A Mystery Story for Girls

The PURPLE FLAME

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Title: The Purple Flame
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Release Date: February 4, 2013 [EBook #42016]

Language: English

Produced by Stephen Hutcheson, Rod Crawford, Dave Morgan
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
http://www.pgdp.net

Adventure Stories for Girls

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Author's Logo

The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago

Printed in the United States of America

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CHAPTER I
THE MYSTERY OF THE OLD DREDGE

Marian Norton started, took one step backward, then stood staring. Startled by this sudden action, the spotted reindeer behind her lunged backward to blunder into the brown one that followed him, and this one was in turn thrown against a white one that followed the two. This set all three of them into such a general mix-up that it was a full minute before the girl could get them quieted and could again allow her eyes to seek the object of her alarm.

As she stood there her pulse quickened, her cheeks flushed and she felt an all but irresistible desire to turn and flee. Yet she held her ground. Had she seen a flash of purple flame? She had thought so. It had appeared to shoot out from the side of the dark bulk that lay just before her.

“Might have been my nerves,” she told herself. “Perhaps my eyes are seeing things. T’wouldn’t be strange. I came a long way to-day.”

She *had* come a long way over the Arctic tundra that day. Starting but two mornings before from her reindeer herd, close to a hundred miles from Nome, Alaska, she had covered fully two-thirds of that distance in two days.

Her way had lead over low hills, across streams whose waters ran clear and cold toward the sea, down broad stretches of tundra whose soft mosses had oozed moisture at her every step. Here a young widgeon duck, ready to begin his southward flight—for this was the Arctic’s autumn time—had stretched his long neck to stare at her. Here a mother white fox had yap-yaped at her, insolently and unafraid. Here she had paused to pick a handful of pink salmon berries or to admire a particularly brilliant array of wild flowers, which, but for her passing, might have been “Born to blush unseen and waste their fragrance on the desert

air.” Yet always with the three reindeers at her heels, she had pressed onward toward Nome, the port and metropolis of all that vast north country.

The black bulk that loomed out of the darkness before her was a deserted dredging scow, grounded on a sand bar of the Sinrock River. At least she had thought the scow deserted. Until now she had believed and hoped that here she might spend the night, completing her journey on the morrow.

“But now,” she breathed. “Yes! Yes! There can be no mistake. There it is again.”

Sinking wearily down upon the damp grass, she buried her face in her hands. She was so tired she could cry, yet she must “mush” on through the dark, over the soft, oozing tundra, for fifteen more weary miles. Fifteen miles further down the river was the Sinrock Mission. Here she might hope to find a corral for her deer, and food and rest for herself.

Marian did not cry. Born and bred in the Arctic, she was made of such stern stuff as the Arctic wilderness and the Arctic blizzard alone can mould.

She did not mean to take chances with the occupants of the old dredge. There was something mysterious and uncanny about that purple flame which she now saw shoot straight out, a full two feet, to instantly disappear. She had seen nothing like it before in the Arctic. As she studied the outlines of the dredge, she realized that the light was within it; that it flashed across a small square window in the side of the old scow.

“No,” she reasoned, “I can’t afford to take chances with them. I must go on down the river. I can make Sinrock.”

Speaking to her reindeer, she tugged at their lead straps. One at a time they started forward until at last they again took up the weary swish-swish across the tundra.

Once Marian turned to look back. Again she caught the flash of a purple flame.

Had she known how this purple flame was to be mixed up with her own destiny, she might have paused to look longer. As it was, she gave herself over to wondering what sort of people would take up their habitation in that half tumbled-down dredge, and what their weird light might signify.

She had heard of the strange rites performed by those interesting child-people, the Eskimos, in the worship of the spirits of dead animals. For one of these, the "Bladder Festival," they saved all the bladders of polar bears, walrus and seals which they had killed, and at last, after four days of ceremony, committed them again to the waters of the ocean.

"They burn wild parsnip stalks in that festival," Marian mused, "but that purple flame was not made by burning weeds. It was the brilliant flame of a blue-hot furnace flaring up, or something like that. Probably wasn't Eskimo at all. Probably—well, it may be some Orientals who have stolen away up here to worship their idols by burning strange fires."

She thought of all the foreign people who had crossed the Pacific to take up their homes in the far north city of Nome, which was just forty miles away.

"Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Russians, and members of nameless tribes," she whispered to herself, as if half afraid they might hear her. "Might be any of these. Might—"

Suddenly she broke off her thinking and stopped short. Just before her a form loomed out of the dark. Another and yet another appeared.

For a moment she stood there rigid, scarcely breathing. Then she threw back her head and laughed.

"Reindeer," she exclaimed. "I was frightened by some reindeer. Oh, well," she said, after a moment's reflection, "I might excuse myself for that. I'm tired out with marching over this soggy tundra. Besides, I guess that purple flame got on my nerves. All the same," she avowed stoutly, "I'll solve that mystery yet. See if I don't."

There for the time the subject was dismissed. The presence of these few reindeer before her told of more not far away, a whole herd of them. Where there were reindeer there would be herders, and herders lived in tents. Here there would be a warm, dry place to rest and sleep.

"Must be the Sinrock herd," she concluded.

In this she was right. Soon, off in the distance, she caught the yellow glow of candlelight shining through a tent wall. Fifteen minutes later she was seated

upon a rolled-up sleeping bag, chatting gayly with two black-eyed Eskimo girls who were keeping their brothers' tents while those worthies were out looking for some stray fauns.

After her three reindeers had been relieved of their packs and set free to graze, Marian had dined on hardtack and juicy reindeer chops. Then she crawled deep down into her soft reindeer skin sleeping bag, to snatch a few hours of rest before resuming her journey to Nome.

Before her eyelids closed in sleep her tireless brain went over the problem before her and the purpose of her fatiguing journey. She had come all this way to meet a relative whom she had never seen—a cousin, Patsy Martin, from Louisville, Kentucky.

"Kentucky," she whispered the word for the hundredth time. "Way down south. Imagine a girl who was brought up down there coming here for a winter to endure our cold, snow, and blizzards. She's probably slim, willowy, and tender as a baby; dresses in thin silks, and all that. Why did father send her up here? Looks like it was bad enough to have four hundred reindeer to herd, without having a sixteen year old cousin from Ken-tuck-ie to look after."

She yawned sleepily, yet her mind went on thinking of her reindeer herd and her problems. Though she had lived all but one year of her life in the far north, she had never, until two months before, spent a single night in a reindeer herder's camp. But it was no longer a novel experience.

Until recently her father had been a prosperous merchant in Nome. Financial reverses had come and he had been obliged to sell his store. The reindeer herd, which he had taken as payment for a debt, was the only wealth he had saved from the crash. Following this, his doctor had ordered him to leave the rigorous climate of the North and to seek renewed health in the States. Much as he regretted it, he had been obliged to ask his daughter to give up her studies and to take charge of the herd until a favorable opportunity came for selling it.

"And that won't be soon, I guess," Marian sighed. "Reindeer herds are a drug on the market. Trouble is, it's too hard to dispose of the meat. And if you can't sell reindeer meat you can't make any money. Now, added to this, comes this cousin, Patsy Martin."

Her father had written that Patsy was given to over-study, and that Mr. Martin,

her uncle, thinking that a year in the northern wilds would do her good, had asked permission to send her up to be with Marian. Marian's father had consented, and Patsy was due on the next boat.

"She'll be company for you," her father had written.

"I do wonder if she will?" Marian sighed again. "Oh, well, no use to be a pessimist," and at that she turned over and fell asleep.

It was a surprised Marian who three days later found herself caught in the firm embrace of her cousin, Patsy. Patsy was two years younger than Marian. There could be no missing the fact that she was much slimmer and more graceful, and that there was strength in her slender arms was testified to by her warm embrace.

When at last Marian got a look at Patsy's face, she found it almost as brown as her own. And as for freckles, there could scarcely have been a greater number on one person's face. Her mouth, too, had lines that Marian liked. It was a firm, determined little mouth that said: "When I have a hill to climb I *run* up it."

Never had Marian beheld such a wealth of color as was displayed in Patsy's winter wardrobe. Orange and red sweaters; great, broad scarfs of mixed grays; gay tams; short plaid skirts; heavy brown corduroy knickers; these and many other garments of exquisite workmanship and design were spread out before her.

"And the fun of it all is," giggled Patsy, "we're going to play we're twins and wear one another's clothes. You've got a spotted fawnskin parka, I know you have. I'm going to wear that, right away—this afternoon. Going to have my picture taken in it and send it back to my school friends."

"All right," agreed Marian. "You can have anything I own. I'm heavier than you are, but arctic clothing doesn't fit very tight, so I guess it will be all right."

As if to clinch the bargain, she wound an orange colored scarf about her neck and went strutting across the room.

A half hour later, while Patsy was out having her picture taken, Marian walked slowly up and down the room. She was thinking, and her thoughts were long, long thoughts.

"I like her," she said at last. "I'm going to like her more and more. But it's going

to be hard for her sometimes, fearfully hard. When the blizzards sweep in from the north and we're all shut in; when no one comes and no one goes, and the nights are twenty hours long; when the dogs howl their lonesome song—it's going to be hard for her then. But I'll do the best I can for her. Her father was right—it will do her a world of good. It will teach her the slow and steady patience of those who live in the North, and that's a good thing to know."

Three weeks later the two girls, toiling wearily along after two reindeer sleds, approached the black bulk of the old scow in the river, the one in which Marian had seen the mysterious purple flame. Again it was night. They were on their way north to the reindeer herd. Traveling over the first soft snow of winter, they had made twenty miles that day. For the last hour Patsy had not uttered a single word. She had tramped doggedly after the sled. Only her drooping shoulders told how weary she was. Marian had hoped against hope that they would this time find the old dredge deserted.

"It would make a nice dry place to camp," she said to herself, as she brought her reindeer to a halt and stood studying the dark bulk. Patsy dropped wearily down upon a loaded sled.

Just as Marian was about to give the word to go forward, there flashed across the square window a jet of purple flame.

"Oh!" exclaimed Marian.

"What is it?" asked Patsy.

"The purple flame!"

"The purple flame? What's that?"

"You know as much as I do; only I know it's there in that old dredge. And since it's there, we can't stop here for the night. We must go on."

"Oh, but—but I can't!" Patsy half sobbed. "You don't know, you can't know how tired I am."

"Yes, I know," said Marian softly. "I've been just that way; but we dare not stop here. The people in the old scow might have dogs and they would attack our reindeer. We must go on; five miles more."

“And then—”

“Camp beneath the stars.”

“All right,” said Patsy, with a burst of determination. “Let’s get it over quick.”

Again they moved slowly forward, but neither of them forgot the purple flame. Three times they saw it flash across the window.

“That place must be haunted,” Marian sighed as she turned to give her full attention to the lagging reindeer.

CHAPTER II
PATSY FROM KENTUCKY

Some five miles from the old dredge Marian stopped her reindeer, gazed about her for a moment, then said quietly:

“We’ll camp here.”

“Here?” cried Patsy. “Won’t we freeze?”

“Freeze? No, we’ll be safe as a bug in a rug. Just you sit down on a sled until I unpack this one. After that I’ll picket out the reindeer and get supper.”

From the sled Marian dragged a sheet iron affair which she called a Yukon stove. With dry moss, dug from beneath the snow, and wood brought on the sled, she kindled a fire. They had no shelter, but the glow of the fire cheered Patsy immeasurably. When the smell of frying bacon and warming red beans reached her she was ready to execute a little dance of joy.

Supper over, Marian took a small trench shovel, salvaged by a friend from the great war, and scraped away the snow from above the soft, dry tundra moss. Over this cleared space she spread a square of canvas. Then, untying a thong about a deerskin sleeping bag, she allowed the bag to slowly unroll itself along the canvas.

“There,” she announced, “the bed is made. No need to pull down the shades. We’ll get off our outer garments and hop right in.”

Patsy looked at her in astonishment. Then, seeing her take off first her mackinaw, then her sweater, she followed suit.

“Now,” said Marian as they reached the proper stage of disrobing, “you do it like this.”

Sitting down upon the canvas, she thrust her feet into the sleeping bag, then began to work her way into it.

“Come on,” she directed, “we can do it best together. It’s just big enough for two. I had it made that way on purpose.”

Patsy dropped to the place beside her. Then together they burrowed their way into the depths of the bag until only their eyes and noses were uncovered.

“How soft!” murmured Patsy as she wound an arm about her cousin’s neck, then lay staring up at the stars.

“How warm!” she whispered again five minutes later.

“Yes,” Marian whispered, as though they were sleeping at home and might disturb the household by speaking aloud. “You see, this bag is made of the long haired winter skins of reindeer. The hair is a solid mat more than an inch thick. The skin keeps out the wind. With the foot and the sides of it sewed up tight, you can’t possibly get cold, even if you sleep on the frozen ground.”

“How wonderful!” exclaimed Patsy. “It wouldn’t be a bit of use writing that to my friends. They simply wouldn’t believe it.”

“No, they wouldn’t.”

For a little time, with arms twined about one another, the cousins lay there in silence. Each, busy with her own thoughts, was not at all conscious of the bonds of human affection which the vast silence of the white wilderness was even now weaving about them. Bonds far stronger than their arms about one another’s neck, these were to carry them together through many a wild and mysterious adventure.

As if in anticipation of all this, Patsy snuggled a bit closer to Marian and said:

“I think this is going to be great!”

“Let’s hope so,” Marian answered.

“And will we really herd the reindeer?”

“No,” laughed Marian, “at least not any more than we wish to. You see, we have three Eskimo herders with us, and Attatak, a girl who cooks for them. They do most of the work. All we have to do is to finance the herd and sort of supervise it.

“You see, the Eskimo people are really child-people. They have had many strange customs in the past that don’t fit now. In their old village life of hunting and fishing, it was an unwritten law that if one man had food and another had none, it must be shared. That won’t work now.

“There is only one time of year that we can get food into this herding ground; that is summer. We freight it up the river and store it for winter’s use. That gives us a big supply of provisions in the fall. There are two Eskimo villages thirty miles away. If there were no white people about, our good-hearted herders would share our supplies with the villagers as often as they came around. Before the winter was half through they would be out of supplies. They would then have to live on reindeer meat, and that would be hard on our herd. In fact, we would soon have no herd. So that is the reason we are going to spend a winter on the tundra.”

“And will we live like this?” asked Patsy.

“Oh, no!” laughed Marian. “We have tents for this time of year. In a month we will move into the most interesting houses you ever saw. We’ll reserve that as a surprise for you.”

“Oh! Oh!” sighed Patsy, as she suddenly became conscious of the aches in her legs. “I think it’s going to be grand, if only I get so I can stand the travel as you do. Do you think I ever will?”

“Of course you will—in less than a week.”

“You know,” said Patsy thoughtfully, “down where I came from we think we exercise an awful lot. We swim and row, ride horseback, play tennis and basket-ball, and go on hikes. But, after all, that was just play—sort of skipping ’round. This—this is the real thing!”

Giving her cousin an energetic good-night hug, she closed her eyes and was soon

fast asleep.

Marian did not fall asleep at once. Her mind was working over the mystery of the purple flame. What was it? What had caused it? Who were the persons back there in the old dredge, and why had they come there? Such were some of the problems that crowded her mind.

The old dredge had been there for years. It was but one of the many monuments to men's folly in their greedy search for gold. These monuments—dredges, derricks, sluice-boxes, crushers, smelters, and who knows what others—lined the beaches and rivers about Nome. The bed of the Sinrock River was known to run fairly rich in gold. Someone had imagined that he might become rich by dredging the mud at the bottom of the river and washing it for gold. The scheme had failed. Doubtless the owner of the dredge had gone into bankruptcy. At any rate, here was the old dredge with its long beams and gaping iron bucket still dangling in air, rotting to decay. And here within this tomblike wreck had appeared the purple flame.

It had not been like anything Marian had seen before. "Almost like lightning," she mused, sleepily.

Being a healthy girl with a clean mind, she did not long puzzle her brain about the uncanny mystery of the weird light, but busied her mind with more practical problems. If these makers of the purple flame were to remain long at the dredge, how were they to live? Too often in the past, the answer to such a question had been, "By secretly preying upon the nearest herd."

The Sinrock herd had been moved some distance away. Marian's own herd was now the nearest one to the old dredge. "And when we move into winter quarters it will be five miles nearer. Oh, well!" she sighed, "there's no use borrowing trouble. It's probably some miners going up the river to do assessment work."

"But then," her busy mind questioned, "what about the purple flame? Why have they already stayed there three weeks? Why—"

At this juncture she fell asleep, to awake when the first streaks of dawn were casting fingers of light across the snowy tundra.

She crept softly from her sleeping bag, jumped into her clothes, and was in the act of lighting the fire when a faint sound of heavy breathing caused her to turn

her head. To her surprise she saw Patsy, clothed only in those garments that had served as her sleeping gown, doing a strange, whirling, bare-footed fling of calisthenics, with the sleeping bag as her mat.

“You appear to have quite recovered,” Marian laughed.

“Just seeing if I was all here,” Patsy laughed in turn, as she dropped down upon the bag and began drawing on her stockings.

“Whew!” she puffed. “That’s invigorating; good as a cold plunge in the sea. What do we have for breakfast?”

“Sour-dough flapjacks and maple syrup.”

“Um-um! Make me ten,” exclaimed Patsy, redoubling her efforts to get herself dressed.

That night Marian made a discovery that set her nerves a-tremble to the very roots of her hair and, in spite of the Arctic chill, brought beads of perspiration out on the tip of her nose.

As on the previous night, they had camped out upon the open tundra. This night, however, they had found a sheltered spot beside a clump of willows that lined a stream. The stream ran between low, rolling hills. Over those hills they had been passing when darkness fell. Now, as Marian crept into the sleeping bag, she saw the nearer hills rising like cathedral domes above her. She heard the ceaseless rustle of willow leaves that, caught by an early frost, still clung to their branches. This rustle, together with the faint breeze that fanned her cheeks, had all but lulled her to sleep. Suddenly she sat upright.

“It couldn’t be!” she exclaimed. Then, a moment later, she added:

“But, yes—there it is again. Who would believe it? Lightning in the Arctic, and on such a night as this. Twenty below zero and clear as a bell! Not a cloud in sight.”

Rubbing her brow to clear her mind from the cobweb of dreams that had been forming there, she stared again at the crest of the hill.

Then, swiftly, silently, that she might not waken her cousin, she crept from the

sleeping bag. Donning her fur parka and drawing on knickers and deerskin boots, she hurried away from camp and up the hill, thinking as she did so:

“That’s not lightning. I don’t know what it is, but in the name of all that’s good, I’m going to come nearer solving that mystery than ever I did before.”

Half way up the hill she found a snow blown gully, and up this she crept, half hidden by the shadows. Nearing the crest, a half mile from her camp, she dropped on hands and knees and crawled forward a hundred yards. Then, like some hunter who has stolen upon his game, she propped herself on her elbows and stared straight ahead.

In spite of her expectations, she gasped at what she saw. A purple flame, now six inches in length, now a foot, now two feet, darted out of space, then receded, then flared up again. Three feet above the surface of the snow, it appeared to hang in midair like some ghost fire.

Marian’s heart beat wildly. Her nerves tingled, her knees trembled, and open-mouthed, without the power to move, she stared at this strange apparition.

This spell lasted for a moment. Then, with a half audible exclamation of disgust, she dropped limply to the snow.

“Inside a tent,” she said. “Tent was so like the snow and the sky that I couldn’t see it at first.”

As her eyes became accustomed to this version of her discovery she was able to make out the outlines of the tent and even to recognize a dog sleeping beside it.

Suddenly the shadow of a person began dancing on the wall of the tent. So rapid were the flashes of the purple flame, so flickering and distorted was this image, that it seemed more the shadow of a ghost than of a human being. A second shadow joined the first. The two of them appeared to do some wild dance. Then, of a sudden, all was dark. The purple flame had vanished.

A moment later a yellow light flared up. Then a steady light gleamed.

“Lighted a candle,” was Marian’s comment. “It’s on this side of them, for now they cast no shadows. Are they all men? Or, are there some women? How many are there? Two, or more than two? They are following us. I’d swear to that. I

wonder why?”

Again she thought of the stories she had heard of ne’er-do-wells who dogged the tracks of reindeer herds like camp followers, and lived upon the deer that had strayed too far from the main herd.

“Perhaps,” Marian mused, “they have heard that father’s herd is to be run this winter by two inexperienced girls. Perhaps they think we will be easy. Perhaps —” she set her lips tight, “perhaps we will, and perhaps not. We shall see.”

Then she went stealing back to her camp and crept shivering into the sleeping bag.

She slept very little that night. The camp of the mysterious strangers was too close; the perplexing problems that lay before her too serious to permit of that. She was glad enough when she caught the first faint flush of dawn in the east and knew that a new day was dawning.

“This day,” she told herself, “we make our own camp. There is comfort in that. Let the future take care of itself.”

She cast one glance toward the hill, but seeing no movement there, she began to search the ground for dry moss for kindling a fire.

Soon she had a little yellow flame glowing in her Yukon stove. The feeble flame soon grew to a bright red, and in a little while the coffee pot was singing its song of merry defiance to the Arctic chill.

CHAPTER III
MARIAN FACES A PROBLEM

Marian buried her hand in the thick warm coat of the spotted reindeer that stood by her side and, shading her eyes, gazed away at the distant hills. A brown spot had appeared at the crest of the third hill to her right.

“There’s another and another,” she said. “Reindeer or caribou? I wonder. If it’s caribou, perhaps Terogloona can get one of them with his rifle. It would help out our food supply. But if it’s reindeer—” her brow wrinkled at the thought, “reindeer might mean trouble.”

At that instant something happened that brought her hand to her side. Quickly unstrapping her field glasses, she put them to her eyes.

A fourth object had appeared on the crest. Even with the naked eye one might tell that this one was not like the other three. He was lighter in color and lacked the lace-like suggestion against the sky which meant broad spreading antlers.

“Reindeer!” she groaned. “All of them reindeer, and the last one’s a sled deer. His antlers have been cut off so he’ll travel better. And that means—”

She pursed her lips in deep thought as the furrows in her brow deepened.

“Oh, well!” she exclaimed at last. “Perhaps it doesn’t mean anything after all. Perhaps they’re just a bunch of strays. Who knows? But a sled reindeer?” she argued with herself. “They don’t often stray away.”

For a moment she stood staring at the distant hillcrest. Then, seizing her drive line, she spoke to her deer. As he bounded away she leaped nimbly upon the sled and went skimming along after him.

“We’ll see about that,” she said. “They’re not our deer, that’s sure. Whose are they? That’s what we’re about to find out. A circle across that long valley, then a stiff climb up a gully, will just about bring us to their position.”

Fifteen minutes later she found herself atop the first elevation. For the time, out of sight of the strange reindeer, she had an opportunity to glance back down the valley where her own herd was peacefully feeding. Her eyes lighted up as she looked. It was indeed a beautiful sight. Winter had come, for she and Patsy Martin had now been following the herd for three months. Winter, having buried deep beneath the snow every trace of the browns and greens of summer, had left only deep purple shadows and pale yellow lights over mountain, hill and tundra. In the midst of these lights and shadows, such as are not seen save upon a sun-scorched desert or the winter-charmed Arctic, her little herd of some four hundred deer stood out as if painted on a canvas or done in bas-relief with wood or stone.

