

North-West ROMANCES

STORIES 20c
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 TREKKED
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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A Complete Novel of the Yukon

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"Gold stamped!" The whisper raced on blizzard wings. Cameo Dowd, five-ace king, Burke, the Chechako, and the Girl from Outside follow it to feud's end where the Grim Reaper waited for pay-off.

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Spoilers of Paradise Valley

By ROGER DANIELS

A valley of life in a land of frozen death. A golden-haired goddess in an Eden of a savage, lost race. Through screaming blizzards Corporal Peters sought them—his only sign-posts a madman's ravings and a skeleton's long-stilled boast!

A Novel of the Far Country

“**M**ON Pere! *Le bon Dieu. . .*”
Out of the night and the North, Alcide Jacquard burst into the cabin of Gordon, the missionary, on the lonely reaches of the lower Mackenzie.

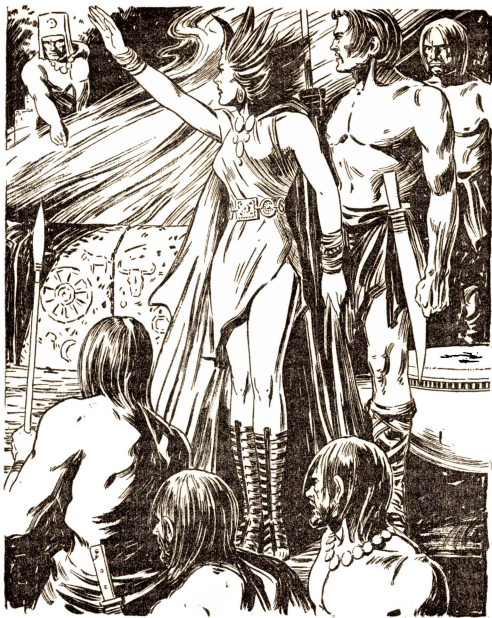
For half the long Arctic night Gordon had been waiting for Jacquard's return, a vigil now of nearly three months, but he had looked for no such pitiful end-of-the-trail appearance as this.

It was seven months since the Geological Survey, for which Jacquard had acted as guide, had given up its search for prehistoric deposits and had passed back through the river trading posts bound for 106

home. But Jacquard had not come with them. The leader of the expedition had said something about “hare-brained.”

That was no new tale to Gordon. There were many who had hinted that Alcide was a half-wit, for all that he knew the trackless ice fields and tundra as a cat at night knows a neighborly alley.

Gordon did not forget the time when he lay helpless with a broken leg and the signs of tetanus beginning to show. It was Jacquard who had fought his way through a week-old blizzard to Fort Murray and had brought back Peters, acting Post surgeon. Peters, too, was one of the few who had a liking for Jacquard and credited the



guide with more wisdom than many of the half-breed's weird notions would countenance in others.

So when the flaming red and green and gold curtain of the Aurora Borealis sent its great folds rolling across the northern sky to proclaim the coming of the Arctic night Gordon prepared to wait it out for Jacquard.

Always before the half-breed had come to the little cabin with a smile that showed his even white teeth. Now, he lay where

he had fallen, an inert heap of numbed flesh and fur, on the floor of the cabin.

Gordon sprang from the table, where he had been reading, to lift the unconscious figure in his strong arms and bear it to the rude bunk in the corner. Jacquard was like a dead man. Gordon virtually tore the parka from him and with his clasp knife hacked away the frozen boot lacings.

When he put his hand to the heel of a boot to pull it off the knowledge that comes to a man who has lived long in the North

told him that the foot was frozen. So he went to work again with the knife, cutting away the boot.

Several hours passed before Jacquard opened his eyes; breathless, almost frantic hours for Gordon. His medical training consisted of a thoroughgoing first aid. He had rubbed the half-breed's frozen feet and hands with snow. He had swathed him in heated blankets. But Jacquard needed more than first aid. When finally he did open his eyes it was to give the missionary another shock.

"Blind, mon Pere," he whispered, putting a bandaged hand to his face. "Two, t'ree day since everyt'ing she go red."

"Good Lord!" Gordon bent over the bunk to stare helplessly into the unseeing eyes. "How under heaven did you get here, Alcide?"

"How the leetle mole she find his way, eh, mon Pere? *Le bon Dieu*, he geev the mole no eye. How she find his way? By gar! Alcide he crawl here by his nose just lak the leetle mole she crawl!"

Jacquard's arm fell and he slipped back in the blankets. Gordon clenched his fists and turned to walk up and down the small room.

Suffering was not a new thing to him, nor was death. But after his long wait, to have Alcide come back to him broken by the Arctic weighed down on him until he could have cried out to high heaven in his anguish. Instead he knelt in prayer, and his prayer was that the end of suffering might come quickly. He was still on his knees before the bunk when he felt the half-breed move. Jacquard raised himself painfully to an elbow. His blank eyes turned vacantly toward the missionary.

"MEBBE, mon Pere don' ask Alcide why he come back, eh?"

Gordon tried to answer and choked.

"Why Alcide don' care one damn if he lose dogs, eh? Why he don' care one damn if he lose t'ousan' dog, eh?"

It was a living horror to have to stand and stare into those unseeing eyes. Gordon heard what the half-breed said like a man under the grip of a terrible nightmare. Every word came to him as in a dream and he was powerless to answer, powerless even to move. He prayed dumbly that the agony of the man before him might

be his own, yet knowing that the prayer was futile. All he could do was to stand there helpless and alone. The cruel torture of the journey back to civilization had driven Alcide mad.

As if the man on the bunk had read his thoughts Gordon heard him whisper:

"Mebbe, mon Pere, he t'ink Alcide he go, w'at you call him? Off his nut, eh? By gar!" The half-breed showed his teeth in a leering grin. Then he leaned forward and went on almost in a mad frenzy.

"All his life Alcide he look for somet'ing. Mebbe, mon Pere, he ask w'at it is Alcide he find? Eh? Mebbe mon Pere he lak to know himself w'at she is?" A maudlin laugh rang through the room.

Gordon shuddered. The fear and loneliness he had felt looming up around him descended with a menacing suddenness as he sensed the cunning with which Jacquard was trying in his mad way to cloak his insane dream.

"Come, come, Alcide, you're all right now, lie quiet." He tried to put assurance into the words, but his voice sounded hollow.

The half-breed, if he heard, gave no sign. He merely grinned.

"How you lak be king, eh, mon Pere? She is fine to be king! Have beautiful wife, eh? Two, t'ree, mebbe ten wife! She is fine job, eh, mon Pere? You t'ink Alcide mean squaw. Mais oui, thees woman he is white. White, mon Pere, lak when gold she is white! And eyes, mon Pere! Thees woman he has eyes so blue lak the sky! Alcide he go crazee, w'at you t'ink?"

Jacquard sank down. Gordon pulled the covers up over him and then went back to his table. All he could do was wait; he knew that. He knew also that the real task before him was to keep his own mind clear of this mad dream that had taken possession of the half-breed's brain. One maniac in a cabin above the Arctic circle was enough.

But there was something strangely insidious in the dream and in Alcide's manner of telling it. He tried to read, but instead of the printed words, those poor blank eyes kept staring at him from the page. He shut the book with a slam. The next moment he repented of his nerves. Jacquard was stirring again.

"Mon Pere, he don't t'ink there really ees king, eh? He wonder how she come there ees king? He t'ink Alcide he tell? Mon Pere, he don' t'ink thees king she has ivoree w'at you call throne? He don' t'ink there ees ivoree room ten times so big as thees shack. Mebbe, mon Pere, Alcide he come back so he could file claim!"

Again the half-breed was quiet and this time the missionary took good care not to disturb him. There was less mockery in the tone of the last speech and to Gordon it seemed that, even in his madness, Alcide was struggling to convince himself that something he had dreamed was really true.

AS a young man Gordon had known the Barbary Coast. He knew the "white flower" dreams of the opium smokers. He had seen the subtle poppy work just such wreckage of the mind of a man the privations of the Arctic had evidently wrought with Jacquard. And the half-breed's dream was much like an opium vagary.

Of course there was no connection with the two, but the other helped him to get hold of himself. He had tended many a drug-soaked wreck. Why should a man driven insane by exposure put his own nerves on edge?

He tried to shake off the feeling of loneliness. Ever since the Geological Survey party had gone through he had waited with the knowledge that Alcide would come back. He knew they had gone looking for fossils. The half-breed might have gained his ivory notion from them.

A well-known explorer had claimed to have found a race of white Eskimos. When madness takes hold of the mind fantasies quickly become facts. There was enough of actual fact to have given Alcide the beginning of his dream. Then had come the loss of reason and the dream had spread its bounds.

So Gordon tried to think it out for the sake of keeping his own mind clear. Without knowing it he dropped off to sleep. He awoke with Jacquard's cry echoing through the room.

"Mon Pere! . . . *Le bon Dieu!* . . ."

