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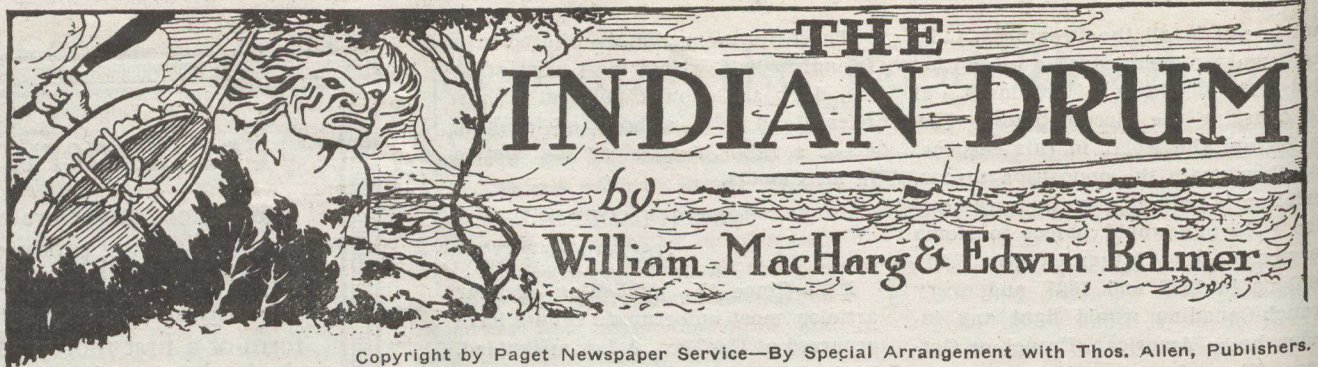
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IT had grown late. The early December dusk—the second dusk since little boats had put off from Number 25—darkened the snow-locked land. The wind from the west cut like a knife, even through her fur coat. The pine trees moaned and bent, with loud whistlings of the wind among their needles; the leafless elms and maples crashed their limbs together; above the clamor of all other sounds, the roaring of the lake came to her, the booming of the waves against the ice, the shatter of floe on floe. No snow had fallen for a few hours, and the sky was even clearing; ragged clouds scurried before the wind and, opening, showed the moon.

Constance hurried westward and then north, following the bend of the shore. The figure of a man—one of the shore patrols—pacing the ice hummocks of the beach and staring out upon the lake, appeared vaguely in the dusk when she had gone about two miles. He seemed surprised at seeing a girl, but less surprised when he had recognized her. Mr. Spearman, he told her, was to the north of them upon the beach somewhere, he did not know how far; he could not leave his post to accompany her, but he assured her that there were men stationed all along the shore. She came, indeed, three quarters of a mile farther on, to a second man; about an equal distance beyond, she found a third, but passed him and went on.

Her legs ached now with the unaccustomed travel upon snowshoes; the cold, which had been only a piercing chill at first, was stopping feeling, almost stopping thought. When clouds covered the moon, complete darkness came; she could go forward only slowly then or must stop and wait; but the intervals of moonlight were growing longer and increasing in frequency. As the sky cleared, she went forward quickly for many minutes at a time, straining her gaze westward over the tumbling water and the floes. It came to her with terrifying apprehension that she must have advanced at least three miles since she had seen the last patrol; she could not have passed any one in the moonlight without seeing him, and in the dark intervals she had advanced so little that she could not have missed one that way either.

She tried to go faster as she realized this; but now travel had become more difficult. There was no longer any beach. High, precipitous bluffs, which she recognized as marking Seven Mile Point, descended here directly to the hummocked ice along the water's edge. She fell many times, traveling upon these hummocks; there were strange, treacherous places between the hummocks where, except for her snowshoes, she would have broken through. Her skirt was torn; she lost one of her gloves and could not stop to look for it; she fell again

and sharp ice cut her ungloved hand and blood froze upon her finger tips. She did not heed any of these things.

