

## Thin Ice

By Charles Dorian

GHOSTLY rays danced witchingly in the northern sky. Away from them raced Godfrey McShane, away toward the black horizon to the south. Not by fear pursued nor by the nightmare of those bobbing bars of light, but bent upon one of the pleasurable duties of doctoring in the remote construction camps, a toboggan jaunt to town for supplies and recreation.

The huskies trotted along briskly, encouraged by the carolling of their driver and an occasional "mush! mush!" Now and then the trail was thick and progress slow, but long stretches were free from drifted snow and the going was considered good.

It was a mild winter. It was talked of as the mildest in history, hence Godfrey McShane's open mackinaw and cap pushed back off his forehead.

And it grew appreciably milder as he advanced toward the railroad and civilization.

There were few astir when he led his huskies to a warm, dry bed of straw and negotiated with the cook for their breakfast, then his own.

Six o'clock breakfasts were common to Godfrey McShane since he became a son of the snow country. His lithe, light body, his clear blue eyes and his other abundant signs of good health may have been gained in any other climate, but the north seemed to stamp a seal upon him which made him fit in precisely with the stern life above the fifty-fourth parallel.

He fitted in with the semi-urban environment of Bury as well, that town which claims a sky-scraper and an electric sign that advertises everything one needs from a cigar to a billet in the king's army.

He expected to breakfast alone as he had done on previous visits. This time there was another presence in the dining-room at six-thirty, a young lady of remarkable comeliness. Her dress contrasted with his so much as to make him feel the woodsman he looked.

"Must have come in on the early morning train from the south," guessed Godfrey, quite correctly. "Prettiest girl I've seen for ages," he went on—to his porridge. He had not seen many girls since he had shouldered his medical knowledge and taken it north for exercise. He looked intently into the things at hand for a few minutes, conscious that the fair presence was almost as interested in him as he in her.

Then the waitress waddled in and removed the dishes, leaving in their place a savory smell of bacon entirely covered by fried eggs. She smiled widely at the girl and exchanged a few remarks. She smiled, too, at the top of Godfrey's head as she passed out.

Godfrey ate slowly to get frequent glimpses at the girl, who he discovered possessed dark eyes of uncommon depth, so deep that they looked black. He saw all that at every glance. There were other things, such as riches of auburn hair, whiteness of teeth, coralness of lips, a peach complexion and a picture hat—but his glimpses were too careful to inventory everything except those wonderful eyes.

As she was leaving the dining-room he absorbed more of the details. He saw that she carried a camera.

"Up for a few days vacation," he guessed, again quite correctly. "But I wonder why she's staying at the hotel," he reflected.

The waitress entered and Godfrey encouraged her to say a few words.

"Oh, she's the proprietor's daughter back from college for the Christmas holidays. You'll soon see the men flocking round her if you stick around."

She accepted her tip graciously and laid down her tray, prepared to enlighten Godfrey upon all subjects pertaining to the lineage of the Marcotts, but he passed it off pleasantly, emerged from the dining-room and out to do his buying.

The morning passed quickly. He meant to use the afternoon to see the sights. As he entered a moving-picture palace he saw Miss Marcott pass with a young man carrying skates. He stayed in the moving-picture house exactly two minutes and then went to the rink. There he rented a pair of skates and made

a few turns of the ice watching the skaters and loungers for—eyes.

Then he spoke to two or three people and learned that most of the crowd that day were on the lake which had just frozen over.

Godfrey stayed no longer at the rink. He was shamelessly bent upon seeing as much of Miss Marcott that day as if he expected never to see her after.

A thin crowd gyrated upon the thin ice, and far out Godfrey descried the figures of Miss Marcott and her companion. They were perilously far out, he judged, when he put on skates and made a few tentative strokes.

The skirling of venturesome skaters brought subaqueous signals of telegraphic clearness that thrilled the limbs of those near the shore and inspired a dread of going out further, much as the vast expanse of smooth ice invited.

Then a terrific cracking and booming occurred. A hurried scurry was made for shore, many giving up then and there and plodding home with their skates a-swing.

A murmur of suppressed terror went up from the throng as they pointed out to what looked like a dark streak, crescent-shaped, expanding.

A breeze had fanned up into a puffy wind. In a short while the crack in the ice widened to five, ten, to twenty feet, and a floe of thin ice was floating away.



Their Little Mistress

And on that floe, clinging frantically to each other, were Miss Marcott and her partner.

It was probably two acres in extent, varying in thickness from one-half to one inch. To skate near the edge meant quick precipitation into the icy water. Rescuers thought of ways to get them off the ice to safety, but no matter how they viewed it the scheme was untenable.

Luckily the stranded pair kept as near to the centre of the ice field as possible. The wind was pushing it farther and farther out. Here and there large pieces chipped off the edges.

A curious crowd remained on shore, among whom were very few possible rescuers. Some went away to spread the news. None of those who remained, including Godfrey McShane, knew what was best to be done as matters stood.

