ye might feel better to ha’ me along. I can turn you over to the old men, and come back.”

So it was decided. They called in Mrs. Konrad, and told her of their plan. She approved at once; she too knew that Ugruk’s mad desire was no longer to be restrained. At once they began preparations for departure.

Angus’s weather predictions came true. The clouds blew away; the Great Bear blazed overhead. While the old moon rose, while the village lay silent as the burrows of the dead, while the wind raved and sobbed, the malemiuts were hitched to the sled, and the travelers stole away.

No one but Gretchen's mother saw them go. Bravely she watched until the shadows hid them, and their last backward glance showed her standing in the doorway, gazing into the gloom. It was a scene Gretchen would never forget. It symbolized the deathless spirit of motherhood. Renunciation. Love that gives everything and asks nothing in return.

With her pocket compass, Gretchen charted the course. They would strike straight across the bays to the island where the old men had their cabin. Under ordinary conditions, this would have been impossible. Usually these shoals were one frozen torment, an impenetrable wilderness of ice. There would be mounds, hills, and mountain-ranges of ice; hollows, swales, pits and ravines; moated castles, buttresses, and ramparts. But this year the bay-ice had never broken up. On the night of the first big freeze the inshore wind had forced the ice-pack in against the village, but the bays beyond had been sheltered, because of their particular contour, and the dead water had frozen as smooth as a skating-rink. Before the wind could swing around to enter the bays, the ice had thickened enough to resist the onslaughts of the pack. Now the snow covered it in an even sheet, firmly crusted by the wind.

The travelers could well feel grateful for these unusual conditions. If they had had to follow the shore, their journey would have been twice or three times as long. Moreover, they would never have found such smooth going. As soon as they crossed the cape onto the first of the level bays, they both mounted the sled and let the dogs out. The animals darted forward in full cry.

There is something indescribably exhilarating in sleighing behind fast dogs. This powerful team ran like a pack of wolves—effortless, smooth, and swift. The wind was behind them, and seemed to give them wings. The night was a miracle in blue crystal. The moon was bright as a polished shield; the crusted snow steel-gray. Gretchen was cheered in spite of herself. Her father's death and all her other grief seemed long ago and far away; she felt she was entering into a new life.

Wrapped in her deerskin sleeping-robe, she hardly felt the cold. Besides, Angus's body was close to hers, pressing hers, and she felt its warm, strong currents. She spoke to him only at long intervals. Words seemed unnecessary. Occasionally she consulted her compass, in the light of her electric flash.

The night paled. The dawn began to glimmer on the skyline. At last the morning came out bright and full, and the world was one great glitter as far as they could see. Still they sped on, with only an occasional brief rest.

Shortly before noon they halted at a nameless island lying off from the mouth of a great river. There was a deserted igloo here, largely broken down, yet it gave them an hour's rest and shelter from the wind. They warmed their food over their oil-lamp, ate lightly, and sped on.

Twilight found them outside the reefs, more than half-way to the old men's island. On the open ice they built their night's shelter—a low-walled dome of snow blocks which is the immemorial rest-house of the Eskimos. Gretchen lighted the lamp and thawed out meat for the dogs. She fed them generously, but this was their last meal until they reached the cabin. Such food as remained must be hoarded for her own and her companion's need.

She and Angus made their meal, then lay down, side by side, in their deerskin robes. The Arctic night came down, mysterious as death. The only sound or suggestion of sound was the *hiss-hiss-hiss* of the wind on the snow, and the soft whisper of their breathing.

They spoke little. Perhaps they feared that their hushed, breathless voices would betray their secret longings. Angus had only to stretch his arm to touch the girl's white throat. She knew she need merely draw her hand across his, as if by accident, to strike a spark that would set them both afire. They were utterly alone. Civilization and its codes lay far beyond frozen seas. They were young, lonely—hungry for love.

For long hours Angus could not sleep. Doubt roweled and tormented him. For all he knew, his code was a fool's dream, his ideals an illusion, his restraint another name for cowardice. If he passed the cup, it might never be offered to him again, and his reward would be disillusionment at last, bitter unslaked thirst, and regret. The call in the darkness was a reality. It stirred him more than even Gretchen would ever know. And for all that his senses could tell him, the call of conscience was a lie, a fraud.

Yet he could not turn aside. If his creed was a cheat, he must stand by it just the same. Otherwise, he would have nothing left to live for, and love and service and honor would be meaningless and vain. He had staked everything on this. If he abandoned it, he would be spiritually bankrupt. No matter how great his desire, or hers, he could not take Gretchen into his arms tonight. She had come thence under his protection, and he must guard her integrity at all costs.

Angus slept at last, half-waking from time to time with vague alarm. It seemed to him that the North had betrayed them, and all was not well with their trip. Not until dawn, however, did his fears take concrete form. He awakened to find that the faint hiss of the wind had increased to a hoarse

whistle. He slipped on his mukluks, broke away a block of snow, and peered out.

Conditions were not now so favorable. Clouds crept up over the horizon, deployed, formed uneasy masses, and charged across the sky. The wind had grown to a giant, the utmost that could be weathered out. If it increased a little more it would be a blizzard, and the travelers would be locked within their snow shelter as by iron doors.

Was this the last burst of the five-day gale, or was it a second gale driving hard upon the first? The answer to this question might actually mean life and death. It was a significant fact that at this point Angus remembered the dogs. And he thought of them in a capacity not concerned with harness and sleds. Their presence here, in easy reach, gave him a queer, grim satisfaction.

But no such pass had been reached. With the present weather and fair luck they could reach the old men's cabin at dusk tonight, though the journey would be arduous; for the wind was not with them now, but had swung around so that it blew straight in over the frozen sea.

Listening to that wind, Angus thought he heard a muffled booming and knocking, far away to the north. It was so faint that when he pulled up the hood of his parka he could not even imagine it. It might be merely the pulse of his blood in his ear-drums, so he decided to say nothing about it.

The team was harnessed and the travelers started on. The dogs ran well—with a desperate haste that puzzled Gretchen—and except for their constant tendency to veer to the southward, required almost no attention. Yet the ride was cold and long. The snow-dust swept over them, stinging, and blinding, in cloud after cloud of ghostly white. They would not even look to the north. And the wind got in under their robes, chilling them to the bone.

The gods of the Arctic were abroad today. The travelers could hear them, running and romping, and at times could almost see them through the veil of snow-dust. And, attendant upon these gods, was a grim camp-follower. Neither Gretchen nor Angus spoke of him, or let him into their thoughts, yet they knew that he was never far away, and by a slight mishap, a little ill-fortune, he might seize them both. His name was Death.

Listening keenly, Angus still heard from time to time a queer knocking and pounding away to the north. It seemed to be coming nearer. But he did not mention it to Gretchen, and it was nearly noon before she picked it up

herself. They had just stopped for one of their short rest periods. She listened a moment, then whirled on Angus.

“Do you hear that?”

“I ha’ been hearing it all morning.”

“Do you know what it is?”

“I ha’ a good idea.”

“It’s the spring break-up, ahead of its time.”

Angus shook his head. “Not the spring break-up,” he corrected. “It couldna come so early. It’s just a movement o’ the ice, due to the gale. The bay-ice is breaking up, not ahead of time, but long delayed. Ye ken, ye were counting on this to happen five months ago.”

“What difference does it make whether it’s behind or ahead of time?” The girl spoke bitterly. “If this ice breaks up while we’re on it, we’re goners, and you know it.”

Quickly he explained what he thought had happened. The gale had driven deep water from distant leads southward, and had started the pack-ice into motion. This was being driven against the shoal-water bay-ice, where it was piling up with irresistible force. The big seas and the battering-rams of ice were attacking the outer edge of the barrier, undermining it and shattering it, and at the same time the current that moves eastward along the shore was exerting a counter force, washing out and breaking off the ice-anchors that held the floes firmly to the reefs. The ever-increasing pressure of sea and current and berg would soon break up and demolish these smooth fields, and destroy any living creature that moved upon them.

True, the break-up might be only temporary. When the wind changed again, the intense cold might congeal the floes, and leave these bays a desolation of impassable ice. But this fact did not lessen the travelers’ danger. If the water broke through around them, they could not live.

“How far do you think it is?” Gretchen asked quietly.

“Ten miles, I should say.”

“I don’t think it’s that far. But it may be far enough for us to get in before the break-up. It’s a race for our lives from now on.”

She hardly raised her voice. Angus met her eyes, smiled, and helped her get settled in the sled. He sat behind her, and in a moment more the big



malemiuts were loping across the level snow. They ran low, with a long flying stride. The long miles sped under them.

As the afternoon advanced, the sound of the break-up came ever nearer. The knocking and pounding grew to a low rumble, the rumble to a subdued roar. By three o'clock, it sounded like a distant thunder-storm; by four, it reminded Angus of the heavy artillery fire he had heard in France. By five, it was one long reverberating crash, deafening and terrifying.

The blowing snow-dust concealed the advancing foe, but they could imagine him only too well. So heavy were the intrushing seas that the pack-ice was not only piled up against the edge of the bay-ice, but was forced under it, the huge cakes being pushed down by the pressure of their fellows until they touched bottom, filling all the space under the ice and driving the water forward to buckle and break the level fields beyond. The wedge of sunken ice, pressed up against the floes, would thrust on and on until the crust would shatter with the roar of a sixteen-inch gun, and hurl hundred-ton blocks of ice in all directions. As soon as the pressure forced a break, it would commence again. These explosions were occurring at every second at various points along the barrier, and besides there was the constant thunderous pounding of the pack-ice, the booming of the sea, and the hoarse screams, as of a giant's skyrocket, when the level fields cracked and ripped open.

The battle raged ever nearer. The ice-armies were advancing with a speed which neither Gretchen nor Angus had counted on. Yet they had been told many times that anything can happen when ice begins to move. They wished they had not tried to come on, but had turned southward at noon toward the shore. The way would have been twice or three times as long, and the break-up might have cut them off from the outlying isle, where the old men had their cabin; but with their small supply of food, and the dogs to fall back on, they could have fought through, with fair luck, to Nigaluk at the mouth of the Colville River. Why had they followed their own faulty judgment, instead of the wise instincts of their dogs? Even now it might be best to turn in toward shore, instead of trying to race the break-up the scant mile that remained between them and safety.

But now the dogs did not want to turn. Perhaps they knew, in the mysterious way of animals, that they were approaching their destination. The islet where the old men lived was not much more than a long roof in the vastness of the frozen sea, storm-swept and still hidden by the billowing clouds of snow-dust, but it was a refuge. All the powers of ice and wave could not shatter the solid rock on which the cabin stood. On the other hand,

the mainland lay several miles to the southward, too far to race the break-up. As Gretchen's whip whistled and cracked, the powerful animals gathered themselves for a last effort, and ran like grey-hounds.

But this was not fast enough. There was a sudden murmur under their feet, and the hard ice began to bulge up around them. It buckled like a metal plate, with a deliberate and assured power terrifying to see. Then there was a ripping, tearing sound, repeated three times, so loud in their ears that they were stunned. The dogs yelped and slid on the snow. The sled piled on top of them and was overturned.

Gretchen sprang up lightly and helped Angus, who was severely shaken, to his feet. "Old boy," she said kindly, "we didn't quite make it, did we?"

She pointed. Like great black serpents on the snow were three long crevices. There was one behind them, one in front, and one between them and the mainland.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ANGUS did not know the ice as Gretchen did. Therefore he could not accept what she accepted so quietly and bravely—the seeming certainty of defeat. He could not believe that the fight was practically over. The cracks looked only four or five feet wide. Nor did he anticipate what she thought would happen immediately—the break-up of the floe under their feet in a cataclysm of violence no terrestrial creature could survive.

Hers was the sensible view. Those great rifts in the ice were only the beginning of a frozen earthquake hard for a *chechaquo* to imagine. The floe would buckle up, shatter, and fall; the bergs would grind, crash, heave, and wallow; and these travelers would hardly know what hit them. But Angus knew no better than to fight on. He righted the sled, then stood upon it to peer about. His face was red and earnest, his eyes were wide under their frosty brows, he was dusted with snow from head to foot—at once an absurd and an inspiring figure.

“The crack dinna seem so wide further on,” he shouted to Gretchen. “Can ye make the dogs go?”

The girl laughed wildly and cracked her whip. Yes, she could make the dogs go. They flew over to the place Angus had indicated.

Here the crevice was but four feet wide. If it would remain so, they could get across and save the dogs, too. However, the floes were slowly, steadily moving apart. Angus whipped out his knife, and began to cut the dogs loose from the sled. At the same time Gretchen was unlashng the supplies, so that they could be thrown across to the floe beyond.

