

The Voice of the Pack

By EDISON MARSHALL

CHAPTER II—Continued.

"We'll rest now," Dan told them at ten o'clock. "The sun is warm enough so that we won't need much of a fire. And we'll try to get five hours' sleep."

"Too long, if we're going to make it out," Lennox objected.

"That leaves a workday of nineteen hours," Dan persisted. "Not any too little. Five hours it will be."

He found where the snow had drifted against a great, dead log, leaving the white covering only a foot in depth on the lee side. He began to scrape the snow away, then backed at the log with his ax until he had procured a piece of comparatively dry wood from its center. They all stood breathless while he lighted the little pile of kindling and heaped it with green wood—the only wood procurable. But it didn't burn freely. It smoked fitfully, threatening to die out, and emitting very little heat.

But they didn't particularly care. The sun was warm above, as always in the mountain winters of southern Oregon. Snowbird and Dan cleared spaces beside the fire and slept. Lennox, who had rested on the journey, lay on his sled and with his uninjured arm tried to hack enough wood from the splinters that Dan had cut to keep the fire burning.

At three they got up, still tired and aching in their bones from exposure. Twenty-four hours had passed since they had tasted food, and their unrefined systems complained. There is no better engine in the wide world than the human body. It will stand more neglect and abuse than the finest steel motors ever made by the hands of craftsmen. A man may fast many days if he lies quietly in one place and keeps warm. But fasting is a deadly proposition while pulling sledges over the snow.

Dan was less hopeful now. His face told what his words did not. The lines etched deeper about his lips and eyes; and Snowbird's heart ached when he tried to encourage her with a smile. It was a wan, strange smile that couldn't quite hide the first sickness of despair.

The shadows quickly lengthened—simply leaping over the snow from the fast-falling sun. The twilight deepened, the snow turned gray, and then, in a vague way, the journey began to partake of a quality of unreality. It was not that the cold and the snow and their hunger were not entirely real, or that the wilderness was no longer naked to their eyes. It was just that their whole effort seemed like some dreadful, unburdened journey in a dream—a stumbling advance under difficulties too many and real to be true.

The first sign was the far-off cry of the wolf pack. It was very faint, simply a stir in the eardrums, yet it was entirely clear. That clear, cold mountain air was a perfect telephone system, conveying a message distinctly, no matter how faintly. There were no tall buildings or cities to disturb the ether waves, and all three of them knew at the same instant it was not exactly the cry they had heard before.

They couldn't have told just why, even if they had wished to talk about it. In some dim way, it had lost the strange quality of despair it had held before. It was as if the pack were running with renewed life, that each wolf was calling to another with a dreadful sort of exultation. It was an excited cry, too—not the long, sad song they had learned to listen for. It sounded immediately behind them.

They couldn't help but listen. No human ears could have shut out the sound. But none of them pretended that they had heard. And this was the worst sign of all. Each one of the three was hoping against hope in his very heart; and at the same time, hoping that the others did not understand.

For a long time, as the darkness deepened about them, the forests were still. Perhaps, Dan thought, he had been mistaken after all. His shoulders straightened. Then the chorus blared again.

The man looked back at the girl, sniffing into her eyes. Lennox lay as if asleep, the lines of his dark face curiously pronounced. And the girl, because she was of the mountains, body and soul, answered Dan's smile. Then they knew that all of them knew the truth. Not even an inexperienced ear could have any delusions about the pack song now. It was that oldest of wilderness songs, the hunting-cry—that frenzied sort of blood-lust that the wolf pack utters when it is smelling on the trail of game. It had found the track of living flesh at last.

"There's no use stopping, or trying to climb a tree," Dan told them simply. "In the first place, Lennox can't do it. In the second, we've got to take a chance—for cold and hunger can get up a tree where the wolf pack can't."

She spoke wholly without emotion. Once more he tightened the traces of the sled.

"I've heard that sometimes the pack will chase a man for days without attacking," Lennox told them. "It all depends on how long they've gone

without food. Keep on and try to forget 'em. Maybe we can keep 'em bluffed."

But as the hours passed, it became increasingly difficult to forget the wolf pack. It was only a matter of turning the head and peering for an instant into the shadows to catch a glimpse of one of the creatures. Their usual fear of men, always their first emotion, had given way wholly to a hunting cunning; an effort to procure their game without too great risk of their own lives. In the desperation of their hunger they could not remember such things as the fear of men. They spread out farther, and at last Dan looked up to find one of the gray beasts waiting, like a shadow himself, in the shadow of a tree not one hundred feet from the sled. Snowbird whipped out her pistol.

"Don't dare!" Dan's voice cracked out to her. He didn't speak loudly; yet the words came so sharp and correct, so like pistol fire itself, that they penetrated into her consciousness and choked back the nervous reflexes that in an instant might have lost them one of their three precious shells. She caught herself with a sob. Dan shouted at the wolf, and it melted into the shadows.

