

# North-West ROMANCES

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OF THE  
WILDERNESS FRONTIER

## SPOILERS OF PARADISE VALLEY

A STEAM-MADE TROPICAL  
OASIS HIDDEN IN THE  
ICE-BOUND WILDERNESS  
—A SAVAGE LOST RACE  
AND A WHITE-SKINNED,  
GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL.

by  
ROGER DANIELS

## TUNDRA GOLD

by  
FRED NEBEL

## HOBNAIL JUSTICE

by  
CHAS. NELSON

SAUNDERS  
FICTION HOUSE  
MAGAZINES

## NO LAW BELOW ZERO

DEATH WAS MARKED FOR  
THE RED-COAT WHO TREKED  
THE BLOOD-SPECKED MURDER  
TRAIL—BUT CORPORAL M'CREE  
WAS HARD TO KILL.

A COMPLETE NORTHLAND  
NOVELET BY

A. de HERRIES  
SMITH



# North-West ROMANCES



T. T. SCOTT, *President and General Manager*  
MALCOLM REISS, *Editor*

Vol. XIII, No. 2.

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# No Law Below Zero

By A. de HERRIES SMITH

**Redcoats north! Far into the frigid Bering's uncharted pack Corporal McCree followed a blood-specked murder trail—led by the will-o'-wisp lure of a fair-haired girl, and the ghostly crew of a long-dead mystery ship!**

**E**XCEPT for the mournful howls of the Eskimo sleigh dogs tied to the rocks on the shingled beach, Fort Herschel was wrapped in slumber. But for some mysterious reason or another sleep evaded Corporal Dick McCree of the Mounted Police.

Warned perhaps by the northman's sixth sense, a feeling came to him that some devilment out of the usual was afoot. Having tossed to and fro on his bed for the better part of an hour, he finally got up and lit a cigarette. Buckling on his revolver belt, he stepped softly out of the barrack room on moccasined feet.

Everything was peaceful. The faint, cold rays of the moon shone down on the white sails of the trading schooners tied to the rock dock, on the skin shelters of the Arctic natives strung along the beach, and tipped the bobbing icebergs being carried out on the current.

McCree listened, went a few feet, listened again, and heard nothing at all. Still a vague uneasiness possessed him as he retraced his steps.

Constable Andrew Burke was sleeping soundly. This habit of Andy's to sleep

through peace and war was irritating at times. McCree shook him now, none too gently.

"There's something wrong here, Andy! Don't know what it is but I can sure feel it," he confided, as his chum joined him outside.

Burke, rubbing his sleepy eyes, yawned: "What I'd like to feel is that pillow again, you darned old nighthawk! However, if you want to ease your mind, old-timer, let's take a ramble up the hills and give the prospective tragedy the once over."

"Fine; come on."

Action was meat and drink to a man of McCree's stamp. He wasn't afraid of anything that ran on two feet or four, but he admitted to himself he was worried. There was that yarn of Hanz Dorberg's to figure on. Out of the Eastern Arctic Dorberg had come on his schooner, bringing word of a strange craft that had robbed and pillaged the Eskimo settlements on King William's Land—burning, destroying, killing. And a few hours distant—at daylight to be precise—he and Burke were scheduled to set sail to discover the trouble; Dorberg to accompany them as pilot, by

his own request and the commanding officer's blind orders.

Winding in and out over the brown tundra hills fresh suspicions and doubts assailed the Corporal's active mind. Why was this man Dorberg so anxious to go back on the Mounted Police patrol boat? Why should he be willing to sacrifice the short three months of open water, so precious to the traders?

"Here," commented McCree, "is some new style of Arctic hellery—as if we didn't have enough on our hands already." But what it was, neither man could tell.

**M**ORE than half an hour elapsed before they reached the lookout station, from which each day the men of Fort Herschel gazed anxiously down toward the dim Northwest, out of which the tall masts of the yearly supply ships must soon appear above the welter of float ice—if they succeeded in battling their way through the berg-choked Bering Straits.

"Huh! Everything in the Arctic garden is lovely, Dick—Wow! Suffering cats!" spluttered Burke, grabbing the corporal's arm, and pointing to the far side of the island. "By James, if you weren't right after all! See that one?"

McCree saw a rocket soar soundlessly up into the zenith. It burst in a shower of white, followed in quick succession by others of red and green.

"Red, white and green—the Russian colors!" breathed the corporal, enlightenment dawning in his watching eyes. He turned back to Burke with an exclamation. "Say, Andy, we're blind and Major Bristow is worse than that. Listen! The name of that schooner which came in yesterday is Russian—*Baikal* is a Siberian lake. Her captain, Kharkoff is certainly a Russ, and his pal Dorberg might be anything. There's going to be Hell popping in the Arctic before long and you and I, old scout, will have to go it alone. The major wouldn't believe our story if we told him; he'd call it a case of nerves. So it's up to us to keep quiet and hop to it! Savvy?"

Trouble, for no reason whatever, always amused Burke. A broad grin spread across his bronzed face now. "Lead me to it, Dickie! Let the former bright and shining star of the good old Third U. S. Cav-

alry tangle with these gents! If the Yanks and the Canucks can't put the kibosh on this business, nobody can! But the thing is—who are these lads signaling to?"

"We'll find that out later," McCree jerked out. "Come on; we'd better get down to the patrol boat and see if they have tried any monkey business there. Got your gun? All right, mush, you old malamute!"

The two Mounties padded down the trail in high spirits. The air had cleared somewhat. At least they were sure now there was something to chase to earth.

**B**EFORE they had gone a dozen feet Burke felt the corporal's arm nudge him, and turned sharply to see McCree breaking into a run. The constable followed him at a lope down the sloping, moss-carpeted valley toward the direction from which the signal flares had been sent up.

Stopping to listen, scarcely breathing for fear their ears should lose it, they caught it again—faint and weak. A woman's cry of distress!

Neither man spoke. It was a moment for action, not words. They plunged on down in the half-light, until the narrow, shingled beach rose up to meet them at the foot of the rolling hills.

"That wasn't a native woman's voice," panted Burke, as he drew up alongside McCree.

"No. It came from a white woman, and there don't happen to be any on the island that I know of," McCree replied shortly, adding: "My God! There it is again!" as the cry, little more than a thread of sound, was carried out on the thin air.

It came from behind now! They knew they had passed no one on the narrow beach, and yet the cry came from the hillside. Baffled, McCree surveyed the tundra-clad slopes rolling up and away from the beach at their feet.

"Must be a cave of some kind here! Get down and look for an entrance," he ordered, dropping onto his knees to grope back and forth along the base of the hill. The sharp flints pierced their hands and legs as they moved about.

A sudden grunt of satisfaction turned Burke about in time to see the pair of long legs and yellow moccasins belong-

ing to McCree wriggling out of sight.

Burke lost no time. He had no intention of being left behind. Throwing himself after the corporal he wormed his way up a damp, narrow tunnel in which there was just sufficient room for a large man to squeeze forward and no more.

A little farther on, the tunnel widened.

Lying motionless both men saw ahead of them a flickering light playing on the glazed walls of an ice cave.

Again came the cry—now clear and distinct!

McCree was on his feet, revolver drawn, and racing across the uneven floor of the cavern.

**C**OWERING against the damp wall, her bare white shoulders almost covered with a mantle of soft, brown hair was a girl—not a native, but a white woman. Bending over her was a thick-set, black-bearded man mouthing in broken English:

"You was my woman now, see? You do vat I say, or—"

Cr-ack! Cr-ack! The blued barrel of a service revolver came down on the man's wrist with a sickening thud of steel on bone; the corporal's left fist shot out to send him reeling across the cave. He stumbled and lay still.

"This concludes the evening's program. Mounted Police radiophone station now signing off. Good night, everybody!" Burke's lazy, good-natured voice broke the tense silence. McCree frowned.

The corporal touched the trembling girl on the arm and left his hand there to steady her. It was years since he had set eyes on a white woman, and this girl was lovely.

The fear in her eyes—brown they were, but black with the terror that had assailed her—had given place to relief. Limply she leaned her light weight against him.

McCree was no saint. Thrown into daily contact with the women of an inferior race he had known the light loves of the far north. But whatever other feeling flamed through his body now he crushed at once. This girl was of his own people, gentle, friendless, to be protected.

Hysterical sobbing shook her from head to foot. McCree looked helplessly at Burke.

"Kiss her! That's the only way to bring

'em to!" that incorrigible optimist assured him, much to his displeasure.

"Well, how the devil am I going to find out what it is all about if she keeps on like this?"

McCree tugged at his uniform nervously. At the same moment the girl's assailant got to his feet, nursing his injured arm, and advanced on the corporal with an attempt at bravado.

"What the hell d'ya think you're doin' here? What right you got to mix up wid me an' my woman? You cursed Mounted Police—"

"Mounted Police!" The girl pressed closer and the whispered words were not lost on McCree. He raised his hand with a protecting gesture that held the hint of a caress, but dropped it promptly.

"Well, she likes the Mounted Police—some of 'em anyhow. We know that much," chuckled Andy. Then to the stranger, "Here you, walrus-face, stay in the five cent seats where you belong!" The constable pushed him back with a gesture that was far from delicate.

The girl had stopped crying and McCree waited patiently in the hope that she would tell him what had happened.

"I was so afraid you would not get here. I knew you would, though!" She smiled a wet, grateful little smile.

"Won't you please tell us what happened to bring you here?" he questioned gravely.

He tried to bring his gaze to rest upon her impersonally, as the light from a ship's lantern, hanging on a peg in the ice wall, lighted up her rounded face when she turned to him obediently.

