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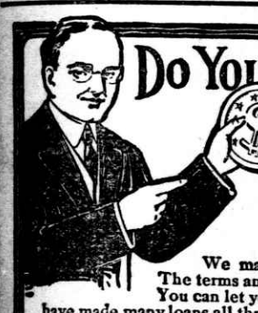

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SMOKE BELLEW

By JACK LONDON

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CHAPTER XXIII.

"I shall help you to run away."

LISTEN to me," said McCan. "The spring thaw is here, an' the crust is comin' on the snow. It's the time to travel. I would run with no less a man than you."

"But you can't run," Smoke contradicted. "Your backbone is as limber as thawed marrow. If I run, I run alone. The world fades, and perhaps I shall never run."

Said Snass: "Your partner is dead. My hunters did not kill him. They found the body, frozen in the first of the spring storms in the mountains. No man can escape. When shall we celebrate your marriage?"

And Labiskwee: "I watch you. There is trouble in your eyes, in your face. I do know all your face. When you are happy the corners of your mouth turn up. When you think sad thoughts they turn down. When you die there are three and four wrinkles at the corners of your eyes. When you laugh there are six. But I can not count them now.

"I have never read books. I do not know how to read. But Four Eyes taught me much. And in his own eyes I have seen the trouble of the hunger of the world. He was often hungry for the world. Is the world so good that you, too, are hungry for it? Four Eyes had nothing. But you have me." She sighed and shook her head. "Four Eyes died still hungry for the world. And if you lived here always would you, too, die hungry for the world? I am afraid I do not know the world. Do you want to run away to the world?"

Smoke could not speak, but by his mouth corner lines was she convinced. Minutes of silence passed in which he visibly struggled, while Smoke hated himself for the unguessed weakness that enabled him to speak the truth about his hunger for the world while it kept his lips tight on the truth of the existence of the other woman.

Again Labiskwee sighed.

"Very well. I love you more than I fear my father's anger, and he is more terrible in anger than a mountain storm. You told me what love is. This is the test of love. I shall help you to run away back to the world."

* * * * * * *

Smoke awakened softly and without movement. Warm, small fingers touched his cheek and slid gently to a pressure on his lips. The one word "Come" was breathed in his ear. He sat up carefully and listened. Close at hand he could distinguish the light regular breathing of Snass.

Labiskwee tugged gently at Smoke's sleeve and he knew she wished him to follow. He took his moccasins and German socks in his hand and crept out into the snow in his sleeping moccasins. Beyond the glow from the dying embers of the fire she indicated to him to put on his outer footgear, and while he obeyed she went back under the fly where Snass slept.

Feeling the hands of his watch, Smoke found it was 1 in the morning. Labiskwee rejoined him and led him on through the sleeping camp.

"Now we can talk," she said when the last fire had been left half a mile behind.

In the starlight, facing him, Smoke noted for the first time that her arms were burdened, and, on feeling, discovered she carried his snowshoes, a rifle, two belts of ammunition and his sleeping robes.

"I have everything fixed," she said, with a happy little laugh. "I have been two days making the cache. There is meat, even flour, matches and skis, which go best on the hard crust, and, when they break through, the webs will hold up longer. Oh, I do know snow travel, and we shall go fast, my lover."

Smoke checked his speech. That she had been arranging his escape was surprise enough, but that she had planned to go with him was more than he was prepared for. Unable to plan immediate action, he gently, one by one, took her burdens from her. He put his arms around her and pressed her close, and still he could not think what to do.

"God is good," she whispered. "He sent me a lover."

Yet Smoke was brave enough not to suggest his going alone. And ere he spoke he saw all his memory of the bright world reel and fade.

"We will go back, Labiskwee," he said. "You will be my wife, and we shall live always with the Caribou people."

"No, no!" And her body, in the circle of his arm, resented his proposal. "I know. I have thought much. The hunger for the world would come upon you, and in the long nights it would devour your heart. Four Eyes died of hunger for the world; so would you die. And I will not have you die. We will go on across the snow mountains on the south traverse."

"Dear, listen," he urged. "We must go back."

