

ewyan they must be unpacked and packed again into three. Then on to the north goes a train of dogs for the distant Yukon; on to the west a train of dogs for the head of the Peace River, and eastward once more the dogs of old John Hawkins.

Not this year! He had it from Baptiste Charette, the half-breed voyageur, just in from the long Yukon trail—the swarthy Baptiste of the tassellated cap and the swift *racquettes*. He had passed Rory's Hope more than ten days before and he had seen the big white Factor there and the Factor's face was white and thin and his voice weak with a sickness. Had not Baptiste stayed there a whole day because of it? The weather had been very bad and few had passed that way, even Indians; the big Factor was much alone. But him, Baptiste, what could he do? He had already lost one day; he must go on.

That very afternoon a train of dogs set out swiftly into the dark of the quick-coming night, and at the gee-pole sped the Factor from the Fond du Lac. Twelve more nights and it would be Christmas Day. At the old Mission near the Pointe de Gravois they were to have spent it; but not now! He had need to travel swiftly, for far across wintry wastes to the desolate shores of the Great Slave Lake lay the way to Rory's Hope and old Roderick MacQuaig was weak with a sickness.

There was a moon that night and he was able to push on without a stop. It came up out of the ocean of snow, round and yellow; after a little it turned to silver that stole brightly over the white wilderness and showed him the track. For a time he skirted the rim of the frozen lake where the pines threw black shadows along the steep rise of the shore; between the trunks the moonlight slanted and the snow, piled high on forest wreck, sparkled and glowed in the fretted light. Debouching from the forest, he descended into a marsh and reached the river. All night they travelled in the bright open of the river reaches and when the daylight came, the last sand ridges and island tops of Lake Athabasca had sunk beneath the horizon.

So the long journey began. The short twilight at the end of the first day found man and dogs alike fagging with the speed of their going, but well on their way. A few scant willows raised dry, leafless saplings through the snow at the place where they made camp, and by burrowing in the deep drift of the willow bushes they found shelter for the night. In this manner they went on, each day but a repetition of the day before, and each night the man crawled into his sleeping-bag, the dogs close at his feet, miles deeper into the freezing waste that stretched to the north in endless distances of hard, drifted snow.

The sixth day found him at Pointe de Gravois; but he paused there only long enough to rest the dogs, then pushed on as before through the nip of the freezing cold. For two more days they pressed on while the light lasted and when the dark closed in, they made camp and the man hauled the bag of frozen fish from the sled and fed the dogs. The next night they rested for a few hours only, then broke camp and went on under a sky that blazed with Northern Lights; there was another reason now to hasten John Hawkins besides the sickness of his friend, for he knew that he must travel nights as well as days if he hoped to reach his journey's end before a northern blizzard filled the air with flying *poudre* snow.

"Mush! Mush!"

His sharp command became a constant urge on the lagging dogs while the icicles gathered in his mustache and clung thick in his beard. But always the great drifts rolled in billows as far as he could see, piled up by the violent winter storms that had swept down from the north. The breath of dogs and man smoked white on the frosty atmosphere and the dry snow spoke beneath the sled. Two of the dogs were limping badly; but the man in front, breaking the path, only clenched his teeth and went on, beating his mittened hands together as he went.

Another day of this, then just before the dark fell, there suddenly opened ahead a vast expanse of frozen lake. The Factor from the Fond du Lac gave a glad shout as he saw it. The dogs were quick to catch the new note in the cry and sprang forward with fresh vigor. They pressed on a little longer in the teeth of the bitter north wind.

Christmas morning broke on a chaos of swirling snow. The *poudre*, caught in the whirl of the gale, smoked in clouds along the frozen crust and sailed away, never ending. The air was blind with flying snow; it bore down with the shrieking wind upon the huddled buildings of Rory's Hope, eddied about

the gables, swept and drifted. Veiled in by the sheets of fine snow that filled the air, a man and a team of dogs hugged the lee of the shore, slowly fighting their way.

"Mush! Mush!"

