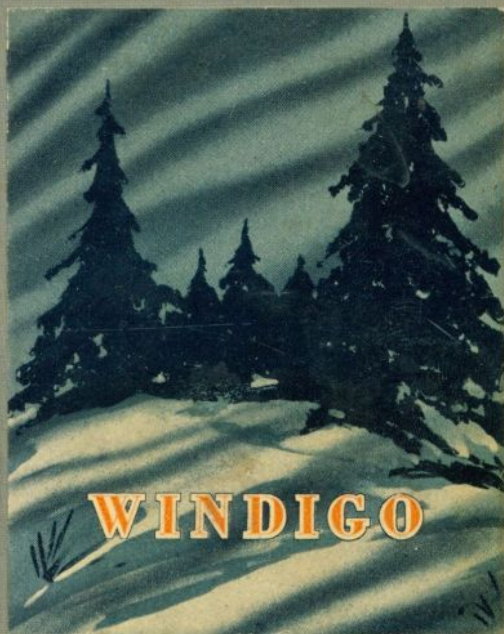




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FOX ISLAND

Kathrene Pinkerton

WINDIGO

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WINDIGO

ONE

THE train had swung north. Ann Jackman stopped talking. She turned to the window and watched the Canadian wilderness slip past. She was going home.

Beside her, Rita Trainor, Ann's guest through the Christmas vacation, became silent, although until now the girls had kept up a steady chatter. It was Rita's first visit to the north and she had found the country of lake and forest, the tiny hamlets and homesteaders' shacks on the Canadian border, strange and exciting. But now the long journey from school was almost over. Nothing but wilderness lay between them and Far Lake, a few hours away.

From the train Ann could catch only snatches of the country, but each glimpse was precious. Already she had a sense of homecoming, as she rejoiced in the beauty of the winter north. The dark green forest was lovely in a sparkling winter dress of snow. A long stretch of unbroken dazzling white flashed past, and Ann thought with quick longing of their own Far Lake and swift gallops behind a dog team. A frosty morning, dogs barking in their eagerness, and a smooth lake trail! Her blue eyes darkened with excitement.

She looked at Rita and wondered if to her this land seemed desolate and empty. As Rita watched the swiftly flowing landscape her eyes were alight with interest, but animation was so much a part of Rita that Ann could not read the thoughts behind it. She knew Rita would either love or hate the north. Rita was never undecided, any more than was Ann.

In that and many other ways the two girls were alike, although outwardly they presented a startling contrast. Rita's dark hair and vivid coloring only emphasized Ann's fairness. Rita was always vivacious while Ann's high spirits flashed out in sudden and unexpected moments. Even their backgrounds had been different. For years Rita had known only boarding schools and travel while Ann had not left the isolation of a northern fur farm until she was sixteen. Yet these vastly different environments had developed the same qualities, unusual self-reliance and a zest for living. It had been a bond between them. Their friendship had been swift and firm.

Ann had known her invitation to Rita for the Christmas holidays was only one of many. Everyone wanted her as a guest when Rita's parents decided not to return to America until spring. Ann had warned Rita that Far Lake could not offer a gay round of holiday parties. The Jackmans were the only white family living in a vast stretch of wilderness.

"There's Dad, Mother, my brother Philip, and old Hughie, the trapper who lives with us," Ann had said. "And Jerry Sloane, the boy who was on that canoe trip last summer, is coming up for the vacation. They're grand people and—"

"I'm crazy about them already, just from what you've told me," Rita had said. "Besides, I've never even seen a dog team or a snowshoe or a live silver fox. And just imagine a country where you have real Indians for neighbors!"

For weeks Rita had talked of nothing but the wilderness house party and had made it sound so glamorous and exciting she had been the envy of the school. It had been a heady triumph for Ann, a new girl.

The train skirted a muskeg swamp. Solid ranks of moss-draped spruce stretched for miles. It was vast and brooding and within its dim interior lay dark mystery. Ann's imagination quickened. Suddenly she realized how she had hungered for this land itself.

Then the muskeg swamp lay behind them, and now the train crossed and recrossed a small river which wound like a white ribbon between scattered spruce. Just beyond lay the deep forest and on its edge was an Indian hunter's camp. The cone-shaped birchbark wigwam was covered with moss and poles to keep out the winter cold. Smoke rose from the smoke hole at the peak. A toboggan and snowshoes hung in a tree. Ann caught these familiar details in the flash of the train's passing.

"Look!" she said. "An Indian's camp."

Rita stared wildly.

"We're miles past it now," Ann laughed.

"My first Indian!" Rita cried. "And you let me miss him!"

"You'll see plenty at Far Lake," Ann said. "We'll call on Wen-dah-ban."

"Isn't he the Indian boy you used to play with?"

"He's a hunter now," Ann said. "He might even be married."

Rita's dark eyes lighted. "You've had the most romantic life!" she said.

Ann laughed. “There’s nothing romantic about—”

“You’re just pretending to think it’s ordinary. Did you ever know any other girl who lived in a log lodge on an island?”

It was the first time Ann had ever heard the house on Far Lake called a lodge and she liked everything the word implied. Her father and Philip always called it a log cabin, which had never seemed to do it justice. Ann decided to adopt Rita’s version even if Philip jeered.

And he might not jeer. He’d be so glad to see her he’d be indulgent. In the years together in the north they’d grown closer than most brothers and sisters. And she knew how much Philip had missed her. For weeks his letters had been filled with plans for Christmas when Ann would be home and Jerry Sloane would spend the vacation with them.

Ann looked at her watch. In less than an hour they would reach Moose Junction where they would meet Jerry, who was coming directly from his school in the East.

“I hope our train gets into the junction before Jerry’s,” Ann said. “I’d like to be waiting on the platform and watch his face when he sees two girls. I didn’t write him you were coming.”

“I hope he likes me,” Rita said.

“He couldn’t help it. At first you might think he’s sort of quiet. I did. But on that canoe trip after the claim jumpers hurt Hughie and we’d lost our food in a rapids and were practically starving, Jerry was wonderful, the way he helped Philip and me get Hughie out to a doctor.”

“You’ve had the most exciting times,” Rita said. “And I’ve never even been in danger. It isn’t fair. We’re the same age—or practically the same age,” she added after a moment’s pause. Rita hated to admit that she was six months younger.

“You talk like Jerry,” Ann said. “He’s almost eighteen but he says Philip who is three years younger has done ten times the things he’s done. Philip hasn’t really. He’s just done different things.”

“Does Philip like Jerry?” Rita asked.

“They were crazy about each other right from the first,” Ann said. “And usually Philip is standoffish. He waits until he’s sure.”

“Perhaps Philip won’t like me,” Rita said. “Did you warn him I’d never seen a snowshoe?”

“As though that would make any difference!”

Rita looked unconvinced. She knew that Ann had dodged her question. Ann had hoped that Rita wouldn't worry about being an awkward beginner in the north. Ann knew how devastating it was to feel unsure and alien. She had discovered that in those first weeks at school. And then it had been Rita who had come to her rescue and made her seem a romantic creature to the other girls. The least she could do now was to give Rita some measure of self-confidence.

“Look!” she said. “There isn't a girl at school who dances as well as you do. Well, anyone who can dance, can snowshoe.”

“Really?” Rita said, and then she laughed. “If Philip thinks I'm an awful nuisance you'll have to take the blame for bringing me along.”

When they reached Moose Junction they hurried out to the platform. Jerry's train drew in a few minutes later. The cold air changed the steam of the engine into a great white cloud of vapor and the wheels shrieked on the frozen rails as it came to a stop.

A porter lifted a big canvas bag to the platform and a moment later Jerry followed. He was dressed in mackinaw, heavy trousers, high woolen socks, and carried a packsack on his shoulders.

He looked older, taller than he had last summer, and Ann sensed a new confidence in his bearing. But his smile was the old slow smile she remembered and it included Rita as he came toward them. The introductions were scarcely over when their own train whistled a warning.

“That's making close connections!” Jerry said.

He ran back for his other duffel while Ann and Rita carried his packsack aboard the train. Each held a strap and the heavy bag swung between them.

“You never told me he was so good looking,” Rita said. “Is he as grand as he looks?”

“Grander!” Ann said. “And I know! You can be sure about someone when you've been through tough times together.”

“I suppose you can,” Rita said. She looked thoughtful and then she turned and faced Ann. “If I'm awful dumb about things up here, you'll know I'm trying anyway, won't you?”

“Of course,” Ann said. “I knew that when I invited you.”

The train had started when Jerry walked down the aisle. Ann made room for him to sit beside her. Jerry's clothes looked very new. His bright plaid shirt still had its original creases.

"I dressed for the trail this morning," Jerry said. "Didn't want to hold up the procession at Far Lake."

"And you couldn't wait to get on your bush clothes," Ann added.

Jerry grinned. "Had to spring my grandeur before you and Philip broke out your skin parkas." He turned to Rita. "You and I'll have to stick together and not let them get us down."

Ann sat back and relaxed. Jerry liked Rita. She might have known she could count on his warm friendliness.

Jerry asked questions to catch up on Jackman gossip. He wanted to hear about the fur farm, Hughie, school, and Philip. Especially about Philip.

"They don't come any gamer than Philip," he said to Rita.

"I'm scared of Philip already," Rita said. "But I'm even more scared of the twenty-mile trip from the railroad to Fox Island."

"But you'll ride out by dog team," Ann said.

"Hey!" Jerry said. "I'm going to have my turn on the toboggan. It's a year since I've been on snowshoes."

"Why don't you two outsiders toss for the first turn?" Ann asked.

"Outsiders?" Jerry scoffed. "What are you now? Bet you're as soft as any of us after four months at school. Is Philip going to meet us?"

"He's probably at the station now," Ann said. "He's talked about this day for weeks."

Plans for their arrival had filled the home letters. The girls would change to trail clothes at the Hudson's Bay Post. Mr. Gillespie, the manager, had invited them for dinner. Jerry beamed approval. He turned to Rita.

"Ever think you'd be the guest of the Company of Adventurers Trading into the Hudson's Bay? Shows what important people we've come to visit. No one but the Jackmans would be invited."

"There's no other white family up here to be," Ann laughed.

Rita picked up her hat and bag.

"I've got less than a half-hour to do what I can to make Ann proud of me," she said. "Ann's got enough to explain without my arriving with a shiny nose."

Ann and Jerry watched Rita go down the aisle to the dressing room.

"Isn't she a wonderful girl?" Ann asked.

Jerry nodded. "She's a nice kid," he said, and his tone was tempered. "Only—"

"Only what?" Ann demanded.

"She's not the sort of girl I'd ever imagine you'd—" He saw Ann's face and stopped. "I only meant she isn't used to this kind of country."

"Neither were you last summer. You didn't even know how to paddle."

Jerry laughed. "Wasn't I the biggest dub!" he said. "You and Philip and Hughie were so decent about my boners. Bet there were times you'd have liked to drown me."

"Never!" Ann said vehemently. "There wasn't anyone in the crowd as good a sport as you were. And Rita will be one, too. Wait and see!"

"You wouldn't pick any other kind," Jerry said. "But she's going to be an awful shock to Philip."

Ann giggled.

"It'll do him good. He ought to know more about outsiders before he goes to school next year. I had to learn everything in one big gulp."

"I often wondered how you were getting along," Jerry said. "Were the first weeks pretty bad?"

"They might have been, except for Rita. She made the other girls think I was different and romantic."

"That makes her my friend for life," Jerry said. "But we'd better not tell Philip she's never been off a sidewalk."

"And we'll watch out for her at first," Ann said. "Until she gets used to things."

Jerry nodded, and his smile had the warmth of a fellow conspirator. When Rita rejoined them a moment later, Ann thought there wasn't another girl at school who could put on a hat so dashingly. Jerry stared with approval. The train was slowing for Far Lake station and they gathered their

belongings. As they started down the aisle Jerry studied both girls judiciously.

“The two best-looking females who ever got off at Far Lake,” he said. “And I’d even be willing to include a lot more territory.”

The train stopped and Ann was the first one down the steps. It seemed years since she’d seen Philip. She looked around, at first with eagerness, then with growing apprehension. Philip was not on the station platform.

TWO

A SCORE of possible disasters crossed Ann's mind. She was so completely the victim of her imagination she did not see Mr. Gillespie coming toward them. At the sound of his voice she swung around. The grizzled Scotch manager's face was beaming.

"Welcome home, my dear!" he cried. "Bless my soul, but you've grown up. Not too grown up, I hope, to let an old man kiss you."

His big arms enveloped her. Then he turned to the others.

"And this is Rita," he said. "Welcome to Far Lake," and his handclasp was almost a ceremony. He thrust out a hand to Jerry. "It's good to see you again, lad. We were sorry to hear your father couldn't make the trip."

"Not half as sorry as he was, sir," Jerry said. "Ever since last summer he'd counted on Christmas at Fox Island. His partner was sick and Dad had to stand by the law firm."

"But where is Philip?" Ann demanded as soon as she could get a word in. "Is anything wrong at Fox Island?"

"There wasn't yesterday when I was out there," the manager said. "He's probably delayed a bit. You've been outside so long you think even dog teams run on schedules like trains."

Ann laughed with the others, but it wasn't like Philip to be late. As they followed the trail to the Hudson's Bay Post she reasoned with her apprehensions. If Mr. Gillespie was concealing disaster from her, he couldn't be so jovial. Kindly as the manager was, he would never flinch from a disagreeable duty, and had anything happened at Fox Island he would have been the first to tell her. Philip's twenty-mile journey must have taken longer than he'd expected.

Mr. Gillespie led them into the trade shop. Ann had always regretted that the coming of the railroad had forced the Company to leave its original post on Lake Caribou. She had loved those old whitewashed buildings with the dwelling house and green lawn and tall flagpole, surrounded by a white picket fence. The present trade shop had seemed more like an ordinary store

and Mr. Gillespie had always pretended to be apologetic about this modern version. But as he led his visitors inside Ann realized that the old pride in the great Company still ruled him. He made no attempt to conceal his pleasure when Jerry spoke of the trade goods he carried for the hunters. Blankets, bolts of duffel, strouds, and dark woolen prints were on the shelves. Behind the big grocery counter were sacks of flour, lead-lined boxes of tea, and sides of pork. And on the walls hung snowshoes, traps, gilling twine, and bright tin kettles.

Michel, the half-breed clerk, entered the trade shop. He smiled at Ann. She shook hands and introduced the others.

"I've known Michel ever since I was a little girl," she said.

"Wah-bo-sence," Michel said, and he laughed.

Jerry turned to Rita. "It's her Indian name," he said. "Little rabbit. It was her hair. Pale, like a rabbit's."

"Why, Ann!" Rita cried. "You never told us you had an Indian name!"

"You'll probably have one too before you leave Far Lake," Ann said.

"Really!" Rita looked eager.

"Most of them are names you'd rather not have translated," Mr. Gillespie warned her. "I've never even asked Michel what the hunters call me."

"Why, you know they call you he-who-speaks-the-truth," Ann said.

Rita stared around at the strange mixture of white man's luxuries and simple necessities of a primitive people.

"This is my first Hudson's Bay Post," she told the manager.

"It's too bad you didn't see one before the coming of the railroad. In those days we had a real trade shop. None of these gimcracks. When I was an apprentice clerk, if anyone had told me I'd be trading alarm clocks and gadgets to our hunters, I'd have left the service. But I won't bore you three young people with an old man's grievance. Ann has heard it many times."

"Remember how you and Dad used to argue about the coming of the railroad and his starting a fur farm?" Ann laughed. "I loved to hear those battles. Even after a long trip in winter to Fort Caribou, I'd sit up and listen to you two until I fell asleep in my chair."

Mr. Gillespie chuckled. "You were always on your dad's side. Well, time proved him right."

He started toward the living quarters. Ann would have liked to linger in the trade shop. This new post on the railroad might not be as colorful as the old one, but it still had the old familiar aroma that aroused so many memories. She drew in her breath sharply, and with a strange delight. Indian smell! The odor of tanned moccasins, of woolen clothing smoked by cooking fires, of skins in the fur loft above. She stopped at the steep stairs which led to it. Rita would love to see those great heaps of fur waiting to be baled. Beaver, fisher, marten, red fox, cross fox, and perhaps even a silver; long strings of white ermine and soft dark mink.

"Can't we go up?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'd never get you girls away from all that fur," he said. "And I promised Mrs. Jackman I'd start you out in time to get to Fox Island before dark. Louise will have dinner ready by the time you've changed to trail clothes."

Louise, the Indian housekeeper, met them at the door of the living quarters. Her broad face was wreathed in smiles. She led the girls to a bedroom where the trail clothes sent by Mrs. Jackman were waiting for them. There was a complete outfit for each—woolen trousers, shirts, heavy socks, and moccasins. On the bed were two caribou-skin parkas. One was Ann's. The other was new. Ann held it out to Rita.

"This must be for you!" she cried. "And look! It's fur-trimmed, just like mine."

Louise giggled. "Mr. Gillespie say it Christmas."

"Mine!" Rita's voice broke in her excitement. "Did you ever see anything so gorgeous!"

"Put it on!" Ann commanded.

Rita slipped the loose skin parka over her head. She pulled up the hood and her glowing face was framed in cross fox. She rushed to the mirror.

"I'd no idea a parka was so becoming," she said. "Shall I wear it down to dinner?"

"You'd melt if you kept it on. But wear it downstairs to show him how wonderful you look."

“Do you think he really meant to give it to me?” Rita asked. She turned to Louise. “This isn’t mine?”

Louise nodded. “Present from Mr. Gillespie.”

Louise had gone downstairs before Rita caught her breath.

“What can I say to thank him?” she demanded. “Did you ever hear of anything so sweet and generous?”

“That’s just the kind of man he is,” Ann said.

Dressed for the trail, even to parkas, they went downstairs to join Jerry and Mr. Gillespie in the living room. The girls halted in the doorway. Jerry whistled.

“Where’d you get the finery?” he asked Rita.

“From Mr. Gillespie,” Rita said. “I’m so pleased and touched, and so embarrassed, I can’t find words to thank him. What can you say to anyone who’s done such a wonderful thing for a stranger?”

Mr. Gillespie was solemn as he put a hand on Rita’s shoulder. “No friend of Ann’s can be a stranger,” he said. “And as pretty a girl as you deserves a fur-trimmed parka.”

Rita flushed with pleasure. She had only managed to stammer an embarrassed thank you when Louise appeared in the doorway.

“You eat now,” the housekeeper said.

It was a gala meal, roast meat, wild rice, home-made bread, and hot black tea. For dessert Louise brought in a pie.

“*Shag-e-nash* pie,” she said, as she set it down for Ann to serve.

The manager looked puzzled. “White man’s pie,” he repeated. “What kind of pie is that?” When his housekeeper didn’t explain he leaned over to watch Ann cut the crust, and then burst out laughing. “Bless my soul, if Louise hasn’t finally conquered the secret of mincemeat!”

Smothered with delighted giggles, Louise rushed from the room. Her contribution to the white man’s party had been a great success.

Mr. Gillespie looked at his watch and said they ought to start if they were to reach Fox Island before dark.

“But what can be delaying Philip?” Ann asked.

“I’ll take a look,” the manager said and left the table.

Suppressed excitement in his manner reminded Ann of past occasions when he'd arranged surprises. In a few moments he returned wearing his finest parka. It was heavily fringed with leather and trimmed with beadwork. He looked every bit the overlord of a vast district and Ann thought of lonely northern trails and snow and blizzards. No wonder the old manager clung to memories of the glory and the prestige of the great Company.

He handed a canvas parka to Jerry. "It isn't caribou skin," he said. "But it'll turn the wind on the lake."

They dressed for the trail and followed the manager to the front door as two dog teams with their drivers rounded the corner of the building.

The half-breed trippers were dressed as half-breeds always dressed in fur land. They wore the skin clothing admired by white men and they had prepared for an important event by putting on their best outfits. Their skin parkas had fur trimming and simple beadwork. Their caps and gauntlet mittens were of fur and their moccasins were beaded. Not a detail of the great Company's ceremonial regalia for an official dog team journey had been forgotten.

The six-dog teams stretched out in two long lines. They were the post's finest teams, great strong animals, magnificently muscled. Now even they seemed to realize this was a festive occasion. Their collars carried big red pompons, and on each back strap was a set of jingling sleigh bells. One team drew the big freight toboggan. The other was harnessed to Mr. Gillespie's own special cariole. As Rita realized its full grandeur, she uttered an exclamation of delight. The high skin sides of the cariole were adorned with beadwork. Bright tassels topped the four corner uprights. The cariole was padded with a soft thick mattress and two lynx paw robes served as blankets.

"And this is why Philip didn't come to meet us!" Ann cried.

"Surely you didn't imagine that the Company would permit distinguished visitors to snowshoe to Fox Island," Mr. Gillespie said. "And I like a share in Jackman celebrations."

"A share!" Ann cried. "You make the celebrations!"

Rita and Ann were to ride luxuriously in the cariole. Mr. Gillespie, Jerry, and the luggage would travel on the freight toboggan. It was loaded amid the excited chatter of two Indian trippers. Ann remembered she had not said good-bye to Louise. She ran to the dwelling quarters and found the housekeeper in the kitchen.

"Thank you, Louise, and a happy Christmas!" she called.

The Indian woman looked up.

“Maybe happy Christmas,” she said, and her voice was troubled.

“Of course it will be,” Ann said. “Christmas is always happy.”

Louise shook her head. “Maybe,” she said dully. “Maybe. But I no like.”

“You don’t like what?” Ann demanded.

But as though she had already said more than she intended, Louise picked up a dish and turned away. Ann knew there was no use in pressing. Louise could retreat completely into that native world of silence. Ann walked out of the kitchen and through the trade shop. Michel, partly white and more articulate than the others, might explain the trouble.

Michel was behind the counter. Ann stopped to wish him a merry Christmas. He did not answer.

“What is Louise afraid of?” she asked suddenly. “Why does she keep saying she no like?”

Surprise startled Michel into an answer.

“Bad medicine,” he said. “Everybody afraid of bad medicine.” He shook his head lugubriously. “By and by white trader he know that is so.”

“Who could make bad medicine against Mr. Gillespie?” Ann demanded.

Michel turned away and began to rearrange trade goods on a shelf. Ann stared at his back and knew he didn’t intend to answer.

“You know bad medicine can’t hurt a white man,” she said. “It is foolish even to try.”

Michel swung around. His face was as blank as that of any Indian’s when he has retreated into his own native world.

“Tell me, Michel,” Ann urged. “You know I am the white trader’s friend.”

Michel said nothing. He picked up an empty box and hurried to the storeroom.

Ann did not follow. She knew it was useless and she walked slowly out of the trade shop to join the others. They were waiting for her. Rita was already in the cariole. Ann sat at Rita’s feet. Rita drew a lynx paw robe around her and sank into the softness of the padded back.

“Already I’ve had thrill enough to satisfy me for a whole vacation,” she said. “Ann, you never told us half the wonderful things about this country.”

Jerry and the manager took their places on the big toboggan and Mr. Gillespie gave the order for departure. The trippers snapped their long whips and called, “*Marchon.*” The dogs, eager and excited, broke into a gallop. Sleigh bells jingled. The trippers shouted to each other and to the post servants who had gathered near the trade shop.

They were off! The trail led past the station to the lake, and then stretched on and on as far as Ann could see. And as the vast white emptiness of Far Lake lay before her, Ann reasoned against a strange and disturbing uneasiness. It was not as definite as fear. It was only the first pinprick awareness of disaster. Undoubtedly native superstition explained her strange talk with Louise and Michel. But if Mr. Gillespie really was in trouble, the Jackmans should know about it.

THREE

THE sun had slipped below a wooded ridge and the trees were a black, wolf-jaw silhouette against the last red glow. The sudden chill of approaching darkness blanketed the lake. Ann saw Fox Island, a dim shape ahead. They'd made good time. Mr. Gillespie's recent trip to the island had left the trail as hard and as smooth as a sidewalk. The dogs had settled to a steady trot, and hour after hour the trippers had run on snowshoes. They seemed tireless.

Slap! Slap! The frames of snowshoes beat a rhythmic tattoo on the hard trail and underneath, a low undertone, was the crunch of the toboggan on frozen snow. It was all so familiar. Ann was lulled into a delicious lethargy.

Mr. Gillespie, on the lead toboggan, called to Ann and pointed. Philip and the team were coming down the lake. Ogema, in the lead, was straining forward as though he knew of Ann's coming. As they drew closer Ogema barked a welcome and Philip waved.

At the manager's command the trippers halted the teams. Ann ran forward and threw her arms around Philip.

"It's so good to see you!" she cried as she held him close.

Usually Philip was not demonstrative, but now he made no effort to hide his joy as he gripped her shoulders and looked into her face. "It's been mighty lonesome without you, Sis," he said.

He became aware of the others waiting to be greeted.

"Hello, Rita," he said as he shook hands. "What do you think of the style the Company put on in your honor?" He turned to Jerry. "Gee, it's good to see you! I'd expected to meet you people in the narrows. You've made good time. Who's riding back with me?"

"I am," Ann said. She wanted Philip within hand touch. "Can't we both ride?"

"We've done it before," Philip said.

Ogema looked around approvingly as Ann settled into their own cariole. It had been a present from Mr. Gillespie. It too was made of caribou skin, and while not as heavily beaded and not equipped with lynx paw robes, Ann thought it quite as beautiful as the manager's own. Philip knelt in the front.

"Marchon!" he shouted. "Get into it, you fellows. Yippee!"

Excitement and exultation in his voice galvanized the team. They started on a gallop. Their claws dug into the frozen trail. Tails curved over backs and shrill barks filled the air. It was an impressive cavalcade which swept up to the island. The three teams stretched out in a long line. The trippers grinned and ran faster.

Ann wanted to talk to Philip about Rita, but she had only time to ask him if he didn't think she was pretty. Philip looked around, his face a curious mixture of misgiving and a desire to please Ann.

"Sure," he said. "But what are we going to do with a girl who's never even seen a trail? Will she mind staying at the cabin while you and Jerry and I get in a trip or two?"

Before they started up the steep slope to the house, Philip put on his snowshoes. Ann made a motion to get out, but he stopped her.

"You're riding right up to the front door," he said.

Mr. and Mrs. Jackman were on the veranda. Ann's eyes were wet as she kissed them. Then the second and the third team swept up to the veranda steps, and there was the joyous confusion of fresh arrivals and happy laughter. The trippers carried the luggage to the veranda and Mrs. Jackman threw open the front door. Philip said he'd take the dogs to the corral.

"And don't talk about anything important while I'm gone," he said. He turned to the trippers. "I'll show you where to tie your teams."

"We've got to start for home," the manager protested.

"Not until you've had supper!" Mrs. Jackman cried. "I made a chocolate cake."

"That settles it," Mr. Gillespie said as he pulled off his parka. "I was hoping to be invited."

"He means, Mary, he was wanting to be urged," Mr. Jackman said. "As though Alex Gillespie had to wait for that."

The Scotchman's blue eyes twinkled. "I don't," he said. "But it's pleasant hearing."

The confusion of arrival subsided. Ann wondered why she had never realized what a general her mother was, bringing order without seeming to take command. Ann led Rita to her own room which they were to share. Philip helped Jerry carry bags to the guest room downstairs. Mr. Jackman and the manager settled in easy chairs before the big fireplace. Mrs. Jackman gave the trippers their supper in the kitchen.

The girls unpacked and changed from trail clothes. Rita's cherry red dress brought out her lovely coloring and Ann chose a soft green wool, a new one her family had never seen. Before they joined the others, they stood for a moment on the balcony which ran the full length of the big room below.

Ann thought how lovely the room was. The soft firelight deepened the warm shades of seasoned Norway logs and caught the highlights of the waxed walnut chests.

"Candles and pewter on the table of a log lodge!" Rita said ecstatically. "I never dreamed it could be half so wonderful. And who thought of having the bedrooms open on a gallery?"

"I did," Ann said. "At least I copied the idea from a novel I read when I was young. It had a picture of a big log room. I never forgot it. Everybody laughed at me except Hughie. He said heat went up, and it was smart not to waste all the firewood it would take to heat this high room and when I told him that in the book there were big fur rugs hanging from the railing, he trapped a bear skin for me."

As they walked downstairs Rita stopped to admire the great hewn timbers of the staircase. "They look as though they'd last for centuries."

Ann laughed. "It took Hugh days and days to hew and square those big timbers, but I'd told him about a log staircase in the book."

The house seemed strange without Hugh. Ann missed him. Her mother had said he'd gone to an Indian camp and might return that evening. The errand sounded mysterious. Ann suspected a surprise. For a year Hugh had said they needed a second dog team and it would be like Hugh to buy one for the Christmas party.