“It’s not like anything in the world,” said Marian, “and I love it. Oh, how I do love it! How I wish I could paint it as it really is!”

As she rode on up the valley her mind went over the months that had passed and the problems she and Patsy now faced.

Great as was her love for the Arctic, fond as she was of its wild, free life, her father had made other plans for her; plans that could not be carried out so long as they were in possession of the herd. This seemed to make the sale of the herd an urgent necessity. Every letter from her father that came to her over hundreds of miles of dog-sled and reindeer trail, suggested some possible means of disposing of the herd.

“We *must* sell by spring,” his last letter had said. “Not that I am in immediate need of money, but you must get back to school. One year out there in the wilderness, with Patsy for your companion, will do no harm, but it must not go on. The doctor says I cannot return to the North for four or five years at the least. So, somehow, we must sell.”

“Sell! Sell!” Marian repeated, almost savagely. It seemed to her that there could be no selling the herd. There was only a limited market for reindeer meat. Miners here and there bought it. The mining cities bought it, but of late the increase to one hundred thousand reindeer in Alaska had overloaded the market.

A little meat could be shipped to the States, there to be served at great club luncheons and in palatial hotels, but the demand was not large.

“Sell?” she questioned, “how can we sell?”

Little she knew how soon a possible answer to that question would come. Not knowing, she visioned herself following the herd year after year, while all those beautiful, wonderful months she had had a taste of, and now dreamed of by day and night, faded from her thoughts.

She had spent one year under the shadows of a great university. Marvelous new thoughts had come to her that year. Friendships had been made, such friendships as she in her northern wilds had never dreamed of. The stately towers of the university even now appeared to loom before her, and again she seemed to hear the melodious chimes of the bells.

“Oh!” she cried, “I must go back. I must! I must!”

And yet Marian was not unhappy. For the present she would not be any other place than where she was. It was a charming life, this wandering life of the reindeer herder. During the short summer, and even into the frosts of fall and winter, they lived in tents, and like nomads of the desert, wandered from place to place, always seeking the freshest water, the greenest grass, the tallest willow bushes. But when winter truly came swooping down upon them, they went to a spot chosen months before, the center of rich feeding grounds where the ground beneath the snow was green-white with “reindeer moss.” Here they made a more permanent camp. After that there remained but the task of defending the herd from wolves and other marauders, and of driving the herd to camp each day, that they might not wander too far away.

As for Patsy, she had fairly revelled in it all. Reared in a city apartment where a chirping sparrow gave the only touch of nature, she had come to this wilderness with a great thirst for knowledge of the out-of-doors. Each day brought some new revelation to her. The snow buntings, ptarmigans and ravens; the foxes, caribou and reindeer; even the occasional prowling wolves, all were her teachers. From them she learned many secrets of wild nature.

Of course there had been long, shut-in days, when the wind swept the tundra, and the snow, appearing to rest nowhere, whirled on and on. Such days were lonely ones. Letters were weeks in coming and arrived but seldom. All these

things gave the energetic city lass some blue days, but even then she never complained.

Her health was greatly improved. Gone was the nervous twitch of eyelids that told of too many hours spent pouring over books. The summer freckles had been replaced by ruddy brown, such as only Arctic winds and an occasional freeze can impart. As for her muscles, they were like iron bands. Never in the longest day's tramp did she complain of weariness. With the quick adaptability of a bright and cheerful girl, she had become a part of the wild world which surrounded her. The expression of her lips, too, was somehow changed. Firmness and determination were still written there, but certain lines had been added; lines of patience that said louder than words: "I have learned one great lesson; that one may run uphill, but that mountains must be climbed slowly, patiently, circle by circle, till the summit is reached."

They were in winter camp now. As Marian thought of it she smiled. At no other spot in all Alaska was there another such camp as hers. Marian, as you know if you have read our other book, "The Blue Envelope," had, some two years before, spent the short summer months of the Arctic in Siberia, across from Alaska. Much against her own wishes, she had spent a part of the winter there. Someone has said "there is no great loss without some small gain"; and while Marian had endured hardships and known moments of peril in Siberia, from the strange and interesting tribes there she had learned some lessons of real value regarding winter camps in the Arctic. Upon making her own camp she had put this knowledge into practice.

They were now in winter camp. As Marian thought of this, then thought of the four strange reindeer on the ridge above, her brow again showed wrinkles of anxiety.

"If it's Bill Scarberry's herd," she said fiercely, clenching her fists, "if it is!" In her words there was a world of feeling.

In the early stages of the reindeer industry in Alaska, the problem of feed grounds for the deer had been exceedingly simple. There were the broad stretches of tundra, a hundred square miles for every reindeer. Help yourself. Every mile of it was matted deep with rich moss; every stream lined in summer with tender willow leaves. If you chanced to sight another small herd in your wandering, you went to right or left, and so avoided them. There was room for

all.

Now things were vastly changed. One hundred thousand deer ranged the tundra. Reindeer moss, eaten away in a single season, requires four or five years to grow again in abundance. Back, back, farther and farther back from shore and river the herds had been pushed, until now it was difficult indeed to transport food to the herders.

With these conditions arising, the rivalry between owners for good feeding ground grew intense. Many and bitter were the feuds that had arisen between owners. There was not the best of feeling between Bill Scarberry, another owner, and her father; Marian knew that all too well.

“And now maybe his herd is coming into our feeding ground,” she sighed.

It was true that the Government Agent attempted to allot feeding grounds. The valley her deer were feeding upon had been written down in his book as her winter range; but when one is many days’ travel from even the fringe of civilization, when one is the herder of but four hundred deer, and only a girl at that, when an overriding owner of ten thousand deer comes driving in his vast herd to lick up one’s little pasture in a week or two, what is there to do?

These were the bitter thoughts that ran through the girl’s mind as she rode up the valley.

The pasture to the right and left of them, and to the north, had been alloted for so many miles that it was out of the question to think of breaking winter camp and freighting supplies to some new range.

“No,” she said firmly, “we are here, and here we stay!”

Had she known the strange circumstances that would cause her to alter this decision, she might have been startled at the grim humor of it.

CHAPTER IV
THE RANGE ROBBER

Just as Marian finished thinking these things through, her reindeer gave a final leap which brought him squarely upon the crest of the highest ridge. From this point, so it seemed to her, she could view the whole world.

As her eyes automatically sought the spot where the four reindeer had first appeared, a stifled cry escaped her lips. The valley at the foot of that slope was a moving sea of brown and white.

“The great herd!” she exclaimed. “Scarberry’s herd!”

The presence of this great herd at that spot meant almost certain disaster to her own little herd. Even if the herds were kept apart—which seemed extremely unlikely—her pasture would be ruined, and she had no other place to go. If the herds did mix, it would take weeks of patient toil to separate them—toil on the part of all. Knowing Scarberry as she did, she felt certain that little of the work would be done by either his herders or himself. All up and down the coast and far back into the interior, Scarberry was known for the selfishness, the brutality and injustice of his actions.

“Such men should not be allowed upon the Alaskan range,” she hissed through tightly set teeth. “But here he is. Alaska is young. It’s a new and thrilling little world all of itself. He who comes here must take his chance. Some day, the dishonest men will be controlled or driven out. For the present it’s a fight. And we must fight. Girls though we are, we *must* fight. And we will! We will!” she stamped the snow savagely. “Bill Scarberry shall not have our pasture without a struggle.”

Had she been a heroine in a modern novel of the North, she would have leaped

upon her saddle-deer, put the spurs to his side, and gone racing to the camp of the savage Bill Scarberry, then and there to tell him exactly what her rights were and to dare him to trespass against them. Since, so far as we know, there are no saddle-deer in Alaska, and no deer-saddles to be purchased anywhere; and since Marian was an ordinary American girl, with a good degree of common sense and caution, and not a heroine at all in the vulgar sense of the word, she stood exactly where she was and proceeded to examine the herd through her field glass.

If she had hoped against hope that this was not Scarberry's herd at all, but some other herd that was passing to winter quarters, this hope was soon dispelled. The four deer upon the ridge, having strayed some distance from the main herd, were now only a few hundred yards away. She at once made out their markings. Two notches, one circular and one triangular, had been cut from the gristly portion of the right ear of each deer. This brutal manner of marking, so common a few years earlier, had been kept up by Scarberry, who had as little thought for the suffering of his deer as he had for the rights of others. The deer owned by the Government, and Marian's own deer, were marked by aluminum tags attached to their ears.

"They're Scarberry's all right," Marian concluded. "It's his herd, and he brought them here. If they had strayed away by accident and his herders had come after them, they would be driving them back. Now they're just wandering along the edge of the herd, keeping them together. There comes one of them after the four strays. No good seeing him now. It wouldn't accomplish anything, and I might say too much. I'll wait and think."

Turning her deer, for a time she drove along the crest of the ridge.

"I shouldn't wonder," she said to herself, "if he's already taken up quarters in the old miner's cabin down there in the willows on the bank of the Little Soquina River. Yes," she added, "there's the smoke of his fire.

"To think," she stormed, enraged at the cool complacency of the thing, "to think that any man could be so mean. He has thousands of deer, and a broad, rich range. He's afraid the range may be scant in the spring and his deer become poor for the spring shipping market, so he saves it by driving his herd over here for a month or two, that it may eat all the moss we have and leave us to make a perilous or even fatal drive to distant pastures. That, or to see our deer starve

before our very eyes. It’s unfair! It’s brutally inhuman!

“And yet,” she sighed a moment later, “I suppose the men up here are not all to blame. Seems like there is something about the cold and darkness, the terrible lonesomeness of it all, that makes men like wolves that prowl in the scrub forests—fierce, bloodthirsty and savage. But that will do for sentiment. Scarberry must not have his way. He must not feed down our pasture if there is a way to prevent it. And I think there is! I’m almost sure. I must talk to Patsy about it. It would mean something rather hard for her, but she’s a brave little soul, God bless her!”

Then she spoke to her reindeer and went racing away down the slope toward the camp.

It was a strange looking camp that awaited Marian’s coming. Two dome shaped affairs of canvas were all but hidden in a clump of willows, surrounded by deer sleds and a small canvas tent for supplies—surely a strange camp for Alaskan reindeer herders.

But how comfortable were those dome shaped igloos! Marian had learned to make them during that eventful journey with the reindeer Chukches in Siberia.

Winter skins of reindeer are cheap, very cheap in Alaska. Being light, portable and warm, Marian had used many of them in the construction of this winter camp. Her heart warmed with the prospect of perfect comfort, and drawing the harness from her reindeer, she turned it loose to graze. Then she parted the flap to the igloo which she and Patsy shared.

Something of the suppressed excitement which came to her from the discovery of the rival herd must still have shown in her face, for as Patsy turned from her work of preparing a meal to look at Marian she noticed the look on her face and exclaimed:

“Oh! Did you see it, too?”

“I’m not sure that I know what you mean,” said Marian, puzzled by her question. Where had Patsy been? Surely the herd could not be seen from the camp, and she had not said she was going far from it; in fact, she had been left to watch camp.

“I’ve seen enough,” continued Marian, “to make me dreadfully angry.

Something's got to be done about it. Right away, too. As soon as we have a bite to eat we'll talk it over."

"I knew you'd feel that way about it," said Patsy. "I think it's a shame that they should hang about this way."

"See here, Patsy," exclaimed Marian, seizing her by the shoulder and turning her about, "what are we—what are *you* talking about?"

"Why, I—you—" Patsy stammered, mystified, "you just come out here and I'll show you."

Dragging her cousin out of the igloo and around the end of the willows, she pointed toward a hillcrest.

There, atop the hill, stood a newly erected tent, and at that very moment its interior was lighted by a strange purple light.

"The purple flame!" exclaimed Marian. "More trouble. Or is it all one? Is it Bill Scarberry who lights that mysterious flame? Does he think that by doing that he can frighten us from our range?"

"Bill Scarberry?" questioned Patsy, "who is he, and what has he to do with it?"

"Come on into the igloo and I'll tell you," said Marian, shivering as a gust of wind swept down from the hill.

As they turned to go back Patsy said:

"Terogloona came in a few minutes ago. He said to tell you that another deer was gone. This time it is a spotted two-year-old."

"That makes seven that have disappeared in the last six weeks. If that keeps up we won't need to sell our herd; it will vanish like snow in the spring. It can't be wolves. They leave the bones behind. You can always tell when they're about. I wonder if those strange people of the purple flame are living off our deer? I've a good mind to go right up there and accuse them of it. But no, I can't now; there are other more important things before us."

"What could be more important?" asked Patsy in astonishment.

“Wait, I’ll tell you,” said Marian, as she parted the flap of the igloo and disappeared within.

A half hour later they were munching biscuits and drinking steaming coffee. Marian had said not a single word about the problems and adventures that lay just before them. Patsy asked no questions. She knew that the great moment of confiding came when they were snugly tucked in beneath blankets and deerskins in the strangest little sleeping room in all the world. Knowing this, she was content to wait until night for Marian to tell her all about this important matter.

CHAPTER V
PLANNING A PERILOUS JOURNEY

The house in which the girls lived was a cunningly built affair. Eight long poles, brought from the distant river, had been lashed together at one end. Then they had all been raised to an upright position and spread apart like the pole of an Indian's tepee. Canvas was spread over this circle of poles. That there might be more room in the tent, curved willow branches were lashed to the poles. These held the canvas away in a circle. After this had been accomplished the whole inside was lined with deerskins. Only an opening at the top was left for the passing of smoke from the Yukon stove. The stove stood in the front center of the house. Back of it was a platform six by eight feet. This platform was surrounded on all four sides and above by a second lining of deerskin. This platform formed the floor and the deerskins the walls of a little room within the skin house. This was the sleeping room of Marian and Patsy.

A more cozy place could scarcely be imagined. Even with the thermometer at forty below, and the wind howling about the igloo, this room was warm as toast. With the sleeping bag for a bed, and with a heavy deerskin rug and blankets piled upon them, the girls could sleep in perfect comfort.

In this cozy spot, with one arm thrown loosely about her cousin's neck, Marian lay that night for a full five minutes in perfect silent repose.

"Patsy," she said, as her arm suddenly tightened about her cousin's neck in an affectionate hug, "would you be terribly afraid to stay here all by yourself with the Eskimos?"

"How—how long?" Patsy faltered.

"I don't know exactly. Perhaps a week, perhaps three. In the Arctic one never

knows. Things happen. There are blizzards; rivers can not be crossed; there is no food to be had; who knows what may happen?”

“Why, no,” said Patsy slowly, “with Attatak here I think I shouldn’t mind.”

“I think,” said Marian with evident reluctance, “that I should take Attatak with me. I’d like to take old Terogloona. He’d be more help; but at a time like this he can’t leave the herd. He’s absolutely faithful—would give his life for us. Father once saved him from drowning when a skin boat was run down by a motor launch. An Eskimo never forgets.”

“How strangely you talk,” said Patsy suddenly. “Is—is the purple flame as serious an affair as that?”

“Oh, no!” answered Marian. “That may become serious. They may be killing our deer, but we haven’t caught them at it. That, for the present, is just an interesting mystery.”

“But what are you—where are you going?”

“Listen, Patsy,” said Marian thoughtfully; “do you remember the radio message we picked up three days ago—the one from the Government Agent, sent from Nome to Fairbanks?”

Patsy did remember. She had spent many interesting hours listening in on the compact but powerful radio set her father had presented to her as a parting gift.

“Yes,” she said, “I remember.”

“When did he say he was leaving Nome?”

“The 5th.”

“That means he’ll be at the Siman’s trading station on about the 12th. And Siman’s is the spot on the Nome-Fairbanks trail that is nearest to us. By fast driving and good luck I can get there before him.”

“But why should you?” persisted Patsy.

Then Marian confided to her cousin the new trouble they were facing, the almost

certain loss of their range, with all the calamities that would follow.

“If only I can see the Agent before he passes on to Fairbanks I am sure he would deputize someone to come over here and compel Scarberry to take his herd from our range. If I can’t do that, then I don’t see that we have a single chance. We might as well—as well—” there was a catch in her voice—“as well make Scarberry a present of our herd and go on our way back to Nome. We’d be flat broke; not a penny in the world! And father—father would not have a single chance for a fresh start. But we will be ruined soon enough if we try to put up a fight all by ourselves, for Scarberry’s too strong; he’s got three herders to our one. The Agent is our only chance.”

For a long time after this speech all was silence, and Marian was beginning to think that Patsy had gone to sleep. Then she felt her soft warm hand steal into hers as she whispered:

“No, I’m not afraid. I—I’ll stay, and I’ll do all I can to keep that thief and his deer off our range until you get back. I’ll do it, too! See if I don’t!”

Patsy’s southern fighting blood was up. At such a time she felt equal to anything.

“All right, old dear; only be careful.” Marian gave her a rousing hug, then whispered as she drew the deerskins about her:

“Go to sleep now. I must be away before dawn.”

CHAPTER VI
A JOURNEY WELL BEGUN

Two hours before the tardy dawn, Marian and Attatak were away. With three tried and trusted reindeer—Spot, Whitie, and Brownie—they were to attempt a journey of some hundreds of miles. Across trackless wilderness they must lay their course by the stars until the Little Kalikumf River was reached. After this it was a straight course down a well marked trail to the trading station, providing the river was fully frozen over.

This river was one of the many problems they must face. There were others. Stray dogs might attack their deer; they might cross the track of a mother wolf and her hungry pack of half grown cubs; a blizzard might overtake them and, lacking the guiding light of the stars, they might become lost and wander aimlessly on the tundra until cold and hunger claimed them for their own. But of all these, Marian thought most of the river. Would it be frozen over, or would they be forced to turn back after covering all those weary miles and enduring the hardships?

“Attatak,” she said to the native girl, “they say the Little Kalikumf River has rapids in it by the end of a glacier and that no man dares shoot those rapids. Is that true?”

“*Eh-eh*,” (yes) answered Attatak. “Spirit of water angry at ice cut away far below. Want to shoot rapids; boats and man run beneath that ice. Soon smashed boat, killed man. That’s all.”

It was quite enough, Marian thought; but somehow they must pass these rapids whether they were frozen over or not.

“Ah, well,” she sighed, “that’s still far away. First comes the fight with tundra,

hills and sweeping winds."

Patting her reindeer on the side, she sent him flying up the valley while she raced along beside him.

These reindeer were wonderful steeds. No food need be carried for them. They found their own food beneath the snow when day was done. A hundred miles in a day, over a smooth trail, was not too much for them. Soft snow—the wind-blown, blizzard-sifted snow that was like granulated sugar—did not trouble them. They trotted straight on. There was no need to search out a water hole that they might slake their thirst; they scooped up mouthfuls of snow as they raced along.

"Wonderful old friends," murmured Marian as she reached out a hand to touch her spotted leader. "There are those who say a dog team is better. Bill Scarberry, they say, never drives reindeer; always drives dogs. But on a long journey, a great marathon race, reindeer would win, I do believe they would. I—"

She was suddenly startled from her reflections by the appearance of a brown-hooded head not twenty rods away. Their course had led them closer to Scarberry's camp than she thought. As she came out upon the ridge she saw an Eskimo scout disappearing into the willows from which a camp smoke was rising.

Marian was greatly disturbed by the thought that Scarberry's camp would soon know of her departure. She had hoped that they might not learn of her errand, that they might not miss her from the camp. For Patsy's sake she was tempted to turn back, but after a moment's indecision, she determined to push forward. There was no other way to win, and win she must!

An hour later she halted the deer at a fork in the trail. Directly before her stood a bold range of mountains, and their peaks seemed to be smoking with drifting snow. Blizzards were there, the perpetual blizzards of Arctic peaks. She had never crossed those mountains, perhaps no person ever had. She had intended skirting them to the north. This would require at least one added day of travel. As she thought of the perils that awaited Patsy while alone with the herd, and as she thought of the great necessity of making every hour count, she was tempted to try the mountain pass. Here was a time for decision; when all might be gained by a bold stroke.

Rising suddenly on tip-toe, as if thus to emphasize a great resolve, she pointed away to the mountains and said with all the dignity of a Jean d'Arc:

"Attatak, we go that way."

Wide-eyed with amazement, Attatak stared at Marian for a full minute; then with the cheerful smile of a born explorer—which any member of her race always is—she said:

"*Na-goo-va-ruk-tuck.*" (That will be very good.)

CHAPTER VII
THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN

Since the time she had been able to remember anything, these mountains of the far north, standing away in bleak triangles of lights and shadows, smoking with the eternally drifting snows, had always held an all but irresistible lure for Marian. Even as a child of six, listening to the weird folk-stories of the Eskimo, she had peopled those treeless, wind swept mountains with all manner of strange folks. Now they were fairies, white and drifting as the snow itself; now they were strange black goblins with round faces and red noses; and now an Eskimo people who lived in enchanted caves that never were cold, no matter how bitterly the wind and cold assailed the fortresses of rocks that offered them protection.

“All my life,” she murmured as she tightened the rawhide thong that served as a belt to bind her parka close about her waist, “I have wanted to go to the crest of that range, and now I am to attempt it.”

She shivered a little at thought of the perils that awaited her. Many were the strange, wild tales she had heard told round the glowing stove at the back of her father’s store; tales of privation, freezing, starvation and death; tales told by grizzled old prospectors who had lost their pals in a bold struggle with the elements. She thought of these stories and again she shivered, but she did not turn back.

Once only, after an hour of travel up steep ravines and steeper foothills, she paused to unstrap her field glasses and look back over the way they had come. Then she threw back her head and laughed. It was the wild, free laugh of a daring soul that defies failure.

Attatak showed all her splendid white teeth in a grin.

“Who is afraid?” Marian laughed. “Snow, cold, wind—who cares?”

Marian spoke to her reindeer, and again they were away.

As they left the foothills and began to circle one of the lesser peaks—a slow, gradually rising spiral circle that brought them higher and higher—Marian felt the old charm of the mountains come back to her. Again they were peopled by strange fairies and goblins. So real was the illusion that at times it seemed to her that if worst came to worst and they found themselves lost in a storm at the mountain top, they might call upon these phantom people for shelter.

The mountain was not exactly as she had expected to find it. She had supposed that it was one vast cone of gleaming snow. In the main this was true, yet here and there some rocky promontory, towering higher than its fellows, reared itself above the surface, a pier of granite standing out black against the whiteness about it, mute monument to all those daring climbers who have lost their lives on mountain peaks.

Once, too, off some distance to her right and farther up, she fancied she saw the yawning mouth of a cavern.

“Doesn’t seem possible,” she told herself. And yet, it did seem so real that she found herself expecting some strange Rip Van Winkle-like people to come swarming out of the cavern.

She shook herself as a rude blast of wind swept up from below, all but freezing her cheek at a single wild whirl.

“I must stop dreaming,” she told herself stoutly. “Night is falling. We are on the mountain, nearing the crest. A storm is rising. It is colder here than in any place I have ever been. Perhaps we have been foolhardy, but now we must go on!”

Even as she thought this through, Attatak pointed to her cheek and exclaimed:

“Froze-tuck.”

“My cheek frozen!” Marian cried in consternation.

“*Eh-eh*” (yes.)

“And we have an hour’s climb to reach the top. Perhaps more. Somehow we must have shelter. Attatak, can you build a snow house?”

“Not very good. Not build them any more, my people.”

