

It was not large, but beautifully proportioned, and lavishly ornamented, though with admirable taste; and it seemed that it had only just been completed. That was clear from its general freshness of appearance, and from the staring purity of the stone facings. He paused in the still unpaved road outside the churchyard, and read the sign which announced the name of the church, and that the Vicar was the Rev. James Weekes, living at Lilith Cottage, Burnham road. The sexton's name was stated to be William Whitley, and he lived, it appeared, at Thorn's Cottage. The hours of service were also given.

During all the time that he stood there not a soul had appeared in sight in any direction. Not a house fronted the open space which he had just traversed; not a house, indeed, was near, except the one hidden away behind old and crumbling garden walls.

HE opened the gate softly, and went to the front door. As he had expected, he found it locked. He came out of the porch and walked round the side of the building until he came at last to the little side door, that led, no doubt, into the clergyman's room, the robing-room, and other offices near the chancel. But this door was also fastened. The windows he scanned carefully. Those of the church were too high to be easily accessible, and probably would not open even if he could reach them. There were small windows near the side door, evidently lighting the clergyman's study; but these were not only fast, but were protected by heavy iron bars outside.

He walked on past the flying buttresses at the corner, and round by the east end; but there was no other door or opening until he came close to the wall that divided the churchyard from the grounds of the house next door. There in the corner was an opening into what appeared to be a cellar. He stepped down, and peered into the darkness.

A pair of yellow eyes gleamed at him. Percy's muscles stiffened, and then he gave a short laugh as a large black cat walked leisurely out and scrambled on to the wall. He lighted a match, and walked into the darkness. He saw that he was near the furnace which heated the building. He

thought it likely that there might be an entrance somewhere near, and by the light of matches he walked carefully round the place, examining the walls, his boots making an eerie scrunch of cinders and coke with every step. At last—a little staircase, and the door at the top opened to his hand. He stood looking into the church.

The afternoon sun filtered through the stained-glass windows, casting soft shadows of sumptuous rich colour on the interior, softening the staring white of the walls, darkening the new carved oak pews, and diffusing an atmosphere of æsthetic benediction all about. It almost seemed to Percy Marshall that, in stealing thus into that sacred building, he had profaned a sanctuary; that, even in suspecting that under that roof a deed of ruthless horror had been done, he had committed an act of sacrilege.

On tiptoe—an unconscious testimony to the spirit of the place—he walked the length of the nave, until at last he stood before the oaken door that led into the tower. It was pierced near the top by three lozenge-shaped openings, and he caught the faint, close odour that comes from dark places shut out from sunshine and air.

He softly turned the handle. The door was fastened, but seemed to yield slightly to his pressure. He pushed with his foot.

The bottom gave for nearly an inch. It was clear that the door was bolted from within near the top. He put his hand through one of the openings, and found the bolt. He drew it softly down, and the door flew open.

In front of him was a flight of stone steps, twining round a central post. He began a slow ascent, examining each stair with the utmost care by the light of successively lighted matches.

THE tower had been so lately completed that there had as yet accumulated none of the usual dust; hence he came to a landing without having discovered the faintest signs that anybody had ever been up or down those silent stairs. There was a small open arch—though there were wooden shutters by which it could be closed—on this landing! but Marshall knew that he had not arrived at his destination. He was still in the square tower; and the landing he sought was in the pointed spire. After a careful examination, which revealed nothing,

he commenced the ascent of the long ladder which now took the place of the staircase. As he climbed round by round, he saw that the sides were closing in on him, and that above him was a trap-door. If he could open that door—he, too, would be looking on the landing into which the telescope had looked. What should he find?

With knees pressed against the rounds of the ladder, and back of head resting against the side of the opening, he was able to use his two hands. The heavy trap-door moved upward, and he swung it one side, and put his head through the opening. A whirl of wings, as he startled a couple of cooing pigeons; that was all. He stepped on the landing, and replaced the trap-door, lest in the narrow space he should fall through the opening. The rays of the afternoon sun shone obliquely through the arch. He examined every inch of the place—nothing—not a hint, not a scratch on the boards, no dust, not the tiniest red spot.

Percy Marshall began to believe that, after all, he had come on a wild-goose chase. There was still another ladder, however, leading upwards. Quickly he ascended, useless as it seemed. He would be able to return to Margaret with the statement that whatever she saw was not tragedy. He rapidly calculated that he could get back to town, change, and be at the flat by eight o'clock.

The air grew hot as he climbed, and the narrow spire shut in on him. He felt that a search up there was useless—but he went on.

When near the top he scratched his hand on a nail. He lighted a match. Clinging to the nail was a little piece of yellow silk—a little triangular piece.

Percy caught his breath. The telescope had not lied after all.

Placing the tiny fragment in his pocket, he rapidly continued the ascent. Above his head was now another trap-door, smaller than the one underneath—not more than two feet across. The whole width of the spire here could not have exceeded eight feet.