But the Factor's gasping shout was smothered in the roar of the wind and flung far away on the wings of the blizzard. The dogs needed no urging; plunging forward through the driving wind and snow, they headed straight for the shelter of human habitation with unerring instinct. They were on top of the place before they knew it and they staggered in at last to Rory's Hope.

"Mon, mon! And is it y'rsel'—y'r very ain sel'? I knew ye'd coom, John, old friend—Ou-aye! I knew ye'd coom!"

Poor old Roderick MacQuaig! That was all he could speak while he stroked the hand of the Factor from the faraway Fond du Lac and would not let it go. Over and over he said it half-hysterically, tears of gladness rolling unheeded down the furrows of his cheeks. Baptiste Charette had spoken truth; the face was very white and thin and the voice little above a whisper.

"Aye! John, it's the heart's gang wrang I'm thinkin'. I hae been readin' a' about it in yon almanac, hangin' by the wee bit string. It speers twenty-sax times so't a mon may unnerstaun when somethin's gang wrang wi' his heart. Twenty-sax!—one after the ither, till a man micht gae fair daft and losh wi' frettin' did he no trust i' the Lord. I hae been tellin' 'em ower, John, and I maun say to ye I hae twenty o' them things the matter wi' me! I'm nae sae sure about the ither sax.

"Aweel, ye needna fash y'r noodle. I maun just bide patient for deeleverance and be thanifu'—Aye, sae thanifu'!"

He propped himself painfully on an elbow, slowly shaking his white head from side to side in the wonder of his joy while the hunger of his loneliness looked from his eyes.

"Mon, mon! but it's the bonnie sicht for sair eyes ye are!" He patted the other's rough hand fondly. "And it's Chrus'mus morn, lad, d'ye ken? And we're alookin' into one anither's eyes and ahaudin' o' one anither's honds, just as we planned it a' three lang year ago. A Murry Chrus'mus to ye, old friend! A Murry, Murry—Chrus'mus!"

He sank back weakly among the blankets of the bunk.

It had needed but one keen glance to satisfy the Factor from the Fond du Lac that Roderick MacQuaig was a sick man and the shock of that first look had startled him like a blow. He had expected to find him ill; but not like this—not a mere shadow of his former rugged self. There came to him quickly a vision of the long, lonely hours, dragging by so slowly, one by one, there in that little storm-swept log building, and when he tried to speak his voice was husky with a great tenderness.

Christmas Day had indeed come and they had met, just as they had planned it all three long years ago, but—Yes, and God willing, it would be a merry Christmas; it must be! He would see to it; wasn't that what he was here for? It could not be the Christmas they had planned exactly, with a great old-fashioned dinner and all that—MacQuaig was too sick for that; but he could be made comfortable and with a great fire roaring up the big chimney, they could be cozy in there, let the blizzard howl its worst. They were together again after three long years and that in itself was the real pleasure.

Besides, there was hot broth, steaming hot and savory, made from tender moose venison—surely he was not too sick to sip a little hot broth! And it was such a great strengthener, hot broth! Perhaps they could have their "musquash talk" about the Company's affairs after all, and who knew, before the day was over, they might even get down the old checker-board and settle that never-settled dispute as to who was best man! A merry Christmas it should be in spite of the sickness; nothing was ever so bad but it might be worse, and they had a lot to be thankful for. He'd have MacQuaig out of that bunk and eating like a timber-wolf before he left him.

John Hawkins hummed cheerfully as he began to potter around and "tidy up a bit." He soon had a brighter blaze crackling musically in the great fireplace. He pulled his fur cap down tightly over his ears, muffled up in his big fur coat, and went out into the blizzard to attend to the dogs, housed near by. When he came back he brought a load of evergreens with him, and these he decked about the blackened rafters and the log walls till the place took

on quite a festive appearance. And the Factor of Rory's Hope, lying back snugly in his blankets, chuckled in the pure contentment of it, and his eyes grew brighter and brighter as they followed every move the big man made.

"John, lad, wull ye no coom here a wee," he called faintly from his bunk at length.

There was a certain mystery in his manner that puzzled the Factor from the Fond du Lac.