“Then—then,” said Marian slowly, as she rubbed snow on the white, frozen spots of her cheek, “then we must go on.”

Five times in the next twenty minutes Attatak told her her cheeks were frozen. Twice Attatak had been obliged to rub the frost from her own cheeks. Each time the intervals between freezings were shorter.

“Attatak,” Marian asked, “can we make it?”

“*Canok-ti-ma-na*” (I don’t know.) The Eskimo girl’s face was very grave.

As Marian turned about she realized that the storm from below was increasing. Snow, stopping nowhere, raced past them to go smoking out over the mountain peak.

She was about to start forward when again she caught sight of a dark spot on the mountain side above. It looked like the mouth of a cavern.

“If only it were,” she said wistfully, “we would camp there for the night and wait for the worst of the storm to pass.”

“Attatak,” she said suddenly, “you wait here. I am going to try to climb up there.” She pointed to the dark spot on the hillside.

“All right,” said Attatak. “Be careful. Foot slip, start to slide; never stop.” She looked first up the hill, then down the dizzy white slope that extended for a half mile to unknown depths below.

As Marian’s gaze followed Attatak’s she saw herself gliding down the slope, gaining speed, shooting down faster and faster to some awful, unknown end; a dash against a projecting rock; a burial beneath a hundred feet of snow. Little wonder that her knees trembled as she turned to go. Yet she did not falter.

With a cheerful “All right, I’ll be careful,” she gripped her staff and began to climb.

CHAPTER VIII
TROUBLE FOR PATSY

Hardly had Marian left camp when troubles began to pile up for Patsy. Dawn had not yet come when she heard a strange ki-yi-ing that certainly did not come from the herd collies, and she looked out and saw approaching the most disreputable group of Eskimos she had ever seen. Dressed in ragged parkas of rabbit skins, and driving the gauntest, most vicious looking pack of wolf dogs, these people appeared to come from a new and more savage world than hers. A rapid count told her there were seven adults and five children.

“Enough of them to eat us out of everything, even to skin boots and rawhide harness,” she groaned. “If they are determined to camp here, who’s to prevent them?”

For a moment she stood there staring; then with a sudden resolve that she must meet the situation, she exclaimed:

“I must send them on. Some way, I must. I can’t let them starve. They must have food, but they must be sent on to some spot where they have relatives who are able to feed them. The safety of the herd depends upon that. With food gone we cannot hold our herders. With no herders we cannot hold the deer. Marian explained that to me yesterday.”

Walking with all the dignity her sixteen years would permit, she approached the spot where the strangers had halted their dogs and were talking to old Terogloona. The dogs were acting strangely. Sawing at the strong rawhide bonds that held them to the sleds, they reared up on their haunches, ki-yi-ing for all they were worth.

“They smell our deer,” Patsy said to herself. “It’s a good thing our herd is at the

upper end of the range!" She remembered hearing Marian tell how a whole herd of five thousand deer had been hopelessly stampeded by the lusty ki-yi-ing of one wolf dog.

"The reindeer is their natural food," Marian had explained. "If even one of them gets loose when there is a reindeer about he will rush straight at him and leap for his throat."

"That's one more reason why I must get these people to move on at once," Patsy whispered to herself.

To Terogloona she said: "What do they want?"

Terogloona turned to them with a simple: "*Suna-go-pezuk-peet?*" he asked, "What do you want?"

With many guttural expressions and much waving of hands, the leader explained their wishes.

"He say," smiled Terogloona, "that in the hills about here are many foxes, black fox, red fox, white, blue and cross fox. He say, that one, want to camp here; want to set traps; want to catch foxes."

"But what will they eat?" asked Patsy.

Terogloona, having interpreted the question, smiled again at their answer:

"They will eat foxes," he answered quietly and modestly.

For a moment Patsy looked into their staring, hungry, questioning eyes. They were lying, and she knew it, but remembering a bit of advice of her father's: "Never quarrel with a hungry person—feed him," she smiled as she said to Terogloona:

"You tell them that this morning they shall eat breakfast with me; that we will have pancakes and reindeer steak, and tea with plenty of sugar in it."

"*Capseta! Ali-ne-ca! Capseta!*" exclaimed one of the strangers who had understood the word sugar and was passing it on in the native word, *Capseta*, to his companions.

It was a busy morning for Patsy. There seemed no end to the appetites of these half starved natives. Even Terogloona grumbled at the amount they ate, but Patsy silenced him with the words:

“First they must be fed, then we will talk to them.”

Troubles seldom come singly. Hardly had the last pancake been devoured, than Terogloona, looking up from his labors, uttered an exclamation of surprise. A half mile up from the camp the tundra was brown with feeding reindeer.

“Scarberry’s herd,” he hissed.

“Oh!” exclaimed Patsy. “They dare to do that? They dare to drive their deer on our nearest and best pasture? And what can we do to stop them? Must Marian’s mission be in vain? Must she go all that way for nothing? If they remain, the range will be stripped long before she can return!”

Pressing her hands to her temples, she sat down unsteadily upon one of the sleds of the strangers.

She was struggling in a wild endeavor to think of some way out. Then, of a sudden, a wolfdog jumped up at her very feet and began to ki-yi in a most distressing fashion.

Looking up, she saw that three of Scarberry’s deer, having strayed nearer the camp than the others, had attracted the dog’s attention. Like a flash, a possible solution to her problem popped into Patsy’s head.

With a cry of delight she sprang to her feet. The next instant she was her usual, calm self.

“Terogloona,” she said steadily, “come into the tent for a moment. I have something I wish to ask you.”

The task which Marian had set for herself, the scaling of the mountain to the dark spot in its side, was no easy one. Packed by the beating blast of a thousand gales, the snow was like white flint. It rang like steel to the touch of her iron shod staff. It was impossible to make an impression in its surface with the soft heel of her deerskin boots. The only way she could make progress was by the aid

of her staff. One slip of that staff, one false step, and she would go gliding, faster, faster, ever faster, to a terrible death far below.

Yet to falter now meant that death of another sort waited her; death in the form of increasing cold and gathering storm.

Yet she made progress in spite of the cold that numbed her hands and feet; in spite of her wildly beating heart; regardless of the terror that gripped her. Now she had covered half the distance; now two-thirds; now she could be scarcely a hundred yards away. And now she saw clearly. She had not been mistaken. That black spot in the wall of snow was a yawning hole in the side of the mountain, a refuge in the time of storm. Could she but reach it, all would be well.

Could she do it? From her position the way up appeared steeper. She thought of going back for the reindeer. Their knife-like hoofs, cutting into the flinty snow, would carry them safely upward. She now regretted that she had not driven one before her. Vain regret. To descend now was more perilous than to go forward.

So, gripping her staff firmly, pressing her breast to still the wild beating of her heart, and setting her eyes upon the goal lest they stray to the depths below, she again began to climb.

Now she began going first to right, then to left. This zig-zag course, though longer, was less steep. Up—up—up she struggled, until at last, with an exultant cry of joy, she threw herself over a broad parapet of snow and the next instant found herself looking down at a world which but the moment before had appeared to be reaching up white menacing hands at her. Then she turned to peer into the dark depths of the cave. She shivered as she looked. Her old fancies of fairies and goblins, of strange, wild people inhabiting these mountains, came sweeping back and quite unnerved her.

The next moment she was herself again, and turning she called down to Attatak:

“Who-hoo! Who-hoo! Bring the reindeer up. Here is shelter for the night.”

An inaudible answer came floating back to her. Then she saw the reindeer turn about and begin the long, zig-zag course that in time would bring them to the mouth of the newly discovered cave.

“And then,” Marian said softly to herself.

She was no longer afraid of the dark shadows behind her. In the place of fear had come a great curiosity. The same questions which have come to all people throughout all time upon discovering a strange cave in the mountains, had come to her. “Am I,” she asked herself, “the first person whose footsteps have echoed in those mysterious corridors of nature, or have there been others? If there have been others, who were they? What were they like? What did they leave behind that will tell the story of their visit here?”

Marian tried to shake herself free from these questions. It was extremely unlikely that any one, in all the hurrying centuries, had ever passed this way. They were on the side of a mountain. She had never known of a person crossing the range before. So she reasoned, but in the end found herself hoping that this cave might yield to her adventure loving soul some new and hitherto inexperienced thrill.

In the meantime she heard the labored breathing of the reindeer as they toiled up the mountainside. They would soon be here. Then she and Attatak would make camp, and safe from the cold and storm, they would sleep in peace.

A great wave of thankfulness swept over her, and with the fervent reverence of a child, she lifted her eyes to the stars and uttered a prayer of thanksgiving.

When the wave of emotion had passed, curiosity again gripped her. She wished to enter the cave, yet shrank from it. Like a child afraid of the dark, she feared to go forward alone. So, drawing her parka hood close about her face to protect it from the cold, she waited for Attatak’s arrival.

Even as she waited there crept into her mind a disturbing question:

“I wonder,” she said aloud, “I do wonder how Patsy is getting along with the herd?”

CHAPTER IX
PATSY SOLVES A PROBLEM

Turning from the group of strange natives, Patsy lead Terogloona into the igloo and drawing his grandfatherly head down close to hers, she whispered:

“Terogloona, are reindeer much afraid of native wolf dogs?”

“*Eh-eh!*” Terogloona nodded his head.

“Very, very, very much afraid of them?” Patsy insisted.

Terogloona’s head nodded vigorously.

“Then,” said Patsy, with a twinkle in her eye, “if we let one wolfdog loose, and he went toward Bill Scarberry’s herd, would they run away?”

“*Eh-eh.* Mebby. Want kill reindeer, that dog. Mebby kill one, two, three—many. Sometimes that way, wolfdogs.”

Terogloona’s horror of the thing she had proposed, shone in his eyes. Many years he had been a herder of reindeer. Many a dog had he killed to save a reindeer. His love for dogs was strong. His love for reindeer was stronger. To deliberately turn a wolfdog loose to prey upon a herd of reindeer, even an enemy’s herd, was unthinkable.

Patsy, having read his thoughts, threw back her head and laughed.

“We won’t do that,” she said soberly, “but, Terogloona, if each one of those strange Eskimo people should take a dog by his draw rope, and then they all should walk toward that old cheat’s herd, what would happen?”

A sudden gleam stole into the aged herder's eyes. He was beginning to catch her meaning. The deer were upon forbidden ground. She was finding a way to drive them back to the place where they belonged.

"They would go away very fast," he said quickly.

"And would these Eskimos do that; would they do it for two sacks of flour; two cans of baking-powder; two slabs of bacon and some sugar?" asked Patsy breathlessly.

"For all that," said Terogloona, staring at her, "they would do anything; anything you say."

"Go tell them they shall have it," said Patsy. "Tell them they must drive Scarberry's herd back to the Come-saw River valley where they belong, and that they may take their flour, sugar and other things along."

The Eskimos crowded about Terogloona, listened to him in silence until he had finished, then burst into a chorus of "*Eh-eh! Ke! Ke Kullemuk, Ke-Ke,*" which Patsy rightfully interpreted as meaning that they were ready for the enterprise and that Terogloona was to bring on the reward.

It was a strange line of march that formed soon after. Seven Eskimos, each holding to a strap, at the other end of which a native dog reared and ki-yi'ed, spread out in a broad line, and followed by a sled drawn by the four remaining dogs, they started toward Scarberry's herd.

As they came closer to the herd, the leaders of the antlered throng tossed their heads and whistled. As they came still closer there sounded the rattle of antler upon antler as the herd backed in upon itself.

The solitary herder, who had been left to watch the herd, looked at the on-coming members of his own race and then shouted at them angrily.

The Eskimos with the dogs marched straight ahead, appearing not to hear the shouts of the angry herder. In less time than it takes to tell it the herd was in full stampede. In vain were the shouts of Scarberry's herders. In vain their herd dogs sought to stem the flight. The reindeer had scented their ancient foe; they had heard his loud ki-yi. They were headed for their home range, and would not pause until they had reached it. Marian's hills and tundra were not for them.

As for Scarberry's herders, they might remain where they were or follow. They chose to follow. An hour later, with a sigh of satisfaction, Patsy saw them driving their sled deer over the broad trail of the herd that had vanished.

"Will they come back?" she asked Terogloona.

"Mebby yes; mebby no," said Terogloona. "Can't tell."

For a moment he was silent; then with a queer look on his face he said:

"One thing I am much afraid of."

"What is that?" asked Patsy.

"Mebby not come," said Terogloona, looking as if he was sorry he had spoken.

That was all he would say and Patsy felt a bit uneasy over his remark. Nevertheless, she could not help having a feeling of pride in her first day's work as manager of the herd. Two serious problems had arisen and she had matched them against each other with the result that both had vanished. She had succeeded in getting rid of the unwelcome visitors and Bill Scarberry's great herd. She had a right to feel a bit proud.

"10 - 10 = 0," she marked on the floor with a bit of charcoal. "We are minus a few eatables but we can spare them all right. Besides, it's real satisfying to know that you've given several hungry people an opportunity to earn a week's provisions."

Had she known the full and final effect of that week's provisions, she might have experienced some moments of uncomfortable thinking. Lacking that knowledge, she smiled as she busied herself with preparing a belated breakfast for Terogloona and herself.

CHAPTER X
A STARTLING DISCOVERY

To Attatak, whose mind was filled with the weird tales of the spirit world, to enter a cave away on this unknown mountain side was a far greater trial than it was to Marian. Cold, blizzards, the wild beasts of timberlands—these she could face; but the possible dwelling place of the spirits of dead polar bears and walruses, to say nothing of old women who had died because they had disregarded the incantations of witch doctors, “Ugh!”—this was very bad indeed.

Marian felt the native girl tremble as she took her arm and led her gently forward into the dark depths of the cave.

The entrance was not wide, perhaps twelve feet across, but it was fully as high as it was broad.

“Our deer can come in, too,” whispered Marian, “if it goes back far enough.”

“If there are no wolves,” said Attatak with a shudder.

“Wolves?” Marian had not thought of that. “You wait here,” she whispered. “I’ll go for the rifle.”

“No! No!” Attatak gripped her arm until it hurt. “I will go, too.”

So back out of the cave they felt their way, now tripping over rocks that rolled away with a hollow sound like distant thunder, now brushing the wall, till they came at last to the open air.

Marian hated all this delay. Famished with hunger, chilled to the very marrow,

and weary enough to drop, she longed for the warmth of the fire she hoped they might light, for the food they would warm over it, and the comforting rest that would follow. Yet she realized that the utmost caution must be taken. Wolves, once driven from a cave, might stampede their reindeer and lose them forever in the mountains. Without reindeer they should have great trouble in getting back to camp; the Agent would go on his way ignorant of their dilemma; their pasture land would be lost, and perhaps their herd with it.

The rifle securely gripped in the hands of Attatak, who was the surer shot of the two, they again started into the cave. Strange to say, once the rifle was in her grasp, Attatak became the bravest of the brave.

Marian carried a candle in one hand, and in the other a block of safety matches. The candle was not lighted. So drafty was the entrance that no candle would stay lighted. Each step she hoped would bring them to a place where the draft would not extinguish her candle. But in this she was disappointed.

“It’s a windy cavern,” she said. “Must be an entrance at each end.”

Calling on Attatak to pause, Marian struck a match. It flared up, then went out. A second one did the same. The third lighted the candle. There was just time for a hasty glance about. Gloomy brown walls lay to right and left of them, and the awful gloom of the cave was most alarming.

Glancing down at her feet, Marian uttered a low exclamation of surprise. Then, with such a definite and direct puff of wind as might come from human lips, the candle was snuffed out.

“Wha—what was it?” Attatak whispered. She was shaking so that Marian feared she would let the rifle go clattering to the rocky floor.

“Nothing,” Marian answered. “Really nothing at all. The ashes of a camp-fire, and I thought—thought,” she gulped, “thought I saw bones in the ashes!”

“Bones?” This time the rifle did clatter to the floor.

“Attatak,” Marian scolded; “Attatak. This is absurd!”

Groping in the dark for the rifle, she grasped a handful of ashes, then something hard and cold that was not the rifle.

“Ugh!” she groaned, struggling with all her might to keep from running away.

Again she tried for the rifle, this time successfully. She gave it to Attatak, with the admonition:

“*Ca-ca!*” (Do take care!)

“*Eh-eh,*” Attatak whispered.

Stepping gingerly out of the ashes of the mysterious camp-fire, they again started forward.

The current of air now became less and less strong, and finally when Marian again tried the candle it burned with a flickering blaze.

A glance about told them they were now between narrow dark walls, that the ceiling was very high, and there was nothing beneath their feet but rock.

The yellow glow of light cheered them. If there were wolves they had made no sound; the gleam of their eyes had not been seen. If the spirits of the men who had built that long extinguished fire still haunted the place, the light would drive them away. Attatak assured Marian of that.

With one candle securely set in a rocky recess, and with another close at hand, Attatak was even willing to remain in the cave while Marian brought the reindeer in a little way and carried the articles necessary for a meal to the back of the cave.

“There is no moss on this barren mountain,” Marian sighed. “Our reindeer must go hungry to-night, but once we are off the mountain they shall have a grand feast.”

By the time they had made a small fire on the floor of the cave and had finished their supper, night had closed in upon their mountain world. Darkness came quickly, deepened tenfold by the wild storm that appeared to redouble its fury at every fresh blast. The darkness without vied with the bleakness of the cave until both were one. Such a storm as it was! Born and reared on the coast of Alaska, Marian had never before experienced anything that approached it in its shrieking violence. She did not wonder now that the mountains appeared to smoke with sweeping snow. She shivered as she thought what it would have meant had they

not found the cave.

“Why,” she said to Attatak, “we should have been caught up by the wind like two bits of snow and hurled over the mountain peak.”

The two girls walked to the mouth of the cave and for a moment stood peering into the night. The whistle and howl of the wind was deafening. “Whew—whoo—whoo—whe-w—w-o—,” how it did howl! The very rock ribbed mountain seemed to shake from the violence of it.

“*Eleet-pon-a-muck*,” (too bad), said Attatak as she turned her back to the storm.

For Marian, however, the spectacle held a strange fascination. Had the thing been possible, she should have liked nothing better than leaping out into it. To battle with it; to answer its roar with a wild scream of her own; to whirl away with it; to become a part of it; to revel in its madness—this, it seemed to her, would be the height of ecstatic joy. Such was the call of unbridled nature to her joyous, triumphant youth.

It was with reluctance that she at last turned back into the depths of the cave and helped Attatak unroll the bedding roll and prepare for the night.

“To-morrow,” she whispered to Attatak before she closed her eyes in sleep, “if the storm has not passed, and we dare not venture out, we will explore the cave.”

“*Eh-eh*,” Attatak answered drowsily.

The next moment the roaring storm had no auditors. The girls were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XI
THE GIRL OF THE PURPLE FLAME

There is something in the sharp tang of the Arctic air, in the honest weariness of a long day of tramping, in the invigorating freshness of everything about one, that makes for perfect repose. In spite of the problems that faced them, regardless of the mystery that haunted this chamber of nature, hour after hour, to the very tune of the whirling storm, the girls slept the calm and peaceful sleep of those who bear ill will toward no one.

When at last Marian pried her eyes open to look at her watch, she was surprised to learn that eight hours had passed. She did not look to see the gleam of dawn at the mouth of the cave. Dawn in this strange Arctic land was still four hours away.

She knew that the storm was still raging. There came the roar and boom of the wind. Now and again, as if the demons of storm were determined upon pulling them from their retreat, a steady sucking breath of it came sweeping down through the cave. Marian listened, and then she quoted:

"'Blow high, blow low,
Not all your snow
Can quench our hearth-fire's
Ruddy glow.'"

She smiled to herself. Their tiny fire had gone out long ago, but another might easily be kindled.

She was about to turn over in her bed for another ten winks, when she suddenly remembered the mysterious discovery of the night before—the ashes and the bones, and at once she found herself eager for an exploration of the place. To

discover if possible what sort of people had been here before her; to guess how long ago that had been; to search for any relics they may have left behind—all these exerted upon her mind an irresistible appeal.

She had risen and was drawing on her knickers when Attatak awakened.

“Come on,” Marian cried, “it is morning. The storm is still tearing away at the mountain side. We can’t go on our way. We—”

“*Eleet-pon-a-muck!*” (too bad), broke in Attatak. “Now Bill Scarberry will get our pasture. The Agent will pass before we arrive. We shall have no one to defend our herd.”

At this Marian plumped down upon her sleeping bag. What Attatak said was true. Should they be unable to leave the cave this day, the gain they had hoped to make was lost.

“Well,” she laughed bravely, “we have reindeer, and they are swift. We will win yet.”

“Anyway,” she said, springing to her feet, “no use crying over spilled milk. Until we can leave the cave our time’s our own. Come on. Get dressed. We’ll see what wealth lies hidden in this old home in the mountain side.”

In the meantime Patsy was having a full share of strange adventure. Late in the afternoon, feeling herself quite free from the annoying presence of the visiting band of Eskimos and of Scarberry’s herd, she harnessed her favorite spotted reindeer and went for a drive up the valley. The two young Eskimos who worked under Terogloona had been sent into the hills to round up their herd and bring them into camp. This was one of the daily tasks of the herders. If this was done every day the herd would never stray too far. Patsy liked to mount a hill with her sled deer and then, like a general reviewing his troops, watch the broad procession of brown and white deer as they marched down the valley.

This day she was a little late. The herd began passing before she had climbed half way up the ridge. She paused to watch them pass. Then, undecided whether to climb on up the slope or turn back to camp, she stood there until the uncertain light of the low Arctic sun had faded and night had come. Just as she had decided to turn her deer toward home, she caught a purple gleam on the hill

directly above her.

“The purple flame!” she exclaimed. “And not a quarter of a mile above me. I could climb up there in fifteen minutes.”

For a moment she stood undecided. Then, seized by a sudden touch of daring, she whirled her deer about, tethered him to his sled, and went scouting up a gully toward the spot where the mysterious flame had flashed for a moment, then had gone out.

“I’ll see something, anyway,” she told herself as she strove in vain to still the painful fluttering of her heart.

She had worked her way to a position on the side of the hill where the outlines of a tent, with its extension of stovepipe standing out black above it, was outlined against the sky. Then, to her consternation, she saw the flaps of the tent move.

“Someone is coming out,” she whispered to herself. “Perhaps they have been watching me through a hole in the tent. Perhaps—”

Her heart stopped beating at thought of the dangers that might be threatening. Should she turn and flee, or should she flatten herself against the snow and hope that she might not be seen? Suddenly remembering that her parka, made of white fawnskin, would blend perfectly with the snow, she decided on the latter course.

There was not a second to lose. Hardly had she melted into the background of snow when a person appeared at the entrance of the tent.

Then it was that Patsy received a thrilling shock. She had been prepared to see a bearded miner, an Eskimo, most any type of man. But the person she saw was not a man, but *a woman*; scarcely that—little more than a girl.

It was with the utmost difficulty that Patsy suppressed an audible exclamation. Closing her lips tight, she took one startled look at the strange girl.

Carefully dressed in short plaid skirt, bright checkered mackinaw, and a blue knit hood; the girl stood perfectly silhouetted against the sky. Her eyes and hair were brown; Patsy was sure of that. Her features were fine. There was a deep shade of healthy pink in her cheeks.

“She’s not a native Alaskan,” Patsy told herself. “Like me, she has not been long in Alaska.”

