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NUMBER 5.

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1916	FEBRUARY	1916				
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29				

Phases of the Moon.  
New moon ..... 3d Full moon ..... 18th  
First quarter ..... 11th Last quarter ..... 25th

Shorty begin to undo the sled lashings and Smoke attack the dead spruce with an ax, whereupon the animals dropped in the snow and curled into balls, the bush of each tall curved to cover four padded feet and an ice rimmed muzzle. In twenty minutes from the time they halted the meal was ready to eat.

"About forty below," Shorty mumbled through a mouthful of beans. "Hope it don't get colder—or warmer neither. It's just right for trail breakin'."

Smoke did not answer. His own mouth full of beans, he had glanced to glance at the lead dog lying half a dozen feet away. That gray, frosty wolf was gazing at him with the infinite wistfulness and yearning that glimmer and haze so often in the eyes of northland dogs. Smoke knew it well, but never got over the unfathomable wonder of it.

As if to shake off the hypnotism he set down his plate and coffee cup, went to the sled and began opening the dried fish sack.

"Hey!" Shorty expostulated. "What 'r you doin'?"

"Breaking all law, custom, precedent and trail usage," Smoke replied. "I'm going to feed the dogs in the middle of the day—just this once. Bright there has been talking to me, telling me all unfeeling things with those eyes of his."

Shorty laughed skeptically. "Oh, if it's a hunch, go to it. A man's always got to follow his hunches."

"It isn't a hunch, Shorty. Bright just sort of got on my imagination for a couple of twists. He told me more in one minute with those eyes of his than I could read in the books in a thousand years. His eyes were a-crawl with the secrets of life. They were just squirming and wriggling there. The trouble is I almost got them, and then I didn't. I'm no wiser than I was before, but I was near them."

"Boiled down into simple American, you got a hunch," Shorty insisted. "Somethin's goin' to happen before the day is out. You'll see. An' them dried fish'll have a bearin'."

"You've got to show me," said Smoke.

"No, I ain't. The day'll take care of itself an' show you. Now, listen to what I'm tellin' you. I got a hunch myself out of your hunch. I'll bet eleven ounces against three ornery toothpicks I'm right."

"You bet the toothpicks, and I'll bet the ounces," Smoke returned.

"None. That'd be plain robbery. I win. I know a hunch when it tickles me. Before the day's out somethin' 'll happen, an' them fish'll have a meanin'."

An hour later they cleared the divide, dipped down past the Bald buttes through a sharp, elbow canyon and took the steep, open slope that dropped into Porcupine creek. Shorty, in the lead, stopped abruptly, and Smoke whined the dogs. Beneath them, coming up, was a procession of humans, scattered and dragged, a quarter of a mile long.

"They move like it was a funeral," Shorty noted.

"They're no dogs," said Smoke.

"Yep; there's a couple of men pullin' on a sled."

"See that fellow fall down? There's somethin' the matter, Shorty, and there must be 200 of them."

"Look at 'em stagger as if they was sussed. There goes another."

"It's a whole tribe. There are children there."

"Smoke, I win," Shorty proclaimed. "A hunch is a hunch, an' you can't beat it. There she comes. Look at her—surgin' up like a lot of corpses."

The mass of Indians at sight of the two men had raised a weird cry of joy and accelerated its pace.

"They're sure tolerable woozy," commented Shorty. "See 'em fallin' down in lumps an' bunches."

"Look at the face of that first one," Smoke said. "It's starvation—that's what's the matter with them. They've eaten their dogs."

"What'll we do? Run for it?"

"And leave the sled and dogs?" Smoke demanded reproachfully.

"They'll sure eat us if we don't. They look hungry enough for it. Hello, old skeetik! What's wrong with you? Don't look at that dog that way. No cookin' pot for him—savvy?"

The fore-runners were arriving and crowding about them, moaning and plainting in an unfamiliar jargon. To Smoke the picture was grotesque and horrible. It was famine unmistakable. Their faces, below checked and skin stretched, were so many death's heads. More and more arrived and crowded about until Smoke and Shorty were hemmed in by the wild crew. Their ragged garments of skin and fur were cut and slashed away, and Smoke knew the reason for it when he saw a wizened child on a squaw's back that sucked and chewed a strip of filthy fur.