Jerry and Philip helped Mrs. Jackman bring in the supper. Philip pretended to scowl at Ann as he set a pile of plates on the table.

"Doing this because it's your first night home, Sis," he warned her.

They gathered around the table. Mr. Jackman insisted that Ann and Rita sit beside him.

“Need a new audience,” he said. “Mary’s getting tired of my stories.”

Mrs. Jackman flashed a smile at her husband. It had warmth and laughter and understanding. Ann was suddenly aware, with all the joy of fresh discovery, how much these two meant to each other.

“No young fellow’s going to have my place by Mary’s side,” the post manager said. “I haven’t had a chance to tell her I’m going away for a holiday.”

“Why, Alex!” Mrs. Jackman cried. “I never dreamed you’d leave the post in winter!”

“Neither did I, Mary. I’ve been as demoralized as the hunters by the coming of the railroad. An old friend from Scotland will be in Winnipeg and it’s my only chance to visit him.”

“Who’ll run the post while you’re away?” Philip asked.

“Michel. Do him good. He needs to be reminded that he’s partly white. He’s been mooning around like a scared native ever since my ruckus with Dan Wilson two weeks ago.”

“I remember Wilson,” Philip said. “Hanging around the station. He had mean eyes.”

“Wasn’t he a free trader?” Dave Jackman asked.

“Yes, and I’ll wager he’ll be the last in my district for some time. It’s a good story. Want to hear it?”

Ann leaned forward. So this is what had caused the forebodings of Louise and Michel.

“Please, someone, tell me what a free trader is,” Rita said.

“An independent fur buyer,” Philip said. “Hudson’s Bay men don’t like them.”

“And for good reason,” the manager said, and his face was grim. “He’s an outsider who tries to destroy the loyalty of hunters to a Company which has stood behind them since the signing of our charter in 1670. A free trader deserves anything that happens to him.”

“But, Alex, what did happen to him?” Mrs. Jackman demanded.

Mr. Gillespie began to laugh.

“Wilson thought because he could get here by railroad the old Hudson’s Bay days were a thing of the past. Probably he expected to set up shop beside me. He arrived at Far Lake one morning and arranged to live with the station master. He tried to avoid me, and I got suspicious of the chap. I got his record. He’d cheated some Indians to the south on a fur deal and thought he’d come far enough so the story wouldn’t follow. He didn’t tell anybody his business at Far Lake, and I didn’t ask him. But I made it my business to get acquainted with the chap. Insisted he drop in for a spot of tea and chat. He decided I was just an old fool, a Company servant, left to drowse beside the railroad.

“So he kept on with his dirty spying and his trickery to steal my hunters, without even guessing I knew what he was up to. He wasn’t even suspicious when I invited him for supper, nor afterward when I brought out some brandy. Good brandy it was too. Much too good for a free trader. Before bedtime I was acting as though I was in my cups, and so was he. I made him spend the night. It was bitter cold and I said, ‘My dear chap, I couldn’t allow you to walk to the station on a night like this.’ Made a great fuss about his comfort. Loaned him a good linen nightshirt and carried his clothes downstairs to the big heater so they’d be warm in the morning.

“I stumbled about a bit, and seemed to be having trouble with my words. Then I went to my room and snored so you could have heard me all over the dwelling quarters. Had to keep that up for an hour before he felt safe to do his thieving. Then I heard him tiptoe downstairs. I let him get well started on his dirty work in the office before I followed. Caught him at it. He’d copied the hunters’ names out of the fur book, had the records of their catches, the prices we’d paid and the amount of debt we’d given ’em.”

“What did you do?” Ann cried.

“Not a thing,” and the manager’s voice was blameless. “I let him go back to the station.”

“But, Alex! That was Company property! Information you’d spent years in getting. Surely you didn’t let him steal it!” Mrs. Jackman was as aroused as though she herself was a servant of the Company. “Why, just for his treachery as a guest he deserved . . .”

“Oh, I didn’t let him take that information with him,” Mr. Gillespie said. “And naturally I couldn’t keep such scum around long enough for him to dress. And so he went down the trail barefoot, in my best linen nightshirt on the coldest night this winter.”

Their shouts of laughter stopped him. Dave Jackman wiped tears from his eyes.

“Who but you, Alex, would have dressed him in a white nightshirt!”

The old Scotchman looked pleased. “Wasn’t a bad trick, was it? They were still laughing at the station the next day. Laughed Dan Wilson out of the country. He couldn’t buy a pelt from a hunter in my district.” The trader turned to Rita. “With an Indian nothing is worse than to be the object of ridicule. They’ll have no respect for Wilson.”

“But if the Indians live scattered through the woods, how will they hear the story?” Rita asked.

“My dear, if I knew how to explain the speed of the moccasin telegraph, I’d be the smartest man in the service,” Mr. Gillespie said. “All I can tell you is that it exists. That story will go the length and breadth of my district.”

Later the manager was having his after-supper pipe before departure when Ann asked about Wen-dah-ban.

“You knew he was married?”

“Sho-shun’s daughter?” Ann asked.

“No. Shaw-win, a new girl he met last summer at the blueberry dances.”

It sounded like a romance. “Is she good enough for Wen-dah-ban?” Ann asked.

“She’s a fine girl. Good looking too, which is more’n you could say for Sho-shun’s daughter. They’re a promising young couple. Gave ’em blankets for a wedding present, and they’ve set up a wigwam in Wen-dah-ban’s trapping territory. You ought to go and see ’em. It would please the lad. He thinks a lot of the Jackmans.”

“And we of him,” Dave Jackman said. “I’ve liked the boy ever since he first brought his bows and arrows and came over to play with Ann and Philip. Always knew he’d make a fine hunter.”

The manager nodded. “You know how I’ve always depended on his father. Wen-dah-ban will be as great a leader as old Pe-tah-bo. The lad proved his weight in that trouble with Ehe-bik over the silver fox. He’s half the age of Ehe-bik, but was twice the man.”

“It was Wen-dah-ban’s fox, wasn’t it?” Philip asked.

"No doubt of it. The fox wasn't prime, nor well marked. But a silver fox is a big catch for any man and not many hunters get one. I knew Wen-dah-ban would never steal another hunter's fur."

Mr. Gillespie told the story. A fox had been caught in early December. Ehe-bik, whose hunting territory was next to Wen-dah-ban's, claimed the fox had been stolen from his trap. But Wen-dah-ban had put fox poison on an island before freeze-up.

"There wasn't any question but that the fox was poisoned," the manager finished. "I showed them the blue skin on the belly. Wen-dah-ban was reasonable, and he'd been unjustly accused of stealing. But Ehe-bik was disgruntled. I couldn't make him admit he was wrong."

"I never liked Ehe-bik," Ann said. "Maybe it's because his name means 'spider.'"

"Can't blame him because a spider was the first thing his father saw after he was born."

"Is that the way the Indians get their names?" Rita asked. "What a perfectly frightful custom!"

"It works out pretty well," the manager said. "You couldn't better Wen-dah-ban's name. Coming dawn. And Shaw-win's name means 'the south.' That might have helped Wen-dah-ban to keep her down here. At least, she never went back north with her father when the dances were over. But of course a fine young fellow like Wen-dah-ban is enough of a reason for any girl."

"You're pleased about this marriage, aren't you?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"I like to see the young'uns of fine old families marry. Her father, old An-ah-mee-kee, is as much of a leader as Pe-tah-bo. He's one of the few men left who belong to the *Midewiwin*."

"What's that?" Rita whispered to Ann.

But Mr. Gillespie had arisen to go. Jerry and Philip went out to call the trippers. The manager held out his hand.

"I'll miss my Christmas at Fox Island," he said. "But I'll expect you people at the post on New Year's."

It was an important day in fur land when the Company held open house. Every hunter in the district gathered to have cake and coffee in the dwelling

house and to shake the big trader's hand. No vacation would be allowed to interfere with that ceremony.

They walked to the veranda with the manager and watched the Company teams disappear from the circle of lamplight streaming out of the front windows. Gradually the jingle of sleigh bells grew fainter.

"Isn't he a fine fellow!" Jerry said when they went inside. "I've seen him only twice, once last summer and today. But I feel as though he'd been my friend for life."

"And how do you think we feel about him?" Dave Jackman said. "If we lived to be a hundred we'd never be able to square our debt of friendship."

His departure left a strange emptiness. Ann had a let-down feeling. Jerry, too, must have felt it, for a moment later he came out of his room carrying a huge package wrapped in gay paper and red ribbon.

"It may not be Christmas yet, but Dad would want us to enjoy this. It's his present to the family."

They tore off wrappings and excelsior to find a phonograph and records. Not a member of the family had been forgotten. Mrs. Jackman exclaimed over an album.

"John Sloane even remembered I'd said I missed Beethoven!"

"And that I'd said I liked a fiddle," her husband added. "This Kreisler's quite a lad."

Jerry put on a dance record.

"Come on, Ann. Let's see how well you've learned to dance," he said. They started off, and he called over his shoulder, "Get your partners, everybody. This isn't an exhibition."

Dave Jackman reached for his wife's hand. "Let's try it, Mary. We used to be pretty good at this."

Jerry and Ann watched Philip standing beside Rita.

"Think she can make him dance?" Jerry whispered.

"Perhaps we'd better help," Ann said. "Let's just happen to stop near them."

Jerry maneuvered across the room. They danced by, close enough to realize how little Rita needed aid. As they passed her she was saying, "Why,

Philip, anyone who can snowshoe as well as you do, can dance without half trying.”

FOUR

THE next morning Mrs. Jackman, Ann, and Rita lingered at the breakfast table. The others were still occupied with morning chores, for not even a house party could interfere with the inflexible demands of wilderness routine. Fires had to be built, wood brought in, water carried from the water hole in the lake, and foxes and mink cared for. They missed Hughie's pair of hands.

"I don't know how we ever managed without him," Mrs. Jackman said.

"Do you remember how we worried when we first heard him say he'd do one more little job before he 'got along'?" Ann laughed. "In three years he's never begun a job without that speech."

"And I hope he never does," her mother said. "Dear old Hughie and his dream of farther places! But nothing would hurt his feelings more than to discover we'd ever thought he meant it."

"Do you suppose anything has happened to him?" Ann asked. "Didn't you expect him home last night?"

"My dear, if I'd worried every time any of you failed to arrive when you were expected, I'd be a white-haired old woman," Mrs. Jackman said.

She became suddenly energetic as she picked up a dish and led the way to the kitchen. A moment later Philip entered, carrying the last pails for the big water barrel. It was filled to the brim. He said the others were feeding the foxes.

"It's a good time to show Rita the fur farm," Ann said. "She won't need snowshoes," and she turned to Philip. "Isn't the trail to the fur pens hard enough to walk on?"

"Rita and I've got something to do first," Philip said.

"What?" Ann asked.

"Trade snowshoe lessons for dancing. That's only fair. Get on your parka, Rita."

Rita dressed and went off with Philip. While Ann and her mother washed the breakfast dishes they could hear the snowshoe lesson going on outside. It seemed to be more laughter than instruction.

“Don’t you like her?” Ann asked.

“Very much,” her mother said. “Last night she was wonderful about Philip’s dancing. Didn’t make him feel embarrassed.”

“Rita’s like that with people,” Ann said. “I’ve learned a lot from her.”

“You weren’t exactly a social problem before,” her mother said.

“Perhaps not,” Ann said. “But it was Rita who made me sure I wasn’t.”

For a few moments they washed dishes in companionable silence. It was the first time Ann had been alone with her mother. She thought of all the things they’d done together and how she had looked forward to these precious days.

“Isn’t it marvelous to be home for Christmas!” she burst out suddenly. “And to have our two best friends with us.”

Her mother nodded. “It’s as I’ve liked to imagine this house. Full and running over with young people.”

It was almost noon before they were ready to start on the inspection of the fur farm. Everyone put on snowshoes. Philip boasted of his pupil’s progress.

“In another day she’ll be ready to race you,” he said to Jerry.

“Not if you make her snowshoe until she gets *mal de racquette*,” Jerry said.

“What’s that?” Rita asked in alarm.

“Leg tendons you’ve never used before stand up and howl,” Jerry said. “Strong men break down and cry with pain.”

Rita looked unconvinced.

“Snowshoeing is a lot more dangerous than dancing,” Jerry went on. “Snowshoe thongs freeze and get like iron. They’ll cut right through a moccasin so you leave a trail of blood.”

“Pooh!” Rita said. “I can run on these things. Watch me.”

She ran down the trail. Everyone applauded, Philip more loudly than the others. And just at that moment Rita stepped on one snowshoe with the other

and went headlong into a snowdrift.

She was on her feet before they could reach her. She shook snow from sleeves and dug it from inside the neck of her parka. Mr. Jackman struggled against a smile. Then Rita laughed.

“That will teach me not to get smart,” she said as she fell into line behind Philip. “From now on, I watch teacher.”

They started off in single file. It was the first time Rita had really seen the island. It was shaped like a huge dumbbell, with the house at one end and fur farm at the other. The house topped a slope in a stand of Norway. Near the house, and partially hidden in a well-kept growth of spruce and birch and poplar, were the other buildings—storehouse, Hugh’s cabin, root cellar, icehouse, workshop, and dog corral.

Rita had never dreamed a home in the wilderness required so much support. “It’s like downtown in a village,” she said. “You have ice, meat, groceries, vegetables, fuel, a repair shop, and a livery stable. I mean the corral.”

“We have no one but ourselves to depend on,” Mr. Jackman said.

“And you haven’t seen the fur farm yet,” Philip said. “It has its own storehouse and workshop.”

They crossed the narrow neck of land which separated the two portions of the island. The fur farm end was larger than the other and partially wooded. It was enclosed by an outer eight-foot fence of heavy netting. Mr. Jackman unlocked the gate.

“Make a practice of keeping it locked,” he said a bit apologetically. “But we’re not as careful as the Prince Edward Island fox farms. They have burglar alarms and day and night guards.”

“You’re going to see thousands of dollars’ worth of fur walking around on its feet,” Jerry explained to Rita. Having seen the fur farm the previous summer, he felt justified in acting as a guide.

“Let’s show Rita the mink first,” Mrs. Jackman said. “They are the bread and butter of a fur farm. We’ll save the cake until the last.”

The mink pens were in a long row. Netting divided the yards. Each pair of mink lived separately, and each had both indoor and outdoor quarters. The houses were used for sleeping, nesting, and in cold weather, and could be entered from a long corridor which formed the rear of the mink kennel.

At the end of the corridor was a room where food was cooked, water heated, and sick mink cared for.

“But we’ve not had many sick ones,” Mr. Jackman said. “We’ve been lucky.”

“Or watchful,” his wife added. “Many children aren’t fed as carefully as these mink.”

They walked along the open pens. Some of the mink retreated to their houses but the tamer ones remained to watch the visitors. They lifted their heads on long slender bodies. Their eyes were bright with interest and their coats were dark and glistening.

Ann hurried to the pen of her own mink and called, “Violet.” A sharp little face looked out of the low doorway of the house.

“She knows my voice,” Ann said. “How is her family?”

“Fat and grown,” her father said. “You’d never recognize them as the little rascals you fed last summer.”

“I wish you Jackmans weren’t so modest,” Jerry said. “Does Rita know this fur farm started from scratch, and these were wild mink?”

“We’ll do our boasting at the fox pens,” Mr. Jackman said. “They are really what she wants to see.”

“If you don’t, I’ll boast for you,” Jerry said. “It was Ann who located the fox den. They all worked to dig them out. A pair and five cubs. Every one a silver! Mr. Gillespie said it made fur land history. Then the Jackmans raised the entire litter. Didn’t lose a cub.”

“Jerry doesn’t leave me much to boast about,” Mr. Jackman said as they walked toward the fox pens.

The foxes were elaborately housed, as befitted fur land’s royalty. The pens were larger than those of the mink. Each pen had its separate house, and sunlight and shade, and in each of the netting-enclosed yards was a sawed-off stump.

“Foxes like to sit up high and look around,” Philip explained.

Rita stared at the pair of foxes in the first pen. She drew in her breath with excitement.

“They’re beautiful!” she said.

They *were* beautiful. Cold had conditioned their silky coats. They were glossy and very black, with silver shadings in wide bands.

“Pride and Princess of Fox Island,” Mr. Jackman said. “They’re registered by that name. Our first pair of foxes. And we wouldn’t part with them for any money. Know anything about silver foxes?”

“Not much,” Rita said. “Except that they’re rare and terribly expensive.”

“Not as rare as they were once,” Mr. Jackman said. “There was a time when not more than twenty-five silver fox pelts reached the London market in a year. But a man by the name of Dalton first proved that the fox could be domesticated and a silver strain established. He organized the First Ten Companies of Prince Edward Island, and a few years ago, in 1910, they sent their first silver foxes to the market. There were 703 silver fox pelts in the shipment. That was the beginning of the industry of the Golden Pelt.”

“Two years ago when we were in Paris Mother pointed out a silver fox to me,” Rita said. “Countess d’Aubeville wore it. She was supposed to be one of the best-dressed women in France. But Mother was a lot more excited about the silver fox. She had never seen one.”

“Few people had seen silver fox pelts before the Prince Edward Island fox farms put them on the market,” Mr. Jackman said. “They’re supposed to have the finest strain in the country, but I’d be willing to put our foxes up against them.”

“Some day the Jackman foxes will be as famous,” Philip said.

“Not so fast, son. It would take a lot of capital to make our name count in this game.”

“It could happen,” Philip insisted. “We’ve got a start.”

“More than a start,” his father said. “When I used to talk about silver foxes, I never imagined we would ever own one. Perhaps it’s a good idea to raise your sights a bit. Sort of makes things happen.”

“That was the story I wanted them to tell you,” Jerry said to Rita. “Now you can admire nine royal children.”

They walked toward the other pens.

“Eric’s not really a silver fox,” Ann said. “He’s red, but he’s black beneath and has a white-tipped tail.”

“And can be the daddy of silvers,” her father added. “Besides, Ann considered him the cutest cub in the whole lot.”

When they returned to the house they saw Hugh coming up the trail. He looked tired, and he left his loaded toboggan at the foot of the veranda steps, which wasn't like Hugh.

"Was hoping to bring back a dog team," he said as he kissed Ann.

"As though we needed another!" Ann said. "None of us has forgotten how to snowshoe."

"Didn't suppose you had," and the smile wrinkles deepened around his eyes. He shook hands with Jerry and with Rita. "Pleased to meet you," he said to Rita, and then added, "I'm glad to know Ann's partner."

Ann had never thought of Rita as a partner. But she was, by Hughie's standards. Partners stood together.

"Sorry you had that long trip for nothing, Hugh," Dave Jackman said. "Didn't the Indian have a dog team?"

"The nitchie wouldn't sell it," Hugh said. "I came back by way of Ehebik's camp. Heard he knew of a team for sale."

"Did he?"

Hugh leaned forward with sudden animation.

"Funny thing happened," he said. "Ehe-bik wasn't there. Neither was his woman. Wigwam looked as though they had just left it. Even their toboggan was hanging in a tree."

"They'd gone on the trap line," Dave Jackman said.

"That was what I thought. Went out a ways but no sign they'd been there. So I made a circle. That's what took me so long. But I didn't raise hide nor hair of either of them."

Hugh was unmistakably bothered. The old woodsman prided himself on keen observation and to him the reading of the history of others' movements should be as easy as print on the pages of a book.

"You just didn't happen to cut their trail," Dave Jackman said. "They probably went off for a visit."

"When'd you ever hear of a nitchie going visitin' in winter?" Hugh demanded. "I hung around that camp and studied until I was afraid I'd be late for supper. But for all I could find out, they flew away like a couple of birds."

Never before had Hugh made a mystery of ordinary events. The prickles started up Ann's spine until her father laughed.

"Hugh's so mad at himself for not picking up Ehe-bik's trail he'd like to think they took to the air," he said. "Better give him supper, Mary, so he can forget about his trip."

FIVE

UPPER did not entirely heal Hugh's chagrin over his failure in woodcraft. That evening when they sat before the fire and he learned the four intended to visit Wen-dah-ban and his young wife the next day, he asked them to inquire about Ehe-bik.

"I'd sure like to find out how they left that camp," he said. "Maybe Wen-dah-ban knows."

Talk turned to tomorrow's expedition. They planned to spend the day so Ann and Philip could have a visit with Wen-dah-ban's wife.

"We'll eat lunch in their wigwam," Ann said. "That will give us a chance to talk to Shaw-win."

"What was it Mr. Gillespie called Shaw-win's father?" Jerry asked. "He used a word I never heard before."

"*Midewiwin*," Mr. Jackman said. "He is a *mide* (*mi-de*)."

"Does that make her some sort of princess?" Jerry asked.

"It means her father is an old man who shakes rattles and pretends to make magic," Hugh said.

"That's not quite fair, Hugh," Dave Jackman said. "The *midewiwin* has been an important secret society among the Ojibwas."

"You mean like our fraternities and lodges?" Jerry asked.

"I imagine every race has them," Mr. Jackman said. "The *midewiwin* is an old order, with initiations and lodge houses. It takes a long time for a member to work up through the four degrees and become a full-fledged *mide*."

"Then what does he do?" Rita asked. "Go to lodge meetings?"

"Yes, because every year a *mide* has to make sure his *mi-gis* is in good working order. *Mi-gis* means the life which was shot into his body when he was initiated. A *mide* tests this by the power of his medicine bag, or *pin-jigo-san*, which carries his charms. It is usually made of the dried skin of

some animal, like a weasel or skunk, or a hawk, or a bear paw, or even a wolf head. When a *mide* waves this at an Indian, the Indian falls to the ground.”

“Sure he does,” Hugh said. “Every Indian in the meeting is a *mide*, and he’s got a bag he wants to prove is powerful too. It wouldn’t do to get the idea started that the medicine bags weren’t working.”

“Might be something to that,” Mr. Jackman said. “Hugh’s ideas are always practical.”

“And I don’t hold with all that gibberish they go through at their meetings,” Hugh said.

“What sort of gibberish?” Jerry asked. “Did you ever watch a meeting?”

“A fellow who’s lived in the bush as many years as me couldn’t help runnin’ into one of their lodge meetings,” Hugh said. “They don’t mind if white men see ’em. But I’ll let Dave tell you. He’ll make a good story of it.”

“A meeting of the *midewiwin* is a rare thing now,” Mr. Jackman said. “The old *mides* are dying off and the young fellows don’t go for it much. They won’t pay presents for their initiation and they won’t spend the time and money for instruction in the ritual.”

“Maybe the young fellows got more sense than I ever give a nitchie credit for,” Hugh said. “The Indians would ’a’ been a lot better off if they hadn’t let a bunch of medicine men run their business.”

“Hugh’s right about that, Dave,” Mrs. Jackman said. “The *midewiwin* has held back the Ojibwa race. If it hadn’t been for the Indian medicine men, government doctors would have been able to educate the Indians.”

“Perhaps,” her husband said, “but don’t forget the Indian has centuries of native superstition behind him. Even now, when there are few *mides*, native beliefs about sickness or misfortune haven’t changed. And there’s something to be said on the side of the *midewiwin*. It’s been a social club, business organization, and medical society, all in one. It served a primitive people when they had no one else to turn to.”

“Business organization!” Hugh snorted. “You bet it was! The *mides* never made medicine unless they got paid for it.”

Dave Jackman’s eyes twinkled. “A *mide* has to live same’s a trapper. It’s cost him a lot to become a *mide*. He’s given presents to the lodge and to his instructor. I’ve known *mides* who practically beggared themselves to get the highest degree.”

“The old fellows who’ve already bought their way in drive a good bargain,” Hugh said.

Mr. Jackman lighted his pipe.

“And they have to teach an elaborate ritual,” he said. “It took a day for a *mide* to tell me about all the degrees. I’ll try to boil it down for what’s left of the evening.

“A young Indian gets the idea he wants to be a *mide*. Either he’s had a dream, or his father was a *mide*, or it just appeals to him, like a white man decides to join a lodge. First the Indian has to find out if the other *mides* will accept him. Then he has to find a *mide* who will teach him. The ritual of songs and medicinal knowledge of herbs is handed down by word of mouth. Naturally the instructor has to be paid with presents, which are arranged beforehand. When the candidate is ready for initiation, a lodge house is built. It’s about eighty feet long and twenty feet wide, and made of poles driven into the ground and branches twisted head high around the poles. It is usually built in a grove and always has an eastern and a western entrance. The candidate goes in from the east and leaves by way of the west.

“Arrangements inside depend on the degree to be granted. The higher degrees are very elaborate. For the first degree there is a large white stone, a blanket to receive initiation presents, and a sacred cedar post with a stuffed owl. Outside the lodge house is a sweat lodge for the purification bath before the ceremony.

“The candidate is led into the lodge for the ordeal. Sacred serpents try to bar his progress, very much like our mock initiations. Afterwards the candidate kneels and the four officiating *mides* shoot him with life by striking him with their medicine bags. He falls to the ground and finally spits out the white shell which is the sacred symbol of the society. This proves the miracle of his being shot with life, and entitles him to become a member.”

“Course, there’s nothing to prevent his having the shell in his mouth all along,” Hugh said.

“Wouldn’t you make sure you had a shell if your degree depended on your producing one?” Dave Jackman asked. “It’s a friendly conspiracy. I never heard of a shell being challenged.”

“’Cause every *mide* at the meeting has worked it the same way,” Hugh said.

“Undoubtedly, but that doesn’t mean some *mides* don’t sincerely believe they have been given supernatural powers. These increase with each degree.

So does the cost of instruction and initiation. The fourth degree *mide* has gone through a harder ordeal and been challenged by more malignant spirits. And he has been accepted by their most powerful bear spirit. He's supposed to have tremendous power. The fourth degree is highly prized."

"And all he's got to show for it is a little piece of birchbark," Hugh jeered.

"Did you ever see one of their certificates of membership?" Dave Jackman asked. "They don't often show them to white men."

"No, but I heard about 'em," Hugh said.

"I saw a second degree certificate. They're always made of narrow strips of birchbark with small incised figures, like picture writing, of the initiations. The one I saw had lines running from the eyes and ears of the figure of the candidate. That meant he could see into the future and knew events which were taking place at a distance. The *mide* who owned it was awfully proud of his certificate."

"But can they convince other Indians with just a piece of birchbark?" Rita asked. "I should think they'd really have to prove they had these powers."

"*Mides* do prophesy and tell of distant events. But their main job is to treat sickness. They use charms, herbs, and chants. I watched a *mide* work on a boy who had lost the ability to walk, a common illness among Indians. The *mide* made a great business of the treatment. He shook his birchbark rattle filled with pebbles and waved his medicine bag of charms. Then he sang a chant, or rather intoned it so it sounded like poetry. It was a regular ritual chant. 'You will walk again. It is I who say it. My power is great. Through our white shell I will enable you to walk again.'"

"And did he?" Rita asked.

"The boy walked that evening."

"You're not trying to tell us a song and birchbark rattle ever cured so much as a cut finger!" Hugh exclaimed.

"I only said the treatment worked," Dave Jackman said.

"I suppose the next thing you'll be telling is that those fakers who 'shake the tent' really talk to the spirits like they pretend," Hugh said.

"Are they *mides*?" Jerry asked.

“Not always,” Mr. Jackman said. “Although usually they belong to *midewiwin* too. Hugh means the medicine men called *jes-sak-kid*, or jugglers. They haven’t studied herbs but depend on magic for their cures. They claim great influence with the malignant spirit, An-i-mi-ki, the thunder bird. ‘Shaking the tent’ is supposed to be a supernatural manifestation and is considered proof that the juggler has summoned the spirits. I saw a juggler work, although it’s not often a white man has a chance to watch that.

“I was in the Forest Service when some Indians told me a medicine man was going to make medicine that night. Conjury is always done after sunset. A woman in the village had a swollen throat and couldn’t swallow. Her family paid a juggler to cure her. The conjury tent was built before sunset. Six poles were stuck upright in the ground and the lower part covered with birchbark and canvas above that. It looked something like a barrel. Around the top were all sorts of noise-making tools, strings of deer’s dewclaws and cans filled with shot and caribou hoof rattles.

“After sunset the juggler took his conjuring bag and went inside the tent. All the Indians from the village sat around and waited. For a time nothing happened, but the audience didn’t get impatient. They knew this was the way the show was run. The juggler shook his rattles and called the spirits and chanted. When the tent began to sway a bit, the Indians were delighted. The spirits were going to come in to answer the summons. Then the noise-making instruments began to move, the tent really shook, and the spirits talked. The audience knew the different voices and when they heard *Mik-i-mak* they laughed. He is their favorite spirit and has a reputation for being jolly and a lot of fun. I didn’t know enough Ojibwa then to understand the long conversation this juggler had with all the spirits, but the Indians enjoyed it.”

“You sure the medicine man wasn’t doing all the talking hisself?” Hugh asked.