How she knew this she could not exactly tell, but she was as sure of it as she was of anything in life. Suddenly she was puzzled by a question: “What had brought the girl from the warmth of the tent into the cold?”

Patsy saw her glance up toward the sky. There was a rapt look on her face as she gazed fixedly at the first evening stars.

“It’s as if she were saying a prayer or a Psalm,” Patsy murmured. “‘The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament his handiwork.’”

For a full moment the strange girl stood thus; then, turning slowly, she stepped back into the tent. That the tent had at least one other occupant, Patsy knew at once by a shadow that flitted across the wall as the girl entered.

“Well,” mused Patsy. “Well, now, I wonder?”

She was more puzzled than ever, but suddenly remembering that she had barely escaped being caught spying on these strangers, she rose and went gliding down the hill.

When she reached her reindeer she loosed him and turned him toward home, nor did she allow him to pause until he stood beside her igloo.

Once inside her lodge, with the candle gleaming brightly and a fire of dry willows snapping in the sheet-iron stove, Patsy took a good long time for thinking things through.

Somewhat to her surprise, she found herself experiencing a new feeling of safety. It was true she had not been much afraid since Marian had left her alone with the herders, for it was but a step from her igloo to Terogloona’s tent. This old herder, who treated her as if she were his grandchild, would gladly give his life in defending her from danger. Nevertheless, a little feeling of fear lingered in her mind whenever she thought of the tent of the purple flame. As she thought of it now she realized that she had lost that fear when she had discovered that there was a girl living in that tent.

“And yet,” she told herself, “there are bad women in Alaska just as there are

everywhere. She might be bad, but somehow she didn’t look bad. She looked educated and sort of refined and—and—she looked a bit lonely as she stood there gazing at the stars. I wanted to walk right up to her and say ‘Hello!’ just like that, nice and chummy. Perhaps I will, too, some day.

“And perhaps I won’t,” she thoughtfully added a moment later. Something of the old dread of the purple flame still haunted her mind. Then, too, there were two puzzling questions: Why were these people here at all; and how did they live, if not off Marian’s deer?

Not many days later Patsy was to make a startling discovery that, to all appearances, was an answer to this last question.

CHAPTER XII
ANCIENT TREASURE

With a hand that trembled slightly, Marian held the candle that was to light their way in the exploration of the mysterious mountain cavern. As if drawn by a magnet, she led the way straight to the spot where but a few hours before she had been so frightened by finding herself standing in the burned out ashes and bones of an old camp-fire.

She laughed now as she bent over to examine the spot. There could be no question that there had once been a camp-fire here. There were a number of bones strewn about, too.

“That fire,” she said slowly, “must have burned itself out years ago; perhaps fifty years. Those bones are from the legs of a reindeer or caribou. They’re old, too. How gray and dry they are! They are about to fall into dust.”

She studied the spot for some time. At last she straightened up.

“Not much to it, after all,” she sighed. “It’s interesting enough to know that some storm blown traveler who attempted the pass, as we did, once spent the night here. But he left no relic of interest behind, unless—why—what have you there?” She turned suddenly to her companion.

Attatak was holding a slim, dull brown object in her hand.

“Only the broken handle of an old cow-drill,” she said slowly, still studying the thing by the candle light.

“It’s ivory.”

"*Eh-eh.*"

"And quite old?"

"Mebby twenty, mebby fifty years. Who knows?"

"Why are you looking at it so sharply?"

"Trying to read."

"Read what?"

"Well," smiled Attatak, as she placed the bit of ivory in Marian's hand, "long ago, before the white man came, my people told stories by drawing little pictures on ivory. They scratched the pictures on the ivory, then rubbed smoke black in them so they would see them well. This cow-drill handle is square. It has four sides. Each side tells a story. Three are of hunting—walrus, polar bear and caribou. But the other side is something else. I can't quite tell what it says."

Marian studied it for a time in silence.

"Mr. Cole would love that," she said at last, and her thoughts were far away. For the moment her mind had carried her back to those thrilling days aboard the pleasure yacht, *The O'Moo*. Since you have doubtless read our other book, "The Cruise of *The O'Moo*," I need scarcely remind you that Mr. Cole was the curator of a great museum, and knew all about strange and ancient things. He had done much to aid Marian and her friends in unravelling the mystery of the strange blue face.

"Bring it along," Marian said, handing the piece back to Attatak. "It tells us one thing—that the man who built that fire was an Eskimo. It is worth keeping. I should like to take it with me to the Museum when I go back.

"Now," she said briskly, "let's go all over the cave. There may be things that we have not yet discovered."

And indeed there were. It was with the delicious sensation of research and adventure that the girls wandered back and forth from wall to wall of the gloomy cavern.

Not until they had passed the spot where they had spent the night, and were far back in the cave, did they make a discovery of any importance. Then it was that Marian, with a little cry of joy, put out her hand and took from a ledge of rock a strange looking little dish no larger than a finger bowl. It was so incrusted with dirt and dust that she could not tell whether it was really a rare find of some ancient pottery, or an ordinary china dish left here by some white adventurer. However, something within her seemed to whisper: “Here is wealth untold; here is a prize that will cause your friend, the museum curator, to turn green with envy.”

“*Sulee!*” (another), said Attatak, as she took down a larger object of the same general shape.

A few feet farther on was a ledge fairly covered with curious objects; strange shaped dishes; bits of ivory, black as coal; pieces of copper, dulled with age. Such were the treasures of the past that lay before them.

“Someone’s pantry of long ago,” mused Marian.

“Very, very old,” said Attatak, holding up a bit of black ivory. “Mebby two hundred, mebby five hundred years. Ivory turn black slow; very, very slow. By and by, after long, long time, look like that.”

As Attatak uttered these words Marian could have hugged her for sheer joy. She knew now that they had made a very rare find. The objects had not been left there by a white man, but by some native. Broken bits of ancient Eskimo pottery had been found in mounds on the Arctic coast. Those had been treasured. But here were perfect specimens, such as any museum in the world would covet.

And yet, had she but known it, the rareness and value of some of these were to exceed her fondest dreams. But this discovery was to come later.

Drawing off her calico parka, Marian tied it at the top, and using it as a sack, carefully packed all the articles.

“Let’s go back,” she said in an awed whisper.

“*Eh-eh,*” Attatak answered.

There was a strange spookiness about the place that made them half afraid to

remain any longer.

They had turned to go, when Marian, chancing to glance down, saw the bit of ivory they had found by the outer camp-fire. At first she was tempted to let it remain where it lay. It seemed an insignificant thing after the discovery of these rarer treasures. But finally she picked it up and thrust it into her bag.

Well for her that she did. Later it was to prove the key to a mystery, an entirely new mystery which had as yet not appeared above their horizon, but was, in a way, associated with the mystery of the purple flame.

“Listen!” said Marian, as they came nearer to the mouth of the cave, “I do believe the storm is passing. Perhaps we can get off the mountain to-day. Oh, Attatak! We’ll win yet! Won’t that be glorious?”

It was true; the storm was passing. Attatak was dispatched to investigate, and soon came hurrying back with the report that they could be on their way as soon as they had eaten breakfast and packed.

Marian was possessed with a wild desire to inspect her newly discovered treasure—to wash, scrub and scrape it and try to discover how it was made and what it was made of. Yet she realized that any delay for such a cause would be all but criminal folly. So, after a hasty breakfast, she rubbed as much dust as she could from the strange treasures and packed them carefully in the folds of the sleeping bags.

Soon the girls found themselves beside their deer, picking their way cautiously forward over the remaining distance to the divide; then quite as cautiously they started down the other side.

During the day they halted for a cold lunch while their reindeer fed on a broad plateau, a protected place where they were safe from the wild blizzards of the peaks that loomed far above them.

“From now on,” said Marian, “there will be little rest for us. Our bold stroke has saved us nothing. It is now a question of whether reindeer are trustworthy steeds in the Arctic; also whether girls are capable of solving problems, and of enduring many hardships. As for me,” she shook her fist in the general direction of Scarberry’s herd, “I’ll say they are. We’ll win! See if we don’t!”

To this declaration Attatak uttered an “*Eh-eh*,” which to Marian sounded like a fervent “Amen!”

CHAPTER XIII
THE LONG TRAIL

At nightfall of the following day, worn from the constant travel, and walking as if in their sleep, the two girls came to the junction of the two forks of a modest sized river. The frozen stream, coated as it was by a hard crust of snow, had given them a perfect trail over the last ten miles of travel. Before that they had crossed endless tiers of low-lying hills whose hard packed and treacherously slippery sides had brought grief to them and to their reindeer. Twice an overturned sled had dragged a reindeer off his feet, and reindeer, sled and driver had gone rolling and tumbling down the hill to be piled in a heap in the gully below.

Those had been trying hours; but now they were looking forward to many miles of smooth going between the banks of this river.

First, however, there must be rest and food for them and for their deer. They were watching the shelving bank for some likely place to camp, where there was shelter from the biting wind and driftwood lodged along the bank for a fire. Then, with a little cry of surprise, Marian pointed at a bend in the river.

“At this point,” she said, “the river runs southwest.”

Attatak looked straight down the river and at the low sweeping banks beyond, then uttered a low: “*Eh-eh*,” in agreement.

“That means that we cannot follow the river,” said Marian. “Our course runs northwest. Every mile travelled on the river takes us off our course and lessens our chance of reaching our goal in time.”

“What shall we do?” asked Attatak, in perplexity.

“Let me think,” said Marian. “There is time enough to decide. We must camp here. The deer must have food and rest. So must we. There is not much danger of wolves. If any come prowling around, the deer will let us know soon enough. We will sleep on our sleds and if anything goes wrong, the deer, tethered to the sleds, will tumble us out of our beds. Anyway, they will waken us.”

Soon supper was over. The deer, having had their fill of moss dug from beneath the snow, had lain down to rest. The girls spread their sleeping bags out upon the sleds and prepared for a few hours of much needed rest. Attatak, with the carefree unconcern that is characteristic of her race, had scarcely buried her face in an improvised pillow when she was fast asleep.

Sleep did not come so quickly to Marian. Many matters of interest lingered in her mind. It was as if her mind were a room all littered up with the odds and ends of a day’s work. She must put it to rights before she could sleep.

She thought once more of the strange treasures they had brought from the cave. Tired as she was, she was tempted to get out those articles and look at them, and to brush them up a bit and see what they were like.

“I know it’s foolish,” she told herself, “but it’s exactly as if I had hung up my stocking on Christmas Eve, and then when Christmas morning came, had been obliged to seize my stocking without so much as a glance inside, and forced to start at once on a long journey which would offer me no opportunity to examine my stocking until the journey was at an end. But I won’t look; not now. It’s too cold. Brr-r,” she shivered.

As she drew herself farther down into the furry depths of her sleeping bag, she was reminded of the time she and Patsy had slept together beneath the stars. She could not help wishing that Patsy was with her now, sharing her sleeping bag, and looking up at the gleaming Milky Way.

She wondered vaguely how Patsy was getting on with the herd, but the thought did not greatly disturb her. She was about to drift off to the land of dreams, when a thought popped into her mind that brought her up wide awake again. Their morning’s course was not yet laid. What should it be?

She closed her eyes and tried to think. Then, like a flash, it came to her.

“It’s the hard way,” she whispered to herself. “Seems as if it were always the

hard way that is safe and sure."

The thought that had come to her was this: In order to reach their destination, they must still travel several miles north. The river they were following flowed southwest. To go south was to go out of their way. Were they to strike due north, across country, they might in the course of a day's travel come to another stream which did not angle toward the south. That would mean infinitely hard travel over snow that was soft and yielding, and across tundra whose frozen caribou bogs were as rough as a cordwood road.

"It's the long, hard way," she sighed, "but we may win. If we follow this river we never can."

Then, with all her problems put in order, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV
MYSTERIOUS MUSIC

Two days later Marian and Attatak found themselves tramping slowly along behind their tired deer. It was night. Now and again the moon shot a golden beam of light across their trail. For the most part that trail was dark, overshadowed by great spruce and fir trees that stood out black against the whiteness of the snow, each tree seeming a gown clad monk—silent witnesses of their passing.

There was now a definitely marked trail. An ax cut here and there on a tree told them this trail had been made by men, and not by moose and caribou. They had seen no traces of man. No human habitation had sent its gleam of light across their trail to bid them welcome. Scarcely knowing whether she wished to see the light of a cabin, Marian tramped doggedly on. It was long past camping time, yet she feared to make camp. Several times she had caught the long drawn howl of a wolf, faint and indistinct in the distance.

With a burst of joy and hope she thought of the progress they had made. The tramp across open tundra had been fearfully hard. They had, however, reaped from it a rich reward; the river they had found was larger than the other and its surface had offered an almost perfect trail. It flowed north by west instead of southwest. It took them directly on their way. Even now Marian was wondering if this were not the very river at whose junction with the great Yukon was located the station they sought to reach before the Government Agent had passed.

“If it is,” she murmured, “what can hinder us from making the station in time?”

It seemed that there could be but one answer to this; yet in the Arctic there is no

expression that is so invariably true as this one: “You never can tell.”

Then, suddenly, Marian’s thoughts were drawn to another subject. A peculiar gleam of moonlight among the trees reminded her of the purple flame. At once she began wondering what could be the source of that peculiar and powerful light; who possessed it, and what their purpose was in living on the tundra.

“And Patsy?” she questioned herself, “I wonder if they are troubling her. Wonder if they are really living off our deer. I wish I had not been obliged to leave our camp. Seems that there were problems enough without this. I wish—”

Suddenly she put out one hand and stopped her deer, while with the other she gave Attatak a mute signal for silence.

Breaking gently through the hushed stillness of the forest, like a spring zephyr over a meadow, there came to her ears a sound of wonderful sweetness.

“Music,” she breathed, “and such music! The very music of Heaven!”

Moments passed, and still with slightly bowed heads, as if listening to the Angelus, they stood there, still as statues, listening to the strange music.

“The woods were God’s first temples,” Marian whispered.

For the moment she lived as in a trance. A great lover of music, she felt the thrill of perfect melody breaking over her soul like bright waves upon golden sand. She fancied that this melody had no human origin, that it was a spontaneous outburst from the very heart of the forest; God himself speaking through the mute life of earth.

When this illusion had passed she still stood there wondering.

“Attatak, what day of the week is this?”

For a moment Attatak did not answer. She was counting on her fingers.

“Sunday,” she said at last.

“Sunday,” Marian repeated. “And that is a pipe organ. How wonderful! How perfectly beautiful! A pipe organ in the midst of the forest!”

“And yet,” she hesitated, scarcely daring to believe her senses, “how could a pipe organ be brought way up here?”

“But it is!” she affirmed a few seconds later. “Attatak, you watch the deer while I go ahead and find out what sort of place it is, and whether there are dangerous dogs about.”

Her wonder grew with every step that she took in the direction of the mysterious musician. As she came closer, and the tones became more distinct, she knew that she could not be mistaken.

“It’s a pipe organ,” she told herself with conviction, “and a splendid one at that! Who in all the world would bring such a wonderful instrument away up here? Strange I have never heard of this settlement. It must be a rather large village or they could not afford such an organ for their church.”

As she thought of these things, and as the rise and fall of the music still came sweeping through the trees, a strange spell fell upon her. It was as if she were resting upon the soft, cushioned seat of some splendid church. With the service appealing to her sense of the artistic and the beautiful, and to her instinct of reverence; with the soft lights pervading all, she was again in the chapel of her own university.

“Oh!” she cried, “I do hope it’s a real church and that we’re not too late for the service.”

One thought troubled her as she hurried forward. If this was a large village, where were the tracks of dog teams that must surely be travelling up the river; trappers going out over their lines of traps; hunters seeking caribou; prospectors starting away over the trail for a fresh search for the ever illusive yellow gold? Surely all these would have left a well beaten trail. Yet since the last snow there had not been a single team passing that way.

“It’s like a village of the dead,” she mused, and shivered at the thought.

When at last she rounded a turn and came within full sight of the place from which the enchanting tones issued, the sight that met her eyes caused her to start back and stare with surprise and amazement.

She had expected to find a cluster of log cabins; a store, a church and a school.

Instead, she saw a yawning hole in a bank of snow; a hole that was doubtless an entrance to some sort of structure. Whether the structure was built of sod, logs, or merely of snow, she could not guess. Some thirty feet from this entrance, and higher, apparently perched on the crust of snow, were two such cupola affairs as Marian had seen on certain types of sailing vessels and gasoline schooners. From these there streamed a pale yellow light.

“Well!” she exclaimed. “Well, of all things!”

For a moment, undecided whether to flee from that strange place, she stood stock still.

The organ, for the moment, was stilled. The woods were silent. Such a hush as she had never experienced in all her life lay over all. Then, faint, indistinct, came a single note of music. Someone had touched a key. The next instant the world seemed filled with the most wonderful melody.

“*Handel’s Largo*,” she whispered as she stood there enchanted. Of all pipe organ music, she loved Handel’s Largo best. Throughout the rendering of the entire selection, she stood as one enchanted.

“It is enough,” she said when the sound of the last note had died away in the tree tops. “It’s all very mysterious, but any person who can play *Handel’s Largo* like that is not going to be unkind to two girls who are far from home. I’m going in.”

With unfaltering footsteps she started forward.

CHAPTER XV
AN OLD MAN OF THE NORTH

Having walked resolutely to the black hole in the snow bank, Marian looked within. There was no door; merely an opening here. A dim lamp in the distance sent an uncertain and ghostly light down the corridor. By this light she made out numerous posts and saw that a narrow passage-way ran between them.

There was something so mysterious about the place that she hesitated on the threshold. At that moment a thought flashed through her mind, a startling and disheartening thought.

“Radio,” she murmured, “nothing but radio.”

She was convinced in an instant that her solution of the origin of the wonderful music was correct.

The persons who lived in this strange dwelling, which reminded her of pictures she had seen of the dens and caves of robbers and brigands, had somehow come into possession of a powerful radio receiving set. Somewhere in Nome, or Fairbanks, or perhaps even in Seattle—a noted musician was giving an organ recital. This radio set with its loud speaker had picked up the music and had faithfully reproduced it. That was all there was to the mystery. There was no pipe organ, no skillful musician out here in the forest wilderness. It had been stupid of her to think there might be.

This revelation, for revelation it surely seemed to be, was both disappointing and disturbing. Disappointing, because in her adventure-loving soul she had hoped to discover here in the wilderness a thing that to all appearances could not be—a modern miracle. Disturbing it was, too, for since a mere instrument, a radio-phone, has no soul, the character of the person who operated it might be

anything at all. She could not conceive of the person who actually touched the keys and caused that divine music to pour forth as a villain. Any sort of person, however, might snap on the switch that sends such music vibrating from the horn of the loud speaker of a radiophone.

For a full five minutes she wavered between two courses of action; to go on inside this den, or to go back to Attatak and attempt to pass it unobserved.

Perhaps it was the touch of a finger on what she supposed to be a far off key—the resuming of the music; perhaps it was her own utter weariness that decided her at last. Whatever it was, she set a resolute foot inside the entrance, and the next instant found herself carefully picking her way down the dark passage toward the dim lamp.

To her surprise, when she at last reached the lamp that hung over a door, she found not an oil lamp, but a small electric light bulb.

“Will marvels never cease?” she whispered.

For a second she hesitated. Should she knock? She hated spying; yet the door stood invitingly ajar. If the persons within did not appear to be the sort of persons a girl might trust; if she could see them and remain unobserved, there was still opportunity for flight.

Acting upon this impulse, she peered through the crack in the door.

Imagine her surprise upon seeing at the far end of a long, high-ceilinged, heavily timbered room, not a radio horn, but a pipe organ.

“So,” she breathed, “my first thought was right. That enchanting music *was* produced on the spot. And by such a musician!”

Seated with his side toward her, was the bent figure of an old man. His long, flowing white beard, his snowy locks, the dreamy look upon his face as his fingers drifted back and forth across the keys, reminded her of pictures she had seen of ancient bards playing upon golden harps.

“‘Harp of the North that mouldering long has hung,’” she recited in a low voice.

The fingers on the keys suddenly ceased their drifting, the dreamy look faded

from the musician’s face. A smile lighted his eyes as, turning about, he spoke in a cheery voice:

“Come in. I have been waiting for you. You are welcome to an old man’s lonely house; doubly welcome, coming as you do in time for Sunday vespers.”

This strange, almost uncanny proceeding so startled the girl that for a second she was tempted to turn and flee. The next second she had complete control of herself. Pushing the door open, as if entering the chamber of the king of fairies, she made a little bow and said:

“Thank you.”

Then, realizing how perfectly absurd her action had been, she broke into a hearty laugh and in this laugh the old man joined.

So, with the ice broken, they became friends at once.

To her vast relief she found that the old man, though he had undoubtedly been expecting them or someone else, did not know all about them. He asked if they travelled with dog team or reindeer. Upon being told that they drove reindeer, he smiled and said:

“Good. It’s lucky I have feed for your deer. Reindeer people seldom come this way. Once I was caught unprepared to entertain them, so last autumn I put in a good stock of moss and willow leaves. Your deer shall be safely housed and richly fed, and so shall you. Go bring them at once. Or shall I go with you?”

“Oh no; that is not necessary,” Marian hastened to assure him.

“Very well then, while you go I will put the birds on to broil. You are doubtless very hungry.”

Ten minutes later Marian was chattering to Attatak:

“The queerest place you ever saw; and the strangest old gentleman. But really, I think he is a dear.”

CHAPTER XVI
THE BARRIER

The curiosity of the two girls knew no bounds as they neared the strange abode. Who was this man? Why did he live here all by himself? How had he brought his pipe organ to this remote spot? Whence had come those peculiar skylights through which the yellow light gleamed? Whence came the power for those electric lights? How had this strange man known of their coming? Or had he known? Had he been expecting someone else and had he, as a perfect host, pretended it was Marian he had known to be at the door? These, and many other questions, flashed through Marian's alert mind as she guided her deer over the remaining distance and up to the entrance to the cave-like structure.

Lights flashed on here and there as they passed inside. A long corridor, walled on either side by hewn logs, led to a stall-like room where was food in abundance for their reindeer, and, what was better still, perfect protection from any night prowler.

Marian was wondering what sort of meal was being prepared for them when they were at last led into the large room. Here, on the side opposite the pipe organ, great logs crackled merrily in a fireplace half as wide as the room itself.

After taking their fur parkas, the host motioned them to seats beside the fire. There, charmed by the drowsy warmth, Marian experienced great difficulty in keeping awake. Strange fancies floated through her mind. She fancied she was aboard a ship at sea; the walls about her were the walls of her state-room; the huge beams above, the ship's beams; the strange cupola affairs above, the lights to her cabin.

As she shook herself free from this fancy, she realized that aside from the

fireplace, the inside of the room was very like a cabin of a high class schooner.

“It must all come from some vessel,” she reasoned. “Even the lighting fixtures look as if they had been taken from a ship. I wonder what ship, and why?”

She thought of stories she had read of beach combers who wrecked ships by displaying fake shore lights on stormy nights that they might gather the wreckage from the beach. For a moment she fancied this bearded patriarch playing such a role. Finding this too absurd even for fancy, she shook herself free from it.

“Food,” she murmured to herself, “I’m ravenously hungry. He spoke of putting on the birds. I wonder what he could have meant?”