**T**HERE was an appeal to his chivalry in her every action, but the thought flashed, lightning-pointed through his mind: "Why should a girl of her apparent refinement be in the company of such a man, in a territory devoid of white women?" There was something more to this perhaps than either he or Burke guessed, and he must not let his feelings run away with him.

McCree shrugged his shoulders, unclasped the slim hands from his arm and wheeled on the stranger.

"Well?"

The foreigner grinned *insinuatingly* as he lurched forward.

"Just what I said. What the blazes d'ya think I'm doing up in the Arctic with her? Said she vas my woman, didn't I? Going east with me on my schooner. Brought her up from Seattle. What kind of women do the traders bring in? Answer that! Little innocent school girl? Ya! Ya! Why, she's nothing but—"

If the girl had been weak before she was strong now, confronting the leering brute like a vicious little tongue of flame. He cowered before the wrath that sprang at him with all the vengeance of an overwrought mind—but it was only for a moment, and she fell back beside McCree, white and spent.

"You cowardly, lying cur!" The corporal's eyes were narrowed to deadly pin points. There was a sharp, reverberating report, an acrid smell of gun smoke, and silence.

Burke nodded cheerfully. "Fine work! You gave him a one way ticket to where they don't have to haul driftwood for the winter fires! Just about now he's arguing the point with old St. Peter!"

The corporal put the girl aside and felt the man's heart. He appeared to be dead.

"Take this lady down to the commanding officer's quarters," McCree called to Burke over his shoulder. "See that the Eskimo house-girls make her comfortable until some arrangements can be made to send her back to wherever she came from. I want you to meet me at the patrol boat just as soon as you get back."

The girl hesitated. "Don't you want to know my name or—?"

"I'll get that later, thank you." McCree told her stiffly, without looking up.

She picked up a coat from the floor of the cave, and with her chin ridiculously high scrambled out at the constable's heels.

## II

WHEN the two Mounties reached the patrol boat each scrambled up and lay along one of the mainsail booms. By pulling the canvas about them they were effectually concealed.

"Quiet now, Andy!" McCree cautioned, as the sound of voices aboard the *Baikal* drifted across to them.

They waited patiently for fully half an hour before the silence was broken by foot-

falls on the Russian schooner. The men felt the *Aurora* list slightly as the intruder came aboard from the other vessel.

McCree watched him step softly to the stern, swing in the Colt quickfirer, deftly untie the gun's waterproof cover, make some motion he could not pick up, and then without even looking about him, step off the vessel again.

The corporal wriggled free of his hiding place, whispering to Burke, "You see to that gun; I'm going over to the *Baikal* to make look-see. Back in a jiffy. Wait for me ashore."

The constable watched him crawl along on hands and knees, saw him reach the other schooner's deck, and ease his weight aboard on fingers and toes.

As McCree expected, a light showed from the narrow ports above the cabin. Warming his way aft he cautiously loughed down to see Dorberg, Kharkoff and two other men, whom he did not recognize, grouped about a folding table.

With a stubby pencil Dorberg was marking a map of the Arctic, apparently tracing a vessel's course eastward from Herschel Island. They talked in Russian. McCree caught only the words, important enough in themselves, "Dolphin Straits, Coronation Gulf, Admiralty Island." Stopping there, Dorberg marked a complete circle about the island and drew a cross through it. He then folded up the map and tossed it to Kharkoff, who said something in his native tongue, slapped Dorberg on the back and reaching up to a cupboard behind him brought forth a black bottle and some glasses.

It was with difficulty that McCree contained his mirth. He chuckled softly as he slid down. Now he knew where the strange vessel lay! In no time he was back on shore, and with Burke beside him making his way to the barracks.

"Any luck, Andy?"

"Nothing much; just a packet of dynamite poked into the muzzle of the Colt!" the constable replied flippantly, exhibiting his find.

"Just as I thought! They sure were going to fix it so that the *Aurora* would not bother them. Well, I'd say Mr. Dorberg was going to get the surprise of his life before this trip is over. Lord! I'm tired. Let's hit the hay."

CLEAR of the land, the westerly wind lifted the sea-ice fog, rustling the little ensign on the *Aurora's* stern. McCree noted the breeze and yelled to Burke and Barton, "Fair wind now, boys; shut off the engine, Andy. We'll stick up the rags and save gas."

The other men clambered on deck. In a few minutes the patrol boat's masts were clothed in white. Bending gently to the breeze she slipped along on her course to Coronation Gulf, eight hundred miles to the east.

"Take a squint to the north, skipper, and see who's here!" Andy nudged the corporal, who saw through the glasses another vessel following the *Aurora's* example, also headed for the East, but laying a course which kept her farther north.

The two exchanged significant glances, but there was no time for speech for Dörberg was coming aft. He, too, saw the vessel, and his grunt of satisfaction was not lost on the two men standing by the wheel.

All that day the breeze held, driving the police cruiser steadily on her course. Sundown revealed the other craft still in the offing, her sails shining against the green of the Beaufort Sea, her bows a smother of foam.

"Holy jumping Jehosaphat!" In sheer amazement Burke dropped the spokes of the steering wheel he had just taken over. The schooner jibed off the wind and lay with her sails rattling and flapping as he pointed in the direction of the cabin.

McCREE followed his finger and leaned weakly against the gunwale, for peering out over the coaming was a bright, oval face, the small, arrogant head crowned with a soft mass of brown hair. There was no mistaking her. The girl of the cave was a stowaway on the *Aurora!*

McCree was furious. He strode over to where she was curled like a sleepy kitten on a pile of bags.

"What do you mean by this, madam? Do you realize—?"

She broke in on his angry voice, a little frightened, but not at all cast down.

"Please listen to me," she announced calmly. "Come into the cabin and I will explain everything."

There was little else to do but follow

her. In the cabin the corporal perched stiffly on the edge of his berth and waited. "This girl is playing for time," he reflected.

She met his cold eyes and dropped her own. McCree managed to control the sense of admiration he felt mounting; by an effort he emphasized to himself that duty came first.

"Well?"

She glanced up and McCree thought he detected a fleeting smile. Was it possible that she was laughing at him?

"I feel sure that you must think frightful things of me, but I am not what I seem. You must believe that! You will, won't you?"

She waited expectantly for his answer, but none was forthcoming, and a sudden defiance lifted her chin airily as she went on: "There is a great deal I would like to tell you, but my lips are sealed for the present. I have a mission to fulfill in the Arctic. Until it is completed you must trust me. I believe you will."

"Pretty darned cool!" McCree thought to himself. He wished she wasn't so pretty, though. Those little tendrils of brown hair were bobbing between him and the narrow path of duty.

"Damn!" he muttered impatiently. "She doesn't look like one of those singed butterflies of the outside. Her eyes are too clear. But still. . . . He hated to do it, but there wasn't anything else. "I'm sorry, but you must consider yourself my prisoner until you see fit to explain your movements. I arrest you in the name of the King!"

The corporal was not prepared for her faintly mocking and apparently satisfied, "Oh, how lovely! And, of course, you'll let me stay on the *Aurora?*" The edged charm of her smile was not lost on the Mountie.

"Yes," he retorted bitterly. "You'll remain on the schooner because I can't very well put you ashore on an uninhabited island. It would be better for you if it could be managed. We are engaged in risky work; all our lives are in danger and now you have complicated things beautifully. I must demand that you give me some particulars regarding yourself."

The corporal jerked out the collapsible table, rummaged around in his sea chest, pulled out a bundle of printed forms and commenced to fill in one of the papers.

"Name and nationality, please?"

The girl leaned ever so lightly above his shoulder. McCree frowned.

"Margaret Vernon—but, of course, my friends always call me Molly," she murmured frivolously.

The corporal squirmed uncomfortably, waiting with pen poised.

"Er—business or profession?"

"Oh! Spinster to be sure."

She refused to treat the matter seriously.

Well, he'd show her!

"Place of residence?"

"Oh! Just put down United States, west of the Rocky Mountains," Molly Vernon told him airily.

**B**ANG! McCree was on his feet. The table whirled across the little cabin. He caught her by the wrists and shook the girl roughly. The laughter swept out of her eyes like fire before a sudden dash of rain.

"You great big bully! You're just like the rest, and I did think you were better than the other men in this horrible country."

The contempt in her voice left the Mountie groping helplessly for a word sufficient in itself to relieve the situation—but speech eluded him.

She stepped backwards quickly and stumbled, striking her head a glancing blow on one of the steel uprights.

McCree's panther-like muscles shot him through the air. He caught her before she fell. Tenderness came to him easily in spite of his greath strength. He bent his head slowly and kissed the scarlet mouth, no longer mocking but very still.

She stirred, moaned a little and opened her eyes. Her head hurt and she clung dizzily to McCree.

"You said I was your prisoner, didn't you?" She smiled painfully.

"I didn't mean—I didn't—oh, blazes, what do I mean?" McCree finished under his breath, avoiding her eyes.

"Holy pink-toed Eliza! Suffering ca—I Hey, Dick, come on deck right away! Quick now!" Burke's voice filled the cabin as his rounded face, split with a delighted grin, appeared over the hatchway coaming.

Molly Vernon left the shelter of the corporal's arms with as much dignity as she could summon in spite of the fact that

her knees were far from bearing her weight with any attempt at steadiness, and her hair was falling in disorder about her shoulders.

McCree took an indecisive step after Andy, lingered a brief second, then vaulted out of the cabin to where Burke, Barton and Dorberg were pointing and gesticulating wildly astern.

"Good God!" the corporal ejaculated as his gaze swept the water, now teeming with sudden life. The Arctic was alive with sea-lions!

