

AN ICE WRAITH.

A MIDWINTER ROMANCE ON A FROZEN RIVER.

By John Boyd Clarke.

Franklin, who had seen the river only in a booming spring flood when the timber drives were ascending down, scarcely recognized the stream under its present peaceful guise. For miles the white ice stretched away from the pulp mill landing, unbroken save near the west shore, where the Upper Creek tumbled its rude current into the broader waterway.

The river was half a mile wide, and although the swift current of the creek kept the ice open quite half its width, there was sufficient room for an ice-yacht to work in the stiffest breeze that ever swooped down the valley. No matter how low the temperature fell, this channel in the ice was but lightly skimmed over, and the ice men passing up and down the river with their sledges or heavy iceboats always gave it a wide berth.

Franklin had the ice wraith built under his personal superintendence. As soon as he arrived at the landing and saw the state of the river he had not about the construction of the craft. For three months the ice would probably afford the easiest route up and down the river and the possibility of a swift ice boat appeared to the young civil engineer at once.

The other ice boats were little better than wood sledges with heavy sails affixed. Upon them the settlers from the valley transported their cordwood to the railway at the landing. The ice wraith was built after the most approved ice-yacht plans.

Franklin's duties as paymaster and general overseer of his father's lumber camps took him thirty miles up the river two or three times a week. The upper camp was beyond Bannock's and back some distance from the river; Franklin always left his

boat at Bannock's little landing and usually took dinner at Bannock's house. Abe Bannock was rather a hard citizen, even for the backwoods of Maine, and the men who frequented the place were, many of them, worse than the proprietor. Abe sold liquor to the surrounding lumber camps and was more than suspected of aiding in smuggling enterprises.

Franklin was never molested, however. He only had the money for one crew when he reached Abe's and, as reckless as the old fellow was known to be, it is doubtful if he would have countenanced any scheme of outright robbery. Besides, Franklin had gained a friend at court in the person of Abe's wife, a coarse, masculine woman, who could use a gun, or drink a canoe, or wield an axe—yes, or drink as much liquor and hold up her end of a bottle with the best man who ever came to Bannock's. But she was a woman for all that, and Franklin's gallantry and his infectious good nature won her at his first visit.

Another member of the tavern keeper's family upon whom the civil engineer had made a good impression was Rose, the daughter of Abe's half-brother. She had been left to her uncle's care when her father died less than a year before. When Franklin had surveyed his father's purchases, Rose had not been at the tavern, but from Mrs. Abe he gained all the facts in the case.

The woman seemed to dimly realize that the place was not fit for the girl, but she confided to the young man that her husband had declared that "What was good enough for him was good enough for Bill's gal—" and she was brought up on milk and water.

When there was much company Rose had "assist at sitting on the stools and their coarse jests and attempts at gallantry evidently frightened her. She was very pretty, with a pink and white prettiness, and she looked like a fragile doll beside her aunt or among the rude fellows who congregated at the tavern. Her form was small but pleasing; her brown hair clustered about her white brow, upon which the blue veins showed plainly, and her blue eyes were as clear and pure as a child's. But Franklin could not help wondering, with something like a shudder, if her eyes would have the same innocence for very long.

First out of pity the young fellow became friendly with old Abe's niece. He saw at once that she was glad to talk with him because he belonged to that outside world of which she once had been a part. He found her very intelligent, showing the marks of careful home training and some education. The more Franklin saw of her the more deeply he felt the misfortune of her position.

He sounded Abe once regarding her, but very carefully, and learned that the old man had never liked her father and seemed to take satisfaction in keeping Rose in her unsavory surroundings.

"She's a wantin' ter go Bangor way an' teach skule," said the tavern keeper. "But she's with too much ter me here. The boys like to see her 'round—an'—an' it draws trade."

But Franklin learned quite by accident that Abe Bannock had something else in his mind. There was a fellow, Hi Conley, who came frequently to the tavern and Mrs. Abe one day let drop something which assured the engineer that Abe intended Rose for him. The latter was supposed to be a guide in the season, but his frequent trips to and from "the line" pointed to his connection with the "free-traders." Franklin felt a sudden tide of passion rise within him as he thought of the poor girl sacrificed to this

happens they are afraid I will tell somebody." "You mean that they are going to get you married right away?" "Yes."

"How? There's no minister in these parts now."

"But there's a justice of the peace up at the Falls, a friend of His. He'll do it in spite of any objections on my part."

Franklin's jaws came together with a snap. "When?" he asked.

"Not for several days, I think. The justice is away just now."

"You'll see me day after tomorrow," declared the engineer, and a moment later the ice wraith skimmed out into the river.

"By thunder!" muttered Franklin, after he had started. "I wish I had swung her aboard here and carried her off. She could have taken the train at the landing for Bangor. But then, the justice has been fair to her. It would have started some evil tongue to wagging. The legal way is the best and safest method."

But after he had talked with a lawyer he began to believe that an "elopement" would have been the best way out of the difficulty, after all. The legal process promised to be a long one, and there was a grave doubt in Franklin's mind if Bannock and Hi Conley would await the pleasure of the courts before carrying their own plans into effect.

