



THE RIVER of SKULLS

—by George Marsh—

© PENN PUBLISHING CO.

WNU SERVICE

CHAPTER XII—Continued

For three days the two men worked with the pan from daylight to deep twilight, while Heather did the cooking and then joined them to stand, breeches rolled above her knees, in the cold water, rotating a frying pan filled with gravel and sand to add her share to the increasing weight of dust, coarse gold and small nuggets in one of the small caribou hide bags they had made for the purpose. For the moment all thought of the future was lost in the desire to see the first, small, skin bag filled with gold.

In three days Noel and Napayo returned carrying long faces. They had traveled far back on the barrens to the west and had not seen a deer. There were many old trails deep in the caribou moss but the deer had not started south. A bear that they had worked hard to get had slipped them in a creek bottom. At the camp, the gill-nets set in the river had taken nothing but small river trout and the dogs were on short rations. If the first run of sea-trout and salmon did not appear shortly, it would be serious, for they could not feed the dogs from their small stock of dried caribou, and the emergency rations must be held for the trip home. That night over the fire, for the evenings were always cool, the prospectors held a council of war.

"We can't go on this way and trust to luck," said Alan, "gold or no gold. We've got to get fish or caribou shortly, or starve. The dogs haven't had a square meal in a week. I suggest that Napayo, Noel and I pack the canoe past the gorge and travel up the river, then cut into the tundra. If we strike deer, we can load the boat down with meat and skins and run downstream."

"Alec Drummond told me the sea salmon run in August," objected McCord. "We'll only have to wait a few days for the first run. Why not drop down to the Koksoak and set the nets?"

Noel shook his head. "Napayo say onlee small fesh een Koksoak be'ow here, ontill salmon and sea trout come een from de salt water."

"The dogs need almost twenty pounds of fish a day to keep fit and I'm not going to see them grow poor on rabbit, if I can help it. I'm going into the barrens, John! The salmon may be a week or more late."

"The berries'll be ripe soon," chimed in Heather. "I was up on the barren today. We'll have bake-apple and blueberries soon, and I saw bushes of cranberries. We can have berry bannock. Won't that be good?"

"So that's where you were! And you promised never to leave camp alone," said Alan, sternly.

"I had my rifle," she answered, "and I always carry this." She touched the pistol on her belt. "Anyway, does it make much difference, Alan? I told you I've given up all thought of our ever getting back."

He took her roughly by the elbows and looked into her defiant, blue eyes. "Stop that kind of talk! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he said sharply. "What's got into you, anyway? Why, you were wonderful, Heather, most of the way down the Koksoak—never complained—look everything as it came with a smile, and it was hard, mighty hard! But lately, you seem to have lost your nerve. Brace up, girl!"

Suddenly the courageous eyes that had met his so frankly, defiantly, grew soft, misty. With a deep breath, she released her arms, as she said, as if to herself: "Yes, I guess I've lost my nerve and—everything else."

He watched her as she walked away, the glory of the golden hair, the clean lines of her shoulders in the patched blouse, the strength and symmetry of her lithe figure in the worn whippoorwill and leggings, and then into his memory flashed a picture of a girl standing on a sand beach at the water's edge. Unstrung by the conflicting emotions that stirred him, he turned to where McCord was busy fashioning a wooden shovel with axe and draw-knife.

"We can't touch our flour, bacon or beans, now, John. We save that for November. Noel and I will take Napayo and carry the canoe around the gorge. I'm going on a caribou hunt and may not be back for a week."

McCord shook his head. "Need you here, Alan?" he objected. "We've not scratched this shore yet and look what dust we already have in the bag!"

Alan's glance met Heather's. "I'm going on a hunt, up the river," he repeated, his eyes still on the girl who stood listening. "I'm taking the dogs. We'll feed them on Arctic hare and ptarmigan if we don't strike game. Don't expect us back for five or six days."

McCord was so immersed with his gold washing and the building of a sluice box that he refused to consider the danger that threatened them if the sea-salmon were too late. "All right!" he agreed.