"You won't do it again, Snowbird?" He asked her very humbly. But his meaning was clear. He was not as skilled with a pistol as she; but if her nerves were breaking, the gun must be taken from her hands. The three shells must be saved to the moment of utmost need.

"No," she told him, looking straight into his eyes. "I won't do it again." He believed her. He knew that she spoke the truth. He met her eyes with a half smile. Then, wholly without warning, Fate played its last trump. Again the wilderness reminded them of its might, and their brave spirits were almost broken by the utter remorselessness of the blow. The girl went on her face with a crack of wood.



"Maybe We Can Keep Them Bluffed."

Her snow shoe had been cracked by her fall of the day before, when running to the fire, and whether she struck some other obstruction in the snow, or whether the cracked wood had simply given way under her weight, mattered not even enough for them to investigate. As in all great disasters, only the result remained. The result in this case was that her snowshoe, with which she could not walk at all, was irreparably broken.

"Fate has stacked the cards against us," Lennox told them, after the first moment's horror from the broken snowshoe.

But no one answered him. The girl, white-faced, kept her wide eyes on Dan. He seemed to be peering into the shadows beside the trail, as if he were watching for the gray forms that now and then glided from tree to tree. In reality, he was not looking for wolves. He was gazing down into his own soul, measuring his own spirit for the trial that lay before him.

The girl, unable to step with the broken snowshoe, rested her weight on one foot and hobbled like a bird with broken wings across to him. No sight of all this terrible journey had been more dreadful in her father's eyes than this. It seemed to smelt upon the strong heart of the man. She touched her hand to his arm.

"I'm sorry, Dan," she told him. "You tried so hard—"

Just one little sound broke from his throat—a strange, deep gasp that could not be suppressed. Then he caught her hand in his and kissed it—again and again. "Do you think I care about that?" he asked her. "I only wish I could have done more—and what I have done doesn't count. Just as in my fight with Cranston, nothing

counts because I didn't win. It's just fat. Snowbird. It's no one's fault, but maybe, in this world, nothing is ever anyone's fault." For in the twilight of death itself, perhaps he was catching glimpses of eternal truths that are hidden from all but the most far-seeing eyes.

"And this is the end?" she asked him. She spoke very bravely.

"No!" His hand tightened on hers. "No, so long as an ounce of strength remains. To fight—never to give up—may God give me spirit for it till I die."

And this was no idle prayer. His eyes raised to the starry sky as he spoke.

"But, son," Lennox asked him rather quietly, "what can you do? The wolves aren't going to wait a great deal longer, and we can't go on."

"There's one thing more—one more trial to make," Dan answered. "I thought about it at first, but it was too long a chance to try if there was any other way. And I suppose you thought of it too."

"Overtaking Cranston?"

"Of course. And it sounds like a crazy dream. But listen, both of you. If we have got to die, up here in the snow—and it looks like we had—what is the thing you want done worst before we go?"

Lennox's hands clasped, and he leaned forward on the sled. "Pay Cranston!" he said.

"Yes!" Dan's voice rang. "Cranston's never going to be paid unless we do it. There will be no signs of incendiarism at the house, and no proofs. They'll find our bodies in the snow, and we'll just be a mystery, with no one made to pay. The evidence in my pocket will be taken by Cranston, some time this winter. If I don't make him pay, he never will pay. And that's one reason why I'm going to try to carry out this plan I've got."

"The second reason is that it's the one hope we have left. I take it that none of us are deceived on that point. And no man can die tamely—if he is a man—while there's a chance. I mean a young man, like me—not one who is old and tired. It sounds perfectly silly to talk about finding Cranston's winter quarters, and then, with my bare hands, conquering him, taking his food and his blankets and his snowshoes and his rifle, to fight away these wolves, and bringing 'em back here."

"You wouldn't be bargained," the girl reminded him. "You could have the pistol."

He didn't even seem to hear her. "I've been thinking about it. It's a long, long chance—much worse than the chance we had of getting out by straight walking. I think we could have made it, if the wolves had kept off and the snowshoe hadn't broken. It would have nearly killed us, but I believe we could have got out. That's why I didn't try this other way first. A man with his bare hands hasn't much of a chance against another with a rifle, and I don't want you to be too hopeful. And of course, the hardest problem is finding his camp."

"But I do feel sure of one thing: that he is back to his old trapping line on the North Fork—somewhere south of here—and his camp is somewhere on the river. I think he would have gone there so that he could cut off any attempt I might make to get through with those letters. My plan is to start back at an angle that will carry me between the North Fork and our old house. Somewhere in there I'll find his tracks, the tracks he made when he first came 'over to burn up the house. I suppose he was careful to mix 'em up after once he arrived here, but the first part of the way he likely walked straight toward the house from his camp. Somewhere, if I go that way, I'll cross his trail—with in 10 miles at least. Then I'll back-track him to his camp."

"And never come back!" the girl cried.

