



THE world was white. Day after day the cold had held, the only changes being from fair to snow and from snow to fair. Such days as the fair ones had been! The sun blazing from flawless blue, the air above and the white world below glittering with the sparkle of diamond dust.

And the nights, when Kabibonokka rested from his snow-building. The stars flashed overhead like pearls frozen to a dome of polished steel, while through them the great moon steered her silent course with only the velvet shadows below to chart her progress.

These were nights for snowshoeing as it should be, and the faithful were busy. Stalwarts, snug in blanket garb, with their beards fresh-powdered by that barber who does more cutting than shaving; maidens, with cheeks tinted to that rich, winy warmth which the resources of the boudoir have never contained, nightly climbed Mount Royal and gathered in the cheery light and comfort of the club-houses to enjoy the frolics of the snowshoers.

Three weeks of almost uninterrupted shoeing over old Royal are an excellent preparation for work in the woods, and as Christmas drew near I anxiously waited for word from a trapper friend who held my pledge to spend the holidays with him in the wilds of the Mattawa country.

The old song says the letter that was longed for never came, but in this case it was different. The letter came at last. The writing greatly resembled an antiquated rail fence. After doing

a trifle of algebra and Euclid, helped out by a few mental handsprings, I guessed that it stood for:

"Mister Sans, deer Sur—Cum up to Matwa soon an ile show sum fun mose yard back bout seven mile an i can fine sum bare never new so mutch game an chances is fustrate sure of bare fur won stol my pig back a peece an i can fine the den i sed how i fine game rite the sekund trip i hev game this trip ef i aint i ly thats all.

"Youres respectfully

"Abe."

It was a characteristic note, but in spite of its literary crudeness it was most welcome, for it whispered of fun ahead. Its writer was one of the best pieces of rough material that ever came out of the woods of Northern Ontario.

Poor old boy! He was indeed a simple child of nature, but his heart was ever warm, light and true, and he knew more than most men of the ways of the wild creatures of his district. He could trail, trap, read a sign or trot a log with the best of them. He was a fairly good shot with a rifle, about the average at the paddle, while he was so full of practical resources for emergencies that he was apt to get the best of rivals who treated him with carelessness. His single fault, one too common among his class, was a weakness for that stuff which makes a man appear erratic in his movements if judged by the tracks he leaves in dry snow.

He made his last camp some years ago, and only the trees and rocks about the lonely Mattawa can tell the true story of the fated "jam," and Abe's awful cruise through the long, white tumult to the black pool below. Those who ride with a groaning, grinding, leaping

squadron of charging logs, which take the rapid with perfect bark and end the dash barkless, white and polished, never tell of their experience. The logs spare nothing softer than themselves—Abe started with them—that is all!

May game be plentiful, all currents logy, and all carries short in his corner of the Happy Hunting Grounds!

My objective point, the village of Mattawa (The Forks), is situated at the confluence of the Mattawa with the Ottawa River. The village is part lumber town, part general outfitting point for those bound for the upper Ottawa and the lakes above. It has some stores, a fair hotel, with a unique Hibernian proprietor, a Hudson Bay post, and a winter climate that can give the shivers to a brass monkey. Beyond the village stretches the grand solitude of forest—leagues of snow-laden, darkly green stillness, broken only by the blows of axes, the thunder of falling timber, the hallos of woodsmen and the occasional crack of a rifle.

It is a far cry to Mattawa. The long, pallid reaches of the Ottawa in December offer no variety, although they are very beautiful during summer and autumn. The snowy trees near the train, the sunlit open of the broad river, and the huge, white mounds marking the hills of Quebec, were about all I saw until the forest closed in upon either side and the train halted at Mattawa.

Stout old Abe was waiting at the station, and my first glance at him detected the fact that he had been waiting somewhere else at least long enough to spoil a reasonable share of the curse of the country.

"Hello, old pard; how's your head?" I queried.

"Shed's or-rite—push stuff inner slay an' we'll get out 'n yer."

A few moments sufficed for the transfer of my outfit to the jumper sleigh, and then we were ready for the long, cold drive to Abe's shanty.

