DILLON WALLACE

THE GAUNT GRAY WOLF

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Wallace D.

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Содержание

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The Gaunt Gray Wolf: A Tale of Adventure With Ungava Bob

I
SHAD TROWBRIDGE OF BOSTON

On a foggy morning of early July in the year 1890, the Labrador mail boat, northward bound from St. Johns, felt her way cautiously into the mist-enveloped harbour of Fort Pelican and to her anchorage.

For six days the little steamer had been buffeted by wind and ice and fog, and when at last her engines ceased to throb and she lay at rest in harbour, Allen Shadrach Trowbridge of Boston, her only passenger, felt hugely relieved, for the voyage had been a most unpleasant one, and here he was to disembark.

In June, Allen Shadrach Trowbridge–or "Shad" Trowbridge as the fellows called him, and as we shall call him–had completed his freshman year in college. When college closed he set sail at once for Labrador, where he was to spend his summer holiday canoeing and fishing in the wilderness.

This was the first extended journey Shad Trowbridge had ever made quite alone. For many months he had been planning and preparing for it, and he promised himself it was to be an eventful experience.

He was standing now at the rail, as the ship anchored, peering eagerly through the mist at the group of low, whitewashed buildings which composed Fort Pelican post of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at the dim outline of dark forest behind–a clean-cut, square-shouldered, athletic young fellow, who carried his head with the air of one possessing a fair share of self-esteem and self-reliance, and whose square jaw suggested wilfulness if not determination.

The rugged surroundings thrilled him with promise of adventure. The historic post of the old fur traders, the boundless, mysterious forest, and the romantic life of the trappers and dusky tribes which it sheltered, were pregnant with interest. But his wildest dreams could not have foretold the part Shad Trowbridge was destined to play in this primordial land and life before he should bid farewell to its bleak coast.

"A rough-looking country," remarked the steward, joining Shad at the rail.

"It's glorious!" exclaimed Shad enthusiastically. "A real frontier! And back there is a real wilderness! Just the sort of wilderness I've dreamed about getting into all my life."

"The deck of the mail boat's about as near as I want to get to it," said the steward with a deprecatory shrug. "It's a land o' hard knocks and short grub. You'd better leave it to the livyeres and Indians, young man, and go back to God's country with the ship."

"No, thank you," said Shad. "I'm going to have a rattling good summer hunting and fishing here before I see the ship again."

"When we come on our next voyage, a fortnight from now, you'll be standing out there on the dock looking for us, and mighty glad to see us," laughed the steward. "You'll have all you want of The Labrador by then. Shall I put your things ashore?"

"Yes, if you please–all but the canoe. I'll paddle that over, if you'll send a man to help me launch it."

"Pooh!" thought Shad, as the steward left him. "'Hard knocks and short grub'! Of course there would be some hard knocks, but he expected that, for he was going to rough it! But with the woods

full of game and fish there'd be plenty to eat! He didn't expect any Pullman-car jaunt; he could have had that at home. What kind of a fellow did the steward take him for, anyway?"

A half-dozen natives on the boat wharf watched Shad curiously as he paddled to a low stretch of beach adjoining the wharf, and two of them strolled down to inspect his canoe when he lifted it out of the water and turned it upon its side at a safe distance above the lapping waves.

"Now she's what I calls a rare fine canoe," observed one, a tall, big-boned, loose-jointed fellow with a straggly red beard, and picturesquely attired in moleskin trousers tucked into the tops of sealskin boots, a flannel shirt, a short jacket, and the peakless cap of the trapper.

"That she be, Ed, an' a wonderful sight better'n th' bark canoes th' Injuns uses," agreed the other, a powerful, broad-shouldered, deep-chested man, who wore a light-cloth adicky, but whose dress was otherwise similar to that of his companion.

"She have better lines than th' Injun craft," said the one addressed as Ed, eyeing the canoe critically.

"An' she's stancher–a wonderful lot stancher," continued the other.

"She is a pretty good canoe, and a splendid white-water craft," Shad remarked, to break the ice of reserve, and to give the two trappers the opening for conversation for which they were evidently hedging.

"Aye, sir," said the man in the adicky, "they's no doot o' that. Her lines be right, sir. She'd be a fine craft in th' rapids, now–a fine un."

"Be you comin' far, an' be you goin' back wi' th' ship?" asked Ed, unable to restrain his curiosity longer.

"I came from Boston, and if I can get a guide I shall stay for the summer and take a canoe trip into the country," answered Shad.

"I'm thinkin' you can get un in th' shop," suggested Ed.

"Get them in the shop?" asked Shad, in astonishment, not quite certain whether he was misunderstood, or whether the trapper was making game of him. Ed's respectful manner, however, quickly satisfied him that the former was the case.

"Aye," said Ed. "They keeps a wonderful stock o' things in the shop."

"I refer to a man," explained Shad. "I wish to employ a man to go into the country with me to show me about and to assist me."

"'Tis a pilot you wants!" exclaimed Ed, light breaking upon him.

"O' course 'tis a pilot!" broke in the other, with an intonation that suggested scorn of Ed's ignorance. "A pilot an' a guide be th' same thing. A pilot be a guide, an' a guide be a pilot."

"I'd like wonderful well t' pilot you myself, sir, but I couldn't do it nohow," volunteered Ed, in a tone of apology. "You see, I has my nets out, an' I has t' get in firewood for th' wife, t' last she through th' winter whilst I be on th' trail trappin'. An Dick here's fixed th' same. Dick an' me's partners fishin', an' he gives me a hand gettin' out wood, an' I helps he. This be Dick Blake, sir," continued Ed, suddenly remembering that there had been no introduction, "an' I be Ed Matheson."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," Shad acknowledged. "My name is Trowbridge. Perhaps you may be able to tell me where I can employ a guide. I would appreciate your assistance."

"Le'me see," Ed meditated. "Now I'm thinkin' Ungava Bob might go," he at length suggested. "He were home th' winter, an' they hauled a rare lot o' wood out wi' th' dogs, an' his father can 'tend th' nets. What d'you think, Dick?"

"Aye, Ungava Bob could sure go, whatever," agreed Dick.

"'Ungava Bob' sounds interesting," said Shad. "How old a man is this Ungava Bob, and is that his real name, or is 'Ungava' a title?"

"He's but a lad-eighteen year old comin' September–but a rare likely lad–good as a man. Aye, good as a man," declared Ed.

"His real name be Bob Gray," explained Dick, "but we calls him 'Ungava Bob' for a wonderful cruise he were makin' two year ago comin' winter."

"Seventeen years of age, and already so famous as to have won a title! I'm interested, and I'd like to hear more about him," suggested Shad.

"An' you wants t' hear," said Ed. "But now we be a-standin' an' a-keepin' you, when you wants t' see Mr. Forbes."

"Yes, I wish to see Mr. Forbes, if he is the factor of the post, but you haven't detained me in the least. I can see him presently," reassured Shad.

"Mr. Forbes be wonderful busy till th' ship goes, an' she'll be here for nigh an hour yet," advised Ed.

"Very well, I'll not call on him, then, till the ship goes," decided Shad, "and I'd be glad to hear something of Ungava Bob's travels, in the meantime."

"We might step into th' men's kitchen, where there be seats an' we can talk in comfort," suggested Ed. "This fog be wonderful chillin' standin' still."

"That's a good suggestion," agreed Shad. "The fog is cold." And he followed the two trappers down the long board walk to the men's kitchen.

II
THE LURE OF THE WILDERNESS

"Ungava Bob's father's name be Richard Gray," began Ed, while he cut tobacco from a black plug and stuffed it into his pipe, when they were presently seated in the men's kitchen. "Dick's name, here, be Richard, too, but we calls he 'Dick,' and Richard Gray, Richard,' so's not t' get un mixed up. You see, if we calls un both 'Dick' or both 'Richard,' we'd never be knowin' who 'twas were meant."

"I see," said Shad.

"Well, Richard were havin' a wonderful streak o' bad luck," continued Ed, striking a match and holding it aloft for the sulphur to burn off, "wonderful hard luck. His furrin' fails he two years runnin', an' then th' fishin' fails he, an' his debt wi' th' Company gets so big he's two year behind, whatever, th' best he does." Ed paused to apply the match to his pipe.

"Were you ever noticin', Mr. Toobridge–"

"Tumbridge," corrected Dick.