"Heather and I'll live on the nets until you show up with a boat load of meat."

"We may not get meat. Then what good will that dust in the bags do us? If we're going to get back, we've got to have a big cache of grub stored up."

"Then we'll eat our dust," laughed the miner. "The salmon will show soon, anyway."

But even if their fish racks above the smoke fires had been heavy with fat, sea-run salmon, Alan Cameron would have gone into the barrens after deer. For that morning, as he talked to Heather, he had made a discovery. He had learned what he had felt vaguely for weeks—that Berthe was fast becoming a shadow, something unreal, and that this girl toward whom he had once felt as an older brother had suddenly become a magnet to his senses. The touch of her arms, that morning, the nearness of her as she had said: "I guess I've lost my nerve and—everything else," had touched depths within him of which he had been unconscious. It had left him dazed, dazed at his calm acceptance of the fact that Berthe seemed

very far away, as unsubstantial as a dream, that morning when he held Heather's arms and watched her shining eyes grow dark.

The realization of her appeal confused him. He must get away, get away into the barrens, have a chance to think. She was hardly a woman; it seemed unfair.

The following morning Alan and Noel took the Peterboro on their shoulders and carried past the gorge while Napayo, to avoid the wrath of the spirits, made a wide circle and met them above. Before they started, Heather drew Alan to one side.

"Father is mad about the gold he's getting. Those nuggets he got on that sand bar almost drove him crazy. He refuses to think of the food supply. I do! I know you're worried, Alan," she said.

"It is serious, Heather. The migration may pass fifty miles beyond us. Then everything will depend on the salmon. Don't touch the emergency flour and other stuff. We've got to save it for the trip home."

"I won't! Take care of yourself, Alan," she almost whispered. "Good luck!"

With the dogs running the shore, the canoe made good time upstream. They camped far above the gorge and, in the morning, went back on the tundra. The white moss hills were etched and lined with the old paths of caribou, but although they traveled all day, they saw no deer. Patches of cloud berries, blueberries, and moss berries were beginning to ripen, and the excited dogs soon found where barren ground bear had already tested them. From small clumps of deer bush and dwarf spruce, Lapland longspur rose before their approach with their merry "Chee-chups!" Curious ravens followed them deep into the barrens from the river. Far into the tundra traveled the hunters, with the dogs on leashes, for they hoped to see and stop a bear, but no game except the ever-present ptarmigan, an occasional loping hare, or a curious fox, met the sweep of Alan's binoculars.

On up the river pushed the canoe for three days, while Napayo kept abreast of them on the high shore, watching for game. At the third camp, when again the search of the barrens for deer had been fruitless, Alan began to have misgivings about the man and the girl he had left at the camp below the gorge. Suppose the Naskapi had followed the Peterboro down the Koksoak from the rapids. Still they would not know the canoe had ascended the River of Skulls and probably would have feared to enter it. But a feeling of impending calamity depressed him. If they missed the deer on their way south, they would lack proper clothes as well as food. The salmon would surely reach the river sometime in August. Salmon would keep them

and the dogs alive, but they needed rawhide for snowshoes and skins for clothing.

On the next day, they made a last hunt into the barrens. At a fold in the tundra where scrub spruce, deer bush and berry heath had made a stand against the fierce winds of winter, Napayo suddenly stopped and pointed. Three crossed poles marked where a deer skin tent had once stood. A spruce twig, an Indian date record, hung at the intersection of the poles. Napayo and Noel studied the dried twig then Noel reported to Alan who held the dogs on thong leashes:

"Deer hunter camp here many sleeps—a moon ago."

"They were Fort Chimo hunters," explained Napayo in his native tongue. "They came across from the Quiet Water. But there are no bones here. They missed the deer passing north."

"And we may miss them passing south! Then what, Noel?"

"De gole een dose bag do us no good den. We freeze widout plente deer skin and meat."

