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The Trail of the Chippeway Snowshoe

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knocked commandingly. Rather a timid voice responded "Entrez," and peering across the dim cabin Peter beheld Blaton, looking at him with an expression of suspense. Then as he threw back his parki hood and the Frenchman recognized him, the latter let forth a laugh of greeting, which seemed to Peter to bear also a note of relief.

"Ah, it is you, Peter Angus. Mon ami—my dear friend!" cried Blaton. "I am enchanted to see you—" and he held out a flabby hand, white from the flour bowl, for a Frenchman's friendly shake.

"You were expecting someone else, Monsieur?" queried Peter soberly, flinging his gear into a corner.

"Yes—no. That is—O mon ami, we have had such times! Such times! That wretched Indian shooting the driver quite near my home—it has been unpleasant, very embarrassing. I have had the police in and out, and I am so tired of the whole business."

Peter Angus looked at the man keenly. "Suppose I tell you that it was not an Indian who shot the driver?" he said slowly.

Blaton's eyes became very wide. His jaw dropped. He went a shade pale, and Peter, noting every sign, watched him closely. "Is that so?" gasped the settler. "Then you know who did it?" He stepped forward and clutched Peter by the arm. "Tell me who did it?" he whis-

pered earnestly. "Tell me and I will keep your secret."

But Peter shook himself disdainfully. "What business is it of mine?" he answered hotly. "I do not know, and if I did I would not tell one who babbles in his cups."

A cry broke from the settler's lips. He staggered back, his hands to his eyes. "Ah, you are like the priest, mon Dieu!" he cried. "You despise me because I am never sober. You, who are a halfbreed, despise me, a white man!" and he laughed uproariously. "Ah, mon petit, you may be a halfbreed in a thousand; you may be famous from Cripple Creek to the Labrador; but you must not forget you are only a—breed!"

Peter's color left him. A breed! How he hated that word, hurled so often in his face from jealous lips. "A breed I may be," he answered coldly, "but above all things on heaven and earth I try to live clean."

The Frenchman sank back on the bench, clutching the table edge for support. "Ah, mon ami, you are young," he cried. "You have your youth, your glorious youth! Wait till that leaves you, then the gnawing, bitter loneliness of this land will crush the very soul out of you! Wait till you see your ideals sliding by one by one, your dreams unrealized, as I have done, and the prime of your life gone. Wait till you have learnt that there is but one man in all this world you can trust and believe, and that man yourself—then perhaps your strength will become your weakness, and

you will drift—drift as I have done!"

"Never!" cried Peter, then suddenly a great wave of pity welled up within him for this poor, broken derelict, washed to the outside edge like so much of the flotsam and jetsam of humanity. "Ah, my friend, you are not the only one I have seen broken at the wheel of these northern camps," he pursued. "I have known them in Porcupine and the Yukon, and away up in that land God gave to Cain—the Labrador coast, but every one of them, like you, threw up the sponge ere he was really beaten. See, you are fit and strong! You want to leave this loneliness behind and get back to the World, where you can do a man's work in a country for men. What is there to hold you here—what future is there for you? Nothing but drink—drink—drink!"

The settler shook his head. "It is too late now," he said. "I cannot go."

Peter looked at him keenly. "Then by heaven I'll make you!" he said.

"How?"

"Wait and see. Now give me some supper. Tell me the news, for in a few hours I must get on towards Portage of the Woods."

"You have business to take you there?" queried the Frenchman.

"Important business."

Blaton heaved a sigh of relief. This young man was not interested, then, in the recent tragedy.

Peter now received, detail for detail, an account of what had happened—how the halfbreed had come in late at night, stayed overnight, and departed next morning. Blaton had no inkling of the tragedy till some days later the police arrived to find out what had happened to the driver and his packet, the dogs having returned with gnawed and dangling harness.

Peter listened intently, made no comment, and turned in. At dawn, while the Frenchman still slept, he got up, made his breakfast, left cash on the table, and pulled out.

That day Peter's woodcraft was to stand him in good stead, for he had only the tracks in the snow to guide him. First of all he made himself familiar with the imprints of the snowshoes left by the police, then with those of the halfbreed. He was not long in discovering that Blaton had told him at least one lie. This was when the Frenchman said that the halfbreed left at daybreak, for, by studying the signs, Peter found where the halfbreed had dropped his hunting knife and gone back to look for it, striking matches which littered the spot where the knife had lain. "A man does not strike matches in broad daylight," said Peter to himself. He went on slowly, examining the signs. They were difficult to read, for everywhere were the imprints of the returning sled dogs, and also, the police seemed to have made a point of trampling back and forth.

Presently Peter stopped with an exclamation. Here was the mark of yet another snowshoe, not that of the police nor yet of the driver, but a long Chippeway snowshoe, probably that of an Indian. The man had come out from the bush edge, peered up the river, then stolen back again into the cover, following the sled under shelter of the trees.

"It looks bad for the Indian," said Peter to himself. He turned again to the tracks of the dog team. He saw that the driver had quickened his pace, using his whips mercilessly, for there in the very snow were the marks of the leash.

Had the man seen the following Indian? Was it this that had caused his state of terror? No, for every here and there he had turned from lashing his dogs and peered in the direction of the dark trees along the left bank of the river, while the Indian was following along the right bank.

Peter went to the left bank and searched the trees. What he saw startled him, and set his finger tips tingling. It was the tracks of a huge wolf.

Quicker went the halfbreed driver, and still quicker, edging now to the right bank of the river where the Indian stalked, and as he did so the wolf came out upon the open ice, gradually closing in upon him. Here the driver had begun to cast off the contents of the sled, so as to add to the fleetness of his dogs.

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