"Keep off there—keep back!" Shorty yelled, falling back on English after futile attempts with the little Indian he did know.

Bucks and squaws and children tottered and swayed on shaking legs and continued to urge in, their mad eyes swimming with weakness and burning with ravenous desire. A woman, moaning, staggered past Shorty and fell with spread and grasping arms on the sled. An old man followed her, panting and gasping, with trembling hands striving to cast off the sled lashings and get at the grub sacks beneath. A young man with a naked snifle tried to rush in, but was flung back by Smoke. The whole mass pressed in upon them, and the fight was on.

At first Smoke and Shorty shored and thrust and threw back. Then they used the butt of the dog whip and their fists on the food mad crowd. And all this against a background of moaning and wailing women and children

Here and there in a dozen places the sled lashings were cut. Men crawled in on their bellies, regardless of a rain of kicks and blows, and tried to drag out the grub. These had to be picked up bodily and flung back. And such was their weakness that they fell continually under the slightest pressure or shove. Yet they made no attempt to injure the two men who defended the sled.

It was the utter weakness of the Indians that saved Smoke and Shorty from being overborne. In five minutes the wall of upstanding, on-struggling Indians had been changed to heaps of fallen ones, that moaned and gibbered in the snow and cried and sniveled at their staring, swimming eyes focused on the grub that meant life to them



"Me Carluk. Me good Siwash."

and that brought the sliver to their lips. And behind it all arose the wailing of the women and children.

"This is terrible," Smoke muttered.

"I'm all bet up," Shorty replied. "I'm real sweaty. An' now what 'r we goin' to do with this ambulance outfit?"

Smoke shook his head, and then the problem was solved for him. An Indian crawled forward, his one eye fixed on Smoke instead of on the sled, and in it Smoke could see the struggle of sanity to assert itself. Shorty remembered having punched the other eye, which was already swollen shut. The Indian raised himself on his elbow and spoke:

"Me Carluk. Me good Siwash. Me savvy Boston man plenty. Me plenty hungry. All people plenty hungry. All people no savvy Boston man. Me savvy. Me eat grub now. All people eat grub now. We buy 'n grub. Got 'n plenty gold. No got 'n grub. Summer salmon no come Milk river. Winter caribou no come. No grub. Me make 'n talk all people. Me tell 'n plenty Boston man come Yukon. Boston man like 'n gold. We take 'n gold. Yukon, Boston man give 'n grub. Plenty gold. Me savvy Boston man like 'n gold."

He began fumbling with wasted fingers at the drawing of a pouch he took from his belt.

"Too much make 'n noise," Shorty broke in distractedly. "You tell 'n squaw, you tell 'n papoose, shut 'n up mouth."

Carluk turned and addressed the wailing women. Other bucks, listening, raised their voices authoritatively, and slowly the squaws stilled and stilled the children near to them. Carluk paused from fumbling the drawers and held up his fingers many times.

"Him people make 'n die," he said.

"And Smoke, following the count, knew that seventy-five of the tribe had starved to death."

"Me buy 'n grub," Carluk said as he got the pouch open and drew out a large chunk of heavy metal. Others were following his example, and on every side appeared similar chunks. Shorty stared.

"Great jiminy!" he cried. "Copper! Raw, red copper! An' they think it's gold!"

"And the poor devils banked everything on it," Smoke muttered. "Look at it. The chunk there weighs forty pounds. They've got hundreds of pounds of it, and they've carried it when they didn't have strength enough to drag themselves. Look here, Shorty. We've got to feed them."

"Huh! Sounds easy. But how about statistics? You an' me has a month's grub, which is six meals times thirty, which is 180 meals. Here's 200 Indians, with real, full grown appetites. How can we give 'n one meal even?"

"There's no dog grub," Smoke answered. "A couple of hundred pounds of dried salmon ought to help out. We've got to do it. They've planned their faith on the white man, you know."

"Sure, an' we can't throw 'n down," Shorty agreed. "An' we got two nasty jobs out for us, each just about twice as nasty as the other. One of us has got to make a run of it to Muclic, an' raise a relief. The other has to stay here an' run the hospital an' most likely be eaten. Don't let slip your noodle that we've been six days gettin' here, an', travelin' light an' all played out. It can't be made back in less 'n three days."

