

The Valley of Voices

By GEORGE MARSH

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"Tollers of the Trail"
"The Whelps of the Wolf"
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CHAPTER VII—Continued

It was Lascelles' turn to laugh, for his word stung Steele like the lash of a whip. But unlike the Frenchman, the face of the other reflected his thoughts solely in the swift hardening of the mouth and the glitter in the gray eyes.

"Then of course, colonel," he countered savagely, "you cannot go. You French are such careful chaperons."

Lascelles openly scowled his disappointment as St. Onge retorted:

"Oh, naturally I shall stay; so I shall wish you bon voyage and all success, Monsieur Steele." And he shook his guest's hand. "We shall expect you again before you start south."

"Goodby, sir, and my deepest thanks for your hospitality. You will send a canoe, anyway, in two weeks to meet Michel at the Feather lakes?"

"Yes, au revoir!"

Ignoring Lascelles, he stepped into the canoe, launched by Michel and David, then as if it were an afterthought, Steele called banteringly to the inspector: "And to you, sir, a pleasant stay at Walling River, and safe run to Albany, for I very much wish to meet you again."

With the lunge of three narrow blades, the canoe leaped upstream leaving two men on the shore—one with frank approval in the tired eyes which watched the broad back of Brent Steele as he followed the vicious stroke of the Iroquois in the bow; the other nervously stroking a black mustache which adorned features on which perplexity and hate were written large.

Three days later, when the canoe of Steele was far on its way to the Feather lakes in its search for the trail of the Windigo, Denise St. Onge sat in her living-room with the man who controlled her father's future with the Revillon Freres. For two days, all that sutured and the plea of illness could avail to avoid being alone with him, she had made use of, but now that he was returning to Fort Albany, he would not be denied his hour.

"Mademoiselle," he was saying, "when a man travels as far as I have to visit his fiancée, is he not entitled to a somewhat warmer welcome—to a more frequent opportunity to enjoy her society than you have accorded me?"

"Monsieur Lascelles," replied the girl coldly, "I wrote you accepting the offer which you have made me many times in the last three years. In consideration that you kept my father in the employ of the company in charge of a first-class post, I agreed to marry you within a year. It was a contract of business, monsieur. The day of your arrival here you agreed to my terms."

Lascelles fidgeted under the calm, impersonal gaze of the girl's black eyes.

"It is true, mademoiselle," and he twisted his mustache in his chagrin, "but I am deeply in love with you, and it is most unusual, is it not, to be ignored—avoided? I have some rights."

"I have not promised to love you, monsieur, if that is what you mean," was her quiet answer.

"No," and the blood suddenly flushed his face, "but I have reason to believe that you have an interest in this American, Steele. Why has he stayed here two weeks? Why, except for the fact that Mademoiselle St. Onge is pretty and charming, eh?"

Denise St. Onge smiled wearily. "Possibly, monsieur. It is not unlikely you will think so anyway. You are the type of man who always insists on the woman motive."

"Woman motive? Why not? In this case it is clear," he burst out, walking the floor, mad with jealousy, and helpless before the indifference of the woman whom he had traveled three hundred miles to see.

"Pardon me, but as a matter of fact, you are wrong. Monsieur Steele is an ethnologist and is deeply interested in this mystery which you make light of."

Lascelles snapped his fingers viciously. "You believe in this Windigo myth, too? Your father is imbecilic about it."

The dark face of the girl flamed with anger at the reference to her father. "You laugh at what has ruined this post, monsieur, because it suited your plan, is it not so?"

He turned to her with a snarl. "Evidently you are as superstitious as the ignorant Indians."

"Possibly I am. I don't know what I believe," she said calmly. "I only know what I heard that terrible night—what the Indians believe—and where is the fur canoe? Where are your furs? Where are your men? Is that of no consequence?"

It was to the credit of the infatuated Lascelles, as he bade the woman who had promised to marry him, goodbye, that what was his of right he did not demand when he entered his canoe at the foot of the carry.

