

The Valley of Voices

By GEORGE MARSH

CHAPTER X—Continued

"No! Tie him up and put him in the shack and get our stuff to the canoe! I'll get rid of the girl!"

The die was cast. Every minute at the post spelled danger. But Steele now had an excuse for refusing to take Rose Laffamme to the railroad.

"You understand, David? Keep your knife out of him. Your turn will come on the snow. Now get the canoe!"

David carried Laffamme into the shack, and went for the canoe.

Returning to the girl, trembling in the dark, Steele said: "It was he, David, who knocked him out, but he's not hurt. We must get away at once."

With an impulsive movement, Rose Laffamme found Steele's neck with her arms and kissed him wildly.

"But," explained the harassed American, "we've got to travel fast; they'll follow us—we can't take you!"

"You mean you'll not take me now?" gasped the girl in her despair.

"We'll have to run the portages, break our backs to beat the Indians he'll send after us. If you go, they'll get us!" protested Steele.

"Take me, take me with you!" she moaned. "Am I not beautiful, beautiful American? Don't leave me here!"

Then Brent Steele gambled: "What was Pierre doing down river?"

"I will tell you in the canoe," she parried, and he crunched his teeth in his chagrin. "When we are in the canoe I will tell you things—things you nevalre dream of," she urged, "I know all."

She would exchange her information at a price—her freedom; and that price Steele would not pay. But it was necessary to get her back to the house.

"All right," he said, "go and get some heavy clothes, and be at the log landing in an hour. Don't make any noise. We don't want them to find Laffamme until morning. Now be careful!"

With a low cry, she again circled Steele's neck with her arms, kissed him and disappeared. In an hour he and David would be far down the lake on their way to Nepigon house.

She had intended making a catspaw of him to escape from Ogoko and Steele wasted no sympathy on her. He wondered whether, on finding herself tricked, she would arouse the post or take to her bed, feigning ignorance of the whole business.

And he also wondered whether if Denise St. Onge ever learned of this night's work at Ogoko, she would believe that every act and word of his had been in her service.

Through the night, the churn-swish, churn-swish of the paddles of David and Steele ceaselessly marked off the miles, for with the sun might come a head wind, which meant fighting for every foot while their pursuers gained on them with a four or six-man crew.

Time and again through the long hours, the keen eyes of David alone had sensed through the murk in which they traveled, the menace of a rocky point or the threat of bowlders, awash, square in their course.

"How far have we come?" asked Steele, laying his paddle on the gunwale to stretch his stiffened arms.

"Wal, dees point ees ver' far up de lak'. Eeen two hour we hit de inlet."

"Good! If that is so, we're thirty miles ahead of them."

The Ojibway shook his head. "We tak' no chance—we travel lak' h—!"

On shore the tea-pail was soon boiling, while David and Steele overhauled their scant supplies. There were barely beans, bacon and flour to do a week, and Nepigon lake was two weeks' hard travel. It meant shooting their way out, unless the fish would bite, for they had given their net to Michel.

"Let's have a look at the old Mannerlicher," said Steele as David watched the bacon sputtering in the pan. "We may need her before we get out of this mess. I was a fool to stop there. I might have—"

He had thrown the bolt-handle up and back, when his face sobered. The startled eyes which met the inquiring gaze of the man at the fire drew a quick: "W'at you see—ghost?"

Making no reply, Steele sprang to the canoe, tore the lashings from a bag and fumbled with its contents—then emptied the bag on the beach. Taking David's rifle from the canoe, he opened the breach.

"Both guns empty!" he said in dismay. "They've got our shells—two boxes in the bag! Not a shot left—cleaned out!"

The white man looked long into the immobile face of the Indian.

"If they catch us—we're done! If they don't, we can't even shoot our way home. It's 'ash—or starve!'"

The Ojibway squatted on his heels and resumed his frying. "Wal, boss," he said stonily, "we have been feed dis mornin'—den paddle lak h—!"

For two hours the canoe was driven as only seasoned men can push maple paddles. Then, leaving the lake, they faced forty miles of the swift Rouge before they turned off on the portage to the Jackfish. Once on the Jackfish they could travel as fast as their pursuers, for from there it was all down stream to Nepigon. But the thought which added pounds to the thrust of pole and lung of paddle through the travail and sweat of that October day was the chance of being headed by Indians sent overland to the Jackfish portage. With no shells for their rifles, they were at the mercy of the best half-breed to come up with them.