Attracted by the moving shapes below, an eagle circled above them. "If we could strike a bear or two, it would be something to take back to camp," lamented Alan, disheartened. He swept the barren with his glasses. Suddenly he stiffened, interested. The others intently watched his face. Presently he said:

"I'm sure I saw a bear on the skyline. He went down into that little valley over there. We'll circle and work up wind along the other side of that hill."

The dogs whom Alan had carefully trained to silence when on leash thongs, were taken with them. Cautiously, behind the protection of the ridge, the three men with the silent but excited dogs approached the hill above the swale where Alan had seen the bear. Leaving Noel and Napayo with the huskies, Alan worked along taking cover behind boulders and rises in the ground until he commanded a view of the little valley.

Two hundred yards beyond him, feeding on the ripening berries, was a large, barren-ground bear. Here was the meat they so badly needed. He began to stalk for a closer shot, for bear will carry much lead. At fifty yards he fired at the shaggy, black shoulder in the heath and ground juniper.

With a bellow of rage the bear turned, bit savagely at his side, then started to run. Again the whip-lash explosion of the 30-30 waked the tundra. The shot went true to its mark. The bear stumbled, slid into the berry heath and lay still.

"Two hundred pounds of meat on him!" cried the hunter as he hurried to the black bulk that lay in the swale. "There come the dogs!"

Alan had laid his rifle to one side and was starting to draw his skinning knife when a trampling in his rear swung him around.

Red lips baring yellow tusks, small pig-like eyes flaming, a raging black bulk hurled itself at the startled hunter. With a leap, Alan cleared the dead bear and started up the swale, the black hurricane of fury hard on his heels. His only chance was to keep away from those scimiter-like claws.

Suddenly the bear stopped and struck savagely at something in its rear while Alan put yards between himself and the bellowing brute. As the runner circled back to reach his gun, the bear plunged after him. Again long tusks tore at the beast's hams and he stopped and pivoted to slash at the enemy in his rear, who leaped away out of reach.

Then the puppies reached Rough.

Leaping in and out, dodging the slashes of the knife-edged claws, the four dogs held the bear at bay until Alan reached his gun. Before he could use it, a rifle, behind him, crashed, crashed again. The bear swayed. Two long clawed forefeet pawed the air as the dogs closed in. With a grunt the beast lunged into the berry heath, a black dog upon him.

Like the surf over a rock, the four Ungavars swarmed over their enemy. Behind Alan stood Noel pumping an exploded shell from his rifle.

"By gar, Alan," cried the excited Noel, "dat Rough ees smart! De odder dog stop at de first bear, but Rough, he see de bear chase you and he stop heem wid de bite on hees tail. I run, but I was scare to shoot w'en you were so close to de bear. By gar, dat ees ver' smart dog, for sure!"

"Yes," said Alan, watching the angered huskies milling over the carcass of their dead enemy. "He's a great dog, Noel—one in a thousand! He'd die for me, and I'd die for him!"

While the dogs had their first full meal in days, the men cut up the bear meat and back fat, and lashing their tump-lines to the heavy loads packed them down to the river. Their caribou hunt was a failure, but they now had food to tide them over until the salmon run without touching their emergency rations. So they started for camp for Allen was worried.

That night in their camp down the river Napayo talked of the life of his people—the northern Naskapi who traded at Fort Chimo. From his boyhood, life had been very hard. When they met the caribou migration in the summer and could dry quantities of meat, there were no terrors in the withering winds that swept the interior in the moons of the long snows. But often the deer changed their route in the late summer and the hunters watched in vain at the old trails at lake and river crossings. Then there was waiting in the tips before the long winter's end, for, unless they had cached a huge supply of salmon, they were sure to starve. No one ever knew where the deer were. They were like the wind, now here, now there. When they found the migration, the deer were like the leaves of the forest and the Naskapi were happy.

The spring before, Napayo said, his family had been in a starving condition. What was why they ascended the Koksoak beyond the Nipiwi, the dead line. The night before, an owl had hooted in a tree northeast of their camp on the Koksoak. And Death, in the Naskapi legends, always comes from the northeast. It came that night.