**E**VERYWHERE the huge rounded heads seemed to be breaking the surface, the roars of the great animals appearing almost to shake the ship. The sun glinted from long tusks that had spelt death to many small vessels sailing these barren coasts.

McCree knew they were gathering to attack the schooner, and immediate action was the only thing that would save them.

"You, Dorberg, rip the cover off that gun!" But the Mountie spoke to empty air, for the Russian was halfway to the bows; he had not forgotten the charge of dynamite placed in the barrel!

Burke laughed and tore the tarpaulin off the Colt, threading the cartridge belt.

"Keep her straight ahead, Barton," McCree called over his shoulder, as he ran for the cabin where the service rifles were racked.

The girl tried to brush past him, to go on deck.

"You can't go up! No! I am in command of this ship. You will do just exactly as I say!" He picked Molly Vernon up and tossed her into one of the bunks out of his way. There was no time for courtesy. She slid down again, indignant and flushed. McCree shoved the girl aside brusquely, jerked the rifles out of the rack, and raced back to the deck.

### III

**"C**R-ACK, cr-ack, cr-ack!" The Colt spat a steady stream of lead across the water, churning foam, deadening the roars that filled the air.

Here and there great animals thrashed the bloody water in dying fury, but still the herds pressed forward, their fins send-



ing up clouds of spray, heads and shoulders elevated above the sea with the speed at which they race downward to the schooner.

"Hell! There are hundreds of the brutes!" McCree spat out, savagely throwing down the smoking rifle.

Another weapon was forced into his hands. Surprised, he looked down to see the girl's brown head bent over a Lee-Enfield, deft fingers forcing the nicked shells into the magazine. She looked up, met his eyes and smiled before bending again to her task.

The little schooner trembled with the speed at which her wide-open engine was driving her forward. Her sails flapped, neglected, as Barton headed her steadily offshore. White waves danced back from the *Aurora's* bows, but the three men knew that the herds were gaining upon them. Looking back, they could see the pig eyes gleaming redly in the sun. Between the explosions of the machine gun and the crackling of the rifles they could hear the deep, harsh breathing. There was a reasonless fury about the whole horrible hunting pack.

"Oh! Look! Look!" The girl jumped, screaming, to her feet and pointed to the starboard gunwale. Burke swore viciously and swung the muzzle of the Colt inboard. It jammed. He wrenched and tugged at the levers without success, left the machine gun, snatched up a rifle and ran forward to where a huge head reared above the rail. The infuriated sea-lion tore at the slender woodwork with its eight-foot tusks, splintering the planking of the deck.

With a yell Burke ramméd the muzzle of the rifle into the immense, gaping mouth and emptied the magazine.

The sea-lion roared, threshed wildly for a moment, then hung inert over the side. It was dead, but in death proved more disastrous than in life. The great bulk listed the schooner to one side; she slackened her speed. Instead of racing forward she commenced to circle slowly.

"This is the end," moaned Molly Vernon, covering her face with her hands.

All about the ship the sea was black with the shining, oily bodies shoving, jostling each other in frenzied attempts to reach the schooner.

Burke raced past the girl to fire point-blank into the vicious eyes of another brute

in the act of rearing its monstrous head above the rail. It fell back, gurgling sickeningly, but the gap was immediately filled.

"Hey! McCree! Over here—quick!" Barton shouted from where he was wrenching at the steering-wheel in a futile endeavor to keep the vessel on her course.

An excited yell from the corporal at the same instant brought the others running aft. He was lying flat on the deck. They saw him yank out his long sheath knife and slash out over the stern at something.

In another moment he came to his feet, and with legs braced whirled a round object above his head and let go. The thing sailed through the air and lit in the water some twenty yards behind the schooner.

There was a chorus of maddened howls from the sea-lions. They raced at the floating black dot, tearing at it with their long white tusks, beating at it with their flippers.

Burke jerked an ax out of its clips alongside the deckhouse and slashed at the tusks of the beast hanging to the vessel's side. When he stepped back, exhausted, Barton snatched the ax from him. In a few minutes two shattered ivory tusks lay on the deck. The bloody head disappeared overboard.

The schooner righted herself. Barton sprang for the wheel again. The *Aurora* sped away from the jumble of shining bodies which still fought and tore at the elusive black dot bobbing about in the water, churned now to thick foam, red-tinted.

Molly Vernon laid her hand on the corporal's arm.

"Walrus medicine!" he explained shortly in answer to her unspoken query.

"Walrus medicine? What a funny name! What does it mean?"

"Just this: Someone on board the schooner tied that bag of putrid whale meat under the *Aurora's* stern, knowing it would attract all the sea-lions from here to Kingdom Come. It's an old whaler's trick, used by all the vessels that come in here from the Pacific to hunt the white whales and the sea-lions."

McCree stared at her oddly and walked away. He came back before he had gone more than a few feet to thank her for the help she had given. Then he saw that the girl's hands were bruised and stained with

blood. He took the hands in his big paws.

"Have you changed your mind about me?" she inquired archly, letting him examine the torn fingers. McCree dropped them as though they had been red hot, flushing beneath his tan.

A few feet away Burke and Barton, with arms about each other's shoulders, were engaged in a step dance, gazing at one another in a good imitation of rapt ecstasy, and from the bows Dorberg was making his way aft.

"I'll get one of the boys to fix up the forward cabin for you, Miss Vernon; it's small, but we cannot help that," McCree told her, and walked away.

The girl faced the sea, an inscrutable smile touching her mouth. It might have meant anything or nothing.

"Damned if I'll believe it! I can't!" McCree muttered to himself as she disappeared below decks, reviewing and rejecting the fears and suspicions that crowded into his mind.

Dorberg advanced with a sickly smile, only to be shoved aside by the corporal as he roared at the two dancing men: "Cut that out! Barton, you make up the forward cabin for Miss Vernon. Take the wheel, Burke; I'm going below."

WITH Burke at the wheel the patrol boat was feeling her way through the narrow Dolphin straits in the dark. Completely exhausted, McCree was sleeping soundly, but Barton could not compose himself.

After a time he crept lightly out of the bunk and lay flat on the floor of the cabin with his ear against the partition.

It was impossible to hear much owing to the noise of the oil engine. He placed his hands on the wooden wall of the bulkhead and divined that there was some movement behind it. The swinging lamp lighted the cabin but faintly.

Whatever was in his mind, he changed it, and returning to the bunk lay there, still keeping his hands against the partition. It was plain from the peculiar trembling of the frame that the screws which held the uprights were being withdrawn. Presently a slight current of air became noticeable. He figured that one section of the bulkhead was being removed.

Barton got up on his hands and feet to see in the gloomy light one shadow darker than the others bend forward. A hand reached up to the top of the gasoline reservoir.

The Mountie threw himself headlong. With one bound he was on the Russian. There was a crash of woodwork and a heavy thud as the two bodies hurtled back into the main hold.

"McCree! Dick! Dick!" Barton shouted in the dark. The Russian was on top now, had him by the throat. If he could just last out until McCree came!

The corporal was out of his deep sleep instantly. He turned up the light and broke into sudden action as the sounds from beyond the partition smote his ears. Slamming off the throttle of the engine with one hand he caught up his revolver and leaped into the dark.

"Hey! What's coming off here? Who shut down that engine?" roared Burke, running to the cabin. He saw the broken partition and straightway dived into the hold.

Barton lay on his face, groaning and coughing blood. McCree was kneeling on the body of the Russian with the butt of his revolver against his head. He saw Burke and called to him:

"Help me lift Barton. I'm afraid the poor old boy is done for." As gently as they could the two Mounties carried the constable back into the cabin and laid him on the bunk. "I'll attend to Charlie, Burke. You get the handcuffs on that man. Hurry, before he comes to."

The wounded man opened his eyes. "No use, Dick—" He coughed, falling back weakly against the other's arm. "Dorberg had a knife." He groaned as McCree ripped open his shirt, endeavoring to stop the flow of blood with a compress.

"I'm going West, Dick—no use to do that—this is the end. Tell the boys at Herschel—" He was speaking with great difficulty. The voice died and broke away into a whisper, "Passed out on active service, Dick; that's—"

The stifled breathing ceased. With cold eyes the corporal rose and gently drew the blanket over his comrade's face.

"By God, that swine dies, too!" McCree growled as he flung out of the cabin. He came upon Burke and the Russian and hesitated, desire and discipline conflicting

with each other. "None of that, Andy; we're in the Mounted Police, remember!" he ordered, pushing Burke aside. "We'll deal with him in the proper manner. You listen to me, Burke. I am in command of this vessel!"

The other got up reluctantly and waited. "Kick over the engine, Andy, and take the wheel again. We must keep ahead of that other schooner. Everything depends on that."

**B**URKE said nothing but returned to the deck and put the vessel on her course. McCree went back to the cabin and set about the gruesome task of searching the dead man's pockets for letters and trinkets which his relatives might treasure. He also removed his uniform badges. This completed, he straightened out the body, wrapped it in a blanket, and with a heavy needle sewed up all that remained of Charlie Barton into a rough shroud.

Dawn was streaking the sky with faint colors when McCree left the deck and went back to the hold to find the Russian sitting as comfortably as his bonds would allow. The corporal examined his scalp wound, washed it clean and unlocked the handcuffs.

"Get up!" he ordered shortly but without heat. The Russian was humped on the bench before the table, holding his throbbing head in his hands. He did not look once at the shrouded figure in the bunk. "Now, Dorberg, I'm not going to waste any breath on you. If I did not wear the uniform I'd kill you with my bare hands, but you will be given a fair trial according to Canadian law when we get back to Fort Herschel. In the meantime you will be handcuffed—but not at present. We are going to use you. Get on deck!"