For a minute Smoke pondered the miles of the way they had come, vi-stooling the miles in terms of time

measured by his capacity for exertion. "I can get there tomorrow night," he announced.

"All right," Shorty acquiesced cheerfully. "An', I'll stay an' be eaten."

"But I'm going to take one fish each for the dogs," Smoke explained, "and one meal for myself."

"An' you'll see need it if you make Muclic tomorrow night."

Smoke, through the medium of Carluk, stated the program. "Make fires. Plenty fires, plenty fires," he concluded.

"Plenty Boston man stop Muclic. Boston man much good. Boston man plenty grub. Five sleeps I come back plenty grub. This man, his name Shorty, very good friend of mine. He stop here. He big boss—savvy?"

Carluk nodded and interpreted. "All grub stop here. Shorty, he give 'n grub. He boss—savvy?"

Carluk interpreted, and nods and guttural cries of agreement proceeded from the men.

Smoke remained and managed until the full swing of the arrangement was under way. Those who were able crawled or staggered in the collecting of firewood. Long Indian fires were built that accommodated all. Shorty, aided by a dozen assistants, with a short club handy for the rapping of hungry knuckles, plunged into the cooking.

First, a tiny piece of bacon was distributed all around and, next, a spoonful of sugar to cloy the edge of their razor appetites. Soon on a circle of fires drawn about Shorty many pots of beans were boiling, and he, with a wrathful eye for what he called the renegades, was frying and apportioning the thinnest of flapjacks.

"Me for the big cookin'," was his farewell to Smoke. "You just keep squaw. Trot all the way back an' run all the way back. I'll take you today an' tomorrow to get there, and you can't be back inside three days more. Tomorrow they'll eat the last of the dogfish, an' then there'll be nary a scrap for three days. You gotta keep a-comin', Smoke; you gotta keep a-comin'."

CHAPTER XVI.  
The Hanging of Cultus George.

MIDNIGHT had gone a quarter of an hour in the Annie Mine. The main room was comfortably crowded, while roaring stoves, combined with lack of ventilation, kept the big room insufferably warm. The click of chips and the boisterous play at the craps table furnished a monotonous background of sound to the equally monotonous rumble of men's voices where they sat and stood about and talked in groups and twos and threes. Through the open door that led to the dance room came the rollicking strains of a Virginia reel played by a piano and a fiddle.

Cultus George, a big, strapping Circle City Indian, leaned distantly and dourly against the log wall. He was a civilized Indian, if living like a white man connotes civilization, and he was sorely offended, though the offense was of long standing.

For years he had done a white man's work, had done it alongside of white men and often had done it better than they did. He wore the same heavy woolens and heavy shirts. He sported his good hair on the side and ate the same food—bacon, beans and flour—and yet he was denied their greatest diversion and reward—namely, whisky.

Cultus George was a money earner. He had staked claims and bought and sold claims. He had been grubstaker, and he had accorded grubstakes. Just now he was a dog musher and freighter, charging 28 cents a pound for the winter haul from Sixty Mile to Muclic, and for bacon 33 cents, as was the custom. His poke was fat with dust. He had the price of many drinks. Yet no barkeeper would serve him. Whisky, the hottest, swiftest, completest gratifier of civilization, was not for him. And he resented this invidious distinction, as he had resented it for years, deeply. And he was especially thirsty and resentful this night, while the white men he had so sedulously emulated he hated more bitterly than ever before.

The Virginia reel in the dance room wound to a wild close. "All couples promenade to the bar!" was the caller's last cry as the music stopped. And the couples were so promeneading through the wide doorway into the main room—the men in furs and moccasins, the women in soft, duffy dresses, silk stockings and dancing slippers—when the double storm doors were thrust open, and Smoke Bellew staggered wearily in.

Eyes centered on him, and silence began to fall. He tried to speak, pulled off his mittens, which fell dangling from their cords, and clawed at the frozen moisture of his breath which had formed in fifty miles of running.

Only the man at the craps table, without turning his head, continued to roll the dice and to cry: "Oh, you Joe! Come on, you Joe!" The gamekeeper's gaze, fixed on Smoke, caught the player's attention, and he, too, with suspended dice, turned and looked.