"Au revoir!" he said, taking her hand and kissing it. "You will write by the Christmas mail?" And the man who had journeyed up the Albany and the Walling, exulting in his bargain with a desperate girl, returned, beaten, mystified and consumed with jealousy.

CHAPTER VIII

Driven by three iron-hard backs and pairs of arms, Steele's canoe nosed a wide ripple on the smoldering surface

of Big Feather lake, which opened out before them in mile upon mile of sleeping water.

A group of women, children and dogs awaited the canoe's landing at the fishing camp of the Ojibways.

"Bo'jo', bo'jo'!" And Michel, kicking his way through the snarling bushes, shook hands with the surprised women, curious to learn what had brought the headman at Walling River to the Feather lakes in September.

"So the Windigo cries no longer at night on the burnt ridge?" he began, in Ojibway.

To his surprise the women stared at him in amazement, which changed to fear at the thought of the possibility of the presence of a demon so dreaded, in the Feather Lake country.

"No Windigo has cried here," replied an old woman, excitedly. "We would not stay! Our men are away in the muskogs, hunting caribou. They would not leave us here to be eaten by a Windigo."

Michel looked at Steele. "She says no Windigo bin here. Why did Pierre lie to us?"

"Queer for him to bring that tale to Walling River," muttered Steele.

"Pierre, who left you to trade at Ogoke last spring," continued Michel. "Has he camped here this summer?"

"No, we have not seen his family since the moon of flowers. They went to Ogoke."

Michel nodded, as if satisfied. "Well, Michel, it looks as if we were on a wild goose chase."

The small eyes of the Iroquois glittered. "I think we ketch dis goose jes de same."

"What d'you mean?"

"Wal, we know Pierre is a liar and he cum to Wallin' Riviere to mak' talk wid Tete-Boule. Now Pierre an' Tete-Boule try mak' some trouble ovaiv dees



Steele Struggled to Keep at the Heels of His Men.

Windigo. We'n I go back Tete-Boule weel tell me w'at Pierre say to heem." And the lean face of Michel took on a fierceness which caused the squaws instinctively to draw back.

What motive Pierre could have had in the tale of the Windigo at Feather lake, other than the needless agitation of the post Indians, was an enigma to Steele, but it was evident that Michel had an idea of its nature which he would divulge only when ready to talk.

"Michel," Steele asked, as the three men sat by their fire smoking after-supper pipes, "what's in the back of your head regarding this Pierre? You think he knew of the dead Indian at Stopping river when he came to the post, yet made no mention of that but told this wild tale of the Feather lake Windigo scare. Why should he lie about the one and conceal the other?"

The Iroquois slowly exhaled a column of smoke before replying.

"Does Pierre I know for long time. He alway mak' trouble. When I see heem, he tell me somet'ing or he nevair mak' more trouble on dees riviere," was the unresponsive answer.

"But what is he driving at? Why shouldn't he report the killing of that Indian at Stopping river as well as the Windigo scare that existed at Feather lake?"

Michel shook his head. "Eet ees queer t'ing, for sure," was the laconic reply.

Steele's eyes sought David's impassive face, but the Ojibway seemed deep in a problem of his own. It was irritating to a degree, but Steele knew his Indians—knew that Michel would talk in his own time and not before—that questioning would only drive him into a deeper silence.

"How many Indians trap the Portage Lake country?" Steele asked.

"Good manee hunt dat valley, good manee ovaiv on de Little Current."

"We'll start tomorrow. It looks as if Monsieur Windigo was not going to pay this country—"

From the ridges of the mainland the moaning bellow of a cow moose slowly rose and died on the frosty night.

"Dat cow holler veer' strange," said David, as the three sat with tilted heads, ears straining.

Again out across the still lake drifted the mating call.

"Hub!" muttered Michel, "dat Injun poor caller."

Rigid, the three listened to the voice in the night, and in the mind of each slowly took shape the same surmise.

Then from the burnt ridge of the opposite shore lifted a low wail, gathering in volume until it climaxed in a scream.

"De Windigo!" With a leap, Michel had his rifle and was sliding the canoe into the water.

