

How the Up-to-Date Michael Strogoff Found a Bride

MICHAEL STROGOFF has been found at Prince Albert, the capital of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. Only his name is not Michael Strogoff nor is he the famous courier of the czar. His real name is Race McLeod, and he is known to his friends as Michael Strogoff because he recently completed a journey across the frozen wilds of Athabasca to the Caribou mountains and beyond, nearly losing his life a score of times and finding a bride on the way.

The story of Race McLeod's wild journey across the trackless snows of Saskatchewan and Athabasca began in a dining car on the Canadian Pacific railway last November. When Race McLeod entered the diner it contained but one vacant seat. He took it.

The prosperous looking men who sat at the table next to his with their backs close to him probably didn't know that Race McLeod was spending almost his last dollar for a luxurious meal—the last that he might have for many weeks. They were engrossed in their own earnest conversation and talked loudly, so McLeod could not help catching the drift of their conversation.

He gathered that business interests with a large fortune at stake compelled them to send on a hazardous mission a trusted agent. He did not learn the details—indeed, he resented the fact that he had to listen, even innocently, to a private conversation, but the one fact to which his mind clung was that the two men needed an agent for their dangerous mission so urgently that they were willing to pay handsomely, and money was what Race McLeod wanted more than anything else in the world.

"But whom can we send?" asked one of the men petulantly.

"Dashed if I know," replied the other. "We can't trust a halfbreed."

"You might send me," said Race McLeod quietly.

The two men faced around angrily and McLeod had to speak quickly.

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation," he said, "unless I gave up my dinner—and I couldn't afford to do that—but if you want an agent for a risky piece of work—and it's honorable—why, I'm your man."

"We don't know you," put in one of the men.

"Neither do I know you," retorted McLeod.

The matter ended in an appointment at a hotel at Regina the next day—the train was due at Regina that evening. The next day when McLeod appeared the matter was placed before him.

Briefly, certain mysterious letters were to be delivered to certain individuals at Fort Pitt, Fort McMurray, Fort Chippewyan, Fort Smith, and Fort Resolution. These letters were to be sealed and were to be delivered secretly without the knowledge of any of the officers of the British Northwest mounted police stationed at any of the forts. For the delivery of the letters McLeod was to be paid a certain sum—it was a large one—and sufficient money was to be advanced to him with which to purchase ponies, clothing, and furs suitable for the journey, with such camp equipment as he might deem necessary, and to employ guides.

"It's a dangerous mission," McLeod was told.

"I'll deliver the letters," replied Race McLeod.

"You may be frozen to death," warned his employers.

"I'll deliver the letters," said McLeod.

"There are wolves," he was told, suggestively.

"I'll deliver the letters," was McLeod's only answer.

McLeod purchased his outfit and engaged a guide at Prince Albert in the first week in November. He made his purchases secretly, following instructions, and left Prince Albert before daylight on the morning of Nov. 10, with Fort Pitt, 125 miles due west, as his first objective point.

Beginning His Perilous Journey.

It was early winter and McLeod had little difficulty in reaching Fort Pitt at the end of a twenty-two hour ride. Resting two days, he set out with his guide and his ponies for Fort McMurray, 200 miles north of Fort Pitt as the crow flies, but to avoid crossing the Great Bear mountains—an almost impossible task in the winter—he had to skirt the western end of the range, thus adding nearly 100 miles to the second stage of his journey.

McLeod started northward from Fort Pitt on Nov. 14. He pushed on in the face of a light snow storm until he reached the valley of the Beaver river, sixty-five miles to the north. By this time the snow was so deep that the ponies scarcely could make four miles an hour. The guide,

confused in the rising storm on the night of Nov. 18, became separated from McLeod, and the latter found himself at the mercy of a furious blizzard in a trackless waste of snow.

McLeod abandoned his pony and kept moving on foot aimlessly all through the night. He had no idea where he was going. He knew that he must stumble on through the snowdrifts. To lie down, to rest, even for a few moments, meant to sleep and consequently to die.

In the long night battle with the darkness and the storm McLeod realized dimly that he was ascending a mountain side. He knew that he was lost, for his road, if there had been one, would have skirted the mountain at its base. Still he could not go back and he could not go on. He stumbled and floundered, slipping, falling over powder only half covered with snow, getting up again, and going on and on—only to keep moving.

Brave Fight Against the Storm.

Toward morning of that long night McLeod felt that he could do no more. Exhausted too much for further effort, he sank down to his knees, striving vainly to keep his weary eyelids from closing. Then the earth seemed to fall away from him and he felt himself suffocated, choked by masses of snow. He was falling into a great gulf, the sides of which were lined with jagged rocks and stumps of trees that reached out and struck him, bruised him, on face, neck, shoulders, body, and limbs.

As he fell McLeod lapsed into unconsciousness. Several

hours later he awoke, aching in every joint, and parched with thirst. He could not see, for his eyelids, bruised and swollen, could hardly be parted.

The hours passed on and McLeod felt that somewhere near him the sun was shining. He felt rather than saw its radiance through the snow. His thirst maddened him, and he buried his face in the mass of snow and swallowed huge masses of it.

Afterwards he became feverish and delirious. He wondered why he had not frozen to death, failing to realize that the masses of snow which covered him, but which had not smothered him, had kept him warm.