She did not have long to wait. A moment later there came to her nostrils the delicious aroma of perfectly brewed coffee. Mingled with it were various savory odors which gave promise of a rich meal.

“You are not yet fully warmed,” said their host, “so you may eat by the fire.”

He was pushing before him a tea-wagon of wonderful design and craftsmanship. This was fairly creaking under its load of chinaware of exquisite design, and silver which did not require a second look to tell that it was sterling. Marian barely avoided a gasp at sight of it.

If the service was perfect, the food was no less so. Four ptarmigan, those wonderful “quail of the Arctic,” broiled to a delicious turn, were flanked with potatoes, gravy, peas and apple sauce. The desert was blueberries preserved in wild honey.

“Only idleness or indifference,” smiled their host as he caught their looks of appreciation, “can hinder one from securing appetizing foods in any land.”

“And now,” he said as they finished, “there are questions you may wish to ask; information that you may wish to impart.”

“Why—we—” Marian began in some confusion.

He interrupted her with a wave of the hand. “It will all keep until morning. This habit young people have, of sitting up talking all hours of the night because life

seems too exciting for sleep, is all wrong. You are in need of rest. ‘Everything in its good time’ is my motto. Fortunately my guest room is warm. The fire is not yet burned out. Last night I had the honor of furnishing a night’s lodging to the Agent of our Government.”

“The Agent?” Marian asked in surprise.

“Yes. He came up here to ask me about the lay of the land above here. I think,” there was a merry twinkle in his eye, “that I may lay claim to being the oldest resident of this town. No doubt I was able to give him some valuable information.”

“And he is—is gone?” Marian gasped.

“Left this morning. Why? Did you wish to see him? Surely—yes, you would. Being connected with the reindeer business, you would. Unfortunate that you did not reach here a few hours earlier. He left on foot. The trail around the rapids is rough. He did not try to bring his dogs and sleds through. Left them with his driver at the foot of the rapids. Well enough that he did. Couldn’t have made it.”

Upon realizing that she had missed the man she had come so far to see, Marian could have burst into tears.

“You may find him at the Station, though,” her host assured her. “I believe he means to stay there a day or two. His dogs are footsore from travelling over crusted snow.”

Marian’s heart gave a leap of joy. But what was this about the trail and the rapids?

“Did—did you say that one could not pass over the trail with a sled?” she asked in the calmest tone she could command. “Are the rapids not yet frozen over?”

“Frozen?” he stared at her incredulously. “Have you not heard them? Ah, then, you came from up stream. The forest shuts out the sound. Slip on your parka and come with me, and you shall hear. It is grand music, that ceaseless rush and roar, that beating of waters and tumbling of ice.”

It may have seemed glorious to the old man, but to Marian, who listened to the wild tumult of waters, it was frightening and disheartening.

“Can a boat run the rapids?” she asked, though she knew the question was foolish and that no boat could run them.

“None ever has.”

“Can—can a sled pass over the trail above?”

“None has. None can. The way is too rough; the trees too closely crowded together. Dogs, reindeer, men, yes; but sleds, no.”

“How far is it to the station?” Marian faltered.

“Three days journey.”

“Are there any houses on the way?”

“None.”

“Then, without our sleds, we would not dare undertake the journey.”

“No. It would not do. You would starve or freeze.”

It required all Marian’s power of will to remain standing as she faltering said; “Then we are defeated. We—we must turn back. We—” She could not go on.

The aged man studied her face for a moment. Then quietly he asked:

“Is it very important that you get to the station; that you see the Agent?”

“Oh, very, very important! We—”

Again he motioned for silence. “Do not tell me now. I think it can be arranged that your sleds may pass the rapids. It *shall* be arranged. I promise it. Come, you are worn out. It is time you should sleep.”

CHAPTER XVII
AGE SERVES YOUTH

The two girls had carried no suit-case, satchel or duffel bag on this trip. Their spare clothing was stowed away in their sleeping bags. When their host had lighted their way to the room that was to be theirs for the night, and had retired to his large room, they tip-toed back to their sleds, unlashed their sleeping bags and carried them as they were to their room.

For some hours Marian had not thought of the ancient treasure found in the cave, but once she began unrolling her sleeping bag she was reminded of it. A piece of old ivory went clattering to the floor. With a cry of surprise she picked it up, then carefully removed the other pieces of ivory, copper and ancient pottery and stood them in a row against the wall.

Again there came the temptation to give them a thorough examination. Events transpired later that caused her to wish that she had done so. But weary and troubled by the turn affairs had taken, she again put off this inviting task. She slipped at once into her sleeping gown and plunged beneath the covers of the most delightful bed she had ever known. Attatak followed her a few seconds later.

They found themselves lying upon a bed of springy moss mixed with the fragrant tips of balsam. Over this had been thrown wolfskin robes. With one of these beneath them, and two above, they snuggled down until only their noses were showing.

They did not sleep at once. Left to himself, the mysterious old man had seated himself at his organ, and now sent forth such wild, pealing tones as Marian had never heard before. He was doing Dvorjak’s wildest symphony, and making it

wilder and more weird than even the composer himself could have dreamed it might be made.

Throughout its rendition, Marian lay tense as a bow-string. As it ended with a wild, racing crash, she settled back with a shiver, wondering what could throw such a spell over an old man as would cause him to play in that manner.

Had she known the reason she would have done little sleeping that night. The aged host was tuning his soul to such a key as would nerve him for a Herculean task.

Since Marian did not know, she puzzled for a time over the trail they must travel in the morning; wondered vaguely how her host was to keep his promise of bringing their sleds safely past the rapids; then fell asleep.

As for their host, fifteen minutes after the last note of his wild symphony had died away, he tip-toed down the silent corridor which led to the door of the room in which the girls were sleeping. Having convinced himself by a moment of listening that they were asleep, he made his way to the spot where their two sleds had been left. These he examined carefully. After straightening up, he murmured:

“Took their sleeping-bags. That’s bad. Didn’t need ’em. Can’t disturb ’em now. Guess it can be managed.”

After delivering himself of this monologue, he proceeded to wrap the contents of each sled in a water-proof blanket, then dragged them out into the moonlight.

Having strapped an axe, a pick and a shovel on one sled, he tied the other sled to it and began pulling them over the smooth downhill trail that led toward the falls.

For a full mile he plodded stolidly on. Then he halted, separated the sleds, and with the foremost sled gliding on before him, plunged down a steep bank to the right. Presently he came toiling back up the hill for the other sled.

At the bottom once more, he stood for a moment staring into the foaming depths of a roaring torrent.

“Pretty bad,” he muttered. “Never did it before at this time of year. Might fail.

Might—”

Suddenly he broke off and began humming, “Tum—te—tum—tum—tum.” He was going over and over that mad symphony. It appeared to give him strength and courage, and seizing the pick, he began hacking away at some object that lay half buried in the snow.

Fifteen minutes later he had exhumed a short, square raft.

“Built you for other purposes, but you’ll do for this,” he muttered. “Other logs where you came from.”

He set both sleds carefully upon the raft; then with yards upon yards of rawhide rope, lashed them solidly to it.

This done, he began running out a heavier rope. This he carried up the bank to a spot where there was a mass of jagged rock covered here and there by hard packed snow.

More than once he slipped, but always he struggled upward until at last he stood upon the topmost pinnacle. A heroic figure silhouetted in the moonlight, he stood for a full five minutes staring down at the racing waters below. Dancing in the moonlight, they appeared to reach out black hands to grasp and drag him down.

Before him, on the opposite side, gleamed a high white bank. A sheer precipice of ice fifty feet high, this was the end of a glacier that every now and again sent a thousand tons of ice thundering into the deep pool at its foot.

Beneath this ice barrier the water had worn a channel. A boat drifting down on the rushing waters would certainly be sucked down beneath this ice and be crushed like an eggshell.

What the old man intended to do was evident enough. He meant to set the raft, laden with the sleds and trappings so precious to his young guests, afloat in those turbulent waters and then to attempt by means of the rope to hold it from being drawn beneath the ice, and to guide it a half mile down the river to quieter waters below. There was no path for him to follow. Jagged rocks and ice-like snow, slippery as glass, awaited him; yet he dared to try it.

Here was a task fit for the youngest and the strongest; yet there he stood, the

spirit of a hero flowing in his veins—age serving youth. The gallantry of a great and perfect gentleman bowing to fair ladies and daring all. How Marian would have thrilled at sight of this daring act.

With a swift turn he tightened the rope, then with the “de—de—dum” of his symphony upon his lips, strained every muscle until he felt the rope slack, then eased away as he saw the raft tilt for the glide. Then he relaxed his muscles and stood there watching.

With a slow graceful movement the small raft glided out upon the water. An eddy seized it and whirled it about. Three times it turned, then the current caught it, and whirled it away. The rope was tight now, and every muscle of the grand old man was tense. A battle had begun which was to decide whether or not the two girls were to reach the station and fulfill their mission.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE TRAIL OF BLOOD

That same evening Patsy made her second startling discovery. An hour before night was to set in, she had harnessed a sled deer and struck out into the hills in search of a brown yearling that had been missing for two days.

“Strange where they all go,” she murmured as she climbed a hill for a better view of the surrounding country. “Marian was right; unless we discover the cause of these disappearances and put an end to them, soon there will be no herd. It’s a shame! How I wish I could make the discovery all by myself and surprise Marian with the good news when she gets home.”

As she scanned the horizon away across to the west, she saw a single dark figure on the crest of a hill.

“Old Omnap-puk,” she said, taking in with admiration the full sweep of his splendid antlers. “It’s the first time I’ve seen him for a long while. We can’t lose you, can we? And we can’t catch you,” she said, speaking to the lone figure.

Old Omnap-puk was neither reindeer nor caribou; at least this was what Marian had said about it. She believed that he was a cross-breed—half reindeer and half caribou. He was large like a caribou, larger than the largest deer in the herd. He had something of the dark brown coat of the caribou, but a bright white spot on his left side told of the reindeer blood that flowed in his veins.

But he was very wild. Haunting the edge of the herd, he never came close enough to be lassoed or driven into a brush corral. Many a wild chase had he lead the herders, but always he had shown them his sleek brown heels.

Many times the girls had debated the question of allowing the herders to kill him

for food and for his splendid coat; yet they had hesitated. They were not sure that he was not a full-blooded reindeer; that he was not marked and did not belong to someone. If he was a stray reindeer, they had no right to kill him. Besides this, it seemed a pity to kill such a wonderful creature. So the matter stood. And here he was on their feeding ground.

As Patsy stood there gazing at this splendid creature, she slowly realized that the Arctic sun had flamed down below the far horizon and long shadows raced out of the West. A full orbed moon stood just atop the trees that lined the eastern rim of hills. Turning reluctantly to leave, her eyes caught sight of a dark spot in the snow. She bent over to examine it, and a moment later straightened up with a startled exclamation.

“Blood! It is a trail of blood. I wonder which way it goes?”

Unable to answer this question, she decided to circle until she could find some sign that would tell her whether or not she was back-tracking. Satisfied at last of the direction, she pushed on, and there in the eerie moonlight, through the ghostly silence of an Arctic night, she silently followed the trail of blood.

Suddenly she stopped and stood still. Just before her was a large discoloration of the snow. And, though the snow was so wind packed that she walked on it without snowshoes, her keen eyes detected spots where it had been broken and scratched by some hard, heavy object.

Dropping on her knees, she began examining every detail of the markings. When she arose she spoke with a quiet tone of conviction:

“This is the track of a man. He has killed one of our deer and had been carrying it on his shoulder. Blood dropped from the still warm carcass. That explains the trail of blood. The load has become too heavy for him. At this spot he has laid his burden down. In places the antlers have scratched the snow. After a time he has gone on. But which way did he go?”

Once more she bent over. On the hard packed snow, the sole of a skin boot makes no tracks. After a moment’s study she again straightened up.

“There’s a long scratch, as if he had dragged the carcass to his shoulder as he started on, and an antler had dragged for two or three feet. That would indicate that he went the way I have been going. Question is, shall I go farther, or shall I

go for the herders with their rifles?” She decided to go on.

The blood spots grew less and less as she advanced. She was beginning to despair of being able to follow much farther, when, with a startled gesture, she came to a sudden halt.

“The purple flame!” she said in an awed whisper.

It was true. As she stared down at a little willow lined valley, she saw the outline of a tent. From the very center of it there appeared to burst that weird purple light.

“Well,” she concluded, “I am at least sure that they’ve killed one of our deer; killed several, probably. No doubt they have been living off our herd.”

For a moment she stood there undecided; then, with reluctant feet, she turned back. It was the only wise thing to do. She was alone and unarmed. To follow that trail further would be dangerous and foolhardy.

But what should she do, once she had reached her own camp? She was convinced in her own mind that the slain creature was one of their deer; yet she could not prove it. Should she lead her armed herders to the stranger’s tent and demand an explanation? Oh, how she did wish that Marian was here!

As she walked homeward she felt terribly depressed. There was a girl in that tent of the purple flame. She had seen her. She had hoped that sometime, in the not too distant future, they might be friends. Such a friend in this lonely land, especially since Marian and Attatak were gone, would be a boon indeed. Now she felt that such a thing could never be. It was as if a great gulf had suddenly yawned between them.

After reaching her camp and sipping a cup of tea and munching at some hard crackers, she sat for hours thinking things through. Her final decision was that for the present she could do nothing. Marian might return any day now. In such matters her judgment would be best and Patsy did not feel warranted in starting what might prove to be a dangerous feud.

CHAPTER XIX
PASSING THE RAPIDS

As the raft, which had been dragged from the bank of the river by the hermit of the mysterious lodge, swung out into the ice strewn current, it shot directly for the glacier's end as if drawn by a magnet.

Taking a quick turn of the rope about a point of rock, the aged man braced himself for the shock which must come when the raft, with its load of sleds and other trappings, had taken up the slack.

All too soon it came. Bracing himself as best he could, he held his ground. The strain increased. It seemed that the rope must snap; that the old man's iron grip must yield. Should the raft reach the glacier it would be lost forever. The muscles in the man's arms played like bands of steel. Blood vessels stood out on his temples like whipcords, yet he held his ground.

Ten seconds passed, twenty, thirty, then with a whirl like some wild animal yielding to its captor, the raft swung about and shot away down stream.

Plunging forward, leaping rocks, gliding over glassy surfaces of snow, puffing, perspiring, the old man followed.

Now he was down; the cause seemed lost. But in a flash he was up again, clutching at a jagged rock that tore his hand. For a second time he stayed the mad rush of the raft. Then he was on again.

Bobbing from reef to reef, plunging through foam, leaping high above the torrents, the raft went careering on. Twice it all but turned over, and but for the skill of its master would have been crushed by great grinding cakes of ice.

For thirty long minutes the battle lasted; minutes that seemed hours to the aged man. Then with a sigh he guided the raft into a safe eddy of water.

Sinking down upon a hard packed bank of snow, he lay there as if dead. For a long time he lay there, then rising stiffly, made his way down the ledge to drag the raft ashore and unlash the sleds. After this he drew the sleds up the hill one at a time and set them across the blazed trail.

“There!” he sighed. “A good night’s work done, and a neat one. I could not have done it better twenty years ago. ‘Grow old along with me,’” he threw back his hair as if in defiance of raging torrents, “‘The best is yet to be. The last of life, for which the first was made—’”

Having delivered this bit of poetical oration to the tune of the booming rapids, he turned to pick his way back over the uncertain trail that led to his strange abode.

Eight hours after she had crept into the luxurious bed in the guest room of the strange lodge, Marian stirred, then half awake, felt the drowsy warmth of wolf-skin rugs. For a moment she lay there and inhaled the drug-like perfume of balsam and listened to the steady breathing of the Eskimo girl beside her. She was about to turn over for another sleep, when, from some cell of her brain where it had been stowed the night before, there came the urge that told her she must make haste.

“Haste! Haste! Haste!” came beating in upon her drowsy senses. It was as if her brain were a radio, and the message was coming from the air.

Suddenly she sat bolt upright. At the same instant she found herself wide awake, fully alert and conscious of the problems she must face that day—the passing of the rapids and covering a long span of that trail which still lay between them and their goal.

She did not waken Attatak. That might not be necessary for another hour. She sprang out upon the heavy bear skin rug, and there went through a set of wild, whirling gestures that limbered every muscle in her body and sent the red blood racing through her veins. After that she quickly slipped into her blouse, knickers, stockings and deerskin boots, to at last go tiptoeing down the corridor toward the large living-room where she heard the roar of the open fire as it raced up the chimney.

She found her host sitting by the fire. In the uncertain light he appeared haggard and worn, as if quite done in from some great exertion. Of course Marian could not so much as guess how he had spent the night. She had slept through it all.

With a smile of greeting the old man motioned her to a seat beside him.

“You’ll not begrudge an old man a half hour’s company?” he said.

“Indeed not.”

“You’ll wish to ask me things. Everyone who passes this way wants to. Mostly they ask and I don’t tell. A fair lady, though,” there was something of ancient gallantry in his tone, “fair ladies usually ask what they will and get it, too.”

For a moment he sat staring silently into the fire.

“This house,” he said at last, “is a bit unusual. That pipe organ, for instance—you wouldn’t expect it here. It came here as if by accident; Providence, I call it. A rich young man had more things than he knew what to do with. The Creator sent some of them to me.

“As for me, I came here voluntarily. You have probably taken me for a prospector. I have never bought pick nor pan. There are things that lure me, but gold is not one of them.

“I had troubles before I came here. Troubles are the heritage of the aged. I sometimes think that it is not well to live too long.

“And yet,” he shook himself free of the mood; his face lighting up as he exclaimed, “And yet, life is very wonderful! Wonderful, even up here in the frozen north. I might almost say, *especially* here in the north.

“I came here to be alone. I brought in food with a dog team. I built a cabin of logs, and here I lived for a year.

“One day a young man came up the river in a wonderful pleasure yacht and anchored at the foot of the rapids. Being a lover of music, he had built a pipe organ into his yacht; the one you heard last night.”

“And did—did he die?” Marian asked, a little break coming in her voice.

“No,” the old man smiled, “he tarried too long. Being a lover of nature—a hunter and an expert angler—and having found the most ideal spot in the world as long as summer lasted, he stayed on after the frosts and the first snow. I was away at the time, else I would have warned him. I returned the day after it happened. There had been a heavy freeze far up the river, then a storm came that broke the ice away. The ice came racing down over the rapids like mad and wrecked his wonderful yacht beyond all repair.

“We did as much as we could about getting the parts on shore; saved almost all but the hull. He stayed with me for a few days; then, becoming restless, traded me all there was left of his boat for my dog team.

“That winter, with the help of three Indians and their dogs, I brought the wreckage up here. Gradually, little by little, I have arranged it into the form of a home that is as much like a boat as a house. The organ was unimpaired, and here it sings to me every day of the great white winter.”

He ceased speaking and for a long time was silent. When he spoke again his tones were mellow with kindness and a strange joy.

“I am seldom lonely now. The woods and waters are full of interesting secrets. Travellers, like you, come this way now and again. I try to be prepared to serve them; to be their friend.”

“May—may I ask one question?” Marian suggested timidly.

“As many as you like.”

“How did you know I was at the door last night when you were playing? You did not see me. You couldn’t have heard me.”

“That,” he smiled, “is a question I should like to ask someone myself; someone much wiser than I am. I knew you were there. I had been feeling your presence for more than an hour before you came. I knew I had an audience. I was playing for them. How did I know? I cannot tell. It has often been so before. Perhaps all human presence can be felt by some specially endowed persons. It may be that in the throngs of great cities the message of soul to soul is lost, just as a radio message is lost in a jumble of many messages sent at once.

“But then,” he laughed, “why speculate? Life’s too short. Some things we must

accept as they are. What's more important to you is that your sleds are beyond the rapids. When breakfast is over, you can strap your sleeping bags on your deer and I will guide you over the trail around the rapids to the point where I left your sleds."

A look of consternation flashed over Marian's face. She was thinking of the ancient dishes and how fragile they were. "I have some fragile articles in the sleeping bags," she said. "They—they might break!"

"Break?" He wore a puzzled look.

For a second she hesitated; then, reassured by the kindly face of the gentle old man, decided to tell him the story of their adventure in the cave. Then she launched into the story with all the eagerness of a discoverer.

"I see," he said, when she had finished the story. "I know just how you feel. However, there is now only one safe thing to do. Leave these treasures with me. If the rapids are frozen over when the time comes for the return trip, you can pass here and get them. You'll always be welcome. Better leave an address to which they may be sent in case you should not pass this way. The rapids freeze over every winter. I will surely be able to get them off on the first river boat. They can be sent to any spot in the world. To attempt to pack them over on your deer would mean certain destruction."

Reluctant as Marian was to leave the treasure behind, she saw the wisdom of his advice. So, feeling a perfect confidence in him, she decided to leave her treasure in his care. Then she gave him her address at Nome, with instructions for shipping should she fail to return this way.

"One thing more I wanted to ask you," she said. "How many men are there at the Station?"

"One man; the trader. He stays there the year 'round."

"One man!" she exclaimed.

"One is all. Time was when there were twenty. Prospectors, traders, Indians, trappers. Two years ago forest fires destroyed the timber. The game sought other feeding grounds and the trappers, traders and Indians went with them. Gold doesn't seem to exist in the streams hereabouts, so the prospectors have left, too.

Now one man keeps the post; sort of holding on, I guess, just to see if the old days won't return."

"Do you suppose he could—could leave for a week or two?" Marian faltered.

"Guess not. Company wouldn't permit it."

"Then—then—" Marian set her lips tight. She would not worry this kind old man with her troubles. The fact remained, however, that if there was but one man at the Station, and he could not leave, there was no one who could be delegated by the Government Agent to go back with her to help fight her battles against Scarberry.

Suddenly, as she thought of the weary miles they had travelled, of the hardships they had endured, and of the probability that they would, after all, fail in fulfilling their mission, she felt very weak and as one who has suddenly grown old.

CHAPTER XX
A MESSAGE FROM THE AIR

A cup of perfect coffee, followed by a dash into the bracing Arctic morning, completely revived Marian's spirits. Casting one longing look backward at the mysterious treasure of ancient dishes and old ivory, throwing doubt and discouragement to the winds, with energy and courage she set herself to face the problems of the day.

The passing of the rapids by the overland trail was all that their host had promised. Struggling over rocky, snow-packed slopes; slipping, sliding, buffeted by strong winds, beaten back by swinging overhanging branches of ancient spruce and firs, they made their way pantingly forward until at last, with a little cry of joy, Marian saw their own sleds in the trail ahead.

"That's over," she breathed. "How thankful I am that we did not attempt to make it with the sleds, or with our treasure on the backs of the deer. There would not have been left a fragment of our dishes as big as a dime. As for the sleds, well it simply couldn't be done."

"*No-me*," sighed Attatak.

"I wonder how he could have brought them by the rapids?" Marian mused as she examined the sleds. There were flakes of ice frozen to the runners. She could only guess at the method he had used, only dimly picture the struggle it must have taken. Even as she attempted to picture the night battle, a great wave of admiration and trust swept over her.

"The treasure is safer in his hands than in ours," she told herself.

"But, after it has left his hands?" questioned her doubting self.

“Oh well,” she sighed at last, “what must be, will be. The important thing after all is to reach the station before the Agent has started on his way.”