At first the road was excellent, and the rough pony hauled us along at a very creditable pace. Then we reached softer going which required more care in driving. Here Abe performed one of his miracles, *i. e.*, he rose to the occasion, shook off every trace of his spiritual burden, and at once became interesting.

Through the silent woods we went,

up hill, down dale, the sled runners groaning and grinding as runners will when frost is hard. Mile after mile was covered and through it all Abe talked, and through his talk were woven threads of the lore of moose and bear.

At last we reached his lone loghouse, and after making the good pony comfortable in a warm, intensely dark log stable, we toted my traps into the shanty, where we started a rousing fire in a rough stone hearth. Later we had a meal, and after that, for three good hours, I listened to the quaint anecdotes and shrewd remarks of a man who had spent his life in the forest to excellent purpose.

Among other things, I learned that within five miles was a moose-yard, or, more properly, a winter feeding-ground of the great cervidae, for, owing to the nature of the country, there was no necessity for the moose to "yard," in the proper sense of that term.

Five or six moose had decided to winter in a densely forested valley, and Abe was confident that we could easily get a peep at them the first favorable day. There were also plenty of ruffed grouse, a few deer, and an unknown quantity of "bare." The latter were snugly denned for the winter somewhere in the vicinity—just where, we might discover later.

The morning dawned frigidly cold, and all that day the sun was hidden behind a mask of dull, gray clouds. About nine o'clock we started into the woods and prowled about for hours, closely searching a dim ravine, where Abe "surmised thar wuz bare."

By noon we had, entered a series of thickets with small, level openings here and there. Crossing these openings we found tracks in great numbers. Foxes had been busy during the night, and the trim prints of the grouse's feet told whom the business had concerned. Marten and mink had double-dotted to and fro where the triangles of the hare's snowshoes were thickest.

In one place we came upon a murderer and the unmistakable evidence of his crime. The half light of a dull day in such woods evidently suited the guilty party's huge eyes. He noiselessly swept upward before us, his great fans of wings making not the slightest sound—thanks to the marvelously planned downy fringe along the edges of his flight feathers. He, a male great horned owl.

coolly perched upon a broken branch and glared defiance at us.

This unusual action surprised me, nor was my surprise lessened when I distinctly heard the rapid, angry clap-snap of his powerful bill. He, evidently, did not fancy our intrusion during his repast. A glance upon the snow told what the rascal had been doing. A pinkish tinge, many scattered feathers and fragments of flesh, and a goodly portion of what had been a fine grouse, explained matters.

I could cheerfully slay grouse myself, but the bare idea of this feathery-horned, bubble-eyed varlet daring to do likewise was so irritating that I drew fine upon his bristling mustachios and made a good cat-owl out of him before he had time to cease his ridiculous rufflings and bluffings.

Some time later we routed out a number of grouse, a couple of which I killed with the breech-loader. The birds were very tame, and the survivors treed not far away. Abe remarked "Thet we cuddent scar a sleepin' bare nohow, an' the mose wuz too fur away to hear us, so we'd best hev a few patridges whiles the wuz handy."

We took turn-about with his Winchester and trimmed the heads off three birds at short range.

I had left my rifle at the shanty and carried a light twelve-gauge, which, as it was a cylinder, shot small buckshot famously. I had a dozen shells loaded with three and three-fourths drachms black powder and twelve small buckshot—a charge which made the gun roar and kick vigorously, but would kill anything at short range, as most shots are in the woods.

Before we got home that evening Abe declared that the morrow would bring a "snortin' storm," which it did, with a vengeance. All day long the wind howled, and the snow drove, in fleecy clouds; the great trees groaned and swayed wildly to and fro, and big limbs yielded to the strain and crashed in falling ruins.

It was no day for roving in the woods, and we wisely remained at the shanty.

The next day proved bright, but intensely cold. Not a cloud obscured the steely sky, and the wind blew strongly and steadily from the north. Standing outside the shanty, I could hear the ceaseless, dull, surf-like roar of the wind-

threshed forest, and the creaking and clicking of countless restless branches.