She pressed her mitten against his lips to prevent further speech. "You love me. Say that you love me."

"I do love you, Labiskwee. You are my wonderful sweetheart."

Again the mitten was a caressing obstacle to utterance. "We shall go on to the cache," she said with decision. "It would be a great wrong to you to go back. I—I am only a wild girl, and I am afraid of the world, but I am more afraid for you. You see, it is as you told me. I love you more than anybody else in the world. I love you more than myself. The Indian language is not a good language. The English language is not a good language. The thoughts in my heart for you, as bright and as many as the stars—there is no language for them. How can I tell you them? They are there—see!"

As she spoke she slipped the mitten from his hand and thrust the hand inside the warmth of her parka until it rested against her breast. Tightly and steadily she pressed his hand in its position. And in the long silence he felt the beat, beat of her heart and knew that every beat of it was love. And then slowly, almost imperceptibly,

"We will go back, Labiskwee. You will be my wife."

still holding his hand, her body began to incline away from his and toward the direction of the cache. Nor would he resist. It was as if he were drawn by her heart itself that so nearly lay in the hollow of his hand.

So firm was the crust that they slid along rapidly on their skis.

"Just here, in the trees, is the cache," Labiskwee told Smoke.

The next moment she caught his arm with a startle of surprise. The flames of a small fire were dancing merrily, and crouched by the fire was McCan.

"I was minded you'd run without me," McCan explained when they came up, his small peering eyes glimmering with cunning. "So I kept an eye on the girl, an' when I seen her cachin' skis an' grub I was on. I've brought my own skis an' webs an' grub. Will we be startin' now?"

Labiskwee looked swift consternation at Smoke, as swiftly achieved a judgment on the matter and spoke.

"McCan, you are a dog!" she hissed, and her eyes were savage with anger. "I know it is in your heart to raise the camp if we don't take you. Very well. We must take you. But you know my father. I am like my father. You will do your share of the work. You will obey. And if you play one dirty trick it would be better for you if you had never run."

Daylight found them in the belt of foothills that lay between the rolling country and the mountains. McCan suggested breakfast, but they held on.

Labiskwee explained to Smoke her knowledge of the country and the way she planned to baffle pursuit. There were but two ways out, one west, the other south. Snass would immediately dispatch parties of young men to guard the two trails. But there was another way south. True, it did no more than penetrate halfway into the high mountains; then, twisting to the west and crossing three divides, it joined the regular trail. When the young men found no traces on the regular trail they would turn back in the belief that the escape had been made by the west traverse, never dreaming that the runaways had ventured the harder and longer way around.

Glancing back at McCan, in the rear, Labiskwee spoke in an undertone to Smoke. "He is eating," she said. "It is not good."

Smoke looked. The man was secretly munching caribou suet from the pocketful he carried.

"No eating between meals," he commanded. "There's no game in the country ahead, and the grub will have to be whacked in equal rations from the start. The only way you can travel with us is by playing fair."

By 1 o'clock the crust had thawed so that the skis broke through, and before 2 o'clock the web shoes were breaking through. Camp was made and the first meal eaten. Smoke took stock of the food. McCan's supply was a disappointment. So many silver fox skins had he stuffed into the bottom of the meat bag that there was little space left for meat.

Enough food for a month, with careful husbanding and appetites that never blunted their edge, was Smoke's and Labiskwee's judgment. Smoke apportioned the weight and bulk of the packs, yielding in the end to Labiskwee's insistence that she, too, should carry a pack.

Next day the stream shallowed out in a wide mountain valley, and they were already breaking through the crust on the flats when they gained the harder surface of the slope of the divide.

"Ten minutes later, and we wouldn't have got across the flats," Smoke said when they paused for breath on the bald crest of the summit. "We must be a thousand feet higher here."

But Labiskwee, without speaking, pointed down to an open flat among the trees. In the midst of it, scattered abreast, were five dark specks that scarcely moved.

"The young men," said Labiskwee.

"They are wallowing to their hips," Smoke said. "They will never gain the hard footing this day. We have hours the start of them. Come on, McCan. Buck up. We don't eat till we can't travel."

