



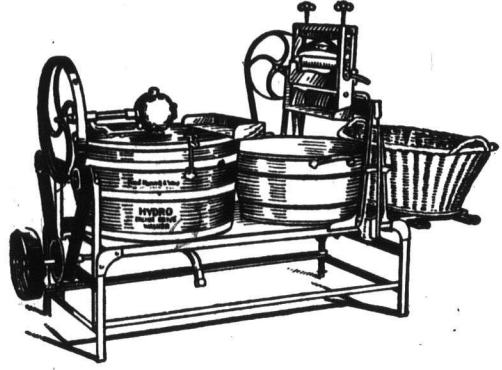
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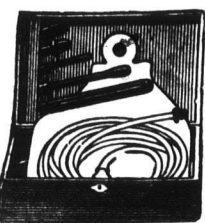
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"My child, if you are set on this, remember to use every precaution. The pistols—"

"I know. I'll take a gun, too."

"And the charcoal to rub on your eyelids to prevent snow-blindness—"

"Yes, yes."

"And the chocolate. Remember, too, your poor Uncle Jasper's fate, and don't lose your sense of direction. Take the old compass that's hanging on the nail yonder."

At the reference to her beloved uncle, her father's only brother, who had been lost in the snow four years previously when on a prospecting expedition, the girl paused. A shadow of pain crossed her face. John Williamson himself felt a clutch in his throat as he spoke, and to cover his emotion he turned to the big box stove in the centre of the room and threw some fresh hardwood logs on the fire.

Sunset arrived, but no mail team, so the factor's four dogs were hitched to the big sled, the packages placed thereon, and Madge Williamson with her snowshoes, weapons and lunch set off for Devine's Landing, thirty miles north and west. It was now nearly five o'clock, and everything going well and the dogs making their best speed, she would reach her destination well before midnight, passing the dread Beaver Rock about half-way. However, the long twilight of this northern land, together with the beautiful arctic lights which began soon after sundown to flash across the sky, made the great wintry expanses that stretched away from her on every side as bright almost as day. Deep-piled, glistening drifts, great stretches of glare ice, now and then a precarious bit of trail that skirted a small precipice—these were encountered and passed in an endless succession. On the whole the trail was a straight one. She had very little need of the compass, she decided.

The tinkle of the harness bells made a sort of monotonous music, pleasing and soothing. The tang of the air made the girl's cheeks red as holly berries. Now and then she broke into a snatch of song, for when one is only twenty and full of the joy of living, what are a few indefinite fears, more or less!

"There's Beaver Rock!" she exclaimed, at length. And as if the dogs heard and understood, the four of them set up a long howl in unison. But they kept on, steadily.

"Go it, Wolf! Go it, Jack!" she cried to the leaders. "Mush, boys! We'll spin around that old Rock like oiled lightning, won't we?"

"Yipe, yipe!" answered the dogs, and increased their speed by several knots.

The great Rock reared its beaver-shaped form from out a shallow valley by a small lake. Madge could discern the outlines of it while yet three or four miles away. As they drew nearer and nearer, in spite of her assumed bravado, Madge felt her heart beating rapidly, so rapidly it caught her breath occasionally. Also, it seemed to be getting colder. Or was it hunger that made her feel chilly and rather forlorn? She had no time to decide the question, for the next moment they had swung around a bend and were in full sight of Beaver Rock.

There it rose, not forty rods away, dark and massive and mysterious. A keen wind blew from the little frozen lake. Madge pulled her beaver cap down tighter over her ears, and in doing so probably saved her own life, for in that second of time the dogs suddenly whined, slackened quickly on the reins and came to an abrupt halt upon their haunches, throwing the girl violently off her balance and into the drifts. Her head just glanced by a sharp, jutting rock, but her shoulder received the full force of the blow, and, with a curious sense of weakness mingled with a dull, throbbing pain, she felt everything going black before her eyes.

How much time passed then she could not tell, either at the time or afterwards. When she came to, it was to smell a sharp odor of frying venison. Then she saw a dull light. Presently her eyes made out earth walls, a rude table, an oil lantern suspended from the roof and smoking badly, some shovels and picks leaning against a wall and an old gun hanging from a nail over the couch on which she lay. She started up, but was arrested by

a sharp stabbing pain in her right shoulder. As she fell back she moaned in agony, and lay panting for several moments trying to piece together the almost unaccountable bits of evidence before her. Was this a dream? How had she gotten into this sod shak? Where were the dogs?

She felt her bed. It was made of hide stretched on a frame and covered with buffalo skins and a coarse dark blanket. Then a voice spoke. It was a hoarse, deep voice—the voice of a man. She turned to find a tall, uncouth figure bending over her. It was a white man, although at first glance she thought he must surely be an Indian. A thick grizzly beard covered most of his chest. He smiled a vacuous sort of smile, even while he asked with rough sympathy, how she felt. His face was bronzed to the color of old leather and his garments were a motley assemblage of skins of various animals. When he spoke it seemed to be with difficulty, as though he had been so long accustomed to isolation from his kind that his mother tongue tripped on his lips.

Madge stared at him with growing fear. He was the oddest creature she had ever seen. But as he haltingly told her of the hot supper he had just prepared for her, she made an heroic effort to smile.

"I can't eat—yet," she said, nervously. "Where is my sled, and the dogs and the parcels? I must be going on presently. I—"

"Eat—drink," insisted the stranger. "It will give you strength. Come."

Madge swallowed some of the soup, and felt better.

"I thought you were a man," said the odd creature, grinning queerly, "till I picked you up. I didn't know there was a woman in all this region—only squaws."

"Who are you?" demanded the girl, pushing away his proffered meat. "I—I never saw you before."

The man leaned against the wall, still smiling. "I'm the Spirit of this white wilderness," he replied in a sing-song voice, as though repeating a part in a play. "I'm the owner of gold—much gold. But they're all afraid of me. They—" Here he broke into a queer, mirthless, cackling laugh.

"They call me 'The Windigo,'" he added, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper.

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Or Not It Is
Harmful**

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