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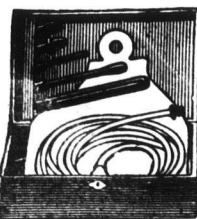
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down, safe as houses, after two years alone, but now you've got company, you want to cut it out and to get along striking that pay streak. It's there—you bet your boots it's there!" And he grinned contentedly.

There were no troubled thoughts in the mind of the prospector when he drew his blankets over him. He fell asleep with bright visions of the pay streak, which he might strike any day, but the boy who shared his hut did not fall asleep. This great white chief he worshipped had restored him to strength and generously equipped him for the long trail. It is not the custom of the Indian to outstay his welcome, and to-morrow Kaswin must depart, whither he did not know. To the teepees of his own tribe?—no, that was impossible, for would not the horrors of that winter linger in his memory like a nightmare, for it was the Winter of the Great Plague. To-morrow he must go, but whither the trail of fate would lead him he did not know.

When the sweet-scented dawn wafted, gossamer-like, into the shanty, Lombert awoke to find the boy, fully equipped for the trail, at his bunkside. How long he had been standing there at attention the white man did not know, but as their eyes met the boy spoke.

"My father," he said, "the creeks are now free of ice, the wild fowl are gone north. My heart is heavy in leaving thee, but see—I am wearing the things you yourself have made in readiness for the long trail! Little Moosewa I am leaving as a token of my thanks. Farewell, my father!"

Lombert stared and blinked. Hitherto Kaswin's conversation had consisted of nouns and verbs, and this carefully prepared string of eloquence left the prospector speechless. Had he wakened to find Moosewa sitting by his bunk smoking a pipe, had Moosewa offered him a silver-mounted pouch containing the same luxurious brand, he could not have been more surprised. He merely flung his scraggy legs from under the blanket, sat bolt upright, and gasped—"Ah?"

Then it dawned upon him that the boy might be homesick, and naturally anxious to return to his tribe. The red man cannot live happily with the white, nor the white with the red. Lombert took the boy's limp hand, and then, still staring sleepily, he watched the small upright figure depart through the door.

For some moments the white man sat motionless, then, as the quietude fell, the awful loneliness of the place enveloped him. The vision of striking the pay streak seemed to flit over the horizon and out of the frightening loneliness of the future rose the old dim phantoms. He had seen what the north had done with other men who dwelt alone. It was merely a matter of time—of time and whisky! The fruitless desolation of it seemed to pin him where he sat, but at length he shook himself free and hurried to the door.

"Hi!" he called. "Hi!"

The boy turned and slowly strolled back. Soon they stood face to face, and the moose calf was for once ignored while she wrestled with the offensive frying pan.

"What you goin' for?" demanded Lombert gruffly.

Kaswin stared at him, then for the first time in their acquaintance the boy grinned. It was a strangely tearful grin, if an Indian can be tearful, but it gave the answer.

"Then you get along and cut the bacon, as I've shown you," ordered Nat. "If you cut it wrong, I'll sure cuff you silly."

Thus the partnership was sealed. Lombert gave his surviving liquor to a visiting trader, who all but died of hunger ere he reached the other end. Bit by bit the boy, by studious imitation, imbibed the white man's ways and customs. His one object in life became to do things according to the way of the whites, and his devotion to Lombert widened considerably in his sphere of usefulness. Each night Lombert explained to him, painstakingly and at length, that they were on the point of striking the pay streak. Each night the boy fell asleep in the midst of it. At first the Indian figured the pay streak as being a new type of food to be added to the long and wonderful array he had recently sampled. By repeated description he decided that it was not a food, but a vague and mysterious something which hovered over the tree tops of the white man's city—a something

the white man strove for, drank for, fought for, and which divided the grain from the dross of the white man's world. Several weeks elapsed ere the boy realized that the pay streak was the mother lode of the yellow dust he and old Nat wallowed daily in the trench to unearth.

But though the boy developed mentally with marvelous strides, Moosewa developed only in physique. By constant disputes with the culinary equipment she became bald of snout, but the baldness was replaced by pure white down, and far and wide she became known as Lombert's white nosed calf. All that summer she floundered from one wrong doing to another with clockwork regularity, but when autumn came a new restlessness possessed her. At times she would utter a foolish little squeal, and having uttered it she would stand for minutes on end, listening intently.

One night, in response to the squeal, there came a thrashing of mighty antlers on the nearby bush, and when morning arrived Moosewa was gone, but in the soft clay about the trench were the marks of gigantic hoofs, accompanying those of Moosewa.

Lombert looked at his partner. "Gone off with her husband, I guess," he said dolefully. "Seems we've lost our calf, sonny. Now you get along and cut that bacon, and if you cut it thick, I'll sure cuff you silly!"

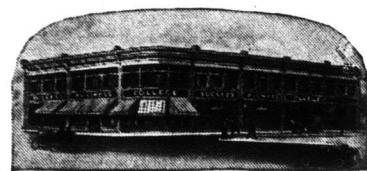
As a matter of fact there was no more gold on Lombert's claim than would just pay for washing out, and at the back of his mind Lombert knew it. Nothing, however, would have shaken him from the steadfastness of his assertion that they were just on the point of striking a huge pay streak. For years now he had wallowed in the icy slush of thawed out trenches, from one claim to another, each claim being situated "just on the edge" of the illusive pay streak! His underlying principle as a gold hunter was to keep plugging ahead, ignoring science and modern application, and trusting entirely to one's luck. And like every old time prospector, he imagined his luck to be superlative, and this in the face of all contrary fact; so he ignored his commonsense promptings to chuck the claim and start an eating house as a more probable source of wealth.

Chuck the claim he eventually did, but not from choice. It was when, early that winter, one attack of sciatica after another made a cripple of him, preventing him visiting the town for stores. The attacks became more severe, and so it came about that just as he had saved the boy, so it was now up to the boy to save him.

Had Lombert been alone he would never have survived that period of winter suffering. The boy chopped firewood, caught fish for the pan, kept the stove going, and nursed his master hand and foot. Day after day, week after week, no visitor chanced their way. Steadily and mercilessly the cold became worse, so that the life of the boy was one ceaseless battle against the elements. Fish became scarce, the ice through which the fish trap was lowered almost impenetrable. The flour sack was becoming light—there was no bacon left. They dropped down to quarter rations. The man turned delirious; the boy, feeble and tottering, following his instructions with the blind faithfulness of devotion. Gammely he stuck to his guns, but as the long nightmare dragged by it was forced in upon him that only some mysterious power, which he himself could not understand, but which, doubtless, was within the comprehension of the white man, could save them. They had started the winter with no store of firewood, and now it seemed that the cold was slowly but surely permeating the shanty—striking upwards from the floor, downwards through the roof, and reflected from the very log walls surrounding him.

Thus, slowly, and remorselessly, the crisis came. No food—the boy, starved, chilled and exhausted, clutching the woodwork for support—too weak to chop more firewood, calmly resigned to their inevitable fate. They had shared the food together, and now there was only water to offer—the old familiar bucket, caked with cat-ice, by Lombert's bunk. It was merely a matter now of waiting till the stove died out, and through the window the "Hunger Moon" shone down with dazzling brilliance.

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