So, without stopping at noon, the fleeing canoe pushed on up the Rouge, and not until dusk settled on the valley, was it turned to the shore.

There, unloading the weary crew carried boat and outfit back into the "bush" against the possible chance of their camp smoke being seen at daylight by those at their heels.

Dawn found them at their galley slaving with another back-breaking day to live through before the clearing of the Jackfish portage would open up ahead. Unless they were run down shortly, that night the fleeing canoe would ride the Jackfish, and they had won.

They were rounding a bend below a backwater when the man in the bow lifted his hand and pointed. In the shallows, not fifty yards away, stood a yearling moose.

"Meat to take us to Nepigon!" groaned Steele.

David slapped the water with the flat of his paddle. "Marche, you!" he cried, "or de cutt'roat behin' us weel get you!"

"One shell would have got him!" said Steele, ruefully, as the moose slowly turned and disappeared.

"Wal, I not wast' de last shot on moose," and the Indian held up a shining cartridge for the inspection of his friend.

"Where in the devil did you get that?" cried the amazed and delighted stern man.

"I fin' eet een de grub bag."

"And you never told me! Is that fair, David?"

"Wal, eef I tell you, you fire eet at de moose?"

"Why not? We would have red meat then, to Nepigon."

The Ojibway shook his head soberly: "Daveed save eet for one of Laffamme's men."

To Steele, who felt now that sundown would find them at the Jackfish portage; that their pursuers were far in the rear; the words of David sounded unduly ominous. It was possible that some of the Indians on their trail could travel the forty miles of broken, bush-grown river shore in a night and a day, but he doubted it.

So he laughed loudly at the square back of his friend when, an hour before sunset, they landed at Jackfish portage.

"Well, we did it, old boy!" cried Steele, slapping the knotted shoulder of the grinning David. "Now we'll take her all over in one trip or throw this museum stuff away. Can we do it?"

David nodded. "De carry to de lak' ees short. I tak' the canoe an' de Injun stuff. You tak' de rest."

"Man alive! It will go four hundred—with the boat!"

But David was busy slinging his tump-line to the largest of the bags and made no answer.

So, after further protest, which the Indian brushed aside, Steele packed the three hundred pounds of bags on the Ojibway's wide back, and on top balanced the canoe, and the thick howls of the red son of Anak moved steadily up the trail.

With the dusk, the canoe was in the Jackfish and the two men gripped hands in mutual congratulation. They had set Laffamme's gang a pace over a hundred miles of lake and river which they would not soon forget. Dropping downstream they camped in the thick spruce, back from the river, and for the first time in two days, baked cornbread for their beans and bacon, and feasted.

Beside a fire which the scrub masked at fifty feet, two men, at ease with the world, pulled on after-supper pipes. With a little luck in the pike lakes of the lower Jackfish, they could eke out their scanty food supply; and if, as seemed certain, they had left their pursuers hopelessly behind, the shell in David's rifle might bring them meat.

"Boss," said the Ojibway, after a period of silence which was characteristic, "I nevalre tell you w'y I hunt dis Laffamme."

From a reverie in which Denise St. Onge again played to him on her Hill of Dreams, far in the north, Steele turned with interest to the speaker.

"No, I should like to hear."

"Get was manee year back—ten, twelve. Dis Laffamme trade wid de 'Jibway up Los' lak' way. My brodder work for heem. He sen' my brodder an' 'noder man to mak' cache on de Pelican riviere. One day, beeg spruce log, she fall and hit heem in de back. De 'noder feller try carry heem ovaiv de portage but eet pain my brodder too much. He say, 'I stay here w'ile you broeng men from Los lak'. Day tak' me ovaiv de long portage on de spruce hie'!"

For a long space David sat with head on hands, staring into the fire. Steele smoked in silence, waiting for the mood of his friend to change, when the rest would be told.

At length, David straightened and turned to the other, black eyes glittering, as he hoarsely demanded: "W'at you tink dat Laffamme say w'en de feller reach Los' lak'? Dees ees w'at he say: 'Dat man ovaiv on de Pelican ees dead by now. I got no men to sen'. You not go back; I got wor' for you wid beeg canoe down in Wahl-goon.'"

Again David paused, his face black with his thoughts.

