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**The Valley of Voices**

By **GEORGE MARSH**

Author of  
"Trailers of the Trail"  
"The Whelps of the Wolf"

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**THE WINDIGO**

SYNOPSIS.—With David, half-breed guide, Brent Steele, of the American Museum of Natural History, is traveling in northern Canada. By a stream he hears Denise, daughter of Col. Blaire St. Onge, factor at Walling River, play the violin superbly. He introduces himself and accepts an invitation to make the post his home during his stay. He finds the factor worried and mystified. The "log chateau" is a real home. From St. Onge he learns of the mysterious creature of evil, the windigo, and the disappearance of a canoe and its crew, with the season's take of furs.

**CHAPTER II—Continued**

She shook her head, wistfully. "At the Conservatoire they had planned for me—a career, but father was coming out to Canada—and I could not have him come—alone."

"She was the favorite pupil of the great Mario," announced St. Onge, proudly, "but her love for her old father could not suffer a separation, so she is sharing with me—" the Frenchman rose and nervously paced the room, then, with a gesture of hopelessness, finished, "the loneliness and the—hell of this spirit-ridden valley."

Steele's eyes were on the line profile of the girl as she followed her father's nervous pacing. Frankly ignoring his presence, she made no effort to conceal the solicitude pictured by her sensitive face. What a sacrifice she had made! To give up career, life—all that people, cities, civilization mean to the artist—how could St. Onge have permitted it? What a tragedy he had stumbled on at Walling River!

"I've told David he could go down the river with Michel, sir," Steele hastened to change a too painful subject.

"They will find nothing, monsieur." "Has Michel told you exactly what they are going to look for, Colonel St. Onge?"

The factor stopped his pacing. "Why, what is there to seek, monsieur, except the evidence which has escaped us?" "Based on a familiarity with the way David's mind works, coupled with an idea of my own, my guess is that they will not spend much time following the shore."

St. Onge's black eyebrows lifted in surprise. "What do you mean; they are going into the back country?" "Precisely."

"What for?" "To find a trail!" "A trail—through the muskeg? But they couldn't get out that way. A trail leading where?"

"That's what puzzles me, colonel." "Oh, you are wrong! My men never stole that fur. We shall find something yet to prove they were broken up in the big rapid—"

"And then, father, it may be too late," added the low voice of Denise St. Onge.

It was Greek to Steele—this innuendo, and besides, he was hungry for music. "Please, mademoiselle, just a little more—if you are not too tired," he begged.

But the gay mood was not to be recaptured. She shook her head, put aside her bow and violin, and with chin in hand sat with brooding eyes on the bearskin rug at her feet. As the factor talked of the trade, the glance of his guest shifted constantly to the masses of the girl's hair, stray tendrils of which caught and held the light of the candles; to the hand of the artist, with its tapering fingers, which masked her cheek; to the trim foot, in the house moccasin, and rounded ankle; and within him was born the determination to help this girl in her secret trouble, if the aid of a stranger were possible.

Shortly, with a few words of apology, she bade them good night. With a sigh, as she left the room, the factor went to a cupboard and produced a bottle and two glasses.

"You will honor me, monsieur, by joining me in a glass of cognac? This, and the books, I insisted on having if I were to be exiled to this valley."

Steele poured himself a modest

drink. "It is not right, colonel, that you should squander this good stuff upon me. In a few weeks I shall be in New York, while your supply is limited."

"It is not wasted if appreciated," protested St. Onge, "but I fear you have a suspicion of it; you have hardly a taste there," and he deliberately filled his own glass, and raising it with the toast, "Your health, monsieur, and the devil take the Windigo and their friends!" swallowed the brandy.

It was not long before the potent spirits asserted themselves in the Frenchman's manner, which grew appreciably warmer.

"Monsieur Steele," he said, "you doubtless ask yourself why I, a retired colonel, in the army of France, should find myself a trader of fur for the Revillon Freres in Canada—should have brought a girl, educated, refined, to this wilderness?"

"It was, of course, a surprise, sir, to find a woman of the charm—of the remarkable musical talent of your daughter here, in this valley. It is marvelous—her playing. She should have a career, sir."

"Yes, a career!" echoed St. Onge, as he poured himself another drink, "and she has lost it, lost it because she would not leave me."

The liquor had aged the once handsome face of St. Onge. Lines multiplied about the eyes and mouth as he slouched in his chair. All trace of the soldier had vanished; in his place sat a man, broken—conquered by life.

"You have not been in Canada long?" Steele ventured, hoping that the Frenchman would now talk more freely.

"Four years. I was a year at Albany—at school, you might say, learn-



She Shook Her Head Wistfully.

ing the ways of the trade. Then they sent me here."

"You found it hard—this life in the North—after France?"

The factor straightened in his chair. His dark eyes snapped. His face stiffened. He looked the leader of men. "Hard, monsieur? I have faced hardship all my life—in Algeria, Senegal, the Sahara. It's not the hardship here, it's the humiliation, for one who has led his regiment of cavalry in two Moroccan campaigns, to receive the orders of a former sous-lieutenant."

"You mean Lascelles, at Albany?" "Yes!" St. Onge was patently laboring under strong excitement. It seemed to Steele that a revelation was imminent, but the factor turned to the bottle. "Monsieur," he protested, "you do not flatter my cognac!"