Gordon sprang to the door. Half way there he was wide awake. It was that first cry of Alcide's which had rung in his ears. And now in his haste he had knocked back his chair with a thud.

The figure on the bunk stirred and Gordon tip-toed softly over. But the sightless eyes were closed. Only a low moan came from the sleeper. The missionary bent over him and noticed that the half-breed scarcely breathed. The moaning ceased. Then an expression of pain that turned suddenly to a smile passed over Jacquard's tired face.

"Alcide." Gordon spoke low.

But the half-breed did not hear. Even as the missionary spoke his name a purple shadow came like a sudden flush to Jacquard's cheeks. Gordon had seen the shadow of death before. His prayer that suffering might end quickly had been answered.

A sob that was half grief and half thankfulness caught in his throat as he dropped to his knees beside the dead.

II

GORDON picked up the little cylinder of white bone and held it on the palm of his hand, idly balancing it, as a man does when he guesses the weight of an object. He, too, was judging its weight but not in terms of pounds and ounces. The ivory talisman impressed him as an extraordinary proof of the frailty of man. That Jacquard of all men should have succumbed to its subtle mystery!

It was with the sense that he held in his hand the chief cause of the half-breed's death that he reached up and placed it back on the hewn log above the fireplace which served as a shelf.

It was folly to think that trivial things like this could possess supernatural powers exerting an uncanny influence over the possessor. There were precious stones which had gained notoriety because of such tales woven about them. Gordon did not believe in such things but nevertheless he was glad when he no longer held the cylinder in his hand.

The Far North is superstitious. Many strange tales had come to his ears during the years of his mission work. Among the French-Canadian trappers the *loup garou*, or werewolf, was a common source of conversation. Gordon knew how easily such tales gained credence. He still recalled with a shudder his own sudden meeting with the albino wolf. How its pinkish eyes had glared at him from the under-

growth. Then the ghostlike movement as it loped off into the gloom. It had been just at dawn.

Such animals were freaks of nature, nothing more, but a freak met under unpropitious conditions is a hard thing to shake from one's mind. All that day every snow-covered bush he passed had sent a chill through his body. Even the dogs had snarled most of the way home. So does the weird and unknown haunt the mind of man and break down the courage of dumb brutes. In spite of himself his eyes roved to the ledge above the fireplace and sought out the ivory cylinder.

A cold sweat stood on his forehead at the thought that he, too, might even now be coming under its unknown spell.

"How you lak be king, eh, mon Pere?" The mad words still rang through the room.

And what was it Alcide had said about a woman "white lak gold she is white"?

Gordon was too old a hand at loneliness to know that if his present state of mind kept up he would be crazier than Jacquard was when he burst open the door of the cabin. He bundled himself in his parka and with an axe went out to cut a grave through the snow and ice.

THE exercise did him good and he was in a glow all over when he came back into the cabin an hour later. But it was no easy task to lay away the body of a friend in the cold tundra. He hunted through his dunnage bag for some bits of candle. Alcide would sleep better out there in the cold if a candle had burned at his bier.

A search of the half-breed's parka revealed a crucifix. Who was he to question the faith of any man? Besides it did him good to think of the spiritual side of the half-breed's life. In another age and time Alcide might have been swashbuckler and lover by turn.

There is nothing soft in life above the Arctic Circle. But there were things which Gordon knew had been dear to the half-breed in life. It was proper that they should be held dear to him in death.

He had waited months for Alcide. There was no reason why he should not sit a few hours longer in the little cabin by the side of his friend now that there was an end of waiting. To his tired mind it seemed

restful just to sit there and watch the candles flicker. Man was like that. A candle flickering in a blustering world. Some kept the flame of life burning bright to the very end. In some lives the flame never seemed to go out but continued to burn brightly even after death.

And here was a man, true to the law of give and take, ready with an arm to help the weak, yet the flame of life was gone before half the course had run. All that remained now were a few flickering tallow candles.

Gordon was glad when morning came. At least he called it morning. He had sat twelve full hours beside the dead. Outside the winter night gave no gleam. He was a shadow bearing another shadow when he made his way to the grave he had dug with the axe. When that task was finished he turned to the axe again and ripped up a section of the floor. A cross would mark the place where Alcide lay.

When at last he came back and everything had been done—not another blessed thing to fill his mind—he sank down at his table and wept. Then it was that thoughts of the ivory cylinder took hold of him again.

He got up and brought it from the mantelpiece. Here was the thing responsible for Alcide's death. Where had it come from? Until he found it in the pocket of the half-breed's parka he had dismissed everything Jacquard had said as the mutterings of insanity. But ivory had been the burden of Alcide's wild tale. A whole room of ivory, "ten times so beeg as thees shack," were the half-breed's own words. He had spoken of an ivory throne, and the white woman—ivory was white—this cylinder was back of it all.

It was about seven inches in diameter and an inch to an inch and a quarter thick. Around the edge of it ran a series of hieroglyphics or pictographs. They were so small Gordon could not decide to which type of primitive writing the symbols belonged. Across the upper face of the cylinder was a design that he took to be an attempt at real picture making. The artist, whoever he might have been, had scratched mountains and valleys on the white surface.

But the more Gordon studied it, the deeper grew the feeling, that the real significance of the cylinder ran deeper than the

meaning of the figures scratched on its surface. The ones around the edge were much older than the design on the face. Further than that he could make no conjecture. He was puzzling over it when he fell asleep. When he awoke again it was to begin where he had left off.

So gradually the spell of the ivory cylinder took hold of him. The North and the long night vanished. Alcide came back and together they worked over the secret. There was a claim to be filed. He was to be king. It was in the land where golden women lived. There were ivory thrones, whole rooms of ivory.

Gordon laughed. He laughed again at the echo.

"How the leetle mole she find his way, eh?"

It was nice that Alcide had come back to talk to him. It was like Alcide to do that. But Gordon had known from the beginning that the little half-breed would come back. And in the spring they were going to the land of ivory—he and Jacquard—Jacquard whom he had buried out there in the snow.

III

NEWS of men and events in the world outside filters slowly into the North. It comes to the dwellers of the tundra above the spruce line through the medium of month-old papers, infrequent letters and the like that are brought by the river steamers in summer and dog-teams when the rivers close.

So it was that into the R. N. W. M. P. post at Fort Murray word came telling that the red-bearded missionary in the lonely cabin on the delta of the Mackenzie had gone mad. And with the news came other rumors linked with superstition. Evil spirits were abroad in the land. Alcide Jacquard was not only dead but buried, and the wolves had howled over his grave. Worse than death hovered about the cabin on the lower Mackenzie.

"Constable Peters will proceed at once to the old Fort Retribution post and bring back James Gordon, reported insane."

Very formal, matter of fact and to the point ran the orders of the Mounted. That was all they had to answer to both news and rumor, "Get the man."

Much that is full of glamour has been written and told about the wearers of the Scarlet Tunics of the North. Much more that has nothing to do with glamour is the workaday rule of their lives. *Maintiens le droit* is a motto of service not of words. "According to the Code" is a phrase that accepts facts as facts. Glamour is something to be found in books.

WITHIN half an hour after he received the order from Inspector Curtot, Constable Peters swung into the North at the rear of a well-stocked sledge behind a team of eleven picked dogs. Fang, a husky he had reared from a puppy, was in the lead trace.

Peters was soldier and surgeon both. He was built, like every member of the Mounted is built, for action. Just under six feet, weighing close to two hundred, smooth shaven, clean cut, and with a jaw that did not need a lot of words to show he meant business.

Heads and hands were skilled in the knowledge and use of scalpel and bandage. But that could not hold him. His heart craved the open. In the North he found the place where heart and head and hands could meet on equal ground.

Three winters had slipped by since his first trip to the old post in which Gordon had made his home. That first trip Peters had made in a blizzard that the North remembered and he was new to the country. But Alcide Jacquard had been his guide on that occasion. Now Jacquard was dead and he was alone.

IT was on the tenth day after leaving Fort Murray that Peters came in sight of Gordon's shack. The broad reaches of the Mackenzie delta wind through a flat country and it took him nearly three hours to get within hailing distance after he first sighted the place.

There was no answer to his halloo. Peters had not really expected one, but still it gave him a doubt. Gordon might have gone off or died. He'd know in another minute or two. There was no answer to his knock either as he pushed open the door. Gordon sat on a corner of his bunk, gazing at the floor where the planks had been ripped up, his hands folded together between his knees. Peters walked across

the cabin and laid his hand on the missionary's shoulder without speaking. Gordon did not move.

Peters had seen the cross marking Alcide's grave as he approached the shack. That accounted for the planks missing from the floor. It was just about as he thought; Gordon's mind had gone out to Alcide.

"Poor devil. Well, we've got to get him out of here, that's certain. Hulloo!"

His eye roving around the room caught sight of the ivory cylinder above the fireplace. He walked over and picking it up examined it closely before the fire. He turned to Gordon and saw that the missionary was watching him. He put the cylinder back on the mantle.