"So Laffamme left your trother to die alone—to starve?"

David nodded.

"Dat feller had fear of Laffamme, but he go back to de Pelican w'en he get chance."

"What did he find?" asked Steele.

"Nodin'."

"What?"

"My brodder crawl to de riviere an' drown heeself—before he starve."

"David," said the man across the fire, "I want to apologize for keeping you off that snake. He was helpless and I thought if I allowed you to go back that night, and we were afterward overhauled, it would mean our finish; but now I wish you had throttled him."

"I had hard fight not to keel heem—but you're de boss," added the loyal Ojibway.

"You'll have your opportunity this winter—never fear."

"Mebbe; but dey may wait for us tomorrow at de Frying Pan."

"You still think that some of them may have been sent overland to cut us off?"

"Wal," said the cool half-breed, "eef I hunt canoe traveling dis way from Ogoko, dat ees w'ere I sen' dem."

"But they won't have had time to get there."

"Mebbe not. Tomorrow we see." And the red stoic rolled himself in his blanket.

The stars still hung above the Jackfish, although there was a hint of dawn in the gray east, when a canoe slid swiftly through the shadows on the way to the Frying Pan rapids. Once over the carry around this roaring cauldron of white-water, into the spray of whose fumes and cross currents no man, red or white, had ridden a canoe and come through, and the two friends could snap their fingers at Laffamme's pursuing pack of wolves, for thirty miles of hard-running river, from which they would not lift their flying canoe, then lay before them.

As they paddled toward the carry above the thundering Frying Pan, Steele asked the Indian whose eyes ceaselessly searched the shore below them: "Have these rapids ever been run?"

"No! Dey are ver' bad een some place," muttered David.

"Could we run them?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Then why did you insist on our having our setting poles handy?"

David did not answer.

"You're wasting your time watching that portage," laughed Steele.

Still the Ojibway ignored the man in the stern. Then the scoffer suddenly wondered why the bowman was edging the nose of the boat, as they drifted, away from the carry. A thrill shot through him. Had David seen something suspicious?"

The boat was fast approaching easy rifle range. With his paddle buried, the Indian, simulating leisurely action, and followed by Steele, was rapidly adding to the distance between the canoe and the shore. But to the straining eyes of the American the scrub told nothing.

"What is it? I can't make anything out," demanded Steele.

Back from the tow came: "Keep on paddle; dey are dere!"

The words froze Steele where he knelt.

On drifted the craft, ever edging farther and farther from the ambush.

Stiff as stone knelt the man in the bow, outthrust arms rigid, eyes anchored to the beach, wrists alone in motion. Hunched in the stern, fingers fiercely gripping his paddle, Steele, marveling at the Ojibway's nerve, waited for his order. A hundred yards more and the suck of the first chute would draw them into the Frying Pan. The boat was now passing the portage, yet the rifles on the shore were silent. Then Steele understood. The plan was to drown them.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Realizing His Profits

He walked into a brokerage office several months ago, deposited \$10,000 and bought some stocks on the firm's advice. No one saw him until lately when he walked in again and asked how much profit he had.

"Twenty thousand dollars, or thereabouts," replied one of the partners, after the account had been checked up.

"Sell my stocks and give me my profits in cash," the customer directed, after a few minutes.

As soon as the orders could be executed and a messenger returned from the bank, the partner counted out to him twenty one-thousand-dollar notes and some odd bills and change. He stuffed the money in his wallet and sat down. Then, after he had enjoyed for half an hour the sensation of carrying his profits in his clothes, he pulled out the money, handed it back to the partner, and said:

"Buy all those stocks back again!" —Wall Street Journal.

Words

Words, too, are more than sounds; they are garnered stored with history and the experience of generations of their users. Languages, also, have their distinctive characters, and forms of expression and meter suited to one language do violence to another. Even words seem to welcome the emotion, the rhythm which the poet brings, and respond to his touch.—Lancelotti Abercrombia.

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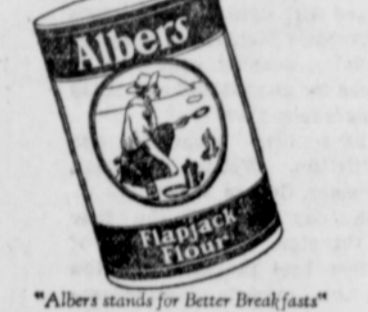
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