"I am enjoying it, sir," replied Steele, pouring himself a drink to humor his host, to which he added water, for the brandy was powerful. That the cognac habit was an old story with St. Onge was evident, and the younger man wondered what relation a fondness for strong liquor had to St. Onge's presence in Canada. Then he opened abruptly:

"By keeping this post active, under the conditions here in this valley, Lascelles must have realized the chances he took. I cannot understand a fur-trader of judgment doing such a thing."

The face of the Frenchman hardened. "Why this post was built in this place, I do not know; but I do know why Lascelles sent me here." St. Onge leaned toward Steele as he repeated bitterly, "He sent me here—to ruin me."

"To ruin you?" gasped the other. "I don't understand. It is to his interest as an inspector that every post in his district should make a profit." Then he suddenly remembered the mysterious statement of Michel. "M'sieu Lascelles sees no fool; he not keep set for fur; he keep set for noder reason." That explained it; the head man knew. "But why?" pressed the curious Steele.

The factor rose and paced the floor, his hands working nervously. Turning impulsively to the man he had met but a few hours before, he exclaimed: "Why I am telling you this, I do not know. It is an affair the most private, but I am alone with my troubles—and

you are a gentleman—a man of heart. You will understand."

Steele tingled with expectancy. "It surprised you to hear that I was sent here to make a failure of the trade, but that is the truth," went on the factor.

"But for what reason, sir?" St. Onge shook with emotion. "Because that cannille at Albany desires to marry my daughter!"

Steele wondered, now, why he had not guessed. Of course, the failure of St. Onge as a trader would put him into the hands of his superior at Albany, so he had been sent to the doomed fur post on the Walling.

"You will leave the company, then?" he hazarded, sick with thoughts of the girl who was the stake in this mad game of Lascelles.

"I must, if I fall here. Up to this year, I have beaten him, in spite of the odds—shown a small profit. And this year, at Portage Lake, we had a good trade—better than ever before—in spite of Lafamme. But the loss of this fur canoe destroys our four years' profits, Monsieur. I am a ruined man."

There was little Steele could say. For a space St. Onge walked the floor with his bitter thoughts, then he began:

"We have been a proud family, the St. Onzes. My grandfather fought under the great Napoleon. My father was killed at Sedan. We have always been soldiers, bearing an honored name, but I, the last, am unworthy of it. Cards and this," pointing to the bottle, "have done it. They lost me my old home in Touraine; my poor wife died while I was deep in the Sahara, at Lake Tchad. She is all I have left—Denise." The voice of St. Onge softened as he spoke of his daughter. Then he finished fiercely:

"Give her to that bourgeois! Never!"

Conscious of the fact that the voice of the enraged factor carried to the remotest corner of the house, the embarrassed Steele rose to check further revelations which could prove only a source of pain and mortification to the girl who heard them.

"It is very late, sir—we may be disturbing your daughter," and he offered his hand with a "good-night!" when the pat of moccasins drew the attention of both men.

Clothed in a loose garment, caught at the waist by a Cree sash, her wayward hair in a great coil at the nape of her neck, Denise St. Onge stood in the doorway. She was a figure of peculiar beauty and dignity as she calmly said: "Father, Monsieur Steele doubtless desires to rest after his long journey. It is late."

St. Onge pulled himself together. "Pardon me, monsieur, you are tired. Good-night."

Red with confusion, Steele met the level eyes of the girl who had heard her personal affairs so intimately discussed with a stranger, and marveled to find there no humiliation, no anger, as he murmured a good night and sought his room.

There, for a time, he sat smoking, as he watched the moon drift down to the purple ridge beyond the river. His thoughts traversed the events of the day; the meeting with Denise St. Onge; the news of the loss of the fur canoe and the panic of the post Indians; the startling revelation by the factor of what the future might hold for him and the girl downstairs. As for this fur canoe—St. Onge was palpably holding back something there. But what? And his daughter—had he told the whole story? Could it be that she had already bound herself to Lascelles, to save her father? That would account for the heartache, but not for the fear he had seen in her eyes at the rapids. Fear of whom? Would the old soldier, in spite of his protestations, allow her to sacrifice herself? This Windigo matter—what a rare chance for a first-hand study of the Ojibway superstition! What a monograph it would make for the museum! There was certainly much to do here until they were forced to race the ice down to Nepegon.

Steele undressed and was soon asleep. Presently, from a dream in which timber wolves in full cry were running an old caribou across a frozen lake, he waked to find himself sitting upright in his cot. Across the valley floated a low wall. The man stirred. For a space the hush of the forest night returned. Then from the somber shoulder of the ridge rose sobbing as of a creature in torment:

Wide awake now, nerves tingling, Steele sprang to the window. The voice ceased. The man waited, expectant. Was it a trick of his senses, had he dreamed it, or— Then the eerie wall filled the night with horror, rising in wild crescendo to climax in a demoniacal shriek.

The brain of the excited and mystified man at the window was working swiftly. "Lynx," he muttered. "No! Wolverine? No, not at this time of the year. Wolf? Impossible!" Then his mouth shaped a grim smile. "Th. Windigo!"

Apparently the Windigo is performing for Steele's benefit. What can the thing be?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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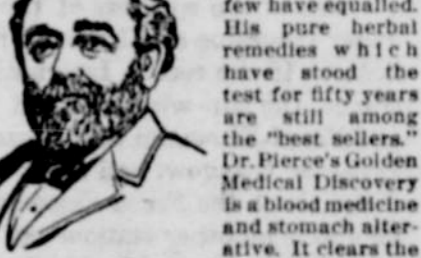
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