

❁ ❁ The Story Page. ❁ ❁

Nijnavik the Hunter.

A Brief Tale of Yule-tide in the Klondike.

WRITTEN FOR THE MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

The air is bitterly cold, and the frosty snow frolics among the projecting rocks, fluffy as flakes of down from the winter coat of the eagle.

Nijnavik, the hunter, has been creeping for more than an hour up the rugged side of a mountain. A stranger might scarcely see him, clothed as he is in wolf-skin, ploughing aloft through the snow-drifts, as white as a rabbit in winter, for his garments are loaded with snow-flakes.

Now he has come to a wall of rock where no creature could gain a foothold, he knows that he must be almost at his destination. Giving a slight shrug of his shoulders as he thinks of the chasm beneath him, he creeps toward a shaggy spruce and vanishes among its motherly branches; then he climbs up carefully, every motion of the tree bringing down bushels of snow, until he is high enough to see over the wall of rock into a little valley.

Soon a gleam of exultation glows in his snaky eye, for he has guessed correctly; there, in a sheltered nook, not thirty yards away several mountain sheep are standing. He seizes their mild eyes blinking, as the level sunlight strikes them from a rift near the eastern horizon. Getting himself fixed among the branches, he draws a short rifle from under his coat and waits for a little, until two of the beautiful creatures may arrange themselves so that one-bull shall make them both his own.

The Pale-faces have offered him \$50-a piece for as many sheep as he can capture; he wonders at their offer, but having heard them speak of Christmas coming, he supposes that Christmas is one of the gods they worship; so he wanders alone on the mountains, for no one would venture out with him while the mercury froze by the fire. They wait for their cold Christmas dinner, and wish they were home by the oven where the sizzling round and aroma are exceedingly full of suggestions.

Nijnavik cares nothing for Christmas; he received his harsh name from the Russians, but in everything else he is heathen. He is one of "The men of Yukon," the wolf was his dark mother's totem, his father belonged to the eagles; he tries to be savage and daring—as fierce as a wolf in his actions. He has danced by his father's dead body while the funeral-pyre was burning, and shouted with demon-like frenzy when the hags forced his timid young mother to prove to the tribe her devotion by lying beside the dead body till her hair was burned off by the fire. He slaughtered a slave, and then burned him that his father might still have a servant; then he joined in the mad celebration and thrust his harpoon through the body to frighten away evil spirits.

The rugged hunter sits now with a stolid expression on his sunburned face; he is getting uncomfortable, for his feet are numb with the cold. The mountain sheep have begun to move and uncover small patches of brown moss. Now, ready, he fires; one of the creatures is down, another leaps wildly forward and over the edge of a precipice; Nijnavik sees it strike on a long sheet of ice, and scoot to the trail more than a mile away.

No sooner has the body struck the trail than a dozen hungry adventurers who are encamped nearby rush to the spot and, using their knives, hack it to pieces and breakfast on the raw flesh that is still quivering with life. The owner can see the Pale-faces, but wastes not a moment to watch them; he expected no good at their hands, and so he is not disappointed; the fox and the wolf and the eagle have fattened on many a carcass while he strode alone to his cabin.

He climbs higher up the tree, keeping on the side next the rock, until the tree bends from his weight and allows him to fix his feet in a crevice, when, rebounding, it throws its whole load of snow into the gulf beneath. A minute later Nijnavik with his prize on shoulder and rifle in hand is following the trail of the fleeing game down an easier slope to the valley. A gaunt wolf slinks to the spot where the blood stains the frozen snow and crouches the crimson ice.

The sun is declining toward the western summits before Nijnavik the hunter reaches his little turf hut under the ledge of a projecting rock, but he drags two plump mountain sheep when he comes within sight of his cabin. Somebody inside hears him and opens the door for her master, then she takes some dried fish from the rafters and hurries to get him his supper. She gets the dogs harnessed and loads the sled while he eats, and soon he is on his way to the Pale-face encampment, wondering how near they will keep to the promise they made him the evening before in the rum shop.

