

The Valley of Voices

By GEORGE MARSH

CHAPTER XIII

In the morning, Little Jacques was sent back to the post with a letter from Steele informing St. Onge of the reappearance in the Portage lake country of the night wailer. He expressed the hope of being able, with the help of the hound, to obtain a shot at the creature if it remained near the lake. Denise, he did not mention.

With David and Michel breaking trail through the foot of new snow which had fallen over night, the party started on the ice for the mouth of Still river, a small tributary of the lake on which there was a trappers' camp which Michel had not yet visited. Arriving at the tip of the Ojibways, they found them loading their sled preparatory to making a hasty departure, the dark faces of two men and a boy, marked with fear, while from the interior of the lodge rose the low pitiful wailing of women.

"What are you doing? Why do you leave good otter and mink water and the ridges which have given you many pelts of the silver and the black fox? There is much flour and sugar and tea; there are many trade goods, at the post, which wait for you to come with your pelts at New Year's. Where are you going?" he asked in Ojibway.

Opening his arms in a dramatic gesture the older of the men replied: "How can we stay? The Windigo howls at night from the ridges and robs our trap-lines. He wailed and went last night when the snow covered the moon. Our women will not pass another sleep here; we fear he will find and kill us."

"Where was he?"
"On the ridge there."
"No good!" Michel turned to Steele. "De snow cover hees track." Then he asked: "You say he robbed your traps? Did you see the trail?"

"Oh, yes, his trail was everywhere. One sleep before the new snow fell, he followed my fox and marten traps, and ate two foxes—the snow was red with blood. They were large—the tracks of the man-eater, very large, and we ran when we saw them."

"Will you stay tonight in your tipi, if we camp here? This is a great shaman from the south," Michel pointed to Steele. "He has a dog that hunts the Windigo—he has a magic howl, and the Windigo fears him. He has bewitched many Windigos in his own country with his great voice. Tomorrow we will go with you to your trap-lines. No harm can come to you, because of this medicine man and his shaman dog."

The Ojibways gazed in awe and wonder at the great hound, strange to the north, with the pendulous ears and the furrowed forehead, then argued rapidly among themselves, finally calling their women from the tent.

"The Windigo will not come tonight, for he knows the shaman dog can follow his trail even through water, and in his voice there is death," said Michel gravely, to the impressed Indians. "If you will unload your sleds and camp here, near us, we will bring the skin of the Windigo to hang from your lodge poles before the moon changes."

After considerable discussion with his people the older Indian replied: "We do not wish to leave the hunting ground of our fathers. As you say, there is game on the ridges and in the creek bottoms. If you will camp here with the white medicine man and the shaman dog with the voice of the thunder, we will stay."

"We will camp here and keep the Windigo away," answered Michel, trusting that the beast would prove him a false prophet.

In the morning—leaving David at the camp to ease the fear of the women, Steele and Michel slipped into their snow-shoes and taking the hound, drove their sled with the traps to the first lines of marten and fox sets on the neighboring ridges. There, along the line which the Windigo had robbed, Michel set the six double-spring wolf traps under the new snow near the marten cabins, chaining them to spruce logs, which he buried. Farther on, at two of the fox sets, Michel and Steele brought from their sled the two bear traps. These, also, were buried in the snow where an animal approaching the baited fox trap would step on the pan, releasing the yawning jaws.

It would take six days for Little Jacques to make the round trip to the post, and that night over the fire, while the Ojibways covered in their tipi, the three men talked of what message he might bring. They wondered in what way Lafamme would show his teeth—for strike he would before the long snows faded; if he would dare again to send men to the post. It seemed unlikely, for he did not know that the head man was absent, the Iroquois, from Nipissing, who was known the length of the Walling and the great Albany for the sureness of his eye over the sights and the possession of a stone-hard nerve. No, Lafamme would not send men to the post on so desperate a venture.

Five uneventful days passed. Confident of the supernatural powers of Steele and his strange dog whom they now heard in full voice in the forest following the trail of Michel, the Indians again began to travel their lines of traps. However, it was clear that a few more nights of the Windigo at Portage lake would mean a general exodus.

On the afternoon of the sixth day

of Little Jacques' absence a dog-team limped slowly up the Still river trail. "There he is!" cried Steele. "Now we'll hear how things have been going down below." And he hurried to the ice to meet the half-breed.

"Bo-jo', Jacques! What's been driving you so hard. Your dogs are all in."

"Dere ees bad news down riviere." "What's happened, quick? What is it?" Steele's heart skipped a beat, then started to pound, as he flinched from the answer to his question, when David and Michel, with anxious faces, joined him.

"De night we leevve Walling Riviere to hunt de Windigo, he holler on de ridge. De peopl' are ver' scare'." Steele glanced at his friends to find them nodding in quiet satisfaction, then clapping the astonished half-breed on the back, burst out with:

"Jacques, that's not bad news; that's good news! He's moving around and we'll hear him yet. Where's the letter?" The dog-runner handed Steele a letter wrapped in oil-skin which ran as follows:

"Monsieur Steele: "Jacques brought your note. I am glad to learn that you have hope of the hound. On the night you left, the Windigo wailed again on the ridge opposite us."

"I am in fear that something has happened to Tete-Boule. He left for the caribou barrens a week before you reached us and is long overdue. Jacques tells me you did not find my



Lafamme Stepped Inside and, as She Retreated, Closed the Door, Following Her Into the Living Room.

message at the rendezvous. I sent Gaspard but he may have feared the Windigo and hid to me. My daughter and I are well and send our felicitations. Hilarie St. Onge."

"Well, what have you got to say, Michel?" demanded.

"I say wen de dog res', Jacques go down riviere an' breing up grub. De Windigo ees on dis lak' now. We hear hees soon."