“Might be,” Dave Jackman said, “but the old medicine man put on quite a show. The tent shook, the stuff rattled, the medicine man shouted, and the spirits answered. After the spirits had gone away, the medicine man came out of his tent and seemed to be having a sort of fit. He spit out three small bones. Those were the bones which were choking the woman. When he showed them to her, her throat stopped aching and she could swallow.”

Jerry laughed. “I see what you mean,” he said. “The medicine men don’t do any more faking than the patients.”

“Faking isn’t exactly the word for it,” and Dave Jackman stood up and emptied his pipe. “You’ve opened a big subject. The Indian doesn’t know he’s faking when he suddenly loses the power to walk or swallow or even feels just plain sick. However, he does know his race has a special sort of sickness. They even have a word for it, *anic-a-be-wa-pine*. It means ‘sent by someone.’ An enemy has wished sickness or even death upon him. He’s been conjured. And he is sick, and often dies, because he believes his enemy has the power to do this to him. He’s as helpless as you would be to fight typhoid fever.”

“That’s Dave’s way of saying a nitchie can be scared to death,” Hugh said.

“And he can,” Dave Jackman said. “His belief in conjury is so real he can die of fright. I’ve known of one case. Alex Gillespie must know of others. This isn’t true of only the forest Ojibwa. Conjury is common in many primitive races. Savages in Africa believe in it. But all I’m trying to say is that you’ve got to understand how real a threat the fear of conjury is if you’re going to understand these Indians.”

He stood up and banked the fire. Seldom did Dave Jackman talk as much as he had that evening. Now he was a bit embarrassed.

“You should never get me started about Indians,” he said. “It’s a full hour past our bedtime.”

SIX

RITA and Ann packed lunch for the day-long trip to Wen-dah-ban's camp. Rita made sandwiches while Ann cut bacon into thin slices which could be broiled over Shaw-win's fire.

"Hot meat will give us a good excuse for not eating boiled rabbit," Ann said.

"Wouldn't it be good?" Rita asked.

Ann hesitated. She didn't want to create a bad impression of native life before Rita had even seen a wigwam. "Perhaps Shaw-win is a better cook than her mother-in-law, Wah-be-goon," she said, and then added, "But Indians don't seem to mind rabbit hair in the cooking kettle."

Mrs. Jackman brought a can of cookies. "Give this to Shaw-win from me," she said.

"I'm so glad you remembered to send her cookies," Ann said. "Probably old Wah-be-goon has told her how you always sent cookies. Now Shaw-win will understand that you're her neighbor too."

"And I am," her mother said. "I'd like to send that young couple a wedding gift."

They held a consultation. Rita offered a necklace, but it would be a gift only for Shaw-win. Cooking utensils were too practical and undoubtedly the new household was equipped with kettles from the post's trade shop. Ann suggested a bright-colored tea set, but Mrs. Jackman said that would be a nuisance when they traveled. She went to her bedroom and returned with a roll of cretonne, patterned with birds and flowers in soft colors. She held it up.

"Just the thing!" Ann cried. "It's as lovely as a picture. They can use it in a half dozen ways."

"Drapes in a wigwam!" Rita laughed.

"They can line the inside of the blanket door, cover bedding rolls, or make bags," Ann said. "Wen-dah-ban will be crazy about it. He always

admired the way we dressed up our cabin at Home Bay.”

“He’s scarcely been inside this house,” her mother said.

“That’s been partly our fault,” Ann said. “The first year at Home Bay when he played with us and stayed for dinners, and you taught him English, he really tried to learn white men’s ways. It was later when he grew up so fast and became a hunter that we let him slip away from us. I’m sorry now. I’d like to make it up to him and Shaw-win.”

“What do you suppose she’s like?” Rita asked.

“I hope she’s a true native and follows native customs,” Mrs. Jackman said. “Wen-dah-ban would never be happy living any other way.”

“Rita, it took a whole year to convince Mother of that,” Ann said. “At first she tried to make him share our lessons.”

Her mother smiled. “At least I managed to teach him to write his name, but he’s probably forgotten how by now.” She brought a cake from the pantry. “Better take it all,” she said. “Wen-dah-ban loves sugar. I’m going to wrap his wedding present in bright paper,” and she went upstairs.

“Your mother likes him, doesn’t she?” Rita said.

“Of course,” Ann said. “To her he’s just a youngster she watched grow up. After you’ve met him and seen how nice he is, you’ll understand.”

Hugh came into the kitchen.

“Mind putting up a lunch for me?” he said. “I’m going to Home Bay. Happened to remember a piece of old iron I could use.”

Ann smiled. Hugh and her father often found errands which required a visit to their first home in the northland. Hugh sometimes spent a night at the cabin. Now he grinned a bit sheepishly.

“A piece of metal is as good excuse as any,” he said. “A lot of livin’ has been done in that cabin.”

“I’d like to see it,” Rita said.

“We’ll drive over some day,” Ann said.

“Then I’d better get it cleaned up a bit,” Hugh said. “I’ll build a fire and get the frost out. Maybe we could have dinner there tomorrow.”

“Mother would like that,” Ann said. “I don’t think she’s been at Home Bay since she and I spent an afternoon there just before I went to school.”

"See, Rita," Hugh said. "They laugh at me, but they all streak back like homing pigeons. We was living in that cabin when we got the mink and foxes and it was there I first saw the Jackmans. Remember, Ann? I was on my way north. Stopped to cut a little jag o' wood before I got along."

Hugh took his lunch and departed on his sentimental journey long before the picnickers were ready to harness the dogs. They stopped outside the kitchen door to collect their snowshoes. Jerry counted the six pairs stuck upright in a snowdrift.

"In the north you can always tell how many are home and if there are visitors," he said. "That the reason you do it?"

"They're handy this way," Philip said. "No chance for them to get stepped on. Might break a frame."

They followed the deep hard trail to the corral. Trenched paths branched off and their straight sides, sparkling in the sunshine, made a lovely pattern of light and shadow. Rita admired the efficiency of northern methods.

"I'd expected to spend half the vacation shoveling snow," she said. "But you people just trample it down with snowshoes. It's so easy."

"Wait until you help break a fresh trail to Wen-dah-ban's camp," Philip said.

The dogs heard them coming and went wild with delight when they saw the harnesses. Philip called the dogs by name and each thrust his head through the round collar and quivered with excitement while the bellyband was buckled. Every harness had a set of sleigh bells but only Ogema wore a red pompon. Rita protested against this injustice.

"A pompon marks the leader," Philip said sternly. "Mr. Gillespie knows that. He was only putting on extra style for you."

"It would hurt Ogema's feelings if the other dogs wore pompons," Ann said.

Neither she nor Philip ever faltered in their allegiance to Ogema. He had been their first and, for a time, their only dog, and as others had been added he had welded them into a team and given them team spirit. He had maintained morale and settled quarrels and it required only a warning growl from Ogema to recall any teammate to his duty. Ogema was proud of his role of leader and now, since another task had been added, making morning and evening inspections of the outer fence of the fur farm, he was equally jealous of that honor.

They fastened the traces of Tony, the wheel dog, to the cariole, and then in turn hooked the traces of each dog to rings in the traces of the dog behind him. The team was whimpering with joy, and as each dog was snapped in place he trembled in his eagerness to be off. Eyes gleamed and red tongues lolled.

“Now I know what it’s like to handle bronchos,” Jerry said.

Only Ogema waited with dignity to take his place at the head of the line, but his eyes were shining with delight. Ann patted his black head.

“You’ve missed me, haven’t you, Ogema?” she said.

“You girls better get aboard,” Philip said. “There’ll be no holding this team once Ogema is hooked up.”

The girls scrambled into the cariole. The last trace was snapped. Philip shouted *marchon*, more for the sake of discipline than to urge the team to action. They were off in a mad gallop past the house and onto the lake. Ears were up, tails were high like flags, and all five dogs joined in a glad chorus of shrill barks.

The trail to the mainland was hard and beaten by loads of wood hauled to the island. Jerry took advantage of the extra canine energy and clung to the tail-rope of the cariole. Halfway across they saw Hugh’s trail turn off to Home Bay. His snowshoes had sunk deep in two feet of loose snow. Rita said it looked like awfully hard work.

“He’s following a firm trail beneath,” Philip said. “We’ve been to Home Bay since the first heavy snowfall in November. Hugh’s trip home tonight will leave a trail you girls can ride on tomorrow.”

On the mainland, they followed a broken trail to a stand of poplars where Hugh and Mr. Jackman cut kitchen wood for the island. The dogs recognized the spot and Ogema, without waiting for orders, began to turn his team around beside a pile of logs.

“He thinks we’ve come for wood,” Philip said. “No, boy! This is a holiday for you fellows.”

The broken trail ended in the wood lot and everyone put on snowshoes. Philip took the lead, his snowshoes packing the snow down a foot below the surface. Jerry followed, taking care to break joints by setting his webs down where Philip had not. Ann, third in line, left the trail completely smooth and Rita, in the rear, complained she was useless as a trail maker.

“You help pack it,” Philip said. “But your weight would do just as much good in the cariole.”

“But my pride would hurt,” Rita said.

Single file, with the dogs behind them, they crossed a ridge. It was a hushed, white world. Scurryings of tiny animals, crackle of broken twigs, all the sounds of summer travel, were stilled. For a long time they did not speak but let the beauty of the winter woods weave its spell upon them.

Ann walked in rapture. She’d forgotten how lovely a forest of green and white can be, a forest with all sharp angles softened and molded into strange shapes of beauty by white drapery. It was an iridescent forest. Sunlight caught snow crystals on green needles and lighted the top of each tree into a jeweled crown. Each broad branch was snow-laden. Sometimes a vagrant breeze would stir the branches and one would drop its snow burden into the drift below with a muffled swoosh.

Halfway down the ridge Philip halted and pointed out the creek they must follow around the next ridge to Ahmik Lake, where he thought they would find Wen-dah-ban’s wigwam. Long ago the Indian boy had said he would have a camp there sometime. Ahmik was a favorite lake, probably because its name meant beaver, and beaver meant wealth to a native, for a beaver pelt had once been the medium of exchange in fur land.

“Don’t you know where Wen-dah-ban’s camp is?” Ann asked.

“Not exactly,” Philip admitted. “But I figured we could hit his trap line and follow that.”

“It’s my turn to take the lead,” Jerry said. “You’ve had the hardest going long enough.”

Philip fell behind Jerry. “You can follow the creek all right,” he said. “Just swing around until we hit the lake.”

“Wasn’t the trip over the ridge beautiful?” Ann asked.

“It’d be hard to beat that stretch of bush,” Jerry said. “Rita is still big-eyed with wonder.”

“I want to do it again,” Rita said. “When I don’t have to watch where I set my snowshoes.”

The creek gave them easier going and they followed the broad band of white that twisted through the forest. The creek had borne other traffic. A

mink had explored its bank, a fox had crossed it, and a wolf had walked boldly down the middle.

It was almost noon when they came out on Ahmik Lake. They studied the empty shores until Philip saw a curl of smoke above a stand of balsam down the shore. They started toward it and soon saw a wigwam.

As they approached they called and shouted. The blanket door was thrust aside and a girl stepped out. Even at that distance Ann knew she was pretty. She was dressed as native women dress even in winter. She wore a short jacket made of an old blanket and the dress beneath was long and full. Despite the voluminous folds, she looked young and slim.

Evidently she recognized them, for she smiled as she waited.

SEVEN

ANN missed the usual uproar of arrival at Wen-dah-ban's camp. His dogs had carried on a feud with the Jackman team and no one had ever been able to talk or even shriek above the pandemonium of canine insults until the teams had been tied where they could not reach each other. Ann asked about the dogs even before she asked the whereabouts of their master.

"Wen-dah-ban gave them to Pe-tah-bo," Shaw-win said.

"Don't you need them?" Philip asked.

"Better at Pe-tah-bo's," Shaw-win said.

"Is Wen-dah-ban home?" Ann asked.

Shaw-win shook her head. "Maybe by-and-by," she said.

Ann knew the vagueness of the native "by-and-by." Wen-dah-ban might return the next hour or the next day.

"Is he on his trap line?" Philip asked.

Shaw-win looked up quickly. "*Kah-win*," she said, and her "no" had such finality they asked no more questions.

While Jerry and Philip tied the dogs, Ann looked around. The dooryard of the wigwam had none of the usual clutter of a native camp. Shaw-win's snowshoes hung in a tree so that dogs couldn't eat the webs of babiche, or rawhide. An ax was safely cared for by being driven into a tree trunk and below it was wood sufficient for several days. In Wen-dah-ban's boyhood home they had cut fuel as it was needed and any article past its usefulness had been tossed out of the wigwam door.

Apparently this new regime had been due to marriage. Ann felt a growing respect for Shaw-win. It deepened to admiration when she led them inside the wigwam. Even Philip, who had always maintained that Wah-be-goon's housekeeping left nothing to be desired, looked around with surprised approval. Ann had not known a wigwam could look so well.

“*Nish-i-shin, nish-i-shin,*” she said, and wished that she didn’t have to use the overworked word “good.” This home needed superlatives.

The floor of the wigwam had been swept and strewn with fresh cedar branches and their pungent fragrance filled the dwelling. The bedding had been rolled, covered with a deerskin hide, and set against the wall. From a tripod above the fire in the center hung the inevitable kettle of simmering meat, but both kettle and meat looked clean. It was no pot of stew which went on day after day. This was Wen-dah-ban’s dinner, freshly prepared against his coming. Ann began to have hope that the “by-and-by” really meant the next hour.

The wigwam was completely equipped for housekeeping, and was charming. In the woman’s place at the left of the blanket door was a tier of shelves. On them were dishes and cooking utensils. Sticks had been pointed for forks, spoons carved from wood. There were enormous cooking spoons with beautifully carved handles and smaller spoons for eating. There were small wooden bowls carved out of knots of trees, and flat birchbark baskets. On the lower shelves were larger birchbark kettles or *ma-kuks*. Some had covers and moose-thong handles with which to lift them. All were heavy, made of layers of unsplit birchbark and sewn with cedar root twine.

Shaw-win was a good basket maker. There is great difference in birchbark work and nothing indicated the craftsmanship of an Ojibwa woman more than her baskets. Shaw-win’s were sturdy and well-shaped, were strongly bound with cedar root, and the stitches of root twine were fine and regular. Her baskets would serve many years.

Around the walls hung large bags of woven cedar bark for heavy objects and smaller bags of reeds which Shaw-win had dyed and woven in gay patterns. Her workbasket, on the ground where she had left it when she heard them call, was truly lovely. It was made of birchbark, had a cover and a moose-thong handle, and had been sewn with bright red stitches in a simple pattern. Beside it was her unfinished work, deer sinews she had been splitting to make fine strong thread for beadwork. Beside it was the curved canoe knife which all Ojibwa women used so expertly.

Everywhere Ann looked, she saw how Shaw-win’s workmanship had transformed a bare birchbark wigwam into a home. She had used the materials of the forest and Ann was glad she had not brought the colored tea set. Here it would have seemed incongruous, even ugly. The products of Shaw-win’s skill and ingenuity really belonged in this forest home.

On a frame was a half-completed mat of split cedar bark. When Ann admired the bold black-and-white pattern, Shaw-win looked pleased and the last constraint in her manner vanished. She could speak a little English and tried to do so for the outsiders. But often she relapsed into Ojibwa and then Philip and Ann interpreted.

It was time to produce the wedding present, even though Wen-dah-ban was not home to receive it. Philip made a speech. It was influenced by the native love of oratory.

“My family and Wen-dah-ban’s family have been friends,” he said. “Now it is good that our friend Wen-dah-ban has found you to live in his wigwam. We do not wonder that he chose you. You deserve to be the wife of a great hunter. And we want you to know we are your friends.”

Ann beamed with pride. Philip’s effort had been as fine as old Pe-tah-bo’s, who was famous among his people. She interpreted the speech for Jerry and Rita. They applauded. Shaw-win blushed and stammered and said thank you and seemed almost overcome with pleasure.

She unrolled the cretonne and held it up so all could admire the birds and flowers, and in the excitement of planning what should be done with it a medley of English and Ojibwa filled the wigwam. Everyone had ideas. Shaw-win liked Ann’s suggestion of a lining for the blanket door, the rest to be used for bags and basket linings. Shaw-win made measurements and they knew not an inch of material would be wasted.

It was warm in the wigwam and the visitors removed their parkas. Shaw-win admired the softness of the skin and asked the name of the maker who took such fine stitches.

“You could make one every bit as good,” Ann said.

Shaw-win smiled. “Once the Indians wore nothing but skin clothes,” she said. “But now only white men wear them.”

Her tone suggested that this was a strange choice. Ann had never been able to solve the mystery of why the white man had adopted the primitive native’s dress while the Indians prized only white man’s wool. She asked Shaw-win but this was much too philosophical a question to interest her. Shaw-win merely maintained that wool was warm and lifted the material of her dress to prove it, exposing a second dress of wool beneath.

Indian women fought cold by adding layers. A wealthy hunter often supplied his wife with three dresses for a winter, worn simultaneously. Ann was glad to see Shaw-win did not follow the usual custom of wearing the

torn and shabby dress of the previous winter as a top layer. Both of Shaw-win's dresses were clean and new and well-made.

Ann opened the lunch basket. Their hunger couldn't wait on Wen-dah-ban another moment. Shaw-win unrolled a cedar mat to spread the food on and then rushed outdoors for her contribution.

"Isn't she wonderful?" Rita cried, as soon as their hostess had left the wigwam. "You never told me an Indian home was as clean and comfortable as this."

"I've never seen such housekeeping among the women around here," Ann said. "Isn't that so, Philip?"

"She comes from a band that is more primitive," Philip said. "They haven't been spoiled by white man's goods."

"You sound like Mr. Gillespie." Ann laughed.

Philip became earnest. "Doesn't she prove he's right?" he demanded. "It was lucky for Wen-dah-ban that she came down for the blueberry dances. I bet he never looked at Sho-shun's daughter after he once saw Shaw-win."

Their young hostess returned with a whitefish to be roasted on a stick before the fire, but the bacon was broiled long before the fish had even melted. Shaw-win said they'd save the fish for Wen-dah-ban.

"Hope he gets here soon," Philip said. "We want our friends to hear him tell how he caught his first fisher. Wasn't that a story? I'd tell it if I could as well as he does."

For dessert, Shaw-win produced small dark-red cakes smaller than cookies. Ann and Philip had never seen them. Shaw-win said they were raspberries cooked down, dried in pats, and put away for winter. They were delicious. Everyone ate several.

Provision for a future season was something Ann had never known among the Indians. At Pe-tah-bo's, when they were hungry, Wah-be-goan lifted the fish nets or visited the rabbit snares.

"Do your people put up fruit like we do?" Ann asked.

Shaw-win looked surprised at the question.

"I show you," she said. "Come."

Outside she showed them her storeroom. It was made of birchbark and set high above the ground on posts. In it were tools, the frozen bodies of

dressed rabbits and cleaned fish. That was how she had produced the whitefish so quickly.

Shaw-win led them to her winter food cache. It was a pit, the top protected from dogs by a cover of logs and birchbark. It was lined with birchbark, filled with dried marsh grass to keep the foods from freezing, and was six feet deep. Shaw-win pointed to bags of smoked meat, birchbark baskets of deer and moose fat, *ma-kuks* of wild rice, smoked fish tied in bundles with cedar twine, and blueberries which had been strung whole on reeds and dried in the sun. No housewife ever displayed jars of jelly and jam with greater pride.

“The Wen-dah-bans are going to eat this winter!” Philip said.

It took a long time to explain the meaning of that speech to Shaw-win. Then she laughed happily. Wen-dah-ban had dug the pit, she told them. It had taken a long time. Two suns.

It was generous of her to be so eager to share the applause with Wen-dah-ban. Ann thought what a fine young couple they were. No wonder Mr. Gillespie had been so pleased about the marriage. Wen-dah-ban had been lucky in his romance, and he deserved it.

They walked back to the wigwam. Jerry was beside Ann.

“I’m beginning to wonder if this Wen-dah-ban lad of yours is half good enough for her,” he said. “You’ll have to produce a paragon.”

“He’s not quite that,” Ann said, “but when you see him you’ll understand why Philip and I have always been so fond of him.”

It was getting late. Philip said they couldn’t remain much longer. Rita begged to wait another fifteen minutes.

“I’ve heard so much about Wen-dah-ban I’ve got to see him,” she said.

The fifteen minutes passed and they went outside. Philip shouted.

“There’s Wen-dah-ban now!” he exclaimed.

Wen-dah-ban came along the trail. He was dressed in his best outfit, a white capote, a frock-like coat of wind-proof wool. A l’assumption belt, a woven band of bright-colored wool, bound his waist.

Philip waved and shouted, Ann called, but Wen-dah-ban made no sign of recognition. As he came closer, the face which looked out from the hood of the capote was somber. Always before when he had found them at his

wigwam he had broken into smiles and hurried toward them. Now he came slowly up the trail.

Jerry and Rita stared in astonishment. This wasn't the joyous Indian lad Ann had promised. Ann expected Shaw-win to rush to meet him and ask what had happened, but Shaw-win only waited with the others. As he came nearer, Shaw-win broke into a torrent of Ojibwa, explaining who the guests were. It was so different from what Ann had planned that she could have shaken Wen-dah-ban in her vexation.

"Wen-dah-ban," she said severely, "these are my good friends who have come to see you."

"*B'jou*," Wen-dah-ban said and shook hands, but his gloom did not lift.

"We've had a fine visit with Shaw-win," Philip said. "Now she is our friend, as you are."

"*Nish-i-shin, nish-i-shin*," Wen-dah-ban said in a voice more depressing than silence would have been.

Ann studied Wen-dah-ban's face. She knew it was useless to ask the cause of his depression. Mr. Gillespie had often said that when a native brooded, half the time he couldn't tell the real reason for his dejection. That it had nothing to do with his marriage she was sure, for there was tenderness in Shaw-win's eyes when she looked at him. She was equally sure they had not hurt his feelings, for he had looked dejected on the trail before he was aware of their presence.

Perhaps Mr. Gillespie would find out when he returned. Or they might come again soon and try to get behind the strange barrier which shut a grieving Indian apart from his fellows.

Ann thought of Hugh's message. It might swing Wen-dah-ban's thoughts from himself. He would laugh to think a white man had failed to read the signs of a departure.

"He said to ask you where Ehe-bik had gone," she finished. "Now he thinks Ehe-bik and his woman flew away like birds."

With horror in her face, Shaw-win stared at her husband.

"He didn't really mean that," Ann hastened to reassure them. "It was just a white man's joke."

Wen-dah-ban only shook his head and turned away.

Reluctantly, Philip untied the team. Ann and Rita settled in the cariole and called good-bye. Wen-dah-ban and Shaw-win stood before their wigwam and Ann felt better when they waved as the visitors rounded the point. Philip halted as soon as they were out of sight.

"What do you suppose is eating Wen-dah-ban?" he said. "That joke about the Ehe-biks turning into birds sure had 'em scared."

"I should have known better than to tell it," Ann said. "No Indian would think that was funny."

"We'd better forget it and start for Fox Island," Jerry said. "It will be dark before we know it."

The trail was well broken, the dogs were anxious for their daily meal, and they swept up to the house just as lamplight streamed from its windows. Hugh was home and Mrs. Jackman had supper ready.

Conversation at the table was devoted mostly to Wen-dah-ban. No one could explain his actions. Hugh's reasoning was, as always, practical.

"Probably he had some bad luck on the trap line," he said. "That lad's awful proud of his hunting. He'll feel better soon's he makes a good catch."

"And he couldn't grieve long with as fine a wife as you say Shaw-win is," Mrs. Jackman said. "We'll go over tomorrow and make sure everything is all right. If as good a neighbor as Wen-dah-ban really is in trouble, we should help him."

In the evening they sat around the fire. Mr. Jackman popped corn and they played the new phonograph. Rita taught Jerry, Ann, and Philip a new dance step. No one thought of the time until Mrs. Jackman looked at the clock.

"It's past eleven!" she cried. "That's not keeping bush hours."

They were in their rooms and almost ready for bed when they heard someone beating on the door. Mr. Jackman went downstairs while Mrs. Jackman, Philip, and the girls leaned over the railing. Never had a visitor arrived at Fox Island in the middle of the night.

Mr. Jackman lighted the big lamp in the living room and threw open the front door. Shaw-win stood on the veranda. Her dress was bedraggled, her hair disheveled. She was terrified. Mr. Jackman stared.

Nothing short of disaster could have brought her over that trail in the darkness.

“Where is Wen-dah-ban?” he demanded.

Ann and the others could not catch the low-voiced answer. Even Mr. Jackman had to lean down to hear. Then he led her into the house and seated her before the fire.

“Wait here,” he said. “I’ll get my wife.”

Mrs. Jackman met him on the stairs.

“She says Wen-dah-ban has been conjured into a windigo,” he said. “She’s crying and I can’t understand all she says.”

“The poor child!” Mrs. Jackman cried. “Who put such nonsense into her head?” She started down the stairs. “Philip and Ann, come with me to talk Ojibwa. Come if you want to, Rita.”

As they reached the living room, Jerry came out of his bedroom and a moment later Hugh arrived.

“Saw the light and thought something might have happened,” he said.

Mr. Jackman, Ann, and Philip gathered around Shaw-win. In her fright the Indian girl forgot the little English she knew and her rapid Ojibwa frequently left them baffled. At last they got the story piecemeal.

“She says Wen-dah-ban was conjured,” Mr. Jackman said. “Wen-dah-ban had a dream which warned him he was turning into a windigo. Now she is afraid he will devour humans. Ehe-bik and his wife have disappeared and she fears Wen-dah-ban was responsible. No one is safe, she says, not even Wah-be-goon and Pe-tah-bo. She wants to get her father, An-ah-mee-kee. He can drive a windigo away.”

“She can’t want Wen-dah-ban driven away!” Mrs. Jackman cried.

“She’s so frightened she doesn’t know what she wants,” Dave Jackman said.

“And too exhausted to talk about it. She needs rest. In the morning we can think what to do. Now she needs a cup of hot chocolate,” and Mrs. Jackman went to the kitchen. “Ann, you and Rita put Shaw-win to bed in Philip’s room.”

The girls led Shaw-win upstairs. Some of the terror had left the Indian girl’s eyes when Mrs. Jackman came with hot chocolate and bread and butter. She was almost asleep before she finished.

Rita and Ann went to their room. Ann was sick with apprehension. Wen-dah-ban alone in the bush, a conjured Indian, Shaw-win wishing to bring her medicine-man father to drive off an evil spirit—it was incredible. And yet such things happened in fur land. Ann lay thinking about it in the darkness.

“Are you asleep?” Rita asked.

“No,” Ann said.

“Tell me, just what is a windigo?”

“It’s the worst evil spirit the Ojibwas have. A windigo is a cannibal. He eats his family and his friends. He eats anyone.”

“You can’t mean—” Rita stopped, for it seemed too horrible to put in words. “Wen-dah-ban couldn’t really become a cannibal!”

“Of course not!” Ann cried. “But terrible things can happen when other Indians believe anyone has turned into a windigo.”

EIGHT

THE shadow of Shaw-win's trouble hung over the Jackman home next morning. When Ann awakened she wondered if it had not been an incredible and terrible nightmare. She tiptoed to Philip's room and when she saw the Indian girl was still asleep she closed the door.

"Poor child!" Mrs. Jackman said at the breakfast table. "I'm so glad she can sleep. I dread her waking to face that horror."

"But we've got to talk to her before we hunt for Wen-dah-ban," Philip said.

"Who's going after the lad?" Hugh asked.

"We're the ones to do it," Philip said. "We're Wen-dah-ban's friends."

Philip said it as if there could be no argument. There had been an air of purpose in his and Jerry's manner when they came downstairs, and Ann and Rita were dressed for the trail.

"Think you can bring him back?" Hugh asked.

"They'll have to bring him, Hugh!" Mrs. Jackman cried. "We've got to make him understand there's no such thing as conjury."

"Much easier said than done," and Dave Jackman's tone was serious. "The Indian's belief in sorcery goes deep."

"We're not going to let two people's lives be ruined by superstition!" Mrs. Jackman said.

"How'd he ever get this idea he is a windigo?" Jerry asked. "We ought to know how it happened before we try to talk to him."

"I've heard of a few cases like this, although ordinarily the windigo is only a vague evil spirit," Mr. Jackman said. "Usually the Indians think of a windigo as a terrible creature which towers above the trees, a giant cannibal. You might call it a sorcerer's dream. It is the greatest dread in an Indian's life. They've been brought up on windigo fear. Among the more primitive natives, any stranger is watched lest he be a windigo, and if the stranger stays overnight, one Indian remains awake to guard the others."