Again her brow clouded. What if there was no one to go back with her?

To dispel this doubt, she hastened to hitch her deer to her sled. Soon they were racing away over the trail, causing the last miles of their long journey to melt away like ice in the river before a spring thaw.

In the meantime a third startling revelation had come to Patsy. First she had discovered that at least one of the persons connected with the strange purple flame was a girl. Next she had found the red trail of blood that apparently was made by one of Marian’s slain deer, and which led to the door of their tent. The third discovery had nothing to do with the first two, nor with the purple flame. It was of a totally different nature, and was most encouraging.

“If only Marian were here!” she said to herself as she paced the floor after receiving the important message.

This message came to her over the radiophone. It was not meant particularly for her, nor for Marian. It was just news; not much more than a rumor, at that. Yet such news as it was, if only it were true!

Faint and far away, it came drifting in upon the air from some powerful sending station. Perhaps that station was Fairbanks, Dawson or Nome. She missed that part of the message.

Only this much came to her that night as she sat at their compact, powerful receiving set, beguiling the lonesome hours by catching snatches of messages from near and far:

“Rumor has it that the Canadian Government plans the purchase of reindeer to be given to her Eskimo people on the north coast of the Arctic. Five or six hundred will be purchased as an experiment, if the plan carries. It seems probable that the deer purchased will be procured in Alaska. It is thought possible to drive herds across the intervening space and over the line from Alaska, and that in this way they may be purchased by the Canadian Agent on Canadian soil. A call for such herds may be issued later over the radio, as it is well known that many owners of herds have their camps equipped with radio-

phones.”

There the message ended. It had left Patsy in a fever of excitement. Marian and her father wished to sell the herd. It was absolutely necessary to sell it if Marian’s hopes of continuing her education were not to be blasted. There was no market now for a herd in Alaska. In the future, as pastures grew scarcer, and as herds increased in numbers, there would be still less opportunity for a sale.

“What a wonderful opportunity!” Patsy exclaimed. “To sell the whole herd to a Government that would pay fair prices and cash! And what a glorious adventure! To drive a reindeer herd over hundreds of miles of rivers, forests, tundra, hills and mountains; to camp each night in some spot where perhaps no man has been before; surely that would be wonderful! Wonderful!”

Just at that moment there entered her mind a startling thought. Scarberry’s camp, too, was equipped with a radio-phone. Probably he, too, at this very moment, was smiling at the prospect of selling six hundred of his deer. He wanted to sell. Of course he did. Everyone did. He would make the drive. Certainly he would.

“And then,” she breathed, pressing her hands to her fluttering heart, “then it will be a race; a race between two reindeer herd; a race over hundreds of miles of wilderness for a grand prize. What a glorious adventure!”

“If only Marian were here,” she sighed again. “The message announcing the plans may come while she is gone. Then—”

She sat in a study for a long time. Finally she whispered to herself:

“If the message comes while she is gone; if the opportunity is sure to be lost unless the herd starts as soon as the message comes, I wonder if I’d dare to start on the race with the herd, with Terogloona and without Marian and Attatak. I wonder if I would?”

For a long time she sat staring at the fire. Perhaps she was attempting to read the answer in the flames.

At last, with cheeks a trifle flushed, she sprang to her feet, did three or four leaps across the floor, and throwing off her clothing, crept between the deer-skins in the strange little sleeping compartment.

CHAPTER XXI
FADING HOPES

Just at dawn of a wonderfully crisp morning, Marian found herself following her reindeer over a trail that had recently been travelled by a dog team. She was just approaching the Trading Station where the questions that haunted her tired brain would be answered.

Since leaving the cabin in the forest above the rapids, she and Attatak had travelled almost day and night. A half hour for a hasty lunch here and there, an hour or two for sleep and for permitting the deer to feed; that was all they had allowed themselves.

An hour earlier, Marian had felt that she could not travel another mile. Then they had come upon the trail of the dog team, and realizing that they were nearing their goal, her blood had quickened like a marathon racer's at the end of his long race. No longer feeling fatigue, she urged her weary reindeer forward. Contrary to her usually cautious nature, she even cast discretion to the winds and drove her deer straight toward the settlement. That there were dogs which might attack her deer she knew right well. That they were not of the species that attacked deer, or that they were chained, was her hope.

So, with her heart throbbing, she rounded a sudden turn to find herself within sight of a group of low-lying cabins that at one time had been a small town.

Now, as her aged host had said, it was a town in name only. She knew this at a glance. One look at the chimneys told her the place was all but deserted.

"No smoke," she murmured.

"Yes, one smoke," Attatak said, pointing.

It was true. From one long cabin there curled a white wreath of smoke.

For a moment Marian hesitated. No dogs had come out to bark, yet they might be there.

“You stay with the deer,” she said to Attatak. “Tether them strongly to the sleds. If dogs come, beat them off.”

She was away like an arrow. Straight to that cabin of the one smoke she hurried. She caught her breath as she saw a splendid team of dogs standing at the door. Someone was going on a trip. The sled was loaded for the journey. Was it the Agent’s sled? Had she arrived in time?

She did not have long to wait before knowing. She had come within ten feet of the cabin when a tall, deep-chested man opened the door and stepped out. She caught her breath. Instantly she knew him. It was the Agent.

He, in turn, recognized her, and with cap in hand and astonishment showing in his eyes, he advanced to meet her.

“You here!” he exclaimed. “Why Marian Norton, you belong in Nome.”

“Once I did,” she smiled, “but now I belong on the tundra with our herd. It is the herd that has brought me here. May I speak to you about it?”

“Certainly you may. But you look tired and hungry. The Trader has a piping Mulligan stew on the stove. It will do you good. Come inside.”

An Indian boy, who made his home with the Trader, was dispatched to relieve Attatak of her watch, and Marian sat down to enjoy a delicious repast.

There are some disappointments that come to us so gradually that, though the matters they effect are of the utmost importance, we are not greatly shocked when at last their full meaning is unfolded to us. It was so with Marian. She had dared and endured much to reach this spot. She had arrived at the critical moment. An hour later the Agent would have been gone. The Agent was her friend. Ready to do anything he could to help her, he would gladly have gone back with her to assist in defending her rights. But duty called him over another trail. He had no one, absolutely no one to send from this post to execute his orders.

“Of course,” he said after hearing her story, “I can give you a note to that outlaw, Scarberry, but he’d pay no attention to it.”

“He’d tear it up and throw it in my face,” asserted Marian stoutly.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said the Agent, rising and walking the floor. “There is Ben Neighbor over at the foot of Sugar Loaf Mountain. His cabin is only three days travel from your camp. He’s a good man, and a brave one. He is a Deputy Marshal. If I give you a note to him, he will serve you as well as I could.”

“Would we need take a different trail home?”

“Why? Which way did you come?”

Marian described their course. The Agent whistled. “It’s a wonder you didn’t perish!”

“Here,” he said, “is a rough map of the country. I will mark out the course to Ben’s cabin. You’ll find it a much safer way.”

“Oh, all right,” she said slowly. “Thanks. That’s surely the best way.”

She was thinking of the treasure left at the cabin. She had hoped to return by that route and claim it. Now that hope was gone.

CHAPTER XXII
A FRUITLESS JOURNEY

It was night; such a night as only the Arctic knows. Cold stars, gleaming like bits of burnished silver in the sky, shone down upon vast stretches of glistening snow. Out of that whiteness one object loomed, black as ink against the whiteness of its background.

Weary with five days of constant travel, Marian found herself approaching this black bulk. She pushed doggedly forward, expecting at every moment to catch a lightning-like zig-zag flash of purple flame shooting up the side of it.

The black bulk was the old dredge in Sinrock River. She had passed that way twice before. Each time she had hoped to find there a haven of rest, and each time she had been frightened away by the flash of the purple flame. Those mysterious people had left this spot at one time. Had they returned? Was the dredge now a place of danger, or a haven for weary travellers? The answer to this question was only to be found by marching boldly up to the dredge.

This called for courage. Born with a brave soul, Marian was equal to any emergency. Sheer weariness and lack of sleep added to this a touch of daring.

Without pausing, she drove straight up to the door. Reassured by the snow banked up against it, she hastily scooped away the bank with her snow-shoe, and having shoved the door open, boldly entered.

It was a cheerless place, black and empty. The wind whistled through the cracks where the planks had rotted away. Yet it was a shelter. Passing through another door, she found herself in an inner room that housed the boiler of the engine that had furnished power to the dredge. The boiler, a great red drum of rust, stood directly in front of her.

“Here’s where we camp,” she said to Attatak. “We can build a fire in the fire-box of the boiler and broil some steak. That will be splendid!”

“*Eh-eh,*” grinned Attatak.

“And Attatak, bring the deer through the outer door, then close it. They were fed two hours ago. That will do until morning.”

She lighted a candle, gathered up some bits of wood that lay strewn about the narrow room, and began to kindle a fire while Attatak went out after the deer.

For the moment, being alone, she began to think of the herd. How was the herd faring? What had happened to Patsy during those many days of her absence? Were Bill Scarberry’s deer rapidly destroying her herd ground.

“Well, if they are, we are powerless to prevent it,” she told herself with a sigh.

As she looked back upon it now, she felt that her whole journey had been a colossal failure. They had discovered the mountain cave treasure, only to be obliged to leave the treasure behind. They had reached the Station in time to talk with the Government Agent, but he had not been able to come with her. Only twenty-four hours before they had reached the cabin of Ben Neighbor, only to find it dark and deserted. He had gone somewhere, as people in the Arctic have a way of doing; and where that might be she could not even hazard a guess. At last, in despair, she had headed her deer toward her own camp. In thirty-six hours she would be there.

“Well, at any rate,” she sighed, “it will be a pleasure to see Patsy and to sleep the clock round in our own sweet little deerskin bedroom.”

She was indeed to see Patsy, but the privilege of sleeping the clock round was not to be hers for many a day. She was destined to find the immediate future far too stirring for that.

Twenty-four hours later saw Marian well on her way home. Ten hours more, she felt sure, would bring her to camp. And then what? She could not even guess. Had she been able to even so much as suspect what was going on at camp, she would have urged her reindeer to do their utmost.

Patsy was right in the middle of a peck of trouble. Because of the fact that for the last few days she had been living in a realm of exciting dreams, the troubles that had come down upon her seemed all the more grievous. Since that most welcome radio message regarding the proposed purchase of reindeer by the Canadian Government had come drifting in over the air, she had, during every available moment, hovered over the radio-phone in the momentary expectation of receiving the confirmation of that rumor which might send the herd over mountains and tundra in a wild race for a prize, a prize worth thousands of dollars to her uncle and cousin—the sale of the herd.

Perhaps it was because of her too close application to the radio-phone that she failed to note the approach of Scarberry's herd as it returned to ravish their feeding ground. Certain it was that the first of the deer, with the entire herd close upon their heels, were already over the hills before she knew of their coming.

It was night when Terogloona brought this bit of disquieting news.

"And this time," Patsy wailed, "we have not so much as one hungry Eskimo with his dog to send against them."

As if in answer to the complaint, the aged herder plucked at her sleeve, then led her out beneath the open sky.

With an impressive gesture, he waved his arm toward the distant hills that lay in the opposite direction of Scarberry's herd. To her great surprise and mystification, she saw gleaming there the lights of twenty or more campfires.

"*U-bogok*," (see there) he said.

"What—what does it mean?" Patsy stammered, grasping at her dry throat.

"It is that I fear," said Terogloona. "They come. To-morrow they are here. You gave food for a week for a few; flour, sugar, bacon. They like him. Now come whole village of Sitne-zok. Want food. You gave them food. What you think? No food for herders, no herders. No herders, no herd. What you think?"

Patsy did not know what to think. Gone was all her little burst of pride over the way she had handled the other situation that had confronted her. Now she felt that she was but a girl, a very small girl, and very, very much alone. She wished Marian would come. Oh, how she did wish that she would come!

“In the morning we will see what can be done,” was all she could say to the faithful old herder as she turned to re-enter the igloo.

That night she did not undress. She sat up for hours, trying to think of some way out. She sat long with the radio head-set over her ears. She entertained some wild notion of fleeing with the herd toward the Canadian border, providing the message confirming the offer for the deer came. But the message did not come.

At last, in utter exhaustion, she threw herself among the deerskins and fell into a troubled sleep.

She was roused from this sleep by a loud: “Hello there!” followed by a cheery: “Where are you? Are you asleep?”

It was Marian. The next moment poor, tired, worried Patsy threw herself sobbing into her cousin’s strong arms.

“There now,” said Marian, soothingly, as Patsy’s sobbing ceased, “sit down and tell me all about it. You’re safe; that’s something. Your experiences can’t have been worse than ours.”

“The Eskimo! Bill Scarberry’s herd!” burst out Patsy, “They’re here. All of them!”

“Tell me all about it,” encouraged Marian.

“Wait till I get my head-set on,” said Patsy, more hopefully. “It’s been due for days; may come at any time.”

“What’s due?” asked Marian, mystified.

“Wait! I’ll tell you. One thing at a time. Let’s get it all straight.”

She began at the beginning and recited all that had transpired since Marian had left camp. When she came to tell of her discovery that one of the mysterious occupants of the tent of the purple flame was a girl, Marian’s astonishment knew no bounds. When told of the bloody trail, Marian was up in arms. The camp of the purple flame must be raided at once. They would put a stop to that sort of thing. They would take their armed herders and raid that camp this very night.

“But wait!” Patsy held up a warning finger, “I am not half through yet. There is more. Too much more!”

She was in the midst of recounting her experiences with the band of wandering Eskimo and Scarberry’s herd, when suddenly she clapped the radio receiver tightly to her ears and stopped talking. Then she murmured:

“It’s coming! At last, it is coming!”

“For goodness sake!” exclaimed Marian, out of all patience, “Will you kindly tell me what is coming?”

But Patsy only held the receiver to her ears and listened the more intently as she whispered:

“Shush! Wait!”

CHAPTER XXIII
PLANNING THE LONG DRIVE

The message that was holding Patsy's attention was one from the Canadian Government. It was a bonafide offer from that Government to purchase the first herd of from four to six hundred reindeer that should reach Fort Jarvis.

When Patsy had imparted the exciting news to her, Marian sat long in silent thought. Fort Jarvis, as she well knew, lay some five hundred miles away over hills and tundra. She had just returned from one such wearisome journey. Should she start again? And would this second great endeavor prove more successful than the first? Of all the herds in Alaska, two were closest to Fort Jarvis; Scarberry's and her own. She had not the slightest doubt that Scarberry would start driving a section of his herd toward that goal. It would be a race; a race that would be won by the bravest, strongest and most skillful. Marian believed in her herders. She believed in herself and Patsy. She believed as strongly in her herd, her sled-deer and her dogs. It was the grand opportunity; the way out of all troubles. That the band of begging natives would not follow, she knew right well. Nor would the mysterious persons of the purple flame camp; at least, she hoped not. As for their little herd range, if they sold their deer, Scarberry might have it, and welcome; if they did not sell, they could doubtless find pasture in some far away Canadian valley.

"Yes," she said in a tone of decision, "we will go. We will waken the herders at once. Come on, let's go."

As they burst breathlessly into the cabin of their Eskimo herders, they received something of a shock. Since all the work of the day had long since been done, they had expected to find the entire group of four assembled in the cabin, or asleep in their bunks. But here was only old Terogloona and Attatak.

“Where’s Oatinna? Where’s Azazruk?” demanded Marian.

“Gone,” said Terogloona solemnly.

“Where? Go call them, quick!”

Terogloona did not move. He merely shrugged his shoulders and mumbled:

“No good. Gone long way. Bill Scarberry’s camp. No come back, say that one.”

“What!” exclaimed Marian in consternation. “Gone? Deserted us?”

“*Eh-eh*,” Terogloona nodded his head. “Say Bill Scarberry pay more money; more deer; say that one Oatinna, that one Azazruk. No good, that one Bill Scarberry, me think.” He shook his head solemnly. “Not listen that one Oatinna, that one Azazruk. Say wanna go. Go, that’s all.”

“Then we can’t start the herd,” murmured Marian, sinking down upon a rolled up sleeping-bag. “Yes, we will!” she exclaimed resolutely. “Terogloona, where are the rifles?”

“Gone,” he repeated like a parrot. “Mebby you forget. That one rifle b’long herder boys.”

“And your rifle?” questioned Marian, “where is your rifle?”

“Broke-tuk. Hammer not want come down hard. Not want shoot, that one rifle, mine.”

Marian was stunned with surprise and chagrin. She and Patsy returned silently to their igloo.

“Oh, that treacherous Bill Scarberry!” she exploded. “He has known this was coming. He knew our herders were energetic and capable. He thought if they remained with us, we might beat him to the prize; so he sent some spy over here to buy them away from us with promises of more pay.”

“And now?” asked Patsy.

“Now he will drive his herd to Fort Jarvis and sell it, and our grand chance is

gone forever."

"No!" exclaimed Patsy, "He won't! He shall not! We will beat him yet. We are strong. Terogloona and Attatak are faithful. We have our three collies. We can do it. We will beat him yet. Our herd is better than his. It will travel faster. Oh, Marian! Somehow, *somehow* we must do it. It's your chance! Your one big, wonderful opportunity."

"Yes," exclaimed Marian, suddenly fired by her cousin's hot blooded southern enthusiasm, "we will do it or perish in the attempt. It's to be a race," she exclaimed, "a race for a wonderful prize, a race between two large herds of reindeer over five hundred miles of hills, tundra and forest. There may be wolves in the forests. In Alaska dangers lurk at every turn; rivers too rapid to freeze over and blizzards and wild beasts. We will be terribly handicapped from the very start. But for father's sake we must try it."

"For your father's and for your own sake," murmured Patsy. "And, Marian, I have always believed that our great Creator was on the side of those who are kind and just. Bill Scarberry played us a mean trick. Perhaps God will somehow even the score."

An hour was spent in consultation with old Terogloona. His face became very sober at the situation, but in the end, with the blood of youth coursing eternally in his veins, he sprang to his feet and exclaimed:

"*Eh-eh!*" (Yes-yes) "We will go. Before it is day we will be away. You go sleep. You must be very strong. In the morning Terogloona will have reindeer and sleds ready. We will call to the dogs. We will be away before the sun. We will shout '*Kul-le-a-muck, Kul-le-a-muck*' (Hurry! Hurry!) to dogs and reindeer. We will beat that one Bill yet.

"You know what?" he exclaimed, his face darkening like a thundercloud, "You know that mean man, that one Bill Scarberry. Want my boy, So-queena, work for him. Want pay him reindeer. Give him bad rifle, very bad rifle. Want shoot, my boy So-queena. Shot at carabou, So-queena. Rifle go flash. Crooch! Just like that. Shoot back powder, that rifle. Came in So-queena's eyes, that powder. Can't see, that one. Almost lost to freeze, that one, So-queena. Bye'm bye find camp. Stay camp mebby five days. Can see, not very good. Bill, he say: 'Go herd reindeer,' So-queena, he say: 'Can't see. Mebby get lost. Mebby freeze'.

“He say Bill very mad. ‘Get out! No good, you! Go freeze. Who cares?’

“So-queena come my house—long way. Plenty starve. Plenty freeze. No give reindeer that one So-queena, that one Bill. Bad one, that Bill. So me think; beat Bill. Sell reindeer herd white man. Think very good. Work hard. Mebby beat that one Bill Scarberry.”

There came a look of determination to Patsy’s face such as Marian had never seen there.

“If that’s the kind of man he is; if he would send an Eskimo boy, half-blinded by his own worthless rifle, out into the snow and the cold, then we must beat him. We must! We must!” said Patsy vehemently.

“That’s exactly the kind of man he is,” said Marian soberly. “We must beat him if we can. But it will be a long, hard journey.”

They had hardly crept between their deerskins when Patsy was fast asleep. Not so Marian. The full responsibility of this perilous journey rested upon her shoulders. She knew too well the hardships and dangers they must face. They must pass through broad stretches of forest where food for the deer was scarce, and where lurking wolves, worn down to mere skeletons by the scarcity of food, might attack and scatter their herd beyond recovery.

They must cross high hills, from whose summits the snow at times poured like smoke from volcanoes in circling sweeps hundreds of feet in extent. Here there would be danger of losing their deer in some wild blizzard, or having them buried beneath the snows of some thundering avalanche.

“It’s not for myself alone that I’m afraid,” she told herself. “It’s for Patsy, Patsy from Kentucky. Who would have thought a girl from the sunny south could be so brave, such a good sport.”

As she thought of the courageous, carefree manner in which Patsy had insisted on the journey, a lump rose in her throat, and she brushed a hand hastily over her eyes.

“And yet,” she asked herself, “ought I to allow her to do it? She’s younger than I, and not so strong. Can she stand the strain?”

Again her mind took up the thought of the perils they must face.

There were wandering tribes of Indians in the territory they must cross; the skulking and oft-times treacherous Indians of the Little Sticks. What if they were to cross the path of these? What if a great band of caribou should come pouring down some mountain pass and, having swallowed up their little herd, go sweeping on, leaving them in the midst of a great wilderness with only their sled-deer to stand between them and starvation.

As if dreaming of Marian's thoughts, Patsy suddenly turned over with a little sobbing cry, and wound her arms about Marian.

"What is it?" Marian whispered.

Patsy did not answer. She was still asleep. The dream soon passed, her muscles relaxed, and with a deep sigh she sank back into her place.

This little drama left Marian in an exceedingly troubled state of mind.

"We ought not to go," she told herself. "We will not." Then, from sheer exhaustion, she too, fell asleep.

Three hours before the tardy Arctic sunrise, she heard Terogloona pounding at their door. She found that sleep had banished fear, and that every muscle in her body and every cell of her brain was ready for action, eager to be away.

As for Patsy, she could not dress half fast enough, so great was her desire for the wonderful adventure.

CHAPTER XXIV
CAMP FOLLOWERS

It was just as Marian was tightening the ropes to the pack on her sled that, happening to glance away at a distant hill, she was reminded of Patsy's latest story of the purple flame. From the crest of that hill there came a purple flare of light. Quickly as it had come, just so quickly it vanished, leaving the hill a faint outline against the sky.

"The purple flame," she breathed. "I wonder if we can leave those mysterious camp-followers of ours behind?"

On the instant a disturbing thought flashed through her mind. It caused an indignant flash of color to rise to her cheek.

"I wonder," she said slowly, "if those mysterious people are spies set by Bill Scarberry to dog our tracks?"

"They may start with us," she smiled to herself, as she at last dismissed the subject from her mind, "but unless they really are Bill Scarberry's spies and set to watch us, they'll never finish with us. Camp-followers don't follow over five hundred miles of wild trail. They're not that fond of hard marching."

In this conclusion she was partly wrong.

Just as the sun was painting the distant mountain peaks with a gleam of gold, the collies began to bark and the broad herd of reindeer moved slowly forward. Marian and Patsy touched their deer gently with the reins, and they were away.

It was with a distinct feeling of homesickness that Marian turned to look back at the campsite. She had spent many happy hours there. Now she was leaving it,

perhaps forever. What was more, she was leaving the tundra; the broad-stretching deer pastures of the Arctics. Should their enterprise succeed, she would pass over one of the Canadian trails, southward to the States and back to the University. Should they fail, she might indeed return to the tundra, but she knew it could never be the same to her.

