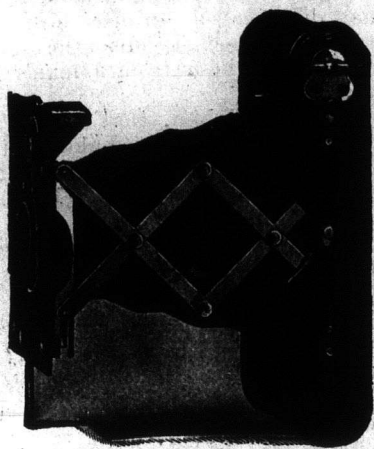


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"Ain't you going to eat?" asked Macdolan.

Ginger Bill shook his head. "Ain't hungry," he lied gallantly, but as Macdolan closed his eyes a faint smile curved his thin lips. "He's a little 'ero!" he mused complacently. "That's what he is."

When night came on Ginger Bill was aware that a fresh calamity had befallen him. He had not noticed the numbness creeping through his right hand as the constant strain of the rope deadened the circulation. Now he was brought to the consciousness of the fact that his mind was hopelessly frozen.

"Seems an unlucky year for me," he muttered, reluctantly confessing the obvious; then he discarded his rifle and cartridge belt, which could now be of no further use to him. He piled up a huge fire, sleeping with his feet close to it, so that when it burnt low it awakened him, and with the first pale streak of dawn was astir. He fed his partner, and ate a little pemmican himself with wolfish hunger. Macdolan did not fail to notice the trembling of his companion's hands, the black swollenness about his lips, the starved and cadaverous look which was quickly warping his features. "A little 'ero!" muttered the sick man, and a tear trickled slowly down his cheek and froze on his beard.

"Ginger," he added aloud, "why are you doing all this for me? You don't know me, anyway; and you're just about all in."

Ginger Bill screwed up his face. "Why?" he repeated. "Well—because you're just a woodsman, like myself, and out in the forest here we have to

childish. He knew that the end of the trail was very, very near, and he was thinking of his partner's wife and kiddies waiting—waiting for one whom they would see no more.

Later in the day, as he struggled in the harness, he began to suffer from an obsession. It was only the shape of his moccasins, constantly bobbing under his nose, that troubled him. He tried not to watch them, but had to. They held his gaze with a strange fascination.

Then the burning thirst from which he had suffered for days got worse and worse. He ate snow by the handful till it chilled his whole body, but it did not assuage his thirst. His lips, black and blistered, burnt like fire. His swollen gums seemed to throb up to his temples, and always—always the bobbing moccasins troubled him.

All this he regarded as a natural part of the proceedings now that the end of the trail was so near. Once he almost walked into a rift in the ice, and after that he forced himself to stare ahead. Then he began to wonder what day it was. This, in turn, became an obsession. As a rule, names did not trouble Ginger Bill, but he would have given much, had he possessed it, to know the name of that particular day.

Darkness came, blotting the troublesome moccasins from his way. He did not make camp—why should he? The way was clear. He had only to keep going till—he reached the end of the trail.

The moon came out, and bathed the forest world in its soft splendor. The aurora hissed coldly and sullenly over the treetops, as Ginger Bill's mind ran wild in a chaos of thought. He was



A Line-up.

stand by one another. I should do the same for you if you was only an Indian."

Macdolan groaned, and passed his hand over his eyes. Only a woodsman like Ginger Bill! No, no! He could never be like Ginger Bill, in spite of his thousands. Macdolan, the millionaire, lying helpless in the heart of those great silent forests, was well aware of his own insignificance. He who, away in New York City, held thousands in his power, felt himself unworthy even to shake the hand of this simple-souled, red-haired little woodsman. He longed to tell the truth, but he could not do so. He, too, was thinking of a brightly-lighted room, where a woman sat by the fireside—waiting, waiting, and little children looked up at her with sad and wondering wistfulness.

"O, you little 'ero! You little 'ero!" he muttered soulfully, but Ginger Bill was already toiling and straining in the harness.

That day Macdolan became delirious, and proceeded to remain so. He had suffered agonies since the race with death began, but he had suffered in silence, inspired by the pluck and bravery of his companion. Now he cried out in a frenzy of pain, and Ginger Bill gathered that the sick man's conversation concerned a wife and kiddies away in sunny New York. The little man dashed a tear from his cheek with the back of his frozen hand, and toiled on.

But things quickly passed from bad to worse. On the morning of the fifth day Bill gave the last remaining fragment of pemmican to his partner. Then he sat down and wept, for he was a sick man, and the weakness had made him

back at home, amidst faces familiar to him—men and women who were holding out helping hands which he could not reach. He was back in his boyhood, strolling through the woods with the only human being towards whom he had ever extended the love of brotherhood—the dark-haired, bright-eyed boy.

The visions vanished. He was staring ahead of him at a vague, strange light that seemed to move and flicker among the trees. It was a fire—a camp fire! He fancied he could see the dark figures of men moving about it. Then he laughed aloud; for this was but one of those distant fires which tired woodsmen see when they near the end of the trail—fires which vanish as they draw near, then flame out again far ahead, beckoning them on, on.

Then Ginger Bill, the trapper, sank to his knees. He was aware of a ghostly shape approaching him across the snow, then another and another. He reached for his rifle. It was gone. Then he smiled resignedly. After all, this was but the natural course of events. The old moose, driven from his place of eminence in the herd, is speedily overpowered and dragged down by wolves. The old Indian, no longer able to travel with his tribe, is left behind, and sooner or later the wolves get him. And Ginger Bill knew now that his turn had come—it was but the law of the forest.

A cold muzzle was thrust into his face; a warm tongue caressed his cheek. Ginger Bill did not feel them. He lay very still in the snow, his face downwards, and slept.

Thus the search party, who had set out to look for Macdolan, the mil-

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