“Even the children play a windigo game. The boy who’s chosen to be windigo puts leaves on his head and hides in a clump of bushes. Then the oldest or bravest boy arms himself with a club and tries to get the other children past the bushes in safety. The windigo rushes out to get a child and eat him and has to be driven off with clubs and screams and a great furor.”

“If Wen-dah-ban played the game, he should know a windigo is only imaginary,” Jerry said. “Wouldn’t that be one way of getting at him?”

“I wish it were as simple,” Dave Jackman said. “You have to look at this the way an Indian does.”

“Wen-dah-ban never talked about windigos to us,” Ann said.

“He wouldn’t,” her father said. “He’d begun to grow up and accept the superstitions of his race. Indians don’t like even to talk about this evil spirit and they won’t go into windigo country. A rumor that a windigo is coming can start a stampede. A windigo scare can grow out of nothing, queer noises in the bush or even a big wind. The few Indians I’ve heard of who were suspected of being windigos were feared and shunned by everyone.”

“But look!” Jerry said. “Wen-dah-ban knows he isn’t a giant. And he must know he hasn’t eaten anyone. What’s got him so scared?”

“The fear of conjury,” Dave Jackman said. “That fear is behind everything an Ojibwa does or doesn’t do. He’s afraid to injure anyone, afraid to make fun of another, even afraid to seem too successful lest he arouse jealousy. He believes any Indian can send a spell against him. Sickness, disaster, even bad luck in hunting, is always explained as bad medicine made by another. Because he believes that every other Indian has the power to conjure, he makes no enemies if he can avoid it. If he has an enemy he lives in dread.”

“Did Wen-dah-ban’s trouble with Ehe-bik have anything to do with this, Dad?” Ann asked.

“I’m sure it did,” her father said. “Wen-dah-ban knew Ehe-bik was angry. He’s probably been sick with worry for fear Ehe-bik would use conjury. If Wen-dah-ban had broken a leg or had bad luck on the trap line, he’d have said it was caused by Ehe-bik. I wish something simple had happened. Then Wen-dah-ban would think he knew the worst and stop brooding. Instead he’s been dreading what might happen. Being conjured into a windigo is the worst fate he can imagine, and it fastened in his mind.”

“Gee, that was tough,” Philip said. “If Wen-dah-ban had taken a crack at Ehe-bik, he’d have settled it long ago.”

“He wouldn’t dare,” his father said. “Then he’d have been sure Ehe-bik would use conjury.”

“He’d have done it in a second if it hadn’t been for all this conjury business.” Philip’s loyalty took fire. He turned to Rita and Jerry. “Wen-dah-ban’s got plenty of nerve. You should have seen him when we were tracking down a fur thief.”

“It’s too bad Shaw-win is the daughter of a *mide*,” Mrs. Jackman said. “All that medicine man stuff can’t help but have affected her. She may even have made Wen-dah-ban think he had a dream.”

“Not necessarily,” her husband said. “You know how timber Indians respect their dreams. Ever since Wen-dah-ban was a child he’s been told to remember what he dreams and encouraged to have dreams. Undoubtedly when he was twelve Pe-tah-bo sent him out in the bush to fast and dream, and told him that whatever he dreamed about would be a symbol all his life. Naturally, when he was frightened, he turned to a dream for guidance.”

“And now we’ve got to fight all that nonsense in his upbringing,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“It isn’t nonsense to him, and you won’t be able to help him unless you realize that fact.”

“What a time for Alex Gillespie to choose to leave the post!” Mrs. Jackman said.

“For two years you’ve been urging him to take a vacation, Mary.”

“So I have,” she admitted. “Now I’m just terrified because we need him so.”

“Philip and I ought to be able to argue Wen-dah-ban out of this,” Ann said. “We used to talk him out of things when we were kids. Remember how I made him stop shooting birds with his bow and arrow?”

“Ann always bossed Wen-dah-ban,” Hugh said. “But the young’uns sure got their job cut out for them this time. I wouldn’t try to talk a nitchie out o’ anything.”

“Then you agree we should let them handle it?” Dave Jackman asked.

“Sure! Except—” The old trapper paused a moment. “Maybe there’s something more to this than you think, Dave. In all the guessing that’s been going on here, I never heard anyone mention what happened to Ehe-bik and his woman.”

"You don't think Wen-dah-ban had anything to do with their disappearance?" Dave Jackman asked quickly.

"I don't suppose he did," Hugh said. "But why didn't they take their toboggan and outfit?"

"Don't let us think up any more mysteries!" Mrs. Jackman protested, and the vehemence of her tone admitted how bothered she really was. "There's undoubtedly a perfectly reasonable explanation. We don't know Ehe-bik well enough even to guess where he went. I've never seen him. I don't think anyone at this table has ever said more than ten words to him. We've got enough horror without using our imaginations."

"Guess you're right, ma'am," Hugh said. "But last night Ann said Wen-dah-ban didn't answer her when she asked about Ehe-bik."

Ann thought of the horror in Shaw-win's face when the Indian girl had turned to her husband. That couldn't have been in her own imagination.

"I can understand his silence," Mrs. Jackman said. "If Wen-dah-ban thought he was a windigo and had told Shaw-win, naturally they'd both be terrified by Ann's question."

"That makes sense," Hugh said. "Tomorrow I'll take the dogs and run over to Ehe-bik's to have another look around. Probably they're back in camp already. And I won't say nothing about it to Shaw-win. Might get her worried and—"

"I just heard her door open," Philip said.

"I'll get her," Mrs. Jackman said. "And let that poor child eat breakfast before you begin to ask questions."

A few moments later the two came downstairs. Shaw-win seemed rested and some of the fear was gone from her eyes. Her hair was combed, parted in the center and drawn smoothly back into a knot. Despite the strain and terror of the night, she was actually pretty. Her dark eyes looked shyly around the table. For no reason at all, Ann suddenly remembered a wild bird she had held for a moment in cupped hands.

Mrs. Jackman gave Shaw-win a cup of hot black tea and went to the kitchen for fresh pancakes. She brought them flooded with syrup and melted butter.

"*Me-quetch*," the Indian girl said with a smile, and after her first mouthful she exclaimed, "*Nish-i-shin!*"

It was the familiar Indian formula of “thank you” and “good.” Ann’s heart sank a bit. Yesterday Shaw-win had used English phrases and had been proud of her ability to do so. Now she had slipped back into the native ways, and the door to that primitive world of strange fears and reticence and superstition was being closed against the white race.

Ann doubted if she would tell her story. Yet she had turned to them when she was frightened. She had even remembered Philip’s speech of friendship.

The sympathetic faces began to have effect and before Shaw-win had finished breakfast she seemed more at ease. Mr. Jackman suggested they talk before the fire, and as he arranged chairs in a semicircle there was a touch of formality in his manner. Ann knew he was playing up to the native love of ceremony. Mrs. Jackman drew Shaw-win to the couch beside her and held the Indian girl’s hand. The older woman’s Ojibwa might be limited but she understood the ways of friendship.

When Mr. Jackman asked why Wen-dah-ban thought he had been conjured, Shaw-win flew to the defense of her husband.

“It was Wen-dah-ban’s silver fox,” she said in Ojibwa. “It had been poisoned with Wen-dah-ban’s poison. The white trader said so. But Ehe-bik did not believe this and so he was Wen-dah-ban’s enemy and made bad medicine.”

“Did Ehe-bik say he would make bad medicine?” Mr. Jackman asked.

Shaw-win shook her head.

“Did anyone else tell Wen-dah-ban that Ehe-bik had made medicine?” Mr. Jackman asked.

“No,” Shaw-win said in a low tone.

“Then how does Wen-dah-ban know Ehe-bik made medicine?” Mr. Jackman insisted.

Everyone waited. Shaw-win stared at the doubting faces. She forced herself to answer.

“Wen-dah-ban met Ehe-bik one day in the forest. When Ehe-bik saw Wen-dah-ban he looked frightened and ran away. Then Wen-dah-ban knew Ehe-bik had sent an evil thing upon him.”

“You guessed right so far, Dave,” Hugh said. “Maybe that’s the answer to what happened to Ehe-bik.”

But Shaw-win's need of sharing her sorrow had started her to talk and now the swift-flowing phrases were difficult to follow.

Wen-dah-ban had been sick with thinking. He had stayed home from the trap line and sat in the wigwam. She had sat beside him and tried to share his sorrow. But he would not tell her what he was thinking. Sometimes he had gone out to walk in the forest and on his face when he returned was only "*ak-o-si-win, ak-o-si-win.*" Even the sound of the Ojibwa word for sickness carried the weight of deep foreboding.

"And it was then that Wen-dah-ban had his *in-a-pu-we*?" Mr. Jackman asked.

Shaw-win looked startled that he knew the Ojibwa word for the dream of warning. She nodded.

"Did he tell you what it was?" Mr. Jackman asked.

The question brought terror to Shaw-win's eyes. She could not have spoken.

"Dave! It isn't necessary to stir up the poor child like this!" Mrs. Jackman cried.

"The more we know, the easier it will be to help Wen-dah-ban," her husband said.

"But it's as clear as day, Dave. It's exactly as you said."

"Can't we ask where she left Wen-dah-ban?" Philip said.

Shaw-win told the story of the evening. After Wah-bo-sence had asked about Ehe-bik and his woman, Wen-dah-ban had said nothing. He had sat in the wigwam. He had not eaten. And as she watched him she saw in his eyes what he was thinking. For a long time he sat without speaking. Then suddenly he had rushed out into the darkness.

She had waited, her heart heavy. And then, after a long time, far, far away in the forest she had heard a windigo and knew this evil thing had come to Wen-dah-ban. It was as he feared, and soon he would come back to eat her, as he had eaten Ehe-bik and his woman. So she had left the wigwam and run fast so he could not find her.

The low voice stopped at last. No one spoke. Sympathy, incredulity, and a sort of horror held them speechless. Mrs. Jackman gathered the anguished girl into her arms. At any other moment the older woman's speech, a mixture of English and every odd Ojibwa phrase which crossed her mind,

would have caused smiles. Now the others knew that somehow Mrs. Jackman had managed to make Shaw-win understand she was safe with them.

If only Shaw-win had confided in them, Ann thought, so much of this horror might have been averted. When the Indian girl had grown more quiet, Ann spoke of it.

"Why did you not tell us yesterday when we were at your wigwam?" she asked. "You knew we were your friends."

The answer required deep thought.

"White people do not understand these things," Shaw-win said.

"But we do!" Ann cried. "We're going to help you."

Shaw-win shook her head and then looked up with sudden hope.

If they would take her to the white trader, he would send for An-ah-mee-kee, her father. The trader knew her father was a powerful *mide*. He could call on the great bear spirit and he knew much medicine. Once he had driven out a windigo. All the Indians had been frightened, but her father had gone into his conjury tent and called the spirits. He had made medicine for a long time and finally they had heard the windigo pass high above them. It had made a big wind. Everyone had heard it and been happy.

"About all we need around here is one of those tent shakers," Hugh muttered.

"Dave, you won't—" Mrs. Jackman began, then stopped as she caught her husband's glance.

Mr. Jackman's manner was so calm and reasonable Ann feared he might be going to grant Shaw-win's wish, but as he began to speak she realized what a great trader he would have made. Mr. Gillespie could not have outdone his answer to the terrified Indian girl.

He had heard of An-ah-mee-kee, the great *mide*. It would be well if he could be here to help Shaw-win in her trouble. But now the white trader was away. He could not send for her father. And Shaw-win could not make the long journey. She must rest. Later when the white trader returned they would go to him and get his help in Shaw-win's trouble. But for the present she must stay at Fox Island and be safe. And they, the Jackmans, would take the place of the white trader. They would help her as he would help her. They would help Wen-dah-ban. No harm should come to any hunter in this district

because the white trader trusted the Jackmans and had left all things in their charge.

Later when the four were at the corral harnessing the team, Mr. Jackman joined them. He looked a bit shame-faced.

“Maybe I promised a lot for you people,” he said, “but we’ve got to keep Shaw-win at Fox Island until you can find Wen-dah-ban. He’s the most important job right now. I don’t like the idea of that boy thinking he is conjured. And we don’t want a *mide* father at Far Lake. Things are bad enough now without having a conjury tent and rattles.”

“Dad, I was proud of the way you talked to Shaw-win,” Philip said.

“Thank you, son. But I wouldn’t have gotten anywhere without your mother. She’s put Shaw-win in bed and is fussing over her like a sick child. I guess that’s what she is.”

“I’m sorry, sir, that we’re leaving you and Hugh with all the chores,” Jerry said.

Ann thought she detected a new respect in Jerry’s voice. Her father seemed just one of them until they faced a crisis. Then there was always something dependable, and yet inspired, about him. Philip was like that too. Being a Jackman was a challenge. You had to measure up to it. She slipped an arm through her father’s. Suddenly she realized she’d never told him how good it was to be with him again. As she felt his answering pressure, she wondered if she hadn’t told him in the way he’d prefer.

“Any idea where we’d find Wen-dah-ban?” Philip asked.

“Probably brooding in the wigwam,” his father said. “That’s the way a conjured Indian usually acts.”

Jerry led Ogema to his place. Rita was already in the cariole. Ann walked back to join her.

“Good luck to you,” Mr. Jackman called. “You’ll need it. You’ll have to figure out what you’ll say to him. But I know you folks will swing the trick.”

NINE

As the dogs sped across the lake toward the mainland, Ann felt a glow of confidence. Her father believed in their ability. It was like him, too, not to outline their campaign for them. He trusted them to meet the situation. She was proud of his last speech and hoped Rita had understood all it meant. A few moments later she knew Rita had.

"I'm crazy about your father!" Rita burst forth suddenly. "He's like my dad in so many ways." She stopped and then she added, "We've been lucky, Ann. Some fathers don't expect you to have good sense."

Ann nodded. "But Dad'll be terribly proud when we bring Wen-dah-ban back tonight," she said, and at the time nothing else seemed possible.

On the mainland the dogs followed the trail to the wood lot. This morning Ogema turned inquiringly to Philip for orders.

"Haw!" Philip shouted.

Ogema swung to the left on the trail toward Wen-dah-ban's camp. He looked back, his eyes gleaming, to show he approved of the decision.

"Ogema's going to expect a bush trip every day," Jerry said.

"There's nothing I'd like better," Rita said. "Except I'm not getting any practice with snowshoes."

"If it snows you'll get plenty," Ann said. "Better ride while you can."

The trail twisted through the forest. Windfalls and hummocks were buried in snow and sometimes Philip had to swing on the tail-rope to keep the cariole upright. It was a rough ride with the flexible toboggan base turning and twisting with the sinuousness of a snake.

Philip handed the tail-rope to Jerry. "I'm going ahead to look for Shaw-win's tracks," he said.

A hundred yards beyond he found them, faint impressions of webs on frozen snow. There were no other tracks. If Wen-dah-ban suspected where she had fled, he had not followed. The trail narrowed to skirt a large

outspreading cedar and in the loose snow of the side wall were sharp slashes cut by the tails of her snowshoes.

“She was running here,” Philip said. “Something must have scared her.” He walked down the trail and a few feet farther came again to marks of wide-flung webs. “Running here, too,” he said. “Poor kid! I bet it was an awful trip.”

It had not needed this evidence of terror for them to imagine the fear of the lonely journey through a dark forest.

“It shows how anxious she was to get to Fox Island,” Jerry said. “Took a lot of faith in you people to make her come through this.”

That was only more reason why they must find Wen-dah-ban, Ann thought. You can’t fail people who depend on you.

Rita looked at the close-pressing forest.

“Honestly, Ann, would you dare to follow this trail alone at night?” she asked. “I’d be scared to death.”

“Philip and I have often traveled after dark,” Ann said, “but we don’t believe in windigos.”

“Think what it must have been for Shaw-win,” Rita said. “How old do you suppose she is?”

“Wen-dah-ban’s my age,” Ann said. “And she’s certainly no older.”

“And already she’s been married and perhaps even—”

“Don’t say it!” Ann cried. “We can’t let anything happen to Wen-dah-ban.”

When they reached the shore of Ahmik Lake, Philip halted the dogs while they were still out of sight of the wigwam.

“Anybody got any ideas?” he asked.

“I thought we came to get Wen-dah-ban,” Jerry said.

“What do we do if he won’t come with us?” Philip asked.

Ann smiled. It seemed like old times. Philip always wanted to plan in advance, while she trusted to inspiration in a crisis. But they’d always proved an unbeatable combination.

“We can’t argue with Wen-dah-ban while we stand here,” Ann said.

Philip grinned. "All right, Sis," he said. "Have it your way, but you'd better think fast if Wen-dah-ban digs in his heels."

"If Jerry and I could speak Ojibwa, the four of us could talk him down in five minutes," Rita said.

She looked resolute and determined, a stalwart ally, even if moral support was all she offered.

"Rita and I'll back you up with convincing gestures," Jerry said. "Let's get going."

They followed the shore to the clump of balsam. No smoke curled above the wigwam. They did not call as they approached, for there was something ominous about the closed wigwam and the empty lake. Ann dreaded what they might find when they pulled back the blanket door.

They peered into the dim interior, lighted only from the smoke hole. The wigwam was empty. Except for the absence of a welcoming fire, it looked as they had left it the day before. Even the kettle of meat still hung from the tripod.

Philip touched the dead ashes.

"Been no fire for hours," he said.

Jerry looked into the kettle of meat. It was frozen.

"No one's had a meal," he said.

They examined everything, hoping to find evidence that Wen-dah-ban had spent the night there. Nothing was changed except Shaw-win's workbasket which had been moved to the wall. She had probably put her work away. Jerry missed the roasted fish and Rita found it beneath a cedar branch.

"Wen-dah-ban might have sat here all night," Philip said, and his voice was troubled. "But he'd have frozen without a fire."

They went outside. Philip examined the snow in front of the wigwam but the hard-packed surface revealed nothing. Trails led in several directions. They followed one to the fire-killed stump where Shaw-win cut dry kindling. Another led to an alder swamp, crisscrossed with rabbit runs. Shaw-win must have reset her snares yesterday for a long white snowshoe rabbit swung above each run. Ann looked at the ghostly bodies hanging from sprung poles. They were depressing. Rita shuddered and turned away. Philip stopped to loosen a rawhide thong from the neck of a rabbit.

“Don’t touch it!” Rita cried. “I can’t bear it.”

“I’ve always hated rabbit snares,” Ann said.

Philip stepped back. “Shaw-win can bring them in when she gets home,” he said.

A third trail led to the big cedar where Shaw-win cut fresh branches. Two more well-beaten paths were obviously Wen-dah-ban’s trapping trails.

“There’s nothing left to do but follow a trap line or cut a circle,” Philip said. “We’d better eat first.”

They built a fire in the wigwam. Philip carried in poplar branches for a quick, clean blaze and it lighted the bark walls and threw out a grateful warmth. But a meal in the deserted wigwam was strange and cheerless. Only yesterday they’d been a merry party. Then they had not even suspected the approach of deep trouble. And now it had touched them all.

No one talked much. When Ann hung a kettle of snow over the fire so they could wash the cups, Philip arose.

“Jerry and I can make better time without you girls,” he said. “Mind staying alone?”

“Someone ought to be here in case Wen-dah-ban comes,” Ann said.

She hoped her voice sounded confident and assured while she wondered why she dreaded the empty wigwam.

“If it weren’t for Ann I wouldn’t stay here a minute,” Rita said. “And I don’t care who knows it.”

“I wish neither of you girls had to stay here,” Jerry said. “But Philip and I have got to cover ground. Where are we going, Philip?”

“On his trap line,” Philip said. “He might have gone to his first night’s camp. That would be about ten miles. We can make it there and back this afternoon.”

“Ever been there?” Jerry asked.

“No, but he’d lay it out in a triangle with three days’ travel and two overnight camps,” Philip said.

“You mean Shaw-win stays alone at night!” Rita cried. “And I’m fussing about an afternoon!”

She was still bothered about her admission of fear when the boys and the dogs departed. “Don’t you people ever admit it when you’re scared?” she

asked suddenly.

“Maybe we don’t,” Ann said, “but I liked the way you did. Philip liked it too. It was so honest.”

“You’re really scared down inside, aren’t you?”

“Not scared exactly. But I feel queer in this empty wigwam. All that conjury talk must have made me jumpy.”

For a long time the two sat staring into the fire. Outside was only silence, until they heard the sharp crack of an explosion. It sounded like rifle fire. Rita leaped to her feet.

“It’s only frost in a tree,” Ann said. “When it’s very cold, the sap freezes and expands.”

“Does it do that often?” Rita asked.

“Not in December. Later in the winter when it gets really cold, you should hear the bush sound off.”

“No wonder Indians believe in evil spirits,” Rita said. “It wouldn’t surprise me if a windigo walked through the door this minute. Do you suppose Shaw-win sat here like we are, just listening to queer noises and being afraid?”

“Indian women have never known anything else, and they are always busy.”

“Maybe we’d feel better if we had something to do,” Rita said. “Anyway, the time would go faster.”

“Yes,” Ann said, and she looked at the uncompleted cedar mat hanging in its frame, but she abandoned the idea with reluctance. “My weaving is terrible,” she confessed. “Even Wah-be-goona used to laugh at it.”

“Shaw-win wouldn’t thank us to spoil that tricky pattern,” Rita agreed. “But there ought to be something we could do.”

“They usually have games,” Ann said. “We played them with Wen-dah-ban.”

“What kind of games?”

“Different sorts. Mostly stick games. We’d throw fan sticks and try to make them land with the same side up. Sometimes we played an outdoor stick game to see who could throw his stick the farthest on snow crust.

There's another game with a wooden bowl and flat bone dice they use for gambling."

"With real money?"

"Indians don't have money."

"Not even the trappers?"

"Every fall they get 'debt.' That's the food, clothes, and traps they need. They pay it off with furs. If they've had a good year and have credit left over, they buy everything in the trade shop they can lay their hands on. Once Wen-dah-ban bought a Stetson hat just like his father's."

"What if they've had a bad year and can't pay their debt?"

"The Company trusts them or pretends some of the debt is paid. Mr. Gillespie never lets his hunters get discouraged. He knows a cheerful Indian is a better hunter."

"He must understand Indians."

"He's spent his life with them."

"Then why didn't he make Louise and Michel stop worrying?" Rita asked. "You said they were afraid of Christmas."

"Michel would never talk to Mr. Gillespie about that! Indians never talk to white men about bad medicine. And Michel is more of an Indian than he admits. He'd know Mr. Gillespie would laugh if he thought Michel was worrying about bad medicine just because the post manager had made fun of a free trader."

"Can't we stop talking about conjury this afternoon?" Rita asked plaintively. "I've been expecting a windigo to come in that door. Don't laugh, Ann. It's true!" She laughed even as she said it, and then abruptly changed the subject. "It'd be fun to see what Shaw-win keeps in those bags. Do you think she'd mind?"

"No. When I was a youngster Wah-be-goona used to give me her workbags to play with."

They carried the bags to the fire to examine the contents in a good light, and as bag after bag gave up its treasures, Ann was astonished at Shaw-win's preparation for winter wigwam days. Wah-be-goona had never shown one tenth the ingenuity or foresight. The girls fingered the soft tanned skins of caribou and moose and deer. There were moose sinews for heavy sewing and deer sinews for finer work.

Another bag contained products of the cedar tree, split bark for basket making bundled in different widths, coils of root twine, and roots still to be dampened and split. Ann had watched Wah-be-goon do this with a curved canoe knife.

Shaw-win had taken advantage of summer days to gather a year's supply of birchbark. Some of this had already been split and rolled and there were other great pieces of heavy unsplit bark with which to make birchbark *ma-kuks* and dishes.

A bright-colored bag contained novelties, reeds which had been dyed in bright colors, beads, awls made of deer bone, and one small lacelike basket not yet completed. It was woven of colored grasses and trimmed with black moose hair and was lovely enough to be a jewel case.

Rita's eyes were shining with excitement as she looked at the collection.

"It's like a dry goods store," she said. "Shaw-win must have worked all summer. There isn't anything they need she couldn't make."

And then both girls sobered. It was only another reminder of the thought and work and hope that had gone into the making of this forest home.

"Isn't it time for the boys to be back?" Rita asked. "They've been gone for hours."

It seemed so, but Ann knew they hadn't. She rummaged through Shaw-win's workbasket with sudden energy and held up an unfinished moccasin.

"Wonder if I can sew the puckering around this toe before they get here," she said. "I'm slow and not good at it. Wah-be-goon used to try to teach me but she said I never could be a good Ojibwa. Then how she would laugh!"

"Why?"

"The word Ojibwa means 'to pucker.' They're the only people who wear the puckered moccasin."

Rita watched Ann begin to sew. "What can I do?" she asked.

"Why don't you finish beading this *say-song*," Ann said. "It's the top part of the moccasin. There's one all finished for a pattern."

Rita studied the bright bead flowers of the finished *say-song*. Its uncompleted mate had no lines to guide the worker.

"I'd better draw in the design," Rita said.

“With what?” Ann laughed. “You couldn’t find a pencil in a wigwam. Indian women use birchbark patterns for beadwork. There are a lot of them in Shaw-win’s workbasket.”

Rita decided it would be more practical to count the beads. It took a long time to complete one petal. Ann industriously sewed puckers, ripped and sewed again. She couldn’t make as neat a toe as she had made three years before. The girls became so interested they didn’t even talk. The jingle of sleigh bells just outside the wigwam broke in on their absorption. A moment later Philip and Jerry stood in the doorway.

“Everybody’s gone native,” Jerry said. “We come home from the trap line to find them sitting cross-legged beside a wigwam fire, sewing moccasins.”

There was no need to ask about Wen-dah-ban. Philip’s weary and disheartened face told of their failure.

“Went as far as the first camp,” he said, “but no one had spent a night there since the last snow. We couldn’t find out a thing from the trail. It’s so hard his moccasins wouldn’t have left a track.”

“Then he could have gone right past his first camp,” Ann said.

“Maybe, but we didn’t dare go any farther today,” Jerry said. “It’ll be dark before we get to Fox Island as it is. Ready to start?”

Rita and Ann put away their sewing. They debated taking clothes to Shaw-win, or at least her comb, which she evidently prized for it was kept in a birchbark case. Then they decided not to tell her they had visited the wigwam.

“I stopped at the cubbies and picked up the fur and sprung the traps,” Philip said. “Didn’t get much. Three mink, a few ermine, and a red fox. Hugh and I can skin the catch and give it to Wen-dah-ban later.”

Ann wondered when “later” would be. Philip too must have wondered, for his tone lacked its usual buoyancy. Depression rode with them on the homeward journey. Darkness came before they had left the forest. The team maintained a steady lope and Philip didn’t have to be so vigilant in keeping the cariole level. The trail to Wen-dah-ban’s was fast becoming a hard pavement. And they must travel it again tomorrow.

As they crossed from the mainland to Fox Island, Ann saw the lights of home. For the first time they did not lift her spirits. She dreaded meeting Shaw-win. She dreaded even more reporting failure to her father.

He was waiting for them outside the house.

“Heard you coming,” he said. “What luck?”

“We didn’t find Wen-dah-ban,” Ann said.

“An Indian can hide out a good many days without anything serious happening to him,” Mr. Jackman said. “We didn’t tell Shaw-win where you’d gone. Might be as well not to mention it.”

“How is she?” Ann asked.

“Quiet, and no trouble. Your mother’s kept her in the kitchen. They cooked together, using mostly sign language. Now Shaw-win’s sitting in front of the fire.”

It was a subdued supper table. Shaw-win had said only “*B’jou*” and had shown no interest in their absence. For once Ann was grateful for the taciturnity of the Ojibwa when he is with white men. Mrs. Jackman had Shaw-win sit beside her and it was astonishing how their friendship had progressed on smiles and the few words each knew of the other’s language.

Mr. Jackman began a long story about a bear. He told it in two languages, stopping after each sentence to translate, and it was obviously an effort to make talk. He was half through the tale when the dogs in the corral raised a rumpus, and their excitement showed resentment of invasion.

“Must be someone with a dog team,” Hugh said.

“I’ll go see,” Philip said.

“I’ll go with you,” and his father started to his feet.

There was uneasy apprehension in his voice. Everyone had stiffened. Shaw-win’s eyes were wide with dread. Ann wondered if it was the Indian girl’s expression which had brought her own quick sensing of disaster. The others sat tense and silent. Then they heard soft shuffling on the veranda.

Mr. Jackman crossed the room and threw open the front door. The light of the lamp streamed out to reveal Pe-tah-bo and Wah-be-goona. With Ann’s first glance she caught the desolation in their faces. Pe-tah-bo was stern, even in his grief. Wah-be-goona had crumpled into an old and frightened woman.

“Come in!” Mr. Jackman said.

Pe-tah-bo stood fast in the doorway.