He started for Bannock's the following morning in a state of considerable indecision. It would be a week or more before the lawyer could get an order from the court restraining Abe Bannock from exercising further guardianship over the girl until the case had been examined by the judge; and a week was a long time.

When he arrived at the tavern he saw at once that something was on foot. There was a crowd of men around the door and within Franklin saw the petticoats of two or three women. He entered the barroom in some trepidation.

Abe Bannock was behind the bar, but he was not waiting upon customers. His wife was doing the honors for the thirsty crew.

"Hallo, Mr. Franklin!" exclaimed the tavern keeper. "Might—blet—y—glad ter see you. Ye're in good season."

"What's up?" demanded the engineer carelessly, but his heart beat faster.

"Weddin'," said Abe with satisfaction. "M' niece's goin' ter be married. Justice'll be—blet—here shortly."

Franklin kept a strong hand upon his emotions and waited.

"It's a great day, sir. Hope ye'll fine us. That's the happy bridegroom over yander. And the tinsy tavern keeper pointed to the figure of Hi Conley lolling upon a dirty table across the room. At his words Hi arose unsteadily and looked at Franklin with an ugly light in his eyes. He was not as drunk as Abe, but he was the more dangerous.

"Yes, sir! I'm the bridegroom. An' I reckon I kin look out for my wife, too. I want all you fellers to take notice," he said, waving his hand to the crowd at the bar.

"Anybody that gits ter minny's 'round my will get it arter trouble!" This went on.

"Oh, you're all right, Hi," responded Franklin with a laugh. But he desired with a mighty desire to seize the fellow by the throat and choke the breath out of his cowardly body.

Mrs. Abe followed the engineer into the dining room for a moment.

"I reckon you kin have some dinner, sir," she said. "But Rose'll haf ter wait on yer. 'Twon't take her long an' 'twon't hurt her 'long as she settles an' offah." She went to the foot of the stairs and shouted: "Rose! You Rose! Come down yere. Here's Mr. Franklin ter be waited on."

In a moment the girl's white face appeared at the door.

"Thank God, thank God!" she whispered, tremblingly. "I had given up hope. I sat there waiting to hear the—justice come, with this by me," she drew out from under her skirt a sharp-baded knife. "I thought it was when you came, and—"

"Great heavens!" gasped Franklin, "would you kill yourself?"

She drew herself up to her full height and she seemed suddenly taller than ever before. "Do you think for a moment I would marry that wretch? Better death a thousand times. Although I am a coward and fear bodily punishment, the knife was at my breast when you called me."

She flung it down upon the table and Franklin seized the weapon as though he feared she would do herself harm with it, even now.

"Now what do you want me to do?" she asked. Evidently the idea that he might fall so protect and save her had never disturbed the girl's mind. Franklin could not tell her he was as yet powerless.

"I saw the lawyer," he said, feebly. "And is he here?" she asked eagerly. "He will take me away?"

"He cannot until he gets an order from the court."

"Then how will he stop the marriage and—"

"He can't," returned Franklin, with a sudden burst of desperation. "He can't save you; but I can, and I'll do it!"

"Yes, Mr. Franklin, I never doubted you," she said, with a blush, and in some surprise at his vehemence.

"Quick, now! Do just as I tell you," he said. "Serve me some dinner here—any thing will do. I will go out after I have eaten and tell Abe that I will be back from the lumber camp before the ceremony; and I'll leave some money with my wife to treat the boys."

"You must slip out the back way and get down to the river unseen. I'll join you there and we'll get away in my ice boat—there's nothing on the river can stop her once she gets going. With five minutes' start I don't believe they can overtake us, either on skates or horseback. Wrap yourself up warmly. Now bring me in something to eat."

She obeyed to the letter. In ten minutes he joined her at the river's edge. Everybody had fled into the little barroom at

Franklin's invitation, and not a soul was in sight as the engineer raised the yacht's mainsail and pushed the craft out upon the ice.

Rose darted out of the bushes and hoisted her s-board bodily and with a mighty push leaped in herself. The ice wraith started slowly. There was a light but fair wind, and as soon as they were out from under the land the huge sail would feel it.

Franklin was scarcely seated at the tiller when there was a wind whist from the tavern. He glanced back. The men were swarming out of the place and at their head was Hi Conley. Rose hid her face in her hands and trembled.

Conley swung a rifle above his head, then brought the weapon to his shoulder and fired recklessly after the ice boat. The bullet sang less than a foot above Franklin's head. He was an excellent shot—when sober. The engineer heard him yelling for his return and threatening to shoot him if he did not obey.

But the ice wraith was steadily creeping out into the river and the sail bellied with the wind. There was no second shot, but glancing back Franklin saw half a dozen of the men leap upon horses and into a sledge which stood before the tavern, and the whole cavalcade clattered away down the river road. They meant to overtake him at the landing or head him off before he reached there.

"Are they coming?" cried Rose.