Now that Nini the house-wife is free again, she goes on with her work, making nets for the river and repairing the traps that were broken. Suddenly she starts up as if at the command of a spirit, and overturning a heap of fox skins brings out a pair of beautifully wrought moccasins; she has been looking forward for weeks, ever since the work was done, to this evening, not to give

them to husband or children; but to offer them up to the river. One of the children cries in its sleep, then it wakens and bellows in earnest; she takes down a lump of tallow from a sooty ledge, out of reach of children and dogs, and gives it to the quivering child; the little thing tries to gnaw its "candy" with its toothless gums, and soon is asleep like the others.

Now that all is still, she catches up a hatchet, and hurries from the hut with the moccasins securely hidden under her short fur cloak, never glancing to the right or to the left until she slides down the steep bank of the river, and turns to a steaming spring-hole where she often has fished by the hour, and prayed to the fish and the river; she throws in the beautiful buskins, and laughs when the river receives them. Her sad laugh resounds through the forest.

Soon she hastens back in her foot-prints, and grins with a grim sense of pleasure, but clenches her teeth in a moment when she thinks of a little frozen form far away in the forest;—it is the body of her first girl-baby; she has left the frail little thing for the wolves to eat, rather than see her live to be the drudge that she herself has been. She argues it surely is better to 'transit' in innocent childhood, than loaded with crimes of a lifetime, from this to the spirit-life after. She never has heard of a Saviour, and knows no escape from her burden.

A hundred times she has cursed her own mother, when she thinks of the time that Nijnavik came to their home by the seashore carrying a load of blankets, ten of which were enough to buy her; then in the prime of her girlhood, from all that she knew of a home-life. Since that time, ten dozen moons have been gobbled by the great serpent, and another has now almost ripened, but she never was loved, nor respected.

It is Christmas-eve in the Klondike; but what does it mean to the natives? There they live, in our land, born Canadians, with a soul to each stout greasy body. Did Jesus Christ come to these people, and has he said go, teach, and save them? Oh say are we true men and women if we leave that great land to the devil; if the foulest of crimes are left rampant; if the base gambling-den, and the rum-shop, and evils too horrid to mention, are left to destroy our own people? Shall we leave Nijnavik the hunter, and Nini his bosom-companion, to fall by this scourge, and go downward,—as others around them are going? If we do, there is blood on our garments. We are false both to them and their Father.

Nini is soon home, she feels a faint glow of pride because Nijnavik is one of "The men of the Yukon," and not a base Chilkoot, or low Eskimo; she knows that there is no better hunter than he in the whole country,—a country more than ten times as great as the Maritime Provinces; she hopes that his boys will be like him; she knows of no higher ideal, for the whole group of gods have been guilty.

A low noise is heard at the door, it is not any phantom with r'andees, who finds that the hut has no chimney; she opens, and in rush the dogs, with the sled and their master behind them. Surely Nijnavik has a burden; he throws off the robes, and there, lying on the hunter's breast, is a Pale-face. As quickly as possible they bathe and chafe his frozen limbs; he is breathing, but his features are frozen, and his eyes have an unearthly stare; they stretch out his form on a mattress, and Nini makes haste with the supper, while Nijnavik hangs up the dog-sled after loosing his steeds from the harness; as he goes to hand his wife a handful of gold—the price of his venison, he notices a motherly dog licking the face of the unconscious stranger.

By slow degrees the stranger, who was lost on the plains by the river, already unconscious in death-sleep, revived by the warmth and attention; he moves, then he sighs, and he murmurs: "It is dark," "take me home" "to my mother." Neither master nor wife knows his language; he struggles, and speaks with an effort, his lips cannot move, so he murmurs with a weird and unusual cadence. Now his mind has returned to the Klondike, and his faculties feel the excitement; he murmurs distinctly what follows:—

The winter night broods cold and dark

On grim Al-ak-shak's mountains,
Belated fishes, stiff and stark,
Sleep in her icy fountains.