"Be it 'Toobridge' or 'Tumbridge,' sir?" asked Ed, unwilling to accept Dick's correction.

"Trowbridge."

"Leastways Toobridge were nigher right than Tumbridge," declared Ed, looking disdainfully at Dick. "Were you ever noticin' how bad luck, when she strikes a man's trail, follows him like a pack o' hungry wolves? Well, just at th' time I'm speakin' about, Richard's little maid Emily falls off a ledge an' hurts she so she can't walk. They tries all th' cures they knows, but 't weren't no good, an' then they brings Emily here t' Pelican, t' see th' mail-boat doctor when th' ship comes.

"Th' mail-boat doctor tells un th' only cure is t' take she t' th' hospital in St. Johns, an' so they fetches Emily back t' Wolf Bight, for a trip t' St. Johns takes a wonderful lot o' money, an' Richard ain't got un.

"Bob thinks a wonderful lot o' Emily. He be only sixteen then, but a rare big an' stalwart lad for his years, an' unbeknown t' Richard an' his ma he goes t' Douglas Campbell, an' says t' Douglas, an' he lets he work th' Big Hill trail on shares th' winter, he's thinkin' he may ha' th' luck t' trap a silver fox, an' leastways fur t' pay t' send Emily t' th' hospital."

"Who is Douglas Campbell?" asked Shad.

"Oh, every one knows he, an' a rare old man he be. He comes t' th' Bay from th' Orkneys nigh forty year ago, workin' as servant for th' Company, an' then leavin' th' Company t' go trappin'. He done wonderful well, buyin' traps an' openin' new trails, which he lets out on shares. Th' Big Hill trail up th' Grand River were a new one.

"Well, Bob goes in wi' me an' Dick an' Bill Campbell, Douglas's lad, we workin' connectin' trails, an' he done fine. He starts right in catchin' martens an' silver foxes–a wonderful lot for a lad–"

"He only catches one silver, barrin' th' one after he were lost!" broke in Dick. "Now don't go yarnin', Ed."

"Leastways, he gets one silver an' a rare lot o' martens an' otters up t' Christmas, an' a plenty t' send Emily t' th' hospital.

"Then Micmac John–he were a thievin' half-breed as asks Douglas for th' Big Hill trail, an' feels a grudge ag'in' Bob because Douglas give un t' Bob–Micmac goes in an' steals Bob's tent when Bob were up country after deer. A snow comin' on–'twere wonderful cold–Bob gives out tryin' t' find his tilt, an' falls down, an' loses his senses. When he wakes up he's in a Nascaupee Injun tent, th' Injuns comin' on he where he falls an' takin' he with un.

"Bob not knowin' th' lingo they speaks, an' they not knowin' his lingo, an' he not knowin' how far they took he before he wakes up, or rightly how t' find his tilt, he sticks t' the' Injuns, an' they keeps workin' north till they comes t' Ungava."

"A wonderful trip that were! A wonderful trip! No man in th' Bay were ever t' Ungava before, so we calls he 'Ungava Bob,'" interrupted Dick.

"Then Bob works 'cross th' nu'th'ard country with huskies," continued Ed, "an' up th' coast with huskies, until he goes adrift on th' ice–him an' his two huskies he has with he–an' when they thinks they's lost, or like t' be lost, they comes on a tradin' vessel froze in th' ice an' loaded wi' tradin' goods an' furs, an' not e'er a man aboard she. Bob an' th' huskies sails th' vessel in here, when th' ice breaks up, an' th' ship goes free.

"That were just one year ago. Me an' Dick gets out from th' trails th' day Bob gets home, an' Douglas goin' with us, we sails th' vessel, which were 'The Maid o' the North,' t' St. Johns, an' Bob gets fifteen thousand dollars salvage money. A rare lot o' money, sir, that were for any man t' have, let alone a lad."

"What happened to the little girl–his sister?" asked Shad.

"She goes t' th' hospital, an' comes back t' Wolf Bight in September, cured an' fine. She be a fine little maid, too–a fine little maid," Ed asserted.

"What was done to the half-breed Indian–Micmac John, I think you called him?"

"Micmac? Oh, he were killed by wolves handy t' th' place th' Injuns finds Bob. Me, wi' Bill an' Dick, here, goes lookin' for Bob an' finds Micmac's bones where th' wolves scatters un, an' handy to un is Bob's flatsled an' thinkin' they's Bob's remains I hauls un out in th' winter, an' his folks buries un proper for his remains before he gets out in th' spring."

"What an experience for a kid!" exclaimed Shad. "He must have had some rattling adventures?"

"Aye, that he did," said Ed. "'Twould be a long story t' tell un all, but there were one, now–"

"Now don't go yarnin', Ed," interrupted Dick, who had stepped out of doors and returned at this moment. "Ed never tells un straight, Mr. Trunbridge."

"Troobridge," broke in Ed.

"Trowbridge," volunteered Shad.

"Mr. Trowbridge," continued Dick. "He makes un a lot worse'n Bob tells un. Fog's clearin', Ed, an' we better be goin' after we eats dinner."

"That we had, an' the fog's clearin'," agreed Ed.

"But how about Ungava Bob? I'd like to meet him. Do you really think I may be able to engage him to guide me on a two or three weeks' trip?" asked Shad.

"Aye," said Ed. "I'm thinkin', now, you might. Bob's not startin' for th' trails for three weeks, whatever, an' he's bidin' home till he goes, an' not wonderful busy. I'm thinkin' Bob could go."

"That settles it," Shad decided. "I'll look him up."

"You'll be welcome t' a place in our boat," suggested Dick. "'Tis a two-days' sail, wi' fair wind. They's plenty o' room, an' we can tow th' canoe. Me an' Ed lives at Porcupine Cove, an' you can paddle th' canoe over from there t' Wolf Bight in half a day, whatever."

"Done!" exclaimed Shad.

With the assurance of Mr. James Forbes, the factor, that the rivers flowing into the head of the Bay, a hundred miles inland from Fort Pelican, offered good canoe routes, Shad felt that a kind fate had indeed directed him to Fort Pelican, and that he had been particularly fortunate in meeting the two trappers.

"Bob Gray will be a good man for you if you can engage him, and I think you can," said Mr. Forbes. "Bob has had some truly remarkable adventures, and he's an interesting chap. Ed Matheson will probably relate these adventures to you, properly embellished, if you go up the Bay with him and Dick Blake. Take Ed's stories, though, with a grain of salt. He is a good trapper, but he has a vivid imagination."

Shad accepted Mr. Forbes's invitation to dine in the "big house," as the factor's residence was called, and when, after dinner, Mr. Forbes accompanied him to the wharf, the trappers had already stowed his outfit into their boat, and the two mean were awaiting his arrival. No time was lost in

getting away. Sail was hoisted at once, and with Shad's canoe in tow the boat turned westward into the narrows that connect Eskimo Bay with the ocean.

"Th' wind's shifted t' nu'th'ard, and when we gets through th' narrows there'll be no fog," Dick prophesied, and his prophecy proved true. Presently the sky cleared, the sun broke through the mist, the freshening north wind swept away the last lingering fog bank, and as a curtain rises upon a scene, so the lifting fog revealed to Shad Trowbridge the weird, primitive beauty of the rugged northland that he was entering.

The atmosphere, so lately clogged with mist, had suddenly become transparent. To the southward, beyond a broad stretch of gently heaving waters, rose a range of snow-capped mountains, extending far to the westward. Reaching up from the nearby northern shore of the bay, and stretching away over gently rolling hills lay the boundless evergreen forest.

Somewhere in the distance a wild goose honked. White-winged gulls soared gracefully overhead. Now and again a seal rose to gaze for an inquisitive moment at the passing boat, and once a flock of ducks settled upon the waters. The air was redolent with the pungent odour of spruce and balsam fir–the perfume of the forest–and Shad, lounging contentedly at the bow of the boat, drank in great wholesome lungfuls of it.

All this was commonplace to the trappers, and quite unmindful of it Ed Matheson launched upon tales of stirring wilderness adventures in which his imagination was unrestrained, save by an occasional expostulation from Dick.

The wild region through which they were passing gave proper setting for Ed's stories, and Shad, a receptive listener, wished that he, too, might battle with nature as these men did. How tame and uneventful his own life seemed. Already the subtle lure of the wilderness was asserting itself.