She hardly knew what she was doing. If she had stopped to think, she would have remembered that the old men’s cabin had been stocked with abundant supplies, and that these few things on the sled would not be needed. In all probability, she was wasting precious seconds. Yet she seemed to be driven by some deep-seated instinct. The first law of Arctic travel is to stay by the food supply, and this law commanded her still.

When the dogs were free, Angus beckoned them to jump across the fissure, but they hung back, whining. When he tried to force them, they cowered down on the ice. “Jump across and call ’em,” he yelled to Gretchen. The girl obeyed as soon as she could, first throwing over her snowshoes, and then springing across the black gap like a deer. But the dogs would not obey. Still they huddled, whining, close to the sled.

There was no more time to lose. The floes were drifting apart. Half-crazy with excitement, Angus began to pitch across the pokes of supplies. Gretchen screamed at him to hurry—that the floe behind him was breaking up. Indeed, it was rocking and moaning, apparently about to collapse.

By now he had thrown across the food and some of the robes. Behind him the tough ice was ripping open with a banshee scream, and the air about him and the sky above him and the floe beneath him was one great deafening roar. It was a nightmare moment. Gretchen and Angus too were temporarily insane; if they survived, they would remember the scene only in disconnected flashes—a mouth opened wide and yelling, a dog raising his nose to howl, the black streak of a new crevice zigzagging across the ice. Nature was insane too. Chaos reigned.

The gap was now seven feet wide. The dogs raced crazily about the floe. “Come, come,” Gretchen was yelling. “It’s your last chance.”

Angus threw over his snowshoes. Then he drew back, took a running start, leaped strongly, and landed with a yard to spare. If Gretchen and himself had kept their heads, they might now have called the dogs over, too; but their only thought was to reach land. They picked up such of their articles as they could find in the blowing snow-dust, and started for the island, just now visible. Bewildered by the break-up, the animals did not try to follow.

Although the ice quaked and bulged around them, it held long enough for the terror-driven pair to reach shore. When they felt the solid ground under their feet, instead of the reeling floe, they dropped their bundles and looked into each other’s faces. They hardly would have known each other. They were haggard and drawn, and their eyes burned luridly.

“We’ve been through hell together, haven’t we, Angus?” the girl cried hysterically.

“A hell o’ ice and snow,” Angus answered solemnly. “I dinna think Gehenna itself could be much worse.”

As yet there was no exaltation in his countenance or his voice. This must wait until they were warm and safe in the old men’s cabin. Now they must put on their snow-shoes for the half-mile march that remained.

But when they searched through their scanty supplies, they could find only three snowshoes. In the excitement of the escape, Gretchen had picked up only one of the pair she had thrown across the crevice. “It’s no matter,”

he told her, when he saw the despair in her face. “The old men will fix you up with an extra shoe. Now put on mine, and we’ll go to the cabin.”

Nevertheless, the accident depressed him. It might prove of no importance, yet under certain circumstances easily imagined, it could turn out to be the precise difference between life and death. Combining like pigmies to attack a lion, such little disasters can wreck the best-laid plans. Yet he did not censure her, even in his thoughts. He had been out of his head, too; he had failed to throw across Gretchen’s rifle. The only weapon saved from the wreck was his thirty-two-caliber pistol.

Under protest, she put on Angus’s snow-shoes, and led the way toward the old men’s cabin. To save Angus, she carried the greater part of the supplies. He followed the best he could, breaking through the snow-crust at almost every step. On into the nebulous drift they made their weary way.

Behind them the break-up roared and pounded. Before them lay the white drifts, wan, trackless, and forlorn. Hovering over them, never lifting, never mitigating, was the Great Cold. Twilight was just falling. It was the dreariest hour of the day, when all hope is suspended, when the soul is lonely, sad, and afraid. The two strained into the murk for the first glimpse of a cabin.

Perhaps they would see a light at the window. Their eyes ached for the sight. Perhaps they would see smoke, drifting up from the chimney. Perhaps, best of all, they would hear the old men’s voices as they reviled each other. Any sight or any voice, almost, would be better than these empty silent drifts stretching on and on before them.

Presently they made out a dark shape ahead. It was the old men’s cabin of driftwood and turf. But it seemed ominously silent. No dogs clamored at them, nor were there any tracks at the threshold. Gretchen spoke sharply over her shoulder.

“They’re not here, Angus.”

It was true. There was no smoke in the chimney. The little heap of driftwood in the lean-to, and the small hand-sled nearby, were covered with six inches of blown snow. Plainly Bill and Charlie had departed days or weeks before.

The travelers unhooked the door and stepped inside. But only the cold greeted them—the still, dismal cold of a forsaken house. Quickly Angus scratched a match and peered about the room.

Bare walls threw back the gleam. The truth was only too plain: the old men had vacated, apparently for good, and had taken their supplies with them. There were no pokes of oil and pemmican, no strings of dried deer meat. There were not even skins on the floor or robes on the wooden bunks. The only comfort to be seen was, a pile of kindling beside each of the two small stoves, ready for the cold hand of the first traveler that passed that way.

“We’ll make a fire,” Angus said dully, “then we’ll see how we stand.”

He laid the kindling with a shaking hand. A match was lighted; blessed warmth began to pervade the room. By laying on driftwood, he soon had a roaring fire. To cheer his companion still more, he left open the stove door, so that the firelight could glimmer on the walls.

“What does it mean, Angus?” Gretchen asked at last. “I can’t make my mind work.”

Angus had been staring dazedly into the fire, but the question seemed to arouse him. He turned to his companion and smiled into her eyes. The smile itself was dim, tired, and forlorn, but the spirit behind it moved the girl deeply. Her mind seemed to clear; a vestige of her courage welled back into her heart. She was ineffably grateful to him.

“I dinna ken, for sure, but I do ken we’re going to come through,” he answered at last.

“You think the old men will be back?”

“Perhaps, but we dinna dare count on that. Gretchen, we’re going to make our own way out. We can do it, if we set our hearts on it.”

“But you don’t understand, Angus. The sea will likely be full of broken ice for weeks. Even if it freezes up tonight, the bays will be practically impassable. The ice won’t be smooth any more, but will be torn and pitted and piled up so we can’t travel ten miles a day.”

“Do you think we can reach the mainland?”

“Perhaps. This island runs in pretty close at the other end, and the strait will likely be jammed full, so that we can cross. But there’s nothing on the mainland but hundreds of miles of open coast.”

“Aye, but we can follow that coast—as long as we can keep going.”

“Toward home, you mean?”

“If it’s the nearest place to go for help. But since we can’t cut straight across the bays, and must go the long way, we’d better head for Nigaluk.”

“But we have only two or three days’ supply of food. We’ll never make it in God’s world.”

“Anything is possible in God’s world. We’re just *obliged* to make it. We hanna much food, true, but we must eke it out. If we had five pounds less, I dinna think there’d be any hope. But wi’ what we ha’, and the best o’ luck, and the absolute limit o’ human endurance, we can come through.”

She knew what he meant. Even a little food, to put in the mouth and to stave off the horrible griping of emptiness, would help their chances immeasurably. He estimated that there would be a morsel for each day of the long trek. But every ounce was vital. By hoarding it, and getting the utmost from it, they might, more dead than alive, come through.

“We have no lamp, and no oil to burn in it,” the girl said.

“No, and if we get a blizzard or a hard spell of cold, it will finish us. But maybe the weather will stay moderate. If it does, we can build small snow-huts and keep warm.”

“You saved the two sleeping-robos?”

“Aye, but the extra robes were lost. No matter—we couldna carry ’em anyway. We’ll put what we ha’ on that hand-sled ye saw in the lean-to. It isna much good, and hasna even a gee-pole—I s’pose the old men used it for hauling in driftwood—but it’s better than carrying our supplies on our backs.”

“There’s one thing you haven’t thought of, and it’s going to beat us. We have only one pair of snowshoes.”

Watching him, she saw his face cloud. The snow was hip-deep on the level. The crust was strong enough to support the webs, but not an unshod mukluk. With snowshoes she could walk swiftly; without them Angus must wallow and plunge a yard at a time, and she could not mush on and leave him.

“We’ll try it, anyway,” was all he could answer.

“Yes, we’ll try it. We’ll not go down without a struggle, and we’ll show this devil’s country how hard we are to kill. I’m with you in that, Angus.” Gretchen’s eyes burned feverishly. “Just the same, you’d better make your will, if you’ve got any to make. There are too many ‘ifs’ against us. If a

blizzard sets in—if we lose our way for even a day—if we get a spell of forty below—but why go over them again? You know 'em all.”

“Aye, we’ve faced the facts, and ’tis better so. We know just how we stand.”

“I hope so. One more ‘if,’ and we might as well lie down here, with the door open, and let the cold come in and finish us off with some kind of decency.”

Her voice died away. They lay prone, resting, on the rude bunks. They tried not to think of the future; there was no profit in it, only fear and despair. Surely they had faced it bravely enough. They had considered every possible contingency, it seemed, and knew just how they stood.

But did they know? Gretchen started and sat up when she heard the rattle of the latch outside the cabin door.

For one breathless second, she dared to hope that the two old miners had returned. But when the door opened, there was only one figure on the threshold, and its face was too dark to be either Bill’s or Charlie’s. At first the kindly shadows concealed that face, but as the newcomer lurched into the room, the firelight showed it plain.

It was haggard, blue with cold save where the frost rime lay on brows and scanty beard, and its lines were black and deep as old scars; still she did not mistake it. She stared with slowly widening eyes. Ugruk had not remained bereft in Narwhale Cape, but had come to claim his own.

But first there was a more pressing need. He advanced, swaying from side to side with weakness, until he stood before Angus. He held out his hand, palm up, in an age-old gesture. “*Kow-kow*,” he said simply.

Angus gasped sharply. “Where’s your *kow-kow*?”

Ugruk held out both palms—empty. “*Kow-kow—pechuk!* (The food is all gone.)”



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

UGRUK'S wild adventure had begun two nights before.

He had wakened in the warm igloo with a sense of misgiving. Perhaps it was a telepathic message—neither he nor anyone else will ever know as to this. Driven by a power outside himself, he had got up, dressed, and emerged into the storm. As on a hundred other nights, he had trudged over to the trading building to look at Gretchen's window. Almost at once he had discovered that the sled-dogs were gone from their shelters; and the almost-obliterated sled-tracks told the rest.

His bird had flown. Ugruk had been close to madness, perhaps even to murder, in that first hour of discovery. Frantic, desperate, he had started running across the cape toward the frozen bays. If he had any idea at all, it was to run down the fugitives on foot.

But he had paused on the beach. His keen mind had recalled a matter of which he had heard the preceding day, but which had not yet become known in the village. He also might find means of rapid travel. Four days earlier, on the eve of the storm, his tribesmen Kotsegear had come in from Nigaluk with a half-dozen domestic reindeer. There had been nothing surprising in this fact—although the Narwhale Cape Eskimos did not herd reindeer regularly as did the Barrow and Nigaluk natives, they often trafficked in the animals, for meat and skin. The only unusual aspect of the present transaction was the Kotsegear had bought these deer not for slaughter, but as draft animals. Some of them were already broken to the sled, a common practice down the coast. Because the gale had kept the natives in their huts and cut short the usual village gossip, Angus and Gretchen had not heard of the purchase.

Ugruk had hastened to Kotsegear's house and, by transferring his credit at the trading store, had bought two of the animals. Hitching them to a light sled, he had driven them at breakneck speed across the frozen inlets. The snow-dust had wiped out the fugitives' trail, and he could not see them in the storm, but he had actually overtaken them and passed them during their night's rest.

After certain hours, of whose number Ugruk had not even an approximate idea, the deer had collapsed on the ice. They had been literally run to death. But even now Ugruk had not turned homeward. Like a lash on

his naked back, his dream and his passion had scourged him on. This was the most intense, perhaps the most noble experience of Ugruk's life.

He scorned hunger, danger, fatigue. True, his hunger had not yet become acute, his danger not yet visible, but only a veiled threat in the distance, and his fatigue not yet intense; but he had showed will-power far beyond Eskimo limits, which must have come straight down from Red Mackenzie. His white blood had been in the ascendancy. This was his great hour.

Without even pausing to drink the dying reindeer's blood, he had trotted on. Through the dark hours he had sped, in some fashion keeping his course. Surely the gods of his people had been on his side that night. He had headed toward the old men's cabin, where he had felt the fugitives were bound.

He had reached the island ahead of his quarry, but in the storm had passed by the cabin and had run to the upper end of the island. It was an hour before he had found his way back.

Now he stood swaying in the firelight. Angus seemed to waver in his sight, and Ugruk was not sure he was real. Gretchen, beautiful as a dream even now, seemed to dim and brighten, alternately—to sweep toward him until he could almost clasp her, then to recede in the unattainable distance. The only sound was his tired heart leaping in fitful throes.

