

With a heart less buoyant than at any time since he left home he crossed the river to the opposite side from which the straggling wolves had taken their departure and hastened on with all speed until he journeyed several miles away knowing that it was useless to look for any game nearer to the scene of the conflict and uproar of the previous afternoon and night.

With advancing day he became more wary and cautious. His stealthy step fell noiseless upon the fleecy snow, his keen eyes sought out and investigated every likely spot and possible lurking place where the quarry he sought might be concealed. All the knowledge and skill of the wily Indian were working at their best.

But no game came in range, and not even an odd track was found in the snow to give encouragement. Every hour brought him nearer to the settlement and his chances were rapidly growing less and less, but the Virgin's promise still buoyed him up, and the goddess Hope still spurred him on.

He needed no sun in the heavens to tell him it was past mid-day and that night would soon be at hand. He worked back toward the top of the divide where he hoped he might find some game yarded. He followed the crest of the hill with all the patience and skill of the most ardent still hunter, every sense keen, alert, tense. But no pleasing sight of game rewarded his efforts. His heart sunk within him.

Must he go home empty-handed? The afternoon was well spent and he had now but few miles to go.

But what a Christmas eve for the proud Sabattis! Fate as cruel as stern had deprived him of his fresh meat and Christmas good cheer. The day was spent and night was at hand. There was no use to hunt longer. He would go home.



The relation of his adventure will at least tell the tale of his success, and his fortunate escape will break the force and dull the edge of the cruel, crushing disappointment. With tired footsteps and a heavy heart Sabattis slowly descended the sloping hill-side and in the early twilight he was again upon the ice of the Sebasticook. The ice along the shore was safe but occasional reaches of open water were discernible where the current was swift.

He hastened on,—but was it the haste of despair? Sabattis would have said no! He will yet succeed, he cannot now see how, but somewhere,—somehow. "Sabattis will succeed!" "Sabattis will succeed!" kept ringing in his ears,—and to him the promise was as real as life itself.

The twilight of early evening deepened into the darkness of night and he hurried on.

The great full moon rose resplendent in the east, and the outlying cabins of the village came into view. Already the windows of the little chapel are aglow with light, as loving hands of old and young make it more beautiful with a wealth of fragrant evergreen as a fitting decoration for the midnight Mass which is soon to usher in the feast of the Nativity.

The open channel in the river swept in close to the shore.