Three days after leaving Fort Pelican, Shad and the two trappers sailed their dory into Porcupine Cove. It was mid-afternoon, and Shad, impatient to reach Wolf Bight and begin his explorations in company with Ungava Bob, prepared for immediate departure, after a bountiful dinner of boiled grouse, bread, and tea in Dick Blake's cabin.

"Better 'bide wi' me th' evenin'," invited Dick, "an' take an early start in th' mornin'. Th' wind's veered t' th' nor'-nor'west, an' she's like t' kick up some chop th' evenin', an' 'tis a full half-day's cruise t' Wolf Bight, whatever."

"I can make it all right," insisted Shad. "Bob may not be able to give me much time, and I want to take advantage of all he can give me."

"Well, if you must be goin', I'd not hinder you; but," continued Dick, "keep clost t' shore, until you reaches that p'int yonder, an' then make th' crossin' for th' south shore, keepin' that blue mountain peak just off your starboard bow, an' you can't be missin' Wolf Bight. If th' wind freshens, camp on th' p'int, an' wait for calm t' make th' crossin' t' th' s'uth'ard shore."

"Thank you, I'll follow your advice," said Shad.

"Wait, now," called Ed, who had disappeared into the cabin, and reappeared with a rope. "I'm thinkin' I'll lash your outfit t' th' canoe. They's no knowin' what's like t' happen, an' 'tis best t' be sure, whatever."

Shad felt truly grateful to the two bronzed trappers as he shook their hands and said adieu to them. It was only his impatience to plunge into the deep forests reaching away to the westward, and a growing curiosity to meet Ungava Bob, that induced him to decline the sincerely extended hospitality of Blake and Matheson.

Afternoon was waning into evening when Shad reached the point Dick had indicated, and the rising breeze was beginning to whip the wave crests here and there into white foam.

Dick Blake had advised him to camp here if the wind increased. It had increased considerably, but Shad had set his heart upon reaching Wolf Bight that night, and he did not wish to stop. The sun was setting, but there was to be a full moon, and he would be able to see nearly as well as by day. The sea, though a little rougher than it had been during the afternoon, was not, after all, he argued, so bad.

"I'll make a try for it, anyhow; I know I can make it," said he, after a little hesitation, and turning his back upon the point he paddled on.

Presently, however, he began to regret his decision. With the setting sun the wind increased perceptibly. The sea grew uncomfortably rough. Little by little the canoe began to ship water, and with every moment the situation became more perilous.

Now, genuinely alarmed, Shad made a vain attempt to turn about, in the hope that he might gain the lee of the point and effect a landing. But it was too late. He quickly found that it was quite impossible to stem the wind, and he had no choice but to continue upon his course.

With full realization of his desperate position, Shad paddled hard and paddled for his life. He was a good swimmer, but he knew well that were his canoe to capsize he could not hope to survive long in these cold waters.

The canoe was gradually filling with water, but he dared not release his paddle to bail the water out. With each big sea that bore down upon him he held his breath in fear that it would overwhelm him.

Nearer and nearer the south shore loomed in the moonlight, and with every muscle strained Shad paddled for it with all his might. If he could only keep afloat another twenty minutes!

But he had taken too desperate a chance. His goal was still a full mile away when a great wave broke over the canoe. Then came another and another in quick succession, and Shad suddenly found himself cast into the sea, struggling in the icy waters, hopelessly far from shore.

III
UNGAVA BOB MAKES A RESCUE

Twilight was settling into gloom, and the first faint stars were struggling to show themselves above the distant line of dark fir and spruce trees that marked the edge of the forest bordering Eskimo Bay. Dark cloud patches scudding across the sky, now and again obscured the face of the rising moon. A brisk northwest breeze was blowing, and though it was mid-July the air had grown chill with the setting of the sun.

Ungava Bob, alone in his boat, arose, buttoned his jacket, trimmed sail, and by force of habit stood with his left hand resting upon the tiller while he scanned the moonlit waters of the bay before resuming his seat.

He was a tall, square-shouldered, well-developed lad of seventeen, straight and lithe as an Indian, with keen, gray-blue eyes, which seemed ever alert and observant. Exposure to sun and wind had tanned his naturally fair skin a rich bronze, and his thick, dark-brown hair, with a tendency to curl up at the ends, where it fell below his cap, gave his round, full face an appearance of boyish innocence.

He was now homeward bound to Wolf Bight from the Hudson's Bay Company's post on the north shore, where he had purchased a supply of steel traps and other equipment preparatory to his next winter's campaign upon the trapping trails of the far interior wilderness; for Bob Gray, though but seventeen years of age, was already an experienced hunter and trapper.

Suddenly, as he looked over the troubled sea, a small black object rising upon the crest of a wave far to leeward caught his eye. The small black object was Shad's canoe, and one with less keen vision might have passed it unnoticed, or seeing it have supposed it belated debris cast into the bay by the rivers, for the spring floods had hardly yet fully subsided. But Bob's training as a hunter taught him to take nothing for granted, and, watching intently for its reappearance from the trough of the sea, he presently discerned in the moonlight the faint glint of a paddle.

"A canoe!" he exclaimed, as he sat down. "An' what, now, be an Injun doin' out there this time o' night? An' Injuns never crosses where this un be. I'll see, now, who it is, an' what he's up to, whatever," and, suiting the action to the resolve, he shifted his course to bear down upon the stranger.

The hunter instinctively attributes importance to every sign, sound, or action that is not in harmony with the usual routine of his world, and by actual investigation he must needs satisfy himself of its meaning. This is not idle curiosity, but an instinct born of necessity and life-long training, and it was this instinct that prompted Ungava Bob's action in turning from his direct course homeward.

"'Tis no Injun," he presently said, as with a nearer approach he observed the stroke. "'Tis too long an' slow a paddle-stroke."

This puzzled him, for he knew well every white settler of the Bay within a hundred miles of his home, and he knew, too, that only some extraordinary mission could have called one of them abroad so late in the evening, and particularly upon the course this canoe was taking at a season of the year when all were employed upon their fishing grounds.

Gradually he drew down upon the canoe, until at length he could make out its lines, and observed that it was not a birch bark, the only sort of canoe in use in the Bay by either Indians or white natives. The canoeist, too, was a stranger in the region. Of this he had no doubt, though he could not see his features.

He was well within hailing distance, though it was evident the stranger in the canoe had not yet discovered his approach, when a black cloud passed over the face of the moon, plunging the sea into darkness, and when the moon again lighted the waters canoe and canoeist had vanished as by magic.

Like a flash, realising what had happened, Bob seized a coil of rope, made one end fast to the stern of his boat, grasped the coil in his right hand, and, tense and expectant, scanned the sea for the reappearance of the unfortunate stranger.

Presently he discovered the submerged canoe directly ahead, and an instant later saw Shad rise to the surface, strike out for it, and catch and cling to the gunwale.

Bob poised himself for the effort, and as he scudded past, measuring the distance to a nicety, deftly cast the line directly across the canoe and within the reach of Shad's hand, shouting as he did so:

"Make un fast!"

Without looking for the result, he sprang forward, lowered sail, shipped the oars, pulled the boat about, and Shad, who had caught the rope, had scarcely time to thrust it under a thwart and secure it before Bob, drawing alongside, caught him by the collar of his shirt and hauled him aboard the boat. Seizing the oars again, and pulling safely free from danger of collision with the canoe, Bob hoisted sail, brought the boat before the wind, and resuming his seat astern had his first good look at his thus suddenly acquired passenger.

Shad, amidships, was engaged in drawing off his outer flannel shirt, from which he coolly proceeded to wring, as thoroughly as possible, the excess water, before donning it again.

Not a word had passed between them, and neither spoke until Shad had readjusted his shirt, when, by way of opening conversation, Bob remarked:

"You'm wet, sir."

"Naturally," admitted Shad. "I've been in the Bay, and the bay water is surprisingly wet."

"Aye," agreed Bob, "'tis that."

"And surprisingly cold."

"Aye, 'tis wonderful cold."

"And I'm profoundly grateful to you for pulling me out of it."

"'Twere fine I comes up before your canoe founders, or I'm thinkin' you'd be handy t' drownded by now."

"A sombre thought, but I guess you're right. A fellow couldn't swim far or stick it out long in there," said Shad, waving his arm toward the dark waters. "I'm sure I owe my life to you. It was lucky for me you saw me."

