

Peter would suffer as the night drew on! Fear might kill him or drive him mad!

Suddenly and silently, snow began to circle down out of the brooding sky. "So!" exclaimed Pierre. "I have done my best! Then I must be quick of hand and eye on the night of the new moon." He turned and struck out swiftly on the back trail. The circling flakes weaved a curtain of mystery and silence around him. He thought of the hidden menaces of the wilderness, and his heart ached again for Little Peter. He pictured him in the darkening cabin, crouched close to the hearth, crying quietly. It was for the child he suffered!—for himself, it was a matter to laugh at! Had he nothing but his own safety to consider he would simply press forward until the trail vanished in the new snow and then make camp until the storm was over. He had spent many a night under the winter sky, his bed a trench in the drifted snow. But now he changed his long stride to a trot, determined to win back to familiar landmarks before the prints of the racquets were entirely obliterated. This would require no great skill or endurance; but anxiety for Little Peter, unnerving him and flustering his wits, made it look a desperate undertaking.

Vastly to his relief, Pierre Lacrosse arrived in safety at his shack about mid-afternoon. The snow was still circling down, unstirred by any wind, filling the breathless gloom with a frail, million-footed rustling that was audible to the spirit, rather than the ear. Pierre sounded the familiar signal on the door, and was answered by a quick, glad cry. The latch was lifted. Striding in, snow-cloaked and with the snow-banked racquets still on his feet, he let his rifle fall clattering to the floor and lifted his son in his hungry arms. The night of the new moon, only two days distant, was forgotten.

On the night of the new moon the

light over the wilderness was shimmering and dim. The high stars, glinting above a scarcely perceptible haze of frost, cast a tangled, subdued radiance across the forest spires. Running Thunder slipped out of the shimmer and shadow of the spruces, quiet himself as a shadow, and stole across the narrow clearing to Pierre Lacrosse's shack. He carried his rifle in his hand, with cartridges in the magazine and one in the breech, but indecision was stirring in his heart. He saw firelight, like a red shadow, wavering on the frosted panes of the tiny window. He crept along the side of the shack, high on the drifted snow, and laid his ear to the frame of the window. He could hear nothing. He drew back a little and pulled one of his heavy, fur-lined mittens from his hand. "I must get him mad," he reflected, "and I must get mad myself. I can't shoot him in cold blood, like I would a porcupine."

He tapped on the frosted pane with his bare fingers, then held the empty mitten against the glass, keeping his hand behind the frame. A rifle *whanged* viciously! The mitten flew from his fingers and tinkling fragments of glass fell inwards to the floor.

In the startled, ringing silence that followed, Running Thunder smiled grimly. "He has taken first shot! Now it is my turn!" he muttered. Still kneeling, still smiling grimly, he turned toward the end of the shack in which the one door was situated. His victim would soon be out to ascertain the result of his quick shot. He waited, the muzzle of his rifle advanced, his thumb on the hammer, his forefinger on the trigger. Then a surprising, disconcerting sound caught his ear—the sound of a child crying and the voice of the half-breed striving to comfort. Light came to him in a flash. But why had the stranger not told him about the papoose that day they met on the trail? He continued to kneel, quiet and