In the higher valley in which they now found themselves the crust did not break till 3 in the afternoon, at which time they managed to gain the shadow of a mountain where the crust was already freezing again.

Black darkness came on, after a long twilight, at 9 o'clock, when they made camp in a clump of dwarf spruce. McCan was helpless. The day's march had been exhausting, but in addition, despite his nine years' experience in the arctic, he had been eating snow and was in agony with his parched and burning mouth. He crouched by the fire and groaned while they made the camp.

In the night came wind and snow, and through the day of blizzard they fought their way blindly, missing the turn of the way that led up a small stream and crossed a divide to the west. For two more days they wandered, crossing other and wrong divides, and in those two days they dropped spring behind and climbed up into the abode of winter.

"The young men have lost our trail, an' what's to stop us restin' a day?" McCan begged.

But no rest was accorded. Smoke and Labiskwee knew their danger. They were lost in the high mountains, and they had seen no game nor signs of game. Day after day they struggled on through an iron configuration of landscape that compelled them to labyrinthine canyons and valleys that led rarely to the west. The terrible toil and the cold ate up energy, yet they cut down the size of the ration they permitted themselves.

One night Smoke was awakened by a sound of struggling. Distinctly he heard a gasping and strangling from where McCan slept. Kicking the fire into flame, by its light he saw Labiskwee, her hands at the man's throat and forcing from his mouth a chunk of partly chewed meat. Even as Smoke saw this her hand went to her hip and flashed with the sheath knife in it.

"Labiskwee!" Smoke cried, and his voice was peremptory.

The hand hesitated.

"Don't!" he said, coming to her side.

She was shaking with anger, but the hand, after hesitating a moment longer, descended reluctantly to the sheath.

McCan sat up, whimpering and snarling.

"Where did you get it?" Smoke demanded.

"Feel around his body," Labiskwee said.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Like Weary Ghosts In a Dead World.

McCAN strove to struggle, but Smoke gripped him cruelly and searched him, drawing forth from under his armpit, where it had been thawed by the heat of his body, a strip of caribou meat. A quick exclamation from Labiskwee drew Smoke's attention. She had sprung to McCan's pack and was opening it. Instead of meat out poured moss, spruce needles, chips—all the light refuse that had taken the place of the meat and given the pack its due proportion minus its weight.

Again Labiskwee's hand went to her hip, and she flew at the culprit, only to

She Flew at the Culprit, Only to Be Caught In Smoke's Arms.

be caught in Smoke's arms, where she surrendered herself, sobbing with the futility of her rage.

"Oh, lover, it is not the food!" she panted. "It is you, your life. The dog! He is eating you, he is eating you!"

* * * * * * *

It was a morning stark still, clear blue above, with white sun dazzle on the snow. The way led up a long wide slope of crust. They moved like weary ghosts in a dead world.

"Something is going to happen," Labiskwee whispered. "Don't you feel it—here, there, everywhere? Everything is strange."

"I feel a chill that is not of cold," Smoke answered. "Nor is it of hunger."

"It is in your head, your heart," she agreed excitedly. "That is the way I feel it."

A quarter of an hour later they paused for breath.

"The air is getting thick and heavy," said Labiskwee. "It is hard to breathe."

"There be three suns," McCan muttered hoarsely, reeling as he clung to his staff for support.

They saw a mock sun on either side of the real sun.

"There are five," said Labiskwee, and as they looked new suns formed and flashed before their eyes.

"By heaven, the sky is filled with suns beyant all countin'," McCan cried in fear.

Which was true, for, look where they would, half the circle of the sky dazzled and blazed with new suns forming.

McCan yelped sharply with surprise and pain. "I'm stung!" he cried out, then yelped again.

Then Labiskwee cried out, and Smoke felt a pricking stab on his cheek so cold that it burned like acid.

And then a shot rang out, strangely muffled. Down the slope were the young men, standing on their skis, and one after another they opened fire.

"Spread out!" Smoke commanded. "And climb for it! We're almost to the top. They're a quarter of a mile below, and that means a couple of miles the start of them on the down going on the other side."

