

The Trail of the Chippeway Snowshoe

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"Tell me about it, little sister," he commanded her. And she told. Her husband had been arrested for shooting a halfbreed dog driver away on the trail for Portage of the Woods. The man was found dead on the trail, though so mauled either by wolves or by his own sled dogs that he was practically unrecognizable. His dogs had arrived back at the trading post trailing their harness, and the police, setting out to search for the driver, found what has been described. In the snow near the murdered halfbreed they found snowshoe signs—saw where the man wearing the snowshoes had followed, then finally dropped on one knee and fired, evidently the shot that killed the dog driver. The police forthwith searched the forest, and found the Indian, this woman's husband, camping near. Searching him the police found that he had pilfered the packet, for in his possession were many of the things the halfbreed was carrying, among others the latter's hunting knife.

By this condemning evidence it was pretty clear that the Indian had shot the dog driver in order to rob him, and so they had arrested the man for murder and robbery on the trails.

"But he did not do it!" cried Moniave. "He found the driver lying dead, just as the police found him later, so was he not justified in taking such things as he wanted when he went his way?"

"It was foolish of him," said Peter Angus. "But, of course, he did not understand. When did this thing happen?"

"Ten sleeps ago. I have come straight here."

"Ten sleeps," repeated Peter. "Then no snow has fallen since." He rose, took up his parki and his stampede pack.

"Where are you going?" asked the woman.

"To the Hudson's Bay."

"It is ten sleeps distant," she cried. "I shall do it in five."

"When do you start?" asked the woman.

"Now," replied Peter. He stood at the doorway, looking back at her. "Stay here till you are fed and rested," he said.

"Close the door when you go. I am going to see for myself what happened, and if we find that your husband is not guilty of this thing you will know, when he returns to you, that the God of the white man's sun is all just and powerful. I have spoken."

And he was gone.

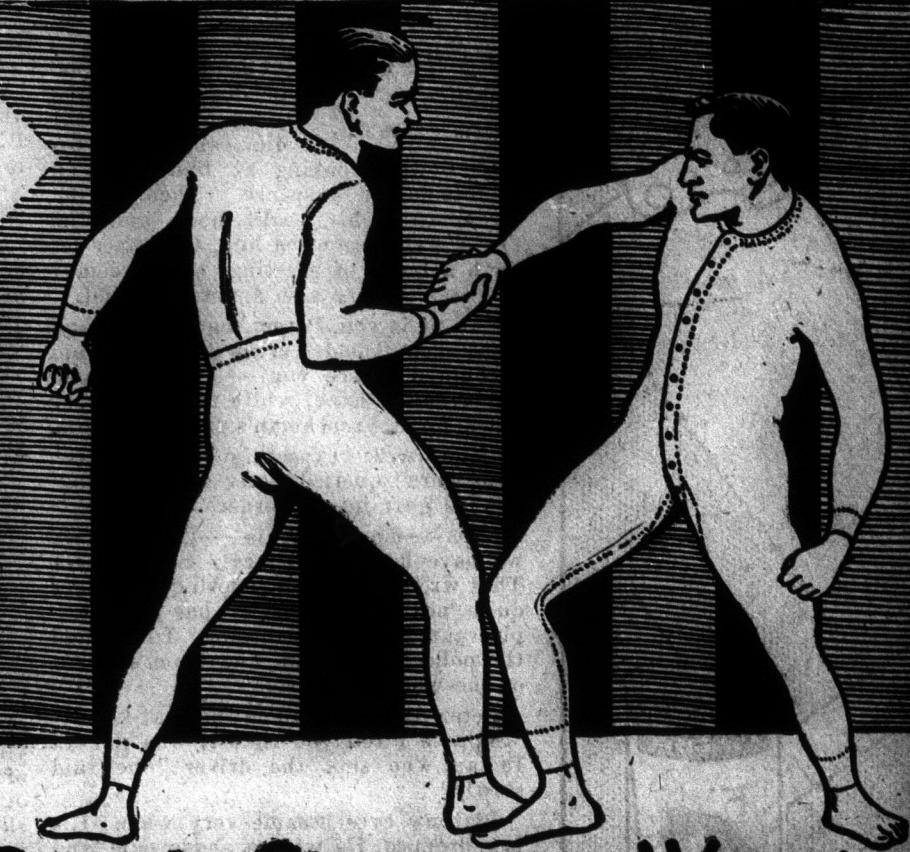
II.

Peter Angus knew the locality where the crime had happened. The halfbreed was travelling between Moose Factory and Portage of the Woods, trading posts about two hundred miles apart. There was only one stopping place between these two posts, the cabin of a French-Canadian settler named Blaton, a half-way house, so to speak, where every traveller was sure of a bunk and plenty of grub. It is to be feared that Blaton dealt also in another kind of refreshment—that, in fact, the loneliness of his life had got him down, and like so many similarly placed he had taken to drinking.

The murdered halfbreed had been found only a few miles on the northward side of Blaton's cabin, so it was for Blaton's cabin that Peter Angus headed, over silent lakes covered with wolf tracks, through dense timber and along shadowy creeks, guided by his superb knowledge of the country and by his equally wonderful sense of direction. At an easy, swinging lope he went, mile after mile, making camp long after darkness fell, and rising, white with frost, from his wolf-like crouch before the dawn. Many times he heard wolves skulking after him, but he took not the least notice of them—save for once, when they came too near. Then he turned, a grim and motionless figure, his rifle ready, and waited till the cold warned him to move on, but by then the wolves also had moved on, having no nerve for an encounter with that erect and fearless figure.

At the end of the fifth day Peter swung up to the door of Blaton's forest-marooned shanty, hung up his snowshoes, placed his rifle under the eaves, and

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