Notwithstanding his utmost efforts, however, he could not move the door away. It yielded slightly to his two hands, braced against it as they had been braced against the one below, but he could not push

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THE LITTLE BULL OF THE BARRENS

How the Musk-ox Fared with the Trapper and the Wolves

By CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

THROUGH the thick drive of the snowflakes—small, hard, bitter flakes, borne on the long wind of the terrible copper mine barrens—the man and the beast stood staring at each other, motionless. In the beast's eyes was heavy wonder, mixed with curiosity and dread. Never before had he seen any being like this erect, slim shape, veiled and vague and dark in the whirling drift. He felt it to be dangerous; but he was loath to tear himself away from the scrutiny of it.

The man, on the other hand, had neither wonder, curiosity, nor dread in his gaze. He knew that the black and massive apparition before him was a musk ox. His first impulse had been to snatch up his rifle and shoot, before the beast could fade off into the white confusion of the storm; but his practised eye had told him that the animal was an old bull. His necessity was not fierce enough to drive him to the eating of such flesh,—tough, and reeking to nausea with musk. He wanted a young cow, whose meat would be tender and sweet as caribou. He was content to wait, knowing that the herd must be near and would not leave these feeding grounds unless frightened. At this season the black bull, then staring at him heavily through the drift, would not be solitary.

The man was a trapper, who was making his way down the river to the Hudson Bay Company's post at the mouth. Through failure of the caribou to come his way, according to their custom, his supplies had run short, and he was seeking the post in good time, before the pinch of hunger should fix itself upon him. But he had had bad luck. The failure of the caribou had hit others besides himself. The wolves had suffered by it. Perhaps, in their shrewd and savage spirits, they had blamed the man for the absence of their accustomed quarry. Some weeks before his start they had craftily picked off his dogs, a reasonable and satisfying retaliation. There being no other means of

travel the man was now hauling the sledge himself.

In a moment's lift of the storm the man had noted a little valley, a depression in the vast, wind swept level of the barrens, lying but a couple of stones' throw aside from the banks of the river that was his guide. He knew that there he would find a dense growth of the stunted firs that spring up wherever they can find shelter from the wind. There, he knew, he would find dry stuff in plenty for his fire. There he would take covert till the storm should go down and suffer him to trail the musk ox herd.

After eyeing the black bull steadily for some minutes, he softly turned away, and without haste made for the Valley of the Little Firs, dragging the laden sledge behind him.

The black bull snorted thickly and took several steps forward. The strange figure fading silently away through the drift evidently feared him. A fleeing foe was surely to be followed; but that long, dark shape, crawling at the stranger's heels, that looked formidable and very mysterious. The beast stopped, shook his head, snorted again more loudly, and drew back those few paces he had advanced. Perhaps it was just as well not to be too bold in interrogating the Unknown. After a few moments of hesitation he wheeled aside, lifted his massive and shaggy head, sniffed the air, listened intently, and withdrew to rejoin the little herd, which was lying down and contentedly chewing the cud, all indifferent to the drive of the polar storm.

The black bull of the barrens, as he stood and eyed the resting herd contemplatively, showed small in stature but extraordinarily massive in build. A scant six feet in length from muzzle to tail, and not over three feet high at the shoulder, he was modeled, nevertheless, on lines that for power a mammoth might have envied. His square frame was clothed with long blackish hair reaching almost to the fetlocks. His ponderous head, maned and

shaggy, was armed with short crescent horns, keen tipped and serviceable for battle. And he carried it swung low, muzzle in and front well forward, always ready for defense against the enemies of the herd.

The herd numbered some dozen or fifteen cows, armed and powerful like their mates, several younger bulls, and perhaps a dozen yearling or two-year-old calves. At one moment, as the fierce drift slackened, they would all be more or less visible, shrouded, dark forms with contemplative eyes, peacefully ruminating. A moment more and they would vanish, as the snow again closed down about them.

IT was the old bull alone that seemed to be thoroughly on the alert. Hither and thither, with a certain slow vigilance, he moved through the herd. All at once he lifted his head sharply and questioned the air with dilating nostrils, while his eyes gleamed with anger and anxiety. The next instant he stamped his foot and gave a loud, abrupt call, half bleat, half bellow.

Plainly it was a signal well understood. In a second the whole herd was on its feet. In another, with lightning precision, it had formed itself into a compact circle, using the watchful leader as the basic point of its formation. The calves, butted unceremoniously into the center, hustled one upon the other, with uplifted muzzles over the others' shoulders and mild eyes staring with startled fright. The outer rim of the circle became a fringe of sullen lowering foreheads, angry eyes, and keen horns jutting formidably from snow powdered manes of dark hair.

Not a member of the musk ox herd, to the youngest calf, but knew very well against what enemy the old bull had so suddenly marshaled them into fighting phalanx. For some moments, however,—long, tense, vigilant moments,—nothing appeared.