"Thank the Lord," Smoke panted to Labiskwee, "all these suns spoil their aim."

"It shows my father's temper," she said. "They have orders to kill."

"How strange you talk!" Smoke said. "Your voice sounds far away."

"Cover your mouth," Labiskwee cried suddenly. "And don't talk. I know what it is. Cover your mouth with your sleeve, thus, and do not talk."

From the crest, looking back, they saw the young men stumbling and falling on the upward climb.

"They will never get here," Labiskwee said. "It is the white death. I know it, though I have never seen it. I have heard the old men talk. Soon will come a mist unlike any mist or fog or frost smoke you ever saw. Few have seen it and lived."

McCan gasped and strangled.

"Keep your mouth covered," Smoke commanded. McCan had sunk down, squatting, on his skis, his mouth and eyes covered by his arms.

"Come on, make a start," Smoke ordered.

"I can't move," McCan moaned.

"Let him be," Labiskwee muttered harshly.

But Smoke persisted, dragging the man to his feet and facing him down the long slope they must go. Then he started him with a shove, and McCan, braking and steering with his staff, shot into the sheen of diamond dust and disappeared.

Smoke looked at Labiskwee, who smiled, though it was all she could do to keep from sinking down. He nodded for her to push off, but she came near to him, and, side by side, a dozen feet apart, they flew down through the stinging thickness of cold fire.

Brake as he would, Smoke's heavier body carried him past her, and he dashed on alone, a long way, at tremendous speed, that did not slacken till he came out on a level, crusted plateau. Here he braked till Labiskwee overtook him, and they went on, again side by side, with diminishing speed, which finally ceased. The lethargy had grown more pronounced. The wildest effort of will could move them no more than at a snail's pace. They passed McCan, again crouched down on his skis, and Smoke roused him with his staff in passing.

"Now we must stop," Labiskwee whispered painfully, "or we will die. We must cover up—so the old men said."

She did not delay to untie knots, but began cutting her pack lashings. Smoke cut his, and, with a last look at the fiery death mist and the mockery of suns, they covered themselves over with the sleeping furs and crouched in each other's arms. They felt a body stumble over them and fall, then heard feeble whimpering drowned in a violent coughing fit and knew it was McCan who huddled against them as he wrapped his robe about him.

Their own lung strangling began, and they were racked and torn by a dry cough, spasmodic and uncontrollable. Smoke noted his temperature rising in a fever, and Labiskwee suffered similarly. Hour after hour the coughing spells increased in frequency and violence, and not till late afternoon was the worst reached. After that the mend came slowly, and between spells they dozed in exhaustion.

Smoke awoke with lips touching his lips. He lay partly in Labiskwee's arms, his head pillowed on her breast. Her voice was cheerful and usual. The muffled sound of it had vanished.

"It is day," she said, lifting the edge of the robes a trifle. "See, oh, my lover, it is day! We have lived through, and we no longer cough. Let us look at the world, though I could stay here thus forever and always."

"I do not hear McCan," Smoke said. "And what has become of the young men that they have not found us?"

He threw back the robes and saw a normal and solitary sun in the sky. A gentle breeze was blowing, crisp with frost and hinting of warmer days to come. All the world was natural again. McCan lay on his back, his unwashed face, swarthy from camp smoke, frozen hard as marble. The sight did not affect Labiskwee.

"Look!" she cried. "A snowbird! It is a good sign."

There was no evidence of the young men. Either they had died on the other side of the divide or had turned back.

There was so little food that they dared not eat a tithe of what they needed, and in the days that followed, wandering through the lone mountain land, the sharp sting of life grew blunted, and the wandering merged half into a dream. Smoke would become abruptly conscious to find himself staring at the never ending hated snow peaks, his senseless babble still ringing in his ears. And the next he would know, after seeming centuries, was that again he was roused to the sound of his own maunderings. Labiskwee, too, was light headed most of the time.