"Abe," I called, "this is the day of days for your moose-yard; wind steady, woods as noisy as a city street. I'd like to see the big fellows, even if we cannot lawfully kill any. Let's try for them anyway—what say you?"

"Guess we'd best make it ter-day," he replied; "it's warm 'nuff in the woods, an' we kin creep rite onto an old mose with wind a-yowlin' thet-away. You ain't figgerin' on doin' enny shutin'?"

"No. What's the sense of it? We can't get out with a head without getting nailed, and, besides, I do not fancy law-breaking."

"Or-rite! But we'd best tote the shutin' irons 'long ennyhow. Thur's patridges, shure, an' we mite fine er bare."

Warmly clad, with heavy woolen mitts on hands, we entered the somber woods. For a time we tramped through trackless aisles of powdery snow, seeing no sign of life, hearing no sound except the groans of resisting trees and the hoarse breathing of the storm as it wrestled the supple pine-tops high overhead.

There was life all about, however. The wild things know the moods of the atmosphere as a student knows his favorite pages. They know, better than man with all his science can guess, what time the storm will arrive, from whence, and how long it will rage. They have retreats, warm and well hidden, where they drowse away the disturbed period in safety, unless they be prematurely forced forth by intruder or unbearable famine.

Abe kept peering from side to side as we traveled.

"What are you looking for, old man?" I asked.

"Bare. Now shet yer head; we're gettin' near the yard and the mose oughter be yonder."

He pointed toward a long, low-lying reach of tangled cover, so dense that it was impossible to see more than a few yards within its bounds. It simply was a snarl of alder, birch and dwarfed firs. It extended over many acres and was surrounded by low hills, forested in every direction except to the west, where an old fire had left only a few ghostly rampikes standing above a luxuriant second growth.

As we neared this lower cover Abe suddenly halted and pointed to the snow. The first glance detected the wide-spread slots of a big moose. They led into the brush and were so fresh that I involuntarily looked ahead for the maker of the sign. But nothing was in sight except tangled foliage and wan, cold snow.

We turned upon the track and crept slowly, noiselessly, as a lynx creeps on its prey, along the tell-tale traces. Once within the cover, we merely advanced by *inches*, for the growth was so dense that treacherous twigs had to be handled one by one before a step could be safely risked.

The wind maintained its force, occasionally whirling a cloud of loosened snow into our faces. The endless whishwew of the blast and the rustling and chafing of swaying branches muffled what little noise we made. Had it been a still day we could not have advanced twenty yards without betraying our presence.

Presently Abe halted and whispered: "Gosh all hemlocks; it wuz a cuss left that sign, shure."

Crossing our line was a moose track, so fresh that the snow was still tumbling into the deep impressions, and so large that for a moment I thought two or more animals must have traveled in Indian file, stepping in each other's footprints.

Turning from our previous course we followed the monster's trail. Every instant I expected to hear the crash of brush or to see the animal moving ahead, but for half an hour more we crept in vain.

As we were crossing a fallen log Abe halted and gazed intently at the hill over which the fire had swept. Halfway up the slope, halted motionless, and sharply defined against the white background, was a huge black mass, the mighty bull that had made the track we were following. The young growth, burdened with snow, bent low to earth and barely concealed his knees, and there he stood in all his pride, looking backward. So near was he that we distinctly saw the twin streams of white vapor curling from his nostrils, and I could have planted a ball behind the ear or in the breast at will.

Abe slowly turned his head and whispered:

"Mose can't see but durn little; keep still—he's smellin' fur us."

I had first noticed something else. I did not dare to move a finger, but my eyes burned into Abe's with all the intensity at my command. Mentally I was "rooting," hard to make him understand. He twigged that something else was afoot, for into his eyes flashed a gleam of surprised intelligence. Slowly I rolled my eyes to the right, glanced back at him, then again rolled them to the right.

A quiver of his eyelid told that he understood, and slowly—so slowly that I could hardly detect the motion—his head began to turn. Barely forty feet from us, in the midst of some brush, stood an animal as large as a fair-sized horse. It was a full-grown cow moose, and she was attentively eyeing us.

