

The Honor of the Big Snows

By James Oliver Curwood

PROLOGUE.

Up in the "Big Snows," near the dome of the earth, lies the scene of this story of real men and real women, who have all of the virtues of their hardening environment and few of the failings of their more civilized relatives. This is a tale for reading when one is tired of the artificialities of civilization—or at any other time when a good story is appreciated. You will find in it romance and adventure and mystery mixed in such skillful manner and in such proportion that no ingredient interferes with another. Yet all go to make fine reading for women who like to hear of brave deeds and sacrifice for love's sake and for men with even a drop of the spirit of adventure in their veins. And one thing more—the author has lived among the people whose lives he describes, and he knows how to tell a story.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Rescue.

W AIST deep in the light snow, Jan began the ascent, dragging himself up by the tops of the slender saplings, stopping every few yards to half stretch himself out in the soft mass through which he was struggling, panting with exhaustion. He shouted when he gained the top of the ridge. Up through the white blur of snow on the other side there came to him faintly a shout, yet, in spite of its faintness, Jan knew that it was very near.

"Something has happened to Ledgeo," he told himself, "but he surely has food, and we can live it out until the storm is over."

It was easier going down the ridge, and he went quickly in the direction from which the voice had come, until a mass of huge boulders loomed up before him. There was a faint odor of smoke in the air, and he followed it in among the rocks, where it grew stronger.

"Ho, Ledgeo!" he shouted. A voice replied a dozen yards away. Slowly, as he advanced, he made out the dim shadow of life in the white gloom—a bit of smoke climbing weakly in the storm, the black opening of a brush shelter—and then, between the opening and the spiral of smoke, a living thing that came creeping toward him on all fours, like an animal.

He plunged toward it and the shadow staggered upward and would have fallen had it not been for the support of the deep snow. Another step, and a sharp cry fell from Jan's lips. It was not Ledgeo, but Dixon, who stood there with white, starved face and staring eyes in the snow gloom!

"My God, I am starving—and dying for a drink of water!" gasped the Englishman chokingly, thrusting out his arms. "Thoreau, God be praised!"

He staggered and fell in the snow. Jan dragged him back to the shelter. "I will have water for you—and something to eat—very soon," he said. His voice sounded unreal. There was a mistiness before his eyes which was not caused by the storm. He suspended his two small pails over the embers, which he coaxed into a blaze.



Another Step and a Sharp Cry Fell From Jan's Lips. It Was Not Ledgeo, but Dixon.

Both he filled with snow. Into one he emptied the handful of flour that he had carried in his pocket, into the other he put tea. Fifteen minutes later he carried them to the Englishman. Dixon sat up, a glazed passion filling his eyes. He drank the hot tea greedily and as greedily ate the boiled



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bour pudding. Jan watched him hungrily until the last crumb of it was gone. He refilled the pails with snow, added more tea and then rejoined the Englishman. New life was already shining in Dixon's eyes.

"Not a moment too soon, Thoreau," he said thankfully, reaching over to grip the other's hand. "Another night and"— Suddenly he stopped. "Great Heaven! What is the matter?"

He noticed for the first time the pinched torture in his companion's face. Jan's head dropped weakly upon his breast. His hands were icy cold.

"Nothing," he murmured drowsily, "only I'm starving, too, Dixon." He rolled over upon the balsam boughs with a restful sigh. "Let me sleep."

Dixon went to the pack. One by one in his search for food he took out the few articles that it contained. After that he drank more tea, crawled back into the balsam shelter and lay down beside Jan. It was broad day when he awoke, and he called hoarsely to his companion when he saw that the snow had ceased falling.

Jan did not stir. For a moment Dixon leaned over to listen to his breathing and then dragged himself slowly and painfully out into the day. The fire was out. A leaden blackness still filled the sky; deep, silent gloom hung in the wake of the storm.