The Russian dragged himself up the companionway, but shrank back as he met Burke's eyes.

"Go on!" McCree shouted impatiently, prodding him in the back with his revolver muzzle.

The girl was on deck, too, white-faced and trembling. The corporal went straight to where she was standing.

"There's going to be shooting here shortly and you would be in the way. You must go below and stay there. Don't come on deck again unless I order you to do so.

Otherwise I shall have to lock you in the cabin," he told her crisply.

**S**HE turned without a word and left him looking after her, a little surprised. He had expected opposition.

Several miles astern the Mountie made out the other schooner, on the same course as that of the *Aurora*. He whispered to Burke for a few moments, then turned to the Russian, motioning with his revolver.

"Now listen, Dorberg, and get it straight, or you may not live to be hanged in civilized style at Herschel. No matter what I tell you to do within the next hour, you do it. We know all about you and the trap you tried to lead us into. We're going to get that schooner, and then attend to the 'Mystery Ship' you were so kindly piloting us to."

The Russian glowered. He spoke no word, but hatred showed in every line of his face.

Then, to the amazement of the pirate, the two Mounties apparently went mad. Burke ran to the cabin, switched off the engine, and reappeared almost instantly with two of the service rifles, whose magazines he emptied in a fusillade of wild shots, fired to all points of the compass, while McCree danced and tore about the deck, howling and shouting at the top of his voice.

Both men presently flopped to the deck, McCree keeping his revolver on a level with the Russian's head. Burke was engaged in fitting the cartridge belt on the Colt gun.

The schooner, helmless, swung broadside to the current, and was carried slowly along.

"Now listen again, carefully, Dorberg," McCree addressed the prisoner. "You are supposed to have taken this ship, and we're dead. Get that? All right! You go ahead and haul that ensign up and down on the halyards as a sign that you have captured the schooner. Then stand right where you are and signal to the *Baikal* to close in. If you make the wrong signal you won't make a second one!"

The Russian carried out his orders, Within a second the two men saw the *Baikal* forge ahead, make a wide detour to inspect the patrol boat, and then apparently satisfied that the lone figure was

that of the comrade, head direct for the *Aurora*.

"Go ahead and signal!" snapped McCree, watching every move of the prisoner. The Russian waved his arms, and yelled something across the water. The corporal could see two men standing in the bows of the *Baikal* return the salute. The vessel closed in until they were less than fifty feet apart.

"Now, Burke!" McCree whispered.

ANDY came to his knees and the Colt was spitting a stream of lead across to the decks of the other boat. The man at the wheel let go and leaped backward, while the two in the bows gesticulated madly at Dorberg, but made no attempt to get to the cabin, where their arms would be stored. Between them and it was a barricade of screaming lead!

"Tell that man at the wheel to shut the engine off. Let him know he'll be in the Happy Land, pronto, if he is not back on deck in a second, too," McCree threatened.

Dorberg bellowed across the water in his own tongue, and Burke sent another dozen shots screaming over from the Colt gun, which gave the helmsman added speed. He dived down into the cabin, to reappear almost immediately, and went over to the others, all three standing with their hands above their heads as the *Baikal* drifted down on the *Aurora*.

"Tell them to come aboard now, one at a time. You translate the order and then hold out your hands, Dorberg. Taking no chances with you," the corporal ordered as Burke swung the patrol boat over.

Dorberg made a line fast to the *Baikal's* bowsprit. Kharkoff and another man stepped over the rail to be promptly handcuffed. As the third man came forward McCree bent a look of incredulous surprise on him. A cry of mingled fear and horror came from the girl, crouched in a corner, unnoticed until now by the men. It was the man who had been left for dead in the cave!

The corporal brought his eyes to rest upon the face of the girl. Was it possible that she was this man's? This foreigner with the uncouth figure, his unshaven face covered with coarse black hair, the greasy, ill-fitting clothes, the knotted hands and the clumsy sea boots? Such a "dock-rat" as

one might run across any day on the wharves or in the dives of San Francisco or Seattle.

A wave of sheer physical disgust shook McCree.

#### IV

THE morning sun was glinting over the forbidding cliffs, shining on the white sides of the two schooners lying motionless on the glassy sea. Aboard the *Aurora* the scarlet Canadian ensign hung limply at half-mast; the water lapped gently against the sides of the vessel.

Not a sound came from the little group of men standing with bared heads at the patrol boat's rail.

Suddenly Burke raised his revolver and swung the threatening muzzle toward the Russians.

"Look reverent, you swine!" he commanded through compressed lips. The foreigners bent their heads.

McCree tenderly raised the shrouded remains of Constable Barton from the deck to the ship's rail. Behind the corporal the girl stood with her face buried in her hands as the Mountie intoned the only prayer he knew. Then the thing that was Charlie Barton slid slowly off the rail. The sea received it with a swift splash. The eddying circles grew wider and wider.

Not trusting himself to look at McCree, Burke barked a curt order to the Russians to get below, watching them out of sight before he vaulted into the cabin. The silence was broken again by the chug-chug of the gas engine, and the *Aurora's* bow was pointed eastward once more on her quest.

An hour later, despite violent protestations on the part of the prisoners, they were landed on a small island with a month's supply of provisions and their handcuffs removed.

"Don't worry about us forgetting you!" Burke yelled in parting, as the patrol boat backed offshore. "We'll be back, all right, and you can count on being tried for murder and piracy on the high seas just as soon as we get you to Herschel—and if the sergeant-major doesn't detail me to pull on the rope I'll quit the damn police!"

Farther down the rocky coast the *Baikal* was run into a deep inlet and securely

fastened, fore and aft. On the vessel remained the girl stowaway, emphatically against her will, though McCree explained again and again the danger of proceeding farther.

AS the *Aurora* was cast off and dropped away over the widening water there flared one sentence, repeated again and again:

"Oh! I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

"What's biting that jane, anyhow? She has a nice warm cabin and plenty of grub. Say, Dickie, women are the devil and all to understand!" Burke volunteered.

McCree whirled on him, eyes flashing dangerously.

"Who the devil asked you for your opinion? Get below and start the engine!"

"Holy mackinaw! What's got into the old boy? Never saw him like that before," Burke grumbled to himself, as he went to the cabin and cranked the motor.

On deck McCree steered blindly down the narrow channel. The patrol boat swung crazily from port to starboard.

CORPORAL MCCREE threw aside his telltale scarlet tunic, and, flattening his six feet of bone and sinew, carefully wormed his way to the crest of the cliffs that fringed the uncharted waters of Coronation Gulf.

With field-glasses he swept the ragged brown coast line below him. Sea birds wheeled in screaming circles. A school of walrus waddled down the shingled beach to disappear into their native element with roars of delight. Finally the Mountie picked up thin wisps of smoke from an Eskimo encampment close to the water's edge.

He moved to and fro impatiently, turning his eyes seaward to where the hot sun had drawn a mist from the sea-ice which still floated here and there in the frigid waters. Nothing but the glare of the white bergs through the fog greeted his anxious gaze.

He was about to crawl back from the brink of the cliff when an excited exclamation from his companion of "Quick! Look there!" caused him to wheel round. Following Burke's guiding finger, he raised the glasses again. As the fog lifted momen-

tarily he could see, clearly outlined against the blanket of white mist, three masts and the black hull of a large vessel.

"That's the Mystery Ship right enough!" he whispered half aloud. Burke nodded. "Well, Andy, we're up against it in good shape. That ship must carry a big crew; it's out of the question to think of going back to Herschel for reinforcements, and there's nothing ahead but a thousand miles of desolate coast peopled by the savage hunters of the sea-ice."

Burke nodded again, a smile at the corners of his cheerful mouth.

The two lone men had the choice of a forlorn hope, forward, or a reasonable retreat in the face of overwhelming odds, but they gave it not an instant's thought. Their orders read, "You will continue the patrol until this matter is brought to a satisfactory conclusion."

"These rocks are as hard as army bread. Let's go back to the patrol boat and have a good sleep before we get killed," Andy suggested.

The corporal was in no mood for jocularity. He sensed the magnitude of the task confronting them, and as the constable proceeded to roll over comfortably on his back and hum, "Home, Sweet Home," McCree turned the glasses on the black hull and untidy rigging of the brig, in a vain endeavor to discover the identity of the strange ship.

"No use lying here," he grumbled to himself. "Come on, Andy, we'll get back to the boat and talk things over."

The two men wormed their way back from the cliff face, donned their uniforms, and hurried down the bare hillsides to the western side of Cape Krusenstern, where, tied to the rocks, was the trim white shape of the schooner.

McCree leaped to the deck and walked aft, where he paced to and fro, wrapped in thought. Knowing that he would say nothing until the matter had been threshed out in his mind, Burke went to the cabin and cooked the usual meal of beans and bannock, which the two ate in silence.

WHEN the meal was over and their pipes were going full blast, McCree completed the outlines of his plans.

"A great life," Burke commented. "Down on the plains we're cavalry; dog-

mushers and canoemen in the Territories; sailors in the Arctic; and now we're going to have a whirl at being pirates for a change. However, you're the skipper, so let's go."

Together they unscrewed the Colt from its mountings and stowed it below decks, smeared mud on the polished brasswork, and threw the neatly coiled ropes in disordered heaps, allowing the sheeted sails to trail the decks from the booms.

This done, they threw off their uniforms, climbed into greasy overalls and worn parkas. Then, with the corporal at the wheel, the once spick and span *Aurora*, now effectually disguised as the average trading craft, was chugging along under the power of her gas engine.