"Ivoree!"

Peters was looking at Gordon and saw the missionary's lips move. But it was Jacquard's voice that he heard. For the moment it startled him.

Gordon smiled, but it was a smile devoid of all sense of reason, just the blank grin of a man who has lost his mind.

"Mebbe I come back file claim, eh, mon Pere?"

Peters nodded. He knew now why Gordon had gone mad. But that told him nothing concerning Jacquard's death. "Ivoree," and this last about filing a claim. He knew Gordon was repeating things the half-breed had said. There was mystery enough, no doubt about that. The carved bone might be a real clue. He picked it up.

"Ivoree!" This time he was not startled.

"*Mais, oui,*" Peters answered, imitating as nearly as he could the patois of Jacquard. "She is w'at you call heem, vair nice ivoree, eh?"

The smile left Gordon's face. He clasped his hands and turned to look again at the place where the boards were torn up from the floor.

PETERS took the cylinder to the table, lit the lamp and studied the markings. It was the design on the face of the cylinder that held his attention. He got out his knife and scraped the dirt out of the lines. The bone showed whiter underneath. Next he examined the dirt he had scraped out. So Jacquard had come back to file a claim.

Peters wondered how much of this ivory there was and where Jacquard had come

across it. As a curio it might be valuable. The markings around the edge evidently told the story of some forgotten race. The design on the face was a map and Jacquard or someone else had carved it quite recently. But petrified bone, even though it be of the finest tusk ivory, was useless. The silica deposit that caused its petrification had robbed it of its beauty. The texture that ivory has, had gone. Another mystery had been boiled down to plain facts. If any anthropologist wanted to go digging around in the Arctic tundra, he was welcome.

"*Mais, oui,* thees woman he is white. White, mon Pere, lak when gold she is white."

"What!" Peters swung around.

Gordon was grinning again.

"Mon Pere, he t'ink Alcide he tell." The mad missionary threw back his head in a maudlin laugh.

Peters relaxed. So ivory wasn't the whole tale after all. A woman like gold! Well, that was enough to have turned Alcide or any other mortal man a little off. But the job now at hand was to get this other poor wreck back to Fort Murray. He slipped the cylinder into the inside pocket of his parka.

IT was on the third day down to the Fort that Peters suddenly had his hands full. They had swung from the fringe of spruce that clung to the shore of the Mackenzie and were heading for the river trail when Gordon half-rolled, half sprang from the sledge. Peters threw all his weight against the geepole, yelled to Fang and brought the dog team to a halt. But not until Gordon had jumped to his feet and was tearing along over the ice hummocks toward the black water of the rapids.

The river made a roaring drop for nearly half a mile and even the icy grip of winter could not hold the turbulent water in check. The spray drove through the air like particles of pointed steel. All winter long it had been doing that until the black water was held in by a miniature range of ice mountains, sharp, jagged hummocks that made going uncertain and a fall dangerous.

The mad missionary was unmindful of the ice; that rumble of dark water fascinated him. For nearly a mile as they

followed the shore line through the spruce his eyes had never left it. Now in his mad haste he stumbled and fell. He was up again and off.

The fall had given Peters a few precious yards and he redoubled his efforts. He, too, was unmindful of the rough going.

Up one ice hummock, down and over the next, with every leap he gained. The roaring grew louder; the cut of the frozen spray blinded him.

The last hummocks were smooth as glass. Already Gordon was climbing over them. Peters went headlong then. There was no time to feel for a footing in the ice humps. He threw himself over them, fell in a heap, rolled, was up again and dived over the next hummock.

Even then he would have lost, had not Gordon paused momentarily at the top of the last ridge, fascinated by the roaring turmoil below. Peters closed on him knowing full well the almost superhuman strength insanity brings. Down they went together, thrashing back and forth at the very edge of the rapids.

Peters locked his arms around the missionary and hung on for dear life. He was nearly exhausted from the long chase over the ice; his face was grim. Either they would both go down into that seething torrent below or he would take Gordon back to Fort Murray.

THE missionary strained against his arms until he thought the muscles of his shoulders would give way. Each second, and they passed like hours, he felt Gordon's strength grow while his own diminished. Still he held on, gritted his teeth at the tearing pain in his arms and with his head tried to bore upward against the missionary's jaw. Even in his madness Gordon sensed this new move; his fingers closed on Peters' throat.

Like the tongue of some insatiable fiend the water of the rapids whirled up over the ice. The icy lash of it took Peters' breath. He gasped. That viselike grip was choking the life from him. Sight left his eyes, the leering face of the madman was no longer grinning down at him. Then came a vision and with it that intuition that has saved many a clever man in a crisis.

"Mon Pere!" he gasped. "W'at . . .

you . . . t'ink . . . thees . . . woman . . . he . . . ees . . . white . . . lak . . . when . . . ivoree . . . she . . ."

The cruel fingers relaxed their grip. Peters slipped from the missionary's hold, sank in an exhausted heap and lay there for several minutes unable to move. In his cars rang the noise of the torrent. He had lost. He would not take his man back to Fort Murray. But it was good just to lie there and be able to breathe.

Then he opened his eyes. There at his feet sat Gordon gazing blankly at the black water. He had sat that way on the bunk in his cabin when Peters first found him. The water no longer held a fascination for his tired brain. His whole being had gone out to Alcide Jacquard. Peters knew that it was his utterance in the patois of the little half-breed that had saved the lives of them both.

But the vision which had prompted that utterance! In that terrible moment when the world had grown dark before his eyes the golden woman had come to him. True, he had spoken the words of Jacquard—but the vision he had seen was his own. Peters, the skeptic, shook his head. It was fallacy for a man to allow his mind to run to such things.

Yet, here was Gordon sitting quietly at his feet. Back there over the ice hummocks Fangs and the dog team were waiting.

He would still get his man to Fort Murray.

IV

IT was ten days after the struggle at the edge of the rapids that Peters mused into Fort Murray. Ten terrible days they had been. Half a dozen times Gordon had broken away from the sledge. Half a dozen dead-in-earnest fights had Peters had on his hands to subdue the missionary, bring him back to the sledge, bundle him up against the cold and renew the journey.

Yet, when Peters made his report to Inspector Curtot it was the formal report of the Mounted. He had reached old Fort Retribution without difficulty, confirmed the rumor that Alcide Jacquard was dead, had seen the cross marking his grave, had found James Gordon in his present condition and had brought him back.

That was all. Not a word of the life and death fights at the rapids. It was one of the hardest jobs Peters had ever had in his life, but he reported it as though it were only a routine matter of the day's work.

Then he saluted, went to his quarters, turned in and slept nearly twice around the clock. When he awoke hardly a trace of the ordeal he had been through remained. His mind was clear and the only thought he had for Gordon was one of deep pity. Peters was not one to let such things dwell on his mind. He had done his duty, no man could do more.

One thing he could not shake from his mind, nor did he desire to do so, was Jacquard's hint concerning the golden woman and the vision he himself had had of her. He was still skeptical about it. It might have been nothing more than an hallucination, yet the vividness of the vision was not in any way related to any dream he had ever had. It had saved his life, he was certain of that.

In recent years there had been great discoveries in the realm of the unconscious mind—but the unexplored regions of the unconscious were vast. Peters had delved into psychology. So his thoughts ran the gamut from skepticism to belief and back again. Nothing was uncanny. Even hallucinations did not just happen. There was a reason for everything under the sun. Even golden women did not come out of thin air.

Cunning practical Alcide Jacquard was not sent to his death by a wild dream. He had found something and that petrified cylinder with its queer markings was the key. Peters went to his parka, took the cylinder from the pocket, toyed with it for a few minutes, then reached for his hat. He was going to see Inspector Curtot.

"Humph!" grunted Curtot, after he had examined the strange markings. "Not going in for archeology, Peters?"

"Maybe, maybe not," Peter answered. "The truth of the matter is that I don't think we've heard the last of Alcide Jacquard."

"Spirits, Peters?" The Inspector's eyes twinkled.

Peters laughed. "Not quite. But you know the mind of the average trapper and as for natives—" he made a sweeping ges-

ture. "None of your trappers is ever going to believe that Jacquard died only of exposure and, in that, I'll agree with them. But—"

"So it is spirits after all!" Curtot interrupted. "Take it easy, Peters. You've had a trying trip. You've done a real job. Spring'll be along in a couple of months now. You've got a deserved leave of absence coming to you and I mean to see that you get it. I'm going down to Ottawa and you're coming along."

"But, Inspector Curtot, I'm serious. I was never more in earnest in my life."

"Which is the proper way to be. So am I and you need a rest."

Peters hesitated. When he had come to the Inspector's office there was no plan in his mind. This talk of a leave of absence had changed the color of things. Funny he hadn't thought of that.

"Could I have it now, Inspector?" he asked. "I mean the leave."