Suddenly there came to Dixon's ears a sound. Just beyond the hanging pails a moosebird hopped out upon the snow. Slowly Dixon forced his right foot through the snow to the rear of his left and as cautiously brought his left behind his right, working himself backward step by step until he reached the shelter. Just inside was his rifle. He drew it out and snuck upon his knees in the snow to aim. At the report of the rifle Jan stirred, but did not open his eyes. He made no movement when Dixon called out in shrill joy that he had killed meat. He heard, he strove to arouse himself, but something more powerful than his own will seemed pulling him down into oblivion. It seemed an eternity before he was conscious of a voice again. He felt himself lifted and opened his eyes with his head resting against the Englishman's shoulder.

"Drink this, Thoreau," he heard. He drank and knew that it was not tea that ran down his throat.

"Whisky Jack soup," he heard again. "How is it?" He became wide awake. Dixon was offering him a dozen small bits of meat on a tin plate, and he ate without questioning. Suddenly, when there were only two or three of the smallest scraps left, he stopped.

"It was whisky Jack!" he cried. "I have eaten it all!" The young Englishman's white face grinned at him.

"I've got the flour inside of me, Thoreau. You've got the moose bird. Isn't that fair?" The plate dropped between them. Over it their hands met in a great, clutching grip, and up from Jan's heart there welled words which almost burst from his lips in voice, words which rang in his brain and which were an unspoken prayer—"Melisse, I think the great God that it is this man whom you love!" But it was in silence that he staggered to his feet and went out into the gloom.

"This may be only a lull in the storm," he said. "We must lose no time. How long did you travel before you made this camp?"

"About ten hours," said Dixon. "I made due west by compass until I knew that I had passed Lac Bain and then struck north."

"Ah, you have the compass!" cried Jan, his eyes lighting up. "M'sieur Dixon, we are very near to the post if you camped so soon! Tell me which is north."

"That is north." "Then we go south—south and east. If you traveled ten hours, first west and then north, we are northwest of Lac Bain."

Jan spoke no more, but got his rifle

from the snorter and put only the tea and two pails in his pack, leaving the remaining blanket upon the snow. The Englishman followed close behind him, bending weakly under the weight of his gun.

Tediously they struggled to the top of the ridge, and as Jan stopped to look through the gray day about him Dixon sank down into the snow. When the other turned toward him he grinned up feebly into his face.

"Rushed," he gasped. "Don't believe I can make it through this snow, Thoreau."

"There was no fear in his eyes, there was even a cheerful ring in his voice. A sudden glow leaped into Jan's face. 'I know this ridge,' he exclaimed. 'It runs within a mile of Lac Bain. You'd better leave your rifle behind.'"

Dixon made an effort to rise, and Jan helped him. They went on slowly, resting every few hundred yards, and each time that he rose from these periods of rest Dixon's face was twisted with pain.

"It's the flour and water anchored amidships," he snarled grimly. "Cramps—ugh! I wish you'd go on alone," he urged. "You could send help!"

"I promised Melisse that I would bring you back if I found you," replied Jan, his face turned away. "If the storm broke again you would be lost."

"Tell me—tell me"—he heard Dixon pant eagerly, "did she send you to hunt for me, Thoreau?"

Something in the Englishman's voice drew his eyes to him. There was an excited flush in his starved cheeks; his eyes shone.

"Did she send you?" Jan struggled hard to speak calmly. "Not in words, M'sieur Dixon. But I know that if I get you safely back to Lac Bain she will be very happy."

Something came in Dixon's sobbing breath which Jan did not hear. A little later he stopped and built a fire over which he melted more snow and boiled tea. The drink stimulated them and they went on. A little later still and Jan hung his rifle in the crotch of a sapling.

"We will return for the guns in a day or so," he said. Dixon leaned upon him more heavily now, and the distances they traveled between resting periods became shorter and shorter. Three times they stopped to build fires and cook tea. It was night when they descended from the ridge to the snow covered ice of Lac Bain. It was past midnight when Jan dragged Dixon from the spruce forest into the opening at the post. There were no lights burning, and he went with his half-conscious burden to the company's store. He awakened Croisset, who let them in.