"Come on," cried Steele, "we'll separate and stalk that ridge from three directions."

They were half-way to the shore when the voice burst out anew in sobs and maudlin mewling, and Steele pitied the terrified women and children of the fishing camp, facing the horror alone, with their men far in the caribou barrens.

Landing on the beach under the ridge, Steele left the others with the warning: "No wild firing, now! Remember the whistle! We'll meet here on this sand beach."

The canoe vanished in the shadows and the American started his stalk. Twice he stopped for a space to study the coterwauling on the brow beyond him. Blood-chilling, unearthly, the voice filled the calm night.

The danger of the hunters firing into each other was great, and he climbed cautiously, taking the cover of the down timber, ears alert for the staccato whistle of the yellow legs, their signal of identification.

At last, with skin and clothes torn by the brittle twigs of the dead spruce, he reached the flat shoulder of the ridge. For some time the night had brooded, unmarred by the voice. Cocking his rifle he crept forward, searching the area of skeleton trees, ghostly in the pale light of the stars, for some movement. He was puzzled at the failure of the Indians, whose pace should have been faster than his, to reach the brow of the ridge. If they had, perhaps even now, the roving eye of Michel already marked him out—was sighting down a rifle barrel, his crooked finger on the trigger, waiting to be sure of his target before he fired. At the thought Steele flattened out and whistled.

But the hoo-hoo of a gray owl, patrolling the green timber of the lake shore below, was his only answer.

Minutes, which seemed interminable to the watcher, passed. Where were the Indians?

Then to his surprise an unspeakable mewling defied the night. In vain he strove to locate the position of the beast. But, as the mewling merged into the shrieks of a woman, the flash and report, flash and report, of two rifles cut it short off. Something thrashed through the timber out in front.

He swung his rifle in the direction of the sound, his eyes straining for a target. The starlight gave him a fleeting glimpse of a dark object crossing the bole of a skeleton spruce, and he fired twice. Then leaping down, he plunged through the tangle of dead spruce in the wake of David and Michel who had stalked their quarry, but evidently in the uncertain light, missed.

Down over the treacherous going of the slope of the ridge the sure-footed Indians hunted the thing their rifle shots had stampeded. Tripping, falling, to rise and stumble on through the network of trunks and limbs, Steele struggled to keep at the heels of his men. But gradually the noise of the pursuit drew away from the white man, no match for those who, from childhood, had traveled the forests at night.

In an hour two grimy, battered half-breeds, bleeding from contact with the timber, appeared on the beach.

"Well, it fooled us again," vouchsafed Steele, ruefully, "did you see it?"

"We nevair see heem," muttered the disheartened Michel, squatting on his heels at the water's edge to bathe his face, and his shoulders from which the woolen shirt hung in ribbons.

"You did not see him when you fired?" demanded the surprised Steele. "I got a look at him for a second."

David grinned at his chief. "Dat was me you shoot at. De bullet seeng close, too. Good shot!"

"What you were out in front of me? Why didn't you whistle?" protested the chagrined Steele. "I didn't know, until you fired, that you two had got up there. From the sound, what did he travel like, Michel?"

The half-breed lifted a grave face. "He travel lak' a seek bear; but no bear holler lak' a lynx."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

To Excavate Roman Stadium.

It is planned to excavate the Circus Maximus at Rome which was the greatest stadium ever built. It seated 250,000 people and would make some of the modern stadiums such as the Yankee Bowl and the Yankee stadium look like county fair amphitheatres. The Circus Maximus was three times as large as the famous Colosseum at Rome. It was first built in the time of the early Roman kings, was used during the republic and had its best days during the empire. Here Julius Caesar entertained the Roman populace on a magnificent scale. Indeed the scale was so large that he had to sell one of his private villas to pay for the games and chariot races. In this great stadium the gladiators fought in mortal combat with wild beasts imported from Africa and Asia.