He was not aware of asking for food. When he heard the muttered words, he thought someone else had spoken them. "*Kow-kow*," he said again. "*Kow-kow pechuk. Kow-kow pillitay. (Give me food.)*"

The girl spoke sharply, English words that Ugruk's tired brain could not interpret. "Angus, don't give him an ounce." Her eyes were steely; her voice cut the silence of this breathless room like a sword. "Let him die; the sooner the better."

"But I can't let him die," Angus answered dully.

"What's he good for, except trouble? If he gets his strength back, he'll use it against me."

For a considerable time Angus stood with bent head. At first Gretchen thought he was praying, but peering closer, she saw that he was counting on his fingers. That he was estimating the food supply, and the number of days it must last, she did not doubt. At last he shook his head and turned.

"Ugruk," he began kindly, "to sleep is to eat. Did ye ever hear that saying?"

"Ugruk—no—understand."

“Sleep will restore you, like food. I canna gi’ you any food tonight. Ye understand that?”

“You—no—give—Ugruk—*kow-kow*?”

“Not tonight. I’ll think about it again tomorrow. Neither Gretchen nor I ha’ had anything to eat tonight, and we ha’ had a hard day, too. Now lie down and sleep. I will keep the fire burning at least till midnight.”

Ugruk turned at once and lay down on the floor back of the stove. Instantly he was asleep. Angus and Gretchen sat on the opposite side, in the rude chairs which Bill and Charlie had fashioned of driftwood. Gretchen had broken noticeably since Ugruk’s entrance; her face was ghastly white, and she pressed the back of her hand against her mouth.

“What are you going to do?” she cried at last.

“I dinna know, yet.”

“I know what my father would do. He’d kill Ugruk, and take his snowshoes.”

Angus got up and walked to the girl’s side. He took her hand away from her mouth, and pressed it gently between his own. “Steady, girl,” he whispered. “Steady Gretchen. Ye must mind what ye say, or ye will have heartache, later. We ha’ the North to fight, and we mustna waste our strength fighting each other.”

Her eyes slowly filled with tears. “I’m sorry. You’re brave, Angus. But I’m afraid you won’t be stern enough, now that we are up against it so. I wish my father was here to show you.”

“Your father’s sternness only got him killed. I’ll be stern too, if ye desire, but maybe not in the way ye mean. But even Emil Konrad wouldna do what ye say. Except to protect you, he wouldna raise his hand against Ugruk.”

“But Ugruk has come here to take me.”

“Aye, and I will stand between you and him. But I canna take his life to save my own, nor could Emil Konrad, if he were here in my place. Anyway, I am not Emil Konrad. I must go my own way.”

“And your way will cost both our lives, if you’re not careful.” Gretchen’s voice began to rise, hysterically, but she checked it and held it level. “Just remember this, Angus. Only two people can go from here. There are only two pairs of snowshoes, bedding for two, food for two. If three try to go, they will all three die. There’s no margin of safety. The chances are all

against two making out; for three there's no chance at all. If you give Ugruk even one meal you'll not only strengthen him to make trouble for me, but will end all hope of our coming through."

"I ha' thought o' that."

"You promise me you won't give him any food?"

"I will be fair, Gretchen. I canna promise anything more, until I ha' time to think it out. I'll be fair to you, to Ugruk, and to myself, as far as the good Lord shows me how. Now ye must get in your sleeping-robe. Ye won't be able to cross the strait at least till tomorrow noon, so ye can take a good night's sleep. To sleep—is to eat."

She turned at once, laid her deerskin robe on the bunk, and crawled into it. In spite of her torn nerves, she was soon asleep. Her last look of the room showed Angus slumped in his chair, his face ruddy in the firelight. A wave of tenderness swept over her.

For a long time Angus listened to the wind. He was aware that its tune had somehow changed. He got up, opened the door, and peered out; the night was pitch-black. There was an inch of fresh snow on the threshold, and when he held out his hand, the dry flakes fell on it like cold feathers. Well, if this kept up, the out-trail would be all the harder. Soft, dry snow is bad enough for men well-fed; for the starving it is death.

He got wood from the lean-to, fed the fire, and sat down again. His mind began to move in great circles, embracing all his Arctic adventure. Particularly he recalled, in the least detail, his farewell to Red Mackenzie. He had promised to atone for Red Mackenzie's sin, to make wrong right, to see justice done.

He had not known what the sin was, then, but he had found out. Red Mackenzie had incurred a debt he could never pay, and had passed it into Angus's hands. Could Angus wipe it out by wiping out the creditor? Not by any code he knew. To atone for Ugruk's birth, he must make Ugruk's life worth while. Could he achieve this by forsaking him to famine and cold? Such was not the law. At the last and at the worst, could he stand by and let Ugruk die when he had power to save him?

Yet when he tried to analyze the debt, and to think out its discharge, his thoughts kept straying to Gretchen. Well, Gretchen came first. Why this was so he did not know; he only knew it *was* so. Gretchen's life was worth more than Ugruk's, and more than Ugruk's soul. This last was not sound theology,

but it was revelation straight from the heart. Gretchen's life and prospects must be looked to, first of all.

He got up, crossed the narrow room, and looked down at the sleeping girl. How he wanted her! He could not deny this now. He had been a fool ever to try to deny it. The stars had guided him here, to this mystic North, not to find Ugruk, but only to find her. She would make his life whole; without her it would remain a fragment.

A ghost of beauty haunted her still. Her lashes shadowed her white cheek, her red lips were parted, her hair was deep black as the Arctic night. And this beauty had been poured out for him! No one else could know it to the full; to no other could it be perfect physical fulfilment. The perfection, the completeness, of her beauty was in a sense his own gift; his own eyes had endowed her with it; no other man could see it, and therefore, except for Angus, it did not exist. His arms ached for her. His lips thrilled at the thought of pressing hers. Only by possessing her to the full—body and soul—could his rightful destiny come true.

And who stood between him and this wonderful happiness? No one but Ugruk. A half-breed Eskimo, godless and ignoble. And this had been true from the first. Always his shadow had fallen between Angus and Gretchen. And Angus dared not step upon it. Frank Jannison had been no more than an episode. This drama of the North had but three characters—Angus, Gretchen, and Ugruk. And Ugruk was his brother!

Now the three were face to face. They were alone with the North. The eternal mystery of the Arctic was over them and upon them, and held their fate concealed. Yet all three must move, speak, and act as had been predestined long ago. This gentle, hesitant touch of Angus's hand on the girl's breast had lain in the womb of time since time's own beginnings, waiting for its appointed second—at least so Angus believed.

It was a solemn thought. It made man the direct instrument of God. It steadied this Presbyterian minister, inspired him, and gave him strength. When at last he crawled into his sleeping-robe, he believed he knew his course.

However, he lay sleepless a long time. Tragic, bitter doubts assailed him. For all he knew, the Deil was beside his bed. He was tempted as never before.

He slept at last, but rose every hour to feed the fire. He did not forget his brother, sleeping without covers beside the stove. When the gray dawn

broke over the frozen world, his path showed plain and straight. He had conquered himself and his doubts.

Gretchen, waking, stared at him with wide eyes. He looked more commonplace than ever. Freckles dusted his red face; his sandy hair was ruffled; tired lines emphasized the irregularity of his features. Yet he was never so dear to her as now. She saw him through a mist of tears.

But she feared his lean jaw. It betokened a steadfastness that no art, no lure of hers could seduce. The shine in his eyes alarmed her out of all reason.

He seemed to know just what he wanted to do. First he took a small quantity of pemmican out of one of the pokes, warmed it over the fire, and divided it with Gretchen. "Eat," he told her quietly. She obeyed, and he ate his own portion. Curiously enough, he did not attempt to hide this pleasant rite from Ugruk. Indeed, he lingered over every bite, and smacked his lips almost in Ugruk's face. It looked as if he were deliberately tantalizing his brother.

The Eskimo's eyes began to glisten. He made short, uneasy gestures with his hand. "*Kow-kow*," he begged at last. "*Kow-kow pillitay*."

But Angus did not seem to hear him. He began to untie the pokes and lay out the total supply of food they contained. "Is this all we have?" he asked Gretchen.

"Every ounce. In heaven's name, Angus—what do you mean to do?"

He began to divide the food into two equal piles. Meticulously he measured every ounce of pemmican, and weighed in his hand every stick of dried venison. When the task was completed, he took one of the piles and laid it on Gretchen's bunk. With it he put her sleeping-robe, and his own pair of snow-shoes. "This is yours, Gretchen," he said. "It's the precise half o' our total supply o' food. I think it best to divide it now, for reasons ye will soon see."

She gazed at him in dread. "What do you mean to do?" she demanded again.

"I mean to do what I ha' to do—no more." He turned, and put the other pile of food on his own cot. "Ugruk," he called.

"*Ab*," came the guttural answer.

“Ye see this *kow-kow*?”

“*Ab.*”

“Ye want some o’ it, don’t you?”

“*Arre gah, arre gah.*”

“There’s enough here to get one man out, if his luck’s good, and he hoards it well. Ugruk, this food is for sale. What will ye gi’ me for it?”

Gretchen cried out, and hurrying to Angus, seized his hand. She was gray with fear. “Angus, have you gone crazy? For the love of God, don’t do that—”

He turned sternly toward her. “Ye must leave this to me. Ye ha’ your half the food, and this is my half. I am doing the only thing that’s left to do.” Then, turning away: “Come, Ugruk? How much will ye gi’ me for this *kow-kow*?”

Ugruk looked at the pile with glistening eyes. “Ugruk, him give you heap skins. Him got three white fox in igloo—him catch ten, twenty more for you.”

“No, I dinna want any foxskins.” Angus smiled gravely. “I dinna see how I could use them, out here. What else can ye gi’ me?”

“I give you twenty foxskins twice. All I catch next winter.”

“I said I dinna want any foxskins, Ugruk. I dinna want any furs o’ any kind.”

“Then Ugruk give you his traps. Him got plenty traps. Him give you five walrus tusks, one old walrus tusk plenty colored. Trader, him say him give Ugruk twenty dollar for that tusk.”

“I don’t want any ivory, Ugruk, or any traps either.”

Ugruk stood in deep thought. From time to time he glanced back at the food, and his mouth watered. At last a cunning gleam came into his deep-set slanted eyes.

“Ugruk, he know now. He make heap good bargain with you. If you—give—Ugruk—*kow-kow*”—and his dark hand began to waggle—“Ugruk—let—you—put water—on—head.”

Angus did not smile now. This matter was too close to his heart. His eyes kindled, and he slowly shook his head. “No, brother. Ye must be

willing to pay for baptism, not expect to be paid for receiving it. Such a baptism wouldna get you into heaven. What else ha' ye got, Ugruk."

"Ugruk, he no got nothing else. Ugruk, he starve."

Angus looked intensely into his face. "There's one o' your possessions ye hanna mentioned."

The Eskimo looked sad. "You mean Ugruk's snow-shoes?"

"No, I dinna mean your snow-shoes. Snow-shoes wouldna be much good wi'out grub. All right, I'll tell you what I want." And in a voice that never quavered: "I'll trade you the food for the girl."

The only sound in the room was Gretchen's sharp gasp. Long seconds passed before her throat could shape words, then they came in a rush. "Oh, you have no right to buy and sell me like a dog."

"If your father had the right to sell you, I ha' the right to buy you," Angus answered quietly. "But please don't interfere in this matter, Gretchen. I'm doing the only thing that can be done." He turned and addressed Ugruk in a businesslike tone. "What do ye think o' it? You take the grub—I take the girl."

For the first time in Angus's memory, Ugruk's face portrayed emotion. An intense, poignant sorrow darkened it, emphasizing its deep-cut lines. Gretchen, hating him a second before, now almost pitied him.

"Ugruk—no—want—sell Gretchen," he complained at last. "He just as soon starve—no have Gretchen."

But Angus was adamant. "Starve, then," he answered crisply. He reached to the poke of food, broke off a splinter of dried venison, and put it in his mouth.

Ugruk moved nearer the food. He eyed it as a child might, then his eye roved to Gretchen. Caught up by this drama, the girl stood frozen, watching his face.

"Ugruk, he mighty hungry," he muttered.

"You'll be hungrier still before the day's over. And you'll be dead by the end of the week."

"You give Ugruk just one handful dried venison. He your brother."

"I need every bite o' it. You gi' me Gretchen, and I let you ha' all o' it."



“If Ugruk die”—and the Eskimo seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Angus—“he no have Gretchen anyway. And Ugruk he die pretty quick if he no get *kow-kow*.”

“About two days from now, I think—that is, if ye try to travel.”

The native looked from Gretchen to the food. The old, old war between idealism and materialism raged in his heart. The girl was beautiful beyond his poor power to tell. If he could possess her wholly, even for a day, it would square all his account with life, justify his unsought birth and all the travail of his existence, and atone for his dark skin. It would be the nearest that he could dream to heaven.

