

Breakfast that morning took less time than lunch the day before. Both Murray, the young miner who was with me, and the Indian were anxious. All the Indian hunting camps were deserted; their fires had been cold for a week; we were the last on the river, and as we had no 'grub' with us we should not be able to get either up stream again or down stream to Wrangel before the ice became solid. In the meantime we should have to sit still amongst those impenetrable black pines in the deep snow and slowly starve to death. Better men, we knew, had done so before us, and we set our teeth and struggled through the ice all day, grudging ourselves time to speak or eat. We were pulling an oar apiece, and the Indian helped us a good deal with his paddle, though steering was his principal business; we only stopped when it was so dark that we dare not go on any further, and were rewarded by making over sixty miles in the day.

I confess that neither Murray (a man of eight-and-twenty, lean and spare, but weighing 215 lbs.) nor I could feel much life left in our arms when we stopped, but that did not trouble us. The ice was behind us, and could not catch us again. It would be open to us to go as far south that winter as we pleased, and we could laugh at our fears; though, if the truth be told, we had both of us had our eyes fixed almost all day upon a certain mountain far up the river, which, seen in a strange yellow mist peculiar to the wintry North, seemed like a vampire with spread wings hurrying after us. Even the Indian noticed its fantastic form. 'All same devil,' he said, and then turned his head and put a pound or two more beef into his paddling.

Next day we crossed to Wrangel, leaving our mast and the thwart through which it was stepped, blown overboard *en route*, and then the gates of Jötunheim are closed against us for six months. Ice and snow are now over everything; on the river all is deadly still; even the bears sleep; only somewhere, far above the cañon, away on the 'Hyland' and the 'Muddy,' two friends of mine are buried for the winter, and, in spite of anything the thermometer chooses to register, still hunt the moose and the caribou for food and sport, maintaining that they have a right to decide for themselves what is and what is not pleasure.

What a pity for some of us that Valhalla is not to be relied upon as the scene for the second act!