David nodded in acquiescence.

The day that Little Jacques left the post on his return to Portage lake with the letter to Steele from St. Onge, the factor sat in his trade-room staring with unseeing eyes at the wall. The hope inspired by the return of Steele, despaired of as dead, with his plans for the running down of the brute, whose appearances in the valley of the Walling and in the lake districts of its water-shed were fast working the doom of the post, was at low ebb. Try as they might, he felt that the problem which faced his three loyal friends would prove beyond their power of solution in time to save the post. There would be little Christmas trade, and summer would find Walling River deserted.

As he sat brooding with his pipe, the jingle of dog bells brought him to his feet. Could it be Jacques returning for something he had forgotten? St. Onge threw on his duffle capote and went out, to meet a panting team of huskies, the steam of their hot breaths rising in clouds in the biting air.

"Tete-Boule! We thought something had happened!"

"I see Michel at de fork of de Stoopin'. He geeve me dis for you." Tete-Boule produced from his sled a roll of birch-bark, on which were traced with a charred stick syllabic characters in Ojibway.

St. Onge translated: "Come to fork Stooping river quick when you get this from Tete-Boule, Michel."

"You met Michel upriver?" asked the surprised factor.

"Yes, he cum dere at daylight, w're I camp. Hees dog can travel no more. He geeve dis to me so you get dere before sun go down, and he res' hees dog. He go back Portage lak' dis sleep."

"Did he say what had happened? He gave you no letter from Steele?" "M'sieu Steele ees ovair on de Leetle Current wid Daveed."

"But why does he want to see you tonight?"

"He foun' someth' on de Portage lak'. He not tell me."

Of course, thought St. Onge, Michel would not confide in the medicine man he hated. But what could they have found? If he were to make the fork before dark, there was no time to waste. Ordering his own team harnessed and provisions and blankets put on the sled, St. Onge hurried to the house.

"Denise, my dear! Tete-Boule is back with a message from Michel, whom he met at the fork. I must start at once. You may expect me back tomorrow afternoon."

"Monsieur Steele sent you no message?"

"No! They are all well. I've got to travel to make the fork before dark, so au revoir, my dear girl!" He kissed her and left. From the window she watched his dogs take the river trail at a wild gallop. The hooded driver turned and waved back at the girl at the window, and shortly, the sled reached the bend and was gone.

"It will be lonely here tonight, but I have dear old Charlotte. I shall play her to sleep in her chair."

Denise took the violin from its case and laid her cheek caressingly on the strings. "What would I do here without you?" she whispered. "Father and you! Once I thought he had joined us—was one of us. But after his admission, and this—" She took from a drawer in a desk a letter, and read it slowly. And in her face was anguish. Then she replaced it in the drawer.

The letter had been given to her in person by the Indian who stopped on his way from Ogoke to Albany in October—the Indian who had told Michel of the drowning of Steele and David in the rapids of the Jackfish. And the signature at the end of the letter addressed to Denise St. Onge was that of—Rose Lafamme.

Later, Denise and Charlotte were finishing the luncheon dishes, when their attention was attracted by dog-bells in the clearing.

"Could father have turned back?" she remarked.

The women went to a window and looked out to see a group of men and two teams of dogs in front of the trade-house.

"Who can it be? I cannot see their faces! The large man has never been here before!" cried Denise, swept by a wild fear—a premonition of personal peril. "One of them is coming here!"

Charlotte hastily left the window and shuffling to a table, took from a drawer a sinister-looking metal knife. Running a hard thumb over its edge, she calmly said: "I weel stay by de door."

There was a loud knock on the door of the factor's quarters. Then the blood of French soldiers and gentlemen in the veins of Denise St. Onge flamed in her face—proved itself. With a firm step she went to the door and opening it, looked proudly into the eyes of Louis Lafamme.

The free-trader had made his threat good.

"Mademoiselle St. Onge, I have come to talk with you."

"It is evident, monsieur," Lafamme stepped inside and, as she retreated, closed the door, following her into the living-room.

"You will pardon me if I throw off my coat," he said.

"I do not desire trouble here in my father's absence," she protested with a confidence she did not feel, "but I shall send Charlotte to call our men and force you to leave this post."

Lafamme laughed, as he paced the floor nervously. "Your men? You might better call on your women to aid you. Two of your brave retainers are under guard now, in the trade-house. We couldn't find the others, if you have them."

It was clear to the girl, who gallantly fought with her fear of Lafamme's purpose in coming to the post when she was alone—helpless, that he controlled the situation, and would be heard.

"What have you come here for, monsieur?" she began.

The bold face of the trader flushed as he gazed at the girl whose memory had taken his peace of mind. The hardness of the mouth softened, in the dark eyes was the look of a boy as he answered:

"It is a story you have heard before, mademoiselle. But I am here to tell it at a time when you will be wise to listen. This is a ruined fur post. Your father will be forced to leave in the spring. What does that mean to you?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Speaking Plainly

A farmer who had married a rich woman was constantly irritated by having the fact of his wife's wealth thrown up at him by the wife herself and by her relatives. Whenever he bought anything, or made any improvement on the farm, it was always, "If it wasn't for my money you wouldn't have been able to do that." One day the farmer brought back from market a fine cow that he had bought for a mere song. While he was exhibiting the animal to an admiring group of farm-hands, his wife came on the scene. "Well, Nellie," he said proudly, "Isn't this a splendid cow?" "Yes," she replied coldly, "but if it wasn't for my money it wouldn't be here." Exasperated, the farmer yelled out, "No, woman, and if it hadn't been for your money you wouldn't have been here yourself!"

CENSUS REVEALS ASTONISHING FACT

8,549,511 Working Women in United States



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Slow but Sure
"So you're buying a house?"
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So It Seems
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