“We must not fail,” she told herself, clenching her hands tight and staring away at the magnificent panorama which lay before her. “We must not! Must not fail!”

As she saw the reindeer, a mass of brown and white moving down the slope, a feeling of sadness swept over her. She had come to love these gentle and half-wild creatures of the North. She was especially fond of the sled-deer, her three; the spotted one, the brown one, and the white. Many hundred miles had she driven them. Nowhere in the world, she was sure, could there be deer who covered more miles in a day, who were quicker to recognize the pull of rein, more willing to stomp the tiresome nights away at the ends of their tethers.

Dearest of all were the three collie dogs; Gold, Copper and Bronze, she whimsically named them, for their coats were just what their names indicated. Copper and Bronze were young dogs. Gold was the pick of the three; an old, well-trained sheep dog. Accustomed to the sunny pastures of California, he had been brought to this cold and barren land to herd reindeer. With the sturdy devotion of his kind, he had endured the biting cold without a whimper, and had gnawed his toes, cut by the crusted snow, in silence. He had done the work assigned to him with a zeal and thoroughness that might have shamed many a human master.

“These, too, I must leave,” she told herself. “Worse than that, I am leading them out into wild desert. Within a week that beautiful herd may be hopelessly scattered; our sled-deers killed by wolves; our dogs—well, anyway, they will never desert us. Together we will fight it out to the bitter end.”

A lump came into her throat. Then, realizing that she was the commander of this expedition and that it was unbecoming of commanders to betray emotion, she quickly conquered her feelings and gave herself over to the work of assisting in keeping the herd moving steadily forward in a compact mass.

Five days later, with their herd still moving steadily on before them, and with hopes rising high because of the continued success of their march, they found

themselves crossing a succession of low-lying, grass-covered hills. As they reached the crest of the highest of these, and arrived at a place where they could get an unrestricted view of the tundra that lay beyond, an exclamation escaped Marian's lips.

"A forest!" she exclaimed.

"A real Arctic forest," echoed Patsy. "Won't it be wonderful!"

"Wonderful and dangerous," Marian replied. "Unless I miss my guess, here is where our troubles begin. It may not be so bad, though," she quickly amended, as she saw the look of fear that came over her cousin's face. "That forest is fully ten miles away. The sun is about to set. We'll drive our herd down into the tundra where there is plenty of moss. We'll camp there, and get up for an early start in the morning. The forest may be only a narrow belt along a river."

Marian did not feel very sure that her predictions would prove true, but she was the sort of person who measures all perils carefully, then hopes for the best.

Two hours later they were eating a meal of reindeer stew and hot biscuits, which had been cooked over a willow-wood fire in their Yukon stove. Then as they chatted of the future, Marian held up a finger for silence.

"What was that?" she whispered. "A shot?"

"I didn't—"

"Yes, yes. There's another!"

Marian was up and out of the tent in an instant.

As her eyes swept the horizon they caught a gleam of light from the hills above, the red and yellow light of a camp-fire.

With one sweeping glance she took in the position of her herd. She had just noted that a certain brown deer had strayed some distance up the hill. She was about to suggest to Terogloona, who had also been called from his tent by the shots, that he send a dog after the deer, when, to her great astonishment, she caught a flash of light, heard a sharp report, then saw the brown deer crumple up like an empty sack and drop to the snow.

For one instant she stood there as if in a trance, then with a quick turn she said:

“Patsy, you stay with Attatak. Terogloona, you come with me.”

Turning, she walked straight toward the spot where the reindeer had fallen. The faithful Terogloona, in spite of his fear of the Indians of the Little Sticks, followed at her heels.

When they arrived at the spot, they found a man bending over the dead deer. In his hand was the rifle that had sped the bullet. The soft-soled “muck-lucks” that Marian and Terogloona wore made no sound on the snow. The man’s back was toward them and they came upon him unobserved. The powerful Terogloona would have leaped upon his back and thrown him to the snow, but Marian held him back.

“Stranger,” said the girl, in as steady a voice as she could, “why did you kill our deer?”

Like a flash the man gripped his rifle as he wheeled about. Then, seeing it was a girl who spoke, he lowered his weapon.

Marian’s eyes took him in with one feeling glance. His face was haggard, emaciated. His hands were mere skin and bones. He was an Indian.

“Too hungry,” he murmured, “No come caribou. No come ptarmigan. No fish in the river; no rabbits on the tundra!” He spread out his bony hands in a gesture of despair.

“But you needn’t have killed him. Had you come to us we would have given you meat, all you could use.” The girl’s face was frank and fearless, yet there was a certain huskiness in her voice that to the sensitive ears of the Indian betokened kindness.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “maybe you would. Yesterday we saw other reindeer herd, north mebby ten miles. Want deer; ask man, big man, much whiskers; say want food. Man said: ‘Get out!’ Want’a kill me if I not go quick. Bad man, that one. We go way. Then see your herd. Say, take one deer. You want to fight, then fight. Better to die by bullet than by hunger.”

“The man you saw,” said Marian, her heart sinking as she realized that he must

be a half day in the lead, “was Bill Scarberry. Yes, he is a mean man. But see! Have you a cache? Some place where you can keep meat from the wolves and wolverines?”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed the Indian eagerly. “Ten miles. Diesa River, a cabin.”

“How many deer must you have to keep you until game comes?”

“Mebby—mebby,” the Indian stared at her in astonishment, “Mebby two, mebby three.”

“All right,” said Marian, “you have killed a fine doe. That was bad, but I forgive you.” She held our her hand to grasp the native’s bony fingers.

“Now,” she said briskly, “since you have killed her, you may keep the meat. Terogloona,” she turned to the Eskimo, “point out two young bucks, the best we have. Tell him he may kill them and that he and his friends may take them to their cabin.”

“I—I—” the Indian attempted to speak. Failing utterly, he turned and walked a few steps away, then turning, struck straight away toward the spot where the red and yellow campfire gleamed.

“That is his camp?” asked Marian.

Terogloona nodded silently.

“They will come for the meat, and will give us no further trouble?”

“*Eh-eh*” smiled the Eskimo. “The daughter of my master has acted wisely. The man who starves, he is different. These reindeer,” he waved his arms toward the herd, “they belong to my master and his daughter. When men are not starving—yes. When men are starving—no. To the starving all things belong. Bill Scarberry, he remember yet. Indians of Little Sticks, they never forget.”

As Marian turned to retrace her steps to camp, she chanced to glance up at the other camp where, but an hour before, she had seen the flash of the purple flame. It was closer than she thought. The flash of flame was gone, but she was sure she caught the outlines of a tent; surer still that she saw a solitary figure atop a nearby knoll. Sitting as if on watch, this solitary man held a rifle across his

knees.

“I wonder why he is there?” she said to herself, “I wonder why they are following us?”

“Oh,” she breathed as she walked toward camp, “it’s so tantalizing, that purple flame and all! I have half a notion to take Terogloona, as I did with that Indian, and march right up to them and demand the meaning of their mysterious actions!”

As if intending to turn this thought into action at once, she stopped and turned about. To her surprise, as she looked toward the crest of the hill, she saw the solitary watcher was gone.

“Oh, well,” she sighed, “we have no real reason for invading their camp. We’ve no proof that they’ve ever done us any harm; except, perhaps the time that Patsy saw the blood-trail and the antler marks in the snow. It seems that it must have been our deer, but we never could prove it.”

Glancing away at a more distant hill-crest, she was surprised at the picture revealed there.

The moon, just rising from behind the hill, threw out in bold relief the broad-spreading antlers of a magnificent creature of the wilderness.

“Old Omnap-puk!” said Marian. “What do you think of that? We have traveled five days, and yet we are still in the company of the mysterious camp-followers of the purple flame and old Omnap-puk, the caribou-reindeer who has haunted the outskirts of our camp so long.

“I suppose,” she said thoughtfully, “that I should tell Terogloona to have the Indians kill Omnap-puk. That would save one of our reindeers, and besides, if we let him live, who knows but that at some critical moment he may rush in and assume the leadership of our herd and lead them to disaster, or lose them to us forever. I have heard of that happening with horses and cattle. Why not with reindeer? And yet,” she sighed, “I can’t quite make up my mind to do it. He is such a wonderful fellow!”

The time was to come, and that very soon, when she was to rejoice because of this decision.

CHAPTER XXV
THE MIRAGE

That night Marian lay awake for a long time. She had a vague feeling that they were approaching a crisis. Many agencies were at work. Some appeared to favor the success of their enterprise, and some were working directly against them. Scarberry, with his herd, was some hours ahead of them. That was bad. If he succeeded in retaining this lead, the race was lost. However, less than half the distance had been covered, the easiest half. Many a peril awaited each herd. Who could tell when prowling wolves, large bands of Indians, a caribou herd, an impassable river, might bring either to a halt?

Marian could not answer all of the questions that troubled her. The Indians? Would they be satisfied with her gift of food, or would they continue to prey upon the herd? Would they go back to some large tribe and lead them to the herd that they might drive them away, an easy bounty?

She had dealt with Eskimos; knew about what to expect from them. “But Indians,” she whispered to herself, “What are they like?”

As if in answer to her perplexity, there came to her mind the words of a great and good man:

“Humanity is everywhere very much the same.”

This thought gave her comfort. She could not help but feel that the Indian she had befriended would not betray her, but might even come to her aid in some emergency.

“But those of the purple flame?” she whispered to herself. “That silent watcher on the hill—what did he mean by sitting there with a rifle across his knee? Is he

and his companions our friends or our enemies?”

Here, indeed, was a problem. Until this day, she had felt that these persons were to be distrusted and feared. However, there had been something about that silent watcher that had given her a feeling of safety in spite of her prejudice.

“It was as if he were set there as a watch to see that the Indian did us no harm,” she told herself. “And yet, how could he?”

It was in the midst of this perplexity that she fell asleep.

Long before dawn the girls awoke to face a new day and a new, unknown peril. The forest, stretching out black and somber against the white foreground of snow, seemed a great menacing hand, reaching out to seize their precious possession. They could not know what perils awaited them in the forest.

With breakfast over, the tents struck, sled-deer harnessed and hitched to the sled, and everything in readiness for the continuing of the race to Fort Jarvis, the girls climbed the nearest hill, hoping that they might catch some glimpse of the country beyond the forest.

Their hopes were vain. Far as eye could see, the forest stretched before them. They could only guess the miles they must travel before coming again to rolling hills and level tundra. They were traveling over a region of the great Northland which had never really been explored. No accurate maps showed where rivers ran or forests spread out over the plains.

Standing there, looking at the great forest, Patsy quoted:

> “‘This the forest primeval;
> The murmuring pines and the hemlocks
> Stand like Druids of old
> With beards that rest on their bosom.’

“And, with two Eskimos for companions, we are to enter that forest. Only wild people, and wilder caribou and wolves, have been there before us. Oh, Marian! We are explorers! We really, truly are! Isn’t it gran-n-d!”

Marian did not answer. There was a puzzled look on her face as she stared away toward the north. Out of the very clouds faint images appeared to be marching.

Yes, yes, now they became clearer. Reindeer—a whole herd of them. What could it mean? Was this a vision? Was she “seeing things,” or was it possible that much higher hills lay over there and that the reindeer were crossing them?

“Look,” she said to her cousin, pointing away to the clouds.

Together, with bated breaths, they watched the panorama that moved before them. Now they saw the herders and their dogs, saw them run this way and that; saw the herd change its course, saw the herders again take up the steady march.

“Why,” exclaimed Patsy, “Seems as if you could hear the crack-crack of reindeer hoofs and the bark of the dogs!”

“They must be miles away. It’s the Scarberry herd,” said Marian.

“Look,” whispered Patsy, “the deer are stopping.”

It was true. Having come to an abrupt halt, as if facing an insurmountable barrier, the leaders compelled those that followed to pack in a solid mass behind them or to spread out to right or left. In an incredibly short time they stood out in a straight line, facing east.

“It—it must be a river, a river that is still open, that cannot be crossed,” said Marian in tones of tense excitement.

“And that means!” exclaimed Patsy.

“That our rival has been stopped. Nature has brought them to a halt. We may win yet. Let’s hurry. We may find a crossing-place in the forest.”

“But look, look over there to the left!” cried Patsy.

“What? Where?”

“Why, they’re gone!” exclaimed Patsy. “There were three men. Indians, they looked like. They seemed to be watching the Scarberry herd from a hilltop some distance away.”

“But look!” cried Marian. “It’s gone!”

To their great astonishment, the herd had vanished. As it had appeared to march out of the clouds, so it seemed now to have receded again into them.

“Were we dreaming?” Patsy asked in an awed whisper.

“No,” said Marian thoughtfully, “It was a mirage, a mirage of the great white wilderness. We have them here just as they do on the desert. By the aid of this mirage, nature has shown us a great secret; that we still have a splendid chance to win the race. Let’s get down to camp and be away.”

“But the three Indians?” questioned Patsy. “What were they about to do?”

“Who knows?” said Marian. “We have little to do with the Scarberry herd. Our task is that of getting to Fort Jarvis.”

Two hours were consumed in reaching the edge of the forest. After that, for hours they passed through the wonder world of a northern forest in winter. Deep and still, the snow lay like a great white blanket. Black as ebonite against this whiteness stood the fir and spruce trees. There was something strangely solemn about the place. The crack of reindeer’s hoofs, the bark of dogs, all seemed strangely out of place here. It was as though they stood on holy ground.

“It’s like a church,” Patsy said in an awed voice.

“God’s great cathedral,” answered Marian.

Fortunately the trees were not too close together. There was room for the deer to pass between them. So, as before, the herd moved forward in a fairly compact mass.

“Going to be easy,” was Patsy’s comment after three hours had passed.

“I don’t know,” Marian shook her head in doubt, “I hope so, but you know an Alaskan who is used to barren hills and tundra, dreads a forest. I belong to the tundra, so I dread it, too.”

In spite of her fears, just at nightfall Marian found herself passing from beneath the last spruce tree and gazing away at rolling hills beyond.

She was just offering up a little prayer of thanksgiving, when some movement of

the forward herd leaders attracted her attention.

“They’re stopping,” she said. “I wonder why?”

Instantly the vision of the morning flashed through her mind.

“The river!” she exclaimed in alarm. “If—if we can’t cross it, we’ll have to camp at the edge of the forest. And that is bad, very bad. Animals that are cowards, and slink away by day, become daring beasts of prey at night.”

A hurried race forward confirmed her worst suspicions; there, at her feet was a river, flanked on one side by willows and on the other by a steep bank. It was not a broad stream—she could throw a stone across it—but it did flow swiftly. Its powerful current had thus far defied the winter’s fiercest blasts. It was full to the brim with milky water and crowding cakes of ice. No creature could brave that torrent, and live.

“Blocked!” she cried. “And just when I was hoping for so much!”

Sinking down upon the snow, she gave herself over for a moment to hopeless despair. The next moment she was on her feet. With arms outstretched toward the stars as if in appeal for aid, she spoke through tight clenched teeth:

“We must! We will! We will win!”

As if in mockery of her high resolves, at that moment there came to her ears the long-drawn howl of a timber wolf.

The call of the wolf was answered by another, and yet another. At the moment they seemed some distance away, but Marian trembled at the sound.

“A wolf travels fast,” she told herself as she turned to hurry back to Patsy and her faithful Eskimo.

“Listen!” she exclaimed, as she came near to her companions. “Sounds like ten or twelve of them howling at once. Terogloona, do wolves travel in packs?”

“Mebby not,” the Eskimo shrugged his shoulders, “but often they are many. Then they call to one another. They come all to one place. Then there’s trouble. There will be trouble to-night, and we have no rifle. We—”

He broke off abruptly to lean forward in a listening attitude. “That is strange,” he murmured, “They have found some prey back there where they are, perhaps a caribou.”

As they stood at strained attention, it became evident to all that the creature being pursued was coming down the wind toward them. The yap-yap of the wolves, now in full pursuit, grew momentarily louder. At the beginning they had seemed two miles away. Now they seemed but one mile; a half mile. The girls fairly held their breaths as they watched and waited.

And now it seemed that the wolves must be all but upon them. Then, with a sudden cry, Marian saw the great spreading antlers of old Omnap-puk, the king of reindeer and caribou, rise above the ridge.

“He’s not alone. There are others,” Patsy breathed.

“Reindeer!” Marian murmured in astonishment.

It was true. One by one at first, then by fives and tens, a drove of deer, fifty or sixty in number, appeared on the crest of the hill and came plunging down toward Marian’s herd.

The old Monarch had never before joined their herd, but this time, without a second’s hesitation, he plunged straight on until he came to the edge of the herd. Then, with a peculiar whistled challenge, he wheeled about and with antlers lowered for battle, pawed defiance at the on-rushing band of wolves.

Then a strange and interesting drama began to be enacted. There was a shifting and turning of deer. Front ranks were quickly formed. When the wolves, with lolling tongues and dripping jaws reached the spot, they found themselves facing a solid row of bayonet-like antlers.

Quick as they were to understand the situation, and to rush away in a circle to execute a rear attack, the deer, under the monarch’s leadership, were quicker. Other lines were formed until a complete circle of antlers confronted the beasts of prey. The weaker and younger deer were in the center.

Then it was that the girls discovered for the first time that they, too, were in the center; that they were surrounded by the restless, snorting, pawing herd of deer. In their interest at watching the progress of events, they had not been aware of

the fact that the deer, in swinging about, had encircled them.

That they were in peril, they knew all too well. They read this in the look of concern on Terogloona's face.

"Circle hold, all right," he said soberly. "Not hold, bad! Deer afraid. Go mad. Want'a trample down all; want'a get away fast. Mebby knock down my master's daughter, her friend, Terogloona, Attatak; knock down all; mebby trampled. Mebby die. Mebby wolf kill."

There was apparently nothing to do but wait. To the wolf pack new numbers appeared to be added from time to time. The sound of their yap-yapping came incessantly. The circle swayed now to this side and now to that as some frightened deer appeared ready to break away. It was with the utmost difficulty that the girls prevented themselves from being knocked down and trampled under the sharp hoofs of the surging deer.

"What will it be like if the circle breaks and they really stampede?" groaned Patsy. For the first time in her Arctic experience she was truly frightened.

"I don't know," answered Marian. "We can only trust. I wish we were out of this. I wish—"

A sharp exclamation escaped Marian's lips. Over to the left a deer had gone down. The wolves appeared to have cut the tendons to his forelegs. There was terrible confusion. It seemed that the day was lost, that the stampede was at hand.

"Keep close to me," Marian whispered bravely. "Some way we will pull through."

Patsy gripped her arm for the final struggle. Then, to her astonishment, she heard the sound of a shot, then another, and yet another.

"Someone to our rescue," cried Marian. "Who can it be?"

CHAPTER XXVI
THE MYSTERIOUS DELIVERER

Accustomed as they were to the presence of men, the reindeer, not at all frightened by the shots, held their position in the impregnable circle. The cowardly wolves began to slink away at the first shot. It seemed no time at all until the only sound to be heard was the rattle of antlers as the deer broke ranks and began to scatter again for feeding.

Some moments before the girls could make their way out of the center of the herd the firing ceased.

“Who could it have been?” Patsy asked.

“Don’t know,” said Marian. “Whoever it was, we must find them and thank them.”

This task she found to be more difficult than she had supposed. There had doubtless been tracks left by the strange deliverer, but these had already been trampled by the deer. Search as they might, they could find no trace of the person who had fired the shots. Mute testimony of his skill as a marksman, two dead wolves lay on the snow close to the spot where the defensive circle had been formed.

“What did you make of that?” Marian asked at last in great bewilderment. “Terogloona, where could they have gone?”

“*Canok-ti-ma-na*” (I don’t know), Terogloona shook his head soberly.

One of Marian’s sleds had been left at the edge of the forest. Upon returning to this, they experienced another great surprise. Lying across the sled was a rifle,

and in a pile beside it were five boxes of cartridges.

“A rifle!” exclaimed Marian, seizing it and drawing it from his leather sheath. “A beauty! And a new one!”

The two girls sat down on the sled and stared at one another in speechless silence.

Terogloona and Attatak soon joined them.

“It was the Indian, the one we saved from starving!” exclaimed Patsy at last, “I just know it was.”

Terogloona shook his head. “Old rifle, mebby all right,” he mumbled; “new rifle, mebby Indian not give.”

The girls, not at all convinced that this conclusion was a correct one, still clung to the belief that their protector had been the Indian.

Since it was impossible to cross the river, it was decided that they should make camp at the edge of the forest; that Terogloona, with the rifle, was to keep watch over the herd the first part of the night; and Marian, who was a good shot, the latter half.

It was while Marian was packing away the dishes after supper that the piece of old ivory with the ancient engraving on it, the newest piece which they had found in the mountain cave, fell out of her sleeping bag. Without knowing it, she had saved this, the least of their treasures.

“Look!” she said to Terogloona, who sat cross-legged before the fire, “we found this in a mountain cave. What does it say? Surely you can read it.”

For a long time Terogloona studied the crude picture in silence. When at last he spoke, it was to inform her that the ivory had once belonged to his great-uncle; that it told of a very successful hunt in which twenty caribou had been driven into a trap and killed with bows and arrows; that shortly after that they had come upon a white man with a long beard, starving in a cabin beside a stream. They had given the man caribou meat. He had grown strong, then had gone away. As pay for their kindness he had offered them heavy yellow pebbles and dust from a moosehide sack. This they had not taken because they did not know what it was

good for. They had asked two cups and a knife instead.

As he explained this, the Eskimo showed each picture that told the part of the story narrated.

“It seems very real,” said Marian. “How long ago could it have been?”

“Mebby twenty years,” said Terogloona.

“The white man was a prospector.”

“And the yellow pebbles and dust must have been gold!” exclaimed Patsy. “Oh, Marian! If we could find that place we’d be rich. Terogloona, could you find the place?”

Again the Eskimo studied the ancient picture-writing.

“*Eh-eh*,” he said at last. “Mebby could.”

“Oh, Marian! We’ll go back,” said Patsy, doing a wild dance on her sleeping bag. “We’ll go back for gold!”

“For the present,” said Marian, quietly, “we have work enough. We must get our herd to Fort Jarvis. Looks as if that will be a difficult enough task.”

“But tell me,” she turned suddenly to Terogloona, “there were more than fifty reindeer with old Omnap-puk, were there not?”

“Yes.”

“Where did they come from?”

“My master’s herd.”

“They are the deer we have been missing all winter, the ones we thought had been killed?”

“Yes.”

“Why, then—” she leaped suddenly to her feet in her excitement, “then those people can not have killed our deer at all!”

“No. Not kill.”

“Then why did they follow us? Are they following us now? What was it they killed that night, if not our deer? Oh! it’s too perplexing for words.”

Terogloona looked at her and smiled a droll smile. “Many strange things on hill and tundra. Some time mebby know; mebby not. Terogloona must go watch; you sleep. To-morrow mebby very hard.” Taking up the rifle, he left the tent.

Before creeping into her sleeping bag, Marian stepped out of the tent to cool her heated brow in the crisp night air. Above her the stars gleamed like tiny camp-fires; beyond her the dark forest loomed. From the distance she caught the bump and grind of ice crowding the banks of the river.

Morning came, and with it the problem of crossing the river. They had been traveling by compass. As far as Marian could tell, to go either up or down the river would be to go out of their direct path. Terogloona advised going north. Some signs unintelligible to the girls, but clear enough to him, appeared to promise a crossing two or three miles above.