He wanted to die rather than give her up. Vaguely he knew that this would be a noble, wondrous thing. If he could just hold out, and not yield, he would be transfigured; from a driven man-brute creature he would be like the white men themselves. There would be no one in the tribe like him. He would leave them all behind, cowering in their igloos. No more need he fear the Torno, the Spirit Bear, the Phantom Reindeer that rode the wind and the hell-dogs that ran the ice.

But could he face death—the cold, the dark, the void? *Nah gah*. He was an Eskimo.

His flesh, his conquering flesh, demanded that he live on. He could not die until the North forced him to; he was but the sledge-dog of the raw powers he lived among. Outside the cabin lay the deep snow, the torn and tortured ice, the great cold; and these were his masters, rather than his feeble, darkened spirit.

He had a long, long way to climb, possibly a thousand lifetimes, before he could reach the glory. Like the bear and the wolf, self-preservation was his first law, a tyrant’s law imposed when men still walked in darkness, and he could not deny it. Like Esau, he must barter away his birthright—a birthright handed down from his white sires—for a mess of pottage.

He was an Eskimo, and hungry. He bent and laid his hands on the food.

“I take him,” he said. “You take Gretchen.”

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GRETCHEN seemed in a trance, and not until Ugruk had taken a quantity of the pemmican and sat down on the floor to eat it, did she waken and stir. Then she came creeping up to Angus, as if she were stalking him, and peered into his face. "Oh, you fool!" she cried bitterly.

"Maybe so. But it's the good Lord's fault, not mine."

"If you had waited awhile, and given him one meal, he would have tried to seize me." She was half hysterical with rage and fear. "Then you'd have had an excuse to kill him."

"Ye told me not to gi' him even a bite. Besides—I dinna want an excuse to kill him. Ye are na talking sense, Gretchen. He is my brother."

"He is an Eskimo. Your life is worth ten of his. And now you've thrown your life away for a crazy ideal, and a promise made to a dead man. Well, it's not my funeral. I'm going as soon as I can cross the strait. I'll go on, and live, and have a good time, and forget you—left in this hell-hole to die."

"That is just what I want you to do." His eyes began to glow with a zealot's fire. "To go on, and live—and have a good time—and forget me, left here in this hell-hole with my crazy ideal—and my silly promise made to a dead man."

"Oh!" The rage died in her eyes, and only fear, growing and tragic, remained. "I didn't mean what I said."

"And I dinna mean I want you to forget me, either." His face clouded. "I want you to remember me—always."

Before she could answer Angus, Ugruk got up and came hastening toward them. He had bolted his pemmican; his first hunger was relieved. The manifest excitement on his dusky face checked the stream of their own wild thoughts.

"Ugruk, he want Gretchen back," the Eskimo said.

"But ye sold her to me," Angus answered.

"But Ugruk want buy her back. He give you all *kow-kow* he got left, plenty foxskins too."

"Ye're too late, brother. I winna sell her to you. The deal's closed."

Ugruk nodded, sadly. The shine went out of his eyes. “Ugruk, he fool. But brother—you fool too. You buy girl, but you no keep her heap long. You no live without *kow-kow*.” A dim hope crept into his face. “Pretty soon you lie down, starve, die. Then maybe you give her to Ugruk?”

“No, I’m going to send her outside. Ye understand, Ugruk, she is mine, whether I live or die.”

The Eskimo nodded. “You no give her to brother, when you no use her no more?”

“No, never. Now listen what I want you to do. Ye put your grub on the little hand-sled, and the girl will put hers there, too. Ye are na to touch hers, and she winna touch yours.”

“*Ab.*”

“As soon as ye can cross the ice to the mainland, you and she take the sled and start for Nigaluk. One can break trail through the soft snow, the other will pull the sled. Ye can take turns.”

“*Ab.*”

“Ye can take my sleeping-robe to sleep in. She will sleep in her own. At night ye will build a wind-shelter, and sleep. To sleep is to eat. In the day ye will travel—step after step, mile after mile, no matter how hard it is. And ye must take only a morsel o’ food each day. When ye feel tired, don’t stop, but keep on going. When ye feel hungry, make yourself wait and wait and wait before ye eat, and then only eat a bite. Unless ye do this, ye will both die.”

“*Nah gah,*” Ugruk whispered.

“But will ye do what I say?”

“*Ab.*”

“Remember, ye are na to lay hands on the girl except to help her in the snow. She isna yours, but mine. Even if ye are two weeks on the trail, ye are na to lay hands on her, on her grub, or anything that belongs to her. She will ha’ my pistol, to kill you if ye molest her, but I know she winna need it. Ye understand?”

“*Ab.*”

And Ugruk did understand. She would have no use for the pistol. He was an Eskimo, and the Eskimo *will not steal*. They make free with each other’s wives, but this is a matter of mutual agreement and satisfaction. The strange thing was that Gretchen could travel with Ugruk clear to Point Barrow, day

after day on the trail and night after night in the wind-shelter cut off from all living things, and be perfectly safe with him. This was incredible, but true, as any Arctic explorer will affirm; and Angus staked everything on it. She was a white man's property, and except by the owner's consent, she was taboo.

"Tell me what ye are going to do, so I know I can trust you."

"Ugruk, him take girl as you tell him. Him no try get her. She yours."

"That's right, brother. And if ye stay together and help each other, ye'll both ha' a better chance o' coming through alive. She will do her part o' the work, ye do yours. And now I want another promise from you. It is nothing that will benefit me, but only yourself. I ask it because ye are my brother."

"*Ab.* Ugruk—him your brother. Him like you fine."

"When summer comes again, and the ship comes, I want you to make a long journey. I want you to go clear to Point Hope. Ye know where that is?"

"*Ab.* Kotsegear's wife, she come from Tigara people."

"I want you to go there, and see Father Goodman, and ask him to put water on your head and baptize you. It will be good for you, and it winna cost you even one foxskin. It is just a sign that ye believe in and worship the living God, the only true God. Ye do this?"

"Ugruk not know. White man's god, him not very big god. If him so big, why him get you in this fix? Why him no let you have *kow-kow*? You kneel down to him, say prayer, say big words about him. Then why him let you starve, die?"

"All men die sometime, Ugruk—one way or another. Some starve, some drown, some get sick and die, some grow old and die. God doesna want anyone to live forever on this earth. It is what He gives them in their lifetime that counts. God doesna save men's lives when their time comes, but to those who worship Him He gives great strength to live right. Ye watch this, Ugruk. When ye see a man who is strong—strong to do right—ye can be sure he believes in God. It is nothing to Him to gi' a man the strength o' ten."

But the Eskimo seemed doubtful. "Ugruk not know. Him watch and see, think plenty. If him see Christians be so strong, maybe him be Christian too. Ugruk do what him think best. Now you tell Ugruk what *you* do. Ugruk no understand."

"I'm going to stay here."

The Eskimo glanced sharply about the room. "But no *kow-kow* here."

"I'm afraid not, brother. But ye see, I hanna any *kow-kow* to travel on."

"You give Ugruk robe, so you freeze plenty quick."

"Not as long as the driftwood lasts. And I think the two old men will be back here by then."

"You plenty fool. Talk-talk men they go for good, no come back. If you stay here, pretty soon you get hungry, sick, tired. You lie down, sleep, fire him go out. You wike up stiff, too cold go out get driftwood, cut kindling, light fire, blow. You say, no matter anyway, I just go sleep again. You go sleep—no wake up. If you stay here, you dead."

"Maybe not." Angus's eyes glittered, "Maybe it isna my time. But certainly it is my time to stay here, and pray that you two people will get through all right."

He spoke simply, in a commonplace tone without dramatic emphasis, and this was what Gretchen could not stand. She could bear up much better if he would deliberately act a hero's part. If he would strike but one pose, raise his voice even once, she would feel relieved: somehow it would mitigate the stark, dreadful reality of this thing, and make her think that she too was just an actor in a play. But he was so matter-of-fact about it all. His face was so red, so earnest-looking, his freckles so conspicuous. The bitter tears flooded her eyes again, and she turned away.

Meanwhile Ugruk seemed puzzled. He stood with bent head, arms hanging bowed in front of his body, his torso inclined forward at the hips. His mind was slowly, painfully trying to encompass the situation. "Parson, you my brother," he said at last.

Startled by his tone, Angus whirled toward him. "Aye."

"Ugruk, him like you fine. You no like Ugruk—him get in the way, cause plenty trouble—but him like you fine. Him no want to leave you here to die. So when we go, you come too. Gretchen, she eat her *kow-kow*, every bite. But Ugruk, him give you part of his *kow-kow*. When Ugruk eat, you eat."

Gretchen was not greatly surprised at this offer. Eskimos are always "potlatching"—that is, giving away their property; it is a matter of mutual protection. The time might come when they would be needy themselves, and must depend on the gifts of their tribesmen. This is providence, of a sort, but the custom has risen through the natural improvidence of the Eskimo people.

As long as there is abundant food for today, the Eskimo does not worry about tomorrow. In this case Ugruk blandly trusted that by some unforeseen good fortune they could kill game on the way home. Gretchen's eyes lighted, but they did not shine on Ugruk. Her only thought was for Angus—that he might now be persuaded to give up his desperate plan of remaining in the cabin, and would accompany her and Ugruk in their race to safety.

But Angus saw the matter in the light of his own ideals. He was deeply touched. Smiling brilliantly, he shook his brother's hand. "That's fine o' you, Ugruk. It is the finest thing I ever heard ye say. Just the same, lad, I canna accept. In the first place, I canna keep up wi' you, wi' no snow-shoes. In the second place, that would cut down the grub too thin. It would only mean all three o' us would perish on the trail. I will stay here, and take my chance on the old men coming back."

Ugruk was greatly puzzled. Why should Angus refuse a share of the good *kow-kow*? At least it would prolong his life a few days. It was true that by staying here, and starving, he might save Gretchen's life, but how would he himself benefit? He could not enjoy her later. He would lie still, and his stiff arms could not enfold her, nor his brittle lips press hers. He would not even be able to see her face.

If he died so that his brother might live, where was the gain? He would never see Ugruk again, to make use of him, perhaps to baptize him and make him put money in the church plate. If there was a fish-hook concealed in this bait, Ugruk could not find it. True, Angus seemed to set great store on Ugruk's being baptized. Was this the reason Angus so wanted him to live? It did not make sense. Angus himself would not survive to see the ceremony; and it would be performed by another minister. Did he have some kind of cunning agreement with Father Goodman, to share the benefits of Ugruk's baptism? But what benefits could there be, and how could they be delivered to a dead man?

Finally Ugruk seized on what he thought was the explanation. A grim look stole into his face. Why, the whole business was a lie—just another white man's lie. Angus was starving here because he thought it was his best chance. He had reasons for thinking the old men would be back, saving him from the long and bitter and almost hopeless trek across the snows. Fearing that the old men's food-supply would be limited, he wanted Ugruk and Gretchen out of the way. Such was the white man's cunning! And Ugruk felt relieved by this explanation, rather than angry or disappointed. What was the use of being angry at the ways of life? He was a realist to the last drop of blood in his veins. He no longer felt baffled and confused; his world had

straightened out logically, and his preconceptions, which he had dreaded to change, seemed to be proved true.

The Eskimo's eyes shifted back and forth. What information was his brother keeping back? Whatever it was, it was ill-founded. The hunch was wrong: the old men would not soon return. Let Angus stay, if he insisted; Ugruk would trust to his legs.

Meanwhile Angus and Gretchen withdrew to the other side of the room. "Why do you want to die?" she asked. "Why did you refuse Ugruk's offer?"

Angus raised his ashen face. "Ye remember what ye said last night—that only two people can get through alive. There are two pairs o' snow-shoes, bedding for two, food for two—those were your vera words. Gretchen, if I felt there was even a slight chance for three o' us to make it in, I would go wi' you in a minute. I would risk Ugruk's life, and yours too. But there isna the least hope. It would just mean death for all three o' us."

"But why not try it a little way, anyhow?"

"That little way would just be enough to beat you. If I'd eat one pound o' food, ye would starve to death by one pound. If I held you back for five minutes, ye would lack five minutes o' getting in. The odds against you are too heavy now. They'd be overwhelming if they were increased by a fraction. Lord knows I dinna want to stay here. But Gretchen—what else can I do?"

"If only two can go, why not you and me? Why isn't Ugruk the one to stay here?"

Angus passed his hand over his brow in bewilderment. "I dinna know. It just happens. Ugruk must live, and go on, if there's the slightest chance or hope. His destiny isna yet fulfilled, and more than your own . . . I dinna know why—"

"Is yours fulfilled?" the girl asked sharply.

"It's hard to think so, but it must be. Dinna ye see, Gretchen, that I canna stand in his way? Ye know how I ha' taken him under my wing, for my father's sake and promised to do all I could for the sin o' his being born? Can I keep that promise by leaving him here in this cabin to die?"