“Tonight we sleep on this island,” he said. “Tomorrow we go to the white trader.”

He had spoken directly to Mr. Jackman. Then he looked at the silent group and for the first time saw Shaw-win. She had risen to her feet and stood frozen with terror.

Pe-tah-bo stared at her for a moment and his eyes softened with sudden pity.

“You know then,” he said. “You know Wen-dah-ban is a windigo.”

TEN

PE-TAH-BO had spoken in Ojibwa but everyone heard the word, windigo. It stunned them. Mr. Jackman recovered first and brought Pe-tah-bo and Wah-be-goon in before the fire.

“How about supper for them, Mary?” he asked.

Mrs. Jackman rallied and rushed to the kitchen for warm food. But when Ann and Rita carried the plates to the old couple, Wah-be-goon shook her head.

The Indian woman’s face was tearless but deep lines told of her suffering. Shaw-win’s unquestioning acceptance of Pe-tah-bo’s statement had seemed to confirm the tragedy for Wah-be-goon. Arms folded across her breast, she rocked back and forth in silent grief. Ann feared that at any moment she might burst into the native cry of mourning.

Once Ann had heard that cry. It had come across a lake, from a wigwam where a child had died, and for weeks afterwards the anguish of the eerie sound had haunted her.

Mrs. Jackman sat between the two Indian women. She could not speak words of sympathy to the stricken wife or the grieving mother, but in her face was a look of such pity and understanding Ann knew nothing she might say in Ojibwa could be as comforting. Mrs. Jackman did not need a common language to share another mother’s sorrow.

Pe-tah-bo and Mr. Jackman sat apart and Ann caught only phrases of their low-voiced talk. Often the two men sat through long silences, and then Pe-tah-bo would begin again to tell his story. Grief had not robbed him of his natural dignity. His fine old face retained a look of unmistakable strength. Ann marveled as she watched him. No wonder he had been a leader among his people, just as Wen-dah-ban had been destined to become a leader. The thought made the tragedy seem even more dreadful.

Later, in the kitchen, Mr. Jackman told Pe-tah-bo’s story. Last night they had thought they had to deal only with Shaw-win’s superstitious fear. Now

the rumor had spread and threatened catastrophe to the entire district. A windigo scare was in the making.

Mr. Jackman had closed the door to the living room so the Indians would not hear him.

"I'll leave the three alone," he said. "Do 'em good to talk it over."

"Who told Pe-tah-bo about Wen-dah-ban?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"Wen-dah-ban did," her husband said. "He met his father on the trap line and warned him he had been conjured. Pe-tah-bo said even before he talked to Wen-dah-ban he had feared a windigo. He'd heard strange noises in the night and he'd smelled the smell of a windigo."

"Smelled!" Mrs. Jackman exclaimed. "What will they think of next!"

"Pe-tah-bo says once when he was a boy he smelled a windigo. He's never forgotten it. He says nothing else smells like it."

"What's it like?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"He tried to describe it. He says it fills the forest. He made it sound fearful, like something fetid and unclean. But it doesn't make any difference what he smelled. You can't argue an Indian out of the fears of his imagination."

"When did he see Wen-dah-ban?" Philip asked.

"Today. At least we know the lad is somewhere near."

"Then what happened?" Ann asked.

"After Wen-dah-ban warned his father he'd already eaten Ehe-bik and his wife and that no one was safe, he turned and walked away."

"And his father let him go!" Mrs. Jackman cried. "That poor boy!"

"You mustn't blame Pe-tah-bo, Mary. A windigo has always been an outcast. Pe-tah-bo thought he had to protect Wah-be-goan. He hurried home to bring her to Fox Island."

Ann asked if Wen-dah-ban had returned to his empty wigwam and discovered Shaw-win had run away.

"You saw how surprised Pe-tah-bo was to find Shaw-win here," her father said. "By this time Wen-dah-ban may even think he's eaten her."

For a moment no one spoke. The thought of Wen-dah-ban wandering in the forest in terror of the dreadful thing he had become was too horrible.

"I knew we shouldn't have come home without him!" Philip said. "We ought to start out right now to find him."

"Couldn't do anything tonight," his father said. "Wait till daylight, when you can make a real search. Pe-tah-bo may have some idea where the lad is hiding."

"We'll ask him before we start," Philip said. "You girls coming along?"

Ann hadn't considered doing otherwise. She'd not even consulted Rita.

"What do you think, Dave?" Mrs. Jackman asked. "Is it dangerous?"

"No more than the trip today," her husband said. "Thought we talked it over this morning. Ann and Philip could reason with Wen-dah-ban a lot better than Hugh or me."

"Rita and I may not be good reasoners in Ojibwa," Jerry said. "But we don't intend to be left at home."

"As though we'd quit in the middle of any job!" Rita exclaimed. "I don't see why you even asked such a silly question, Philip Jackman."

"Thought maybe you might be getting tired of bush trips," Philip said. "Besides, Wen-dah-ban is really Ann's and my job."

Hugh had come in the back door in time to hear Philip's speech.

"Looks like he's getting to be a job for all of us," he said. "I put the nitchie dogs in that old shed, Dave. Gives us a chance to sleep without their racket. And I stopped by my shack and got it ready for company."

"You're not expecting any others!" Mrs. Jackman cried.

"The old couple's got to sleep somewhere," Hugh said.

"But we can't send them out of the house after we took Shaw-win in," Mrs. Jackman said. "Besides, Hugh, you'd hate having them in your cabin."

Hugh didn't argue his reluctance, only muttered he'd find some way to get rid of the nitchie smell.

"But where had you intended to have them sleep, Mary?" her husband asked.

"In the living room, of course! They'd be comfortable on the floor before the fire. Shaw-win could stay with them and Philip could have his room again."

"Why don't you put all three in my room?" Jerry asked.

Mrs. Jackman hesitated. No one but Mr. Gillespie and Jerry had ever occupied the guest room.

"Jerry's got an idea there," Mr. Jackman said. "Puts them off by themselves. I'm not crazy about having the living room turned into an Indian camp."

"If Hugh is willing to give them his cabin, I shouldn't fuss about the guest room," his wife said. "Did you tell Pe-tah-bo how long it would be before Mr. Gillespie got back, Dave?"

"Not exactly," he said. "I've always wanted a chance to try that infuriating Ojibwa word. So I said 'by-and-by.' And, do you know, it worked!"

Next morning the suddenly increased household brought Ann and her mother into the kitchen early. Hugh was up even earlier and had lifted the net which stretched between two holes in the ice. He laid a large lake trout on the table.

"If we're goin' to run a nitchie boardin' house, might as well do it right," he said. "And don't you worry, Missus. I'll have this fish fried in no time. No need for you to get wore out."

"Goodness, Hugh, there are only three extra people," Mrs. Jackman said.

"That's all has come as yet," Hugh said.

Ann hoped the old trapper wasn't prophetic. It was one thing to introduce Rita to Indian neighbors who lived in as charming a wigwam as Shaw-win's and quite another to have the house overrun with native hunters whose house and table manners were definitely primitive. Even Wah-be-goos were somewhat of a shock at times, although Ann was too fond of her to admit it. Hugh had never been so charitable.

"Rita'll understand why I don't hold with Indians," he said. "Just wait till she watches Wah-be-goos tie into this food."

"I hope she does tie in," Mrs. Jackman said. "I'd be glad to see her enjoy a breakfast even if she does eat with her fingers. I thought of that sad old face all night."

Jerry and Philip entered with Mr. Jackman. They had been at the fur pens, feeding and watering the mink and foxes.

"Breakfast is ready, Dave," his wife said. "It's time to call our guests. I haven't seen them yet."

“Probably a bit shy.” He started toward the living room door, then stopped.

“Maybe we’d better do a bit of plotting first,” he said. “We’ve got here on Fox Island every Indian who thinks Wen-dah-ban is a windigo. If we can keep them here we may be able to head off the rumor. Once word of it gets through the bush, Gillespie wouldn’t have a hunter left. As I see it, Mary, it will be our job to hold the Indians while the young folks hunt for Wen-dah-ban.”

“Did Pe-tah-bo want to bring a *mide* here?” Philip asked.

“He spoke of it,” Dave Jackman said, “but I put him off as I did Shaw-win. I wish I knew how Alex Gillespie would handle this.”

“Maybe he didn’t get away on this vacation,” Hugh said. “What’s the matter with me taking the second team and running down to the post to make sure? If Gillespie’s in his district we sure need him.”

“Good idea, Hugh!” Dave Jackman said. “But don’t let Pe-tah-bo go. His story would send even Michel and Louise flying into the bush.”

“I’d figured on going alone,” Hugh said. “Looks like this conjury business is as catching as measles.”

“And we’re not coming back until we find Wen-dah-ban,” Philip said. “We’ll take a camping outfit.”

“Surely that won’t be necessary,” Mrs. Jackman said. “Wen-dah-ban’s only —”

“It’s always a good idea to take enough to be comfortable if they get caught out overnight,” her husband said.

“And look at the time we’d waste coming back twenty miles just because we didn’t have grub and blankets,” Philip argued. “If we’d had them yesterday we could have done his whole trap line. We might have found him.”

“I’m glad you weren’t away last night,” his mother said. “With all this talk of conjury and windigos, I’m becoming a timid woman. I like my family safe at home by dark.”

Mrs. Jackman so seldom confessed maternal anxieties that everyone looked startled.

“You know, Mother, we won’t stay out unless we have to,” Ann said.

“And if we do stay, you shouldn’t be surprised,” Philip added with a disarming smile. He went to the door. “Come on, Jerry. We’ll get the grub box from the storehouse.”

“There’s a big can of frozen baked beans on the top shelf,” Mrs. Jackman said as the boys went out.

“Leave some for me,” Hugh called. “I’ll have to make a lunch stop this noon.”

“I baked an extra supply this week,” Mrs. Jackman said, “but I didn’t plan on quite so many bush meals.”

The Jackman household was never without this food for unexpected winter trips. Many woodsmen carried frozen boiled beans, but Mrs. Jackman baked them with plenty of sugar and fat salt pork, and then froze them, spread on a sheet of canvas on the snow. Each bean froze in a separate sweet, brown pellet.

Ann had helped to do this many times, and often she had watched the beans melt and turn even browner over winter fires. They were, she thought, the north’s most delicious food.

The boys had brought in the grub box, and Ann and her mother were filling food sacks when Rita entered the kitchen. Her eyes lighted at the prospect of a winter camp. Ann still spoke of an overnight stay as the merest possibility, but Philip did not want anyone to misunderstand his intention.

“This time we’ll stay long enough to do a real job of hunting,” he said. “Wen-dah-ban’s in that country somewhere.”

“This may be a cold hard trip, Rita,” Mrs. Jackman warned her. “You mustn’t feel you have to go.”

“But I want to go, Mrs. Jackman!” Rita cried. “I’m just as anxious as the others to find Wen-dah-ban.”

Mr. Jackman laughed. “It’s no use, Mary. Rita feels the same about this as Ann and Philip. And you know how we brought up our young’uns.”

“Listen to Dave take all the credit!” Hugh exclaimed. “Talkin’ about bringin’ up folks! Way I look at it, folks ain’t much different from foxes. If they’ve got the right color and markings, ain’t much anyone can do to spoil ’em.”

“Hugh means, Rita, he likes our color and our markings,” Ann said.

Hugh looked at the two girls, and the little sun-and-smile wrinkles deepened around his eyes.

“Not much about either of you I could find fault with,” he admitted.

As soon as they had eaten breakfast, Philip asked Pe-tah-bo if he had any idea where Wen-dah-ban might be hiding, but the Indian was terrified at the thought of trying to find his son.

“No good, no good,” he repeated, shaking his head.

Philip asked about a camp Wen-dah-ban had built in his first year of trapping, and of which he had been very proud. He had once said he would never take down that wigwam. Pe-tah-bo said, “Maybe,” and when they asked if he had ever been there, he admitted he had. After long pondering he agreed that big sickness, *ak-o-si-win*, might make Wen-dah-ban go there.

“That’s just where he would go!” Philip exclaimed.

Hope made them all grasp at the possibility. Pe-tah-bo would have liked to drop the subject but they prodded him until the Indian squatted and traced the route on the floor with a finger.

It was not as a white man would give directions. Seldom did Pe-tah-bo use the points of the compass but he gave infinite details—an island with two trees, a fire-blackened stump on a point, a portage trail that began in a swamp and went over a ridge, a rapids marked by a tree from which all the bark had been scratched by bears.

Pe-tah-bo spoke of large and small lakes, of ridges, but he did not mention miles. Distance was measured by “smokes.” Ann knew a “smoke” came every two hours, but there might be a big difference in the Indian’s speed of travel and their own. Philip and Mr. Jackman nodded gravely and asked more questions.

“I’ve got most of it,” Philip said at last. “We go through that spruce swamp south of Wen-dah-ban’s wigwam and cross a notched ridge, follow a creek to the River That Flows Over Boiling Sand, leave that at the bear tree, cross two ridges, and come out on a big lake.”

“That’s the way I got it,” Mr. Jackman said. “And Wen-dah-ban’s old camp is on the south side of that lake. But how big is the lake and just where is the camp?”

“I’ll draw it out, just to make sure,” Philip said, and he got paper and pencil and made a sketch.

Pe-tah-bo watched and approved and then tried to make them understand where the old wigwam stood.

“I’ve got it,” Philip said at last. “When we reach the lake we see two islands in the middle. We go between them and then straight on till we hit the south shore, and there’s the camp. I’ll draw it.”

He did, and Pe-tah-bo at once nodded approval. But he was still terrified at the thought of their going. Philip cut short his warnings.

“We’ve got to get started,” he said. “We’ve lost a lot of time and it’s a long way. We’ll get the dogs, Jerry.”

Hugh had already departed for the Hudson’s Bay Company post and Mr. Jackman helped Ann load the toboggan with blankets, food, cooking outfit, fish for the dogs, lashing the supplies under a big tarpaulin. They were ready by the time the boys brought the harnessed team. Philip said the girls could take turns riding on the grub box. A luxurious cariole did not fit this expedition.

“Unless you’re lucky and pick up Wen-dah-ban’s trail, I don’t think any of you’ll do much riding,” his father said. “Hope you make it back tonight. This is different from a winter picnic. All the talk about Wen-dah-ban has bothered your mother a bit.”

“We’ll get here if we can,” Philip said. “You know we’ll be all right.”

“Sure,” his father agreed. “But I’m counting on you people not to take on too big a job.” Admonitions from Mr. Jackman were rare and he hesitated in embarrassment. “I promised Mary to say this to you, but I’d intended to all along. If Wen-dah-ban gives any trouble, watch out for yourselves first of all.”

“Philip and I will remember that, sir,” Jerry said. “You can count on us.”

Every turn in the trail to Wen-dah-ban’s wigwam was familiar now, and seemed shorter each time they crossed it. Soon they reached Ahmik Lake. Philip followed the broken trail to the shore in front of Wen-dah-ban’s camp.

The wigwam, in the stand of balsam, stood forlorn and deserted, a hundred feet away. They walked over to it and looked in, but saw no sign of Wen-dah-ban having been there. They’d not expected he would come. Yesterday had proved that.

When they turned south they had to break a new trail and everyone put on snowshoes. Rita was fourth, with the team behind her. Ogema, who had completely capitulated to Rita, frequently thrust his black muzzle into her

mittened hand. To get near enough to do so, he had to cross his feet like a dancer to avoid stepping on the tails of her snowshoes. Rita said she was so touched by Ogema's attention she would have forgiven him had he tripped her.

"But he'd be brokenhearted over his bad manners," Ann said. "You'd get only a fall, but he'd be humiliated."

They left the lake and crossed a ridge. Below them lay the spruce swamp. Close ranks of trees with interlacing branches held the snow as a canopy of sparkling white which stretched for miles to the west.

"Isn't it beautiful!" Rita cried. "Do we walk under that?"

"We do while we cross the swamp," Philip said and he pointed to the south. "See that notched ridge? That's where the creek is that Pe-tah-bo told us to hit."

"Do we follow our noses?" Jerry asked.

"We'll use a compass in the swamp," Philip said. "Once we're in there, you'll see why."

They entered the dim interior. Trees grew so close together their branches met above and from them everywhere hung long festoons of gray caribou moss. The matted greenery above held up the snow of a winter. So little had sifted to the ground the hummocks of ground moss with tiny red flowers were scarcely covered. Even the green branches of the trees were only faintly dusted with white powdering.

It was still and eerie, a quiet and secluded world, and in that ceilinged forest they unconsciously lowered their voices until they spoke in whispers.

"It's ghostly, isn't it?" Rita said.

"If anything moved, I'd jump a mile," Jerry said.

At that moment a rabbit bounded from beneath his feet, ran a few yards, and stopped to sit up on its haunches. It had a fine protective coat of white, but it didn't know how its black shoe-button eyes betrayed it.

"If I had a peashooter I could hit it," Jerry said.

Laughter restored normality. Philip grew increasingly cheerful as they neared the edge of the swamp, and when they left it he saw the notched ridge toward which he had headed.

“It’s those long shots that keep a fellow feeling good,” he said. “If our compass happened to go wrong back there, we’d be out of luck. How about celebrating with a meal? I’m hungry.”

They all were. A breeze had sprung up and they chose the shelter of thick saplings. Rita and Ann knocked the snow off a windfall with their snowshoes, Jerry made a fire, Philip unlashed the canvas and opened the grub box. With a few strokes of his ax he cut a pole handle for the frying pan. Soon snow was being melted for tea water and the frozen beans had begun to sizzle. Ann and Rita toasted bread on sticks.

When the beans were browned and smelling deliciously, Philip set the frying pan on the windfall and drew two crossed lines to divide the contents into four equal parts. They scooped the beans up on their toast and Philip and Jerry quarreled amiably about the division between their shares.

“Now I understand why Indians eat out of a common pot,” Rita said. “We won’t have to wash plates.”

It was cozy in the little camp. Ann would have liked to linger. Winter noon stops were so snug and pleasant. But the breeze was freshening and already snow was sifting from the laden branches. Philip looked at the sky.

“Wind’s driving those clouds,” he said. “I’d like to get across that big lake before it hits us.”

At times like these, Philip always sounded so much like Hugh.

They started on. The boys stopped occasionally to consult the map. So far, Pe-tah-bo’s directions had been perfect, except in the matter of time. They laughed at his “one smoke” measurement as they fought their way across a swale between two ridges. It was cluttered with jack pots in which down trees were so inextricably entangled they had to detour. At times both boys used axes to clear branches. The dogs waited, tense and eager, for the obstruction to be cleared away and then came on a run.

“They’re working just as hard as we are!” Jerry said.

“That’s the difference between dogs and horses,” Philip said. “Horses work for you but these lads work with you.”

The breeze had become a cold raw wind when they reached the open lake. Out in the center were the two islands Pe-tah-bo had described. Jerry looked to the north and whistled.

“Big lake is right!” he exclaimed. “That wind’s in the north and clearing. It’s got a good full sweep. We’re going to catch it on this crossing.”

It was Rita's turn to ride on top of the load, but she got off when the full force of wind struck them. She put on her snowshoes.

"The muscles of my legs don't hurt enough for me to want to freeze to death," she said.

They plodded on. The dogs' heads drooped and they humped their bodies against the wind. The shores of the lake were low and only made the loneliness and the emptiness of that vast white expanse the greater.

"We'll forget all this when we find Wen-dah-ban," Ann said. "Didn't Petah-bo say his camp was near the shore?"

Philip nodded.

"I don't see anything about this lake to make anyone want to come back," Rita said.

Ann agreed with her but did not say so. After this long hard journey she couldn't face the possibility of failure. She had to believe Wen-dah-ban had returned to his first wigwam.

They reached the shore at last.

"I'll have a look in that little bay," Philip said. "It's where Wen-dah-ban's camp would be."

The others waited. The dogs lay down, stretched out in line. Ann and Rita sat on the loaded toboggan. Jerry paced up and down, stopping occasionally to make strange geometric designs with his webs.

In a few minutes Philip emerged from the clump of trees and started toward them. They read his news in the dejected slump of his shoulders.

"No one's been in that wigwam for a year," he said. "But it was worth the try."

"What'll we do now?" Jerry asked.

"Make camp," Philip said. "If we hustle we can beat the dark. First we got to find a camp site."

ELEVEN

THE urgency in Philip's voice startled Rita. She looked at her watch. "It's only half past three," she said. "The sun isn't down yet."

"It's dropping fast," Philip said. "There's a lot of chopping for a winter camp. It'll be dark in an hour."

"You're in the north, gal," Jerry told Rita. "Didn't they teach you geography and all about the arctic darkness, and the numbing cold when night comes?"

"Tell her about it after camp's made," Philip said. "We haven't even found a good place yet."

He led the way along the shore, which was low spruce swamp, until he came to a place where a ridge jutted out to the lake. He turned to the land at the base of the ridge.

"There's generally a place between a ridge and a swamp," he said.

"But it'd be warm and cozy in the swamp," Rita said. "Why don't we go in there?"

"This camp will be swamp cozy," Philip promised. "We can get plenty of green birch from the ridge for a good fire, and dead jack pine to keep the birch going. The swamp will give us spruce boughs for shelter. Everything close by."

"Are we going to make a Hudson's Bay camp?" Ann asked.

"And the best you ever saw," her brother said. "Here's a perfect place for one. Everything to order. Even an opening under this big spruce. Don't even have to clear the ground."

Philip led the team forward so the toboggan stopped beneath the spruce tree. He unlashd the tarpaulin and took out two axes. He moved quickly, as though every moment was too precious to be wasted in explanation.

"You girls can take care of things here, Sis," he said.

Ann nodded and began to unhitch the dogs.

"I've got muscle, Philip," Jerry said. "And I'm willing to use it. Orders, boss."

Philip handed him an ax and led the way into the swamp. He walked as if in a great hurry and he and Jerry disappeared among the trees. Rita stared after them in astonishment.

"What's it all about?" she asked.

Ann laughed. "You mustn't mind Philip and me," she said. "We know how fast it gets cold when the sun goes down in a clear sky. He's thinking about all the wood they've got to get before dark, and I know how much snow we have to shovel. But first we have to take care of the dogs."

Ann unbuckled the harnesses and Rita hung them in a sapling. When the dogs were free, they gathered around Ann in an expectant circle.

"At four o'clock all you fellows think about is supper," she said. "But you're willing to pull your hearts out all day long."

Ann took five frozen whitefish from a sack on the toboggan. The dogs rushed toward her.

"Let me feed Ogema," Rita said. "He's my friend."

Ogema snatched the fish from Rita's outstretched hand. His good manners didn't cover meals.

"I don't blame you," Rita said as she watched him gulp the frozen fish. "I wouldn't be polite if I only ate once a day. What next?"

"Clear the camp. It'll be here, about this size," and Ann marked a space ten feet square. "We'll pile the snow around the sides and back and leave the front open for a fire. Use a snowshoe for a shovel."

She began work, heaping snow outside the marked lines as straight as possible and clearing to the ground. The girls worked fast, for the sound of axes in the swamp warned them of the imminent arrival of green branches. Jerry came when the space was half cleared, dragging a small spruce tree.

"Philip's cutting down the whole swamp," he said. "That boy certainly can use an ax."

"I'm so warm now I don't think I'll need a fire," Rita said. "Who'd have guessed snow-shoveling was such hot work?"

Jerry cut off the limbs with sharp clips of his ax and departed for more. The girls cleared all the snow from the ground and had a bank nearly five

feet high on three sides of a square. Ann picked up the longest branches Jerry had cut and thrust them into the top of the bank so that they leaned toward the center. Rita helped her until they had a canopy that nearly met in the center.

“So that’s a Hudson’s Bay camp!” Rita said, looking at the green shelter with admiration.

“You don’t even guess how warm it will be,” Ann said. “Tonight we’ll have a big fire across the open side and all the heat will be reflected by the walls and top down onto us. Now for the beds.”

Jerry had been dragging in spruce, and then he’d brought balsam. The girls took the largest branches and covered the frozen ground, laying the bowed side up. They thatched it well and then added small soft branches until they had a solid bed more than a foot thick.

Dusk came as they finished. With the disappearance of the pale winter sun the north wind died and intense cold struck down. The girls’ breaths were feathery vapor, but the air had a clean cold smell tinged by the fragrance of the freshly cut balsam.

Long before the girls had finished, the boys had moved to the ridge, where Philip’s ax had a different ring as it struck into dead jack pine trees. Jerry dragged long poles of pine to the camp site and then began bringing poles of green birch.

Ann cleared a place for a fire, stripped bark from the birch, broke dead limbs from the big spruce, and lighted a small fire.

“We can’t have a big fire for cooking,” she said a bit apologetically, for Rita’s nose and cheeks were crimson from the cold.

But even a small blaze lighted the green and white walls of the camp and gave warmth. And the shelter became a home.

“Isn’t this marvelous!” Rita cried as she sat on the soft balsam bed. “I never dreamed we’d build anything as cozy. It didn’t take us long.”

Jerry and Philip were dragging in wood now, long poles of birch and pine. Philip looked at the growing pile with pride.

“We’ve got more cut,” he said. “Can you girls cook supper?”

“Of course,” Ann said. “We’ll have what we had this noon, except there’s a pie.”

She got the pie from the grub box and propped it before the fire with a stick so it would thaw.

“Let’s have two pansful of beans,” Rita said. “I’m starving. And let me do it.”

She took off her mittens to scoop the frozen beans out of the bag, but quickly she put the spoon down. Ann laughed.

“You cook and eat and sleep in mittens when you’re winter camping,” she said.

It was long past dark when the last of the wood had been dragged in.

“Have to call this enough,” Philip said. “Using an ax in deep snow after dark isn’t too safe.” He looked at the huge pile. “But tonight we’ll have a real fire.”

They sat close to the little blaze during supper and all ate with mittens on. Long ago the dogs had dug holes in the snow and settled down for the night, but when they smelled food five pairs of eyes gleamed in the darkness. Winter camping might mean rules would be broken. Ogema was the first to come forward.

“Rules should be broken,” Rita said. “They’ve worked harder than any of us. I bet they even know we’re trying to find Wen-dah-ban.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” Philip said, and he divided pieces of hot buttered toast for Rita to feed them. “Right now they’re wondering how soon they can move into camp. I won’t object. A dog’s as good as a stove.”

After supper the boys built up the fire. They laid long pine and birch poles on the cooking blaze and soon the fire was roaring high and had stretched nearly the width of the opening. The heat beat in and was reflected from the slanting boughs above. Everyone took off mittens and parkas. They leaned back against the big roll of blankets. Suddenly they were aware of a strange content.

For a long time no one spoke as they stared into the fire. Small blue flames of exploding gases crackled and ran along the birch logs, and below the gay little spurts of fire was a growing bed of embers. Outside, the black dark was a wall which enclosed them in a tiny world of light and warmth and friendship.

“The fellow who learned to start the first fire didn’t feel any prouder than I do right now,” Jerry said.

It was like him to express their mood so well. Ann had felt it, and now she wondered if she'd ever learn to say things as well as Jerry did.

A birch log burned through. Philip lifted the unburned halves onto the fire.

"So that's how you planned to cut those long logs!" Rita said. "I'd wondered. I thought you were just being lazy."

Philip grinned. "Hugh always told me that if I used my head I could save my back. Thought this was a good time to try it. How come you didn't ask us?"

"There are a lot of things I notice but don't speak of," Rita said. "I bet I'm the only one here who knows what night this is."

"It's a fine night," Philip said drowsily.

"And it's Christmas Eve!" Rita said.

"It is!" Ann cried. "And we'd planned a special celebration this year! Oh, Rita! I'm so sorry! I never even thought what day it was, we were so worried about Wen-dah-ban. When did you think of it?"

"When we were shoveling snow," Rita said. "But then I didn't know how grand this evening was going to be."

They shouted with laughter at her unconscious admission.

"She was feeling sorry for herself," Jerry said. "We can still give the gal a celebration. How about—"

A long cry swept across lake and forest. It came from far away, and it was weird and unreal and set the hair crawling at the backs of their necks. Rita stared in horror at the others.

"Wolves," Philip said.

The sound ceased. And then a moment later it was answered from another direction. The dogs, backs bristling, crowded into the firelight and stared uneasily into the darkness.

"Those are scouts," Philip said. "On the trail of something."

A moment later a chorus of wails broke out in the swamp behind them. The dogs whimpered and crowded closer to the humans. Jerry stood up. The howls increased in savagery until the din was terrific. The clamor circled behind them, left the swamp, and swung up the ridge.

"The whole band's in it now," Philip said. "Probably cut out a young moose. Listen to those devils!"

The howling burst forth with new fury. It was pitiless and malevolent. It died away, only to burst out anew. But it was on the other side of the ridge now, and did not come nearer. Jerry sat down.