"'Tweren't luck, sir; 'twere Providence. 'Twere th' Lord's way o' takin' care o' you."

"Well, it was a pretty good way, anyhow. But where did you drop from? I didn't see you till you threw me that line a few minutes ago."

"I were passin' t' wind'ard, sir, when I sights you, an' not knowin' who 'twere, I sails close in till I makes you out as a stranger, an' then you goes down an' I picks you up."

"That sounds very simple, but it was a good stunt, just the same, to get me the line and come around in this chop the way you did, and then haul me aboard before I knew what you were about–you kept your head beautifully, and knew what to do–and you only a kid, too!" added Shad, in surprise, as the moonlight fell full on Bob's face.

"A–kid?" asked Bob, not quite certain what "kid" might be.

"Yes–just a youngster–a boy."

"I'm seventeen," Bob asserted, in a tone which resented the imputation of extreme youth. "You don't look much older'n that yourself."

"But I am–much older–I'm eighteen," said Shad, grinning. "My name's Trowbridge–Shad Trowbridge, from Boston. What is your name? Let's get acquainted," and Shad extended his hand.

"I'm Bob Gray, o' Wolf Bight," said Bob, taking Shad's hand.

"Not Ungava Bob?" exclaimed Shad.

"Aye, they calls me Ungava Bob here-abouts sometimes."

"Why, I was on my way to Wolf Bight to see you!"

"T' see me, sir?"

"Yes, I came up from Fort Pelican to Porcupine Cove with two trappers named Blake and Matheson, and they told me about you. They said I might induce you to take a trip with me."

"A trip with you, sir?"

"Yes. I want to take a little canoe and fishing trip into the country, and Blake and Matheson suggested that you might have two or three weeks to spare and could go along with me. I'll pay you well for your services. What do you think of it?"

"I'm–not just knowin'," Bob hesitated. "I leaves for my trappin' grounds th' first o' August t' be gone th' winter, an'–I'm thinkin' I wants t' stay home till I goes–an' my folks'll be wantin' me home."

"Well, let's not decide now. We'll talk it over to-morrow."

"You'm cold," said Bob, after a moment's silence, reaching into a locker under his seat and bringing out a moleskin adicky. "Put un on. She's fine and warm."

"Thank you. I'm thoroughly chilled," Shad admitted, gratefully accepting the adicky and drawing it on over his wet clothing.

"Pull th' hood up," suggested Bob. "'Twill help warm you."

"There, that's better; I'll soon be quite comfortable."

"We don't seem to be making much headway," Shad remarked, observing the shore after a brief lapse in conversation.

"No," said Bob, "th' canoe bein' awash 'tis a heavy drag towin' she, but we'll soon be in th' lee, an' out o' danger o' th' sea smashin' she ag'in' th' boat, an' then I'll haul she alongside an' bring your outfit aboard."

They were slowly approaching the south shore and presently, as Bob had predicted, ran under the lee of a long point of land, where in calmer water the canoe was manoeuvred alongside, and Shad's outfit, so fortunately and securely lashed fast by Ed Matheson, was found intact, save the paddle which Shad had been using.

The things were quickly transferred to the boat, and, this accomplished, Bob bailed the canoe free of water, dropped it astern, now a light and easy tow, and catching the breeze again in the open, turned at length into Wolf Bight, where he made a landing on a sandy beach.

"That's where I lives," said Bob, indicating a little log cabin, sharply silhouetted against the moonlit sky, on a gentle rise above them.

When the canoe, quite unharmed, was lifted from the water and all made snug, Shad silently followed up the path and into the door of the darkened cabin, where Bob lighted a candle, displaying a large square room, the uncarpeted floor scoured to immaculate whiteness, as were also the home-made wooden chairs, a chest of drawers, and uncovered table.

There were two windows on the south side and one on the north side, all gracefully draped with snowy muslin. A clock ticked cheerfully on a rude mantel behind a large box stove. To the left of the door, a rough stairway led to the attic, and the rear of the room was curtained off into two compartments, the spotlessly clean curtains of a pale blue and white checked print, giving a refreshing touch of colour to the room which, simply as it was furnished, possessed an atmosphere of restfulness and homely comfort that impressed the visitor at once as cosy and wholesome.

"My folks be all abed," explained Bob, as he placed the candle on the table, "but we'll put a fire on an' boil th' kettle. A drop o' hot tea'll warm you up after your cold souse."

"I would appreciate it," said Shad, his teeth chattering.

"Be that you, Bob?" asked a voice from behind the curtain.

"Aye, Father," answered Bob, "an' I has a gentleman with me, come t' visit us."

"Now that be fine. I'll be gettin' right up," said the voice.

"Put a fire on, lad, an' set th' kettle over," suggested a woman's voice, "an' I'll be gettin' a bite t' eat."

"Please don't leave your bed," pleaded Shad. "It will make me feel that I am causing a lot of trouble. Bob and I will do very nicely."

"'Tis no trouble, sir–'tis no trouble at all," the man's voice assured.

"Oh, no, sir; 'tis no trouble," echoed the woman's voice. "'Tis too rare a pleasure t' have a visitor."

Both spoke in accents of such honest welcome and hospitality that Shad made no further objection.

The fire was quickly lighted, and Shad, as the stove began to send out its genial warmth, had but just removed his borrowed adicky when the curtain parted and Mr. and Mrs. Gray appeared.

"Mr. Trowbridge, this be Father and Mother," said Bob; adding as a second thought, "Mr. Trowbridge lives in Boston."

"'Tis fine t' see a stranger, sir," welcomed Richard Gray, as he shook Shad's hand warmly, "an' from Boston, too! I have hearn th' fishermen o' th' coast tell o' Boston more'n once, but I never were thinkin' we'd have some one from Boston come t' our house! An' you comes all th' way from Boston, now?"

"Yes," admitted Shad, "but I feel sure I'm causing you and Mrs. Gray no end of inconvenience, coming at this time of night."

"Oh, no, sir! 'Tis no inconvenience in th' least. We're proud t' have you," assured Mrs. Gray, taking his hand. "Why, you'm wet, sir!" she exclaimed, noticing Shad's clinging garments, and her motherly instinct at once asserted itself. "You must have a change. Bob, lad, hold th' candle, now, whilst I get some dry clothes."

"Please don't trouble yourself. I'm very comfortable by the fire; indeed, I am," Shad protested.

But Bob nevertheless held the candle while his mother selected a suit of warm underwear, a pair of woollen socks, a flannel outer shirt, and a pair of freshly washed white moleskin trousers from the chest of drawers.

"These be Bob's clothes, but they'll be a handy fit for you, I'm thinkin', for Bob an' you be as like in size as two duck's eggs," she commented, looking the two over for comparison. "Now, Bob, light a candle an' show Mr. Trowbridge above stairs. When you're changed, sir, bring your wet things down, an' we'll hang un by th' stove t' dry."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Gray," said Shad gratefully, turning to follow Bob.

In the attic were three bunks spread with downy Hudson's Bay Company blankets, two stools, and a small table. It contained no other furniture, but was beautifully clean. There was an open window at either end, one looking toward the water, the other toward the spruce forest, and the atmosphere, bearing the perfume of balsam and fir, was fresh and wholesome.

"I sleeps here," informed Bob, placing the candle on the table and indicating one of the bunks, "an' you may have either o' th' other beds you wants. Now whilst you changes, sir, I'll bring up th' things from th' boat. Here's a pair o' deerskin moccasins. Put un on," he added, selecting a new pair from several hanging on a peg.

Shad made his toilet leisurely, and as he turned to descend the stairs with his wet garments on his arm he met the appetising odour of frying fish, which reminded him that he had eaten nothing since mid-day and was ravenously hungry.

In the room below he found the table spread with a white cloth. A plate of bread and a jar of jam were upon it, and at the stove Mrs. Gray was transferring from frying-pan to platter some deliciously browned brook trout. Bob, with his father's assistance, had brought up Shad's belongings from the boat, and Richard was critically examining Shad's repeating rifle.

"Let me have un," said he, putting down the gun, and reaching for the wet garments on Shad's arm proceeded at once to spread them upon a line behind the stove.

"Set in an' have a bite, now. You must be wonderful hungry after your cruise," invited Mrs. Gray.