"Take care of Dixon," said Jan, "and don't arouse any of the people tonight. It will be time enough to tell what has happened in the morning."

Over the stove in his own room he cooked meat and coffee, and for a long time sat silent before the fire. He had brought back Dixon. In the morning Melisse would know. First she would go to the Englishman, then—then—she would come to him.

He rose and went to the rude board table in the corner of his room. "No, Melisse must not come to me in the morning," he whispered to himself. "She must never again look upon Jan Thoreau."

He took pencil and paper and wrote. Page after page he crumpled in his hand and flung into the fire. At last, swiftly and despairingly, he ended with half a dozen lines. What he said came from his heart in French:

I have brought him back to you, my Melisse, and pray that the good God may give you happiness. I leave you the old violin, and always when you play it will tell you of the love of Jan Thoreau.

He folded the page and sealed it in one of the company's envelopes. Very quietly he went from his room down into the deserted store. Without striking a light, he found a new pack, a few articles of food and ammunition. The envelope addressed to Melisse he left where Croisset or the factor would find it in the morning. His dogs were housed in a shack behind the store, and he called out their names softly and warningly as he went among them. As stealthily as their master they trailed behind him to the edge of the forest, and close under the old spruce that guarded the grave Jan stopped and silently he stretched out his arms to the little cabin.

The dogs watched him. Kazan, the one-eyed leader, glared from him into the dimness of the night, whining softly. A low, mourning wail swept through the spruce tops, and from Jan's throat there burst sobbing words which he had heard beside this same grave more than seventeen years before when Williams' choking voice had risen in a last prayer for the woman.

"May the great God care for Melisse!" He turned into the trail upon which Jean de Gravois had fought the Englishman, led his dogs and sledge in a twisting path through the caribou swamp and stood at last beside the log stick tree that leaned out over the edge of the white Barrens. With his knife he dug out the papers which he had concealed in that whisky Jack hole.

It was near dawn when he recovered the rifle which he had abandoned on the mountain top. A little later it be-

gan to snow. He was glad, for it would conceal his trail.

For thirteen days he forced his dogs through the deep snows into the south. On the fourteenth they came to Le Pas, which is the edge of civilization. It was night when he came out of the forest, so that he could see the faint glow of lights beyond the Saskatchewan.

For a few moments, before crossing, he stopped his tired dogs and turned his face back into the grim desolation of the north, where the aurora was playing feebly in the skies and beckoning to him and telling him that the old life of centuries and centuries ago would wait for him always at the dome of the earth.

"The good God bless you and keep you and care for you ever more, my Melisse," he whispered. And he walked slowly ahead of his dogs across the river and into the other world.

There was music that night in Le Pas. A door opened and a man and a woman came out. The man was cursing, and the woman was laughing at him—laughing as Jan had never heard a woman laugh before, and he held his breath as he listened to the taunting mockery in it. Kazan, the one-eyed leader, snarled. The trace dogs slunk close to the leader's heels. With a low word Jan led them on.

Close down to the river, where the Saskatchewan swung in a half moon to the south and west, he found a low, squat building with a light hung over the door illuminating a bit of humor in the form of a printed legend which said that it was "King Edward's hotel." The scrub bush of the forest grew within a hundred yards of it, and in this bush Jan tied his dogs and left his sledge. It did not occur to him that now, when he had entered civilization, he had come also into the land of lock and bolt, of robbers and thieves. It was loneliness and not suspicion that sent him back to unless Kazan and take him with him.

They entered the hotel, Kazan with suspicious caution. The door opened into a big room lighted by an oil lamp turned low. The room was empty except for a solitary figure sitting in a chair facing a wide window which looked into the north. Making no sound that he might not disturb this other occupant, Jan also sent himself before the window. Kazan laid his wolfish head across his master's knees, his one eye upon him steadily and questioningly. Never in all his years of life had Jan felt the depth of loneliness that swept upon him now as he looked into the north. He did not know that he was surrendering to hunger and exhaustion, the cumulative effects of his thirteen days' fight in the forests. It was the low, heartbroken sob of grief that fell from his own lips that awakened him again to a consciousness of the present.