"Poor devil," he said. "Whatever it was, I hope it got away."

"Doesn't sound as though it has a chance," Philip said. "Listen! They're closing in!"

The yelping reached a crescendo of ferocity that left the four shaken.

"Philip!" Ann cried. "It's cornered! It's like that time at Home Bay. I can't bear it!"

The howling ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Stillness returned to the winter wilderness.

The four drew deep breaths.

"That wasn't the sort of celebration I meant," Jerry said in a shaky attempt to joke, and then he added, "I didn't like the sound of those fellows any more than Rita did. My hair is still standing straight up."

"No one likes the sound of wolves," Ann said. "Even Hugh admits he doesn't. He knows they won't hurt him, but when he hears that howl he says an ice-cold snake starts crawling up the back of his neck."

"Can't we stop talking about wolves?" Rita said. "They don't belong to Christmas Eve."

"I'd started to tell you I was going to make the gang Christmas presents," Jerry said. "Took a prize once for soap carving. Maybe I can do something with snow."

"Carving!" Philip said. "I'll show you some carving. I can make presents too."

He took an ax and went into the swamp. Ann said she'd seen a Norway sapling near the ridge and went to find it. When she returned with a branch, Rita was peeling sheets of birchbark from a log and had the sewing kit open beside her. Philip brought back a piece of dead cedar.

All four set to work. At first each tried to hide his handiwork, and then they sat close to the fire and agreed to trust to each other's honor.

Jerry finished first. He had molded three figures and when they had been placed away from the fire to freeze they were covered with coats of crystal.

“Why, Jerry!” Ann cried. “You’ve made them look like us! That’s Rita when she was learning to snowshoe. And Philip when he starts out ahead of the dogs. I didn’t know you were a sculptor!”

“And see Ann!” Philip said. “He’s got her head thrown back and her shoulders squared just like she does when she’s not going to let a job lick her.”

“That’s the way I always think of Ann,” Jerry said as he set the three figures away from the fire.

Rita produced her Christmas present.

“You’ll have to share it,” she said as she held up a doll. “She’s a hula dancer and she’s come to dance for you.”

The doll had a grotesque gaiety. Her bodice was of frilly birchbark and her skirt a fringe of pine needles. The head was molded from a piece of bread, and her long stick legs had safety-pin feet.

“Living in the north, she doesn’t get much chance to practice,” Rita said as she danced the doll stiffly up and down. “So you mustn’t be too critical.”

“Rita, she’s wonderful,” Ann said. “I’d never have thought to make a hula skirt of pine needles. Can I have her?”

“I made her for you,” Rita said.

“Show your presents, Ann,” Philip said. “Mine aren’t finished. I’m carving souvenir spoons of cedar but I made the mistake of cutting the handles like pine trees. It takes a long time.”

Ann slipped a necklace over Rita’s head. It was made of Norway needles fashioned into tiny snowshoe frames. The point of each needle had been inserted in its own socket to form the tail and the ovals were interlaced to make a chain. It was delicate, green, and lacelike.

“Where did you learn to make such a lovely thing?” Rita cried.

“Wah-be-goona taught me long ago,” Ann said. “I’ve made something else—for everyone.” She brought out four miniature birchbark wigwams. The merest wisp of gray green moss at the peak looked like smoke. “If I had a pencil I’d write the date,” she said.

“As though we needed a date,” Rita said. “I’ll never forget this camp. Wait until I show this to the girls when they bring out dance programs. There isn’t anyone who’ll have a souvenir of Christmas Eve to compare with this.”

“Maybe you’ll hang this up with the wigwam,” Philip said as he held out a small spoon of carved cedar. “Tell them that queer thing on the end is a pine tree.”

“I won’t have to tell them,” Rita said. “A blind man would know what it was.”

Jerry hollowed out a niche in the snow wall.

“Remember how every fellow always had his own special place for Christmas loot,” he said. “Here’s my shelf.”

“I’ve got one more present,” Ann said. “I guess you’d call it a ballet. The empty pie tin isn’t a very big stage but it’ll have to do.”

She set several tufts of Norway needles on the pan. Each had been cut squarely so it stood erect. The tufts still retained a bit of the woody stem to suggest a head and at the waist line some needles had been cut away to give the appearance of arms or a shawl. Ann shook the pan gently and the figures moved slowly as in a stately dance.

The audience applauded.

“Wah-be-goan could make them walk forward and back,” Ann said, “but I never could.”

“Do it again, Ann,” Jerry said. “It was great! The best present of the lot!”

A long silence followed the dance of the Norway tufts. Ann remembered the sudden let-down feeling which always came on Christmas Eve after the gifts had been opened and admired. At home they’d had games, corn to be popped, and all sorts of ideas for a festivity, but there wasn’t much four people could do around a fire.

“Perhaps you folks will laugh,” Philip said hesitantly, “but in the north we always sing Christmas carols.”

“The very thing!” Rita cried, and her fresh young voice led off with “God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen.”

They joined. One carol followed another until they finished with “Silent Night, Holy Night.” As the last strains died away, Ann wondered if her

mother wasn't seated at the piano at that moment. "Silent Night" had ended every Christmas Eve since Ann could remember.

The fire had burned low while they sang. As Philip stood up to replenish it the moon rose above the ridge.

"Philip!" Ann cried. "Don't put wood on yet!"

She pointed at the big spruce above the fire. All evening steam had risen from the green birch to be condensed on the tree. Now the moisture had frozen and every needle, every branch, was aglitter. Jeweled, the tree stood sparkling in the moonlight, a thing of beauty, its green coated by fragile crystal.

Rita drew her breath in wonder.

"The moon lighted our tree for us," she said. "What a finish for a Christmas Eve!"

TWELVE

PHILIP wakened first. The fire had burned low and it was bitter cold. He put on fresh fuel. Ann heard him and saw his crouched figure outlined against the flames. He turned and knew she was awake.

"Merry Christmas, Sis," he whispered. It was a strange place to exchange a Christmas greeting.

The cheerful crackling of the replenished fire awakened the others.

"I never knew a thing from the moment I closed my eyes," Rita said. "That's the first time in my life I ever slept outdoors."

"She sailed right through the league of summer campers," Jerry said. "From now on she'll jeer at them as sissies. How cold do you think it got?"

"It was about forty-five below the last time I got up to tend the fire," Philip said.

"I'd have sworn fifty-five or even sixty on my turn," Jerry said. "Now I'll never have to go to the Arctic."

"I didn't hear either of you fix the fire," Rita said. "I didn't even feel Ogema curl up beside me."

"Ogema!" Philip said. "Do you think he's the only one?"

Rita sat up quickly. "Ann!" she cried. "We're covered with dogs."

The entire team had deserted the snow holes and moved into camp.

"Aren't you fellows ashamed," Philip said. "You're supposed to be sledge dogs but you act like house pets."

Not an eye opened or an ear twitched lest Philip order them away. He tugged at Dick's thick tail.

"You hear me all right," Philip said gruffly, and then he added in a gentle tone, "But you can stay until we get up for breakfast."

Heads were lifted then, tails wagged, and the dogs curled more deeply into their nests.

“What time do we start?” Jerry asked.

“Not till daylight,” Philip said. “We have to watch for Wen-dah-ban’s tracks.”

“There aren’t many more places to look,” Ann said. “One overnight trapping camp and the rest of his trap line.”

“Got enough grub to stay out another night,” Philip said.

“We shouldn’t,” Ann said quickly as she saw a sudden gleam of purpose in Philip’s eyes.

“Suppose not,” he agreed. “But it’d save us time and travel. There are a lot of places to look yet. He might have gone to Pe-tah-bo’s, or to one of the other hunters or—”

“Or even to Fox Island,” Jerry said. “I thought of that last night when I was sitting on my haunches coaxing the fire to burn. He might have gone there.” The idea sounded reasonable and he went on with growing conviction. “The rest of the family rushed to you people when they were in trouble. Why wouldn’t Wen-dah-ban?”

It was a possibility they had not considered. But it was logical. Ann wanted to believe it. At first Philip was only skeptical and then he began to embrace the theory with even more certainty than the others.

“I bet that’s exactly what did happen!” he burst out suddenly at breakfast. “While we’ve been running around the bush worrying about him, he’s been safe at Fox Island.”

Philip had never been inclined to grasp at straws. Ann felt encouraged to believe Jerry had guessed Wen-dah-ban’s actions.

“Won’t it be wonderful to find him safe with Dad and Mother!” she cried.

“But what will his family do when they think a windigo has followed them to the island?” Rita asked.

Until that moment no one had considered the possible complications. They had tried to build an insulating wall around the rumor of a windigo and now it threatened to break out anew.

“Gosh!” Philip said. “Dad and Mother were there alone. Hugh couldn’t get back from the Post until late last night. We’d better hurry.”

They speeded camp-breaking. The first trace of dawn came as they lashed the load on the toboggan, harnessed the dogs, and started across the big lake. The air was still, as if it were frozen, and no one thought of riding. Only by constant movement could they keep warm. They did not need snowshoes. The trail they had broken the previous day was frozen until it was as hard as concrete.

Rita looked at the great white expanse. "I've never seen a sunrise in a place like this," she said. "I hope we're not across too soon."

"I'm afraid we'll hit the other shore just at the wrong time," Ann said.

"What do you mean?" Rita asked.

"At sunrise you have to watch your face to keep it from freezing."

"She means sunburn," Jerry said. "The girl's mixed up."

"Wait and see," Ann said.

They had crossed the lake and were traveling along the shore of a point when at last the sun lifted above the horizon. There was no color in the clear dry air and the sun seemed to have no warmth. Rita turned around and laughed when she saw Ann.

"You don't know how funny you look!" she said. "You've got white spots big as dollars on your chin and cheeks and forehead."

"So have you!" Ann said. "Quick! Rub them with your bare hands so the skin won't peel."

"And look at Jerry!" Rita said. "He's got them too! We look like clowns. Turn around, Philip."

He too wore white patches. They halted the team and gave first aid to themselves and each other.

"Wait till I tell the girls that up north the sun freezes skin," Rita said.

"It isn't the sun," Philip said. "It's only that sunrise warms the air along the shore and the warmed air rises and starts a little breeze. On a morning as cold as this it takes only that much air stirring to freeze you."

Rita looked back across the lake. The sun was up now and its light was reflected by myriad frost crystals on the snow.

"It's worth a frozen face," she said. "Look at Wen-dah-ban's lake now! It's like a fairyland."

They went on. Later it grew warmer and the girls took turns riding. Lunch was an early and hurried stop in the shelter of a spruce swamp. They were driven by the need of getting to Fox Island.

“We might make it by early afternoon,” Philip said. “The trail from Wen-dah-ban’s will seem like a highway.”

When they reached the shore in front of Wen-dah-ban’s wigwam, they could see it through a break in the forest. The blanket door was closed. No smoke rose from the peak.

“He didn’t come back here,” Philip said.

Their previous visits to the empty wigwam robbed Philip’s comment of any acute disappointment. They’d not expected to find Wen-dah-ban. Now Ann looked at the wigwam, standing forlorn and deserted, and wondered if it ever would be lived in again. The sight of it was only a reminder of the happiness which had been shattered by ignorance and superstition. Anger mingled with her sadness. Philip too glanced at it, then looked away quickly. Rita sensed their mood.

“Jerry guessed right,” she said. “We’ll find Wen-dah-ban at Fox Island. You wait and see. Don’t feel so badly, Ann.”

“You’re a stout fellow,” Ann said, and she smiled.

“I don’t know what it means,” Rita said. “But it sounds like something I’d like to be.”

“Mr. Gillespie says it means a fellow who stands alongside and can be counted on. Like you and Jerry. You’ve been so grand about Wen-dah-ban.”

They had gone a short distance down the trail when Ann suddenly called to Philip.

“We never even looked in that wigwam!”

“Why should we?” Philip asked. “Wen-dah-ban wouldn’t stay there without a fire.”

“But we’ve got to be sure!” Ann cried.

She leaped from the toboggan and started back. The others followed and Philip turned the team. The merry jingle of the sleigh bells seemed strangely out of keeping as they approached the silent wigwam. This was a place of tragedy and unhappiness. Ann pulled back the blanket door.

Wen-dah-ban sat beside the cold ashes of the fire. Weary, thin, he was hunched over, his arms around his knees. As the opened door let in daylight he looked up. In his dull eyes was no recognition. He did not speak.

“Wen-dah-ban!” Ann cried. “We’ve been looking for you!”

He stared at her as though her words had not reached through his desolation. Philip pushed past Ann and entered the wigwam.

“Aren’t you glad to see us?” he asked as he put his hand on the Indian boy’s shoulder.

Wen-dah-ban shrugged away from Philip’s friendly grasp.

“*Kah-win*,” he said and the “no” was as sullen as only an Indian could make it.

“Let me talk to him,” Philip said, and he sat beside Wen-dah-ban.

But the Indian boy did not look at Philip or appear even to hear his pleading. Only once did he raise his head. Philip said they knew he had a great sickness and when Wen-dah-ban heard the Ojibwa word *ak-o-si-win* he looked up as though grateful someone understood his trouble. But he did not answer.

“We’re not getting anywhere,” Jerry said. “Let’s go outside where we can talk.”

Wen-dah-ban seemed unaware of their departure. Philip led the way to the toboggan, where they would not be overheard.

“We can’t let him stay here and freeze to death,” he said.

“Can the two of us handle him?” Jerry asked. “Would he fight?”

“Not the way white men fight,” Philip said. “An Indian doesn’t know how to strike a blow. Or take one.”

“I wanted to know what we were getting into,” Jerry said. “Will we have to tie him?”

“I don’t think so,” Philip said. “If we can get him on the toboggan we’ll have no trouble.”

“But we can’t take him to Fox Island!” Ann cried. “If Shaw-win saw him looking this way she’d be sure he was a windigo.”

“Is there any way to keep him hidden?” Jerry asked.

"I've got it!" Philip exclaimed. "We'll take him to our cabin at Home Bay. Then the Indians on the Island wouldn't know we'd found him. Jerry and I could stay and watch him, or get Hugh to help us."

It was the perfect answer. Philip had risen to this crisis.

"That's the thing to do, of course!" Ann cried.

They began to plan the campaign. Philip said he and Jerry would get Wen-dah-ban started. Ann insisted they needed her.

"Wen-dah-ban has always listened to me," she said. "We'll act as though we expected him to come."

"It might work," Philip said. "You take one arm, Ann, and I'll take the other. If he turns nasty, leave him to Jerry and me."

"Any danger of his using a knife?" Jerry asked.

"I don't think so," Philip said. "He's just a sick scared Indian. Once we get him started, he'll come along."

"What shall I do?" Rita asked.

"You turn the team around and have it ready to start out in a hurry," Philip said. "We don't want to chance his bucking at the last minute."

When the determined trio entered the wigwam, Wen-dah-ban glanced up and then slumped back into a dejected heap. He was as uninterested in their return as he had been in their arrival. Ann leaned down and took an arm.

"*Om-beh,*" she said, and when her first "come" made no impression, she repeated it with more authority.

Philip took the other arm. He too said "come" but he added "*bim-e-to,*" because the word "quick" added even more urgency to imperative commands, and it produced an instant result. Wen-dah-ban started to rise. Ann and Philip lifted and led him to the door and out. Jerry was close to Ann.

"Good work," he whispered.

Ann felt triumphant as they came outside. It had been so much easier than she had really hoped.

Wen-dah-ban saw the toboggan and dog team and stopped. For a moment he stood motionless and then with startling strength he broke free from Ann and Philip.

He leaped backward, glaring at them, then looked wildly for a way of escape. Philip put out a detaining hand.

“We are your friends,” he said. “We want only—”

“Philip!” Ann screamed.

Wen-dah-ban had stooped and grasped a stick of wood, and when Ann saw the madness in his eyes she wondered if he hadn’t become a windigo.

Almost as Ann cried her warning Wen-dah-ban lifted the stick to bring it down. At that moment Jerry stepped in. His blow was timed with the step so as to put his whole weight into it. His fist caught Wen-dah-ban on the side of the jaw. The Indian boy sagged, crumpled, lay on the snow.

“I’m sorry,” Jerry said, “but I had to do it.”

Philip was pale.

“I was so scared I couldn’t have dodged that stick,” he said.

Wen-dah-ban lay still. His eyes were closed. Ann wondered if he were dead. This, she thought, was all a part of the terrible thing that had happened to her friend. She wanted to get down on her knees and tell him they had not wanted to hurt him, and she started forward. Jerry stopped her.

“It was better than having Philip brained with a club,” he said. “You know that.”

“Of course!” Ann said. “I was so afraid for Philip. Oh, Jerry! What would we have done without you?”

Wen-dah-ban’s legs moved, then his arms. His eyes opened and their dazed expression told them he knew nothing of what had happened or where he was.

“He’s not hurt,” Jerry said. “Boxing at school, fellows have taken worse than that and got up to go on fighting.”

“Let’s get him onto the toboggan before he really comes to,” Philip said.

Rita stood at Ogema’s head. Ann ran into the wigwam for Wen-dah-ban’s snowshoes while Philip and Jerry half carried and half dragged Wen-dah-ban to the toboggan. He lay on top of the load, staring at them.

Jerry picked up the tail-rope.

“I’d better stay close in case he needs more of the same,” he said.

Philip nodded and fell in behind Jerry. Ann and Rita brought up the rear. Now that it was all over, Ann discovered she was trembling. Yet, except for that one dreadful moment, she had not been really frightened.

No one talked on the way home. Ogema, as though realizing the seriousness of their mission, set a steady pace which demanded as much speed as either Ann or Rita could manage. Except to change his position Wen-dah-ban made no move, but Philip and Jerry never relaxed their vigilance.

It was late afternoon when they left the mainland and started across the lake. As they came to the beaten trail to Home Bay and Philip called, "Haw," to turn north, Ogema looked around to inquire if Philip really meant it. Ogema's thoughts were on the daily meal but he swung obediently to the left.

The sun had begun to set as they rode up the slope to their old cabin. The team halted outside the door and the boys led an unprotesting Wen-dah-ban inside. Jerry stood by his chair while Philip built a fire. The cabin was like an icebox, despite Hugh's efforts four days before to take the chill off. White frost covered the metal hinges of the door and windows and clung to the brown log walls.

Philip crammed pitch-pine kindling into the heater until the fire roared and the stove was red. Ann and Rita stood in the open doorway. It was warmer outside than in, and this was not as Ann had planned to show Rita their first home in the north. She watched Wen-dah-ban, hoping the familiar room in which he had played so often might recall him from that world of terror. But if Wen-dah-ban recognized the room he did not show it.

"You girls go get Hugh," Philip said. "Take the team and tell him to bring food and bedding."

It was a relief to leave the icy cabin. Ogema, thinking of an evening meal, started on a cheerful gallop. At the entrance of Home Bay they saw Hugh coming on a dog-trot.

"There's Hugh now!" Rita cried. "What's he doing here?"

The old trapper's face was anxious as he approached.

"Saw you folks turn up toward Home Bay," he said. "Where are the lads? What's happened?"

They told him.

"It was smart to bring the nitchie here," Hugh said. "I'll go help the lads."

"But how'd you happen to see us on the lake?" Ann asked. "Was Mother worried?"

"We spent the day telling each other how we wasn't even thinking about you, but I noticed Dave and the Missus and me managed to get to the window often," Hugh said. "That's how I happened to see you folks going up the lake."

"Is everything all right at home?" Ann asked.

"As right as things can be with a bunch of Indians sittin' around the fire. A nitchie can go longer without talkin' than anybody I ever saw. I don't like it. It's my guess they're cookin' up something and I notice Dave is worried."

"Was Mr. Gillespie gone?"

"Got off just like he planned. But I sent a telegram to Winnipeg that we needed him bad. Course we don't know he'll get it."

For Hugh, who "didn't hold" with railroads or any of their services, to have sent a telegram was an admission of extreme concern. He turned the team around.

"Got any idea where Wen-dah-ban was all the time you've been hunting?" he asked.

"No. But he wasn't at the wigwam," Rita said. "We made sure of that."

Hugh nodded. "Bet you did," he said. "Probably he's been sittin' in the bush over a fire all the time you folks been runnin' your hearts out."

"He'd have frozen to death if he hadn't," Ann said. "But he's suffered. Terribly. You'll know that when you see how thin and sick he looks."

"Can you girls get home all right?" Hugh asked. "I'll use this camping outfit for tonight. Philip can bring my stuff in the morning."

Hugh picked up the tail-rope, ready for departure. Ogema looked back as though to inquire if the long-awaited meal was to be delayed again. Ann wished Hugh was not in such a hurry. She would have liked to explain more about Wen-dah-ban. The old trapper wasn't as understanding of native fears as she would wish.

"Don't you worry about Wen-dah-ban," Hugh said. "I won't let him out of sight. Tell your mother to start supper. The lads will be home in no time."

THIRTEEN

ANN and Rita went around the house and entered the back door. As Ann had hoped, her father had seen them coming and was waiting in the kitchen. The report had to be told hurriedly and Mrs. Jackman kept a watchful eye on the living room, where Pe-tah-bo and his family were sitting before the fire.

"They slip around in moccasins so quietly they're at your elbow before you know it," she warned them.

"I was sure you'd found Wen-dah-ban when you turned to Home Bay," Mr. Jackman said. "You'd better talk to Pe-tah-bo before he gets to wondering. They've heard you come."

When Ann went into the living room, Pe-tah-bo looked up.

"You find the camp?" he asked, and Ann thought there was more dread than hope in his question.

She nodded and said Wen-dah-ban had not been at the camp by the big lake for a year. That was the truth. She steeled herself for further questions.

But Pe-tah-bo only looked away.

Ann looked at the silent group and felt so helpless. It seemed dreadful not to be able to tell them that Wen-dah-ban was alive and safe. She was afraid they might even read the news in her face, and for the first time she knew complete exasperation with the native mind. She wanted to shake them out of their foolish grief, to shout at them that now, when Wen-dah-ban needed his family so badly, they must not fail him.

Only by thinking of Mr. Gillespie and the harm truth would do did she choke back an outburst. She was still resentful of native ignorance when she returned to the kitchen.

"I don't see how you two have stood it!" she said. "Three people sitting around, mourning something that never happened! Didn't you try to talk them out of it, Mother?"

“At first I thought I was winning Shaw-win’s confidence, but since the others came she’s drawn away,” her mother said. “It is a strain always to be on guard. Dave and I have done our talking in the kitchen.”

“But they don’t understand English, do they?” Rita asked.

“You never know how much an Indian understands,” Ann said.

Like all their race, Pe-tah-bo and Wah-be-goan had often pretended not to understand. In the old days it had been fun to catch them at their wily game, but now the Jackmans really had something to conceal.

“I don’t know what we can do about our Christmas,” Mrs. Jackman told them. “I haven’t even wrapped the presents. We couldn’t have a celebration with three people in such trouble.”

“I’m surprised you even remembered it is Christmas,” Ann said. “What’s my important present, Mother?”

“The ring you’ve been wanting for a year. You might as well know now. And we got Philip a new rifle.”

“We’ll put it in his room and see how soon he notices it,” Mr. Jackman said. “And I can smell Christmas.”

“I couldn’t imagine this day without plum pudding,” Mrs. Jackman said. “I’m so glad you are home to eat it.”

But even plum pudding didn’t bring a Christmas feeling. The Indians enjoyed it without knowing the holiday it celebrated. But long before the dessert appeared the young people were fighting an overpowering desire to sleep. A warm house and hot food after two days of wind and cold made all four drowsy. Ann struggled to stay awake through supper and when Philip had eaten he stretched out before the fire and promptly went to sleep.

The three Indians formed a silent, watchful group in a corner. The first violence of their grief and fear had passed, and impassive faces shut their thoughts from an alien race. Ann remembered the Ojibwa name for sorrow and loneliness, the sickness-of-long-long-thinking, and she saw it now in Wah-be-goan’s face and Shaw-win’s, and most of all in Pe-tah-bo’s.

It was a relief to everyone when Mr. Jackman banked the fire.

“All of us need sleep,” he said.

They awakened Philip with difficulty. He staggered off to bed and Ann was sure he never saw his new rifle. The others crowded into Ann’s room to look at the gifts. Jerry tried on his beaded moccasins and marveled at the

way they fitted. Mrs. Jackman admired the pewter platter Rita had brought, and Rita exclaimed with delight when she saw the coral sweater Mrs. Jackman had knitted for her. Ann slipped on the new ring and wished she wasn't so sleepy. She would have liked to spend hours enjoying the sparkle of the topaz. Mr. Jackman collected an assortment of ties, socks, and handkerchiefs and assured them he intended to wear a tie every evening.

"It's been a strange Christmas," Mrs. Jackman said when Mr. Jackman and Jerry had departed. She kissed the girls and turned out the light. "At least we know Wen-dah-ban is safe at Home Bay, and you won't have to make any more long trips to find him."

Home was wonderful. Ann snuggled down beneath the blankets. It was pleasant to think they'd not have to start out again the next morning. She wondered if Rita was as tired, and was about to ask when from the other bed she heard deep regular breathing.

It was late when Ann awakened. The winter sun was already shining in the windows. There were no voices in the big room below and Ann knew breakfast must be over. She was dressing when Rita asked sleepily why Ann was putting on trail breeches.

"I'm going to Home Bay with supplies for Hugh," Ann said. "But you don't have to stir out of the house all day."

Rita became energetic. "I'm not going to run the chance of missing anything," she said.

They went downstairs to find Philip and Jerry had already departed for Home Bay.

"I wouldn't let them call you," Mrs. Jackman said. "I've set your breakfast table in the kitchen," and she nodded warningly toward the closed door of the guest room.

The girls followed Mrs. Jackman to the kitchen like conspirators. In a house which had never held secrets, furtiveness seemed strange.

"When those three go off alone, I worry more than when they sit in front of the fire," Mrs. Jackman said as she poured hot coffee. "I'll be relieved when Alex Gillespie gets here."

"He won't be back for almost a week unless he gets Hugh's telegram," Ann said. "We can't wait that long."

"We may have to," her mother said.

Before they had finished breakfast, Jerry and Philip returned from Home Bay. Mr. Jackman followed the boys into the kitchen.

“Did you see Wen-dah-ban?” Ann asked.

“I tried to talk to him but he wouldn’t answer,” Philip said. “He acts like he did yesterday.”

“Hugh said we needn’t worry about his brooding,” Jerry told them. “He ate supper and then slept all night.”

“How does Hugh feel about staying with him?” Mr. Jackman asked.

“Hugh said he’d rather watch one crazy nitchie than three of ’em,” and Jerry’s tone was like the old trapper’s.

Everyone smiled. Hugh would always find the lighter side of trouble.

“Right now I’d like to change places with Hugh,” Mr. Jackman said. “That Ojibwa word, ‘by-and-by,’ isn’t working any more. Pe-tah-bo wants to get An-ah-mee-kee. He says he can’t wait any longer for the white trader.”

“I thought they were planning something!” Mrs. Jackman said. “But you can’t let him bring a medicine man here, Dave!”

“I don’t know how I can prevent it, though I’ve tried to delay things a bit.”

Mr. Jackman was not sure his strategy would work. Pe-tah-bo was now talking it over with Wah-be-goona. Pe-tah-bo had admitted he could travel faster alone and that he’d like to leave the women on the island where they would be safe from the windigo. Mr. Jackman had agreed to this if Pe-tah-bo would fix a place for his family to live. He had shown the old Indian a cabin once used by workmen.

“It’s where we should have put them in the first place,” he said. “They’ll be happier by themselves.”

“But, Dave, that cabin could be gotten ready in an hour!” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Not the way they’ll work. They’ll have to put up a stove and I’ll let them struggle with that. I might even have trouble finding stovepipe. Take ’em a day at least.”

“A day won’t help much,” Ann said. “Mr. Gillespie won’t be here by then. We’ve got to do something!”

“We are,” her father said. “Every day we keep Pe-tah-bo out of the bush is helping to save the district. He’d warn every Indian he met and start a panic among the hunters. And while he’s working on the cabin he’s not watching us. If they discovered Wen-dah-ban was at Home Bay, they’d be out of here like scared rabbits.”

“Shshsh!” Mrs. Jackman warned. “I heard their door open.”

Mr. Jackman looked into the living room.

“Hello, Pe-tah-bo,” he said. “You asked Wah-be-goon?”

“She stay,” Pe-tah-bo said. “Shaw-win stay. We fix cabin. Then I go to get An-ah-mee-kee.”

“Good! Good!” Mr. Jackman said. “You are a brave man, Pe-tah-bo, to go alone in the bush when you know about the windigo. If you waited for the white trader I would not blame you.”

Ann thought a shadow of fear crossed Pe-tah-bo’s face.

