

The Trail of the Chippeway Snowshoe

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but that wolf meant business, as slowly it was closing—closing. Not a sign missed Peter Angus. He had read already a hundred signs the police had missed, signs clearly written in the snow—writing upon which the life of a man might depend.

But—wait! What was this? The Indian with the Chippeway snowshoes had hurried out into the centre of the creek. He had cast off one snowshoe and knelt on it, and Peter, as he stood, could picture the form of the Indian crouching there with rifle raised, firing that deadly shot.

"Just up the creek there," Peter told himself, pointing ahead, "the driver fell, and these are the signs that condemn the husband of Moniave. That woman was not lying, yet how can it be?"

He went on slowly, reading each sign with his Indian gift for such things. He saw where the halfbreed driver had leapt on to the sledge, lashing madly at his dogs; he saw where the wolf had drawn upon the sledge; he knew that at this in, and in, till its tracks disappeared. Then he knew that it, too, had leapt point where the runners had sunk deeper, a deadly combat had taken place between man and wolf. Yes, here was a melée of tracks and a dark stain upon the snow. Here the trail had ended.

Yet, what was this? The tracks of yet another pair of snowshoes, of Chippeway snowshoes like those of the man who had fired the fatal shot. Yet it was not the same man! One glance satisfied Peter as to that, for this man walked straight-toed and his left snowshoe had been repaired at the bow.

Peter took up this new track at a run, stooping low like a hunting Indian. The police, too, had followed it, and it had taken them—as now it took him—to a camping place under the trees. This was where the police had arrested the husband of Moniave, but Peter's quick perception had enabled him to note that this Indian had merely passed across the scene of the tragedy, and that it was not he, but another man, who had knelt in the snow and fired that fatal shot.

Who, then, was the other man? Peter knew well, but he had no proof. He went back to the scene of the tragedy and picked up the trail of the real criminal. It led him to a dark rift in the ice—a blowhole—and into this blowhole the man who had fired that shot had lowered something. What was it? Not the body of the halfbreed driver? That was impossible.

Peter quickly made a grapple out of the twisted remains of the sledge. He lowered it into the hole by means of the sled lashings, and presently he hooked something—something heavy. Fearful of what it might be, he drew up and dragged it out on to the ice. It was the body of a huge malamute sled dog shot through the head.

"Ah!" cried Peter, throwing up his arms. "Thank goodness no human being did this dreadful thing! Thank goodness that the man who fired that shot fired it—not at the halfbreed but at this great dog—the dog that was dragging the halfbreed down!"

So far so good; but much yet remained to be discovered. Peter back-tracked the prints of those Chippeway snowshoes till he had reached the point where he had first seen them. Swiftly he back-tracked them still further, away through the woods by a shortened route, and so to the very door of Blaton's cabin.

And there on the wall hung the Chippeway snowshoes!

Peter flung open the door and stood on the threshold, his thin lips drawn, his eyes flashing fire, and looked at Blaton with eyes of condemnation.

"You coward!" he cried. "You miserable, cowardly wretch! You would crouch here and let a man swing for a crime he never did, in order to save yourself the trouble of being involved! I have found you out, Blaton. I know the whole secret. I know that you followed the halfbreed and shot the dog that attacked him. But why were you afraid to own up? Why did you cower here and let them take an innocent man?"

"I—I didn't do it—" began Blaton; but Peter fell upon him and shook

him as a wolf shakes a muskrat.

"Tell me the whole truth and nothing but it," he cried, "or I'll pack you into the blowhole, and no one will ever know what became of you. Now, speak, and speak quickly."

And Blaton spoke. He spoke hurriedly and in a frightened whisper, but every word of it was true.

"The halfbreed came in at dusk," he said, "and we fell to quarreling over our cups. We fought like madmen, and all the time we were fighting my big sled dog was trying to force its way into the hut. When we had fought it out the halfbreed said he would go, so I went and caught the dog and brought him in here. When the halfbreed was gone I closed the door behind him, with the dog inside. Twenty minutes later the dog leapt up and bounded through the parch-

ment window. He was half-wolf, you see, and very dangerous to any man but myself. I know now that he meant to kill the breed, so I hurried out with my rifle in pursuit of the dog. But I was too late. When at length I got up to them they were fighting desperately, both on the sled. The moon was out, and I fired and killed the dog, but when I got up the halfbreed was dead. Overcome with horror and terror, I lowered the dog into the blowhole and came away, and a day or two later I thanked my lucky stars that the police never suspected me."

"You worm!" muttered Peter. For a moment he was silent, then he added: "I said that I would force you to leave this country and now I will do it. I will make your name stink so that neither white man nor Indian will go near you

wherever you are known. And now you are coming south with me to make a clean breast of everything before the police. They cannot punish you for what you have done, but you will save that Indian."

A few nights later Peter Angus paused on the ice as a young Indian brave and a squaw passed him in the moonlight, heading northwards.

"Is that you, Moniave?" he said.

"Yes," the woman answered.

"And you are happy again?" asked Peter.

"Quite happy."

"Why?" The question stabbed the silence like a pistol shot, but the answer came in the same quiet voice—

"Because God of the White Man's Sun is just and powerful."



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