He jerked himself erect and found Kazan with his fangs gleaming. The stranger had risen. He was standing



The Stranger Had Risen.

close to him, leaning down, staring at him in the dim lamplight, and as Jan lifted his own eyes he knew that in the pale, eager face of the man above him there was written a grief which might have been a reflection of his own. Something reached out to Jan and set his tired blood tingling. He knew that this man was not a forest man. He was not of his people. His face bore the stamp of the people to the south of civilization. And yet something passed between them, leaped all barriers and made them friends before they had spoken. The stranger reached down his hand, and Jan reached up his. All of the loneliness, the clinging to hope, the starving desire of two men for companionship, passed in the long grip of their hands.

"You have just come down," said the man half-questioningly. "That was your sledge out there?"

"Yes," said Jan. "The stranger sat down in the chair next to Jan.

"From the camps?" he questioned eagerly.

"What camps, m'sieur?" "The railroad camps, where they are putting the new line through beyond Wekusko."

"I know of no camps," said Jan simply. "I know of no railroad except this that comes to Le Pas. I come from Lac Bain, on the edge of the Barren lands."

"You have never been down before?" asked the stranger softly. Jan won-

dered at the light in his eyes.

"A long time ago," he said, "for a day. I have passed all of my life up there." Jan pointed to the north, and the other's eyes turned to where the polar star was fading low in the sky.

"And I have passed all of my life down there," he replied, nodding his head to the south. "A year ago I came up here for—for health and happiness." He laughed nervously. "I found them both, but I'm leaving them. I'm going back tomorrow. My name is Thornton," he added, holding out his hand again. "I come from Chicago."

"My name is Thoreau—Jan Thoreau," said Jan. "I have read of Chicago in a book and have seen pictures of it. Is it larger than the city that is called Winnipeg?"

He looked at Thornton, and Thornton turned his head a little so that the light did not shine in his face. The grip of his fingers tightened about Jan's hand.

"Yes, it is larger." "The officers of the great company are at Winnipeg and the commissioner, are they not, m'sieur?"

"Of the Hudson's Bay company—yes."

"And if there was business to do—important business, m'sieur, would it not be best to go to the commissioner?" questioned Jan.

Thornton looked hard at the tense eagerness in Jan's face.

"There are nearer headquarters—at Prince Albert," he said.

"That is not far," exclaimed Jan, rising. "And they would do business there—important business?" He dropped his hand to Kazan's head and half turned toward the door.

"Perhaps better than the commissioner," replied Thornton. "It might depend on what your business is."

To them, as each stood for a moment in silence, there came the low wailing of a dog out in the night. "They are calling for Kazan," said Jan quietly, as though he had not read the question in Thornton's last words. "Good night, m'sieur!"

(Continued.)

LADIES AUXILIARY MEETS WITH MRS. ROSECRANS

From Wednesday's Daily.

The Ladies' Auxiliary of the Presbyterian church were delightfully entertained at the home of Mrs. W. E. Rosencrans yesterday afternoon. A large number of the ladies were in attendance and whiled away some very pleasant moments in stitching on dainty fancy work, social conversation and other amusements. The regular business session was held at which time the ladies decided that they would give one of those popular chicken pie suppers during the last week of December. Another feature of the business session was the arrangements made for the treat for the children of the Sunday school at Christmas time. They also voted \$75.00 to the trustees of the church which will be applied on some of the church's indebtedness. During the course of the afternoon's entertainment an excellent luncheon was served by the hostess.

JOSEPH THOMPSON MEETS WITH A SERIOUS ACCIDENT

From Wednesday's Daily.