Rounding the sheer cliffs of Cape Krusenstern, the patrol boat forged steadily along, McCree steering directly for the strange ship, which lay about two miles off shore. As they closed in on her they noted her sides, scraped and slivered by the action of the ice, and the clutter of Eskimo skin boats tied to the rope ladder hanging over the bulwarks amidships.

On the vessel itself there was no sign of life, except for a faint curl of smoke from the galley chimney.

McCREE ran the patrol boat within fifty feet of the stranger's stern. A sudden ejaculation of surprise swept him in sheer astonishment, as his eyes picked out the battered white letters forming the words, "*Valhalla*—Reykjavik."

"By Jupiter, Dorberg wasn't lying, after all," he murmured, marveling still. "The *Valhalla* of Reykjavik in Iceland; the ship whose disappearance with her whole crew is still one of the mysteries discussed by sailors in the ports of Scandinavia!"

He recounted her history in his mind. On a voyage in ballast from Iceland to Franz Joseph Land to load a cargo of coal at the hills of the black fuel there the ship had disappeared. Then had come word of a strange craft sailing down the Greenland coast, robbing the Eskimo settlements in Danish territory. Again she had been lost track of, to reappear now in the Canadian Arctic, having battled a passage in the intervening two years through the ice floes of Hudson's straits and the unknown coasts of the Northwest Passage, and

wantonly killing and pillaging on her way.

"But the Russians? How did they come to be in command of the vessel?" he asked himself. "Probably a raiding party from the White Sea, after the Soviet had risen to power." That seemed the logical conclusion. At any rate, they were on the ship.

The corporal's reverie was cut short by a shout from the *Valhalla* as a huge man lumbered to the raised poop deck, bawling across the water, "Ahoy there! What ship was that?"

McCree, cupping his hands, roared back in a thick voice:

"*Aurora* of Herschel Island, Captain, What ship are you?"

Ignoring the question, the man on the brig howled some order in a foreign tongue. A moment later a score of heads appeared above the bulwarks, several of the men jerking rifles up on the rail.

"Shut off the engine, Andy," McCree called, and the *Aurora* drifted in closer on the other vessel.

An order from the big man boomed out again. From the *Valhalla's* well deck came a chorus of shouts, cries, and women's voices. McCree, from his long residence in the Arctic, well knew they came from Eskimos.

"Hey, you!" the Russian called. "How far to dis Herschel Island?"

"About eight hundred miles, Captain."

"Those Canada police there, eh?"

"Oh yes! Plenty of them."

"What you doin' here?"

"Trading with the natives," McCree yelled back, as he slumped at the wheel.

"Vell, you stheer off, see! Dis country trade was all belong to us. You get out, see! Maybe you fellas get into trouble," he was informed by the captain of the *Valhalla*.

"Oh, we mind our own business, Captain. We'll keep away from your natives, all right," the corporal assured him. "We don't want any trouble."

He waved a hand in parting salute, the other answering by turning on his heel. Burke started the engine and in a few minutes the *Aurora* was out of earshot and making her way slowly toward Dease Straits.

For an hour McCree steered along the coast, then turned the schooner's bows for a river flowing from the north, and having

proceeded for a few miles up this stream the patrol boat was tied up once more.

"This is where someone gets it in the neck—probably us, from the looks of things," announced Burke cheerfully. The two men loaded themselves with packs of food and strapping on their revolver belts started to make their way back in the direction of the pirate ship and the Eskimo coast settlements they had passed during the morning.

## V

**D**ORBERG, squatting gloomily on the shingled beach of his island prison, followed the retreating shapes of the two vessels with baleful eyes. His humor was by no means improved by the actions of Constable Andrew Burke, at the wheel of the police boat. As the schooners swung to the north and came abeam, Burke performed a rude dance of derision, completing the performance by rudely placing his fingers to his nose—a wholly unjustified action, and distinctly against the Regulations!

"Well, you made a fine mess of it, Dorberg!" growled Kharkoff, kicking savagely at the loose beach stones. "Got us all landed here, and then when these cursed Mounted Police come back you'll be hung and good enough—"

Aflame with sudden passion, Dorberg jerked himself to his feet, picked up a large stone and with a venomous gesture launched himself at the other.

"If I'm going to swing, I'll fix you before I go, you—" he roared, his English suddenly tapering off into a flood of Russian.

Kharkoff rose partially, but was hurled to the ground again as Dorberg flung himself at the man, the two rolling over and over down the sharply shelving beach, roaring blasphemies in their native tongue, hacking at each other, yelling insanelly.

The two others stood back calmly and watched the fight. On the *Valhalla* they had witnessed many such scenes. "What if one or both of them get killed? So much the better; there will be more food for us!" they grinned at one another as the same thought struck them both.

Still rolling down the steep beach, arms whirling and legs kicking spasmodically in

the endeavor to obtain a foothold on the slippery surface, the two men toppled over and plunged into the ice-cold waters of the Arctic. Involuntarily each loosened his grip, staggered to his feet, and suddenly forgetting the quarrel scrambled out of the frigid water.

Kharkoff turned and walked back to the other two.

"God! I'm freezing!" he muttered. "Look, we've got to hang together until this thing is over. No use fighting. That's foolishness. I'm going to make a fire and dry out."

Seizing a sharp stone he commenced to break up one of the boxes in which the Mounted Police had put their food supplies ashore, and in a few minutes had a tiny blaze mounting. The others wandered along the beach searching for driftwood, cast up by the current.

Then Kharkoff and Dorberg silently pulled off their soaked clothing and standing with blankets wrapped around them dried their garments at the fire, looking about them vacantly at the brown treeless hillsides, the green, ice-flecked water, and the low, distant coast—the barren, lifeless Arctic.

**F**OR half an hour they stood thus, the fire gradually bringing back life to their numbed tissues. But their blood ran cold again in a moment when from the crest of the ridge which crossed the island came an unearthly chorus of yells. These were followed by the figures of the two Russians careening madly down the hillside, slipping on the loose shingle, rolling over and over, and gaining their feet, only to fall once more.

"Kharkoff! Kharkoff! What was that?" Dorberg shouted, pointing a quivering finger at the three huge, dirty white shapes racing clumsily but speedily behind the fleeing men.

Kharkoff stared and his face went white. "Polar bears!" he whispered at length with lips which could scarcely frame the words.

Throwing his blanket aside in a sudden panic, he commenced to run back and forth like a lost child. But at once it came to him that there was nowhere to go!

Screaming their terror, the two hunted men reached the fire, behind which they crouched, making meaningless, threatening

gestures at the three bears, which stopped short on catching the scent of the burning wood.

Here was something the great animals had never met before; this strange thing with the red eyes and crackling noise. They paused, undecided, long snouts wrinkled, heads weaving from side to side, the piercing black eyes shifting ceaselessly from the men to the fire, and back again. Here was food; these strange upright animals could be killed—but then that spitting, snapping thing!

"God! They're awful brutes!" moaned Dorberg, looking up at last. "They're starved." He pointed to the gaunt sides of the big she-bear and shuddered at the anticipatory saliva which flowed from the animal's drooling jaws as the deep-set eyes took in the figure of the crouching man.

He leaped to his feet. "We've got to do something quick! They won't come near the fire. One of you men get some wood. We must have wood or they'll kill us all! You hear that! We must have wood!"

Kharkoff turned on him and spat out, "Get the wood yourself; you got us into this mess and it's up to you to get us out of it again!"

The others chorused assent.

Dorberg glanced wildly about him; at the bears trotting about them in wide circles; at the few pieces of driftwood scattered along the beach. He threw himself down and whined hopelessly.

Kharkoff said something in whispered Russian to the others. They nodded decisively. Then the three suddenly rushed at Dorberg, jerking the trembling man to his feet. He looked in their eyes and read the message there!

"Get the wood! Get the wood! Get the wood! You said it yourself!" Kharkoff repeated the phrase a dozen times in an insane frenzy. Aided by the others, he picked Dorberg up, carried him a few steps beyond the fire and threw him down.

**T**HE man rolled over and over down the steep beach, but by a superhuman effort he stopped himself, got to his feet and commenced to scramble back toward the fire.

"Keep him off! Keep him off!" roared Kharkoff. Picking up a handful of sharp

stones he commenced hurling them at the unfortunate man. The others, quick to copy the master mind, followed suit; a shower of flints whizzed through the air, striking Dorberg on the head and body.

The panic stricken Russian howled curses in his native tongue, pleaded, cajoled, threatened, but in the eyes of his comrades he saw no mercy. Still the showers of knife-edged rocks steadily ripped his flesh. At last, with a despairing cry, he turned and fled down the beach, falling and rising, only to fall again.

But the bears did not stumble! This was their native land. With clumsy fleetness they raced after the man. He turned to feel the animal's hot breath in his face, raised his hands appealingly and gave one last terrible cry. The great mother bear reared upward with a snort; one slash of the huge forearm and Dorberg tumbled in a heap.

The sailors at the campfire—hardened butchers of helpless Eskimos though they were—shuddered at the horrid noises coming from where the three dirty white backs bent and tore at the bloody thing on the ground. But through death they must live.

"Get the wood! Get the wood!" Kharkoff mouthed again and again. It was becoming a chant with him now.

While the bears made their bestial meal the three men raced back and forth in short runs, gathering such small pieces of wood as lay within reach.

**I**N a little while the bears rose, and squatting again licked their horribly stained fur. All three presently got up and padded forward silently with a peculiar swaying motion to where the Russians stood by the little fire. They circled the men slowly, coming closer and closer, finally all lying down flat to gaze with inquiring eyes at the fire. At times the younger animals slapped at one another with puppyish gestures. Each time they did so the old bear turned on them and growled. This was hunting, not play.