She was horrified to find that she was growing weak, and that her senses were becoming confused. She mistook at times floating ice, metallic under the moonlight, for boats; her heart beat fast then while she scrambled part way up the bluff to gain better sight and so ascertained her mistake. Deep ravines at places broke the shores; following the bend of the bluffs, she got into these ravines and only learned her error when she found that she was departing from the shore. She had come, in all, perhaps eight miles; and she was "playing out"; other girls, she assured herself—other girls would not have weakened like this; they would have had strength to make certain no boats were there, or at least to get help. She had seen no houses; those, she knew, stood back from the shore, high upon the bluffs, and were not easy to find; but she scaled the bluff now and looked about for lights. The country was wild and wooded, and the moonlight showed only the white stretches of the shrouding snow.

SHE descended to the beach again and went on; her gaze continued to search the lake, but now, wherever there was a break in the bluffs, she looked toward the shore as well. At the third of these breaks, the yellow glow of a window appeared, marking a house in a hollow between snow-shrouded hills. She turned eagerly that way; she could go only very slowly now. There was no path; at least, if there was, the snow drifts hid it. Through the drifts a thicket projected; the pines on the ravine sides overhead stood so close that only a silver tracery of the moonlight came through; beyond the pines, birch trees, stripped of their bark, stood black up to the white boughs.

Constance climbed over leafless briars and through brush and came upon a clearing perhaps fifty yards across, crescent-shaped, as it followed the configuration of the hills. Dead cornstalks, above the snow, showed plowed ground; beyond that, a little, black cabin huddled in the further point of the crescent, and Constance gasped with disappointment as she saw it. She had expected a farmhouse; but this plainly was not even that. The framework was of logs or poles which had been partly boarded over; and above the boards and where they were lacking, black building paper had been nailed, secured by big tin discs. The rude, weather-beaten door was closed; smoke, however, came from a pipe stuck through the roof.

She struggled to the door and knocked upon it, and receiving no reply, she beat upon it with both fists.

"Who's here?" she cried. "Who's here?"

The door opened then a very little, and the frightened face of an Indian woman appeared in the crack. The woman evidently had expected—and feared—some arrival; and was reassured when she saw only a girl. She threw the door wider open, and bent to help unfasten Constance's snowshoes; having done that, she led her in and closed the door.

Constance looked swiftly around the single room of the cabin. There was a cot on one side; there was a table, home carpentered, there were a couple of boxes for clothing or utensils. The stove, a good range once in the house of a prosperous farmer, had been bricked up by its present owners so as to hold fire. Dried onions and yellow ears of corn hung from the rafters; on the shelves were little birchbark canoes, woven baskets, and porcupine quill boxes of the ordinary sort made for the summer trade. Constance recognized the woman now as one who had come sometimes to the Point to sell such things, and who could speak fairly good English. The woman clearly had recognized Constance at once.

"Where is your man?" Constance had caught the woman's arm.

"They sent for him to the beach. A ship has sunk."

"Are there houses near here? You must run to one of them at once. Bring whoever you can get; or if you won't do that, tell me where to go."

The woman stared at her stolidly and moved away. "None near," she said. "Besides, you could not get somebody before some one will come."

"Who is that?"

"He is on the beach—Henry Spearman. He comes here to warm himself. It is nearly time he comes again."

"How long has he been about here?"

"Since before noon. Sit down. I will make you tea."

Constance gazed at her; the woman was plainly glad of her coming. Her relief—relief from that fear she had been feeling when she opened the door—was very evident. It was Henry, then, who had frightened her.

THE Indian woman set a chair for her beside the stove, and put water in a pan to heat; she shook tea leaves from a box into a bowl and brought a cup.

"How many on that ship?"

"Altogether there were thirty-nine,"

Constance replied.

"Some saved?"

"Yes; a boat was picked up yesterday morning with twelve."

The woman seemed making some computation which was difficult for her.

"Seven are living then," she said.