This morning while Joseph Thompson was engaged in delivering his express to the merchants on Main street he started to get out of his wagon, which he had stopped in front of the store of Peter Claus, and in some manner slipped and fell striking the wheel and falling to the pavement. It was thought for a few minutes that he had sustained some broken bones, but it was found that he had only received some very severe bruises. Mr. Thompson was carried into the store of Mr. Claus and medical attention summoned and the injured man conveyed to his home, where at last reports he is resting easy. Although he will probably be laid up for several days with the injuries.

Brothers Bought Lot.

The Journal has been requested to make a correction of the statement in the council proceedings in regard to the sale of a cemetery lot to Mrs. Rhoda Cotner. This statement was a part of the report of the city clerk and relatives of Mrs. Grant Cotner claim it is wrong as they state the lot was purchased by the brothers of the deceased.

Change in Hours at Shops.

The Burlington shops yesterday began work at 7:30 instead of at 7 o'clock, and quit work at 5:30 p. m. The coach shop department are to work eight hours, quitting at 4:30.

The most useful gifts in the world at Eastwood's.

FIRE BOYS WILL HOLD BANQUET IN JANUARY

From Wednesday's Daily.

The Plattsmouth fire department held their regular session last evening at the council chamber in this city, which was quite largely attended by the members of the department. The department has made arrangements to hold a banquet at their room in the city hall on the first meeting in January, and a very sumptuous "feed" will be served to the boys and the occasion will be one long to be remembered in the history of the department. Anything that is possible for the citizens to do to aid the department should be done, as they are always on hand to protect the property of the citizens whenever the occasion demands.

LECTURE TO THE YOUNG MEN'S BIBLE CLASS

From Wednesday's Daily.

The next number in the free lecture course offered to the young men of the city by the Young Men's Bible class of the Methodist church will be a stereoscopic lecture by Dr. W. O. Henry of Omaha, who will speak in the parlors of the church at 8 o'clock on Monday evening, December 16. This is a rare opportunity and every young man in the city who can do so should avail himself of it. No charge of any kind is made for these lectures, and this one is of such importance that seats for 100 will be placed in the larger room instead of the usual class room.

Makes Way With Velocipede.

Monday night some party or parties desiring a ride, stole a railroad velocipede, which was being used by K. W. Savogren of the Burlington at South Bend, and proceeded to get away with it, leaving no trace of the direction in which they went. It is very probable that they transferred the velocipede to the Rock Island tracks and rode into Omaha, as no sign of the car has been found in this part of the county.

Will Sure Be Here.

Principal Larson of the High school has received word from Superintendent Martin of the Nebraska City High school that their basket ball team would sure be here the 20th to play the local team. The Nebraska City bunch are a fast aggregation and a lively contest may be looked for, as the team here is determined to hang another scalp on their belt.

Epidemic of Diphtheria.

There is quite an epidemic of diphtheria about seven miles west of Murray. The families of Bird Dawson and John Philpot are now under quarantine and four of the schools in that section have been closed down. Every thing possible is being done to stamp out the disease.

Manderson Books.

The splendid volumes—and there are hundreds of them—donated to our public library through the courtesy and kindness of Mr. Byron Clark, must have some room to be placed in and new shelving will need to be constructed at once. Soon there will be heard the rasp of saws and the hammering of nails.

Departs for Kansas.

Jesse R. McVey departed this morning on the Missouri Pacific for Sterling, Kansas, where he expects to visit relatives for a short time. After visiting at Sterling, Mr. McVey will go to Mississippi, where he expects to spend the winter, returning to Nebraska about the last of March.

An Enthusiastic Committee.

The Misses Verna Leonard, Barbara Gering and Olive Jones were appointed at the last library board meeting as a special committee to assist in gathering funds for the cataloging of the library. You may feel sure that they will do their duty. In fact, they are hard at work.

Death of Infant Child.

Sunday night Mr. and Mrs. Arj Halstrom were called upon to mourn the loss of their new born baby girl. The parents will have the sympathy of the entire community in their bereavement.

For Sale.

A number of thoroughbred white Wyndotte cockrels. Inquire of Julius Pitz. 12-9-8t-wkly