"You don't want Ugruk to die until he's baptized. That's one thing."

"I wouldna like to ha' him, true. I only feel—I know—that his life is not complete." Angus took the girl's hand and pressed it between his.

“Gretchen, I dinna understand it all myself. I only know I’m doing what I am forced to do—what my heart tells me to do.”

“It’s a hard heart.” Gretchen spoke darkly. “A flinty, puritan heart. Angus—I beg you to go.”

“And I beg you not to beg me. I canna stand it.”

“But your life is worth ten of Ugruk’s.

“My life would be worth nothing if I broke faith. Ye hanna forgotten what ye told me, the night we came back from saving Wunchee’s baby?”

“I can’t remember—”

“Ye said ye thought that the North was going to prove me ‘a liar and a fool.’ Ye meant that the North would force me to go back on my ideals. And ye said, furthermore, that ye didna want me to fail, that ye wanted me to keep faith. It was the real Gretchen Konrad talking then. Ye told me what ye really felt, and ye still feel so. It’s just the fear that makes ye talk differently now.”

“But I felt differently about you then. . . . I—I didn’t love—you—then.” Wildly she looked up into Angus’s face.

He sat so long that it gave the effect of a start. “I loved you, even then,” he answered. “I just didna know.”

The bright tears began to gleam on her lashes. “I lied to you, just now.”

“Ye mean, ye dinna love me?”

“No, not that. I lied when I said I didn’t love you then—that night at the doorway. I loved you all the time, too. I fought against it, but it didn’t do any good.”

He drew her toward him, her glossy head against his mouth, and began to caress her hair with quick, gentle strokes of his fingers. She was weeping quietly, so at last he bent and kissed the tears out of her eyes. A strange sense of security—of some distant, inevitable, and sweet security—stole over them both, and stilled the pain in their hearts.

“I love you more than all the world,” Angus whispered, his lips against hers.

She drew slowly from his embrace, and her eyes searched his. “And yet—in spite of our love—you ask me to go on with Ugruk, and leave you here to die?” she asked.



“I ask you to. But it isna in spite o’ our love. It’s in the name o’ our love. I ask you, as your lover, to let me keep faith wi’ my God and wi’ my soul.”

Thus, in one sentence, Angus Mackenzie declared his life’s creed. Thus idealism, mistaken and vain though it might be, triumphed over materialism. The North had not shown Angus to be a liar. Even Gretchen knew, when she saw his face flame, that the North had proved him neither a liar nor a fool.

“I understand,” she told him, smiling dimly through her tears. “I’ll go on with Ugruk, and leave you here.” Her voice broke. “In the name—of our love.”

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WITH fine courage, Gretchen made preparations for departure. She slipped on her parka and mittens, got the hand-sled out of the lean-to, dusted off its mantle of fresh snow, and drew it to the cabin ready to load. She could hardly trust herself to speak. Even when she tried to address Ugruk, her lips trembled and her voice broke. "We must get ready, now," she told him quietly at last. "There is no use waiting any more."

The sled was small, built for hauling in driftwood, but more than sufficient to carry their scanty supplies. On the sled Gretchen put her food and her sleeping-robe. Ugruk added his own stores, and the robe Angus had given him. Meanwhile Angus watched the girl guardedly, to see if she were in a fit state to start out. Yes, her movements were strong and sure: evidently her long training in the North stood her in good stead.

Whether or not she could cross to the mainland in the present weather was still an open question. The wind had changed during the night. The big seas had flattened out, and the heavy artillery of the embattled ice shook the island no more. The deafening roaring crash had died to the last echo, and the only sound remaining was the hiss of dry snow, running before the wind like blown sand. It seemed likely that the narrower parts of the strait would be jammed full of ice, permitting a crossing.

It was not the right time of day to start out. The light would fail in three hours. Yet Angus decided to raise no objection. The farther the travelers could go today, the better chance for their food supply to last.

Almost at once they were ready to start. Gretchen turned slowly to Angus, and the realization that she must now part from him made her reel. Oh, she could never go through with it! Her splendid physical strength that had upborne her until now seemed to be ebbing from her, and blowing away in the wind. She wanted to sink down, crying, at Angus's feet.

But as his eyes met hers, she slowly steadied. His grave smile seemed to inspire her. A feeling of awe crept over her; her face paled. Suddenly she knew that there was some high purpose working here, some great fulfilment with which she must not interfere. It mattered more than all her grief; it would atone, in the end, for the empty, yearning years to come.

Angus stretched his arms, and she went gently into them. He kissed her eyes, her forehead, her lips. For all its sorrow, the moment was sweet

beyond her girlish dreams. Her heart sang with joy that she and Angus had found and loved each other, even if they lost each other now.

“I will keep faith,” he promised, his lips moving against hers.

Solemnly came her answer. “I will keep faith.”

She slipped out of his arms, and stood looking away into the white distance, dimmed by the blowing snow. What trials waited her there? Angus took his pistol from his holster and held it out to her, butt foremost. “Take this wi’ you. I winna need it.”

“You might need it, if the loneliness—and the cold—and the hunger takes you hard enough,” she answered brokenly. “But I’ll take it, just as I’ve taken everything of yours. . . . And I promise—I promise—I won’t use it except in self-protection.”

“I will pray for you to come through all right, wi’out trouble.” There was a long, poignant silence. “Good-by, sweetheart—and God bless you.”

She caught her breath sharply, as if she would cry out, but at last she turned and smiled into Angus’s eyes. “God bless you, Angus.”

She walked away, breaking trail for Ugruk. The Eskimo took the sled rope and started to follow, but he paused as he went by Angus. “Goo’by,” he muttered, holding out his hand. “Ugruk, him sick. I think him die soon.”

“You’re all right.” Angus clasped the dark hand. “You must keep strong, and fight your way out. Good-by, brother.”

*“Nah gah, nah gah.”* Ugruk, he all mixed up. He feel plenty bad.”

The Eskimo trudged on, in the trail Gretchen had broken. Angus still waited by the lean-to, gazing after them. How quickly the storm swept between! Already they were but shadows, moving and dimming in the whirling snow. Still Gretchen did not look back.

The truth was she dared not look back. She knew too well what she would see—a forsaken friend standing beside the forsaken hut, in this empty wasteland. She could imagine his red face, his freckles, his sandy hair powdered with snow. Unless all signs failed, she would never see him again.

And this was a reality, enormous and all-pervading, not just a bad dream. Her journey from him had actually begun; every step widened the distance between them. How had it happened? Why had she not insisted on staying with him, come what may? True, it was his own fault. He had forced her to go, with an appeal to her emotions such as few women could resist. Yet

perhaps her own terror, of famine and death in this lonely cabin, had added its voice to his. Now she was tormented with doubts and self-accusation.

After half an hour's tramp, she took the sled rope, and let Ugruk march ahead to break trail. As they stopped to make the change she perceived that weather conditions were growing steadily worse. The wind was rising again; the snow-clouds swept by with a wilder rush, a louder, more mournful wail. The light, which should have held two hours more, was already dying.

A mile or so farther on, one of the straps of her snowshoe gave way. She bent to repair it the best she could; intent upon the work, it did not occur to her to call to Ugruk. The Eskimo did not know she had paused, so he continued to trudge on down the island shore. This was characteristic Eskimo behavior: to mush steadily on, oblivious to his companion.

Five minutes later an event occurred that made him forget Gretchen entirely. What appeared to be a white mound of snow suddenly rose up, in savage power, and came to life. It was Nanook, the polar bear, the great white ranger of the North, the monarch of the ice.

This bear had been hunting seals in the blue leads beyond the bay-ice, and had been driven to shore by the break-up. Now he was in a dangerous humor, besides, he was desperately hungry. When he caught sight of Ugruk's dim figure, he snarled and showed his fangs.

His fierce eyes and erect hair indicated that he was about to attack. The lightest blow from Nanook's horned maul would break Ugruk's back like a reed. Moreover, the Eskimo had no weapon. The sole firearm in the outfit was in Gretchen's hands, and it was only a thirty-two pistol, designed to kill men rather than the giants of the Arctic; the sting of its little pellets would merely enrage the animal.

The only thing that could save Ugruk was the bear's natural timidity. The most ferocious carnivores instinctively fear the human smell, and seem to be impressed by man's stature. Ugruk's scent on the wind disconcerted Nanook; perhaps he could sense the presence of a second human being, farther back on Ugruk's trail. In any event, the beast hung back, snarling.

Ugruk played his one chance with Eskimo cunning. He pretended not to see the bear, and veering from his trail, headed toward the interior of the island. Meanwhile he watched Nanook out of the corner of his eye, until the snow-flurries swept between. As soon as the storm covered him, he hurried on at his fastest mushing pace.

Only when he reached the farther shore of the island did he stop to wait for Gretchen. Even now, he dared not linger too long. He was eager to leave this island, which Nanook had possessed, and to cross the ice-filled strait to the mainland. If she escaped the animal, she could follow his tracks.

At this moment, the wind cleared the snow-clouds from the strait, and he could see the dark line of land beyond. He decided to cross over and wait for Gretchen on the opposite shore. If she needed help with the sled in crossing the rough ice, she could call to him. So without further delay, but with many a backward glance, he ventured out into the strait. Over pressure ridges, across crevices, and through the torn, pitted, and almost impassable pack he crawled and climbed until again the land-snow spread before him in an even sheet.

In the meantime, Gretchen had repaired her snowshoes and started on. Although she had been delayed only a few minutes, the snow that ran and whirled before the wind was already filling up and smoothing over Ugruk's tracks, making them hard to follow. Fearful that she would lose them altogether, she tried to quicken her pace. When opportunity offered, she took short cuts.

Presently she saw where Ugruk had turned inland, apparently to reach the higher ground. By cutting straight across, she thought she could intercept him. She hastened on, and to her great relief, soon encountered fresh tracks. These deep smooth hollows, fast filling with snow, she never dreamed were not the imprints of Ugruk's snowshoes.

As she hurried on, the trail became fresher. She was gaining on whoever walked in front. The tracks began to take an odd shape. . . . She stopped with a gasp.

Shaken, she bent and examined this strange spoor. It had not been made by snowshoes. The prints showed claws.

Instantly she knew she was within a few yards of a gigantic polar bear. It might even now be stalking her, through the scudding snow. How she longed for her rifle, the steel tube of death! With this she might attack and kill the fiercest bear in the North; with one lucky shot she could procure enough meat to save her party. But now there was nothing for her but flight. To attack the bear with her light pistol would be simply suicide in an ugly form.

Yet her fear was not half so intense as Ugruk's. The blood of the conqueror peoples flowed in her veins; her mind was free from the devil-

tales, many of which center around Nanook, which the Eskimo hunters learn in childhood. She withdrew swiftly and quietly the way she had come.

Glancing down at her own tracks, she was appalled to see how quickly they were wiped out. They grew fainter as she back-trailed, until they were mere shadowy hollows in the snow. Yet she managed to follow them clear to the place where she had repaired her snowshoe.

But where were Ugruk's tracks? They had either drifted over, or else she had overlooked them in the blowing snow. Dazed, she turned again, looking for the place he had turned inland. But the light was failing, and except for her own tracks, the snow seemed smooth and unbroken.

The facts of the case were too apparent to dispute. In the storm and the twilight, she and Ugruk had lost each other.

Suddenly her blood spurted in her veins. A thought grim and dark as this lowering Arctic night made her skin creep. What if she did not find Ugruk? What if she let him wander away, into the lowering storm and bitter dark? Lost and alone, he would soon become panic-stricken. His unstable Eskimo nerve would break. He could find neither his companion nor his way back to the cabin—he would find only death.

And Ugruk's loss was Angus's gain! Could she forget this? If Ugruk died, in the solitude, she could return to the cabin with food whereby both Angus and herself might live.

But as her eyes began to gleam, and her lips to draw in a cold grim smile, a voice spoke from the void. It was only a memory, conjured up from a splendid hour just gone, yet it was so distinct in her ear that she was awed to her inmost soul. Above the *hiss-hiss* of the wind on the snow, she heard Angus whispering farewell. "*I will keep faith,*" he had said. And she had answered: "*I will keep faith.*"

She could not break this vow. Even for Angus's life, she could not betray her lover's belief and trust in her. For herself, she wanted Ugruk to die. He had caused all her trouble; his shadow fell darkly across her trail. But she had plighted her troth. The light of Angus's idealism shone on her still.

Ugruk might yet be in hearing. Her voice rose in a long, clear call. Breathlessly she waited the answer.

But she heard only the wind and the running snow. She called again; still there was no reply. Plainly she must employ a louder voice. So she drew her pistol and fired into the air.

Still the silence held. Thoroughly alarmed now, she moved toward the center of the island. A second time she fired her pistol, but only its muffled echo returned to her.