“It is better I go alone,” he said. “Three, maybe four suns, it take me. I start tomorrow.”

Mr. Jackman nodded. “And if the white trader gets here tomorrow after you are gone, we will tell him what a brave man you are.”

Pe-tah-bo became thoughtful. Ann wondered if he would feel so courageous the next morning. She knew the Ojibwa capacity for procrastination. Never had a fur brigade left the post at the appointed time, and she had watched one family spend a half day in the confusion of departure. Perhaps diplomacy was better than argument and she looked at her father in admiration. He seemed only eager to be helpful as he led the three guests to inspect their new quarters.

He was smiling when he returned a half-hour later.

“So far, they’ve only talked about the stove,” he reported. “It’ll take the rest of the morning to decide where they’re going to put it.”

He filled and lighted his pipe and settled back in an easy chair. “Seems good to have the house to ourselves. Next time, Mary, when you—”

“There won’t be a next time,” his wife assured him. “And next Christmas we won’t have any windigo.”

“Sounds as though she meant it.” Mr. Jackman laughed. “We’ll make up for this next Christmas. I’m inviting Rita and Jerry now. I want a chance to

know them.”

“And I’m accepting right now,” Rita said. “And I hope Ann has told you, Mrs. Jackman, that all I talked about on the train was how much I wanted to use snowshoes and get acquainted with your neighbors. I certainly got my wish.”

“Like Indians, now you know ’em?” Mr. Jackman asked.

Rita considered a moment. “They aren’t a bit as I expected. But I think I like them better. You made me understand them.”

“I’m no expert on Indians,” Mr. Jackman said, “or I’d have figured a way out of this mess.”

Ann knew her father was more worried than he admitted. He didn’t enjoy this game of waiting and delaying and merely hoping Mr. Gillespie would return in time to save his own district. That was a Jackman job, and the first chance they’d ever had to repay a debt of friendship. Her father felt this as keenly as she did.

“What would Mr. Gillespie do if he were here?” Ann asked.

“I don’t know,” her father admitted. “He’s had years of experience with natives. May even have bumped up against the same thing.”

“Do you suppose he’d let Pe-tah-bo bring the medicine man and make Wen-dah-ban think he’s cured?” Jerry asked.

“He might. He has enough influence and authority over the Indians to take the chance.”

“What chance is there?” Ann asked. “If a *mide* said he’d driven the windigo out of Wen-dah-ban, everyone could stop being frightened, even Wen-dah-ban.”

“I’ve told you one of the chances,” her father said. “Pe-tah-bo would panic the whole district with his story. And if he brought An-ah-mee-kee, we’d have no control over his magic.” After a moment he added soberly, “And we all want to protect Wen-dah-ban.”

“What do you mean, Dad?” Ann asked.

“This charge of cannibalism is serious. It isn’t new in the history of the timber Ojibwa. Because he lives in isolated wigwams, his fear of cannibalism is almost hysterical. That’s probably at the bottom of the windigo legend. And because the Indian knows nothing about the explanation of insanity, he’s got that mixed up with evil spirits and he’s

fearful of anyone whose mind is affected. These Indians don't have the ordinary protections of the white race. They've never heard of an institution for the insane and wouldn't think of calling in the police. They've had to take things into their own hands. And they see it as a duty to protect their families against the threat of an evil spirit who might be guilty of the crime of cannibalism."

"You mean An-ah-mee-kee might do something terrible to Wen-dah-ban?" Ann asked.

"He might," her father admitted. "Such tragedies have happened. There was one only a few years ago. A young girl became insane or she may only have been delirious from fever. But the two medicine men really thought she had become an evil spirit. And naturally they feared she might become a cannibal. And they were acting in good faith when they decided she must be killed to protect the others. They really sacrificed themselves to save their tribe for later they were arrested by the Northwest Mounted and tried for murder.

"I don't mean anything so tragic would happen at Fox Island," Mr. Jackman ended as he looked at the circle of sober faces, "but I want you to understand why I don't feel able to decide so serious a question for Mr. Gillespie. I have tried to delay things until he gets here."

"You're right, Dave!" his wife cried. "We can't have an Indian medicine man!"

"I haven't dared oppose it openly," her husband said. "I didn't want Pe-tah-bo to think he had to take matters into his own hands."

"What might happen then, Dad?" Ann asked in a voice she tried to keep steady.

"There have been instances where an Indian killed a member of his own family because he believed the other had been changed into a windigo. You can't call it murder. It was done only to protect the others, and was the result of this understandable fear of cannibalism. Pe-tah-bo has a certain kind of courage and a deep sincerity. I've wanted to protect him as well as Wen-dah-ban."

"But Pe-tah-bo would never do such a thing!" Mrs. Jackman cried. "He worships that son of his."

"I know he does. That's why I'm arming myself against the remotest possibility of this becoming a real tragedy."

Mr. Jackman stood up.

“That’s the story,” he said. “You people have done your part of the job. And I thought it only fair to tell you.”

Ann looked at the others. They were as shocked as she, and yet she knew they were glad her father had told them. She slipped her arm through her father’s. It was the old gesture, when she’d wanted him to know they stood together. His smile told her he understood.

“It’s about time to help Pe-tah-bo decide where to put the stove,” he said. “That cabin should be shipshape by night.”

At noon he brought the three Indians to the house for dinner. Wah-be-goona seemed more cheerful than she had been at any time since her arrival. After dinner everyone carried housekeeping equipment to the cabin. Wah-be-goona was shrill in her admiration of pots and kettles and the colored tea set. Mrs. Jackman told the boys to bring chairs from Hugh’s cabin. Shaw-win was already laying balsam boughs on the floor for beds.

Mrs. Jackman presented the guest house with cans of cookies, jars of fruit, and a big roast of moose meat.

“*Git-chie wah-bose*,” she said, in a proud display of Ojibwa words; and then she added in English, “No rabbits on the island.”

Wah-be-goona understood. Any Indian woman felt lost without a rabbit run, and Wah-be-goona clucked in disappointment.

“I’ll set snares on the mainland,” Philip said. “Get more rabbits than you can eat.”

Wah-be-goona smiled and called him by the name she had given him when a youngster, “he-who-talks-much.”

But Ann noticed Pe-tah-bo made no offer to cross to the mainland for a hunt, and she became certain that by tomorrow Pe-tah-bo would have thought of a convincing reason for not starting on his lonely journey.

They left him struggling with the mystery of stovepipe. Mr. Jackman promised to help later.

“I’ll have to if we get the stove going before sun-down,” he said as they walked toward the house.

“I’m glad you thought of that cabin,” his wife said. “They look happier already.”

“Sure,” Dave Jackman agreed. “They’re busy. In our house they had nothing to do but grieve.”

“Indians can make an occupation of grieving, can’t they?” Jerry asked.

“You’d think so if you’d been here the past two days,” Mr. Jackman said.

He stopped in the canvas-enclosed back porch, which served as tool house in the winter, and took the canoe yoke from its peg and fitted it over his shoulders. “I’ve got to fill the water barrel.”

“I’ll help you,” Jerry offered. “Got another yoke?”

Mr. Jackman handed him one. “You’ll find it beats carrying by hand,” he said.

They went down the hill toward the water hole in the lake.

“Aren’t you going to help them?” Mrs. Jackman asked Philip as he went into the living room with the others.

“No,” he said. “Jerry thinks that’s fun. He doesn’t do it every day.”

Philip grinned when he heard four pails of water dumped into the big barrel in the kitchen. He was listening for the second load when Jerry hurried back.

“There are two Indians down the lake,” he said.

“Coming here?” Mrs. Jackman demanded in dismay.

“They were crossing below here. Mr. Jackman’s gone down to head them off.”

“Weren’t they going to the post?” Philip asked.

“No, and that’s what worried your father. He’s gone down to find out about it.”

Philip stood up. “Let’s go see.”

“It might be Ehe-bik and his wife,” Ann said as they put on snowshoes. “I hope it is. Then Shaw-win couldn’t brood over them any more.”

They reached the shore as Mr. Jackman and two Indians dragging a toboggan came up the lake trail.

“Do you know them?” Mrs. Jackman asked Philip.

“It’s old Bock-i-tay and his wife,” he said. “He always wears a rabbitskin coat.”

If Bock-i-tay had another name, Ann did not know it. He'd been christened "hungry" because of his prodigious appetite on treaty feast days. His hunting territory adjoined Pe-tah-bo's but Ann had never visited his wigwam.

As the three came closer, Ann saw her father's face was serious. The two Indians followed with evident doubt and fear. Finally they stopped, a hesitant and apprehensive couple, while Mr. Jackman hurried to his waiting family.

"Just what I was afraid of!" he said. "The panic's started. Last night they heard a windigo, even smelled one. And when Bock-i-tay rushed out of the wigwam the windigo was looking at him. He saw the enormous eyes up high in a tree."

"Eyes!" Mrs. Jackman cried.

But Mr. Jackman had no time to discuss a windigo. He was much more concerned with its effect upon the Indians.

"Bock-i-tay says they want to leave the country. But I got them to Fox Island by telling them that Pe-tah-bo had brought his family. Bock-i-tay wants to talk to Pe-tah-bo."

"Are you going to make them stay here?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"I'll do my best to keep them. I've got to, Mary. Don't you see what this means? Once the stampede is on, it will be the ruin of this district. Disaster for Alex Gillespie! We've got to find some way to stop it."

FOURTEEN

FOR a moment they struggled to comprehend the extent of the catastrophe which threatened. Mr. Jackman turned back to the Indians.

"I'll take them to Pe-tah-bo's cabin," he said. "I'll stay there until I get their story and have things straightened up. The chores are your job."

He led the two Indians up the hill to the Indians' cabin. The others started home. Philip picked up a pail and filled it in the water hole as though he found a reassurance in a familiar task.

"Now we got to do something to head off that rumor," he said.

"At least this proves to Pe-tah-bo that Wen-dah-ban isn't a windigo," Ann said. "He was safe with Hugh last night."

"But we can't tell that to Pe-tah-bo," Philip said. "And it wouldn't save the district if we did."

They carried the pails to the kitchen and everyone plunged into the evening tasks. It would soon be dark. Ann and Rita fed mink and foxes and locked the pens. Jerry and Philip harnessed the team and drove to Home Bay to warn Hugh of the latest disaster and the need to keep Wen-dah-ban hidden. They took supplies and tools Hugh wanted. Idleness was incomprehensible to the old trapper, and he planned to spend his days as jailer building the mouseproof cupboard he'd always intended to make.

Mrs. Jackman was busier than the others. A guest room had to be reclaimed from Indian occupancy, the disorder of native guests set to rights in the house, and extra food cooked for the last arrivals.

It was long after dark when they had finished. Mr. Jackman brought the empty kettles from the Indians' cabin when he came in for supper.

"Fright didn't seem to hurt their appetites," he said. "Bock-i-tay scraped the dishes."

"Will he stay?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

“Yes. Pe-tah-bo’s family being here seemed to reassure Bock-i-tay about the safety of this island. So two more Indians won’t spread this windigo news. That doesn’t mean we’ve headed off the rumor. Bock-i-tay denied he’d talked to anyone on his way here, but you know the moccasin telegraph.”

His voice was tired and defeated.

“If only Alex Gillespie would get here,” Mrs. Jackman said for the hundredth time.

“And soon,” Dave Jackman added. He turned to Philip. “You know that country around Bock-i-tay’s?” he asked.

“Was over there once with Wen-dah-ban,” Philip said. “There’s a bunch of hunters in there. It’s good fur territory.”

“Much too good to be ruined,” his father said.

“Would it really be ruined?” Rita asked.

“Hunters will not go into windigo country for a long time,” Mr. Jackman said. “That’s what happened to old Nah-sho-tah’s district down the lake.”

“Does Pe-tah-bo intend to leave tomorrow?” Ann asked, thinking a bigger audience might drive Pe-tah-bo to a show of courage.

“Bock-i-tay’s description of a windigo was vivid enough to kill that idea,” her father said. “Pe-tah-bo didn’t admit it would keep him here and the whole affair was cloaked in oratory. I reminded Pe-tah-bo how Gillespie looked to him as a leader and how other hunters said his words were good words. They would believe when he told them a windigo would not come to this island. Bock-i-tay had come to talk with him and other hunters would do like-wise. Bock-i-tay nodded and said ‘good’ in all the right places. He didn’t want Pe-tah-bo to leave and Pe-tah-bo wasn’t too keen on going.

“I said it was Pe-tah-bo’s duty to gather his people about him and give them words of wisdom and courage. The white trader would expect it of him. And Pe-tah-bo agreed not to start tomorrow. It sounded brave and heroic.”

“That’s wonderful!” his wife cried. “Now you won’t be worried by Pe-tah-bo’s going.”

“No,” Dave Jackman said, “but how’d this rumor get started? Bock-i-tay swears no one warned him about a windigo. I can understand Pe-tah-bo’s scare and Wen-dah-ban’s. But Bock-i-tay hadn’t talked with either of them.”

“What did he say happened?” Philip asked.

“He sticks to the same story,” his father said. “I tried to trap him and couldn’t. They were sitting in the wigwam when they heard a windigo. Then they smelled it. And he and Pe-tah-bo both tried to tell me what a terrible smell it is. Bock-i-tay rushed out of the wigwam and saw eyes in the trees. Of course those eyes are a part of the windigo legend.”

“But something must have scared him enough to run out of the wigwam,” Philip said. “He wasn’t expecting anything to happen when he heard noises and smelled a smell just like the others.”

“Son,” Dave Jackman said, “I think you’re on the right track.”

“Sure we are!” Philip exclaimed. “Something’s going on in the bush that we don’t know about.”

“Smart lad! I’ve been so busy talking about Indians I didn’t use my head. Good thing one of us was thinking.”

“If we can find out what it is, we can stop the thing!” Philip had taken fire. “Gosh, Dad! We could cure Wen-dah-ban and save the district for Mr. Gillespie!”

It was the first ray of hope Ann had seen.

“Philip!” she cried. “We’ll start tomorrow!”

“Not so fast,” her father said. “Let’s talk it over. Philip’s got a good idea. Someone’s got to look into this but I’m not sure it’s you and Philip.”

“We could have the boys guard Wen-dah-ban and let Hugh go,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Mother!” Ann protested. “Hugh can’t even talk Ojibwa! You know how he is about Indians. And it was Philip’s idea in the first place. We’ve got to save Mr. Gillespie’s district. Why—why—this isn’t anything Hugh could do.”

“She’s right about Hugh, Mary,” her husband said.

“And Dad can’t go,” Philip said. “If he left, the Indians would be off like a covey of partridge. Then what good would it do, even if we find out what’s happening?”

“We are the only ones who could go,” Jerry said. “And Mr. Gillespie is my friend too.”

“And mine!” Rita added.

"But, Rita!" Mr. Jackman said. "We can't let you go. You're the best sport in the world, and we love you for it, but we must consider your parents. They trusted Dave and me when they let you come for a visit. We can't ignore that responsibility. Can't you imagine how they'd feel about this?"

"I don't have to imagine," Rita said. "I know. They wouldn't want me to chicken out. You know, Mrs. Jackman," and Rita smiled across the table, "Ann and I are lucky. We've got the same sort of families."

Mr. Jackman looked pleased. "If one of them goes, I guess the four do," he said. "You can't beat an argument like that."

"I planned on the four of us from the first," Philip said. "We'll take a rifle and a camping outfit and strike for one of those camps near Bock-i-tay's. Ought to find a hunter who hasn't been scared out yet. We can camp near the wigwam and watch what happens."

"And you mean just watch," his father said. "If I could be sure of that, I'd be for the trip."

"It's the only thing to do," Philip said. "This funny business goes on at night. That's the time to catch 'em at it. You can't tell me the four of us wouldn't be able to find out what's driving hunters from the bush."

"And I still don't like the idea of—" Mrs. Jackman began.

"But, Mother, you wouldn't be very proud of us if, when Mr. Gillespie's district is being ruined, we didn't even try to find out who was doing it," Ann said. "Goodness! He stood by us when we needed a friend. You've said yourself we never could repay him."

"I know," her mother said. "But I'd feel better if I knew what you were going to find."

They shouted with laughter.

"If we knew that, we wouldn't have to go," Philip said. "Don't women say the darnedest things?"

Food sacks were filled that evening. Philip brought his new rifle.

"Never thought I'd have a chance to carry it so soon," he said with a happy grin as he stroked the barrel. "It's a fine gun, and just what I wanted."

"An ax will be a lot more useful to you folks on this trip," his father said. "But a rifle might be a good thing to have along."

"Makes a fellow feel safe," Philip said, and then he saw his mother's expression. "You needn't worry that I'm looking for a chance to use it. I told you we were just going to have a look-see."

"Hugh still thinks Ehe-bik is mixed up in this somehow," Jerry said. "Will we go to his camp?"

"He's probably left the country," Mr. Jackman said.

"We've got to find out why he didn't take his toboggan or his outfit," Philip said.

"Ehe-bik's camp is out of your way," his father objected.

"We can do both," Philip said. "It hasn't snowed since Hugh came back from Ehe-bik's so we'd have a broken trail. Then we'd strike straight across country and pick up Bock-i-tay's trail. That will be good going. He dragged a loaded toboggan."

"It would make quite a day," his father said.

"We could still reach Bock-i-tay's country by dark," Philip said. "And that's what we're going for. To spend a night out and see what happens."

His voice rang with a new confidence. Now at last they had a clue, something definite to accomplish. It had been hard to watch disaster looming ahead for the grizzled Scotch trader and to be able to think of nothing they could do to avert it. He had stood by them in those first lean years in the north.

The next morning they ate breakfast by lamplight. The toboggan, loaded with blankets and grub box, was at the back door. Mr. Jackman came out to see them off. Philip and Rita had gone to the corral for the dog team. Mr. Jackman stood close to Ann and Jerry in the darkness.

"I'm telling you two this because you're older," he said. "If you find anything that looks dangerous, come home and tell us. It won't help anyone if you get into real trouble. Philip—he always hates to quit."

"Hugh says he's like his dad." Ann laughed. "He'd tackle his weight in wildcats."

"Don't let him take on any this trip," her father said.

Philip and Rita came down the trail with the team. It took only a moment to hook it to the toboggan and they were off in the darkness.

Daylight had begun to show when they turned on the trail to Ehe-bik's camp. Hugh's one trip on snowshoes had left the trail only partly broken and both boys went ahead.

"Before we're through this bush will be crisscrossed with dog team highways," Jerry said. "Philip can ride around like a fur land potentate for the rest of the winter."

"Until next snowfall," Philip said. "We've been lucky this last week."

They reached Ehe-bik's camp in midmorning. It was exactly as Hugh described it. A toboggan hung high in a tree. Cooking kettles and birchbark baskets were in the wigwam, even a roll of bedding. The pair might have stepped out only an hour before on a short errand. Ann kept looking over her shoulder, almost expecting them at any moment. Yet she knew they would not come. They had been gone for days.

It was mysterious and it was frightening.

"They wouldn't have left the country without an outfit," Philip said.

"They might have had another toboggan," Jerry said.

"Or maybe they went to visit neighbors," Rita suggested.

Philip and Ann did not answer, but their eyes met. No wonder Hugh had been baffled and uneasy.

The packed snow outside the wigwam told no story. A well-worn trail led to a clump of cedars a few feet from the wigwam, evidently where Ehe-bik's wife cut branches. Ann walked to it. On the snow was a large red stain.

Her startled cry brought the others.

For a long moment they stared at the bloodstain without speaking. On the outer edge the blood had crystallized, but in the center were many tiny circles where blood had dripped and melted the surface, like raindrops in soft mud.

"Ehe-bik dressed some game here!" Philip exclaimed, and the vehemence in his voice denied their thoughts.

No one spoke. They turned and walked back to the wigwam.

"I know that's what it is!" Philip insisted. "It couldn't be anything else."

"Then why didn't Hugh find it?" Ann asked. "He couldn't have helped seeing it if he walked around."

"Hugh said he was in a hurry," Philip told her.

“He did, Ann!” Rita said. “I remember.”

“It doesn’t matter whether it was here when Hugh was at the camp or not,” Jerry said. “It’s whether—” He stopped as he saw Ann’s eyes. “Would it look like that if he’d dressed game?”

“Now we’ve got to find Ehe-bik,” Philip said savagely.

“Will we cover up the stain?” Rita asked. “Or—”

“Let it stay,” Philip said. “We’ll make Ehe-bik tell us what happened.”

“Hugh said he didn’t have time to make a thorough search for tracks,” Jerry said.

“You and I can cut a circle around the camp or we can all go down the trap line,” Philip said. “Which is it?”

“Can’t we go down the trail?” Rita asked. “I wouldn’t like—”

“Neither would I,” Ann said quickly. “Let’s stick together.”

They walked slowly at first, Philip ahead studying the trail. The hard surface revealed nothing and there was no sign of anyone having left the trail or joined it. Ann feared their effort to read Ehe-bik’s movements would be as futile as were Hugh’s.

“What’s this?” Rita asked, pointing to deep slits in the snow that extended in two parallel lines to the left.

“A moose crossed,” Philip said. “I saw those.”

“Oh!” said Rita, a bit crestfallen. “I didn’t know. I never saw a moose.” She looked at the tracks. “But, Philip, if a moose is as tall as you say he is, how’d he walk under that branch without knocking the snow off?”

Philip turned. The tracks led beneath a spruce limb not so high as a man’s head. Philip started toward it.

“Wait a minute!” Jerry called.

He slipped off his snowshoes and stepped into the deep snow. His steps left the deep slits like the others.

“Look at this, Philip!” Ann cried.

But Philip was already standing beneath the spruce branch.

“Rita got it!” he yelled. “This is how Ehe-bik left. I was dumb! I would have missed it.”

Both chagrin and exultation was in his face as he came back. He took off his snowshoes and stepped in the old trail.

“That’s how they did it!” he exclaimed. “Stepped in each other’s tracks. Gee! I was slow not to guess that.”

“Little Rita turned out to be the tracker!” Jerry said. “Good thing we didn’t leave the girls at home.”

“I was only wondering about a moose!” Rita protested. “I didn’t guess it really.”

They followed the tracks, which circled aimlessly, as a moose might walk, but eventually led to the rear of the wigwam.

“No one has to worry about that blood now!” Philip exclaimed, and the relief in his voice told Ann how deeply he had been troubled. “I bet he left that stain on purpose.”

“Shall we follow the tracks to see where they went?” Jerry asked.

Philip shook his head. “Wouldn’t do us any good now,” he said. “They’re days old. See how the edges are worn and the snow’s blown in. But wait till we tell Hugh how Rita guessed the way Ehe-bik fooled us!”

It was amazing how cheerful they’d become now that the red stain held no terror. Ann wondered that dark troubled thoughts had ever crossed her mind. Philip studied the moose tracks in fascination.

“Ehe-bik was smart to figure out a trick like that,” he said. “I was the dumb one. But when we catch up with him I’ll make him sorry he ever started this funny business against Wen-dah-ban.”

FIFTEEN

THEY struck straight south across country to pick up Bock-i-tay's trail. It was hard, slow going. The route crossed two ridges and the swale between was filled with jack pots of dead and down timber so entangled that the huge masses had to be detoured. And always when they bore to left or right they had to compensate for the change in the direction.

The boys took turns in breaking trail. Each stayed in the lead until exhausted and then fell out to follow the other. Ann and Rita drove the dog team. Philip kept pressing and resented every moment of delay.

"We're bound to cross Bock-i-tay's trail if we keep straight south," he said. "But we could lose a day in this kind of going."

"Birds have it on us," Jerry said. "As the crow flies is beginning to mean something to me."

It was long past noon when they came out on Bock-i-tay's trail. Two pairs of snowshoes and a loaded toboggan had left it as smooth and hard and inviting as a sidewalk. They swung onto it joyously.

"We'll make time from here on," Philip said.

Bock-i-tay had followed a chain of lakes and a river. It was a relief to be out of the forest, but the great oxbow bends of the river tantalized with their aimless wandering, and the stream presented a new danger. Often they heard the warning gurgle of water on the outside of bends and knew the swift current had cut beneath the ice. Bock-i-tay had followed the inside of each bend, where the current was sluggish, but even there Philip tested the ice ahead with a heavy stick. This slowed them up and was one more irritation, but Philip was adamant.

"Can't afford to take chances on getting even our feet wet in this cold," he said.

The sun had started down when at last they saw Bock-i-tay's camp ahead. Even an untenanted wigwam looked inviting. They were exhausted. No one knew how far ahead the next camp was. Bock-i-tay had said only

that another hunter was near him. It might be hours before they reached it. This camp at least offered shelter.

“But it’s no good to us,” Philip said. “The windigo won’t come back here. He knows Bock-i-tay has gone. This wigwam was dark last night.”

“You talk as though a wigwam had windows,” Rita said.

“It’s got a smoke hole,” Philip replied.

Rita was puzzled and Ann told her how sparks escaped from the smoke hole and floated off in the darkness.

“Fur trappers always watch for them when looking for a wigwam to spend the night,” she said.

They looked into Bock-i-tay’s empty home. He had left nothing, not even the blanket door, convincing proof of his intention not to return. The beaten trail led past the door and toward the south.

“If we’re going to make the next camp we’d better hustle,” Philip said. “Maybe we can get there before dark.”

They pushed on. The sun set, a pale December sun which left the sky a cold green, without even a rosy glow to lift their chilled spirits. Shadows formed in the black spruce which crowded so close at either side.

Ann feared they would have to make camp along the trail. At each bend she looked ahead for the tiny red sparks floating from a wigwam smoke hole as eagerly as had any tripper.

“I’m so tired I can hardly shove one snowshoe ahead of the other,” she confessed to Rita.

“This trail must lead to something,” Philip insisted.

Ann had begun to doubt it when she saw the dim shape of a wigwam. They would have missed it in the gathering darkness if the trail had not led past the door. The wigwam stood cold, dark, and empty, as bare as Bock-i-tay’s. They stared at the deserted camp in dismay.

“The windigo beat us to it,” Philip said in a tired voice. “We got here too late.”

They went inside. Philip felt the cold ashes in the fireplace. The ground beneath was still warm.

“The windigo must have been here last night,” he said. “They got out this morning.”

It was a zero hour of weariness and failure. Those last dogged miles had brought only defeat. Ann couldn't have spoken. The boys unhitched the team.

"At least we've got a ready-made home," Jerry said. "You girls mind sleeping in a wigwam?"

"I'd sleep anywhere if I can only take off these snowshoes," Rita said.

Philip took his ax from the lashings and felled a near-by spruce. Jerry built a fire and raked the old branches from the floor of the wigwam. He became a brisk salesman.

"We'll agree to supply fresh carpets," he said. "And we have a central heating system. But we can't redo the walls for transients. Besides, birchbark is being used this season."

It might not have been the best humor but it carried them through the zero hour with laughter and they plunged into camp-making.

Later when they had brought in the camping outfit, put a tarpaulin across the door to keep out cold, cooked and eaten supper, the wigwam looked less lonely and forbidding. But dark shadows lurked behind them and the firelight cast strange wavering shapes on the birchbark walls. Everyone hovered close to the fire and when the dogs, one by one, made an unobtrusive entrance and curled close to the little circle, Ann was glad for the reassurance of their presence. Rita patted Ogema's head.

"You won't let a windigo get us, will you?" she said.

"Wigwam scare you?" Jerry asked.

"Not exactly," Rita said. "But I've begun to understand the Indian's fear of evil spirits. Somehow, birchbark doesn't seem thick enough to keep things out."

That was what Ann had been sensing. She had never realized before what the solidity of real walls meant. They afforded the protection they promised, but this wigwam closed them in and yet left them strangely vulnerable. All must have felt it for their voices lowered, and when a branch snapped outside in the forest everyone looked up and listened.

"I hope we don't hear wolves tonight," Rita said.

"We won't hear anything," Philip complained. "I was hoping to catch Ehe-bik at his funny business."

“What makes you so sure it’s Ehe-bik?” Ann demanded. “I’ve been wondering if any Indian would pretend to be a windigo. He’d be too frightened.”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking,” Jerry said. “All we’ve got to go on is that someone walked out of Ehe-bik’s camp without snowshoes.”

“It took more than one person to make those big slits in the snow,” Philip insisted.

“But you can’t be sure of that!” Ann said. “You said yourself that the tracks were so old and worn down you couldn’t tell what had happened.”

“Yes,” Philip admitted. Then he stiffened. “But it’s got to be Ehe-bik! We know he’s mixed up in this. And if it wasn’t Ehe-bik and his wife, who —”

“That’s just what we don’t know,” Jerry said. “We only know we’ve run into something. I think we should go back to Fox Island and tell your father what we’ve found.”

“But we haven’t found anything!” Philip said.