Curtot slapped his knee. "You mean will I give you permission to hunt for the spook of Alcide Jacquard. Peters, I tell you, man, you're tired out. This thing'll get you the way it seems to have gotten this poor devil of a missionary."

Peters laughed. "Really, I am serious and I think you know me well enough to put me down as the last person in the world to go off on a spook hunt. What I meant was that I agreed with the trappers. I know there is something back of Jacquard's death. I don't know what it is. I know the natives will talk. I feel that it will be bad business to let them start building superstitions. Such things once started, make mighty fine cover for a real murder. Not that they are planned that way. But the thing is in the wind. Someone is found dead and then before you get a chance to find a real clue, superstition has the whole affair so clouded you can't make head or tail or it, even if you had Sherlock Holmes with his magnifying glass and galoshes. I'm perfectly fit, I wouldn't have thought of asking for leave until you suggested it, Inspector. All I've got is the clue there on the table and something that you might call 'spirits' that has happened to me."

Inspector Curtot's face grew serious.

"When would you start?"

"Tomorrow. The dogs need another day's rest."

"Peters," Inspector Curtot extended his hand, "I wish you luck."

V

THERE is an adage to the effect that to overcome trouble look for it. So Peters went North looking for trouble. He had two months, which was a mighty short space of time for the country he was traversing.

After the sun begins his return journey from the Southern Hemisphere is the time of all kinds and conditions of weather. It runs the scale from thaw to blizzard.

So Peters found. When he came to old Fort Retribution he left the Mackenzie and took a course that was north by west, which would lead him into the Arctic Slope range of the Rockies. That much he gained from the map on the cylinder. Jacquard had not followed the coast line but had gone into the heart of the mountains. Peters did likewise, knowing full well that his chances of hitting the little half-breed's trail were in the same category with buying tickets for a lottery.

But the lucky ticket did win, there was consolation in that. The tenth day after leaving the Mackenzie he came across the traces of a siwash camp Alcide had built. There was no sign of a trail; that had vanished weeks since. But a fire had been built and Peters was woodsman enough to know that the half-breed had built it.

He put it down as score one in his favor, pushed on and again promptly lost sight of every vestige of a sign that there was another human being in the world besides himself.

He was getting into the foot-hills now, nothing but rising ridges of snow and ice, and the rise made the going harder. Three more days of travel brought him to a blank wall and he had to retrace his steps. He struck out more to the north and pushed on, only to find his way blocked again. There was a pass through this range, for Jacquard had evidently come this way. He figured there was nothing to do but to go back over his trail and begin again. Then, quite by accident, he struck another of Alcide's camps.

There was little comfort in that with the Arctic Range towering up and never a sign of a pass that would let him through

to the other side. Peters camped for the night.

MORNING brought snow and he set off with the sting of it in his face. There is an exhilarating restfulness that comes with snow. The vast expanse of bleak landscape had disappeared. Peters felt that he was in a little world again. The snow made its own horizon, a close-at-hand, friendly horizon that brought companionship.

He traveled on, swinging at an easy, tireless gait behind his dogs. The going grew rougher but he gave no heed until the exertion began to tell on him. Only then he realized that he was again going uphill. He brought his dogs to a halt.

It was the old circle, a thing he had figured out long ago in a queer way that suited his own method of thinking out things. The universe was a mighty circle; the sun had its orbit and so did the earth. Civilization was steadily marching around the earth, how many times it had gone from East to West being a matter of pure conjecture. So why shouldn't a man, once he had lost his bearings, travel in a circle? That was just what Peters had done. But it was a grim conjecture. He was lost.

He hazarded a guess at direction and pushed on again. There was a more vehement sting to the snow, it began to cut like needles of pointed steel. The wind was rising, the bitter, biting wind of the Arctic. Still he pushed on.

The trail climbed again, so he knew he was getting back into the mountains. The pace began to tell on him, breathing grew hard, a numb ache crept up from his ankles until his legs felt stiff and he trotted with an awkward, automatic gait. But the trail led upward without a halt. By dumb, blind luck he had found the pass and he intended to make the most of it. Time enough to halt when his tired limbs would take him no farther.

He put a hand to the gee-pole of the sledge and through the wind called encouragement to the dogs. Night came and still he climbed, halting finally from sheer exhaustion.

Peters awoke stiff and sore, but he broke camp and went on. Some mad, atavistic urge was driving him. Through the ache and pain of the journey he sensed a kin-

ship with the primitive. Reason told him to go back, but reason went by him like the wind. One man was dead, another was mad, reason whispered to him as it fled. Peters laughed and added inches to his stride.

"A woman like gold!"

Not in the patois of Jacquard now, but in his own clear thought, the phrase burned itself into his brain. On he went and on. One of the dogs lagged in the traces. Peters cut him loose and dumped him into the sledge. He had found the pass and he was going to get through!

His whole body ached; the pulse at his temple beat like a trip-hammer; the wind cut him like a knife. Then another dog dropped and Peters knew that meant they could not go much farther. He was so numb with cold and fatigue that it was an effort to free the fallen dog. Somehow he managed and went on again.

But he no longer urged the team. He knew a sledge dog would keep on until he went down. He had left the Post with eleven dogs. Now he had nine. If it was folly to keep mushing like a madman, then he was mad. He admitted it with a grim smile and kept going. He had found the pass. Nothing would stop him till he got through.

HE cut another dog from the traces and almost before he had started again the fourth one was down. An hour more and Peters stumbled against the sledge, lost his balance and fell. The team had stopped. Two more dogs were down and the remaining five could not budge the heavy sledge. He cut them all loose, made a clumsy pack of tent and provisions and went on alone. Then came the snow in earnest; he was heading into an Arctic blizzard.

Gradually the ache went from his legs, but with it went the relentless onward swing. He had to fight to shake off an overwhelming drowsiness. The wind lost its cutting sting and soothed rather than hurt him. Vaguely he realized that he was being lulled into the peaceful sense of security that precedes complete exhaustion. It was the sixth sense of the frontiersman that warned him then.

His only hope lay in rest. To sink down in the snow seemed like the easiest thing

in the world, but even his numbed brain told him that meant death.

He stumbled and fell and as he crawled to his feet again he realized that once more he had gone in a circle. He was holding to the gee-pole of his own sledge. Blind luck had found the pass for him and the same blind luck had saved his life.

It took all his remaining strength to turn the sledge on its side, fasten his tent to it and then crawl into his sleeping bag under the shelter thus afforded.

"Blind luck," he framed the words with his lips, and fell asleep.

But was it? There came to him the vision of the golden woman even as it had come to him on the border of death at the rapids when the mad missionary had him by the throat. Peters could feel her warm breath, sense the throb of her breasts as his arms closed around her and held her fast. Then the vision passed.

As one who comes to wakefulness slowly after deep slumber, Peters gradually grew aware that he was still alive. His limbs were numb but not cold, being cramped from the close confinement of the sleeping bag and the uncomfortable tilt of the dog sledge under which he had crept from the blizzard.

His head felt strangely clear, and reflectively, as a man inured to danger and hardship places all the cards on the table, he pondered the possibilities that lay before him. He was hungry. He did not have the slightest idea how long he had been asleep. The blizzard had abated, but that told him nothing. There was no knowing how long since it had abated or whether its duration after he crawled under the sledge had been days or hours.

From where he lay, the circle of the world was marked by the curve of tent canvas above his head. Within that scant circumference his life, for some unknown number of hours, had been safe. For some other unknown number of hours it would continue safe if he remained under cover of the sledge.

In relation to that he knew exactly where he was. In the world outside he would have to take his chance like any other animal that combated Nature. But he wasn't a real animal. There were countless generations between him and the man-ancestor who could pit himself beast-like against

the trials and attacks of Nature and win out. Death, in time, was a surety if he remained where he was. It seemed equally a surety if he ventured to leave this rude but adequate shelter.

HIS dog team, split up or pack-wise, once cut free had gone back to its forebear, the wolf. The sledge-dog could do that. Many of them showed the wolf-blood in their veins. With them Nature could cope with Nature and win out. But he was a man. Too much inbreeding had robbed him of the pristine knowledge of the fundamental laws of life. The civilization his forebears had reared for him had become his master.

He could plunge into the wilds but he needed the things of civilization to keep him alive. Given nothing but a club, like one of his primitive ancestors, he would probably have starved to death in a land of plenty.

A close inspection of the radium dial of his watch informed him that it had stopped at quarter to two. Was it at night or in the day? Was it yesterday or the day before? He didn't know. He was a product of civilization and one of the toys of his heritage had failed him.

Suddenly, out of the void surrounding his makeshift shelter there came a long-drawn howl.

Peters was all action before the last note of it had gone. He might be sleepily lulled into that security which ended in the most peaceful of deaths, but so long as he had ammunition he was not going to be torn on that terrible wrack of the North. The wolf is crueler than any device wrought even by the cunning tortures of the Spanish Inquisition.