"'Tis only trout an' a bit o' bread an' jam an' a drop o' tea," Richard apologised, as he joined Shad and Bob at the table, "but we has t' do wi' plain eatin' in this country, an' be content with what th' Lord sends us."

"Trout are a real luxury to me," assured Shad. "We are seldom able to get them at home, and a trout supper is a feast to be remembered."

"Well, now! Trout a luxury!" exclaimed Richard. "About all we gets t' eat in th' summer is trout an' salmon, an' we're glad enough when th' birds flies in th' fall."

"What birds do you get?" asked Shad.

"Duck and geese, and there's plenty of partridge in the winter," explained Richard.

"An' I were thinkin', now, you might not care for un," said Mrs. Gray. "I'm wonderful glad you likes un."

Richard asked the blessing, and then invited Shad to "fall to," and frequently urged him to take more trout and not to be "afraid of un," a quite unnecessary warning in view of Shad's long fast and naturally vigorous appetite.

"Mr. Trowbridge wants me t' go on a fortnight's trip up th' country with he," remarked Bob, as they ate.

"A trip up th' country?" inquired Richard.

"Yes," said Shad, "a fishing and canoeing trip."

"But Bob's t' be wonderful busy makin' ready for th' trappin'," Richard objected.

"So he tells me," said Shad, "but perhaps if we talk it over to-morrow you can make some suggestion."

"Aye," agreed Richard, with evident relief, "we'll talk un over to-morrow."

When the meal was finished, Richard devoutly offered thanks, after the manner of the God-fearing folk of the country.

The mantel clock struck two as they arose from the table. Dawn was breaking, for at this season of the year the Labrador nights are short, and Shad, at the end of his long and eventful day, was quite content to follow Bob above stairs to his attic bunk.

IV
AWAY TO THE TRAILS

Sunshine was streaming through the open south window of the attic when Shad awoke. Just outside the window a jay was screeching noisily. Bob's bunk was vacant. It was evident that Shad had slept long and that the hour was late, and he sprang quickly from his bed and consulted his watch, but the watch, flooded with water when the canoe capsized the night before, had stopped.

He paused for a moment at the open window to look out upon the nearby forest and expand his lungs with delicious draughts of the fragrant air. It was a glorious day, and as he left the window to make a hasty toilet his nerves tingled in eager anticipation, for he was at last at the threshold of the great Labrador wilderness–his land of dreams and romance. He was certain it held for him many novel experiences and perhaps thrilling adventures. And he was not to be disappointed.

His clothes, which Richard had hung to dry by the stove the night before, lay on a stool at his bedside, neatly folded. Some one had placed them there while he slept. He donned them quickly, and descending to the living-room found the table spread and Mrs. Gray preparing to set a pot of tea to brew.

"Good morning, sir," she greeted, adding solicitously: "I hopes you had a good rest, and feels none the worse for gettin' wet last evenin'."

"Good morning," said Shad. "I rested splendidly, thank you, and feel fine and dandy. Whew!" he exclaimed, glancing at the mantel clock. "Twelve o'clock!"

"Aye. We was wonderful careful t' be quiet an' not wake you, sir," she explained. "'Tis well t' have plenty o' rest after a wettin' in th' Bay. Dinner's just ready," and going to the open door she called, "Emily! Emily!"

A young girl, perhaps twelve years of age, quickly entered in response to the summons. She was clad in a cool, fresh print frock and wore deerskin moccasins upon her feet. Her wavy chestnut-brown hair, gathered with a ribbon, hung down her back; her oval face, lighted by big blue eyes, was tanned a healthy brown, and Shad thought her a rather pretty and altogether wholesome looking child, as she paused in confusion at the threshold upon seeing him.

"Emily, dear, get Mr. Trowbridge a basin o' water, now; he's wantin' t' wash up," directed Mrs. Gray. "Mr. Trowbridge, this is our little maid, Emily."

"I'm glad to know you, Emily," said Shad courteously. "Have you quite recovered from your injury? When I was at Fort Pelican I heard all about you and your trip to St. Johns."

"I's fine now, thank you, sir," answered Emily, flushing to the roots of her hair.

"Yes, Emily's fine an' well now, sir," assured Mrs. Gray, as Emily turned to fill the basin of water. "But she were wonderful bad after her fall till she goes t' th' hospital in St. Johns t' be cured. They's a fresh towel on the peg above th' bench, sir, an' a comb on th' shelf under th' mirror by th' window," she continued, as Emily placed a basin of water on a bench by the door.

"Thank you," acknowledged Shad, turning to complete his toilet.

"Now, Emily, dear, call Father an' Bob," said Mrs. Gray; "dinner's sot." And Emily, glad of a respite from the embarrassing presence of the stranger, ran out, presently to return with her father and Bob.

When dinner was disposed of, Richard suggested that it was "wonderful warm so handy t' th' stove," and leaving Mrs. Gray and Emily to clear the table he conducted Shad and Bob to a convenient seat near the boat landing, where they could enjoy a cooling breeze from the bay. Here he drew from his pocket a stick of very black and very strong-looking tobacco, and holding it toward Shad, asked:

"Does you smoke, sir?"

"No, thank you," declined Shad. "I had just learned to smoke when I entered college, but I was trying for a place on the 'varsity nine, and I had to drop smoking. A fellow can't play his best ball, you know, if he smokes. So I quit smoking before I formed the habit."

"Is that a game like snowshoe racin'!" asked Bob.

"Oh, no!" and Shad described the game and its tactics minutely, with thrilling detail of battles that his college nine had won and lost upon the diamond.

"Well, Bob," Shad asked finally, "have you decided to go with me for a trip into the country?"

"I'm not rightly knowin', sir, where you wants t' go," said Bob.

Shad stated the object of his journey, and the three talked over the possibilities of making such a trip as he desired within the time at Bob's disposal.

"Countin' on bad weather, 'twouldn't be much of a trip you could make in a fortnut, and that'd be th' most time Bob could spare, whatever, with his gettin' ready t' go t' th' trails," Richard finally explained. "His mother an' me be wantin' he home, too, till he goes, for 'twill be a long winter for his mother t' have he away without seein' he.

"Now you says you has no hurry t' go away. Dick Blake an' Bill Campbell goes t' th' handiest tilt o' th' Big Hill trail t' help Bob an' Ed Matheson in with their outfit, an' they starts th' first o' August. Then they comes back t' take their outfits up an' they has t' get in before freeze up.

"You bein' in no hurry, sir, could go with un on th' first trip, an' come back with un, an' that gives you a fine trip an' a fine view o' th' country. It takes un a month t' go in, but runnin' back light wi' th' rapids they makes un in a week, so you gets back th' first week in September month."

"'Twould be grand t' have you along, sir!" exclaimed Bob. "An' I were never thinkin' o' that. Father's wonderful at plannin'."

"Done!" said Shad. "I'll do it, but I hope you won't find me a nuisance around here during the three weeks we have to wait."

"Oh, no, sir! 'Tis a rare treat t' have you visit us, sir!" protested Richard.

And thus it was finally decided.

Bob was very busy during the days that followed. Not only his provision and clothing supply for a ten months' absence from home was to be made ready, but also the full equipment for the new trails to be established.

The necessary traps had already been purchased, but sheet-iron had to be fashioned into stoves and stove-pipe to heat the tents and log tilts, and one new tent was to be made. It was imperative, too, that each minor necessity that the wilderness itself could not readily supply, he provided in advance, and that nothing be forgotten or overlooked.

The establishment of these trails was an event of high importance in the Gray household. Bob's little fortune of a few thousand dollars, derived from the salvage of a trading schooner the previous year, had been deposited in a St. Johns bank, and his thrifty old friend, Douglas Campbell, had suggested that it might be invested to advantage in a small trading venture.

"Bob can lay his trails this winter," said Douglas, "an' next year take some tradin' goods in. Knowin' th' Nascaupee an' Mountaineer Injuns, an' a bit o' their lingo, he'll be able t' do a snug bit o' tradin' with un, along with his trappin'. An' if you opens a little store here at th' Bight next summer, th' rest of you can 'tend un when Bob's inside trappin'.

"I were thinkin', too," said Douglas, "'twould be fine t' send Emily t' St. Johns t' school th' winter, an' she'd learn t' keep th' books. She's a smart lass, an' she'd learn, now, in a winter or two winters, whatever, an' 'twould pay–an' do th' lass a wonderful lot o' good. I'm wantin' a trip t' St. Johns, an' I'd take she on th' mail boat."

