

**JOY OF ACHIEVEMENT**

A TALE OF GENE LAFARGUE AND THE TEN THOUSAND INGOTS

BY FRANK HEPBURN ORAWFORD

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Day after day a lonely, naked, brown-faced man desperately played a strange game in the face of the desolate Huron shore. And the wind and the ancient forest gave no sign of the lapse of time, but watched the game with curious, grim interest. Far on into October the man



The Man, With Reckless Fury, Flung Himself Upon Them as They Fought for Their Food.

hair glistening wet above his eyes, he clambered aboard his sloop with the stiff inagile movements of a wasted, weak, old man. Yet he would hammer his purpled body and hang above the glowing stove, stretching out his arms above it, then, glancing toward his cabin wall at

the chalk record of his work, still incomplete, would step to deck and dive again. "Come at last, however, the night when the tale of the ten thousand copper ingots the man had sought was complete. And of this ten all but a score were cached behind the shore, while the rest lay stacked in the water on the sandy reef by which the wreck had grounded, and the clean-picked bones of the skeleton Loup Garou were left to rot alone.

Working with a desperate haste, each measure of which marked a palpable drain on his failing vitality, Gene Lafargue loaded the last of his ingots, scrapping the bars up from the sand through a thickening seam of ice that formed in the pool left by their removal and casting them ice-sheathed down within the cockpit.

Now they were all his own! He stooped within his cabin to peer excitedly by the light of an oil lamp at the groups of four vertical chalk lines crossed diagonally by a fifth, that had marked the progress of his lonely task. Each stroke had meant ten ingots raised from the Loup Garou. Each group of five with a ring around it stood for fifty loaded on the sloop. There were two hundred circled groups, and at twenty-four pounds each, and lake copper scarce at twenty-five cents a pound, and ten thousand ingots ravaged from the wreck were a treasure worth sixty thousand dollars.

The man was cold and hungry, and utterly weary. The skin tight stretched across his cheekbones, was blackened there by long exposure to water and wind and frost. His eyes were sunken and his long jaw lean and hairless. But in his soul as he scanned the circled rings of chalk was the warming joy of achievement, and he leaned forward to mark beneath that record: "Last load, November 10."

Now he would smash his way back to shore through the ice, cache his last load, get out again and try to reach Port Huron, far toward the south. He would winter there, and then—in the spring—the ice would break—he would return in the spring—and he would dig up those ingots—and market them—with caution—with very great caution—He awoke in the gray light of early morning.

To the south, from end to end of the half-moon bay in which he was, the ice had bridged the lake. Tentatively the man pounded on the ice with his ax-head. It did not break. Cautiously he clambered out on it. The man with shouldered ax trudge shoreward to the trench he had dug beyond the ice. Cautiously he leaped from a young pine its lower limbs and these he lashed into a rough sled form. More cautiously, for in this temperature his ax would be scarce tougher than a blade of grass, he chopped much firewood, hauling it back on the sled across the ice to the sloop in two loads. Unfurling the sail from the boom and

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stretching its doubled fold across the open cockpit, as a kind of roof, he crept within his tiny cabin that night and slept. When the man, unrested, woke and forced a passage through the snow to the boat's deck, he saw that his world of another day was turned from one of black ice to one of endless white. Taking what tea and food was left, and his blanket and kettle, he left the sloop and trudged westward through the loose snow in the face of the tireless wind. That day he won a score of miles and slept at night, dog-like, in a snow hole behind a sheltered corner of the shore. Resuming his way in the gray morning, he clambered across a projecting finger of land to make his way down again toward the frozen lake edge where the footing was less rough. It was here that he slipped among the shore rocks and pitched sidelong down the sharp declivity. Clawing in the snow, he rose again on his right foot, stepped forward, and fell in a helpless huddle as though he had trusted his weight to an alder staff. The man turned, and, hobbling with great caution, came at last to the ending of his half-obliterated trail of heidly before. By night-fall he had retraced it ten miles. All day long an uneasy sense of some other presence had been with him like an obsession. All day long he had failed to justify the dread. Cunningly he would hobble on, and then, without a warning, pause, whirl in his tracks to stare to rearward. Ever there was nothing. That night he slept uneasily and in pain. One time he came alertly conscious and listened with intensity. There was no sound. Through all the painful tolling of the evening day the man was dogged still by the sense of an unseen, silent presence that watched his way from afar and followed it with stealthy menace. That night he won again and through the deepened snow to the shelter of the ice-bound sloop. That night, too, he heard again in the full-toned voicing of irremediable fault. High up in the shale it commenced, like a demonic scree, slurring then slowly down to the quivering moon of last de-