"More fires! More fires!" yelled Kharkoff suddenly coming out of a stupor of fear.

"Yes, yes!" agreed the other two. "Build many small fires and stand between them!"

The leader, heedless of agonizing burns, grabbed a flaming handful of sticks, and



advancing a few steps threw it down, adding fuel to it from the stock they had gathered. The other Russians copied him. In a minute they were surrounded by a circle of little fires which flamed up brightly.

"Fine! Fine! That's the idea!" they called to one another. But the happy looks on their faces froze almost instantly. In building the new fires they had used up all their meager supply of wood!

"Better get some wood, Kharkoff! You said it yourself! Go on, and get wood! Hurry now!"

The two advanced toward him, each taking his cue from the other. In their hard eyes he saw no mercy. He was to be the next sacrifice!

With a maniacal yell Kharkoff leaped out through the circle of dwindling fires and howling, "Get the wood! Get the wood!" floundered madly down the beach to plunge into the freezing Arctic with a despairing shout. The green waters closed over his head. Bubbles rose and gentle wavelets circled smoothly to lap the stones of the brown island.

THE three bears took scant notice of the tragedy. With eyes still fixed on the two men and the dwindling fires, they waited patiently. The cunning of the Arctic was in their minds. Battling always for an existence in this terrible wilderness, they knew from bitter experience all that a life of kill or be killed had to teach. They sensed that the man-animals were theirs.

The she-bear got up on her hind legs, sniffed, and drew closer. The fires were nothing but a flicker of small flames now.

The men could stand no more. With one accord they turned and fled up the beach, their frenzied cries echoing out over the bitter waters.

Once or twice the three bears looked at the retreating figures, but made no effort to follow. The killings could wait. But how about these curious smells? They sniffed and sniffed, drawing closer and closer. At last the old bear stepped daintily past the still glowing embers, and with one slap of a long-clawed forearm split open a large container of dried apples. The cubs followed suit, scattering the contents of the food supply with ecstatic grunts.

In a few minutes nothing remained but

battered tins, torn bags and fragments of boxes.

Once again the old bear raised herself erect, whined, and turned along the beach in the direction taken by the two Russians. At her heels obediently trotted the cubs, heads weaving from side to side, long hair waving.

## VI

RANGED round the *Valhalla's* well deck were Eskimos' skin shelters, attached to the bulwarks with rawhide thongs. In front of the tents women and children were cooking fish and blubber over shallow stone cooking lamps. Howling huskie dogs were tied to the masts. In the waist a group of Eskimo men squatted, cutting up the carcass of a small white whale with their long knives. Ropes hung from the slewed yards in tangled festoons, and everywhere were the remains of fish scattered on the greasy decks, pieces of driftwood, bones and caribou horns.

Two men, reaching the brig from ashore, unconcernedly picked their way through this maze, going aft to where a group stood smoking on the poop.

"Well?" queried one in Russian. Obviously he was the leader, judging from his air of authority.

"Everything is all right, Captain. We won't have any trouble with that bunch." The big man grunted, and turning to one of the captured Icelandic crew ordered him to get the engines overhauled. "We're going out of here in the morning. Not enough wind to carry us through the straits. And you"—he gave his attention to the knot of men behind him—"get the big whaleboat lowered away and have these decks cleaned up. Quick, too!" He advanced menacingly upon the original crew of the brig, who moved rapidly out of range.

Captain Kuzin jerked his dirty sea-jacket up on his shoulders and motioned to a man nearby.

"Come below, Kichinski."

They descended the after companionway to the cabin. This was in keeping with the deck. Four bunks were set in the cabin walls, which were littered with clothing and bedding. The center table was covered with the remains of a meal on top of which was tossed a map and a sextant.

Five Eskimo girls, dressed in white fox skins, were squatted cross-legged on the floor sewing bead embroideries on sealskin boots. With the entrance of the Russians they rose to their feet, smiling good-naturedly.

"Throw them klotches out!" the captain ordered brusquely. Kichinski beckoned to the girls to leave. As they prepared to do so, one, apparently a favorite, playfully twisted her finger in a lock of shaggy hair which strayed over the mate's forehead. He flung her hand aside with a brutal gesture, at the same time dealing her a resounding smack on the cheek with his open palm. The girl stumbled and fell, carrying two others to the cabin floor with her.

Both men roared with laughter, as the girl, turning fearful eyes on the Russians, ran for the companionway.

"Well, Kichinski, things look as good here as they did in Greenland, eh?" the captain growled, reaching for a bottle and glasses from a shelf under the table.

"Fine, Captain," agreed the other. "You're leaving for Admiralty Island in the morning?"

"Yes, Ivan. Here's the way I have it planned. We have about a hundred of these Eskimos on board now, and with the gang coming tonight we'll have plenty of hunters. Victoria Land is the best white fox country in the Arctic, these natives here say, and there's thousands of caribou as well."

"I'm going to turn the Eskimos loose with enough poison to get every white fox that runs on four legs. We'll be able to buy all the vodka in Siberia, Mister Mate! Good old vodka, hein? That's a man's drink—strong waters for we strong men of the north, eh? No trouble to get these deer, either. All you have to do is to send the hunters into the herds and kill till you're sick of it. While the Eskimos are poisoning the foxes I'll put these Icelanders to work killing the caribou and loading them on the ship. We have plenty of cargo space left, and we can sell the meat to the native settlements on our way down to Vladivostok. When we're through with this Canadian coast, we'll clean up the Alaskan mission stations on our way south. Not missing much, eh?"

"Sure, Captain; that's fine. I'm getting suspicious of these Icelanders, though.

Petroff says they talk a lot amongst themselves now. Not a bad idea to show them who is running this ship, Captain?"

"Yes," Kuzin agreed thoughtfully. "That fellow, Ingstrom, is trying to stir up some trouble maybe. He has too much to say. Might as well use him to frighten the rest of them. We need them now to get these caribou—after that, who knows?" He made a significant gesture toward the frigid waters lapping the side of the vessel.

KICHINSKI reached for the bottle, nodding grimly.

"How about going ashore for those Eskimos now, Captain? We should be all clear to pull out of here at daylight."

"All right; pass that bottle and reach down that whip." The mate handed over a heavily tonged knout with a loaded handle. The captain arose and followed by the other lumbered up the companionway to the deck. There they saw that the crew had the whaleboat in the water and were engaged in clearing up the decks.

With Kichinski trailing behind, the captain strode to the well deck and proceeded to exact discipline by bringing the stinging knout down across the shoulders of any Eskimos within reach—man, woman or child.

Kuzin walked over to where three of the Icelanders were struggling with the greasy remains of the white whale in an effort to raise it to the edge of the bulwarks to throw it over.

"Get under it! Get under it!" the captain bellowed, advancing upon the struggling men. Nervous at his menacing presence, the men fumbled with the slippery thing, raised it almost to the top of the bulwarks, when it slid back to the deck again.

With an infuriated roar the watching man sprang at them, bringing down his knout with resounding blows. All eyes were turned to the three, who made no effort to get away, merely shielding their heads with their arms, as the cruel lash fell again and again. The man Ingstrom, with more spirit than the rest, took a step toward the captain in a fruitless effort to explain.

"No chat from you, Scandinavian fish-eater. I'll show you who is master aboard this craft!" Reversing the knout, the captain brought the loaded stock down crush-

ingly on the Icelander's unprotected head.

"Over with him!" Kuzin roared, tossing the whip to Kichinski, who forced a group of the Eskimo men to toss the insensible Icelander over the rail. Then, as if nothing out of the usual had happened, the mate bellowed "Man the whaleboat!" the terrified Icelanders rushing to obey his order.

Within a few hours the sound of oars brought the captain to the railing of the poop deck, where he looked down to see the whaleboat passing under the *Valhalla's* stern. The boat was loaded with white fox skins, on top of which squatted a number of Eskimo women and children, with men in their kayaks paddling behind.

DELIGHT gleamed in the natives' eyes as they wandered about the ship's decks. They laughed and talked loudly, chattering excitedly as the vessel's cook came forward with a concoction of boiled rice and currants, ladling a stiff ball of the pudding into the outstretched hands.

"Bring the stuff!" Kuzin ordered as he noted the effect of the gift. In a minute the cook was back with a large pot of highly sweetened liquid and a tin cup. Purposely helping the men first, he gave each a mugful of the drink. Those served presently squatted on the deck, swaying a little as if from dizziness. Finally they lay down, and in less than ten minutes the whole band was helpless in the power of the drug.

"That'll fix them for twenty-four hours," grunted the captain. "Heave up the whaleboat, Mister Mate, and clear away to sail at daylight."

IT was still dark when the Icelanders were routed out of the fo'castle and put to work on the capstan. Presently, with Kichinski at the wheel, the heavy gas engine was awakening the echoes, and the mate spun the *Valhalla's* bows for Admiralty Island and the plunger which was to fill her holds to overflowing.

With dawn creeping over the brown hills the Russian took his bearings from the compass. He glanced indifferently at the prostrate bodies on the well deck. Sweeping the shore line with a casual glance, he chuckled on seeing the little cluster of ravaged skin shelters on the bay, which would stand neglected until the Arctic storms carried them away. Doubtless his

merriment would have been less hearty had he noted, on a distant point, a uniformed figure carefully observing every movement on the ship through a field-glass.

What he did not know, also, was that lying on the deck amongst the Eskimos was one man to whom the skin garments were new. Seemingly unconscious from the drug, at that moment Constable Andrew Burke's round face was peering cautiously over the hood of his parka!