There is silence again, as he draws in a long quivering breath, then he murmurs some indistinct sentences; but soon breaks out strongly:—

The fox and wolf, each other's foe,
Hunt hunger-driven through the snow;
Aloft, the hawk, with eager eye,
Can neither food nor life descry,
Though wheeling too and fro;
When lo, some hidden hunter's mark,
It flutters from the freezing sky
Into the frozen dark!

If anybody thinks this picture of native life overdrawn, please read Dr Sheldon Jackson's book on Alaaka. This little tale is told so that all may know the conditions

of affairs on Christmas eve in some homes in Christian Canada.

As you drop presents into tiny stockings, will you not think of what Christmas means to us; and then what we ought to make it mean to our fellow-citizens in the Klondike?
JERRIMIAH S. CLARK
Acadia University.

Seventy Times Seven.

MARY S. DANIELS.

John and Gladys were on the piazza Monday afternoon. Gladys had a box of bright colored glass beads, from which she was making a necklace for Sweet Alice, her doll. There were to be a ruby, an emerald, a topaz, and an amethyst necklace. The unfinished strings were laid carefully on the work-table beside her, as she selected the beads of each color.

John was playing cars. He had a train made up of his old box cart for the freight, his new express wagon as the passenger coach, and the doll's carriage for a parlor car. He himself was the engine, and he was steaming and tooting with all his might.

"Don't come here, John," said Gladys, as he came rattling around the corner of the piazza, dangerously near her table. "This station is on a branch road, and the train don't run to it."

"Choo! choo!" said the engine, switching off.

"Take care, John," said Gladys again, a few minutes later, as the train came still nearer. "I am afraid you'll upset the table and spill my beads."

"Choo! Choo! Ding-a-ling!"

Away went the train. But the engineer must have been very forgetful; for presently the train came driving around at full speed, and before it could be stopped the table was overturned and its contents were rolling in all directions.

"O John," said Gladys, her face scarlet with vexation. "What did I tell you?"

Then she stopped suddenly, as if she had just remembered something. John looked at the scattered beads in dismay.

"I'm awfully sorry, Glad," he began, "Indeed, I didn't mean to spoil your pretty things! I'll help you pick them up and string them again."

John was always sorry, but it did not make him careful. "Never mind, John," said Gladys, quietly; "I'll forgive you."

She had been thinking hard for a minute of the lesson the minister read in church Sunday:

"Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven."

Gladys had a quick temper which gave her a good deal of trouble; but she was earnestly trying to be good, and resolved to obey this lesson.

John looked grateful as well as penitent. He knew Gladys had reason to be vexed with him; and he had expected she would take her doll's carriage out of his train at the very least.

But Gladys was saying to herself, "Seventy times seven. That's four hundred and ninety times, but after that—" She shut her lips tight. Somehow she felt as if a little discipline might be better for heedless John than so much forgiveness.

Gladys was a very wide awake little girl, always seeking questions and trying to understand things. So she knew something about keeping accounts from seeing mamma's housekeeping books.

"I'll have to keep a forgiveness account," she thought, "so as to know when it's seventy times seven."

So before she went to bed she wrote at the top of a clean page in her last year's copy book: "List of the times I forgive John," and under this: "Monday. For spilling my beads."

But just then she remembered that that very day she upset a block tower that John had built to show papa when he came home, and John had not been the least cross with her.

"I suppose I ought to count that on the other side," said Gladys, who had a very strong sense of justice.

So after thinking a minute or two she wrote slowly on the opposite page: "The times John forgives me: Monday. For knocking down his tower."

And of course this made her and John even.

The next day the list on her page was longer. Then for two or three days they were even again.

Saturday was one of those days when everybody seems to go wrong, and when Gladys conscientiously made up her account at bedtime, she found that John had forgiven her four times more than she had forgiven him.

On Sunday there was nothing to put down on either side.

Monday ended a week and Gladys "added up."

Her list seemed long; but alas! after the times John