He was out of his sleeping bag, had slipped the tent flap open and stood waiting, thumbs in belt, when the next cry, nearer than the first, curdled the still air. Its effect on him was that he gripped his belt the tighter—a great elation surged through him. That first cry had caught him unawares, but he was tense and waiting for this second one. If the first howl sent a chill through his blood the second caused it to course with redoubled energy and brought a choking catch to his throat. Here was a possibility he had not reckoned. Again the cry came, shrill but plaintive

now, and with it there was a note of infinite longing.

"Fang!"

Out of the gray light of the pass the dog came. He was a gaunt spectre of the husky that had led the team from Fort Murray. But he gave vent to a full-throated bark of joy and bounded forward. Peters sprang to meet him. The Arctic void had become a living world again to them both.

VI

IT was in looking for wood that Peters first grew aware of a peculiar warmth in the air. The sting of the wind had seemed to have lessened suddenly, but he gave it no heed. One of the phenomena of the North Country is the Chinook wind. After the fiercest of blizzards it will come down a valley. The snow vanishes before it.

So Peters went on in his search for firm sticks that would make a good fire. He was hungry. Food was more important than any caprice of the wind. He noted the change but that was all. It was Fang that made the discovery.

Peters stood stock still at the dog's howl. He heard no other sound. Then Fang howled again. Peters made off on a run in the direction from which the sound had come. Now, as he ran, he caught a subtle metallic odor. His hand went to his gun. He stopped short and listened.

Again the dog howled, this time close at hand, and the howl startled him. He crawled up out on a depression, not knowing what to expect. Before he came to the top of it he knew. There was a cleft in the side of the mountain! He could see it cutting like a great black gash into the wall of ice. It was from this cleft the strange odor issued. Fang stood before it bristling in every hair. Peters gripped his gun and went to the dog.

At first he thought it was a cave. But there was a steady current of air issuing from it. It was warmer than it had been down below. It must be a passage, but where in the world could it lead? Fang growled. Peters decided to make an investigation. With the dog following, he entered the passage.

As he proceeded down the narrow cleft

the odor grew more pungent. The metallic scent was so strong Peters could taste it. With it there was a mocking sense of the warm, heavy fragrance that spring has, the reek of warm earth. Fang, following close at his heels, gave vent to another low, rumbling growl. But that earth smell seemed to mean food. The growl died in a whimper.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" Peters' voice had much in common with the dog's whimper. There was that queer catch again at his throat. It was all like some nightmare, with a cruel subtlety that made it seem so poignantly real. His breath came in short, quick gasps. The air in the cleft was stifling. He tried in vain to still the wild beating of his heart.

It was blacker than the blackest night. His electric torch had gone long since, he remembered, as he futilely groped in his parka, searching for it. His hand came in contact with something hard. The ivory cylinder! That tracing on the face of it was a map! What he had taken for two ranges of mountains was Alcide's mark showing this cleft. He stumbled on.

PETERS could have cried for sheer joy when, feeling his way around a turn, he saw the jagged wall of the cleft standing out in bold relief not more than half a dozen yards ahead of him. There was a sullen growl from Fang.

"Quiet, boy! We've found the opening!" His voice thrilled.

The dog's growl was a warning, however, and as he climbed, Peters tried once more to subdue the wild beating of his heart. He could hear it pounding against his ribs. Again he reached for his gun. The hunger pain gripped him. He had come from death through nothing short of a miracle. Ahead of him he sensed life and he was ready to go down fighting for it.

His eyes blinked in the unaccustomed glare after the long journey through the dark. He leaned down to put a restraining hand on Fang and slipping to one knee leaned anxiously against the wall of the passage. Every nerve urged him to dash ahead to the opening that must be just around the next turn.

But the light hurt his eyes. He needed breath. Too often had such disadvantages been the means of losing a fight. So Pe-

ters knelt and waited though the wait was fraught with a mad desire to spring forward recklessly and learn what was ahead of him.

He had a firm hold of Fang when he went on again, his fingers sunk deep in the scruff of the dog's neck.

"Quiet, boy, quiet."

They made the turn. Not half a dozen paces before them the passage opened to warm earth and sky. They had left a grayish-white waste when they entered the cleft. Here at the other end of it a scrub spruce was brightly green. Again Fang's growl turned to a whimper.

Peters did not hear. He had stepped forward and now stood speechless. From the dawn of history it has been the privilege of men who dared to stand on new peaks, to look out upon new vistas with the dilated eye of the man who blazes the trail. Jacquard had been here before him but still Peters swelled with the pride and elation of discovery. So he stood and gazed his fill. Like this, he thought, Balboa might have stood on his "peak in Darien" and had his first view of the Pacific.

VII

STANDING at the mouth of the cleft, Fang at his side with lolling tongue, Peters could not have been more surprised if he had stepped suddenly into the Garden of Eden. He forgot his fatigue for the moment and was content just to stand and gaze at what might have been a mirage.

Worn out, deluded travelers of the open spaces had been lured deeper and deeper into trackless wastes by the spell of dream cities rising up before them, or on seeming to behold the expanse of a broad lake dancing before their eyes. They had pushed on then only to have the vision fade.

As Peters stood there he felt that this was what was likely to happen now. The moment he took a downward step to the valley below it would be gone like a wraith. He had come from tundra to paradise through the cleft in the mountain. There was snow here, plenty of it, but the change from the flat, gray waste was like being born into a new world—and it was a world of his own—he had found it!

Below him lay a valley fully two miles

wide and its length was lost in the dim bluish-gray of towering cliffs that held it in on all sides. It was cold here, but not that bitter, biting cold that held sway at the other end of the long passage that burrowed its way through the mountain.

Clouds of steam rose from a lake that evidently ran the whole length of the valley. Peters had heard of the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. He had seen geysers and gushing torrents of boiling water, but nothing he had ever seen or heard of could compare with the valley below.

The lake was like some giant wash-tub of Nature; it was more than that. This bubbling lake, probably fed from some unknown depths, had changed the whole nature of the valley. Here above the Arctic Circle Peters stood and gazed at a Valley of Steam. There were spruce and birch growing at the foot of the cliffs and in the spaces where the snow had gone the rocks were gray with lichens.

Great drifts of snow had piled into the cliff crevices. The rising steam meeting the colder air above and attracted to the cold surfaces of the cliffs had formed huge ice-crusts that took a million different forms. It was as though a host of brooding gods looked down on the valley. At the far end a glacier crawled down the face of the cliff to meet the bubbling lake.

Here was Nature at her two extremes, ice and snow, fire and steam; for somewhere there was a seething furnace that made this giant reservoir boil. Even as he gazed he saw a huge ice block from the glacier go down into the seething water below. The spray raced upward in a thousand curves.

Man could fashion no fountain like that; nor stage such a conflict as this iron grip of ice battling with the boiling breath that came from the very bowels of the earth. Little wonder if Alcide Jacquard had gone mad before he died.

PETERS leaned back against the cliff and closed his eyes. In July, and further South, he had picked flowers at the edge of a glacier and marveled at Nature's whim. But there, when winter came, the ice was victor and the flowers vanished.

Here the battle was everlasting and there was neither victor nor vanquished. The valley was a valley of eternal youth, of

eternal spring; the heights were heights of eternal age, of eternal winter.

Leaning there, eyes closed, he heard the whole valley sing, a humming, soothing drone that fell in soft cadences the way the harp of the wind plays in a forest of pines. This was the steam breaking into song as it escaped through the foaming lake from the fires down below.

It was a startled roe deer, breaking through the undergrowth that caused Peters to open his eyes and awake from his dream. Fang leaped down in full cry. He was the typical husky with a quarter strain of the wolf blood. Moreover, his stomach had shrunk. So had Peters' and he was as quick as his dog.

A shot went echoing down the cliffs. The roe gave a frightened leap, that wild spring that comes with death. Already Fang was at her throat and she came down in a quivering heap.

Peters smiled grimly as he held the smoking gun. He had shot from the hip. It was too good to be real. It was a dream, all of it. First the valley sent warmth to him. Now it sent food. All he had was his service revolver and at any other than close range the weapon would have been useless. But down below, Fang had gone wild. His bark filled the valley. So it must be real. Already Peters could smell the venison that would soon be roasting on the spit.

With a gay halloo he leaped down to the feast. It was short work to build a fire and cut up the roe. What if there had never been a report of deer being found so far North? The caribou herds lived on the tundra, thousands of them sometimes mustering in a single herd. There was an occasional musk ox. But never a deer. Their haunt was away to the South where the big timber line ended.

But Peters was too busy to begin a debate with the God of Things as they Really Are whether the copy-books agreed with them or not. He gave any thoughts he might have to the winds. Here was a glacier crawling to its death down the side of a mountain into a boiling lake. Beyond these very cliffs was the bleakest of winter. What hand had scooped out this valley and tucked into it the breath of spring? When venison is turning on a fire of coals of dry wood, a hungry man does not seek

arguments with himself on the whichness of the whatness.