"Maybe not. But at least everything that can be done will be done. Nothing will be left. No regrets. We will have made the last trial. I'm not going to waste any time, Snowbird. The sooner we get your fire built the better."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Make Love and Live Long.

The act of love-making has a direct influence on the heart and blood, says a medical correspondent. It stimulates the working capacity of the former organ, and keeps it up to concert pitch. As a result, the blood circulates with greater strength, and every part of the body is accordingly strengthened. Love-making, moreover, has a very decided influence in stimulating the working of the liver. Patent medicines would have to go out of business to a considerable extent if the world were more generally given to the art of making love with genuine feeling. Perhaps the most striking proof of the immunity of lovers from one form of ill, viz., colds and chills is afforded by the fact that a pair of Cupid's devotees will sit on a damp bench for hours and take no harm.

It is just as wise to watch your windings as it is to wind your watch.

The KITCHEN CABINET

You may grow for your neighbor grapes or grape shot; he also will grow grapes or grape shot for you, and each will reap what he has sown.—Rushkin.

SUMMER FOODS.

A good emergency dessert or salad may be made with any good gelatine jelly as a basis.



Lemon Jelly is especially good. Try it with this one: Arrange some lemon jelly, a teaspoonful or two of peaches cut in quarters, a spoonful of orange marmalade and a tablespoonful of pineapple preserve with a little of its juice to top the sherbet cup. Whipped cream may be added if one has it, but it is good without. Some of the same lemon jelly may be used as a salad with fish at some other meal. Serve it on head lettuce with a rich mayonnaise. Peanuts are nice sprinkled over the top of such a salad.

Creamed Onions With Parsley.—Cook even-sized onions in boiling water, adding salt as they are nearly cooked. Melt three tablespoonfuls of butter, add the same amount of flour for half a dozen onions, a half teaspoonful of salt and a little less of paprika, stir until well blended, then add a cupful of rich milk and half a cupful of the liquor in which the onions were cooked; serve poured over the onions and sprinkle with finely minced parsley.

Lamb Stew With Peas.—Take a shoulder cut, cover with boiling water and cook until tender, thicken with flour stirred with some of the meat liquor, add a pint of green peas and cook until the peas are tender. Season well and serve the meat on a platter surrounded with the peas.

Now is the time to put up the small fruits, crushing until well mashed and mixing with an equal amount of sugar. Stir until the sugar is all dissolved, then can in sterile jars. Set on the cellar bottom or in the ice chest where they will keep cool.

Grape Nectar.—Put a cupful of sugar with a quart of water over to boil. Cook ten minutes, cool, then add the juice of three lemons, two oranges, one-half can of pineapple and a pint of grape juice. Let stand about three hours then serve iced with thinly sliced orange on top of each glass.

Barbecued Ham.—Wipe two slices of ham and trim off most of the fat. Parboil the ham, turning once; drain and put back into the hot frying pan in which the trimmings, having been minced, are tried out; add three tablespoonfuls of vinegar, one teaspoonful of sugar, one teaspoonful of mustard and a few dashes of paprika. When hot pour over the ham.

Though you have everything you like, and riches come to you, You still may be unhappy, son; you'll find that this is true. But you can fill your days with joy; get this; it isn't naive. The way to be real happy is to like the things you have.

TASTY TIDBITS.

When you have several pieces of cheese, too dry to serve in ordinary ways, grate it and to a cupful of grated cheese add one-half cupful of boiling cream; stir until the cheese is dissolved, add cayenne and paprika, salt, if needed, and pour into a cream cheese jar. The cheese will be creamy and delicious and the bits will be saved for something worth while.

Cheese Salad.—Take a cream cheese or two, add thick sweet cream to soften, season with chopped chives, green pepper and nuts. Make into balls and serve on lettuce with a good boiled dressing.

Cottage cheese served plain, after it has been enriched with cream and such seasonings as are needed, served with a good boiled dressing, makes a most tasty salad.

Cheese, Savory.—To one cream cheese add a tablespoonful of softened butter, one teaspoonful of chives, one-half teaspoonful of parsley, both chopped; one-third of a teaspoonful of Worcestershire sauce and anchovy essence, with salt and paprika to taste. Press into a glass and serve from time to time with crackers.

Cheese Croquettes.—To three table spoonfuls of melted butter add one-third of a cupful of flour and stir until well blended, then pour on gradually one cupful of milk. Bring to the boiling point and add the yolks of two eggs slightly beaten and diluted with two tablespoonfuls of cream and two cupfuls of mild cheese cut in small cubes. Season with three-fourths of a teaspoonful of salt, a few dashes of pepper (red) and spread on a plate to cool as soon as the mixture is smooth. When cool, shape, dip in crumbs, egg and fry in deep fat.

Cheese Supper Dish.—Spread bread with butter and sprinkle with grated cheese. Arrange in layers until the required amount fills the baking dish. Pour over a pint of milk mixed with two beaten eggs, a little salt and over the top a generous sprinkling of paprika. Bake until the custard is set. Serve from the dish.

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