

. . . Friend, too, of Gail's whirling brain. . . . Pete staggered up, in time to grin sheepishly at his meek assent.

"No grub-b," broke in Lena, in a half gag, half laugh. "Eat—in this scurvy? I c-can't swallow," she ended in a bitter, dry cacophany.

At a distance, Clara was leaning on Bleven's rifle, as she gazed searchingly about. Gail hallooed to her to return to the sled and help make camp. But, whether she had heard Bleven's surrender, or the observation was involuntary, she called as she approached—

"Any wood's too far."

"Ain't that unkind?" whined Perry. "But what's to hinder us chopping up the sled. Won't need her any more. Burn the tent, too."

Pete gaped in protest, but only opened his mouth soundlessly, like a suffocating fish.

Gail and Clara unrolled the tattered canvas, propped it on their snow-shoes, inserted the tent-pole a-slant beneath. The others spread their sleeping-bags, and instantly crawled into them, without touching the stove and sled, which they had left outside.

Gail ducked under the flap to get them. As he returned, with the axe also, a faint stuttering from Pete and Arlene showed them already asleep. But the sight that riveted him was Clara.

Grasped in both her hands was the big spoon from the empty bean-pot. She had torn up the rotten tarpaulin, and was digging down wildly, avidly heaving her shoulders, muttering, through the floor of snow.

"Crazy—the squirrels at her, too," croaked Bleven, breaking into a withered chuckle, which Gail found himself impotently joining.