Fang gnawed a fresh bone, growling the while. If Peters did not growl, he at least made a joyful noise as he buried his teeth in the toasted, juicy meat. It was done to a beautiful brown. And when the meal was finished, man and dog curled up beside the fire and slept.

PETERS grew restless in his sleep. Too much had happened to him to leave his mind wholly at ease. He passed from one troubled dream to another. Through all of them there ran the vision of the golden woman.

She was a tree that took human form only to become a tree again when he drew near. Out on the tundra he was chased by wolves. He emptied his pistol into them, but still they pursued him. His dogs gave every ounce they had, but the wolf pack closed in. Then miraculously the golden woman had come between him and the pack. Another minute and the wolf pack had completely vanished. Yet, he knew that if he approached her she would vanish, too.

The cries of the pack still echoed when he awoke with a start. There was a cold, wet muzzle at his face. Fang growled low, his eyes ablaze. The dog was crouched flat against the earth, his lips lifted in a menacing snarl that bared the long, vicious teeth.

Peters reached for his gun. He, too, kept prone to the ground and waited. He could see nothing. The air was still, not even the snap of a twig to disturb the silence of the valley, save for that singing drone that came from the lake, and the rumble in Fang's throat.

For several minutes Peters lay tense, every muscle strained to sense sight or sound of some movement in the undergrowth. Finally, he relaxed and sat up. In that moment there was a sudden, swishing whir; he felt the sting of a lash against his cheek; then he was jerked to the ground. He heard Fang rage. Man and dog, they had been caught in a great net that had dropped from nowhere.

From the undergrowth now there rang howls of derision. Then from the cover, burst the men of the valley in a howling mob. Through the meshes of the net Peters peered at them in awe. Massive men

they were, clothed in skins, their great arms bare, their heavy shocks of red hair free to the wind.

But even the suddenness of the attack did not prevent Peters from making the moment one never to be forgotten, for another reason besides his awe. These men were white! It was as though a legion of Vikings had sprung forth in flesh and blood from some forgotten saga of the past. This impress on his mind was strengthened by the fact that they wore a sort of sandal, held on by leather thongs which ran criss-cross to their knees. But they were not Vikings as Peters was to learn later.

All of them carried clubs, heavy, unwieldy looking weapons that could crush a man's skull at a blow. Some had long white spears tipped with white bone. It was the bone that caught Peters' eye. His mind now went back again to the ivory cylinder. The bone of the spears was the same grayish-tinged ivory. It was petrified ivory. Every last one of these spear points were blood brothers to that queer little block of bone Jacquard had brought out of the Arctic and which Peters now had in the pocket of his parka.

Fang snarled with rage and gnashed his teeth on the meshes of the net. The giants standing around in a circle grinned.

Fang raged the more, hurtling himself against Peters and getting both of them more securely entangled in the net.

"Quiet, boy, quiet."

The dog sank to the ground at the sound of his voice, but the snarl still gave proof of his hatred for the net and this ring of men with clubs. They were only men to Fang, but a club was a club. He knew what that meant.

PETERS' voice had caused his captors to break out in a fierce, guttural jargon. They had seen the dog crouch down at the sound. They gesticulated and pointed with their clubs.

It was a time for quick thinking, Peters knew that. He felt sure they had every intention of killing him. They were neither Indians nor Eskimos.

They really did look like Norsemen out of a child's picture book. From the way they squinted at him they had never seen his like before. Or had they? What of

Alcide! The little half-breed had been in this valley and had gotten out of it alive.

Peters had found the real secret of the ivory cylinder. But whether or not he was ever to return to tell about it was not on his mind. He was thinking of the golden woman. Had his dream been true? Always in the dream she had vanished but not until she had done him a service.

Her dispersal of the wolf pack was nothing but a dream. Yet, there was that time at the edge of the rapids and again when he crawled, mayhap to die, under the tent lashed to the dog sledge.

Both times she had come to him. Both times she had seemed to save his life. He knew he never needed a friend more than he did now. Would she come to him?

Half a dozen of his captors had grouped themselves around the carcass of the roe. From the clamor they raised, Peters felt sure he must have killed an animal they held to be sacred. It might have been the only deer in the valley.

But now one of the men began jabbing and cutting with his spear at the wound in the roe's neck. That put an end to his conjecture as to the sacredness of the deer. The man using the spear as a probe gave a yell and the others gathered around him.

Through the net Peters saw that he had found the bullet and was showing it to the rest in the palm of his hand. They drew back and held what seemed to be a council.

It was annoying to be entangled so that he couldn't move; to have to lie there and hear a lot of gibberish that didn't mean a thing to him. If they had never seen a bullet before they certainly had never seen a gun.

It dawned on Peters why they had drawn back. No wonder they gazed at him in as much awe as, at first sight, he had gazed at them. They thought he had thrown the bullet! He would gain his freedom yet.

VIII

THERE was no time now for further thought on the matter. Evidently the council had come to a decision. The jabbering ceased and the valley men gathered in a ring around him and his dog. He saw that there were several lead ropes attached to the net and at a sign from a veritable

giant, who seemed to be their leader, four of the men sprang to these ropes.

The working of the net was not unlike the fish-traps bank fishermen use, and Peters, despite the helplessness of his plight, wondered at the ingenuity which had invented it. The men pulled.

He braced himself but nothing happened. Then there was a snarl from Fang.

Peters saw that the ropes the men were pulling had lifted the dog from the ground still encased in the thongs of the net.

Fang's wrath sent the valley men into spasms of mocking glee. One of them poked at the husky with the butt end of a spear. Fang's jaws closed on it and the valley men howled. Peters' blood boiled at the sight and he tore at the meshes that held him.

It was no use; he only wasted his strength and drew the thongs so tight that they cut through his clothes into his flesh. The effort brought raucous shouts from the ring. He sank back to the ground in dull anger; hate gripped him and claimed him for its own. If he had been able to reach his gun he would have emptied it into that howling mob and not cared what might happen next. They were torturing his dog and he couldn't do a thing to prevent it.

The giant who was their leader gave a yell of command and the man with the spear desisted. Now the men on the lead ropes closed in. Two others stepped forward. As if by magic the net opened and Fang rolled out of it in a raging scramble to the ground. But the last two men had slipped nooses over his legs. Now they thrust a long pole underneath the nooses and Fang, raging still, was lifted to their shoulders.

There was an expert skill about their primitive methods that made Peters marvel. He knew at once that he had no mean antagonists to contend with even if his chance for liberty should come. He saw now that two nets had dropped miraculously from nowhere in the suddenness of that first attack.

Having disposed of the dog the valley men turned their attention to him. Again the lead ropes were pulled taut. He had a sensation of flying upward. Then the net opened and he hit the ground with a thump. But the noose-throwers had been

as quick as the men on 'he ropes. He was hog-tied.

These men took no chances; they went about their task in deadly earnest.

A pole was slipped between his ankles and wrists, then the pole was raised and he was marched off through the undergrowth like a live pig being taken to market.

A moment before he had burned at the treatment given his dog. At least these valley men had a sense of fairness. They showed no partiality. They had not poked at him with the butt end of a spear, but that was probably because they were in a hurry. He and Fang were receiving share and share alike.

FROM somewhere ahead of him he could hear the husky's snarls and then would come wild glee from the men carrying him. They went through the undergrowth at a dog trot. There was no path that Peters could mark. Obstructions did not deter his captors; they simply plowed through the stunted spruce forest. The released limbs came zinging against the back of his head and neck with a stinging swish.

He swore and raised his head by lifting against the thongs that bound his wrists to the pole. The thongs cut and he winced at the pain, but even that was better than having a spruce limb give you a bang on the back of the neck. The man behind him, with the pole on his shoulder, grinned.

Soon they came out of the undergrowth and Peters saw that they had reached a sort of plateau. More valley men were gathered here and on a rock, with a mantle of black and white fur, and a head-dress of waving white-tipped tails, stood a giant who looked fully eight feet tall.

The waving head-dress accentuated his height and to Peters, hanging head downward and gazing upon a topsy-turvy world, the man seemed to tower up to the sky. The rock he was standing on was flat-topped, perfectly smooth and polished until it shone. In the center of it a fire burned.

So that was it. His captors were fire worshippers. The giant on the rock was high priest or shaman. Peters saw that the spear he carried was made entirely of the petrified bone, ornamented with rows of the white-tipped tails tied to it.

As the valley men came to the polished

rock they stretched out their arms and bent low in obeisance to the giant with the head-dress. He saw the two men carrying Fang simply let the pole slip from their shoulders as they bent down to pay their homage.

The dog fell to the ground with the pole on top of him. He snarled his rage, but this time there were no jeers from the valley men. All eyes were on the shaman and the fire that glowed behind him.

Peters braced himself against the fall he knew was coming. It was only a drop of a couple of feet. But the ground beneath him was solid rock and he was swung from side to side as his bearers walked. The next minute they let go of the pole and he managed to fall on his side.