pair, and cadencing in its mournful course through all the mingling moods of fury, terror, anguish and dismay. Rising, falling, rising, falling, flooding the frigid midnight air with palpitant waves, it was the primal and the ultimate voicing of the world-old melancholy of all life. Peering outward, the man saw that the snow had ceased and the stars were far, glittering points above the world. And he saw at last the hitherto half-sensed presence. During the night he heard the padding of many feet on the deck above him. Excitedly the man faced to the north. The jest was turned! It had been willed that the wolves besiege him, and here of their number was one dead by his hand; and of its skin he would make a covering, and of its flesh his food. But even as he started forward the pack were upon the fallen leader, and in a space he was not. The man, with reckless fury, flung himself upon them as they fought for their food, and his ax swung twice among them before they drew away. In the brains of one it sank, and another's back was broken, so that it writhed convulsively at his feet, and he struck it again to still it. Before the cold could stiffen their forms he roughly skinned them and dragged one red carcass within the cabin for immediate consumption, while the other he chopped in sections and stuffed in a locker beneath the tiller. That night he slept with heavy belly,

and dreamed much. He dreamed it was a game the pack and he were playing, and each wolf was a point and a death scored one to the side that got the meat. When he awoke the next day, with a touch of grim humor, he chalked a scoreboard on a bare space of the cabin wall. He wrote, "Man," and beneath this, "Wolves," and between the two drew a horizontal line. To the right of the words he drew a number of vertical lines, to mark the days, and, guessing at the time, he dated them successively. For the first day he scored two points for the man and one for the wolves. Then he again threw open his door. Two forms skulked in the cockpit, but as he stooped through his door and limped out, one flashed by him with a splendid leap up through the uncovered part, while the other, cornered beneath the canvas top, sprang full at his throat, to be met by the outthrust ax-head. Snarling, it fell back, and with quick recovery the man slashed at it, missing the head, but gashing deep in the shoulder. The wolf reeled, but gained its poise again and lunged toward its antagonist, locking its jaws about the man's fractured knee-cap with a grip like a spring steel trap. The anguish of it turned the man weak, and he staggered back against the cabin, chopping down at the head with gray tufts above the eyes and lines of gray along the nostril ridge. But the yawning jaws fell open, and with a final tremor the brained beast lay prostrate across his feet. When the subsiding pain of his lacerated knee permitted, he limped back, dragging the new wolf with him, and scored one each for Man and Wolves, at the same time erasing one of the Man's marks for the preceding day, leaving the score two all. That day he dragged out more ballast, replaced the square of flooring, and, bringing out the trap-door of the cellar, lashed on top of it the weights, and then propped it up on deck with a fagot, to which he had tied a line reaching down within his cabin. At night he placed the entrails of the last wolf beneath the trap and waited, peering

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**A. O. SKINNER**

freely to drive the temperature up a few degrees nearer zero. The swollen knee-joint had ceased to pain him. At first he was troubled by this fact and then he did not care. Could he have seen his haggard, hony face, with its skin tight-drawn from point to point, he would not have known it for his own. He had grown very weak. The hot spark of life within him was turning at last to gray ash. He felt no remorse. Had he, Gene Lafargue, not played the game like a man to the end? The north had made of his mighty effort a great jest. The main raised himself feebly on one arm. "I laugh!" he tried to cry defiantly, but the words were just a hoarse croaking. Groping for the chalk, the man raised his hand and uncertainly reached toward the score-board. Opposite the word wolves he marked the figure 5. He fell back among his pelts and blankets with face turned toward the sheet-iron stove. It still was warm from the last charge of fuel. His eyes were closed, but he reached out and pressed his hand against the hot surface. A smell of scorched flesh was in the air, but he did not know. The stove remained in place. He pressed harder. It fell to his side and the glowing embers scattered out. His eyes opened at the sound, and he smiled with them, though his lips remained set. Feebly he thrust forward the nearest ember, a splinter of wood and watched its ignition with approval. Then, more feebly, he shoved toward the flame a board fragment and saw the flame curl up about it. The flames spread along the cabin walls. The space within became smoke-filled. The fire rose upward and ate its way through the roofing. The man lay very still, as with the placid languor of utter drowsiness. To his dimmed consciousness sensations came but haltingly and gently, as to the ear might come faint, half-headed sound waves of distant Sabbath bells across a lonely country-side, sun-warmed and flowering. It was as though, like a thing aloof, his soul departing, hesitant, stood off a space to watch the discarded meat's cremation. Smith was one of the foremost engineers of his time. His one fault was an enormous bump of conceit. He completed a piece of work for a large corporation and was compelled to sue for his fee, which was \$25,000. He was being cross-examined by the attorney acting as counsel for the corporation: "On what ground do you base your exorbitant charge on this miserable piece of work?" "On the ground that I am the greatest engineer in the world." After the suit had been concluded one of Smith's friends came to him and in an admonishing tone, said: "Smith, you should never make such statements in public; allow others to acclaim you as the greatest in your profession." Smith answered: "I know it, and I felt like a blooming idiot up there on the stand; but, blast it all, I was under oath."

A French poodle dog belonging to Howard Smith of Jenkintown, Pa., dropped all its teeth recently, the fact being explained on the ground that it was eleven years old. Within the last few days, however, a new set has started to come, and within a short time the dog will have a complete new set of first-class teeth.