After lying for what seemed to him many days he suddenly felt that he was being lifted in strong arms and that he was being carried swiftly—somewhere.

When McLeod again returned to consciousness he knew that he was in a sledge and that the sledge was in motion. Pulling the robes and blankets from his face he saw by his side a blue eyed girl with an anxious face surrounded by masses of yellow hair—it looked yellow to McLeod then, but now he swears it is golden—curling from the edge of a fur hood. He was too weak, too dizzy to even wonder who she was or where she was taking him.

Then it began to snow again and once more McLeod was in the grasp of the blizzard. The drifts piled up in front of



the sledge. He could hear the girl's anxious voice urging the horses forward, but the sledge moved scarcely not at all. Finally it stopped altogether.

The darkness came once again and the girl seemed to have gone away. After a long time she returned and McLeod felt that he was being lifted out of the sledge. He did not even wonder why the girl was strong enough to lift him. It seemed the most natural thing in the world.

The girl carried her helpless burden to the shelter of a great rock, where already she had started a fire. She placed him on the ground, piled robes and blankets over him, and then huddled beside him during the hours of the night. Morning brought the sun again and again the girl placed her human burden in the sledge, but this time she drew it herself—the horses had frozen during the night.

It was bitterly cold in spite of the blinding glare of the sun on the vast expanse of snow. But the girl toiled on and on, sometimes sinking from exhaustion. At these times she would crawl into the sledge beside its half unconscious burden and remain until she was warmed and rested; then again she would toil onward with the sledge.

All things come to an end some time, and when McLeod again returned to consciousness he found himself in a big, comfortable room, lying on a couch covered with wolf skins. At the side of the room a great fireplace gave out a comfortable, restful glow of heat, and in front of it sat the girl.

Simple Explanation of Strange Romance.

All this doubtless sounds romantic and improbable, but really it is simple when explained. Two years ago Helig Oldstrom, a bluff Norwegian farmer, had left North Dakota and bought land for a wheat ranch in the Beaver valley

of Saskatchewan. He built a one story house, half of logs, half of sod, with a sod roof. He was 100 miles from a railroad—but the railroad would be there in two years, and Oldstrom knew that in two years he would have wheat to sell.

His wife died, but his daughter Olga remained with him. Then, last October, Oldstrom himself died, and Olga was left alone. She was not a weak, timid girl. She was 22 years old, 5 feet 10 inches in height, and although graceful and handsome, was muscled like an athlete. Frequently she had shot a deer and carried it home on her shoulders, and more than once she had stood off a pack of ravening wolves with her rifle. She was a natural pioneer, rugged as a man, but as tender hearted and far more good looking than most of her sex.

There was not a neighbor within thirty miles when Oldstrom died and Olga buried her father in a grave which she dug herself. She could not leave the ranch, for there was the stock to care for; besides it was her home.

On the day that Race McLeod became lost in the storm, however, Olga Oldstrom had harnessed a team of horses to a light sledge—almost a dog sledge—and started for the home of her nearest neighbor, thirty miles away. As she drove around the base of the mountain, fifteen miles from her home, her horses shied at a strange hillock in the road. Springing out of her sledge she brushed away the snow—and found Race McLeod. He had been carried down the side of the mountain by an avalanche of snow.

At first she thought he must be dead. Then she discovered that he was alive, but unconscious, and hurt—how badly she could not tell. So she bundled him into the sledge, turned her horses, and started back home with him.

Told Her Story and His Love.

All this she told him in a matter of fact way, as if it had been nothing. On his part Race McLeod told her why he happened to be lost so far from civilization.

He told her that he had given his word that he would deliver certain letters to certain men at Forts McMurray, Chippewyan, Smith, and Resolution before Jan. 1. He told her his whole story. He had lived in Scotland, graduated from an English university, and had made a fool of himself at home. He had been in South Africa, Australia, and had failed at whatever he had undertaken, and had come to Canada determined to make a fortune before he returned home to his father. He had lived a careless life, but he had never given his word and broken it.

"Now, I'm going to deliver those letters. I will get only \$2,000 for doing it, but I said I would and I will."

"You cannot reach Fort Resolution," said Olga Oldstrom.

"Then I'll die trying," retorted Race McLeod.

"You are a real man," was the girl's answer, and McLeod somehow took it as a compliment. Then, with a curious look on his face, he said:

"I've lived a rough life, but not a bad one. I've been in every country in the world, but you are the only real woman I ever knew."

"I'll marry you for that," said the girl, "when you come back from Fort Resolution."

Race McLeod did go to Fort McMurray, then on to Chippewyan. He crossed the frozen surface of Athabasca lake, delivered his letters to the parties addressed at Fort Smith, and followed the Great Slave river down to Fort Resolution. He made the return trip in safety. He traveled the entire distance going and coming on snow shoes and got back to the Oldstrom ranch on Jan. 5. Altogether he had covered a distance of 600 miles in less than thirty days, averaging more than thirty miles a day. He needed no guide, for he followed first the Athabasca river, which took him directly to Fort McMurray, and then to Fort Chippewyan. He had to skirt the eastern end of the Caribou mountain range, but keeping the mountains in sight he easily found the Great Slave river, which ran true to the end of his journey.

Two weeks after his return Race McLeod and Olga Oldstrom were married at Prince Albert. In the spring they will return to the ranch in the Beaver valley.