Came a day when it turned cold and a thick snow, that was not snow, but frost crystals of the size of grains of sand, began to fall. For three days and nights it continued to fall. It was impossible to travel until it crusted under the spring sun, so they lay in their furs and rested and ate less because they rested. So small was the ration they permitted that it gave no appeasement to the hunger pang that was much of the stomach, but more of the brain. And Labiskwee, delirious, maddened by the taste of her tiny portion, sobbing and mumbling, fell upon the next day's portion and crammed it into her mouth.

Then it was given to Smoke to see a wonderful thing. The food between her teeth roused her to consciousness. She spat it out and with a great anger struck herself with her clinched fist on the offending mouth.

It was given to Smoke to see many wonderful things in the days yet to come. After the long snowfall came on a great wind that drove the dry and tiny frost particles as sand is driven in a sandstorm. All through the night the sand frost drove by, and in the full light of a clear and wind blown day Smoke looked with swimming eyes and reeling brain upon what he took to be the vision of a dream. All about towered great peaks, and from the tip of every peak, swaying, undulating, flaring out broadly against the azure sky, streamed gigantic snow banners, miles in length, milky and nebulous, ever waving lights and shadows and flashing silver from the sun.

Labiskwee sat up among the furs.

"I dream, Labiskwee," he said. "Look. Do you, too, dream within my dream?"

"It is no dream," she replied. "This have the old men told me. And after this will blow the warm winds, and we shall live and win west."

Smoke shot a snowbird, and they divided it. Once, in a valley where willows budded standing in the snow, he shot a snowshoe rabbit. Another time he got a lean white weasel.

"It is summer in the lower valleys," said Labiskwee. "Soon will it be summer here."

The days lengthened, and the snow began to sink. Each day the crust thawed, each night it froze again, and they were afoot early and late, being compelled to camp and rest during the midday hours of thaw when the crust could not bear their weight. When Smoke grew snow blind Labiskwee towed him on a thong tied to her waist. And when she was so blinded she was towed by a thong to his waist. And, starving, in a deeper dream, they struggled on through an awakening land bare of any life save their own.

The time came when the last food was gone. The high peaks receded, the divides became lower, and the way opened promisingly to the west. But their reserves of strength were gone, and, without food, the time quickly followed when they lay down at night and in the morning did not arise. Smoke weakly gained his feet, collapsed and on hands and knees crawled about the building of a fire. But, try as she would, Labiskwee sank back each time in an extremity of weakness. And Smoke sank down beside her, a wan sneer on his face for the automatism that had made him struggle for an unneeded fire. There was nothing to cook, and the day was warm.

CHAPTER XXV.

Wonder of Women.

LABISKWEE lay in a stupor, her breathing so imperceptible that often Smoke thought her dead.

In the afternoon the chattering of a squirrel aroused him. Dragging the heavy rifle, he wallowed through the crust that had become slush. He crept on hands and knees or stood upright and fell forward in the direction of the squirrel that chattered its wrath and fled slowly and tantalizingly before him. He had not the strength for a quick shot, and the squirrel was never still.

So profound was his weakness that he lay like dead through the night, nor did dreams disturb him.

The sun was in the sky, the same squirrel chattering through the trees, when Labiskwee's hand on Smoke's cheek awakened him.

"Put your hand on my heart, lover," she said, her voice clear, but faint and very far away. "My heart is my love, and you hold it in your hand." A long time seemed to go by ere she spoke again. "Remember always there is no way south. That is well known to the caribou people. West—that is the way—and you are almost there—and you will make it."

And Smoke drowsed in the numbness that is near to death until once more she aroused him.

"Put your lips on mine," she said. "I will die so."

"We will die together, sweetheart," was his answer.

"No." A feeble flutter of her hand checked him, and so thin was her voice that scarcely did he hear it, yet did he

Concluded on Page Four.

For Sale

Second-hand Lumber,
Second-hand Brick,
Second-hand Fire Brick,
Blacksmith Coal, at less than cost.

All our lands, on long time. We want to sell to Bossier people. It should be the ambition of every man to own a piece of land.

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A LAND OF MURDERS.

Papua, a Cold Blooded Country, Where Life Is Held Cheap.