Alan asked him what he thought they had better do, if the deer did not soon appear on the River of Skulls.

The Naskapi shook his head. "They may be moving now far in the land where the sun sleeps." He pointed into the west. "But if they cross the Big River as many as the stars, and go into the country of the rising sun, only Gitchei Manitou will know. You cannot follow and find them. They must come to you. If they do not come, you will freeze and starve."

Alan glanced at the disconsolate Noel who sat, chin cupped in hands. "We're not going to starve, Napayo," he said, with finality. "We're going to dry enough salmon to see us through, deer or no deer."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Supply of American Bison Wiped Out; Few Surviving Herds Throughout U. S.

Our buffalo, the American bison, is forever gone in its old abundance. The thundering herds of millions, sweeping from the Canadian prairies to the Gulf of Mexico and back in their search for fat grazing lands, could not now be tolerated in a country of railroads, towns, fences and farms, writes Ding Darling in the Washington Star.

There are many men now living who can recall the last of the vast herds. Bison vanished east of the Mississippi about 1800, but the last wild specimens were killed in the West less than 50 years ago. Sixty years ago, at Kearney, Neb., there was a factory for canning buffalo tongues. Buffalo robes were the standard equipment for every one who owned a horse and buggy. Bales of raw buffalo hides sold at 4 cents a pound.

From the buffalo the Indians got food, clothing and shelter, the hides being used in making tepees. Hunted with arrows and lances, the enormous herds were never seriously affected before the coming of the white man. Great lobo wolves followed the buffalo as they moved up and down the country and destroyed the weak and old.

The white man made short work of this great natural endowment.

The SALLY SMILE

—By—
D. J. Walsh

Copyright
WNU Service

MRS. PINNEY had called to see Miss Bowman, and the two women were in close conversation in Miss Bowman's private office. Miss Bowman was chief executive of the governing board of the hospital, and Mrs. Pinney was a director.

"Well, it simply has come to this," Miss Bowman said, wiping her eyeglasses nervously. "We'll have to close the hospital, if we can't get something to run it on. The citizens have done nobly—nobly, but they can't do everything. It remains for some moneyed person to come to the front now."

"Like Mrs. Chichester?" suggested Mrs. Pinney. Mrs. Pinney was a small, eager woman, who looked rather worn from the long-continued struggle of keeping the precious little hospital going on next to nothing a year.

"Yes! Mrs. Chichester. She is our richest citizen. She could give \$50,000 and never feel it."

"But would she?"

"There's the question. I'm afraid she wouldn't. I've approached her unsuccessfully—"

"So have I," moaned Mrs. Pinney. "Well, you can't force a person to give up her money, that's certain. I suppose it's hopeless."

"I don't know about that. I've been thinking I'd send Sally Drew to her and see what good that would do."

"Sally Drew!" Mrs. Pinney jumped. "She's the very one. I'll see her this afternoon."

Sally Drew was a tiny woman with hair like snowy wool and a pale pointed little face. Her eyes were wonderful, so bright, so black, so alive. They danced in her face. But her smile was more wonderful than her eyes.

The smile came now at sight of Mrs. Pinney.

"Julia!" she cried. "Come right in."

In Sally's small living room, so old-fashioned, so cozy, and withal so well suited to Sally herself, Julia Pinney told her story.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Sally asked.

"I want you to go to Helen Chichester and get her to give us \$5,000. That will keep the hospital running for one year. After that—but we'll hope."

Sally's smile vanished. She was silent an instant.

"I'll go, of course," she said quietly.

Mrs. Pinney arose.

"Sally, you're a dear. If any one can do it you can. You are our last resort."

At 9, just as Mrs. Pinney was ready to fly to pieces with suspense, Sally walked in. The Sally smile was bright indeed.