There were many long discussions before it was finally decided that Bob should launch upon the venture. Bob's mother opposed it. The terrible winter of suspense when Bob, lost in the snow, was given up for dead, was still a vivid remembrance to her. She recalled those tedious months of

grief as one recalls a horrid nightmare, and she declared that another such winter, particularly if she were to be deprived of Emily's society, would be unendurable.

But her objections were finally overcome. Emily was to go to school and it was decided Bob should establish two new trails. One of these he was to hunt himself, the other one Ed Matheson had agreed to hunt on a profit-sharing basis. Dick Blake and Bill Campbell–a son of Douglas Campbell–were to occupy adjoining trails, and the four to work more or less in conjunction with one another.

Shad and Emily became fast friends at once. On pleasant afternoons she would lead him away to explore the surrounding woods in search of wild flowers, and after supper he would tell her fairy tales from Grimm, but best of all she liked his stories from Greek and Roman mythology.

She, and the whole family, indeed, listened with rapt attention when Shad related how Chronos attacked Uranos with a sickle, wounding and driving Uranos from his throne; how from some of the drops that fell from Uranos's wounds sprang giants, the forefathers of the wild Indians; how from still other drops came the swift-footed Furies–the three Erinnyes–who punished those who did wrong, and were the dread of the wicked.

Thus the days passed quickly and pleasantly–even the occasional foggy or rainy days, when Bob and his father worked indoors, and Bob, at Emily's request, recounted very modestly his own adventures. Emily particularly liked to have Bob tell of Ma-ni-ka-wan, an Indian maiden who nursed him back to health after Sish-e-ta-ku-shin and Moo-koo-mahn, Manikawan's father and brother, had found him unconscious in the snow and carried him to their skin wigwam.

"Th' Nascaupees was rare kind t' me," Bob explained to Shad. "They made me one o' th' tribe, Sishetakushin calls me his son, an' they gives me an Indian name meanin' in our talk 'White Brother o' th' Snow.' They were thinkin' I'd stop with un, an' they were wonderful sorry when I leaves un t' come home with th' huskies. Manikawan were a pretty maid–as pretty as ever I see."

"Were she as pretty as Bessie, now?" asked Emily slyly.

"Now, Emily, dear, don't go teasin' Bob," warned Mrs. Gray.

"I were just askin' he," said Emily; "he's so wonderful fond o' Bessie."

"O' course he's fond o' Bessie, and so be all of us. Emily's speakin' o' Bessie Black, sir," Mrs. Gray explained, to Shad. "She's Tom Black's lass. Tom is th' factor's man over t' th' post, an' th' Blacks be great friends of ours. Bessie's but a young maid–a year younger'n Bob. You'll see th' Blacks when you goes over t' th' post with Bob."

"I'm immensely interested in your Indian friends," said Shad. "Manikawan was a little brick, and the Nascaupees bully good fellows. Will there be a chance of my meeting them?"

"No, they camps on lakes down t' th' n'uth'ard in summer," Bob explained. "If you was stayin' th' winter, now, you'd see un."

"I'm almost persuaded to remain on the trails with you all winter, and see something of the life of real, uncivilised Indians," asserted Shad. "I would stay if it were not for college."

"'Twould be fine t' have you, now!" exclaimed Bob enthusiastically. "But," he added doubtfully, "I'm fearin' you'd find th' winter wonderful cold, an' th' tilts lonesome places t' stop in, not bein' used to un."

"An' your mother would be worryin' about you; now, wouldn't she?" suggested Mrs. Gray.

"My mother died when I was a little boy, and Father died two years ago," said Shad. "I have one sister, but she learned long ago that I could take care of myself."

"Is she a little sister?" asked Emily.

"Oh, no," said Shad, "she's a big, married sister, and has a little girl of her own nearly as old as you are."

"'Twould be grand t' have you stay," Bob again suggested.

"Thank you, and it would be grand to stay, I'm sure, but," said Shad regretfully, "I can't do it. I must go back to college."

At length Bob announced one day that his outfit was completed and that all was in readiness, save a few incidentals to be purchased at the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post, fifteen miles across the bay. Shad, too, found it necessary to make some purchases preparatory to his journey to the interior, and the following morning the two sailed away in Bob's dory.

Tom Black, the post servant, welcomed them as they stepped ashore on the sandy beach below the post, and with him was Bob's old friend, Douglas Campbell, who stated that he had arrived at the post an hour earlier.

"I'm glad you come over, Bob," said he, as the four walked up toward Black's cabin. "When I comes t' th' post this mornin', I were thinkin' t' go back t' Kenemish by way of Wolf Bight t' have a talk with you, but your comin' saves me th' cruise. Set down here, now, a bit, till dinner's ready. I wants t' hear your plans for th' trails."

And while Shad was carried off by Tom to meet Mr. McDonald, the factor, Douglas and Bob seated themselves upon a bench before the cabin and discussed the proposed new trails.

"Now, Bob, 'tis this I were wantin' t' say to you, an' I weren't wantin' t' say it when your mother'd hear, an' set her worryn'," said Douglas finally. "Don't forget you're goin' where no white trapper was ever goin' before. You'll have to be a wonderful sight more careful than on th' Big Hill trail. Last year when I goes on th' Big Hill trail some Mingen Injuns come t' th' last tilt an' made some trouble, an' told me they'd never let a white trapper hunt th' country beyond th' Big Hill trail, an' you plans t' go, Bob. Now, if you works west'ard of a line from th' last tilt o' th' Big Hill trail an' th' river, be wonderful careful o' th' Mingens. They's a bad lot of Injuns."

"I'll be careful, sir," promised Bob, adding, however, "I'm not fearin' th' Injuns, though."

"You never knows what an Injun's goin' t' do," cautioned Douglas. "You was findin' th' Nascaupees friendly, but th' Mingens is different."

Presently Tom joined them and invited them to dinner in the crudely furnished but spotlessly clean living-room of the cabin. Mrs. Black, a stout, motherly woman, had countless questions to ask of Douglas and Bob as to how "th' folks t' home" fared, while she and her daughter Bessie served the meal.

Shad dined with Mr. McDonald, but directly after dinner joined Bob while they made their purchases in the shop, and prepared for immediate departure to Wolf Bight. When all was ready, Bob left Shad waiting at the boat while he returned to the cabin to say goodbye to Mrs. Black and Bessie.

Bessie followed him to the door, and when they were outside where none could see she drew from beneath her apron a buckskin cartridge pouch, upon which she had neatly worked in silk the word "BOB" in the centre of a floral design, doubtless the result of many days' labour.

"Here, Bob," said she, "I were makin' it for you, an' when you carries it on th' trail remember we're all thinkin' of you down here, an' wishin' you luck in th' furrin', an' hopin' you're safe."

"Oh!–Bessie–'tis–'tis wonderful kind of you–I'll always be rememberin'," Bob stammered in acceptance, for a moment quite overcome with surprise and embarrassment.

"Now take care of yourself, Bob. We'll be missin' you th' winter–good-bye, Bob."

"Good-bye, Bessie."

Bob and Shad quickly hoisted sail, and as they drew away from shore Bob looked back to see Bessie still standing in the cabin door, waving her handkerchief to him, and he regretted that he had not shown more plainly his appreciation of her gift and her thoughtfulness.

The following Monday was the day set for the departure of the adventurers, and in accordance with a previous arrangement, late on Sunday afternoon Dick Blake, Ed Matheson, and Bill Campbell, Ungava Bob's trapping companions, joined him and Shad at Wolf Bight, where they were to spend the night. Bill Campbell was a tall, awkward, bashful young man of twenty-one, whose chief physical characteristic was a great shock of curly red hair.

Monday morning came all too soon. Breakfast was eaten by candle light, and with the first grey hints of coming dawn the boat and Shad's canoe were loaded for the start.

Shad's tent and camping equipment, less heavy and cumbersome than Bob's, together with a limited supply of provisions for daily use upon the journey to the plateau, were carried in the canoe. The bulk of the provisions and the heavier outfit for the trails, made up into easily portaged packs, were stowed in the boat. This arrangement of the outfit was made to avoid the necessity of unpacking and repacking at night camp, and with packs thus always ready for the carry, much time could be saved.