One had noticed that the open water lane extended to the boathouses alongshore. He disappeared in that direction and was next seen manning a canoe toward the floe.

He waved to the pair, signalling them to skate toward the edge while he moved the canoe close up.

Neither skater dared to attempt anything so hazardous. The man skated within thirty feet of the edge and drew back as the ice split ten feet in front of him. He was livid with fear.

"It's no use, Bob," he chattered. "We can't swim."

More than an hour passed without any progress at the rescue. The canoeist made many encouraging propositions and tried his best to hearten the pair.

This was not without its beneficial effect, but the situation developed into one of those in which it seemed that there was nothing to do but pray. It is not always those in peril who pray best: perhaps the spiritual faculties of expression become chilled; perhaps it is because the thought of self-saving is repugnant to an inclusive Savior who sees life beyond death. "Save me! save me!" may be an appealing demand but scarcely a prayer; implicit resignation would seem to be the most efficacious. In this, therefore, Godfrey McShane, pacing up and down the beach with head bowed, making no frantic efforts to show off what man can do in momentous crises, but supplicating for something to happen to enable him to help back to safety those in danger, was obeying some fundamental law. This meditation helped him in his practice of medicine; there, the peril was often hidden; here, it was too plainly in view. Unless a greater Power than Godfrey McShane willed it the perishing of Marion Marcott and Richard Belrose in icy waters was imminent.

Something fired Godfrey's meditation with a force he knew not theretofore. What would at that moment destroy Marion Marcott would destroy him also. But he thought not of the probabilities of loss so much as the hope that he would be given an opportunity to allow her to live. He could not love her less by dying for her; it was her fate he was anxious about, not his own. Love comes to man in no other way. And hope is the strongest ally love possesses. Hope had more

"Crazy's a starved coyote," commented Godfrey, walking rapidly away from the scene.

When he reached the hotel he learned that the proprietor and his wife were down at the boathouses. Godfrey had noticed the crowd increasing there and some action was apparently being considered from that point.

The weighty waitress accosted him with the query:

"Oh, it ain't true, is it, that Marion Marcott is gone adrift with that scamp, Belrose?"

His face was answer enough. He did not wait to get a pen picture of Belrose's career but departed to the stable, murmuring:

"Scamp, eh? Physical ruin before. Nerves gone up, now—if the poor devil isn't drowned by now."

A joyous clamor from the huskies greeted him in the stable. He stroked their heads and portioned out their meal, talking "dog" to them all the while. He gave them barely time to gulp their supper when he hitched them up and with an impressive pat on each head indicated to them that a new achievement was to be theirs.

He headed them towards the lake, now thickly padded with snow. Whooping wildly he urged them to their full speed. After a few preliminary stumbles they got their heads and in a few moments had bounded by the breach in the ice, dragging the toboggan and their driver safely toward the girl. A cheer rang out from the direction of the boathouses.

The girl was now weeping piteously. She was huddled upon the ice but strove to rise and bravely brushed her tears away when help arrived. She tried to speak but her voice broke and her teeth chattered.

Godfrey begged her not to try to speak and assisted her to the toboggan. He wrapped her up warmly in the Navajo rug and, standing on the tail of the toboggan, he leashed the dogs for home over the route they had come.

The greatest difficulty was now before him. Belrose had made a dash for "Bob" Gaynor's canoe and had crashed through the ice. It was with the greatest adroitness that Gaynor was able to reach the floundering man. He could not himself have told how it was accomplished. The douching seemed to bring Belrose to his senses and he lay in the canoe as calmly as violent shivering would allow.

Godfrey returned with the dog-team dragging three long thin planks on the toboggan. These he "shied" in the direction of the canoe from a safe distance. Gaynor reached out for them and securing the end of one to the gunwale of the canoe slid the next one out on it as far as he could. Then carrying the other he stepped gingerly out of the boat and walked the planks already laid and placed the other lapping the end of the second one and was now on comparatively safe ice. He motioned to Belrose to follow his example while Godfrey drove him away. When he returned for Belrose he found him on hands and knees clinging desperately to the plank and he had to back the toboggan up to the end of the walk before he could induce Belrose to leave it.

Godfrey McShane faced some rare vintage at a special little supper given at the Marcott hotel partly in his honor, partly to warm up Marion who was thoroughly chilled.

"My, I do not know in what condition I should be now had I obtained my wish," said Marion, shuddering.

"And that was?" asked her father.

"That it would freeze hard, hard, hard!"

"And I was praying," confessed Godfrey, "that it would remain mild, so that the chances for a snowstorm and change of wind would be better! I knew the dogs could do it under the right conditions."

Benjamin Marcott, her father, insisted upon feasting the dogs. Marion placed chairs for them, but, when the canines were brought in, they refused to sit at table. All their husky nature drove them under the table where they smelled at Godfrey's boots.

"They are thinking of the long hike ahead of them to-night," offered Godfrey.

"You're not returning to-night?" asked Marion, eagerly.

(Continued on Page 9)