Wit and Humor



WILLIE BETRAYS MA

The family was at supper when the vicar called. Hurriedly the mother put the beer bottles under the table. "Good evening. Rather a cool evening," she said. "Yes," replied the vicar; "no doubt we shall get some more hail." "I don't think you will," chirped little Willie. "Mother's just hid it under the table."—London Tit-Bits.

Needed a Holiday

"My word, I'm badly overworked." "What are you doing?" "Oh, this and that." "When?" "Now and then." "Where?" "Here or there." "Well, you must need a holiday."

NO GOOD AT ALL



"I tell you this medicine is equally as good for curing headaches as it is for curing chills, liver complaint or spinal meningitis." "I don't doubt that for a minute. So's rain water."

That's Where She Wins

Take it as you find it, Or make it over new, Can't beat the old world At its job of pulling through.

Exactly

"She hesitated a long time between an old banker and a young doctor. Finally she decided to make the doctor happy!" "I see. She married the banker?"

Geometrics of Fashion

"The absence of corsets has changed the appearance of women." "Yes," admitted Miss Cayenne. "We now represent a parallelogram instead of a pair of isosceles triangles."

A Great Help

"You certainly have a dumb office boy." "Yes, but he talks just like me over the phone."

Unluckiest Month

"Grandpa, what is the unluckiest month in the year to get married in?" "I don't know, my boy. Everybody has to find out for himself—just as I did."

Ingenuity

Willis—What! An armless man running for office? What a terrible handicap! Mills—Frightful, but they say he's learning to shake hands with his feet.

WHOLE CHEESE



"So your brother is engaged to a Swiss girl? What does he think of her?" "He thinks she's the whole cheese."

Desire

I'd love to be a million things, Like any other gear, But most of all I'd love, by Jings, To be a graceful sneezer.

A Romance

An elderly lady, climbing on one of our local variety of street cars, handed the conductor a transfer. "This is two days old," he growled. "I've been waiting patiently," she murmured.—The Flamingo.

Happy Days

"You like fall?" "Yes, in summer you kick about the heat; in winter, about the cold." "Well?" "In fall you get both."

Build your body back to Health

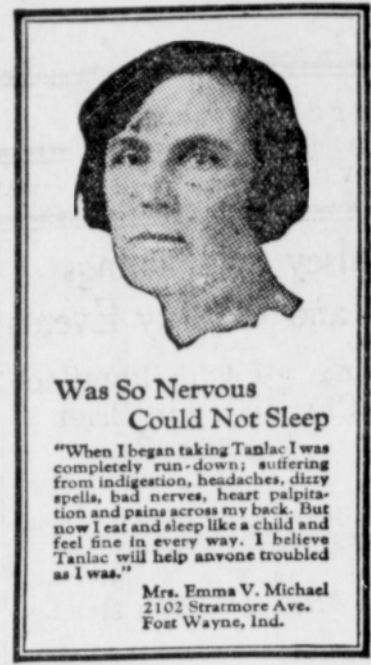
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now if you want to build your body back to health and vigor. Take Tanlac Vegetable Pills for constipation.

Nothing So Plebeian

Caller—Are your little ones playing store? Mrs. Newrich (haughtily)—Store? I should say not. My children never play anything but bank.—Boston Transcript.

One can't rear children properly if one is selfish. They soon discover it.

Failed to Get Away

"What are you in for, my good fellow?" asked the prison visitor. "For being found out," sighed the former bank cashier, who had kept up his pecuniations for years before the officials got wise.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Fortunate the man whose hobby is his job.

Demand

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Settling Grudge in China

In full view of shopkeepers and passing pedestrians in the international settlement in Shanghai a Chinese member of a criminal gang was backed to death with meat cleavers by two other Chinese. It is believed he was the victim of a rival gang's vengeance. Despite the fact that many persons witnessed the incident no one attempted to help the victim or to call the police.

Complete Wish

"Knee-length skirts have reduced street car accidents 50 per cent." "Wouldn't it be fine if accidents could be prevented entirely?"—Buffalo Bison.

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The Reason

Blake—What makes that policeman so fat? Drake—Too much traffic jam.

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