## VII

THE corporal lay for an hour on the brink of the cliff watching the slattern yards of the *Valhalla* gradually fading into the east. The ship moved slowly. He was puzzled at this, knowing how she was engaged. Then he remembered the years the vessel had been at sea, and how by now her wooden hull would be covered with a thick marine growth of weeds and shellfish life.

"It will take her at least three days to make it through the Gulf and Dease straits to Admiralty Island," he reflected. "In the meantime there's nothing for me to do but lie around."

McCree loathed idleness; he was never happy unless moving fast. He rolled over on his back, staring up into the cloudless blue vault of heaven under the shade of his broad-leafed Stetson.

"Whiskers on the moon!" he laughed to himself, using one of Burke's assorted exclamations. "I've heard of that, but this thing of curls on the sun is something new!" But curls there were, inviting little fluffy twists, meant expressly for twining about a forefinger. Big, long-lashed brown eyes looked down at him. There was a divine pout on the sun's rosy lips.

He got up, shook himself, and straightened his uniform. The *Valhalla* was out of sight. Nothing met his eyes now but one brown rock cape jutting beyond another; a few bergs glinting under the sun's rays; the circling gulls.

"Well, why not?" the thought came to him. Perhaps the girl might be terrified at her loneliness. He had time at his disposal now to talk to her—and alone; to settle once and for all what her mission was, and her relationship to these uncouth foreigners. He might have misjudged her.

"Anyhow, I'll make her say 'I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!' again," the corporal chuckled to himself, his fancy drinking in the picture of the small figure tensed, the flashing eyes, and the emphatic foot stamping—stamping—stamping.

In an hour he was back on the schooner and chugging off to the west. That evening he swung the *Aurora's* bows up the rocky estuary, unconsciously giving his service hat a rather more rakish tilt, tugging his uniform down, and peering eagerly ahead.

His eyes widened. He rubbed them to make sure the vision was not defective. No! He was not blind. There, clear and distinct, were the red rocks, the shingled beach, and the brown hills—but the *Baikal* was gone!

"DARN it all, McCree let me into a nice mess doing the Eskimo act aboard this cursed wind-jammer!" Burke muttered to himself, as he strode up and down the cluttered deck. "Here I am as helpless as a monkey without a tail. Might just as well be back playing poker with the lads at Herschel as wasting my valuable time wandering up and down, looking like the Wild Man from—"

The constable's train of thought was suddenly interrupted. From the direction of the cabin came a succession of heart-rending woman's screams. He wheeled about involuntarily and gazed about the crowded pirate ship—at the heedless Eskimos; at the black-visaged Icelanders coiling ropes and throwing rubbish overboard.

"Hell! I've just about had enough of this watching and waiting business. Constable Andrew Burke, regimental number 786, kiss yourself good-bye!" Before he well realized what he was doing, he had reached the door of the cabin.

Another scream welled up, and the Mountie was out of sight.

He took the short flight of steps at one bound. The scene in the cabin seared itself on his brain. In the far corner three Eskimo girls clung to one another, staring with fearful eyes to where Kichinski was forcing another maiden into the waiting arms of the captain. The message she read in his loathsome gaze penetrated even to the dull consciousness of the Eskimo woman. With all her strength she resisted him, struggling uselessly.

Burke launched himself through the air with a catapult-like spring. Disdaining all the ethics of civilized warfare, he rammed one knee hard into Kuzin's stomach, and reached the floor astride the Russian, sending in blow after blow.

"You black chimpanzee—*smack! smack!*—Want jungle scrapping, eh?—*crack!*—All right—here's a cavalry wallop—*smack!*—you foul—"

The constable's Irish blood ran away with his caution. He forgot all else but the punishment due this brute about whose thick throat his fingers were digging deep into the ugly flesh.

Sensing that assistance would come, Kuzin clung to Burke, suffering the blows which crashed into his face. Kichinski rushed forward, throwing aside the table to kick savagely with his heavy sea boots. In less than a moment the Mountie was stretched on the cabin floor, a mangled mass.

The Eskimo girls fled in a mad frenzy, falling over each other in their flight. Kichinski took no notice of them whatever. He bent all his energies toward reviving his chief, pouring the raw Danish whisky down his throat, bathing his head with cold water.

At last Kuzin sat up dazedly—a red-eyed disgust—feeling his battered lips and stinging neck. Blubbering thickly through his puffed lips, he pointed to Burke.

"Kill that swine—and the girl, too!"

The mate reached for his seaman's knife.

"No, not that, you fool! Too quick! Throw them both overboard!"

He took no further interest in the matter or in anything else, except to gulp another mouthful of whisky and fling himself down on his bunk, moaning.

Kichinski lumbered out, returning to the cabin shortly with two Icelanders, who at a sharp command from the mate carried the still unconscious constable up the steep stairway. They laid him down near the gunwhale.

"Bring that girl Natook!" the mate roared into the gloom of the well deck. Struggling and screaming, the Eskimo girl was dragged to the rail beside the Mountie.

"Come on there! What d'ya think this is—a party? Over with 'em!"

Kichinski stood behind the sailors watching the four men bend to their task. The limp body of the constable was raised to

the rail to roll over and disappear, with the girl immediately behind him, fighting to the last.

All five men craned their heads overboard to listen for the telltale splash of the icy water.

Not a sound came!

### VIII

MOLLY VERNON sat huddled on the cabin floor, brimming eyes staring hopelessly at the black bulk of the silent engine. "You've got to go! You've just got to!" Grasping the crank handle she put all her frail strength into a final effort. Nothing came but a sucking sound from the mass of cold steel.

She sank back on the cabin floor, nursing her bruised hands.

"Oh! Why did I ever do it?" she moaned despairingly. "The schooner is adrift, a thousand miles from the nearest white outpost. Oh! how foolish I was!" The girl sprang to her feet, eyes wide. "Am I going insane? Is this madness, or—"

She raced to the deck, and with the binoculars swept the surface of the Arctic, her body trembling with excitement.

"It was a shout! It was a shout!" Silent lips framed the words as her straining eyes picked up two fur-clad figures on an ice-pan scarcely large enough to hold them. They were waving frantically.

She ran to the stern, pulled the schooner's canoe alongside, and lowering herself carefully into the little craft paddled toward the figures on the ice-pan.

Her eyes widened; the paddle nearly slid from her fingers. Standing on the fragment of floating ice was Constable Burke, and beside him a young Eskimo woman.

Molly caught her breath excitedly. Her questions tumbled over each other.

"What is the meaning of all this? How- ever did you get there? Where is Corporal McCree? Has anything happened to him? Tell me at once!"

Burke gripped the canoe, lifted the Eskimo girl aboard, slid in himself and turned to Molly Vernon.

"Got any beans?" he asked. "Say, Natook and I are hungry enough to eat our moccasins! McCree? Oh! Dick's all

right, I guess. Couldn't hurt that son of a gun with an ax!"

The girl stamped her foot. Burke laughed again, took the paddle and set out for the schooner.

"How did we get on the ice-pan? Easy as kiss your hand! Russians threw us off the *Valhalla* and we landed kerplunk on the darned thing. Just happened to be sliding past. Say, when I get back to Des Moines, I'll never say 'No' to an ice-man again. Great respect for the stuff now. Would have passed out, though, but for this little girl. Great kid!"

Natook glanced from one to the other in her endeavor to understand their expressions as they talked. She returned Molly's sympathetic smile with suspicious eyes, holding tight to Burke's parka with a gesture which plainly read: "This is my man! You leave him alone!"

Andy pushed back his plate regretfully.

"Now we'll tangle with this won't-work engine and hit back for the shore," he decided. "The corporal is somewhere back there watching for the *Valhalla*."

THE girl's face brightened at this casual mention of McCree. Her heart was singing a little song of: "Dick is here! Dick is here!" With a happy tune on her lips she climbed the short steps to the deck—to be gripped by a pair of huge, hairy hands!

Screaming, struggling, she cried to Burke for help.

"Yell away, little one. That's the way the Captain likes 'em. So you're the young lady from the United States, eh? Pretty too. If old Kuzin doesn't want you, perhaps I'll keep you myself. Hein?"

As her head jerked level with his shoulder she saw Burke behind them. Then, thundering across the *Baikal's* deck, the heavy tramp of the pirates' sea-boots.

Alongside was one of the brig's whale-boats crowded with men. Beyond a distant point showed the slatternly yards of the Russian ship.

Kichinski doubled with laughter. "So you brought the *Baikal* back alone, eh? But Dorberg, Kharkoff and the others, what of them? You don't know? Well, we'll make you talk! And your friend here is not an Eskimo after all? Swears pretty near good enough for a sailor! And he and Natook are going back to the *Valhalla*

too. Himmell! But we'll have fine sport aboard the ship tonight!"

The whaleboat pushed off. Oars splashed as she threaded her way in and out through the ice-pan, carrying her prisoners to their fate.

WEIGHTED down with his camp equipment, ammunition, and extra service revolver, Corporal McCree made slow progress over the rolling brown hills and through the deep valleys still carpeted with snow on the sheltered slopes.

Day after day he passed through the caribou herds feeding on the mosses and lichens. Gentle creatures these deer were, staring at him with timid eyes. There were uncounted thousands—a shifting, softly colored brown mass covering the whole face of the country.

"These Russians had it well planned out, all right," McCree told himself as he dwelt upon the ease with which they could fill the holds of their vessel. "Well they won't do it—unless they get me first."