"I couldn't get away sooner. Helen wouldn't let me come. You

A Costly Road

The Pulaski skyway is probably the most expensive read in the world for its length. The part of it that is raised is three miles long and cost \$21,000,000. The approaches cost an additional \$19,000,000. This roadway is 50 feet in width and can easily accommodate five lanes of traffic. It is estimated that 20,000,000 motor vehicles use it annually. It passes over both the Hackensack and the Passaic rivers and the New Jersey Meadows.

see, we haven't spoken before in thirty years—"

"What?" gasped Mrs. Pinney. "Thirty years," nodded Sally. "I did hate to go. But after I got there it was all right. Here's your money." She drew a check from her handbag and gave it to Julia. "Fifty thousand dollars!" Mrs. Pinney could just articulate. "But we hoped your smile would do it."

"It did," Sally grew grave. "Thirty years ago Helen got the man I wanted. But no one ever knew it except her and me, for the day she was married I pinned on my smile and I've worn it ever since."

Herbert Chichester had only lived five years, but he had lived long enough to spoil the lives of two women. His wife had grown selfish and sore, but the woman she had won him from had "pinned on a smile" that had brightened a whole community.

Brave little Sally who had given away the secret of her life to help a good cause!

Sally was smiling the Sally smile—as usual.

Quality + Economy = Firestone CONVOY

AS LOW AS \$7.90
4.50-21

Firestone CONVOY
For Cars, Trucks and Buses

4.75-19.. \$8.15	5.50-17 \$10.45
5.00-19.. 8.80	6.00-16 11.80
5.25-17.. 9.25	6.25-16 13.15
5.25-18.. 9.65	6.50-16 14.50

Tires for Trucks and Buses at Proportionately Low Prices

When it is low cost combined with high quality it's always Firestone. Car owners everywhere are buying Firestone Convoy Tires for safe, sure economical service because they want to get a high quality tire at an unusually low price. Only Firestone gives you all of these patented and exclusive extra value features:

1. Gum-Dipping, the Firestone patented process which protects against blowouts.
2. Two extra layers of Gum-Dipped cords under the tread, a patented construction which protects against punctures.
3. Scientifically designed tread which protects against skidding and gives long mileage.

See your nearby Firestone Dealer or Firestone Auto Supply & Service Store and equip your car with Firestone Convoy Tires—the safest tire that money can buy at these low prices.

LOOK AT THESE LOW PRICES

LOOK AT THIS GUARANTEE

LIFETIME GUARANTEE

Every tire of our manufacture, bearing our name and serial number, is guaranteed by us to be free from defects in workmanship and material, without limit as to time or mileage, and to give satisfactory service under normal operating conditions. If our examination shows that any tire has failed under the terms of this guarantee, we will either repair the tire or make an allowance on the purchase of a new tire.

TRUCK OWNERS SAVE MONEY TOO!

The Firestone Convoy Truck Tire is made in all sizes for trucks and buses. It brings you high quality at low cost. Truck owners who have already used this tire are referring to it as the truck tire sensation of 1938. Cut your cost per ton mile and at the same time keep your tire investment low — equip your truck today with a set of Firestone Convoy Truck Tires.

CHANGE OVER TO A Firestone BATTERY

Here is a battery that will take you through the hardest winter without trouble. Built with patented allrubber separators and interlocking grids, it assures quick starting, longer life, greater dependability. Ask for our special "Changeover Price."

Firestone AUTO RADIOS

With 6 1/2-inch tubes, 8-inch dynamic speaker sound diffusion system, represents highest quality.

\$29.95

Custom Built Dishes Available

Firestone SPARK PLUGS

Save gasoline, secure quicker starting and improve motor performance by putting in a new set of Firestone Spark Plugs today.

Listen to THE FIRESTONE VOICE OF THE FARM—Interviews with the Champion Farmers of America, featuring Everett Mitchell, twice weekly during the noon hour. Consult your local paper for the station, day, and time of broadcast.

Listen to THE VOICE OF FIRESTONE featuring Richard Crooks and Margaret Spinks and the 70-piece Firestone Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Alfred Wallenstein, Monday evenings over Nationwide N. B. C. Red Network.