It had been more than a mile through the undergrowth and his temples throbbed from the rush of blood to his head. His throat was parched, his wrists and ankles were numb from the thongs that bound them.

With his elbow he managed to feel for his gun. It was still secure, just beneath his parka. If they released his bonds before the fire ceremony began he still had a chance. He would get the high-priest person first. The report of the gun was enough to cause at least a momentary panic among the valley men. He could cut Fang free and they would make a running fight of it.

There wasn't more than a chance in a thousand that he could get back to the cleft in the mountain, but once there, he could stand off a host of primitive men armed with nothing but clubs and spears. If only they untied him before their sacrifice began, they would never be able to burn him alive.

GREAT bundles of fagots were thrown up onto the altar rock and the tongues of fire rose higher and higher. From somewhere back on the edge of the crowd there began a weird and guttural intoning, a sort of savage chant. Peters' heart fell as he saw four large cross pieces lifted to the altar rock, two of them on each side of the fire.

He and Fang were to be slung over the flame on the same poles to which they were now trussed. His hope for escape vanished. His head sank to his chest, he closed

his eyes and gritted his teeth. He wasn't afraid to die. He had been in many a tight corner when death seemed inevitable. But this—the cross pieces were high—that damned medicine man seemed to be waiting until the fire should become a bed of hot coals—This wasn't death. It was . . .

Peters felt himself lifted, but did not open his eyes. He stiffened every muscle. Then he relaxed again. A man could bear more in a position of calm rest. Overcoming pain wasn't a matter of physical endurance. Muscles would pull and twitch at pain involuntarily. These strange captors of his, would they howl in derision at cries? Not if the sheer power of will could seal his lips.

The weird chanting had risen to a rumbling that was almost deafening. It was as if all the fiends of hell were singing some hellish hymn in unison. Of a sudden the wild anathema became a thousand blood-curdling shrieks. Peters was hurled headlong. He held his breath. He was going out like a man. It was striking the polished surface of the rock that brought him to a startled sense that something had happened that was not in the pre-arranged order of things. He was on the alert in an instant.

He glimpsed a fleeting flash of gold and then his hands were free. He could feel the scorching breath of the fire. All about the rock was a sea of bedlam. The men of the valley had gone mad with frenzy. They were jumping around the altar rock like maniacs, howling like fiends and waving their giant clubs and spears.

ABOVE the ungodly howls of the valley men came a piercing shriek of terror. Was there another victim? . . . He was free! Of the thousand things that surged through his brain in that brief instant the dominant one was that he was free. He had a chance to fight it out. Free! But how? There had been a fleeting flash of gold. His thongs had been cut. The piercing, terror-stricken cry! The onrushing, frenzied fiends of the valley! Peters turned and in a flash he saw just what had happened.

The golden woman had come to him! No dream vision, but a glowing vibrant creature of flesh and blood. Hers was the shriek of terror. She was the reason for

the change from savage anathema to hellish rage. It was because of her the men of the valley had gone mad. It was she who had thrown herself against his captors and had severed his bonds as he fell to the altar.

Peters' hand closed on his gun and he yanked it from the holster. Then his fingers opened and the gun dropped to the polished surface of the altar. It was no mere gesture. He had dropped it intentionally. In the twinkling of an eye he had turned from death to life.

For years this moment had lain dormant within him. Passing from sleep to wakefulness he had sensed it. The locale of the scene had always been hazy in his mind. The place as he had seen it a thousand times was dark and he had thought of an empty street or a blind alley. It was the other man's life or his, just the two of them battling on the brink of Eternity. And they had no weapons but their hands. So now that uncanny understanding that had dwelt far down in his subconscious self stood revealed. And with it the golden woman of his dreams had come to life. That piercing cry was addressed to him. In the instant of a crisis a man's whole life stands before him. Peters crouched and sprang.

Before the sacrificial fire towered the medicine man. Helpless as a child against such brute strength was the woman of gold. Only a glimpse of her did Peters have as he threw himself upon the giant who held her. The glimpse told him she was the most beautiful being his eyes had ever seen. That flash of gold he sensed rather than saw when his bonds were cut was but the glint from her hair.

Her eyes, frantic, pleading eyes, as she struggled, helpless, in the hands of the priest, were like lakes of blue shot with fire, even in their fear.

Her skin was the color of dawn when the sun comes up out of the sea. The tunic of fur torn ruthlessly from her shoulders laid bare a breast of snow and coral. Glamorous, pulsating with love and life, Peters' dream of her was beggarly by comparison.

And she had set him free! All in an instant Peters had gone back centuries into the primitive. Tooth and nail were the wapons of his atavistic forebears and with tooth and nail he sprang now.

He was outweighed by fully one hundred pounds. The only advantage he had was that he made the first spring. He landed full on the giant medicine man's back, wrapped his legs about him, sunk nails and teeth in his neck and hung on with a grip of death.

He felt the golden woman slip from the giant's grasp. Just one wild pant of her breath against his face as she fell. Then he was shaken as when the wind goes through a clump of willows. He dug his nails the deeper and tore.

That vital vein in the neck was his only chance. His teeth sank through the flesh and his breath came from him in a growl. He was thrashed about and together they went down.

The giant's weight pressed back on him like a vise, crushing him to the rock. His lungs were bursting. The grip he held with his legs was broken. There was a roaring in his ears. He choked. The roaring became a cataclysm of sound. The world turned red before his eyes. It was a world of blood.

Again he could hear the men of the valley howling like fiends of hell. Again he heard the golden woman's piercing scream. His ears could bear no more. In a final explosion the world vanished in a mad red roar.

THE men of the valley were chanting. They were very far away. It was the same subtle, weird note Peters had heard at the beginning of the sacrificial fire ceremony. He could measure the cadence as it rose and fell. Presently he fancied that there were words to the chant. It was still a long way off, but there was a certain repetition of word sounds.

The chant grew louder. The repetition became more distinct, a phrasing of gutturals and vowels that he could follow but could not quite pin down. There was one word in particular. Or it might be two words. . . . There were two words. . . . He could distinguish them now. They came at the highest pitch of the chant. It was probably their name for God. It was funny he should hear the men of the valley chanting. He had died when the world turned red.

They were coming to the high note again. This time he would make it out. There

it was—"Thir-Keld." The chant went on while he waited breathlessly. Again the cadence swept upward. He let himself go with it. . . . "Thir-Keld."

The swell of it grew less and less. He was getting farther and farther away from the men of the valley. There had been a nightmare of sound. He was glad to slip back into the quiet again. When the final whisper of the chant had died he felt that it had been a dream.

The thing to know was where reality ended and the dream began. There had been a blizzard. He had found a cleft through the mountain and come upon the Valley of Steam. He had been caught in a net, bound to a pole and led up a fire altar to die. And, as always in his dreams of late, the golden woman had come to save his life. He had seen her, held fast in the arms of the giant medicine man who was bent on throwing her into the flames. He remembered the touch of her hot breath against his cheek. And the medicine man? . . .

Peters opened his eyes. The medicine man lay a scant yard from him. The sight of the giant made him shudder. The features were horrible, not a human trace left about them. It was ghastly. He prayed that he might wake up. This dream of being awake, of looking upon worse than a chambers of horrors, made him shiver.

There was something black and shiny lying on the rock. His gun! By what freak of the mind had he dropped it? He reached for it, not that he expected his hand to touch it, but rather to make sure that it was all a dream. His finger came in contact with the muzzle. It was warm.

He grabbed the gun then, broke it open and examined the chamber. He had fired at the deer when he entered the valley. That was all—one shot. He saw two cartridges had been exploded! That accounted for the terrible features of the dead medicine man at his side! The gun had been fired point blank into the giant's face!

"The golden woman! Thir-Keld!" The words sprang to his lips.

It was she who had fired the shot!

But by what intuition? What had happened to her? Peters tried to get to his feet and sank back with a groan. Something had happened to one of his legs. From the feel of it he judged it was broken.

He managed to sit up and look about. There was not a living soul in sight. He was on the fire altar alone with the dead medicine man.

IX

PAINFULLY, Peters unlaced his boot. His ankle was badly swollen but as nearly as his fingers would tell him did not seem to be broken. It had been badly wrenched and it would be several days before it would bear his weight.

He made a bandage with strips cut from his parka, relaced the boot, and with his injured leg dragging behind him crawled to the edge of the altar rock.

A whimper greeted him from below. He still had his dog! Tears came to his eyes. Fang had chewed his front feet loose but the thongs that trussed his hind legs were so twisted that he couldn't get good leeway for his jaws. Peters saw that one foot was bleeding. It was a good twelve feet to the shelf below and the steps down were cut in the rock on an angle. With his crippled leg he could never make the steps.

He gripped the edge of the rock, swung himself over, hung precariously for a moment, did his best to keep the injured leg held up at the knee and dropped.

He lit in a heap, went white at the pain and crawled to Fang. The dog went crazy and he had a hard time quieting him down so he could cut through the thongs. The injury to the dog's foot was small.