I was supporting part of my weight upon my right hand and, after about a minute of mute staring, the snow under my hand yielded with a soft "prut." At once the cow moved a few feet; then from our left and from immediately in front sounded faint rustlings. Apparently half a dozen dark bodies glided through the brush almost as silently as so many shadows.

We enjoyed a sight which comparatively few white men have seen. Favored by the storm, we had crept almost within touch of the herd of moose, and we could easily have killed three or more. Even then they could not wind us. They were merely uneasy, and not at all sure what danger threatened.

The old cow still eyed us, and I could see her broad muffle quivering as her nostrils vainly strove to catch some taint on the baffling wind. Suddenly, as though moved by a common impulse, all the moose drifted ahead, silent, ghost-like shapes of black, gliding soundless through the close-growing scrub, until they seemed but so many wind-blown phantoms.

It was simply past belief that creatures of their enormous bulk and weight could move over such ground without causing no end of a row, yet they did so.

Directly before us one of the last encountered a huge fallen pine. The trunk was more than waist-high above the ground, but the moose merely halted, raised itself for an instant erect upon its hind legs, then leaped the obstruction and alighted almost without a sound. Gliding between the trees

they vanished as if by magic. After the last had disappeared Abe turned and remarked:

"Wa-al, I'll be durned! We cud a-pasted half on 'em. Be you satisfied?"

I was more than satisfied. I had seen a sight that I shall never forget, and no blood-letting was necessary to complete my triumph. Furthermore, I had learned several most interesting things about moose, and these new facts threw light upon many things which previously had puzzled me. The jump of the one moose, especially, was a fascinating performance. The great beast got upon his hind legs, exactly as a rabbit might have done, and he jumped like nimble bunny. The leap itself evidently was a trifling matter, but there was something about the way in which it was done that spoke volumes for the marvelous power of the animal's hindquarters. He surely could have cleared a jump three times as high, had occasion demanded such an exhibition of his ability.

In this connection I may state that since the jump described I have seen a tame cow moose, about full grown, better illustrate the astonishing agility and strength of this apparently misshapen animal. The cow in question was exhibited by a Frenchman in a tent. Her chief accomplishment lay in leaping, and she appeared to be quite able to clear anything she could lay her chin upon. She wore a headstall, to which was attached a few feet of rope. Her leaps were made over a movable bar, which could be raised or lowered at will.

The highest leap I saw her make was over the bar, without touching, when it was so high that she could just place her chin upon it. For the leap, her owner led her to the bar, passed the rope over, gave a tug or two, and a command in *patois*. She rose upon her hind legs like an immense goat, poised herself a moment, crouched until her

hocks were well bent, then sailed over like a winged thing.

In leaping, she rose straight until her fore legs were well over, then dipped until her head was nearly straight down—of course, landing on her fore feet. While her hindquarters were clearing the bar the hind legs were folded away under her belly in some mysterious manner which occupied the least possible amount of space.

Taken altogether, it was the most astounding piece of cleverness of the kind which I have ever seen, and the last thing one would suspect a moose of being capable of. She disposed her hind legs exactly as though she could see just where they and the bar were, and she seemed always to jump without a mistake, or even touching the bar. This accounts for the masterly way in which her kind can get over heavy fallen timber, and in so doing maintain a fair rate of speed.

But to return to our moose. The old bull still held his position on the hillside. Up the slope went his family till they reached him, when one and all wheeled and stared in our direction.

Quoth Abe: "Gosh all hemlocks, but my trigger finger jest itched. How wuz yourn?"

"Itching hard, Abraham," I replied. "But look! They have all turned."

"Golly! but I cud paste thet thar ole bull," growled Abe; "he's the durndest biggest mose I ever seed. S'pose I plug him for fun?"

My reply was a yell that might have barked a tree at forty rods—a yell from my very soul, which liberated all the raging excitement of the long, cautious stalk and final view. At the outburst the terrified moose whirled to the right-about; every nose was straightened to a line with the back, and away the band went pounding up hill. A moment later all had gone, and gone forever.