"They'll never follow us upon the ice," said Franklin, cheerfully. There was some danger from those on the river road, however. The wind might die out and leave them stranded, or the horses might even beat the ice yacht in the race. The road was considerably shorter than the ice route. It cut off a big curve in the river ten miles below.

But the ice wraith gathered speed. With the wind directly astern, the ice began fairly to "squelch" beneath the heavy runners. The powdered ice flew about them in a cloud and the huge sail tugged as though trying to drag the mast from its socket. Franklin was determined not to reef the sail unless actually obliged to do so, and he tackled the ice wraith new about, balanced upon her starboard runners. Rose screamed and clung to his arm, but the engineer, glancing back, saw the horses pounding along the river road and then a moment later they were gaining upon their pursuers.

The race was young, however. When the ice wraith went to the eastward the wind was not so fair and Franklin was obliged to tack twice before rounding the point. Their pursuers had passed the point, and the engineer half feared to find them upon the ice below awaiting their coming. But they were not in sight.

He kept the ice wraith near the east shore. He did not fancy stopping in ball-beds from the bushes along the river bank. They were now quite half way to the pulp mill landing. He looked at his watch and saw with delight that, unless delayed, they would be in time for the afternoon train.

Far below him he saw the engine water at the mouth of Upper creek and remembered that he would have to steer to the west side to avoid the treacherous spot. He gazed keenly at the woods there, but nothing at first saw to alarm him.

He allowed the ice wraith to run gradually over toward that side. The boat flew like a great bird. They had the wind at their backs again.

But suddenly, while they were still two or three miles from the chasm in the ice, a man with a gun broke through the bushes on the west shore of the river and ran out upon the ice. Franklin knew it was Hi Conley. He was followed by two or three others as drunk as Abe, and two horses were driven out upon the river also. They were headed off!

All the men had guns or sled stakes and the horses were headed down the river in readiness to race with the iceboat. If, by any possibility, Franklin got by unscathed, he would have to fight his way through reckless and half-drunken fellows would

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fall, however, that the volunteer officers were just as anxious to wear their uniforms as the regulars were to get out of them. One of the sights downtown morning, moon and night was the appearance of a young man, hitherto unknown to fame, in his uniform of a volunteer officer of the signal corps. He wore the whole outfit, boots, spurs and all, notwithstanding the heat.

He was the official censor of the downtown cable offices for a few glorious weeks, and as soon as he was commissioned an officer in the signal corps, that he might have some military authority, he got into his uniform and stayed in it apparently until he was mustered out. During the fall one of the coast line boats which left this port for the south carried among its passengers a very imposing looking family. It consisted of papa, mamma and several half-grown children. All of them were more or less military in their dress. Papa's uniform was concealed under a military coat as he came aboard, but it was very evident that he was no slouch of a fighting man.

Mamma wore a blue military cape and patriotic buttons and flaps and the children were all blue and gilt lace. The boys wore uniforms of their fathers' uniforms and the girls wore dresses that might have served a daughter of the regiment in a Borey melodrama. It was a surprise to the other passengers when at dinner they discovered that papa was a staff officer with a 8000 on the collar of his coat and mamma that he belonged to a state regiment which was not in service at that time. He and his family were off on a two weeks' vacation and he elected to wear his uniform.

One night last week an officer in uniform appeared in the balcony of a Broadway theater. His seat was well around the end of the balcony, and as he stirred around a good deal he attracted no little attention from the people in the orchestra chairs.

"Hi! bet a supper for the crowd!" said a man who had seen service and who was annoyed by the sight of the man in uniform at the theater. "I'll bet a supper for the crowd that that fellow up there is a volunteer. If he were a regular he wouldn't be in uniform."

Several people around him heard this offer to bet, and when at the end of the next act the officer descended from the balcony to look up a friend in the orchestra circle they craned their necks to see what his uniform was. When the whole crowd saw that he was a surgeon and that he was a "U. S. V."

"Of course, Mr. Franklin, if I'd known you had the seal, you could have had her for the arsk!" I don't reckon Rose will ever come back this 'ere way, eh?"

"I don't believe she will," replied Franklin, sternly, for the memory of those blue welts upon Rose's pretty shoulders came over him very strongly for the moment. "My wife's experience with you wasn't pleasant enough for her to want to renew old associations."

OFFICERS IN UNIFORM.

Volunteers More Anxious to Display Themselves Than the Regulars.

In the unwritten code of army and navy officers, sartorial etiquette plays an important part. The regulations of both branches of the service, says the New York Sun, define the uniforms to be worn with so much exactness that any tailor may make them, and custom has defined the occasions on which officers should wear citizen's clothes. It is customary, for instance, for naval officers who go ashore when not on official business to don their plain clothes. Much the same code of dress prevails in the army, and no regular army officer under normal conditions would appear in the streets in uniform. When an order was issued at Washington during the war commanding all staff officers to wear their uniforms while on duty there was a great shaking out of moth balls and a lot of grumbling. This order meant the purchase of new uniforms by many of them, and while they complied with the letter of the command they took every opportunity to exchange their uniforms for their plain clothes.

It was noticeable during the summer and

they passed the word along, and the man who had been given said "I told you so."

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Rose