For once the canny instincts of the Eskimo failed. He was no longer in his own land of barren hills, tundra and sea; perhaps this caused him to err. One thing was certain, as they traveled northward the hills that lined the stream grew more rugged and rocky, and the river more turbulent.

“We won’t find a crossing for miles,” Marian said, with a tone of conviction.

Even Terogloona paused to ponder and scratch his head.

It was just at the moment when despair appeared about to take possession of them that Patsy, chancing to glance away at the hills that loomed above the opposite banks, suddenly cried:

“Look! A man!”

All looked in the direction she had pointed. The man was standing perfectly still, but his right hand was pointing. Like a wooden signboard, it pointed downstream. Three times the arm dropped. Three times it was raised to point again.

“He is an Indian,” said Terogloona, stoically. “It is his country. He knows. We must go back. The crossing lies in that direction.”

As the man on the hill saw them turn their herd about and start back, he began to travel slowly downstream. All that day, and even into the night, he went before them, showing the way.

“Like the pillar of fire,” said Marian, with a little choke in her voice.

There was no doubt in her mind that this benefactor was the Indian they had befriended when he was starving. To her lips there came a line she had long known, “I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat.”

Not wishing to camp again at the edge of the forest, they traveled without rest or food for eight hours. At last, when they were so hungry and weary that they felt they must drop in their tracks and fall asleep, they came suddenly to a place where the troubled rush of waters ceased; where the river spread out into a broad, quiet, icebound lake.

“Thank God!” Marian murmured reverently as she dropped exhausted upon her sled.

After resting and eating a cold lunch of hardtack, frozen boiled beans, and reindeer steak, they headed the herd across the lake. Having passed through the narrow forest that skirted the lake, they came upon a series of low-lying, barren hills. Here, in a little gully lined with willows whose clinging dead leaves rustled incessantly in the breeze, the girls made camp.

Before going to sleep, Marian walked out into the night to view her herd. The sky was clear. The golden moon made the night light as day. The herd was resting peacefully. She wondered vaguely if other human beings might be near. Their mysterious guide had left them at the shore of the lake. At no time had he come close enough to be identified. She was wondering about him, and as her gaze swept the horizon she saw the red and yellow gleam of a camp-fire.

Her feeling toward that camp-fire had changed. There had been a time when it filled her with fear. Now, as she gazed steadily at it, it seemed a star of hope, a protecting fire that was perhaps to go with them all their long journey through.

“The Indian’s camp, I suppose. And yet,” she asked herself, “is it? It might be

the tent of the purple flame, and if it is, do they mean us good or ill?”

Sleep that night was long and refreshing. They awoke next morning with renewed courage. Before them lay great sweeping stretches of tundra. For days, without a single new adventure, they pushed on toward Fort Jarvis. Sometimes, beside a camp-fire of willows, Marian sat wondering how they were coming on with their race. Were Scarberry and his herd nearer the Fort than they? There was no way to tell. Traveling the trackless Arctic wilderness is like sailing the boundless sea. As a thousand ships might pass you by night or day, so a thousand herds, taking other courses, might pass this one on its way to Fort Jarvis and no owner know of the others passing.

Sometimes, too, she thought of those mysterious camp followers—the people of the purple flame. She no longer feared them; was curious about them, that was all. No longer did she catch the gleam of their light by night. Had they turned aside, gone back, or had they merely extinguished their unusual light?

The Indians, she thought, must have been left behind. They would not travel far from their hunting ground. They had been served, and had served in turn. Now they might safely be forgotten.

Then there came a time that called for all the courage and endurance their natures could command. One night they found themselves camped among the foothills of a range of mountains. The mountains, a row of alternating triangles of deep purple and light yellow, lay away to the east and at their peaks the snow, tossed high in air by the incessant gales that blew there, made each peak seem a smoking volcano.

“To-morrow,” said Terogloona, throwing out his hand in a sweeping gesture, “we must cross.”

“Is there no other way?” asked Patsy.

“Must do!” said Terogloona as he turned to the task of putting all in readiness.

Two o’clock in the afternoon of the following day found them engaged in a terrific battle with the blizzard that ever raged up the mountain pass which they must cross.

“‘Try not the pass,
The old man said,
The storm is lowering overhead,’”

Patsy chanted bravely as, with snow encrusted head and with cheeks that must be rubbed incessantly to prevent them from freezing, she struggled forward.

A moment later, as a fiercer shock seemed about to lift her from her feet and hurl her down the mountain side, Marian heard her fairly shriek into the teeth of the gale:

“Excelsior! Excelsior!”

Many hard battles had Marian fought out on the tundra, but nothing had ever equalled this. The snow, seeming never to stop, shot past them, or in a wild whirling eddy dashed into their faces. The wind tore at them. Now it came in rude gusts, and now poured down some narrow pass with all the force of the waterfall. Only by bending low and leaping into it could they make progress.

The herd plunged stumblingly forward in a broad line. The dogs, incessantly at their heels, urged them forward. Terogloona, and even the brave Attatak, did all in their power to keep the herd moving.

“If they stop; oh, if they do!” panted Marian. “If they refuse to go on we are lost! If only we reach the summit I am sure we will be safe. It must be calm on the other side.”

Now Gold, the master collie, completely exhausted and blinded by the snow, came slinking back to his mistress. Marian rubbed the snow from the eyes of the faithful dog and, patting his side, bade him go back into the fight. Tears came to her eyes as the dog bravely returned to his task.

The time came at last when all three dogs seemed done in; when the deer all but stopped; when it seemed impossible that they might be kept moving another five minutes. Then it was that the indomitable Marian sank down upon her sled in the depths of despair.

“Look! Look!” cried Patsy, who had turned about to rub the frost from her cheeks. “Wolves! A whole pack of them!”

Marian wheeled about for one look; then, digging into her pack, drew forth her rifle.

“We’ll die fighting!” she murmured as she took steady aim at the foremost member of the pack that came tearing up the trail.

She was about to press the trigger when Patsy gave her arm a sudden pull.

“Wait!” she cried. “Wait! Those are not wolves. They’re dogs; great big, wonderful dogs!”

CHAPTER XXVII
THE END OF THE TRAIL

Troops of conflicting hopes and fears waged battle in Marian’s brain when she realized that the pack approaching them on the run up the trail in the teeth of the storm were not wolves, but dogs. There are two types of dogs in Alaska; one, more wolf than dog, is the native wolf dog. This type, once he is loosed, leaps at the throat of the first reindeer he sees. A pack of these dogs, in such a crisis as the girls were now facing, would not only destroy many of the feebly struggling, worn-out and helpless younger deer, but beyond doubt would drive the remainder of the herd into such a wild panic as would lose them to their owners forever.

Were the dogs of this or the other type—white men’s dogs, who treat the reindeer as they might cattle or sheep, and merely bark at them and drive them forward? If they were white men’s dogs they might save the day; for the barking of such a pack, as fresh for the struggle they appeared to be, would doubtless drive the exhausted deer to renewed efforts and carry them on over the top.

With bated breath and trembling heart Marian watched their approach. Once hope fell as she thought she caught the sharp ki-yi of a wolf dog. In this she must have been mistaken, for as they came closer she saw that they were magnificent shaggy-coated fellows, with an unmistakable collie strain in their blood.

“Oh!” she cried, “‘the chariots of the Lord, and the horsemen thereof.’”

It was a strange expression, but fitted the occasion so well that Patsy felt her heart give a great leap of joy.

Indeed the steeds of the Arctic, if not the horsemen, had come to their aid in a time of great need, and, passing them with a wild leap, the dogs burst upon the

deer with a rush and roar that sent them forward by leaps and bounds.

Staggering forward, the girls followed as best they could. Now they were a thousand yards from the summit, now five hundred, now three, now two. And now the first deer were disappearing over the top. Enheartened by this, the others crowded forward until with one final rush they all passed over the top and started down on the other side.

Just as the girls reached the crest and were peering over the summit, a shrill whistle smote their ears. It sounded again, and yet again. There was a movement just before them. Then the snow-covered pack of dogs rushed pel-mel past them on the back trail down hill.

“Someone whistled to them. They are going back. How wonderfully they must be trained!” exclaimed Patsy.

“They were someone’s team,” Marian said slowly, as if for the first time realizing they had not really been sent direct from Heaven to save them. “They’re somebody’s team. He knew we were in trouble and turned the dogs loose to help us. I wonder who he could have been?”

For the present the question must remain unanswered. The herd had gone on before them. It was all important that they join them. So, having straightened out the draw-straps to their sleds, they began making their way down the hard packed and uncertain descent.

It was not long before they came upon the herd feeding on a little mountain plateau. Terogloona was already busy making camp, and Attatak thawing out food over a fire of tiny scrub fir trees.

“Isn’t it wonderful to think that the great struggle is over?” whispered Marian, contentedly, as they lounged on their sleeping bags an hour later. “This is really the worst of it, I hope. Fort Jarvis can’t be more than four days away now, over a smoother down trail.”

“If only we are in time!” sighed Patsy.

“We must be. Oh, we must!” exclaimed Marian passionately. “Surely it would be too much to struggle as we have, and then lose!”

Before Marian fell asleep she set her mind to meet any outcome of their adventure. She thought of the wonderful opportunities the sale of the herd would bring to her father and herself. Near some splendid school they must rent a bungalow. There she would keep house for him and go to school. In her mind she saw the wonderful roses that bloomed around their door-step, and pictured the glorious sunsets they would view from their back door.

“Perhaps, too,” she told herself, “Patsy could live with us for a year or two and attend my school.”

When she had pictured all this, she saw in her mind that the race had been lost; that Scarberry had sold his herd to the Canadian officials; that she was to turn the heads of her leading reindeer toward the home tundra.

With great difficulty at first, but with ever increasing enthusiasm, in her imagination she drove the herd all the way back to enter once more upon the wild, free, life of the herder.

“It really does not matter,” she told herself; “it’s really only for father. He is so lonely down there all by himself.”

In her heart of hearts she knew that it did matter, mattered a very great deal indeed. Brave girl that she was, she only prepared her mind for the shock that would come if the race were really lost.

Four days later the two girls found themselves approaching a small village of log cabins and long, low-lying buildings. This was Fort Jarvis. They had made the remainder of the journey in safety. Leaving their herd some ten miles from the Fort, where the deer would be safe, they had tramped in on snowshoes.

Marian found her heart fluttering painfully as her feet fell in the hard-packed village path. Had Scarberry been there? Was the race lost? Had the man of the purple flame been there? Had he anything to do with the deal?

Twice they asked directions of passing Indians. At last they knocked at a door. The door swung open and they found themselves inside a long, low room. At a table close to an open fire sat a man in uniform. He rose and bowed as they came toward him.

“You—you are the agent for the Canadian Government?” Marian faltered,

addressing the man in uniform.

The man nodded his head and smiled a little welcome.

“You wish to buy a reindeer herd?” Marian asked the question point-blank.

“I believe,” the man answered quietly, “that I have already agreed to purchase one—”

“You—you—” Marian sank to a chair. The shock was too much.

“You see, the truth is,” smiled the Major, as though there had been no interruption, “I believe I have agreed to purchase your herd.”

“My herd!” exclaimed Marian, unable to believe her ears. “But how did you know of my herd—how did you know I was on the way? Who told you—”

“One question at a time, young lady,” laughed the Major. “I think I have a number of surprises for you. As to your first question, I will say that I have never heard of your herd until two days ago. That day, two days after the great storm, a half famished Indian reached Fort Jarvis, driving a splendid team of white men’s dogs. They had been hard driven.

“After we had fed him, he jerkily told us the story of your race against a man named Scarberry. He told us of the treatment you had given him; of your kindnesses to his people. Then he told of Scarberry. Told how Scarberry’s herd had been delayed and held up along the trail, and how he had tried to be of help to you. Then he told of your battle against the storm, and how, once you were safely over the pass, he had driven night and day to reach here. His hope was to get here ahead of any other herd and intercede for you. Such loyalty is not to be denied. And I told him that should your herd reach here in good shape, that I would give it preference, even should Scarberry get here ahead of you. I believe that answers one of your questions.”

“But how in the world did this Indian know that the Government had agreed to purchase a herd?” asked Marian.

“In the North,” answered the Major, “rumor flies fast, even over seemingly uninhabited places. And you may depend upon it that the Indian will know what is going on; even if he does have but little to say. Now, to business. I understand

you have brought the herd with you?”

“Yes,” answered Marian, “they are at our camp about ten miles out.”

“Then we may consider the deal closed. There remains but to count the deer; to weed out those that are too old or too weak for the final drive, then to make out your order on our Government. We have Lapland herders who will assist in the work. You may rest here with us until the count is completed. After that I will see that you have guides and dog-teams for the passage south to the rail head.”

“Oh! how wonderful!” exclaimed Patsy, impulsively leaping to her feet. “But Bill Scarberry,” she asked suddenly, “did he really win?”

“No,” smiled the Major, “he has not yet been heard from. So you won the race after all.”

“Good!” exclaimed Patsy, “I could never have been happy again if we had lost, even if Marian did sell her herd.”

After a night’s rest at the post, Marian and Patsy felt like they had come into a new life. They had lain awake long into the night, exchanging excited whispers over their good luck. The next morning, as Marian was passing down the street, she noticed a dog team. There was something about the leader that looked familiar. One glance at the driver brought an exclamation of surprise to her lips. He was none other than the Indian she had saved from starvation, and who in turn had served as her guardian angel.

“That is the dog team that came to our rescue in the blizzard,” was her mental comment.

While she had been told the rest of the story by the Major, she preferred to have the story from the man’s own lips. She found him very reluctant to talk, but after his heart had been warmed by a splendid meal of boiled reindeer meat and coffee, he told his story from the time she had given him three of her reindeer until the present moment. Shortly after leaving her, he had come in with some of his own people who were well fed and prosperous. Knowing that the girls were headed straight for trouble, and feeling very grateful to them, he had persuaded one of these, his kinsmen, to go with him and to follow the reindeer herd with his team of white men’s dogs. It had been they who had driven the wolf-pack away and had left a rifle and ammunition for the girls. It was their dog team that

had been released from the sled and had assisted in driving the reindeer herd over the mountain.

“But why did you do all this?” Marian asked.

The man looked at her for a moment in silence, then he asked: “Why did you give reindeer?”

“Because you were in need.”

“And you,” a faint smile played across his face, “you too were in need. Indian all same white man.”

Then Marian understood, and her heart was filled with a new love for all those strange people who inhabit the White Wilderness.

The next day, Marian and Patsy, together with the Major and his Lapland herders, went out to Marian’s camp and there began the business of sorting and counting the deer. This work continued for three days, and on the evening of the third day, leaving the herd in charge of the Lapland herders, Marian, Patsy and the Major, together with Terogloona and Attatak, started for Fort Jarvis by way of deer sled.

Topping a hill some two miles from Fort Jarvis, they suddenly came upon a tent. Just before they reached it, the interior became suddenly lighted with a strange purple flame. Marian halted her deer with an exclamation of surprise.

“The purple flame!” she gasped, and turning to the Major said: “I can stand this mystery no longer. Do you know who is in that tent?”

“Why yes, I think so,” said the Major. “I think it is Mr. Montgomery, an old prospector. He is well known throughout the North. Why do you ask?”

“I want to meet him,” said Marian. “Will you please come with me to his tent?”

A moment later a hearty old man came to the door of the tent in response to their call, and with a cheery smile acknowledged the Major’s introduction of Marian and Patsy, at once inviting them in.

Imagine Marian’s surprise, when upon entering the tent she saw a young girl of

about her own age, seated at a radio sending set. And there, under the deft fingers of the girl operator, a crackling purple flash jumped back and forth across a wide spark gap.

“The girl of the purple flame,” gasped Patsy.

At sound of her voice the girl turned around and smiled a welcome. Marian turned to Mr. Montgomery:

“So you are the people of the purple flame.”

“Are we, indeed!” laughed the old Prospector.

“Yes,” said Marian, “and I thought all the while, back there in Alaska, that you were dogging our footsteps, and, to speak honestly, we feared you.”

“Well, well,” laughed the old gentleman. “So that was your reindeer camp. We thought all the while that *you* were dogging *our* footsteps.”

Then the old prospector launched into a long story that cleared up the entire mystery of the purple flame.

It appeared that in his youth he had been a prospector in Alaska and had found a very rich vein of gold. Ill health had overtaken him and he had been forced to return to the States. Years passed, and fortune and wealth had come to him, but the lure of searching for gold was still in his veins, and in the end he had come again to Alaska, thinking to find his mine. The years had somewhat dimmed his memory, and he had searched in vein for the lost mine. Moving from day to day, he had been just as surprised to note that Marian’s camp moved with him as was Marian to discover that his camp moved with hers. In time he had become suspicious, fearing that they were dogging his footsteps. He knew that he had been well known throughout the North in the past, and he feared that others knew of his lost mine.

“And that,” concluded Mr. Montgomery, “is the reason I never called at your camp.”

“And that radio set,” said Marian, “with its flash of purple flame, is the reason that I never called at your camp. There was something so mysterious about it all.”

The old prospector smiled. “I suppose,” he said, “that my having a sending and receiving radio set is a bit strange and perhaps a little mysterious. Certainly the set is a bit strange, for to my knowledge there is not another set like it in the country. It is very compact and yet most powerful. You see, my interests in the outside are very extensive, and it is necessary for me to keep in touch with them. By the use of this set, I can keep in touch with my agent in Nome, and he, in turn, can keep in touch with the States by use of the cable.

“It was the spark of my set, while sending, that made the purple colored flash which kept you so mystified. You know, most mysterious things become quite simple when you find out all about them.

“This radio has made it possible for me to come back and look for my lost mine. It’s the lure of the thing that draws me, not the desire for the gold.”

And then it was that Marian, remembering the treasures that she had found in the cave on the enchanted mountain, and feeling that she had something in common with this old prospector, told him her story.

As she told of the carved ivory, the old man’s eyes glowed with delight, and in the end he insisted that he go into Fort Jarvis with them that he might at least see the piece they had brought along and hear Terogloona’s story.

At the post old Terogloona, in a halting way, read the pictured inscription on the four sides. Other bits of information furnished by Terogloona convinced the old prospector that Terogloona’s great-uncle had been his guide in the days when he was first prospecting and had found the mine. Mr. Montgomery wanted to set out at once with Terogloona and Attatak for the cave on the mountain.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “that’s very near my lost mine, for I remember that my old guide, Terogloona’s great-uncle, spoke of the cave as a place where we might winter in safety, should winter come down upon us before we expected it.”

“How wonderful!” said Marian. “We have just completed the count and sale of our deer. Patsy and I are going back to the States, and I am sure Terogloona and Attatak will go with you. And you will be in good hands,” she added, giving both of the faithful servants a glowing smile.

The sale of the deer was successfully completed. After a much needed rest, the girls began the long journey to the “Outside.” So far were they from the strange

cabin of the recluse musician, they were unable to return for the treasure they had taken from the mountain cave.

Many months passed, and then one day as the two girls returned from an afternoon of shopping in Chicago, Marian found a registered package awaiting her. From its bulk, and from the many post-marks upon it, she knew at once that it contained the long awaited ancient treasure.

Her fingers trembled as she undid the many wrappings. When at last she came to the treasure she found each piece separately wrapped. The copper instruments and the old ivory pieces were just as she had found them, tarnished and blackened with age.

“But what’s this?” she held up before Patsy’s astonished eyes a green bowl which gleamed in the light like a crystal.

“Why!” exclaimed Patsy, as she saw her cousin unpack another and another and yet another, “he has thought your old dishes were useless and has sent you some of his exquisite glassware instead.”

“How strange!” murmured Marian, ready to cry with disappointment. She had so hoped to surprise Mr. Cole, the Curator of the Museum, with rare pieces of ancient pottery such as had never before been brought from the Arctic; and here were only four pieces of glassware. How they had ever come to be here, she could not guess; but here they were.

“Look!” cried Patsy, “What a strange appearance they have when you hold them to the light! And see, two of them are blue and two are a tawny green, like huge cat’s eyes.”

“Wait!” said Marian, “here is a note from our aged friend.”

She unfolded it and read it aloud:

“Please pardon an old man’s fancy. I could not resist the temptation of polishing these up a bit. The very sight of them makes me envious. They are indeed a rare find. I have a guess as to what they are made of, but your friend the Curator will know.”

“So,” exclaimed Patsy, “they are the very dishes you found in the cave!”

“How very, very strange! We must have Mr. Cole come over at once,” said Marian, half beside herself with curiosity.

She raced to the telephone and a moment later had the Curator on the wire. If you have read our other book, “The Cruise of the O’Moo” you will remember that Marian, with her two friends, Lucile and Florence had once made a rare find for the Museum, so you will not wonder that so great a man should hurry right over in answer to their call.

When he arrived, Marian placed one of the bowls in his hand with the single comment: “From a cave in a mountain in Alaska.”

For three minutes he turned the bowl about before the light.

“What do you want me to tell you about it?” There was a strange light in his eye.

“Almost everything!” exclaimed Marian. “What it’s made of, who made it, how long ago, how—”

“Wait a bit. Not so fast!” the Curator held up a hand for silence.

“You should know what it’s made of,” he smiled. “What was the Blue God made of?”

“Jade.”

“And this.”

“Is that jade, too?”

“Blue and green jade.”

“Then—then the bowls should be valuable.”

“Quite decidedly. As for your other questions, much more information is needed before we can know who made them and when. So far as I know, nothing of this kind has ever before been discovered. Were there any other pieces?”

Marian held out a handful of ivory pieces.

For ten minutes there was silence in the room, save for the click of specimens as

the Curator turned them over. Then, turning suddenly, Mr. Cole put out his hands to the girls.

“I want to congratulate you,” he said, his eyes gleaming, “upon your good fortune in discovering the finest collection of specimens ever brought from Alaska. From its discoloration this ivory should be at least five hundred years old. The bowls are doubtless of the same period. That makes them priceless.”

On hearing these words Marian’s joy knew no bounds. As for Patsy, her unselfish pleasure in the success of her cousin was quite as great as if it had been she who had made the find.

It was arranged that Mr. Cole should take charge of the specimens, and should advise Marian in regard to their disposal.

Marian’s dream came true. She and her father secured the bungalow, rose bush and all, and owned it free from debt. There was money enough left for her education. As for Patsy, she was glad enough to hurry back to rejoin her classmates in Louisville, Kentucky.

An unfortunate part of having plenty of money is that it is likely to shut out from one’s life the thrills that come with a struggle for an existence. For the time being Marian’s life lost most of its thrills.

Not so, however, with her friend, Lucille Tucker. You will remember her from reading “The Blue Envelope,” “The Cruise of the O’Moo” and “The Secret Mark.” Life for her continued to have thrills a-plenty. Our next book, “The Crimson Thread,” will have to do with the adventures which came to her during a Christmas vacation. If you think that two weeks’ time can contain but few adventures, this book will prove that you are mistaken.

Transcriber’s Notes

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- Silently corrected palpable typos, leaving a few amusing ones unchanged.

Amusing Typo/Puns

- “searched in vein for the lost mine”—Shouldn’t that be the other way around?
- “looking for some stray fauns”—a long way from Greece!
- “hours spent pouring over books”—a bit more drastic than throwing cold water on ideas...

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