The family gathered at the shore to bid the travellers farewell. First, the boat with Dick Blake, Ed Matheson, and Bill Campbell at the oars pulled off into the curtain of heavy morning mist that lay upon the waters. Then Bob kissed his mother and Emily, pressed his father's hand, took his place in the canoe with Shad, and a moment later they, too, were swallowed up by the fog.

The long journey, to be followed by a winter of hardship and adventure, was begun, and with heavy hearts the little family upon the shore turned back to their lowly cabin and weary months of misgiving and uncertainty.

V
IN THE FAR WILDERNESS

Beyond the sheltered bight a good breeze was blowing and presently, as the sun arose and the mist lifted from the water, Shad and Bob, keeping close to shore, discovered the boat a half-mile away with sails hoisted, bowling along at good speed.

"We'll be makin' rare time, now," said Bob. "We'll be passin' Rabbit Island in an hour, an' makin' the Traverspine t' boil th' kettle for dinner."

"No rapids to-day?" asked Shad.

"No, th' portage at Muskrat Falls is th' first," answered Bob, adding uncertainly: "I'm 'feared you'll find th' work on th' river wearisome, not bein' used t' un–th' portagin' an' trackin'. I finds un hard."

"That's a part of the game," said Shad. "I expect to do my share of the work, old man, and I don't think you'll find me a quitter."

"I were knowin', now, you were that kind, ever since I picks you out o' th' Bay," exclaimed Bob. "You weren't losin' your head, an' by th' time I h'ists sail you was wringin' th' water outen your shirt, just as if 'tweren't nothin'. An', Mr. Trowbridge, I likes you ever since."

"Thank you, Bob, but if you want me to be your friend drop the handle from my name and call me 'Shad.' We're on an equal footing from this on."

"'Twill be wonderful hard, Mr. Trow–"

"Shad!"

"'Twill be wonderful hard t' call you 'Shad '–it sounds kind of unrespectful, now."

"Not in the least," laughed Shad. "All the fellows call me Shad."

"I'll try t' think now t' do it, Mr.–I means Shad. But 'tis a rare queer name."

"Shadrach is the full name. It is pretty awful, isn't it? But doting parents cast it upon me, and I'll have to hold my head up under it."

"'Tis a Bible name, now. I remembers readin' about Shadrach somewheres in th' Book o' Daniel."

The canoe and boat had been gradually drawing together and now, within speaking distance, Bob called out:

"I'm thinkin' me an' Shad'll go on t' th' Traverspine or handy t' un, an' have th' kettle boiled when you comes up. We ought t' make clost t' th' Traverspine by noon."

"You an' who?" bawled Dick.

"Me an' Shad–Mr. Trowbridge."

"Oh, aye," answered Dick, "'twill save time."

"Bob's gettin' wonderful unrespectful, callin' Mr. Toobridge 'Shad!'" remarked Ed.

"'Tain't 'Toobridge,' Ed!" exclaimed Dick, in disgust. "Can't you remember, now? 'Tis Towbreg–T-o-w-b-r-e-g. You'll be callin' he wrong t' his face again."

"I'm thinkin' you be right this time, Dick," Ed reluctantly admitted.

The lighter and swifter canoe had already shot ahead and was out of hearing. Bob's mind filled with plans for the future, Shad enjoying the wide vista of water and wilderness, they paddled in silence.

The brilliant sunshine, the low, rocky shores, the spruce-clad hills rising above, with now and again a breath of the perfumed forest wafted to them upon the breeze, inspired and exhilarated the young voyageurs. Shad was conscious of a new sense of freedom and power taking possession of him. The romance of the situation appealed to his imagination. Was he not one of an adventurous band of pioneers going into a vast wilderness, an untamed and unexplored land, to battle with nature and the elements?

For several hours they paddled, finally entering the wide river mouth. Here the first indication of a current was encountered, and the northern bank was followed closely that they might take advantage of counter eddies, and thus overcome the retarding effect of the midstream current.

"'Twill be noon when th' boat comes, an' we'll stop now t' boil th' kettle," Bob finally suggested. "Th' Traverspine River is handy by. She comes into this river just above here a bit."

"Good!" exclaimed Shad. "I'm nearly famished, and I've been hoping for the last hour to hear you say that."

"Paddlin' do make for hunger," admitted Bob, as he stepped ashore on a sandy beach near the mouth of a rushing brook. "I'm a bit hungry myself. I'll be puttin' a fire on now, an' you brings up th' things from th' canoe."

In an incredibly short time the fire was lighted, and when Shad brought up a kettle of water from the river Bob had already cut a stiff pole about five feet in length. The butt end of this he sharpened, and, jamming it into the ground, inclined it in such manner that the kettle, which he took from Shad and hung by its bail upon the other end of the pole, was suspended directly over the blaze.

Bob, who installed himself as cook, now sliced some fat pork to fry, while Shad gathered a quantity of large dry sticks which lay plentifully about and began piling them upon the fire.

"Oh, don't make such a big fire, now!" exclaimed Bob, when he discovered what Shad was about. "'Twill be too hot t' cook by. A small bit o' fire's enough;" and he proceeded to pull out of the blaze the large wood which Shad had placed upon it.

"If there's nothing else for me to do, I'll see if there are any trout in that brook," said Shad.

Shad made his first cast in a promising pool a little way from the fire, and the moment the fly touched the water, "zip!" went the reel. The result was a fine big trout. Within twenty minutes he had landed eighteen, and when presently the boat drew up a delicious odour of frying fish welcomed the three hungry men as they sprang ashore and made the painter fast.

"Shad got un," explained Bob, in response to an exclamation of pleasure from Ed.

"You means Mr. Towbridge, Bob," corrected Dick, with dignity.

"No," broke in Shad, "Bob's right. Shad is my front name and I want you fellows to call me Shad; leave the handle off."

"An' you wants, sir," agreed Dick. "'Tis a bit more friendly soundin'."

"Them trout makes me think," said Ed, as he cut some tobacco from a plug and filled his pipe after dinner, "of onct I were out huntin' pa'tridges. I gets plenty o' pa'tridges, but I finds myself wonderful hungry for trout, when I comes to a pool in a brook where I stops t' cook my dinner an' sees a big un jump.

"'Now,' says I, t' myself, 'Ed,' says I, 'you got t' get un somehow,' an' I goes through my pocket lookin' for tackle. All I finds is a piece o' salmon twine an' one fishhook. 'I'll try un, whatever,' says I, an' I cuts a pole an' ties th' salmon twine t' un, an' th' hook t' th' salmon twine, an,' baitin' th' hook with a bit o' pa'tridge skin, throws in.

"Quicker'n a steel trap a trout takes un, but he's a little un, an' I'm so disgusted-like I don't pull he right in. Then before I knows it a big trout takes an' swallows th' little un."

Ed paused to lend effect to the climax, while he lighted his pipe and began puffing vigorously.

"Well?" asked Shad. "Did you land him?"

"Not very prompt," continued Ed. "I was so flustrated I just looks at un for a bit, skiddin' around in th' water. Then, while I lets un play, quicker'n I can say 'boo' an old whopper up an' grabs th' big un an' swallows he. Then I yanks, an' I lands th' three of un.

"Th' outside un were two foot and a half long an' a fraction over. I measures he. Th' next one were nineteen an' three-quarters inches long, an' th' little un were ten inches long. Th' little un an' th' next weren't hurt much, an' not wantin' they I throws un back, an' th' big un does me for dinner an' supper an' breakfast th' next mornin', an' then I throws a big hunk that were left over away, because I don't want t' pack un any longer."

"Ed," said Dick solemnly, "you'll be struck dead some day for lyin' so."

"Who? Me lyin'?" asked Ed, with assumed indignation.

"Yes, you. You'm always yarnin', Ed. You never seen a trout moren't two foot long, no more'n I have," declared Dick.

"Oh, well," sighed Ed, while the others laughed, "they's no use tellin' you of happenin's, Dick, you always were a doubtin' o' me."

The following day at noon the Muskrat Falls were reached, and here the real work and hardship of the journey began. Day after day the men were driven to toil with tracking lines up swift currents, more often than not immersed to their waists in the icy waters of the river, or for weary miles they staggered over portages with heavy loads upon their backs. To add to their difficulties a season of rain set in, and hardly a day passed without its hours of drizzle or downpour. But they could not permit rain or weather to retard their progress.