Walking farther down the island, she fired again. Now there were only three cartridges left in the magazine, scarcely enough for self-defense; but she would risk one more. If this did not summon Ugruk she must take some more drastic means of rescuing him.

The fourth shot brought no reply. It was evident, now, that Ugruk had wandered swiftly and far. But she had no spirit or strength to seek him farther. If he were to be found and saved, in the bitter storm and dark, it must be by stronger hands and surer feet than hers. She had done all she could. She turned and headed back toward the cabin.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

UGRUK waited a long time for Gretchen to overtake him. He stood peering out into the ice-filled strait, but never did he see her dim outline advance and take form in the snow-eddies. He only saw the wind cutting away his tracks, and the fine white drift filling them up and smoothing them over. Still he dared not cross back to the island where Nanook roamed. He waited until dusk, a disastrous, perhaps a fatal mistake. Fear consumed him. It was a strange fact, significant and auspicious, that now he feared for his companion more than for himself. It might be that the bear had caught and killed her. Perhaps she had lost her way, in which case the storm might make quick work of her. To be lost usually means to become panic-stricken, and to be struck with panic, in the Great Cold, means to die.

Suddenly he remembered that she was not now his chief concern. He no longer possessed her; he had sold her for a few pounds of *kow-kow*. And where was that *kow-kow*? She had it! If he failed to find her, she would not be the only one to perish in these drifts!

Once more he ventured out on the ice. But now the dusk bewildered him, and he did not keep a straight course. He was seeking the island he had just left, but he did not find it; instead he found icy ramparts, gullies, hollows, pressure ridges, and finally open leads that he could not cross.

Terror had him now. Still he did not start running; a deep-seated instinct kept him trudging at a slow, regular pace. A strange figure in these white solitudes! His clothes glistened white; except for his dark face, under the hood of his parka, he looked dim as the snow-ghosts which sometimes his people meet on the silent floes. The night deepened. The wind-blown snow ran at his feet, and eddied and whirled about him.

He moved in a great circle, seeking land. He found it at last—another island adjacent to the one he was seeking. Ugruk did not know this shore, and decided it must be the mainland. If he could follow down the coast, he would ultimately fetch up at Nigaluk. But he could not go on tonight. He was tired, and the ways were dark. He would build a wind-shelter, and rest.

With a queer deathless patience he drew his knife and began to cut snow-blocks. Brick by brick his wind-shelter rose, until it was half his own height. Slowly, like a wounded animal, he crawled behind it and burrowed in the snow.



He would rest till daylight, he thought, then strike on down the coast. It was far, far, and he had no food, but he would try to make it. Perhaps he would find lemming in the snow—such miracles had happened before. But he must not fall asleep, here. It would not be safe, considering he had no *ahtiga*—an extra outer garment for extreme cold weather. He would merely close his eyes and doze.

Almost instantly he was sound asleep. The frost began to penetrate his body. But there was no pain, no trouble. The North can be wondrous gentle, at times. And, indeed, this would be a merciful finish for him: there would be pain and trouble enough if he lived till morning. Starving, dazed, and lost, he would not discover that he was on an island instead of the mainland. He would wander round and round the long coast, ever peering through the snow-clouds for the roofs of Nigaluk. It was better to lie in peace in the white coffin he had built, here in the silence, the darkness, the limitless waste.

Meanwhile, Angus too had journeyed far—almost down to Gehenna and return. His body remained in the chair by the stove, but his soul wandered through a wasteland more wild and forlorn than the snowy solitudes in which Ugruk had lost his way. And for a time Angus was lost, too. The star he followed burned him, and almost faded from sight.

Once the missionary groaned aloud. Once he sprang up and threw open the door, with the crazy idea of trying to follow and call back the travelers. But the sharp cold on the threshold brought him to his senses; so he went to the lean-to, loaded his arms with wood, and returned to the fire, as if this had been his intention from the first. Mostly he sat with bowed head, his hands limp in his lap, his eyes dull as stones.

He made no plans for the future, but lived only in the past. Vaguely he knew that he would hold on as long as possible, but whether the limit would be reached in an hour, or a day, or a week, he had no thought or care. He was denied even the solace of prayer, until now a strong force in his life; somehow his brain would not shape the thought or his lips the words.

In the darkest hour, the door behind him slowly opened. Someone stole in, and laid a hand gently upon his shoulder. He raised his head and looked into the drawn, haggard face of the girl he loved.'

“Gretchen!” he spoke doubtfully, discrediting his senses.

“Yes, Angus.”

“Why ha’ ye returned? Where’s Ugruk?”

“I don’t know. Somewhere in the storm. I tried hard—so hard—to find him, but I couldn’t.” Her voice broke as she saw him reaching for his parka: “Oh, what are you going to do?”

“Gretchen, ye ha’ kept faith—I can see it in your face—and now I must do the same. Can ye figure where he may ha’ gone?”

“He may have crossed to the mainland. Possibly he got turned around, crossed the strait at the wrong place, and came out on the next island.”

“That seems more likely. If he reached the mainland, he would find his way back alone. I’ll look for him on the island tonight. Tomorrow I’ll search wider.”

“Tomorrow!” She looked at him in dazed, breathless horror. “Don’t you know there won’t be any tomorrow? If you don’t find him tonight, you’ll never come back. You’ll die in the storm.”

He took her hands and steadied them between his own. “If I die in the storm, it is God’s will,” he told her solemnly. “I canna think o’ that, tonight. I can think only o’ my brother, lost out there in the dark.”

Now he was slipping on his mittens and was turning toward the door. She ran after him and seized his arm. “I don’t want to live without you; I’m going with you.”

“Ye must stay here, and keep the fire burning. Ye must be fresh and strong to help us, in case we come in nigh dead. And if I dinna come back, ye must go on to the settlements and finish out your life.”

The girl nodded. Her eyes widened with awe. This work tonight was part of the trial of her faith. He must look into the face of death; she must gaze into the darker vista of the empty years. Of one thing only she was certain: that this was their last parting. If Angus came back to her tonight, they must never sever again.

Her hand fell from his arm, and she drew back to let him go out the door. There was not a second to waste, so she did not expect him to pause and tell her good-by. But suddenly his arms reached far, and drew her in. He could not go forth to pay his father’s debt of sin until he acknowledged the debt of love that he owed Gretchen.

“I love you,” he whispered. “I pray that I will come back to you.” Then he was gone, and the snow flurries swept between.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

ALWAYS, it seemed to Angus, he must be choosing between Gretchen and Ugruk. If he served one, he must neglect the other; if he helped his brother's chances, he must hurt the girl he loved. One such choice confronted him when he started out to look for Ugruk. Should he wear his snowshoes, or leave them?

If he took them, he might not be able to return them. Thus Gretchen's chances of getting out would be materially cut down. But if he did not take them, he might as well remain in the cabin. The race tonight was to the swift. He could not hope to wallow through the drifts in time to save Ugruk's life; he must fly over them at the fastest mushing pace. The snow was soft, slow going at best.

Added danger for Gretchen, or certain death for Ugruk? This was the proposition. Well, he must cross his bridges as he came to them, so he decided to take the shoes. Unless the storm overwhelmed him, on the white desert, he would bring them back to the girl when his search was over. In case he did not return she still had a chance to get out. Although her difficulties would be greatly increased and her speed cut down, she would probably have food enough to carry her through.

As soon as Angus emerged from the lee of the cabin, the storm smote him with pitiless force. It seemed a living, ferocious power, hating him, hating the warmth of his being here in this world of ice. The wind buffeted and bludgeoned him.

He had set himself an arduous task. It would be hard to find Ugruk; it would be almost as hard to find his way back to the cabin. The dry flakes fell no more, but the wind had risen, and the world was lost in whirling, eddying, scudding clouds of finest snow-dust. Already the lighted square of the cabin doorway was darkened and hidden. Just to survive, to keep going, would tax him to the utmost. A slight mishap of some sort, or the least mistake in direction, would end this fray almost before it began.

Why had he attempted it? He had everything to lose and nothing to gain. He had already sacrificed greatly, standing back to let Ugruk go on. If now the man died it was by the act of God. On the other hand, if Angus found him and brought him back, his own life was forfeit. Why should he walk into a death-trap, so that Ugruk might live?

It made no sense. He himself was the better man, the more useful to the world. With Ugruk out of the way, he and Gretchen could go on to their life's fulfilment. Why not let the North take its ruthless course? Why should he interfere with the mills of the gods?

The gods? Yes, but not his God. There was a truth here which he could feel but not wholly understand. It is the law of the Arctic that might is right, that the weakest shall perish, but Angus bowed before a higher law. The gods of the ice and snow had decreed that Ugruk should die, like the darkened brute-man that he was, but Angus's God, moving in ways unseen, had written that Ugruk must be saved. His hour had not yet struck. He must live on to fulfil his appointed destiny.

Yes, it was all foreordained. And not only Ugruk's fate was operating here, but Angus's also. Somehow it seemed poetically fitting that he should wage this battle for Ugruk's life. He was responsible for Ugruk, by an oath taken at his father's death-bed, and he had promised to keep faith to the end. Now it had come to trial. The issue was a simple one of life and death—Angus, fighting the North, for Ugruk's life and soul. Angus was Ugruk's shepherd, and it was decreed by a law older than this ice that he should go forth in the night and storm to bring back his own.

It was fitting that he should make this fight alone. Gretchen had no part in it. It was a matter between Ugruk, Angus, and God.

For an hour Angus tramped down the island shore. How he found his way he did not know; there was no apparent light. True, the clouds were breaking away, and the stars glittered like fabulous jewels on the velvet canopy of the sky, but the moon was hidden and the snow a dull lusterless gray. He dared not trust to the wind to keep him oriented. The gusts were treacherous as the sea-ice they swept; they buffeted him first on one quarter, then on another. He was forced to rely wholly on his instinctive sense of direction. It was as if an invisible monitor were leading him by the hand.

He did not dare pause to question. He tried to keep his conscious intelligence in abeyance, so that his spiritual and psychic impulses could reach him more clearly. He knew that if he turned aside even once, or disobeyed the least prompting of his instincts, he would be hopelessly bewildered and lost. Plunging onward through the storm, he hardly seemed the Angus Mackenzie that Gretchen knew. He was no longer calm, deliberate, and self-assured, but was like a wild creature of the snow, trusting to a wisdom greater than his own.

At last the urge came to push out on the torn, rough sea-ice. In the wan starlight, this was an experience outside the pale of reality. It was hard for him to believe that he was still alive, and this wilderness of ice was part of his known, charted world. He could see somewhat better now. Perhaps his eyes had become accustomed to the murk; perhaps the rising wind and the lowering cold had dispelled all moisture from the upper atmosphere, letting the stars glimmer through. The ice ridges looked gray as he passed. The broken fragments took uncanny shapes, dimly seen in the witch-light beating up from the snow. The blown snow-dust streamed by him in pallid clouds, hissing and whispering.

On the barricades of the heaped-up floes he made his way. Over walls, down into deep pits, into black tunnels, and across yawning crevices, all formed of solid ice, he fought to the land beyond. Fortunately the strait was narrow. Soon he emerged on another island.

How he had gone straight to it he would never be able to explain. It was the triumph of his inner voices and spiritual wisdom over faulty mortal intelligence. There were miracles in the air tonight.

He began his search. He looked first for tracks that might show the course Ugruk had taken. Once his heart leaped up, but the shadowy patches in the level white were not made by snowshoes. A polar bear had passed that way only a few minutes before, no doubt the same that had crossed Gretchen's trail at dusk. Probably he was crouching near by, waiting for Angus to go on. The animal could not be far away or the running snow would already have wiped out his footprints.

Angus began to follow the island shore. Now he was walking straight into the wind, labor greater than any he had ever known. He could not keep this up for long. His spirit might be unconquerable, but the strength of his body had limits. Every step required an effort. The wind was getting under his fur garments chilling him already, to kill him soon. The cold seemed to be numbing his brain. He could hardly remember how he had come here, whom he was seeking. Yet for a full hour more he fought his way down the beach.

The time came at last when he could not go on. He could not generate sufficient muscular force to hurl himself into the wind. It was like trying to push down a solid wall of ice. The elements were too strong for him, and, so far as he could see, the fight was over and lost. There remained but one recourse. It was strange that it had not occurred to him sooner. Always before it had been his first impulse, not his last. Had he forgotten his faith,

his creed, his profession? Why need he rely on feeble bodily strength, infinite in extent, to be had for the asking? Had he forgotten the cardinal practice of his religion?

Most men who go into the ministry are essentially mystics. This is particularly true of Scotch Presbyterians. It was not surprising that Angus should believe whole-heartedly in that greatest of mysteries, which is prayer. Indeed, he could not be a true priest and believe otherwise. Why had he not prayed, hours since, to find and save Ugruk?