"Oop on top o' yon shelf ye'll find it—i' the tin box—Aye! I hae a bit giftie to make—the lid, mon!—tak the lid aff! Canna ye unnerstaun? Noo, ye maun just lift oot the ither box—Aye! She's in there—Losh! mon, but ye're slow!—Lift her oot!" he urged impatiently.

"Plum-puddin'!" fairly shouted Hawkins in astonishment. He stared, his mouth open.

"Aye."

Snf!—Snf! Poking his nose eagerly into the tin, he sniffed at it.

"Great Bumble Bees an' Hummin' Birds!" he ejaculated, eyes round with wonder. "Why, it's English plum-puddin'—real old English plum-puddin'! Don't tell me it ain't; I'll bet fifty beaver skins that there puddin' come from the other side! I know the smell o' 'em! I ain't had a whiff o' one for years an' years but you can't fool me on that flavour."

"Aye, she's travelled some, John," nodded MacQuaig.

"Where'd you get it, eh? Where on earth'd you get it?" demanded Hawkins excitedly. His whole face was wreathed in smiles. He was as tickled as a boy.

"She cam' by the packet twa year ago," said the Factor of Rory's Hope proudly; his eyes were beaming. "Twa year ago, mon, and I maun just be a-savin' of her ever sin', awaitin' for ye to coom and hae a bit wi' me."

Hawkins lifted out the little round sack and poised it solicitously on his knee. He stared into the thin face that looked from the bunk.

"Two years!" he repeated slowly. "Do you mean to say, MacQuaig, you've had this here puddin' in y'r possession for two years an' y' ain't never et any of 't?"

"Aye. She cam' along in Feb'uary. Last Yule-tide I was sair temptet, she looket that guid, mon. I tuk her oot to haud her a wee and there I was like any dom ful, a-spankin' of her and a-snuffin' at her an' a-wushin' 'twur y'rsel' was wi' me so't we micht hae spread her oot an' discusst her to the last crumb. It was a sair temptation, John, but I had said I wadna tech her twull ye cam'. But noo, I hae a confession to mak' ye, an' if ye wull just be untynin' the string, ye wull see whur I poket oot a wee bittie wi' my finger. She looket that guid, mon, I was fair daft to tak a wee taste, knowin' ye wadna mind—"

Then did John Hawkins' lips come tight together till his whole bewhiskered face bulged indignation. He deliberately tied the string again about the pudding-sack, got up with equal deliberation, strode over to the bunk and brought the pudding down with a thump among the blankets. He wobbled his big fist within an inch of the other's nose and scolded till even his mighty chest was empty of breath.

"Hoots, mon!" gasped the Factor of Rory's Hope with spirit. "Dinna ye claver i' that feckless fashion! Haud y'r tongue, wull ye! I'll hae ye unnerstaun I want nae mair o' y'r blab! Haud y'r tongue an' dinna let it be rinnin' awa wi' ye! Ye maun just sit doon this very meenit an' eat a piece o' yon puddin'—!"

"An' that's just what I won't be doin', MacQuaig!" snapped John Hawkins resolutely. "D' you think I come away up here for Christmas Day, only to be gettin' up a spread for myself an' eatin' it in front of your very nose when y'aint able to join in, you blatherskite! Tut! Tut! I'll tell y' just what I am goin' to do. I'm goin' to make some hot soup for you an' what's more I'm goin' to have some of it myself whether you say I can or whether you don't. We'll eat the puddin' when you're well enough to enjoy it an' we ain't goin' to eat it a minute sooner whether you say so or whether you don't. We'll have the puddin' on New Year's. To-day it's soup—good hot broth an'—"

"Broth!" snorted the Factor of Rory's Hope. "Broth—for y'r Chrus'mus dinner!"

He lay back, weak with his disgust.

"Now, look y'here, Rod, 'taint goin' to do no good, you gettin' up that Scotch temper o' yours. Who's bossin' Rory's Hope while you're abed? Who's y'r doctor? It's doctor's orders you must be quiet an' peaceable or first thing you know, you won't get