

Beyond the Second Portage 17

the broken ground the pace grew steadier, and conversation became possible once more.

'Duke Radford began to talk then with almost feverish haste, but he carefully avoided any mention of the news contained in the boatbuilder's letter, and a sickening fear of something, she knew not what, crept into the heart of Katherine and spoiled for her the glory of that winter afternoon. The sun went down in flaming splendours of crimson and gold, a young moon hung like a sickle of silver above the dark pine forest, and everywhere below was the white purity of the fresh-fallen snow.

Supper was nearly ready when they got back to Roaring Water Portage, but there were two or three customers in the store, and Katherine went to help her father with them, while Miles unharnessed and fed the four dogs. Oily Dave was one of the people gathered round the stove waiting to be served with flour and bacon, and it was his voice raised in eager talk which Katherine heard when she came back from the sitting-room into the store.

"If it's true what they are saying, that Barton, Skinner, & Co. are in liquidation, then things is going to look queer for some of us when the spring comes, and the question will be as to who can claim the boats, though some of them ain't much good."

"I suppose that you'll stick to your'n, seeing that it is by far the best in the fleet," said another man, who had a deep, rumbling laugh.

Katherine looked at her father in dumb surprise. She had been expecting him to announce the news of the fishing boats having been bought by the Englishman with the remarkable name, instead of which he was just going on with his work, and