He knew why. The prayer would have been hypocrisy. He had not wanted to find and save Ugruk, and had secretly hoped that he might overlook his brother in the darkness and storm, so that he could go on with Gretchen into love and life. He had wanted Ugruk to die.

Was this a sin? For some men, no, perhaps; for Angus, yes. His eyes were clear now, and his heart was pure: he would lie to himself no more. No matter how Gretchen might look at it, no matter what excuses his own intelligence might offer, he had walked wide of the road; at least so his heart told him. He had been tempted, and he fell.

He felt remorse. Fervently he wished that death would spare him for a few hours, at least, so that he might try to atone for what he thought was his sin. And this wish was akin to prayer. It was the first melting of the ice around his heart. A flame seemed to strike him. It shot through his tissues, kindling his eyes and flushing his face.

He knew the way now. He had come through. Moved almost to tears, he dropped to his knees in the snow. Alone in the storm, a dim figure in the white desert, under the stars beside the frozen sea, Parson Mackenzie prayed.

He rose at last. His limbs felt strong and free. Quietly he waited for what must befall.

The darkness was suddenly cleft as by a sword. The far snow-fields leaped white to his gaze. Thrilling, he looked skyward. Up out of the west shot a splendid rocket that burst with divine radiance in the blue vault, flickered, and died away.

In the second that the light lasted, Angus could see nearly half a mile. He beheld the weird amorphous of the sea-ice, the snow-clouds drifting far, and the wide white spaces of the shore. With blazing eyes and wildly leaping heart, he waited for the next flash.

It came presently—a great golden bow from one horizon to another. This did not at once flicker out, but ebbed and flowed, dimmed and brightened, with unimaginable beauty. But now Angus turned his eyes away from this glory, and began to search the distant snow-fields. And almost instantly he saw what seemed to be a small white mound, two hundred yards away on the level snow.

He had not seen it in the darkness. If he had not paused to pray, he would have passed on before the northern lights could reveal it. This, at least, was a miracle. He knew he had found Ugruk.

Under the blaze and splendor of the Aurora, he made his way to the wind-shelter. It was silent, ominously so, yet Angus was not afraid. The miracle that had revealed Ugruk was not in vain; it would light his way to the cabin and to his future destiny. Angus knelt beside an odd-shaped drift and began to dig into the snow.

It was not easy to rouse Ugruk. He was deep in a dreamless slumber that led straight down to death. But at Angus's repeated calls, he wakened and stirred.

“Get up, Ugruk. I'm going to take you to the cabin.”

“*Namick, namick.*”

“Get up, man. You'll freeze to death there.”

“You leave Ugruk alone. Him tired, want sleep.”

But the white man's will was the stronger. Ugruk got up, staggered, fell, and at his brother's imperious cry, rose again. And now they stood together under the northern lights.

“Ye'll go to the cabin, now,” Angus told him. “When ye get there ye can ha' some food. The wind is wi' ye, and ye'll make it easily. I'll break trail.”

Ugruk hardly heard him. He was half-frozen, half-conscious, baffled by the power of his brother's will, by the storm and the weird fire-dance on the snow. Yet when Angus started away, he reeled after him. They began the march to the cabin.

At frequent intervals Angus paused, to rest and to make sure that Ugruk was following him. He did not want to take chances on his brother slipping off in the darkness, as Gretchen had done. Soon this vigilance became unnecessary. Ugruk was rallying swiftly; the prospect of food and warmth replenished his strength and quickened his instinct of self-preservation. And

now Angus needed help more than Ugruk. His long fight with the elements had exhausted his resources, so that he staggered on the trail.

The last of his strength was ebbing rapidly. He wanted to lie down in the snow, and let the storm have its way. His hope was ebbing too, and a man cannot live without hope. Warmth and food awaited Ugruk in the cabin, but what awaited him? A glimpse of Gretchen's tears, perhaps—a word or two of farewell—and then silence and darkness. It were better to linger here and yield to the strange mercy of the North—the bed of snow and the lethal drug of cold.

But he must not yield. He must lead on if for no other reason than to show Ugruk the way.

At last they reached the ice-filled strait, and somehow they crossed that strait. Soon they were on the old men's island, and the hut lay only a mile beyond. But that last mile was insuperably long. Angus came to the calm conclusion that he could not make it. His body was inert clay, and even his will was failing now. Besides, the northern lights were burning low, and the way was dark.

He let Ugruk move in front and break trail. A little while more he reeled forward, following the dark shape in front. He moved as in an endless dream, and no longer knew his directions. If Ugruk got off the course, Angus could never set him right.

But Ugruk did not lose his way again. Suddenly he paused, grunting. "*Arre gah*," he whispered. "*Arre gah*."

Angus raised his tired head. In the middle distance was a golden triangle of light, bright and beautiful as the face of love that it symbolized. It was a beacon fire that Gretchen had built on the snow outside the cabin, to guide home those who had wandered far in storm and darkness.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ANGUS collapsed in the doorway, and Gretchen and Ugruk carried him into the cabin. Presently he lay in his sleeping-robe beside the stove, warm, vaguely conscious, following Gretchen's movements with dazed eyes, and wondering at her tears. He was in a dangerous stage of fatigue, but not frozen; and if he survived the next hour he would no doubt recover soon.

Through the remainder of the night Gretchen and Ugruk took turns keeping fire, snatching what sleep they could. Just before dawn, Angus hurled out of a dream with a cry. Gretchen ran to him, and bent over him.

"What are ye doing here, Gretchen?" he asked dazedly. "Don't ye know ye should be on your way? The longer ye stay here, the less food and strength ye'll have for the journey."

"I am not going on a journey," Gretchen answered quietly.

Watching him, she saw the sleep-shadows pass from his eyes. Presently he was himself, wide-awake, cold and sure of thought, competent to direct his affairs and her own. "What has happened?"

"Nothing new, except perhaps a new understanding of things on my part. I told you the truth, Angus. I am not going on any journey, unless you can go too. I won't leave you again."

"But ye know what it means."

"I know what it will likely mean. Just the same, it stands. I've thought it all out, Angus, and I know what is worth while and what is not. It isn't worth while to leave you."

"Ye mean—it isn't worth while to *live*?"

"Not if I have to pay such a high price." She spoke with a quiet dignity far beyond her years, and Angus could scarcely believe that she was the same madcap girl who had lightered him to shore in her kaiak, eight months before. "In other words, Angus—old boy—I'm not going to be a deserter, and spend the rest of my life hating myself, and mourning my lost opportunity. If you come through, I will too. Otherwise, not."

"What about Ugruk?"

"He can take his half the food, and start when he likes."

Angus lay silent and motionless for a long moment. His eyes kindled, at last, and he raised himself on his elbow so that he could look into his companion's face. "Well, if that's the way ye see it," he said gently. "It isna for me to come between you and the light ye see. Besides, I ha' not the strength to put pressure on you now. I want you so much that it overcomes my will. I canna even command you to go."

"I wouldn't go, even if you did command me."

"Even though I own you?" His face lit with a humor and kindness that almost compelled her tears. "Ha' ye forgotten that I bought and paid for you wi' my share of the food?"

"You own me, but you can't drive me away," she told him happily. "And your title is better than Ugruk's because—because—it is with my full consent."

"If we live, we'll record that title legally. If not—"

"If not, we'll have each other for as long a time as we can."

For the past hour Ugruk had been sitting inert in a chair by the stove, but now Angus's voice roused him, and he trudged to his brother's side. The expression on his bronzed face startled his white companions.

"Ugruk, him want make talk," he announced, towering above the cot. "You speak to Ugruk now?"

"Any time, brother."

"Ugruk, him no understand something. Last night, Ugruk get lost, built shelter, go sleep. Him die if you no come wake him up. Why you do it?"

"What do ye mean, man?"

"Why you go out in storm, look for Ugruk, bring him in? Ugruk, he no carry *kow-kow*. Girl, she got *kow-kow*, hers and Ugruk's too. Why you no let Ugruk die?"

"You're my brother, aren't ye? I couldna let ye die."

"Ugruk your brother, but you no care whether Ugruk die or not. You wish Ugruk never been born, never cause trouble. If Ugruk die, maybe you live. You eat Ugruk's *kow-kow*, go out with Gretchen, maybe come through all right. But if Ugruk live, come back to cabin, you go hungry. Two people maybe get out all right, three people die sure. So why you come save Ugruk?"

Angus gazed upon him solemnly. "Because I thought it was the right thing to do."

"But if Ugruk die, you no catch trouble. If Ugruk live, you catch plenty trouble. Ugruk him no have chance pay you back, bring you furs. Him no catch furs for dead man."

"I dinna do it so that you could catch furs for me. Ye must try to understand. I told you why I did it—because I thought it was the right thing."

"And you want to do 'right thing' more'n you want to live?"

"I want to live, Ugruk. Every sane man does. But there are certain things a man has to do whether he lives or dies. That is—if he believes in God."

Ugruk nodded a long time. His sunken eyes glowed with an intense, though suppressed, excitement. "You no very big fellow."

"No."

"You no half so strong as Ugruk. But you go where Ugruk no go, find way where Ugruk get lost, walk through storm where Ugruk fall down, save Ugruk when he pretty near die. Your God—he make you do this, too?"

"All strength comes from God."

"Your God, maybe Him fool, but Him heap strong. Him heap, big, *sook* God! Ugruk take Him."

Angus's face blazed. "What do ye mean, brother?" he asked.

"Ugruk want your God to look out for him. Him believe in your God, do what your God say. Him sit on bench in mission house, sing loud, put money in plate, no more make talk to spirits."

Ugruk was gesturing futilely, as if he were trying to grasp English words to express his new wonder, and Angus seized the brown hand in his. "This is the greatest thing in your life, brother."

"*Arre gah!* Now—I—let you—put—water—on—Ugruk's head."

When Angus heard these muttered words, his blood rushed to his heart, and his face paled. Gretchen had never seen him more deeply moved. The light in his eyes moved her, too—thrilling her in ways she could not name, and wakening her to a new valuation of things until now unimagined. Life was poignantly beautiful and significant beyond thought. She stood close to some tremendous and ineffable mystery.

“I thank God this has come to you,” Angus said solemnly. Simply as possible, he explained what he knew of the meaning of baptism. It was nothing less than rebirth. “Your own sin is wiped out, and my father’s sin against you is atoned for,” Angus went on. “Ye ha’ not lived in vain, and if ye die, ye know ye ha’ not died in vain. Justice is done. Wrong has been made right. Ye are no longer an outcast, but one o’ the blessed. And no matter what danger faces ye, ye know ye are in God’s care.”

Gretchen herself went to gather the pure snow beyond the cabin threshold, and put it on the stove to warm. When it was melted, Ugruk knelt beside the cot. Quickly Angus performed the simple rite of baptism, as it is practiced by his church. So that Ugruk could better understand, Angus translated the immortal words into the Eskimo tongue, as he had learned to do in his mission at Narwhale Cape. Gretchen watched through tears.

When he reached the final invocation, his voice rang in the room. “*Ahtannik Ahpah, Igningah, chulee Nahguruk Eelitkoosik* (In the name of the Father, the son, and the Holy Ghost).”

The rite over, Angus sank back in his cot. Ugruk trudged across the room to the stove and stood warming himself. There was little to show how the service had impressed him. He stood stolidly, feet braced, arms hung in front of his body, in a characteristic Eskimo posture; his face was like old leather. Yet Gretchen saw—or thought she saw—an excited glitter in his eyes.

Neither she nor Angus perceived what had really happened. Ugruk was exalted to the skies. True, he had understood but little of the baptismal service. To him, all ghosts were fearful and unfriendly beings. There was no Eskimo equivalent for such terms as depravity, sanctification, glory. Yet in spite of all this, Ugruk sensed the operation of big medicine. Angus’s voice resounded in his ears; the solemn words thrilled him. His brother’s fire burned him, and made his wild blood leap in his veins.

He was called from his trance by a low sound outside the cabin walls. He strained, listening. The sound came again—a subdued grunt, familiar enough to this son of the North. Ugruk opened the door and peered out.

The dawn had just risen. The snow lay milky white, mile on mile, as far as the eye could reach. The sun was not up, so there was no glitter to blind the eyes. Just in front of the doorway stood the hand-sled on which Ugruk had loaded his food. Devouring the last of this food was an immense polar bear.

This was no doubt the same animal that Ugruk had seen the preceding night. Scenting meat on the wind, he had defied the human scent. In the clear light, he seemed even more formidable than before. He was a full grown male; and his rangy body and long fish-like head embalmed his appearance of power. Certainly he was monarch of the floes.

This was the Eskimo's ancestral enemy. Many and red were the combats which the bear's clan had waged with the brown men amid the heaving bergs. Ugruk knew him well—the swishing violence of his big white maul, and the bone-crushing, flesh-rending fury of his fangs. This was Nanook, of the ice. His strength was equal to ten men. Usually he would run from a human being, but when he showed fight, the price of his fur was high. When Ugruk hunted him, it was never alone, but in well-armed parties that could surround him and lay him low with cross fire. The only weapon that could match his might was the long-range firestick of the white man.