The corporal knew he must be approaching Admiralty Bay from the time he had taken in the crossing of Victoria Land. He proceeded more cautiously now, and upon making each succeeding hill, wormed his way slowly to the crest, peering out over the next valley before rising to his feet again.

On the fourth morning, after he had traveled several hours, he crawled carefully to the top of a hill and elevated his head above the abrupt crest.

"Great guns!" Surprise sucked his breath in between his teeth like a rusty whistle.

He had reached the pirates' meeting place at last!

From the hill top the ground sloped gently to the peaceful sea, against which the *Valhalla's* masts and spars were thrown up in keen relief. On the sides of the hills the herds of caribou moved about, occasionally lifting their antlered heads to gaze and scent at this new odor invading their pastures.

"Hell's delights! So that's the idea, is it?" the Mountie queried explosively as he witnessed the actions of the toiling men strung along the hills. "They're going to build two long walls of loose stones to the ship, and then drive the caribou down

to the killing place near the vessel. Of course, these deer have never seen a barrier of any kind and will naturally trot calmly down to the butchery!" The enormity of the thing held him breathless.

The corporal commenced an unhurried inspection through the glasses of the scene. Some of the Eskimo faces in the nearest working party he knew, but although he went up and down the line time and again, in search of the short figure and jovial face of his comrade, he could not find him.

"Wonder if they've got Andy? He's a reckless devil, anyhow, and may have got himself into some jackpot or another. Perhaps I should not have let him go; I sure need the old boy now," he thought.

He shook off the feeling of uneasiness and crept down the hill. He worked his way along the lower slopes until he came to the head of the wide valley, where the out-flung wings of the wall commenced.

For an hour the corporal lay watching with as much patience as he could summon. He kept his eyes fixed on the nearest Eskimo party as it drew nearer and nearer.

Satisfied, at last, he rose to his knees, cupped his mouth with his hands and three times gave the long, low hunting call of the Innuits.

The Eskimos dropped their stones, staring wildly about them.

"I've got to risk everything now!" McCree muttered, whipping off his scarlet tunic and holding it so that it was in plain sight of the natives. In a low, penetrating voice he called to them:

"Behold the Red Coats come to free the People of the Ice. Let one only advance slowly, the others performing their tasks. You, Innitok! Come to me slowly, creeping upon thy belly as does the white fox! Slowly now, slowly!"

The Eskimos turned to one another.

"Behold the Red Coats never lie," they muttered. "Here is one of the Very Strong Men! He comes from the Great White King to take us from these men. It is well. Let Innitok go forward."

In a minute the native was around the corner of the hill and out of sight. A little whisper of dispelled breaths came from the watching men.

McCree wasted no time.

"You did well, Innitok. Now tell of this

thing. Speak of these strange men from the Far Country, telling all."

For more than an hour the Eskimo talked with the corporal, and listening, McCree formed his plans.

"It's a desperate chance," he thought, "but I'll have to take it. It means relying on these natives and the Icelanders when the time comes to strike, and they may fail me. However, there's no other way out."

"Listen, Innitok!" He explained his plan of action to the native in detail, going over it several times. Then he made the Eskimo repeat it word for word, impressing on him the necessity for getting his message broadcast to both his own race and the captured crew of the *Valhalla*.

"Great Master! Have I not driven dogs for the Mounted Police? Do I not speak some words of your tongue? It is well. Innitok is no child!"

Again the Eskimo flattened himself upon the ground and wriggled back to his comrades, unobserved, as McCree thought.

## IX

**D**USK was clothing the gaunt hills with purple shadows, softening the glare of the ice-pans, blotting out the tapering masts of the pirate ship.

At a shrill whistle from the *Valhalla* the groups of men dotting the hillside obediently commenced to straggle back to the ship. The day's work was done.

Hearing the call Captain Kuzin lumbered up from the cabin, a hard look coming into his eyes as he glimpsed Molly Vernon pacing to and fro on the starboard side of the poop deck. He lumbered across the deck, crossed in front of the girl and blocked her way.

"So you don't like me, little spitfire, eh? That's all right; stamp that foot again. I like it. But I am going to make you do what I want, see? You are not the first girl to learn that from Captain Kuzin in the cabin of the *Valhalla*." He laughed evilly, reaching for her. "Kiss me, little gir—"

"You loathsome beast!" Fiercely she wrenched herself from his surprised grasp, racing blindly across the deck, Kuzin at her heels, cursing, reaching, just missing her every time.

Hearing the captain's bellows of rage,

Kichinski darted from his cabin to aid in the pursuit. He stumbled over an out-thrust foot and fell to the deck with a crash.

Clinging to his throat, Burke struck him blow after blow over the head with an iron belaying pin.

The mate lay still. Andy did not wait to find out whether he was alive or dead, but followed the flying figures of Kuzin and the girl to the shore.

**T**HE girl raced straight for the hillside, Kuzin close behind her. Several of his men sprang forward to stop her.

"Keep away! Keep away, you—" the captain howled. "I'll catch that woman myself. None of you touch her. Stand off!"

Molly Vernon prayed wildly as she sped along. She could not hold out much longer. Already her speed was slackening. She was weak and her labored breathing was agony.

"Oh! God!" she groaned, her knees giving way. "The sea! the sea!" There was a refuge. She turned for the cold, green water, stumbled, fell, came to her knees and put a hand dazedly to her head.

Two spurts of flame almost blinded her. From behind came a muffled groan.

McCree jumped across Kuzin's lifeless body and raced headlong down the slope calling "Areah! Areah!"—the hunting call of the Innuits.

"The Red Coats have come! The Red Coats have come!" howled the waiting Eskimos, leaping and gesticulating in a frenzy of delight, as the lone Mountie tore forward—one against scores.

With Innitok's message still ringing in their ears the natives seized the sharp stones from the walls and hurled themselves on the Russians.

Dozens fell under the pirates' revolver shots, but in a second the gaps in the ranks were filled again.

**I**NTO the battle went the Icelanders howling the age-old sagas of their native isle. This was the hour for which they had hoped and prayed.

They tore at the Russians with horrible savagery. McCree saw one Icelandic giant grasp one of the pirates by the heels, and dash his head against the stone wall.

"Hey! Dick! Gimme a gun! Quick!" panted Burke at the corporal's elbow. Without speaking McCree jerked a revolver out of the second holster.

Shoulder to shoulder they made for the thick of the fight, picking out the armed Russians, shooting them down without mercy. There was little for them to do, however. The long pent-up fury of the *Valhalla's* crew was let loose upon the pirates like a flaming tidal wave.

"No use trying to stop the killing, Andy; let them go to it. But great Heavens, it's sickening!" McCree turned on his heel in disgust.

"Stop them? Not me!" ejaculated Andy. "Go to it, boys! Here comes the Irish Brigade!"

"Cut that out, Andy! That's orders, yes! Let those screaming maniacs finish the business. We're police and we still have work to do. You go down and take charge of the ship. We may have trouble handling the men after this is over. See that they don't get to the cabin where the liquor is stored. The Eskimos will be wanting to stage one of their dances tonight, so I guess we won't be able to get away until the morning. Get the Icelanders to work putting the gun in shape for sea. I'm going up for Miss Vernon."

The constable watched him go, a quizzical smile about his wide mouth.

"By cripes, those two give me a severe pain. We'll each of us draw about twenty thousand dollars for grabbing this windjammer. We've had a nice little vacation on full pay and young Cupid's plugged our hides full of arrows! Hell—they're crazy!" Burke turned to where the remaining Russians were running for their lives. "Sic 'em, Towser!"

McCREE went slowly up the hill.

"Miss Vernon," he began without looking at the girl, "I want you to understand that I have no personal interest in the matter, but as a Mounted Policeman I must ask you now for a detailed statement of your reasons for being in the Arctic. I must remind you that you are under arrest unless you do so."

Molly Vernon had been waiting, but not for this! She flushed, came to her feet suddenly, and faced him heatedly.

"I won't be bullied! I will tell you nothing!" A sudden gust of misery shook her.

Something in her voice, something in her deep eyes—of hurt and truth—whipped his blood to fierce action. Before he realized what he was doing she was in his arms and he was whispering passionately, "I love you, Molly! I love you in spite of everything—even of the past!"

Molly Vernon lifted her head quickly. A hint of laughter dawned in her eyes.

"You mean that I really did not—not—belong to Dorberg. And you want me anyway? You love me like that?"

McCree nodded, drawing her closer, but she held him back.

"Dick," she said gravely, "because you are big enough to want me in the face of all that, I'd like to tell you the truth. First of all I came up from Seattle on the Hudson Bay's steamer to teach the Eskimo children at the Aklavik mission. Then—" she shivered, her hands tightening about his. "I was wandering about the island, waiting for the mission schooner, and I was captured by those Russians. They were taking me away to their ship when you saved me from that—and I—I loved you, Dick, almost from that moment. Oh! stop, Dickie; let me finish! I knew you would be in danger on the patrol boat so I made up my mind that I would go with you and share the danger. Of course, I went away on the *Baikal* because I hated you then—but I don't hate you quite so much now! There!"

McCree lifted her chin with one finger. Their lips met.

From all about them came the gentle stepping of the caribou in the darkness. Lights glimmered faintly on the *Valhalla*; shouts and laughter echoed out across the Arctic waters.

The bizarre music of an Icelander's accordion came to them on the still air, accompanied by the monotonous thudding of the Eskimos' tom-toms.

Molly crept closer into the Mountie's arms.

"What a funny noise," she whispered, smiling a little. McCree smiled too, looking down into her face.

"The wedding march of the Mounted Police, little sweetheart," he said, "played by the drums of the Frozen Sea."