

RUNNING THUNDER

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RUNNING THUNDER'S trapping country stretched from the Push-and-cuss Rapids on Little Beaver to Pipe Pond, eastward to the Kettebec and westward to the Lost Barrens. His father and his grandfather before him had taken toll of that wilderness.

Pierre Lacrosse came into Running Thunder's country in October and built a shack on Little Beaver, beside the rapids that were long ago christened "Push-and-cuss" by some weary and exasperated voyager. He brought with him a little boy of about four years of age, provisions, a few traps, and a rifle. That was surely a desolate spot to select for a long winter's residence—so desolate that a man might sit among the spruces that overhang the rapids from year's-end to year's-end and not catch so much as a glimpse or sound of a brother human. It suited Pierre, however—a safe retreat in which to care for the child; the solace of nature for his aching heart; and the means of an honest livelihood lurking, soft-footed, on every side.

The child's name was also Pierre, but the father, though a French half-breed, always gave him his name in English. "Little Peter" he called him—the name the blue-eyed English mother had given him. The woman had died in August, after a year of suffering. Pierre had nursed her tenderly and steadfastly throughout those bitter months, giving up his work so that he might devote all his

time to her; and when it was over, broken and impoverished, he had borrowed enough money to outfit for a winter's trapping and had come to the Little Beaver country with his son and his memories. Now he lived for nothing else in the world but little Peter.

So vast was the region that it was mid-winter before Running Thunder learned that a stranger was trapping in his thickets and along his frozen water-ways. Striking further afield than usual one February morning, he happened upon Pierre's trail. The marks of the racquets in the snow were as easily read by Running Thunder as a printed page by a scholar of books. In the big, white type he saw much of interest; but the information that touched him most (and this was given by the shallowness of the imprints in the snow) was that the stranger travelled without a load. Now a man who tramps the wilderness in mid-winter, when all the water-ways are frozen, with neither a sledge at his heels or a load on his back, must have his headquarters somewhere near at hand. The unknown was not a chance traveller then, but a trapper—a taker of furs in Running Thunder's own country! Realisation of this fact brought anger, like the shadow of a flame, to the young man's dark eyes. He cleared his rifle from its woollen case and set off at a brisk trot along the stranger's tracks.

It was close upon noon when Run-