There was no such gun at hand. The only available firearm was Angus's pistol, which lay on a shelf beside the door. Under ordinary circumstances, Ugruk would not have dreamed of attacking Nanook with a toy like this. He would not have faced him alone, at close range, with any kind of a weapon.

But as Ugruk stood on the threshold, a strange madness overcame him. Partly it was rage at the theft of his food. He had bartered away his soul for those few pounds of pemmican and oil the bear was devouring. Yet there was a force operating in him that was higher, more noble, than anger. It was a glory he had never before experienced.

This was Ugruk's great hour. A solemn exaltation was upon him. The thrilling thought came to him that if he could kill the animal, his comrades' food problem would be solved. At least he might be able to drive him away, and save the few scraps of food that remained on the sled.

He knew the danger. This white giant was Nanook, no less, and he was only Ugruk, a dark-skinned Eskimo. If he dared to attack he might be slain. Yet it would be a splendid act. His death, so gained, would be glorious in some distant and miraculous way he could sense vaguely though never understand. He wanted to show his white companions that he too was a man, not a driven beast, and worthy of the sacrament just received.

He snatched up the pistol and ran out the door. The bear reared, a titanic figure, snarling. Ugruk fired into the white breast.

It was such a puny sound, that pistol fire. It seemed so pitifully inadequate against such a monster of fury and might. The bullet sped true,

but administered no more than a flesh wound, enraging the bear the more. He pounced down on all fours and charged.

As he sprang through the air, he was more like a white tiger than a bear—long neck extended, fangs gleaming, hair erect, white paws stretching wide. Ugruk fired a second time, the bullet passing through Nanook's jaw. The beast paused an instant, shook his head savagely, and sprang forward again.

If Ugruk could have kept on firing, he might have turned the animal. But when the Eskimo pulled the trigger again, the gun snapped. Four of the six cartridges it had originally contained had been fired by Gretchen the preceding night. Now the weapon was empty, and Ugruk must take the charge unarmed.

In one second more the fight was over. The bear struck Ugruk and ran him down like a snow-slide from a mountain top. Just once the big mailed paw whizzed in the air with a curious sideways bat, hurling Ugruk a distance of ten feet. But Nanook dared not follow, to vent his fury upon his helpless prey. Smarting from his wounds, and fearful of his victim's companions, who were now running out the door, the white killer vanished.

In dead silence, Angus lifted his brother, and carried him into the cabin. This was not an attempt to save his life, only to ease his passing. One look at the battered head told Angus all. Ugruk's great hour had proved to be his last hour. His life's purpose had been fulfilled.

"It's a glorious end for him," Angus said quietly, as he gazed down at the still face. "I couldna wish him a braver one—even though he failed in what he tried to do. He has shown us to what heights an Eskimo half-breed can go."

The two watchers expected Ugruk to slip away without returning to consciousness, but they had not reckoned on his immense vitality. Presently he opened his eyes, gazed dazedly into his brother's face, and then seemed to orient himself. His dark eyes glimmered a little, like dying embers, and he nodded his head almost imperceptibly. "Nanook kill me?" he asked.

"Aye."

The nod became more apparent. "Ugruk remember now. Nanook rear up, come like hell. And him steal Ugruk's *kow-kow*."

"Aye, but ye dinna need that *kow-kow* now. Ye dinna need anything on this earth."

“*Ab*. Ugruk die plenty quick. Him pretty near dead now.”

This was true. His face was turning gray. The long powerful arms quivered faintly. “Is there anything we can do for you?” Gretchen asked.

“Just stay here, till Ugruk go. Ugruk plenty scared.”

Angus took the cool, limp hand in his. “There’s nothing to be scared of, brother. Ye’re going on to a new life. And it’s a better life than ye ha’ had here.”

Ugruk struggled for breath, and arrested for one moment more his swift, gentle descent. The look of pitiful fear passed from his face, leaving only a childlike wonder. “Where Ugruk go—maybe no so cold?”

“It winna be so cold, I’m sure.”

“Ugruk no care whether him catch’m wing, or hear angel sing like phonograph, but him want plenty warm weather. Where Ugruk go, plenty summer, plenty bird fly, ice no come?”

“It will always be summer, I think.”

“Sun him shine, never go sleep for three moons?”

“It will always be light, Ugruk.”

And now, faintly whispering: “Ugruk catch plenty *kow-kow*? Plenty blubber, plenty sugar, plenty coffee? You no tell Ugruk lie?”

“I’ll tell you the truth. Ye’ll never go hungry again.”

“*Arre gah. Arre gah.*”

The whisper died away. Silence rushed in. The dark hand that Angus held grew slowly cold.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IF ANGUS and Gretchen had been less fine, Ugruk's death might have crushed them. They might have yielded tamely to the forces of disaster closing in on every side. As it was, his bravery inspired them to new strength.

Standing arm in arm at the cabin threshold, they looked out into the white distance. As far as eye could reach, the land lay prostrate under the lash of winter. There was no refuge, no hope, but only the trackless snow, the pallid clouds of ice-dust streaming by, the solitude and the silence. Over his domain rode the Erlking of the North—the clutching, fatal cold.

"It's waiting for us, and it means to get us," Angus murmured. "Every gateway is closed—our sentence is signed and sealed. Gretchen, shall we give up?"

"Give up?" The girl's shoulders straightened. "Not while there is the slightest hope."

"There is always hope. It is God's last mercy to his people. But let's face the facts. Ye know how much food we ha'. Ye know it's a physical impossibility for two people to walk from here to the settlements on such a supply. Our pistol is empty, so we canna kill game on the trail, even if we were lucky enough to encounter any."

"We can keep going as long as we can."

"Aye, for three days—five days—possibly a week. But no matter how brave we are, or how strong, we canna make it in. Somewhere between here and the settlements we'll reach a point that we canna take another step. And then—"

"What other choice have we?" Gretchen's voice held steady.

"We can stay here and give up. We can lie in each other's arms till the cold comes in. We will be saved many a weary step, many a night o' cold and horror, and much hunger." Gently he turned her toward him, so that he could look into her eyes. "Gretchen, ye and I are na afraid o' death. We ha' seen too much and lived through too much to ha' any such fear left! besides, we ha' the refuge o' each other's love. The question is—whether we prefer to die quietly, wi' as little agony as possible, or whether we want to die fighting."



Gretchen swayed toward him, and kissed his lips. “Why are you putting it up to me? You already know what we are going to do.”

“The end is the same,” he went on, as if he had not heard. “So shall we take it lying down—or standing up?”

As if she did not know! The flame in his face suddenly leaped across to her, burning her, emboldening her heart, and shining in her eyes. Never were they so close as now. The same valor transfigured them both. Their love was a glory on which no shadow, however deep, might fall.

“We’ll take it standing up,” she whispered, as his arms drew her close.

Even to these stalwarts, the North showed no mercy. Angered at their courage, the white wolves of death hounded them from their first hour.

Through the limitless white, the eternal solitudes, Angus and Gretchen began the long march to the settlements. They had no need of the sled. Their small supply of food, and their sleeping-ropes, were carried in light packs on their backs. At first they moved strongly—more than fifteen miles the first day. But their tragic experiences of the last week had tried them, and they were white and shaken and reeling with exhaustion when they stopped for their night’s rest.

In the gray dawn they rose again, and plunged on. Their limbs did not move so freely today. The soft snow would not support the webs of their snowshoes, and they had to take turns breaking trail. The cold seemed more intense; the wind bit them to the bone.

The simple fact was that they were starving. The small amount of food that they dared consume did not provide sufficient fuel for their toiling bodies. The hunger pangs, at first so moderate that they could try to ignore them, grew more intense with the passing hours, and the third day they were stabbing, clutching, snatching furies in their vitals.

Still they were tender with each other. When their eyes met, it was with a smile; and sometimes their laughter rose into the very teeth of the wind. At night they hovered in each other’s arms.

The third and fourth day passed, and the fifth. The hunger pangs were less sharp, but this was a doubtful mercy. Steeped in the hunger-lore of the Eskimo people, and versed in the tales of famine camps on the uttermost ice, neither traveler failed to recognize the symptom. It meant the beginning of the end. They were entering into the second stage of starvation.

At night they dreamed of food. In their waking hours, they had a queer floating sensation which they could dispel only by a strong effort of will. Actually they were sinking faster than they dared acknowledge. They could have lasted twice as long in moderate weather, but the intense cold, combined with hard work, overtaxed the heat-giving mechanism of their bodies, and ravished their tissues.

On the sixth day their senses became less keen. Perhaps this was a mental state, born of fear and woe; perhaps their nerves were poisoned by fatigue. The shore became one white blur, void of meaning and reality. When they spoke, their voices sounded far off and strange. The throbbing muscular pains that had tortured them so at the start of the journey became a dull ache of which they were hardly conscious. They stared at each other with hollow, feverish eyes.

Still they tried to be brave, to hearten each other. When one of them tripped and fell, the other was quick to help. "We must go on," Angus kept saying. "We must keep going a few miles more." But there were many falls, that terrible sixth day.

With the seventh day came delirium. They seemed to be moving in an endless dream. One step followed another, on and on down that empty coast, but where they had come from, where they were going, they did not know. They did not even know whether they were still alive, or whether they were ghosts wandering on some eternal quest.

"We mustn't give up," Angus cried, between one hallucination and another. "We must keep going awhile yet."

On and on, through the solitudes. Often the snow-clouds swept over them, blotting them out, but always they emerged and pushed forward. Often the wind smote them in the face, buffeting them so that they seemed to be walking on a treadmill, but the end of every day found them a few miles nearer to the settlements. Across frozen rivers, over snow-swept hills, down through still haunted valleys where men had never come—reeling, falling to rise again, fighting at every step—they made their valiant way.

But human strength has limits, and at noon of the ninth day these limits seemed to be reached. Suddenly Gretchen collapsed in the trail, weeping. When Angus turned back to her, and crouched at her side, he saw the fever-lights die in her eyes and the look of bewildered horror pass from her face. She was wholly herself.

"Angus, I can't go on any more," she told him simply.

Her quiet tone steadied him, and drove some of the mists from his brain. “A little way farther,” he answered dully.

“No, I’m through. There’s no more hope.”

“There’s always hope.” He spoke so earnestly, with such a depth of passion, that she could hardly believe he was at the end of the rope himself. “Gretchen, let’s try once more.”

“Oh, haven’t you had enough? Why should we torture ourselves like this? The game’s over, and we’ve lost.”

He stood up and gazed across the silent waste. “You see that hill just ahead.”

Dazed, she looked where he pointed. “Yes—”

“Let’s try to reach it. It isna more than two miles. From there we can look over the country. If ye go wi’ me that far, I won’t urge you any more.”

She protested, weeping, but when he put his arms around her, and kissed her lips, she straggled to her feet. Once more they reeled on.

It was their last effort. Why they should even attempt it they did not know; certainly it was with no thought of salvation. Rather the battle was one of the spirit. The highland beyond seemed to them a symbol of their soul’s victory over their flesh; its attainment would declare, now and forever, that they had come through the shadow of earthly woe and fear. They had not surrendered. They had gone down fighting. They had kept faith.

Somehow—they would never know in what fashion—they reached this goal. The cruel North bludgeoned them in vain. They sank down on the hilltop, with no dream but that this was the end, with no hope other than to see the light fail clasped in each other’s arms. Yet before he bowed his head, Angus looked once more across the white fastness.

His glance was so long, so still, that a wave of intense excitement swept through Gretchen; she sat up, straining into the distance. “What is it?” she whispered.

“I dinna know. . . . I dinna think it’s anything.”

“I see some black dots far, far off. Is that what you see?”

“Yes. What could they be, Gretchen? They are na rocks, or they’d be covered with snow. And—and—but ye mustna begin to hope—”

The girl strained until her tears blinded her. “Angus, they seem to be moving—”

“Aye, but it may be just a trick o’ our eyes. We mustna build on it—”

“Angus, they *are* moving! I tell you I can see them—”

“Maybe they’re just animals. . . . They may be reindeer, lost from some herd . . . more likely they’re wolves, that will run away.”

Yes, they might be wolves. As they came closer, they seemed to move with a wolf-like gait. They appeared to be running in two files.

A moment more the two watched. Their breath was still, their hearts stopped. And then the girl uttered a wild, triumphant cry.

“They’re not wolves,” she sobbed, as she threw her arms around her lover. “They’re dogs, and Charlie and Bill are driving them. *Oh, Angus, we’re saved, we’re saved!*”

## THE END

### TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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.

[The end of *Mission of Revenge* by Edison Marshall]