

THE MAN OF THE MOUND

A STORY OF A NEWFOUNDLAND MYSTERY

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"The Survivors," etc.

H. M. S. "Falcon," flagship of the Newfoundland Fisheries Protection Squadron, lay at anchor in Frenchman's Harbour and flew the week's wash of her crew to the invigorating wind. The season was mid-September; and there was a tang in the air that was not to be denied by three stout hearts in the little cruiser's gun-room.

"Now is our chance to bag a good head apiece," said Rodway. "Round in St. John's, what with girls and tennis and golf, a man can't call his time his own."

Mr. Rodway was sixteen years of age—and felt it.

"D'ye think we can find a guide, in this forsaken hole?" queried Brown.

"No,—nor a nurse-maid, either," replied Wallace, senior midshipman.

"Look here," cried Rodway, "I'll lay you five to one—in shillins—that I'll walk as far as you, an' shoot as straight."

"Oh, shut up, or we'll leave you at home," retorted Mr. Wallace. "I'm not at all sure," he added, reflectively, "that it would be just the thing to allow a kid like you to toddle 'round after self-respecting caribou."

"There's something in that," drawled Brown.

"All right," said Rodway. "I'll go by myself and take both my rifles."

"Oh, come now," laughed Wallace. "It's bad form to let your hair fly off at a little bit of kiddin'. Of course we'll be glad to have you—and I'm much obliged I'm sure, for the use of the rifle."

So, early next morning, they set out, guideless, into the brown and extensive barrens. After four hours of the roughest tramping they had ever experienced, uncheered by any signs of deer, they sat down and devoured all the food they had brought along with them.

"May as well clean it up," remarked Wallace, helping himself to the last thick slice of bread and butter; "for it's easier to carry inside than out."

Rodway lit a cigarette, climbed wearily to the summit of a rocky knoll nearby, and began a half-hearted inspection of the country through his glasses. Suddenly he turned and descended to where the others lay, smoking and grumbling.

"I've sighted 'em," he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "A dozen if there's one, by George."

Wallace and Brown jumped to their feet and picked up their rifles.

"Close?" queried Wallace, scarcely above his breath.

"Yes—well, about two miles away, I think," replied Rodway, nervously and still in guarded tones.

Even Brown was too delightfully excited to remark the absurdity of conversing in whispers for fear of startling game two miles distant. All three ascended to the top of the knoll and Wallace and Brown, under the directions of the proud Rodway, feasted their eyes (with the assistance of the field-glasses) on the distant herd. Even at two miles they were shaken with what is commonly known as "buck fever." It was the first experience of the kind for even the senior midshipman; but he had gathered a good deal of mixed information on the subject of stalking and shooting the Newfoundland caribou from acquaintances in St. John's.

"We're to win'ward of 'em. We must crawl 'round and get to leeward," he informed the others. "They're not much with their search-lights but they're wonders with their noses."

On the strength of his knowledge of the characteristics of their intended victims, Wallace took the lead on a

course intended to place them down-wind from the caribou. There was plenty of cover and he took every advantage of it; and Rodway followed his example with uncomfortable zeal. Brown, however, stalked along at his full height.

"If they are short-sighted," he said, "why should we begin crawlin' until we get somewhere near them? And as for their precious noses—I, for one, don't smell any stronger standin' up than squirmin' along on my stomach."

Cheerless dusk was creeping over the wilderness when the three sportsmen, fatigued, empty-handed and faint with hunger, came upon a queer looking mound of rocks and poles from which ascended a trail of smoke.

"Well, by my Sam," exclaimed Rodway.

The sight of even so poor a human habitation in this desolate wild through which they had travelled all day without sighting a living creature save the elusive caribou, and a few grouse and snipe, was too much for Wallace and Brown. They stared, speechless, with an unfamiliar sensation of awe in their hearts. Rodway, however, was not so easily impressed.

"If that's not the smell of cookin' then call me a Dutchman," he said.

At that moment the figure of a man appeared, issuing from an opening in the mound and immediately standing erect in an attitude of keen attention.

"Hullo, there," cried Rodway.

The man started violently, seemed to hesitate, and then advanced toward the three gun-room officers of the "Falcon." Wallace recovered his faculties sufficiently to step in front of Rodway and address the mound-dweller.

"We're in rather a hole," he ventured. "Haven't the least idea where we are—lost our compass, y'know—and are keen enough to wolf a hundred-weight of grub."

The man came close and peered at them through the gathering dusk.

"R. N.?" he queried, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"Right O," replied Rodway. "We belong to the 'Falcon' and came ashore this morning to shoot several herds of caribou. But Brown here lost our compass."

"Shut up, you young ass," whispered Brown. "This man may not enjoy your babbling any more than other men do." The only inhabitant was possessed of very sharp ears.

"Oh, let the kid talk," said he.

All three looked with renewed amazement. His hair reached to his shoulders. His lower face was covered with a flowing beard and his mouth was hidden by a sweeping moustache. His clothing was ragged and of fisherman's quality, and on his feet were raw-hide moccasins. To have such a figure of fun speak of him as a kid was too much for Rodway's temper and vanity. He opened his mouth—but Wallace wrenched him aside so suddenly that the only result was a bitten tongue.

"Come into my hut," said the man with the beard. They followed him in silence, stooping to enter the low doorway and then blinking around at the fire-lit interior. The walls were lined with trimmed poles. Caribou skins lay on the earthen floor, which was several feet below the ground level. The furniture consisted of a rough table, a bunk and a stool. Pelts of fox and lynx were nailed to the walls, here and there, and several pairs of snow-shoes lay in a rack overhead.

The visitors speedily made themselves at home—put



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