"What's up, Smoke?" Matson, the owner of the Annie Mine, demanded.

With a last effort Smoke clawed his mouth free. "I got some dogs out there—dead beat," he said huskily. "Somebody go and take care of them, and I'll tell you what's the matter."

In a dozen brief sentences he outlined the situation. The craps player, his money still lying on the table and his slippery Joe Cotton still uncaptured, had come over to Smoke and was now the first to speak.

"We gotta do something. That's straight. But what? You've had time to think. What's your plan? Split it out!"

"Sure," Smoke assented. "We've got to hustle light sleds on the jump. Say 100 pounds of grub on each sled. The driver's outfit and dog grub will fetch it up fifty more. But they can make time. Say we start five of these sleds pronto—best running teams, best mushers and trail eaters. On the soft trail the sleds can take the lead turn about. They've got to start at once. At the best, by the time they can get there all those Indians won't have had a scrap to eat for three days."

"And then as soon as we've got those sleds off we'll have to follow up with heavy sleds. Figure it out yourself. Two pounds a day is the very least we can decently keep those Indians traveling on. That's 400 pounds a day, and, with the old people and the children, five days is the quickest time we can bring them into Muclic. Now, what are you going to do?"

"Take up a collection to buy all the grub," said the craps player. "Fetch a washbasin, somebody. It won't take a minute. An' here's a starter."

He pulled a heavy gold sack from his pocket, untied the mouth and poured a stream of coarse dust and nuggets into the basin. A man beside him caught his hand up with a jerk and an oath, elevating the mouth of the sack so as to stop the run of the dust. To a casual eye six or eight ounces had already run into the basin.

"Don't be a haver!" cried the second man. "You ain't the only one with a poke. Gimme a chance at it."

Men crowded and jostled for the opportunity to contribute, and when they were satisfied Smoke hefted the heavy basin with both hands and grinned.

"It'll keep the whole tribe in grub for the rest of the winter," he said. "Now for the dogs. Five light teams that have some run in them."

A dozen teams were volunteered, and the camp, as a committee of the whole, bickered and debated, accepted and rejected.

As fast as a team was selected its owner, with half a dozen aids, departed to harness up and get ready.

One team was rejected because it had come in tired that afternoon. One owner contributed his team, but apologetically exposed a bandaged ankle that prevented him from driving it. This team Smoke took, overriding the objection of the crowd that he was played out.

Long Bill Haskell pointed out that, while Fat Olsen's team was a crackerjack, Fat Olsen himself was an elephant. Fat Olsen's 240 pounds of heartiness was indignant. Tears of anger exploded into his eyes, and his Teutonic complexion could not be stopped until he was given a place in the heavy division, the craps player jumping at the chance to take out Olsen's light team.

Being harnessed and loaded, but only four drivers had satisfied the committee of the whole.

"There's Cultus George," some one cried. "He's a trail eater, and he's fresh and rested."

All eyes turned upon the Indian, but his face was expressionless, and he said nothing.

"You'll take a team?" Smoke said to him.

Still the big Indian made no answer. As with an electric thrill it ran through all of them that something untoward was impending. A restless shifting of the group took place, forming a circle in which Smoke and Cultus George faced each other. And Smoke realized that by common consent he had been made the representative of his fellows in what was taking place.

Also he was angered. It was beyond him that any human creature, a witless to the scramble of volunteers, should hang back. For another thing, in what followed Smoke did not have Cultus George's point of view—did not dream that the Indian held back for any reason save the selfish, mercenary one.

"Of course you will take a team," Smoke said.

"How much?" Cultus George asked.

A snarl, spontaneous and general, grated in the throats and twisted the mouths of the miners.

"Wait a bit, boys," Smoke cried. "Maybe he doesn't understand. Look here, George. Don't you see, nobody's charging anything. They're giving everything to save 200 Indians from starving to death." He paused to let it sink home.

"How much?" said Cultus George.