Philip was showing signs of becoming stubborn. Ann knew them, and all afternoon she had been troubled, as she knew Jerry was, by their promise to her father. They’d been put on their honor because they were older. It was their job to make sure they weren’t running into trouble.

“We know someone’s trying to hide his tracks,” Jerry said. “It might have been Ehe-bik. Or it might be anyone. I don’t know and neither do you. But I’d say we’d found out plenty. What do you think, Ann?”

She had dreaded the question. Always she’d stood with Philip even when they’d stretched a point on promises to avoid a danger. She’d been proud of their daring. This was a fine point in courage.

“Jerry’s right,” she said. “He’s only keeping his promise to Dad. He made me promise too.”

“Dad did!” Philip exclaimed. “He’s a fine one to talk! Why, he’d tackle his weight in wildcats!”

Ann smiled, thinking of what her father had said.

“That’s exactly what Dad—” she began, then stopped and stiffened.

A wail that groaned and moaned, that seemed to shake the wigwam and the forest around it, brought all four erect. Ann felt the skin creep along the

back of her neck. She couldn't have moved if her life depended on it, and it didn't help to see that the others were as frightened.

The sound ceased, began again. The dogs leaped to their feet, hair on backs and necks bristling and throats vibrating with deep growls. Terror packed the wigwam.

"The windigo!" Philip said when silence came.

"But it can't be!" Ann cried. "There isn't such a—"

The sound burst across the forest. It was like nothing Ann had ever heard in the north, which made it all the harder to convince herself Ojibwa superstition could not be responsible for this thing that groaned and moaned and set the dogs to whimpering.

She looked at the others. No one moved. They listened with their entire bodies, and fear showed in their eyes. As she looked at Philip a strange thing happened. He began to grin.

"Remember, Sis?" he said. "Before we came to Far Lake, when the school principal got married and we had a charivari? And Halloween too."

"Philip!" Ann cried. "That's the noise you boys made!"

"Sure," Philip said. "I'd have figured it out sooner if I hadn't been expecting something else. We made it with a tin can and a string and a chunk of rosin. No wonder the Indians had the wits scared out of them."

"I know now!" Jerry exclaimed. "Punch a small hole in the end of a can, pass a string through it that has a knot at the end, and then pull a chunk of rosin along the string."

"Oh!" Rita cried, and she was angry. "You mean I've sat here shivering, scared to death by a thing like that!"

"How did Ehe-bik learn to—" Jerry began.

"He didn't," Philip said. "Indians never have cans. That sound was made by a white man. Now we're really finding out something!"

It was a moment before Ann grasped the meaning of Philip's speech. He had said it so quietly it had at first made no impression.

"You mean a white man is pretending to be a windigo?" she demanded.

"He's out there now," Philip said. "On the ridge behind the swamp. That's where the sound came from."

“And we don’t want him to guess we’re not Indians,” said Jerry, suddenly vigilant. “Better stop talking and sit quiet. He might come down to find out if it worked.”

The sound began again. But now it held no terror. They thought only of the man who made it.

Philip drew his rifle from its case. Ann knew he would never dream of using the weapon against an Indian. It was strange, she thought, that in the north only the white man should be dangerous.

After it had wailed long and loud, the sound ceased. They waited, taut, prepared for danger. Philip sat near the door, his rifle across his knees, his right hand gripping the weapon, a forefinger on the trigger.

No one moved. No one spoke above a whisper. Ann was so tense she did not notice a strange smell until she saw Philip’s nostrils twitch.

It was unlike anything she had ever smelled before, and she remembered what Pe-tah-bo had said about the odor of a windigo. A horrible cannibalistic spirit might give out such a noisome stench.

The others smelled it too, and soon the odor filled the wigwam. It was rank and fetid, as evil and mysterious as the idea of the windigo itself.

“What is it?” Rita whispered.

“It’s like something dead, only a lot worse,” Jerry said.

Philip’s eyes gleamed in sudden recognition.

“Philip!” Ann whispered. “Do you know what it is?”

“Asafetida,” he said. “This fellow’s been giving the Indians the whole works. First the noise and then the smell. I’ll bet he’s put eyes in the trees. I’m going to look.”

“Don’t go out there!” Ann cried. “You don’t know what might happen!”

“He won’t hear me,” Philip said. “Keep the dogs inside.” He slipped out, taking his rifle.

They waited a long five minutes. They could hear no sound. Nothing happened. Jerry became restless.

“I’d better go see,” he whispered.

Ann shook her head. “Philip’s safer alone,” she said. “He knows how to stalk.”

A little later Philip returned. "No eyes," he said. "And I didn't hear anyone moving in the bush. He must have thrown the asafetida and beat it."

"What is asafetida?" Rita asked.

"I don't know," Philip said. "Smelled it once before we came here. Some trappers use it to attract game. Supposed to bring fur for miles."

"Then Pe-tah-bo should have recognized it," Jerry said. "And the other Indians too."

"Hunters up here don't know it," Philip said. "Never heard of anyone but a white trapper using it, and not a good trapper at that."

His explanation deepened the sense of peril. No longer were they chasing a will-o'-the-wisp of Ojibwa superstition. This was real sound and smell, an intention to terrorize the hunters, and the white man who had devised the terror had been close to the wigwam. He had depended on a Halloween trick and a trapping lure to frighten simple natives, but what if he discovered that members of his own race, and not cowering Indians, were in the wigwam? What might he do then?

Ann thought of all this as Jerry built up the fire.

"I'll put the dogs out," Philip said. "They'd never let anyone get near the wigwam."

"He may not try to," Jerry said. "He's probably gone, sure that he's cleaned out another wigwam."

"He'll know different tomorrow," Philip said.

Ann knew what Philip meant. Her brother was looking for wildcats to battle. Jerry unrolled the blankets.

"I'll toss for the first trick at keeping the fire going," he said, trying to make his tone casual.

"You needn't pretend for Rita and me," Ann said. "You're going to stand watch."

"Sure we are," Philip said. "We're not going to give that bird a chance to sneak up on us."

SIXTEEN

THE next morning Ann awakened to discover she had slept and slept soundly. When she had stretched out beside the fire she had intended to remain awake and vigilant. But fear, like every other emotion, wears off. Now for a moment she had to search her mind to remember the cause of that keen, sharp sense of peril which shocked her to alertness.

Philip had built up the fire and hung a kettle of snow above the blaze. He saw her open eyes.

"A white windigo didn't make you lose much sleep," he said.

"Did anything happen?" she asked.

"Not a thing," he said.

Jerry, on the other side of the fire, threw off his blanket and sat up.

"I must have dozed off in my last watch," he said a bit sheepishly.

"You know I did," Philip said. "I never knew when you took over."

"Is it morning?" Rita asked sleepily, and she looked like a small brown cocoon in her roll of blankets. "What do we do now?"

"Get ready to start so we can pick up those tracks by daylight," Philip said.

Last night Ann had known Philip intended to follow the white windigo and she dreaded the inevitable argument. She glanced at Jerry, and his eyes avoided hers.

"I suppose we ought to look at the tracks before we start for home," Ann said.

"We're not going home," Philip said. "Take a look outside. It's snowing. Those tracks will be covered in a day." There was savage satisfaction in his voice as he added, "I guess that settles the promise."

Ann looked outside. Big flakes were swirling lazily toward earth, forerunner of a heavy storm. Philip was right. Any clew must be discovered

within the next few hours. To go home now would be to lose all they had gained in their night's vigil in the wigwam. Ann felt a great relief. The argument had been settled for them. They couldn't fail Mr. Gillespie and Wen-dah-ban. She let the tarpaulin fall back into place.

"Dad would be ashamed of us if we went home now," she said.

"Can't you hear him trying to explain to Mr. Gillespie we were on the trail of a white windigo, but we'd promised to run home and tell him?" Philip asked.

"This is a time when a promise doesn't hold," Jerry said.

He looked as relieved as Ann felt. Now that the snowstorm had cleared all doubt, they plunged into plans. Philip still maintained Ehe-bik was mixed up with the white windigo.

"What's Ehe-bik doing with a white man?" Jerry asked.

"Maybe Ehe-bik got hold of a half-breed who hates Wen-dah-ban," Philip said. "Ehe-bik's been looking for a way to get even for that silver fox."

"But a half-breed would be as scared of a windigo and bad medicine as any Indian," Ann said.

"We'll know a lot more when we've run down this bird." Philip picked up a dog harness. "What are we going to do about these bells on the back pads? Anyone could hear us a half mile off."

"We could stuff them with moss," Rita said.

"It might shake out just when we needed to be quiet," Jerry said. "Can't you cut them off?"

"That would spoil the harness," Philip said. "But I've got an idea. We can count on water staying frozen."

He laid the harness on the wigwam floor, poured water into each bell, and then carefully carried the harness outside. Rita held back the blanket door to give him light, and five sets of clappers had been cased in ice by the time Ann and Jerry had finished cooking breakfast. It was a hurried meal. They were packed and ready for departure by the first signs of daylight. Philip made a quick circle of the camp.

"He didn't come within a hundred feet of the wigwam," he reported. "There's no chance he knows we aren't Indians."

They started for the ridge. Snow was falling faster now and urgency speeded their pace. Philip led the way to the bare shoulder of the ridge. It held the familiar man-made moose tracks.

“Standing here, he could see sparks from our smoke hole,” Philip said. “But why’d he come back here last night?”

“Maybe he hadn’t been here before,” Ann said. “You remember Dad was afraid Bock-i-tay had started the moccasin telegraph.”

“I bet he had!” Philip said. “And this bunch got out ahead of the windigo.”

They found tracks where the windigo had stood when he worked the can and string. Although they sniffed and compared impressions, they could not decide whether the smell of asafetida, which still lingered at the wigwam, was any stronger on the ridge.

Ann and Jerry wanted to piece together the whole history of the man’s actions but Philip grew impatient.

“Doesn’t make any difference how he did it,” he said. “Let’s get started. It’s snowing harder.”

Fortunately the windigo had come and gone by the same route. The two sets of moose tracks sometimes crossed, sometimes paralleled, and sometimes lay far apart, but they led in the same direction. There was no need to decide which was made going or coming.

“But we could have done it,” Philip said. “I figured it out last night.”

For his own satisfaction as much as to convince the others, he made an experiment. With a snowshoe he carefully cut the snow away from around a slit. Almost two feet below snow level was the firm impression of a moccasin-clad foot. Even in the fresh snow which sifted down they could see the footprint clearly enough to know they were on the departure route. Philip grinned.

“It worked,” he said.

“If we compared how far we sink in moccasins, we could even figure out his weight,” Jerry said.

“I’d rather take a look at him,” Philip said. “Let’s get going. We’ll stick to this set.”

The tracks made a big circle. Ann marveled that anyone would walk so far without snowshoes and Jerry said it must be hard work to play windigo.

"I can't believe a half-breed or a white man went to all this trouble to help Ehe-bik," Ann said. "And no one could hate Wen-dah-ban that much."

"Ehe-bik did," Philip said. "He's the one I want to catch. It's the best way to cure Wen-dah-ban."

Ann didn't answer. She knew that stubborn quality in Philip, especially when he was aroused by an injury to anyone he cared for. For years Wen-dah-ban had been the only boy Philip knew. And that friendship, formed in those early years, would be compelling now.

They went on silently, following the tracks. These wandered around a big jack pot and then suddenly joined a broken trail.

"Thought it was time for him to put on snowshoes," Philip said. "From here on it's easy."

He took the rifle from the lashings of the toboggan and as he started off in the lead the others felt the added tension. The windigo had walked this way last night, and although falling snow had already blotted out the clear impressions of his webs, they knew that around any turn in the trail they might come upon him.

After an hour they climbed a ridge. At the crest Philip stopped. Smoke was rising above spruce trees in the swamp beneath them.

Jerry handed the tail-rope of the toboggan to Rita and went forward. Philip warned them to make no noise. "And keep the dogs quiet," he said as he started on.

Ann walked with her hand on Ogema's head. Now at last, when they were actually at the windigo's camp, Ann discovered her heart was pounding. Rita, clinging to the tail-rope, looked both frightened and ferociously determined. They could count on Rita, Ann thought, just as they could on Jerry. There was a truculent set to his shoulders as he walked behind Philip.

They made their way down the ridge carefully, avoiding every branch or twig which might snap and announce their coming. Philip halted often, his body tense. Ann remembered the many times she and Philip had stalked game together. She tried to tell herself this was no different than creeping up on a moose or deer. But she knew it was different.

They had reached the swamp when they heard the sound of an ax. It came from a thick stand of trees just off the trail ahead. Philip motioned them to stop. He took a few steps forward and raised his rifle.

“Put up your hands!” he called. “I’ve got you covered.”

The sound of the ax stopped.

“And drop that ax!” Philip said. “Step away from it or I’ll plug you. Walk toward me.”

Ann saw a man come out to the trail.

“Stop there!” Philip said. “Jerry, cut in behind him and get his ax.”

There was an unreality about it, even when the man stood there, his hands high in the air.

“What’s all this talk of shooting?” the stranger demanded. “You’re young Jackman, aren’t you? Don’t you know me?”

“Sure, you’re Wilson, the free trader.”

“That’s no crime even in this country,” Wilson said. He glanced at the two girls and the dog team. “I heard you Jackman kids were wild. A joke’s a joke, but—” and he began experimentally to lower his arms.

“Get ’em up quick!” Philip snapped, and sighted along his rifle barrel.

“Go easy with that gun,” Wilson said. “A crazy kid with a rifle is bad business.”

“You’ll think so before we’re through,” Philip said. “Start walking toward your camp.”

“What do you think you’re doing?” Wilson asked.

“We know your game,” Philip said. “Throwing asafetida around the bush and—”

“Just because some hunters got wise and started using a new lure you can’t—”

“And making noises like a windigo,” Philip went on as though Wilson had not spoken.

“What kind of a noise is that?” Wilson demanded. “You kids have lived up here so long you’re as bushy as the Indians.”

“It’s no use, Wilson,” Philip said. “We’ve got it on you.”

Ann wondered if they had. They had caught him but they had no proof to offer. Their story would never convince the hunters or Wen-dah-ban. Wilson still wore a look of amazement and injury. He was a small man, not so heavy as Jerry, but his close-set eyes had a dangerous glint.

"This is a free country," he said. "I'm through fooling with you. Drop that gun and you kids turn around and go your way and I'll go mine. Then everything will be peaceable."

"Lead the way to camp," Philip said. "And keep your hands up."

Wilson hesitated a moment, then started along the trail. They followed single file, Philip driving the free trader ahead of him. Jerry walked a step behind Philip. Ann, Rita, and the dogs followed. Soon they saw the camp, a shelter of branches in a thick growth of spruce. Wilson began to walk faster.

"Stop!" Philip said. "Step off beside the trail and keep your hands up. I'll hold him here, Jerry, while you go ahead. He might have a gun at camp."

"You think of everything, don't you?" Wilson said. "Since when has Gillespie used kids to do his stalking?"

Jerry disappeared in the green enclosure. He came out with a rifle and a trade gun.

"There are two Indians in there and I took their gun too," Jerry said.

"Who are they?" Philip asked.

Ann looked in while the boys kept Wilson covered.

"It's Ehe-bik and his wife!" she cried.

"Thought we'd find 'em," Philip said. "I knew Ehe-bik never figured out those moose tracks and that stain of blood."

"You can have the Indians and welcome," Wilson said. "There's no law in this country against a man dressing a rabbit or walking any way he wants to."

"You won't think so when we turn you over to Gillespie," Philip said.

"He's not even in the country," Wilson said. "Won't be back till New Year's. I'm figuring on striking south to the railroad. I could make the midnight train. You folks got any real argument against that?"

"A couple of rifles," Philip said. "And keep your hands up."

Ehe-bik and his wife were peering fearfully from the shelter. The tableau was most evidently beyond their comprehension, but they showed no inclination to aid the free trader who stood facing Jerry and Philip. Rita guarded the dogs, which were whimpering with excitement.

"Now we got him, all we need is his windigo outfit," Philip said. "You look for that, Ann."

When she went into the spruce enclosure, Ehe-bik tried to tell her something about Wen-dah-ban, but she had no time to listen as she searched bedding and sacks and even turned back spruce boughs on the ground. She asked the two natives, but in her excitement she could think of no Ojibwa word to describe the can and string. They shook their heads and looked even more frightened.

"Find anything?" Wilson asked when she stepped out, and there was satisfaction in his tone.

"You know I didn't," she said.

"Now maybe we can talk terms," Wilson said.

Ann waited breathlessly. It would be a triumph to drive Wilson before a rifle to Fox Island. Philip could do it. Even Dan Wilson knew Philip would carry out his threat. But what would that accomplish without proof he was the windigo?

"Turn over the stuff and we'll let you start for the railroad," Philip said.

Then Ann knew that Philip had grown up.

"How'd I be sure of that?" Wilson asked.

"You heard me say it."

"If one of you boys can drop a rifle long enough, you'll find everything in that cedar tree," Wilson said.

"I'll look," Ann said and she walked to the cedar tree.

The can with the rosin string was large, and easily discovered in its hiding place on the lowest branch. She laid it on the ground. Next she brought out two smaller cans with paper over the open ends and holes in the sides with half-burned candles. It was easily guessed that these had served as eyes in the trees. Last of all she found a dark bottle, securely corked.

"Don't open that!" Philip yelled. "It would drive us out of camp."

"That's the lot," Wilson said, and he had lost all his bravado. "How about letting me start for the railroad before it gets to snowing harder?"

Philip nodded. They watched him put a rabbitskin robe and food in a pack and sling it to his shoulders.

"You can get your rifle at the Hudson's Bay Post next time you come through," Philip said. "Gillespie will give it to you."

The free trader scowled.

“And you can tell him I evened up for that nightshirt,” he said.

“But you haven’t!” Ann cried. “All the hunters are waiting for him at our island.”

It was the final humiliation. The free trader glared and walked up the trail.

Suddenly Ann felt very tired. They were hours from Fox Island, it was snowing harder, and they still had to make Ehe-bik understand he must go with them. She didn’t feel equal to a session of Ojibwa oratory and she doubted if Philip was, but Ehe-bik was anxious to explain his reason for the hidden camp. He began with the silver fox.

“You tell the white trader,” Philip cut him short. “He wants to see you. He sent us here to get you.”

It might be untrue but it was effective. Ehe-bik stopped talking.

“Come!” Philip said. “Come quick. You understand?”

Ehe-bik and his wife looked at each other. They picked up their rabbitskin robes.

SEVENTEEN

IT was dark when they came out on Far Lake and started toward Fox Island. The cavalcade stretched in a long line, six people and a dog team. Ehe-bik and his wife trudged stolidly between Jerry and Philip.

They made no protest and asked no questions. These strange events were just one of the mystifying actions of the white race.

It had begun to snow in earnest. They were shut in by an opaque curtain of falling flakes, and traveled through a murky darkness until at last Ann saw the lights of home. She wondered how many nights they had returned late and how many mornings they had started out. The past days were only a confusion of departures and arrivals.

No one had thought to melt the ice from the sleigh bells and their approach was silent. At the steps of the veranda they called and Mr. Jackman threw open the front door. Behind him stood Mr. Gillespie.

"Bless my soul!" the manager exclaimed. "If they haven't got Ehe-bik and his wife!"

"That's only half of it!" Philip shouted. "We caught the windigo!"

After that, everything had to wait on the story. Mrs. Jackman hurried from the kitchen. All were too excited to notice the cold which rushed in the open door. The four windigo hunters stood on the veranda while they gave the barest details. Mr. Gillespie appeared dazed for the first time since they had known him. Hugh's telegram had brought him and he had arrived only a half-hour before to learn about the windigo. Now there wasn't one.

"Give me time to catch up," he begged. "And you four tackled that scum Dan Wilson!"

"Philip tackled him," Jerry said.

The old Scotchman's blue eyes glistened. He was more moved than Ann had ever seen him.

"Always knew I couldn't get along without the Jackmans," the manager said, and then he abandoned all pretense. "It was then or never, following

those tracks. It took courage. I won't even try to tell how I feel about it."

Dave Jackman smiled proudly. He made no mention of tackling wildcats.

"I'd like to have seen Dan Wilson's face when you four showed up," he said.

It was a triumphant homecoming. For a time everyone forgot how much still remained to be done. It would have accomplished little to have solved the mystery if the frightened hunters could not be convinced. Mr. Gillespie was the first to realize the task which faced them. He sent his driver and the Company team to Home Bay to get Wen-dah-ban and Hugh. Dave Jackman went too, for fear the driver would miss the strange trail in the darkness and snow storm.

Mr. Gillespie took Ehe-bik and his wife into the house to hear their story.

"That's the first thing to clean up before Wen-dah-ban gets here," he said.

Armed with jugs of hot water, Ann and Rita went upstairs to dress. They stood for a moment on the balcony and watched Mr. Gillespie talking to Ehe-bik and his wife. He had become again the efficient, watchful administrator of a district.

"Do you think he'll ever get this straightened out?" Rita asked when they were in their room.

"If he doesn't, no one can," Ann said.

Rita shed her trail clothes, poured a basin of water, and experimentally tested the temperature. Apparently she had something on her mind.

"I hate to tell even you how scared I was when Philip walked down that trail with his rifle," she said.

"I was afraid the man would hear my heart pounding," Ann confessed.

Rita scrubbed for a moment.

"I never dreamed when I came here I'd do anything half so exciting," she said. "Now I don't envy you that canoe trip to Hugh's gold mine any more. Isn't a free trader a lot more dangerous than a claim jumper?"

Ann considered the ticklish question.

"He certainly caused a lot more trouble," she said. "And today it was a lot more frightening because we had a chance to think about it beforehand.

You know—we didn't have to do this."

"Oh, yes, we did!" Rita said. "Not one of us could have chickened out on Mr. Gillespie or Wen-dah-ban."

Ann and Rita were downstairs when Mr. Jackman, Hugh, and Wen-dah-ban came in the front door. Wen-dah-ban was less thin and worn but his face was still somber. Then he saw Ehe-bik and his eyes lighted with such relief Ann felt repaid for every moment on the trail.

Mr. Gillespie led Wen-dah-ban to Ehe-bik.

"A white man has made much trouble," the manager said. "He has not said true words. He told Ehe-bik that Wen-dah-ban had sent bad medicine to conjure. Ehe-bik was afraid, but the white man said he could make white medicine to keep this from happening to Ehe-bik. And all the time Ehe-bik and his woman were hiding in the forest your heart has been troubled. Is that not so?"

Wen-dah-ban nodded.

"Now Ehe-bik knows it was wrong to walk away so that no one could tell how he had gone. He knows you were not angry with him and that you did not steal his silver fox or make bad medicine against him. And he did not make bad medicine against you. Only the evil thoughts of a white man have caused this trouble. Do you believe that?"

Wen-dah-ban nodded but he still looked troubled.

"Later I will tell you many things," the manager said. "Then you will know all this trouble has been only in your own thoughts and that you have no enemy. I have always spoken true words to you. And you will believe me."

He left the three Indians alone to think it over. The others followed him to the kitchen.

"That was a fine speech, Alex!" Mrs. Jackman said. "No wonder your Indians believe you!"

"Thank you, Mary. I was afraid you wouldn't approve. You and I have never agreed on Wen-dah-ban's education."

"But I wish Shaw-win had heard it," Ann said. "Don't you think we ought to get her?"

The manager hesitated.

"I want to tell Shaw-win about the windigo before she has a chance to talk to Wen-dah-ban," he said. "We can't risk a failure. They're a fine young couple and it was partly my fault this happened to them."

"Why don't you talk to all of them now?" Mrs. Jackman said.

"I'd like to," the manager said, "but I thought you people would be too hungry to hold a council."

"We'll enjoy our supper better, once this is settled," Mrs. Jackman said.

"If anybody's asking me," Hugh said, "I'd rather hear words than eat. I got so I was talking to myself."

"I'll get the gang," Mr. Jackman said. "You folks be ready to hold the meeting."

It was to be conducted with all the ceremony the natives loved. When Mr. Jackman entered with the Indians, everyone was waiting. Mr. Gillespie sat between Ehe-bik and Wen-dah-ban. Shaw-win saw them both, gave a little gasp and looked away. Wah-be-goona stared at her son with hungry eyes but made no move in his direction. Wen-dah-ban watched his family and said nothing.

Mr. Gillespie stood up to speak. He told them about the sounds at night, the eyes in the trees, and the smell of the windigo which had come into their wigwams. And he commended Pe-tah-bo's courage and wisdom in remaining with his people. Then he told of the trouble between Ehe-bik and Wen-dah-ban and of the evil which a white man had brought about.

The Indians leaned forward now. With their instinctive sense of drama, they knew the manager was leading up to something. But not once, Ann noticed, did he question the existence of windigos or doubt conjury. As she listened, she got only a feeling of his sympathy and understanding for the fears and loneliness of a forest people.

He told the story of the deserted wigwam and how white people too had heard the sounds and smelled the windigo. Pe-tah-bo and Wah-be-goona looked at Ann and Philip with sympathy and horror. He described the chase and capture of a white man who had tried to drive the hunters from their trapping territories.

Mr. Gillespie stopped and looked at the table, on which the can with its string, the "eyes in the trees," and the bottle of asafetida had been placed.

"Philip," he said in English, "can you or Jerry demonstrate the fiendish noise contraption that Wilson used? Frankly, I never heard of one of the

things.”

“Jerry’s bigger and he can make more noise,” Philip said.

Jerry went to the table, but he hesitated.

“It’ll drive them all out, sir,” he said.

“I’ll stop ’em,” Mr. Gillespie said. “Is it something like the bagpipes?”

“Worse,” Jerry said, and he grinned. “A lot worse.”

He picked up the can, held it with his left hand, and with his right he placed the piece of rosin against the string and pulled.

Sound beat through the room. Even Mr. and Mrs. Jackman started, and every Indian jumped to his feet. Ann expected they would rush out the door but Mr. Gillespie was there first. He stood with arms lifted.

“Stop!” he shouted. “That is only how an evil white man fooled us, fooled you and me. But there is more. This is how he made the eyes of his false windigo in the trees.”

He herded the Indians back to their seats and then nodded to Philip, who carried the big lamp into the kitchen and left the room in darkness. Then Philip came back with a tin can in which a candle burned dimly behind a paper shield.

“Wah!” the Indians cried, and they jabbered in swift Ojibwa.

But they were not afraid now. Ann knew Mr. Gillespie had won his audience.

Philip brought back the lamp and Mr. Gillespie lifted the bottle of asafetida. He said it was a smell too evil to release but he gave it to Pe-tah-bo.

“Some day when you are alone in the forest, see if that is not the scent you smelled,” he said. “Do you believe I have spoken true words, Pe-tah-bo?”

The old man stood up. There was dignity and serenity in his face as he said the white trader had always spoken true words. They knew he would not send them back to their hunting territory if a windigo was in the forest. They had been fooled. Wen-dah-ban had been fooled. And now Wen-dah-ban knew no one had made bad medicine against him. He could go back to his wigwam and be a hunter. Their hearts were no longer heavy.

Shaw-win said nothing, but when she crossed the room and sat beside Wen-dah-ban Ann was afraid she was going to cry.

Mr. Gillespie stood at the door and shook hands with the Indians as they filed out. He insisted Ann and Philip stand beside him so each Indian could thank those who had saved them from deep sorrow. Ann was all choked up before the ceremony was over.

Mr. Jackman closed the door after the last "*B'jou.*"

"Alex, that was a fine job," he said. "Thank heavens, you were here. I'd have muffed it."

"You'd be the first Jackman who ever did," the manager said, but he was pleased with his own performance. "They'll sit up all night to talk that over."

"I'm afraid they'll have to sit up," Mrs. Jackman said. "Do you realize that, counting your driver, there are nine Indians in that little cabin?"

Supper was late, but it was one of the happiest meals Ann ever remembered. Always before when they had rejoiced at a happy outcome, it had been the Jackmans' fortunes which had been threatened. But this disaster would have touched them all.

Ann thought of the wigwam in the forest where Shaw-win and Wen-dah-ban could live in peace and happiness again. She remembered Wah-be-goan's face as she looked at her son, no longer an outcast, but the boy who would grow up to make her proud. She knew she would never forget the serenity and peace and dignity of Pe-tah-bo's words.

Philip was almost garrulous in his relief about Wen-dah-ban.

"Think he'll tumble for that windigo stuff again?" he asked the manager. "I bet he won't be so easy to fool the next time."

"None of them will be quite so gullible again," Mr. Gillespie said. "And that's a long advance which they owe to their neighbors. But I haven't been thinking so much about the hunters and their families as I sat here." He stopped and blew his nose and frankly wiped his eyes. "I was considering a speech. And then I knew I couldn't tell you what an empty country this would be to a lonely old Scotchman without the Jackmans and their friends."

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 *Windigo*, by Kathrene Pinkerton.]