Papua has long been known as a bloody land. It is a bloody land still. But the blood of white men is rarely let, and the wanton slaughter of natives, the one by the other—at least in those fast widening regions which are within the sphere of the law—is fast diminishing. All this being so in one year, nevertheless, when there were 215 prisoners committed for trial, 118 of them were charged with murder, nine with manslaughter and five with attempted murder.

To the civilized mind the motives to murder, shocking enough, to be sure, nor wanting an aspect of grewsome humor, are upon occasion incredible. As they are matters of record, however, disclosed on painstaking investigation, they are to be accepted, not as irresponsible tales, such as wander about the eastern seas, but as substantial facts, however singular and incomprehensible they may appear.

It is a matter of court record, for example, that certain natives of what is called the coast range, being upon trial for the murder of two carriers, whose throats they had cut, admitted the deed without the least hesitation and sought to justify the ghastly business upon the ground that the carrier had appeared to be "cold and hungry"—dejected fellows, far away from their village. The prisoners had not eaten the carriers. They had merely—with the most considerate expedition—cut the throats of the carriers, who were strangers, at any rate, and therefore of no great consequence, and no ingenuity of cross questioning could elicit a motive ulterior to the one so ingenuously advanced—that the carriers, appearing to be "cold and hungry," were, in the opinion of the gentlemen who had incontinently cut their throats, much better dead.

A similar case of merciful extermination concerned a young native employed to shoot game for a white planter, who encountered a sick man (Papuan) on the road near a river and strangled him to death. Upon trial he explained that the sick man had created annoyance and a considerable embarrassment as well by insistently requesting to be carried across the river to the other side, whence his way lay forward to his village.

"Quite so," said the presiding officer. "Why, then, didn't you carry him across the river?"

"He was too heavy," replied the native. "It would have put me to a great deal of trouble."

"Why did you kill him?"

"What else could I do? The man was sick."

It was out of the question to endure the labor of carrying the sick man across the river. It was equally out of the question to abandon the pitiable object. Therefore the bewildered fellow had strangled him—the most obvious way out of a dilemma which bade fair to distress his feelings.—Harper's Magazine.

A Sailor's Compliment.

Through all the years they were together Mrs. Jessie Benton Fremont lived for her husband, as before her marriage she had lived for her father. Her brilliant mind, her heart and her hands were constantly busy in her husband's service, and a gallant sailor's compliment shows that her devotion was widely recognized. During the war, when Admiral Porter had command of the Federal fleet on the Mississippi, his flagship was the steamer Benton, named after Mrs. Fremont's father. The admiral named the little tender of the flagship Jessie Benton Fremont, and he wrote to Mrs. Fremont his explanation:

"You have always sailed close to your husband and your father."

Did Their Best.

Judge Robert O. Harris tells of a rather embarrassing introduction which former Ambassador Curtis Guild once received when he went to speak at a political rally in the western part of Massachusetts. According to Judge Harris, it went something after this fashion: "The voters decided that the town committee ought to have a rally, with the best speaker it could get. We couldn't get Governor Robinson; we couldn't get Senator Hoar nor Tom Reed, but we did the best we could, and I now have the honor of introducing Mr. Curtis Guild of Boston."—Indianapolis News.

Genuine Art.

"That man says he wants his picture to look perfectly natural," said the protographer's assistant.

"Make it as handsome as possible," replied the proprietor.

"But he insists that he doesn't want the picture to flatter him."

"He won't think it flatters him. He'll think that at last somebody has managed to catch the way he really looks."—Washington Star.

Much Needed Assistance.

"Here's a man suing for divorce because his wife goes through his pockets," said Mrs. Smith, reading from the newspaper. "What would you do if you woke up and found me going through your pockets?"

"I?" said Mr. Smith sadly. "I would get up and help you look."—Exchange.

Yielding the Place.

"I'll show you who's boss."

"My dear," responded Mr. Enpeck, "these continual demonstrations are unnecessary. I do not dispute the title."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

It is a peculiar quality of a fool to perceive the faults of others and to forget his own.—Cicero.