"How many fellows! Now, listen, George. We don't want you to make any mistake. These starving people are your kind of people. They're anxious to die, but they're Indians just the same. Now, you've seen what the white men are doing—coughing up their dust, giving their dogs and sleds, falling over one another to hit the trail. Only the best men can go with the first sleds. Look at Fat Olsen, there. He was ready to fight because they wouldn't let him go. You ought to be mighty proud because all men think you a No. 1 musher. It isn't a case of how much, but how quick."

"How much?" said Cultus George.

"Kill him!" "Dust his head!" "Tar and feathers!" were several of the cries in the wild melody that went up. The spirit of philanthropy and good fellowship changed to brute savagery so the instant.

In the storm center Cultus George stood imperturbable, while Smoke thrust back the fiercest and shouted: "Wait! Who's running this?" The clamor died away. "Fetch a rope," he added quietly.

Cultus George shrugged his shoulders. He knew this white man's breed. He had toiled on trail with it and eaten its flour and bacon and beans too long not to know it. It was a law abiding breed. He knew that thoroughly. It always punished the man who broke the law. But he had broken no law. He knew his law. He had

lived up to it. He had neither murdered, stolen nor lied.

There was nothing in the white man's law against charging a price and driving a bargain. They all charged a price and drove bargains. He was doing nothing more than that, and it was the thing they had taught him. Besides, if he wasn't good enough to drink with them, then he was not good enough to be charitable with them nor to join them in any of their foolish diversions.

Neither Smoke nor any man there glimpsed what lay in Cultus George's brain, behind his attitude and prompting his attitude. Though they did not know it, they were as beclouded as he in the matter of mutual understanding. To them he was a selfish brute; to him they were selfish brutes.

When the rope was brought Long Bill Haskell, Fat Olsen and the craps player, with much awkwardness and angry haste, got the silpnoose around the Indian's neck and rove the rope over a raft. At the other end a dozen men tugged on, ready to hoist away. Nor had Cultus George resisted. He knew it for what it was—bluff. The

"It's your last chance, George," said Smoke.

Smoke's second offering. Was not growl poke the second offering? They not buy and sell and make all bargains with bluff? Yes; he had seen a white man do business with a look on his face of four acres and in his hand a busted straight.

"Wait," Smoke commanded. "The his hands. We don't want him climbing."

More bluff. Cultus George decided, and passively permitted his hands to be tied behind his back.

"Now it's your last chance, George," said Smoke. "Will you take out the team?"

"How much?" said Cultus George.

Astounded at himself that he should be able to do such a thing and at the same time angered by the colossal selfishness of the Indian, Smoke gave the signal. Nor was Cultus George any less astounded when he felt the noose tighten with a jerk and swing him off the floor. His stolidity broke on the instant. On his face, in quick succession, appeared surprise, dismay and pain.

Smoke watched anxiously. Having never been hanged himself, he felt a tye at the business. The body struggled convulsively, the tied hands strove to burst their bonds, and from the throat came unpleasant noises of strangulation. Smoke held up his hands.

"Slack away!" he ordered.

Grumbling at the shortness of the punishment, the men on the rope lowered Cultus George to the floor. His eyes were bulging, and he was tottery on his feet, swaying from side to side and still making a fight with his hands. Smoke divined what was the matter, thrust violent fingers between the rope and the neck and brought the noose slack with a jerk. With a great heave of the chest Cultus George got his first breath.

"Will you take that team out?" Smoke demanded.

Cultus George did not answer. He was too busy breathing.

"Oh, we white men are dogs," Smoke filled in the interval, resentful himself at the part he was compelled to play. "We'd sell our souls for gold, and all that. But once in awhile we forget about it and turn loose and do something without a thought of how much there is in it. And when we do that, Cultus George, watch out. What we want to know is, are you going to take out that team?"

Cultus George debated with himself. He was no coward. Perhaps this was the extent of his bluff, and if he gave in now he was a fool. And while he debated Smoke suffered from secret worry lest this stubborn aborigine would persist in being hanged.

"How much?" said Cultus George.

Smoke started to raise his hand for the signal.

"Me go," Cultus George said very quickly before the rope could tighten.

"An' when that rescue expedition found me," Shorty told it in the Annie Mine, "that ornery Cultus George was the first in, beatin' Smoke's sled by three hours, an', don't you forget it, Smoke comes in second at that. Just the same, it was about time, when I heard Cultus George yellin' at his

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