Always between sunrise and sunset they were tormented, too, by myriads of black flies and mosquitoes, the pests of the North. There was no protection against the attacks of the insects. The black flies were particularly vicious; not only was their bite poisonous, but a drop of blood appeared wherever one of them made a wound, and in consequence the faces, hands, and wrists of the toiling voyageurs were not alone constantly swollen, but were coated with a mixture of blood and sweat.

Shad, less toughened than his companions, suffered more than they. He was actually made ill for a day or two by the poison thus inoculated into his system, though with his characteristic determination, he still insisted, against the protests of the others, upon doing his full share of the work. Dick advised him, finally, to carry a fat pork rind in his pocket and to occasionally apply the greasy side of the rind to his face and hands. This he discovered offered some relief, though, as he remarked, grease, added to blood and sweat, gave him the appearance of a painted savage.

With the evening camp-fire, however, came a respite to the weary travellers, and recompense for all the hardship and toil of the day. Here they would relax after supper, and with vast enjoyment smoke and chat or tell stories of wild adventure.

Shad contributed tales of college pranks, which never failed to bring forth uproarious laughter, while his vivid descriptions of battles on the gridiron or on the diamond, illustrated with diagrams drawn with a stick upon the ground, and minutely explained, held his hearers in suspense until the final goal was kicked or the last inning played.

Dick and Ed described many stirring personal adventures, the latter embellishing his stories with so many fantastic flights of imagination that Shad would scarcely have known where fact ended and fiction began had Dick not made it a point to interject his warnings of the eternal vengeance that awaited Ed if he did not "have a care of his yamin'."

One morning during the third week after leaving Wolf Bight, a beautiful sheet of placid water opened before them in a far-reaching vista to the northwest. On either side of the narrow lake rose towering cliffs of granite, their dark faces lighted at intervals by brooklets tumbling in cascades from the heights above. A loon laughed weirdly in the distance, and from the hills above a wolf sounded a dismal howl. It was a scene of rugged, primeval grandeur, and Shad, taken completely by surprise, caught his breath.

"'Tis Lake Wanakapow," explained Ed. "There'll be no more trackin' or portagin'. 'Twill be straight sailin' an' paddlin' from this on. Th' first tilt o' th' Big Hill trail's handy, an' if th' wind holds fair we'll reach un by th' end o' th' week, whatever."

For the first time since their departure the voyageurs were enabled to don dry clothing, with the assurance that they could remain dry and comfortable throughout the day. The evenings were becoming frosty and exhilarating. The black flies and mosquitoes had ceased to annoy. Wild geese and ducks upon the waters, and flocks of ptarmigans along the shores, gave promise of an abundance and variety of food.

With the changed conditions, in marked contrast to the toil and hardships of the preceding weeks, Shad's desire to remain throughout the winter grew. The lure of the wilderness had its power upon him.

The first tilt of the Big Hill trail was reached on Saturday, as Ed had predicted. Here camp was pitched, the boat finally unloaded, and preparation made for Dick and Bill to begin their return voyage on Monday morning.

When supper was eaten and they were gathered about the evening camp-fire in blissful relaxation, silently watching the aurora borealis work its wild wonders in the sky, Shad suddenly asked:

"Are you certain, Bob, I'd not be a burden to you if I remained here all winter, You know, I'm a tenderfoot in the woods."

"Oh, no!" Bob assured enthusiastically. "You'd be no burden! An' when your feet gets tender you can bide in th' tilt an' rest un."

"I don't mean that my feet are tender in that way," laughed Shad, "but I'm a novice in woodcraft and I've never done any trapping. You'd have to teach me a great deal about these things, and I don't want to stay if I'll hinder your work in the least."

"Oh, you'd never be hinderin' th' work! An' you'd be a wonderful lot o' company, whatever! I hopes you'll stay, Shad!"

"Thank you, Bob. I'll stay. It will put me back a whole year in college, but I'll stay anyhow. My experience with you will be worth the sacrifice of a year in college, I'm sure."

"Now that be grand!" exclaimed Bob, his face beaming pleasure.

"An' Shad stays, Ed, he'll give Bob a hand with th' tilts," suggested Dick. "Can't you go back, now, with me an' Bill, t' help us up with our outfits? 'Twill be a wonderful hard an' slow pull for just th' two of us."

"Be you thinkin', now, you can manage th' tilts?" asked Ed, turning to Bob.

"O' course me an' Shad can manage un," assured Bob.

"I'll go back, then, Dick," consented Ed. "'Twould be hard t' manage with just two on th' boat."

Arrangements were made for the three trappers to bring Shad some adequate winter clothing upon their return, letters were written home, and at daylight on Monday morning adieus were said. Bob and Shad stood upon the shore watching the boat bearing their friends away, until it turned a bend in the river below and was lost to view.

"We'll not see un again for five weeks," said Bob regretfully, as they retraced their steps to the embers of the camp-fire over which breakfast had been cooked.

"And in the meantime," began Shad gaily, with a sweep of his arm, "we are monarch, of all–" Suddenly he stopped. His eyes, following the sweep of his arm, had fallen upon two Indians watching them from the shadow of the spruce trees beyond their camp.

VI
OLD FRIENDS

"Sishetakushin and Mookoomahn!" exclaimed Bob.

The moment they were recognised the two Indians strode forward, laughing, and grasped Bob's hand in a manner that left no doubt of their pleasure at meeting him, while both voiced their feeling in a torrent of tumultuous words.

They were tall, lithe, sinewy fellows, clad in buckskin shirt, tight-fitting buckskin leggings, and moccasins. They wore no hats, but a band of buckskin, decorated in colours, passing around the forehead, held in subjection the long black hair, which fell nearly to their shoulders. In the hollow of his left arm each carried a long, muzzle-loading trade gun, and Mookoomahn, the younger of the two, also carried at his back a bow and a quiver of arrows.

"These be th' Injuns I were tellin' you of," Bob finally introduced, when an opportunity offered. "Shake hands with un, Shad. This un is Sishetakushin, an' this un is his son, Mookoomahn. I've been tellin' they you're my friend."

In their attitude toward Shad they were dignified and reserved. Neither could speak English, and Bob, who had a fair mastery of the Indian tongue, interpreted.

"We are glad to meet the friend of White Brother of the Snow," said Sishetakushin, acting as spokesman. "We welcome him to our country. White Brother of the Snow tells us he will remain for many moons. He will visit our lodge with White Brother of the Snow and eat our meat. He will be welcome."

"I thank you," responded Shad. "'White Brother of the Snow has told me how kind you were to him when he was in trouble, and it is a great pleasure to meet you. I will certainly visit your lodge with him and eat your meat."

The ceremony of introduction completed, Bob renewed the fire and brewed a kettle of tea for his visitors. They drank it greedily, and at a temperature that would have scalded a white man's throat.

"They's wonderful fond o' tea, and tobacco, too," explained Bob, "an' they only gets un when they goes t' Ungava onct or twict a year."

Upon Bob's suggestion that, should they meet Indians, it would prove an acceptable gift, Shad had purchased at the post and brought with him a bountiful supply of black plug tobacco, such as the natives used, and with this hint from Bob he gave each of the Indians a half-dozen plugs. The swarthy faces and black eyes of the visitors lighted with pleasure, and from that moment much of the reserve that they had hitherto maintained toward him vanished.

"The friend of White Brother of the Snow is generous," said Sishetakushin, in accepting the tobacco. "For four moons we have had nothing to smoke but dried leaves and the bark of the red willow."

Each Indian carried at his belt a pipe, the bowl fashioned from soft, red pipe stone, the stem a hollow spruce stick. Squatting upon their haunches before the fire, they at once filled their pipes with tobacco, lighted them with coals from the fire, and blissfully puffed in silence for several minutes.

"How are Manikawan and her mother?" Bob presently inquired.

"The mother is well, but the maiden has grieved long because White Brother of the Snow never returns," answered Sishetakushin. "She watches for him when the Spirit of the Wind speaks in the tree-tops. She watches when the moon is bright and the shadow spirits are abroad. She watches when the evil spirits of the storm are raging in fury through the forest. She watches always, and is sad. Young men have sought her hand to wife, but she has denied them. White Brother of the Snow will return. He will come again to our lodge, and the maiden will be joyful."

Shad was unable to understand a word of this, but Bob's face told him plainly that something not altogether pleasant to the lad had been said.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.