"We're a pair of cripples, old boy," Peters said to him.

Fang yelped in answer and licked his face. Suddenly the dog stiffened back and growled. Peters grasped his gun. Then out of the spruce came Thir-Keld, and on her head she wore the white-tipped tails the medicine man had worn.

For the moment Peters forgot Fang and the dog sprang forward. He yelled but Fang gave no heed. Crouched close to the ground, teeth bared, he went straight for Thir-Keld. Peters turned cold. He swallowed hard and gripped his gun.

Inch by inch Fang crouched forward. Peters cried in vain to the dog to stop. He raised his gun. The golden woman had paused. Fang's deep-throated snarl was filled with menace. The bristling arch of his neck curved upward. His teeth gleamed

white. The dog had reverted to the wolf.

The sweat stood out on Peters like cold beads of ice. His whole body turned to ice. Not twenty yards away stood the golden woman of his dreams, the most beautiful being on earth. And now more than half way between crouched Fang ready to spring. He knew what that spring meant. Good God! he couldn't kill his dog! But the woman! With the muzzle of the gun resting against his shoulder Peters measured the distance.

THIR-KELD stepped forward with her hands outstretched. Her arms were bare to the shoulder, like the men of the valley. Fang sprang and Peters could feel those tearing teeth sink into the warm flesh. Quick as a flash he shot. But Fang's spring was short. His teeth snapped on empty air. He turned and sprang again and again; the menace of the spring died in midair and was short.

The golden woman laughed and stood still. Fang slowly circled about her. The snarl changed to a growl, which in turn became a whimper. Finally, he crawled bellywise until his head rested against her feet. Thir-Keld knelt and put her arms about him.

Peters saw it all through a daze. He still held the smoking gun. He had missed at twenty yards. Had that spring gone its full course he would have killed his dog. And there knelt the golden woman with her arms about Fang. He pulled himself up against the rock.

He felt faint. There was a mist before his eyes and through the mist the golden woman was running toward him. He put out his arms. In another moment they closed about her.

"Thir-Keld!"

"Man!"

Peters did not hear. He forgot the pain in his ankle. The nightmare on the rock passed. He was in a golden haze. The soft warmth and perfume of it was all about him. Always before it had been only a vision. Now he could feel the throb of her breast, and catch the warmth of the breath from her parted lips. It might all be a dream, but it was a dream come true. Reaching down he kissed her.

"Thir-Keld!"

"Man!"

HAPPY days were those spent in the Valley of Steam. With Fang at his side and Thir-Keld, the golden woman, as a guide, he explored the valley from one end to the other when his ankle was strong again.

The valley people went about their task of living, and let Peters severely alone. In the company of Thir-Keld, he followed a true explorer's bent by searching into every phenomena of this garden of Eden, and thus the primitive white tribe seemed to take as the natural right of the mate of their goddess—for so they considered Thir-Keld.

One of Peters' first discoveries was that the long lake was not a lake at all, but a river that came bubbling up out of the valley at one end and lost itself in the ground at the other. He had seen hot springs before, both in cold and warm climates.

Sometimes the water bubbled up out of the ground and continued on until its course led to some above the ground stream. Other springs returned again to the bowels of the earth from which they bubbled forth. And he had discovered a hot spring that was a veritable river! But what was a boiling river, or a hundred boiling rivers, or a strange white tribe, or a hundred strange, primitive white tribes compared to the woman of gold who went by his side in the day and held him close and was held by him in the night!

And that first embrace when she had called him, "Man." He had thought nothing of it then. It came to him like a voice out of the past, a voice he had known always. It was on the day he showed her the ivory cylinder that he guessed her story.

The path led upward that day through a cave of ice in the overhanging cliffs. Peters had tried signs, had drawn pictures, but there was nothing he had said or done that could make Thir-Keld understand. Had Alcide Jacquard been in this valley? Thir-Keld shook her head and did not understand.

Then from his neglected parka he brought her the little cylinder. She looked at Peters in wonder. He saw that she knew what it was and when she pointed to the side of the cliff he resolved to find out the secret at once.

It was cold in the ice cave, bitter cold,

the cold that seemed to have existed for ages. As they went along Peters sensed that frozen eyes were staring at him from behind those frozen walls. He guessed the answer to the riddle. The little cylinder was a section of a petrified tusk of a mammoth. It was probably older than the Valley of Steam. It went back to the great ice sheet in the days when the Arctic had been a country as fertile as it now was barren.

Now the cave opened out with a great room which proved his surmise was right. But the sight took his breath away. The whole place was lined with petrified tusks. And in the center there was a dais with a great seat that might have been a throne.

Two pillars were raised on either side of it like arms. As Peters gazed at them he saw that one was slightly shorter than the other. They were square but one had a round cylinder at the top. The cylinder that belonged on the other was the one he held in his hand.

Here was the ivory dream of Alcide Jacquard! Peters stepped up onto the dais and put the cylinder on the pillar. There was an ominous rumble. It seemed that the whole room would fall. He caught at Thir-Keld's arm and together they ran from the cave. The rumble grew louder. Thir-Keld crept into his arms and trembled. The rumbling ceased.

Presently she looked up at him. She had looked that way before. It was the look of a child who tries to remember, a sort of studied effort, that is, a pantomime of the process of think. Thir-Keld had looked that way on the day she had said, "Dog!"

PETERS was deeply moved. Thir-Keld had not been born in the Valley of Steam. The valley men and women were white, but they were the white off-shoot of some forgotten race. Only in color of skin and hair did they show the features of the white race. In other respects they looked like giant Asiatics. The word "man" meant nothing to the valley people. Fang was the first dog any of them had ever laid eyes upon, but Thir-Keld had said, "dog."

Now she was struggling with another word. The moment before she had been in wild alarm at the rumble in the ice cave.

She smiled now as she looked up at him.

"Thir-Keld," he whispered.

"Ship," she answered.

The face Peters looked down into was the face of a child—child and woman both. The woman did not know what a ship was, but far back the mind of the child remembered. She saw that what she said had made him glad. She smiled wistfully and snuggled against him.

"Man . . . dog . . . ship." She knew other words, for she had learned many from Peters. These three were her very own. "Man . . . dog . . . ship."

Peters heard her and didn't hear. His eye had stopped on something half-embedded in the ice. He stooped down and caught hold of it. It was rotten and came away easily in his hand. But there was no mistaking what it was—a piece of heavy sail canvas. The whole story flashed through his mind.

The ship had broken up in the Arctic ice. Thir-Keld had probably been born on the ship. Those who had escaped over the ice with dog teams had found the cleft through the mountain and had come into the Valley of Steam. They had been attacked and killed. The way he, too, might have been killed.

The child had been saved. Her hair was like gold and most of the valley people had shocks of reddish-colored hair.

And she had grown up into a sort of tribal leadership until the day she had dared defy the medicine man to save his life. With the medicine man's death, Thir-Keld's power had become absolute.

That was the only story he could ever know. And Peters did not care. He knew that he possessed a woman beside whom Helen of Troy was a creature of clay. He had happiness, and he would never question the sources of it. He was content.

"Man . . . dog . . . ship." She was smiling up at him, all of her, womanly now, all of her vibrant, glowing.

Peters could feel her breast throbbing against his as he caught her close and held her.

"Love," he whispered.

She knew that word. "Love," she whispered and held up her red lips to be kissed.

"Little golden woman, we're going home!"

That was a new word and Thir-Keld looked up at him questioningly.

"Home?"

"Home, Thir-Keld. We—we're going!"

SPRING was in the air. He had been happy in the valley. He had always wanted to get right to the heart of things. Maybe they would come back some day. So he mused as arm in arm they went down the path.

Presently they came to a place where the path ended in a wall of rock. It hadn't been there when they went to the cave. This was the cause of the rumble that had come when they were in the cave. A great slide had carried down a huge mass of the cliff.

They turned aside to take the path on the lower level. As they passed a stunted spruce that was torn up by the roots, a sudden catch came to Peters' throat. There was a funny little crook in the spruce about four feet above the roots. It was the tree he had seen when he first came through the cleft from the other side of the mountain. They were standing on a large flat rock. Beside it showed signs of the first fire Peters had built in the valley.

The slide had closed the passage!

Peters turned and ran, motioning to Thir-Keld to wait. He came to another open place a little higher up from where he could see the opening of the passage. The cliff was now a solid wall of rock. The Valley of Steam was a world to itself.

He stood facing the closed cleft. Rigidly his hand came to the salute. Inspector Curtot would put down the name of Constable Peters, late surgeon to His Majesty's Own Fusileers, as "missing in line of duty while on leave."

His arm came back to his side. Down on the flat rock Thir-Keld was waiting for him.

"Home," he whispered to himself as he went down. It was a new word to him, too—for it meant now, the Valley of Steam. There he and Thir-Keld would live out the rest of their days. And—together—they would be happy.